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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME VII, ISSUE I

Fall 2014
Open Theme



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Table of Contents

Introduction and Editor's Note	2
<i>At the Same Moment, Around the World</i>	3-4
<i>Flying the Dragon</i>	5-7
<i>The Man With The Violin</i>	8-9
<i>The Nazi Hunters</i>	10-11
<i>The Princess and the Foal</i>	12-13
<i>Rose Under Fire</i>	14-15
<i>So Much for Democracy</i>	16-17
<i>Soldier Doll</i>	18-19
<i>Sugar Kid: A Story of the Girl from the Last Century Told By Stella Nudolskaya</i>	20-21
<i>Tua and the Elephant</i>	22-24
<i>Victoria</i>	25-26
<i>What's Your Story?</i>	27-28

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Introduction and Editor's Note

This issue of *WOW Review* begins and ends with an invitation to consider the many stories and perspectives of others across the globe and across eras. The opening review of *At the Same Moment around the World*, takes readers eastward from the Greenwich meridian suggesting many potential stories of the 24 fictitious children we meet. The issue closes with a review that asks the question, *What's Your Story?* as it tells of an orphan boy who has migrated from England to Australia in 1788 and an Aboriginal girl who befriends the boy as they ultimately share their varied stories. This non-themed issue of *WOW Review* presents an interesting collection of titles that together reflect an insight described in *What's Your Story?*—that history is “a collection of stories—not just one story but many stories by many different people.”

The stories shared in this issue provide insight to historical events and those not so distant to which readers can personally connect and come to know. *The Man with the Violin*, a true contemporary story of a young child who pauses to listen to a violin player in a subway amidst the adults who hurry by, can help us remember to savor life as it happens around us. *Tua and the Elephant* is a refreshing reminder of people supporting each other in protection of the natural world around them. Stories of courage and resilience beckon readers to find their own sense of agency in their own situations—such stories as *Victoria, Sugar Kid: A Story of the Girl from the Last Century Told by Stella Nudolskaya*, and *Rose under Fire*. The costs of conflict in personal lives and relationships is revealed in *Nazi Hunter, So Much for Democracy*, and *Soldier Doll*—potential lessons that remind readers to take a stand for justice. *Flying the Dragon* points to the struggle, but importance, of developing identity in light of one's culture while *The Princess and the Foal* speaks to holding onto one's dreams despite the stereotypes that might challenge a goal.

As you read this issue of *WOW Review* and conclude with the question, “What's Your Story?” you may decide that many of your stories might well be woven within the books reviewed here. We hope these reviews are an invitation to read many of these titles and we encourage you to share your story of reading and responding to any of these books with us.

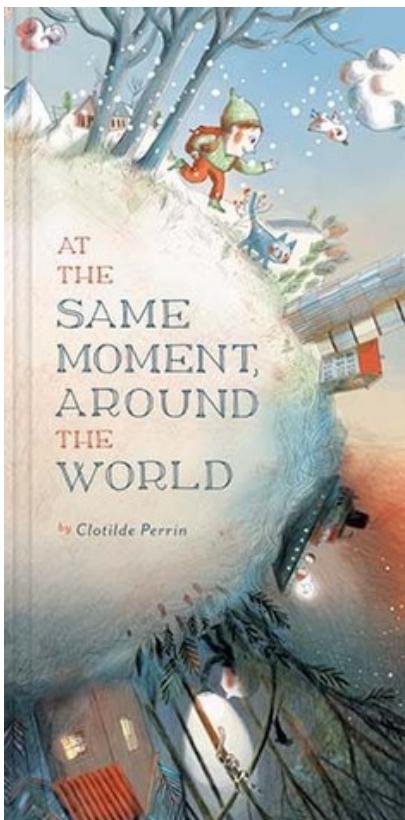
Additionally, we invite you to consider submitting a review for Vol. VII, Issue 2 of *WOW Review*. This theme for this issue is “Humor in International Children’s Literature” and the call for submissions, due November 1, can be found here (<http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewcall/>).

Janelle Mathis, Editor

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At The Same Moment, Around The World

Written by Clotilde Perrin

Chronicle, 2014; Rue du Monde, 2011, np.

ISBN: 978-1452122083

At 6:00 in the morning in Senegal, Keita awakens to help his father count fish and so begins a journey around the world to explore what children are doing in each of the 24 time zones at the same time. This journey begins at the Greenwich Meridian and travels eastward visiting select cities in the zone for each hour. The text on each page begins, “At the same moment in . . .” followed by the name of a specific city, country and often other identifying geographical markers, such as “Himalayan mountains near the towering Mount Everest” or “in the desert between Ayers Rock and Sydney, Australia,” or simply “Apia, Samoa.” Each page provides the typical name of a child who is doing something typical of that culture. However, each child’s actions are ones that readers can connect with such as shopping in the market, taking a dog for a walk, or kissing parents good night. A typical text is: “At the same moment, in Sofia, Bulgaria, it is eight o’clock in the

morning when Mitko chases after the school bus.” The pictures reveal a somewhat whimsical character whose hair and skin color fit with that setting and a glimpse of an ordinary scene in which this character might be enacting the text. In Mitko’s case, it is a cold weather scene with a young boy hurrying to a bus.

With illustrations created in pencil and colored digitally, Clotilde Perrin has created rich detail that speaks specifically to each culture with light and dark color tones indicating the time of day being portrayed. Yet, as with the actions of the child, the contexts are realistic with which readers can identify and consider similarities and differences between their own events of the day at specific hours and that of other children around the globe. The various people, items, and settings appear to be authentic for that one moment in time, in one city, and for the one child. However, the book invites readers to explore each city and compare photographs and descriptions to verify what they observe in the pictures and to learn more about other contexts of the countries that share the huge expanse of one time zone.

The focus of the book is time zones and so concludes with two pages of information entitled “About Time Zones” with sections on Early Timekeeping, The Invention of Time Zones, and Accurate Timekeeping. End pages of blue swirls give the impression of water that envelopes the 24 children in their communities. Attached to the final end page is a World Map that identifies each city and country shared in the book with borders that picture the faces and names of the 24 children whose lives were briefly visited. Additionally, one can open the book so the front and back are a flat surface and find that the cover image extends to the back of the book depicting a circular map with each country’s child specifically placed around its

rim. Once the book is read, children will enjoy locating the characters whose brief life portraits they find in the book.

Originally published in France as *Au meme instant, sur la Terre*, the format in French is that of an accordion style that the author/illustrator says is meant to be put on the ground and walked around. Perrin has published more than 25 books since 2002 that can be seen on her inviting website (<http://www.clotildeperrin.net/>). Most of these are in French and reveal an identifying style of character and use of color for young readers weaving throughout various genres.

