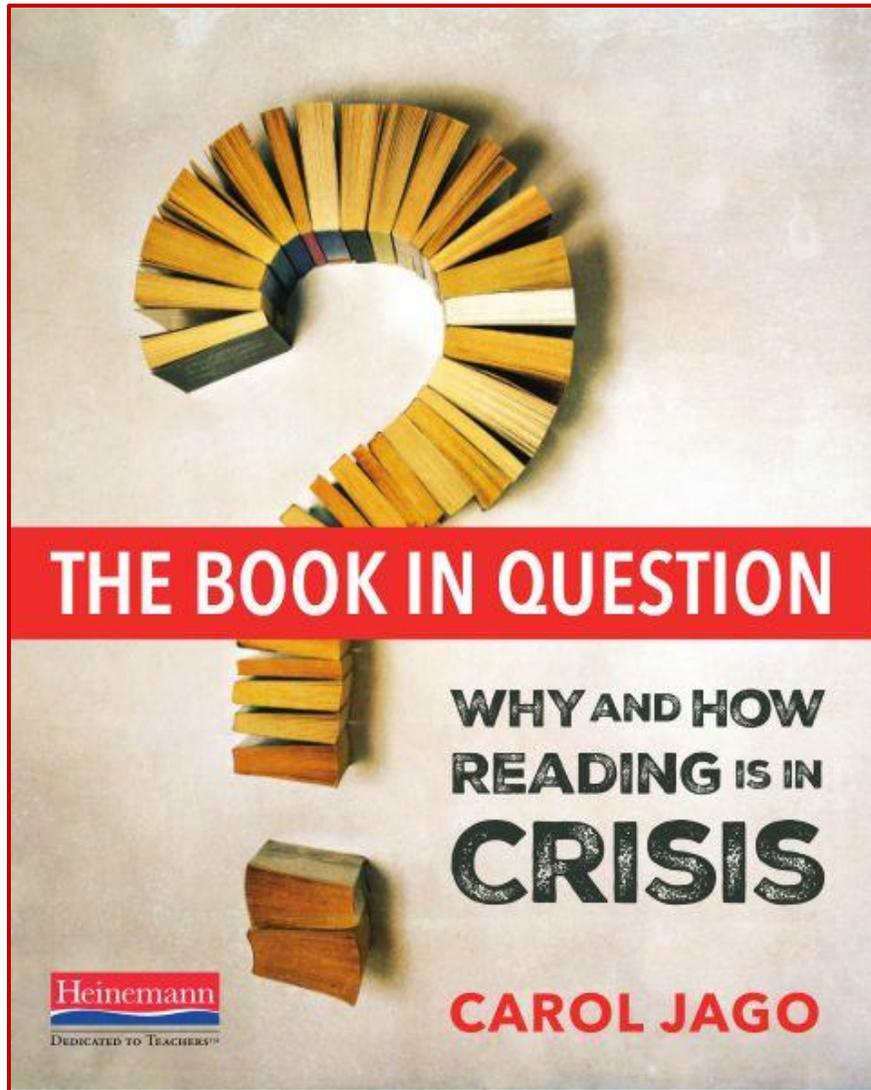


The Liminality of Reading and Writing in the Age of AI

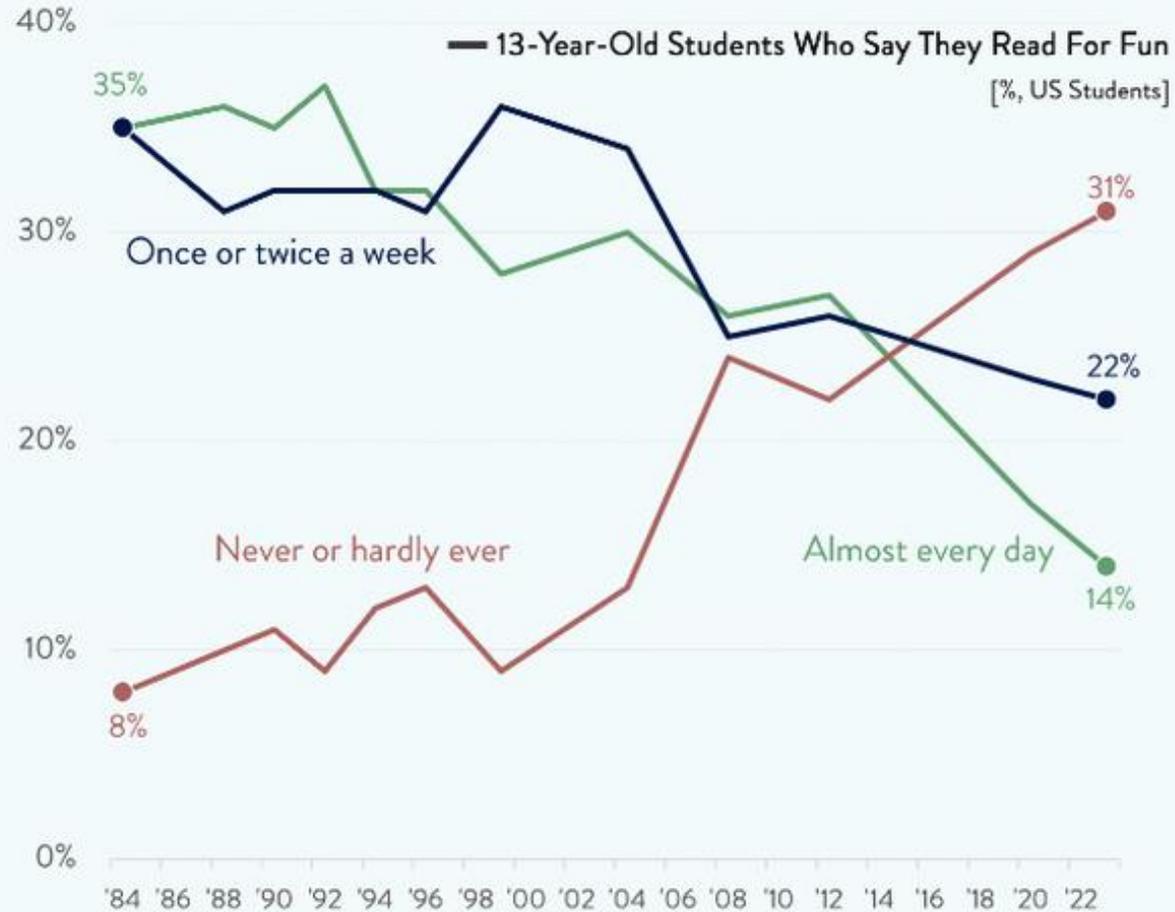
Carol Jago
ERWC summer institute
June, 2025



There is urgency

- Nationally, NAEP reading scores are down in both 4th and 8th grade. Only 30% of students at or above proficient.
- Instead of making up lost ground, reading scores continue to slide.
- Students are reading less than any previous generation.

Books Are Losing The Attention War For Kids, As Fewer Teens Read For Fun



Source: NCES Nation's Report Card

chart



Popular

Latest

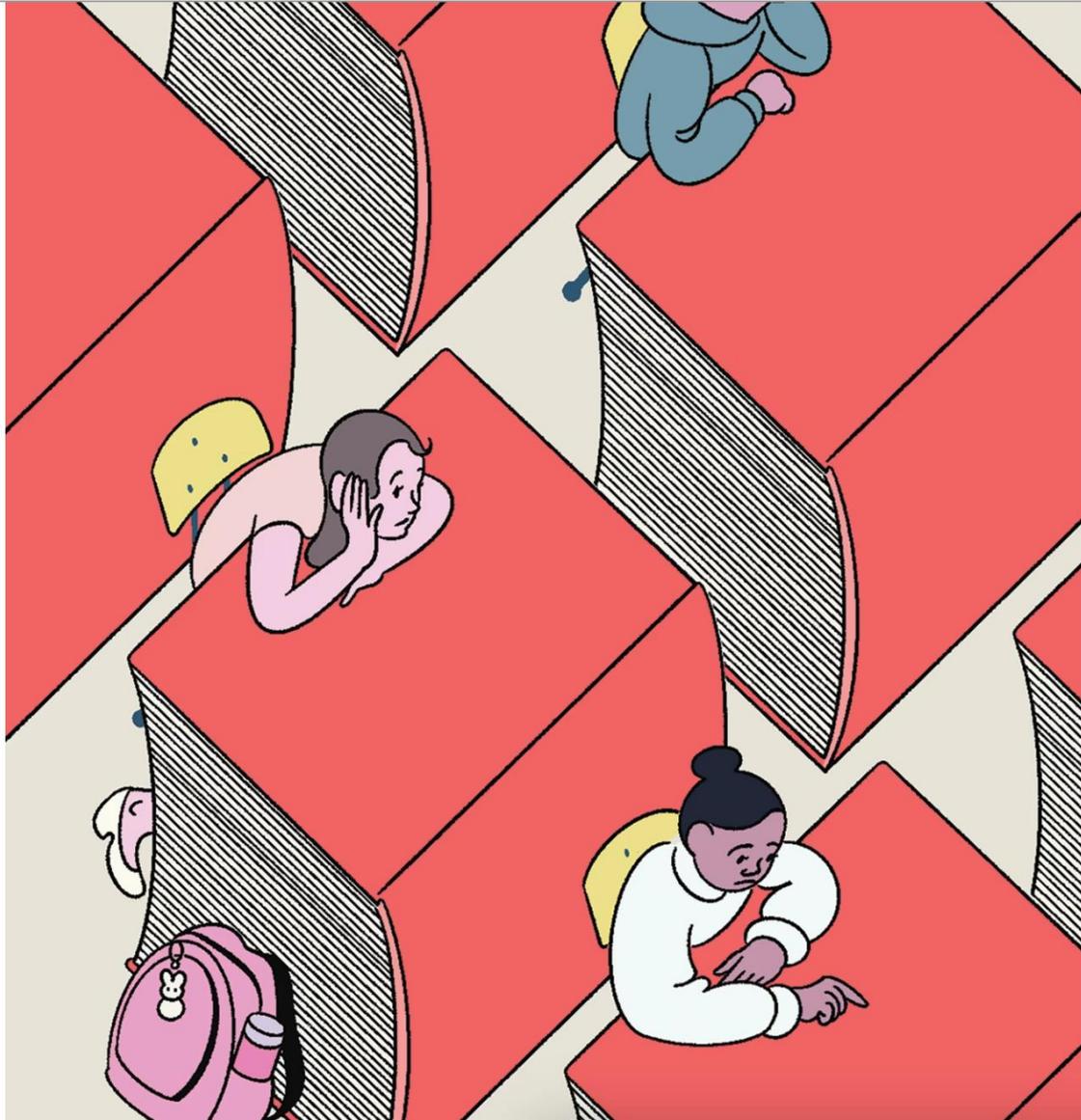
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EDUCATION

THE ELITE COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO CAN'T READ BOOKS

To read a book in college, it helps to have read a book in high school.

