

ISSN 2577-0527



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME VII, ISSUE 4

July 2015

Immigration as Opportunities

Worlds
of WORDS 



College
of
Education

wowlit.org

WOW Review: Volume VII Issue 4

July 2015

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Volume VII Issue 4

Introduction and Editors' Note

This themed issue of *WOW Review* offers readers the opportunity to consider the complexity of factors that surround the immigration experience, both past and present. The 10 titles here join other books across past issues of *WOW Review* that look at the many reasons people immigrate within the global community.

Historically, some of these titles represent the search for a better life—one with opportunities to succeed, to be oneself, and to escape discrimination. *Touched by Fire* is the story of one family's journey from Russia via Berlin to New York City as they escape discrimination and possible death. Set in the early 1900's, the hardships, challenges and dreams of those coming to America during that time period are shared. In *The Castaways*, Tucker is one of many children who take to the rails during The Great Depression in the United States in order to search for work and alleviate the number of people to feed at home. Simon's family in *The Other Side of the Wall*, decide to go from East to West Berlin in order to "take control of their lives." Both of these titles are graphic novels, relying on art to tell these immigrant stories.

Both *Grandfather's Journey* and *The Matchbox Diary* consider the stories of past generations as they tell of immigrants from different parts of the world coming to the United States. Each invites readers to consider their family histories and the stories of grandparents and great-grandparents who brought their cultures and heritage to the United States from another country.

Other titles provide more contemporary experiences and invite readers to reflect on both the global and local society in which they exist and their relationships to immigrants. *The London Jungle Book* casts a light of celebration on two cultures in the story of one artist's journey from India to England. A focus in this book is the perspectives with which the artist views this strange land and culture—a reminder of the differences for any immigrant embarking on a journey of discovery.

With a more contemporary setting, this book leads to the other titles that share different perspectives on immigrants coming from Mexico. *Migrant, the Journey of a Mexican Worker* uses intricate drawing in a codex form to give insight to this immigration experience—one that is frequently discussed in contemporary news. *González & Daughter Trucking Co.: A Road Novel with Literary License* provides yet another glimpse into the experience of people coming across the Mexico/United States border to work and live. *Enrique's Journey* shares the true story of a teenager, one of thousands who yearly ride the trains from Guatemala through Mexico and across the United States border in search for their families who have already made the journey. The realistic insights of the books focused on crossing the US/Mexico border provide authentic reading that documents experiences that are occurring today. One last book

with a more contemporary setting is *The Name Jar*, a story that invites discussions around the importance of a name in maintaining one's cultural heritage.

These books offer unique perspectives on immigration—ones that can support a growing understanding of the global community and its people as they transition from one culture or nation to another.

As you read this issue of *WOW Review*, we invite you to share your own connections to each story's characters and themes as well as to other books that align with these books.

Janelle Mathis, Editor



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Book Review: The Castaways

Written by Rob Vollmer; Illustrated by Pablo C. Callejo

NBM Publishing, N.Y., 2008, 64 pp.

ISBN: 9781561634927

*You can just forget what your mamma tell you. She's a weak woman
elsewise my brother wouldn't have run off on her like that.... If you've got a
bit of sense and any kind of Christian raising, you'll be a man about this
and slip off without raising no fuss. (p. 8)*

So begins this realistic fiction account of a thirteen-year-old boy forced to leave home due to an absent father, an overworked mother, four younger siblings, and a tired older Aunt who has just run out of patience. Set during the Great Depression, the story begins when Tucker Freeman leaves home, hops a train and embarks on a journey of discovery. This graphic novel focuses on the difficulties endured by many children of that time. Even today children are separated from their families in order to help by working or reducing the number of mouths to be fed.

