



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME V, ISSUE 3

Spring 2013
Open Theme

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College
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Education

WOW Review: Volume V, Issue 3

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Introduction and Editor's Note

This unthemed issue of *WOW Review* reflects the rich diversity of literature that represents the global community. In choosing books that were of interest to them personally, reviewers introduce both picture books and chapter books from a variety of genre that take readers into the countries of Israel, Palestine, Brazil, India, Cuba, Mexico, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Mali, and within the Korean American and Latino (Dominican Republic) cultures of the United States. Through compelling characters, both contemporary and historical, we are invited to share their lives—the humor, celebrations, conflicts, and social challenges—by entering these stories.

In some of these books, we immediately are drawn in by familiar situations: mother-daughter perspectives as described in *On the Swing* or family relationships in *How Tia Lola Saved the Summer*. We might laugh at Jamela's antics in *A Song for Jamela* as she helps in her aunt's beauty shop or float joyfully around Cuba with the characters in *Floating on Mama's Song: Flotando en la canción de mamá*. Or we might join in celebrating many African Brazilian traditions with the Mourrice at his nanny's house in *Carnavalia*.

In other titles, we may enter the story only to be more an observer of characters and contexts as we learn about situations and challenges removed from our daily experiences. *Islands' End* focuses on what happens when the lifestyles of Indigenous people are disrupted by a society that has both the problems and solutions of science and technology. *Faces in the Water* keeps readers intently focused on a story about female infanticide—a practice still in existence today. *No Ordinary Day* engages readers in considering leprosy—its stereotypes as well as its threat for people in other parts of the world.

We also might be reminded by these books that what we take for granted is often a precious commodity for others. The technology to facilitate our work might be seen in a new light after reading Yatandou whose village women are joyous over the grinding machine for grain that gives them more time to learn and, for many, time to be a child. Living in a community that is not a battlefield may become more significant when reading about others whose homeland is in conflict, such as in *Bottle in the Gaza Sea*, *Good Night, Commander*, or *Keeping Score*. We also might reconsider our own challenges to accomplishing what we desire in life as we stand amazed at the life challenges of the richly talented artist, *Frida Kahlo*, in *Frida: ¡Viva la vida! Long Live Life!*.

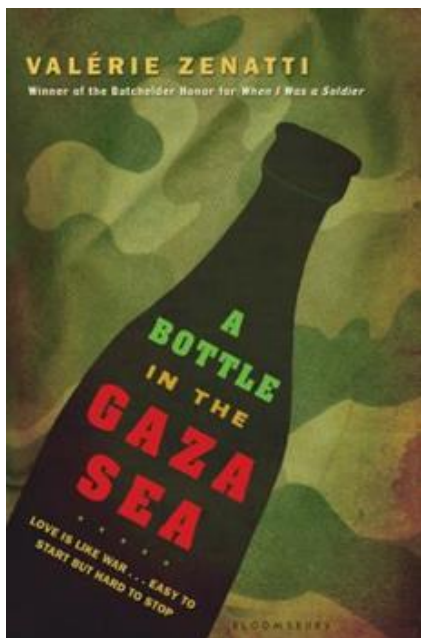
Of course, the reviewers have provided insights that compel and, at times, caution our reading. It is only when we accept the invitation and set aside the time to read, to live within these stories that we become more informed and understanding of others with whom we share the global community.

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Bottle in the Gaza Sea

Written by Valérie Zenatti
Bloomsbury, 2005, 160 pp.
ISBN: 978-1599902005

I'd like to turn the silence right up, but how do you do that? (p.2)

Imagine you are watching television when you hear an explosion in your neighborhood. Your program is interrupted for an emergency broadcast. Your brother is a soldier working in the occupied territories. Your mother begins crying in the kitchen. Your father isn't home from work yet. "Will he make it home? Is he

okay?" you might wonder. Simultaneously, a young man less than fifty miles away wonders if his father will make it home from his job as a hospital nurse. Will the gates that surround his community be closed? Will there be a curfew? In her novel for young readers, Valérie Zenatti gives voice to dual perspectives, an Israeli teenager and a twenty-year-old Palestinian who become electronic pen pals.

Set in 2003, after the bombing of the Hillel Café, Tal writes a note and places it in a bottle and asks her brother to toss it into the Gaza Sea. The bottle is discovered by a Palestinian who identifies himself as "Gazaman," ending his first email to Tal dismissively, saying "Goodbye forever" (p. 39), but Tal persists, sending numerous emails. She talks about how Rabin's assassination has affected her; she questions the killing of innocents and defends her family's desire for peace. While working on a documentary about Israel, Tal witnesses the bombing of a bus. As she works through her grief and shock, her email relationship with Gazaman deepens. She begins to see things from his perspective. When she hears the news of Israel's retaliation, she worries about her friend. Interspersed with diary-style chapters from each youth, long periods pass between short flurries of emails. Tal's voice engages the reader with her ability to say "banal things in a distraught, melodramatic way" (p. 54).

Zanetti has a direct claim to the voice of Tal. She lived in Israel as a teenager and served as a soldier. Tal's character is sincere with all the concomitant emotional ups and downs of a well-educated teen from a liberal-minded family who lives in a war zone. There are moments of complete normalcy as she interacts with her best friend Efrat and her boyfriend Ori. The book includes factual references to recent events in Israel/Palestine that lend authenticity to the story.

One might question the authenticity of a Jewish author portraying a Palestinian from Gaza, but Zenatti's "Gazaman" cannot be easily dismissed. When Gazaman writes Tal, he lashes out in anger at the naïveté of this privileged Jewish girl who sends a note in a bottle.

Gazaman wants Tal to know the hardship of life in Gaza, the deprivation, the lack of work, and the crowdedness. Just being spied emailing someone in Jerusalem from an Internet café in the Gaza Strip could brand him as a “collaborator” and symbolizes the fear that Palestinians face every day.

Zenatti juxtaposes Gazaman and Tal’s lives, creating tension while allowing for the development of trust. Zenatti encapsulates the tension during an instant messaging dialogue in which the teens decide that, “peace comes from insanity.” Naïm (Gazaman’s name) and Tal joke about building the “Majnun and Mesuga Institute, a Palestinian Israeli Asylum” (p. 121). Naïm’s feelings evolve from anger to love, from defensiveness to compassion. Some critics have questioned this transformation. Would today’s tech-savvy teens wonder why it took Gazaman so long to use the Internet service in a downstairs office of his apartment building rather than at a dangerously public internet cafe, or why he and Tal didn’t catch on to instant messaging much sooner? (Bush, 2008). We believe the novel invites the young reader to consider that other contemporary youth, using the Internet, attending school, struggling with peer and family relationships actually *do live* in this part of the world that only seems to get attention when another car bomb explodes.

Paired readings for this book might include Valérie Zennati’s *When I Was a Soldier* (2002), a memoir of her teen years in Israel pre and post military service. Elsa Marston’s *Santa Clause in Baghdad and Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World* (2008) has additional perspectives from Palestinian youth such as “The Olive Garden” in which a radicalized youth realizes that jihad can be a personal transformation as he shifts from throwing rocks to peaceful protest in the face of Israeli tanks that would plow down his family’s way of life. Another pairing is Marc Aronson’s *Unsettled: The Problem of Loving Israel* (2008) about an American Jew and his own love/hate relationship with Israel, loving his homeland yet questioning the occupation of Palestine. Background on the history of the region can be helpful to young readers and can be found on the Internet.

Bush, Elizabeth. *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, May 2008, Vol. 61, No. 9. Retrieved from <http://www.clcd.com>.

