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**Introduction and Overview**

**Purpose and Scope**
Building knowledge is essential to effective literacy instruction, because background knowledge is essential to comprehending text. The *2017 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy* expects students to engage with a wide variety of texts that work together to build literacy skills along with knowledge of the world, including diverse peoples and perspectives as well as academic subjects such as history and science.

This handbook guides school and district leaders through a text inventory process designed to gather information about the texts high school (grades 9-12) students encounter in school. The goal is not to evaluate individual teachers’ choices of texts; it is to examine how teachers’ choices fit together, identifying connections to emphasize, gaps and redundancies to address, and other opportunities for increasing the coherence and variety of students’ experiences with text. This process was informed by the *Knowledge Map Initiative* at Johns Hopkins University’s Institute for Education Policy.

This document divides the text inventory process into four steps:

- **Step 1: Identifying Your Focus**
- **Step 2: Surveying Teachers**
- **Step 3: Analyzing the Data**
- **Step 4: Identifying Next Steps**

Please note that ensuring appropriate complexity, another indispensable component of text selection, is outside the scope of this resource. For more on text complexity, see [this quick reference guide](#).

The Teacher Survey instrument at the heart of this process exists separately as a Google Forms template. Teachers complete the short survey once for each major (key, anchor) text they assign. The survey has four sections, each designed to gather a specific type of information about a text, and you can choose to edit or omit content not aligned to local priorities.

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1 At this time, the handbook and accompanying survey are designed for use at the high school level. We plan to expand their scope in future years.
Figure 1. Text Inventory Survey Structure

- **General Text Information** collects basic information about the text, including its author, historical period, and genre as well as the grade or course in which it is assigned.
- **Module 1: Diverse Cultures and Perspectives** collects information about the text’s representation of selected elements of identity:
  - Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Geographic origin
  - Gender identity
  - LGBTQ status
  - Religious affiliation
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Disability status
  - Family status
- **Module 2: History and Social Science Content Connections** collects information about whether and how the text relates to standards in the **2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework**.
- **Module 3: Science and Technology/Engineering Content Connections** collects information about whether and how the text relates to standards in the **2016 Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Curriculum Framework**.

It is important to understand the limitations of this survey. For example, it can tell you how many of the texts students encounter have protagonists who are women or girls—which is valuable information—but it cannot tell you how those texts perpetuate or disrupt gender stereotypes or how teachers and students grapple with that question together. Please see below for more on important considerations that the survey does not encompass.
Communicating About This Process

As you embark on your text inventory, you will want to communicate about its intent and importance with teachers and other stakeholders both early and often. The messages below may be especially useful to send clearly:

- **This work will help us better serve all students.** One purpose of this inventory is to gain a better understanding of how the texts we assign serve both as “mirrors” that help students understand themselves and as “windows” that help them appreciate cultures, perspectives, and historical periods different from their own. All students benefit from access to both “mirror” and “window” texts.

- **This inventory is not evaluating individual teachers’ choices.** Even when every teacher’s choices of texts are balanced and appropriate, without taking a systems-level view—looking at patterns across courses, subjects, and grades—we risk narrowing or distorting our students’ understanding of the world. This inventory will inform big-picture discussions of curricular coherence across our school [or district].

- **There is no one right answer or quota.** Nothing says that a certain proportion of our texts need to be about science or history, or that a certain proportion of their authors need to have particular identities. We will look at the data we collect and deliberate together on what we see as strengths and opportunities for improvement.

- **This is a first step.** Much as student assessment is a first step toward determining how to support further learning, this survey is just a first step toward determining how to improve our curriculum. We will work together as a school [or district] to analyze our survey data and determine what next steps we want to take.

- **This aligns with our existing work.** [How you articulate this point will depend on your local priorities, but the sample text below shows one way you might approach it.]

Here is some sample text you may want to use or adapt:

*Over the next several months, our [school/district] will be collecting information about the texts students encounter across grade levels and courses to better understand how these texts work together to build content knowledge and engage our students with diverse cultures and perspectives.*

*We are doing this because it is important to keep improving our curriculum and better serve all students. This initiative also aligns to our ongoing work. As you may know, one goal for this year is to [insert aligned goal]. This process will be just one step in working towards that goal. It will collect information, and as a team we will make decisions about next steps based on that information.*

*If you are asked to complete the text inventory survey with information about the texts in your courses, it is important to know that the inventory is not designed to evaluate the individual choices you have made. While each individual teacher’s decisions may be well*
grounded, it is essential to look across courses and grade levels to determine whether our overall curriculum extends or narrows our students’ understanding of the world.