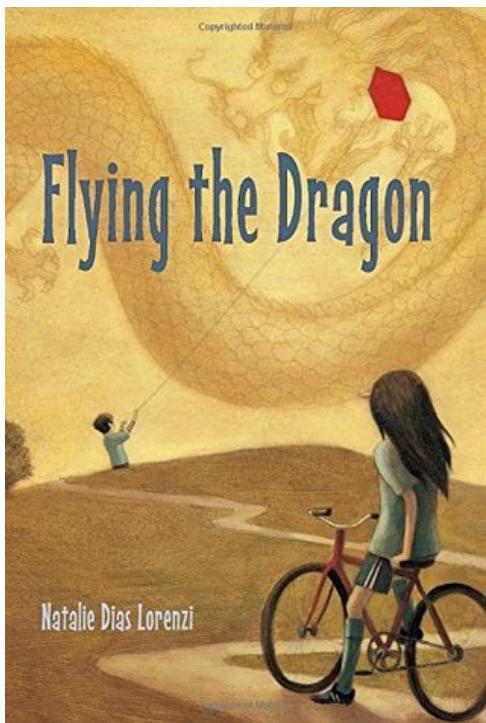
Other books that might be used with this to show perspective in cultures through geography and time for young readers are *Walk this World* by Jenny Broom (2013), *It's About Time: Untangling Everything You Need to Know about Time* by Pascale Estellon (2014), and *Maps* by Aleksandra and Daniel Mizielenska (2013).

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Flying the Dragon

Written by Natalie Dias Lorenzi

Charlesbridge, 2012, 240 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1580894340

This contemporary realistic novel focuses on the lives of two cousins: an American-born girl named Skye and a Japanese-born boy named Hiroshi. Skye loves soccer and dreams of becoming a member of the All-Star soccer team. Her father is Japanese but she has not explored her Japanese heritage or her Japanese-American identity. She eats American foods, mostly speaks English at home, and never visits Japan. Hiroshi lives in Japan and has not thought much about his uncle's family living in Virginia, USA. He loves making and flying kites with his grandfather who is a professional kite maker, flyer, and fighter. Both of their lives drastically change when the

grandfather becomes sick and the family decides to seek treatment in America. Neither Skye nor Hiroshi is happy with this change. Skye has to trade her All-Star soccer dreams for Japanese classes. Her parents want her to be more familiar with Japanese culture and language in order to develop a kinship with the Japanese side of her family and to help Hiroshi in his new life. Hiroshi has to give up an important kite championship in Japan in order to come to America. In Virginia, both cousins experience difficulties adjusting to new cultures, and they struggle with misunderstandings and prejudice caused by their cultural differences.

Natalie Dias Lorenzi provides gentle insight into human nature through the children's experiences of a new culture and language told in their alternative voices. Looking at their cultural experiences through the lens of a continuum of intercultural learning (Fennes & Hapgood, 1996), a process of intercultural understanding including ethnocentrism, understanding, respect, change, and intercultural competence, is revealed. At first, Hiroshi experiences culture shock, homesickness, and frustration because of the cultural differences and language difficulties he faces in the U.S. Through her communication with him, Skye begins to pay more attention to her own identity. She shows some hesitation about accepting her Japanese identity because her classmates tease her for speaking Japanese with Hiroshi; as a result, she feels a sense of "otherness." Although the cousins have difficulties, they also have shared experiences, such as their family history, flying a dragon kite that Hiroshi brings from Japan, and teaching and learning language with each other. These connections encourage them to understand and appreciate their cultures and each other.

This book addresses themes of cultural connection/disconnection and identity in thoughtful ways, but there are also issues of cultural authenticity to discuss due to

culturally inauthentic and inaccurate portrayals:

• Skye's father says, "Twelve years in America and I've forgotten how to eat [with chopsticks]" (p. 2). The story explains that he has sacrificed a great deal for his American family and has lost skills as a result, such as the ability to use chopsticks. As a Japanese cultural insider, I know that this is a problematic depiction. Twelve years is not a sufficiently long period of time to forget how to use chopsticks.

• Skye's dad says that "Japanese people always smile in public, even if they're sad or embarrassed" (p. 33). This is a very traditional and old-fashioned concept. It may mislead readers to believe that all Japanese individuals are still like that in present day Japan, which is no longer true.

• "Hiroshi picked up his fork. He looked from the spaghetti to his fork and back to the spaghetti again. How am I supposed to eat this? Hiroshi poked the pile of noodles. The spaghetti slipped and spilled down the front of his shirt" (p. 56). This passage shows how Hiroshi struggled with eating spaghetti with a fork, giving readers the impression that Japanese people do not know how to use forks. This is inaccurate because they do sometimes use forks and certainly know how to use them. It really depends on the foods being eaten: they eat spaghetti with a fork, soup with a spoon, and rice with chopsticks.

• "Hiroshi stood and grabbed another sushi roll" (p. 65). This book, as well as other books about Japan, frequently shows sushi as an ordinary food. I assume that authors use cultural icons like sushi to create a sense of exoticism around Japanese culture. However, overrepresentation of cultural icons, such as showing sushi without any other foods, may create stereotypical views, suggesting that Japanese people always eat sushi. In fact, for many Japanese people, sushi is not an ordinary food but a meal that they have on special days, such as birthday parties.

In the acknowledgments, Lorenz states that this story is culturally and linguistically accurate because her manuscript was verified by Japanese individuals. I agree with the linguistic accuracy but not the cultural accuracy. Some depictions of Japanese customs and ways of thinking are problematic and so may create bias and cultural misunderstandings for readers.

This middle-grade novel can be read alongside *Hannah's Winter* (Kierin Meehan, 2009), a fictional novel about an Australian girl's exploration of Japan and her cultural understandings, and *The Language Inside* (Holly Thompson, 2013), a story about an American girl raised in Japan. Also, picture books about Japanese culture and people such as *Tokyo Friends* (Betty Reynolds, 1999), *The Wakame Gatherer* (Holly Thompson & Kazumi Wilds, 2007), and *I live in Tokyo* (Mari Takabayashi, 2001) encourage readers to be aware of

the authenticity and accuracy issues embedded in this novel, thereby enhancing their critical perspectives.

