



Voices of Resistance: Letters from the Dragon World

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*"What creates crisis cannot solve it." ---The Red Nation, *The Red Deal*[1]*

Introduction

"Hey Mr. Lopez, do we have to do this?" "Why do we have to do that?" "Do we have to write?" "Do we have to write this again?" "Why can you do that, but we can't?" "Why do all the teachers get to do that?" "This is so unfair" "Why do we have this rule?" "Why?"

These are the types of questions I receive on a daily basis from 10-11-year-old students in fifth grade who are constantly questioning rules, expectations, procedures, and the limitations adults impose on them. As a fifth-grade teacher, I usually just give them short answers, ignore them, redirect them, or just move on with the curriculum. Year after year, I notice this pattern and taking this seminar has given me the opportunity to approach to it from a different perspective: Fifth grade students are not constantly questioning just to challenge adults. They are transitioning from a concrete operational way of thinking to a more formal operational stage through a cognitive developmental phase that Piaget names as the stages of development.[2] I used to think that most of the times, they just want to avoid doing the activities. However, according to this developmental stage, the most probable thing is that they are learning how to navigate a world that they no longer view through a set of rigid facts; they start formulating alternate possibilities and questioning the logical consistency of the adults reasoning with these questions. They start understanding abstract concepts like justice, fairness, and hypothetical scenarios.

Students encounter power every day not only in a classroom setting, with the classroom expectations, but with family responsibilities, friendships, online spaces (texting), and the video games they play. Lawrence Kohlbergs, in stages of moral development, says that children at this age are moving away from preconventional morality toward conventional morality.[3] What this means is that they begin to recognize that rules are "co-constructed" by humans, rather than absolute universal truths. Students in general evaluate the intent and fairness behind a responsibility rather than just the consequence of breaking it. A classroom's

expectation feels sometimes arbitrary for them, or unfair, and they use their developing verbal skills to challenge them or transgress them.

Erik Erikson's stages talk about the individuation process and autonomy and how pre-teens are starting to navigate the tension between industry, and identity, and how they fit in a world that has inconsistent expectations between parental or adult rules, and the growing pressure to fit in with their friends.[4] Students are constantly asking whether rules are fair, whether adults listen, whether leaders (*they admire like youtubers, gamers, famous people in music or in sports*) keep promises, and whether a person should obey when obedience harms their reputation or their "tribe."

The vocabulary used to discuss these experiences ---authority, power, resistance, justice, and legitimacy --- is usually reserved for older students, but fifth graders might experience them more than we think. The creation of this unit is designed for an English Language Arts classroom and brings those ideas to an elementary appropriate language level for their discussion through the exploration of a fantasy novel that students consistently choose and check out from the library.

Voices of Resistance: Letters from the Dragon World uses Tui T. Sutherland's *Wings of Fire: The Dragonet Prophecy* as the principal text to review.[5] This novel follows five young dragons (dragonets) who have been raised in isolation and trained to fulfill a prophecy that adults claim will end a devastating war. The dragonets are told that their confinement, training, and sacrifice are necessary for the good of the world. Their story creates an accessible space in which students can ask difficult political questions: Who has the right to decide another person's future? When does protection become imprisonment? Does a noble goal justify imposed methods? Why do some characters obey while others resist? What responsibilities do people have when someone else is threatened?

The unit is grounded in some of the seminar readings on tyranny, political authority, resistance, abolition, empire, and revolution. These texts will serve as the intellectual framework rather than direct readings for the students and will support the structure of the activities to plan and develop with students as well.

Jonathan Wolff's *Introduction to Political Philosophy* clarifies questions about the state, authority, liberty, and justice.[6] Plato's *Republic* presents tyranny as both a political condition and a disorder of desire, in which the ruler is no longer governed by reason.[7] Sophocles, Livy, and Tacitus offer contrasting representations of conscience, emergency power, empire captivity, and abuse of rank. The *Red Deal*, *David Walker's Appeal*, and *The Life of John Lewis* broaden the creation/inquiry of the unit by establishing that **resistance** may be collective, abolitionist, revolutionary, environmental, disciplined, and nonviolent.

The primary goal is not to teach students that all authority is bad, or that refusal is always heroic. The goal is to teach students how to evaluate power and reflect on how it is gained, justified, limited, and experienced. Students will learn to distinguish power from legitimate authority, strong leadership from domination, protection from control, and impulsive defiance from purposeful resistance. They will practice supporting interpretations with evidence and listening to competing viewpoints. One of the unit's central questions will be: *When is it right to say no?*

Writing is the vehicle through which students will make these ideas their own. Students will write letters from the perspectives of the characters in *The Dragonet Prophecy*, choosing an audience, purpose, tone, and message. Some letters will be private reflections, some will be warnings or petitions, and some will become public appeals. The letters should move beyond simply summarizing the plot, although plot summaries may serve as an appropriate scaffold for students who are still developing their writing skills. Through planning,

drafting, feedback, revision, and publication, students will use character voice to show how power feels from the inside and how resistance can begin with language before it becomes action. The unit is designed for approximately four to five weeks and can be taught with selected chapters, or excerpts from the book and integrates literary analysis, writing, speaking protocols, listening, and civic inquiry.

Teaching Situation & Rationale

This unit is intended for fifth-grade students at Marrama Elementary School in Denver Public Schools, located in far northeast Denver. Marrama serves students from prekindergarten through fifth grade. According to the Colorado Department of Education SchoolView data for the 2025-2026 school year, Marrama serves 546 students. The community is culturally, racially, linguistically, and economically diverse; and CDE reports that approximately 46.7 percent of students are identified as English learners, including students in their first two monitoring years after reaching English proficiency; 93.2 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 12.3 percent receive special education services.[8] School-level family language records indicate that more than twenty languages are represented across students' households. This linguistic diversity is not a deficit to overcome, but a source of knowledge, perspective, and interpretive strength of the school community.