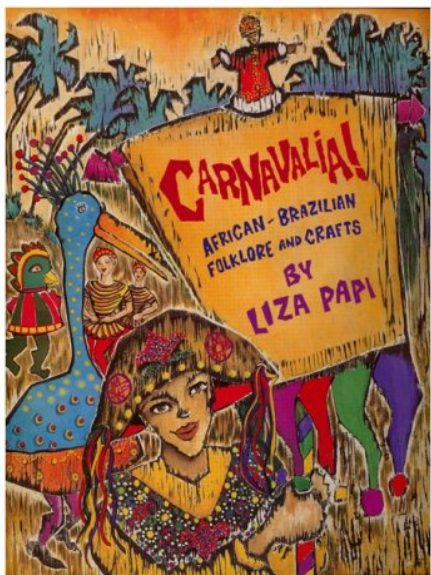
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Carnavalia! African-Brazilian Folklore and Crafts

Written and illustrated by Liza Papi
Diane Publishing Company, 1994, 48 pp.
ISBN: 978-084781779

This story begins when a group of people dressed in costumes and carrying instruments come to Nanny's house to sing on Christmas Eve. Nanny explains to Mourrice, her seven-year-old grandson, that what he is seeing is part of the Reisado, a celebration announcing the arrival of the Messiah. This celebration marks the beginning of a joyful season with many more festivities and ending with Carnival. The next celebration that Mourrice learns about is Bumba-meu-Boi, a tale told through the music. The costumes and drumming involve

a Bull that dies and is brought back to life. Following this celebration is Frevo where Mourrice, Nanny, neighbors, and friends participate in holding colorful umbrellas and moving to the driving rhythm of the drums, dancing in the streets of their northeastern Brazilian village. After that, Mourrice dresses up in different costumes and participates in the Congo and Mozambique dances along with his grandmother and other people, celebrating St. Benedict, the patron saint of the African descendants. Finally Maracatú, a celebration that honors some of the African-Brazilian ancestors who were once kings, closes this joyful season for Mourrice and Nanny.

Brazilian artist Liza Papi translates the energy and the tradition of northeastern Brazil into her vibrant, hand-colored, woodcut prints. Papi was born in Brazil, studied art at Guignard Fine Art School, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil and received a bachelor's degree in art history. Later, she obtained a master of fine arts in printmaking from the City College of New York. Her work has been exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro and in galleries in New York and Europe. During her research for this book, Papi was mostly influenced by professionals who are closely related to arts and crafts or dance performances. Along with the story, she provides the history of Brazil and a section on crafts that guides children in creating their own carnival crafts.

The chronological structure of the story and a simple and easy to follow text along with detailed captivating illustrations allow readers to experience important regional traditions that take place during a short period of time. Papi as an illustrator and author approached this book from an insider's perspective of Brazilian culture and emphasizes multiple cultures that coexist within Brazil. Introducing the African-Brazilian culture as one of the unique cultures in Brazil, Papi weaves a powerful theme of multiculturalism within Brazil through the story of a young boy who enjoys the festivities. In addition to all of the rich historical information and cultural details, Papi reflects the Brazilian culture through her retelling of the ceremonies while highlighting relationships. Her skillful illustrations and

vivid portrayals indicate that she spent time researching in order to provide various aspects of African-Brazilian traditions. More importantly, she brings to the forefront the importance of the elders passing on their knowledge and wisdom to the young generation, offering numerous possibilities for discussions on the strength of values and traditions.

Although the author is from Brazil, positioning herself as an insider, cultural authenticity and accuracy is of concern. When it comes to the content of the book, the author appears to have generalized some religious traditions as part of the carnival and changed the date of Maracatú, from June to February. What's more, the author seems to pay little attention to situating the book in a specific region of the northeast Brazil that holds the celebrations described in the book, insinuating that these festivities are celebrated all over the northeastern regions. Some of her translations in terms of her word choices, such as flag instead of banner, are problematic for insiders. So, her cultural accuracy, in some instances, will be debatable for insiders from that region of Brazil, even though these issues will probably not be recognized by outsiders.

Some details that are inaccurate include berimbau, an instrument that is placed in a celebration in the book that does not call for one, a character dressed up in costume of another celebration, an overuse of black on the illustrations, and the lack of other colors in some costumes. Inaccurate representations of particular artifacts that are presented in the book may be confusing to Brazilian insiders. Despite having an insider's perspective, the author's misrepresentations and misinterpretations could create issues and concerns about cultural authenticity and result in the reader's perception that the author lacks familiarity with that specific region of Brazil. It is especially concerning that many outsider readers may celebrate the uniqueness of Brazilian culture without attention to the multiple Brazilian traditions and cultures. There is no one insider cultural tradition in Brazil and the author has failed to recognize this issue in her own research.

This story by Brazilian illustrator/author Papi might appeal to families and children in many parts of the world who have experienced the effects of colonialism and cultural miscegenation and to Brazilian-American children who have few resources about their culture available in English. Other related books that address the Brazilian culture, history, and folklores include *Brazil: The Culture* (Malika Hollander, 2003), *Victory Goes to Brazil* (Maria De Fatima Campos, 2009), *Dancing Turtle: A Folktale from Brazil* (Pleasant DeSpain, 2005), *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil* (Hermano Vianna, 1999).

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Faces in the Water

Written by Ranjit Lal

Penguin Books India, 2010, 202 pp

ISBN: 978-0143331063

In this young adult novel, Ranjit Lal tells the story of fifteen-year-old Gurmeet (Gurmi for short) of the privileged Diwanchand family, a family respected for their long-standing tradition of raising boys—and only boys. The family attributes the well water at their family farm as their source of good fortune; however, when Gurmi leaves modern Delhi and visits the family farm one year, he discovers the truth—for several years his family has participated in female infanticide, drowning newborn girls in the well. Three spirits appear in the well and introduce themselves as Gurmi's sisters, and they explain the story of their births and deaths as part of a family tradition.

Initially shocked and angered, Gurmi seeks revenge for this injustice; quickly, though, he befriends his sisters (and, later, female cousins) and interacts with them through an elaborate use of computer technology, an enlightened sense of listening, and experience in a magical parallel world. Soon, Gurmi learns to forgive and work for what is right, and his moment for righteousness comes with the birth of his twin sisters.

Lal sets up *Faces in the Water* in a way that potentially could critique financial and social privilege in India, such as Gurmi's family remodeling their house with marble and granite or, as an only child, Gurmi being spoiled with electronics and sweet treats. However, Lal focuses on the controversial issue of female infanticide in India. The title of the book reflects the catalytic moment in the novel, when Gurmi sneaks to the family well and sees faces in the water; these faces come alive in the form of his disappeared sisters and, later in the story, lost cousins. Though Gurmi ultimately strives to end female infanticide in the Diwanchand family, the majority of the story focuses on family adventures that could-have-been, such as camping trips and cricket matches with sisters, which emphasize differences between growing up as a boy in a one-child, privileged household with growing up as a boy with three sisters in the same privileged world. Furthermore, the novel explores a schema of happiness equals, where Lal clearly argues that daughters and sisters are the cause of such happiness, and a lack of girls (or the purposeful elimination of girls) will cause extreme unhappiness in a family, particularly for the parents.

Thematically, the serious nature of female infanticide exists as a true issue—often unspoken, yet widely understood in India. According to census statistics, women are “missing” from world population; between 1901 and 2001, there have been approximately 35 million fewer women than men in India. A decline in girls ages 0-6 years continues to grow; in 1941 there were 1010 girls to 1000 boys, but the number decreases to 927 girls for every 1000 boys in 2001 (http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1360.htm). Furthermore, female infanticide practices are not limited to certain classes; as in the novel, privileged families

participate in the practice. Female babies and children are often abandoned or discarded, thus earning the title “dustbin babies,” and though less studied, many participate in female feticide. In an interview, Lal describes, “I was horrified by the news reports about female infanticide which happens even in well-off families. And that led me to write this book” (http://crazybiswadip.blogspot.com/2011_09_04_archive.html). Expanding on issues of content and style in *Faces in the Water*, he notes, “It was quite a challenge to write on such an issue, considering that the readers will be younger people.” Therefore, in an attempt to compose a story that addresses a complex, contentious issue, Lal wrote a story for adolescents, about adolescents.

Though his main audience is adolescent Indians, *Faces in the Water* is written in English as a way to include a greater sense of the culture. However, Lal includes a smattering of untranslated words and phrases, including terms of endearment and respect for family members and names of foods. Additionally, Lal chooses not to use English when he strings words or phrases together to depict moments of high emotion, particularly when the Papa storms angrily around the house. In order to understand the accuracy of the language used in the novel, one must consult a professional translator or native speaker. For a foreign reader, this language serves as a reminder of the novel’s setting.

Set in a modern context in India, Lal attempts to appeal to adolescent readers by incorporating elements of modern technology into the plot. In particular, Gurmi uses his digital camera to take pictures of his sisters who are invisible outside of the well; the girls appear on digital screens which leads Gurmi’s parents to believe he used photo-editing software on his personal laptop to manipulate images. Additionally, Gurmi and his cousins play with remote controlled model cars and airplanes, courtesy of their fathers who work for Hanuman Motors, an India-based company. All the models are high-class SUVs, racecars, or fighter planes recognizable to an audience with exposure to popular media. However, this approach breaks down with the inconsistent use of technology for accessing the parallel and real universes in which Gurmi and the girls inhabit. Technology serves as means of communication—with his sisters and female cousins—yet the novel lacks a developed explanation of the “software” and “memory” necessary to view and interact with the girls. Rather, Lal borrows superficially from science fiction and social media, ultimately making the story less and less believable.

