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WOW STORIES

STORIES AS INVITATION AND TRANSFORMATION:
GLOBAL LITERATURE INTEGRATION ACROSS
MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

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WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom is a regular on-line publication of *WOW* containing vignettes written by classroom educators about children's experiences reading and responding to literature in the classroom setting.

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Stories as Invitation and Transformation: Global Literature Integration across Multiple Contexts

Tracy Smiles

Kathy Short (2012) argues that, “If we step back from the pressure of tests and standards and consider why story matters and the ways in which story is thinking and world making, we have time to reconsider and recapture the role of story and literature in our classrooms” (p. 9). This issue of *WOW Stories* presents five articles demonstrating the impact of stories, both personal and those found in children's and adolescent literature, and how they can invite students to explore

their cultural identities, develop awareness and respect for different cultures, examine personal, local, and global issues, and guide students in taking thoughtful new actions as a result of their expanded perspectives. These vignettes show how literature integration across a range of educational contexts, including elementary school, high school, and university courses can foster intercultural understanding, and how stories and literature that portray cultures, cultural perspectives, and critical issues can develop curiosity and a caring perspective on those with multiple ways of being in the world. The student participants in these vignettes, whether twelve or twenty, came to recognize a common humanity they share with people they read about in the literature, a first step to making the world a better place for all (Short, 2009).

In “[‘Is Pokémon Japanese?’: Fifth Graders’ Intercultural Learning through Japanese Pictorial Texts](#),” Junko Sakoi and Trinka Hall share what happened when they introduced Japanese culture through reading and discussing Japanese pictorial texts and picture books in Trinka’s fifth grade classroom. Initial responses to the texts revealed ethnocentric perspectives in Trinka’s students for other cultures. However, through carefully scaffolded discussions and interactions with Junko, a Japanese native, students were able to move beyond their initial judgements of Japanese culture as strange and exotic to recognizing they were making these judgements from their own cultural perspectives and that culture is part of everyone’s human experience.

Similarly, Marie Lejeune, in “[Nudging Young Adults’ Readings of Gendered and Cultured Texts: What is the Role of the Adult in a Reader Centered Space?](#)” wondered what would happen when reading books that explored issues of the body with high school girls in an after school book group. She focuses on *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, which not only deals with the victimization of women and girls but does so in an unfamiliar setting to the book group’s participants. The vignette addresses the challenges of embracing a reader response perspective on using texts and the desire to push readers beyond initial, often superficial, perspectives on the stories they take up. In this case, the girls’ perspectives on the victimization of women in India and their victimization of women as something occurring somewhere else was a viewpoint that LeJeune wanted to challenge. She “nudged” the girls to consider the global issues and the victimization of women within their local context. She uses her experience of engaging students in explorations of critical issues to offer suggestions as to how to “nudge” students into considering critical perspectives without taking control of discussions or diminishing students’ initial responses to difficult texts.

Yang Wang and Yuebo Zheng present a unique perspective in that the “other” their students explore through literature are people in the United States in “[A Mirror and a Window: Read Aloud Multicultural Books to Adult EFL Learners](#).” In a university course on English as a Foreign Language in China, Wang and Zheng read aloud children’s literature about the United States and China that were produced in the United States and encouraged student participants to reflect on their experiences while identifying cultural differences as well as connections they shared with

people in the United States through stories and traditions. Students began to see that learning a language is learning a culture, and were able to critically analyze texts about themselves and pose questions about representations of themselves and other people in the world in contemporary texts and media.

The last two vignettes demonstrate how children's and adolescent literature can be implemented in teacher preparation and graduate professional development programs to effectively engage preservice and inservice teachers in critical explorations of diversity. Kinga Varga-Dobai in "[Names, Objects, Histories: Intercultural Learning in Action](#)" describes using the short story "My Name" by Sandra Cisneros (1991) as a springboard for students to explore their personal cultural identities. This story allowed preservice teachers to recognize how issues of diversity have personal, local, and global relevance to their work in their clinical placements and future classrooms. Similarly, Michele Ebersole, Huihui Kanehele-Mossman, and Alice Kawakami in "[Teaching through Story: Using Narratives in a Graduate Ethnicity Course](#)," wondered if their graduate course on ethnicity and education was presenting teacher participants with meaningful experiences that would in turn encourage teachers to explore and implement culturally responsive practices within their teaching contexts. Disappointed with past course results, the course instructors situated the course in story in order to facilitate critical explorations of the participant's *experiential knowledge, academic knowledge, and reflective knowledge*. Through discussions of children's and adolescent literature, field trips to local historical sites, and guest speakers within the community, teachers were able to recognize their stereotypes of students from particular cultural groups in their schools. They came to see that culturally responsive practice is not something they "do," but rather a disposition that that guides their decision-making and reflection.

The vignettes in this issue present readers of *WOW Stories* with examples of the potential of stories, literature, and inquiry for transforming how teachers and students engage with themselves and others living around the world. We hope you find through the innovative projects presented in these vignettes inspiration to integrate global stories and literature in your teaching contexts, and that you share those experiences with readers of *WOW Stories*.

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“Is Pokémon Japanese?": Fifth Graders' Intercultural Learning through Japanese Pictorial Texts

Junko Sakoi and Trinkka Hall

Working together in a fifth grade classroom at Cañon Elementary School in central Arizona, Junko, a university researcher from the University of Arizona, and Trinkka, a fifth grade teacher, wanted to explore intercultural understanding. Japanese pictorial texts, including *manga*, *anime*, *kamishibai* (Japanese traditional visual storytelling), and picture books were introduced in Trinkka's classroom while incorporating cultural aspects of Junko's native country, Japan, to fifth grade students. Trinkka, having known Junko previously, was excited to have her provide students with this opportunity. Over a six-month period, Junko visited the class twice a week, giving students opportunities to explore both modern and historical Japan using Japanese pictorial texts.

Context and Curriculum

Cañon Elementary School is a small K-8 public school located in Black Canyon City, Arizona, approximately 50 miles north of the Phoenix metropolitan area. Student demographic information for the school consists of 86% of Caucasian and 14% of Latino, American Indian, African American, and Asian American. Around 60% of the students are eligible for free lunches. The participants included 12 fifth graders: four females and eight males. Nine of them were Caucasian and three of them were Latino, African American, and Native American. Most of these students had not traveled far beyond their remote community of Black Canyon City.

The fifth graders learned about Japan within a curriculum involving a curriculum as inquiry framework (Short, 2009; Short, Harste & Burke, 1996), intertextuality (Short, 1992, 1993), and a curriculum that is international (Short, 2008). In the first phase of enacting the curriculum, the students explored 53 picture books regarding Japan; 22 books came from *Worlds of Words' Japanese Culture and Language Book Kits*, and 31 books were chosen from the WorldCat library search engine. Many books portrayed cultural and historical facts and details that were unfamiliar to students; therefore, Junko located the books based on universal themes, which would open up the accessibility of the books to students. Themes included: (1) War and Peace, (2) Land and Ecology, (3) Cities and Villages, (4) People, (5) Family and Friends, and (6) Animals. Text sets were constructed around each theme (see Table 1).

Table 1: Picture book text-sets.

Groups	Fiction	Non-fiction
		• <i>Pearl Harbor Child</i>
		• <u>Sadako</u> *
	• <u>Barefoot Gen</u> *	

1	War & Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseball Saved Us • The Unbreakable Code 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shin's Tricycle • Hiroshima and Nagasaki • Hiroshima • Atom Bomb
2	Land & Ecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My First Japanese Kanji Book * • The Ainu and the Fox * • The Wakame Gatherers • How My Parents Learned to Eat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiromi's Hands • Cooking the Japanese Way • A Taste of Japan • Food and Recipes of Japan • A World of Recipes: Japan • Sushi for Kids
3	Cities & Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandpa's Town * • Kamishibai Man * • The Park Bench * • I Lost My Dad * • Erika-san • Tokyo Friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Asian Home • Dropping in on Japan • Peoples of the World
4	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook Melons Turn to Frogs!: The Life and Poems of Issa * • The Ainu: A Story of Japan's Original People * • My Japan * • Tea with Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Search of the Spirits: The Living National Treasures of Japan * • Honda * • Japan (World in View) • Cities of the World • Tokyo
5	Family & Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Way We Do It in Japan • Grandfather's Journey • Suki's Kimono • The Moon Princess * • The Boy of the Three-Year Nap * 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries of the World: Japan • Southern and Eastern Asia

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Allison •<u>The Origami Master</u>* •<u>Ho-LimLim</u>* •<u>The Adventure of Momotaro</u>* 	
6 Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>The Animals: Selected Poems</u>* •<u>Guri and Gura</u>* •<u>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</u>* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Hachiko</u>* •Japan

Note. * shows the books are from Japanese culture and language book kits, provided by *Worlds of Words* at the University of Arizona. Retrieved from <http://wowlit.org/links/booklists/japanese-language-and-culture-kit-book-list/>

In the second phase of the curriculum, students explored Japan using Japanese pictorial texts including manga, anime, and kamishibai along with picture books and various Internet resources about Japan. For manga, a comic book originally published in Japan and translated into English, they read *Yotsuba&!, Volume 1* (Azuma, 2009), a contemporary realistic fictional text about a five-year-old girl's everyday life with her adoptive father and neighbors, set in an urban city in Japan. For anime, animation originating in Japan, students watched *Ponyo* (Miyazaki & Suzuki, 2010), a modern fantasy about a relationship between a female goldfish and a young boy, set in a seaside village in Japan. For kamishibai, a traditional Japanese form of visual storytelling, students watched *Hats for the Jizos* (Matsutani, Matsuyama & Tamaki, 2002), a Japanese folktale about an old couple and statues of Jizo, set in a village in Japan. One kamishibai story typically consists of 12 to 16 sturdy panels. Illustrations are printed on the front of the panel, and on the back of it is the text to be read. A kamishibai audience looks only at the illustrations while a storyteller reads the texts.



