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WOW REVIEW

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WOW Review: Volume XII Issue 1

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Open Theme

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Volume XII Issue

Introduction and Editors' Note

Open-themed issues are exactly that—open to a wide range of titles and dependent on what reviewers have been reading and thinking about. As editors the challenge is to take a disparate collection of titles and find common threads across the narratives. In this issue that was easy. These titles feature characters caught in systems they try to understand and navigate but that limit opportunities.

One group of titles highlights the limiting nature of government-sanctioned systems. In *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*, Sara Saedi introduces readers to life as an undocumented Iranian immigrant, negotiating her secret with her teen desires to fit in with American culture. In *The Bell Rang*, the young narrator is also caught up in a system she cannot control, that of slavery in the U.S. She lets readers in on the struggles of living by the bell and describes the tension that occurs on the plantation and within her family when her brother escapes North. In *Habibi*, Liyana experiences the limitations of being an Arab-American living in her father's native Palestine and falling in love with David, a young Jewish teen. In *I Am Thunder*, the daughter of Pakistani immigrants to London experiences the tension of embracing her Muslim faith yet holding firm against religious radicalization. In the near-dystopian novel *The Internment*, American teen Layla and her family are removed from their homes to internment camps. The Muslim teen rallies others through social media to resist the silencing of their freedom to speak.

Another group of titles features the limiting nature of the culture a person lives in. In *Long Way Down*, author Jason Reynolds tells the story of Will and the gang-related system of revenge that he feels obliged to honor when his brother is shot and killed. In *Josefina Learns a Lesson*, set in the 1820's in New Mexico, the protagonist feels tension between her desire to follow new parameters for girls and become literate, and her desire to honor the lifestyle of her deceased mother. In *Juana & Lucas*, it is the character's own attitude towards learning English that limits her joy in learning.

The final group of titles features negotiating life in the borderlands and living life in two seemingly incongruous cultures, yet the protagonist demonstrates thriving "in the in between." In *They Call Me Guëro: A Border Kid's Poems* the protagonist gains his voice as he writes poems about living on the border of Mexico and Texas. In *Yo Soy Muslim: A Father's Letter to His Daughter* author Mark Gonzalez describes the joys and challenges of being a Latino Muslim.

We invite you to read about strong characters who make mistakes, learn, and try again as they negotiate borders and systems that try to limit the way they live their lives.

We have invited the committee members of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award to write the reviews for our Winter 2019-2020 issue. Our Spring 2020 issue is open-themed. We

welcome reviews of recent children's and young adult books that highlight intercultural and global perspectives. Submission deadline: February 15, 2020.

Susan Corapi and Prisca Martens, Co-Editors



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Book Review: *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*

Written by Sara Saedi

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/550595/americanized-rebel-without-a-green-card-by-sara-saedi/>, 2018, 253 pp

ISBN: 978-1524717797

Sara Saedi writes a memoir about her status as an undocumented Iranian immigrant and her family's long and arduous journey to achieving citizenship. Growing up in the U.S. since the age of two, Sara doesn't find out about her undocumented status until she is in her teens. When she does, her status becomes a central concern and characteristic of her identity. The story seems like a rudimentary account of a normal teen's life—dealing with acne, school, boys, drinking, family—but it is all tainted by the deep secret she harbors. Desperate for a green card but stalled in the legal system, Sara constantly worries about the threat of deportation while navigating her changing body, relationships, and environment.

Americanized is a cornucopia of various forms of information and media. The book starts off with a note from the author where she explains that her book is meant to be humorous, but that being undocumented is anything but a joke. Then, she dives into the moment when she finds out about her own undocumented status. When her frustrated sister laments her inability to get a part-time job because she doesn't have a social security number, Sara realizes that she doesn't have one either. The rest of the book is laid out in fifteen chapters that chronicle the history of her parents, relationships with her siblings, and teen exploits, all enshrouded in a continuous legal labor of trying to get green cards. Chapters are accented with excerpts from her diary, family photos, analogous charts, and footnotes that explain her use of historical references, Iranian words, or general reflections. Every two chapters, Sara includes "Frequently Asked Questions" where she addresses stereotypes or misunderstandings about Iranians. Finally, the book wraps up in an Epilogue, where Sara pens a letter to her alternate self – the girl who grew up in Iran instead of the U.S. As an added bonus, the book includes an "Undocumented Immigrant Refresher Course" where Sara summarizes immigration policies, highlights pertinent vocabulary, and talks about legal rights. Finally, questions for discussion as well as an interview with the author are available at the end.

Saedi masterfully depicts the delicate balance between being an American teenager and an undocumented immigrant. Although Sara grows up in the U.S. and seems to have similar problems to other teens, the pervasive anxiety of being undocumented never lets her forget how different she actually is. The diary excerpts and family photos throughout the book give an authenticity to the author's story. In addition, her conversational, light tone makes it seem like she is conversing with a close friend. Sara shares the happy stories along with the more embarrassing and tragic ones, and doesn't mince words when expressing how much her undocumented status affected her life. At the same time, her appeal to pop culture and memes will intrigue young readers and help them empathize with her as a person.

Saedi also highlights her family's particular version of being Iranian, but that part of her life seems overshadowed by her American experience and how being undocumented creates a barrier for her. Still, this isn't a book meant to highlight her race and culture, it is a book aimed at shining a light on the undocumented immigrant experience. Even in her dedication Saedi addressed "all the dreamers" along with her siblings. Saedi captures how devastating and painful the process of legalization can be.