Furthermore, the story fails to fully address the seriousness of female infanticide. By focusing on the girls who would be Gurmi’s age or younger, Lal omits the long history of infanticide, leaving a reader to wonder where other disappeared Diwanchand girls may be in the parallel world. The plot’s focus on the adventures that could-have-been creates a feeling of empathetic warmth, yet removes most of the underlying issue’s weight. The novel ends quickly—in less than a chapter, Gurmi acts to save the lives of his newborn twin sisters and, with a transformed outlook on life, a formerly angry Papa turns the farm into a home for displaced girls. This ending may not fully satisfy a reader who asks questions of “what to do,” as it offers few solutions to the identified problem of infanticide. Despite these critiques, Lal does succeed in a crucial way: *Faces in the Water* broaches the subject of female infanticide in India, condemning the practice in a story aimed at an adolescent audience immersed in a technology-driven world.

Based in India, Lal writes both fiction and nonfiction books, including his recent publications *The Battle for No. 19* (2007), *The Caterpillar Who Went on a Diet and Other Stories* (2004), and *When Banshee Kissed Bimbo and Other Bird Stories* (2005), books with audiences of both children and adults. *Faces in the Water* won the 2010 Vodafone Crossword Prize for children's fiction with the young adult novel.

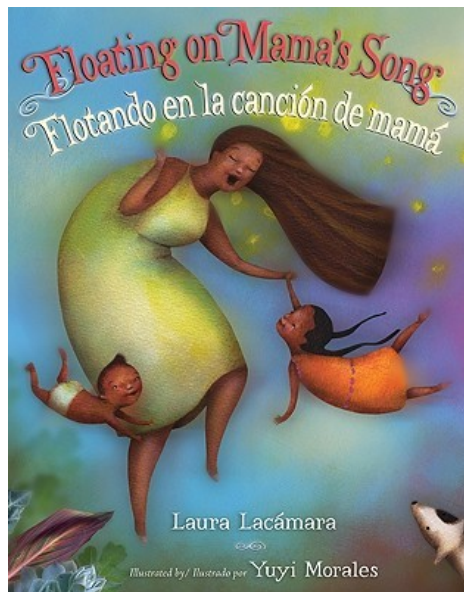
Faces in the Water fits within international and multicultural literature for young adults that addresses issues of gender, though few consider the issue of infanticide. In India, these novels include *Keeping Corner* by Kashmira Sheth (2007), which examines traditional practices for treatment of widows including child widows, and *Secret Keeper* by Mitali Perkins (2009), which explores the clash of cultures when an Indian family moves to the United States. Similarly, in China, young adult novels discuss issues of gender, including *Chinese Cinderella* by Yen Mah (2010), which critiques cultural perceptions of girls, and *The Diary of Ma Yan* (Ma Yan, 2009), which records a girl's struggles to attend school. Many novels from Africa also discuss issues of gender, including *The Girl with Three Legs* by Soraya Mire (2011), a memoir that takes on female circumcision. Additionally, *Our Secret, Siri Aang* by Cristina Kessler (2004) takes on initiation practices for women (and poaching animals), and *A Girl Named Disaster* by Nancy Farmer (1999) narrates a child-bride's runaway life. In general, international and multicultural novels for young adults such as these take on difficult topics related to issues of local culture and gender.

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Floating on Mama's Song: Flotando en la canción de mamá.

Written by Laura Lacámara

Illustrated by Yuyi Morales

HarperCollins, 2010, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-0060843687

Imagine magically floating around the Cuban countryside joyfully singing with your family (animals included). Laura Lacámara's story feels like a Cuban folktale or fable from the beginning with lush life-like plants and vibrant, yet soft, tropical colors and "the delicious smell of fried plantains and black beans [that] hung in the air." It is not Mama's familiar, beautiful singing that shocks her daughter as she returns home

from school, but Mama and the dog Tito are actually floating, carefree. Anita rushes to tell Grandma and baby brother Orlando but discovers Grandma, whose "heart is a bitter grapefruit" doesn't share this excitement. As the story's conflict arcs, more Cuban traditions are revealed as the reason for Grandma's bitterness. With the happy ending also comes a realization that this same conflict could occur in any place in the world. That dichotomous theme of needing cultural distinction and validation and at the same time needing affirmation that we are all very much alike is actually satisfying. Awarded a Junior Library Guild Selection for 2010 and a Tejas Star Book Award finalist for 2011-12, very positive reviews (<http://lauralacamara.com/index.html>) have kept this story popular with children and educators.

Children as young as four, but as old as ten or twelve, will emotionally connect with this tale and its layers of complexity. The expressive artwork and lyrical prose can "hook" a youngster for the short book, or a reader might delve into the healer who throws the coconut shells and open up a discussion of the rich Santería belief system still prevalent in Cuba today. Similarly, small black and white photographs on Grandma's wall could go unnoticed or could lead to an exploration of 1950's Cuba before the Revolution. And, couldn't that search naturally lead to a discussion about what things are like in Cuba now or the many different versions of Cuban history around that time period? Few children's books have multiple potential layers with such aesthetically pleasing artwork and story. Even the happy ending could easily hold a couple of unstated "morals" if older students wanted to turn it into a Cuban version of an Aesop's fable. Many possibilities for critical discussions can remain below the surface or be a bridge for dialogue on a plethora of issues. In 2008 Monica Brown, an experienced bilingual Latina writer of children's books, said one of her goals is "to open minds and ears to the joy and power of words, decreasing cultural isolation and increasing pride, self-esteem, and a sense of possibility that Latino/as, too, can have public voice, an artistic voice, a space – a community – where their stories are honored and celebrated" (p. 318). *Floating on Mama's Song: Flotando en la canción de mamá* embodies that sense.

Author Laura Lacamara's mother was an opera singer on stage at the famous Gran Teatro de la Habana before her family came to the U. S. when Laura was only a baby. Laura's father had been an artist as well as an art director at a large advertising agency. This is not a story of their perils, but a celebration of her family's culture. She is proud of her Cuban roots and embeds her first authoring of a picture book (she has illustrated two others) with things Cuban: ever-present music, loving family, small village countryside, a nearby healer (Santeria), and nosy Cuban neighbors as she reveals in an author of the month interview in 2012 on Houston public radio.

Yuyi Morales illustrated eight picture books previous to *Floating on Mama's Song: Flotando en la canción de mamá*. Her website shows the incredible processes and details that go into each of her works of art using clay, feathers, oils, computer designs, photographs, paintings, and other mixed media. It is indeed striking. After winning the 2008 Pura Belpre Medal, "Morales became the first author/illustrator to be three times recognized by the Pura Belpre Committee and was established as one of the leading children's book creators working today" (<http://virginia-hamilton.slis.kent.edu/2013-conference/>). Put on your favorite Cuban-influenced music, check out this book and allow the possibilities to float around in your mind.

Pairing the book *Floating on Mama's Song* with other Latina/o picture books would effortlessly expand the discussion of magic. Cristina Garcia's *The Dog Who Loved the Moon* (2008) shares the Cuban setting and the love of music and dancing; but, it also incorporates a puppy that is lovesick for the moon. Paco the puppy cannot find his joy until the magical moon bends down and gives him a kiss, freeing him once again to dance and move to the music. *Clara and Señor Frog* (Campbell Greeslin, 2007) is set in Mexico where Señor Frog is an artist extraordinaire with many fans. Clara's mom marries him and soon afterward Clara and Señor Frog bond over the magic they feel as they each create their very own original art work. For a non-fiction pairing, most children will naturally be curious about Cuba, the island nation. Too in-depth for children who are 4-8 years old, *Cuba: Enchantment of the world* (David K. Wright, 2009) or *Countries of the World: Cuba* (Jen Green, 2007) are books that are a natural fit and provide stunning photographs that might be shared with younger children. Both of these selections can provide larger, stunning photographs of the island, the National Opera House in Havana, musicians and dancers, and other things of interest native to Anita's Grandma's heritage from *Floating on Mama's Song*.

