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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME VI, ISSUE 3

Spring 2014
Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume VI, Issue 3
Spring 2014
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Introduction and Editor's Note

As with other unthemed issues of *WOW Review*, Vol. VI, Issue 3 takes readers across continents and across time with stories that cut across genres. These stories are as universal as they are unique in that they reveal how people face challenges, disasters, relationships, and daily life in both realistic and fantasy-driven ways.

Fantasy and legends establish a strong cultural context. Fantasy is the genre for the Russian tale, *Uncle Fedya, His Dog, and His Cat* and the Ukrainian story, *A Tale about an Old Lion*. Uncle Fedya is a child who discovers that the joys of running away from home are short-lived. And, amidst the unique problems of the animal characters visiting Ukraine, *A Tale about an Old Lion* introduces readers to the culture and hospitality of people in the capital city of this country. Hawaii, the Pacific island state, is the setting for *A`ama Nui Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea*, an original legend that invites readers into Hawaiian culture.

Although traditional tales offer humor as well as value-laden connections, other books use historical fiction, fantasy and contemporary fiction as genres for portraying stories with heavy issues at the center. *The War within these Walls* focuses on the resiliency and resistance of Jewish people during the Holocaust, while *More Than This* explores the reality of life versus death in a British setting. Literature set in the Pacific is found in *Natural Destiny*, historical fiction from Guam that conveys the hardships of Japanese occupation during World War II. A more contemporary story, *Ano Hi no Koto Koto (The Things That Happened on That Day): Remember March 11, 2011*, comes from Japan and reflects the recent tsunami. And within the U.S., *Ghost Hawk* is critically examined for its portrayal of Native peoples. Latino cultures are examined through both poetry and informational text in *We are Latinos*—a book that shares both the challenges of Latinos and the heart of the culture that grounds their response to such challenges. New Zealand is the site for *Dear Vincent*, a contemporary and compelling story of suicide. From the Middle East, stories set in Iran and Lebanon offer greater insight to these two cultural groups. *That Night's Train* from Iran tells of a young girl who develops an unexpected relationship with a teacher, while *The Servant*, set in Lebanon in the 1980's, reflects the universal story of a young woman's struggle for identity.

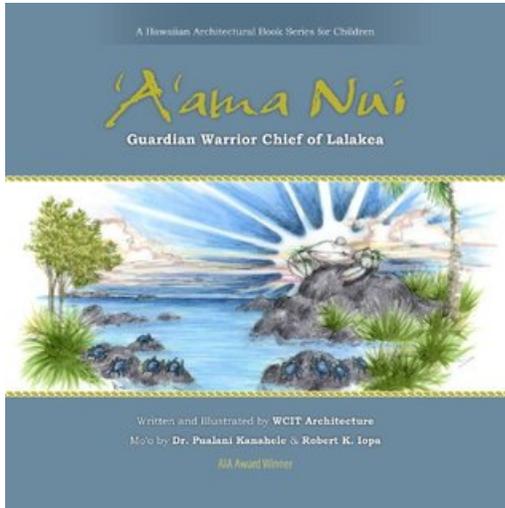
Collectively, the reviews in this issue offer a brief slice of the possibilities of international literature for young readers through books that take readers into diverse cultures and eras while inviting them to respond to situations from their personal positions in life. Taking one's personal experiences into transactions with international stories in distinctly contextualized settings has rich potential for enhancing global perspectives. We look forward to sharing these reviews and titles as well as anticipate your response.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

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‘A`ama Nui Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea

Written and Illustrated by WCIT Architecture

Mo`o Studio, 55 pp.

ISBN: 978-0986058806

This unique children’s picture book, crafted by a team of architects and a cultural expert, is an innovative means of presenting disciplinary and cultural knowledge. Through the creation of an original children’s legend, the history and culture of Hawai`i is skillfully interwoven with the technical and aesthetic aspects of architecture, providing readers with an entertaining and multifaceted view of the design process.

The book breaks the typical reader’s schemata for reading a story from start to finish. There are four major sections within the book that support the focal story, *‘A`ama Nui: Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea*. Each section is prefaced with an introduction by a well-known and respected cultural expert, Pualani Kanahale, or the architect, Robert Iopa, who provides the reader with subtle hints and elucidates the significance of the section.

The book opens with the mo`oku`auhau, lineage of generations of knowledge. Like an opening cultural protocol for a special event, a mele pana (legendary song) is introduced. Kanahale explains this particular mele pana, “initiated the breath,” for the story and the song establishes the relevance of the particular site and the setting for the story.

The next section, mo`olelo, or lineage of generations of tales, is the central children’s story, *‘A`ama Nui Guardian Warrior Chief of Lalakea*. Written by architect, Robert Iopa, the story is told in legend form and embodies the deep historical and cultural significance of the place. Integrated below the written text of the story is a picture of some of the design features from an architectural sketchbook revealing a connection between architectural design features and an element in the story. Attractive illustrations using anime-like characters fill the pages with action. These contemporary and culturally authentic illustrations are both humorous and inviting for young readers.

The legend itself begins with a description of the place and quickly establishes the conflict between a rowdy group of pigs, Na Pua`a Kolohe, and warrior guardians of Lalakea, a group of crabs, Na Koa `A`ama. The crabs are no match for the pigs, but they are comforted by the promise of hope that a giant warrior crab chief, `A`ama Nui, will protect them. `A`ama Nui is born and two turtle helpers, Makana and Makali`i, keep his identity hidden until he is ready for battle. `A`ama Nui is tricked by the pigs and captured. His eyes are stripped from him, leaving his turtle helpers to rescue him by returning one of his eyes. `A`ama Nui then defeats the group of pigs and keeps watch over the ponds at Lalakea. Hence readers learn, `A`ama Nui, the giant crab, is the model for the design of the house at Lalakea.

Many legends are based on heroic individuals and such is in the case of the warrior chief `A`ama Nui. The tale weaves in cultural and experiential knowledge of the place, Lalakea.

For example it is common knowledge that the water at Lalakea is a blending of the icy cold freshwater from mountain fed springs and the warmer saltwater from the nearby ocean. The author plays upon that knowledge within the story and deems that the special water has “mystical powers to soothe and relax . . . but excess time could have an adverse effect.” Words from the Hawaiian language are integrated throughout the story making a non-Hawaiian language reader work to translate meaning. Inclusion of language goes beyond superficial use of Hawaiian character names and includes language that describes concepts and phrases that might be humorous to insiders. Using his own experiences as a native Hawaiian who grew up in the town where the story is set, Iopa and team are able to weave their depth of knowledge of culture and architecture to the writing and illustrations, making this legend a culturally authentic story.

The third section is mo`oka`i, lineage of generations of journeys. Iopa and his team show readers how the story writing process for the `A`ama Nui legend guided the design process. At the top of each page on the left is a quote from the story and below that a color drawing of the house plan along with the cartoonish characters that are superimposed on a photograph of the site, giving a reader an image of the proposed house. Below the picture is a brief explanation of the story and design connection. On the adjacent right page is a real architectural drawing, connected to the quote and the photograph and includes a definition and explanation of the architectural term depicted. It shows how architects can integrate and use the cultural knowledge of the land and people of the place to inspire and inform.