This book can be paired with *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugee* by Don Brown (2018) for a visual look at the struggles of immigrants today; with *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2000) for an in-depth look at the Iranian Revolution; with *Darius the Great is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram (2018) for a fictionalized, but realistic look at fitting in with dual cultures; or with *Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration* by Ann Bausum (2009) for a historical parallel to today's immigration policies. By providing stories of various voices and experiences with immigration and assimilation, teen readers can become more knowledgeable about the reasons people immigrate, the effects of assimilation on the individual, and the way policies help or hinder those in need. Sara Saedi currently lives in Los Angeles, California with her family. Visit her website <http://sarasaediwriter.com/>.

Anastasiya Olkanetskaya, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign



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Book Review: The Bell Rang

Written & illustrated by James E. Ransome

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Bell-Rang/James-E-Ransome/9781442421134>, 2019, 40 pp

ISBN: 9781442421134

The story is narrated by a young slave girl, whose brother and parents work in the fields of the plantation six days a week. Every day except Sunday is the same. When the bell rings in the morning, Daddy gathers wood. Mama prepares breakfast, the family eats, and then Daddy, Mama, and Ben head to the fields.

For most slaves, each day is filled with backbreaking work under oppressive conditions. The narrator does not yet have to work in the fields; she is able to stay behind to mind the children too young to work in the fields.

One day Ben surprises the narrator with a doll he has made for her, but the next day he is gone, having escaped the plantation with two other boys. Her parents are beaten for Ben's escape and his friends are eventually caught, brought back, and whipped, but Ben is not caught. The remainder of the story shows the family as they struggle with a mix of complex emotions in the aftermath of Ben's escape. The family feels sadness for their loss, fear that harm will come to Ben, and also hope that, just maybe, Ben made it North to freedom where he can be "Free like the birds. Free like Moses. No more bells."

The Bell Rang is a moving story of slavery and the no-win option many slaves faced of deciding whether to remain where they are enslaved or risk their lives and lose family through escape. Many stories written about a slave's escape are told from the point-of-view of the escaped slave, but *The Bell Rang* provides a different perspective. Told from the point-of-view of Ben's younger sister, the narrator and her parents struggle to make sense of their array of emotions when Ben escapes.

The story ends on a note of optimism with two specific images that offer hope. The last illustration shows the narrator looking up at the bell. The image of the all-controlling bell is a powerful symbol of slavery in this story. The frequent image of the bell throughout reminds the reader of the way slaves are constantly controlled. However, this illustration leads readers to speculate whether one day the narrator also will decide to run. The other image is that of a bird flying off the last page. Contrasting with the bell, images of birds throughout the story conjure up the notion of flight, freedom and hope. Birds in flight over the gathered slaves on Sunday during worship is one illustration that stirs up feelings of freedom. Likewise the bird flying off the last blank page creates a sense of hope for the family that Ben has made it north.

Ransome's illustrations communicate the love this family possesses for each other. Thick brush strokes of acrylic combine with bold colors to create intimate scenes among family members. Ransome is able to convey the complicated feelings of those who choose to escape and those who are left behind. The single and double-page illustrations skillfully provide more information about the family member's emotions than the words alone offer.

There are many books that can be paired with *The Bell Rang* to address slavery and escape. One book is *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* written by Ellen Levine and illustrated by Kadir Nelson (2007). A second book is *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship & Freedom* written by Tim Tingle, and illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges (2006).

James E. Ransome was born in North Carolina in 1961. His family moved to New Jersey while he was in high school and it was at his new high school that he took filmmaking and photography classes, which influenced his style of illustrating. After high school he went on to attend and receive a bachelor of fine arts degree in illustration from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Faculty at the Pratt Institute include many award-winning artists, designers, architects, writers, and scholars. One of Ransome's teachers at the institute was the award winning illustrator and author Jerry Pinkney who went on to become Ransome's mentor.

Ransome has written 60 children's books and is the winner of multiple awards. The illustrations for *Before She Was Harriett* (2017) received the 2018 Coretta Scott King (CSK) Illustrator Honor. Other award-winning titles include the CSK winner *The Creation* (1994); CSK Honor Book *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* (1998); *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (1995); and *Let My People Go* (1998), winner of the NAACP Image Award. In addition he works as a commissioned artist and has created murals at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, the Underground Railroad Museum in Cincinnati, and at the Hemphill Branch Library in Greensboro, North Carolina.

James lives in upstate New York with his wife, author Lesa Cline-Ransome, who frequently collaborates with him on children's books. Several titles the couple collaborated on are *Game Changers: The Story of Venus and Serena Williams* (2018); *My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey* (2015); and *Words Set Me Free: The Story of Young Frederick Douglass* (2012). Together they also host art and writing segments on the award-winning educational series KidLit TV.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University



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Book Review: *Habibi*

Written by Naomi Shihab Nye

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Habibi/Naomi-Shihab-Nye/9780689825231>, 1997, 272 pp

ISBN: 9780780797864

Liyana's world is turned upside down when her father announces that he is taking their family from their home in St. Louis, Missouri to his homeland of Palestine. Although Liyana is a smart, thoughtful fourteen-year-old, she struggles to cope with the many changes her family endures as they move and try to start a new life in a country vastly different than the one she has previously known. She learns how to thrive in a local Armenian school even though she is an outsider. She tries to master Arabic while getting to know her many relations, particularly her grandmother Sitti. She and her family face cruelty and injustice at the hands of Israeli soldiers, yet she falls in love with a Jewish boy and eventually introduces him to her family. These events shape Liyana into a young woman who is proud of her cultural heritage and who longs to see peace in the midst of unchanging animosity.