By Rose Horowitz



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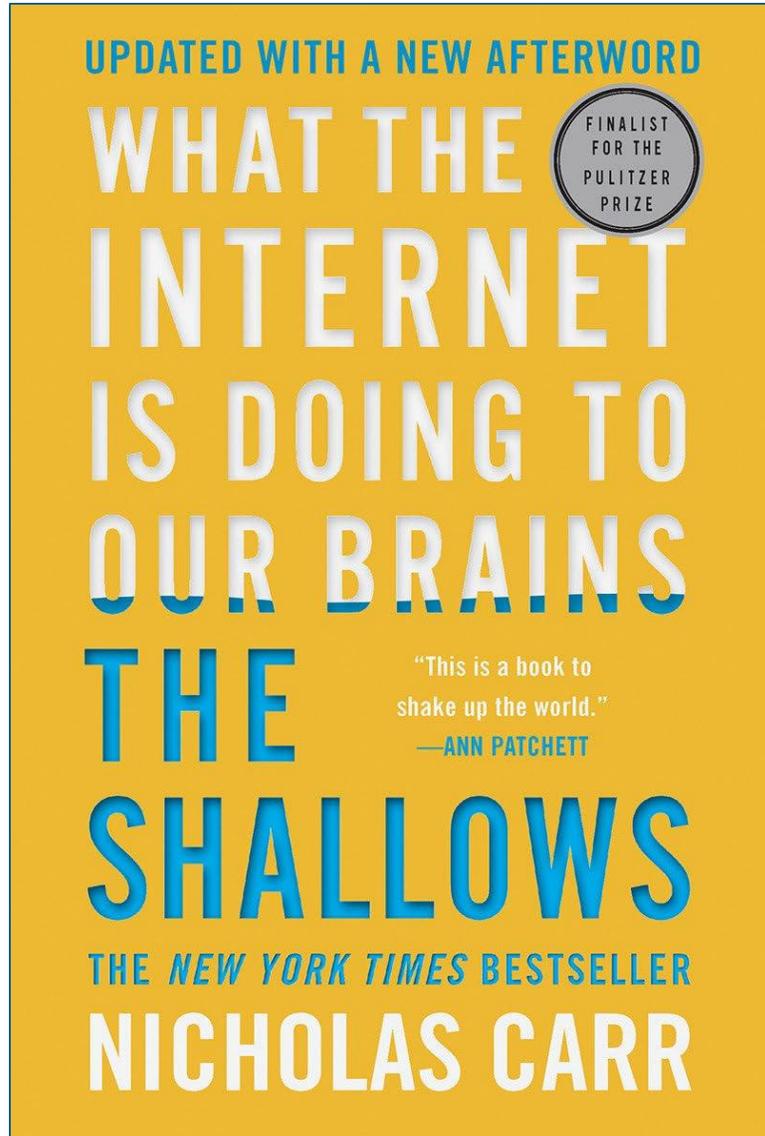
Choose one of the quotations from college professors and write for a few minutes in response.

“It’s not that they don’t want to do the reading. It’s that they don’t know how.”

“It’s not just the frenetic pace; they struggle to attend to small details while keeping track of the overall plot.”

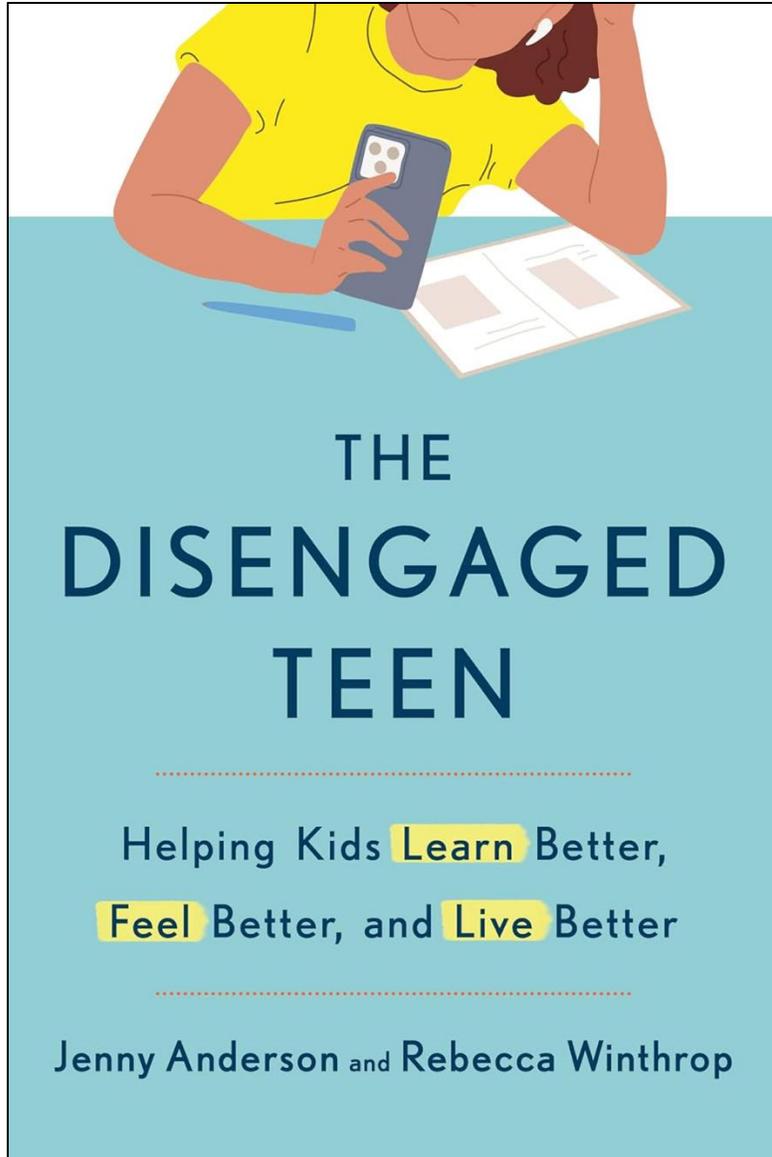
“There are always students who “read insightfully and easily and write beautifully, but they are now more exceptions.”

“Being bored has become unnatural.”



The more time we spend online, the more incapable we seem to become of quiet reverie and the focused attention serious reading demands.

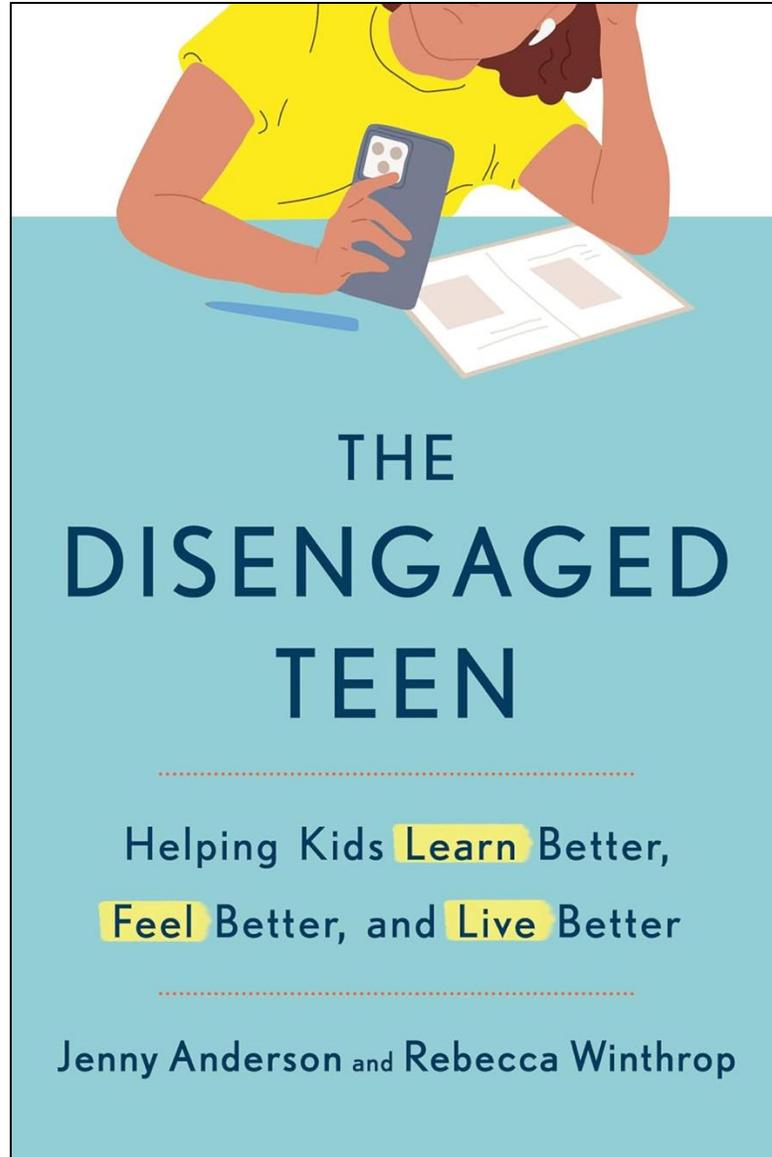
Our brains are being rewired.