In the final section, mo`owaiwai, the lineage of generations of valued practices, Kanahale encourages readers to reread and return to the images. She challenges readers to uncover the many layers of cultural and technical practices to discuss and provides a few examples. The section includes a “glossary” of sorts; however, it isn’t presented in traditional western alphabetical order but rather in non-linear form. The Hawaiian words are paired with an illustration from the story and are presented around the illustration with the Hawaiian word and English translation below it. This makes it tricky for the reader, having to scan the written text around the pictures to find the translation and return to the text of the story again.

This book isn’t intended to be read in one sitting from cover to cover. Readers must return to the text again and again to build meaning. The reader can do an aesthetic reading of the legend purely by itself or read the architectural sketchbook along and the design process section to better understand what it means to be an architect. The book thus might be paired with other informational texts about architecture such as, *Under Every Roof – A Kid’s Style and Field Guide to the Architecture of American Houses* (Brown Glenn, 2009) or *David Macaulay’s Built to Last* (2010) and *Building Big* (2000) to support and extend children’s understandings of architecture. It can also be paired with other Hawaiian stories such as David Kawika Eyre’s Kamehameha series beginning with *White Rainbow, Black Curse* (Eyre, 2007) or the *Legend of the Gourd* (Loebel-Fried, 2010) to explore Hawaiian cultural practices and draw intertextual connections between them.

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Dear Vincent

Written by Mandy Hager

Random House, Auckland, New Zealand, 2013, 276 pp.

ISBN: 978-1775533276

A number of recent young adult books have focused on suicide, but Mandy Hager's *Dear Vincent* is particularly powerful. Tara is going to high school, helping take care of her father (who has been incapacitated by a stroke), working in a rest home, and painting when she gets the chance. She loves Vincent Van Gogh and is making a series of paintings inspired by his work, but with themes from her own life. She is a very gifted artist. Her older sister, Vanessa, has died. Her mother, who works hard to keep

them financially afloat, seems unable to nurture Tara—as she was unable to nurture Vanessa.

Tara finds letters from relatives in Ireland, Tara's parents' homeland, and realizes that Vanessa was not killed in a car accident as she had thought, but that she had killed herself. Filled with rage and anger that her parents had been untruthful and had not treated Vanessa well, Tara moves out and finds refuge at the home of Max, one of the temporary residents at the rest home where she works. She keeps painting, and as the images in her painting get more disturbing the teacher sees she is in distress. Tara thinks that if she goes to visit her uncle and aunt in Ireland, she will find answers to the questions that haunt her about her own family. The uncle and aunt receive her warmly, and indeed she does find out many answers about what happened in her family history during the "time of the Troubles" in Ireland and after their emigration to New Zealand.

Tara longs for her sister and grieves for the pain her sister bore and decides she will join her in death to accompany her in a way she was unable to when she was alive. She comes to the brink of taking her own life—the situation is prepared, ready and at hand—and in getting caught up in finishing her final painting, does not complete the act that would end her own life. The extra time brings her back to a sense that she does want to live, and so begins piecing back together a life that she will find worthwhile. Her aunt and uncle help her find a sense of herself, as does her friend Johannes. She returns to New Zealand as her father is dying to try to figure out how she will live her own life and reconcile herself to her parents.

The book is convincing in helping the reader understand why and how she makes choices. It is written from Tara's point of view, so we follow her thinking, but we also see other's actions and responses and know she has some choices before she realizes it herself. It takes us to the brink of thinking that ending her life is a reasonable choice, given the circumstances, all-the-while thinking "no, no, no—she can't do that." And it does this without being contrived or sentimental.

The book does not leave you with all the pieces tied together or everything being okay, which makes it feel authentic to the trauma that has unfolded. The roles of Max and Johannes in her life seem almost too good to be true sometimes and leave you wondering how likely it would be to have someone come along who could help Tara to that extent. Johannes is a mature 17-year-old. While critical to the plot and a contrast in having to deal with the issue of too much parental love rather than not enough love (and we see that has its problems, too), he is the nurturing opposite of Tara's imperfect mother. On the other hand, without Max and Johannes, the book would be much bleaker—they give a sense of hope and are, in a number of instances, the embodiment of things she has been thinking about in her own head anyway.

The history of her parents and their immigration to New Zealand are easy to believe in their authenticity, both to historical events and to ways people responded to the events. While it has a particular setting, the kinds of stresses her family faces are ones any reader could identify with at some level.

Hager begins each chapter starting with a quote from a letter from Vincent Van Gogh to his brother Theo. As the book continues, the parallel of Vincent writing to his brother Theo, who tried to help Vincent but was in the end unsuccessful in keeping Vincent from killing himself, adds an extra level to the book. Tara's analysis of Vincent's work and mental health are wonderful connections to her making sense of her own life and do not seem contrived or misplaced.

This book could be paired with *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005). Alaska is also burdened by complexities of family, particularly what has happened to her mother, and in the end decides to exit the "labyrinth of life" via suicide. In this book, friends must deal with her death more than the family. In both cases the females are dealing with tough interpersonal issues and the story is told from the perspective of the person left behind.

Mandy Hager has written largely for the YA audience and has personal experience with a friend who was a victim of suicide. This topic is close to her heart and she writes with passion about it—including an afterward pleading for those considering suicide to get help. She was also a teacher for special needs children before she became a full-time writer. A number of her books were written as her own children were teenagers, which may be part of the reason the voices of her characters seem so true and authentic. She has been a finalist for a number of awards and won the LIANZA Esther Glen medal for *Smashed* (2008) and the New Zealand Post Children's Award in 2010 for *The Crossing* (2009). This book is stronger and hopefully will be shortlisted for the New Zealand Post Children's Award for 2013.

http://www.storylines.org.nz/Profiles/Profiles_D-H/Mandy_Hager.html

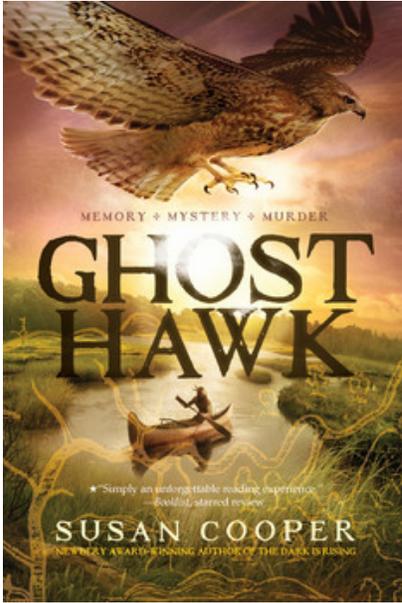
<http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/hagermandy.html>

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Ghost Hawk

Written by Susan Cooper

New York: Margaret McElderry Books pp. 328

ISBN 978-1442481411

Ghost Hawk has received a starred review in Booklist and was listed as one of the 2013 Booklist's Editors' Choice Top of the List: The Best of Editor's Choice. Despite these awards, this book has problematic aspects.