The *Castaways* utilizes a graphic novel format to grimly depict the hunger, fear, and desperation, as well as the hope, love, and family that permeated a broken America during its Great Depression. Tucker is asked to leave his Aunt's farm so that there might be more food for the younger children. He discovers the dangers of the road and the rails the first time he hops a train. Yard bosses are armed and dangerous, employed by the railroads to keep people from riding for free. Tucker meets a kind man, Elijah, one of the few Black men he has ever seen, who helps him learn the ropes. Elijah's and Tucker's adventures take them from the railroad yard, to a hobo camp, back on the trains, to finally looking down both barrels of a shotgun. Through Elijah, Tucker learns the value of a friendship that can transcend race and age.

The author Rob Vollmar is a native of Oklahoma. He earned a BA in English from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in 1995 and is currently employed at USAO Communications Marketing Office as a staff writer. He has published in *World Literature Today*, *The Comics Journal*, and *USAO's Crosstimbers*. Vollmar related via email that the illustrator Pablo G. Callejo lives in Leon, Spain, and illustrates for both Rob Vollmar and Ted Rall. He primarily uses a six-block format for his intricate drawings with a two color look to enhance them. Pablo's art process is a blend of natural pencils and computer design. He does panel layout and composition in pencils and then builds the images in layers using Photoshop. He is a completely self-taught artist, not counting basic high school art instruction.

The inspiration for the story is a PBS documentary called "Riding the Rails" that details the lives of some 250,000 children and teenagers who left home willingly and/or otherwise, during the Great Depression. Meticulously researched and based on oral histories from his own family's experiences, Vollmar has composed a well written story which rings with both authenticity and accuracy. His grandmother had a difficult childhood, one where her father was gone all the time. The author grew up near the stockyards in both Cabool and Springfield, the two principal

locations for the book, adding credibility to the story. *The Castaways* was nominated for an Eisner in the Best Single Issue/ One Shot category. The Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards are prizes given for creative achievement in American comic books, sometimes referred to as the Comics Industry's equivalent of the Oscar Awards.

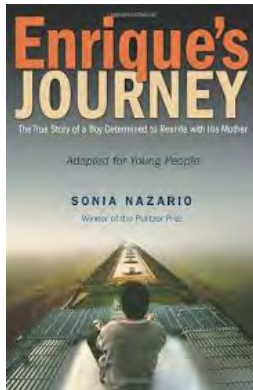
The Castaways, written for all ages, is a welcome addition to social studies curriculum on the Great Depression to pair with fiction such as *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939). Additional YA literature pairings include *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse (1997), *Bud not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999), and *The Thirties: America and the Great Depression* by Fon W. Boardman, Jr. (1967).

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Book Review: Enrique's Journey: The True Story of a Boy Determined to Reunite with His Mother

Written by Sonia Nazario. (Adapted for Young People)

Ember, 2014, 288 pp.

ISBN: 9780385743280

Nazario, well-known for her Pulitzer-Prize writing as an investigative reporter, has been named one of “40 women who changed the media business in the past 40 years” (Columbia Journalism Review, 2012). She has won many other humanitarian awards for her advocacy work around social issues, including discrimination, drug addiction, Foreign Policy, hunger, and immigration.

The impetus for this story began with a conversation Nazario had with her house cleaner. As Carmen told Nazario about her four children she had left in Guatemala, Nazario wondered “What drove her to travel two thousand miles away from her children, not knowing when or if she would ever see them again?” (p. 2). Then, about a year later, one of Carmen’s sons, Minor, makes his way to her; he tells Nazario about his trip to the U.S. and, in particular, his ride on El Tren De Muerte. Once again, Nazario found herself questioning the conditions that would prompt mothers to leave their children and then children to travel “at all costs, to be with their mothers.” As the child of immigrant parents, she says she “understood the desire for opportunity, for freedom;” but she readily admits, “I had no true understanding of what people are willing to do to get here to have that same opportunity and freedom” (pp. 6-7).