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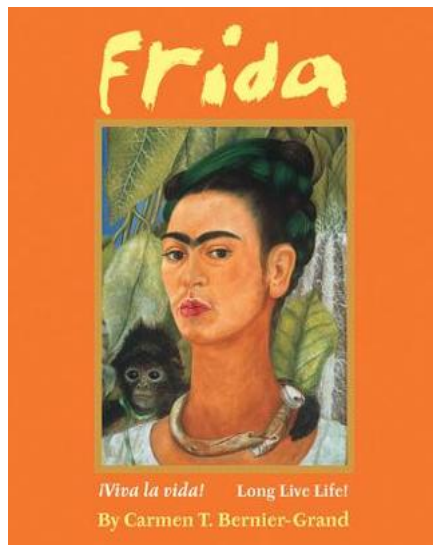
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Frida: ¡Viva la vida! Long Live Life!

Written by Carmen T. Bernier-Grand

Illustrated by Frida Kahlo

Marshall Cavendish, 2007, 64 pp

ISBN: 978-0761453369

wenty-six lyrical free-verse poems, arranged in chronological order, outline the life of the most famous Mexican female artist – Frida Kahlo. The poems are of significant events in Kahlo's life, including her childhood relationships with her parents and grandparents, her struggle with polio, her terrible bus accident and numerous operations, and her stormy relationship with muralist Diego Rivera along with infidelities, miscarriages,

divorce and remarriage. Except for the last poem, which reports on Kahlo's death, the poems are written in the first-person voice and are accompanied by Kahlo's own paintings. Descriptive captions are provided underneath each painting, and they reveal additional information of Kahlo's life events.

Many of the poems deal with pain, both physical and mental. Through Bernier-Grand's words, we feel Kahlo's hurt and despair. However, we can also see the optimistic side of Kahlo between the lines—she loved and embraced life, she painted to make meaning, she was interested in the world around her, and she took social action when there was injustice. The poems convey a rather impressionistic perspective on Kahlo's life rather than a comprehensive one.

The book received a 2008 Pura Belpré Honor Book for writing. Carmen T. Bernier-Grand grew up in Puerto Rico and came to the United States at the age of 27. She has lived in Portland, Oregon for more than 27 years. Most of her books are related to her ethnic and cultural background, and many of her stories are of Puerto Rican folktales. She expressed her uneasiness in an interview about writing her books in English, her second language. *Frida: ¡Viva la vida! Long Live Life!*, was particularly challenging for her because it is a book of poems. She claims: "I can write in Spanish, but most of my books are in English. It takes me longer than it might take a native English speaker" (<http://www.carmenberniergrand.com/>). Her other books dealing with Mexican culture include, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (2012), *César: ¡Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can!* (2011), and *Diego: Bigger than Life* (2009), Bernier-Grand has remarked that she was apprehensive at first to talk about these icons in Mexican culture because she herself was not Mexican. But after exhaustive research, the subject grabbed her heart and she was comfortable enough to write. Frida is an important icon in Mexican culture but she also resonates with other groups as well, such as Chicanos, feminists, political activists and lastly the artistic community. Her life experiences were varied and her story is compelling for so many. Because of this, Bernier-Grand had to make sure she was writing a book that rang true for many different people.

When asked to give advice for writers who are interested in retellings, Bernier-Grand responded: “My advice is not just for the re-tellers but for everyone. Make sure you’re telling your story with accuracy and respect. Even if it is your own culture, check the facts. Don’t rely on your memory. Tell the truth. Write an author’s note saying what you made up and what you didn’t. Tell the readers about your sources. If you don’t have passion for the story, don’t write it. Because then your lack of research will show” (http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit_resources/authors/interviews/CarmenTBernierGrand.html). She practiced her own beliefs in writing this book on Frida Kahlo by including appended quotes from Kahlo’s letters and diary, a prose biography, a chronology of events in Kahlo’s life, a glossary of Spanish words used in the poems and books, movies, documentaries, and websites that she researched for information.

Bernier-Grand appears to be a careful honest writer who is passionate about her craft. Her books offer the reader a stylized rendering of stories and knowledge that seem fitting to the subject matter. Carmen T. Bernier-Grand has given young readers a glimpse into the tragic but nevertheless full of life story of Frida that not only illuminates her art, her words and life but her strength of spirit as well.

No matter how authentic a book, it should always be read with accompanying texts to give the reader a richer understanding. In a text set focusing on Frida Kahlo, this book would work well with the following books: *Me, Frida* (Amy Novesky & David Diaz, 2010), *Frida Kahlo: The Artist Who Painted Herself* (Margaret Frith & Tomie dePaola, 2003), *Frida Kahlo: The Artist in the Blue House* (Magdalena Holzhey, 2003), *Frida Kahlo-Artists in Their Time* (Jill Laidlaw, 2003), *Frida* (Jonah Winter & Aba Juan, 2002), and *Frida Kahlo-Getting to Know the World’s Greatest Artists* (Mike Venezia, 1999), all of which feature the Mexico’s most famous female artist.

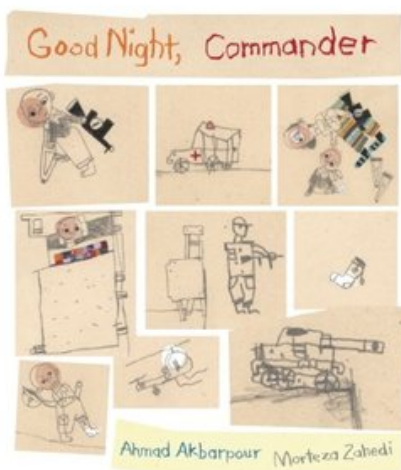
Hsin-Fen Chang, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Michelle Aguilera, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

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Good Night, Commander

Written by Ahmad Akbarpour

Illustrated by Morteza Zahedi

Translated by Shadi Eskandani & Helen Mixer

Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 2010. 24 pp.

ISBN 978-0888999894

This picture book was published in Iran in 2005 and translated from Farsi for publication in the US and in Canada in 2010. This poignant story focuses on an Iranian boy who suffered from the Iran-Iraq war that took place between 1980 and 1988. The war resulted in the loss of one of his legs and his mother. He now spends all of his time in his room, imagining and role-

playing the war that changed the course of his life forever. In his imagination, he becomes the Commander who is at the head of an army that aims at avenging his mother's death. While his father is moving on with his life by planning to marry again, the little boy stays away from talk about this stepmother and goes into his war fantasies. The game stops when he realizes that the Iraqi soldier he is fighting is his alter ego—another kid who lost his mother and a leg in the war.

The illustrations are in a style that is child-like with simple pencil sketches on a brownish background. The only colors on the page are the bed blanket, the bulb and some toys in front of the boiler. All of them represent the boy's room and living room as seen from above. In the story, several characters make a brief appearance: the father, the grandmother and the aunt. These characters are illustrated on page 4 and even though the story takes place after the Islamic revolution and the book was published under the latest government, no women are shown as veiled. From a cultural point of view, that makes the illustrations more authentic. In Iran, women put on the veil when they are out of the house but once they are home they take it off.

Another cultural element that caught my attention due to my own background as an Iranian occurred when the little boy's uncles and aunts come to his house for dinner. There are pastries on the table and the boy comments "I know why." In Iranian culture, when celebrating together, there are always pastries.

The author of *Good Night, Commander*, Ahmad Akbarpour, was born in 1970 which means that he was around 10 years old when the war started. The little boy in the story could be around 10. We might then wonder, whose story Ahmad Akbarpour tried to write—one of his friends or a relative? The illustrator, Morteza Zahedi, was also just a child when the war ended. Both of them must feel very close to the character in the book since they lived the war as children, just like this character. That brings even more authenticity to the story.

Good Night, Commander was written by authors who live in Iran and write about their

culture for children of their culture. The book was then translated and published in the U. S. Readers sometimes struggle with constructing meaning and connecting with particular aspects of translated books because of their lack of cultural familiarity. In *Good Night, Commander*, it is not so much that the culture may not be understood but readers may struggle with the background history of the war. Teachers may need to do some research on the war to provide that historical context through websites such as http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93Iraq_War.

Also, the structure of the book and style of storytelling may not be familiar to readers. Teachers may thus need to carefully scaffold this book for readers so they do not reject the story as strange or boring. On the other hand, this book is a powerful source of insiders' perspectives on their own culture instead of being from the view of a visitor who writes about that culture for an American audience. Other books that teachers might pair with this book include books about children in war such as *Silent Music* (James Rumford, 2008) and *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Mary Williams, 2005) or another book on Iran, *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi, 2002).