The students in my classroom come with different reading levels, vocabulary, writing abilities, language experiences, cultural backgrounds, and interests. Some students are ready to debate theme and character motivation with little support and complex literary analysis independently, while others need explicit modeling, visual support, sentence frames, audio supports, partner talk, small-group instruction or repeated opportunities to practice before they can put their thinking into writing. The unit therefore incorporates Universal Design for Learning principles, including multiple ways to access information, participate in discussion, demonstrate understanding, and publish a final product.[9]

The equity learning I have engaged in through district trainings with DPS helps me name why these matter. In the Equity Experience materials, educational equity is framed as liberation and as a continuous commitment to interrogating one's thoughts, actions, beliefs, and biases.[10] That definition is important for this unit because a curriculum unit about tyranny and resistance cannot only ask students to look at fictional rulers. It also asks me, as a teacher, to look at the classroom systems I create. Who gets to speak? Whose English is treated as academic? Whose silence is misread as disengagement? Whose background knowledge is recognized as knowledge? These are guiding questions to keep in mind during the creation and implementation of this unit.

The Four Pivots, especially the movement from lens to mirror, helps me think about the kind of teacher reflection this unit requires.[11] Instead of only using a lens to examine students, families, or texts, mirror work asks me to examine my own assumptions, reactions, and second thoughts. When a student resists a task, challenges an idea, uses home language, or stays quiet during discussion, I need to pause before turning that moment into a single story and reflect on those moments when bias shapes my assumptions, acknowledge the impact of those assumptions, identify changes in my practice, and commit to more intentional actions that repair harm and support a more equitable classroom community. This becomes part of the hidden curriculum of the unit: If I am asking students to study the concept of power, I need to model how adults can use power with humility and repair.[12]

Zaretta Hammond's "The Power of Protocols for Equity" gives me a practical way to make this reflection visible in instruction. Hammond argues that **academic conversation** is one of the most powerful classroom practices and asks teachers to notice who is doing most of the talking.[13] That question connects directly to this unit because discussions about resistance can easily be dominated by the same confident voices. Protocols help interrupt that pattern by providing time for students to think, talk, listen, and build on one another's ideas. Hammond also reminds educators to let students use the language that is most comfortable for thinking while teaching them to code switch across social, business, and academic registers without abandoning their home and community languages.[14] In my classroom, this is essential.

Intersectionality also strengthens the rationale for the unit. The YW Boston resource explains intersectionality as a framework for understanding how overlapping identities and experiences create different forms of discrimination or disadvantage.[15] For my students, this means I cannot treat "multilingual learner," "fifth grader," "student with an IEP," "immigrant student," "Latinx student," or "quiet student" as one simple category. Students live at the intersections of language, race, culture, class, ability, gender, family experience, and personal history. This unit therefore uses literature to discuss power but also uses equitable protocols to make sure students' own voices are not flattened.

This is why a fantasy novel is a strong entry point. Students can discuss dragons, queens, war, prophecy, confinement, and escape while still practicing the habits of equity: listening, recognizing difference, questioning assumptions, and making room for more than one perspective. The unit also recognizes that there are ethical boundaries appropriate for fifth graders, and historical materials will be summarized and adapted so the discussions can be focused on concepts rather than details. Students will be taught that resistance can be necessary while still producing harm, and that a responsible reader must consider context, means, consequences, and whose voices are missing. Students will not be asked to disclose personal trauma or debate their own identities. Instead, it gives them literary distance and structured protocols so they can practice the language of justice, authority, and resistance in ways that are safe, challenging, and meaningful.

The writing component also supports equity because it provides multiple access points. Students will plan with graphic organizers, rehearse orally, discuss through protocols, use vocabulary charts, draft with sentence frames when needed, revise with peers, and publish in ways that can include illustration, performance, or digital formatting. Research on writing instruction supports explicit teaching strategies, collaboration, feedback, and sustained opportunities to plan, draft, revise, and publish, and it requires sustained practice.[16] In this unit, writing is not only an assignment. It is the place where students claim a character's voice, examine power from inside a situation, and learn that words carry responsibility. Letter writing gives students an authentic rhetorical situation: someone is speaking to someone else for a reason. It requires attention to the audience, tone, evidence, and desired action. By placing students inside a character's point of view, the form also supports empathy without demanding agreement. Students can understand why Clay, Tsunami, Glory, Starlight, Sunny, Kestrel, Queen Scarlet, or Peril acts in a certain way while still evaluating the morality and effects of those decisions.

Unit Content

The intellectual foundation for the unit comes from the political philosophy, resistance literature, and historically significant excerpt texts we have read throughout the seminar; together these readings help me organize the unit around conceptual threads. Each thread begins with a teacher-facing idea from the seminar readings and then moves into student-facing language, a short excerpt or adapted passage students can discuss, and a connection to *Wings of Fire*. I will use the original seminar texts carefully. Some excerpts can be read directly because they are brief and age-appropriate; others will be translated into short, teacher-created summaries so that the concept is accessible and respectful for fifth graders.

Together, these readings give the unit a broader way to define tyranny and resistance. They show that tyranny is not always limited to one cruel ruler or one unfair law. It can also appear through fear, silence, surveillance, punishment, humiliation, confinement, conquest, and language that makes control sound like protection or order. In this unit, I will use that broader understanding to help students look closely at how power works in *Wings of Fire*: who has authority, how that authority is justified, who is silenced, and when characters begin to question or resist the roles assigned to them. This framework will allow students to see resistance not as simple disobedience, but as a thoughtful response to power when rules, systems, or leaders cause harm.