This story is engaging and the writing is bright, descriptive, and beautiful. At the same time, *Habibi* wrestles with a relevant, important, and controversial topic. The way that Liyana must navigate life in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while dealing with her own coming-of-age problems and adjustment issues is powerful. In addition, the way her character attempts to tackle the racial and cultural divide head on is a great mirror for students who are perhaps afraid of speaking out for social change. They can hopefully see Liyana's strength and realize that they have agency to affect change.

Habibi would be an excellent book to use in exploring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In order to add Israeli perspectives, *Habibi* could be paired with *Tali's Jerusalem Scrapbook* by Sylvia Rouss (2003) or *If You Could Be My Friend: Letters of Mervet Akram Sha'Ban and Galit Fink* by Litsa Boudalika (1998). The movie *Israel and Palestine: A Divided Land* by Knowledge Unlimited (2004) or the book *Israel and Palestine* by Paul Mason (2009) also provide more context to the current conflict.

Naomi Shihab Nye was born in St. Louis, Missouri, to a Palestinian father and American mother and spent some of her adolescence in Palestine. She wrote *Habibi* based on many of her personal experiences. Nye currently lives and works in San Antonio, Texas. She has received numerous awards and honors for her poetry, short stories, and novels. Her other novels include *The Turtle of Oman* (2016) and *Going, Going* (2005). To learn more about Nye visit her website <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/naomi-shihab-nye> and <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/naomi-shihab-nye>

Brent Cochran, University of Texas at Arlington



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-xii-issue-1/>



Book Review: I am Thunder

Written by Muhammad Khan

<https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/muhammad-khan/i-am-thunder/9781509874057>, 2018, 306 pp

ISBN: 978-1509874057

Muzna Saleem feels like her life is ruled by the expectations of her parents and community. As the only daughter of Pakistani immigrants to England, she is expected to give up her dream of becoming a writer to become the doctor her parents want. While her family is Muslim, they do not regularly pray or attend mosque. However, they have very conservative views about makeup, dress, and boys. Muzna survives with the help of her best friend, who encourages both her writing and

her silliness.

When her friend violates an important community standard, Muzna's parents demand that she not have any contact with her. The family moves to a new neighborhood and Muzna begins attending a new school. At the new school, Muzna's writing and confidence soar as she and her classmates (from a multitude of ethnic and religious backgrounds) engage in important and very real conversations about what it means to be British and the cohesion of society. The complexities of these conversations, including the teens' frequent violations of civil dialogue, are one of the strongest parts of this book. As some students work to engage intellectually in the challenging conversations, others revert to name calling and stereotyping. Mr. Dunthrope, their teacher, helps them navigate the conversations with acceptance and understanding.

Muzna becomes friends with several other Muslim students, including a young man, Arif. After going with Arif and his older brother, Jameel, to a talk about how the world is destroying Islam, Muzna becomes more thoughtful about her and her parents' religiosity, choosing to wear the hijab and attending more and more talks with Jameel and Arif, seeing different ways of understanding her religion. As much as she loves Arif, his brother's interpretation of Islam and an errand he has her run for him begin to make her suspicious. Muzna sees how Jameel's beliefs have radicalized his brother and others, and she takes that information to the police. The intense ending shows the reader just how dangerous extreme religious radicalization can be. Muzna discovers that her own views and beliefs are what matter most to her future, and she is able to bring that future to her present while holding on to her new friend.

While it does not focus on the historical reasons for society's current dynamics, this novel would help high school readers deeply consider modern issues like radicalization and terrorism. Khan's novel is well-crafted, realistic, and engaging and a welcome addition to a classroom or library. Other books that would complement this text include *The Lines We Cross* by Randa Abdel-Fattah (2017) and *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai (2013).

The author, Muhammad Khan, was born in Britain to Pakistani parents, making his portrayal of Muzna's conflict between her different cultural worlds even more vivid. In the author's note,

Khan said that this book was his attempt to understand how religious extremism is spread. His book focuses on other important current issues, like wearing the hijab, religious terrorism, and radicalization in ways that both feel real for the characters and eye-opening to the reader.

Amanda Brewer, Texas Woman's University



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Book Review: Internment

Written by Samira Ahmed

<https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/samira-ahmed/internment/9780316522663/>, 2019, 387 pp

ISBN: 9780316522694

Layla Amin is an outspoken ordinary teen who shares the common concerns of any teen within the U.S.—teen crushes, grades, studies, parties, etc. That was before a U.S. president orders that Muslims be sent to internment/detention camps because of their faith. Layla's father is a renowned author and professor at a reputable university and writes poems with an activist/progressive content. He loses his job and his books are burned. The detention camp where Layla and her family are sent is located in 'Independence California.' Camp Mobius is situated close to the site of an actual detention camp for Japanese Americans during WWII. This location is a deliberate decision by the author to connect the historical past with the present. The Director of the camp believes he is above the law in relation to the protection of U.S. citizens and so orders attacks on inhabitants and is deliberately cruel to women. Layla ends up taking action and organizing the teens in the camp to conduct demonstrations and demand being released from the camp. She manages to access the internet through her Jewish boyfriend on the outside and a guard on the inside. Her blog posts and videos go viral and result in a national uproar, which brings reporters and other people to the camp and Red Cross workers as observers. A group of Muslims within the camp are employed by the Director, and are referred to as 'minders.' They remain loyal to and side with the Director on how to keep the citizens of the camp "in order." Some guards on the inside of the camp and Layla's Jewish boyfriend on the outside provide support to the resistance. Although the novel is often grim, it ends with hope.

