

The Kanji Learner's Course

Graded Reading Sets



Series Introduction

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The KLC Series

These *Graded Reading Sets* are designed for use with Kodansha's widely acclaimed *Kanji Learner's Course* (KLC), a step-by-step guide to mastering all the *kanji* (Chinese characters) needed for genuine literacy in Japanese. KLC's self-guiding, self-reinforcing curriculum teaches non-native learners to read and write kanji, gain a native-like understanding of kanji meanings, and acquire a rich kanji-based vocabulary.

The Kanji Learner's Course Series also includes the *Kanji Learner's Course Green Book* (a writing practice workbook), the *Kanji Learner's Course Wall Chart*, and *The Ultimate Kana Wall Chart: A Visual Guide to Japanese Phonetic Writing*.

Join the growing community of KLC users on KeystoJapanese.com and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/keystojapanese), and gain new insights into learning Japanese by subscribing to our [blog](#). Follow the author on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/keystojapanese), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/keystojapanese), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/keystojapanese), and/or [Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1234567890/Andrew_Scott_Conning). Announcements of occasional discounts for items in this series will be made via the blog and Facebook group.

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KLC-GRS Series Introduction

The *Kanji Learner's Course Graded Reading Sets* contain over 30,000 parallel text segments distributed as reading practice for all 2,300 kanji in the course. The exercises for each kanji contain only kanji previously introduced, and are designed to give you contextualized practice with reading the kanji-based vocabulary introduced in the course. The *Graded Reading Sets* allow you to immediately apply each kanji you learn, and continuously review what you have already studied.

Instant reading comprehension from the very first character

With the KLC Graded Reading Sets, there is no need to learn 1000 kanji or more before enjoying the pleasure of reading authentic written Japanese. **Each exercise contains only kanji you have already learned, and is supported by phonetic guides, an English equivalent, and the Japanese-English dictionaries on Kindle and iOS/MacOS for looking up unfamiliar words.** Reading the exercises for each kanji after studying it in the KLC, you will never be stopped in your tracks by an unfamiliar character.

To further aid comprehension, **this series also introduces over 600 key grammatical structures** as they appear, with cross-references that allow you to quickly find in-depth information about any structure that may be unfamiliar to you. This contextualized grammar support allows you to master a wide range of sentence patterns through the natural process of reading and understanding.

Instant gratification = continuous motivation

The difficulty of understanding written Japanese has been a source of frustration and discouragement for generations of Japanese learners. This frustration contributes to a negative feedback cycle resulting in decreased motivation and decreased learning.

The KLC Graded Reading Sets are designed to reverse this discouraging cycle with the **energizing gratification of understanding one sentence after another – including an ever-expanding range of kanji, kanji-based words, and grammar patterns.** Each success will enhance your enthusiasm for further study, contributing to a positive feedback cycle of increased learning and motivation.

The power of “extensive reading”

“Extensive reading” – reading large amounts of comprehensible material – is widely regarded as one of the most effective methods of language learning. **By reading a large volume of material that you can understand, you will absorb grammar patterns, vocabulary words, and subtleties of usage in the most natural and enjoyable way.**

For extensive reading to be educational, it must meet two conditions. First, it must *challenge* you with new forms you have not yet mastered. Second, it must give you adequate *support* to understand what you are reading.

The KLC Graded Reading Sets fulfill these conditions by design. Because each exercise includes a word containing the kanji you have just studied, it necessarily presents a new *challenge*. And since no unfamiliar kanji are used, you are always ready to meet that challenge.

Moreover, because the exercises are supported by phonetic guides, English equivalents, grammar glosses, and the J-E dictionaries on both Kindle and iOS/MacOS, you have all the *support* you need to completely understand each sentence and acquire new insights into how kanji, words, and grammatical structures are used in authentic Japanese.

Optimized practice of recently learned kanji and vocabulary

Various procedures have been used to ensure that the exercises provide you **maximum practice with recently learned kanji and vocabulary** while fully illustrating the meaning and usage of the character you are studying in that set (the “target kanji”).

First, items were selected by sorting a massive database of over 300,000 bilingual text pairs to prioritize items containing recently learned kanji and vocabulary.