A shocking number of students don't see the point of school anymore.

Artificial intelligence offers young people a frictionless world. Kids need to build the muscles for doing hard things.

Becoming good at learning will make students resilient whatever the future may bring.



Four modes of engagement

- Resister
- Passenger
- Achiever
- Explorer



Rigor doesn't need to be rigid

- When choosing texts, be careful not to mistake **difficult** for **valuable**.
- The books we teach should be sources of both **power and pleasure** for students.
- Growth hinges not just on the quality of the books we teach but on the **intellectual culture** we surround them with.
-

Harold Bloom

The Anatomy
of Influence

Literature as a
Way of Life

Bloom's criteria for choosing works to be read, reread, and taught to others

- aesthetic splendor
- cognitive power
- wisdom

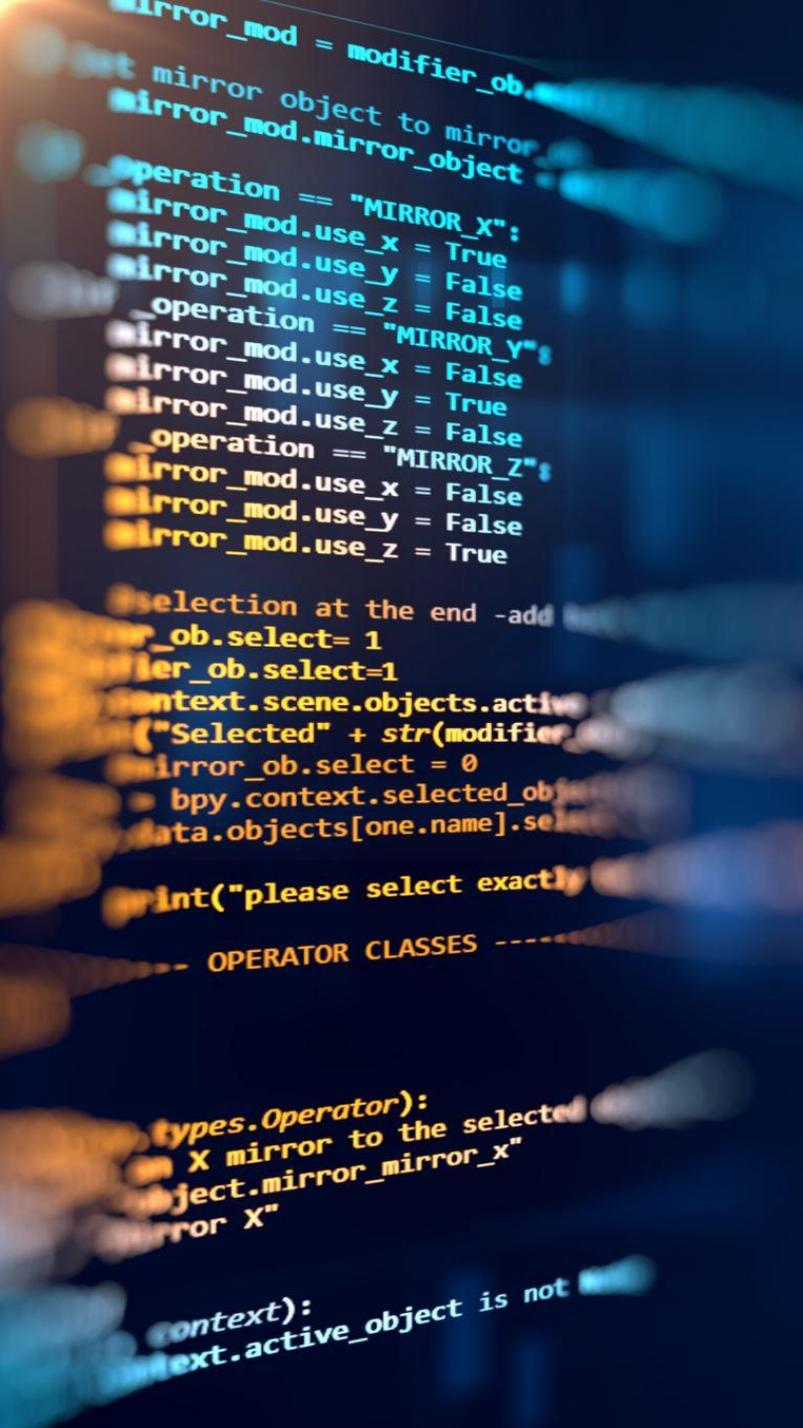
Is comprehension better or worse with digital text?

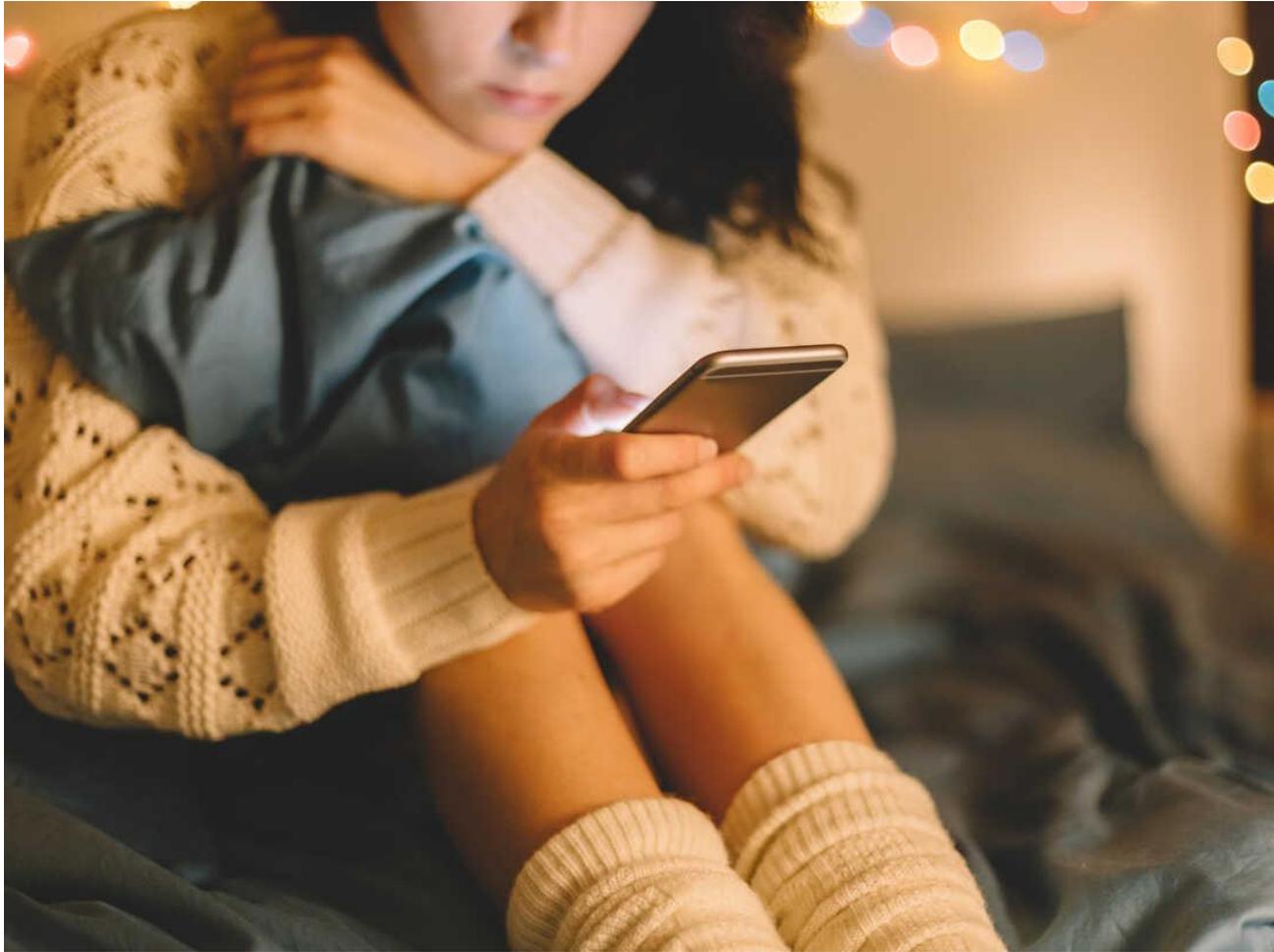
Tim Shanahan on literacy

New studies confirm that the processing of texts on screens is faster and shallower.

