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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME XI, ISSUE 1

Fall 2018

Connections Create Bridges across People and Cultures

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## WOW Review: Volume XI Issue 1

Fall 2018

Connections Create Bridges across People and Cultures

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## Volume XI Issue 1: Connections Create Bridges across People and Cultures

### Introduction

With connections as a central focus, the books in this issue allow for ideas to flow and relationships to be created. For instance, *A Boy Called Bat*, *Front Desk*, *Slug Days*, and *The White Stone* create connections between characters as they address the issues and problems in their lives or communities. In *Boxers*, *how i became a ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story*, and *Islandborn*, the connections are history, as each of these books explore the past through different events and cultures. With *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes*, *The Story of Car Engineer Soichiro Honda*, and *Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!* the connections are to knowledge from the Muslim world, Japan, and Latin America. *La Princesa and the Pea* connects a familiar tale with a new cultural twist. Finally, *The Only Road* connects readers to the circumstances some immigrants might confront when faced with real danger.

Regardless of interest, the books in this issue connect us with the wider world and its different ways of knowing and understanding of that world across cultures.

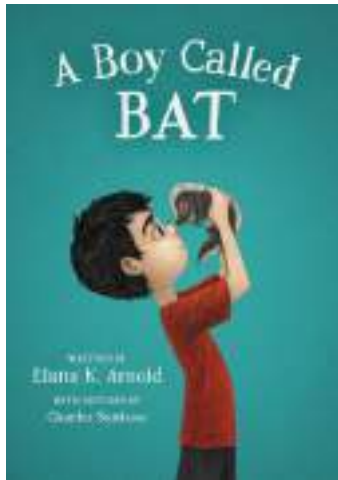
Holly Johnson, Editor

The next issues are:

**Winter, 2018:** (Submission Deadline: November 30, 2018) - Issues Connected to Trauma. The world and those within it, past and present, have created situations or phenomena that result in trauma. What can we learn from reading about such situations? Books addressing trauma—in its broadest terms—have much to teach us. Think about sharing what you have learned from reading about such events.

**Spring, 2019:** (Deadline: February, 27, 2019) - Open theme. An opportunity to share books that you read over the winter or new books that resonate with you.

Submit these reviews to the new journal editors of WOW Review, Susan Corapi and Prisca Martens.



*A Boy Called Bat*

Written By Elana K. Arnold

Illustrated by Charles Santoso

Walden Pond Press, 2017, 208 pp

ISBN: 0062445839

Bixby Alexander Tam's initials spell Bat, but this isn't the only reason his nickname has stuck. He has sensitive hearing (he often wears his sister's earmuffs to muffle loud sounds) and sometimes his hands flap when he's nervous or excited. Bat doesn't mind his nickname—animals are his very favorite thing. When Bat's mom, a veterinarian, brings home a baby skunk to care for until it's old enough to be placed in a rescue center, Bat enthusiastically agrees it's a "good-surprise" (most surprises aren't). Bat loves this skunk more than anything; now, he just has to convince his mom that they belong together. Forever.

Apart from the summary of the book, which describes third-grader Bat as being on the autism spectrum, autism is never directly mentioned within the pages of the book. Rather than labeling Bat, Arnold allows the reader to experience Bat through his own words and actions, the words and actions of others, and the unique ways in which he navigates the world and people who surround him.

Relationships are at the heart of this middle grade novel and the reader is able to witness the complex ways in which Bat tries to make sense of how to engage in these relationships. Whether it is at one of his two homes or in the halls and classroom of his school, Bat is both subtly and sharply reminded of the ways in which he sees and approaches his interactions differently from his family, teachers and peers. At school, group projects are frustrating to Bat because no one seems to care as much as he does, when he states the obvious, his classmates get upset, and grown-ups are always laughing at things that Bat doesn't think are funny. Most of the time, Bat feels he is misunderstood by most everyone.

At home, Bat's big sister, Janie, both teases and offers curt reminders about how to be in the world and interacting socially. Yet this sibling relationship also offers some of the most tender and insightful moments of the story:

*Bat loved braiding Janie's hair, even though he usually wasn't very good at hand things. He liked the feeling of the damp, heavy hair; he liked organizing it into a series of smaller, neatly contained braids; he liked feeling close to Janie like this, by helping her and touching her, without having to have a big conversation that might turn into a fight. Getting along with people was hard for Bat. Figuring out what they meant when they said something, or when they made certain faces at him...People were complicated. But braiding was easy (p. 153).*

Not only does Arnold allow her readers into Bat's thought processes that accompany his day-to-day interactions, she also expertly captures the nuanced responses from others toward Bat--the

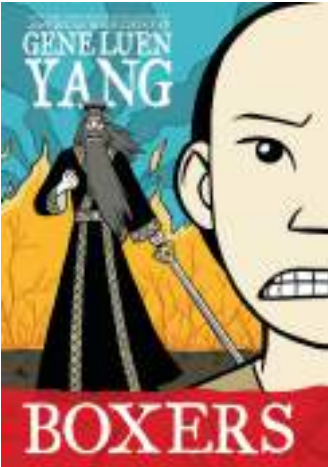
sigh of an adult, the eye roll of a sibling, the unanticipated confusion of a peer. With these nuanced descriptions, she provides multiple sides to every interaction, and as a result, allows any reader--child, parent, teacher, fellow animal lover--to find a point of connection with Bat and to understand how their own words, actions and reactions might be seen by him.

Bat's love for and budding relationship with a young skunk provides a new way of connecting with others. Helpless and completely reliant on his human family, tiny Thor creates a safe space in which Bat can explore his emotions while also learning how to share and communicate these with others. Whether it is emailing a national skunk expert for advice or beginning a new friendship with a classmate, Thor provides a common ground, a jumping off place, a way of finding structure and control within the messiness and often confusing interactions of the human kind.