Intercultural Learning

In the beginning, we saw that students were more apt to notice how different their culture was from Japan's culture. Many things were odd to the students, although they were intrigued by these cultural differences. The more they learned about Japan, the more students gained awareness not only of how different the cultures were, but also of how similar they were when it came to the people themselves. Junko conducted an in-depth analysis of students' learning by questioning what understandings of Japanese culture were demonstrated in students' responses to the texts.

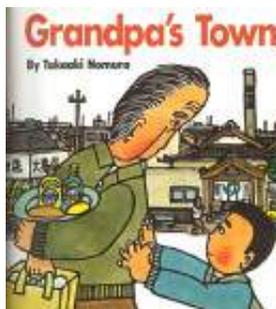
The fifth graders showed four types of responses, including (1) ethnocentrism; (2) understanding and acceptance; (3) respect, appreciation, and valuing; and (4) change. The categories were adapted from Fennes and Hapgood's (1997) "continuum of intercultural learning" model (see Figure 1), after analyzing students' responses in relation to this continuum. It is important to note that Fennes and Hapgood argued that intercultural learning is a continuous and recursive process.



Figure 1: Continuum of intercultural learning (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997, p. 48).

Ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism differentiates the world into two parts, *us* and *them* (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997). At the beginning of the study, students often tended to make judgments about Japanese culture based on their own cultures. For example, many of them resisted [*Grandpa's Town*](#) (Nomura & Stinchecum, 1991), a picture book about the relationship between a grandfather and his grandson set in Japan. When students saw the images of naked people taking a bath together at a public bath, they screamed, "It's *disgusting!*" and, "It's *strange!*" The following conversation illuminates Nicole and Greg's perspectives of the Japanese bath culture:



Nicole: Do you guys [Japanese people] wear bathing suits [at public bath]? I am just wondering because one of the books [*Grandpa's Town*] that you brought ... it has them like the ... everyone is bathing all the together.

Trinka (Teacher): It's different from us.

Junko: It's culture. When we take a bath, women and men take a bath separately

Nicole: That's weird . . . Because we take a shower by ourselves.

Trinka (Teacher): But ... small kids take baths with their parents.

Greg: No [shaking his head], ...I never take a bath with my parents....

Nicole used the word *weird* to express her difficulty in understanding the Japanese bathing culture. Greg also showed resistance to it as an unacceptable practice. We attempted to provide different perspectives, moving from evaluating an unfamiliar cultural practice based on the students' own cultural experiences to understanding and accepting the unfamiliar practice. However, students did not move beyond the stance of resistance.

Understanding and acceptance.

The more knowledge students gained about Japanese culture and people, the more they became aware of cultural similarities as well as differences, leading them to develop an understanding and acceptance of Japanese culture. Cultural x-rays (Short, 2008; see Figure 2), were used to support students' exploration of their own cultural identities, such as holiday activities. We found that learning about holidays in Japan and in the U.S. enhanced the students' cross-cultural awareness. In a holiday activity, for example, students explored Japanese holidays using the two picture books, *I Live in Tokyo* (Takabayashi, 2001) and *Japanese Celebrations: Cherry Blossoms, Lanterns and Stars!* (Reynolds, 2006). During the read-aloud of the books, students were invited to bring up questions, wonderings, or connections related with the stories or their experiences by asking questions such as "What do you notice?" and "Does this remind you of anything you have done before?" They identified different holidays and holiday activities in Japan, and compared them to those in the United States. After the read-aloud sessions, they were encouraged to consider cross-cultural commonalities between Japanese and American holidays in the following activity:

- Students in pairs were provided 10 cards having the names of Japanese holidays and 14 cards having the names of American holidays;
- The student pairs sorted out the cards according to connections, themes, and patterns, not by country or holiday (see Figure 3);
- After the student pairs finished sorting, they shared connections they found, using the comparison chart (see Figure 4).

This sorting activity encouraged students to identify both different and similar holiday and social activities in Japan and in the United States. For example, they identified activities such as cleaning

up trash and caring for nature and the environment on Ocean Day in Japan, and on Earth Day in the United States. Also, their thinking clearly shifted from merely making surface connections between the holidays in both countries to more deeply understanding the holidays as connected by themes such as children’s respect and giving love to people.



Figure 2: Cultural x-ray.



Figure 3: Activity of sorting holiday cards.



Figure 4: Comparison chart of holidays in Japan and the U.S.

Respect, appreciation, and valuing.

Fennes and Hapgood (1997) argued that people respect, appreciate, and value culture when they develop an understanding of cultural diversity and complexity. These fifth graders began to demonstrate positive attitudes for Japanese culture as they gained an understanding of the diversity and complexity within Japanese culture, through learning about cultural values and beliefs, language, and social and historical issues. In the example below, Michael recognized Ponyo's mother playing two roles, a mother and a sea god, in anime *Ponyo*:

Junko: Who is Ponyo's mom?

Bianca: She is beautiful and pretty.

Michael: She is a sea god?

Junko: Yes, she is. How do you know that?

Michael: Because the guys [shipmen] when they saw her [Ponyo's mother], the guys did this [putting his palms together in front of his chest and bowing].

Michael supported his identification of Ponyo's mother as a sea god based on his own observations of the characters' religious gestures in Figure 5. This awareness encouraged Michael and other students to discuss and learn about the roles of the sea and the sea god in Japan; the ocean is regarded as a sacred place, always connected to *mother* because Japanese people believe that the ocean is *the mother* who gives birth, since all life is thought to have begun there.



Figure 5: Sailors bowing to a sea god presented in *Ponyo*.

Students also learned about Japanese cultural values and beliefs through the kamishibai story, *Hats for the Jizos*. The Jizo statue, a religious figure of Japanese Buddhism, is depicted as an important character in the story. As shown in this conversation, making a connection between the Jizo statue and the U.S. Statue of Liberty, and identifying a statue as a symbolical link between both countries helped raise students' awareness that the Japanese people believe in the spiritual value of the Jizo statue:

Nicole: The Statue of Liberty is in New York and the statues of *Jizos* are in Japan.

Greg: Both are statues....

Michael: People present there and they look up to them [the *Jizo* and the Statue of Liberty].

Change.

Change refers to the development of new attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997). As the students developed an understanding of, and started to accept and value, Japanese culture, they began to actively show great curiosity about Japan. Many students started to make connections between Japan and the United States using “kid culture” (Short & Kaser, 1998) as “significant cultural domains” (Sung, Kim, & O’Herron, 2014). For example, on the last day of this study, when students were encouraged to sketch or write about the most significant thing that they learned throughout the Japan inquiry, Sam and Jerry engaged in drawing *Pokémon* (see Figure 6, Shudo & Tanaka, 1998) as an important popular cultural icon among both Japanese and American children, serving as a cultural bridge between Japanese and American cultures.

Greg and Peter expressed their significant connections in Figure 7. When Greg was asked why he was drawing an airplane, he said, “People in Nagasaki are asking for help when the bomb is dropping from the plane.” Similar to Greg, Peter’s focus was on drawing a train that people were taking in order to escape from the bomb. Greg and Peter were the two students who extensively explored the text set regarding War and Peace, including *Shin’s Tricycle* (Kodama & Ando, 1995) and *Sadako* (Coerr, 1993). These stories seemed to affect the two students on a deeper level, and helped them develop emotional connections and a sense of caring because they had to imagine themselves in the situations depicted.



Figure 6: Graffiti board by Jerry and Sam.

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Nudging Young Adults' Readings of Gendered and Cultured Texts: What is the Role of the Adult in a Reader Centered Space?

Marie LeJeune

What is a teacher's role in navigating problematic issues of sexism, gender bias, or abuse of children and marginalized people within a society as they are discussed in a text for children? How might teachers or adults facilitate critical and thoughtful discussions of damaging practices while not reducing a culture, country, or group of people? Although critical literacy and other culturally responsive pedagogies call for opening up classroom spaces to examinations of different ways of being in the world, often this necessitates a delicate juggling act for readers and teachers (Simpson, 1996; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Short, 2009).

These were the professional tensions I struggled to resolve when I spent two weeks reading Patricia McCormick's book [Sold](#) (2008) with a small group of high school girls (ages 14-17) in an after school girls' book group. I was a former teacher at the high school and completing my dissertation research at the school site. The impetus for a girls' book group stemmed from my interest in adolescent girls' literacy practices and requests from former students for a 'girls only' reading group. The thematic thread that united the titles was embodiment, or issues related to the body,

issues group participants had indicated as being of great importance. *Sold* was the third book we read together. *Sold* is set in India and Nepal, and chronicles the struggles of 13-year-old Lakshmi who is sold into prostitution in an Indian brothel.