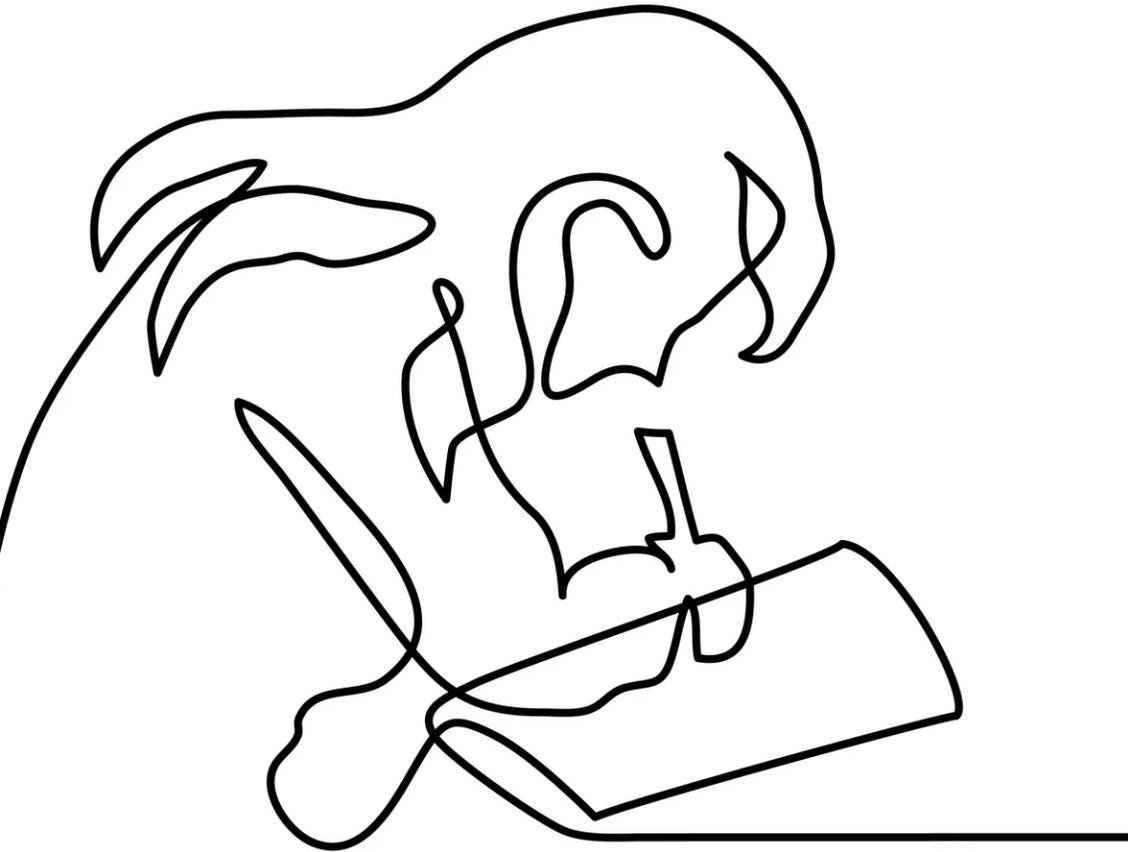
We skim more when reading screens and we are less likely to stop and think about what we are reading which limits later memory for the information.

Teachers should be trying to figure out how to prepare kids to read digitally. Students don't comprehend digital text as well as they do paper text. **But they must and they should.**





It isn't that deep reading isn't possible on a screen, **but it's harder.**

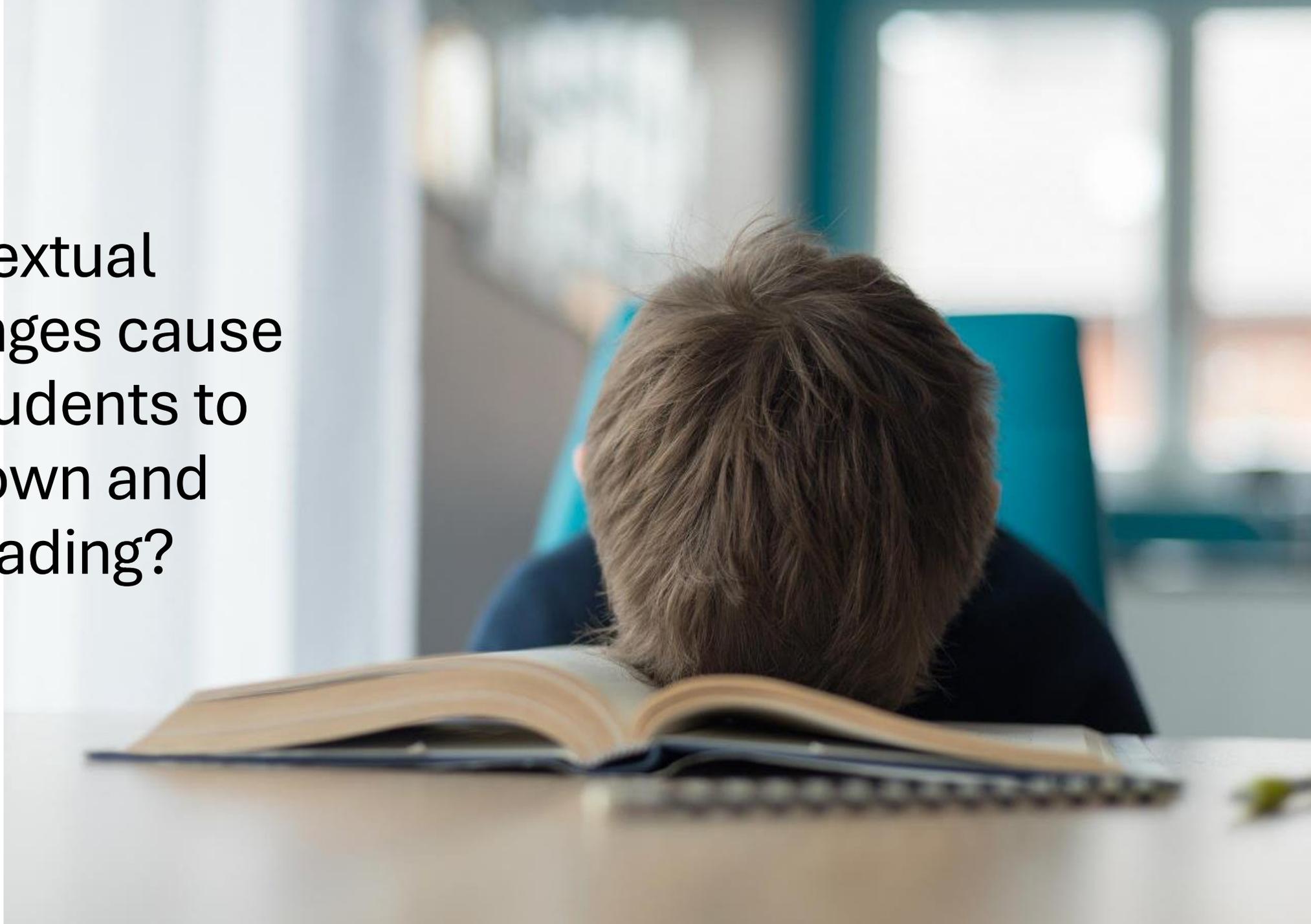


Vgotsky's ZPD, zone of proximal development

The space between what a student can do independently and what that student can do with the help of a teacher.

Desirable difficulty – working at the edge of our current ability.

What textual challenges cause your students to shut down and stop reading?



Common Textual Challenges

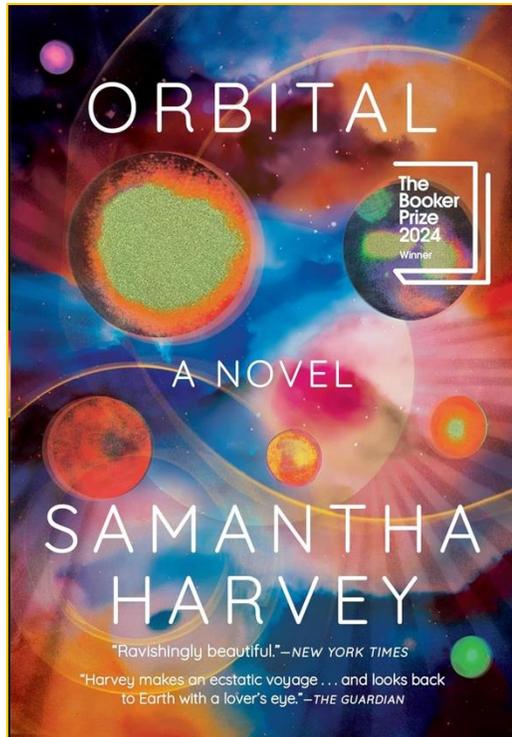
- lack of prior background knowledge
- vocabulary
- complex syntax
- dense paragraphs
- length of the text
- use of figurative language
- too much description, too little action



Think Alouds

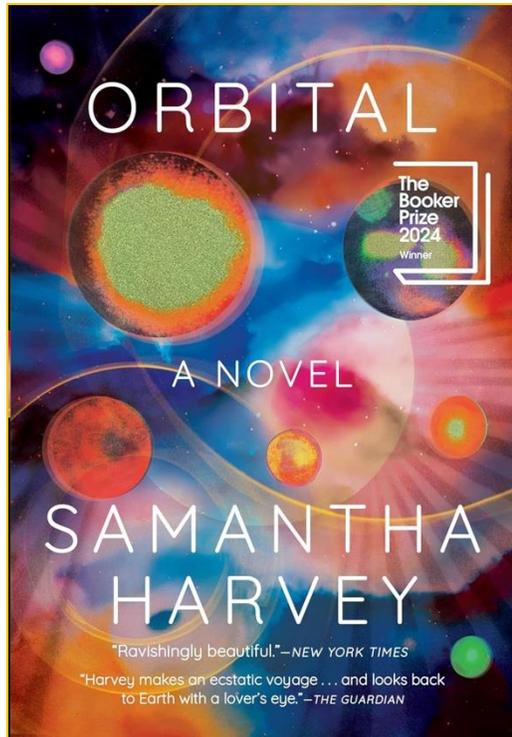


Orbit minus 1



Rotating about the earth in their spacecraft they are so together, and so alone, that even their thoughts, their internal mythologies, at times convene. Sometimes they dream the same dreams – of fractals and blue spheres and familiar faces engulfed in the dark, and of the bright energetic black of space that slams their senses. Raw space is a panther, feral and primal; they dream it stalking through their quarters.

They hang in their sleeping bags, A hand-span away beyond a skin of metal the universe unfolds in simple eternities. Their sleep begins to thin and some distant earthly morning dawns and their laptops flash the first silent messages of a new day; the wide-awake, always-awake station vibrates with fans and filters. In the galley are the remnants of last night's dinner – dirty forks secured to the table by magnets and chopsticks wedged in a pouch on the wall. Four blue balloons are buoyed on the circulating air, some foil bunting says *Happy Birthday*, it was nobody's birthday but it was a celebration and it was all they had. There's a smear of chocolate on a pair of scissors and a small felt moon on a piece of string, tied to the handles of the foldable table.



