


TEXT SET TOPIC: Resistance Through Humor and Storytelling
Suggested for use with Born a Crime by Trevor Noah

Grade Level Recommendation: Grades 11-12

Key Focus Areas for Design:

Counternarratives **Current Events** **Identity** Language Perspectives **Social Justice**

Topic: This text set is about encouraging students to see how humor and storytelling can be powerful vehicles for resisting injustice and to understand how racial inequity is upheld through laws and policies.

Curriculum Connection:  This text set can be done as is but is suggested as a companion resource for Trevor Noah's memoir, *Born a Crime*.

Context/Rationale/Reflections: This text set focuses on Trevor Noah's use of humor as a narrative element and challenges students to emphasize humor through their own storytelling. Resources are selected to pair with *Born a Crime's* content and to enhance students' understandings of the author's perspective, the sociopolitical climate when the text was written about, and connections to today.

Important teacher notes for this text set

- Despite being “born a crime” during apartheid in South Africa, Trevor Noah emphasizes the use of humor in his memoir, *Born a Crime*. This text set aims to uplift these elements of joy and humor while also not minimizing the legacies of apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow in the United States.
- The background knowledge of *Born a Crime* is high complexity. The additional readings and activities in this text set aim to support students' background knowledge and critical thinking so students are better able to comprehend the context behind events in the novel.



Resources to build teacher background knowledge:

- [Trevor Noah - Age, Family & Facts](#): This website provides more information on Trevor Noah, author of *Born a Crime*.
- [Apartheid: The rise and fall of South Africa's 'apartness' laws](#): This video provides historical context about how apartheid came to be.
- [Race and ethnicity in South Africa](#): This website provides more information on the racial and ethnic categories in South Africa and how they came to be.
- [Jim Crow Laws - Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#): This website provides a sampling of Jim Crow Laws from the 1880s to the 1960s.
- [Racial Segregation and Concentrated Poverty: The History of Housing in Black America](#): This video provides historical context of housing inequality and federal housing policies.
- [The colonisation of South Africa](#): This video provides historical context of the colonial history of South Africa.
- [Soweto Student Uprising](#): This website provides an overview of the Soweto Student Uprising in 1976.



A note for multilingual students:



Text Sets are meant to support knowledge building! Support opportunities for student **translanguaging** while using this text set by encouraging students to write, discuss, and present in their home language(s), English, or a combination while they are learning.

Text/ Resource	Author/ Creator	Brief Description/Notes	Why use this resource?	Considerations for using this resource
Permanent Exhibition – Apartheid Museum VIRTUAL MUSEUM	The Apartheid Museum	“The permanent exhibition is a trip through time that traces the country’s footsteps from these dark days of bondage to a place of healing founded on the principles of a democracy.”	<i>Born a Crime</i> is a rich novel with a lot of historical context that may be out of students’ purview. This virtual apartheid museum provides students with information on 21 different topics related to apartheid.	Assign student groups to different categories on The Apartheid Museum website (e.g., “The Pillars of the Constitution,” “Race Classification,” etc.). Read and take notes. Have students create a presentation and present to the class their findings on their assigned or chosen topic(s).
Trevor Chats with His Grandma About Apartheid and Tours Her Home. “MTV Cribs”-Style The Daily Show VIDEO	The Daily Show, Trevor Noah	Trevor Noah gives an “MTV Cribs”-style tour of his grandma’s home.	There are many lively scenes described in <i>Born a Crime</i> . This video gives students a visual of where Trevor Noah grew up.	<p>Have students choose their favorite scene from <i>Born a Crime</i> thus far, illustrate it, and give their picture a caption that uses humor to describe what is happening.</p> <p>Students can create their own memory floor plan by picking a place that is important to them and/or where they have spent a lot of time, sketching a floor plan of that place, and listing memories or experiences they associated with different parts of the floor plan. Students can construct a narrative to go along with their memory floor plan.</p>
Soweto by Kamau Brathwaite Poetry Foundation POEM	Kamau Brathwaite	<p>Kamau Brathwaite was a Barbadian poet and academic. This poem is about the Soweto Uprising in 1976.</p> <p>For more information: The Soweto Uprising, 1976 - Exhibit - Divestment for Humanity: The Anti-Apartheid Movement at the University of Michigan</p>	<p>Trevor Noah’s mom raised him in the Black township of Soweto. This poem gives students the context of an anti-apartheid resistance movement and the violence that ensued as retaliation towards their resistance efforts.</p> <p><i>For context: Trevor Noah was born 8 years after the Soweto Uprising.</i></p>	Have students read and annotate the poem. Students choose a passage from the poem that has meaningful diction, look for words and phrases that seem to form some sort of pattern, and analyze the denotations and connotations of those words and phrases. How does Brathwaite’s use of diction affect the mood of the poem?