The book group was situated within a reader response tradition that guided literature circles and literature based instruction, encouraging participants within the space of book group to voice their personal responses to the reading of literature as it related to issues of the body (Rosenblatt, 1938). The six books we read were selected by the girls, although I initially “book talked” over 20 titles with the group. I continually searched for ways to encourage students to take a critical stance on what they read and in their responses to literature (Franzak, 2006; Lewis, 2000; McLaughlin, 2004). Inspired by the work of Mellor and Patterson (2000, 2004), I wanted to explore ways in which critical practices offer opportunities to deconstruct racist, sexist, and other limiting or oppressive readings of texts and social discourses. At the same time, I was committed to offering this after-school, optional book group as a girl-centered space where adolescent girls held the power within the circle of the book discussion, rather than the presumed knowledgeable other (me, their teacher) guiding the content of the talk (O’Neill, 1993).

Grappling with Gender Issues: Book Group Discussions

The girls had powerful discussions about society’s conflicting messages to young women about sexuality while reading the novel. In the following excerpt, the girls discuss a scene in the novel where one of the young women, already a prostitute, finally earns enough money to return to her home village to see her family and daughter, something the character has dreamed of for years. The girls pondered what would happen if other girls in the brothel were ever able to escape. (Note: all names of participants are pseudonyms.)

Desiree: Even if she did make it back home, I doubt they’d accept her.

Sydney: Yeah, ‘cause there’s the one girl, she’s so excited because she gets to go home. And she’s paid enough to earn her way back home. And then she gets home and no one will, they turn her away; no one in town will talk to her. They turn her away because she’s shamed, even though she didn’t choose that life. Her father sold her and then he won’t take her back because she’s shamed.

Desiree: Yeah, and she like buys things for them and makes sure her dad gets his surgery when he’s in pain, and he still just throws her out like she’s nothing.

Carolina: Yeah and that was so sad and then they told her daughter that she was dead. All she wanted was to see her daughter and her family.

Tammy: They act like she chose this rather than them choosing it for her.

The girls were shocked and dismayed when the character is turned away from her family because of the stigma she bears for her sexual activity and prostitution. The character being discussed was forced into prostitution to keep her family from starving and uses the money she earns to help pay for a life-saving operation for her father. The young woman's family would rather her daughter and the rest of the village think she is dead than know that she has been a prostitute, even though the family pushed her into the brothel.

When Sydney said the word "shamed" she said it scornfully, offering tone and body language to indicate a critique of the girl's family. The girls went on to discuss how the character, who they believed should have been seen as a victim, is instead viewed as a pariah. The group was clearly disturbed by these events and critiqued the notion of a woman's social standing in the community being tied to her sexual activities, especially those she had no control over herself. As 15-year-old Bethany commented, "So what? The men used her and now it's her fault? Why does she have to take all of the blame?"

Nudging Critical Conversations within the Book Group

After this discussion I reflected on ways I might ask nudging, problem-posing questions that would encourage the girls to place situations of gendered shaming and the victimization of women into a larger context—as an adult I knew that the abuse of women and children is not localized to 'other places,' but is a problem across societies. In our next conversation, this issue of gendered relationships arises again, this time around the issue of marriage as presented to Lakshmi by her mother. Lakshmi's father dies and her mother re-marries a man who is an alcoholic and emotionally abusive to the family. The girls discussed in detail how the stepfather contributes little to the family, yet is expected by the cultural values of the setting to be treated with great respect and deference.

Desiree: I know how her mom thinks that they're the best thing you can have and it's better to have a drunk gambler than no man at all, but I figure if she thinks that her daughter is going to be sold into prostitution, I don't know, she may be against what she's been taught to save her daughter.

Carolina: She would want to, but she would be afraid. She thinks she needs him. That happens here too...women choose their husbands over their kids. They're afraid to stand up to them.

Ms. L: I think that's a good point. I mean, we keep saying in this culture...but I think you're right, here, could that happen as well? Could there be situations where women say it's better to have a drunk or a gambler than no man at all? Is this a problem that crosses our experiences?

Desiree: Well, I think some women are like that, but I think the majority...if he's a horrible man and he beats you and he drinks and he gambles your money, then like you're supposed to get rid of him. But the other society they say he's a man, keep him...

Carolina: Another thing you have to think about is that they're from a very poor family. That happens here, too, and in other countries. If a woman is very poor, she doesn't feel like she can leave her husband and especially if they have kids. Like some of my relatives...they have a lot of kids and their husbands might not be great, but what are they going to do? They feel like they need a husband and a dad, even if he's not so great? They feel like they can't leave. How will bills get paid?

Bethany: It's easy to say, "Why don't you leave?" I guess. I never thought of it that way, but that's like blaming them instead of realizing that they are trapped there and wish they could leave.

Ms. L: This is a really interesting 'aha' moment I think we're having. It's making me think about a lot of things we've been talking about. We're talking about the problems being about the society but also might the problems that we're upset about be about bigger things? Carolina mentioned poverty, for example.

Sydney: Maybe. I still think maybe things would be different here. But we do have different laws and we're just a different culture. But it is true that things are messed up in lots of places, even here. And it's true that being poor is not going to make you feel like you have all the choices.

Here the girls began to bridge text-to-world connections as well as draw upon larger discourses and problems such as poverty and its effect on perceptions of power. I entered the discussion in an attempt to repeat girls' statements that highlight some of these cross-cultural connections and discussions of larger themes. I also asked follow up questions by using think-alouds and discussing things I noticed being discussed in the book group. I found such tools offer no guarantee in transitioning conversations to a more critical stance, but they often introduce new ways of interrogating a topic, which can lead students to consider alternative viewpoints.

Throughout their reading of *Sold*, the girls struggled with Lakshmi's role as a woman in society. The girls kept coming back to how it didn't "make sense" that the culture would be this way, and were not themselves able to make sense of cultural values that they saw as inequitable and unfair. They carried on a conversation beyond the transcript about why cultural values privileging men were nonsensical; within the context of the novel the women are the "strength of the family," and daughters are the ones who "actually do something" such as "take care of you when you get older." Men in contrast simply "get pampered by the women."

While the girls expressed their inability to connect to what they saw as “foreign values,” there were occasional references to other systems of inequity around gender that exist in societies, including their own. I did notice the girls seemed to find it much easier to identify and critique inequities in the textual and cultural world of *Lakshmi* than in their lived experiences. The details and storyline of *Sold* are difficult for any reader; it is a beautiful yet painful story of the exploitation of a young girl. Its issues of embodied power (or rather absence of power) are weightier than many of the other young adult novels we read in book group. Still, I hoped the girls would continue to pick up the social discourse that ran through all of the books that we read together indicating that adolescent girls and their bodies are inscribed by issues of culture and power (McWilliam, 2000; Pillow, 2002; Tolman, 2006). At the time, I was still struggling with the balance between my beliefs about critical literature conversations and my ability to support and scaffold such conversations fully with adolescent readers (Short, 2009).

Possible Strategies for Nudging a Critical Stance

Some time has passed since I facilitated this book group and I continue to work with young adult readers, their teachers, and secondary school faculty. Just as the girls in this book group had many ‘aha’ moments about their readings of texts, many of my own ‘aha’ moments have evolved as I have learned to manage the tricky balance of encouraging authentic, student/reader led pedagogies while using my voice to nudge and problem pose within group discussions. Below, I highlight some lessons I learned and ways I approach my role within book groups and literature discussions from the powerful voices of adolescent readers.

Encouraging Critical Stances about Social Issues within Reader-Centered Book Groups and Literature Circles (While Still Encouraging Students to do Most of the Talking):

- When I hear a powerful statement that begins to demonstrate a critical stance on a tough topic, I attempt to repeat it, comment on it, or restate it to the group. When powerful thoughts are shared, they often bear repeating. Ex: “Wow, that’s a really powerful point that Bethany just shared; it’s really making me think about this entire issue in a new way.” I find that drawing out these examples of critical stance brings the group back to a problem posing viewpoint and also emphasizes the importance of such a lens for examining issues of diversity.
- I attempt to encourage summaries of group points by using the pronoun, “we.” Ex: “Something I’ve been thinking about that **we** have been discussing is...” This is important to identify that I am a member of the group, not the leader of the group.
- When students struggle to see issues of discrimination or power as being about larger social discourses rather than the way a particular culture or country is organized, I often try to encourage students to make connections to prior conversations, readings, or experiences. Ex:

“We’re really talking so much about how this frustrates us to see this happening to these characters; where else do we see issues like this that frustrate us?” These are difficult issues for many readers to tackle; scaffolding literary conversations with purposeful questions is one way to support critical conversations with readers.

