

2018

Dear Mrs. Trzaski

William Prezioso
Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cr_essays

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Prezioso, William, "Dear Mrs. Trzaski" (2018). *Common Reading Essay Contest Winners*. 16.
https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cr_essays/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Common Reading Program at DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Common Reading Essay Contest Winners by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact elizabeth.tietjen@providence.edu.

Dear Mrs. Trzaski,

Literature has a long-standing history of remaining locked in English classes. It rarely traverses the divide into the domain of other subjects. History classes, science classes, and even math classes could all benefit from adding enriching texts to their curriculum. This was realized while trying to decide where *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah could possibly fit in Trumbull High School. I loved the book, and I truly believe that it should fit somewhere into class, but at first my perspective was not broad enough. This collection of stories took so long to place because, frankly, it does not quite benefit any of the English classes; it belongs in your 9th grade history, better known as Global Civilizations. To learn for complete understanding rather than just basic comprehension in preparation for assessments, there is absolutely no better way than through stories told from a relatable source. I was truly inspired by Noah's words and I feel I would be remiss if I did not wholeheartedly recommend this book to you and your future students.

The energy of culture is something that simply cannot be taught in a textbook or a PowerPoint. The traditions and celebrations and ideals, sure, but the way that people of a culture feel and the pride (or contempt) that they have for it is something that can only be understood through story and dialogue. Trevor Noah puts his life experiences under the microscope and presses the lens to our eye in *Born a Crime*. South Africa has many different languages, such as Xhosa, Pedi, Afrikaans, Zulu, etc., and it is easy to dismiss that when hearing it during regular learning. But when Noah explains how people he knows cannot speak to each other or how citizens cannot even communicate with the police, it shows the flaws in having so many languages. Language is a major part of culture, but religion is another huge factor. The fact that most tribes mix their own traditional beliefs with the Christianity that was forced upon them shows that, while many South Africans have similar beliefs to us, they also have their differences – differences in culture. Adding this book to the curriculum would provide students with a deeper understanding of cultural differences and the beauty that comes from them.

In Global Civilizations, we learned about different civilizations through history and for a brief moment, apartheid in South Africa was taught. I would be lying if I said I could recall any of that knowledge from those lessons, but, after finishing this book, I feel more informed

on what apartheid really was. Apartheid was a systematic oppression of blacks and other minorities, built on racism and enforced by pushing these minorities into ghettos in the outskirts with no possible way to move forward and exit the life of poverty. Noah briefly touches on the “black tax” and this is one of the most difficult issues to understand. It’s easy to say, “work harder to make more money and move out of the ghetto” but the “black tax” proves this notion to be false. A family member who starts succeeding has to help bring the whole family up with them, a burden too heavy for one person to manage and still succeed. This coupled with explanations of settlements such as Hammanskraal, that can never physically advance or improve because of the geographical and economic factors, showed me that it is not as simple as teaching a man to fish. As Noah says, you also have to give him a rod. I would never have truly understood this hopelessness without hearing about it from a firsthand source. Textbooks and presentations can explain the governmental structure of apartheid all they want, but stories have a more genuine nature and are more likely to stick in the brains of students. Although this attitude towards my 9th grade education may seem cavalier and perhaps insulting, I mean it in the best way possible. I see this shortcoming as an opportunity to build upon what was tried and make it better. I believe that adding *Born a Crime* into the Global Civilizations curriculum as supplementary reading could only show great results.

Born a Crime, while a terrific piece of literature for casual reading, is also a source of knowledge that traditional learning simply cannot compete with. I believe from the bottom of my heart that this book being added into the curriculum of Global Civilizations could not only draw out the greatness in students on their exams, but give them a tool to learn for more than just tests, a tool to learn for true understanding.