



Somewhere Among
Written by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
Illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian
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A BRIDGE

*Papa would say I am
one foot here
one foot there
between two worlds
– Japan and America –
binational
bicultural
bilingual
biracial.*

*There, Americans would say
I am half
half this
half that.*

*Here, Japanese would say
hafu
if they had to say something. (p. 7)*

Somewhere Among is a novel-length work of contemporary realistic fiction, written in the poetic style of free verse. It is the story of Emma, an 11-year-old girl in the year 2001 who has a Japanese father and an American mother. At the beginning of the story, she is living in the United States but preparing for a six-month-stay in Japan. She is packing her clothing, books, and schoolbags and worrying about her long stay overseas, fearing she will miss her friends and American grandparents who will be left behind. Once in Japan, Emma and her parents stay at her Japanese grandparents' house in western Tokyo. Emma and her mother go through a difficult time, facing cultural conflicts and struggling with the dissonant relationship with their Japanese relatives. Emma also has problems with her classmates at school. Reflecting on her own cultural heritage and developing cross-cultural connections that develop her understanding of herself and others help Emma solve these problems.

Cross-cultural connections are significant in the development of Emma's transnational identity. She finds several connections on national holidays celebrated in both Japan and in the United States, such as Japan's Labor Thanksgiving Day and the American Thanksgiving Day. She learns that both take place that year on the same date, November 23rd, although the things that people give thanks for are different: in

Japan, people are thankful for labor and production, while in the United States, they give thanks for the blessings of the harvest. Emma also learns that, like people in the United States, Japanese people celebrate Christmas, though in Japan it is regardless of their religion. There are other things that are familiar to her, such as Pokémon character crayons, Pokémon Christmas trees, and director Hayao Miyazaki's anime movies, which provide her with a space to create connections with Japanese children. Making cross-cultural connections with people's beliefs and values as well as with universal children's culture help her build a sense of belonging to both countries and develop her transnational identity.

Emma's family members, including her parents and grandparents, also show development of their cross-cultural understandings. At first, differences between cultural values, beliefs, and lifestyles cause tensions between Emma's Japanese grandmother and her American mother. Yet, over time, sharing feelings and emotions and caring about each other while facing and solving problems together restores their relationship and builds trust. When Emma's pregnant mother hears about the events of 9/11 taking place in the US, she becomes mentally and physically weak, as she is very worried about her parents, and a Japanese family takes care of her. Respecting her religion, they help her get to a Christian church and pray for healing. When the Japanese grandfather gets sick and becomes hospitalized, both the Japanese and American family members are concerned about him. When Emma's mother gives birth, everyone celebrates the newborn baby. The Japanese grandmother cooks red beans with rice, a sign of happiness in Japanese culture. Going through these experiences together helps the family transfer their stances from misunderstanding and strife to understanding, acceptance, and mutual respect.

Somewhere Among can be paired with cross-cultural stories of transnational children and teens' lives, including Holly Thompson's *The Language Inside* (2013), *Orchards* (2012), and *Falling into the Dragon's Mouth* (2016), Aiko Ikegami's *Friends* (2016), Lynne Barasch's *Hiromi's Hands* (2007), Natalie Dias Lorenzi's *Flying the Dragon* (2014), and Chieri Uegaki and Qin Leng's *Hana Hashimoto Sixth Violin* (2014). This book also can be paired with works that pick up the tragedy of 9/11, such as Jewell Parker Rhodes's *Tower Falling* (2016), Nora Raleigh Baskin's *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story* (2016), and Carmen Agra Deedy, Wilson Kimeli Kaiyomah, and Thomas Gonzalez's *14 Cows for America* (2009).

Somewhere Among is Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu's debut novel. She grew up in Texas and has lived in Tokyo with her family for more than twenty years. Her website provides resources for teachers and librarians using this book (<https://anniedonwerth-chikamatsu.com/>). She also shares her daily life in Japan on her blog for children: (<http://hereandtherejapan.blogspot.com/>).

Meet Annie at: <http://www.fromthemixedupfiles.com/>

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