- Strategically use think alouds to encourage critical stance and problem posing techniques. Ex: “When you shared your opinion, it really made me think about how this might be about a bigger issue or problem. I’m really going to need to continue to think about that some more as I read.”
- In classroom spaces, I often use class time *outside of the book group talk time* to revisit important issues of culture, power, and difference. Mini lessons, writing prompts, and larger class discussions can extend and deepen issues that come up within book group spaces without taking away the student-centered locus of control that is so important within a literature circle or book group.

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A Mirror and a Window: Read Aloud Multicultural Books for Adult EFL Learners

Yang Wang with Yuebo Zheng

The first time I learned about multicultural literature was in a seminar during my doctoral program. Reflecting on my past teaching experiences, I realized that many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Mainland China did not have access to authentic literature, narrative and expository texts that are written in the original, natural language of the authors. Instead, they read textbooks and completed worksheets to learn the English language. Seldom did students have opportunities to take an aesthetic stance to what they read and share their initial responses to literature (Rosenblatt, 1978). Since my early teaching experiences in China I have come to believe readers create meaning through participating in the text (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1982). Each individual reads literary work for himself/herself, which is to say, he/she draws on past experiences and molds new experiences through transaction with the text.

Similarly, I believe that learning a language is learning a culture. This concern, coupled with my desire to incorporate authentic literature into the teaching English as a foreign language to Chinese students, led me to work with Mrs. Zheng in introducing multicultural books to a group of college EFL learners. We selected many picture books that provided information through text and visual representations (Sipe, 1998). Our work together was built on the premise that reading multicultural literature could provide readers with a mirror that reflects their culture and a window into learning about other cultures (Glazier & Seo, 2005). Our inquiry question was: How do adult EFL learners on the mainland of China respond to the read-aloud of multicultural books in the English language class? How does reading aloud multicultural literature affect their learning?

Setting and Participants

Mrs. Zheng taught at a major university in the middle region of China. During this inquiry she had 30 freshmen majoring in English Language and Culture. They met twice a week for her Comprehensive English class. Through an online survey and communications with Mrs. Zheng's students, I learned that half had never read authentic children's literature in English, with others having read one to three classic novels, texts that represent some high standard of quality that has stood the test of time, such as *The Tempest*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Red and Black*, *Shakespeare sonnets*, *Hamlet*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Emma*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Greek mythology*, etc.

I selected books that reflected American and Chinese culture created by American and Chinese American authors and illustrators (see Table 1). My selection criteria were largely based on students' interests, American teachers' recommendations, and my knowledge and experiences of reading multicultural children's and young adult literature. For each book I created questions and activities that paralleled students' understanding of the texts' content. Mrs. Zheng read aloud one book each week and led the discussion. She audio-recorded the read-alouds and kept teaching journals. I interviewed her and three teacher-selected students of varied English language proficiency after we introduced the seven books.

	Title	Genre
Chinese Culture	<i>The Dragon Prince: A Chinese Beauty & the Beast Tale</i>	Fairy tale
	<i>Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China</i>	Folklore
	<i>Taichi Morning: Snapshots of China</i>	Poetry
American Culture	<i>The Relatives Came</i>	Fiction
	<i>My Name is Sangoel</i>	Fiction
	<i>When I was Young in the Mountains</i>	Fiction
	<i>Jazz</i>	Poetry

Reading in Action

The first book we introduced was *The Dragon Prince* (Yep, 1997), a Chinese version of the beauty and beast fairy tale. It is about a farmer's youngest daughter, Seven, who has to marry a dragon in order to save her family. In the end, the dragon turns out to be a prince living in the palace under the ocean. Mrs. Zheng read aloud this book and asked: "How do you think this book represents

Chinese culture? How authentic it is? Why is it authentic? What makes it authentic? What misconceptions does it carry?” The responses of students in their discussion were based on their knowledge and experiences of living in China all their lives, with their comments falling into two categories.

On one side, they reported this book represented Chinese culture in a variety of ways: the traditional images of dragon and characters; justice will always win over evil; the emperor and the prince are symbolized by the dragon; the dragon lives at the bottom of the ocean; women were responsible for embroidering and making shoes in ancient times; the groom paid for a bride; the newly married bride visits her parents several days after the wedding; many parents named their children One, Two, Three, ... ; and the images of the architecture, furniture, clothing, and hairstyle represent Chinese culture.

On the other side, they pointed out elements that concerned them, such as the book was created by an outsider who was born in the U.S.; people respect dragons as the dragon represents power, dignity, royalty, greatness, fortune, etc., and not evil. They also noted that it was unusual that the farmer did not have any sons in his family, with the eldest child supporting the family, not the youngest. Additionally, they observed that an emperor or prince usually has more than one wife in the history, and were troubled by the images that didn't reflect how women had small feet in Qing dynasty due to the foot-binding tradition, not big feet as illustrated in the book. The women and the prince's outfits came from different dynasties. Women followed the “Three Obediences” in ancient China, that is to say, a woman was required to obey her father before marriage, and her husband after marriage, and her sons in widowhood, so it was rare that the farmer's six daughters did not listen to him. One student said,

There's the misconception of the image of dragon. In China, dragon is considered a symbol of power, dignity, royalty, greatness, good luck, etc. Dragon can even bring rain to people when there is a drought. It shouldn't be related with any bad things. And when people meet it, they will consider it to be extremely good luck, showing their utmost respect to it. If there is the chance for them to marry their daughter to it, they will die for joy. But in this story, the dragon is described as a monster who will even kill and eat people for supper, which is American understanding of dragon--- it is considered as being ugly and fierce.

After reading all the selected books about Chinese culture, students responded that they learned about their culture from outsiders' perspectives. They read Chinese American books based on their background and experiences and commented on the cultural authenticity in those books. Looking through the mirror of cultural books, they recognized the cultural elements in those books, discussed those elements as cultural insiders and enjoyed taking the ownership of reading about their cultures in English. Maoxin, a student, said in her interview,

Personally, Chinese culture is complicated. Even many Chinese people are not able to understand the whole of it. Although some foreign authors have mentioned abundant kinds of opinions in the books, it didn't mean they know everything about Chinese culture.

Among the books that represented American culture, the students' favorite was [My Name is Sangoel](#) (Williams, 2009). This book is about a refugee boy, Sangol, who teaches his teacher and classmates how to pronounce his name correctly by making a t-shirt with images associated with his name. We asked these questions after the read-aloud: "What do you think of the book? What does the book tell you? What does it tell you about American culture? How would you like others to name you? How would you like American people to name you? Why? What does your name mean for you? "

Students responded that they learned that people show respect by pronouncing names correctly; people of other countries may not understand your name because your name carries your traditional culture and heritage; Americans are open, warm-hearted, friendly, helpful, and equal. After their discussion, they wrote about their own names and designed ways to help English speakers pronounce their names correctly (see Figure 1).



Figure 1.

Through the window of reading picture books set in the U.S., students learned about American culture from insiders' perspectives. However, this learning is double-sided. They confirmed the cultural elements in these picture books using knowledge they learned from their textbooks,

English language class, and other second-hand sources. They were concerned that they did not have any first-hand sources to check whether the books are authentic. Some students shared, “What I know is book knowledge,” and “I’m not American.” They believed they had to experience the culture and live in the U.S. in order to better understand it.

Discussion

Through reading aloud multicultural picture books, adult EFL learners in Mrs. Zheng’s class became more engaged with texts, more motivated to learn the language, expanded their perspectives on American culture, and reflected on Chinese culture from an outsider’s point of view.

Through participation with authentic multicultural picture books, these EFL students created personal connections and critical responses. Student participants really enjoyed discussing the books, and the questions Mrs. Zheng posed guided them in understanding the books and encouraged deep discussions of the texts in light of cultural explorations. Shiyong, one of the student participants, explained the experience, “We listen and we discuss together. Very active we are. The questions we discussed are interesting.” Students had an opportunity share their voices, make connections and question the texts. Mrs. Zheng reported this change in her students in the following excerpt,

The students became more critical in thinking. They even sometimes pointed out some of the mistakes in the pictures and descriptions . . . it makes me think more deeply about the effective ways of English language teaching and training of students' critical thinking. The students became more critical by not only simply reading and receiving the material but also thinking actively, evaluating what they are receiving, detecting the inconsistency or even mistakes, and even reflecting on the knowledge they've learned or the idea they already hold.

The EFL students enjoyed reading aloud multicultural books and became more motivated to learn the English language. Student participants learned the English language through reading the texts in those multicultural books and the illustrations in the books helped them with constructing meanings. Shiyong said in her interview, “I like the book you choose for us. Picture, culture and the question are valuable.” Another student Tiange said, “I became more interested in learning English. Everyone is more engaged in class.” Some students asked where to purchase the books so they can keep copies and read to their younger siblings and other relatives. They were motivated not only to learn the language but also to teach younger English learners.

The students learned about American culture and reflected on their culture using multicultural books. The read-aloud books about American culture provided the EFL students a window into understanding a culture beyond simply learning English language. One student said,

“Reading more foreign books can help us a lot in English learning and know more about their culture.” Moreover, students reflected on Chinese culture using the books as a mirror. One student explained, “Some (books) remind us the Chinese culture that we forget or ignore.” Another said that reading the books helped her, “know something about American culture, and what China is like in their eyes.” They reported they learned about the differences between American culture and Chinese culture and respected those differences. Mrs. Zheng commented that reading multicultural books,

Let the students know more about American culture, such as values, traditions, idiomatic ways of expression . . . ; aroused the students' interest in English learning; made the class atmosphere more active; made the students more critical in their thinking; improved my teaching ability and enriched the teaching method.