Text/ Resource	Author/ Creator	Brief Description/Notes	Why use this resource?	Considerations for using this resource
<p>Nelson Mandela's Statement from the Dock at the Opening of the Defence Case in the Rivonia Trial - 1964</p> <p>SPEECH</p>	<p>Nelson Mandela</p>	<p>Nelson Mandela's statement from the Rivonia Trial in 1964. "At the conclusion of the trial, Mandela and seven others...were convicted. Mandela was found guilty on four charges of sabotage and like the others was sentenced to life imprisonment."</p>	<p>Nelson Mandela was a South African anti-apartheid activist and is mentioned often in <i>Born a Crime</i>. This speech provides students with insights into his efforts and personhood and the ability to reflect on what makes a speech effective.</p>	<p>Have students finish this sentence: "Violence is..." Have students share their answers with each other and see if they can reach consensus as a class on a definition of violence. Generally, students will agree that if people are being hurt in some way, violence is occurring. Based on their definition of violence, in what ways could the whole system of apartheid be considered violent?</p> <p>Have students evaluate Nelson Mandela's speech for rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) and evaluate the effectiveness of his speech.</p> <p>In turn, students can write their own speech advocating for change and elevating an issue which interests them.</p>
<p>The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 Africa's Great Civilizations PBS LearningMedia</p> <p>VIDEO</p>	<p>PBS</p>	<p>This video details the genocide that took place in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1885 and 1907, where it is estimated that at least 10 million Congolese people were brutally killed and countless more were forced to endure other horrific acts of subjugation.</p> <p><i>Note: Please see the sensitivity note on this resource. There is content/use of visuals depicting atrocities committed that may be challenging for some students. Teachers should consider students' experience and be prepared to engage further as needed.</i></p>	<p>In <i>Born a Crime</i>, Trevor Noah says that because there is a lack of records of African atrocities, it is harder for people to be horrified by them. This video gives students insight into one atrocity we do have documented and gives students insight into the devastation of European imperialism in Africa.</p> <p><i>Note: Be sure to use a map when discussing this event to reinforce the size and geography of the continent of Africa and to highlight that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa are two different countries within this large continent.</i></p>	<p>Have students brainstorm and discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role can schools play in upholding unjust systems? • What role can schools play in resisting unjust systems? • What responsibility do schools have to equip students with the knowledge and skills to resist unjust systems? <p>In Chapter 13 of <i>Born a Crime</i>, Trevor gets called to the principal's office to discuss Teddy's shoplifting. In his conversation with school and police officials, he appears shocked and oblivious. We know through his narration that he is actually feeling invisible and angry that they are unable to see that it is clearly him in the video due to their own racial prejudice. The juxtaposition of Trevor's internal thoughts with the dialogue in this scene shows how powerful it is when we blend these tools.</p>

Text/ Resource	Author/ Creator	Brief Description/Notes	Why use this resource?	Considerations for using this resource
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have students brainstorm a list of moments in their lives where their internal thoughts did not match what they were saying out loud. Write this scene using narration and dialogue. Attempt to incorporate elements of humor as Trevor Noah does in this scene.
Changing South Africa's 'abysmal legacy' in black education ARTICLE	NJ PBS	<p>This video explores an initiative that attempts to address Black educational inequality through entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Other groups who continue to work toward an equitable society in post-apartheid South Africa:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the young activists shaking up South Africa - BBC News • Stories of South Africa's Powerful Women Doing Extraordinary Things Human Rights Watch • Transitional Justice in South Africa Facing History and Ourselves 	<p>These resources give student examples of groups and the work they do in post-apartheid South Africa to fight for equity. The resistance efforts featured in these sources offer students the opportunity to expand their definition of resistance and look at examples of resistance in <i>Born a Crime</i>.</p>	<p>Have students brainstorm examples of resistance from their reading of <i>Born a Crime</i> thus far (e.g., Trevor's mom choosing to call her son Trevor so that he is "beholden to no fate," buying a car and traveling to places "black people never went," etc.). As a class, brainstorm how humor can be a method of resistance as well.</p> <p>Have students write a funny story about something they remember from their childhood. Students should first brainstorm a list of things they remember from childhood and then identify which things could lend to writing a funny story.</p>

Text/ Resource	Author/ Creator	Brief Description/Notes	Why use this resource?	Considerations for using this resource
Trevor Noah I was Born a Crime VIDEO	Trevor Noah	<p>This video is a brief comedy segment. In the segment, Trevor Noah provides context about growing up during apartheid and how his very existence was a crime.</p> <p><i>Note: Teacher discretion is needed for using this resource. There are curse words that are bleeped but evident in this video. Trevor Noah also draws on assumptions/stereotypes in his comedy; to make use of this clip, teachers should be prepared to engage in conversations with students about these assumptions and stereotypes.</i></p>	This video can be utilized at the beginning or end of the unit as it gives students brief insight into Trevor Noah’s life under apartheid as well as his sense of humor.	<p>At the conclusion of <i>Born a Crime</i>, brainstorm several ways that Trevor used humor and what overall purpose humor held in his memoir.</p> <p>What assumptions or stereotypes is Trevor Noah sharing and/or confronting in this resource? Why does he use comedy and humor in the face of racial injustice/bias? What points is he making about race when reflecting on the way in which he was labeled in South Africa versus the United States?</p> <p>What role does storytelling, like Trevor Noah’s <i>Born a Crime</i>, have in challenging unjust systems? Students can use evidence from <i>Born a Crime</i> and any other sources of their choice to support their claim.</p>

Options for culminating experiences:

- **Informational Research Paper** → Students will write a thesis-driven informational paper in which they research what they perceive to be a past or present unjust law, policy, and/or regulation and analyze the resistance movements (or people behind the movements) that were monumental in overturning these unjust laws, policies, and/or regulations.
- **Mini Memoir** → Students will write a story that provides the opportunity to bring awareness to an unjust system and/or about a moment in their lives, allowing them to incorporate humor. Stories should contain a clear beginning, middle, and end and incorporate a thoughtful mix of thoughtshots, snapshots, and dialogue.