What Constitutes Literary Merit?

**The work of literature:**

1. Entertains the reader and is interesting to read; gives a voice to real-world issues facing the targeted audience.

2. Does not merely conform to the expectations of a single genre or formula.

3. Has been judged to have artistic quality by the literary community (teachers, students, librarians, critics, other writers, the targeted reading audience). Illustrates artistic usage of literary devices to enhance plot, characterization, setting…etc.

4. Has stood the test of time in some way, regardless of the date of publication.

5. Shows thematic depth: the themes merit revisiting and study because they are complex and nuanced.

6. Demonstrates innovation in style, voice, structure, characterization, plot and/or description.

7. May have a social, political or ideological impact on society during the lifetime of the author or afterward.

8. Does not fall into the traps of “pulp” fiction such as clichéd or derivative

descriptions and plot devices, or sentimentality rather than “earned” emotion.

9. Is intended by the author to communicate in an artistic manner.

10. Is universal in its appeal (i.e., the themes and insights are not only accessible to one culture or time period).

Adapted from College Board

**Also consider:**

11. Offers a strong cultural or social perspective that is not as prominent in the novels that already exist in curriculum.

12. Pairs well with other novels that already exist in our curriculum.

**Conversely, consider:**

13. Contains language, ethical, moral issues that may be too controversial or overshadow the gains of the book.

14. Perspectives/opinions that may deviate from conventional practices or ideas that may overshadow the gains of the book.