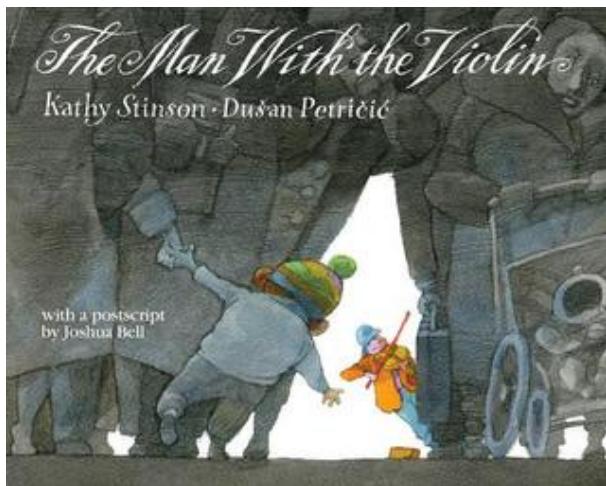
Natalie Dias Lorenzi is an elementary school teacher and librarian in the United States. She has had various international experiences such as living in Germany, Italy, and Japan and traveling to many other countries. This book has received many awards, such as the IRA Children's and Young Adult Book Awards (Intermediate Fiction Honor Book, 2013). It was also included in the 2014–2015 Massachusetts Children's Book Award Master List and the New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing (2012).

Junko Sakoi, University of Arizona

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The Man with the Violin

Written by Kathy Stinson

Illustrated by Dušan Petričić

Annick Press, 2013, 32 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1554515653

Dylan and his mother are hurrying to catch their subway train when Dylan hears beautiful musical notes that “soar to the ceiling” and “swoop to the floor” and tickle the hairs on the back of his neck. Dylan scans the crowd and sees a

man in a blue baseball cap playing a violin. The 10-year-old is mesmerized by the music and begs his mother to stop so they can listen. Oblivious to the music, his mother pulls Dylan down the escalator to the train. Throughout the day the music lingers in Dylan’s head. That night, listening to the radio at home, Dylan hears the music again. The announcer explains that Joshua Bell, “one of the finest musicians in the world” played in the train station that day, “yet few people listened even for a minute.” Dylan’s mother realizes they should have earlier taken time to listen and so they listen and dance together.

The Man with the Violin is based on the renowned violinist Joshua Bell who, in 2007, played his Stradivarius in a metro station in Washington, D.C. Though people all over the world pay large amounts of money to hear him play in a concert hall, Bell collected only \$37.14 in the violin case that lay open at the train station. The story reminds readers to stop and appreciate the serendipitous moments in life and to pay attention to people who surround them, no matter what their circumstances appear to be.

Canadian author Kathy Stinson has written a range of books from picture to young adult and from realistic and historical fiction to horror stories. Her preschool books, *Red is Best* (2012) and *Big or Little* (1983, 2009) received international acclaim. When she heard about the Joshua Bell event and that the children who passed by wanted to stop and listen but were hurried on by their accompanying adults, she knew there was a story to tell. Her written text has a “music” of its own, with its rich descriptions, alliterations, onomatopoeia, and varying sentence patterns. She concludes the book with a short biography of Bell, a brief description of the subway event, and a postscript written by Joshua Bell—all attesting to the authenticity of this story. The back cover indicates that a portion of the book’s proceeds are being donated to a “charity that promotes engagement with music among young people.”

Dušan Petričić, a Yugoslavian born Canadian illustrator, has won many awards for his work. He effectively and skillfully portrays this musical story with graphite and watercolor. Through the use of color contrast, for example, he highlights what Dylan notices through color while what Dylan’s mother sees is left white. He also contrasts the

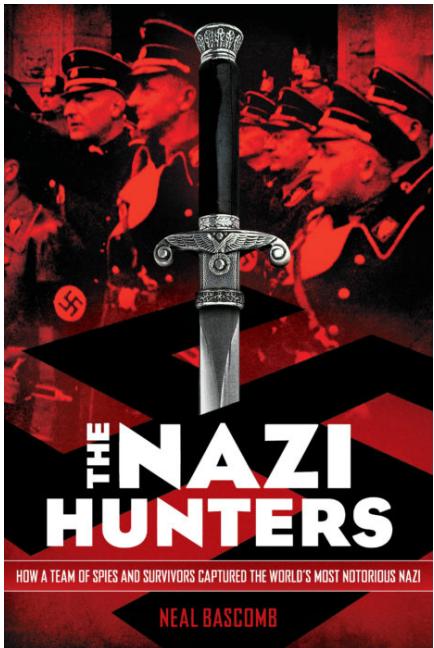
lyrical flow of Bell's music, drawn in flowing lines that sweep Dylan in, with the jagged zig-zag lines of the sounds of the trains and people talking. In a text set on music, *The Man with the Violin* might be paired with books such as *Music for the End of Time* (Jen Bryant, 2005) and *The Cello of Mr. O* (Jane Cutler, 1999). It would also work well in a text set on respecting and valuing those who seem different, paired with such books as *Each Kindness* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2012) and *Crow Boy* (Taro Yashima, 1964).

Prisca Martens, Towson University

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The Nazi Hunters

Written by Neal Bascomb
Arthur Levine, 2013, 256 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-0545430999

Bascomb has adapted his 2009 adult book, *Hunting Eichman*, to make it available for a younger audience by shortening the story and altering the language for an adolescents. *The Nazi Hunters* includes a list of participants to help readers keep track of the extensive group of individuals involved in the mission to capture Eichman. In addition, Bascomb provides numerous black and white photos that add a multilayered and visual dimension to the story. Notes throughout the book make clear the existence of conflicting evidence about Eichman's identity and skillfully aids the reader in the mission's progress from beginning to end.

Eichman escaped capture by the Allies and slowly made his way to Argentina where he lived in a small, paltry home with his wife and four sons who had gone ahead to Argentina. Eichman was exposed when his oldest son was invited to his girlfriend's home and her Jewish father became suspicious after a conversation with the boy. The mission to capture Eichman is permeated throughout with complications that Bascom skillfully covers. In part, this book reads like a suspenseful thriller in which the reader is left wondering what will happen next despite inferring from the beginning that Eichman is eventually captured. The suspense of this story is more a question of how the Israeli operatives deal with obstacles instead of whether or not the obstacles will end the mission.

This book could accompany any unit on World War II or human rights. The text can help students understand how Germany, one of the most advanced countries in the world in the 1930s, allowed Hitler's unspeakable acts of inhumanity and cruelty. It is important to know history, perpetrators of atrocities, and those who fought to bring those who committed crimes to justice.

This book is an important addition to non-fiction literature about the Holocaust for several reasons. Bascomb meticulously documents the process Wiesenthal used to bring war criminals to justice, as well as how, in the post-war chaos, many war criminals were able to escape Germany and hide for years in other countries. Readers can see the multiple sides of Eichman's personality and how he could mastermind the extermination of thousands of Hungarian Jews, while at the same time play the role of husband and father. Lastly, the book also demonstrates how many Jews affected by the Holocaust went to great lengths to bring war criminals to trial.