Unlike many books featuring characters with autism, Arnold has not written a book about autism. Instead, she has introduced her readers to a third-grade boy named Bat, who loves animals, vanilla yogurt and the candy shop that has jelly beans arranged by color, offering rich and multiple entry points to which readers can connect. A first inclination may be to pair this book with other books featuring autistic characters. Instead, the following middle grade books feature characters who often feel misunderstood and puzzle at the ways in which other people move through the world differently than they do--*Lola Levine is Not Mean* (and others in this series) by Monica Brown, *Hello, Universe* by Erin Entrada Kelly, and *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* by Dusti Bowling.

Like Bat, Arnold is an animal lover and likes to say that she writes books for kids and books about teens. In addition to *Bat and the Waiting Game*, the second book in the Bat series, she is also the author of several books for young adults, including *Infamous*, the National Book Award finalist, *What Girls are Made Of*, and the forthcoming *Damsel*.

Dorea Kleker, University of Arizona



*Boxers*

Written and illustrated by Gene Luen Yang

First Second, 2013, 336 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-59643-359-5

A troubling time in China, 1894 to 1900, saw severe droughts followed by floods and famine in the Shandong province. Conflicts increased as foreign missionaries spread across China, intimidating the local peasants and attempting to convert them to Christianity. Foreign soldiers increased the suffering of the Chinese people. Little Bao, trained by a Kung Fu master, organizes a group of fighters to rebel against the foreign invaders. Fighting along with his brothers, Little Bao travels through China protecting peasants. Little

Bao's group gains popularity, and is given the title of the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists by the Chinese. The group becomes equally well-known by Westerners who call them the Boxers. These fighters believe that they gain their power from Chinese gods and are convinced they are untouchable by foreign weapons, and therefore indestructible.

Little Bao has many internal conflicts as he tries to follow the edicts the Kung Fu master had taught him, like "Edict # 4: Have compassion for the weak" (p. 151). Later, Little Bao learns that there is no room for compassion in the war as his own brother dies at the hands of a child whose life he spares. Bao grows from a traditional, sympathetic young man into a fighter who is able to commit monstrous acts. Villages and churches are burned by the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists. The Boxers kill everyone who threatens China, including the "secondary devils," the Chinese who converted to Christianity.

During the years of the Boxer rebellion, Bao gets to know Mei-wen, a young woman who later joins the Boxer rebels and organizes her own society of female fighters. As rebels reach Peking (today's Beijing), they encounter many Western colonists, foreign soldiers, and Chinese Christians. Eventually, in the name of China, Little Bao burns a church full of Christian women and children. With the support of the Imperial Army, the Boxers make foreigners and Chinese Christians seek refuge in the Legation Quarter. After many days of the siege, the foreigners gain support from their allies, defeat the Boxer rebels, and take back Peking.

Although this graphic novel is reader-friendly and looks like a comic book geared for children, there are parts that are horrifying, like the scene that shows the fate of Red Lantern Chu, the Kung Fu master, whose head is carried on a spike after being beheaded by the Imperial Army. Yang explained that although he wanted to make it easy to read, he used terrifying graphic images and descriptions because he wanted the reader to empathize with Little Bao while demonstrating the struggles that the Chinese people endured in that era (Interview, 2013).

As there are two sides to every story, there are also two sides to the Boxer rebellion. *Boxers* is the first part of the two-volume project, *Boxers & Saints*. Yang wrote *Saints*, the second part of the project, from the view of a young Christian protagonist who fights the Boxers. As Yang stated, "When I looked into the lives of these [recently canonized] saints, I discovered that

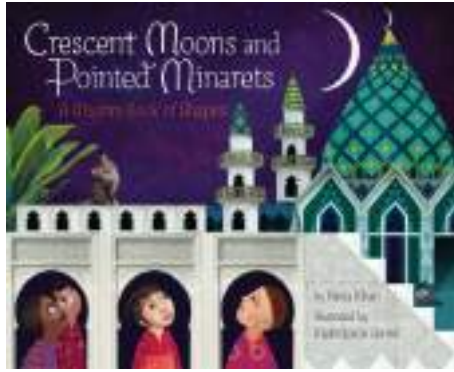
many of them had been martyred during the Boxer Rebellion. The more I read about the Boxer Rebellion, the more conflicted I felt. Did I sympathize more with the Boxers or their Chinese Christian victims? That's why the project ended up as two volumes. The protagonists in one are the antagonists in the other" (Interview, 2013). Possible pairing for these two books could include *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2007) or books on rebellions or books such as *Bull Run* (Fleischman, 1995), which also includes a multi-voiced storyline.

Gene Luan Yang grew up in a Chinese-American Catholic community in the San Francisco Bay area. To him, Christianity and Chinese culture seemed to go hand-in-hand, but it was not the same for people in China in the 1900s. "Being a Chinese Christian was seen as a contradiction," Yang said. "Embracing a Western faith meant turning your back on Eastern culture" (Interview, 2013). An accomplished graphic novelist, Yang wrote this historical fiction also as a graphic novel. However, unlike some of his other published novels, Yang wrote and illustrated *Boxers* entirely himself in order to control the tone and message of the story. This was important as the violence he was describing was often overwhelming, and he tried to 'cartoonify' the scenes in order to, as he put it, "make it more palatable" (Interview, 2013).

Flyura Gasca, Coastal Carolina University

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Interview: Gene Luen Yang on Boxers & Saints. (2013, September 19). Retrieved from <http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/2013/09/19/interview-gene-luen-yang-on-boxers-saints/>



*Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes*

Written by Hena Khan

Illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini

Chronicle, 2018, np

ISBN: 978-1452155418

At a time when educators are sharing literature that increases children's cultural competence, books like *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes* are needed. This informative book captures home- and community-based religious practices, includes select Arabic words, and depicts Muslim culture in settings from around the world. It is also stunningly illustrated.

Hena Khan's rhyming couplets provide a Muslim child's view of shapes as they appear in daily life, annual religious holidays, and community events. "Rectangle is the/mosque's carved wooden door,/filled with a pattern/that reaches the floor." A number of the poetic lines include Arabic words, which further increases the authenticity of the information shared. "Circle is a daff,/a drum large and round./We fill the air/with its festive sound." A glossary provides a pronunciation guide as well as definitions.