The story has three parts all of which are narrated by a Native boy, Little Hawk. The first two parts take place in the 17th century and are focused on encounters between the Pilgrims and Native people. The first part tells the story of Little Hawk. Little Hawk and his grandmother are

the only survivors of a disease that is brought by the whites and that obliterates many native villages. In their new village, Little Hawk meets a Pilgrim boy, John. At the end of part one, Little Hawk is shot by a Pilgrim and becomes a spirit. He says, "I can see past and present, though not future. I can hear speech and thought no matter what its language. I may not intervene. I may be seen, if I choose, and I may communicate, if I choose, but only in a certain place, and at certain times." John is able to see and talk to Little Hawk at dawn and sunset if he goes to an island off the coast. There Little Hawk teaches John his native language, Wampanoag, and instructs him about the culture of his people.

In his narration, Little Hawk observes and tells what happened to his people as well as what happens to John as he matures and becomes a leader in a new community apart from the rigid Pilgrims. Part three takes place in contemporary times. A woman comes to live on the island where she sees Little Hawk's ghost, and finds a way to release his spirit. Cooper's Author's Note explains how she built a house on Little Hawk's island. She writes, "It is not possible to live here without listening to the land and its past, and so I found myself writing this book. The story is a work of the imagination: not a historical novel, but a fantasy set within a historical background."

Several aspects of the story were difficult for me to accept. First, when Little Hawk is killed, John feels responsible because he called for help and Little Hawk came to his father's rescue. In doing so, Little Hawk is killed by a Pilgrim who comes on the scene thinking Little Hawk is attacking the father. John's father dies, yet John is more distraught over the injustice of Little Hawk's death. John is more saddened by Little Hawk's death than his father's death.

Another part of the story that is difficult to believe has to do with how the ghost of Little Hawk teaches John his language and culture. These teachings can only occur in the short spaces where the spirit can communicate and be seen during sunrise and sunset. Furthermore, John can only get away to travel to the island a few times. Yet he becomes a fluent speaker of Wampanoag and acquires an in-depth knowledge of the culture.

The authenticity of Native cultural descriptions in the book is also a concern. Cooper writes in her Author's Note that her research included Nathaniel Philbrick's *Mayflower*, which provided a portrait of the period about the Pilgrims. The Pilgrim part of the story seems accurate; however, it is not clear how she undertook her research about the Native people in that area, the Wampanoag. What she imagines about their life appears to rely on stereotypes, since there are few if any records about this group at that time. Debbie Reese critiques the portrayal of Native people of *Ghost Hawk* in her blog, *American Indians in Children's Literature*. She writes, "From my point of view, Cooper took many liberties in the ways that she portrays Native peoples in *Ghost Hawk*." Her blog details her many objections to the book.

Cooper is a master of her craft. Her writing is lyrical and descriptive of the beautiful settings, making obvious why she has been honored with a Newbery Award and a Newbery Honor. In addition, she has been honored for her body of work by the American Library Association with the Margaret Edwards Award in 2012. However, despite her strong writing, the problematic aspects of her book raise questions about the starred reviews and whether reviewers considered issues of authenticity.

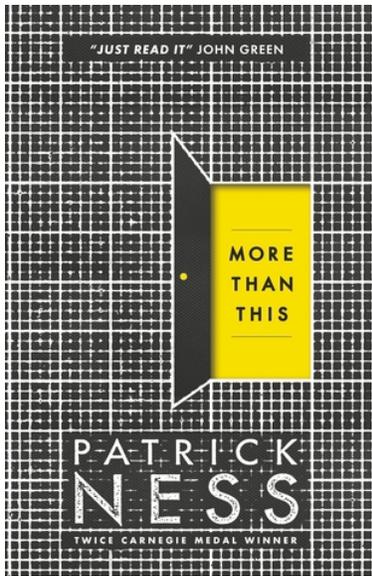
Share Louise Erdrich's books of historical fiction with children for a more thoughtful portrayal of Native People. Erdrich's historical series begins with *The Birchbark House* (2002) and continues with *The Game of Silence* (2006), *The Porcupine Year* (2010) and *Chickadee* (2013). The stories about an Ojibwa family balance the portrayals of Native Americans in Cooper's book. Other Native American authors like, Michael Dorris and Joseph Bruchac have also written fine historical fiction about the Native American experience

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More than This

Written by Patrick Ness
Candlewick Press, 2013, 472 pp.
ISBN: 978-0763662585

The first moments after the boy's death pass for him in a confused and weighty blur. He is dimly aware of pain, but mostly of a tremendous fatigue, as if he has been covered in layer upon layer of impossibly heavy blankets. (Ness, p. 7)

Seth drowns at the age of 17 and knows he has died—once he awakens again to find himself outside his English childhood home where he has not lived for eight years. He is confused, splayed out on the street, dressed in very little clothing. He has difficulty walking, and comes to understand that he is in this place where the electricity does not work, where the people and animals have disappeared, and where everything has been left with little forethought. Seth gives this place the only name he has for where people who have died might find themselves so totally alone—hell. Eventually, however, Seth discovers he is not alone, which could be a much more dangerous situation. And then he begins to wonder if he has died at all.

More Than This is a gripping adventure that will keep readers wondering what is really happening with Seth as he attempts to discover what has happened to himself, his family, and those from his boyhood community. Reminiscent of the movie “The Matrix” and Asimov’s (1973) *I, Robot*, the story addresses issues of survival, grief, friendship, family, and perceptions as reality. Seth is a dynamic character who wrestles with which reality seems most feasible—the one in which he currently finds himself, or the one that he remembers. His memories are vivid while his current reality is lifeless, dust-covered, and terribly, terribly wrong. Readers are held in healthy abeyance along with Seth through much of the story through a plotline that creates evidence for both possibilities, a delicate feat superbly achieved by the author.

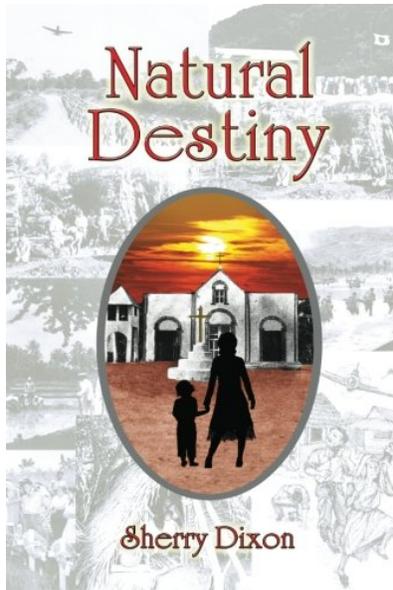
With a storyline that would engage middle and high school students, *More than This* makes a great companion to texts such as *Feed* (M. T. Anderson, 2012) or *The Walking Dark* (Robin Wasserman, 2013). It could also be used in a text set with books such as *Sex & Violence* (Carrie Mesrobian, 2013) and *The Shadow of Blackbirds* (Cat Winters, 2013) as a way of examining desperation and what measures people will go through to avoid pain.