Second, additional automated sorting and text conversion was used to replace many pronouns (かれ He, かのじょ She) and katakana names (トム Tom, メアリ Mary) in the source material with Japanese names (宮崎さん Miyazaki-san) and other personal nouns (記者 reporter, 教授 professor, 総理 Prime Minister, etc.) **selected to maximize your practice with recently learned kanji**. Because the “recently learned kanji” vary throughout the series, this procedure automatically ensures exposure to a constantly changing set of personal and proper nouns, helping you master a long list of Japanese names along the way, including both surnames and given names.

Quality and variety

Language learning resources typically use artificial texts to provide reading practice for beginning and low-intermediate learners. While such texts serve a useful purpose, they tend to be dry and unnatural. Moreover, they tend to repeat specific patterns and subject matter, and lack the range of usage of authentic writing.

The KLC Graded Reading Sets series does incorporate artificial items as needed for specific purposes (particularly in the first two volumes), but it primarily consists of **authentic writing drawn from distinguished authors and texts across a diverse range of fields**. Drawing on a rich corpus of over 100 original sources, this series assembles writing of the highest quality from literature, science, technology, history, law, ethnology, sociology, popular culture, government, business, public health, art, romance, philosophy, economics, and other fields.

This diversity of source material ensures that you are exposed to a range of vocabulary and usage similar to that which you will encounter in authentic Japanese texts. Indeed the extraordinary diversity of source material used in this series is perhaps unique among bilingual graded readers for Japanese.

A range of challenges to suit every level and every learner

To offer maximum value to the user, this series incorporates a prodigious volume of reading practice (the 286,000 words of the English translations are roughly equivalent to seventeen copies of *Macbeth*). While some users may wish to take advantage of all 30,000+ exercises in this series, others may find it more practical to read a smaller subset.

To make it easy for you to read as much or as little as you like, exercises are sorted by length, starting with short terms or phrases and building up to full sentences or even chains of sentences. At the intermediate and advanced levels, you will find an increasing number of long, complex sentences and multi-sentence exercises. Kanji sets at all levels begin with short, simple exercises to allow you to fully grasp the target kanji before tackling more complex structures.

Naturally, the exercises at the lower levels tend to be shorter and less interesting, since they must be constructed from a narrower range of characters. At these early stages, you may take encouragement from knowing that the reading will grow ever more interesting as you advance through the levels.

Grammar glosses

The exercises in this series incorporate thousands of glosses introducing grammatical phrases and other fixed expressions. These “grammar glosses” are designed to aid comprehension and help you master a wide range of sentence patterns in the course of your reading.

For example, the exercises below introduce the expressions 「～ことがある」 (“__ has occurred”) and 「いかに～」 (“how __”):

以前に会ったことがある。

I've met him before.

「～ことがある」 {～事がある* 80} ["__ has occurred"]: DJG v1 p196; Genki ch11; Marx v1 day62; Tobira ch1 #6.

私たちはこれまで、君主が自分の基盤を固めることがいかに必要であり、そうしなければ必然的に破滅するのだということを見してきました。

We have seen above how necessary it is for a prince to have his foundations well laid; otherwise he will surely go to ruin.

「いかに～」 {如何に～** 2197; 815} ["how __"]: DJG v3 p135; Tobira ch14 #9.

In each case, the expression introduced is enclosed in Japanese quotation brackets 「」, followed in curved brackets {} by a kanji version, if one exists. Asterisks in the kanji version indicate that it is used less frequently (single asterisk) or much less frequently (double asterisk) than the kana-only version. Numerals indicate the kanji's KLC entry number(s). The end of the gloss contains references to popular grammar resources for more information on how the pattern is used:

- “**DJG**”: *A Dictionary of Japanese Grammar*, by Seiichi Makino & Michio Tsutsui (a comprehensive reference series). References marked “v1” refer to *A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar*, while those marked “v2” refer to *A Dictionary of Intermediate Japanese Grammar*; and those marked “v3” refer to *A Dictionary of Advanced Japanese Grammar*.
- “**Genki**”: *Genki: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese, 2nd Edition*, by Eri Banno et al. (the most popular traditional textbook). References to chapters 1-12 refer to Volume 1, while those to chapters 13-23 refer to Volume 2.
- “**Marx**”: *Speak Japanese in 90 Days*, by Kevin Marx (an inexpensive and easy-to-follow self-teaching guide). “Marx v1” refers to the first volume, and “v2” to the second volume.
- “**Tobira**”: *Tobira: Gateway to Advanced Japanese*, by Mayumi Oka, et al. (a popular intermediate-level resource that picks up where Genki leaves off). The Tobira references point to numbered items in the 「文法ノート」 sections at the end of each chapter.