Also, please know that there is no one right answer or quota for any of the questions you may be asked in this survey. It will be up to our team to better understand the balance of texts across the curriculum and whether that aligns to our goals.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns about this important work. If you are interested in being part of the team analyzing the data, please let me know.

After collecting data, you will also want to share what you learned and how you will identify and implement next steps. Regular two-way communication and active participation from a variety of stakeholders—teachers, administrators, students, and families, for example—will facilitate and enrich the entire text inventory process.

Further reading to build understanding and buy-in:

- [Knowing and reading: What we can do to make sure kids know enough to comprehend](#)
- [The importance of asking hard questions about what students learn in school](#)
- [Students have a right and a need to read diverse books](#)
Step 1: Identifying Your Focus

The survey is not designed to be used in its entirety. To decide how you want to adapt it, consider how the data it gathers can help inform new or existing goals or priorities in your system.

Below are three examples of how districts might choose to focus their text inventories. Step 2 describes how each of these districts can adapt the survey to ensure alignment with its focal area.

- **District A**
  - **Existing District Goal:** Assessing how the texts students encounter prepare them for rigorous academic tasks in content-area courses
    - **Focal Area:** Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to STE content
  - **Module(s) they will use:** General Information, Module 3

- **District B**
  - **Existing District Goal:** Diversifying the voices and perspectives represented in assigned literature
    - **Focal Area:** Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the racial identity of the author and main character
  - **Module(s) they will use:** General Information, Module 1 (with some items removed)

- **District C**
  - **Existing District Goal 1:** Updating curriculum to align with the 2018 History/Social Science Framework
    - **Focal Area 1:** Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to content in the HSS Framework
  - **Existing District Goal 2:** Increasing empathy through diverse perspectives in assigned texts
    - **Focal Area 2:** Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the gender identity of the author and main character
  - **Module(s) they will use:** General Information, Module 1 (with some items removed), Module 2
**Step 2: Surveying Teachers**

*Downloading a Customizable Version of the Survey*
Access the template here. You will be prompted to create a copy. Once you click “Make a Copy,” the version you view and edit will be accessible only to you: DESE will not have access to your survey or the data you collect.

*Adjusting the Directions to Align with Your Needs*
You may wish to add to or adjust portions of the directions. For example, in the template, “key/anchor text” is defined as a text that students engage with for a significant portion of a course (i.e., not every article or passage students read). If you would like to use a different definition, just adjust this language in the directions.

Most questions in the survey, including all questions in Module 1, do not include an *unknown* or *not applicable* answer choice. We hope this will encourage teachers to answer all questions fully (though it is not required to respond to all questions in order to submit a response). You may choose to add *unknown* or *not applicable* answer choices.

*Adapting the Survey to Your Focal Area(s)*
To customize the survey, delete any modules not relevant to your focal area(s). Within each module, you can make additional changes to better reflect and organize the information you hope to collect. For example, you might pre-populate course names rather than having teachers write them in.

For more on how to make these changes, see [Appendix A](#).

*District Examples*
The three sample districts introduced above might adapt the survey in these ways:

- **District A**
  - *Focal Area*: Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to STE content
  - *Module(s) they will use*: General Information, Module 3
    - *Changes they will make*:
      - Delete Modules 1 and 2 (Sections 4–6)

- **District B**
  - *Focal Area*: Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the racial identity of the author and main character
  - *Module(s) they will use*: General Information, Module 1 (with some items removed)
    - *Changes they will make*:
      - Delete Modules 2 and 3 (Sections 6–7)
      - In Module 1, delete Part B
• In Module 1, Part A, delete items about ethnicity, geographic origin, gender, and LGBTQ status

• District C
  o Focal Area 1: Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to content in the HSS Framework
  o Focal Area 2: Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the gender identity of the author and main character
  o Module(s) they will use: General Information, Module 1 (with some items removed), Module 2
    ▪ Changes they will make:
      • Delete Module 3
      • Delete Module 1, Part B
      • Delete Module 1, Part A, items about race, ethnicity, geographic origin, and LGBTQ status

Sending Out the Survey
Once you have customized the survey, it is ready to distribute. But first, you will need to decide which teachers you want to complete the survey: for example, just ELA teachers, all ELA and HSS teachers, or teachers of every subject. Again there is no right answer; your choice will depend on the organization of your school or district, its curriculum, and your priority areas.