She reflected on her teaching and commented that read-aloud is an effective instructional strategy for EFL learners. In addition, she wanted to seek for more authentic teaching strategies for her students.

Final Reflections

Through our experience of reading picture books to adult EFL learners, we have come to believe EFL teachers could use multicultural picture books to engage students of varied ages learning English language. Teachers could use questions and meaningful activities to stimulate personal responses and develop critical inquiry. In addition, EFL learners could read multicultural literature for information (efferent stance) as well as for pleasure and personal explorations (aesthetic stance) (Rosenblatt, 1978). Additionally, multicultural literature can help learners reflect on their cultural experiences and build global experiences (Short, 2011).

Through student surveys and student and teacher interviews, I learned both the teacher and students wanted to collaborate with American native speakers and discuss their responses to the same books they read because, as one student noted, “we have never been to the U.S.” Reading multicultural literature books encouraged Chinese EFL learners to reach out and explore global experiences.

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Names, Objects, Histories: Intercultural Learning in Action

Kinga Varga-Dobai with Ze Moua and Sarah Kelley Campbell

After several weeks of class, I ask my students, who are pre-service teachers, to share how they felt when they first saw my name on their class schedule. Some students say that my hyphenated name confuses them because they cannot place me in any “foreign name” category. Once a student confessed she was sure that I would have an accent and was worried she would not understand me.

I find this exercise useful because pre-service teachers are surrounded in their school placement classrooms by children who come from different cultural and racial backgrounds, or who have foreign names and accents, or parents who do not speak English. I find that verbalizing their thoughts brings awareness of the relevance of diversity in our schools and how we react when faced with the unfamiliar, often making assumptions about people who sound and look different than us before we really get to know them. Through the use of children's literature and reflective and critical writing activities, it has become important for me as a teacher educator to engage students in the exploration of culture, and to help them recognize how culture shapes their personal beliefs as well as their practice and perspectives as future educators.

Cultural Self Project: Name Stories

What I originally planned to use as a simple introduction turned into a series of activities called the *Cultural Self Project*. Pre-service teachers start these activities during the first class in an early childhood methods course and incorporate them throughout the semester in discussions around children's books, role play, and arts-based activities. All activities investigate the importance of cultural identity. The *Name Story* assignment that two students, Ze and Sarah, and I illustrate in this article relies on the use of children's literature as a conversation starter with a goal of engaging students in learning about culture.

Additionally, the *Name Story* provides an opportunity for students to become familiar with the theoretical concepts of *Other* and *Othering*, notions "that mirror the realities we create through our language, behavior and everyday interactions" (Varga-Dobai, 2009, p. 9). The concept of *Other* according to the postcolonial theorist Bhabha (1994/2004) is built on a strong binary opposition of the *I-Thou* within which the I is associated with the *Self*, and *You (Thou)* represents the *Other* who is different than the *I*.

The short story used in class as an inspiration for pre-service teachers to write our own stories is "My Name" by Cisneros (1991) from the collection of short stories *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros' short story emphasizes the cultural relevance and connotations of a name and evocatively describes how a name can become a reason for *Othering*. By sharing the story of her name, the author shares important details about her family, and her cultural background. The story about the name becomes a critique on gender relations and cultural traditions, and on being different.

Students use Cisneros' story and our discussion about the story as an inspiration for the *Cultural Self Project*. I offer guiding questions: Who named you? What is the significance of your name? How does your name relate to other family members? What troubles or opportunities has your name afforded you? What are some of the names you almost had? What is your nickname or what are the names that you always wanted to be called? But I purposefully leave the project guidelines

vague, and encourage students to rely on their own creativity in putting together their stories.

This article shares three name stories and a reflective conversation between two of my students and myself on how this project engaged us in intercultural learning. Additionally, I include images of objects that relate to the history of our names.

Name Stories

Kinga Varga-Dobai

My grandparents gave me a vase on the day I was born (see Figure 1. Vase). The vase has a misspelled version of one of my last names and my first name engraved on it. Unfamiliar with the spelling of the Hungarian names Dobai and Kinga, the glassblower came up with a new name for me, Dobo and Keny.



My parents exchanged names when they got married so it was not only my mother who took my father's name, Varga, but my father also took my mother's name, Dobai. My sister and I inherited both names automatically with a dash. When I share this information, people usually think that my parents were making a statement about gender equality with this gesture of exchanging names.

According to my parents, exchanging names had nothing to do with a statement on gender equality. My mother wanted to keep her last name because it was a rare Hungarian last name. My father also had an appreciation for the uniqueness of the name, and took it on.

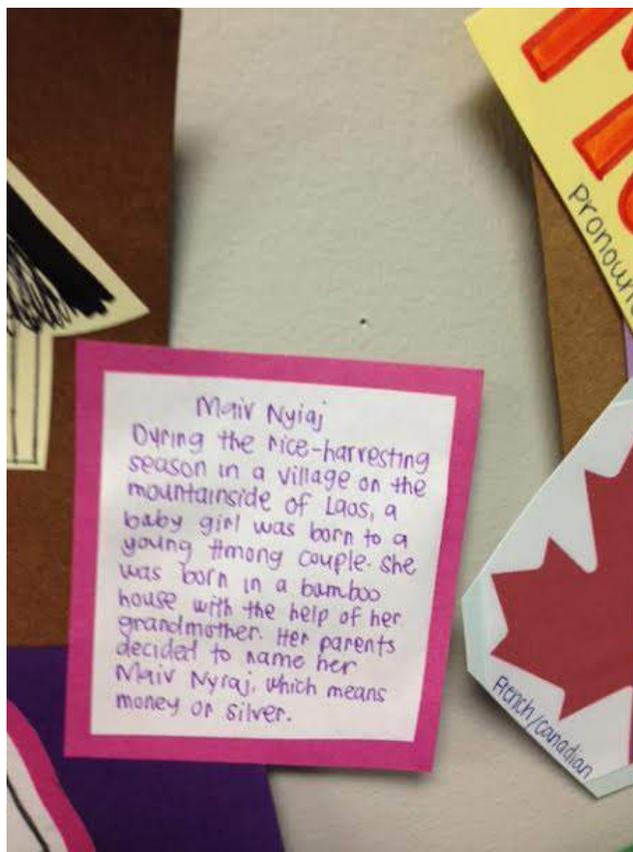
My parents named me Kinga because in the 1970s in communist Romania, choosing a name that did not have a Romanian variant was the easiest way to keep your ethnic identity. Kinga, as an ethnic Hungarian name, was not translatable and did not have variants in other languages. In my Hungarian culture, every first name has a day of celebration, and every morning the host of the public radio starts the day by announcing the name of the day with information about the origin and popularity. My name day is June 24. Nowadays, I often forget; my parents and their e-card in my inbox on every morning of June 24 help me remember.

Ze Moua

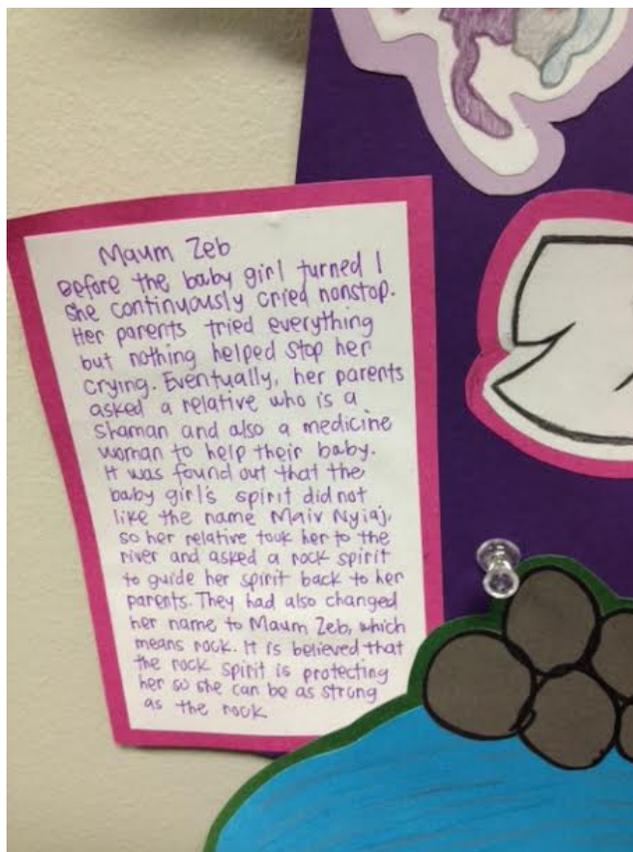
When the Hmong lost the Hmong-Chinese War in the early 1800's, their written language was burned by the Chinese Empire. The Hmong were forced to migrate to Southeast Asia, mainly into Laos. As time went by, they forgot their written language and their history prior to their migration to Laos. Therefore, the meaning or history behind the clan name Muas has been lost.