Author Hena Khan is a Pakistani-American Muslim woman who was born and raised in Maryland. She enjoys sharing and writing about her culture and religion (<https://www.henakhan.com>). Her Author's Note at the end of the book includes information about the role shapes and geometry play in Islamic art and architecture. Since Islam forbids worshipping idols and discourages the use of human or animal forms in art, geometric patterns along with calligraphy and nature motifs predominate Islamic art.

The Author's Note also says that artist Mehrdokht Amini depicted different Muslim traditions across countries in terms of art, architecture, and culture in each double-page spread. I emailed Amini to ask which countries were reflected in her artwork, and she responded immediately. The countries and cultural references she used in depicting each shape are (in order of their appearance in the book):

Cone - set in Malaysia;  
 Rectangle - set in Egypt;  
 Octagon – set in Afghanistan;  
 Triangle – set in Turkey;  
 Arch – set in Iran;  
 Cube – set in Saudi Arabia;  
 Square - set in Pakistan;  
 Circle – set in Kazakhstan;  
 Hexagon - set in Nigeria;  
 Oval – set in the Philippines;  
 Diamond - set in Mexico;



Crescent – set in the United Kingdom;  
And the concluding page – set in Lebanon.

Including this information in the book would have been helpful for young readers (and educators) to emphasize that Muslim people live all around the world, with diverse local cultures and shared religious traditions.

Illustrator Mehrdokht Amini lives in Surrey, England. In addition to their cultural specificity, her illustrations sensitively capture her characters' facial expressions as exemplified in another of her recent titles, *Yo Soy Muslim: A Father's Letter to His Daughter* (Mark Gonzales, 2017). On her website, Mehrdokht Amini shares numerous examples of her artwork at <https://www.myart2c.com>.

Helping children increase their knowledge and further develop empathy as preparation for actively and effectively participating in a global community is a significant goal for educators and families. *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: A Muslim Book of Shapes* is a beautiful book—both in print and illustration—that deserves a special place in classroom, school, and home libraries.

Educators can pair this book with this author and illustrator team's prior collaboration: *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors* (2015). Include both books in a text set focused on Muslim culture. For a focus on cultural competence and global citizenship, Chronicle Books published an annotated and illustrated list of other books that could be paired with *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets* an annotated and illustrated list of other books that could be paired with *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets*.

A text set focused on art, shapes, and color would also be fun and informative for young learners. *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes* (2015) written by Roseanne Greenfield Thong and illustrated by John Para and *Green Is a Chile Pepper: A Book of Colors* (2016) created by the same author and illustrator team would make thoughtful pairings. The former is available in a Spanish/English bilingual edition. These books, focused on Latinx culture, also offer rhyming text. John Para's culturally authentic illustrations offer opportunities for comparison with Mehrdokht Amini's art in *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets*.

Judi Moreillon, Literacies and Libraries Consultant, Tucson, Arizona



*Front Desk*

Written by Kelly Yang

Arthur A. Levine Books, 2018, 286 pp

ISBN 9781338157796

*"It's just so unfair," I said. My mother sighed. She walked over and put a hand on my shoulder. "We're immigrants," she said. "Our lives are never fair." (p.68).*

News that her family will be immigrating from China to America, where, her parents tell her, people can live in a house with a dog, eat hamburgers, and "do whatever they want" (p.1), sounds good to 10-year-old Mia. Mia's experience in America, however, is significantly different from what her family imagined. Instead of a dog, poverty welcomes Mia's family and stays with them for a long time. In the summertime, they live in a car with a broken air conditioner, making life unbearable. Their financial condition grows worse when Mia's mom loses her waitressing job. Eventually, Mia's parents find motel management jobs at the Calvista Motel where the family is allowed to live. It is like getting free rent, but their room is so close to the front desk that Mia's family are nearly on 24-hour duty. Mia works at the front desk while her parents take care of other tasks such as housekeeping and laundry.

The hotel owner is Taiwanese-American Michael Yao and his son Jason is one of Mia's new classmates. Mr. Yao is infamous for his greed, selfishness, arrogance, and rudeness. His unreasonable orders make life stressful and challenging for Mia's parents. Mr. Yao symbolically displays the classic cliché that America is the land of opportunities. Prevalent racism against black people is also widely reflected when Mr. Yao and a security guard from a neighboring motel state that Blacks are "bad people." Thus, Hank, a weekly guest at the motel, becomes the suspect of a stolen vehicle. Many socio-cultural, socio-economic, and political issues of 1990's America are revealed through Mia's narrative.

This is an historical narrative that focuses on Chinese immigration set in the 1990's when many highly educated Chinese people left China due to the post-cultural revolution crisis. However, the social issues from that time period in America in respect to immigrants, people of color, poverty, and school bullying are very contemporary. When the school teacher displays a picture of Qin Shin Huang, a Chinese emperor, Mia thinks, "I don't know where Mrs. Douglas got her picture from, but Qi Shi Huang's eyes were ridiculously slanted. His eyebrows went all the way up to his forehead" (p.87). Such ethnic stereotypes have not disappeared in today's America. Mia's cross-cultural friendship with Lupe, an immigrant from Mexico, sends a positive message, developing empathetic connections between them around each other's transnational identities.

Mia is wise, insightful, clever, reflective, brave, and most of all, she displays agency. She is a relatively new Chinese immigrant child, but she resembles an American child. More accurately, Mia's perspective seems more Chinese American than Chinese immigrant. She is more vocal and clever than most of the adults in the story. Such confidence and street smartness are diffi-

cult to develop in the short time period projected within the book. However, Mia is capable of reaching out to different grown-up characters who she thinks or feels need her help. She is not shy around adults, including policemen. Given that the family immigrated in the 1990s, it would make more sense for the family, including Mia, to feel uncomfortable and fearful around government authorities. Government controls are one of many reasons that people left China after the cultural revolution. In *Front Desk*, Mia doesn't show any hesitancy to call and even assert her opinion in defending Hank with the police. Mia is like a nice adult in a child's body.