Several books that can be paired with *Nazi Hunters* are: *Adolf Eichman: Executing the "Final Solution"* (Thomas Streissguth, 2005), *The Importance of Series – Simon*

Wiesenthal (Linda Jacobs-Altman, 1999), and *Encyclopedia of War Crimes & Genocide* (2 Volume Set by Leslie Alan Horvitz and Christopher Catherwood, 2011). *Adolf Eichman: Executing the "Final Solution"* is a thorough survey of the career of Adolf Eichmann and his carrying out of the Final Solution in Hungary of over 700,000 Jews. *The Importance Of Series – Simon Wiesenthal* is one book in a three-book series that include biographies of Adolf Hitler, and Heinrich Himmler. Simon Wiesenthal was a Holocaust survivor who used his post-war anguish to tirelessly bring war criminals to justice. The *Encyclopedia of War Crimes & Genocide* studies modern-day crimes against humanity that take place during war and peacetime.

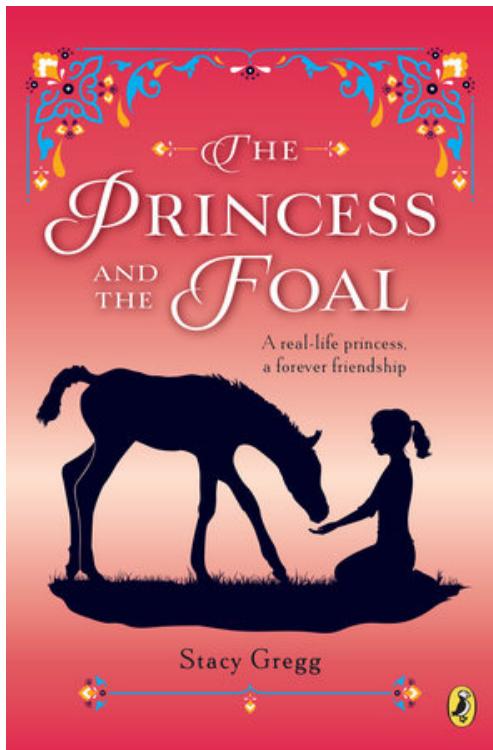
Though born in Denver, Colorado in 1971, Neal Bascomb was raised in St. Louis, Missouri and spent a lot of his youth at the ice rink practicing hockey. After graduating from Miami University he worked as a journalist in both London and Dublin. Later, he moved to New York where he became an editor for St. Martin's Press. Bascomb eventually left the states again for a period as a columnist for a Parisian magazine. In 2000, Bascomb turned to writing books as a full-time career.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, Illinois

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The Princess and the Foal

Written by Stacy Gregg
 Philomel Books, 2014, 260 pp.
 ISBN-13: 978-0399168871

"I'm going to be a champion too," Haya says. "I'm going to be a champion horse rider. One day I will ride in the King's Cup!" (p. 48)

Riding in the illustrious, but brutal King's Cup has not traditionally been available to women, much less 12-year-old girls. Haya knows how to ride, and she knows her horse Bree, and believes that together they can accomplish the tasks needed to be champions. Will Haya ride? Will she become a champion? *The Princess and the Foal* is a story of a girl and her love of horses, but in particular one horse that came to her when it was just

three days old. This story, however, starts long before Haya takes responsibility for Bree. It begins when she is just 3 years old, with the death of her mother, Her Royal Highness Queen Alia, wife of King Hussein of Jordan. Based on the actual events that resulted in Princess Haya leading the team to the King's Cup at the age of twelve, this text presents readers with the life of one of the most prominent women in the Middle East. It won the Children's Choice Junior Award in the United Kingdom.

The Princess and the Foal is a fascinating story of a determined young girl who is not only an avid equestrienne, but a formidable presence in the royal palace. Haya is not anything like current stereotypes of women from the Middle East, which allows readers to question their own ideas of how people live across the world. Readers will gain an understanding of Haya's life as well as her relationship with her father and young brother. Centered predominantly on Haya's growth as an equestrienne, the book is a nice introduction to the country of Jordan, to a real world princess, and the reality of what it takes to care for a horse. This account of Haya's life is an inspiration to young readers to not give up on their dreams, yet they must realize that those dreams are often born out of hard work as well as guidance and encouragement from others.

A story that would engage younger adolescents, the book could be read as a fairy tale, but the facts of Haya's incredible experience in the King's Cup are well-documented, as are other facts of her early life. It would make a great companion to *National Velvet* (Enid Bagnold, 1999; 2013), *Black Beauty* (Anna Sewell, 2009), *Shadow Horse* (Alison Hart, 2001), and *Horses with a Mission: Extraordinary True Stories of Equine Service* (Allen Anderson & Linda Anderson, 2009) all of which address the equine aspect of Haya's story. It could also be used in a text set such as *Princess Academy* (Shannon Hale, 2007), *The Princess Diaries*

(Meg Cabot, 2008), *The Royal Diaries* series by various authors (2011), including Kathryn Lasky and Carolyn Meyer, or *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* series by Jessica Day George (2009-2013) as a way of examining the images of princesses in literature.

Stacy Gregg loves horses and owns one herself. She was born and lives in New Zealand and has published the *Pony Club Secrets* and the *Pony Club Rival* series. She has another book, *The Island of the Lost Horses*, coming out soon. More information about Stacy can be found at her website (<http://stacygregg.co.uk/>).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati

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Rose under Fire

Written by Elizabeth Wein

Disney Hyperion, 2013, 368 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1423183099

Elizabeth Wein, the author of this World War II YA novel, was born in 1964 New York City and moved to England with her family when she was three. She also spent time living in Jamaica and Pennsylvania as a child. She now resides in Scotland with her husband and two children. Well acquainted with folklore and inspired by British history, she based her Arthurian series on British legend and drew on World War II history with *Code Name Verity* and *Rose under Fire*. Like her main characters these two novels, she and husband are pilots.

Rose under Fire serves as companion novel to *Code*

Name Verity (2012) in which Wein first introduced the character of Rose Justice. The connection is made through the main characters' friendship with a mutual friend, Maddie. In *Rose under Fire*, Rose works as an ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) worker, ferrying Allied planes between England and Paris. The initial portion of the story details the daily routine of Rose and other ATA pilots. It is not until Rose is captured by the Nazis that the story shifts to a historically accurate chronicle of Rose's daily existence in Ravensbruck, an all-female concentration camp.

In Ravensbruck, a group of women befriend Rose and help her during her time in the camp. Among Rose's fellow prisoners are a group of women referred to as the "rabbits". Rabbits are Polish prisoners who were medically experimented on by Nazi doctors. The rabbits who lived through the experiments are maimed, mutilated, and bear both exterior and interior scars from the experiments. One of the main themes throughout this story is the need for Rose to bear witness to the world of the rabbits and tell their story as well as to record other atrocities at the camp. The novel is written in a journal format and offers Rose's perceptions of events.