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Note that an additional review of this book was published in Volume 2, Issue 4.



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How Tía Lola Saved the Summer

Written by Julia Alvarez
Alfred A. Knopf, 2011, 160 pp
ISBN: 978-0375866876

Julia Alvarez's *How Tía Lola Saved the Summer* (2011) marks the third in the series of Tía Lola stories for children and has the title character continuing to bring sunshine and a Dominican cultural flair into the lives of her Vermont relatives, Linda and her two children, Miguel and Juanita. Linda is recently divorced and needs help with her children, so Tía Lola (in the previous books in the series) moves to Vermont to help raise the children. In this book of ten chapters, Lola has many more lives to brighten, as Linda's new boyfriend, Victor, brings his three daughters to Vermont to see if they might like it (and Linda's family) enough to be willing to move there if

love blooms and he wins the heart of Linda.

Linda and Lola welcome the houseguests with open arms, but the children have reservations about this summer's experiences. The week begins with Lola giving each family member a sword, telling them its magic will help them overcome any obstacle that blocks their way to happiness. In *Mary Poppins* fashion, Lola works her "magic," as chapter by chapter, each child and even some adults find that their lives are made better through the self-confidence they gain from talking with Tía Lola. The chapters are arranged beautifully, so that each separate chapter deals with a specific family member's issue or fear, which gets resolved by the end of the chapter. However, the chapters also build on each other, as the book has an over-arching frame: Will Victor and his daughters move to Vermont? The book, then, is a wonderful experience, as readers enjoy each chapter and learn a new story but also get to enjoy the deeper pleasures of reading all ten stories, so that the final page feels like the ending of a feel-good novel.

Alvarez carefully weaves a variety of themes throughout the stories, many of which will appeal to adult readers, although the reading level is most suited for intermediate readers. Children will certainly understand that Tía Lola functions a little like Oz in *The Wizard of Oz*—her "magic" really manifests itself in the ways she helps the characters find their true selves. The theme of each chapter is self-discovery and the realization that life is what you make it. The theme of the work as a whole deals with the more grown-up issue of combined families dealing with the aftermath of divorce, relocation, and even death. These are heavy themes for a children's book, but today's children deal with these, or similar problems, almost every day, and the book doesn't shy away from showing characters struggling with how to relate to a potential new step-parent or other tricky social issues, like breaking away from an over-protective parent.

Another interesting element is the cultural backgrounds of the characters. Tía Lola, Linda, Miguel and Juanita have roots that go back to the Dominican Republic, and Tía Lola frequently uses phrases in Spanish and sometimes struggles to find the correct English word to express her thought. But beyond the inclusion of Spanish words like “Abuelo” and “especial” the book is infused with a sense of family and extended family. For example, in one chapter of the book, the house is filled with guests from at least three different family groups. Twelve people share living space, not counting the dog, conveying an appreciation of a cultural background that welcomes large gatherings rather than finding them an invasion of personal space.

Alvarez is in a good position to write about cross-cultural concerns. Born in New York, but raised in the Dominican Republic for ten years before returning to the United States, she has lived the life of her characters Tía Lola and Linda. She knows what it is like to fit into a culture when one has a heart in two countries. Her fiction for adults, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), shows just how deeply she understands the world of a first generation immigrant, trying both to hang on to the culture one has left behind while also trying to acculturate into the ways of the new homeland. In *How Tía Lola Saved the Summer*, these concerns are barely visible but still add an element of authenticity to the work.

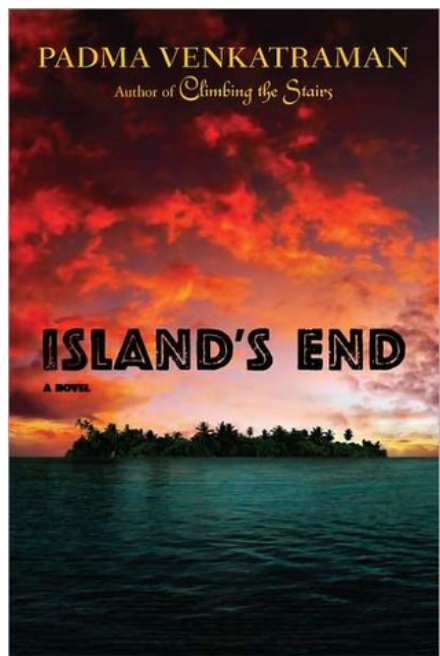
A natural pairing of this book would be with the other Tia Lola stories by Alvarez: *How Tia Lola Came to Visit* (2002), *How Tia Lola Learned to Teach* (2011), *How Tia Lola Ended Up Starting Over* (2012) as well as other stories that reflect the Dominican Republic life, such as *The Color of My Words* (Lyn Joseph, 2001) and *Before We Were Free* (Julia Alvarez, 2004). Other book pairings might be titles that include different Latino cultures such as *Return to Sender* (Julia Alvarez, 2009), *My Name is Maria Isabel* (Alma Flor Ada, 1995), *Salsa Stories* (Lulu Delacre, 2000) or *The House on Mango Street* (Sandra Cisneros, 1991).

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Island's End

Written by Padma Venkatraman
Penguin Putnam, 2011, 228 pp
ISBN: 978-0399250996

Uido, an adolescent girl of the En-ge tribe, has been chosen to begin her training as the next spiritual leader of her people. Within the Bay of Bengal, on an Indian-owned Andaman Island, Uido has dreams that foretell the future, in which the spirits speak to her and guide her. In a dream, Uido sees strangers from another island appear on her shore. When this dream becomes reality, she understands what Lah-ame, the En-ge leader, has warned her. The strangers are so different. Their ways go against the En-ge way of life, but are very appealing, especially to the younger members of her tribe. When Uido's little brother falls ill from a disease brought by the strangers, Uido

chooses to go to the strangers' island to use their medicine in order to save her brother. Upon her return, she worries that her people will not respect her or the traditional En-ge ways of life because they have seen the power of the strangers' medicine. As she struggles with how to talk about what she saw on the other island, she has another premonition that a great wave is coming to devour her island. She tells the others to seek higher ground, warning them of her vision. Many heed her warning, but a few do not respect her authority, perishing as the great wave demolishes the lowlands of the island. When the sea calms again, Uido's people are calmed as well, safe in their belief that Uido has proven herself to be a true and wise leader.

This book provides a feminist perspective of a young girl becoming the leader of her tribe, facing opposition not only because of her age, but also her gender. It also tells the story of a tribe that is out of contact with our modern age. Reading *Island's End* with Indigenous rights in mind, the reader is guided to a positive message about not disturbing uncontacted tribes. The possibility for contact is left open, as Uido leaves her island to seek modern medicine; however the sickness which necessitates the medicine was brought to the tribe by uninvited visitors. When Uido is on the mainland, she sees a woman related to her own tribe, who is haggard, begging and hungry. Uido learns that modern society has a negative impact on her people, draining and ruining a once healthy culture.

The book *Whale Rider* (2012) by Witi Tame Ihimaera and the movie by the same name would provide an excellent complimentary narrative through the story of Kahu, a Maori girl in New Zealand. The leader of her tribe is looking for a successor, but he has no heirs except Kahu, his great-granddaughter. In contrast with *Island's End*, there had been no female leaders of the Maori tribe to draw on as example, as Maori tradition had not allowed female leaders. But when hundreds of whales are beached and dying, Kahu reveals her ancient connection and hidden gift of being able to communicate with whales. Like Uido, she saves lives with her extraordinary gift, proving her ability to lead her people.

Venkatraman, an outsider to Andaman culture, explains in an author's note that the impetus for writing a book about cultures of the Andaman Islands came from a scientific research trip during which she stayed briefly with some members of the Onge tribe. In order to write the book, she spoke with anthropologists and read texts and peer-reviewed literature to get a greater understanding of the people of the Andaman Islands. Because the five tribes who live on the islands are not interested in contact from outside cultures, there has been little written about them and their lives. Therefore it is difficult to assess authenticity in this novel. However, within the small amount of writing that does exist about the peoples of the Andaman Islands, there is a lot of negative stereotyping. The two most destructive stereotypes are that the islanders are cannibals (based on their wearing of the bones of the dead) and the descriptions of their nudity (based on experiences of companies offering human safaris). Venkatraman beautifully treats these subjects by weaving them delicately into the plot, erasing the negative implications of both the bone wearing and the nudity.