Power, Authority, and Legitimacy

The first conceptual distinction in the unit is between *power* and *authority*. Power is the ability to influence what happens or what others do but authority is more specific. Authority is not the same as force. Alexandre Kojève argues that authority exists when a person is able to act upon others without those others resisting, even though they are capable of doing so.[17] This distinction is important for the unit because it helps students ask whether a character is obeyed because others recognize that character's authority, or because they are afraid of punishment. Legitimacy then asks whether that authority is justified. A character may have power because of strength, rank, information, fear, wealth, or control resources, but students will learn that having power does not automatically make its use fair, wise or legitimate.

Wolff organizes political philosophy around persistent questions: what would life be without government? Why should some people have the right to rule? How should benefits and burdens be distributed? These questions can be translated into student-friendly prompts: Why do communities create leaders? What should leaders be allowed to decide? What rules protect everyone? What should happen when a leader breaks the community's trust?[18] The purpose of these prompts is not to lead students toward one political answer, but to teach them to identify the reasons behind these claims.

Short excerpt adapted for students: "Having power does not always mean having the right to use it."

Student-facing language: This is a teacher-created sentence based on Wolff's distinction between force, authority, and obligation. Students can underline the words power and right and explain why those words are not the same. A person or group has power when they can make something happen. A person has authority when others recognize that person as having the right to lead or make decisions. A leader is legitimate when

that leadership is fair, responsible, and connected to the good of the community.

Definitions will be revised as students encounter new scenes. *Power* will be defined as the ability to affect people, choices, or outcomes through actual or threatened harm. *Authority* will mean a claimed or accepted right to make decisions. *Legitimacy* will mean a justified or trusted right to lead. *Tyranny* will mean the use of concentrated power without adequate limits, accountability, or regard for the freedom and dignity of others. *Resistance* will mean purposeful action that challenges domination or injustice. *Conscience* will mean a person's inner judgement about right and wrong. *Responsibility* will remind students that both power and resistance have consequences.

Connection to the novel: The Talons of Peace and the dragonets' guardians have power over the dragonets because they control information, movement, training, food, and safety. The question for students is whether that power is legitimate. Students can ask: Are adults protecting the dragonets, using them or both?

Tyranny as Political and Personal Disorder

Plato's *Republic* offers one of the unit's deepest teacher-facing ideas: political disorder is connected to disorder within the person who rules. In book VIII and IX, tyranny emerges when appetite, pride, fear, and domination overtake wisdom and self-control.[19] This matters because students often recognize bad leadership only when a character is cruel. Plato helps me ask a deeper question: What happens when a ruler cannot rule themselves? This becomes the distinction between a leader who can govern the self and a leader controlled by anger, pride, jealousy, or desire. A tyrant may look powerful from the outside but may actually be unable to control the impulses that guide decisions.

Short excerpt adapted for students: *"A ruler who cannot control selfish desire may try to control everyone else"*

Student-facing language: This teacher-created sentence will help students connect inner character traits to public leadership and they can identify cause-and-effect relationship in the sentence and then apply it to a character. A tyrant is not just a strict leader. A tyrant is someone who uses power mainly for control, fear, attention, or self-desire. A tyrant may have a title, a crown, or a law, but that does not mean the tyrant is wise or just.

Connection to the novel: Queen Scarlet offers a clear literary example of tyrannical power. She has royal authority, but she uses public fear, spectacle, and punishment to strengthen control. Students can examine how she performs power in front of others and why an audience matters to a tyrant.

The distinction between self-governed and appetite-governed leadership can also be applied to the dragonets. Tsunami's anger and urgency sometimes support courage, but they can also narrow her choices. Clay's desire to protect others can become a source of moral strength, yet it may expose him to manipulation. Starflight's fear may produce caution and useful reflection, but it can also make resistance difficult. Students will learn that the language of political philosophy can deepen characterization rather than reduce character to labels such as "good" or "bad."

Law, Conscience, and the Limits of Obedience

Sophocles' *Antigone* provides a model for thinking about conflict between law and conscience. Creon treats obedience to the ruler as necessary for civic order, while Antigone believes his command violates sacred and familial obligations that are higher than his law.[20] When Haemon argues that no city belongs to one man, the play challenges the idea that political authority makes the community the ruler's private possession. The play is useful because it does not present resistance as painless. Antigone accepts severe consequences, and Creon's refusal to listen eventually damages his family and city. The text helps students ask whether a law can be legal and still unjust.

Short excerpt for students: "*No city belongs to one man.*" This line from *Antigone* can be used as a short discussion anchor because it is accessible and powerful. Students can paraphrase it as: A community does not belong to only the ruler. Then they can apply the idea to a classroom, a school, or Pyrrhia (*In Wings of Fire*).

Student-facing language: Conscience is the part of a person that helps them think about right and wrong. Resistance based on conscience is not the same as doing whatever one wants. It requires reasoned judgment about harm, duty, and justice. A conscientious act requires reasoned judgement about harm, duty, and justice. Students will use a "Claim-Reason-Consequence" organizer: What does the character believe is wrong? What evidence supports the belief? What action does the character take? Who may be helped or harmed? This structure prevents "resistance" from becoming a synonym for impulsive refusal.

Connection to the novel: Students can compare Antigone's refusal with the dragonets' decision to challenge the expectations placed on them. When one of the dragonets is threatened or treated as disposable, students can ask: Is obedience still loyalty, or does loyalty require resistance?

