ISSN 2577-0551

WOW STORIES

CONNECTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM

VOLUME IV, ISSUE I

November 2011

Building Intercultural Connections through Literacy Community
Explorations of Global and Multicultural Literature

Worlds of WORDS

ARIZONA College of Education

wowlit.org

Volume IV, Issue 1

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.*

Contents

Spokane, Washington Literacy Community

Building Intercultural Connections through Literacy Community Explorations of Global and Multicultural Literature

Research on educational innovation indicates that when educators connect collaboratively around a focus, they are more likely to transform their practice and to sustain a particular innovation. Their commitment to the group as well as the support and challenge that develop through dialogue and shared explorations provide a generative context for innovation. In 2010-2011, World of Words promoted this form of collaboration by awarding grants to four literacy communities. These literacy communities were made up of five to ten teachers that met regularly to explore how to use global and multicultural literature in their classrooms. Community members were also provided an online forum where they could share their explorations and support each other across the different groups. In turn, each literacy community wrote at least one vignette for *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*.

This effort by Worlds of Words was supported by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding, an organization that has been helping young people in the United States learn about world regions and global issues since 1966.

In this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* three literacy communities share their explorations of how to use global and multicultural literature with children. The issue begins with four vignettes from a literacy community based in Maryland. In “Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature: An Introduction to Our Work” Prisca Martens and Ray Martens provide an overview of their project goals and introductory engagements, which included exploring how global picture books support children’s intercultural understandings of themselves and others as cultural beings and the role art plays in their developing understandings. Michelle Hassay Doyle shares how her first graders explored family in “"That's NOT how it is in my family!": Children Develop Intercultural Understandings of Themselves and Others.” Jenna Loomis describes how her first graders investigated the idea of taking action across the globe in “He inspired others to change his world”: An Exploration of Taking Action through Reading and Writing.” Finally, in “Reading and Creating with Art: Picture Books in the Art Classroom” art teacher Stacy Aghalarov describes how she facilitates comprehension of global picture books through examining artistic techniques.

The next four vignettes come from a literacy community in Oklahoma. Seemi Aziz provides an overview of the literacy community in “Literature about Immigration and Middle Eastern Cultures.” Melanie Bradley and Zeinab Mohamed share how they supported first graders as students explored books representing Middle Eastern and Arab cultures in “Cross-Cultural Understanding through Children’s Literature.” In “First Grade Explorations of Global Literature about the Middle East,” Jackie Iob discusses how her ethnically and linguistically diverse students began developing global awareness and sensitivity while discussing several books depicting Middle Eastern or Arab cultures. The last vignette from this community is “Third Grade Connections to Middle Eastern and Arab Cultures” by Rhonda Hover. Hover shares how she used literature circles with a small group of struggling readers to confront ignorance and stereotypes about Muslim cultures.

The last set of vignettes is from a literacy community based in Spokane, Washington. Marilyn Carpenter provides an overview of the project in “Providing the Books for Literacy Community Classrooms.” Carpenter describes how she chose books for community members to use and discuss with their students. In “Redefining Normal in the Lives of Second Graders,” Melissa Carpenter shares how she helped students explore their personal culture, focusing on the concept of family. Next, three teachers, Abby Spencer, Lindsay Wing, and Lacey Grummons, describe engagements with children’s literature that supported inquiry into personal culture in “Exploring Personal Culture with Young Children.” Finally, Meg Baker, Charlotte Streit and Kimberly Wade discuss

using global literature in a unit on Japan in "A Cross-Cultural Study of Japanese & American Culture."

In our next issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* we will share vignettes from the fourth literacy community. This will be followed by an unthemed issue in the spring of 2012. Think about how you connect students of all ages with literature in ways that promote intercultural understandings. Consider sharing your innovative practices by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.

Janine M. Schall

Editor, *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*

Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature: An Introduction to Our Work

By Prisca Martens and Ray Martens

In spring 2011 seven teacher colleagues joined us in a study group to explore using global literature to build children's intercultural understandings. We were particularly interested in learning how global picture books support children's intercultural understandings of themselves and others as cultural beings, their understandings of their roles and responsibilities for taking action to make the world a better place, and the role art plays in their developing understandings. We focused on both the written and the pictorial texts in these books. Our group was comprised of two first grade teachers (Michelle and Jenna), four second grade teachers (Jan, Debra, Brooke, and Rachael), the school art teacher (Stacy), and us as university researchers. We met as a group every few weeks to discuss global literature, what we were seeing and experiencing with the children in the classrooms, and issues that arose. In this introduction we set the stage for the vignettes about our work by explaining our purposes and goals and how we got started. Then, Michelle, Jenna, and Stacy will share some of our experiences with the children around global literature.

Why Global Literature?

Several factors motivated us to enter into our exploration of the development of first and second grade children's intercultural understandings related to identity and taking action through global

literature.

First, we felt the need to enhance children's global awareness. With occasional exceptions, the literature the children primarily read was multicultural, set and published in the United States. While very rich, this literature focused the children on life in the U.S. Given the ever-increasing interconnectedness of the world economically, politically, and socially, we wanted the children to develop understandings of different cultures and ways of life and other issues and realities around the globe (Allan, 2003; Banks, 2004). We believed that consciously including international books would provide rich opportunities to discuss people, life, and experiences in global cultures with the children. Our hope was that through discussions of and experiences with global literature children would broaden their understandings of culture, develop a pluralistic perspective, value ways of living/being around the world, and understand interdependence among people/nations (Allan, 2003; Banks, 2004; Short, 2009), thereby strengthening their intercultural understandings.

Our second motivation for the study was the rich diverse population of the school. The student body (537 students in grades PK-5) was 41% European American; 29% African American; 17% Asian/Pacific Islander; 13% Hispanic; and, <1% Native American. Each of the classrooms that participated in our study had 22-23 students and included one to three students who were born in another country (i.e., Nigeria, India, Nepal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Korea, Cuba) and 3-10 who spoke languages other than English at home (i.e., Greek, Nepali, Telugu, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Hindi, Afrikaans, Yuruba, Tagalog, Swahili). In addition, each classroom had one to six children who were born in the United States but whose families immigrated within the past fifteen years. We knew the diverse languages and experiences the children brought with them to school would add to the discussions of global literature. We also thought that reading and hearing literature from places around the world where their own and their classmates' families originated would connect children to the books in personal ways.

Our final motivation was to continue our exploration of the written text and art in picture books with children. For several years Michelle, Jenna, and Stacy have collaborated with us to study how helping children learn the language of art and read the artistic meanings represented in the pictorial text (illustrations), along with reading the written text, related to the children's thinking and comprehension. We've found that children move seamlessly between the sign systems of art and written language to build deep understandings of story and that they are attentive to details, think critically, and use the written and pictorial texts to make strong inferences (Croce et al., 2009; Maderazo et al., 2010; Martens et al., 2010). In addition to continuing this work using global literature, we wanted to explore how the children's representations of the intercultural understandings they expressed in written language related to the understandings they expressed through their artwork.

Before explaining the specifics of what we did, in the next section we'll share how we got started and oriented the children to reading global literature and thinking globally.

Getting Started

To contextualize our focus on global literature, we purchased a large world map (approximately 2' x 3') for each classroom. We laminated the maps and mounted them on foam core so they could simultaneously be easily accessible to the teachers and children for close up work but could also be moved to different places in the classrooms. The teachers also created and posted timelines in their classrooms. In some classrooms the timelines stretched across the wall over the chalkboard and in others they were on a large poster.

The teachers explained to the children that over the coming months they would be reading books from different places around the world. They also explained that probably everyone's family moved to the United States at some point. The teachers highlighted children who had recently moved and talked about how their own and other families had moved a long time ago. To learn when and from where families came, the teachers asked children to have their parents complete and return a survey. The children took the surveys home, accompanied with a note explaining what we were doing and asking the parents to reply with the following information:

Name: _____

Where was your child born?

_____

In what country/countries did your family originate?

_____

Approximately when did your family/families immigrate to the United States?

_____

What language(s) are spoken in your home?

_____

As the children brought back their survey forms we created charts that summarized the information. Here is an excerpt of one of the second grade charts:

Name	Born	Origination	Immigration	Languages (and English)

Xxx	Maryland	England, Mongolia	1700s	English
Xxx	Maryland	Ireland, England	1800s	English
Xxx	Maryland	Germany, Ireland, Italy, Philippines	1920s, 1970s	Tagalog (Filipino)
Xxx	Indiana	Yugoslavia	1904	English
Xxx	New York	Jamaica, Ireland	1919	English
Xxx	U.S.A.	Korea	1993	Korean
Xxx	Nepal	Nepal	2005	Napali
Xxx	Maryland	Germany, France, Italy, Ireland	Mid 1800s	English
Xxx	California	India	1998	Telugu
Xxx	Maryland	Africa	1600s	English

Table 1. Chart sharing survey results.

The teachers plotted the families' origins on their maps and connected a piece of string from a picture of the child outside of the map to his/her family's place of origin. The map from Michelle's classroom is found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Michelle's map with her students' family origins plotted.

The teachers also entered the child's name on the timeline to indicate when the family immigrated to the U.S. Figure 2 shows an example of one of the timelines from second grade.

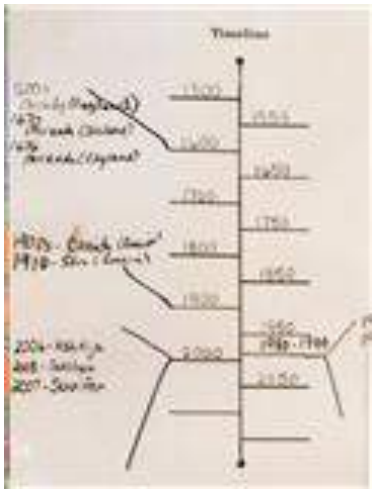

Figure 2. A second grade timeline indicating when the children's families came to the U.S.

The teachers also included information on their own family origins and we added our information to the maps and timelines in each classroom as well.

Not surprisingly, plotting where their families were from and when was a difficult concept for some parents and many of these young children. Quite a few parents returned the information sheets stating their family originated in the United States or Maryland or Texas, etc. We worked with these parents to explain the information we wanted.

Many children struggled with this concept too. When the teachers plotted the information on the map/timeline, children would insist, "But I was born here!" Ki, a first grader in Michelle's class, was one of those children. For four months he insisted his family was from the United States. Then

one morning he came in and announced, “OH! My family started in Africa, Mrs. Doyle! My mom said so. Now I get it!” It was evident from Ki (and other children) that discussions around family, family origins, and what happened in the years before the children were born occurred in homes. Ki beamed as he finally connected his picture on the side of the map to Africa with a piece of yarn.

Plotting family origins on the map raised other issues. During one of Jenna’s map discussions with her first graders, she plotted Elinah’s and Alice’s families, both of whom had origins in Kenya. Joe asked, “If they’re both from Kenya, why do they have different colored skin?” Jenna explained that both of Elinah’s parents were from Kenya while one of Alice’s parents was from Kenya and the other from Europe. As the discussion continued, the children made connections and built their understandings together. This opened the door to discussions related to identity that Jenna built on as she read and discussed the global literature with her students.

Organizing Our Study

To explore the children’s intercultural understandings of themselves and others as cultural beings and support their understandings of taking action to make the world a better place we created two text sets of global literature, one for each focus. Each text set also highlighted an art concept. For the Identity Text Set we focused on the artists’ use of color to represent feelings and emotions and line to represent movement. In the Taking Action Text Set the art focus was contrast, how artists use differences in color or lack of color, contrast of pattern, or contrast of shape and line to express meaning.

Ray and Prisca were in the classrooms to read and discuss some of the books and the teachers read others with their children. Whenever a book was read, we highlighted the country in which the story was set and/or published on the map and whose family was from that area of the world.

Our usual procedure was to read the books on a document camera so the children could follow the written and pictorial texts clearly. After each reading we invited the children to respond to the story orally. Through these discussions the children constructed rich meanings together, building on each other’s insights and connections. As the discussions and responses progressed, we went back to the book to examine two or three illustrations and talk with the children about why the artist made the particular decisions he/she did to represent story meanings. These explorations of the art further enhanced the children’s understandings of the stories. Following the oral responses to the story meaning, we invited children to explore and connect to aspects of the story using art concepts as the artist did. Children usually created these artistic explorations in their sketchbooks.

The children carried their sketchbooks between their homeroom and art instruction where Stacy built on the concepts discussed in the classroom. Sometimes Stacy went back to stories the children already read and sometimes she introduced a book. Sometimes too the children would create a

piece of artwork with Stacy and then write about it in their classroom.

In the following articles we talk more specifically about our discussions around global literature for each text set and the art connections. Michelle Hassay Doyle discusses and provides examples of the children's work and thinking with the Identity Text Set and Jenna Loomis shares discussions and children's work related to the Taking Action Text Set. Stacy Aghalarov discusses how she worked with the teachers and connected her art instruction to the global literature we were reading.

References

Allan, M. (2003). Frontier crossings: Cultural dissonance, intercultural learning and the multicultural personality. *Journal of Research in International Education, 2*(1), 83-110.

Banks, J. (2004). Teaching for social justice, diversity, and citizenship in a global world. *The Educational Forum, 68,* 296-305.

Croce, K., Martens, P., Martens, R., & Maderazo, C. (2009). Students developing as meaning makers of the pictorial and written texts in picturebooks. In K.M. Leander, D.W. Rowe, D. Dickinson, M. Hundley, R. Jimenez, & V. Risko (Eds.), *58th National Reading Conference Yearbook* (pp. 156-169). Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference.

Maderazo, C., Martens, P., Croce, K., Martens, R., Doyle, M., Aghalarov, S., & Noble, R. (2010). Beyond picture walks: Revaluing picturebooks as written and pictorial texts. *Language Arts, 87*(6), 437-446.

Martens, R., Martens, P., Croce, K., & Maderazo, C. (2010). Reading picturebooks: Integrating the written and pictorial texts to construct meaning. In P. Albers & J. Sanders (Eds.), *Literacy and the arts, multimodality, and 21st century literacies: Perspectives in research and practice from the Commission on Arts and Literacies* (pp. 187–210). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Short, K. (2009). Critically reading the word and the world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird*, (2), pp. 1-10.

Prisca Martens is a Professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Towson University in Towson, Maryland, where she teaches literacy courses. She can be contacted at pmartens@towson.edu.

Ray Martens is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at Towson University in Towson Maryland, where he teaches courses in art education. He can be contacted at

rmartens@towson.edu.

"That's NOT how it is in my family!": Children Develop Intercultural Understandings of Themselves and Others

By Michelle Hassay Doyle

This vignette describes explorations with students arising from a literacy community that examined how global picture books support children's intercultural understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings. Please see Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature: An Introduction to Our Work *by Prisca Martens and Ray Martens for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

To help the children think about what makes them unique cultural beings we created a text set of books that focused on different aspects of who they are, including their relationships, ethnicity, gender, language, etc. (Geertz, 1973). With an understanding of themselves, we believed they would also value, respect, and celebrate the uniqueness in each other. Banks (2004) states, "Self-acceptance is a prerequisite to the acceptance and valuing of others" (p. 302).

We began this exploration of identity with families and what makes each family unique and special. We did this for a several reasons. First, children's families play a major role in who they are as individuals. Family histories, traditions, religious beliefs, experiences, etc. all influence children's values and perspectives of themselves, each other, and the world. Second, as described in the introductory vignette, the children were bringing information on their family origins that we were plotting on the world maps and timelines. Discussions of how families are alike, different, and special were evolving naturally out of that. Finally, the first grade social studies unit at the time was on families and in second grade was on neighborhoods which also made a focus on families a logical starting place.

In this article I'll share highlights from our focus on families and self and how the children demonstrated their intercultural understandings through their experiences with global literature.

Our Families Are Unique and Special

Once we knew we would be studying children's intercultural understandings in the spring, Jenna and I decided to send the family origin survey to the parents of our first graders in early December. We added a question to those Prisca and Ray listed in their vignette that asked parents about their family's cultural traditions during the holiday season. The parents eagerly responded. Yesha's mother, for example, explained that they celebrated Dwali and sent us background information to

use. During the week before winter break we focused on different fall/winter cultural traditions, including Dwali, Las Posadas, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza. When we discussed similarities and differences between the different celebrations, the children pointed out that all of them involve light.

In addition, in my classroom, with the help of Mrs. Nelson, my room parent, the children brought in family recipes that were special to them around the holiday season. I introduced this by sharing a recipe that originated in Czechoslovakia, the country that my family originated from, and that my mother and I make each December. The children also wrote about and illustrated special traditions their families keep throughout the year and how they celebrated them. These experiences helped us begin discussions of culture.

After winter break we read *You and Me Together: Moms, Dads, and Kids Around the World* (Kerley, 2010). Before reading the book, we brainstormed on a web what children knew about families. The children suggested topics such as families have different people, come from different places, do different things, and have friends. We asked the children to look for other information as we read the book. The children made rich comments and connections. One page, for example, contains a photograph of a young girl and her mother whose cheeks are smeared with different colors. When the second graders were reading the book, two girls, one from Nepal and the other from India, simultaneously blurted out, "Holi!" They explained to their classmates that Holi is a festival that celebrates the arrival of spring and then shared some of their experiences.

