

TESTIMONY TO THE TEXAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

BY **Matthew McCormick**, Texas Public Policy Foundation
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Good afternoon.

My name is Matthew McCormick, Education Director at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, speaking in support of the Literature List recommendations.

When evaluating works for inclusion in the curriculum, only two factors should be considered: 1) the suitability and age-appropriateness of the work, and 2) its usefulness as a tool to teach literacy and literature.

I am pleased to report that the Texas Education Agency has recommended a course of texts that achieves both of these aims. TEA staff deserve praise for creating a list of nearly 400 high-quality works without any suitability issues.

The texts cover a wide range of subjects, from moral lessons to historical topics, and expose students to literary traditions from many times and places, including Ancient Greece and Medieval England, as well as folklore from Africa and Mexico. Along the way, students will read biographies of major historical figures such as Davy Crockett, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Clara Barton, and Harriet Tubman. The high school units blend major themes like tyranny and freedom—seen in stories like *Animal Farm* and *Up From Slavery*—with important historical eras, such as the Great Depression and the Holocaust.

I mentioned before that the two factors the Board should consider are suitability and educational value. In this, the Board should not compromise. Intellectual-sounding words such as “critical literacy” will be used to try to persuade you that books should be included that are either not suitable or have lesser literary value. The argument, which often comes from the same groups currently influencing book selection, is that including these books will increase student engagement and worldliness. The end result, however, is always the same: a watered-down curriculum where literacy and appreciation of literature are replaced by shallow invocations of identity and political correctness. This is already happening in many schools, and is the reason why this measure was implemented in the first place.

By approving this reading list, the Board has the opportunity to enact a generational change by ensuring that every Texas public school student receives a strong foundation in literacy and literature.

Thank you.