Emergency, Power, and Restraint

Livy's account of Cincinnatus offers a contrasting model of concentrated power because Rome responds to military danger by appointing a dictator with extraordinary authority. Cincinnatus accepts that authority, acts quickly and then gives it back after the emergency. This story helps students see that strong power is not automatically tyranny; the question is whether it is limited by restraint and service. [21]

Short excerpt adapted for students: "*Cincinnatus gave up the dictatorship on the sixteenth day.*" Students can use this moment as a key sign of restraint. Students can also use the sentence to define the "Cincinnatus Test": Did the leader use power for service, limit it, and return it?

Student-facing language: Emergency power may be needed when the community is in danger, but it must be explained, limited, and returned. Power becomes dangerous when an "emergency" becomes an excuse to control people permanently. Students will compare two statements: "The danger is real, so the leader needs more power" and "The danger is real, so the leader must explain and limit the use of power." The purpose is to let students identify evidence that Cincinnatus uses authority for a defined public purpose and then relinquishes it. They can contrast this restraint with leaders who keep emergency powers, expand their control, or use fear to prevent questions. The goal is to show that strong leadership and tyranny are not

identical. The test is not only how much power a leader has, but why it is used, how long it lasts, whether others can question it, and whether it is returned.

Connection to the novel: Adults in *The Dragonet Prophecy* often justify control by saying the war and prophecy make it necessary. Students can use Cincinnatus Test to evaluate whether adults limit power or simply keep it because they can.

Empire, Language, and Silence

Tacitus' *Agricola* expands the unit by showing how power uses language. Tacitus is a biography of Julius Agricola who was a Roman general and governor of Britain. Tacitus remembers a time when praising honorable people could become a capital offense and when surveillance destroyed the freedom of conversation. A central moment is the speech attributed to Calgacus, because he resists Roman conquest, and describes it as destruction through a famous accusation that conquerors "make a desolation and call it peace." [22] Conquest may be described as peace, order, civilization, or protection by those who benefit from it, while the people being controlled experience the loss of land, dignity, culture, and freedom. Tacitus also helps see that tyranny depends on silence: when people fear punishment for speaking rulers hear less truth.

Short excerpt for students: "They make a desert and call it peace." This short line can help students dissect how naming works. Students can ask: Who is "they"? What is the desert? Why would someone call destruction "peace"?

Student-facing language: Political words can hide harm. A leader might use good-sounding words such as protecting, order, destiny, or peace to describe something that others experience as control. This idea supports a language-focused lesson. Students will examine the following pairs of descriptions: "training" or "control,"; "protection" or "confinement,"; "destiny" or "assigned role." They will learn that the word choice can reveal perspective and that the same action may be described differently by those who command and those who experience the command. This lesson supports point-of-view standards and prepares students to write letters in which characters challenge the language used by authority figures.

Connection to the novel: The words prophecy, destiny, protection, training, and sacrifice can be analyzed from more than one point of view. Students can rewrite one event from the voice of a guardian, a dragonet, and an ordinary dragon citizen to see how language changes the meaning of power.

Systems, Land, and Collective Resistance

One of the most important ideas I take from *The Red Deal* is that tyranny does not always appear through the image of one bad ruler. It can also live inside systems that control land, resources, communities, and the conditions of people's lives. These readings help expand the unit beyond individual characters who misuse power and ask students to think about how power can be built into larger structures. It also introduces resistance as something collective, not only individual. In this section, students will consider how communities

respond when systems of oppression create harm, and how land, survival, responsibility, and justice are connected.

The Red Deal shifts from individual rulers to systems. The Red Nation argues that climate crisis, colonialism, capitalism, land theft, extraction, policing, and militarism are interconnected. This helps me teach students that injustice may continue not only because one bad person makes one bad choice, but because many rules, habits, and institutions support the harm. It states, “*what creates crisis cannot solve it*” and it challenges solutions that leave the underlying structure unchanged.[23] Resistance, in this framework, does not depend on one heroic act or individual. It comes from organized communities, Indigenous sovereignty, land relationships, and action from below.

Short excerpt for students: “What creates crisis cannot solve it.” This statement is concise enough for fifth graders to unpack. Students can explain what crisis means, what creates means, and why a system causing harm may not be able to repair that harm without changing.

Student-facing language: A system is a group of parts that work together. If the system is unfair, changing one person may not be enough. Collective resistance means people work together to change the conditions that keep causing harm.

Connection to the novel: Pyrrhia is divided into territories that shape the identities and powers of dragon tribes. It is divided by tribes, lands, war alliances, and rival claims to rule. Students can map the system of the SandWing succession war: queen competing for power, tribes choosing sides, ordinary dragons living with fear, and the prophecy becoming part of the political systems. Students can also examine other maps and ask how land is represented: as home, resource, border, inheritance, or prize. These activities could help move the class beyond “find the villain” toward “identify the pattern.” This discussion will remain grounded in the fantasy text and prepare them to recognize that land conflicts in history are also conflicts over survival, culture, and relationship.

Humiliation and the Moral Complexity of Resistance

Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* portrays tyranny through captivity, forced labor, humiliation, religious pressure, and public spectacle. Samson’s body is controlled by the Philistines, and his suffering is made visible for the enjoyment of those in power. His final act destroys the ruling elite but also produces mass death, making liberation, revenge, sacrifice, and destruction difficult to separate.[24] This will remain mostly as a teacher-facing resource, but its concept is still valuable: oppressive power may try to control bodies, movement, reputation, and voice. Resistance may be morally complex when hurt; revenge, survival, and liberation are difficult to separate.

