Identifying citizenship themes in literary texts.

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This study explores students' responses to identifying two themes of citizenship, identity and discrimination, in literary texts taught to them at undergraduate level as part of their curriculum at Institute of English, University of Sindh, Pakistan. There have been previous studies in the field exploring the possibilities of teaching citizenship through literature but most have been conducted with children's literature taught to elementary school students in European contexts. The current study takes responses of the students who have read five novels as part of their curriculum, through questionnaires, to find out if they identify two themes in those novels. Further to the survey data, interviews are conducted under the framework of Reader-response theory to investigate the factors that have led to student's choice of certain texts and for dropping out the others. The study finds that students relate to and identify citizenship themes in the texts that are closer to their socio-geographic cultures. The students may relate to and identify discrimination and identity in texts with universal treatment of themes but transaction of meaning is lesser as compared to texts that relate to experiences and observations of the readers. The students however do not identify themes in those novels that are difficult in structure as understanding the narrative technique takes up most of the effort of the readers. Although this study has a small-scale but its findings can lead to a wider-scale study. Based on the findings of this study, citizenship educators can recommend more appropriate texts to teach identity and discrimination through literature wherever explicit statutory teaching of citizenship may not be possible.