To distribute, click Send at the top right of the form. You can either send directly via Google or create a link to embed in an email.

Either way, this not should not be the first time teachers learn about this initiative (see Communicating About This Process above). You can reference earlier communications when you send out the email with the survey link—for example, by adapting this sample text:

As I have previously shared, our [school/district] is collecting data about the texts students read across courses and grade levels, to better understand how these texts are working together to [build a foundation of content knowledge and/or represent diverse cultures and perspectives]. Please complete this inventory [insert link] for each of the key/anchor texts used in your courses.

The form will ask you to enter general information about the text, [identify different components of the author and main character’s identity, and/or select possible ways that the text relates to science and/or history content]. Please answer each question to the best of your ability and skip only questions that you are truly unable to answer.

Your name will not be attached to your response. This data will be collected and analyzed in the aggregate. It will not be used to make judgments about the individual choices you have made for your classroom; rather, it will help us better understand our students’ experiences holistically.
What Teachers Need to Do

Teachers will complete one survey response for each key/anchor text used in their courses. They will start by entering General Text Information, including the title, author, course and grade level(s) in which the text is used, publication date, and genre. Next, they will complete the modules you have chosen to include. No items in these sections are required; teachers can skip items if necessary. Because teachers have the option to skip items if necessary, answer choices generally do not include an unknown or not applicable option. As noted above, you may change the answer options if you would prefer. Once they complete a response for one text and hit Submit, a prompt will help them begin a new response.
Step 3: Analyzing the Data

Where to Find Your Data
To see the data your survey has collected, select the Responses tab at the top of the page.

On this page, you can view an overview of responses to the survey. After sharing the survey, track responses to ensure you have collected all of the data before beginning analysis.

You can also use the icons in the top right corner to view the responses in Google Sheets or download the responses to a .csv file. If you select to view the responses in Google Sheets, the sheet is live and will update with each new response that is submitted.

How to Analyze the Data
The Google Learning Center provides a number of ideas and explanations for using Google Sheets to analyze your data, including how to count, filter, sort, and add responses. As noted above, you may also choose to export your data to a .csv file if you prefer to analyze the data in another program. How you approach analysis will depend on your data and priorities.

District Examples

Looking again at the districts above, here are ways in which they might analyze their data:

- **District A**
  - **Focal Area:** Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to STE content
  - **Possible Research Questions:**
    - How many ELA courses have texts that relate to STE content?
    - How many ELA texts relate to STE content?
    - To which areas of the STE Framework do these texts relate?
    - In which grades do students encounter these texts in their ELA courses?
      - At a particular grade, are the STE texts in ELA classes aligned with the content of STE courses students typically take in that grade?

- **District B**
  - **Focal Area:** Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the racial identity of the author and main character
Possible Research Questions:

- What are the racial identities of the authors of key/anchor texts at each grade level? Of the main characters?
  - In how many key/anchor texts do the author and main character share a racial identity?
  - How does the racial distribution of authors and main characters compare with that of the student body?

District C

- Focal Area 1: Understanding how texts in ELA courses relate to content in the HSS Framework
- Focal Area 2: Understanding diversity of texts in terms of the gender identity of the author and main character

Possible Research Questions:

**Focal Area 1:**
- How many ELA courses have texts that relate to HSS content?
- How many ELA texts relate to HSS content?
- To which areas of the HSS Framework do these texts relate?
- In which grades do students encounter these texts in their ELA courses?
  - At a particular grade, are the HSS texts in ELA classes aligned with the content of HSS courses students typically take in that grade?

**Focal Area 2:**
- What are the gender identities of authors of key/anchor texts at each grade level? Of the main characters?
Step 4: Identifying Next Steps

Once you have gathered and analyzed your survey data, you will likely find yourself deliberating questions like those below.