The novel provides explicit details, such as describing the stitching on a handkerchief, the way to tip a doodlebug, or recounting the Nuremberg Trials. Wein includes a list of primary sources used in researching historical events. Appropriate as a realistic portrayal of war, this book demonstrates the status of women during World War II and their treatment in concentration camps. *Rose under Fire* is a suitable read for individuals 13 and up and can be read as a companion to *Code Name Verity* or on its own. The only cautionary warning concerning this book is that rape and torture are part of the story as are descriptions of the ways humans can inhumanly treat one another. However, the

educational benefits of learning about the treatment and role of female POWs as well as concentration prisoners is important. In the tradition of Rosie the Riveter, this story adds one more narrative to the growing body of work regarding female contributions to the war effort.

There are numerous themes that can be used to pair books with *Rose under Fire*. The most lasting themes are those of solidarity (especially amongst females), defiance, hope, and bringing the truth to light by bearing witness. A text to pair with the theme of solidarity is the book *Dirty Work* (2007) by Julia Bell. *Dirty Work* tells the story of two girls, one of them abducted, in an international prostitution ring. The two girls understand that if they are ever going to get away, they must learn to trust each other.

Texts to pair with the theme of defiance are: *In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry* by Carla Killough McClafferty (2008), *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2006), and *Beyond Courage: The Untold Story of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust* by Doreen Rappaport (2014). *In Defiance of Hitler* tells the story of a young New York journalist who secretly helps refugees in Nazi-occupied France escape. *The Book Thief* tells the story of Liesel Meminger a girl who steals books and then shares the stories with her neighbors during bombings, and the Jewish man hiding in her basement. *Beyond Courage* offers stories of Jews who sabotaged the Nazis in order to help other Jews during the Holocaust.

Texts to pair with the theme of hope are *Call Me Hope: A Novel* by Gretchen Olson (2008), and *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War* by Deborah Ellis (2012). *Call Me Hope* tells the a story of an 11-year-old girl who is verbally abused by her mother but instead of running away, finds strength, gets help and confronts her mother. *Kids of Kabul* tells the account of 24 children between the ages of 10 and 17 living in a war torn country yet wanting to acquire education and life experiences and to have fun.

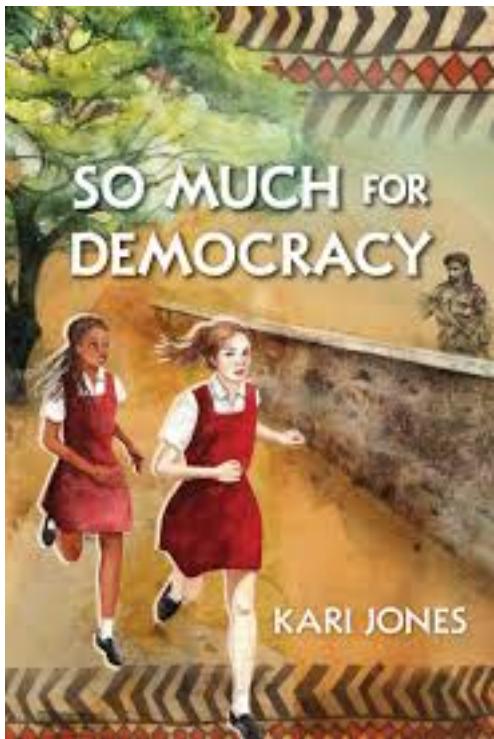
Texts to pair with the theme of bringing the truth to light by bearing witness are *My Secret Camera: Life in the Lodz Ghetto* by Frank Dabba Smith and Mendel Grossman (2008), *Bearing Witness: Stories of the Holocaust* by Bernie Glassman (1999), *Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys (2011), and *Where the Action Was: Women War Correspondents In World War II* by Penny Coleman (2002).

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, Illinois

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So Much for Democracy

Written by Kari Jones

Orca Books, 2014, 170 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1459804814

"What do you mean, unrest?" She shakes her head. "I'm not sure what I mean. These are uncertain times for Ghana. Let's hope I am mistaken and the elections go on as planned." (p. 81)

This novel is told through the eyes of Canadian 12-year-old Astrid, who is in Ghana with her family as her father helps with the 1979 elections. *So Much for Democracy* presents the actual historical situation in Ghana when a group of military personnel attempted a coup. From Astrid's perspective, readers see the multiple responses of ex-patriots who were in the

country during the occurrence as well as its outcome. At the beginning of the novel, Astrid is living what she considers a typical life—she goes to school, is irritated by her younger brother and his friends, and takes care of her younger sister. As tensions heat up, Astrid finds the reactions of her mother and other adults mystifying and unnerving. Her father attempts to keep everyone calm, but it is Astrid who becomes the glue that keeps the family together. The narrative shows how quickly political situations can develop and what can occur when they do.

This middle grade novel will have readers questioning not only the reasons for political unrest, but the ways in which people respond to such situations. Astrid is a well-rounded character who changes as she becomes more knowledgeable about the events taking place around her. Young readers will be able to think about the place of family in stressful situations, what events take place around the world where safety cannot be readily assumed, and how relationships can change as situations shift the political landscape. This novel, ultimately about learning how life can change at any moment but family is a strong foundation, gives readers the opportunity to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between governments and residents, both historic and current, and those who live in fear because of governmental or political circumstances. This narrative could be used in a unit about political situations and family relationships that would include *Ask Me No Questions* (Marina Budhos, 2006), *Kezzie* (Theresa Breslin, 2002), *A Step from Heaven* (An Na, 2003), and *Far from the Bamboo Tree* (Yoko Kawashima Watkins, 2008). *So Much for Democracy* has the potential for inspiring students to understand more about the country of Ghana, the continent of Africa, and the histories connected to that nation and region of the world.

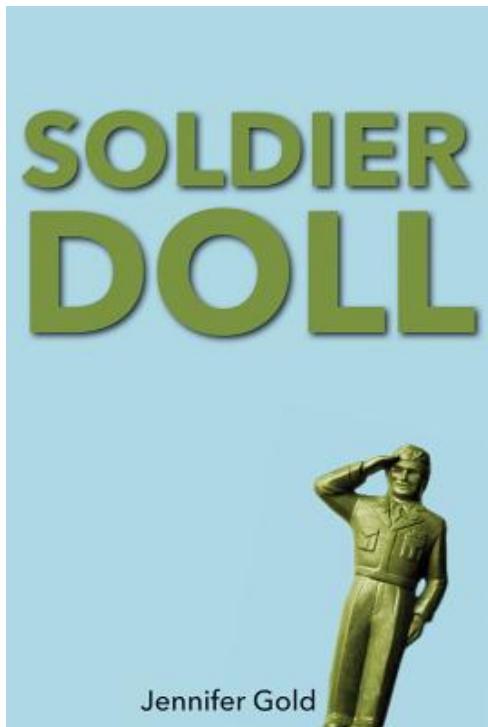
Kari Jones has traveled throughout her life, and spent a number of years in Ghana as a young teen. She currently lives in British Columbia, Canada. More information about her can be found at her website (www.karijones.ca).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati

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Soldier Doll

Written by Jennifer Gold

Second Story Press, 2014, 277 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1927583296

"The little figure is dressed in carefully painted army finery and stands stiffly, arms at his sides, feet together. . . . It looks less like a soldier than a baby in uniform, its delicate little hands a stark contrast to the gray military coat." (p.1)

A “soldier doll” found at a street sale seems like a good birthday present for 15-year-old Elizabeth’s father, who is leaving for Afghanistan on a civilian contract. He likes “finds,” and the doll reminds Elizabeth of when her

father was a soldier. What Elizabeth discovers, however, is that this doll might be the inspiration for a poem about war written during World War I. Purchased for \$1.75, the soldier doll looks like it has been painted over and over, raising the question of whether it is the inspiration of the poem and, if so, why it inspired the poem many adolescents learn about in history class.