Following reading the book, we went back to the webs and the children added new insights, such as families work together, eat different foods, wear different kinds of clothes and jewelry, and have different religions. As we discussed the book further in my class, other interesting conversations emerged. Brendan, for example, commented, "My mom takes care of the family and my dad makes the money" to which Tate quickly responded, "That's NOT how it is in my family!" Our discussions helped the children appreciate the uniqueness of their own families.

At the conclusion of this discussion we asked children to create heart maps in their sketchbooks. After drawing a large heart, the children drew or wrote inside the heart what was unique and special about their families. Their heart maps included such images as family members, places their families go (i.e., beach, amusement park), things they do together (i.e., play board games or sports, watch television), favorite foods they eat (i.e., pizza, chicken), and religious places they attend together (i.e., church, synagogue, temple). Brendan's (see Figure 1) and Kaylie's (see Figure 2) heart maps are examples.

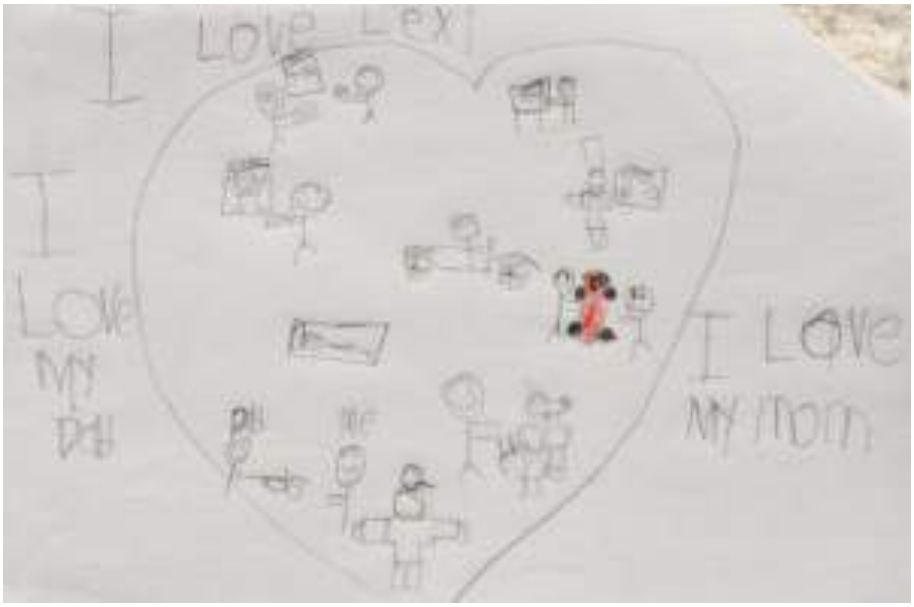

Figure 1: Brendan drew things his family does together, such as vacation, take care of the pets, and eat. He surrounded his heart map with statements of love for his parents and sister.

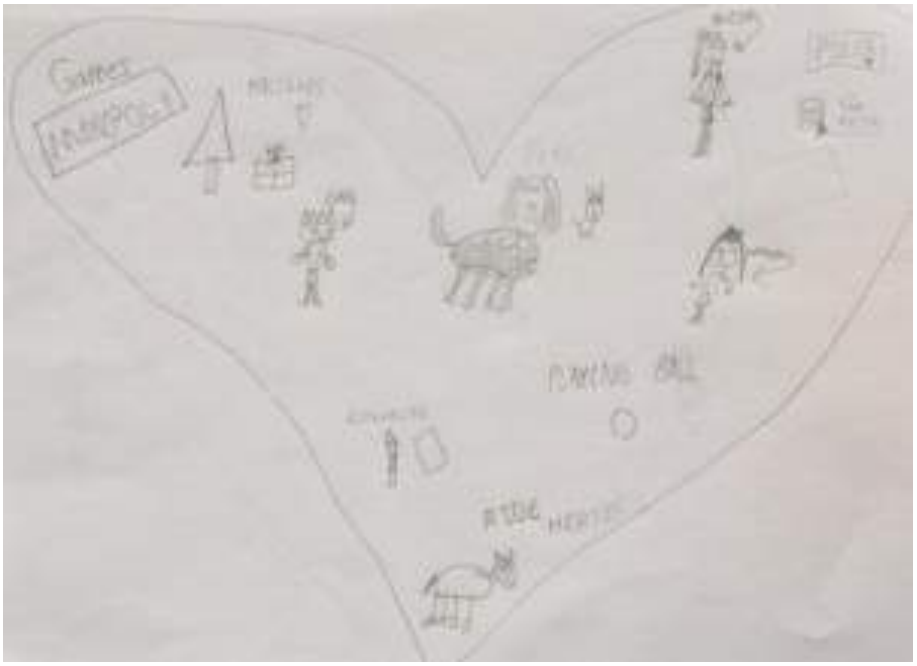

Figure 2. Kaylie included holiday celebrations, games her family plays together, family members, etc., in her heart map.

We Are Each Unique and Special

Suki's Kimono (Uegaki, 2005) was the first book we read to help children consider aspects of who they are in both observable ways others can see as well as inwardly in their hearts. Suki is a young girl who proudly wears her Japanese kimono and geta (wooden clogs) from her grandmother on the first day of school, even though her older sisters discourage her because those clothes aren't "cool". To allow the children to reflect and inquire, we read the book through and then asked for their thoughts. The discussions in each classroom were rich! In my classroom Prisca at one point

asked, “Why don’t Suki’s sisters want to walk with her?” Kaden responded, “They are embarrassed by what she is wearing.” Linda immediately blurted out, “Like some big sisters ignore you, just like my sister ignores me.” Later, when Prisca asked, “Why didn’t Suki fight back when her classmates teased her?” Davis stated, “She was proud she got [the kimono] and didn’t care if anyone else didn’t like it!”

Following the discussion, Ray highlighted several illustrations to help the children think about the decisions the artist Stephane Jorisch made when she created the illustrations. On the page where the taiko drummers are performing, for example, he asked the children how the drums sounded and how they knew that. The children talked about Jorisch’s use of color splotches and diagonal lines (i.e., swinging lanterns, blowing hair) to show the loudness of the drums at the celebration and the energy their noise created. On the page where Suki is dancing the children described how they knew Suki was moving and what she was feeling.

To help the children think about the beliefs and values Suki, her classmates, and her sisters held in their hearts, we introduced the children to cultural x-rays (Short, 2009). Ray outlined three figures on a large piece of paper, labeled the one in the middle “Suki”, and each of the other two “Others” and “Sisters”. We asked the children what was important to Suki and they responded with statements like, “she loves herself”, “she likes her kimono,” “she loves her obachan (grandmother),” and “she is happy and proud” which we wrote in Suki’s heart on the outline. When we asked what was important to the others the children said, “They wanted everyone to look the same” and her sisters “wanted to be cool and look like everyone else”. On the outside of the figures the children suggested physical and visible features of Suki, her sisters, and the others that we drew. The children’s comments indicated to us that they were distinguishing between outer visible aspects of culture and inner aspects of who they are.

We asked the children to think about something they are proud to wear either at school or someplace else and draw that in their sketchbooks, thinking also about line and color. Many children picked up on wearing something “cool” and drew clothes such as sports uniforms, favorite shirts, etc. Davis drew himself in his favorite jersey (see Figure 3) and wrote, “This is me, Davis. I like my jersey. [My jersey] is cool to me. by Davis.”

Figure 3. Davis is proud to wear his jersey.

Yesha drew herself in a dress and wrote, “I would want to wear a dress because it is cool to wear it. But my mother won’t let me because it is not summer if it was summer. But in summer we have a summer vacation. That is the only time when I can wear it but I can wear it in the weekend” (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Yesha drew herself proudly wearing a dress.

Other children drew clothes related to their cultural backgrounds. Richard, a first grader, is Korean and wrote, “I wish I could wear my Hanbok [Korean traditional clothing] to school but I can’t because it is not a special occasion.” Grant, a second grader, drew himself wearing African clothes (see Figure 5). When asked about his drawing he said,

> *That’s me and I have African clothes. I only have one but it’s really special so I don’t wear it to school much but I really want to. My mom says no because people will laugh at me. I’m dancing an African dance [that] someone from Africa showed me. I showed I was dancing by*

putting lines and my feet up and my arms are moving. I feel happy because I like wearing my African clothes.

Figure 5. Grant drew himself doing an African dance while wearing his African clothes.

Figure 6. Harita drew herself wearing her ghagra choli that she wears on Eid and other special occasions

Harita drew herself wearing her ghagra choli and said, “The scarf is normally red and my dress is green with patterns on it. I wear it on Eid or other special times” (see Figure 6).

For the other books in the text set we followed a similar procedure of reading, letting the children respond and orally discussing the story, examining the artist’s use of line and color, and inviting the children to respond in their sketchbooks. These books included *Sebastian’s Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2005), *Guji Guji*, (Chen, 2004), and *Am I a Color Too?* (Cole & Vogl, 2005).

Sharing Who We Are

After reading the books in this text set we provided the children with two opportunities to share their understandings of themselves and who they are as cultural beings. First, each child created a cultural x-ray. The children had some understanding of cultural x-rays from those we created together with *Suki’s Kimono* and other stories we’d read. The teachers further demonstrated cultural x-rays by doing think-alouds to create their own. Then each child received an 11” x 17” piece of paper with the outline of a figure and set to work.

The second opportunity to represent their understandings of themselves came after we read *Millie's Marvelous Hat* (Kitamura, 2009), following the cultural x-rays. In the story, when Millie doesn't have enough money to purchase a hat she sees in a store window, the salesman finds her the perfect hat she can afford: one that she imagines that changes to what she is thinking and feeling. After reading the book, we invited the children to draw themselves (on 11" x 17" paper) wearing a hat that showed who they are and what is special about them.

The cultural x-rays and hats proved to be powerful ways for the children to express their understandings. While there usually was some overlap in the information provided in each engagement, the x-rays and hats also evoked different kinds of information. The hats usually contained images of activities, people, foods, etc., that were important to the children while the x-rays typically contained more writing. The writing not only named important people and things but also listed characteristics the children attributed to themselves. Many children also thoughtfully chose colors and lines in their x-rays and/or hats to symbolize aspects of who they are. Through the cultural x-rays and hats the children explored, wove together, and represented their strengths, interests, backgrounds, talents, and the influences that make them who they are. The hats and cultural x-rays were also eye-opening for us and provided windows to knowing the children more deeply.

Below are examples of the cultural x-rays and hats. Since a summary of the children's explanations cannot possibly capture the richness of their thoughts, audio files of them talking about their work are attached.

First Grade Examples: Brendan and Jordan

See Figure 7 for Brendan's cultural x-ray and a clip of Brendan discussing his work. Figure 8 shows Brendan's hat and Brendan talking about what he drew.

Figure 9. Brendan's Cultural X-Ray

Audio Clip

Figure 8. Brendan's Hat

Audio-Clip

In Figure 9 Jordan explains his cultural x-ray. See Figure 10 for his hat and description of his work.

Figure 9. Jordan's cultural x-ray. Audio-Clip	Figure 10. Jordan's Hat Audio-Clip

Second Grade Examples: Connor and Nina

Connor talks about his cultural x-ray in Figure 11. He explains his hat in Figure 12.

	
Figure 11. Connor's cultural x-ray. Audio-Clip	Figure 12. Connor's Hat Audio-Clip

See Figure 13 to hear Nina talking about her cultural x-ray and Figure 14 for Nina's explanation of her hat.

Figure 13. Nina's cultural x-ray.

Audio-Clip

Figure 14. Nina's Hat

Audio-Clip

Through the Identity Text Set children gained an appreciation not only for their own uniqueness but for that of their classmates. Understandings were built on discussions related to culture that began with the maps and timelines and continued through our readings of and experiences with global literature. The children's intercultural understandings were evident in their deepening caring and sensitivity to each others' individuality and their growing awareness and appreciation of the differences that made them who they are, including their families, backgrounds, experiences, traditions, etc. All of this they worked to express in their artwork. The word "respectful" from our school code of conduct had a richer meaning and value to each of our children.

References

Banks, J. (2004). Teaching for social justice, diversity, and citizenship in a global world. *The Educational Forum, 68,* 296-305.

Chen, C. (2004). *Guji, Guji.* La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.

Cole, H., & Vogl, N. (2005). *Am I a color too?* Illustrated by G. Purnell. Bellevue, WA: Illumination Arts.

de Deu Prats, J. (2005). *Sebastian's roller skates*. Illustrated by F. Rovira. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Kerley, B. (2010). *You and me together: Moms, dads, and kids around the world*. National Geographic Children's Books.

Kitamura, S. (2009). *Millie's marvelous hat*. 21st Century.

Short, K. (2009). Critically reading the word and the world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature,* 47(2), 1-10.

Uegaki, C. (2005). *Suki's kimono*. Illustrated by S. Jorisch. Tonawanda, NY: Kids Can Press.

Michelle Doyle is a first grade teacher at Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland. She can be contacted at mdoyle3@bcps.org.

"He inspired others to change his world": An Exploration of Taking Action Through Reading and Writing

By Jenna Loomis

This vignette describes explorations with students arising from a literacy community that examined how global picture books support children's intercultural understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings. ~Please see Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature: An Introduction to Our Work *by Prisca Martens and Ray Martens for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

Having established a strong sense of individual and cultural identity through work with the Identity Text Set within our classrooms (see Michelle Doyle's vignette), our focus then shifted to "taking action." We began our work with the idea that children with an understanding of their identities and who they are will see themselves as integral members of their communities - home, school, neighborhood, and beyond. These children will assume responsibilities and find ways to take action to support others and make their communities better. In the words of James Banks (2004), our goal was for the students to "develop global identifications [and] a deep understanding of the need to take action as citizens of the global community to help solve the world's difficult global problems" (p. 301).

As with the Identity Text Set, we selected global picture books for our Taking Action Text set that

introduced the big ideas. Our students then explored and developed their ideas through writing and art to demonstrate their understanding of their roles as active members of their communities. We focused on the art concept of contrast in the illustrations - how artists use differences in color, line, shape, and pattern to represent and communicate meaning. After reading and discussing each of the picture books, we studied several illustrations more closely to highlight how the illustrator used contrast.

In this article I share our discussions of books in the Taking Action Text Set, the children's responses to the stories, and their explorations of the artists' use of contrast in the text set books as well as in their own art. I will end by sharing a few of the first grade children's original picture books that they wrote and illustrated to show ways they can take action in the world.

Reading Through the Text Set

The first book we read was *A Child's Garden: A Story of Hope* (Foreman, 2009). It's the story of a boy living in a devastated, barren landscape walled by a barbed wire fence. On the other side of the fence sits a well-tended community. Among the rubble, the boy finds a sprout and decides to take action by watering and creating a shelter to protect it from the hot sun. The sprout grows into a beautiful vine that overtakes the fence. When soldiers destroy the vine, it grows back tended on one side by the boy and on the other by a girl. The vine grows and eventually covers and hides the fence, connecting the children on both sides and offering the children hope for renewed life.

Foreman uses contrast to emphasize the mood and emotion of the story. The beginning illustrations are monochromatic (gray) to stress the devastation and lack of life and hope. Color is visible only in the tiny sprout that gradually grows over the ensuing pages until it finally overtakes the gray, demonstrating the children's hope for the future.

While the action the boy takes in the story is as simple as nurturing the small vine and bringing happiness and beauty to his broken world, my students found deeper meanings as they considered what the contrast in the illustrations conveyed:

- The contrast in color on the front end pages is stark - red background with white barbed wire, cutting horizontally across the front end pages. As students worked to figure out what the image meant, Kaden remarked, "It looks electric, like the fences they have around jail. The ends are very pointy."

- The contrast between the communities within and beyond the fence was evident when we compared the jagged, jumbled lines of the houses close to the boy with the smooth lines of the houses in the distance. When considering what lay beyond the fence, Matthew said, "Maybe they're houses that are whole, not broken like his."

•When the bright green vine, signifying life and renewal, grew and flourished in the otherwise monochromatic surroundings, Saida commented, “Now it’s getting happier because it’s more colorful.”

•When the soldiers tore the growing vine down and returned the landscape to monochromatic grays, Michael suggested, “Probably they hate the other side.”

•The color contrast on the back end pages is just as stark as the beginning. As we wondered again why Foreman did this, Aashi thought that he used the red, “…[m]aybe to show hope.”

The children’s responses and insights demonstrated their understanding that as the boy took responsibility for tending to the vine, he brought hope to his broken community that before was only surrounded by hate. They learned that characters’ actions have important results. When the vines from both sides entwined, connecting life on both sides, Zeynap concluded, “So now if [the soldier] destroys that side, he’ll destroy his side too.” These were big ideas for first graders but talking about Foreman’s use of contrast in the illustrations made them accessible to our students.