Patrick Ness is the author of the acclaimed series, *Chaos Walking* (2009, 2010, 2011), a science fiction trilogy that is equally gripping and won the Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize and the Booktrust Teenage Prize. He is the author of award-winning *A Monster Calls* (2011), which is being made into a movie. He also writes for adults, including a retelling of *The*

Crane Wife (2014) and a series of short stories in *Topics About Which I Know Nothing* (2010). Born and raised in the United States, Ness moved to the United Kingdom in 1999, where he teaches at Oxford University. More information about Ness can be found on his website (<http://www.patrickness.com/>).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, OH

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Natural Destiny

Written by Sherry Dixon.

Sherry Dixon Books, 2012, p. 203

ISBN: 978-1477675120

I was sure that God hated me, and that he always had (p. 1)

Eight-year-old Bernie's opening line in this historical novel plainly foretells a story filled with tragic events and hardships and the horrors that she and other Chamorros in Guam will endure at the hands of their Japanese captors. A semi-biographical novel, *Natural Destiny* gives one small voice to the Chamorros' life experiences in

Japanese-occupied Guam.

The novel opens up with Bernie, short for Bernadita, talking about how her parents died and she came to live with her godmother, Nina Maria, and her mother, Nanan Beha, in the village of Sumay, which also serves as a military installation in Guam. In the first chapter, Bernie decides to celebrate her eighth birthday by cutting her own hair, something that she has seen as a huge burden. Nanan Beha gets upset, explaining to Bernie that it is shameful for island girls to have short hair. Nanan Beha then punishes the eight-year-old by forbidding her from playing with friends until her hair grows out again and tells her that her hair will be cut short until after Christmas, three months away.

The haircut scene serves many purposes in setting up the characters, establishing the cultural norms, and moving the plot forward. Bernie is an excellent portrayal of a young Chamorro girl, one who (for the most part) is able to move efficiently between childhood folly and familial customs. Her desire to be free from the long hair that constantly gets in her way hints at her tomboy behavior and indicates that she is not in any hurry to grow up. Her inability to even fathom that cutting her hair was a bad idea after seeing the shocked looks and angry faces of the ladies of the village belies her naiveté. Yet, Bernie takes the punishment without argument (even though she felt she did nothing wrong), clearly defining her as a Chamorro girl who knows her place in the family structure. The haircut scene also clearly defines Nanan Beha's character and gives insights into the Chamorro family's authority structure. Nanan Beha is portrayed as a strict yet loving woman who has time for "hugs and kisses" but doles out spankings when needed. When Bernie's mother dies, Nina Maria steps in and claims Bernie as her own, according to the Chamorro custom. However, when Bernie cuts her hair, it is not Nina Maria but Nanan Beha who explains to Bernie that what she did was wrong, reminds her of what is expected, and finally lays down punishment. Nina Maria's deference to her mother in this instance gives the clear picture that Nanan Beha is the

true authority and mother figure in the house even for her children's children. These details and characterizations make this a believable story for Chamorro readers.

As the story progresses, Bernie's punishment becomes her saving grace. Bernie is just beginning to feel the weight of her punishment when she is sent home after church while the rest of Sumay (including her Nanan Beha and Nina Maria) stay to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1941. Soon after, she hears an enormous blast and discovers that her entire village, including the church where her family and friends were celebrating, has been literally erased by Japanese bombs. Mistaken for a boy, Bernie is assigned to the men's work party, a vantage point that allows her to watch her Japanese captors and the other villagers' acts of betrayal, heroism, and resistance.

Throughout the novel, Bernie learns about living in the Manenggon camp, working in the rice paddies, stealing in order to survive, silently enduring the Japanese soldiers' cruelty, and remaining hopeful with help and advice from her new family, Grandma Lilly and Uncle Herman. When Bernie starts to become bitter over her losses, Grandma Lilly's reminds her that she needs to look for the good. Similarly, Uncle Herman tells her candidly what will happen and what Bernie must do (and not do) in order to survive witnessing her first execution. Grandma Lilly's reminder to Bernie that "everybody takes care of everybody" particularly stands out because it explains why a man would put himself at risk to pretend to be a strange woman's husband or why Uncle Herman would volunteer to translate for the Japanese. This phrase explains the Chamorro value of inafa'mao'lek in much broader terms than today's "I make it good for you/you make it good for me." This broader definition demonstrates that the Chamorros' commitment to community over individual is more than its modern interpretation of reciprocity.

Natural Destiny may not have the storytelling flair of Jerry Spinelli's (2005) *Milkweed* or Ruta Sepetys' (2011) *Between Shades of Gray* but the voice in the story is uniquely Chamorro. The simplicity of word choice is reminiscent of the matter-of-fact narrative voice of Chamorro folklore. The choices that characters make (e.g. Grandma Lilly and Uncle Carlos pretending to be married and Bernie's relative shielding her from the comfort house) demonstrate how the Chamorros relied on their value systems in order to survive extraordinary ordeals.

Another unique feature about the work is that it brings a village to life that was literally erased by World War II. Just as Bernie remarked that the only reminder of Sumay was the cross outside the church, in real life, the villagers moved into the nearby areas of Santa Rita and Agat and Sumay was never rebuilt. Instead, Sumay became a part of Naval Base Marianas. Today, that area is an open field punctuated only by the church cross. *Sumay: A Legacy for our Children* (James Perez Viernes, 2013) is a wonderful companion piece because it not only gives the history of the village from the villagers' point of view but includes a map of the prewar village with the names of the villagers' homes.

Natural Destiny instantly draws in readers to Bernie's story, making it a quick read. This book would make a wonderful addition to a wartime experience book set but is better served as the cornerstone to a cross-curricular experience by combining this book with *Sumay: A Legacy*

for our Children and the U.S. Population Census of 1940. Students reading this book and then studying the historical documents of the village of Sumay can engage in research to figure out where Bernie lived, where she was and who she encountered as she moved through the village as well as the names of the other villagers, wondering what their stories were, whether or not they survived. Natural Destiny shares one story of World War II experiences in the Pacific Theater, drawing attention to one of the most significant turning points in Guam's history, and brings a village that was erased by war back to life.

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Ano Hi no Koto Koto (The Things That Happened on That Day): Remember March 11, 2011

Written and illustrated by Yoh Shomei

Koreishuppansha, Japan, 2012, 32 pp.

ISBN: 4333025303

Ano Hi no Koto (The Things That Happened on That Day): Remember March 11, 2011 (2012), is a Japanese-English bilingual picture book. Through a boy's perspective, the story invites readers to see the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that happened on March 11, 2011 in the northeastern region of Japan. The central theme of this story is

loss of family, linking with the motifs of separation, social isolation, survival, and hope.

The story begins with the boy's appreciation of the ocean, "I like the sea! My grandpa fishes in the sea. He often said, "We live by the sea, and it gives a living to all of us" (p. 1). Suddenly the sea brings hardship to the boy and other people living near the ocean as a great earthquake and tsunami swallow people, cars, and houses. The disaster happens during school hours, and the boy and other children climb to the school rooftop to survive. During the night, cold and fearful, they wait to be rescued.