Told through a series of stories about the life of the doll, readers will find the connected narratives intriguing, sad, and all too realistic. Protagonist Elizabeth, who knew nothing about the poem since it is taught in the grade she is about to enter, is introduced to the poem by her friend Evan. Both Evan and Elizabeth are dynamic characters that remind us that not all adolescents are disengaged with history or discovery. While the story resides firmly in the present with Elizabeth in Toronto, readers travel across time and place with the doll’s history. The book holds universal themes about war, those left behind, and those who go to battle.

This narrative would make a great companion to books such as *I Had Seen Castles* (Cynthia Rylant, 2004) and *Sunrise over Fallujah* (Walter Dean Myers, 2009). Additionally, this would make a useful addition to any text set that addresses conflict throughout the world, including books on the Holocaust and books on other conflicts in various parts of the world such as *So Much for Democracy* (Kari Jones, 2014), which addresses conflict in Ghana. A story that will create great discussions about lucky objects or portents of disaster, this narrative also shows how connected people are regardless of what “side” they are on. Although the poem in *Soldier Doll* exists only in this book, it has the potential to lead young readers to other poems such as “In Flanders Fields” (John McCrae, 1915) and songs about war and its aftermath throughout the ages.

Jennifer Gold lives in Canada where she works as a lawyer, and *Soldier Doll*, her first book, is a result of her love of history. More information about Ms. Gold and her work can be found at her website (www.jennifergold.ca).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati

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Sugar Kid: A Story of the Girl from the Last Century

Told by Stella Nudolskaya

Written by Olga Gramova

Illustrated by Maria Pasternak

KompasGuide, 2014, 160 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-5000830673

Sugar Kid is a compelling and truthful story about a child growing up during the Stalin era. It is not a memoir; it is rather memories of childhood told many years later to a friend. Olga Gromova, the chief editor of a journal for school librarians, retells the true story of Stella Nudolskaya whose real name was Stella Dubrova. Stella was an engineer and a science teacher; during Perestroika she was an active member of Memorial, an organization which

preserved the memory of those who were arrested under Stalin. Stella is the narrator and a main character of the book. While this is a story of her life, she was not able to write it herself, and asked her younger friend Olga Gromova to help. In effect, it is a true story of a girl whose life was shaped by political events when she was only 4 years old.

Stella, who is called Elli by her parents, grew up in a wonderful family with a loving father and mother. They taught her several languages and read poetry to her. The girl loved fairy tales, legends, and history, from King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table to the Medieval Russian Princes and Joan of Arc. When she was still very young, her father was arrested and sent to a labor camp. It was the time of Stalin's "Great Purge" when many innocent people were arrested and killed. Soon little Elli and her mother were sent to exile. Elli's nanny helped them to pack their winter clothing and other necessities; almost everything was lost during the long journey.

The mother and daughter went to Kirgizia (now Kyrgyzstan) in Central Asia. It was a place with severe climate of extremely hot and extremely cold weather. First, they were sent to the women's labor camp for the family members of the "enemies of the state." They slept on the ground under the open skies, and Stella's mother was forced to work in very harsh conditions. Even in the camp, Elli never forgets about her dream of freedom. She, a small child, was beaten several times by the guards for getting too close to the barb wire which surrounded the camp. She wanted to look at the flowers outside. After being released from the camp, Ellie's mother could not find a job, and they almost died from starvation and cold. A local family, at great risk to themselves, took them into their home.

Later, they settled for a while in a small village in rural Kirgizia. Eventually, Elli's mother found a job and Elli was able to go to school again. She made new friends, and it almost looked as though she could once again have a happy childhood. But Elli always needed to remember that one careless word could get her mother fired or even arrested. And indeed, her mother was fired from her position as a school teacher for a "lack of patriotic

education during the science lessons."

It was very difficult for them to survive in this new environment, but many people were kind to them. Some local Kirgiz families helped them with food and clothing. Elli's mother also always helped people around her. She read loudly to them because many were illiterate. She wrote letters for them. She was a very strong person who always tried to console her daughter when she was scared. She recited wonderful poetry and sang beautiful songs to her.

A lot of people were exiled from Ukraine and sent to Kirgizia, and both mother and daughter learned two new languages, Ukrainian and Kirgiz, because they believed that it is important to know the language of people around them. Elli was a blond girl, which was unusual in these places. She was loved by everyone, and got the nickname Sugar Kid, "Kant Bala" in Kirgiz language. The danger of losing a job or even being again arrested was always there. The mother and daughter were able to return back to Moscow only after Stalin's death, and Elli's father never returned from the camp.

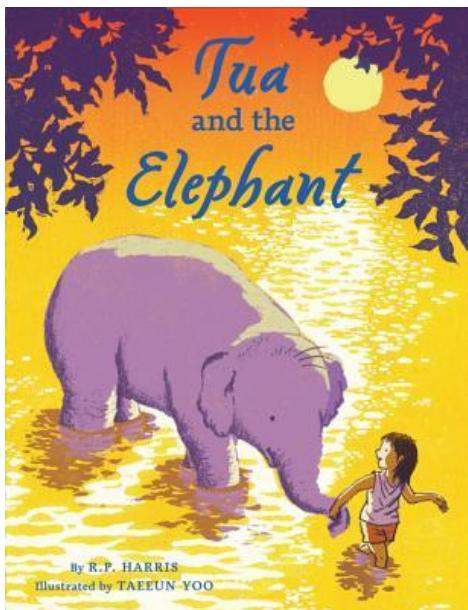
Eugene Yelchin's book *Breaking Stalin's Nose* (2013) can be recommended as further reading about the children of parents arrested during the Stalin era. Another book describing an experience similar to Elli's is Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe: Growing Up in Siberia* (1995). Books about children's suffering under the Nazi regime, such as *Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen (2004) and *Anita Lobel's No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War* (2008), are also recommended.