While Mia introduces herself as relatively new to America, and her English (C- level) is not yet as good as native English speakers, the way she solves problems does not indicate the language barriers of a new immigrant. Mia's oral accent is barely present in the entire story. Actually, she is interpersonally confident in communications. Mia isn't afraid of talking on the phone and it is easy to forget that Mia has been in the U.S. for only a couple of years. Mia's mom is self-conscious in respect to her poor English skills/pronunciation, which is more realistic.

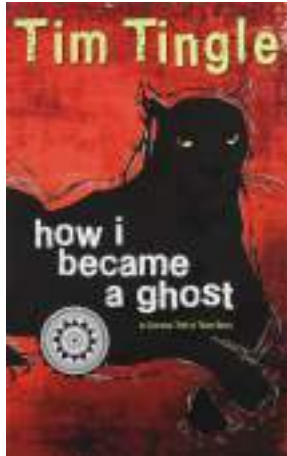
Kelly Yang reveals Mia's immigrant identity through her written English. Mia writes several letters to help solve problems for other people. In the text, the author shows Mia's editing on those letters, but the English word confusions are closer to native English speakers' language confusions than Asian language speakers. Contrasting the English mistakes made by Mia to a Vietnamese refugee child in *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2013) shows that Mia's English confusions are from lack of knowledge about vocabulary and not inexperience of language usage.

*Front Desk* explores a variety of sub-themes including activism, family, school bullying, friendship, and racism. It can be paired with other books such as *Inside Out Back and Again* (2013) by Thanh Lai, *Pandas on the Eastside* (2016) by Gabrielle Prendergast, *Insignificant Event in the Life of a Cactus* (2017) by Dusti Bowling, *The Way Home Looks Now* (2015) by Wendy Wan-Long Shang, and *Forest World* (2017) by Margarita Engle. *Lucy and Lunh* (2014) by Alice Pung portrays an Asian teenager's perspective of her immigrant parents' hard-working life in Australia. *Pandas on the Eastside* (2016) and *The Way Home Looks Now* (2015) would be informative to explore language and cultural diversity among the group of people whom mainstream readers call "Chinese."

Author Kelly Yang signals that the story is somewhat autobiographical, based on when she helped her parents work at different motels in California. In the author's note, Yang provides historical information about Chinese immigration including that China's per capita GDP was only US\$317 in 1990 and in that time 536,000 immigrants from mainland China came to the U.S. While the author's note is informative, the ambiguous timeframe in *Front Desk* may mislead young readers in thinking this is the harsh reality of current Chinese immigrants.

Kelly Yang is the author of three children's books and a columnist for the South China Morning Post. Yang's college entrance at the age of 13 and acceptance into Harvard Law School at the age of 17, making her one of the school's youngest graduates, add to her remarkable history. Currently, she is running KYP (Kelly Yang's Project) where she does curriculum development, teacher training, and work with children writers across various age groups.

Yoo Kyung Sung, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM



*how i became a ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story*

Written by Tim Tingle

The Roadrunner Press, 2013, 141pp.

ISBN 978-1937054557

Powerful reds and blacks and the mesmerizing eyes of the panther on the book cover pulled me in and dared me to pick up *how i became a ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story*. The panther has an outline drawn around him, which gives the appearance that he may move or pounce at any time. After watching the panther and feeling this fear, I noticed his regal posture and felt his leadership. I wanted to find out what was happening within the covers of this book.

Tim Tingle offers an emic approach to his studies of the Choctaw culture and heritage through his books. We learn that "his great-great-grandfather, John Carnes, actually walked the Trail of Tears in 1835." Tingle has dedicated his life to educating people about the Choctaw culture and heritage; from his author website we learn that he has many impressive accomplishments towards this goal. He is an author, speaker, storyteller, winner of many state and national awards for his children's and young adult literature books. He has spoken at the Library of Congress and performed at the Kennedy Center. I was surprised to learn that someone can hire him to come to his or her classroom and teach a workshop on storytelling or writing at a beginning to experienced level. In his academic pursuits, he has earned a Master's Degree in English Literature at the University of Oklahoma in 2003.

Tingle has done a thorough job of recording and researching Choctaw history when he wrote this novel. This suspenseful story, described as historical fiction, travels along the Trail of Tears in 1835. We meet Isaac's family: Mom, Dad, Luke, and Jumper. Isaac is a 10-year-old boy. We watch as soldiers burn their village. Many Choctaw are killed even before they start their walk to their new home. Some are burned or shot; most are killed from blankets infected with small pox.

Isaac's mother invites us to watch a group of the oldest men say good-bye in their unique way in the woods. She says, "These men are saying good-bye to their home" (p.8). Next, his Mother leads Isaac to the river to watch the old women say good-bye to their homes. Both of these activities caused significant physical harm to their bodies, but all remain stoic. The Choctaw see their homes within nature, not the house they sleep in. As Bradford (2011) explains, there are "serious dangers in applying Western theoretical paradigms to non-Western texts" (p.334). This way of saying good-bye is significant enough for Isaac's mother to make it a priority for her to teach Isaac.

A significant portion of this book discusses constant activity between the living world and the ghost world. Isaac shares, "I saw the Choctaw walkers, like before. But now I saw hundreds more Choctaws - Choctaw ghost walkers" (p. 43). Now they travel with their people as ghost walkers. Some Choctaw can see them but most cannot. Later this idea of living world and ghost world living together is strengthened, "No Choctaw would scream to drive a ghost away" (p.92).

Another window into Choctaw cultural experiences is that some Choctaw have the gift to turn into a panther. They are referred to as panther people. Most Choctaw have heard the stories but few have seen this transformation. In this book, one of the ghosts and the panther work together in a rescue mission. A door opened when I read "We did more than save Naomi today. We made our people proud. This is the highest honor a Choctaw can ever earn, to make the ancestors proud" (p.115). This statement reflects a strong and proud culture with a future strengthened by its people making honorable choices.

As a teaching tool, students can research the Trail of Tears and read for the significance of the line "Treaty Talk always meant something else, and that something else was never nice" (p.3). For additional pairings readers could also read about other American Indian tribes in *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moon* (1992) by Josephy Bruchac and Jonathan London.