When Nazario began her investigation in 2000, she discovered about 48,000 unaccompanied children annually rode the rails from Central America and Mexico to the United States in search of their mothers. This rate has now more than doubled. The average child is a 15-year-old male. In order to best capture the story, she wanted to find someone who fit this profile, so she “scoped out a dozen shelters and churches along the Mexican side of the border that help migrants, including children” (p. 10). She eventually discovered Enrique, a 17-year-old boy from Honduras. While he was slightly older than the average age, she noted he had an actual chance of reaching his mother, something she keenly wanted to document.

She carefully laid out her plans, well aware she could not truly experience what these children did because, at the end of the day, she could go to a hotel, shower, and eat. However, she hoped in the process, she would be able to accurately tell their story. Ultimately, she spent more than six months traveling from Honduras to the United States, riding atop seven different trains, and then repeated the entire journey to gather additional information.

I cannot do justice to the telling of Enrique’s story in this review; I do not have the ability to capture the senses in the way Nazario does in her writing—a very intentional process; she writes in a way that helps readers experience what Enrique feels, hears, sees, smells, and tastes along his journey. It is an onslaught of the senses, both good and bad that leaves readers reeling.

Nazario describes this adaptation for young people as “aimed at middle school students and reluctant readers in high school. It was a 2014 Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People award winner, was listed as a Best Teen Book of the Year by Kirkus, and was a Junior Library Guild Selection. This adaptation also includes an 8-page photo spread of Enrique and his family and contains an update on them since the writing of the adult edition.

Books that might be read alongside *Enrique’s Journey* are: *A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story* by Linda Sue Park (2010), *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2010), *Hidden Girl: The True Story of a Modern-Day Child Slave* by Shyima Hall (2015), *Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of Immigration* by Ann Bausum (2009), and *Remix: Conversations with Immigrant Teenagers* by Marnina Budhos (2007).

Gail Pritchard, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ



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Book Review: González & Daughter Trucking Co.: A Road Novel with Literary License

Written by María Amparo Escandón

Three Rivers Press, 2005, 304 pp.

ISBN: 9781400097357

I was never in the same place twice. Sleeping by the side of the road on coyote nights and indigo dawns. Running from no one, camouflaged by my father's fears. (p. 190)

After a lifetime on the road with her father, Libertad has found herself an accidental inmate in a Mexican woman's prison. And oddly, she feels at home. It is the first time in her life that she's had the opportunity to make friends. It is the first time that her bed doesn't have wheels underneath it and that her showers are free. Despite the security she feels in her new home, she still finds herself unable to share the story of how she arrived there. She wants to share what happened with Maciza, her friend and cellmate, but every time she tries to speak, the words simply won't come out.

Libertad suggests to the warden that she might host a Library Club, since she is one of the only inmates able to read, and her idea is quickly approved. While reading aloud, Libertad realizes that she is not reading the story in the book, but has begun to share her own story, from the beginning, starting with her father, a literature professor, fleeing from the University of Mexico when it was invaded by the Mexican army in 1968. After hiding in a university bathroom for more than a week, he escaped, hitched a ride with a trucker, and eventually stowed away in a cargo container to cross the border into the United States.

When the door to that cargo container was opened, he came face to face with a beautiful female trucker. They fell madly in love. She taught him all he needed to know about trucking and they lived on the road with no need for anything but each other. Eventually, they were blessed with a child, but happiness was not to be. After a fateful accident, the mother was lost and Joaquin was left alone with an infant daughter and a truck. This was how they became González & Daughter Trucking Co.

Joaquin raised his daughter on the road, taught her through books they read aloud to one another and through any educational experiences he could find, often taking detours for museums and bookstores while on their way to deliver a load. Convinced that the Mexican army was still looking for him and that everything was dangerous, he changed both his name and hers frequently, buying fake documentation and burying their cash in various locations along their routes. Eventually, his paranoia grew out of control. Every reminder that Libertad was becoming closer to a woman and further away from a child seemed to infuriate him. He became more controlling and possessive, often starting fights at truck stops and even with clients, if one of the men looked in Libertad's direction too long or spoke with her without her father around.