Following our discussion of the story and the meanings in both the art and the written text, we invited the students to explore using contrast to convey meanings and important ideas as Foreman had. While some students wove taking action into their art, others chose to focus only on using contrast.

Carolyn, for example, wrote, “In my picture I am doing ballet. The part of my picture that is dark [is] the ballerinas around me. The part of my picture that is colored is me. The ballerinas that are dark are dark because they are not doing as well as I am. I am colored because I am doing the best at ballet” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Carolyn shows contrast in her drawing of herself as a ballerina.

David used the contrast of the uncolored page when Mom tells him that Grandma is not coming with color on the next page to show his excitement because he hears a knock on the door (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. David shows contrast in his drawing of his grandmother arriving for a visit.

As we continued to read and discuss books in the text set, Michelle and I knew we needed to develop a strong definition with our students on what it means to "take action". Since our plan was to have the students write and illustrate their own "taking action" stories, we wanted a wide variety of actions beyond the more common ones (i.e., environment). As we talked, the students decided that a character in a taking action story does the following:

- Makes the community a better place
- Makes the world happier
- Keeps working hard on the solution to the problem
- Helps others even when they don't have to

The table below shows the taking action ideas and uses of contrast we highlighted for some of the stories in the text set.

Title / Author (Cultural Setting)	Plot Summary	Action Taken	Contrast
The Curious	Liam finds	• planting	

Garden by Peter Brown (Urban area)	some plants that are dying and works to transform the area into a beautiful garden.	• nurturing • inspiring others to do the same • Gray vs. Green (death vs. life) • Little color contrast to emphasize dreariness • Warm vs. cool colors • Complimentary colors	
One Child by Christopher Cheng Illus. by Steven Woolman (Different places in the environment)	One child does things to help save the environment and imagines what could happen if all children did what they could.	• walking/marching for a cause • making a speech • building • singing • making signs • Contrast in value (degrees of light and dark) • Green vs. Gray (spring, rebirth vs. death) • Warm vs. cool colors	
First Come the Zebra by Lynne Barasch (Kenya)	Two Kenyan boys put aside their tribal rivalries to work together to save a baby and become friends.	• making friends with an enemy • saving/protecting a young child • Bringing together different communities • Value (light vs.	

		dark) • Shape (proportional change in size • Thick vs. thin lines • Primary colors • Contrast between the two boys (clothing, etc.)	
Big Red Lollipop by Rukhsana Khan Illus. by Sophie Blackall (Canada)	Rubina is forced to take her younger sister Sana to a birthday party because that is her family's cultural tradition and decides to help when Sana is told to take their youngest sister to a party.	• standing up for another	• Pattern (repetition of line, shape, color) • Shape • Color

Table 1. Ideas on how to take action.

Lights, Camera, Action!

As we turned to the writing process, the final stages of our project took shape. We had some work cut out for us to make sure our students were able to synthesize and apply all they had learned.

Testing Out Ideas

The students worked in their sketchbooks to try out some ideas before they made their final decisions about the topics for their taking action books.

Joanna sketched herself donating clothes, “because that’s what Mom does when I get too big for my clothes” (see Figure 3).

Richard drew himself making a speech about taking action to a captivated audience (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Joanna takes action by donating clothes.

Figure 4. Richard takes action by giving a speech.

David’s picture showed him making signs to keep his driveway clean (see Figure 5). He explained that there had been trash on his driveway and that really bothered him.

Cindy’s sketch showed building bluebird houses (see Figure 6). We have bluebird houses on our school property. Students have learned about the importance of the houses for the bluebird population.

Figure 5. David takes action by making signs to help keep his driveway clean.

Figure 6. Cindy takes action by building bluebird houses.

And, yes, we did have characters planting flowers and trees too!

Planning

To help the students better plan an effective taking action story, we modified the traditional Story Map to create a pre-writing organizer. The Story Map included four boxes: Characters, Before (Problem), Taking Action (to solve the problem), Result (what happened because of the action). When we began drafting, we supplied students with story paper that included a box for a drawing for each page of their story. We suggested that the students do a quick (two minutes) sketch of what they would include on each page. Their drawings helped them to organize the events as well as the art for their stories. Then the writing began.

"*She imagined how she could influence others to make a difference to help our world*"

~ Yesha about *One Child* (Cheng, 2000)

The project came full circle when our students did just that – imagined how they could influence others to make a difference in the world. They wrote it and captured it in their art.

Our students produced amazing stories! Surprisingly, many students did not write about what they originally sketched for an idea. After having the opportunity to share their sketches with partners

and in a large group, many developed different ideas.

•Michael wrote about a rock star who saved electricity during his concerts by using flashlights for spotlights. At the show to practice this new lighting, "[h]e switched the spotlights and it went great. It looked like the sun was shining three red beams on it. He didn't use as much electricity."

•Gabriela wrote about a girl who stole a friend from a girl named Hana. In her story, "[t]hey sang the special song. It was called *Respect Others*. Lizzy learned her lesson. Lizzy learned to treat others with respect."

•Josh starred in his story about himself and a parrot. In the middle of his story, "…Josh and the parrot made signs to save the animals and they made a one-person band! They carried the instruments and signs and played. Everybody listened after the parade and band. Now my pet parrot and other birds are happy!"

Once their job as authors ended, their work as illustrators began. With books from our text set strewn around the room, examples of interesting end pages scattered on the floor, and our art principles anchor charts we had created during the year, the children worked diligently. In the last few weeks of school when it is easy to lose focus, our students were engaged in their work. We had opportunities to share great pages that students completed and artwork that reflected the types of contrast and other art techniques we had studied. The results were impressive. See Figures 7-10 for four of the children's books.

Figure 7. Cindy's book.

Figure 8. Chloe's book.

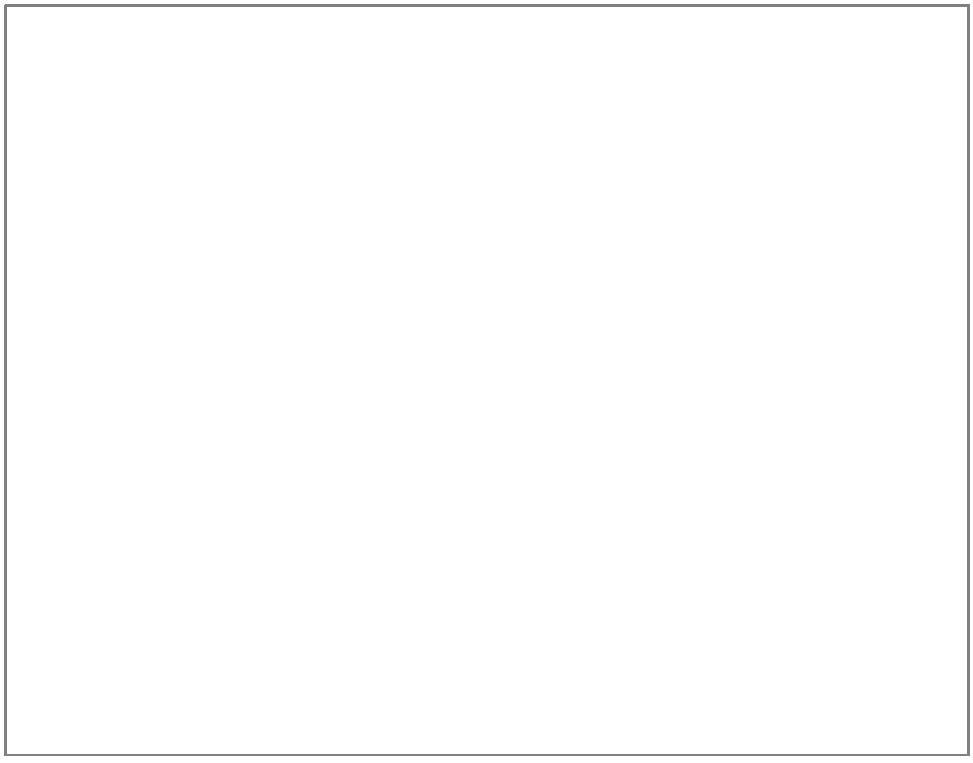

Figure 9. Molly's book.

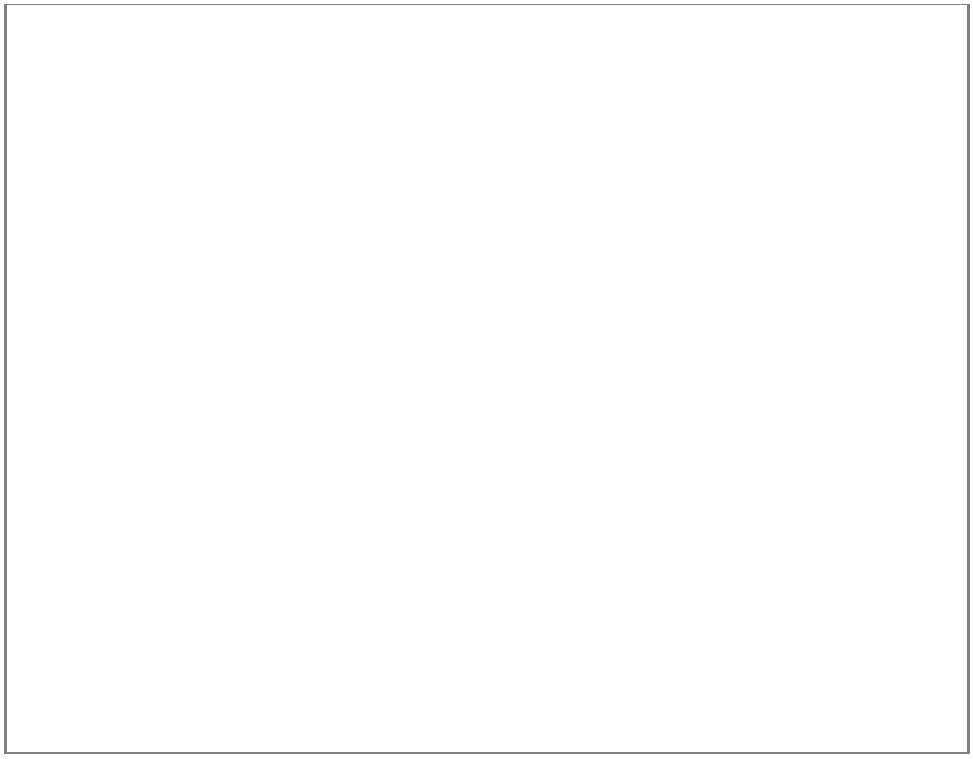

Figure 10. Richard's book.

The thoughtful decisions our students made about their stories and artwork are best told by them. As examples, Molly and Chloe explain their thinking in creating a couple of their illustrations in these video clips.

Figure 11. Chloe explains her illustrations.

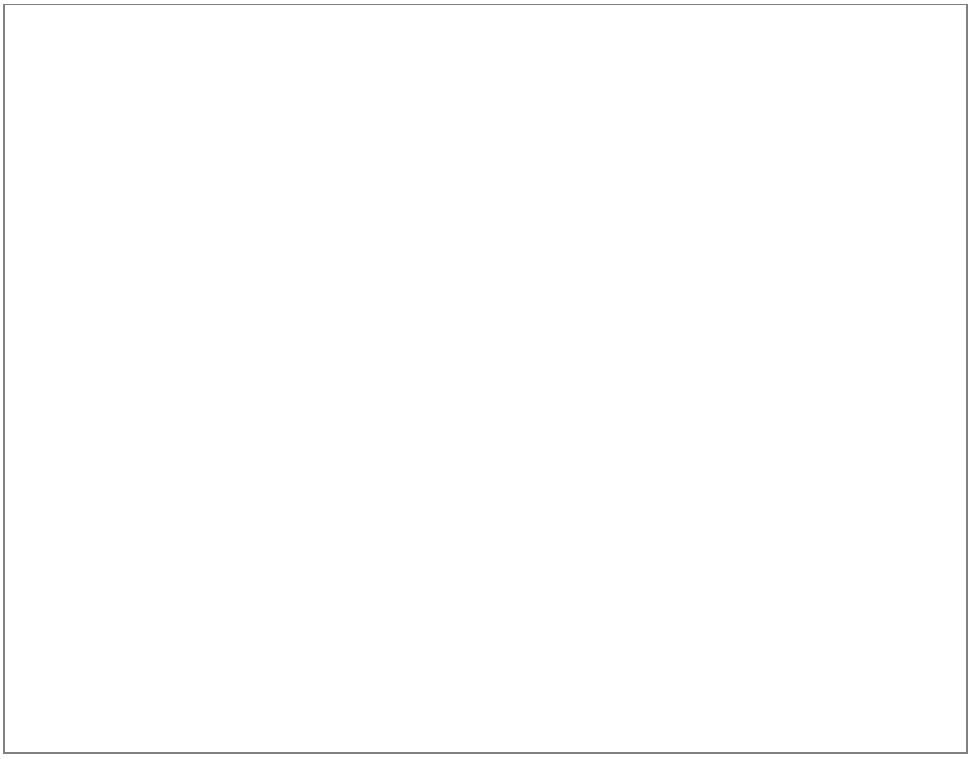

Figure 12. Molly explains her illustrations.

During a discussion of *The Curious Garden* (Brown, 2009) Drew said about Liam, the main character, “He inspired others to change part of their world.” After reading the taking action stories that came out of our classrooms this year, I believe we could say the same about what our students imagined and created in their taking action stories.

References

Banks, J. (2004). Teaching for social justice, diversity, and citizenship in a global world. *The Educational Forum, 68,* 296-305.

Barasch, L. (2009). *First come the zebra*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Brown, P. (2009). *The curious garden*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Cheng, C. (2000). *One child*. Illus. by S. Woolman. New York: Interlink Publishing.

Foreman, M. (2009). *A child’s garden: A story of hope*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Khan, R. (2010). *Big red lollipop*. Illus. by S. Blackall. New York: Viking.

Jenna Loomis is a first grade teacher at Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland. She can be contacted at jloomis@bcps.org.

Reading and Creating with Art: Picture Books in the Art Classroom

By Stacy Aghalarov

This vignette describes explorations with students arising from a literacy community that examined how global picture books support children's intercultural understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings. Please see Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature: An Introduction to Our Work *by Prisca Martens and Ray Martens for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

Illustrations are pictorial representations of meaning. The illustrations in picture books are more than pictures that accompany the written text; they are examples of meaningful texts that artists create using the elements of art and principles of design. Artists use the elements and principles to create pictorial meaning just as authors of written texts use words and grammar to create meaning. In my art instruction, I regularly use picture books for a number of reasons. Picture books show that the art techniques, art elements, and principles of design are used outside of art instruction. Students begin to understand that what they are learning during art instruction is important and can be used in other contexts. For instance, if the reading teacher asks them to illustrate a story they have written, the students can (and do!) think beyond drawing about what they wrote. Often they add more details in their drawings than what they included in their written texts. As students learn to read the illustrations in picture books, they see details not mentioned in the written text which in turn enriches their understanding of the story. I have also noticed that students who study illustrations in picture books create richer meanings in their artwork. This was evident in our study with global picture books. Before discussing how I used global picture books, I'll describe more generally how I integrate picture books into my art instruction.

Teaching Art with Picture Books

When I'm ready to introduce a new art concept, I select picture books that provide examples of how the artist used that concept to create meaning. During art class, we read the story and study the illustrations. I help the students look deeper into the illustration and find clues that will help them understand the story. The students use this knowledge to better understand stories when they read picture books in their classrooms.

After we've studied an art concept from a picture book, I provide the students with opportunities to

explore using the concept in their own artwork. Sometimes I give them a sentence to illustrate in their sketchbooks. If we're talking about color, I suggest to students that they think about why they are drawing the character that certain way and why they are selecting particular colors. If we're talking about line, I ask the students to think about the kinds of lines they could use to help their character look a certain way (good, bad, confused, etc.) I also suggest to students that they think about adding other details to their illustrations that are not mentioned in the sentence. Through experiences like this students understand that pictures often give readers more clues to the meaning than what the written text provides.

As an example, after a discussion of line and color I gave second graders the sentence "The big fish swam around the lily pond looking for the little fish" to illustrate. I left the sentence fairly general to allow for a variety of interpretations. The students added many details to their art that were not in the sentence. Allie's illustration is found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Allie's illustration of "The big fish swam around the lily pond looking for the little fish."