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

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Tua and the Elephant

Written by R. P. Harris

Illustrated by Taeeun Yoo

Chronicle Books, 2012, 202 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-0811877817

"You speak to her (the elephant) with your heart, Tua, the same way she speaks to you. And you speak with your eyes, the tone of your voice, and the touch of your hand. The language of the heart is a tongue all of us would understand if we only took the time to learn it. And you, my little Tua, have a very big heart indeed" (p. 195).

Ten-year-old Tua ("Peanut" in Thai) is an only child living in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Each evening when her single mother goes off to work in a restaurant, Tua heads for the excitement of the nearby Night Market, where a cast of friendly vendors and enticing tastes and sounds await. Taro, tamarind, durian and coconut ice cream – yum! A traditional band of coconut-shell fiddle, bamboo flute, chimes, gongs, and wooden xylophone players' tunes compete with pop music. The Night Market is a feast for the senses and Tua's experiences quickly immerse readers in Thai culture. Illustrator Taeeun Yoo's digitally manipulated charcoal and linoleum block print illustration of the market helps readers see its cultural features. Her occasional illustrations support the print throughout the novel.

While running errands for vendors, Tua discovers a hole in the market wall, climbs through, and leaves the safety of the Night Market where everyone knows and cares about her and finds herself in a larger world of swift moving traffic, intimidating tall buildings, and many farang (foreign) faces. As her uncle was fond of saying, "Farangs are as noisy as frogs in a pond and puffed up to twice their normal size" (p. 27). Mistaken for a beggar and a pickpocket, Tua turns to flee and bumps into a young elephant. True to Thai nature, the girl instantly falls in love with the elephant. Even more than affection, Tua senses she has the ability to communicate with this animal.

Unfortunately, the elephant is under the command of two scruffy, shifty mahouts who are using it to make money from the farangs. Tua wants to speak to the elephant but watches instead. "After accepting a fifty-baht note from a farang, taking it with its trunk as easily as someone with an opposable thumb and four fingers, the elephant stretched as far as it could reach and dropped the note in the lap of a woman who, motioning with hand to mouth in a pantomime of hunger, sat begging on the street with her baby" (p. 33). Tua identifies with this compassionate act but the mahouts scold the elephant, retrieving the money from the begging woman, and leading the animal away in chains.

Tua hears the elephant's plea for help, gives the poor woman money, bows palms together in a wai, and sets out to rescue the elephant from her captors. And so begins the adventure.

At first, Tua hides the elephant in Auntie Orchid's backyard. To her credit, Auntie Orchid, an actress, singer, and eccentric lovable character, brings the elephant inside and helps Tua give it a name. After much negotiation, the elephant is named for Pohntip Tua's best friend at school. Pohn-Pohn (which means double happiness to Tua) is hungry but there isn't enough food in Auntie Orchid's refrigerator. All of the neighbors bring food and during the party that ensues Pohn-Pohn is well fed. The way these neighbors come to each other's aid and enjoy life in the process is in stark contrast to the actions of the people Tua met in the big city. Readers are privy to the elephant's thoughts on the matter: "How curious people are, Pohn-Pohn must have been thinking. How creative and ingenious they are, yet capable of both kindness and cruelty" (p. 66).

The mahouts do not easily let go of their property and are in hot pursuit of their elephant and the "cunning little devil" who stole her. The plot proceeds with narrow escapes, a treacherous river crossing, the help of allies (teenage monks), ransom negotiations, and chases as the determined mahouts search for Tua and the elephant. In the end, Tua delivers Pohn-Pohn safely to a sanctuary where kind farangs join with Mae Noi (an elephant whisperer) to care for and protect Asian elephants. Author R. P. Harris gives readers a satisfying ending: Tua is invited to work alongside Mae Noi at the elephant sanctuary.

Tua's spunky character, a fast-moving plot, and both intense and humorous situations will capture the attention of middle-grade readers and their teachers as an excellent read-aloud selection. But *Tua and the Elephant* offers more. Readers are shown aspects of Thai culture that can enrich their knowledge of other people's way of life and worldviews. In addition to Thai foods, language, geography, and affection for elephants, they will note contrasts between rural and city life in Thailand. Readers can examine stereotypes and prejudices between people from diverse cultures, particularly as native Thais interact with farangs. Readers will also be challenged to consider the plight of poor children and families and animals in an adult world that has placed value elsewhere.

Author R. P. Harris has traveled the world, spending much time in Asia, including three months in Thailand, where this story was born. The book was inspired by Harris's trip to the Elephant Nature Park (<http://www.elephantnaturepark.org/>) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. While Harris writes from a cultural outsider's perspective, he contributes a story to international literature where there is a dearth of books for younger readers about Thai children and culture. R. P. Harris currently lives in Shanghai, China.

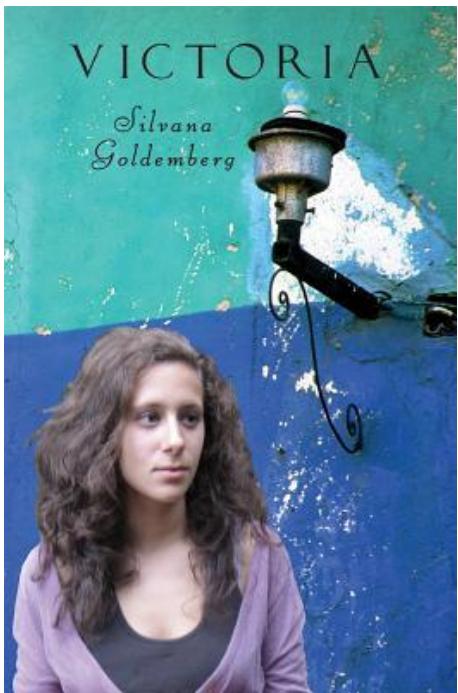
Readers of mainstream U.S. literature may liken Tua to the spunky character of Lucky from Susan Patron's (2008) *The Higher Power of Lucky*. For those who connect with the plight of the Pohn-Pohn and animal rescue efforts, pair this book with *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate (2012) or *The Tiger Rising* by Kate DiCamillo (2002). For additional books about Thailand, search [wowlit.org](http://www.wowlit.org) under Asia/Thailand.

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Victoria

Written by Silvana Goldemberg
 Tradewind Books, 2014, 134 pp.
 ISBN-13: 978-1896580951

"Victoria lies down on the cardboard and feels the chill from the cement under her. Now I'm homeless too. She shivers. But I can't go back tonight. Not tomorrow. Not even the day after that." (p. 23)

It is one thing to have your mother dead and your father gone, living with an aunt who seems only to hate you and your younger brothers. It is another to have your aunt's boyfriend harassing you to the point where your safety is at jeopardy. This became Victoria's life after her mother's death, and the reason she runs away becoming one of the

numerous homeless young people in Argentina. Yet, Victoria is smart and makes connections that keep her safe while she works to remedy her homeless situation.