These readings shape an important classroom principle: Students will distinguish resistance from revenge. Resistance aims to stop, expose, escape, or transform unjust power. Revenge aims primarily to make another person suffer in return. The two can overlap, and literature often refuses a clean answer. Students will evaluate actions using four questions: What harm is being resisted? What method is used? Who is affected? Does the action create more freedom and safety, or mainly repeat the original pattern of domination?

Short adapted text for students: “Captivity controls where someone can go. Humiliation tries to control how

others see that person.” Students here can use this two-sentence excerpt to analyze whether a scene shows physical control, emotional control, or both. They could also watch or read the kids' version of this story.

Connection to the novel: The dragonets' confinement, Glory's treatment, and the arena scenes allow students to analyze captivity and public humiliation and distinguish resistance from revenge by asking whether an action exposes harm, protects someone, escapes control, or mainly tries to hurt back.

Abolition, Revolution and Moral Voice

David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* demonstrates how writing can become resistance. Walker uses direct argument, faith, historical evidence, and moral urgency to confront slavery and call readers toward justice and demand moral and political transformation. His strong voice does not ask the oppressed to wait quietly for justice. It uses history, religion, argument, accusation, and direct address to awaken readers, and challenges the legitimacy of a nation that proclaims liberty while sustaining slavery in the 1800s.[25]

C.L.R. James's play *Toussaint Louverture* adds the drama of collective revolt and revolutionary leadership. The Haitian Revolution demonstrates that enslaved people did not merely receive freedom from others. Freedom is not simply given; it is organized, defended, and argued for.[26] James also portrays the difficult choices of leadership under pressure from competing classes, empires, armies, and visions of freedom and change, Toussaint's tragedy was not caused by ignorance or weakness, but by the limits of ideals when freedom and equality are not extended to the people they claimed to liberate: “Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness.” Together, Walker and James help the unit address resistance as organized thoughts and actions rather than spontaneous an emotional response.[27]

Short excerpt for students: “An appeal is writing that asks people to see injustice and act.” This teacher-created definition will help students understand Walker's rhetorical mode without requiring them to read the full text. Students can identify the claim, audience, urgency, and call to action in an appeal.

Amanda Jackson Green's *John Lewis: Making Good Trouble* offers an accessible bridge to purposeful resistance, disciplined nonviolent for young students. The phrase “good trouble” can help them understand that breaking a rule may be irresponsible in one context, but morally necessary in another when the rule protects injustice.[28]

Connection to the novel: Students will use letters as appeals. A dragonet may write to a friend, a queen, a tribe, or all of Pyrrhia. The purpose is not simply to retell the story, but to use voice to persuade, warn, testify, or call for change.

The Student Text: *Wings of Fire: The Dragonet Prophecy*

Before students begin working with selected excerpts from *Wings of Fire: The Dragonet Prophecy*, the whole class will read the **Prologue** together. This shared reading will give everyone a common understanding of the world of the story, the prophecy, the conflict between the dragon tribes, and the expectations placed on the dragonets. Establishing this common context first will help students better analyze each excerpt later, especially as they discuss power, control, fear, destiny, and resistance throughout the novel.

Page numbers may vary depending on the edition, publisher, format, or printing of the book being used. The page references included in this unit may vary depending on the version used when teaching the unit. I will use the chapter locations below to find the page numbers in the classroom copy I will use with ISBN 978-0-545-34923-9. When possible, I identify both the chapter and the scene so that the excerpt can still be located even if pagination differs across editions.

The selected student-facing excerpts from *The Dragonet Prophecy* will allow students to examine the same concepts introduced through the seminar readings, but in a fantasy text that is more accessible and engaging for fifth graders. Students will not read the entire novel as part of this unit. Instead, they will read chosen scenes that help them analyze how power works, how authority is created, how fear controls people, and how resistance begins. The plan below identifies those main scenes:

1. Prologue and Chapters 1-2: The Prophecy and the Hidden Cave

Students will begin by examining the prophecy, the war among the dragon tribes, and the hidden cave where the dragonets have been raised. These chapters introduce the idea that the dragonets have been assigned a role before they understand who they are. Students can analyze how prophecy functions as a form of power because it shapes the dragonets' identities, limits their choices, and creates expectations they are supposed to obey.

Excerpts for students: *"The dragonets are coming, whether you like it or not, and they'll choose who the next SandWing queen should be."* ...

Burn tapped lightly on the eggshell with one long talon. *"Hello?"* She called. *"Is there a dragonet of destiny in there? Ready to come out and end this big bad war?"*

Why/analysis of the excerpt: students can analyze how prophecy can be both hope and control. They should ask: Who wrote or interprets the prophecy? Who benefits from it? Do the dragonets have a choice in the future described for them?

2. Chapters 1-4: Training, Fear, and Kestrel's Authority

In these early chapters, students will look at the guardians' control over the dragonets, especially the way Kestrel uses fear, punishment, and harsh training to maintain authority. Kestrel, who is a bad-tempered adult female dragon, uses these methods to create fear and obedience.

Excerpt for students: *"I'm your teacher,"* Kestrel snarled. *"Nothing I do is cheating. Get down here and fight like a SkyWing"* Page 3

Why/analysis of the excerpt: Kestrel uses fear and harshness to make the dragonets obey. This excerpt will help students distinguish between legitimate authority and control based on force: Students can ask whether the dragonets obey because they respect the guardians or because they are afraid of what will happen if they resist. They will analyze how tone, and the use of words influence the dragonets.

3. Chapters 4-6: Glory, Difference and Being and the Decision to Escape

These chapters are important because Morrowseer questions Glory's place in the prophecy and treats her as less valuable because she is a RainWing. When one of the dragonets is threatened, the others must decide whether loyalty to the prophecy is more important than loyalty to a friend. The dragonets decide that staying obedient may harm one of them and leaving may be necessary. This supports the central question: When is it right to say no? Students will identify here the moment when private doubt becomes collective resistance.

