

Rethinking Schools *Online*

Q/A: I hate the textbook I've been given to use. What can I do?

In order to present students with multiple perspectives on any topic, it is likely that you will need more than one resource. Part of the challenge in becoming a social justice teacher is finding the materials you will need to supplement the books you have available in your school. Then there is also the trick of finding the time and opportunities in the weekly schedule to use them. It is not easy, but it is worth the energy you expend.

Take the time to review the textbooks you're given, then determine where you will need to add on to what you've got. Start with your school library. Tap the public library as well, for classroom literature. If you have access to a university, see if it has collections of curriculum materials available for lending. Then get on the Internet: Start with the resources and web links you'll find at www.rethinkingschools.org.

Monthly book clubs like Scholastic or Troll often offer quality literature at a great price. They are an inexpensive way to begin collecting multiple copies of books for use in reading instruction. Don't be afraid to ask if there is money in the school budget to add to your classroom collection.

Songs and poetry are great sources of alternative perspectives too. And you can use data and information from the news to help students explore concepts in math, science, and other curricular areas.

If you still feel you're "stuck" with poor resources, remember that you have the ability to help your students look critically at what they are reading and see the shortcomings for themselves. Help them find ways to "talk back" to the textbook and teach them how to find other perspectives that are not represented in its pages.

— *Rita Tenorio*

If your principal has told you to use the textbook, defying a direct order from him/her will generally be considered insubordination and will land you in trouble, or even the unemployment line. However, perhaps there are other people in your school or department who don't like this book. Ask around to find out. Get together with those people. Write up a critique of the book and propose alternative curriculum.

In the short term, go ahead and use the book but use it critically. Invite students to read between the lines: Whose perspectives are missing? Was America "discovered" or "invaded"? See "Students as Textbook Detectives" in *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 1*, or *Rethinking Columbus* for lots of ideas on how to engage students in a critique of their textbooks. ([Click here for more details.](#))

In a nutshell: If you feel like you have to use the assigned text, use it, but find other materials as well. Even if you "use" the textbook, any good administrator will expect you to supplement it with lots of other materials.

— *Bill Bigelow*

Downloaded from the website for The New Teacher Book, published by Rethinking Schools, 2004.

For more information visit www.rethinkingschools.org/newteacher

Last Updated Fall 2004