

canon ^[1]

Type of Speech:

noun ^[2]

Definition:

A collection of works recognized as an authoritative list or standard of intellectual and cultural traditions. The literary canon, for example, represents a collection of works deemed to represent exemplars of quality in literature.

Additional Information:

In schools, the language arts curriculum draws from the literary canon, with students generally reading the “great works” of American and English literature. The literary canon is often criticized, however, for its failure to include works by women and people of color, demonstrating instead a bias for works of mostly white, mostly middle to upper-class men. These critiques have motivated teachers to include more diverse texts on reading lists.

For further explanation:

An ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) Digest article, “Book-Length Works Taught in High School English Courses” defines the canon of book-length works of literature taught in U.S. high schools. Among the findings of this 1989 study: “The lists of most frequently required texts show little recognition of the works of women or of minority authors. In all settings examined, the lists of most frequently required books and authors were dominated by white males, with little change in overall balance from similar lists 25 years ago. In the titles required in 30 percent or more of the public schools in 1988, Grades 7-12, for example, there were only 2 women and no minority authors.”

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