*Making Curricular Changes Based on What You Learned*

**How can we decide what balance of texts we would like to see in our curriculum?**

Deciding what balance of texts should be in your curriculum is a difficult decision, and one that will likely include discussions with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, students, and families, as well as consideration of your school community’s context. It may be helpful to consider any of the following next steps:

- Hold cross-departmental collaboration meetings to allow teachers and administrators to consider how students are experiencing the curriculum and whether they have a coherent experience that builds content knowledge across courses.
- Engage your students to better understand their experience and incorporate their voice into decisions about the balance of texts in their courses.
- Collaborate with higher education and educator preparation partners to generate additional ideas for incorporating diverse perspectives.
- Communicate with families to learn more about your school community and how you might reflect that community in your texts.

**Where might we find more texts that are diverse?**

Several organizations are dedicated to curating resources for identifying and selecting diverse texts:

- [August House](#) shares reading lists for diverse books and books about particular cultures.
- The Center for the Collaborative Classroom offers a list of resources to help build an inclusive text collection, including awards, websites, and journals dedicated to celebrating inclusive texts.
- [I’m Your Neighbor Books](#) shares lists of children’s books featuring new Americans.
- The National Center on Cultural & Linguistic Responsiveness’s [Guide to Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children’s Books](#) provides additional resources for finding culturally appropriate books and guiding questions for selecting which texts to include in your curriculum. While this resource is more geared toward lower grade levels, it has value for all.
- The [School Library Journal](#) frequently compiles lists of books representing diverse cultures and perspectives.
- [We Need Diverse Books](#) compiles lists of sites offering recommendations for diverse titles.
Where might we find more texts that relate to the History and Social Science Framework? The Science Technology/Engineering Framework?

There are a number of organizations dedicated to identifying and curating lists of texts by content area and other categories. Here are a few places to start:

- Appendices D and E of the *2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*: Annotated Primary and Secondary Sources for United States and World History
- *Library of Congress – Digital Collections*: Primary sources, including photographs, texts, music, recordings, cartoons, searchable by topic
- *Massachusetts Historical Society*: Research library for Massachusetts history with digital exhibitions on topics such as the coming of the Revolution, the Adams family papers and slavery and abolition
- *National Council for the Social Studies*: Professional organization for Social Studies teachers with many resources, including yearly collections of best social studies books for children and young adults
- The National Science Teachers Association *NSTA Recommends database*
- *Social Justice Books, See What We See Database*
- *Teaching Tolerance, Student Text Library*
- The Young Adult Library Services Association *Book Awards & Booklists Page*

**Supporting Teachers**

Even when texts already connect to content in the HSS and STE frameworks, teachers may need further support to make the most of those connections and help students do the same. Teachers need opportunities to collaborate across content areas to take full advantage of texts and topics that connect different disciplines.

Similarly, diversity of representation in curriculum is necessary but not sufficient to ensure equitable access to learning in classrooms. Teachers also need to use culturally responsive instructional practices, help students analyze texts through an equity lens, and more. Please see below for more on supporting teachers in this work.

**Applying an Equity Lens**

Even when texts represent diverse perspectives and peoples, they may do so in uncomfortable or disrespectful ways. When accompanied by a teacher’s skillful framing and a commitment to historical and scientific accuracy, exposing students to stereotyped portrayals of groups of people can help them detect instances of propaganda, fallacious logic, prejudice, and bias. These are legitimate pedagogical purposes; lacking such purposes, such portrayals have no place in classrooms.
Further, even when individual texts are selected and taught with care, their cumulative effect may be other than intended. For example, when Baltimore City Public Schools inventoried the texts students were assigned, they found that overall African Americans were represented prominently but one-dimensionally: students “were taught about tragedies of African American history such as slavery and Jim Crow but learned nothing about the Great Migration and very little about the Harlem Renaissance.”

Resources exist to help educators analyze how the texts they assign might perpetuate inequities: for example, Teaching Tolerance’s Text Selection Tool, the National Center on Cultural & Linguistic Responsiveness’s Guide to Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children’s Books, and the #DisruptTexts Project. If an initial survey shows that basic diversity of representation exists in the texts your students are assigned, consider probing more deeply—at both the classroom and the system level—into the nature and possible effects of that representation.