This book has already received a great deal of attention, including starred reviews from *Booklist* (2/01/19), *Kirkus* (1/01/19), *Publishers Weekly* (1/07/19), *School Library Connection* (3/01/19) and *School Library Journal* (3/01/19). Other reviews were published in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (2/01/19), *Horn Book Magazine* (3/01/19), and the *New York Times* (3/10/19).

The story launches with an unsettling beginning where Layla is blatantly trying to break curfew to meet her boyfriend. The novel is written in the first person with the heartfelt expressions of Layla's feelings and thoughts. Apprehensive about her independent and deliberately provocative actions, her parents try to play it safe and curb her outbursts. Then the Exclusion Guards storm into their home to forcibly remove them from their beloved way of life. As the family and other camp members try to adjust to their new restricted surroundings, they are under constant surveillance by drones and guards and an electrically charged boundary. What they see through the wires is an open but inaccessible landscape. Whoever raises a voice disappears and no one knows where they go. A friend and a strong teen activist is lost to the electric wires that keep them inside the camp. The threat of the all-powerful Director looms but there is little emphasis on physical torture. Layla says about her new reality, "I don't measure

time by the old calendar anymore; I don't look at the date. There is only Then and Now. There is only what we once were and what we have become." (p. 2).

This narrative is strong and well written but makes the reader wonder about its acceptance for publication in the current political climate. The book is an alternate version of the present, but the underlying messages are relevant to today's reality where the national and global conversations are often against immigration, with negative portrayals of Muslims. With the separation of families and their children in cages at the border with Mexico, this book can encourage conversations about a range of issues related to immigration and racism. The representation of good and bad in both communities is a strength of the narrative. The 'minders' who sell out other Muslims and the close group around the Director are presented as enablers of the situation, but these negative actions are balanced by the actions of some of the guards and Layla's non-Muslim boyfriend. This narrative is considered a "near" dystopia that could happen in the near future and that connects to present U.S. events such as those of migrants coming from Central America, making the book an effective and courageous commentary on current events. As a reader, I do wonder if such a situation did arise whether the ending would be as hopeful and if the powerful guards would go against direct orders from higher up to help.

These deeply held negative views about Muslims are global and are increasing, with only a small number of supportive voices. Although hope comes from people outside the camp in the novel, the movement of resistance is initiated within the camp with the passionate voices of teens. What is concerning in the narrative is the attitudes of Layla's parent's generation, who are presented as complicit and accepting of the situation rather than supporting the youth. Oppression and displacement always result in this range of reactions. This can be seen currently in Muslim countries, where terrorist groups like ISIS have been able to use fear to take control and engage in terrorist acts that often hurt other Muslims and reinforce globally held negative stereotypes of Muslims.

Beneath this deeply unsettling fear is the realization that this novel is more realistic than dystopic, and that youth often lead the movement to ensure, or move towards, justice for all. When Layla decides to write about what is occurring in the camps, to tell the story that the Director of the camp and the Exclusion Authority is trying to keep from the U.S. public, she does so because it is necessary and despite all the risks. "I have to do something... we have to tell people. I don't think people on the outside will tolerate this if they know" (p. 187). Her courage in the face of real threats from those in power, not only intimidations against her physical and emotional self but also against all that she loves, is an inspiration. This kind of leadership by youth taking action against injustice is not a new trope in YA or in real life, but speaks to the reader of this book in a particularly strong way due to the present political climate.

The fictional voice within this narrative holds so much significance, because it allows readers to imagine themselves speaking out and acting with courage in the face of oppression alongside the brave adolescents who are doing so in our world right now in response to climate change, gun violence and sexual abuse. The recent real-life events where the youth are standing up and

speaking truth to power shows the power of the strength and will of the common people to bring down formidable organizations.

Other narratives thematically connected to this one are hard to locate, but one that stands out is *Guantanamo Boy* by Anna Perera (2011) about Khalid, an average fifteen-year-old boy in England who enjoys playing video games, hanging out with his friends, and cheering for his favorite soccer team. His father is from Pakistan and mother is from Turkey. He has visited Pakistan as an infant but has not been to Turkey. He goes through the same apprehensions and accolades as his friends except for the fact that he is a Muslim and, in the words of Khalid's father, "these are bad times for Muslims." The story is set soon after the events of 9/11. On a family trip to help his paternal aunts settle into a new home in Pakistan, he is kidnapped by the CIA and taken initially to a prison in Afghanistan and then later to the notorious Guantanamo Bay prison as a suspected terrorist. He endures all levels of physical and mental torture, including extreme psychological manipulation to the point that he suffers a mental collapse.