Venkatraman did not spend a great deal of time with the people of the islands. She fictionalized the tribe, the En-ge, as an amalgamation of the five island tribes in order to fit the knowledge she had gathered into her idea for Uido's story. This is a sensitive topic as, in the United States, it is considered inauthentic and disrespectful to write about a general Native American tribe rather than a specific culture. There is a great difference, though, between these two situations. An enormous amount of information exists about Native American tribes, and the youth of these tribes are also potential readers of the literature. It is vital to see oneself reflected in literature. However, because of the paucity of information about the tribes of the Andaman Islands and the extreme unlikelihood that a member of these tribes would read the literature produced, this novel attempts to educate non-Andamese individuals about the desire and right of the tribes of the Andaman Islands to remain secretive and uncontacted. Fiction is one of the most powerful forms of education. The lack of specific authenticity in *Island's End* seems acceptable in order to get out the message about the rights of uncontacted tribes to youth, the leaders of tomorrow. This is a question that is worthy of classroom debate with informed young readers who might visit the sources of information concluding this review. *Island's End* is thought provoking and strong, a powerful read for those interested in how Indigenous youth navigate "two worlds."

Sources of information about Andamanese cultures:

<http://mathildasanthropologyblog.wordpress.com/2008/04/08/the-jarawa-onges-and-sentinelese-of-the-andaman-islands/>

<http://www.andaman.org/BOOK/text-group-BodyChapters.htm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/07/andaman-islands-tribe-tourism-threat>

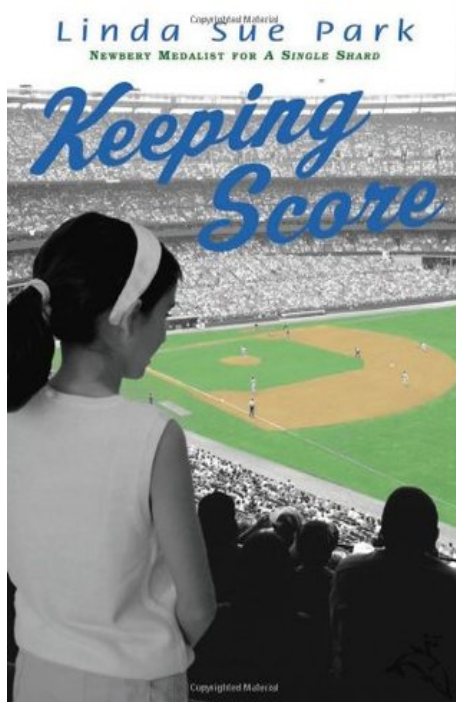
<http://thedailybeagle.net/2013/02/13/uncontacted-tribes-of-the-andaman-islands-do-we-approach/>

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Keeping Score

Written by Linda Sue Park

Clarion, 2008, 202 pp

ISBN: 978-0618927999

This novel draws readers immediately into Maggie's life in Brooklyn, New York, in 1951. The protagonist, Maggie is a nine-year-old girl who was named after New York Yankees baseball player, Joe DiMaggio, but Maggie is not a Yankees' fan. In fact, she is a huge fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers and knows all about them. In her father's old firehouse, Maggie meets the new guy, Jim, and learns how to keep score of games from him. She believes that she helps the team by keeping score. Through the baseball bonding, Maggie and Jim have developed a friendship, but soon Jim is drafted and sent to Korea during the Korean War. Jim and Maggie keep in touch with each other through letters. Often, Jim's letters tell

about a Korean boy, Jay, whom he met, but Jim does not know what is going to happen to Jay.

Linda Sue Park makes a unique connection between baseball and the Korean War. They are two very different topics, but readers will discover how these two topics are connected in the story. Like *Project Mulberry* (2005), Linda Sue Park invites readers to a familiar topic (baseball); she then makes a nice transition to a difficult topic (war). This story structure has the potential to help children understand a difficult topic as they can make a connection to something they already know. Linda Sue Park indirectly addresses the Korean War through Maggie's eyes. Even though she does not describe the war setting in detail, readers can imagine the hardships of soldiers during and after a war. By having two characters living in contrasting worlds—Maggie in a peaceful place where she can enjoy baseball and Jim in the action of the Korean war—young readers can imagine other people who live in a very difficult situation even at the moment when they themselves live peacefully. Linda Sue Park's excellence in writing creates a natural flow of the story that takes readers from the baseball season in the United States to the war front in Korea.

Linda Sue Park is well known as a Korean-American children's book author in the United States. She has written numerous books including the Newbery winner, *A Single Shard* (2001) and most of her books introduce Korean culture, customs and history: *The Kite Fighters* (2000), *Seesaw Girl* (1999), *Bee-Bim Bop!* (2005), *Project Mulberry* (2005), *The Firekeeper's Son* (2004), *Archer's Quest* (2006), and *When my Name was Keoko* (2002). Growing up in the United States, Park devotes much research to her work, and her books speak to issues of authenticity with bold evidence in the characters, contexts, and events of each story. More information about Linda Sue Park can be found at www.lindasuepark.com.

Keeping Score may be read in middle grades in a regular classroom setting, but it may also

be read in a counseling setting for the children whose parents are deployed for the war or are veterans who have returned from the war. Readers may enjoy seeing Maggie being so knowledgeable about the field of baseball even though she is a young girl. A die-hard baseball fan would enjoy this book and its baseball language.

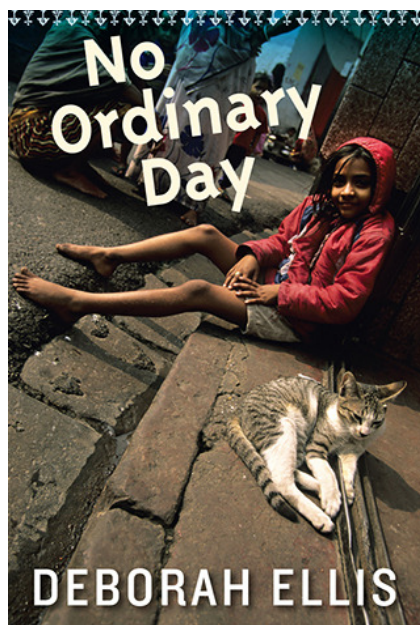
For young readers *Baseball Saved Us* (Ken Mochizuki, 1993) is another book that introduces the hardships during wartime with the topic of baseball, but in the setting of a Japanese-American internment camp. For older readers, *I Remember Korea: Veterans Tell their Stories of the Korean War, 1950-53* (Linda Granfield, 2003) will introduce details regarding the Korean War. Books related to the Korean War and other Asian wars are introduced in books such as *Inside Out & Back Again* (Thanhha Lai, 2011), which focuses on the Vietnam War.

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No Ordinary Day

Written by Deborah Ellis

Groundwood Books, 2011, 160 pp

ISBN: 978-1554981342

Valli is a free-spirited child who lives in the coal town of Jharia, India. Her days are filled with picking up stray pieces of coal to make money for food. Her only concerns are the “monsters” that live on the other side of the train tracks—the lepers. Upon finding that the family she lives with is not her real family, Valli decides to leave Jharia, India, by hiding in the back of a coal truck marking the beginning of her journey. When the driver of the truck finds a stowaway on board his truck, he takes her to a woman’s home for stray children. The woman realizes that Valli has leprosy and sends her to the streets where Valli

sleeps on sidewalks and in doorways, begging for food and money.

Valli’s perseverance and positive attitude help her survive as she realizes that she does not need much. She takes what she needs and gives what she has left over to others that need it more. While traveling around the city she notices that her bare feet have cuts and open wounds, but she feels no pain. She calls them her “magic feet.” Later, Valli encounters Dr. Indra, who finds out that Valli’s magical feet are a result of leprosy. Afraid to stay in the hospital with others like her and unable to face her greatest fear, she heads back to the streets, until she finally finds the courage to face her disease and ask for help.

Ellis was born and raised in Canada where she was an avid reader with a rich fantasy life. She has spent much of her life as an activist working in many different countries for educational rights. Ellis believes that certain causes are worth fighting for. One important cause is shown in *No Ordinary Day*, when Ellis explains leprosy and how this disease can be overcome and not feared. Her passion for those suffering with leprosy is reflected in her donation of all the proceeds from this book to the Leprosy Mission. Due to her time in Kolkata, India, she approaches this book with the perspective of having visited the Leprosy Mission Hospital visiting wards, touring villages and meeting many different people to learn about their journeys.