As Joaquin tried desperately to protect himself and his daughter, she encountered young love and a desire for independence that lead to a series of runaway attempts and finally, to the Mexicali Penal Institution for Women. It is in this place, through the shared stories of the inmates, that Libertad discovers her voice and her freedom.

In this coming-of-age story, the reader is drawn into a world defined by immigration. The reader follows as a professor of literature is forced to leave behind his hard-won credentials and his family as he flees for his life. A daughter is raised on the road, constantly moving from one place to the next, fantasizing of the mundane moments she could experience if only she had a home. And the experiences of women living in a border-zone are explored through Libertad's relationships in the prison. Most of the characters in this story do not know where they belong. Neither country feels like home and nowhere feels safe. It isn't until the past is confronted that all are set free.

María Amparo Escandón, an immigrant herself, was born in Mexico and currently lives in the United States. Her novels focus on the experiences of Latin Americans, and specifically those of Mexican immigrants. Escandón writes in both English and Spanish.

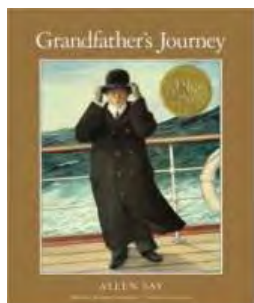
Readers aged 14 and up can find a window into the immigration experiences of a family in other books, such as Vaddey Ratner's (2012) *In the Shadow of the Banyan Tree* and Cristina Henríquez's (2014) *The Book of Unknown Americans: A Novel*. They will also find similarities between coming-of-age experiences of children of immigrant families as seen in Junot Díaz's (2007) *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Guadalupe Garcia McCall's (2011) *Under the Mesquite*. This spirited novel of hope is an opportunity to explore what it means to be Mexican, to be American, to be a family, and to be yourself.

Katie Walker, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



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Book Review: Grandfather's Journey

Written by Allen Say

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1993, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780547076805

Set in two different parts of the world, *Grandfather's Journey* begins with one man's voyage from Japan to America. At the beginning of the journey, the young man, the author's grandfather, travels to America to see the other side of the world. Along the way, he meets new faces and discovers the beauty of a foreign country, deciding to settle in San Francisco. He loves California, yet he yearns to go back to his home country. After many years pass, his family joins him as he sets sail yet again for the return home. Time passes; war tears the country apart, and the grandfather longs to see California one last time. Although the grandfather never makes it back, his grandson does. The grandfather and grandson share a common perspective, "the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other" (p.31).

The pictures provide a vivid reality into the grandfather's cross-cultural experience. At the beginning, he is depicted in his traditional Japanese attire, but adapts to "European" apparel once he crosses the ocean. Influenced by his surroundings, he once again returns to Japan and adapts back to his environment with his Japanese attire.

The reader gains insights into immigration for Japanese people before World War II. The theme of immigration is embedded in the story and the heart of the book reaches out to those who travel from one place to another only to find that part of their heart is longing for the other. Many of the events in the book occur before World War II, but there is an underlying theme of the effects of war. Before the war, the grandfather raised many songbirds, a symbol of peace and harmony, and after the war he never keeps another songbird. The book highlights the impact of war and the sadness of loss.

Allen Say delivers an authentic, three-generational account of his family's cross-cultural experience through broad colors of illustration and writing. Both as the author and illustrator, Say connects the setting and characters to real people and places in time. The story is not only a personal collection of his family timeline, but a love of two countries. Born in Yokohama, Japan, Allen Say immigrated to the United States when he was sixteen. He lives in San Francisco and continues to write and illustrate children books. Some of his related work that offers an informative author study includes, *The Boy in the Garden* (2010), *Tree of Cranes*, (2009), *A River Dream* (1993), *El Chino* (1996), and *The Bicycle Man*, (1989). More information can be found on Say's website.