Jeanmarie Ford Bryant, University of Texas, Arlington

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*Islandborn*

Written by Junot Díaz

Illustrated by Leo Espinosa

Dial, 2018, 48 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7352-2986-0

*Every kid in Lola's school was from somewhere else. Hers was the school of faraway places (p.5).*

Junot Díaz has created a vibrant, thought-provoking book in which Lola, a young African-Caribbean girl, is given a homework assignment to draw a picture of her first country. Lola left "the island" when she was a baby and doesn't remember anything, so she goes on a quest to collect memories by listening to stories of the people and "the island" where her family once lived. Many remember the island with love--nonstop music, fruit that makes you cry, and poetry. Her mother recalls a hurricane passing through the island, destroying their beloved homes and the neighborhood. Islanders rebuilt their island under a new name because of Hurricane San Zenon, and Mr. Mir, the building superintendent, recalls a powerful green "monster" controlling and scaring the islanders long ago. The people worked together to eliminate it and find peace for their country. The illustrations by Leo Espinosa bring Lola's world to life through people's memories and magic. In her community's memories, she learns the "real" stories that were hidden in the metaphors she had not known. For instance, the island "monster" was not an animal, but a ruthless dictator whose 30-year reign terrorized the islanders (Li, 2018, para. 4). Through her new understandings, Lola begins to piece together the stories now imbued with new meaning.

The picturebook shows how different forces, in this case political oppression, can drive people away from their beloved homes. Junot Díaz uses his curious heroine to encourage readers to understand their roots including treasuring those around them and embracing their collective memories. Some, like those on the island, must migrate to faraway places. People end up torn away from where they belong. To survive these situations, immigrants must seek new places with perhaps new opportunities, along with new challenges. Cultural heritage can be kept alive through memories and traditions and will live within people. The place where people come from will remain with a person, no matter how far away they might travel from it.

It's even more fascinating for the reader to discover at the end that Lola's pictures in her school project are replicas of Espinosa's drawn images throughout the story. When the students hand in the assigned pictures, the teacher displays them, by saying, "Now our classroom has windows...Anytime you want to look at someone's first home, all you have to do is look out of their window." Díaz closes his story by Lola showing her classmates that they don't necessarily have to recall a place to understand it. This beautiful text is entertaining and a perfect read-aloud for younger students. The central metaphor makes this story better suited for students grades three and above to understand the themes in the book of immigrant identity. *The Color of Home* by Mary Hoffman is a great pairing to this book, showing the struggles of a boy from Somalia trying to deal with the challenge of being in a new country, the U.S.

Junot Diaz is a Dominican-American writer who is also a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2008 for his book, *The Brief Life of Oscar Wao* (2008). *Islandborn* is his first venture into picturebooks.

Carla Goncalves, Coastal Carolina University

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*La Princesa and the Pea*

Written by Susan Middleton Elya

Illustrated by Juana Martínez-Neal

Penguin Random House, 2017, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780399251566

The classic tale of a prince searching for the perfect wife and an overbearing mother who has her own tests in store for the potential princess is one that many readers are familiar with. However, it becomes a little less familiar when the story setting is Peru, the main characters are Indigenous people, and the story is told in a mix of English and Spanish. This picturebook is a Latin American interpretation of the classic tale, "The Princess and the Pea." The Prince's mother puts the potential princess through the ultimate test, which only a princess can pass. After assuming she is not fit for the throne because she is a peasant, the Prince's mother comes to realize that, indeed, the princess is right for her son.

As a spin-off from a classic Hans Christian Andersen tale, Susan Middleton Elya creates a new kind of mystical fairytale, one told through the outstanding illustrations of Juana Martínez-Neal. By highlighting words and phrases in Spanish, this story presents bilingualism as an important part of the narrative. Perhaps Elya's motivation for this alternative take stemmed from her many years studying Spanish, a language not native to her, or perhaps it stemmed from her travels through various Latin American countries. Nevertheless, it is without a doubt that Elya's take on this classic tale motivates readers to disregard language barriers, and promotes language sharing. Pairing possibilities could include other books with Indigenous motifs such as those found in works by Duncan Tonatiuh or Yuyi Morales.

The collaboration between the author and illustrator works harmoniously to create a fictional world with just the right amount of cultural references to remind readers of relatable topics that can often be hard to find in children's literature. For example, the artwork created by Peruvian-American illustrator Juana Martínez-Neal gives readers a peek into the old world of Indigenous Peru. Her use of light colors and detailed textures adds a feeling of mystery to the story. This book was a winner of the 2018 Pura Belpré Medal Award for Illustration, and was a nominee for the 2018 Ezra Jack Keats Illustration Award. The book was also selected for the 2018 NCTE Notable Books in the Language Arts and the Junior Library Guild.

Though this book most likely targets a younger audience, its underlying messages can be used to promote dialogue about important values for readers of all ages. This story invites readers to consider that they should not jump to conclusions about how people look on the outside. Readers can derive a sense of open mindedness from reading this book, and combine it with the underlying message of language equality, to reinforce the importance of welcoming English Learners into an environment that utilizes their native language as a resource, as opposed to silencing it. For more information on the author and illustrator, check their websites at: <http://www.susanelya.com> and <http://www.juanamartinezneal.com>.

Alexa Schnaid, University of Arizona, Tucson



*Slug Days*

Written by Sarah Leach  
Illustrations by Rebecca Bender  
Pajama Press, 2017, 120 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1772780222

As noted by Sarah Leach, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an umbrella term that has included Asperger Syndrome since 2013. Lauren, the central character in *Slug Days*, has Asperger Syndrome and as readers, we are welcomed into the life of a child who sees things a little bit differently than everyone else. Unlike her peers, Lauren has problems with social cues, sensory overload, and making friends. Throughout the book, readers are constantly reminded of the different characteristics of Asperger Syndrome and how children with these personality traits are taught to cope with seeing the world through different lenses. Readers are also given a look into how Lauren views the adults in her life and how those adults react to what she feels, finding them perfectly acceptable actions to everyday events.