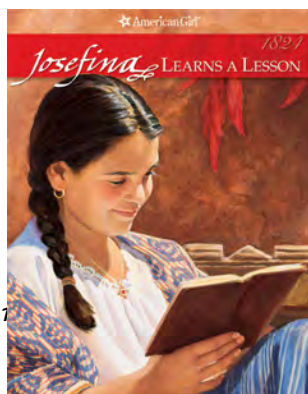
The author of *Internment*, Samira Ahmed, is a New York Times bestselling author of multiple books. She was born in Bombay, India but has been a long-time resident of the U.S., living outside of Chicago. She wrote this novel based on her experiences growing up in the U.S., weaving her experiences into this strong narrative. Find her online at <https://samiraahmed.com/>, https://twitter.com/@sam_aye_ahm and Instagram.

Seemi Aziz, University of Arizona



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Book Review: Josefina Learns a Lesson

Written by Valerie Tripp

Illustrated by Jean-Paul Tibbles

Vignettes by Susan McAliley

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/josefina-learns-a-lesson-by-valerie-tripp/>, 1997,
88 pp

ISBN: 978-1-562475-17-8

“When we can read this book, it will be like hearing Mamá’s voice. And when we can write, we can add things we remember her saying. This book will be a place to keep her words safe forever.” (p. 59)

Josefina Learns a Lesson is historical fiction, set in 1824 before the Mexican American War (1846-1848) when New Mexico was not yet part of the United States. María Josefina Montoya (henceforth, Josefina) is the main character, nine-years old and the youngest of four daughters. Her mother passed away the previous year and Josefina and her three older sisters endeavor to run the household the way they learned from their Mamá. Josefina’s aunt Tía Dolores, Mamá’s sister from Mexico City, agrees to live with Josefina’s family on the ranch for a while to help and teach them as Mamá had done. Tía Dolores provides problem solving skills and even discusses business, talking with Josefina’s father about how to increase the flock of sheep by trading blankets. The family begins a weaving business to obtain sheep, and Josefina greatly admires the changes Tía Dolores brings to the household. However, Francisca, Josefina’s older sister, disagrees because she dislikes their aunt’s new changes. One evening, Tía Dolores tells Josefina’s Papá that she will teach his daughters how to read and write, which excites Josefina. In the middle of the night, however, Josefina’s enthusiasm turns into a moral dilemma when she engages in a conversation with Francisca, who is weeping. Francisca is opposed to learning how to read and write from Tía Dolores, because she believes it is another method their aunt will use to make them forget Mamá. Josefina is conflicted and wonders if it would be ethical to follow her aunt’s ways and learn how to read and write because she does not wish to be disloyal to her Mamá who did not read or write.

Josefina becomes concerned and wonders if she should adhere to the traditions like Mamá or accept the new cultural changes by taking her aunt’s reading and writing lessons. Josefina is afraid of losing Mamá from her own memory when she is unable to remember some of the lines from her mother’s favorite poem. Josefina soon finds relief when she realizes that memories of her Mamá live in a book that Tía Dolores has created which preserves Mamá’s words, funny sayings, poems, songs, stories, and prayers as writings. Josefina acknowledges the importance of how reading and writing will help her feel close to her mother and successfully persuades Francisca by showing her the book made by their aunt. The story ends with Tía Dolores writing Josefina’s name to show her nieces how it is written in letters with flourishes.

The striking features of this book are that both text and illustrations transport readers into Josefina’s world, so that they understand what her life was like in 1824. The colorful illustrations present the food, clothing, and lifestyle of Josefina and her family during this time. The text also provides excellent details and is very informative and supportive of the illustrations. The dialogue is rich; for example, Tía Dolores says, “Reading is a way to hold on to the past, to

travel to places you've never been, and to learn about worlds beyond your own time or experience" (p. 57). Additionally, the illustrations and text describe each characters' psychological state such as excitement, fear, sadness, and joy quite vividly. Spanish words are included in the text which adds authenticity, and there is a glossary at the end of the book which functions as a Spanish-English dictionary.

Josefina Learns a Lesson contains a section titled "Looking Back 1824: A Peek into the Past," which provides information on school and education with images from museums and universities. These add cultural authenticity and historical accuracy to the story and illustrations. This book is appropriate for children to learn about the history of New Mexico and simple Spanish words. Educators can have students engage in discussions about literacy across cultures. Students can share their thoughts about cultural changes in family traditions and differences in customs between families. Additionally, learners can make comparisons of how people live in the world today with digital devices and new technologies along with ways to record history and past events to preserve them for the future.

Josefina Aprende Una Lección is the Spanish edition published by The Hampton-Brown Company and translated by José Moreno (1997). The first book in the series, *Meet Josefina* (Valerie Tripp, 1997) and its Spanish edition *Así Es Josefina* (translated by José Moreno, 1997) could also be incorporated in classrooms for bilingual education and biliteracy. *The Glowing Heart: A Josefina Mystery* (Valerie Tripp, 2016) is an excellent addition for readers who want to join Josefina for more adventures in New Mexico. The author of *Josefina Learns a Lesson*, Valerie Tripp was born in Mt. Kisco, New York. In 1973, she graduated from Yale University, majoring in Philosophy. In 1981, she graduated from Harvard University with a Master's degree in education. Currently, she lives with her husband, Michael, and their daughter, Katherine, in Silver Spring, Maryland. Valerie Tripp stated that she loves words and that writing is a way of talking on paper.

