

Prose, F. (1999, Sept.). I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read: How American High School Students Learn to Loathe Literature. *Harper's*. Retrieved from [www.harpers.com](http://www.harpers.com).

Prose (1999) argues that American English teachers need to improve their selection of literary texts and teaching methods for those texts. Poor teaching and reading habits lead to problems down the road. A significant problem, at least for Prose, the drop in cultural literacy in America relates directly to a drop in the reading of meaningful literature by authors such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Shakespeare. Citing an informal poll in which *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* rank among the most-assigned books in American high school classrooms, (Prose, 1999) fears that reading texts for their structural beauty and value no longer occurs. That reading now revolves around “sappy and melodramatic” themes and, as a result, students leave high school never having experienced the deeply personal wonder and excitement that great literature conjures (Prose, 1999). How can we expect children to understand the beauty and possibility of language when they have never experienced that beauty in any meaningful way? Prose goes on to offer some literary suggestions for both inclusion and elimination in high schools across the country along with some rather turgid advice on how teachers can and should improve their teaching. In the end, Prose argues that great literature continues to lose its footing in American classrooms. And as such, American teenagers often leave high school with jaded recollections instead of inspirational memories of the books they read. Prose would like this trend to cease, and so would I.