Afterward, they move to a shelter, staying with unknown people in uncertain and anxiety-producing circumstances. One day, the boy runs into a puppy that is also alone, and they fill each other's void, left by family separation and anxiety. Eventually, the boy reunites with his family but not with his grandfather, who was fishing in the sea alone and swallowed by the tsunami. Even in hard times, the boy gradually goes forward with hope along with a new family member, the puppy. The boy names the puppy "Umi," which means "the sea" in Japanese. The story ends with the boy saying, "I was looking at the sea when I heard the voice of my grandpa saying, "We live by the sea, and it gives a living to all of us" (p. 27).

The illustrations, with gentle gradients and watercolors, truly make this book. The paintings use muted browns and grays to provide heartbreaking images such as massive tsunami waves sweeping away houses and stark landscapes after the tsunami. The last few pages are filled with picturesque portrayals of the sea, the boy, and the puppy with vibrant colors. The figure of the boy, along with his puppy, looking out the horizon, shows the hope and the future he holds.

While the cultural framework of the book is particular to Japan, the basic concerns, such as family separation, can ring true for many readers. Readers can feel an emotional connection with the young Japanese protagonist, and that connection can encourage empathy in readers who are also struggling with difficult circumstances. The story also invites readers to discuss the role of the sea in Japanese culture. Japanese people have known the power and danger of the sea since ancient times; at the same

time, they deeply appreciate the ocean that brings gifts for them. “The sea” has been a significant part of the Japanese cultural fabric for a very long time. As such, March 11, 2011, became a day that Japanese people would never forget. Many people lost family members, homes, and belongings. On the last page of the book, the author gives a message to readers, “It will make me happy if the boy’s story about his grandfather and Umi, the puppy who survived, will give a ray of hope to all my readers.”

The author, Yoh Shomei, born in Japan, is a picture book artist and poet. He studied oil painting at the Art Students League of New York. He debuted with the picture book *Jake* in 1972, and won the Graphic Award at the Bologna International Children’s Book Exhibition with *Wind and Panther* in 1990. His recent books, such as *Call My Name* (2009), have focused on concerns of modern values and awareness of the earth and humanity. Many of his books are Japanese-English bilingual books and are available in the U.S.

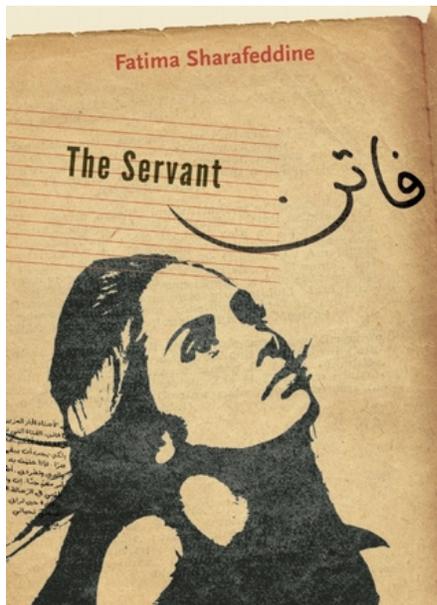
This book can be paired with works that pick up separation and isolation caused by natural disasters, such as *Tomo: Friendship through Fiction—Anthology of Japan Teen Stories* by Holly Thompson and Debbie Ridpath Ohi (2012) and *Field of Cole: Remember the Great East Japan Earthquake*, an English-translated manga by Misukoso (2011). *Tsunami!* (2009), a historical fiction children’s book by Kimiko Kajikawa and Ed Young set in Japan about an old man who saves his village from an impending tsunami, and *Flood* (1997), a book by Mary Calhoun and Erick Ingraham, about a Midwestern girl who loses her home in the 1993 flooding of the Mississippi River, are further connections.

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The Servant

Written by Fatima Sharafeddine
Groundwood Books, 2013, 157 pp.
ISBN: 987-1554983070

Faten hates herself right now. She loathes the prison she is trapped in. How did she get here? Why doesn't she rebel? Why does she submit to what the others want? Why is she afraid of her father? She is here today because of him. Is it only fear, or hate, as well? As for her mother, why is she so weak? Why didn't she stop him from turning their daughter from an excellent student into a house maid? (pp. 54-55)

This quote reflects the crux of this young adult novel. Set in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1980s, *The Servant* follows the trajectory of a cowed and scared teenaged Faten who is thrust from her home to support her family and her transformation into a young woman who creates her own home and future. This story, while originally published in Arabic and set in the Middle East, is not centered on the strife of warring factions or the Christian/Muslim conflict in Lebanon, but rather on the struggle of a young “everywoman” to create her own life despite the patriarchy surrounding her.

This struggle makes a good story. The author presents characters who are multi-layered. Faten helps the reader to see good and bad in everyone except her father. Faten’s father is never forgiven nor are his actions explained. The father’s character is never fleshed out and he is a one-dimensional tyrant.

The Servant is a romance with a twist. Faten is attracted to her neighbor, but more importantly, hopes he will help her attain her dream to become a nurse. She pursues him and starts her quest for agency, a theme that is reflected throughout the novel as the young adult characters negotiate the chasm between what they want and what their families expect of them. This shared struggle wherever and whenever it is set is what makes this text accessible to anyone who has tried to break free.

This novel offered a glimpse into a culture that really isn’t all that foreign. There is none of the exotic “Orientalizing” in *The Servant*. The author was able to write in a way that universalizes how women can overcome patriarchy and that universalizes the very real struggle that still exists in many places around the world.

This novel would work well in a text set of books highlighting the lives of girls/women in the Islamic world, such as *Shabanu* by Suzanne Fisher Staples (1989) and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2003). However, in light of its universal appeal, it might also be paired

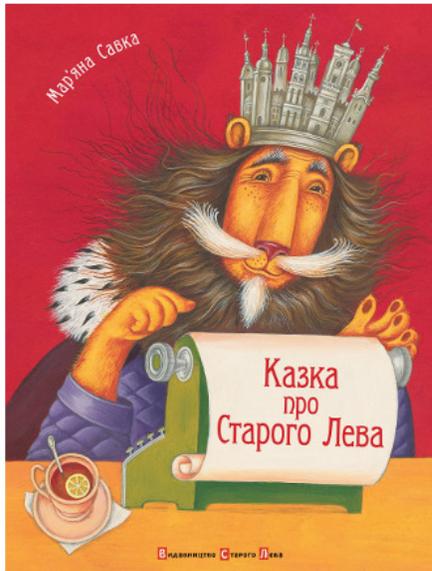
with titles such as *Between Sisters* by Adwoe Badoe (2010) and *Diary of Ma Yan: The Life of a Chinese Schoolgirl* (Ma Yan, 2005).

Melissa B. Wilson, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, LA

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A Tale about an Old Lion

Written by Marjana Savka

Illustrated by Volodymyr Shtanko

L'viv, Ukraine: The Old Lion Publishing House, 2011,
40 pp.

ISBN: 987-9962909753

Written by popular Ukrainian poet Marjana Savka's and illustrated by well-known artist Volodymyr Shtanko, this book was published in L'viv in 2011 by the Old Lion Publishing House. The book received the Best Book of the Year Award in the category of "A Childhood Feast" and was included to the White Raven Online Catalogue, 2012.