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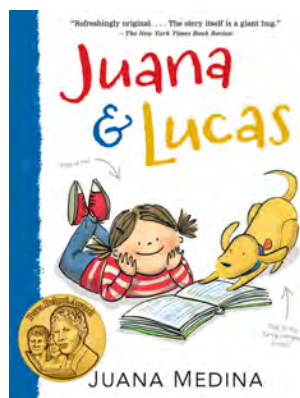
The illustrator, Jean-Paul Tibbles, was born in 1958 in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire and currently lives in England with his wife, two daughters, and three cats. He stated that he enjoyed visiting Santa Fe, New Mexico, and getting a feel for Josefina's 1824 world. Susan McAliley is an illustrator who received her Associates Degree in Commercial Art from Madison Area Technical College. Currently, she lives in the Seattle area.

Hyunjung Lee, University of Arizona



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Book Review: Juana & Lucas

Written and illustrated by Juana Medina

<http://www.candlewick.com/cat.asp?browse=Title&mode=book&isbn=1536206393&pix=y>, 2016, 96 pp

ISBN: 9780763672089

This illustrated chapter book is about a young girl named Juana, who lives in Bogotá, Columbia. Juana loves many things, including living in Bogotá, drawing, reading, and her dog, Lucas. She does not, however, love learning English, which she is supposed to do in school. Through the voice of Juana, we follow her through her day-to-day activities of going to school and visiting relatives, all the while trying to avoid the challenges of learning a new language. Juana seeks out the opinion of trusted adults, asking if they think learning English is worthwhile, assuming that they will agree with her that it isn't. One by one they tell her how they think learning English is beneficial and give their reasons why. But Juana just doesn't understand.

When parent-teacher conference day comes, Juana is terrified because she knows her mother will learn that she isn't doing well in school, especially in learning English. Her grandparents pick her up from school that day so her mom can attend the conference. Juana shares with her grandfather "Abue" how much she dislikes learning English and how challenging it is. He listens to her and shares that he loves English, how it has been an important tool for him, especially in his profession as a neurosurgeon. Abue tells Juana that he is taking her to Spaceland, the amusement park of her dreams, and that she will need to know and use English. That is the motivation that Juana needs to start studying English more diligently! She does a complete turnaround in her thinking and starts diligently practicing her English. Juana goes on the trip to Spaceland and speaks to Astroman in English, her favorite action hero, however she's disappointed that he doesn't speak back to her. She feels like it was a waste of time to learn English, but as she thinks back on her adventure, she realizes that she loves traveling and knowing English has helped her make new friends.

The book has a colorful mix of page layouts, font sizes, and formats. These elements combined with whimsical illustrations by Medina give the book a dynamic and interesting rhythm. It's written in English, with some Spanish words mixed in.

English Language Learners (ELL) can identify with Juana's honest feelings about the challenge of learning a new language and her depictions of aspects of English that don't make sense to her, like homophones and homonyms. In addition, Juana's thoughts and feelings could relate to any subject or new material that readers find challenging. Juana's examples might be specific to learning English, but the challenges and themes of not understanding why something is different, or why we need to learn things that are seemingly without use to us, are universal.

The story points out the benefits of learning English (as well as other languages), but it does so in a way that does not discount the importance of the native language. Juana appreciates her

hometown, country, and language significantly, and at the end of the story she hasn't lost that pride. This is important because the loss of language can be equated with the loss of culture and identity. Juana is excited to learn more languages and travel to other countries and experience their cultures. She has not forgotten her identity, nor has it been diminished; it has been enriched by her travel experience.

Juana & Lucas portrays adults in a respectable, non-stereotypical fashion. Juana is raised by a single mother, a strong woman whose husband died in a fire when Juana was little. Juana's relatives hold a variety of interesting jobs. Her grandfather is a neurosurgeon and her more artistic aunt is a potter. Having this book available for ELL students gives an example of a Spanish-speaking main character whose family members are educated and hold prestigious careers, and shows that those outcomes are available to them as well. Readers see a wide variety of races and cultures throughout the book in the illustrations and descriptions of characters. Friendship across cultures is an important theme that is subtly conveyed by this book.

Books that might be paired with *Juana & Lucas* in read alouds, literature circles, or self-selection/library include *Sofia Martinez: My Family Adventure* by Jacqueline Jules and Kim Smith (2015); *Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer* by Kelly Jones and Katie Kath (2015); *Dory Fantasmagory* by Abby Hanlon (2015); *Meet Yasmin!* by Saadia Faruqi and Hatem Aly (2018); *Sam the Man & the Rutabaga Plan* by Frances O'Roark Dowell and Amy June Bates (2018); *Absolutely Alfie and the Furry, Purry, Secret* by Sally Warner and Shearry Malone (2017); and *Spunky Tells All* by Ann Cameron and Lauren Castillo (2011).