Camille Dittmore, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



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Book Review: *The London Jungle Book*
Written and Illustrated by Bhajju Shyam
Translated by Shiris Rao
Tara, 2014, 48 pp.
ISBN: 9788192317120

An artist goes where there is work. (np)

Rudyard Kipling's narratives from his time in India became favorites for Westerners who viewed India through his British cultural lens. Shyam gives a view of London through his Indian cultural and artistic lens, a view that answers Kipling and gives readers pause as to how we each view cultures outside of our own. Shyam, who is from a small village in central India, was apprenticed and eventually became a gifted artist within the Gond tradition of painting. Commissioned to paint a mural on the wall of a London restaurant, Shyam made his first visit to London, resulting in *The London Jungle Book*, first published in India and then the United Kingdom.

Through Gond style illustrations, Shyam transports readers from his home village in India to London. He uses his distinctive illustrations to document his first adventure to the wider world, and by doing so shows how humans connect and accommodate differing cultures. He provides a Gond overlay of London, transforming the city into a jungle inhabited by a host of wondrous creatures that reflect Shyam's own cultural understandings. Using dots and dashes, Shyam creates mythical beasts and intricate renderings of flora and fauna that reflect the dominant themes and motifs of the animated lives and recorded histories of the Gond people. By bringing this artistic styling to *his* expressive memoir, Shyam invites readers to explore not only his geographical home and culture, but the city of London and its cultural practices through his eyes.

This is a terrific book for anyone who has experienced travel to unfamiliar places. The newness—and strangeness—of a place is often overlaid with the patina of one's own life experiences and values. Travelers often compare their travel locations to what is familiar and that is what Shyam had created with this book. The juxtaposition of how the world changes through traveling to a new location, including the environment, the language used, and the author's cultural experiences allows readers to ponder how culture is an essential part of a place and cultural understandings change according to location as well as the traveler. The book can facilitate discussion about how any place could be viewed as a cultural experience, whether one is an insider, outsider, or someone transitioning from one position to the other. The book has colorful illustrations that are often humorous and give a strong sense of the Gond artistic tradition.

Bhajju Shyam was born in Patangarh, which is located in the forests of central India. He became an artist by helping his mother paint the house, which is the tradition of the Gond people. As an adolescent, he needed a job so moved to a larger city and that is where he perfected his artistic talent. He currently lives in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. One of his books, *That's How I See*

Things was the first book by an Indian honored by the International Board on Books for Young People. More information about Mr. Shyam can be found at the websites Resurgence and Paper Tigers.

This wonderful book simultaneously celebrates both one's home culture as well as the new, and their connections to each other and so would pair nicely with books such as *Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker* (Mateo, 2014) and *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* (Das, 2014), both of which reflect unique illustration styles. Older students might enjoy reviewing Kipling's stories of India in comparison, while still other readers would enjoy adding this to their collections of books highlighting other artists.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, OH



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Book Review: The Matchbox Diary

Written by Paul Fleischman; Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline

Candlewick Press, 2013, 40 pp.

ISBN: 9780763646011

A little girl visits her great-grandfather who shares his immigrant journey through a collection of curio matchboxes. Each matchbox contains an artifact of a remembrance of his life since leaving Italy in the early of 1900s. All of the artifacts, from the olive pit to the printing press letters, tell of the family's poignant immigrant life. The aspiration of being literate and great-grandfather's devotion to family are themes imbued throughout the matchbox stories. The illustrations show warm vintage expressions using acrylic gouache. Remembrance and reality are juxtaposed with the sepia and amber tones in coloration. The elaborate drawing of artifacts takes readers to a museum of the 1900s. Detailed facial expressions capture and convey characters' emotion.