When asked to talk about the decisions she made, Allie said:

> *I drew the little fish in the corner and the big fish was normal size but he was big compared to the little fish. I drew some big rocks on the bottoms and some pebbles. And I drew some frogs sitting on top of the lily pads and a flower on one lily pad. And there is a motorboat in the pond. I made a sun and some clouds…The [green and yellow] lines are the vines from the lily pad that reach to the bottom…I did warm colors for the big fish because he was happily looking for the little fish and for the little fish I also did warm colors. But the little fish was more green and yellow cause he was kind of sad cause he couldn't find his friend…I drew the clouds with curvy line because it's not storming, it's a sunny day. I drew squiggly lines on the big fish because he is happy.*

Harita's drawing is in Figure 2. She interpreted the sentence differently than Allie did. While Allie saw both fish as good, Harita made the big fish bad and the little fish good. She said:

> *My little fish has many colors on him because he can be invisible…I used many different colors to show that he was special…[For the big fish] I used yellow and orange because he wasn't really powerful…I made lily pads and these little blue fish are also running from the big fish because he was going to eat them…The little fish are blue because they have invisible power … I used spiky shapes on bad fish, because it was bad.*

Figure 2. Harita's illustration of "The big fish swam around the lily pond looking for the little fish."

After the students explore the artist's techniques in their own work, I read the picture book to them again. During the second reading, students see more in the pictorial text than they did during the first reading and understand the story more by looking at the pictures for clues. In the following section I discuss this more specifically in relation to *Guji Guji* (Chen, 2004).

Guji Guji

The students read *Guji Guji*, written by Chih-Yuan Chen (2004) in their classrooms as part of our global literature study to talk about identity. In art class I used the book over two weeks to talk about Chen's use of line and color to represent the characters. *Guji Guji* is the story of a young crocodile raised in a family of ducks who believes he is a duck. When the mean crocodiles try to get Guji Guji to side with them and bring his duck family to the pond for them to eat, Guji Guji must decide who he is and where he belongs and hatches a plan to save his family. While we read the story in English (see Figure 3), I used the illustrations from the Chinese (see Figure 4) version of the book for deeper study to focus the children on the art as well as to emphasize to them that the book originated in Taiwan.

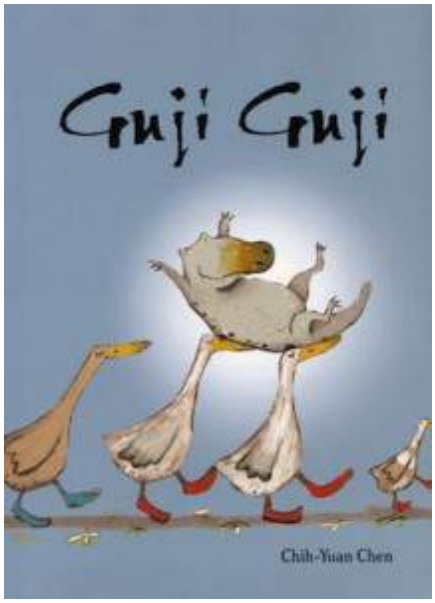

Figure 3. The English translation of *Guji Guji*.

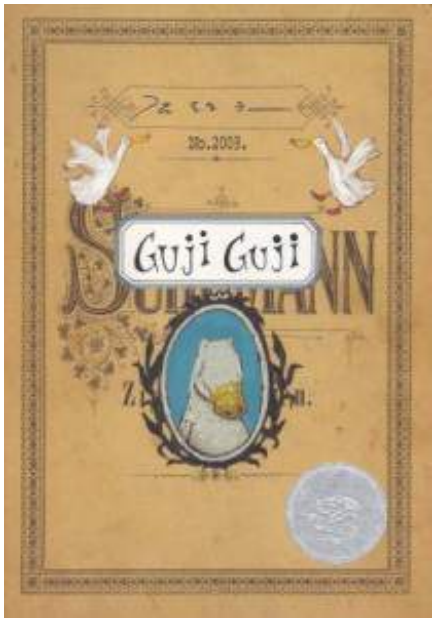

Figure 4. The original Chinese version of *Guji Guji*.

Chen's Use of Line

When the students came into the art room, we read the book together again and then went back and started looking closely at the illustrations. We talked about the main character and how Chen distinguished him from the other crocodiles. The students had many ideas. They noticed that Chen used lots of curvy lines on Guji Guji, especially on his eyes, claws, and teeth. Lucy said, "Guji Guji doesn't have really sharp teeth and his eyes aren't pointy. He looks like a nice crocodile."

When we looked at the other crocodiles in the story, I asked the students how they knew those crocodiles were mean, since Chen doesn't mention that in the written text. Ben said, "Their teeth and eyes are pointier than Guji Guji's and they have long pointy claws." As we continued to discuss Chen's drawings, the students decided that Chen used angled (or pointy) lines to identify the other characters as mean. In a PowerPoint presentation, I showed the students an illustration with Guji Guji and the other crocodiles (see Figure 5). The differences became very apparent to the students when Guji Guji was shown next to the mean crocodiles.

Figure 5. A sample page from *Guji Guji* showing the good and mean crocodiles.

I asked the students to think of an animal character for their own illustration and draw two of that animal, finding ways to distinguish between them. Since the characters were the same animal, students had to use their understandings of line to show the differences, as Chen did in *Guji Guji*. I also asked students to include some sort of conflict between the two characters and add lots of details to show the environment surrounding the characters.

Chen's Use of Color

In the second class using *Guji Guji* I incorporated color, asking students if they thought Chen had any reasons for the colors he chose for the crocodiles. Students noticed that Guji Guji's nose was colored with warm colors (yellow/orange) and the other crocodiles' noses with a cool color (blue). The students associated these colors to their feelings. They commented, for example, that warm colors made them feel safe and warm while cool colors felt cold and made them feel danger as well. Charlie said, "I don't trust a blue-nosed crocodile!" Through our discussions the students came to understand that Chen used warm and cool colors to differentiate Guji Guji from the other crocodiles.

I asked students to go back to their animal drawings from the previous lesson and add color,

suggesting they think about why they were using particular colors so their choices had meaning or importance. When their illustrations were complete, students wrote stories about their characters in their classrooms. I've included examples of the students' stories and art in the next section.

Student Illustrations and Writing

After students finished their illustrations and wrote their stories, I talked with them about their work and read their stories. I was amazed at the amount of detail they included in their stories and in their writing. They had truly become aware of how pictures tell their own stories through details such as line and color. The two examples below were created by first graders.

Carolyn's art about two swans is in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Carolyn's drawing for her story about two swans.

Carolyn's story, titled "A Stolen Toy", is quite long so I will summarize it. Two swans live in Canada. Lily is the good swan and Fred is the mean one. Lily got a new ball and Fred became jealous and decided to steal the ball. He took it one night while Lily she was sleeping. The next morning he didn't want to play with the ball because he'd stolen it from his best friend. So, he returned to ball to Lily and they were friends again.

Carolyn used lines to show the difference between the two swans. Fred, the mean swan on the left, has a pointy tale and beak. He is also hiding behind a pointy leafed bush. Carolyn drew Lily, the good swan, and her surroundings with curvy lines. She decided to keep Lily white when adding color but used warm colors on the beak and legs. In contrast, she colored Fred in cool colors. Carolyn also made the bush next to Fred pointy and in cool colors.

Drew's art and story were about two wolves (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Drew's drawing for his story about two wolves.

Drew wrote:

> *Once upon a time there were two wolves. One was good, one was evil. The good wolf, Daniel, liked curvy lines and warm colors. The bad wolf, Anthony, liked pointy lines and cool colors. And Anthony wanted to eat the Dukes. Their names where Harry Potter, Hermini, and Ron. The wolves didn't get along with each other. One day he went under the bridge. He waited and threw a big rock and his teeth fell. It was really funny. The bad wolf said, "I will get revenge." The End.*

Drew portrayed Daniel, the good wolf, through curvy lines and a happy expression. It is interesting that Drew also mentions in the story that Daniel likes curvy lines and warm colors. Even though Drew didn't color Daniel in with warm colors, he colored the environment surrounding Daniel with bright yellow. He also drew the butterfly and the bush next to Daniel with curvy lines and colored the butterfly with warm colors and the bush in with light green and yellow. In contrast, Drew made Anthony, the butterfly, and the bush next to him with very sharp edges and angle lines. The expression on Anthony's face is completely opposite of Daniel's happy expression, as shown in their eyes and smiles/teeth. Drew also colored Anthony's environment with darker cooler colors including the butterfly and the bush.

Using picture books in the art classroom has proven to be very beneficial. Picture books connect what the students are reading and learning in their classrooms with their art instruction. Their experiences with picture books in both classrooms broaden their understandings of "literacy". Instead of viewing reading and writing as only written text, they understand they can read and create their own meanings in art also. In addition, studying illustrations helps students see things they did not notice before. For instance, little details, such as the use of lines and color, become clues the students use to help them understand the story. This has been evident in the readings and discussions of global literature in classrooms, as Michelle and Jenna discuss in their vignettes.

Students use their knowledge of art concepts in their own artwork, adding another layer of meaning and richness to their work as they express their identity and ways of taking action. Picture books have broadened students' understandings of meaning and pushed them to think more deeply.

References

Chen, C. (2004). *Guji Guji*. La Jolla, CA: Kane Miller Book Publishers.

Stacy Aghalarov is the art teacher at Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland. She can be contacted at saghalarov2@bcps.org.

Interactions with Literature about Immigration and Middle Eastern Cultures

By Seemi Aziz

Jella Lepman, the founder of the International Board on Books for Young People, believed that children's books are "the best ambassadors for world peace for the next generation" (Freeman & Lehman, 2001 p. 92). The significance of quality literature about global cultures as windows, doors and mirrors into various cultures is undeniable. However, lack of quality multicultural and global literature within classrooms became evident through my teaching of undergraduate and graduate courses at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater and my work in supervising first and second year teachers within the rural communities of Shawnee and Perkins. These experiences provided me with an opportunity to see the kinds of literature students were using within their class projects and teachers were using with their mostly White students. There was clearly a need for teachers and students in Oklahoma to become more aware of global cultures. Because of this need, this project involved introducing a rural and urban/rural school community in Oklahoma to books about Middle Eastern cultures and the Arabic language.

Four teachers from various grade levels within Stillwater and the adjoining Perkins school district were interested in including books about Middle East and undertaking a project that would introduce difficult issues into their classroom discourse. Two of the teachers, Jackie Iob and Melanie Bradley, were first grade teachers at a school within Stillwater. Their classes varied between 19-22 students and the project was undertaken as a whole class activity within an extension of a unit on immigration. Rhonda Hover is a Title I reading teacher, working with small groups of children who are struggling with reading in grades one to three. She generally keeps her groups at six students or less in order to preserve the effectiveness of the small group setting. For

this project, she worked with a total of seven third graders who struggled both with reading fluency and comprehension. Both Melanie and Jackie, unlike Rhonda, worked with an ethnically diverse student population with home countries around the world, including Middle Eastern regions. Zeinab Mohammad is an elementary school teacher who at that time was between jobs. She was a native Arabic speaker who could work with the Arabic terms within some of the books. Furthermore, she worked as a coordinator and is the recorder of class proceedings.

The major goals of the group were to observe and record the responses of elementary school students to a book kit about Middle Eastern cultures and to expose two groups of first grade students and a group of ELL children to the books. The texts ranged from picture books and novels to informational texts. We intended to use literature discussion strategies and other activities once a week in one hour sessions within the three classrooms to observe student interest. We also wanted to know if the students' knowledge of the regions/language shifted as we progressed through the semester. The groups participated in multiple activities that reinforced comprehension of new ideas and unfamiliar cultures to the students, including Venn diagrams, literature circles, and graffiti boards. We also used Smart Boards to look up the geographic regions represented in the books, specifically Morocco and Sudan. We based these interactions on the "Curriculum that is International" framework by Kathy Short (2007). The students were asked to explore their own cultures before they were exposed to the various texts from global cultures.

Edelsky (2004) lists multiple ways educators can think about and describe democratic classrooms. "Teaching for democracy. Democratic participation. Curriculum for democratic schooling. Democratizing our teaching. Democracy in classrooms [could mean] teacher-student relationships, curriculum, classroom organization, and so on" (p. 8). As we worked toward democratic classrooms, we used analyses of the audio and video recordings and teacher recollections of the interactions and the process of initiating the dialogues and leading the discussions to document student interest and shifts in students' knowledge of the regions/language represented in the books. We noticed how effective the interactions were when students took responsibility for the content as well as the literature discussions. Student knowledge of and respect for the various regions and of the challenges faced by the immigrant characters in adjusting to Western communities also enhanced empathetic feelings within the groups, especially Rhonda's group where the students responded to aspects of bullying in the texts. As a community we observed that literature presents human experience, and because of this "the reader seeks to participate in another's vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 7).

The world today is rapidly evolving as a powerful place where children are linked to people in numerous and multimodal ways. Educators need to realize that everyone belongs to a global community. ~According to Rosenblatt (1995),

> Our schools and colleges must prepare the student to meet unprecedented and unpredictable problems. [She] needs to understand herself; she needs to work out harmonious relationships with other people. She must achieve a philosophy, an inner center from which to view in perspective a shifting society about her; she will influence for good or ill its future development. Any knowledge about humankind and society that schools can give her should be assimilated into the stream of her actual life (p. 3).

It was interesting to observe that the interactions and the resulting reactions brought an over-all enlightenment and empathy towards the characters in the books, even though there was ethnic diversity in two groups and the complete lack of it in the third. We came away from this experience with the realization that students are ready for thoughtful transactions with literature and are prepared to explore new knowledge and to wrestle with words through dialogue instead of merely walking on top of them (Freire, 2000).

Middle Eastern Culture Picture Books Used in the Project

Baker, J. (2010). *Mirror*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Bunting, E. (2006). *One green apple*. New York: Clarion.

Heide, F. P. (1995). *Sami and the time of troubles*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Khan, R. (2010). *Big red lollipop*. New York: Viking.

Knight, M.B. (1993). *Who belongs here? An American story*. Gardinder, ME: Tilbury.

Mobin-Uddin, A. (2005). *My name is Bilal*. Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press.

Mobin-Uddin A. (2007). *The best Eid ever*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Winters, J. (2009). *Nasreen's secret school*. New York: Beach Lane Books.

Winters, J. (2005). *The librarian of Basra: A true story from Iraq*. San Diego: Harcourt

Williams, K.L. (2009). *My name is Sangoel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's.

References

Edelsky, C. (2004). Democracy in the balance. *Language Arts*, 82(1), 8-15.

Freeman, E., & Lehman, B. (2001). *Global perspectives in children's literature*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Freire, P. (2000 *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (3rd ed.). New York: The Continuum.

Rosenblatt, L. (1995). *Literature as exploration*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.

Short, K. (2007). Exploring a curriculum that is international. *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom 1*(2). Retrieved from http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesi2/

Dr. Seemi Aziz is an Assistant Professor in Reading and Literacy at the Oklahoma State University. Her research interests are in multicultural and global children's literature.

Cross-Cultural Understanding through Children's Literature

By Melanie Bradley and Zeinab Mohamed

This vignette describes explorations with students that arose from a literacy community based in the U.S. state of Oklahoma. Please see Literature about Immigration and Middle Eastern Cultures *by Seemi Aziz for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

I teach first grade in a diverse school with students from over 50 counties. While this is a rarity in rural/suburban Oklahoma, campus housing for the local university is within the elementary school boundaries, which provides an ethnically diverse population of students. During our time of reading and exploring books representing Middle Eastern and Arab cultures, Zeinab Mohamed worked in my classroom facilitating the audio and visual recordings. She also worked with small groups using comprehension strategies with the texts while I was responsible for mediating the whole group experiences. Because I teach in an early primary classroom, the book experiences included an initial read aloud. We came to the carpet and I read aloud while students participated in brief conversations about the text. After initial readings, the children worked as partners or groups to participate in book talks. Zeinab and I would both work our way from group to group to take notes on student conversation about the text. During the book talks, the students were instructed to create a record of their conversations and thinking, which provided us with work samples as well as material for reflection and evaluation. Zeinab and I worked together to reflect on our teaching experiences and plan future book experiences. Based on what we observed during the small group book talks, we then decided whether a book needed further investigation, what texts to use next in the study, and what we should contribute to conversation.

In October, we read *Who Belongs Here? An American Story* by Margy Burns Knight (1993) and

Aekyung's Dream by Min Paek (1988), and participated in interactive activities to create a two-week social studies unit about American immigration. This unit coincidentally laid a foundation for students as they began to explore books about Middle Eastern and Arab cultures. In this immigration unit, the students gained an understanding of what it would feel like to be an American immigrant in modern society and in previous eras. They built awareness of the struggles and difficulties of immigrant peoples. Some of the activities included looking into our family heritage and discussing family traditions that have been passed down through generations, creating a cultural quilt square to represent ourselves in a class quilt, going through a virtual immigrant tour on www.tenement.org, and creating suitcase collages of what we would want to bring to another country, as well as participating in book experiences and discussing characters' feelings as immigrants.

