**GIVING VOICE TO UNHEARD STORIES: CHALLENGING THE MASTER NARRATIVE WITH GRADE 10 BOYS**

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**Introduction**

Inherent in the power of stories is a danger. Stories are the vehicles through which a culture tells its ideology and as such they function as a legitimization of existing power relations, knowledge, and norms. The literature curriculum in English has historically enforced “master narratives” that represent experiences common to white heterosexual males. The obvious danger is that the curriculum reinforces stereotypes of marginalised peoples and reduces the complexity of human experience to a single narrative.

The inspiration for our research grew out of a desire to find an authentic way in which to include marginalized voices in the English curriculum without perpetuating stereotypes or resorting to “tolerance.” We wanted to empower our students to challenge master narratives and to express what they believe has been left unsaid in “single stories.” By giving voice to unheard stories, we hoped to find a way to encourage our students to approach all texts with healthy scepticism and to “listen” for what has been left unsaid.

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**The Research Action**

**1. BASELINE ASSESSMENT**

How might giving voice to unheard stories help Grade 10 boys challenge the master narrative and, in so doing, develop their critical thinking skills?

**2. PRESENT THE MASTER NARRATIVE**

We selected the 1996 film version of Arthur Miller’s The Crucible as our text because it does not directly challenge the racial or cultural identities of our South African students.

**3. DOCUMENT INITIAL REACTIONS**

The majority of the boys were a passive audience and were “preferred readers” in that they responded to the characters in the film in the way in which the writer and director intended.

**4. UNPACK THE TEXT**

During discussions the boys were encouraged to ask basic questions about representation and voice. Later, we introduced more pointed discussion questions designed to interrogate the way in which power dynamics and texts transact: “Who speaks?”, “Who listens?”, and “Why?”

**5. GIVE VOICE TO UNHEARD STORIES**

The boys were invited to give voice to the possible thoughts, opinions, and feelings of the characters from The Crucible through a variety of creative means such as journals, art, storyboards, poetry, videos, and social media pages. It was in the counter storytelling stage that the students were now able to empathise with specific characters; it was no longer a purely intellectual exercise.

**6. FOLLOW-UP ASSESSMENT**

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**Conclusions**

Making choices regarding the literature that we teach has become increasingly important. It is difficult to justify teaching an English literature curriculum that enforces the master narrative, while silencing other voices. While including marginalised voices is imperative, it is also inadequate. Counter-storytelling provides one possible way to move forward. By “listening” to what has been left unsaid in a text and giving it voice, boys are able to shift their engagement with master narratives and improve their overall critical literacy skills.

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**Key Readings**


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**Further Information**

This poster and further information is available at [http://www.theibsc.org/](http://www.theibsc.org/) Researchers: carlislekt@stdavids.co.za; bechust@stdavids.co.za