The socio-economic context of the immigrant family is naturally incorporated. When great-grandfather's family arrived in New York, they worked at a cannery and kept doing piecework, moving from place to place, alienated by social discrimination. The illustration reveals them as powerless with all of the family looking down and father's gaze looking up in resistance. Fleischman's metaphors of hairpins and fish scales represent the gap between their hope and reality. Fleischman's text says that on the ship "high above us were rich ladies" and "we were in the bottom", but "I thought my mother and sisters would look like those women soon." However, "instead of jewels, my mother and sisters had fish scales on their arms." Ibatoulline's illustration enhances this reality by showing the contrast dividing the upper and lower deck, and depicting the great-grandfather as a boy holding a pole extended to the upper deck.

Paul Fleischman intertwined what is typical for those times into the story, saying that "I thought about teaching history as a career, but decided to bring it into my books instead." One of vignettes presented in the story is visiting a ballpark to watch a baseball game, popular in the early 1900s. Great-grandfather found his career as a printer, which was a job that played an important role in the labor movement. The illustration shows a piece of newspaper with the exact date of August 23, 1916. Students, both from an immigrant family or native-born family, might be invited by this story to inquire into the U.S. history of those times and how the historical events influenced the lives of ordinary people.

Even though this story is told by an adult of his experiences, it does not fail to include the perspective of a child. Great-grandfather "had nightmares about buttonhook man", being terrified by the buttonhook inspection at the immigrant quarantine. Ibatoullin's illustrations significantly juxtapose the sharp contrast of children's nature. On one page great-grandfather as a little boy is portrayed as being powerlessly horrified by the inspector. In contrast, on the opposite page, the great-granddaughter is drawn with eyes full of strong confidence.

Paul Fleischman won the 1989 Newbery Medal for *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*. He grew up in a literary family listening to his father read aloud his own books. His father, Sid, is also a

Newbery winner for *The Whipping Boy* in 1987. Paul said in an *interview* that “I work entirely off my own enthusiasms and pay no attention to the market”, and “I write because I have a need to build.” He lives his life following his own passion, rather than pursuing a famous career. Bagram Ibatoulline crafted breathtaking, detailed illustrations. He was born in Russia and studied art in Moscow. His art is based on a solid art education started at the age of ten. To get inspiration and create the style of illustration, Ibatoulline does extensive research and opens his heart to the text.

In the classroom many learning activities can be implemented by using this book. One suggestion is to build a chronological table of students’ parents or ancestors who were the first generation of immigrants to a particular place. While doing so, students will come to know that immigration is a common theme and have a chance to investigate the immigration issue in the broad global context. Reading this book with *In the New World* (Christa Holtei, 2015), a German immigration story told over generations, can introduce students to the perspective of seeing immigration as a valuable journey for their family. *Grandfather’s Journey* (Allen Say, 1993) is an older book that shares the experiences of family members who immigrated. Students will be able to have a chance to share and respect the immigrant experiences of their ancestors and their struggles to overcome adverse circumstances in the early stages of globalism, both in their homeland and in their new land.

Hee Young Kim, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ



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Book Review: *Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker*
 Written by José Manuel Mateo. Illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro.
 Translated from Spanish by Emily Smith
 Harry M. Abrams, 2014, 22 pp.
 ISBN: 9781419709579

I was afraid that they would catch us, because if they capture you, then you disappear. (np)

The political issues of migration are addressed in unlikely way in the captivating picture book, *Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker*. Told from the perspective of a young boy whose father has crossed the border into the U.S. to look for work, readers are drawn into the journey the boy and his family take to find the patriarch of the family. The harrowing experiences, the hope, and eventually the home the family makes will create discussion and debate, but there is no denying the beauty of this book.