The story begins with a clear definition of what constitutes a "slug day" according to Lauren. Usually, a slug day is when a day is not routine or where Lauren has problems in school or at home. A day can start out as a slug day and quickly become a butterfly day if things change and vice versa. As with most children with Asperger Syndrome, Lauren thrives on consistency, routine, and structure. Lauren's love for bugs comes through in her construction of "Insectopia," a craft project she works on with her mother that involves realistic constructions of bug habitats. Through Lauren's construction process, readers are able to note particular characteristics of an individual with Asperger Syndrome, such as fixation on an activity or subject, lack of eye contact with others, and incredible knowledge for a particular topic.

The reader also sees how Lauren views interpersonal relationships. Lauren's teacher, Ms. Patel works well with Lauren and caters to her needs as she is able, but Lauren still notices when Ms. Patel starts to lose her patience. Lauren finds it difficult to make and keep friends within the classroom due to how students view her. She does her best to impress her peers and to read their emotions, but she often finds herself excluded by those she thinks are her friends. Lauren has a strong bond with her parents, but she can tell it is more frustrating for her mother to deal with her Asperger Syndrome than it is for her father. Her father has the patience and kindness Lauren needs, while her mother does her best to provide structure and joy for Lauren's life. At the conclusion of the book, another student, Irma, is welcomed into Ms. Patel's class. While Irma does not have Asperger Syndrome, she is also misunderstood by her peers because she is from another country. At first, she and Lauren are not the best of friends, but through a series of events, Lauren and Irma grow closer together as the story concludes. The author provides imagery in the final part of the book as the two friends take off flying down the hall like butterflies so that they may sit together on the bus.

One of the key connections in this book is that of understanding Asperger Syndrome. An excellent pairing to discuss Autism with young adults is the picture book *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures* (2017) by Julia Finley Mosca and illustrated by Daniel Rieley. Additionally, for those

who seek a bilingual book to explain and understand Autism with young readers there is *Tacos Anyone?/¿Alguien Quiere Tacos?* (2005) by Marvie Ellis and illustrated by Jenny Loehr. *Slug Days* also addresses the struggles of making new friends when you are viewed as different. A good pairing would be *Starting with Alice* (2012) by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. *Slug Days* would be a noteworthy addition to any classroom library, especially those that are looking to have literature focusing on being inclusive to students who have Autism Spectrum Disorder and more specifically, Asperger Syndrome.

Sara Leach is an elementary teacher-librarian from Whistler, British Columbia, who has won awards for her multiple books including *Count on Me* (Ceder Book Award for 2012/13), and *Slug Days* (2017 Foreword INDIES: Juvenile Fiction Award Finalist and 2018 USSBY Outstanding International Books List). Leach has a keen understanding for students with Asperger Syndrome, as she has worked with them in her classroom for multiple years, providing realistic insight to more complex portrayals and angles of those who encounter Asperger Syndrome.

Rebecca Bender is a noted illustrator who has won awards for her work in *Giraffe and Bird* (OLA Blue Spruce Award) and *Don't Laugh at Giraffe* (OLA Blue Spruce Honour Book). Her work in *Slug Days* is noteworthy because it highlights the main points of each chapter for a young reader. As this book is aimed at grades 3-6, the chapters are only around 2-4 pages. Bender's illustrations allow for a young reader to note the main concept of the chapter and to make connections between the text and illustrations. Bender's photos appropriately allow for readers to visualize what is happening in the story through Lauren's unique lens.

Amanda Szwed, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas



*The Only Road*

Written by Alexandra Diaz

Simon & Schuster, 2012, 308 pp.

ISBN 978-1481457507

*Querida Ángela,*

*We're sorry for your loss, as your brother's death is our loss too. To make up for it, we'd like to extend our invitation to have you join us instead.*

*We'll give you six days to mourn your brother, then please report to Parque de San José before school. We'd like your help in delivering a gift*

*to a friend. Your cousin can help too.*

*Sincerely yours, The Alphas (p. 17).*

After Jamie and Ángela's twelve-year-old cousin, Miguel, is brutally murdered by The Alphas, a dangerous gang that has taken over their small town, they receive this letter, telling them that after the six days they have to mourn their cousin, they must join in Miguel's place. The tight-knit, extended family understands what this means--they join or they die--so they band together to get Jamie and Ángela out of their small Guatemalan town, even if that means a long and potentially extended time of separation. For the next few days, the family tries to stick to their routines and appear as normal as possible while preparing the cousins for their journey to El Norte. In the middle of the night, the pair flees knowing only a general plan, carrying a small amount of food, and hiding \$2,000 each (scrounged together from family and close neighbors) sewn deceptively into their pants.

*The Only Road* follows this journey of the two unaccompanied minors (children and teenagers under the age of 18 who are traveling without an adult family member or guardian while trying to cross the U.S. border), trying to make the trek along the only road their families knew to send them. The pair flees from immigration police and gangs along the way, combat hunger and injuries, and face the cruel realities of traveling all alone in a country that does not want them. Through it all, they build friendships with other children and teens and learn to work together to survive, all the while becoming a close family through heartbreak.

Readers will empathize with the seemingly impossible decisions families are forced to make and see how treacherous the journey to El Norte is for many young people from Central America. In a time when immigration is a highly debated topic, readers will be able to connect with the difficult decisions the parents have to make, the challenges the protagonists face, and the uncertainty that awaits them upon reaching their final destination. As a high school teacher, I see many of my students in Jamie and Ángela and have built connections with them using this book. Teachers will be able to build closer relationships with their immigrant students, regardless of their status, and create an understanding of the lasting issues that may derive from making the trip as an unaccompanied child or teen. The overall message along with the highly effective figurative language allows for a realistic connection that both students and teachers can make, regardless of their preconceived thoughts and ideas regarding immigration.

Alexandra Diaz is the daughter of Cuban immigrants and lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She wrote *Of All the Stupid Things*, a YALSA Rainbow List and New Mexico Book Award finalist. A native Spanish speaker, she includes many Spanish phrases and words in her book, frequently moving between Spanish and English in to create a sense of authenticity. She teaches creative writing to teens and adults. If you loved *The Only Road*, other books you may be interested in are *Somos Como Las Nubes/ We Are Like the Clouds* (2016) by Jorge Argueta, *Outcasts United* (2009) by Warren St. John, and *Enrique's Journey* (2006) by Sonia Nazario.