The resources above have been chosen for being the most popular in their categories. For information relevant to determining which of these resources is most suitable for you, please visit keystojapanese.com/gr.

Most grammar patterns are noted only the first several times they appear, unless they have a particularly challenging range of variants or applications. For this reason, the grammar glosses appear less frequently as this series progresses. The [Index of Grammar Glosses](#) lists every gloss in the series and the examples in which it appears.

With a few exceptions, no glosses are provided for individual words, which can generally be looked up using the reading app's J-E dictionary.

Phonetic guides

Each exercise is followed by a phonetic guide displaying all kanji readings in parentheses:

著作権の制限に真っ向から逆らって、地下のアニメ流通は1980年代から1990年代初期に花開き、生まれくる国内産業の基盤を構築した。

著作権(ちょさくけん) の 制限(せいげん) に 真っ向(まっこう) から 逆らっ(さからっ)て、地下(ちか) の アニメ 流通(りゅうつう) は 1980年代(ねんだい) から 1990年代(ねんだい) 初期(しょき) に 花開き(はなひらき)、 生まれ(うまれ)くる 国内(こくない) 産業(さんぎょう) の 基盤(きばん) を 構築(こうちく) した。

Quite against the restrictions of copyright, underground anime distribution flourished throughout the 1980s and early 1990s to build a base for a nascent domestic industry.

[- Progress Against the Law: Fan Distribution, Copyright, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation](#), by Sean Leonard

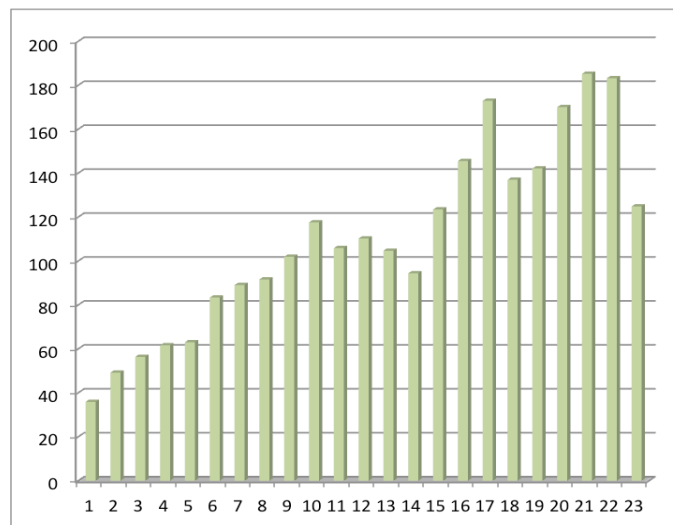
As you can see in the above example, readings are displayed in gray, to make it easy for you to find the word you're looking for (in black). Word division is provided as an additional learning aid.

How this series is organized

Differences between lower and higher levels

As noted above, the exercises tend to get longer and more advanced at the higher levels. Because they encompass more complex content, higher-level exercises are also more interesting to read. After the 300 mark, the average number of exercises also increases, while the proportion of artificial sentences decreases, giving way to authentic material.

The progressive improvement of the series is best measured by calculating the average “kanji content” of each set:



Average kanji content per set for every 100 kanji sets
("1" = 1-100, "2" = 101-200, etc.)

The increasing volume of reading practice from level to level is well adapted to your needs as a

learner. Early on, you should spend relatively little time trying to read, and focus instead on learning more kanji. After all, you will get plenty of practice with the basic kanji later on, and there are many important kanji still awaiting your attention. At this stage, you should just get a quick handle on each kanji and move on to the next one.

As you advance, your needs change. Reading practice becomes more important, as you have ever more kanji to hang onto, and ever fewer left to learn (not to mention that the remaining kanji are increasingly less important). **This series adapts to your developing needs by gradually increasing the volume of reading practice as you make your way through the course.**

Imbalance among sets

You will find that some kanji sets in this series have very few exercises, while others have many. This is consistent with the purpose and organization of this series.