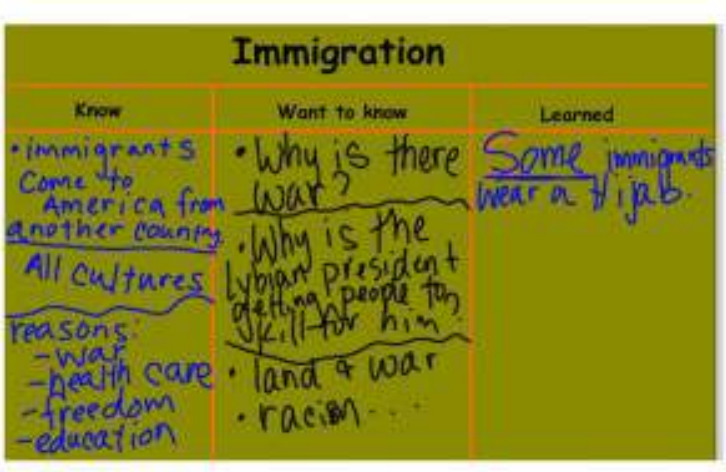

Figure 1. K-W-L Chart before beginning the book study.

We began to use books representing Middle Eastern and Arab cultures for this unit in March. This provided an opportunity to assess the information the students retained about immigration after five months. Before reading the first book in this unit, *My Name is Sangoel* by Karen Lynn Williams (2009), the class filled out a K-W-L chart with what we knew about immigration from our previous book experiences.

As we reflected on the chart, Zeinab and I were pleased with the students' ability to remember the content from the previous unit. We evaluated that they had ample background knowledge, even as first graders, to participate in book talks. Without explicitly explaining *why* people immigrate to other countries, the children were able to deduce four concrete reasons. Due to time constraints Zeinab and I were not able to return to the K-W-L chart after completing the unit, however, the students' comprehension was evident in their work samples. Nevertheless, we were curious about what would have been discussed had we brought up this specific chart to draw conclusions from this learning experience.

We also sent home a survey asking parents to share the meaning of their child's name, its origin, and why they selected it for the child. This is because the main character in *My Name Is Sangoel* deals with Americans struggling to accurately pronounce his name, a key part of his cultural identity. We decided to use this opportunity to celebrate our own cultural identities. When reading the book aloud to the class, we opened the book and showed the cover illustration and asked where they thought the boy in the illustration was from. They thought he was from America, because he was playing soccer. While reading, we discussed new vocabulary that came along in the story, such as refugee, "sky-boat," the "moving stairs in an airport,"and the "doors that open magically when a person walks by" (Williams, 2009). We asked them to think about why Sangoel did not know the correct names for these things. The students immediately knew that his lack of knowledge came from living in a refugee camp where these items were not available. We also asked the students to talk with their neighbors during the read aloud about how Sangoel was feeling at particular times throughout the book. The students responded by sympathizing with Sangoel, though we wished they would have taken it a bit further. When asked what they would have done if they were in his shoes, most of the students originally said they would change their name to something easier to pronounce. Though Zeinab and I tried to keep our opinions out of the discussions, we decided to take the opportunity to discuss the emotional attachments that many people have to their given name. After a discussion, students changed their opinion to reflect the idea of maintaining their heritage through their name, if they felt it had cultural significance.

After reading about how Sangoel represented his name as a sun and a soccer goal, the students thought about their own names and created a pictorial representation of their names. I modeled this by making "melon + knee = MELANIE" for my own first name. While some students had difficulty, they all shared in the experience and celebrated their names and heritage as they shared their homework sheets about the origins of their names.

We lead the class in a discussion and oral summary of the story, probing their comprehension with questions such as:

- How do you welcome new students into this class?
- Do you think new students at our school feel discriminated against?
- Has anyone ever mispronounced your name?
- Would you ever change your name to fit into a new culture?

Zeinab and I were impressed by the students' ability to retain the information from the previous lesson. They were familiar with the key vocabulary that had been introduced. The students discussed the elements of the story, identifying the main characters and listing information they gleaned about the characters. They recalled the country the characters were from, how they felt, and specific things they might have said in the story. They chose to fill in a story map about three

main characters, Sangoel, his father, and his sister Lili. When thinking about the setting of the story, the students remembered that the story transitioned from Sudan to America, and compared the two settings. They described Sudan as a war zone that was dangerous and America as a safe place. They did, however, mention that Sangoel missed Sudan even though it was dangerous, because he felt at home there. They understood his feelings as natural, which demonstrated their development in comprehension. When reflecting in groups, we continuously heard comments about how students would have felt in his shoes.

The next book we read was *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting (2006). We began by reviewing the K-W-L chart and then looked at the cover of the book to make connections and predictions about the book. One student said that "Ms. Mohamed has the same things, but her's is blue and white." Although the student did not know that the 'thing' was called a *hijab*, I asked where they thought that the girl was from based on seeing her wear a *hijab*. Students responded by saying South America, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Africa, and Iraq, which was a surprisingly high number of countries. We frequently refer to the world map in class when a country or specific geographic region is named. For example, if a story mentions a family who takes a trip to the Euphrates River, I show where this is on the map in order to help students have a better understanding of the text. We had previously discussed that all Islamic countries are not on one specific continent. When a student mentioned Iraq, we asked what continent that was on, and they remembered that it was a part of Asia and not Africa, like many of the other Arabic speaking countries.

While reading the story, we stopped periodically for discussion as the main character, Farrah, expresses her feelings of being in a new country. We compared her feelings to that of other characters we have been introduced to. *One Green Apple* focuses on the idea of a cultural melting pot in America, while *My Name is Sangoel* looks at America as a "stir-fry" of different types of cultural uniqueness existing together. The students were unable to see or connect to this concept, so Zeinab and I left it alone realizing that further investigation would depend on our "teaching" the concepts, rather than emerging from the students' dialogues and interpretations of the text. In the book, Farrah calls attention to the idea that even though a green apple is different in color, when made into cider with red apples, it is no longer individual, but becomes one with the others. My students, because of their background reading of characters who wish to maintain their cultural identity, like in *My Name is Sangoel* and *Aekyung's Dream*, looked at the green apple as this representation. When creating a Venn diagram comparing the two characters, they focused on how the characters were treated, who their friends were, where they were from and so on. The overwhelming concept is the differences of a melting pot and a stir-fry America. We wondered if they would have understood a melting pot society had we begun with this book and not had so much discussion around the concept of stir fry.

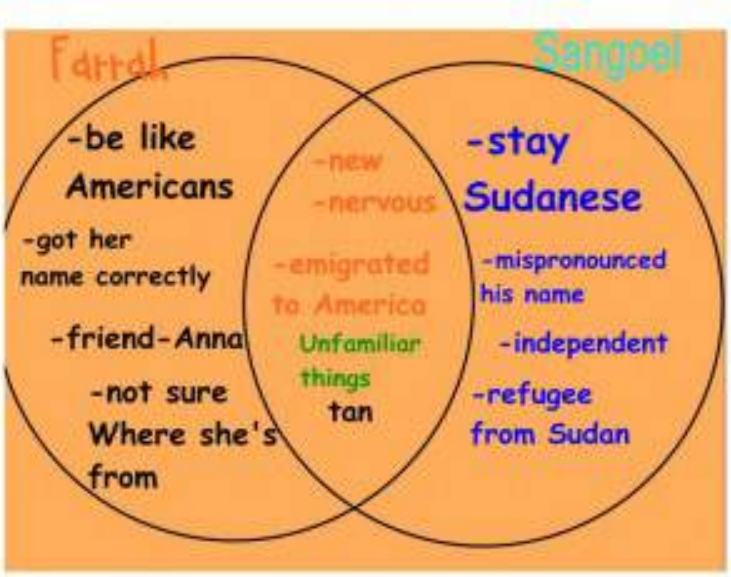

Figure 2. Venn diagram comparing the characters from *My Name is Sangoel* to *One Green Apple*.

When Farrah calls her head covering a *dupatta*, Zeinab and I asked how this compares to other books we read. The students saw that this character is probably from a different country, since she has a different term for a head covering/ We asked the students "What is a *dupatta*?" and they did not know. We informed them that it was the head covering, and we compared the way it looks to the *hijab*. The students then deduced that Farrah is probably not from Sudan, as Sudanese people, like those in *My Name is Sangoel*, wear the hijab. They did not retain the term *dupatta*, however, but reverted back to *hijab* when continuing the discussion of *One Green Apple*. After informing the students of the differences in head coverings, we did not correct them, because it seemed to defeat our purpose for investigating what *they* take from the text rather than what we *teach*. Since they were holding onto the term *hijab*, we allowed them that freedom, as they were not ready to distinguish between the two terms.

Also, when we were discussing the two books, students recalled the unfamiliar elements that Sangoel came across in America, and connected them to Farrah's similar struggles. Sangoel was introduced to an escalator, an airplane, and automatic glass doors. Farrah was introduced to a juicer in the apple orchard. In both books, the immigrants describe the items through a sensory experience of the unknown object while we, as readers, were able to make the terminology connection.

After reading the story and comparing the two characters, we decided to bridge the stories into our writing curriculum. At the time we were working with biographies and autobiographies, so we decided to have the students write the autobiography of one of the characters. They engaged in role play and wrote from that character's point of view. We divided the class into two groups and assigned one group to Sangoel and the other to Farrah. Zeinab and I reviewed the types of things

we included in our autobiographies, and students recalled including their name, family member's names, age, favorite things, and interests. They searched in the books for information to write in the character's autobiographies. Bunting does not mention Farrah's age in *One Green Apple*, so the children decided to make a prediction. We looked at the cover, and together they agreed that she was probably in 6th or 7th grade, so we labeled her as 13. The students then looked back through the book to find significant information to include in an autobiography to write as a group. We were quite impressed with the connections they made from their previous experience writing their own autobiographies, and the ones they worked together to create for the character's in the stories. They related to the character Sangoel's emotions writing, "I feel sad when people mispronounce my name". We were also impressed to see the retention of the vocabulary used throughout the lessons, such as, refugee, immigrated, Pakistan, Sudan, and America. All of these terms were used in the autobiographies.

The next text we read was *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan (2010). The students' reactions and discussion of the book focused mainly on the interactions among the siblings. They did not pay attention to the cultural bias of the Pakistani mother who was naïve about American customs. The candy that was stolen was a major focus, and the students made many text-to-self connections about similar situations with their younger brothers and sisters. The students did raise the issue that the children in the book called their mother "Ami" rather than mom. They were able to predict that the family was from a country other than America and spoke another language, based on the use of this term. Most of the students predicted that the sister would try to get revenge for the loss of her lollipop, rather than do the honorable thing and stand up for her sister. When reflecting on the lesson, Zeinab and I decided this was due to the age and maturity level of our students. One student, however, connected to the act of kindness Rubina showed in standing up for her sister. Others agreed that having integrity, which was a word the class studied, would allow you to demonstrate understanding and compassion for your sibling, and not want them to have the same hardships as you did. One student said "she didn't want her sister to have to go through what she had been through." Again, the main ideas taken from the text were the conflicts between the family members and not the cultural aspects of the text.

The final book was *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010). In our discussion the students compared the lack of cars on the Australian side of the book and the color of the characters' skin. They noticed that one side had "outside stores" and the other had "inside stores." When looking at the market in Morocco, they made text-to-world connections with a farmer's market, as well as the pictures I had previously shown them from my trip to a Belizean market. They noticed that only Australia had electronics, buildings and roads. We were very impressed with these observations. The students discussed what a magic carpet is. They knew that it was a carpet that flies, but noted that "they're not real." The students discussed that magic carpets were fantasy, because "there is no such thing

as magic." When we asked them how they knew what a magic carpet is, they agreed that they were from the Disney movie *Aladdin,* and were not real. When comparing the cultures of the two sides of the "Mirror", they referred to the different settings in the book as "us" and "them". They automatically looked at the light skinned and modern world of Australia to be America, and the desert-like illustrations of Morocco to be "them."

After reading, we worked with our think sheets to record our thoughts. I have students fill these out when we read new stories to practice recording their thinking. Then, we go back and discuss the various things that were recorded. Students make inferences as well as observations, or even their reaction to a particular text. One student recorded that "In Morocco, when they go to the store, it is outside." This indicated to us that the representation of Morocco in the text is misleading to child readers, as there was no inclusion of urban Morocco Another recorded that "In Morocco they ride camels to work." We found that we needed to expose them to more literature about Morocco and Australia as well, in order to help them make more accurate observations about the regions.

Due to the students' assumption that the modern setting in the book was America we informed them that it was not the U.S. and showed a slide show of images from Morocco and Australia. The slide show included images of the Australian outback as well as urban Morocco. Once the students saw that the book only portrayed one side of these countries, they decided that the book was not accurate, and talked about what they would change to make it more authentic. They were able to write and illustrate changes they would make to the story. Using the observations from their think sheets and the slide show, the students discussed and represented an overwhelming misconception in the text. Many students discussed the skin color, the lack of "big buildings in Morocco" and "adding the Outback in Australia." We were very pleased with these connections.

We know that the overall book experiences benefited the students. They were able to comprehend the text and participate in literature circles with their peers. After engaging in the book talks in both units, they became more empathetic and accepting of others, especially those immigrating to America. Their awareness of common misconceptions in literature grew as well, and they become more familiar with various world countries and populations. They understood why people immigrate to other countries and what it feels like to do so.

Although it was difficult, especially at first, to let go of the "teaching" of these books, Zeinab and I have learned to let go of the teaching a bit more, even in the beginning. We originally worried that the children would not be able to benefit fully from the book without guidance toward the elements we wanted them to comprehend. We now know the importance of allowing students to make their own meaning of the books and incorporate the new knowledge into their own experiences with books and the world around them. In the future, we want to allow some concepts to go "over their heads" if they do not seem ready to make sense of them. We noted that they did not retain the

information introduced to them when they were not ready to hear it anyway, so it was not effective to introduce them to concepts too early. We have learned that it is not about understanding every element and underlying theme in a story, but creating some kind of meaning from the story.

Throughout the process we continually reflected on how easily the children owned the new vocabulary. Frequently they were using terminology that we had anticipated would take longer for them to understand and remember. There was also less cultural bias and stereotypes than we had anticipated. At this young of an age there are unfamiliar concepts like the *hijab* and *dupatta,* that are not yet associated with negative thoughts of the people wearing them. They are more curious and open-minded when introduced to these new ideas.

Conducting the literature circles demonstrated that students can engage in critical literacy at any age. The way in which they interact with multicultural literature needs to be adjusted for their emotional preparedness and maturity. For this reason, we did not address politics or religion, but stayed on the topics of tolerance and compassion for people from other cultures and perspectives. We also wanted to make the focal point to be pride in ancestry, which was definitely a success. All of the students felt proud of their cultural backgrounds and gained appreciation of others.

References

Baker, J. (2010). *Mirror*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Bunting, E. (2006). *One green apple*. New York: Clarion.

Khan, R. (2010). *Big red lollipop*. New York: Viking.

Knight, M.B. (1993). *Who belongs here? An American story*. Gardinder, ME: Tilbury House.

Paek, M. (1988). *Aekyung's dream*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.

Williams, K.L. (2009). *My name is Sangoel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman.

Melanie Bradley teaches first grade in Stillwater Oklahoma. She is currently working on her Master's degree in reading and literacy at Oklahoma State University.

Zeinab Mohamed graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Elementary Education from Oklahoma State University in 2009. She is currently a third grade teacher at Will Rogers Elementary School in Stillwater, Oklahoma and a graduate student in the Reading/Literacy Master’s degree program at Oklahoma State University.

First Grade Explorations of Global Literature about the Middle East

By Jackie Iob

This vignette describes explorations with students that arose from a literacy community based in the U.S. state of Oklahoma. Please see Literature about Immigration and Middle Eastern Cultures *by Seemi Aziz for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

The increasing diversity in the United States dictates that children need to be sensitive to cultural differences of individuals from varied backgrounds. Because they are in a formative stage of life, children are an ideal population with which to begin teaching about diversity. I used picture books to promote global awareness and sensitivity in my first grade classroom. Students were introduced to several books, including *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan (2010) and *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010).

I teach in a Title I PreK–5th grade elementary school that has 520 students and is located in a small urban setting near a major state university. Within the district 43% of students receive free and reduced lunch, while in my school it is 90%. I have taught in a self-contained first grade classroom of six- and seven-year-olds for seven years. This year I had between 18 and 20 students throughout the year, fairly evenly divided among boys and girls. Students came from around the world, including Brazil, Mexico, Nepal, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. I began the year with two students who spoke only basic words necessary for survival in their new environment. My six English Language Learners received daily English language instruction. By the time we began the global literature activities, these students were able to follow along and participate in the lessons.

First, I read *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2010) to the class. The following week we discussed what the students remembered about the story and shared text to self connections. They wrote about what was important to them about the story and broke into randomly selected groups to read the stories again together. Each group used one sheet of large paper to draw and write about their connections to the story. The main connections were about experiences with siblings when invited to a party or the excitement of being invited to a party. Although we had discussions about the hijab, Islam, languages and beliefs of cultures different from our own in weeks prior to reading this story, the students didn't focus on multicultural issues in this book.

I was reluctant initially to let first graders read and discuss with each other in literature circles without my direct supervision. I worried that their interest might not be as great or they would have difficulty staying on task. There were some issues, but as I walked around and observed I was able to support each group as needed. The greatest issue within the small groups was holding the book in a position so that all could see. Even with second and third readings, the students were eager to see the pictures. Discussions before small group work helped readers remember what to

do as they were reading. Group members were not hesitant to give reminders about keeping the book available for all to see. I was impressed with the attention given to those presenting the story.