Mary Gilliland is an English teacher in North Texas who works with immigrant students in ESL classes, struggling readers in Reading Improvement, and special education and on-level students in English III. She graduated from the University of North Texas in 2013, and is currently working toward a Master's degree in reading.

Mary Gilliland, Denton Independent School District, Denton, TX



*The Story of Car Engineer Soichiro Honda*

Written by Mark Weston

Illustrated by Katie Yamasaki

Lee & Low Books, 2008, 64 pp.

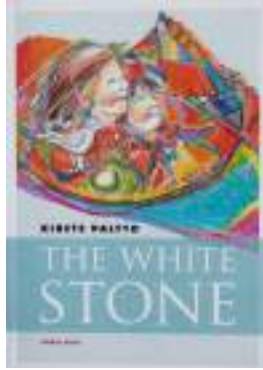
ISBN 10: 1-620-14790-4

This biography tells the story of a young Japanese boy who loved cars and grew up to manufacture cars, motorcycles and airplane propellers. The author begins when Honda was only seven years old and enjoyed watching large boats sail into the harbor, where he saw the first car rumbling through his small town. The car was a Ford Model T, and Honda immediately fell in love, vowing to learn how cars work and to make one himself. Honda was not a good student in school, but he loved to make things with his hands. As a teenager, he moved to Tokyo and found work as a janitor in a car repair shop. For six years, he learned to repair every part on automobiles. He was then ready to open his own shop where he perfected engine parts to sell to Toyota. During World War II, he made propellers for the Japanese Air Force and became quite wealthy. All was lost when Japan was defeated, but Honda soon began manufacturing motorcycles for the poor Japanese people who could not afford cars. While most motorcycle companies were concentrating on building large bikes, Honda found his niche with small motorbikes. When he later made his first cars, they were an instant success. Most everyone in the world now knows his last name and his cars, motorcycles and other equipment.

The book is an excellent example of how a very young boy with a dream and determination can work hard and achieve incredible success against all odds. The story offers many opportunities to teach about perseverance as Honda built a large company only to see it destroyed when Japan was decimated because of its involvement in World War II. The book accurately portrays Honda as a businessman of the world who recognized that his small motorbikes would sell big even in the United States only fifteen years after the U.S. had defeated his country at war. He literally beat the American motorcycle companies at their own game. The book will interest anyone who enjoys cars and motorcycles, especially those who can identify with Honda working on his bikes and cars, and who often are hard to reach with literature.

Katie Yamasaki's illustrations for the book are clear and authentic. There are very good drawings of Honda with the piston rings he designed for Toyota Motor Company and some of Honda racing cars, riding motorcycles, and yelling at his employees. Mark Weston does an excellent job of depicting ordinary Japanese life during and after WWII, and Katie Yamasaki's illustrations show the clothing and culture of Japanese people riding motorcycles and working on Honda's assembly line. The book could be used as an incentive for students to write about their dreams, no matter how fanciful. Few believed Soichiro Honda could rise from janitor to the largest manufacturer of motorcycles in the world and one of the largest manufacturers of cars. Other interesting biographies in this series include *The Story of World War II Hero Irena Sandler* (2018) by Marcia Vaughn and *The Story of Tennis Champion Arthur Ashe* (2018) by Crystal Hubbard.

Edwin Jarrell, Coastal Carolina University



The White Stone

Written by Kirste Paltto

Illustrated by Ulrika Tapio Blind

Translated by Rauna Kuokkanen and Philip Burgess

Davvi Girji, 2011, 101 pp.

ISBN: 978-8273747822

*I have always been happy when I have heard Sámi children speaking the Sámi language. When I listen, it's as if little bells are tinkling in my ears.*  
(Paltto, 2011, p.77)

This work of speculative fiction is written for young readers with soothing illustrations by Ulrika Tapio Blind. It has been translated into English from North Sámi by Paltto's daughter and son-in-law, Rauna Kuokkanen and Philip Burgess. This text could be considered by Western readers to be folklore, legend, or fairy tale. The literature of the Sámi people is often interwoven with their oral traditions and ties to nature; this text is an excellent representation of how stories are told in the Sámi tradition. *The White Stone* tells the story of Elle, a young girl, and the things that she learns about being a Sámi person while on a journey to meet the Mountain Spirit. Elle meets Sáija, a Gufihtar (underworld) girl from under Ptarmigan Mountain, and together they help herd reindeer and play with other children on Elle's spirit journey.

*The White Stone* is focused on teaching cultural values and traditions related to kinship ties and ways of being. Kirste Paltto says that Sámi "are often guided by practicality and tied to the land and its ability to sustain people and other living beings" (Kuokkanen, 2004, p. 93). Nature and the spirit of nature fills this text and informs the characters with the message that being able to communicate in Sámi is how their identity will be maintained. At one point, Golleniedia, the wise mother of Sáija, cautions Elle about losing her mother tongue, "They will try to trick us into forgetting our language, our ways of thinking and our way of life. But I hope you'll never do that, even if someone tried" (p. 87).

The white stone, itself, is a magical object that has been given to Elle by a wagtail as a thank you for Elle preventing her cat from eating a bird. The wagtail tells her "when you are in trouble, listen to the Stone...Keep it next to your heart and it will warm you when you need it" (p. 27). At various times throughout the text the white stone sings to Elle reminding her to be strong, wise, and helpful to her people.

Characters cross the border between what is reality and what is the magical realm of the Gufihtar. For the Sámi the Gufihtar realm is nearly a mirror of the Sámi world, but the Gufihtar are wealthier than most Sámi and they have large reindeer herds that they tend. The theme of crossing borders is very much a part of Sámi existence outside of literature because their ancestral lands are in a place where current nation states also exist. The Sámi are an Indigenous people who live in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. They speak nine different languages, which are not all mutually intelligible. For the Indigenous Sámi, the rights to their lands, languages, and cultures are all in need of protection, which is provided to them in varying degrees by the nation states that occupy their ancestral lands (United Nations, 2018).