Excerpts for the students: "Glory said: "I'm the one that doesn't fit in. I'll fight her or --- or figure something out..." Of course we have to do something," Clay said fiercely. Page 57.

Why/analysis of the excerpt: Glory begins to accept the idea that she is the problem and does not fit the prophecy in the way others expected. She says that she is "the one that doesn't fit in," but Clay responds that they still have to do something. Clays' response challenges that, and he does not treat Glory as a mistake or a problem to remove. Instead, he shows that the group has a responsibility to protect her. This moment will help students analyze how unfair systems often make the person being excluded feel responsible for the harm being done to them. Instead of accepting that Glory is disposable, Clay's response shows solidarity. Students can also discuss how friendship, loyalty, and collective action become a form of resistance when someone is being treated as less valuable. This would be a good opportunity to apply Antigone's question of conscience. They can identify the rule or expectation, the harm it causes, the risks of disobedience if the dragonets escape, and the reasons the dragonets choose solidarity over compliance.

4. Chapters 10-21: Queen Scarlet and the Arena

Queen Scarlet's kingdom and arena provide a strong example of Tyranny in the student text. Her power depends on spectacle, fear, punishment, and public humiliation. Scarlet transforms violence into a spectacle. Students will analyze public fear, humiliation, entertainment, and the ruler's need for an audience. They will connect this scene to Plato's tyrant, Tacitus's concern with domination, and Milton's representation of public humiliation without reading the mature source texts directly.

Excerpt for the students: "She'd held on to her power for thirty years, despite fourteen brave, foolish, extremely dead-now challengers. She was one of the longest-lived and deadliest queens in Pyrrhia..." Page 94

"It looked like a tree with no leaves, a sinuous curving shape with four branches, carved from a single spear of pale gray marble. Looped over the branches, with her tail wound around the trunk, was a dragon the color of deep red rose petals...The guards positioned Glory's tree in one corner of the balcony, and the queen stepped forward...What do you think of my new art?" Pages 127-128

Why/analysis of the excerpt: Students can analyze how Scarlet turns violence into entertainment and how this kind of leadership teaches others to stay silent. This section will help students connect the fantasy world of the novel to the larger concepts of tyranny, cruelty, and misused law in the unit. These scenes also pair well

with Plato's tyrant, Tacitus' language of domination, and the concept of humiliation as a tool of power.

1. 5. Chapters 14-17 and Chapters 27-30: Clay, Peril, and Protective Power

Clay's interactions with Peril give students the opportunity to examine a different kind of power. Peril has dangerous physical power, but she is also controlled by Queen Scarlet and treated as a weapon rather than as a person.

Excerpt for the students: "I don't know what MudWings eat. We've never had one before. You know, because we are on the same side in the war..." page 122

"...Haven't seen any dragons like that," Peril said. "But I'll keep an eye out if you want." Page 125

Why/analysis of the excerpt: Clay's first interactions with Peril while he is imprisoned near Queen Scarlet's arena. In this scene, students can analyze how Peril has been labeled dangerous, but Clay begins to see that she is also lonely, controlled, and more complex than the role Queen Scarlet has assigned to her. Students can also examine how compassion resists a system that labels someone only by danger or usefulness.

6. Chapter 22-30, Chapters 34-35, and the Epilogue: Escape, solidarity, and an Unfinished War

The later chapters show that resistance is not only individual but collective. The dragonets survive because they begin to trust one another, protect one another, and imagine a future beyond the roles assigned to them. At the same time, the ending reminds students that escape does not solve the larger war. This will help them understand that resistance can begin with one action, but systems of power often require continued courage, solidarity, and collective work.

Excerpts for students: "...and the five of them ended up scuffling in the grass and laughing" (chapter 35).

"Clay caught a glimpse of the sky, blue and gold and empty of dragons, for now. He still didn't know how they would fulfill the prophecy and end a war" (page 300).

From the Epilogue: "What's one more dragon here or there on my way to the throne?" Morrowseer smiled. "Then we understand each other." "Give me the dragonets," She said, and we'll both get everything we want" (page 304).

Why/analysis of the excerpt: Students can understand that resistance does not always end the problem immediately. Escaping control is one step; changing the conditions that created the control is another. This connects strongly to *The Red Deal* and to collective resistance. The dragonets' escape does not immediately resolve the war, and this is important because resistance is presented here and is not the same as instant victory. In chapter 35, the dragonets are no longer trapped in Queen Scarlet's arena or the cave, so freedom has begun. However, the ending and Epilogue show that the larger war, the prophecy, and the political struggle between the dragon tribes are not resolved. Students can analyze how escaping one place of control does not automatically dismantle the larger system of power.

Letter Writing as a Form of Resistance

Letters are central to the unit because they make audience and purpose visible. A letter is written by someone, to someone, in a specific situation, for a reason. Students will learn the five conventional parts of a letter: heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature. However, the real focus is a voice choice. How a character chooses words to reveal fear, loyalty, anger, hope, uncertainty, or a demand for change.

The unit will introduce four types of letters. A *private reflection* that allows a character to name fears and doubts that cannot yet be spoken publicly. A *warning or advice letter* asking another character to recognize danger. A *petition letter* addressing a person in authority and requests a specific change. A public appeal letter speaking to a wider community and attempting to redefine a conflict. These will connect literary analysis to the rhetorical traditions represented by Walker, political letters, abolitionist appeals, and civic activism. These forms will allow students to practice writing across audience and purpose.