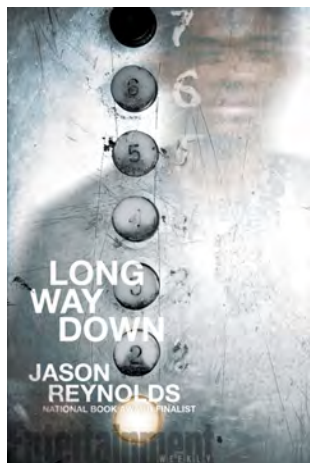
Juana Medina was born and raised in Bogotá, Columbia, and came to the U.S. to study at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). With a background in art and design, Medina began her career in children's literature as an illustrator, creating the images in many children's books including *Smick!* by Doreen Cronan (2015). *Juana & Lucas*, written and illustrated by Medina, won many prestigious awards, including ALA Notable Children's Book, the Pura Belpré Medal, and ILA Notable Book for a Global Society. Medina currently resides in Washington, D. C. and teaches at George Washington University.

Tracy Krause, The University of Texas at Arlington



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Book Review: Long Way Down

Written by Jason Reynolds

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Long-Way-Down/Jason-Reynolds/9781481438261>, 2017, 306 pp

ISBN 978-1481438254

NO. 3: REVENGE

*"If someone you love
gets killed,
find the person
who killed
them and
kill them"* (p. 33).

Will's brother Shawn is dead and 15-year-old Will wants revenge. That is all he can think about as he grabs his brother's gun in their apartment, sneaks past his grieving mother who is sleeping at the kitchen table and walks out the front door. He's sure he knows the person who opened fire outside of their apartment building, killing Shawn. Will has never held a gun but gets on the elevator and travels from the seventh floor to follow the rules passed down through the generations—don't cry, don't snitch, get revenge. Will wrestles with his sanity as the elevator stops at every floor and someone else gets on, including a teenage girl, Buck, and Shawn, all of whom have died. The sixty-second ride to the lobby floor is all the time Will has to decide if he will follow the rules...or break them.

Written as a series of short, free verse poems, *Long Way Down* examines the life of one boy's struggle to decide what to do about his brother's death. Although Will doesn't want to believe his brother was shot, he is not surprised because these events happen in his neighborhood; that's just the way things are. Will must decide for himself if he will do what he was taught to do and follow the rules, or break with tradition and follow a different path, which could mean justice going unserved and never getting revenge on the person who killed his brother.

Throughout the story, readers gain insight into the widespread nature of gun violence in some neighborhoods. Readers are also challenged to consider the vicious cycles of hate and violence caused by blindly following rules without knowing the why behind actions in order to break these cycles and take steps towards finding solutions to gun violence and wide-spread retaliation.

Long Way Down is an excellent text for a social injustice inquiry unit in middle or high school classrooms. Titles with a similar theme include *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas (2017), *The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives* by Dashka Slater (2017), *Dry* by Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman (2018), and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2009).

Jason Reynolds was raised in Oxon Hill, Maryland, and currently resides in Brooklyn, New York. He wrote the New York Times best seller, *Long Way Down* after spending time in U.S. juvenile

detention centers where thousands of 14-year-old boys serve 10-year sentences for gang violence. While visiting these centers, he learned about the crimes committed by the young men even though most had no idea from where the issue stemmed, with one gang rivalry dating back to the 1960s over a pair of shoes. He is the co-author of another New York Times best selling novel, *All American Boys* (2015), and has won several national book awards for young people's literature.

Phylicia Anderson, Texas Woman's University



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Book Review: They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems

Written by David Bowles

https://www.cincopuntos.com/products_detail.sstg?id=303, 2018, 111

pp

ISBN 978-1-947627-07-9

"Poetry is the clearest lens for viewing the world" (p. 33).

In Spanish, the nickname *Güero* refers to someone of Mexican or Latin American descent who is light-skinned, with blonde or red hair. In *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems*, author David Bowles tells the story of life on the border in South Texas, through the eyes of a Mexican-American seventh grader. An avid reader from a young age, the nerdy, freckled-face main character struggles to fit in. He looks more like a gringo than the rest of his family, but he is proud of his heritage. He wishes he were dark like the rest, but as his father tells him, his appearance will someday give him opportunities not afforded to his brown-skinned parents and grandparents.

Through school, Güero has found his posse of like-minded nerdy kids (Los Bobbys), and is excited about the new school year. He has also begun to find his voice. One of his heroes, an English teacher named Ms. Wong, encourages multicultural reading in her class. He is excited to read stories from other countries, including lyrics of Aztec origin. It is through this class that Ms. Wong introduces Güero to poetry. At last, through poetry, he is able to say all the things he has wanted to say, as his "soul comes rushing out in line after line" (p. 34).

Each poem in *They Call Me Güero* is beautifully written, cleverly depicting some aspect of present-day life for Mexican-Americans near the border. In some cases, Bowles writes of the struggles for Latinx people in the U.S. For example, the characters experience verbal abuse from opposing fans of a mostly white school in "Playoff Game" and racial profiling by officers on their way to Six Flags in "Checkpoint." In "The Newcomer," Güero befriends a shy boy fresh from Honduras, whose family endured hardship as they made their way to the United States on "la Bestia," one of a series of cargo trains that runs north through Mexico.

Not all of the poems deal with hardship. Many of the poems are light-hearted and fun, describing the simple joys he finds in his culture and love for his family. In "Cascaron War," the family engages in an Easter egg hunt, where confetti-filled eggs are broken over the participants in a friendly battle. For his sister "Teresa's Quinceanera Waltz," Güero is proud to be asked to play the accordion with the band and gets her approval through her "beaming" smile (p. 103).