For one thing, some kanji only appear in a few words, or even one word, such that there are both fewer examples using these kanji and less need of practicing them.

Moreover, some kanji will have only a few exercises in their own set due to their location in the KLC sequence, but will appear with great frequency later on, once you have learned an important vocabulary word containing the kanji. For example, the kanji 犧 and 牲 are both used almost exclusively in the word 犠牲, so whichever of these appears first is bound to have few or no exercises.

What matters is not the amount of reading practice you get *in any given set*, but that you ultimately get an appropriate amount of practice for each character. To ensure this happens, I have deliberately included a large number of exercises in those sets where it was possible to do so. You will thus find that **each volume, taken as a whole, provides extensive practice across the full range of kanji and vocabulary you have learned to that point**, with special emphasis on recently learned kanji and vocabulary.

Combination of short and long exercises

As noted above, sets at all levels begin with short, simple exercises to allow you to practice the target kanji before tackling more complex structures. These short items (often just compound words or short phrases) give you repeated practice with the target kanji, before giving way to longer items in which the target kanji is mixed in with many others.

The short and long exercises thus serve complementary purposes: **short exercises give you relatively intensive practice with the target kanji, while long exercises give you more practice with sentence structure and review of kanji already studied.** The fact that the exercises are arranged by length thus allows you to tailor your reading selection to your own purposes.

While the longer exercises tend to be more interesting, I have done my best to include many short exercises that manage to say something interesting in just a few words or characters.

Selection and editing of exercises

The following principles were used in selecting and writing examples for each set (in rough order of priority):

- a) To illustrate the most important vocabulary and usages of the target kanji;
- b) To illustrate a wide range of usages of the target kanji;
- c) To illustrate usages of previously learned kanji;
- d) To combine short and simple examples (focused on illustrating the target kanji) with longer and more substantive examples;

- e) To use examples that are authentic and engaging, while still providing some plain vanilla examples for the sake of representing typical patterns;
- f) To represent a range of source material (literature, natural sciences, social sciences, everyday speech, etc.).

As noted elsewhere, a great deal of effort has gone into selecting and editing the exercises to be easy to understand without context.

Personal names

Many pronouns and katakana names have been replaced with Japanese names (and other nouns) to provide additional kanji practice, particularly with recently introduced kanji. To distinguish surnames from given names, note that Japanese surnames will generally have a “-san”, “-sensei”, “Dr.”, etc. **in the English equivalent**, while given names will not:

本田さんは舌がよく回る。

Honda-san is very talkative.

(“san” is included in the English equivalent, signaling that Honda is a surname)

明さんは舌がよく回る。

Akira is very talkative.

(“san” is not included in the English equivalent, signaling that Akira is a given name)

In the Japanese text, the suffix さん (or an alternative such as くん or any one of various titles like 先生, 社長, etc.) **is always included with Japanese names**, to help you avoid mistaking names for common nouns. This rule is not followed for foreign names, which are readily distinguished by virtue of being written in katakana.

These conventions in the presentation of personal names are intended to aid the learning process, and are internal to this series.

Long vowels in Japanese

In the English equivalents, Japanese words (usually names) are written in Hepburn romaji without macrons, which are omitted to avoid display issues across different devices and operating systems. Hence the English versions do not discriminate between, for example, the long “o” of Jiro and the short “o” of Hiroyuki. Similarly, the capital is transliterated as “Tokyo”, without macrons. The correct pronunciation of all Japanese words will be apparent from the Japanese phonetic guides.

Unlisted kanji

The main KLC book includes a handful of vocabulary words, such as 石鹸 (soap), that contain a kanji not listed in the course. Such words appear together with a mixed kanji-kana form (石けん), and are allowed only because the word frequently appears in this mixed form. The same handful of words is also allowed in the reading sets. As in the main book, the unlisted kanji are marked with an ×. Unlike the main book, these reading sets do not show the mixed kanji-kana forms, which are obviated here by the phonetic guides.

When you encounter a kanji marked with an ×, just try to recognize the word it appears in, which will already be familiar to you from the course. It is not important to learn the marked kanji.