As students continued their discussions and worked on expressing their understandings of the story, I noticed they were eager to pronounce character names correctly. They referred to the mother as 'Ami'. Because we had a discussion about the meaning of 'Ami' I thought the students would refer to her as the mom or mother. I think the early exposure to diverse cultures has nurtured their awareness and acceptance of different names. I noticed that most groups recalled the names of the girls in the story and wanted to make sure they were pronouncing them correctly. Students in two groups asked other group members from different countries the correct way to pronounce their name in Mexico or Iraq. In our diverse classroom with five different cultures represented, my students are accustomed to hearing names that sound "different."

At least one person from two different groups commented that a name doesn't change just because a person moves to a different country. We had this discussion earlier in the year when I was sharing my experience living in Saudi Arabia. Someone asked if I had a Saudi Arabian name when I lived there. I believe this might have come up because a few students had discovered my first name on the parent newsletter. We had a fun and informative discussion about how your name doesn't change because you move to a new country. We talked about how some people choose to change their name to fit into their new culture, but that is by choice. I read *My Name is Bilal* by Asma Mobin-Uddin (2005) and we talked about it again when we read *My Name is Sangoel* by Karen Lynn Williams (2009). Several students strongly expressed that you should be proud of your name, no matter where you are.

When reading *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2010), the students noticed the mom wore a hijab, but it was not a main topic of discussion. My students see women wearing hijabs on a daily basis, so seeing this in the story was not surprising to them. Also, we read other stories where the hijab was present, as well as having several guests in our classroom who cover their hair and to whom students were able to ask questions. By the time we read *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2010), their curiosity about this topic had been satisfied. When I asked what they wanted to write or draw about:

> **Joseph:** I am writing about when she was chasing her sister around the living room.
> **Teacher**: Why was that important to you?
> **Joseph**: Because that's what my sister does to me.
> **Teacher**: Ok, so you had a connection there! What kind of connection was that?
> **Joseph:** I had a text to self connection!

We had practiced text connections through think alouds and other comprehension strategies

throughout the year. To hear this student and so many others share their connections was really exciting. I know that to help students become critical thinkers and deepen their understanding of texts read, they need to be able to make strong world connections.

Addy noticed that the title of the story was important because it was also a part of the story. She discovered that the title can help you look for something that might happen or be represented in the story. That seems like a simple thought but I think it was clever that she made that connection and was able to articulate it. It made me think more about how my students are thinking. Her group went on to draw the red lollipop because it looked so good. They decided to draw about the goodie bag because they thought that was the best part of going to a party.

Ethan noticed Ami did not know what a birthday party was. I asked what his group thought:

> **Ethan**: Maybe she never went to a party.
> **Mario**: Everybody goes to parties.
> **Noor**: In my country, we have birthday parties. (Iraq)
> **Teacher**: Why do you think Ami does not know what a birthday party is?
> **Noor**: Maybe she just came to America and doesn't understand it in English yet.
> **Others**: I think that's right!

As I observed a group discussing what they would write and draw about, Satich commented that he didn't know "musical chairs" was a game used in other countries, he thought it was an American game. Satich came to the U.S. as a toddler. I think it is interesting that international students made connections beyond the scenes described in the book. Their reasoning reached into their background knowledge of places outside the U.S. Most have not returned to their home country since arriving in the United States, but have had a grandparent come to visit for an extended time.

After our work with *Big Red Lollipop*, I read *Mirror* (Baker, 2010). My first graders were given a brief introduction to this wordless picture book by reviewing the meaning of comparing and contrasting. The students made predictions about what they thought the story would be about based on the title and cover. I brought to their attention that the book had two types of writing on the cover and one student immediately shouted out that one of them is Arabic. When I asked what made him think that, he replied that Noor, a student who speaks Arabic at home, told him.

During our discussion, Anna predicted that a boy would walk down the street and find a mirror on the sidewalk and the kid will look inside and see different things. Allie thought that a girl would see a floating mirror in the sky, like it and take it home for a Christmas present but that her big sister would take it. I could see they were really digging to make predictions. I asked them to think about those predictions as we "read" the story. I then read the introduction to give them the background and how to use the book. They were fascinated with seeing two sides simultaneously.

Even though I told them the setting was Australia and Morocco, a few referred to the places as America and Iraq. The students made connections to the pictures and America and Iraq were the countries they were familiar with. We compared and contrasted the first page together. Someone noticed there were no words on the pages. How can we read a book with no words? Thankfully, Stacy remembered we had read wordless picture books earlier in the year, which lead to the importance of discussing what you notice when reading this type of book.

Abdul, a quiet boy from Saudi Arabia, wanted to show me he could read Arabic, but did not recognize the words. He did recognize some of the Arabic characters and was able to tell me some of the sounds he knew! The students were put in groups of three or four to discuss and record the similarities and differences of what stood out for them.

American students from one group surmised that people in "Iraq" live underground and people in America do not. Noor, who was born in Iraq, said there are no cars in Iraq, just donkeys and that buildings in Iraq are made of dirt but of bricks in America. Another group noticed that people in Australia ride horses and people in Morocco ride donkeys.

During the group work Noor came to me and said she felt two boys in her group were making fun of her country. They were looking at a picture of a covered woman wearing a veil and Joseph said that person is a robber. Upon further discussion I realized he actually said that person looks like a terrorist. I asked what that meant and he said he saw the label of terrorist on a picture in a book he bought. Looking back, I feel I put him on the defense. That was not my intention; I just did not want him to have the perception that people who wear veils should be labeled terrorists. He finally told me that a terrorist is a person who is Arabic and fights against our country. He also said that the person in the picture looked like he was stealing food. He thought the person in the picture was a man because of the masked face. It was actually a picture of a woman at a market. Noor told him that "sometimes we do that in our country" [Iraq], explaining the type of dress and that she thought the lady was waiting to pay for the things she had shopped for.

I explained that some Middle Eastern women dress this way due to culture and religion and that it does not mean they are terrorists. I explained they might have been influenced by television or conversation, but we shouldn't make assumptions about all people. I realize I might have ruined the moment and broken down the discussion, but I did not want students to leave the group with negative perceptions. I told Joseph that he shouldn't feel bad for thinking that way, but I needed to get that information across to him and the group members.

I also told the group that when we see things that are different from what we are used to, we should not make fun of the differences. Our class is fortunate that we have such diversity in our school and classroom. I asked, "What you do when you want to find out more about something you are

unfamiliar with? What could you do to find out more about the people in the picture?" Joseph replied that we could ask questions.

He then asked Noor if people in Iraq ride in airplanes to which she replied – no! Dr. Aziz asked Noor where she was born and she replied that she was born in Iraq. She was then asked how she got to this country. Initially Noor said she didn't know, and when she was informed she came to America on a plane, she said, "I don't remember, I was only three!"

We finished the morning with students presenting their findings. In the end, the kids did a great job. I had issues with leaving them with one sided thoughts. I went back later in the day and showed current day pictures of both cultures in rural and urban settings. I think they were better able to compare and contrast. I also reminded them of the predictions they made and asked if they found them in the story. Ethan decided that none of those things happened, but he kept looking to see if someone's big sister was taking away a gift. I reminded them that when you make predictions, it's a guess based on what you already know and it's ok if your predictions do not come true. Using predictions is a tool to help us make connections and understand what we read.

The majority of students were surprised to see that Morocco had modern cities that looked like American cities. We also talked about the difference in traditional and modern settings. Even though it was difficult for them to make the distinction between the look of Australia and America, the activity generated great discussion and definitely increased awareness and understanding of the cultures. The use of multicultural literature is so important in our classrooms. Classroom teachers must be innovative in finding ways to include all cultures in today's diverse classrooms.

I am married to a naturalized American citizen. When our children were young and their grandparents or other relatives were coming to visit or when we were getting ready for a trip to my husband's home country, we talked about the customs and cultures to increase their awareness and knowledge. Several of my students have talked about their grandparents coming to visit. I can imagine their parents engaging in similar activities with their children before the grandparents arrive. I believe those experiences, coupled with family discussions about their native country, has enriched their views of people, cultures and the world.

I believe we are challenged with the question of how to instill and enhance the skills among children that are necessary for them to interact effectively with individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Holcomb-McCoy, 2003). Several scholars have pointed out that instilling multicultural sensitivity is an important part of helping children to develop a strong social competence, especially given an increasingly diverse society.

When I asked my students what was they liked or disliked about the stories we read, the greatest response was they had fun. Two mentioned it was cool to see pictures of another country in a book

where their friend is from. Three girls in one group said they were happy to know they could still go to a birthday party if they moved to a new country!

References

Baker, J. (2010). *Mirror*. Somerville: Candlewick Press.

Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2003). Using multicultural literature to enhance peer helping training. *Peer Facilitator Quarterly, 18,* 45-48.

Khan, R., Mohammed, K (2010). *Big red lollipop*. New York: Viking.

Mobin-Uddin, A. (2005). *My name is Bilal*. Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press.

Richards, H., Brown A. & Forde, T. (2007). Teaching exceptional children. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 39 (3) 64-68.

Williams, K. (2010). *My name is Sangoel*. Cambridge: Eerdmans Books.

Jackie Iob taught first grade and is now a reading specialist in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She is currently working on her Master's degree in Reading and Literacy at Oklahoma State University.

Third Grade Connections to Middle Eastern and Arab Cultures

By Rhonda Hover

This vignette describes explorations with students that arose from a literacy community based in the U.S. state of Oklahoma. Please see Literature about Immigration and Middle Eastern Cultures *by Seemi Aziz for an overview of this literacy community's work.*

The rural school where I teach has demographics that are far from diverse. Caucasian students make up 79% of the population while 13% are American Indian, 4% African American, 3% Hispanic and 1% of Asian or Pacific Island descent. Our student body has little to no contact with people from the Arab world or Islamic cultures. I grew up in the same area in which I now teach. My exposure to the Muslim people and their culture was limited to cartoons with flying carpets and rich sheiks, as well as occasionally seeing people outside of my community wearing traditional Arab clothing. Similar to my experiences, my students are exposed to subtle stereotypes of Arabs

through the cartoons and television programs they watch, in the books they read and the commercials they see (Gilliland, 1995). Those who pay attention to world events hear a barrage of news reports about trouble in the Middle East, including the involvement of our military. As the vastness of our world seems to shrink with new advances in technology, children need to have multiple exposures to cultures different from their own in order to build tolerance and understanding of people unlike themselves. I agree with Louise Rosenblatt (as cited in Duckett and Knox, 2001) that children's books, with their combination of picture and text, are well suited to this endeavor.

My goal through this project was to challenge stereotypes and fears that often accompany ignorance through exposing students to children's literature that depicted the Muslim cultures. Al Hazza & Bucher (2008) claim that introducing students to multicultural children's literature is a beneficial step in the process of eliminating stereotyping and prejudice. In addition, Royce (2006) states that we experience not only change, but also an increase in empathy and knowledge when we read about another culture.

As a Title I reading teacher, I work with small groups of children who are struggling with reading in grades 1-3. My groups can and do change throughout the year, depending on what struggles each student is encountering at any given time. I have my own classroom where I work with students and I work with small groups of students in their home classrooms. I generally keep my groups at six students or less in order to preserve the effectiveness of the small group setting. For this project, I worked with a total of seven third graders who struggled with both reading fluently and comprehension. One student was traded out for another after the first two books because the regular classroom teacher felt one was in more need of help with comprehension than the other at that point in the school year. We met twice a week for thirty minute sessions. The group was exposed to seven selections of authentic children's literature that depicted Muslim cultures in a non-stereotypical manner. After reading each selection, we spent time exploring the books in literature circles.

My students began to make connections between their world and the Muslim world with *The Best Eid Ever* (Mobbin-Uddin, 2007). They were able to connect the celebration of Eid, of which they knew nothing, to the celebration of Christmas. I hoped that with each connection they made throughout this project they would be less inclined to make prejudicial or stereotypical judgments.

> **McKinzie:** I think Happy Eid Day is Christmas.
> **Alora:** 'Cause they get gifts just like we do and they celebrate with their family members and the spirit of it.
> **Heather:** Well, it's not really a holiday, but it's a person's thing, like it's a birthday and you get gifts.

Much of their focus was on the hijab worn by the female characters in the story, an item of clothing that was unfamiliar and fascinating to them. Most could not fathom why the girls and women would wear a scarf to cover their hair. Brooklyn thought she knew the explanation behind the 'choice.' She believed that the women were required by their husbands to wear the head covering because they did not want their wives seen by others. This is an excellent example of children's inaccurate beliefs about Muslim culture. The students were interested in finding out more about why Muslim women wear the hijab. Other questions and curiosities were generated through this read-aloud. They wondered where the places of worship like the one mentioned in the story might be. It is interesting to point out that they live within twenty minutes of one of these places of worship, but had no idea it even existed before experiencing it through the literature.

The students continued to make connections to their own lives as we read *My Name is Bilal* (Mobbin-Uddin, 2005). They automatically predicted that Ayeesha would be subject to bullying because of what she was wearing. Despite their predictions, they gasped when we read Scott's words, "This is America…We don't wear dumb things on our heads." Ironically, one student responded as a bully herself, while another simply expressed her disbelief.

> **Brooklyn:** Oh, I'd punch him so hard…
> **Alora:** This is a free country. She can wear that if she wants.

It was clear that they realized bullying and unfair treatment could occur when one's clothing or name was different. They have evidently experienced similar situations either personally or as a witness. Through the literature, they were able to relate those experiences to another culture and stretch their understandings. After reading the book, the students conducted a free write as a literature discussion strategy. Every student's free write dealt with the issue of bullying indicating that the students were transacting with the literature to build understanding.

Next, we read *Nasreen's Secret School* (Winters, 2009). The hijab worn by the female character was still a focus of the students despite the fact that this was not a focal point as it was in *My Name is Bilal*. Although they did not discuss the clothing, several included it in detail in their pictures during our graffiti board response. Students were upset that girls were treated so unfairly in Afghanistan; they did not indicate recognition of the Taliban indicating that they did not have preconceived notions surrounding this group. Their conversations dealt with how they drew and what they were going to draw rather than the events in the story, so I was unable to gain further insights into their perceptions of Muslim people.

In our next session, I introduced *The Librarian of Basra* (Winters, 2005). We read this book around the anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing, so the students made connections with that event even though none of them were alive in 1995. They had been learning about the bombing

in their regular classrooms and had no other experiences of war and bombing from which to draw. They also made connections between their school librarian and the librarian of Basra.

As they discussed the book while they completed a consensus board, they came up with an interesting question. Ethan wondered where the librarian took the books to keep them safe. The other students maintained that she hid them in her house. Ethan persisted in his questioning, "If the books were not safe in the library, then why were they safe in her house?' Several of the students guessed that she must have lived in the country, outside of the city, and that as long as you were outside of the city, you were safe from the bombs. They disagreed whether the books would be safe in the country if the city was being bombed. They had a lively discussion and even questioned what the military commanders are thinking when they decide to bomb an area. Are they choosing a place that is more populated? Their thought processes were set in motion as we discussed this book despite the fact that they had not personally experienced war.

We explored this subject matter further with *Sami and the Time of Troubles* (Heide, 1995). Again, students related the war to the bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. As we discussed the literature through a sketch to stretch activity, only one student drew a picture that related to the book. She depicted the speech given to the people at one point in the book. She included the blue sky and the sun – both details mentioned in the book. Ethan commented that he thought the sky should be black because the feelings evoked by the war in the story seemed more like black and dreary than blue.

As students read the story, they showed no understanding of the effects of war, such as food not being available or there being no place where one would feel safe. However, they worked to come up with solutions that fit in with their understandings and perspectives of such issues.

> **Heather:** On this page, whenever it says Stop, Stop, Stop the fighting, they probably want them to stop fighting because the kids are always stuck inside and stuff and they want freedom to be outside all the time, probably like kids here [in the U.S.]
> **McKinzie:** Well, probably the people there that fight, they probably get bored and don't want to stay in the whole time…
> **Heather:** Well, this is what I think they should do. I think they should stop the war for a day and let the kids play.
> **McKinzie:** Mmhmm…and then the other day [they can fight,] that's what I mean.

***

> **Jacob:** Cause, you saw like all that was destroyed, so I don't think there's like any peaches growing.
> **Heather:** Um, I think they have this market close by that, um beside them, um that a bomb

did not go off around [so the peaches could be growing there.]
Teacher: So, where did the market get the peaches from?
Jacob: It's hidden. (The peaches were grown in a hidden place, safe from the bombing.)
Heather: And they probably went there to get a peach for the two kids to share and it takes two days or something [to get to the hidden growing area.]
McKinzie: Why can't they just take one half for the kids to play on, like this book (pointing to one side of the page,) and the army can keep this side. (She was referring back to the earlier part of the discussion indicating they could divide the area and use part for play and part for fighting.)

