



From Prince to King: Black Panther in Text and Film

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Do you remember playing games at recess as a child? When I was in elementary school back in the 90s, the show Power Rangers was all the rage. Every day it was a great debate amongst my classmates and I about who would be which Power Ranger. Being an African American girl, the only options for me were the girl rangers who were the yellow and pink rangers. One of them Caucasian and the other Asian, so I never really had anyone who resembled me to dream about and emulate. The same was the case for Saturday morning cartoons and growing up loving comic books and superheroes. I imagined I too could possess the talents and superpowers that they did, but I remember always wishing that there was one that looked like me. There was a deep longing I had to buy a toy, watch a show, or read a comic strip with someone that looked like me, my family, and my friends.

My unit, *From Prince to King: Black Panther in Text and Film*, is based on the Marvel Comics Universe's 2018 blockbuster film, *Black Panther* and the children's novel *Black Panther: The Young Prince* by Ronald Smith. The movie tells the story of Prince T'Challa, a young man who becomes the newly crowned king of the fictional wealthy African kingdom of Wakanda upon the death of his father, King T'Chaka. The film drew praise around the world. It is among the ten highest grossing films ever made. For African Americans and other minority groups, this film is a game changer. A new and different type of superhero is showcased as the star: a powerful black man. Young, influential, intelligent African people are shown in their own land, not as victims or in poverty, but as royalty. *Black Panther* has changed society's perception of African culture, as consisting of poor, desolate countries. The film's popularity and use of advanced technology has set a new standard and raised expectations. I would love my students to see and read about characters who look like them and are depicted in a positive light.

The children's novel is an early adaptation of the Marvel Comics' character T'Challa as he travels to America from his home in Africa as a twelve year old boy. I selected this book in an effort to make learning fun for my students, as they are very interested in the world of comic books and superheroes. They role-play superheroes at recess, write about them in their journals, and often check out books from our school library about superhero adventures. It is a culturally relevant age-appropriate novel, and this story will engage my students as they are very interested in the character of Black Panther. Our school is an inner city school with mostly African American students who are learning who they are, so *Black Panther* gives them a superhero they can relate to. He is a strong role model that begins his journey at an age not much older than they are, which will be very captivating.

In the unit I will focus on the skill of analyzing character as we look at the development of T'Challa from one

medium to the other (literature to film) and over time as a prince and then as a king. Studying these adaptations of *Black Panther* will allow me to teach my students to visualize and on a larger scale understand how when adapting a text to film, filmmakers are bringing that text to life using the descriptive words of the author. I will also be able to introduce them to the many ways that film manipulates its audience through showing short scenes. Additionally, students will be practicing the skills of compare and contrast as well as creative writing through creating storyboards, graphic novels, or comic strips.

(Developed for Language Arts Block, Grade 3; Recommended for Language Arts, Grades 3 and 4)

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