Fractal

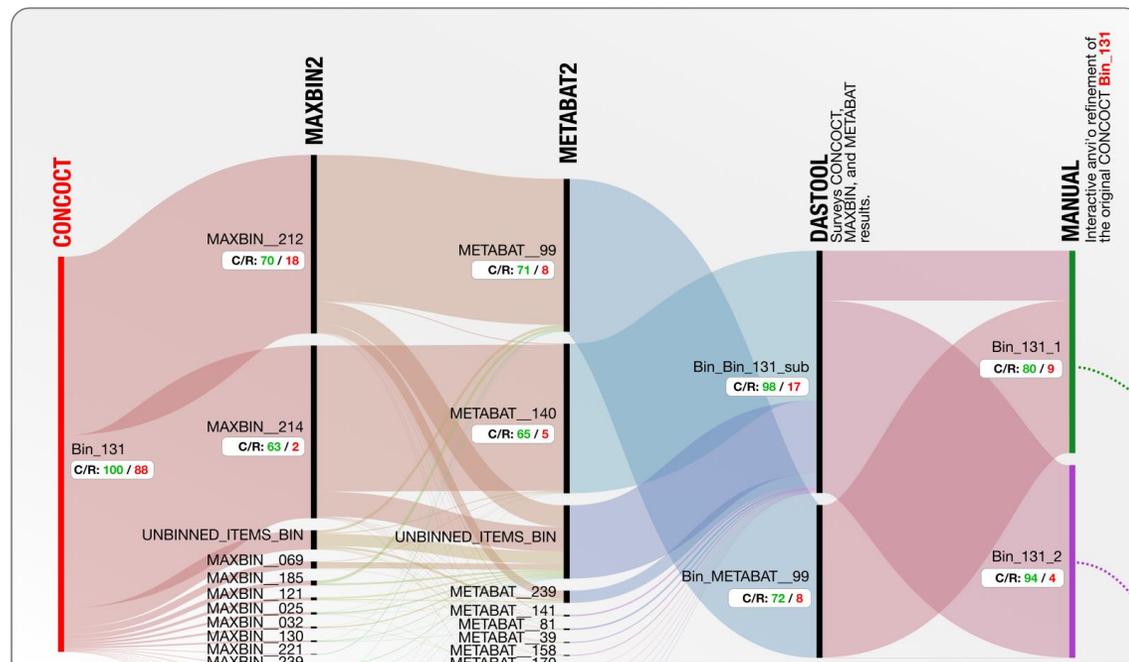
In mathematics, a **fractal** is a geometric shape containing detailed structure at arbitrarily small scales, usually having a fractal dimension strictly exceeding the topological dimension.

Fake Reading

Many students read without without understanding what they have “read.”

They lose the thread, breeze past words they don't understand, read words without knowing to what they refer. Their eyes scan the page, but little meaning sticks with them.



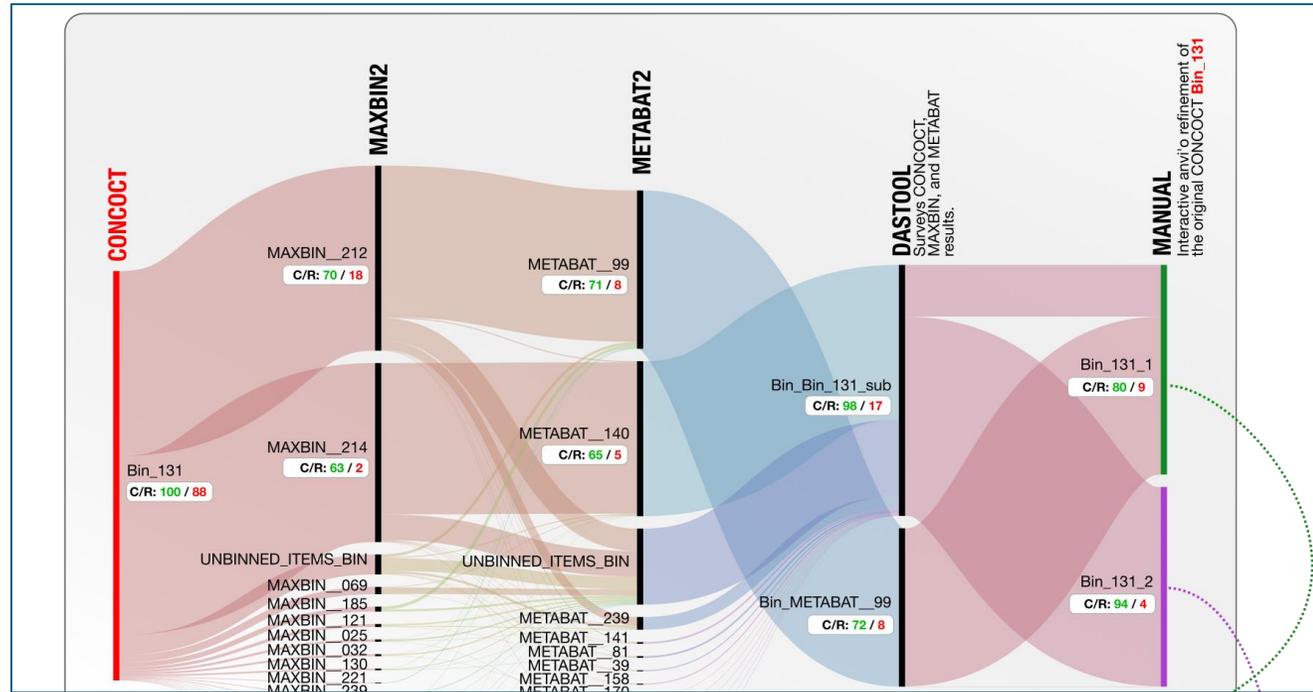


Visualizing the fate of contigs across metagenomic binning algorithms

a blogpost by **A. Murat Eren**

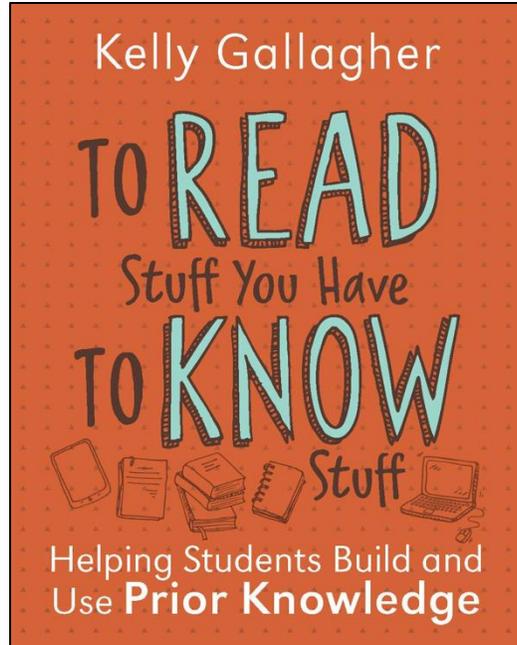
As the number of environmental metagenomes, binning algorithms, and metagenome-assembled genomes (MAGs) rapidly increase, it becomes easier to get washed away by the avalanche of data and forget what really matters. But when the dust settles from the current race of who is going to put together the largest number of genomes in one sit, perhaps we will once again realize that the convenience of outsourcing all decisions to some computer programs did not serve us as well as we thought it would.

The premise of metagenomic binning is relatively simple on paper: collect sample, sequence all DNA, assemble sequences, bin contigs, celebrate.



Talk with a partner about a time when your eyes passed over a text, but you took very little in.

To combat fake reading ...



- Frame challenging, information-laden text.
 - disciplinary vocabulary
 - a trailer for the reading
 - create a context
- Demonstrate when and how to proceed with incomplete information.
- Use writing to help students retain what they are learning from the text.
- Have students ask themselves, “What did the author think I already knew?”

Cultivating reading comprehension in a digital age

Skimming is the new norm for reading.

What goes missing are reading processes which require a quality of attention increasingly at risk in a culture and on a medium in which constant distraction bifurcates our attention.



What are these essential reading processes?



- connecting background knowledge to new information
- making analogies and drawing inferences
- examining truth value, expanding empathy and knowledge
- critical analysis



Forty-two percent of lower-performing students report rarely reading for fun

A larger percentage of 13-year-old students reported **never or hardly ever reading for fun** on their own time compared to 2020 and 2012



How often do you read for fun on your own time?

At least once a week

Proportion of **lower-performing students** (below 25th percentile)



Proportion of **higher-performing students** (at or above 75th percentile)



Once or twice a month



A few times a year



Never or hardly ever



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from students performing at or above the 75th percentile.

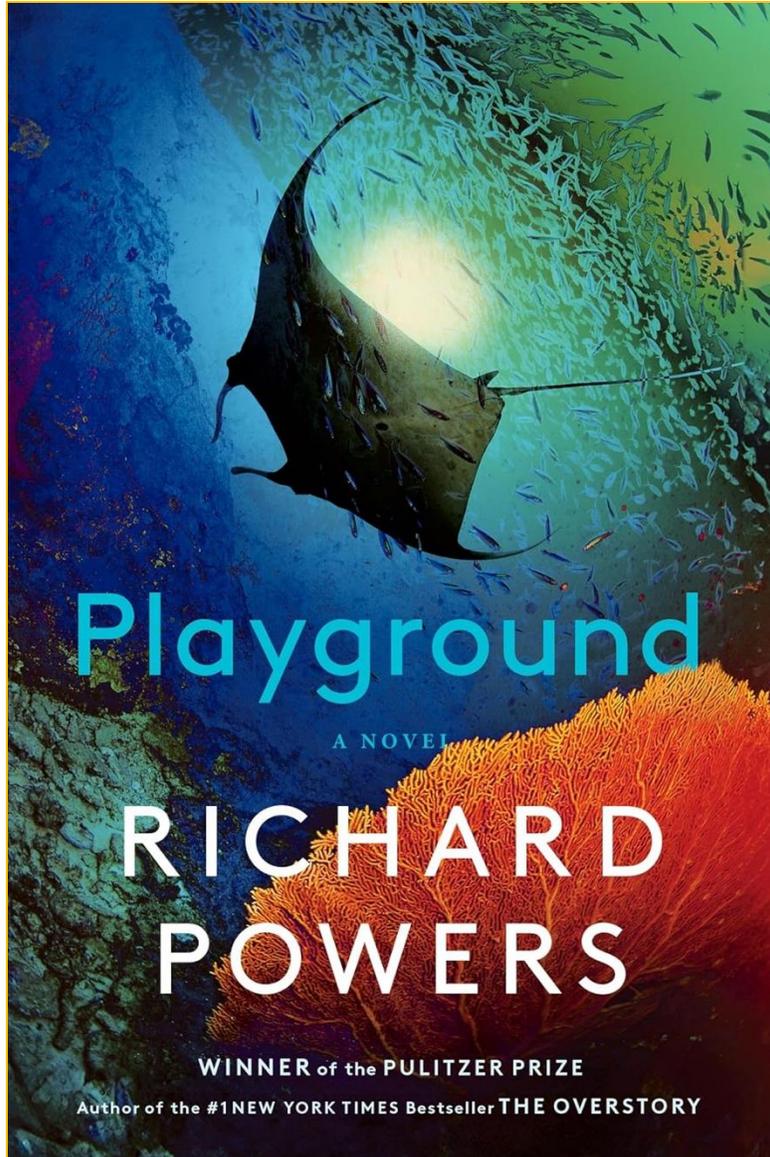
BY KWAME ALEXANDER
NEWBERY AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE CROSSOVER*



Have you ever picked up a book and said to yourself, “I think I’ll practice my reading skills”?