The story literally unfolds in one continuous illustration—a codex—that shows the journey with brief narration in English on one side and Spanish on the other. The intricate drawings not only pay homage to the amate (tree bark) material used for writing in ancient Mesoamerica; the codex style of historical writing and pictographs found in Mexico and parts of Central and South America are also honored through this accordion-style book that is read from top to bottom. This book will be poured over by artists young and old, and the story itself is a brief account of survival and hope that is possible if one can make it across the border. From the cover to the author’s historical note, this book is a gift. It is a truly remarkable piece of work that will especially delight those who find great interest in illustration.

There are numerous ways to pair this book with other texts about immigration that will flesh out the experience. Books such as *Grab Hands and Run* (Temple, 1995), *Tonight, By Sea* (Temple, 1997), *Before We Were Free* (Alvarez, 2004) and *First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants* (Gallo, 2007) will give a sense of why young people chance immigration without documentation. In addition, *Migrant* would pair well with *The London Jungle Book* (Shyam, 2014) and *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* (Das, 2014), which also reflect unique illustration styles. This is a great book to add to a collection of illustration styles in picture books.

Jose Manuel Mateo is a Mexican writer and poet who has written a number of Spanish-language children’s books. He notes that he has not had such an experience, but the illustrator, Javier Martinez Pedro, actually migrated to the U.S. without documentation one time, and thus the drawings reflect his first-hand knowledge of the trip so many have taken from Mexico and points further south.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, AZ



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Book Review: *The Name Jar*
Written and Illustrated by Yangsook Choi
Dragonfly Books, 2001, 40 pp.
ISBN: 9780440417996

The Name Jar was written and illustrated by Yangsook Choi, a Korean American who currently resides in New York City. Choi has received numerous awards for *The Name Jar*, including the IRA Teachers' Choice designation, Chicago Public Library Best of the Best designation, and California Young Reader's Medal nomination. The book is based on one of Choi's experiences when moving to the U.S. In the story, the character, Unhei moves from Korea to the United States with her family. Worried she will be teased because of her hard-to-pronounce Korean name "Yoo-hey," Unhei decides to adopt an American name. When Unhei's classmates try to help her find a new name; they give her a glass jar full of American-style names. However, when Unhei begins to think about the new names, she realizes what it will really mean to give up her name and all that it means. Unhei realizes that the best name for her is the one she has because it is her name and fits her best.

The story is age-appropriate for younger students and makes allusion to weightier issues immigrants face while transitioning to a new life. A name change may appear as an exterior change, but is representative of the numerous internal shifts immigrants make in assimilating to a new home. Two questions among many immigrants face when relocating are: What do we culturally keep? What do we leave behind? Unhei decides that her name is one facet of her life she will keep despite its unusualness in America. The story's ending may be predictable, but Unhei's thoughtfulness regarding a possible name change demonstrates reflection, personal strength and cultural pride. Name changes can have deeper implications beyond self; a name change can affect an individual's family and cultural identity. When the children in the book suggest that Unhei shut her eyes to draw a name from the jar, Ralph points out, "What if she doesn't like the name she draws?" Rosie counters, "Well, we didn't get to choose our names when we were born, did we?" These statements along with Unhei's reflection of changing her name provide an opening for students to consider their names on a deeper level.

The story's cultural details and authenticity are evident in Choi's use of Korean names, Korean signs and food boxes at Mr. Kim's grocery store, traditional furnishings and decorations at Unhei's home, and the name stamp Unhei's grandmother gives her, meaning Grace. Criticism regarding Unhei's use of proper English on arrival in America or that she does not switch languages when she is at home or speaking to Mr. Kim may be a concern with regard to authenticity. Those aspects may have been sacrificed in order to provide a more accessible read for the general public.

Choi grew up in Korea but moved to the United States as a young adult to pursue an education and career in art. She attended school for two years at Kendall College of Arts and Design in Michigan prior to moving to New York City and attending the city's School of Visual Arts and

eventually earning an MFA in illustration. Choi grew up doodling on paper. Her practice of doodling was looked upon as a waste of time and the habit labeled her as lazy in the eyes of adults. In Korea students were expected to study and work at achieving good grades rather than spend time drawing. Choi wanted to live a place that took her illustrations seriously and where she could learn her craft and grow as an artist. Choi chose to leave Korea and move to the United States in order to pursue her passion for illustrating.