For these letters, students will use a “voice triangle” [29] before drafting: Character identity, audience relationship, and purpose. They will also select evidence from the novel and explain how the character would interpret that evidence. In this way, students move from literary analysis to rhetorical choice. Advanced writers may integrate counterarguments, recurring imagery, or rhetorical appeals.

Teaching Strategies

1. Concept Formation Through Examples and Nonexamples

Students will develop definitions by sorting scenarios rather than memorizing abstract dictionary entries. They will compare examples of protection and control, leadership and domination, resistance and revenge, and authority and force. Definitions will be revised as new evidence appears.

2. Close Reading with a Power Map

For each scene, students will identify the decision-maker, the source of power, the stated justification, who benefits, who is harmed, and possible alternatives to act. A visual power map will support multilingual learners who need to see relationships before explaining them in writing.

3. Structured Academic Discussion

The class will use dyads, text-rendering, fishbowl/cipher-style conversations, and “Dragon Council Protocols.” These structures give every student time to think, talk, listen, and build on another idea. They also help redistribute classroom voice, so academic conversation does not belong only to the most confident speakers. Other alternatives for students to participate could be turn-and-talks, Socratic circles,[30] philosophical chairs, and small group “Dragon Council” discussions. Sentence frames will support evidence-based disagreements: “I understand ___’s reason, but...,” “This action may protect ___; however...,” and “The authority seems legitimate/illegitimate because....”

4. Comparative Mini texts (excerpts)

Short teacher-created summaries and brief excerpts from *Antigone*, Livy, Tacitus, *The Red Deal*, Walker, James, and John Lewis will be paired with scenes from the novel. Students will not be expected to master the original adult texts. The comparison will focus on one concept at a time, such as conscience, restraint, propaganda, collective action, or nonviolent resistance.

5. Process Writing and Metacognitive Reflection

Students will plan, draft, receive feedback, revise, edit, and publish. Reflection prompts will ask what changed and why: “Where did you make the character’s voice clearer? What evidence did you add? Where did your letter move beyond summary? What do you want the reader of the letter to do?” Research on writing instruction supports strategy teaching, collaboration, and revision, as central practices.

6. Universal Design and Multilingual Supports

Instruction will include audio text, visuals, bilingual glossaries, sentence frames, oral rehearsal, partner reading, chunked excerpts, color-coded annotation, and flexible publication options. Students may demonstrate planning through drawing, mapping, speaking, and graphic organizers before composing formal paragraphs for the final letters.

7. Ethical Framing and Discussion Norms

The class will separate fictional analysis from personal disclosure. Students will not be asked to share experiences of family conflict, violence, or injustice. The expectations and norms will emphasize that students should critique ideas rather than people, respect for language differences, the right to pass during personal reflections, and recognize that experiences of slavery and colonialism cannot be reduced to fantasy metaphors.

8. Formative Assessment

Formative evidence will include exit tickets, vocabulary revisions, power maps, discussion trackers, quick writes, and letter drafts. The teacher will monitor whether students can identify a source of power, explain a justification, and support an interpretation with evidence from the novel, or excerpt provided.

Classroom Activities/Application and Final Product

Activity 1: Rules That Protect and Rules That Control

The unit begins with low-risk fiction and classroom scenarios. Students sort the rules into four categories: Protects people, controls people, could do either depending on the context, and not enough information. Examples might include wearing safety goggles, forbidding all questions, using a hallway pass, hiding information “for your own good,” or limiting movement during an emergency. Students must justify where they place each of them, and the class records disagreements. The teacher introduces the idea that the fairness of a rule depends on purpose, proportionality and transparency, and consequences. (Consider inviting a guest speaker, such as someone from the district’s Equity Department, to help launch the unit during the

opening week).

Students then complete a short written response: “A rule becomes unjust when...” This sentence will be saved and revisited at the end of the unit. The activity establishes that political thinking begins with reasons, not with labels.

Activity 2: Building the Vocabulary of Power

Small groups receive cards containing the words: power, authority, legitimacy, tyranny, resistance, freedom, and responsibility. Each group creates a provisional definition, an example, and a nonexample. The class revisits the definitions throughout the unit as students encounter new scenes and readings. These cards become an interactive word wall. Students then add novel scenes beneath each term, each time the unit presents them.

Activity 3: Protocol Launch - Who Gets to Speak?

Using a dyad or text-rendering protocol, students respond to a short statement about fairness and voice. I will track who speaks and who listens so I can check whether the classroom conversation reflects the equity goals for the unit. This activity also introduces the idea that the way we discuss power should not recreate unequal power.

Activity 4: Mapping Power in the Hidden Cave

After reading the opening caves scenes, students create a graphic organizer. They identify the dragonets, guardians, Talons of Peace, prophecy, Physical cave, information, and threat of war. Arrows show who controls whom and how. Students distinguish sources of power: physical force, authority, knowledge, fear, loyalty, and control of space. The class discusses whether the prophecy itself has power or whether people give it power through belief and action. Students will write a paragraph answering the question: “Are the dragonets being protected, controlled, or both?” They must use at least two details from the text and acknowledge one competing interpretation.

Activity 5: Conscience and Decision to Say No

Provide a short, age-appropriate summary of Antigone’s conflict with Creon and present the sentence: “No city belongs to one man.” Let students compare Antigone’s decision with the dragonets’ response when Glory is threatened. Then, in groups, they complete a claim-reason-consequence organizer for each act of resistance. Students then discuss whether loyalty to a person can be a form of civic responsibility when institutions do not protect that person.

Activity 6: Emergency Power and the Cincinnatus Test

They identify the emergency, the temporary authority granted, the actions taken, and the return of power. If possible, they could create a “Cincinnatus Test” for emergency leadership: Is the danger real? Is the goal public and specific? Is the power limited? Can the leader be questioned? Is the power returned? Students can apply the test to the Talons of Peace and debate whether the war justifies the dragonets’ confinement.