This book is great reading for all ages, but middle school students, especially those in Mexican-American families, will particularly enjoy this book. The short stories depict life for Latinx people in a real, honest way. Students can connect to the stories of struggle and fears of growing up in that culture, but can also find hope and joy through the everyday experiences of Güero.

This book has already won several awards, including being named a Pura Belpré Honor Book, and earning the 2019 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award. In keeping with the Latin American theme, students may also find interest in Bowles' other works, such as *Flower, Song, Dance: Aztec and Mayan Poetry* (2016). Students may also connect to another recommended book, *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina (2018), which relates to Latinx youth experiences in the U.S.

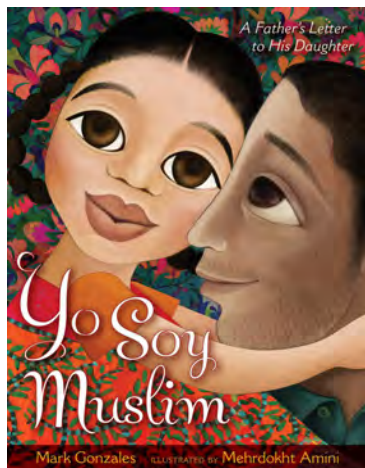
David Bowles is a Mexican-American author, and has written approximately a dozen books, most of which speak to his heritage. Originally from South Texas, he currently serves as an assistant professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Find more information about the author, as well as more of his works, at <https://davidbowles.us>.

Eric Ziegler, Texas Woman's University and Denton ISD



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-xii-issue-1/>



Book Review: *Yo Soy Muslim: A Father's Letter to His Daughter*
Written by Mark Gonzales
Illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini
<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Yo-Soy-Muslim/Mark-Gonzales/9781481489362>, 2017, unpagged
ISBN: 9781481489362

Yo Soy Muslim is a truly beautiful and inspiring letter, written primarily in English, by a father to his young daughter. Author Mark Gonzales uses seemingly simple language to address very important questions and concerns that surround (or will surround) not just his child, but any multiethnic human living in this modern time. The letter begins with brief references to old sayings and reminders to tie his daughter's day-to-day experiences to not so distant cultural anchors. The poetic way in which he advises her to "walk in the steel shadows, remembering Mayan Pyramids that too lived amongst the heavens" pairs perfectly with the illustration of dark foreboding skyscrapers surrounding the young girl and her father. The imagery helps the reader to feel how scary and lonely a culturally detached city may seem. Yet, the words, said with confidence and love, allow the young child to walk bravely amidst these scary, shadowy streets, re-assured by her father's hand holding on to hers.

The letter then moves on to a future time in which deep questions will be asked by her, and of her, "...who invented my hands? Why wasn't I born with wings? And does the moon ever get lonely?" These questions, he tells her, are the types of questions asked when learning "what it means to be human." Again, the text is beautifully illustrated with the father-daughter pair flying over a peaceful moonlit countryside, the young girl's hand reaching out in front of her. This part of the book is simultaneously profound and sad. One gets the feeling the father is perhaps worried he will not be at her side when she is confronted by people who "will not smile at [her]". His words have a gentle urgency as he anticipates the accusing types of questions his young daughter may hear from others, "What are you? And where are you from?" The author is preparing his child and the reader for how to respond to judgmental looks or actions. One does not have to be Muslim or Latinx to experience these types of questions. Anyone considered "other" or somehow "different" can relate to being singled out and confronted in such a manner. It is these premonitory scenarios that compel the author to gift his daughter with proud and soulful answers drawn from her very own cultural, religious, and linguistic essence, her identity!

"On that day tell them this: Yo soy Muslim. I am from Allah, angels, and a place almost as old as time. I speak Spanish, Arabic, and dreams."

These words are so beautifully powerful and relatable, that anyone with a diverse cultural or ethnic background is able to hear and feel the author's message, to proudly (re)claim their identity. He strengthens the message by offering additional powerful statements of being here since the beginning and continuing to be here into the future. The words are meant to be said out loud, proclaimed as it were, over and over as necessary and without shame. The

affirmations are meant to bind his daughter, and the reader, to past, present, and future, allowing us all to become "ancestors in training."

Mark Gonzales began to tell stories and ultimately wrote this book to provide a living voice for those who have been silenced or misrepresented by others. As a Mexican-American Muslim, he has experienced discrimination and marginalization because of those "tags" and not fitting in to a preconceived mold. The current socio-political climate has further "demonized" being Muslim or of Hispanic descent. The book serves as a beacon of light against dark stereotypes. It heals and nurtures identities and souls.

Other books that have similar messages of positive identity are *Mommy's Khimar* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow (2018), *Mixed Me* by Taye Diggs (2015), *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/Marisol McDonald no combina* by Monica Brown (2011), and *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2001).

Mark Gonzales is a self-described futurist who is dedicated to changing the narrative of people of color. He was born in Alaska and has traveled all over the world, currently living in California with his family. Gonzales wants to ensure he provides positive and influential reflections of people of color. More information is available at <http://www.narrativegrowth.com/> about Mehrdokht Amini is an Iranian illustrator who now lives in England. She has vividly and beautifully illustrated many children's books like *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns* (2015), *Chicken in the Kitchen* (2017), and *A Moon for Moe and Mo* (2018). More information is available at <http://childrensillustrators.com/mehrdokht1976/portfolio>.

Maricela M. Salazar Galindo, Denton Independent School District



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