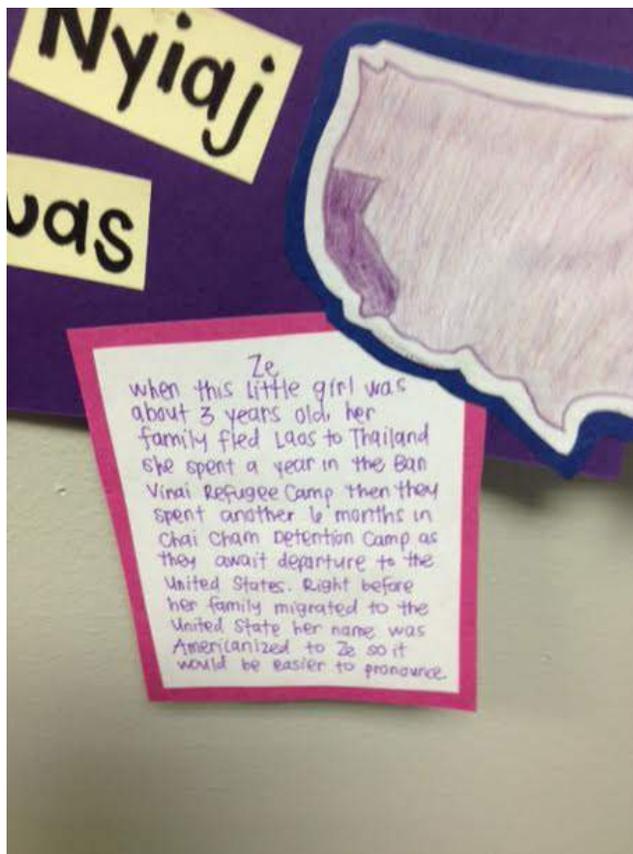
In the dark night of the rice-harvesting season on a mountain-side village of Laos, a baby girl was born to a poor young Hmong couple. She was born in a bamboo house with the help of her grandmother, her parents decided to name her Maiv Nyiaj which means money or silver.



Before the baby girl turned 1, she continuously cried. Her parents tried everything in their power, but nothing helped stop her crying. Eventually, her parents asked a relative who was a Shaman, and also a medicine woman to help their baby. It was found out that the baby girl's spirit did not like the name Maiv Nyiaj, so her relative took her to the river and asked a rock spirit to guide her spirit back to her parents. They also changed her name to Maum Zeb, which means Rock. It was believed that the rock spirit protected her so she would be as strong as the rock.

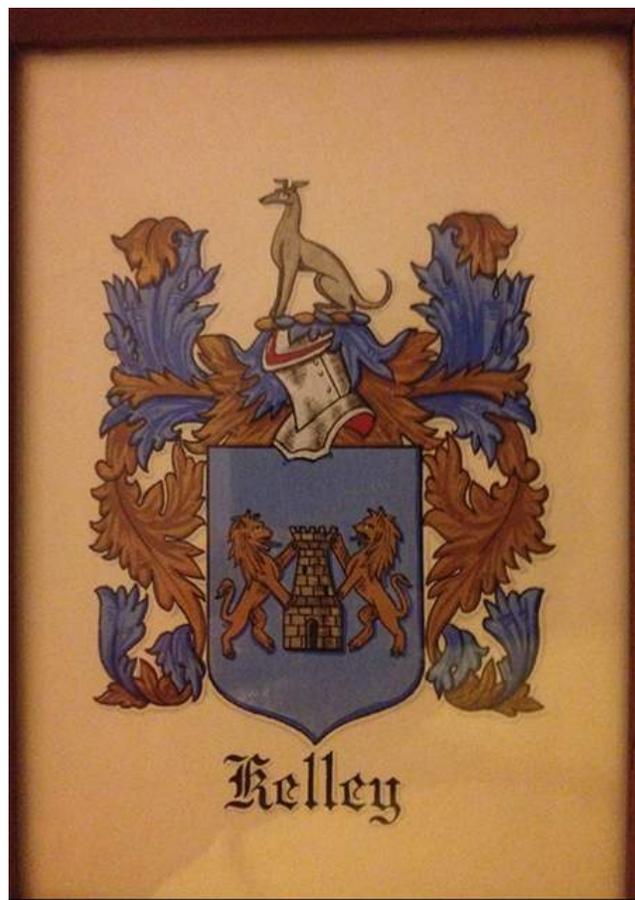


When the little girl was about 3, her family fled Laos to Thailand, she spent a year in the Ban Vinai refugee camp, then they spent another 6 months in Chai Cham retention camp as they awaited departure to the United States. Right before her family migrated to the US her name was changed —Americanized—to Ze (see Figure 6), because they believed it would be easier to pronounce.



Sarah Kelley Campbell:

I have a very close family; all my siblings and our parents live within five minutes of each other. Because of this strong family bond, it came natural to me to keep my maiden name, Kelley, when I got married. Going into this project, I already had some information about my family's Irish heritage, but I never thought that I would be learning so much about history and culture, language, and education by simply researching the story behind my name.



My fathers' full name is Daniel Claude Kelley IV. Upon asking him about our name, he handed me a large binder and said, "Read this; it has some of the Kelley family in it." The oldest documentation that I have found of the Kelley family history is an Amos Newton Kelley whose father was also Amos Kelley, from Galway, Ireland. My grandfather, Daniel Claude Kelley III, did some research on his own. In his journal he talks about Amos Newton Kelley and his father sharing a name. My great great great-grandfather, Dr. Giles Sanford Kelley was a physician in Lawrenceville during the days when doctors accepted things other than money for their service. My dad has a picture of him with a horse and buggy as his car. His son, my great great-grandfather Dr. Daniel Claude Kelley Sr., was also a physician in Lawrenceville. His office was on the square along with two other doctors. I am assuming one of them was his father. His physician building is now the Stark Kelley Plaza on the square, and is still owned by my fathers' family. There is a plaque on the building naming it the Kelley Building.

I also learned that the original spelling of the name Kelley was O Ceallaih which is Gaelic. The Kelley surname is conjecturally descended from the King Colla da Crioch who died in 357 A.D. I learned that my ancestors received land and nobility from Queen Elizabeth during her reign for dropping the *O* in our name. This is evident in their coat of arms that has towers on it symbolizing nobility. There is documentation that I found on a website associated with *Ancestry.com* that states that a Cola O'Kelley was the seventh lord of Screen from 1601 A.D. and was actually granted land and rights by Queen Elizabeth I for dropping the *O* in his surname and thus abandoning his

Irish customs. As I found out from my research, this was common for Queen Elizabeth to do during her reign. Some time before my family migrated to America they got into a conflict with a Scottish Clan and they lost ownership over some of their lands. They were allowed to stay on the land but as tenants and farmers. As the Irish were persecuted the family migrated to Virginia where our family first became established in the Americas.

Through this research, I also learned about some very educated women in my family history, for example, my great great great aunt, Louisa Wickliffe Inzer was among one of the first females to graduate from college in the South or even the nation in 1855 from the Masonic Institute. I learned about family members through this assignment, and am so proud that my heritage is full of freethinkers. These are character traits that my parents have always expected my siblings and me to have and now I know that it comes from who we are as a family. So in the end, that's what my name comes back to, family.

Intercultural Learning in Action

After pre-service teachers present their Name Stories, I ask them to find a partner and share their thoughts about the project and the process they went through to gather information. I also ask them to reflect on this assignment as an intercultural learning experience, specifically how the Name Stories provided them with an opportunity to get to know each other better and learn about a culture that may be different than theirs, and how those stories provided an opportunity to explore the impact of cultural beliefs and traditions on naming and ultimately one's identity. The following dialogue—a transcript of a recorded conversation between Ze, Sarah and I—is an example of a reflective conversation in which we attempt to make connections among our stories while we investigate theoretical concepts such as *Other*, culture and identity, and living on the borderlands of cultures, as well as issues of stereotyping, and discrimination.

Kinga: What is interesting to me is that by simply listening to the stories behind our names, I learned so much about how culture shapes our choices, our interactions and values. Diversity approaches in education often rely on what Short (2009) described as a tourist perspective, one that does not go beyond surface-level information about another culture. I think that by researching the story of our names, we were able to move deeper into this idea of how culture functions and how complex it really is. For example, my name story is also a story about how *Othering* (Bhabha, 2004) works. My parents' decision to name me Kinga was definitely a statement about the value they placed on their ethnic identity in a time and country where they were an *Other*. Choosing an ethnic name for me was a way to ensure that I would keep that ethnic identity. When I first moved to the United States, and as people were trying to make sense of who I was, the fact that I had a hyphenated name, and two last names neither of which was my husband's was unusual. I immediately became an *Other*, as very politely, people would

ask questions about why I chose not to take my husband's American last name and whether keeping my maiden name was a tradition in my country. I usually explained that it was not really a tradition, but giving up my name seemed a little bit like giving up my culture and my language. In order to answer that question, there was always a mini-lecture on history connected to my name. Even today, when I am traveling within the United States, I can never do the self-check in at the airport, because the machine does not recognize the hyphen in my name, or the possibility of two last names. So, that tells you how traditions shape the systems within a culture creating or denying what is possible and what is not.