Activity 7: The language of Peace, Protection, and Destiny

Using Tacitus as the teacher-facing foundation, students analyze how labels shape interpretation. They will

write statements from different perspectives: a guardian, a dragonet, a queen, and an ordinary citizen of Pyrrhia. This helps students see that political words are never neutral.

Activity 8: From One Ruler to a System

Students create a cause-and-effect systems map of the SandWing succession war. They include leadership competition, tribal alliances, fear, revenge, military power, territory, information, and the prophecy. Inspired by the *Red Deal*, students ask whether the problem is only one ruler or the system itself.

Activity 9: Forms of Resistance

The teacher introduces brief profiles of David Walker, Toussaint Louverture, and John Lewis. Students identify different forms of resistance: appeal and argument, organized revolution, disciplined nonviolent action, escape, refusal, testimony, and solidarity.

This would help them recognize which forms of resistance also appear in the novel and how characters respond when power becomes unjust. For advanced learners, or for students who are interested in extending their understanding of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution, they could also explore the illustrated Duke resource *The Revolution That Gave Birth to Haiti*, written by Laurent Dubois and Illustrated by Rocky Cotard.[31] This short, classroom-friendly PDF can help students connect organized revolution to larger questions of freedom, justice, and collective resistance.

Students create a cause-and-effect systems map of the SandWing succession war. They include leadership competition, tribal alliances, fear, revenge, military power, territory, information, and prophecy. Inspired by *The Red Deal*, the teacher asks: “If one queen disappears, what parts of the system remain?” Groups propose changes that address causes rather than the symptoms. This activity prepares students to understand why escape alone does not automatically create peace.

Activity 10: A sequence of Character Letters

Students write four letters. The first one is a private letter or journal-style message in which a character names a fear or doubt. The second is a warning or persuasive letter to a specific person in authority requesting a concrete change. The third is a petition to a person in authority, and a fourth public appeal to a tribe, community, to the Talons of Peace, or all of Pyrrhia. Each letter requires a different tone, and level of evidence, and should increase the complexity one after the other.

Before each draft, students complete the voice triangle and select two details. Peer feedback focuses on one question at a time: Is the character recognizable? Is the purpose clear? Students use revision colors to mark added evidence, stronger voice, and a clearer reasoning.

Activity 11: Culminating Dragon Council and Gallery Walk

For the culminating event, students publish one polished letter on paper or in a digital class anthology (Slide Presentation). Each letter accompanied by a brief reflection identifying the source of power, the injustice or conflict, the form of resistance, and possible consequences. Students may add a symbolic seal, map, illustration, or crest connected to the character and message.

During the Dragon Council, students read selected letters in character. Listeners respond from the perspectives of other characters, asking questions or offering counterarguments. The final gallery walk invites

classmates, families, or another grade level, and admin staff to read the letters and leave comments about voice, evidence, and ethical complexity. The class ends by revisiting the original sentence “A rule becomes unjust when...” and writing a new answer to the central question **“When is it right to say no?”**

Assessment

The final letter and reflection will be assessed using five categories: Textual accuracy and evidence; character point of view; understanding of power and resistance; organization, audience, and purpose; and revision and conventions. The rubric will prioritize meaning and growth. Students who require additional support may submit a shorter letter with a structured frame, audio recording, or illustrated sequence with an oral explanation, while still demonstrating the same conceptual understanding. Students could also complete a short reflection explaining how their understanding of resistance changed from the beginning to the end of the unit.

Suggested Five-Week Sequence

- Week 1: We will begin with the Prologue and early cave scenes from *Wings of Fire*. Establish discussion norms, practice equity-center protocols, learn key vocabulary, create power maps, and write a first reflection about who has power and how that power is used.
- Week 2: Analyze Authority, confinement, and the threat to Glory; Connect these ideas to Antigone and Cincinnatus; Write a private character letter.
- Week 3: Study Queen's scarlet, spectacle, umpire, and the language of power; Introduced systems thinking through Tacitus and *The Red Deal*; draft a petition or collective statement.
- Week 4: Compare forms of resistance through Walker, Toussaint Louverture, and John Lewis. Plan and draft the public appeal or resistance letter; conduct peer review and teacher conferences.
- Week 5: Revise, edit, publish, and rehearse final letters; hold the Dragon Council and gallery walk; complete the final reflection and self-assessment.

Appendix: Implementing Grade 5 English Language Arts Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences. Students select details from the novel to support claims about authority, motivation, and resistance.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2: Determine a theme and summarize the text. Students examine themes of freedom, loyalty, destiny, courage, and responsibility while differentiating analysis from plot summary.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3: Compare and contrast characters, settings, or events. Students analyze how different characters respond to the same source of power and how those responses change over time.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6: Describe how a narrator’s speaker’s point of view influences events. Students compare the language of leaders with the experiences of those they control.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1: Write opinion pieces supported by reasons and information. Petitions and public appeals require a clear claim, evidence, and call to action.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3: Write narratives using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear sequences. Character letters use first-person voice and imagined experienced grounded in the text.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4: Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. Students vary their tone across private letters, petitions, and public appeals.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.5: Develop and strengthen writing through planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying an original/new approach.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9: Draw evidence from literary texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.10: Write routinely over extended and shorter periods for a range of purposes and audiences.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4: Report on a topic or present an opinion with logical sequencing and appropriate facts and details.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.6: Acquire and use appropriate academic and domain specific words, including authority, legitimacy, tyranny, conscience, and resistance.

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