A Tale about an Old Lion represents a "visiting card" to the cultural capital of Ukraine—the city of L'viv. The main character is the Old Lion who settles on a mansard of the City Hall, a home to the City Council and one of the cherished symbols in L'viv. From there, the Old Lion admires picturesque views of the Old City; in this way the author and the illustrator masterfully recreate the best must-see city places. However, living in the ancient mansard is not that comfortable as one might imagine. Since the weather is rainy in L'viv, the Old Lion experiences a number of troubles with his new home. A ceiling starts to leak and the Lion needs immediate help with major repairs and maintenance.

Seeking help, the Old Lion writes letters to his best friends—the Crocodile, the Elephant, and the Giraffe. He knows that they are good with various housekeeping tasks. His friends quickly come to the city; however, they all need to get to the Old Lion's mansard by themselves. Excited about beautiful L'viv, everyone manages to get into trouble. The Giraffe stops at the playground and rocks children on her neck. The Crocodile goes to a restaurant to have a quick lunch where he does not understand a waiter's jokes. He gets aggressive and, as a consequence, is arrested for his misbehavior. Moreover, the Elephant cannot enter the City Hall Gate because of his size. When people start gathering around the Elephant to take a look, the Old Lion finally notices what is happening and surprised at the situation, he falls out of mansard's window. Luckily, he lands right on the Elephant's back. This bustling situation attracts all people of L'viv, with even the Mayor and government representatives rushing to see the unexpected fuss.

After the Mayor's investigation of these whimsical turbulences, he helpfully welcomes three bewildered guests and invites them to enjoy the city. The story's ending offers an invitation to all the tourists from around the world to come to L'viv and see with their own eyes the welcoming atmosphere of the ancient city. Even though, the Old Lion's guests go through some humorous extraordinary adventures, the book represents hospitality and warm hearts of the people of Ukraine.

A Tale about an Old Lion is an artful culturally-conscious book with a vibrant visual narrative. Shtanko's illustrations elaborate and specify a rhythmic text. These are not only the vivid views of the city and its famous landscapes, but also warm brown and yellow colors that depict a unique authentic state of both the old and contemporary L'viv. Since the city is often known as a city of coffee with its numerous coffee houses and pastry shops, this particular color palette is the best choice to recreate an aroma of the city.

Marjana Savka is the author of several books for children and adults. Being also the editor-in-chief of the Old Lion Publishing House, she is a social activist and a promoter of reading culture in Ukraine. Savka was an invited guest speaker and a contributor to the Leipzig Book Fair children's literature program and she is often invited to represent Ukrainian children's literature to both Europe and the U.S.

Volodymyr Shtanko is a celebrated Ukrainian illustrator. The books illustrated by Shtanko are included in the White Raven catalogue and IBBY Honor List 2012. His works were displayed in many European countries and his artistic style is well-recognizable.

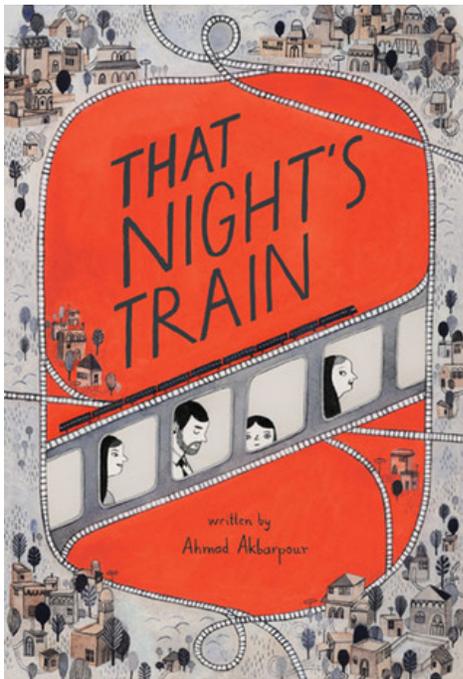
This book can be paired with some of its international editions, available in English published by the Ababahalamaha Publishing House as well as can be used with two distinguishing traditional Ukrainian folktales, *The Mitten* and *The Turnip* designed by Art Studio Agrafka (Andriy Lesiv and Romana Romanyshyn) that were included in the White Raven Catalogue (2012, 2013), available in English as books on demand. It would be an interesting and fun activity to use this book with travel guides/books or a set of maps to introduce Ukraine, which is one of the largest countries in Europe and to visually locate L'viv, in both school and academia classrooms.

Oksana Lushchevska, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

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That Night's Train

Written by Ahmad Akbarpour

Groundwood Books/ House of Anansi Press, 2012, 94 pp.

ISBN: 978-1554981694

That Night's Train is a story about human relationships and the interrelated complications that are emotional, spatial, memorial, and literary. A five-year-old girl, Banafsheh, has unforgettably vivid memories of her late mother. Banafsheh misses her mother who was beautiful and good to her. One night, Banafsheh is taking a train with her grandmother and meets a young passenger sitting across from them. She can't help looking at the young lady as she notices many reminders of her mother, such as the way she reads a book and the way her eyes and lips move. Of course, the lady does not quite compare to her mother according to Banafsheh's perspectives.

In a short introduction, Banafsheh learns that the young lady is a teacher and writer who teaches in two villages on opposite ends of the train line. After a brief dialogue, they develop special affection for each other and eventually look for another chance to see each other. The young lady promises to call Banafsheh on Friday and Banafsheh promises to answer her call in return. The book goes on to tell both sides of the stories of Banafsheh and the writer-teacher. This moment creates a new relationship between two major characters and the audience as well.

What is unique and even feels exotic in a positive sense is the flow of the story that is inclusive of additional characters and settings. The reader is privy to the background of the story as shared in the introduction. As the story proceeds with the teacher telling the story about Banafsheh to her class as if her story is fictional instead actually happening on the train, the reader is made to feel like an insider to how the teacher/writer is developing the story through telling it to her students. Her students anticipate how the little girl and the third character, who is actually the teacher, will continue or discontinue their accidentally created friendship. While the teacher shares her thoughts about Banafsheh through her interactive story-telling with the class, Banafsheh also passively expresses through interactions with her father and grandmother how she is looking forward to talking to the teacher on the phone on Friday, a call that is disappointingly delayed, and even possibly meeting her in the future. Banafsheh experiences emotional ups and downs during the story—from being thrilled to disappointed to longing for contact with the teacher who seems to be nonresponsive for three months.

Although this book is a short novel with relatively large font, it is not easy or quick as a read. Readers have to read and think carefully as if chewing every word read. One of the strategies the author used to develop the theme of human relationships is that of having another inner storytelling; the story of an old man who also develops a quite special friendship with

a young girl and his long journey of waiting for her letter. The theme of story, human relationships and its complexity, is enhanced through this additional storyline. Through the story in the story, the reader-audience gets to know the character of the writer-teacher too. Perhaps the theme of relationships is as dynamic as colors in a crayon box—the feelings of expectancy, patience, disappointment, healing, and hopefulness.

For young readers in the U.S. *That Night's Train* is a great addition to their international children's book collections since the author portrays contemporary Iranian society along with universal experiences. There are healthy gender roles, modern landscapes, respectful teacher and student relationships, and an emphasis on storytelling. For example, Banfsheh's father is not a traditional father. He washes dishes and interacts with his daughter as if they are good friends. The fact the female teacher is also a successful writer may mirror contemporary Iranian society.