Sarah: Right, and *Othering* was also there in the way my Irish ancestors were treated because of their difference.

Ze: Yes, and that's also a great story about how domination works. They received land, but in exchange they had to give up their Irish name and heritage, in other words, they had to give up what was different, to blend in.

Kinga: Yes, and you may also call domination a form of *Power*.

Ze: I honestly have never had much thought about this. My name was changed too when I came to this country. During this time, I would introduce myself as Ze. I never thought about why I had negative feelings about my name as a child or a teenager, but it probably had something to do with the fact that I always felt like an *Other*. As a future educator, I would never want a child to feel that way about her foreign-sounding name.

Sarah: I read this article years ago about a woman in Texas somewhere, a lawmaker, who suggested that people of Asian origin change their names, and adopt American names so they would make the process of voting, if I remember it correctly, easier. As a child, you do not necessarily understand that difference is great unless you really are taught to appreciate it. The only way to go against this bias is by empowering the difference and not diminishing it.

Ze: Yes, but what does empowering mean? I think in schools when we celebrate diversity, we often end up talking about specific food items, or even cultural traditions, but more often these approaches reinforce stereotypes, and they only allow for a very narrow understanding of that culture. So, if you grow up learning about culture and diversity in this very narrow way, you will be stuck with those stereotypes and biases because you never have a chance to look into the complexities, rich stories.

Sarah: I think that this assignment about my name and my Irish heritage helped me understand what a rich story is. It really helped me learn about how culture is a part of your name; or even what researching a culture means. I became a little bit of a detective... I spent

hours reading old documents, I emailed people that I did not know, I got in touch with old family members that I last saw when I was a child because this project made me curious.

Ze: I agree, I think that personal connection—or should I say that authentic connection—matters when you learn about culture and yourself as a cultural being. What is hard, however, is to recognize what an authentic connection is. This really changed when I was about 14 years old, and I was able to find that connection or link that helped me see myself as part of the culture. I received a package with a recorded tape in it from the relative who changed my name. In the tape she called me by Me Maub Zeb, Sweet Little Rock. Around the same time, my uncle visited Laos and brought back a video recording of another aunt calling me Me Maiv Nyiaj, Sweet Little Silver. That was when it suddenly hit me that the story behind my name is real, and my aunt who renamed me is a real person who remembers me, thinks about me. Those recordings helped me think about my connection with my own name and my family in a very new way. I felt ashamed that I never appreciated the richness of the naming tradition, and that I felt inferior, less Western, because of them. But, I really needed that connection, my aunt's voice, I guess, to be able to become a part of that story.

I never really shared my name story before this assignment. This assignment actually gave me the courage to talk about my identity and my culture. I know that not many people will understand my story about Shamans and Spirits because it is so different from the western way of life, but it is also who I am. I'm learning to embrace my differences and I'm learning that stories like mine are unique and that I should be proud of it. Although people may not be able to understand or connect with me, they now know my story. They now know that I have a beautiful story behind my name and I am not just that Asian girl, but I am that Hmong girl who was born in Laos, who had to have her name changed so that for one, she could stop crying and for two, she could enter the United States.

Sarah. I wish I had done this research years ago because it might have helped give me more drive to finish my education quicker. My family has had a history of giving back to their community, so I too want to continue this by creating my own classroom community, and by educating kids about the value of serving others and being kind.

Implications

Pedagogies and practices that recognize the impact of culture on teaching and learning support interculturalism (Allan, 2003; Boran, 2001; Rizvi, 2009; Short, 2009), an attitude that enables us to switch perspectives and understand value systems that are different than ours. As Bennett (1986) and Rizvi (2009) argued, however, the understanding of the Other must always begin with the understanding of the Self, and interculturalism cultivates this kind of awareness. The *Name*

Story as a form of storytelling is a powerful and creative tool to delve into such explorations. Additionally, the follow-up conversation--where students analyzed the information they gathered for their project and made connections among their stories through talk--turned this assignment into a more complete and compelling way to examine Culture and Self. The Name Story connected the concept of Self and Culture, and follow-up reflective conversations that I illustrated above helped investigate the various ways in which culture shaped identities.

Although in this particular vignette, the *Name Story* assignment was conducted among pre-service teachers, similar activities could also be used with young children in elementary or early childhood classrooms. In addition to *My Name*, the short story by Sandra Cisneros (1991), picture books that discuss the importance of a naming would be excellent discussion starters on the topic of culture and self and cultural interactions. Picture book recommendations include: [*The Name Jar*](#) (Choi, 2003), [*My Name is Sangoel*](#) (Williams, 2009), [*Three Names of Me*](#) (Cummings, 2006), or [*My Name is Maria Isabel*](#) (Ada, 1995).

Literacy activities such as the *Name Story* provide opportunities to explore culture, and gain a better understanding of how everyday values and points of view are informed by and embedded in cultural interactions—and ultimately help recognize our role in making the world a more just and equitable place.

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Teaching through Story: Using Narratives in a Graduate Ethnicity Course

Michele Ebersole, Huihui Kanahel-Mossman, Alice Kawakami

As instructors of a graduate course on ethnicity and education at a small rural university in Hawai'i, we wanted to share meaningful and relevant discussions of diversity with teachers. Our initial goal was for teachers to understand and implement culturally relevant instructional practices. We realized a broad set of teaching strategies are needed for working with diverse children and so one of the major course assignments was a "Culturally Responsive Teaching Plan." The plan involved teachers collecting information on the ethnicity of their students and teaching strategies that addressed the diversity of students' cultural experiences.

At the end of the course we were disappointed when we analyzed the course assignments and

noticed isolated activities that seemed to merely “add on” to superficial attempts at addressing diversity within the existing curriculum. We noted that teacher perspectives and practices had not changed in thoughtful ways nor did they provide evidence of understanding their responsibility to engage diverse learners. To address our shortcomings as teacher educators, we asked ourselves: How might the course be reframed to support teacher understanding that encourages meaningful implementation of culturally responsive teaching?

This two-part story is our journey of exploration. The first part of the story describes findings based on analysis of teacher perspectives from the first time we taught this course and how we reframed the course. The second part of the story describes what happened when a different group of teachers experienced the course through a narrative lens.

Part I: Problematizing Our Practices

Our intention was to develop culturally responsive practices; however, we were challenged with the knowledge that culturally responsive practice requires teachers to construct a broad base of knowledge that shifts as students, contexts, and subject matters change (Banks, et al., 2005). These practices are further complicated by the fact that students come to the classroom with multiple cultural identities. We realized that rather than provide generic strategies for addressing student diversity, we needed to help teachers find generative ways “to understand the values and practices of families and cultures that are different from their own” (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 495).

Our collaborative group included the course instructor, a co-teaching partner and a teacher education colleague who took on the role of “critical observer” offering a perspective with a bit of distance. Both the co-teaching partner and teacher education colleague often helped the primary course instructor thoughtfully problematize practices. We met a total of five times to look at student work, examine questionnaire responses, conduct a focus group interview, and engage in critical self-reflective discussion to identify areas of need and approaches to improving the course.

The first group of teachers included 18 teacher participants with a range of teaching experiences and teaching contexts in a rural island community. As a result of looking at the course products and participating in a focus group interview, teachers seemed to have three different approaches to teaching:

1. Providing culture–based activities – For these teachers, connections to culture seemed to be superficial attempts to include cultural activities in their classes or perhaps, efforts to give the instructors what they wanted for the assignment.
2. Moving toward culturally responsive perspectives – These teachers tried to connect pedagogy to students’ cultural backgrounds and construct knowledge in ways inclusive of all

students.

3. Being a culturally responsive teacher – This group of teachers believed they were teaching in culturally responsive ways. They believed they had the necessary cultural content knowledge and were actively promoting a perspective of respect for cultural knowledge and practice.

Although some teacher participants actively promoted culturally responsive teaching practices, they demonstrated a sense of distance or removal for application in their teaching contexts. One teacher stated, “If a class is either very culturally diverse or not very (mostly local kids with local culture) it makes CRT (culturally responsive teaching) either challenging or unnecessary.” We wondered if this misconception was due to the common belief that within the island community there is “a unique blend of ethnic cultures” that coexist harmoniously as one “local culture.” Additionally, they may have felt that they represented the same ethnic diversity as their students or that the large interracial and interethnic population of our community makes culturally responsive teaching unnecessary in their teaching contexts.

At this point, as course instructors, we realized that teachers needed to develop understandings grounded within their own cultural context first. While teachers were able to demonstrate an academic understanding, they did not connect readings to their professional lives. We recognized that we should have explored our own beliefs and assumptions with teachers before emphasizing specific methods to “do culturally responsive activities.”

After much discussion and reflection, we tried to organize our thinking about what we had learned. We developed a framework, highlighting three different categories of knowledge: *experiential*, *academic*, and *reflective* (Figure.1).

Experiential knowledge. This reflects lived knowledge or knowledge teachers gain through personal and professional experiences. It is embedded in practice and builds on “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzales, 1992) or lived cultural experiences, which can legitimize the local knowledge teachers bring to a particular context.