It was interesting to see how their minds made sense of issues that were new to them and the solutions that they came up with. Again, I witnessed their thought processes working to understand material that was unfamiliar. I believe they were building better understandings of what children in other areas of the world experience.

We moved away from war during our next session as we read *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2001). When I first read this book, I thought it was a good example of how we tend to look at our situations selfishly; I thought it would be an opportunity to gain a new perspective while being exposed to another culture. I began with questioning about the different areas that had been the settings in each of our books and was disappointed that my students really were not connecting the places with each story. They even guessed that some of our stories took place in China, although none so far had.

As we looked at the book, the students' attention was once again on the hijab the mother wore. McKinzie asked, "What is that headband thingy they wear?" As we began reading, Heather commented, "She's wearing that thingymabob." They readily recognized the hijab as part of the culture and seemed to accept it. They did not find anything odd about the mother making her oldest take her younger sister to the birthday party. In fact, several of them had experienced similar situations. They did side with Sana and thought she was being treated unfairly. We discussed why the mother did not seem to know what a birthday celebration was.

Teacher: Does the mom understand what a birthday party is?
Students: No. (Silence) Yes. (Students were not sure what the correct answer was.)
Teacher: What can you tell about the way the mom is dressed?
Students: No. (Students were responding to the first question based on my questioning.)
Heather: Um, she's wearing a…a…thingy…(referring to the hijab.)
Teacher: So do you think she's from America?
Students: No.
Teacher: Do you think they don't celebrate birthdays in other places?

Students: No. Yes. (Students were still indecisive.)
McKinzie: Rafael did.
Aubrie: At New China (*a local restaurant*) they wear that stuff.

One controversy surrounding this book centers on stereotyping Pakistani women as being ignorant of world customs, which is ironic because Khan is a proponent of dispelling stereotypes through exposure to different cultures (Khan, 2009). My students did not pick up on this stereotype. I had to lead them to the realization that this was unusual behavior. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that they are exposed to fiction stories more than any other genre, so they are used to reading about different situations in books. This group also struggles with comprehension, so picking up on anomalies such as these does not come easily to them. Towards the end of our discussion, McKinzie made the comment that Rafael had celebrated his birthday. This realization prodded her and several others to begin to travel beyond the surface of the iceberg to understanding deeper concepts of culture.

The last book we read was *Mirror* (Baker, 2010). This book is crafted to expose readers to the differences and the similarities of Morocco, Africa and Sydney, Australia. We looked for connections between the two as we investigated the book. The students noticed such things as they both buy stuff (although in different places and ways) and both have phones and animals (but as pets in Australia). Both have tables, but they sit in chairs like we do in Australia and on the floor in Morocco. They noticed that the hijab worn in Morocco was different from the ones in the literature we had read – it covered the whole face with slits for the eyes. They also noticed that both communities had family units.

We read this book right after the Toms Shoe Drive, in which our school had participated. Aubrie noticed that the characters in both communities were wearing shoes (this was an anomaly for her since we had just collected shoes and gone shoeless for a day to raise awareness for children in other countries who did not have shoes.) They noted that shoes were not worn inside the house in Morocco. As a literature discussion strategy, the students created a web of what was on their minds. Their web consisted of the connections they noticed as we explored the book.

To culminate this project, I asked students if they felt like their feelings towards people from the Middle East and/or the Muslim culture had changed. All felt that they were more familiar with this culture and would not be as wary when they came into contact with a Muslim. One student comes from a military family and had lost an uncle in the occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was the only student who hesitated when asked this question. I believe that this exploration did familiarize the students with another culture that sometimes is associated with fear in our country. This familiarization is a baby step towards dispelling the fears and stereotypes that we develop without even realizing it.

I was discouraged by the fact that they still did not associate the characters in the stories with the Middle East. I do not think they could identify the Middle East at the end of this project despite the fact I showed them maps of the different settings or origins of the people about which we were reading. The other teachers participating in this project kept a paper map on hand at all times and referred to it often; I think their first graders had a better grasp of the geography than my third graders. I could see much growth in my students' understanding and tolerance of Muslim cultures through this project. In the public school system, we tend to shy away from teaching about Muslim cultures; in doing so, we fail to teach our students the difference between the extremists from the culture and those who desire to live peacefully. The result is an unfounded fear of all Muslims. Much more needs to be done in our schools to address this problem and to create a future where diversity and tolerance are the standard rather than the exception.

References

Al-Hazza, T. C. & Bucher, K. T. (2008). Building Arab Americans' cultural identity and acceptance with children's literature. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(3), 210-219.

Duckett, P. & Knox, M. (2001). Secrets in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 27(2), 29-36.

Gilliland, J. H. (1995). Living in Sami's and Ahmed's worlds: Picture books explore children's lives in other countries. In S. Lehr (Ed.) *Battling Dragons*, (pp. 105-112). New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Khan, R. (2009). It's how you say it. *Hornbook Magazine*, 85(5), 499-505. \

Royce, J. (2006). Walking two moons: Crossing borders with international literature. *Knowledge Quest: Journal of the American Association of School Librarians*, 35(2), 32-39.

The Iceberg Concept of Culture. Retrieved from http://www.homeofbob.com/literature/esl/icebergModelCulture.html (May 3, 2011).

Children's Literature Cited

Baker, J. (2010). *Mirror*. London: Walker Books.

Heide, F. P. (1995). *Sami and the time of troubles*. Ill. T. Lewin. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Kahn, R. (2010). *Big red lollipop*. Ill. S. Blackall. New York: Viking.

Mobin-Uddin, A. (2005). *My name is Bilal*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Mobin-Uddin A. (2007). *The best Eid ever*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Winters, J. (2009). *Nasreen's secret school.* New York: Beach Lane Books.

Winters, J. (2005). *The librarian of Basra: A true story from Iraq*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt.

Rhonda Hover is a Title I reading teacher for first through third grade with the Perkins-Tryon School District in Perkins, Oklahoma.

Providing the Books for Literacy Community Classrooms

By Marilyn Carpenter

I take joy in sharing children's books with teachers, my university students and children. When I became part of the Spokane literacy community for the Worlds of Words Grant, I was pleased to be able to provide books for the teachers in our literacy community to share in their classrooms. Our group has seven teachers from three school districts in the Spokane area. There are six primary teachers and one student teacher. In this vignette I explain my role in providing children's books for each classroom.

Our literacy community wanted to address the lack of diversity in our local schools by increasing students' awareness and understanding of our world. We strongly believed that exploring children's literature that focused on diverse cultures would enable us to increase students' empathy for people different from them living in places across the globe. It would also provide children with rich experiences since "…international children's literature can spark the imagination, nurture curiosity, and delight the heart and mind" (Freeman and Lehman, 2001, p. 12).

We planned to begin by sharing books to promote responses regarding personal cultural identities. We based this decision on the "Curriculum that Is International Framework" (Short, 2007). Kathy Short writes, "All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them" (p. 3).

My main role for our literacy community was the selection of the books. My extensive collection of quality children's and young adult literature was used to initiate our study and would be augmented with books purchased through the grant funds. For each of our monthly meetings I furnished books that matched the themes and topics of our inquiries. I believed that careful selection of the books would be beneficial to the children. "When teachers share these books with their students, they bring the world into their classrooms and open up limitless opportunities for

discussion and response" (Freeman and Lehman, 2001, p. 24).

Since the first classroom explorations focused on building personal cultural identities, I selected books about families, play, neighborhoods, homes, relationships, traditions, and children for our first meeting. The books were mainly picture books, but also included non-fiction photographic essays like *On the Go* (Morris, 1994), *Houses and Homes* (Morris, 1995) and others in the Around the World Series to give children a view of how other cultures were similar to their own.

At our second meeting in February I brought books that included settings in other parts of the world. Several teachers brought children's work to show responses to the books they were reading aloud. We were inspired to see how children constructed their understandings of their personal cultures. The teachers showed books that were most successful in deepening those understandings. Here is a sample of those titles (others are listed in the references):

- *Clive Eats Alligators* (Lester, 1991)
- *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* (Mitchell, 1998)
- *Karate Girl* (Leary, 2003)
- *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006)

The discussion at our first meetings demonstrated that we needed to slow down our process of book distribution. Since every teacher had started with at least forty books, they needed more time to enjoy and utilize the resources already provided. Therefore, for our April meeting I brought far fewer books. I carefully selected titles to match topics that I knew the teachers were working with. For example, three teachers were studying Japan in their classrooms. Those teachers grabbed all the books I had brought on Japan.

One of the benefits of using the books from my collection was apparent when it came time for the teachers to order books for their classrooms using the grant funds. Because the teachers had been reading aloud the selected books in their classrooms, guiding the children in response activities and then discussing titles in our meetings, they already knew which books were most successful with their students and ordered those. At our last meeting they were pleased to have the grant books delivered.

I learned, relearned and affirmed ways to share books with teachers through the process of providing books for our literacy community. First, I relearned how important it was for the teachers to have time to browse, read, chat about the books and make choices of those they wished to use in their classrooms. Second, I learned that too many choices of books overwhelmed teachers. "Less is more," should have been my mantra. Since our meetings were held after school for only an hour it was important to focus on fewer books. Finally, I affirmed what a joyful process it is to connect teachers and children with excellent choices of children's books. It was a highlight of this

experience to hear about children's responses to the books. One teacher told us, "My class is on fire with their study of culture and the books that they have been reading!"

References

Bunting, Eve. (2006). *One green apple*. New York: Clarion.

Freeman, E. & Lehman, B. (2001). *Global perspectives in children's literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Leary, M. (2003). *Karate girl*. New York: FSG.

Lester, A. (1991). *Clive eats alligators*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Mitchell, M. (1998). *Uncle Jed's barbershop*. New York: Aladdin.

Morris, A. (1994). *On the go*. New York: HarperCollins.

Morris, A. (1995). *Houses and homes*. New York: HarperCollins.

Short, K. (2007). Exploring a curriculum that is international. *WOW Stories: Connections from the Clasroom, 1*(2). Retrieved from http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesi2/

Additional Children's Literature to Help Children Explore Personal Culture

Banks, K. (2005). *The great blue house*. New York: FSG.

Bennett, K. (2010). *Your daddy was just like you*. New York: Putnam.

Catalanoto, P. (2006). *Emily's art*. New York: Atheneum.

Christiansen, C. B. (1990). *My mother's house, my father's house*. New York: Puffin.

dePaola, T. (2000). *Nana upstairs, Nana downstairs*. New York: Putnam.

Harper, I. (2002). *My cats Nick and Nora*. New York: HarperCollins.

Hughes, S. (2003). *The snow lady*. New York: Lothrop.

Mora, P. (2009). *Book fiesta! Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day*. New York: HarperCollins.

Ryan, P. M. (2011). *Tony Baloney*. New York: Scholastic.

Schertle, A. (2006). *The adventures of Old Bo Bear*. San Francisco: Chronicle.

Swanson, S. (2008). *The House in the Night*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Marilyn Carpenter is Professor Emeritus from Eastern Washington University. There she taught literacy courses, children's and young adult literature as well as a course on global children's literature. Her blog reviews new books: https://marilyncarpenter.wordpress.com/.

Redefining Normal in the Lives of Second Graders

By Melissa Carpenter

This vignette describes engagements with students that arose from a literacy community in Spokane, Washington. Please see Providing the Books for the Literacy Communities *by Marilyn Carpenter for an overview of this group's work.*

During the students' book choice time I placed a cart full of books from our literacy community meeting in the middle of our shared literacy space and did some "kidwatching" to see the children's responses to the new books. This was the beginning of our investigation of personal culture. I was pleased to see that students recognized familiar authors like Bob Graham and made text to text connections with books that we had previously read. The excitement over the books Matt called, "BookMAS! Like Christmas but with books."

Unpacking the Books!

I teach a second grade class in an urban school of 450 students, 79.3% of whom receive free lunch. Students attending my school are primarily white with some Native American, Asian, African American, and Hispanic representation. The lack of ethnic diversity combined with a low socio-economic level made it critical for me to provide my students with opportunities to explore their personal culture as well as other cultures. One of the concepts that needed to be explored was the concept of "normal."

My students' world view is built mostly from digital media sources. They have very limited knowledge and experience within our local community. Even though we are within two miles of our city's downtown cultural area many of my 22 students have never left the immediate neighborhood. Their perceptions from the media of what is normal don't match the lives they live. These perceptions make them feel their lives are lacking. One example is a student who is being raised primarily by a grandparent and father. She would frequently say, "I can't do that because I don't have a Mommy, and that's something mommies do."

Two Homes by Claire Masurel (2003) initiated our conversation about what is normal. At the time four of the students' families were experiencing painful divorces. They were wrestling to understand where they fit in their new family structures while trying to find a sense of belonging since they didn't have what they considered a normal family anymore. One girl who goes between a home with a mom and dad, and a home with a dad and a dad, was able to talk about how she had never seen a book about having two homes before and she hadn't thought it was normal to have two homes. Our class conversation brought out that about half the class lived in one home, and the other half lived in two or more homes. Students acknowledged that no matter how many homes they had they felt loved, they had what they needed, and their arrangements worked for each family. The word "normal" was now used to describe the norms for each individual and a new understanding of personal culture. As we talked about our personal cultures an understanding of culture developed based on one's values, actions, traditions, and stories.

Several books were instrumental in helping the children obtain this understanding of culture. Books by Bob Graham like *Oscar's Half Birthday* (2005), *"Let's Get a Pup!" said Kate* (2003) and *The Trouble with Dogs* (2010), with his slightly androgynous characters helped open the door for conversations about people who may be different looking but hold similar values and then how we can tell what they value based on their actions.

Karate Girl (Leary, 2003) was pivotal in helping students identify elements of their personal cultures that help them successfully navigate day to day events. *Whopper Cake* (Wilson, 2006) and *A Birthday Cake is No Ordinary Cake* (Frasier, 2006) provided opportunities for students to share how their families create celebrations and how those rituals are expressions of culture.

Books like *Janna and the Kings* (Smith, 2003) and *Forever Dog* (Cochran, 2007) gave us a forum to discuss how our cultures help us deal with loss and find new ways to appreciate our relationships. A student shared a connection to *Forever Dog* about missing a friend that he, "like loved." I told the boy I wasn't surprised because he was a lovable guy. "Yeah!" chorused several boys. "WHAT?" the student responded. Another boy wearing a WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) muscle shirt promptly got up, walked across to hug the boy as he said, "I love you, man. You're a good friend," as the class all nodded.

This exchange between the boys was critical because it represented how our class's social interactions were no longer guided by the perceived norms as seen on television. We had established an environment where students were able to say what they stood for and take action that reflected those values. The books I read aloud and that the students read independently made a valuable contribution

I want my students to be able to acknowledge and value the differences in their personal cultures so that they can ultimately see that culture is a tool to navigate and understand their world. Next year I am looking forward to beginning the year with a study of personal cultures to help guide my students to a deeper understanding about our community and world.

References

Cochran, B. (2007). *The forever dog*. New York: HarperCollins.

Frasier, D. (2006). *A birthday cake is no ordinary cake*. New York: Harcourt.

Graham, B. (2003). *"Let's get a pup!" said Kate*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Graham, B. (2005). *Oscar's half birthday*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Graham, B. (2010). *"The trouble with dogs..." said Dad*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Leary, M. (2003). *Karate girl*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Masurel, C. (2003). *Two homes*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Smith, P. (2003). *Janna and the kings*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Wilson, K. (2006). *Whopper cake*. New York: McElderry.

Melissa Carpenter teaches second grade in the Spokane School District in Spokane, Washington. She is a National Board Certified Teacher in Language Arts.

Exploring Personal Culture with Young Children

By Abby Spencer, Lindsay Wing, and Lacey Grummons

This vignette describes engagements with students that arose from a literacy community in Spokane, Washington. Please see Providing the Books for the Literacy Communities *by Marilyn Carpenter for an overview of this group's work.*

Nestled around a group of coffee tables at our local YWCA coffee shop, we began planning our journey to share global and multicultural literature in our classrooms. "We" are a group of seven elementary teachers from three school districts in the Spokane, Washington area and one university professor. After reading Kathy Short's article, "Exploring a Curriculum that Is International" (Short, 2007) we were inspired to start a journey exploring personal culture using children's literature in our classrooms.

Our discussion around the article prompted us to explore individual definitions of culture in an effort to create a vision of where to head with our students. From this discussion we realized there was no ONE correct definition of culture. This realization opened the doors to similar conversations with our students. Hundreds of children's books that focused on culture were provided for us by Marilyn Carpenter from her collection to select and share with our students.

The book selection process was our first step in initiating classroom culture inquiries. Each of the following vignettes provides snapshots of how three of the classrooms explored, defined and studied personal culture using children's literature.

What Is Culture?