Iran is frequently referenced in Western media, which often emphasizes negative stereotypes due to issues of foreign relations with the U.S. Fayyaz and Shirazi (2013) note, "The dominant representations have remained remarkably durable. That is to say, the dominant representational discourse found in these news magazines depicts the political behavior of Iranians on the basis of essentialized notions of Persian and/or Islamic civilization, while very often emphasizing the taken for granted superiority of the West" (p.53). Perhaps the fact the author is an Iranian who actually lives in Shiraz, Iran, enabled him to write a story that does not portray Iranian "culture" as a dominating representational tool but as a basic story setting. Most of all, children's involvement within this book lets the young members tell their universal experiences in Iran, unlike the common stereotypes about Middle Eastern countries that have traditional societal views.

Ahmad Akbarpour is a winner of the Iranian National Book Award Honor list in 2006. In his author's note, Akbarpour shares how this book got started when he had his first experience with a Story Writing for Children class. His inquiry question, "how can I make friends with the children?" (p. 91) served as a critical motivator and two children in his real life influenced him to complete this story. First, the second grader Banafsheh Zarrin, inspired him to write about adults' friendships with children through real life friendships. Second, the sixth grader, Seti Atashzaei, influenced him not to write a predictable story about friendship. Akbarpour dedicates this story to all of the children who inspired him. The friendships in nontraditional relationships can be experienced in other books like *Inside and Out Back Again* (Thanhha Lai, 2013), *One and Only Ivan* (Katherine Applegate, 2012), *Because of Winn Dixie* (Kate DiCamillo, 2000), *Bink & Gollie*, *Two For One* (Kate Dicamillo & McGhee, 2012) and *The Year of the Book* (Andrea Cheng, 2013). Adult friends are not centering characters in these books, yet without their friendship, each story would not be the same. These books illustrate friendship between a child protagonist and adult friend as an important aspect of a healing journey, in which interpersonal relationships help each child protagonist to grow strong and empowered.

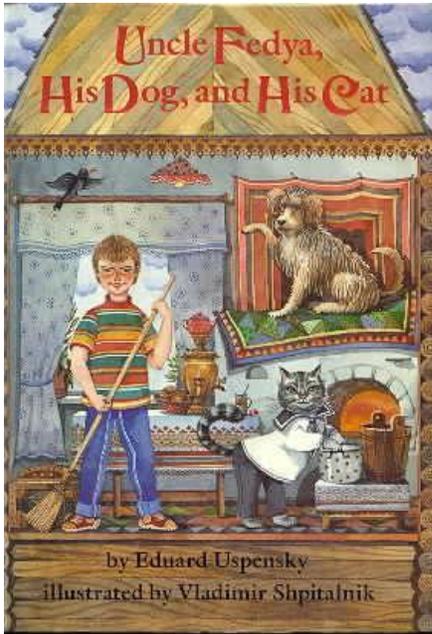
Fayyaz, S., & Shirazi, R. (2013). Good Iranian, Bad Iranian: Representations of Iran and Iranians in Time and Newsweek (1998-2009). *Iranian Studies*, 46, 1, 53-72.

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Uncle Fedya, His Dog, and His Cat

Written by Eduard Uspensky
Illustrated by Vladimir Shpitalnik
Knopf, 1993, 136 pp.
ISBN: 978-0679820642

Uncle Fedya, His Dog, and His Cat by Eduard Uspensky is one of the most popular children’s books in Russia. It has been read by almost every child and was made into a series of cartoons which are loved equally by children and adults. The main character of the book is a little boy named Fedya. He is a very serious young person; “he could read by the time his was four and make soup by the time he was six.” That is why his parents call him Uncle Fedya.

His parents love him, but he is, nevertheless, unhappy. He loves animals, but his mother is absolutely against any animals in the house. One day Uncle Fedya meets a cat. It is not just an ordinary cat. His name is Mr. Matroskin, and he can talk, but he does not have a home. Since Fedya’s mother would not allow Mr. Matroskin to stay with the family, Fedya decides to run away to a village outside of Moscow. There he settles with Mr. Matroskin and a new friend, a stray dog named Sharik. They are a family, helping each other. Mr. Matroskin tends the cow so that they have enough milk. Sharik tries many occupations. He wants to be a hunter, but he does not like to kill animals, so he becomes a photographer.

Mr. Matroskin and Sharik both learned to talk from a professor who studied animal languages and could speak decent Cat and Dog. This professor was working on the People-Cat and the People-Dog dictionaries. But who ever met a cat or a dog “speaking a word of People?”

These three friends have a lot of adventures including finding a treasure chest full of gold and silver coins, experiencing a calf being born, working with a small tractor called Mitya that runs entirely on people’s food, and teasing a local postmaster Pechkin who likes poking his nose into other people’s business. Isn’t this the dream of every child– to run away from home and to be your own boss? But Uncle Fedya became sick, and as much as his friends try to help him, he needs his mother. That is when his parents find him!

The black and white drawings as well as the color cover illustrations by the Russian-born American artist Vladimir Shpitalnik portray the serene world of the Russian village Milkville and the humorous images of the characters. The book was translated into English by Michael Henry Heim who is well-known for his translations of Anton Chekhov, Milan Kundera, and Thomas Mann.

Eduard Uspensky wrote many books for children, including a few translated into English: *Crocodile Gene and His Friends* (1989), and *The Little Warranty People* (1994). These books

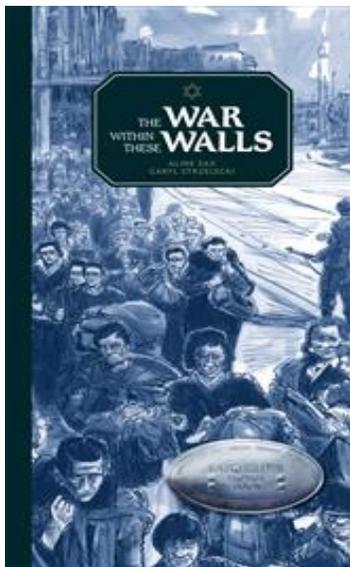
could be read together as an author study and to discover similarities and differences between Russian fantasy and that of other countries. *Uncle Fedya, His Dog, and His Cat* has been translated into a number of other languages, such as Chinese, Estonian, Serbian, Turkish, and Finish.

Olga Bukhina, International Association for the Humanities, New York, NY

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The War within these Walls

Written by Aline Sax

Illustrated by Caryl Strezeleck

Translated by Laura Watkinson

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 172 pp.

ISBN: 978-0802854285

This poignant first-person story of a Jewish teen’s experiences begins in 1940 when his family is herded into the Warsaw Ghetto. This brief novel is powerfully illustrated with pen, ink, and pencil drawings that capture the raw emotions of the protagonist, his family, and fellow Jews as well as the Nazi soldiers who are intent upon crushing them. Alternating black and white pages reinforce the forces of darkness and light at work in this story. Added to the

tall, thin shape, the design of this book captures the reader’s attention and the story holds the reader in its grip.