Me neither.

Grade 6 ERWC module



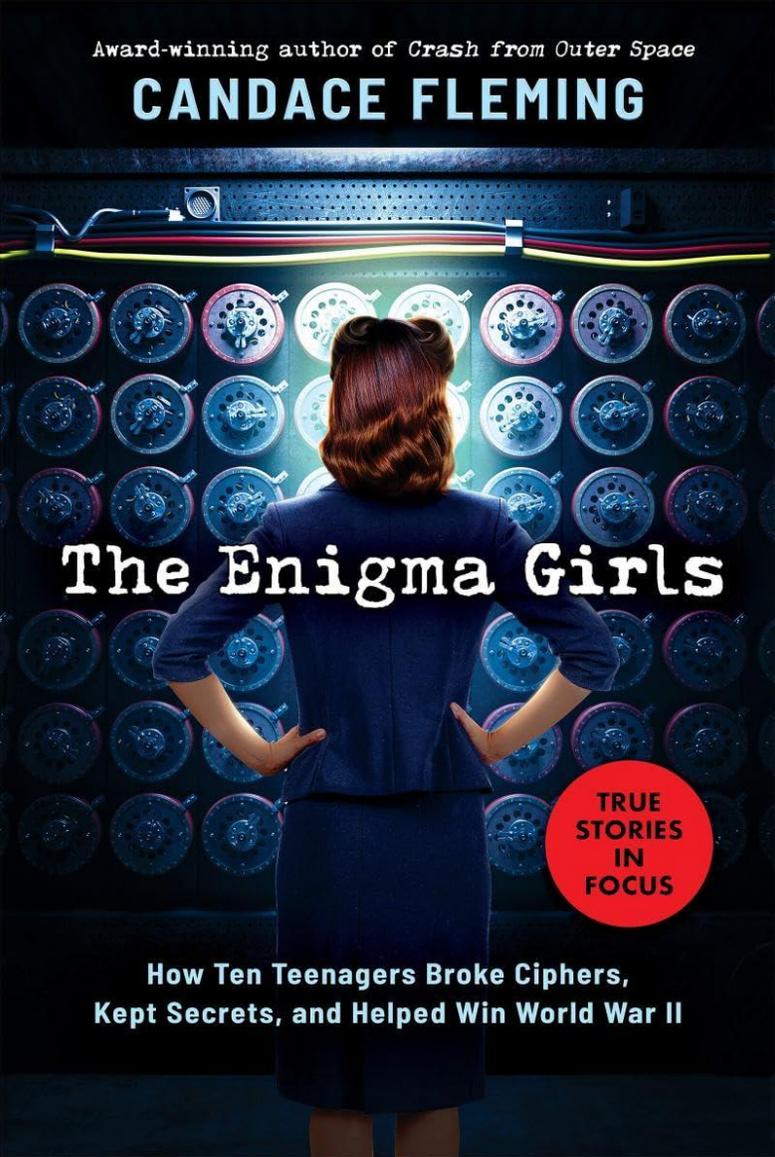
My guess is that mere technology will not kill the novel ... but novels can be sidelined. When that happens, our society will be brutalized and coarsened by people who have no way of understanding us or each other.

Books are uniquely positioned to help us develop a “widened eye.”

- Jane Smiley

Award-winning author of *Crash from Outer Space*

CANDACE FLEMING

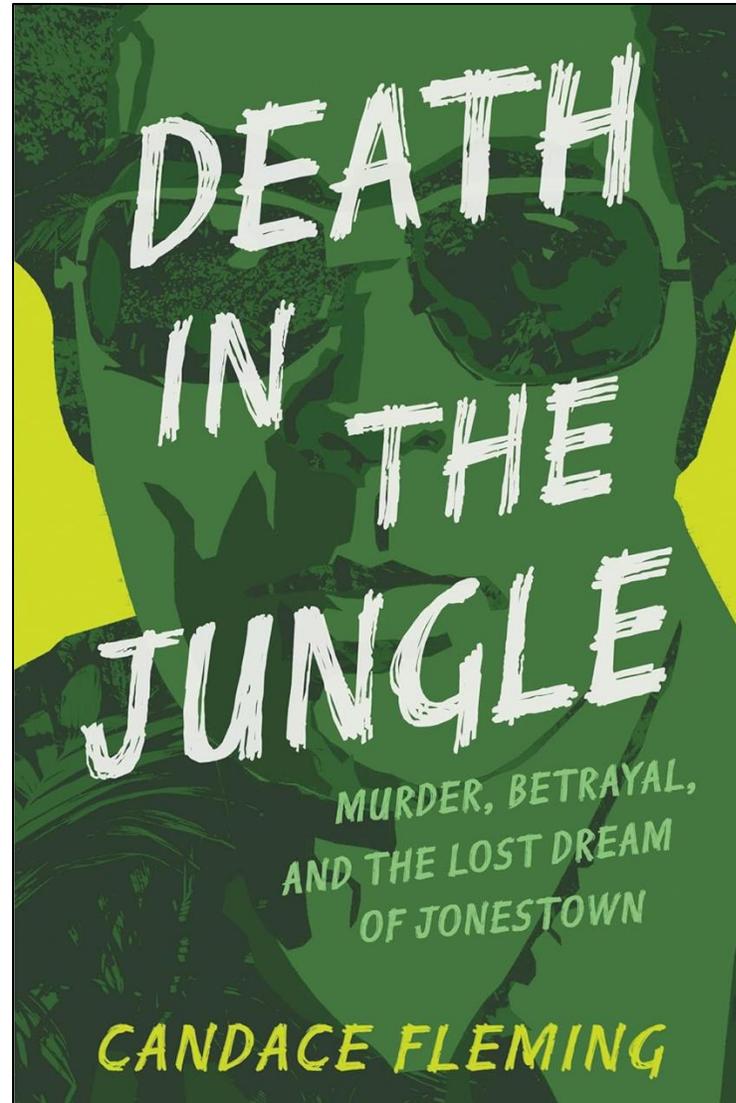


The Enigma Girls

**TRUE
STORIES
IN
FOCUS**

**How Ten Teenagers Broke Ciphers,
Kept Secrets, and Helped Win World War II**





DEATH
IN THE
JUNGLE

MURDER, BETRAYAL,
AND THE LOST DREAM
OF JONESTOWN

CANDACE FLEMING

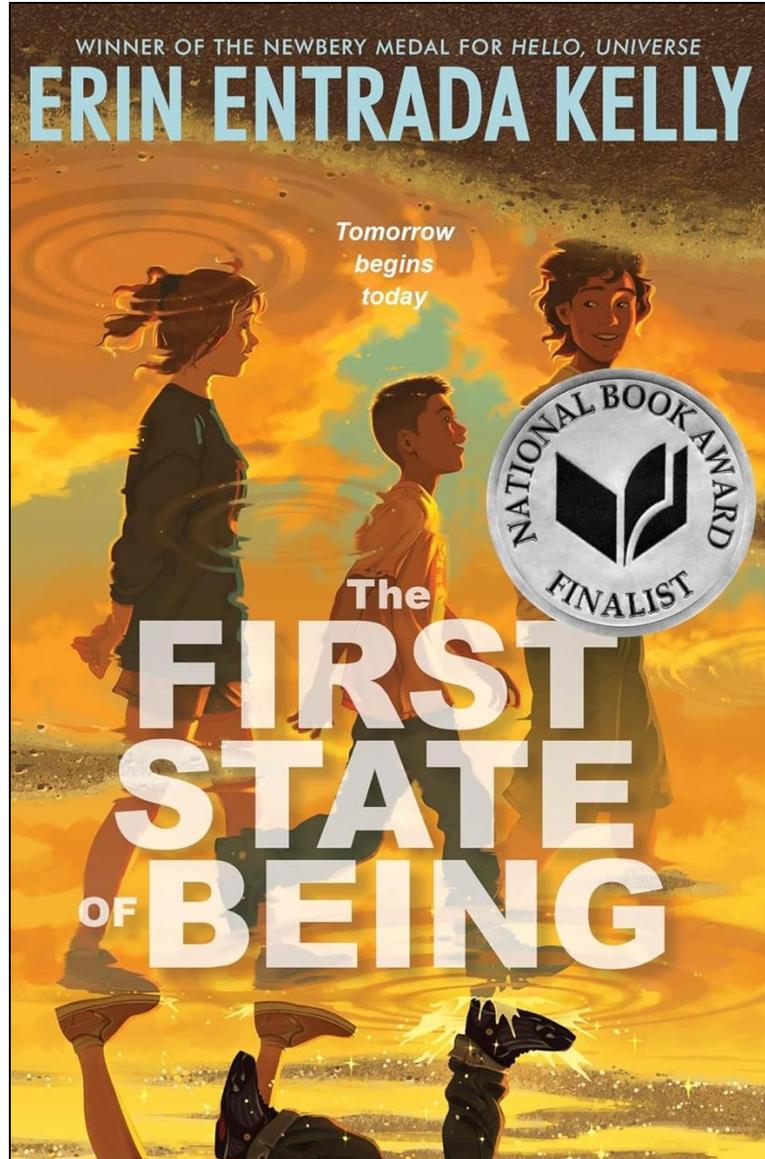
WINNER OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL FOR HELLO, UNIVERSE