The authenticity of this story is easy to assess as even today local villagers and their families scavenge coal from a coal mine in Jharia, India to earn a few dollars a day. Also, leprosy continues to be a problem in India as there are over 130,000 cases detected yearly. Those diagnosed with leprosy are shunned and sent away from their families. Both of these events are authentic representations discussed throughout the book and occurring in India currently.

This book serves as a great teaching tool for middle school students, demonstrating

different lifestyles and cultures of those living in other countries and difficulties they face. Additionally, creating book study groups or teacher guided discussions on homelessness, abuse, leprosy and courage would deepen the lessons learned from this novel as Ellis brings awareness to the forefront and, hopefully, promotes action among its readers.

Deborah Ellis has written twenty books which have been translated into over 25 languages and has won numerous awards. Many of the royalties from her books are donated to social causes. For example, from her Breadwinner Series alone she has donated over \$1 million dollars. Also, royalties from *My Name Is Parvana* (2012) go to an account managed by Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan which helps women and children by building schools, educating children and helping women find work. Her passion, perseverance and desire to help those less fortunate is what keeps Ellis motivated as she travels and continues to write.

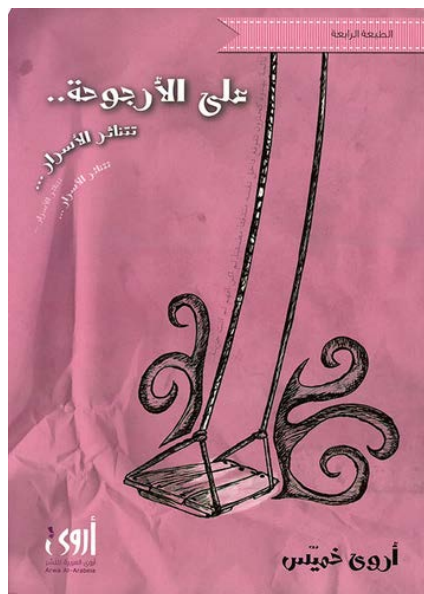
No Ordinary Day might be paired with *In the Shadow of the Pali: A Story of the Hawaiian Leper Colony* by Lisa Cindrich (2002). In this action packed story twelve-year-old Liliha is sent to the Kalaupapa Leprosy Colony at Molokai, Hawaii, where she struggles to endure savage living conditions and people as well as her own disease. Like Valli, Liliha is all alone and has to fight to survive and endure the pain of leprosy. Both are stories of hope, love and survival.

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On the Swing, The Secrets are Scattered

Written by Arwa Khumayes

Arwa Alarabeia (Saudi Arabia), 2009, 111 pp.

ISBN: 978-6020024650

This book tells stories about two sides of the same coin. 14 secrets are shared by a mother and her daughter with each secret told in a short story. Each secret is told twice, switching between the mother's and daughter's voices in a feminine revelation. They both share their thoughts about some daily life event that every mother and daughter goes through. The secrets they share are from the heart of the Saudi society. As the secrets are told, the time passes by and we notice the growth of both the mother and her daughter. The secrets start with the little girl trying really

hard to grow up by adding three years to her age at once and ends with her becoming a teen and feeling like Cinderella as she experiences love for the first time.

The secrets vary in their topics and concerns. In one secret the mother wonders how children can be like their parents, yet different, as she sees her daughter act exactly like her, preferring to eat the rind of a watermelon rather than flesh, which is something that she, the author, used to do when she was little. In another secret the mother watches her daughter turning into a teen and going through hormonal changes. The mother explains to her daughter in an intimate conversation about the circle of life and how girls become women, a topic that is usually private and not discussed in public. In another secret both the mother and daughter describe what they feel when the mother feels "blue" and want to be a "snail." She does not want to leave her bed or do anything including being a mother for that day. While this is a syndrome that all mothers might experience every now and then, they usually do not have the courage to say so. This book speaks about the Saudi society in particular, but also speaks to any mother or daughter around the world. As Carl R. Rogers (1961) said, "What is most personal is most universal" (p. 26).

Speaking as a citizen of Saudi Arabia, I agree that the secrets that the author shares are truly secrets, because in the Saudi society, rarely would anyone interfere with a mother-daughter relationship, and the doors behind such a relationship are not discussed. In this book, the mother opens the doors to build a beautiful friendship with her daughter, yet we can notice the respect that holds the relationship between them. This kind of friendship is what challenges the traditions of the Saudi community. The Saudi community in general is very conservative, and values family relationships. The mother should always be obeyed and never questioned following the Islamic traditions. For that reason, mothers in Saudi Arabia find it hard to accept a book that challenges and questions their powers as mothers. However, there is nothing in Islam that contradicts such a friendship, but to the other extent it is a demand and duty for all Muslims to befriend their mothers as an order from Our Prophet Mohammed PBUH.

What is so unique about this book, other than the dialogue between the mother and her daughter, is the written language. The author used a simple, yet elegant, language. The metaphors and detailed descriptions of daily life events, make reading this book a pleasure to the senses. The author's ability to tackle such sensitive topics from Saudi society in such a satisfactory manner make it accessible to readers of all ages and genders.

Rawaa Bakhsh puts her touch on the book with unique illustrations. In the beginning of each story there are pencil drawings that are related to the topic of the secret. These unusual illustrations in the Saudi literature world give a different nature to the book and add to its authenticity. Some of these illustrations are just doodles while some relate directly to the secret being told and Saudi society. For example, there are two coffee beans in the beginning of each story, a symbol from the heart of the Saudi society that really appreciates Arabic coffee.

The author, Arwa Khumayes, who is Saudi, has a PhD in fashion history and is an assistant teacher in King Abdulaziz University. She is married with two girls and one boy. She has written several children's books and has many other publications. This one was her first attempt to write for young adults. As an insider from the Saudi society, I can assure that readers will have authentic insights as Arwa shares her motherhood experience and her wisdom dealing with the difficulties of being a mother.

Recently Arwa published a children's book called *I am Roomi* illustrated by Hanane Kai (2013), that also discuss the mother-daughter relationship with a different twist. *My Girls* by Salman Al-Ouda (2008) is another book that discusses issues of girls in Saudi society but with a more conservative approach as it is written by a male Muslim Scholar. A book written outside the Saudi community with a similar theme that might be interesting to compare is *Dear Mother, Dear Daughter: Poems for Young People* (Jane Yolen & Heidi Stemple, 2009).

This book is in Arabic, but a limited edition in English is published. To have the English copy of the book you can contact Arwa Khumayes by email: arwa@arwaalarabeia.com.

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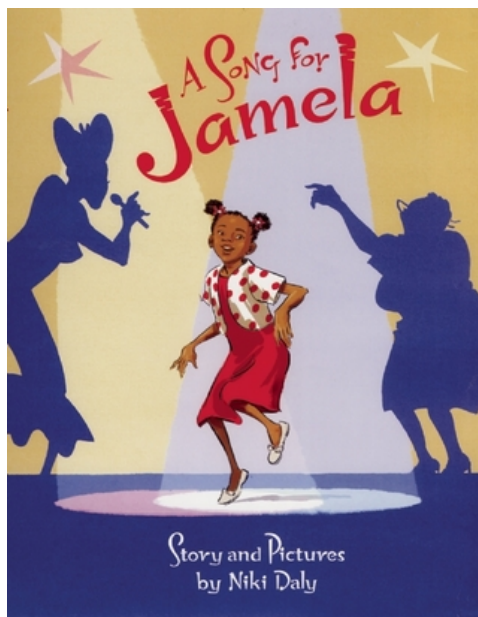
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A Song for Jamela

Written by Niki Daly

Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2009, 36 pp

ISBN: 978-1845078713

Daly has created another adventurous day for Jamela that young readers can enjoy. Similar to the other picture books in this series, Jamela is bored and her mother recommends working at her Aunt Beauty's hair salon to keep her occupied. Jamela's Gogo (grandmother) packs her lunch while she finds a beautiful dress to wear on her outing. Jamela's mother encourages her to "stay out of trouble" while working in the salon. Jamela is able to stay out of trouble until an Afro-Idol from her favorite TV show comes into the salon for a hair appointment. Afro-Idol Miss Bambi Chaka Chaka is popular and everyone in the

hair salon, especially Jameela, is very excited to see her in person. Everything is going fine until she is tasked with killing an annoying fly in the salon. Jamela is trying her best to kill the fly when she inadvertently swats her Aunt Beauty's bottom where the fly has landed. This causes a huge commotion and Aunt Beauty accidentally shaves part of Miss Bambi Chaka Chaka's head. Jamela gives her Aunt Beauty the idea to cover the bald spot with flowers. Oblivious to what has happened to her hair, Miss Bambi Chaka Chaka wakes from her nap to a head full of flowers. She loves the new "hairstyle" that Jamela helps create with the accent of the sunflowers. As an act of appreciation to Jamela, Miss Bambi Chaka Chaka gives her free tickets to a live performance of Afro Idol. Jamela is overjoyed to attend Miss Chaka Chaka's concert.