Academic knowledge. This type of knowledge represents the core teacher education content as identified in teacher performance standards and increasingly evaluated through teacher performance assessments. This knowledge-*for-practice* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) includes subject matter, pedagogy, instructional strategies and theoretical framing which is essential for teacher development. It also includes knowledge, interpretative frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes needed to effectively teach diverse populations (Cochran-Smith, Davis & Fries, 2003).

Reflective knowledge. This type of knowledge is gained through *critical self-reflection*

upon one's teaching practices. It involves "Reflection-on-action" (Schon, 1983) - thinking about the effects one's action has upon others while taking account of social, political and/or cultural influences (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

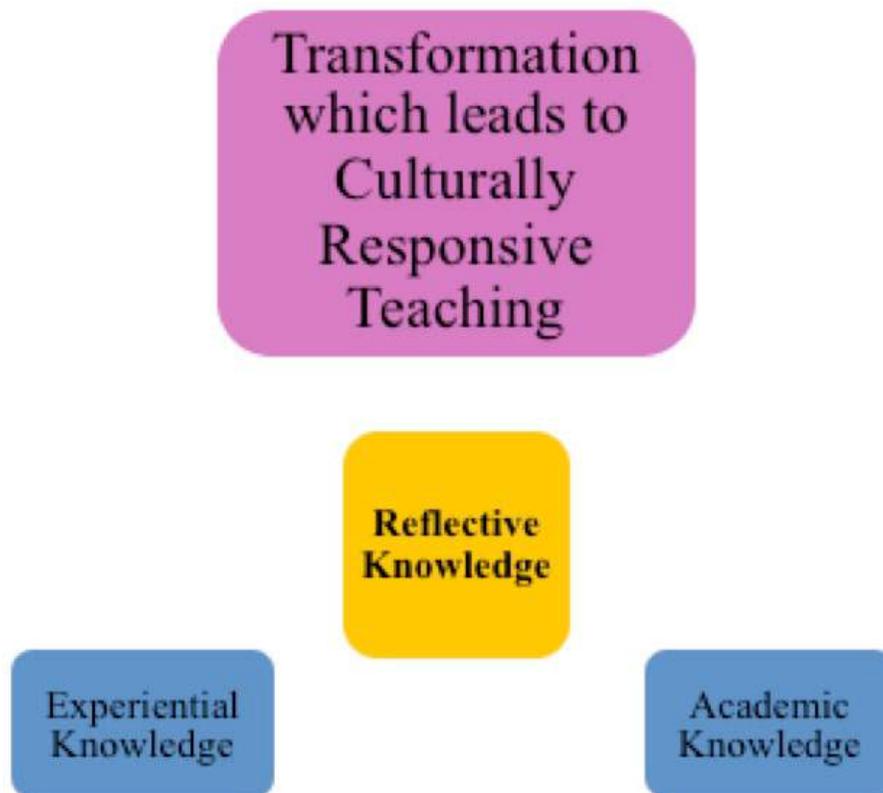


Figure 1. Knowledge and Culturally Responsive Teaching

We believe all three categories are necessary for transformation in leading to culturally responsive teaching. For the purposes of this discussion, we define transformation as "the continuous evolution of one's own understanding and perspectives in order to meet more effectively the needs of all students. It is generally marked by a disruption of values or cultural beliefs through critical reflection with the goal of more socially just teaching" (Schulte, 2004; pg. 709).

In this case, *critical self-reflection* of both *experiential knowledge* and *academic knowledge* is an essential part of the transformation which leads to culturally responsive teaching. By having teacher participants explore their personal and cultural identity, they can tap into their *experiential knowledge* base legitimizing the knowledge they bring to a particular context.

In order for teacher participants to move toward transformation, we needed to provide them with opportunities to *critically self-reflect* on their cultural beliefs and values within their teaching contexts. Initially, we "did activities" without engaging teacher participants in necessary *self-reflection*, thus, they may have felt a sense of distance or removal for their teaching contexts. While we also believe the study of *academic knowledge*, including interpretative frameworks, is

important for teacher growth, we now see that exploration of *experiential knowledge* using *critical-self-reflection* is necessary for teacher development.

Part II - Using Stories to Guide Us

The second time we taught the course, we wanted to immerse teachers into the course content, instead of distancing themselves; thus we reframed the course around “story.” We believed that if they explored *experiential knowledge* and connected their prior knowledge and experience with *academic works* and then engaged in *critical reflection* they might move toward transformation. Rather than the “Culturally Responsive Teaching Plan” that we assigned the first time we taught the course, the final course assignment was to write a personal narrative, “My Story,” based on each individual’s personal and cultural beliefs and prior experiences.

Twenty teachers enrolled in the course the second time. Again they came with a range of experiences and teaching contexts; however, this time they were immersed in the world of story. We took field trips to different places around the community and told traditional, historic, and ancestral stories about each location. These stories explained geological or physical features. Teachers listened to and discussed podcasts and heard personal stories about race and identity. They engaged in literature discussions, reading stories of children and adolescents with cultural experiences both familiar to them and from other places around the world. We read and discussed [*Orchards*](#) (Thompson, 2011), [*A Long Walk to Water*](#) (Park, 2010), [*Night of the Howling Dogs*](#) (Salisbury, 2007), [*My Name is Parvana*](#) (Ellis, 2012) and [*Inside Out and Back Again*](#) (Lai, 2012). These stories were selected to generate discussions about culture, race, and identity.

Teachers also participated in daily theoretical readings and reflections. These *academic* readings introduced historical perspectives and were selected for teachers to begin interrogating ideological assumptions about teaching beliefs and practices.

Teachers participated willingly, but a turning point for many of them occurred mid-term after they heard the story of a guest speaker from the Micronesian community. Micronesians are the most recent immigrant group to the island community and as a group they are often stereotyped as low status with high rates of unemployment and low socioeconomic status; however, the power of the speaker’s stories opened teachers’ eyes. Many were experiencing a rapidly growing population of Pacific Islanders in their classrooms, and so reading the stories of these Pacific Island students, who are often marginalized and mistreated, was shocking to them. Some had not previously considered their own biases and stereotypes. One teacher commented,

The guest speaker’s story was more than just informative; it seemed I went through a mental change. My eyes or maybe my heart changed. I had all these misconceptions and prejudice towards the Micronesian culture. It was difficult for me to see otherwise. The YouTube videos

and his story helped me to understand what it was probably like for my ancestors being immigrants in their new home. I've been so quick to judge and complain about the seemingly irresponsible actions of these families that I generalized many of their actions and decisions as cultural values and beliefs. This gave me an opportunity to not only reflect on my own preconceived notions but also the need for me to educate others.

The power of listening to and hearing the story of the struggles facing the most recent immigrants in the community brought about a sense of empathy in many teachers. It moved some of them to acknowledge how difficult it is for their students who have come from a culture differing from our local culture.

These *experiences* along with *academic* readings and discussions helped teachers examine and challenge some of their assumptions. They encouraged a sociocultural consciousness and an interest in learning more about the backgrounds of their students. Teachers began to *critically reflect* on their *experiential knowledge*. A middle school teacher shared,

To be completely transparent, when I heard the course title "Ethnicity and Education," I was somewhat dreading the week to come. Every professional development course or class I've taken dealing with ethnicity approached it from a superficial point of view and I often times left with a decreased sense of self or a one-sided perspective of culture. Instead, what I found throughout the course this week is that race can be a somewhat fabricated idea formed by people within a particular area or context. What I am taking away is that culture plays a huge role in my life and my students' lives. They come in with a multitude of experiences and customs that I may directly or indirectly embrace or overlook. There is no set formula for cultural pedagogy and it would be difficult to define what makes a classroom culturally responsive. The dynamic nature of culture in itself lends to the endless possibilities of addressing and incorporating race and ethnicity in the classroom.

Teachers took on new perspectives as they experienced the cultural stories that were integrated into course through field trips that generated place-based stories and storytelling, interviews with marginalized immigrants in the community, and reading, responding to, and discussing both academic and multiethnic children's literature. All of these experiences were considered through *critical self-reflection*. One elementary school teacher commented,

My personal learning process has been one of self-reflection. I began this journey with the concept of myself, "Who am I? What do I value? What do I believe?" Then we learned more about this place and its culture. We also turned to the stories of others and how they're so valuable to understanding race, ethnicity, and culture. There were also interesting articles, research, and presentations that helped to again mold the concept of identity and culture. My

perspective of others and myself has changed through stories, the Micronesian culture, and the bridging cultures framework.

Through the power of story, teachers began to move toward transformation. Another elementary school teacher concluded,

We need to be conscious of how we deliver instruction, the choices we provide, the behavioral expectations we set up, and the systems of accountability that we use with our students, including assessment and evaluation. All students are different and have their own personal stories. It is our job as educators to provide support for individuals as needed and to facilitate their learning process. If we do this, we can bring about change as our students succeed.

As course instructors, we look forward to teaching this course for a third time. We continue to search for ways to *critically self-reflect* upon cultural identity, the role identity plays in instructional decisions and how those decisions influence teaching diverse learners. We continue to examine and reflect upon our teaching practices. We also realize the urgency of committing to teaching in culturally responsive ways that inspire and motivate teachers to do the same within their classrooms.

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