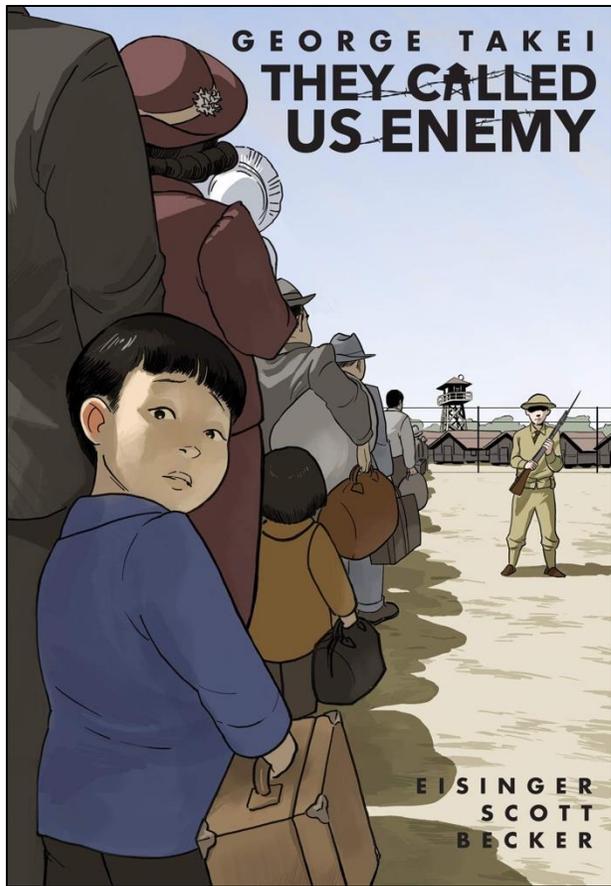
ERIN ENTRADA KELLY

*Tomorrow
begins
today*



The
**FIRST
STATE
OF BEING**





#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AND
AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF SALT TO THE SEA

RUTA SEPETYS
BETWEEN
SHADES
of
GRAY

Now the major
motion picture
ASHES IN THE
SNOW

"Few books are beautifully written, fewer still are
important; this novel is both." —*The Washington Post*

"Superlative . . . masterfully crafted . . . [a] powerful work of historical fiction."
—THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

RUTA
SEPETYS

AUTHOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
BETWEEN SHADES OF GRAY

salt to the sea

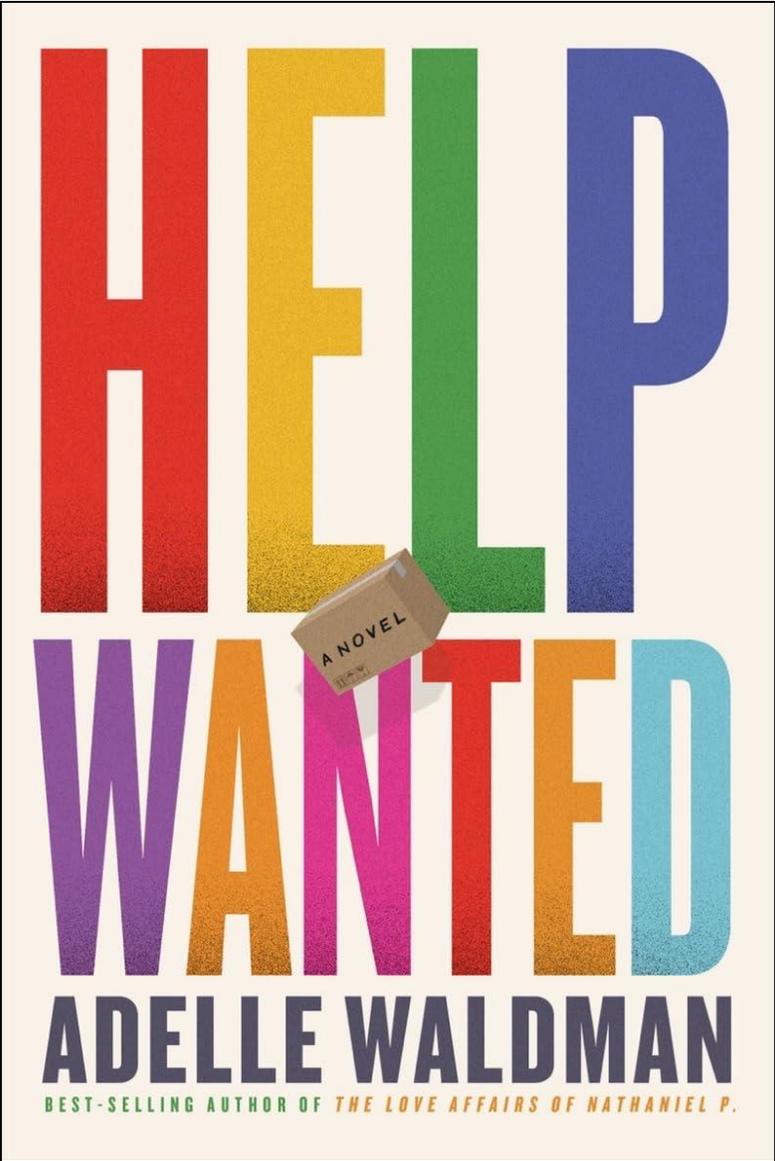
THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING NOVEL
and WINNER of the CARNEGIE MEDAL

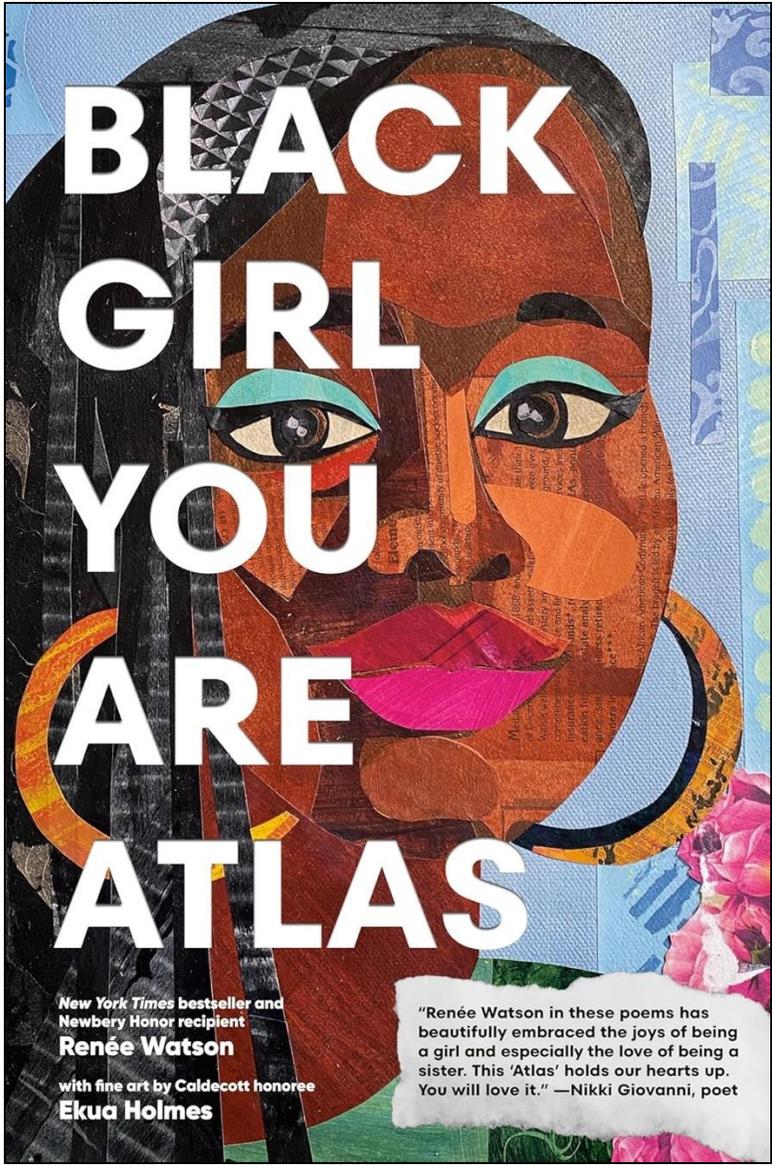
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AND
AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF SALT TO THE SEA

RUTA SEPETYS

I
MUST
betray
YOU

Trust no one.
Tell no one.
Spies are everywhere.