As author and illustrator, Niki Daly has authored many books that reflect life in South Africa post-apartheid for readers. Inspired by Maurice Sendak's work, he is the recipient of the IBBY Honor Award for illustration and British Arts Council Illustration Award among other honors. Insiders are pleased with the subtle messages of change to the country of South Africa as portrayed in this book, as well as in other books, post-apartheid. Daley's work is culturally authentic in *A Song for Jamela* as he gives a glimpse into contemporary South Africa. He resides in the suburbs of Cape Town, South Africa. This experience of living among a thriving hairdressing salon industry, as captured in this energetic book, gives credence to the authenticity of South African culture as depicted in this book. As a White South African, he believes that books should highlight similarities as opposed to differences. Furthermore, he invites others into South Africa's culture by showing the closeness of family as mother, grandmother, and Aunt Beauty all play strong roles throughout the book. The strong sense of family is a theme at the heart of the book and affirms an identity of African culture: that it takes a village to raise a child.

In addition, the strong illustrations of the beautiful clothes with distinct patterns teach readers that members of this culture have a deep affection for their personal appearances. A

Song for Jamela reveals to the readers a sense of community that bonds the people of South Africa. In *A Song for Jamela*, a contemporary way of life (i.e., TV, booming hair salon business, style of clothing) contrasts with typical stereotypes of Africa as an uncivilized and impoverished community of people. Students will finish the book with a deeper understanding of the values, beliefs, and practices of a multidimensional and rich South African culture. Readers will also walk away with a sense of “sameness” as opposed to “otherness” with the characters.

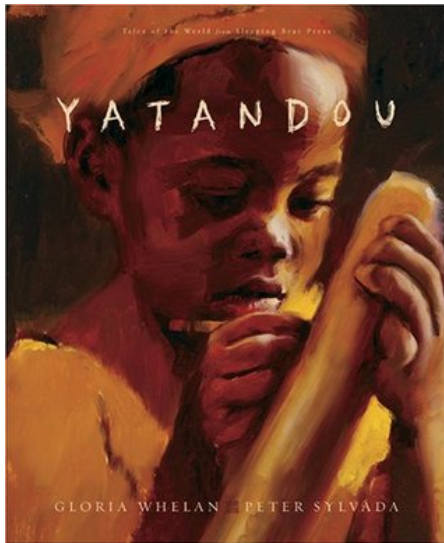
Naturally, this book might be read alongside other Niki Daly Jamela stories such as: *Happy Birthday, Jamela* (2007), *Where’s Jamela?* (2004), or *Jamela’s Dress* (1999). Daly has created other African characters and contexts in picture books that might be considered along with Jamela and her family. These include: *The Herd Boy* (2012), *Pretty Salma* (2007), *Ruby Sings the Blues* (2005) and *Once Upon a Time* (2003).

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Yatandou

Written by Gloria Whelan

Illustrated by Peter Sylvada

Sleeping Bear Press, 2007, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-1585362110

Yatandou, only eight, lives and works in a Mali village with her family. While she would prefer to be outside with her friends or her goat, she must take on the responsibilities of the women in her culture. Her daily struggles are portrayed in this story as she spends three hours a day pounding millet kernels, something a machine can do in seconds. The women of the village each contribute their part through gender specific daily chores and responsibilities. They save their

hard earned money to buy a grinding machine that will save time and allow them to begin attending school. In order for Yatandou to contribute her part, she must part from something very dear to her, but this sacrifice is not thought about twice as she knows the importance of contributing to the community as a whole. When the machine finally arrives, all the women's dreams begin coming true as they can now spend time learning to read and write, since they do not have to spend hours upon hours pounding millet kernels.

Sleeping Bear Press, a company dedicated to publishing rich cultural content within unique picture books, published this book in 2007. *Yatandou* is part of the Tales of the World series, written to help children better understand cultures around the world through relatable picture books. Of the nine books within this series, Whelan is the author of six. Gloria Whelan traveled to Africa to better understand the culture of her work. Through her experience, two things stuck out to her: the beauty of the land and how hard the Africans had to work for basic necessities. In her descriptive and detailed writing, these two pieces are represented. However, because Africa is such a large continent, it is unclear as to which country in Africa she visited. The countries within Africa can vastly differ from one to the next. More specifically, Mali is a vast country with diverse villages. By clustering Mali together as if the customs and struggles are shared throughout the country, readers lose sight of the diversity within the continent of Africa and the countries throughout Africa.

This absent detail may be the reason for some misrepresentations of Mali and the family structure in this story. The family represented in *Yatandou* is depicted as a nuclear family. However, typically families in Mali are extended families (Ware, 2008). Whether it is a biased view towards family structure or a detail that was overlooked or assumed to be true throughout Africa, this may place inaccurate stereotypes on the Mali culture. A teachable opportunity that was missed within the texts is the struggle they face with water shortage. Women of Mali can spend up to nine hours per day fetching water (Rich, 2011). Whelan's (2007) mere mention of "Mother begins her long walk to the water hole in the dark" (p. 4) does not portray the depth of water struggles faced by these women and young girls.

The illustrator, Peter Sylvada, creates vivid paintings that encapsulate the landscape and mood of an African village. These paintings contribute to the story by allowing the reader to picture the author's theme of hope and sacrifice. However the accuracy of some details may be called into question. There is no evidence that Sylvada has been to Africa, leaving room for stereotypes in precise details. On page five, Sylvada's paints a picture of Yatandou bare from the waist up. Women of Mali are typically fully clothed (Ware, 2008). While there are a number of villages in Africa where being topless is a part of the culture, Mali is not one of those countries.

Though specific details of the Malian culture lack authenticity, much of this story is based on true struggles within African cultures. The foreword in the book allows the reader to build background knowledge on the grinding machine and what is already being done to restore this continent and provide villagers with appropriate tools to lead successful lives and minimize tedious manual labor that takes many females away from education and their childhood. The author focuses on an actual problem within this culture, but, at times, had an opportunity to elaborate on the harshness faced by women and young girls and only provided a statement or vague description.

Though this book is written from the perspective of an eight-year-old girl, the perspectives of women, men, and male children are also told through the secondary characters such as her mother and brother. Through Yatandou's narrative, she is able to express the struggles everyone in the village is faced with, not just her personal struggles. The theme of hope and sacrifice is captured through the daily life of children in a Mali community. The author integrated African folklore in describing Yatandou's worries and fears. Language from Mali is integrated into the story in a manner that is understandable through the context.

The power struggles faced by women in Mali are highlighted in this book through their roles and lack of opportunities. Because of the lack of resources within the community, the women miss out on many facets of life that men do not. Whelan was able to show the impact that the grinding machine had on the opportunities women were able to take advantage of. Though women were expected to do many of the daily household chores, they missed out on anything outside of these responsibilities because of the lack of time. The grinding machine opened many doors for the women and Whelan was able to capture those opportunities in this book.

This book relates to others written about different parts of Africa such as *Beatrice's Goat* (Page McBrier, 2001) *Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* (Jeanette Winter, 2008) and *One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference* (Kate Smith Milway, 2008). Though these books are set in different villages, they allow readers to understand the theme of hope and sacrifice each African village faces through different stories relevant to that culture. Another common ground that connects these books is the focus of gender roles within African cultures. The missed opportunities of women and young girls due to their daily responsibilities are also highlighted.

Whelan wrote this book to bring an understanding of African cultures to children and inspire others to help improve the quality of life by providing an awareness of multifunctional platforms. Children will be able to make many connections to this story as they become aware of the differences in resources between their own culture and African cultures. Commodities many expect and take for granted in one country are the same commodities others struggle with in their countries.

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