By Abby Spencer

Early one morning I rolled a heaping crate full of multicultural children's books into my classroom. I wondered how I was going to begin this journey of exploring personal culture with students. Then it came to me… I would simply jump in and ask my students the question that all of us teachers spent so much time pondering the day before, "What is culture?" That very day I began reading aloud from the crate of books. Prior to each reading I would say, "This book is sharing the culture of a character/s with you. As you listen I want you to think about what is culture." Day after day my second and third graders and I read a variety of children's literature that portrayed personal cultures of the characters. After each read aloud we talked about the characters and their experiences. One day after reading *Emily's Art* (Catalanotto, 2006) a conversation about the meaning of "culture" erupted and twenty minutes later we agreed upon the following class definition: culture is what you do, what you believe, the traditions you have and how you behave in

your everyday life.

Once my students knew what culture was, the momentum of our journey began building. I wanted my students to recognize the similarities and differences in each other and others around the world. Inspired by *Emily's Art* I gave each student a set of watercolor paints. Their homework for that night was to paint a snapshot of their own culture.

Figure 1. Watercolor culture snapshot

Figure 2. Watercolor cultural snapshot

Figure 3. Watercolor cultural snapshot

The next day each student shared and talked about their "snapshot." These paintings were priceless

works of art but I wanted my students to know each other and their culture on a larger scale; which prompted a new homework assignment. I asked each student to use our class definition to guide them in creating a personal culture collage. The students used photos, magazine clippings, stickers and illustrations to make their collages.

Figure 4. Personal Culture Collage

Figure 5. Personal Culture Collage

Figure 6. Personal Culture Collage

Figure 7. Personal Culture Collage

Figure 8. Personal Culture Collage

The culture collages trickled in and each student shared the significance of the images they chose to include. The rest of the class responded with questions and comments and our understanding of one another grew with each passing day. I was bummed that we had not embarked upon this journey at the beginning of the school year because I saw what a valuable community building opportunity it was. As the study and school year came to a close I was busy making plans for next year's culture study and pondering how I could go even deeper with my new group of students.

First Graders Explore Personal Culture

By Lindsay Wing

My first grade class began our study of personal culture by participating in our own cultural practice of joining together at the Gathering Place in our classroom. We started off with a discussion of the children's understandings with regards to culture. Then, over several weeks I read aloud books that explored different aspects of personal culture. My class consisted of 24 students, some with Hispanic and Russian backgrounds.

The first book I read was *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon* (Lovell, 2001). I chose this book because it has strong insights to personal culture. I wanted my students to understand that we are all unique in our very own special ways. In this story Molly is most confident about her amazing talents. Another read aloud was *Me I Am* (Prelutsky, 2007). Prelutsky's verse celebrates what is unique about each of us. *I Like Myself* (Beaumont, 2004) also describes a little girl who likes herself for

who she is. The last story I read was *I'm Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem* (Curtis, 2002). At the end of each story, the students talked about how they connected with the characters. The students also reflected on what the books had in common. Finally we talked about our personal cultures and how they make us unique.

I designed a response activity to have the children express their ideas about personal culture. First, I took head shots of each student with my camera. Next, I enlarged the photograph, and cut it in half. Each student was then asked to draw the other half of their own head and write about how each of them is unique. The children were eagerly engaged in their creations.

After they were finished with their pictures we convened at the Gathering Place. Each student was excited to share. I noticed little "lights" turn on as their eyes glistened while they shared their self-portrait with their classmates. Everyone discovered parts of their own personal culture. This activity promoted my students' understanding that we are all different, which makes us who we are. I am eager to work at the beginning of next year on promoting such understandings in my new class.

Figure 9. Student self portrait

Figure 10. Student self portrait

Building Understanding of Personal Culture through Best Friends Books

By Lacey Grummons

In my all-day kindergarten classroom of 20 students, we explored personal culture through reading aloud and responding to a number of children's books. These books inspired class discussions about the children's best friends. I will spotlight four of the books I read aloud: *The Adventures of Old Bo Bear* (Schertle, 2006), *My Best Sweet Potato* (Dohaney, 2006), *Plaidypus Lost* (Crummel & Stevens, 2004), and *Hello Tilly* (Dunbar, 2008) and other titles in the Tilly series.

After reading these books, my students and I had discussions about who their best friends were. We decided a best friend can be a person, pet, or an object such as a stuffed animal. I mentioned that friends are important parts of our lives and personal cultures.

The children wanted to write about their best friends. First, I modeled by writing a short piece about my best friend growing up - my blanket. I showed the students photos of me and my blanket. I made a connection with *Plaidypus Lost* because like the girl in the book with her stuffed animal I took my blanket everywhere I went. I also didn't want it to be cleaned because it had a special smell like the boy with his bear in *The Adventures of Old Bo Bear*. Then each child wrote a sentence about her best friend and what she enjoyed doing with her friend. After writing and illustrating, I made students' writing into a class book that was available for students to read in our classroom library.

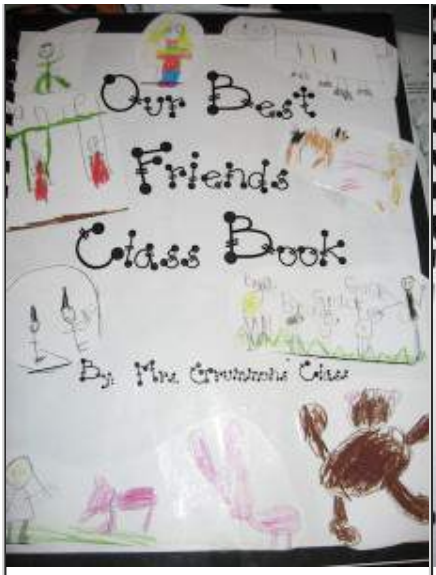

Figure 11. Example from Best Friends Class Book

Figure 12. Example from Best Friends Class Book

Figure 13. Example from Best Friends Class Book

Every day I have a V.I.P (Very Important Person) who brings something from home to share with our class. In our discussions we explored the concept that culture has to do with what we believe, do, and enjoy. Since we have been reading literature about personal culture, I asked students to fill a plastic bag with objects, pictures, and drawings of what they do, believe, and enjoy. I first brought a bag to show my students what I valued. I had my *Bible*, pictures of family members, a coffee cup, a recent book I had read, and a favorite CD. After showing each object to my students, I gave a

student who was the next V.I.P. a bag to fill and return the next day. For twenty days, students enjoyed sharing their personal culture bags. The student below in Figure 14 and Figure 15 brought her ballet slippers, soccer jersey, a kid's *Bible* and her favorite toys. This activity allowed students to explore what they value and how we all have different personal cultures. I have described just a few of the rich experiences we shared as we built new understandings of personal culture.

Figure 14. Student with items from her personal culture bag

Figure 15. Student with personal culture bag

Conclusion

As we ended our classroom explorations of culture and our students' personal cultures we learned how we might begin such explorations with a new group of students. The best part of our explorations was sharing them in our monthly grant meetings. Along the way we discovered new books that will be shared with our students next year. Finally, in the coming year we anticipate that we will have more time to have the students inquire about international cultures.

References

Beaumont, K. (2004). *I like myself*. New York: Harcourt.

Catalanoto, P. (2006). *Emily's art*. New York: Atheneum.

Crummel, S. S. & Stevens, J. (2004). *Plaidypus lost*. New York: Holiday House.

Curtis, J. (2002). *I'm gonna like me: Letting off a little self-esteem*. New York: HarperCollins.

Dohaney, R. (2006). *My best sweet potato*. New York: Atheneum.

Dunbar, P. (2008). *Hello Tilly*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Lovell, P. (2001). *Stand tall Molly Lou Melon*. New York: Putnam.

Prelutsky, J. (2007). *Me I am!* New York: FSG.

Schertle. A. (2006). *The adventures of Old Bo Bear*. San Francisco*:* Chronicle.

Short, K. (2007). Exploring a curriculum that is international. *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom, 1*(2). Retrieved from http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesi2/

Abby Spencer teaches first grade in Spokane, Washington. She has a Reading Endorsement from Washington State and a Master's in Education with a focus on literacy from Eastern Washington University.

Lindsay Wing earned her Master's degree in Literacy from Eastern Washington University in 2010. She has been teaching first grade for five years in Spokane Valley, Washington.

Lacey Grummons teaches all-day Kindergarten in Spokane, Washington. She has her BA in Elementary Education with a Reading Endorsement and a Master's in Education with a focus on literacy from Eastern Washington University.

A Cross-Cultural Study of Japanese & American Culture

By Meg Baker, Charlotte Streit, Kimberly Wade

This vignette describes engagements with students that arose from a literacy community in Spokane, Washington. Please see Providing the Books for the Literacy Communities *by Marilyn Carpenter for an overview of this group's work.*

We are two teachers, Meg Baker and Charlotte Streit and one student teacher, Kimberly Wade, who combined the planning and implementation of a Social Studies unit on Japan for our primary age students. The unit was a cross-cultural study using global literature as a means to build intercultural awareness and understanding for our students. The study involved Meg's first graders and Charlotte's and Kim's multi-age class consisting of first and second grade students. Our elementary school is located in a suburb of Spokane, Washington in a community of low to upper middle-class neighborhoods. The student population is 86.5% Caucasian with American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Pacific Islander, African American, and Hispanic students making up the remaining 13.5%. Of the 636 students in the school, 28.1% of them receive free or reduced lunch.

The study of Japan was part of the district required curriculum. Participation in the Worlds of Words grant provided an excellent opportunity for us to weave global literature and cross-cultural studies into our Japan unit. Before we launched the Japan unit, we first engaged the children in explorations about their own cultures. We read aloud books made available through the grant like *Star of the Week* (Saltzberg, 2010), *Tom* (dePaola, 1997), *Lion Dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year* (Waters, 1991), and *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006). Afterwards we guided the students in responses like cultural X-rays, open mind and heart maps. Finally, we read aloud the story, *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 1997), to present the cross-cultural study on Japan. Fox's story shows that despite the differences among people in the world there are similarities that bring us together. At the end of these experiences the classes came up with their own definitions of culture.

We implemented a thematic approach in our teaching throughout the unit on Japan. We began by discussing some of the topics and experiences the students could anticipate over the course of our study of Japan. We introduced the Japan unit by exploring what students wanted to learn. Students made "I wonder" statements as a means to tell us what they hoped to learn about Japanese culture. The students wrote their thoughts down on sticky notes and we recorded them on an anchor chart. Below are some of their questions and "I wonder" statements:

- "What do they eat?"
- "I wonder how they travel?"
- "Why do they speak another language?"
- "How can we help the earthquake victims?"

- "I wonder what their homes and schools are like?"

We told the students we would save their questions and "I wonder" statements and revisit them later in the unit to discover if their inquiries were answered.

One of our goals was for students to know about the geography of Japan; not only to understand where the country is in relation to North America, but also how geography impacts culture. The fact that Japan is surrounded by the ocean, has volcanic mountains, a large population, and small stretches of land directly impacts the economic, social, and historical aspects of the culture. To illustrate this concept, we prepared a pre-recorded Google map tour in which the students pretended to fly from Spokane to Japan. The tour included stops (close-up images) at each of the four main islands of Japan and Mount Fuji. Students made discoveries through viewing the images. For example, the students noticed that Japan has a lot of mountains. In their discussion they concluded there was less land for farming. They also observed how the islands are surrounded by the ocean. These experiences helped students understand why seafood is a large part of the Japanese diet, not merely because they like fish, but because it is an easily accessible source of food.

Wabi Sabi (Reibstein, 2008) tells the story of a cat that makes a journey across Japan to discover the meaning of her name. Ed Young's rich collage illustrations in *Wabi Sabi* gave the children another view of places in Japan. At the end of our study we concluded with the read aloud, *Tsunami!* (Kajikawa, 2009) to help the children connect with the earthquake and tsunami disasters.

Throughout the unit, we read aloud stories and nonfiction about Japan. Some of these books were purchased from Worlds of Words grant funds. *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 1993) is about a Japanese American man who recounts his grandfather's love for Japan and America. Several of the students made strong connections with the characters. In fact, a few of them wiped away tears at the end of the story. In our group discussion, the students shared their own experiences with their grandparents. This discussion helped the children see the importance of family and history and to recognize that family is a shared value of both Japanese and American people. This new perspective helped students acquire a greater respect for cultures other than their own.

Folktales from Japan were a vital part of our study. We read traditional Japanese folktales such as *Adventure of Momotaro, The Peach Boy* (McCarthy, 2000). We also read aloud *Kamishibai Man* (Say, 2005), that describes a storytelling tradition in Japan. The students retold some of the folktales in the Kamishbai style.

Figure 1. Peach Boy

After we shared folktales like *The Stonecutter* (McDermott, 1975), the students worked together to create murals retelling important parts of the story.

Figure 2. The Stonecutter

During many of our class discussions, we found that students discovered similarities between American and Japanese cultural traditions. For example, we told students the legend of Tanabata (Star Festival), which is about two stars that cross the Milky Way and meet each other once a year on July 7. The Japanese celebrate by holding a parade in the evening with fireworks and bright decorations. On this day, children decorate a bamboo tree with a variety of paper shapes. The children think of wishes (tanzaku) and write them on strips of paper which are hung on the tree. The students connected that tradition with *Wish: Wishing Traditions around the World* (Thong, 2008), a book we had read before starting the Japan unit. They noticed how the tanzaku papers

were similar to making a birthday wish. Finally, the students also compared the Star festival to the holidays of the Fourth of July and Christmas in the U.S. These comparisons and connections demonstrated that the students were developing a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in the cultures of Japan and the United States.

Figure 3. Tanabata Tree

As part of our focus on traditions and food, we read *How My Parents Learned to Eat* by Ina Friedman (1984). A young girl narrates this story about her parents, an American sailor who meets and falls in love with a Japanese woman at the port city of Yokohama. They are both too embarrassed to eat in front of the other because they know their customs are different. In secret, the Japanese woman learns how to handle a fork, knife, and spoon. The American soldier dines alone at a Japanese restaurant and asks the waiter to show him how to use chopsticks and drink soup from a bowl. In the end, the couple meets for dinner and appreciate that each took the time to learn the other's way of eating. At the end of the story, the narrator says, "That's why at our house some days we eat with chopsticks and some days we eat with knives and forks" (np). Friedman weaves Japanese and American eating traditions into the story, but most importantly she teaches respect by showing how two people who care about each other can value their differences. This book prompted a lively discussion about the similarities and differences between the eating styles of the two cultures. Another book that was instrumental in helping the children to understand Japanese food and traditions is *Hiromi's Hands* by Lynne Barasch (2007).

We had two culminating celebrations of our Japan unit. First, we had a field trip to the Spokane branch of Mukogawa Women's University. The Japanese students at this university are English majors who have come to study for a semester in the United States. These college students involved our students in playing Japanese games, storytelling a la *Kamishbai Man*, and calligraphy demonstrations as well as a visit to the campus museum. Our last celebration was a Japanese food

tasting. Parents came to our classes and demonstrated how to make rice balls and sushi. The students had a tasty adventure trying out different Japanese foods.

Toward the end of the unit, we revisited the anchor chart we made at the beginning of our study. The students shared their new learning in relation to their "I wonder" statements and questions. Their responses indicated that they had acquired a significant new awareness of the similarities and differences in cultures. Finally, the children brainstormed their new learning about Japan. It was a long list.

By implementing multicultural literature in our classroom, we discovered that the stories stirred students' imaginations and helped them connect their lives to the characters and events. This was evident in many of the books we read, such as *Grandfather's Journey* (Say, 1993) and *How My Parents Learned to Eat* (Friedman, 1984). The more books we read, the more we noticed students realizing that while cultures may be diverse, people are more similar than different. Finally, it was evident that the students' ability to define culture was enhanced by the combination of reading global literature and reader-response activities.

References

Barasch, L. (2007). *Hiromi's hands*. New York: Lee & Low.

Bunting, E. (2006). *One green apple*. New York: Clarion.

dePaola, T. (1997). *Tom*. New York: Penguin.

Fox, M. (2006). *Whoever you are*. New York: Penguin.

Friedman, I. (1984). *How my parents learned to eat*. .Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kajikawa, K. (2009). *Tsunami!* New York: Penguin.

McCarthy, R. (2000). *Adventure of Momotaro, the peach boy*. New York: Kodansha USA.

McDermott, G. (1975). *The stonecutter*. New York: Puffin Books.

Reibstein, M. (2008). *Wabi sabi*. New York: Little Brown.

Saltzberg, B. (2010). *Star of the week*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Say, A. (1993). *Grandfather's journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Say, A. (2005). *Kamishibai man*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Thong, R. (2008). *Wish: wishing traditions around the world*. San Francisco: Chronicle.

Waters, K. (1991). *Lion dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year*. New York: Scholastic.

Meg Baker is a first grade teacher in the Mead School District in Spokane, Washington. In her 24th year of teaching, Meg has discovered that all children love quality literature!

Charlotte Streit is currently teaching first grade at Farwell Elementary in Spokane Washington. She also teaches Reading in the Content Areas at Eastern Washington University.

Kimberly Wade has just earned her Master's in Teaching from Eastern Washington University and is looking for a teaching position. During the time of the grant she was a student teacher in Charlotte Streit's classroom.