Harassment, possessions requisitioned, and armbands lead Misha to say, “I never felt so Jewish before” (p. 13). The Nazis build a ten-foot-high wall of bricks, barbed wire, and shards of glass around the small section of Warsaw where the Jews have been segregated from the Aryan population. For Misha, the war is both within the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto and within the walls of his own mind. The story begins with the Nazi invasion of Poland and the subsequent imprisonment of the Jewish population. It also begins within Misha himself as he struggles with humiliation and despair about the appalling circumstances in which his family must try to survive.

Along with his physician father, mother, and little sister Janina, Misha suffers daily deprivation. He wrestles with feelings of anger and shame as he watches more and more “relocated” Jews arrive. “Like dirty water, they kept pouring into the mouth and nostrils of the ghetto. Until it would be impossible for us to breathe” (p. 22). The Nazis begin starving the Jews. When patients can no longer pay with food for Misha’s father’s services, the family barter for a bit of bread, and Janina sells her doll for an ounce of lard. When there is nothing left to trade, sickness and death are all they know—all they can hope for.

One day, Misha sees a beautiful parakeet on the ghetto wall, the sight of which for a moment silences the horror all around him. “If it was so easy for the bird to fly over the wall, why couldn’t I do it?” (p. 43). Desperation forces Misha to plunge into the dank sewers to get past the wall and out through a manhole to find food in the city for his starving family. This works for a time until his sister follows him and joins him in procuring food by any means possible. One day, Janina does not return. Sensitive especially to his mother’s hunger, Misha is devastated. He asks himself if his mother will have to die because of his own fear. On one black page with a powerful illustration of Misha, we read his thoughts: “I hated myself” (p. 83).

Another member of the ghetto, Mordechai Anielewicz, invites Misha to join the resistance.

Misha risks his life daily as he finds a reason to live in the people and plots of the movement. He is empowered; he takes action. He breaks through the walls of hopelessness. He resists. He does not believe the Nazis' stories about "resettling" Jews to Russian villages; he has heard about trains and Auschwitz. He sees the Nazis continue to murder the Jews cordoned within the ghetto and then the soldiers begin to destroy the ghetto itself.

In the end, Misha participates in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in which a band of resistance fighters with stolen weapons and homemade bombs pushes back the Nazi soldiers. When the soldiers respond with artillery, the resistance fighters know they are not fighting to win, but rather hope for an honorable death. When the uprising fails as they know it will, everyone remaining in the ghetto, children, women, men, and resistance fighters alike, is slaughtered in their hiding places. And when all seems lost, Misha emerges from a manhole cover on the other side of the wall and takes flight to what optimistic readers pray will be freedom and eventual safety. "I closed my eyes and flew out of the ghetto" (p. 169).

The Historical Note states that Misha is a fictional character, but the events of the story are based on true accounts. Mordechai Anielewicz was the real commander of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance forces; he was only twenty-three at the time. The author helps readers begin to understand the desperation and determination that lead 750 ill-armed Jewish fighters to battle against over two thousand well-armed Nazi soldiers and hold them off for four weeks. Misha's story and the images in this slim volume will live in readers' hearts and minds long after they turn the last page.

This book, based on true events, could be paired with informational books written from a young person's point of view that deal with the experiences of young adults during the Holocaust including *Ben's Story: Holocaust Letters with Selections from the Dutch Underground Press* by Benjamin Wessels (2001), *Hidden Letters* by annotated by Deborah Slier and Ian Shine, translated by Marion van Binsbergen-Pritchard (2008), *I Have Lived A Thousand Years* by Livia Bitton Jackson (1999), and *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps* by Andrea Warren (2002).

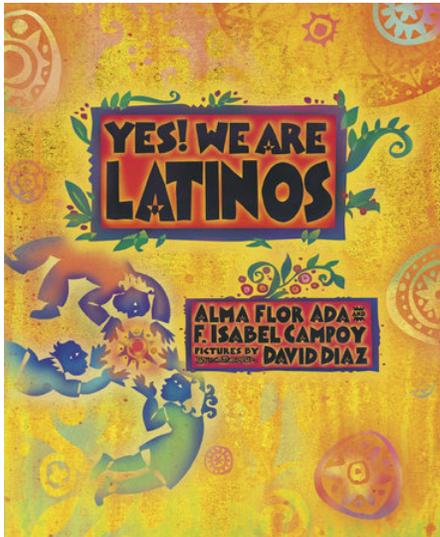
The War within these Walls is a 2014 Mildred L. Batchelder Award Honor Book and is also listed on the 2014 USBBY Outstanding International Books List for grade 9 – 12.

Judi Moreillon, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

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Yes! We Are Latinos

Written by Alma Flor Ada & F. Isabel Campoy

Illustrated by David Diaz

Charlesbridge, 2013, pp. 96

ISBN: 978-158089381

This book celebrates the differences in appreciation of Latino cultures and their diverse backgrounds. It questions rather than reinforces various accepted stereotypes that frame Latinos in the U.S. Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy outdo themselves in finding and recording real-world experiences of Latinos and Latinas from all over the world who reside within the U.S. The authors further convey these experiences with

narrative poetic renderings that explain the experiences in an artistic, personal, and deeper manner. The cultural identities of Latinos are explained further by informational pieces from historical contexts of each Latino/a. Through reading the 12 narrative poems and the informational pieces the reader can gain an intimate look at the cultural roots of each Latino/a. Readers will come away with the knowledge that Latinos are of varied colors and races.

The introduction welcomes an audience that is dissimilar, not merely belonging to Latinos. The later content makes a powerful connection to each of the Latinos that are introduced. Each combination of narrative poetry and informational text reinforces each other. These narratives bring to the reader's attention larger issues of immigration, undocumented citizenship, slavery, and poverty. These issues are dealt with in manner that is both frank and sensitive. These narratives also celebrate the great achievements of Latinos.

Illustrations by David Diaz, Caldecott award winner, add an authentic Latino accent to the overall ambiance of the book. The illustrations are thought-provoking black and white lino cutouts that compare to woodcarvings and papel picado (Day of the Dead) of Latino folk art.

The authors and illustrator of this acclaimed book are well known and respected award-winners in the children's literature field. Alma Flor Ada is a renowned author of children's books and Professor Emerita at the University of San Francisco. She has devoted her life to advocacy for peace by promoting a pedagogy oriented to personal realization and social justice. Her work, in collaboration with F. Isabel Campoy, in promoting authorship in students, teachers, and parents is the content of their book *Authors in the Classroom: A Transformative Education Process* (2003). F. Isabel Campoy is an author of numerous children's books in the areas of poetry, theatre, stories, biographies, and art. As a researcher she has published widely on the importance of adding an awareness of Latino culture to the curriculum.

The manner in which the various Latinos are reflected in this book makes it a necessary accompaniment to novels about Latinos. It can be paired with *The Most Beautiful Place in*

the World by Ann Cameron (1993), *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan (2002), *The Color of My Words* by Lynn Joseph (2001), *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984) and the books of Francisco Jimenez. This book has the depth and breadth to be utilized as either an introduction or a deeper study of Latinos within the U.S. and around the world.

Seemi Aziz, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

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