In addition to using these resources for consideration of which texts to include in your curriculum, guidance such as the Washington Models for the Evaluation of Bias Content in Instructional Materials or the Myra Sadker Foundation’s Practical Ideas for Confronting Curricular Bias can be used as an instructional tool to shape discussion among students in your classrooms regarding the stereotypes advanced or disrupted by their texts. Teaching Tolerance’s Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education also contains strategies to help students critically engage with curricular materials.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Finally, regardless of the texts they assign, teachers must approach curriculum and instruction in culturally responsive ways. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approaches culture and identity as assets. It challenges educators to examine commonly held beliefs about student learning and to use the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to create and sustain culturally responsive environments. Culturally responsive teaching is not just about social justice; it is also about helping students build their brain power. Lessons should be culturally respectful and bias-free such that they leverage diversity and culture to improve and deepen learning.

Exploring different perspectives in and through text requires careful consideration and planning to avoid overgeneralization or stereotyping of diverse groups and peoples. It requires an anti-bias approach that makes inquiry and exploration central to the learning process. In a TED Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie brings awareness to “the danger of a single story”—the damaging tendency to define an experience, person, or group based on an incomplete single account, a limited and one-sided perspective. When teaching about different perspectives, teachers should be open to explore their own perspectives, those of their students, and those presented in texts. Teachers bring a set of cultural understandings, perspectives, and beliefs to the classroom. Examining cultural gaps, values, beliefs, and bias can increase teachers’ understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation of the history, experiences, and lifestyles of other peoples or cultures.

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2 “Q&A with Zaretta Hammond and Mary Hurley” CASEL, May 2017.
Teachers must consider missing viewpoints and narratives within texts, as well as the inquiry necessary to facilitate student learning. As you discuss next steps, consider how your classrooms might foster more culturally responsive discussions of different perspectives. When teachers welcome multiple viewpoints and see them as learning opportunities, they create a classroom culture that engages students to do the same.

Additional Resources:

- Common Beliefs, Teaching Tolerance
- Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Teaching, Teaching Tolerance
- Culture in the Classroom, Teaching Tolerance
- SEL for All, MA DESE Guidance Document
- Teaching Toward Consciousness, Edutopia
- Zaretta Hammond – What the Experts Are Saying, CASEL
Appendix A: Using Google Forms

Adapting the Survey to Your Focal Area(s)
To customize the survey, first, delete any modules not applicable for your focal area(s). Within each module, you can make additional changes to better reflect the information you hope to collect.

To delete a module

Scroll down to the module you wish to delete. Module 1 is in Sections 4 and 5, Module 2 is Section 6, and Module 3 is Section 7 of the form. In the upper right corner of the section, click on the three vertical dots. Click ‘delete section’ from the list.

Note: Do not delete the General Text Information portion of the form (Sections 1-3), as this is where information to identify the text (i.e. title, author) will be entered.

To edit or delete a question

Depending on your school/district’s focal area, you may wish to delete one or more questions in a module without deleting the entire module. To do so, click anywhere within the question you want to delete. The question will pop out slightly from the rest of the form and you will be able to edit the question itself or any options within the question by typing directly into the appropriate space. For multiple choice or checkbox questions, you can add additional options by clicking on the last row shown.

Once you have selected a question, you can also change the type of question. For example, for the third question in the General Information section, you could change the question to multiple choice and enter each of your school/district’s courses as options. To do this, select the dropdown in the top left that says “Short answer.” A dropdown will appear where you can select from the different question types. If you select multiple choice, you can then enter each course as a new row/answer option.
To delete an existing question, click on the question you would like to delete. At the bottom of the question in the center right, you will see an image of a trash bin. Click on that to delete the question.

To add an additional question

Click on the question before where you would like to add a new question. In the top right corner, you will see a plus sign. Click on this to add a new question.
You can then type in the text for the question you would like to ask, select the type of question you would like to ask and enter any applicable answer options.

**To preview what the survey will look like for teachers**

When you open your copy of the Text Inventory Tool and go through the above steps to edit or adapt the tool to your focal area, you are in the editing mode on Google Forms. In order to preview what the survey will look like for end-users, you can click on the preview button in the top right corner (it looks like an eye).

This will allow you to test the survey and ensure questions appear as you intended.

For additional information about editing in Google Forms, please see “Get Started with Google Forms”