Use of optional kanji

As explained below, these reading sets sometimes use kanji where it would be more common to use Arabic numerals or hiragana.

Kanji vs. numerals

In horizontal writing in contemporary Japanese, numbers are usually written with Arabic numerals:

1929年10月29日: 29 October 1929

JIS X 0213: 1面40区32点: JIS X 0213: Plane 1, Subdivision 40, Point 32

...though large numbers are usually shortened by the use of a kanji like 万 or 億, similar to the way we would use English words to refer to numbers of one million or more:

800万人: 8 million people

40億円: 4 billion yen

Despite the prevalence of Arabic numerals, it is still necessary for learners to become proficient in reading numbers in kanji. For this reason, this series (particularly the first part of Volume 1) includes exercises in which numbers typically written in numerals are expressed in kanji:

三田の人口は九千五百五十人です。

The population of Mita is nine thousand five hundred fifty.

千代さんは宝くじで三千万円も手に入れた。

Chiyo won thirty million yen in the lottery.

When you encounter items like these, keep in mind that one would more likely write them like this:

三田の人口は 9550 人です。

The population of Mita is 9,550.

千代さんは宝くじで 3000 万円も手に入れた。

Chiyo won thirty million yen in the lottery.

Kanji vs. hiragana

In these reading sets you will find the same words sometimes written with kanji and sometimes without:

分かり易い。

分かりやすい。

わかりやすい。

Easy to understand.

子供達。

子供たち。

子どもたち。

Children.

This reflects real-life usage and helps you learn to read different forms interchangeably. This remains an essential skill, as the use of optional kanji seems to have increased in recent years, likely due to the convenience of keyboard- and voice-based text input. Moreover, writers sometimes opt for kanji to clarify word division in a long string of hiragana, or for stylistic reasons, such as to express polite formality, to present a learned image, or simply to vary things up a bit!

Compared to real-life usage, **this series is moderately biased in favor of using optional kanji once you have learned them.** After all, the main purpose of this series is to help you master kanji and kanji-based vocabulary. This bias is especially pronounced for recently introduced kanji, which require frequent reinforcement. This pro-kanji bias is partly offset by the fact that only hiragana spellings are used until the kanji in question have been introduced. Just keep in mind that the series is biased 100% against using optional kanji before they have been introduced, and moderately in favor of using them thereafter.

Regardless of the usages you find in this series, a good rule to remember for your own writing is to **be sparing in the use of optional kanji when not necessary for eliminating ambiguity, punctuating a long string of hiragana, or otherwise improving clarity.** In the example below, the first version uses every possible kanji, the last version uses a minimal number of kanji, and the middle version strikes a judicious balance:

子供達は最も酷く苦しんだ。

子供たちは最もひどく苦しんだ。

子どもたちはもっともひどく苦しんだ。

The children suffered worst of all.

Use of esoteric English

A few of the English translations include words that may not be familiar to some native speakers. While I provided glosses in some instances, I did not attempt to filter out examples that contained esoteric English vocabulary. For one thing, you can look up any word instantly just by tapping on it, and some users may appreciate the opportunity to learn some new words. Moreover, it is often easy to infer the meaning of these words based on the kanji of their Japanese equivalent. For example, it is easy to deduce the medical meaning of “indolent” from the example below:

無痛潰瘍 (“non-pain-broken-boil”)。

An indolent ulcer.

- Wordnet

I personally learned from this example that the English word “indolent” (which I thought just meant “lazy”) can also mean “causing little or no pain” (New Oxford). While I did know that “dol” means “pain” – from “dolor” (Spanish), “doleful”, “condolences”, etc. – I never connected this in my mind with “indolent” until I saw this example, where the kanji 痛 (“pain”) make this connection hard to miss. Thanks to kanji, I now know both senses of “indolent”, and have a more nuanced understanding of its usual sense “lazy”, which suggests the idea of “avoiding suffering”.

Indeed, one of the things I love most about kanji is the way they can help us better appreciate the Latin and Greek roots of our own native language, roots that we all too easily ignore. For example, I had no idea where the word “clinical” came from until I learned its equivalent in Japanese (臨床), whose kanji mean “attend” and “bed”. In fact the word “clinical” itself derives from the Greek word for “bed”, which makes it easy to remember its precise meaning: “relating to the observation and treatment of actual patients rather than theoretical or laboratory studies [from Greek *klinikē* (*tekhnē*) ‘bedside (art),’ from *klinē* ‘bed’]” (New Oxford American Dictionary).