This text deals with issues of colonization from the perspective of those whose lands have been invaded, and who wish for the people to remember their old ways and traditions. One evening, in front of the fireplace, Golleniedia explains to Elle and the other children:

*One winter, strange people came to where the Sámi were living. They carried weapons and they stole from them. They even killed some of them. They stole the Sámi's land, put up fences, and built houses. These were hard times for the Sámi...The Mountain Spirit has seen that today the same type of people are still taking the land, that they still carry guns, and build fences. He has seen how the Sámi are becoming separated from each other. He has asked us to go to the Sámi and tell them who they are. (pp. 49-50)*

"Paltto's books are deeply rooted in Sámi traditions. They are based on description of a whole community" (Kuokkanen, 2001, p. 83). This is an intergenerational text that includes elders, grandparents, wise spirits, aunts, brothers, and other kinship ties. In writing this text, Paltto has pulled from her own experiences of hearing stories and tells this story as if readers are in front of a fire on a crisp fall night. "Sámi writers have also a central role as they are the ones who constantly weave the past, present and future into a fabric that gives us the meanings we need to stay grounded in who we are" (Kuokkanen, 2004, p. 92). The feeling that the reader is being spoken to by a storyteller fills this text and allows the reader to believe that there is a magical world that not only reflects us, but reflects a holistic version of who we could be as humans.

The most successful aspect of this text is the way in which the characters' relationships create bonds in both the real and the Gufihtar world. Paltto creates bonds that are playful and safe, but also filled with expectations of good behavior and kindness. These relationships are almost instructional, demonstrating the importance of relating to one another's values and acting as a model for how people should be human to one another and strive to work together. At one point, Sáija tells Elle, "here you are not allowed to leave anybody out" after Elle asks if the little children always get to play (p. 47). At another point she tells Elle, "our reindeer are not marked. The herd is our common herd. Nobody has their own reindeer, except for the draught bulls. We look after the herd together. And we use it together too" (p. 62).

The illustrations throughout the text by Ulrika Tapio Blind deepen the reader's understanding of the text and evoke emotions that bring forward the ideas of kinship, harmony, grace, and kindness. Often Blind uses yellows, reds, blues, and white space to create images that depict the characters in nature, or with structures and items that are undeniably Sámi.

Other books that may interest readers are: *Bless Me Ultima* (1995) by Rudolfo Anaya, and *In Between Worlds* (2016) by Máret Anne Sara (a Sámi text in English translation). These texts connect the world of adolescence to magical knowledge that is sacred wisdom in a place of colonization and change while the primary characters develop a deep understanding and reverence for their culture through the journeys they take.

Paltto is a well-known Sámi author who writes for children and adults. She has numerous publications in Sámi, which have been translated into Finnish, German, Norwegian, and English. Her

topics deal with everyday life and what it means to be an Indigenous person in a colonized place. She has won numerous awards, including the Sámi Parliament's Culture Prize (1997), the Nordic Literature Prize (2001), and the Sámi Councils Literature Prize in (2002). It is important to note that Sámi Literature is very young in its lifetime of publications; the language itself did not have a uniform way of being written until 1978 (Internet Archive, 2008).

Amber Gordon, University of New Mexico – Taos, Taos, New Mexico

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*Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!*

Written by Pat Mora

Illustrated by Rafael López

Lee & Low, 2007

ISBN: 978-1-58430-271-1

This beautifully illustrated picturebook is a vibrant adventure through culture, history, and food, seamlessly integrating informative and poetic text on each page. Readers will be swept through the haiku with awakened senses inviting them to join the activity throughout this artistic work. Pat Mora and Rafael López have created a cultural experience to which readers of all ages and backgrounds can connect. *Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!* will be a welcome addition to any educator's collection in that it approaches diversity with a tone of respect and value through the universal lens of food.

*Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!* is organized into a delightful collection of haiku that focuses on one specific food in the U.S. of Native or Latin American origin per page, such as vanilla and peanuts. Each page also offers a more informative paragraph that introduces readers to a brief history of the food's origin and journey into the modern day. This element could be especially interesting for older or higher level readers. To deepen the reader's cultural and linguistic knowledge, Pat Mora includes the etymologies of these foods, which bring life to the earliest Americans who enjoyed these foods before European colonization. The stunning illustrations seem to move the reader through the joyous stories of each food. Children, families, nature, and culture are vividly represented in cheerful action and in peace through López's artistic depictions. Warm, rich hues of seasonal colors boldly paint a picture of imagination and tradition that all readers will enjoy.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) emphasizes the importance of reading as a form of self-affirmation when she states, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part." *Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!* provides an exemplary reflection of cultural diversity in which readers can find themselves. The variety of ethnicities and colorful anthropomorphism illustrated in these pages teach a fun lesson of value and inclusion while highlighting rich Native and Latin American histories and cuisine. Pat Mora's emphasis on the importance of diversity is open, informative, and approached with a tone of reverence for "the peoples of the Americas long before Christopher Columbus or any other Europeans" (Mora, 2007). Mora ensures that this book could be a valuable resource for a number of different lessons in literacy for the classroom, as it is engaging, culturally relevant and responsive, and teaches poetic and figurative language elements.

The notable themes of family and togetherness are depicted throughout *Yum! ¡Mmmm! ¡Qué Rico!*. In this age of technology in which societies around the world are plagued with stress and strife, this book offers readers a beautiful moment to return to our human roots and remember the loving bonds of family. Children may be encouraged to reflect upon the time that they spend with their families, gathering, celebrating, and engaging in traditions old and new. They

may find a connection in that food is generally an essential piece of this time shared with their families and may see their own traditions and food from their tables come alive in these illustrations.

Pat Mora and Rafael López deliver a wonderful piece that intertwines geography, history, and anthropological elements. Pat Mora has published over twenty-five children's books. She is the founder of the family literacy initiative *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day) and a strong promoter of diversity in children's literature (Mora, 2007). Rafael López grew up in Mexico City, and his art is largely influenced by his heritage (Mora, 2007). His first book, *My Name is Celia* by Monica Brown, won an Américas Award and a Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor (Mora, 2007).

Madelyn Johnson, Coastal Carolina University

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