BLACK GIRL YOU ARE ATLAS

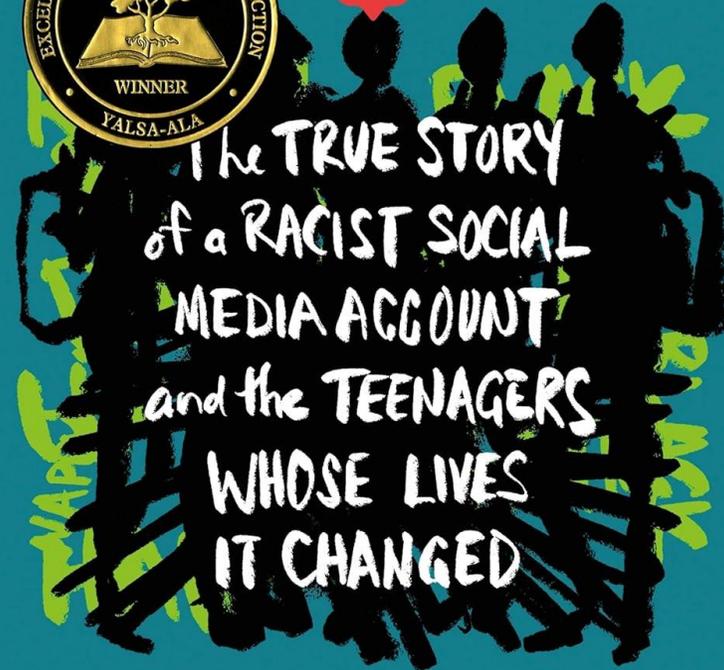
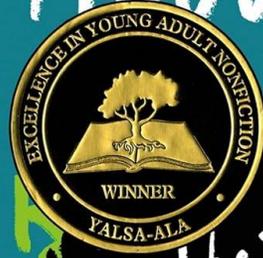
New York Times bestseller and
Newbery Honor recipient

Renée Watson

with fine art by Caldecott honoree
Ekua Holmes

"Renée Watson in these poems has beautifully embraced the joys of being a girl and especially the love of being a sister. This 'Atlas' holds our hearts up. You will love it." —Nikki Giovanni, poet

ACCOUNTABLE



The TRUE STORY
of a RACIST SOCIAL
MEDIA ACCOUNT
and the TEENAGERS
WHOSE LIVES
IT CHANGED

DASHKA SLATER

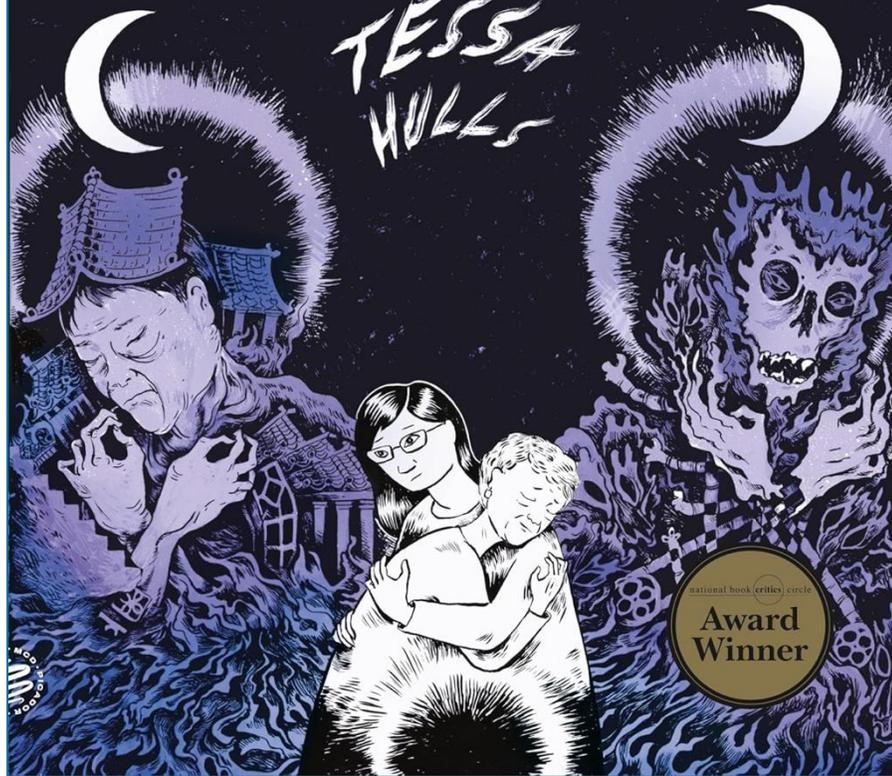
NEW YORK TIMES-BESTSELLING AUTHOR

"A multigenerational story packed with drama, intrigue and heartbreak . . . A triumph of comics storytelling." —*The Seattle Times*

FEEDING GHOSTS

A GRAPHIC MEMOIR

TESSA
HULLS



national book critics circle
**Award
Winner**

REVENGE OF THE TIPPING POINT

Overstories,

Superspreaders, and

the Rise of Social

Engineering



MALCOLM GLADWELL

*#1 New York Times bestselling author
and host of the podcast *Revisionist History**

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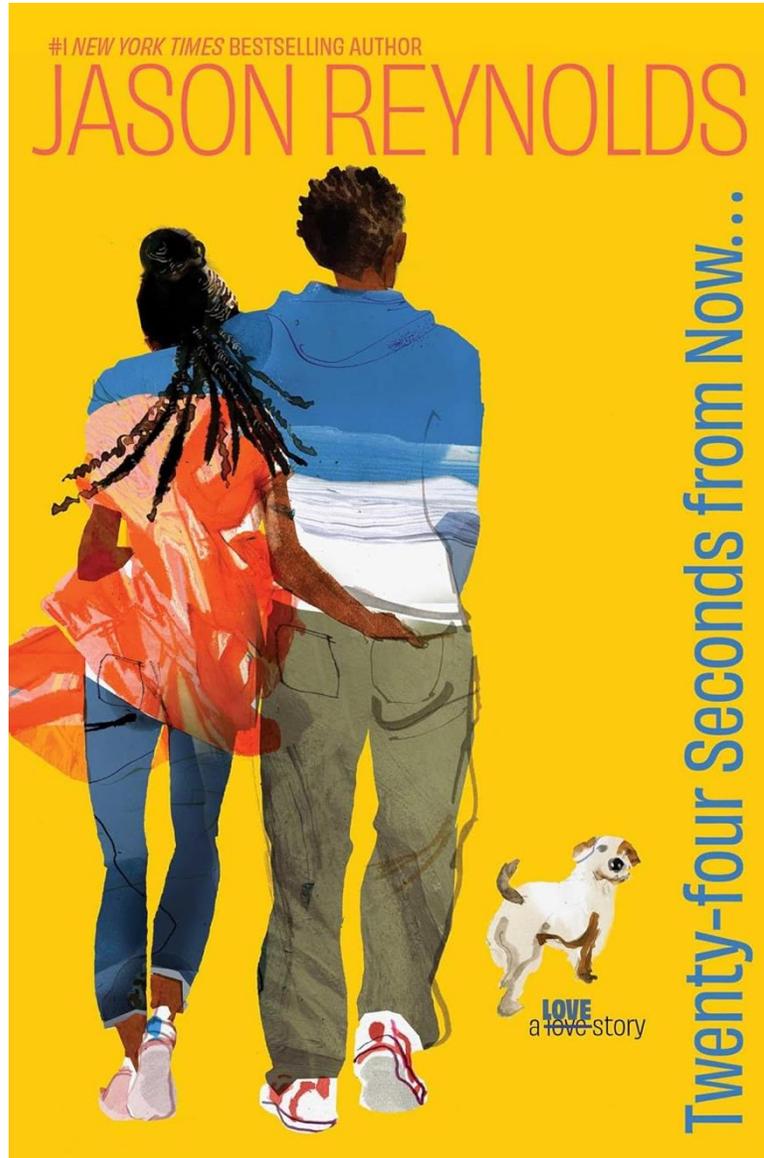


JAMES



PERCIVAL EVERETT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

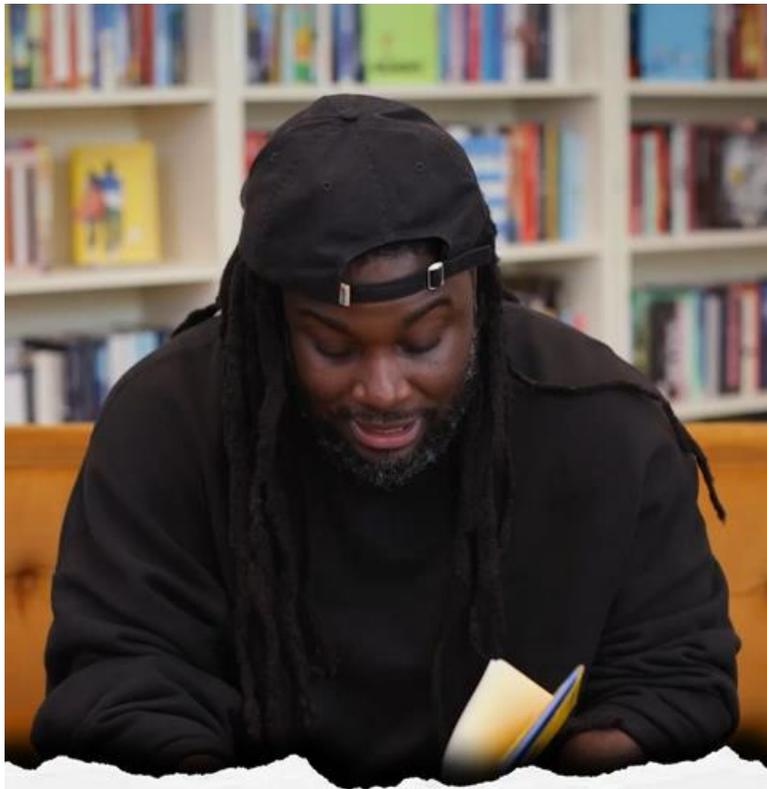


TWENTY-FOUR SECONDS FROM NOW . . . : A LOVE STORY

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I swear. If there was a category in the yearbook for *Ugliest Dog Ever*, you would have no competition. None. It'd be you all day. Because you . . . *ugly*. I mean, them eyes alone are enough to win the superlative. All wonky and whatnot. They somewhere between half sleep and fake mean. Somewhere between madness and . . . *madness*. Glaring at me like we got some kind of problem or something. But let me be clear, your crooked look don't scare me. Neither do them cement chips you got for teeth. Look at you. *Most Likely to Scare* . . . *Nobody*. Or at least not me. What I look like being worried about some stringy-haired mutt with an underbite severe enough to double as a bottle opener? Or Halloween fangs? Or whatever else is supposed to give off scary but ain't scary at all?

At least not to me. At least not tonight.



Get out your head.