Victoria is a dynamic and resourceful character that young adolescents will admire, yet not necessarily want to imitate. Her circumstances are harsh but believable, and the cast of characters she meets on the street will make for engaging dialogue with middle school students about stereotypes and assumptions about the homeless. Readers will want to find out what happens to Victoria and if her story, while not happy, might find a pathway to hope. Through much of the story, Victoria must learn to live without the love of her family and to avoid the tricks of some people who also live on the street, but eventually she learns to trust and to forge new relationships that are supportive and powerful.

A storyline that would engage middle and high school students, Victoria will make a great companion to texts such as *Orphan Train* (Christina Baker Kline, 2013) or *Homeless Bird* (Gloria Whelan, 2001), both of which address homelessness and/or alienation from family. It could also be used in a text set with books such as *Slake's Limbo: 121 Days* (Felice Holman, 1986) and *Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope* (Kevin Ryan & Tina Kelly, 2012) as a way of examining the reasons young people run away and learn to survive on the streets. At the end of the book are a glossary of Spanish words and the list of Spanish songs noted throughout the text that would be of additional interest to readers.

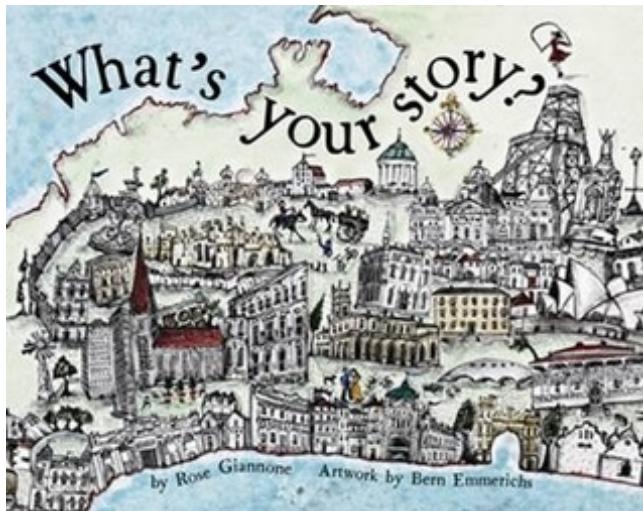
Silvana Goldemberg was born and raised in Argentina. She resides in Canada and has published in both English and Spanish. She currently teaches kindergarten in British Columbia. Emilie Teresa Smith, who is also an author of children's books, translated this book from Spanish.

Holly, Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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What's Your Story?

Written by Rose Giannone

Illustrated by Bern Emmerichs

Berby Publishing, 2013, 40 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-0980671155

This picture book from Australia is set against the backdrop of the first British settlement of Australia in 1788 and describes the friendship of an orphan boy from England and an Aboriginal girl. Leonard and Milba are mesmerized by the peculiarities of each other's worlds and delight in sharing these worlds with

each other. Leonard is a quiet child who stutters but loves books and drawing. As he wanders around his new world, confused and lonely, he encounters Milba from the Eora tribe who has wandered off to catch a glimpse of the "ghost people". The two strike up a friendship, without words, by drawing stories in the sand, and introduce each other to the animals from each their worlds. Understanding how much Leonard enjoys drawing, Milba shows him cave drawings of her people, establishing another link between them. One day, Milba's tribe decides to move on and she only has time to leave a quick drawing in the sand. The book ends by noting that Leonard grew up to become a teacher, often thinking of Milba, while Milba grew up to be a wise elder in her tribe, wondering if Leonard looks at the same sunsets with his family as she does with hers.

The book opens and closes with an invitation for readers to tell their stories. The author carefully sets the context for history as a collection of stories—not just one story but many stories by many different people. Giannone notes that many of the people who came to Australia were forced to do so because they were convicts but that some had only committed the crime of stealing food because they were hungry and others, like Leonard, were not convicts but sent for other reasons. The ships that came were full of people with many different stories. She also points out that the Aboriginal people had already been in this land for 60,000 years, long before anyone from Europe knew of Australia. With a minimum of words, the author provides a careful historical context that respectfully acknowledges multiple perspectives and stories, but does not tell or hint at the story of the racism and displacement of Aboriginal peoples by European settlers. Emmerichs' illustrations are stunning in their details of Australian animals and landforms and people. They were created on large hand-painted ceramic tiles and each color included on each tile was individually fired and then photographed and overlaid with the author's text. That text often weaves and turns like a gentle wave of water around the illustrations on a page.

Rose Giannone is an Australian author who lives in Melbourne. This is her first children's book and grows out of her love of storytelling, both in traditional oral forms and in modern film. Bern Emmerichs is a highly celebrated artist in Australia with many works in galleries and collections. She is known for her work which explores historical narratives related to the

first European settlements of Australia. Both the author and illustrator have a strong interest in this historical time period and engaged in extensive research. Both are from European backgrounds and so foreground Leonard's perspective throughout the book. Even though they are careful to include Milba's perspective, Leonard's perspective is given the most weight and always comes first.

This book should be balanced with other picture books that highlight Aboriginal voices and perspectives, such as *When We Go Walkabout* by Rhoda and Alfred Lalara (Allen & Unwin, 2014), in both English and Anindilyakwa, *When I Was Little Like You* by Mary Malbunka (Allen & Unwin, 2005), *You and Me: Our Place* by Leonie Norrington (Working Title, 2007). The Aboriginal tradition of telling stories through art, such as cave paintings, is another connection that could be explored through books, such as *What is Aboriginal Art?* By Margo Birnberg (J. B. Publishing, 2012) and *Australian Aboriginal Paintings* by Jennifer Isaacs (New Holland Australia, 2002).

Other possible pairings include stories of immigration, such as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (Scholastic, 2007), which is based on stories of Malaysian immigrants to Australia and *Ziba Came on a Boat* by Liz Lofthouse (Kane/Miller, 2007), the story of an Afghan child and her family fleeing across the ocean on a small boat to Australia. These stories can be told alongside newspaper articles about the current treatment of refugees in Australia through detainment in prison camps in Indonesia or on islands off the coast of Australia. *Home and Away* by John Marsden and Matt Ottley (Lothian, 2008) is a powerful indictment of the destruction of families in these detainment centers.

The book ends with an invitation for children to tell their stories and so can be used to invite children to research their own family histories, both distant and close, in order to explore how those histories have shaped their identities and that of the places in which they live. Each classroom contains many stories and histories and sharing those stories can be one step to understanding the complexity and diversity of stories that make up families, communities, and nations.

Note: Australian books not available in the U.S. can be ordered through Austral Ed (<https://wwwlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewvolumevii1/14/www.australed.iinet.net.au>).

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