As illustrated by these examples and countless others, an outstanding feature of kanji is their capacity to make words more transparent to us than they are in our native tongue. To permit just these sorts of insights, I have not attempted to filter out examples containing esoteric English terms.

Parallel definitions

Roughly a tenth of the exercises in this series are drawn from a set of parallel definitions released by Wordnet. These exercises will present definitions in Japanese and English of the same word, which is often not shown. For example:

四旬節の最後の日。

The last day of Lent.

This text is part of the definition of “Holy Saturday”, segmented from the full definition (“*the Saturday before Easter; the last day of Lent*”). A few things to note about these exercises:

- * The English translations for such items are definitions, or parts thereof, and may often sound like crossword or Jeopardy clues. Yet they are not definitions of, or clues for, the Japanese examples. Rather, they are *equivalents* of the Japanese text, which is itself a definition of some term that is not shown.
- * The identity of the terms being defined is irrelevant, as your purpose is to learn to comprehend Japanese text, not to fill out a crossword puzzle!
- * While these exercises are not complete sentences, they are actually **quite useful for practicing kanji and kanji-based vocabulary**, which they contain in high density and without forcing you to read the same old kana and grammatical expressions over and over again.
- * To make reading these parallel definitions a bit more interesting, I often took the trouble of inserting the defined term into the text in both English and Japanese, creating complete sentences along the following pattern:

「内陣」とは、牧師や聖歌隊が使う、教会の祭壇の周りの場所のことを指す。

The "chancel" is the area around the altar of a church used by the clergy and choir.

Sometimes these exercises define terms for which a native speaker would require no definition, such as “death row”:

「死刑囚独房棟」とは、死刑を宣告された者が執行を待つ刑務所の独房棟のことを指す。

"Death row" is the cellblock in a prison where those condemned to death await execution.

While the meaning of “death row” is obvious to any native speaker of English, the meaning of 死刑囚独房棟 is not, and such examples provide intensive and high-quality reading practice for the target kanji (akin to reading an entry in a Japanese-Japanese dictionary).

Style

Reflecting the wide variety of source texts from which they are drawn, the exercises follow a variety of conventions for style, punctuation, and spelling (labor & labour, fulfill & fulfil, behoove & behave, etc.). Almost no attempt has been made to make the text conform to a consistent style, except that of running a procedure to move quote marks from outside of commas and periods to inside them, which I have done to help legitimize this (far more rational!) practice.

In original exercises, I have also made a point of using plural pronouns in lieu of masculine pronouns for generic third-person singular subjects, e.g., the now legitimate “*Each plays their respective role*” in lieu of the needlessly gendered “*Each plays his respective role.*”

Outdated expressions

Largely due to the absurdly long duration of copyrights, the material used for these reading sets relies heavily on texts written prior to 1923. While I have attempted to exclude any item containing offensive language, the remaining items still inevitably reflect the language and ideas of their respective eras. If you come across anything you consider particularly objectionable, please report it to me at info@lexicaglobal.com, thank you.

Lack of diversity among source authors

This series draws most heavily on sources made available by Project Gutenberg and Aozora Bunko. Among the dozens of bilingual texts available from these projects at the time of writing, not a single source was written by an author of African, Hispanic, or Native American descent, to name just a few excluded categories. Female authors were underrepresented.

As a symbolic gesture, I personally translated a small quantity of public domain material written by Afro-American and Afro-European authors. But this material is far from adequate, and for future projects I seek suggestions from readers for sources of copyright-free bilingual material from a wider diversity of authors.

I was particularly disappointed not to be able to use Martin Luther King's historic "I Have a Dream Speech" of 1963. In this case the barrier was not the lack of a translation, but the control Dr. King's estate continues to exert over this copyrighted work.

I invite readers to share their opinions on the issue of author diversity in public domain texts (particularly bilingual texts), both with copyright owners and with the translation community. For more information, please consult the following websites:

weneeddiversebooks.tumblr.com

projectgutenbergproject.blogspot.com/2014/05/wishlist-black-writers-in-public-domain.html

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