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Becoming teachers of engaged citizens

North America and Europe are currently experiencing the tensions caused by the rise in racism and in white supremacy, and the resulting election of populist governments. Educators, living in an age of increased migration, are challenged with building respect across differences of culture, ethnicity, and religion. Teachers of literature have an opportunity to encourage learners to consider multiple cultural perspectives and to become engaged citizens. In order to become critical readers of the world, teachers and students need to be critical readers of text. I have been educating future teachers in critical literary theories such as feminism, postcolonialism, and new historicism, enabling them to introduce these critical lenses to their high school students, thereby enabling teachers and students to interpret inspiring and thought-provoking literature. Former students, now practicing teachers, have been part of a four-year research project focused on using critical theories and literature for social justice teaching. Through analysis of interviews and student work, I will illustrate how initial and ongoing teacher preparation contributes to the development of literate and engaged citizens.