Choi enjoys creating children’s books and sharing her talent with others. She gives equal stock to her writing and illustrating processes. Choi’s writing and illustrations begin with the use of a notebook for collecting ideas, whether in words or sketches. Reading as much as possible on a topic or idea is also part of her creative process. Once Choi gathers enough material she states, “I think about how all those pieces can come together” to create a story. Choi notes that “even when I don’t have enough for an entire story, if I have a solid idea for a character or an ending, then to me that’s enough to start writing.”

Choi’s [style of illustrating](#) includes the use of bold, vibrant colors that often use the entire page. Her illustrations have been described as having “characteristically expressive close-ups of faces,” and art that “enhances her depth of characters,” and “captures expressions on the faces of her characters.” Understandably, Choi’s representation of a character’s nature is one of her strong suits as an illustrator. Her unique artistic identity provides a visually appealing story that adds to and reinforces the written story.

The Name Jar can be paired with other books that deal with issues of children immigrating, fitting in, or other books illustrated by Yangsook Choi. A book to pair with *The Name Jar* that has to do with immigration and change of a name is *My Name is Yoon* by Helen Recorvits (2003). Another book to pair with *The Name Jar* that has a twist about how one fits in culturally is *Apple Pie Fourth of July* by Janet S. Wong (2006). Lastly, several books illustrated by Yangsook Choi that deal with both immigration and/or fitting in are *Landed* by Milly Lee and illustrated by Yangsook Choi (2006) and *Good-bye 382, Shin Dang Dong* by Frances and Ginger Park and illustrated by Yangsook Choi (2006).

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Book Review: *The Other Side of the Wall*

Written & Illustrated by Simon Schwartz

Translated from German by Laura Watkinson

Graphic Universe, 2015, 112 pp.

ISBN: 9781467760287

Sometimes immigration is a choice, sometimes it is a necessity, and sometimes it is a matter of life and death. For these who lived behind the Iron Curtain and on the “wrong” side of the Berlin Wall, immigration was often the only way to take their future into their own hands.

The Other Side of the Wall (2015) by Simon Schwartz is a graphic novel. The book published in Germany in 2009 is translated from German by Laura Watkinson. The narrator tells the story of his family’s immigration to West Berlin from East Germany. He skillfully portrays in black and white pictures of life in the DDR (East Germany) with its political repression and the lack of freedom to discuss openly and to teach about truth. That is why many people made a decision to leave their ordinary lives and to try to make a new life for themselves and for their children. In the DDR, people were often afraid to talk to each other in their own apartments. They were afraid that the secret police would be able to listen to these conversations and so went for walks in the woods to talk with very close friends about their emigration plans.

Simon’s family lived in a town called Erfurt. His mother always wanted to leave for the West, wanting to see the world beyond the Wall. She loved jazz and the Beatles. His father had his doubts. He had a true socialist upbringing and was hired for a teaching position at the university. Meanwhile, many of their friends already left. When Simon’s father refuses to consider the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets as a just war, his decision leads to the need to emigrate. This is a difficult decision, especially because they would need to leave behind parents and professions. He immediately lost his job as a university professor, but the family has to wait three years before they are able to leave. “The authorities in Erfurt were still frozen in a Stalinist ice age” (p. 86).

It is interesting to read about the reactions of Simon’s grandparents. The mother’s parents seem to understand the desire of a younger generation to live a different life, but the father’s parents do not even want to see them after they apply for an exit permit. Once the family leaves, they are not allowed to return even for a short visit. Only Simon is able to go back to East Berlin to visit his maternal grandparents for a few days, but “there was always that worry that I wouldn’t be allowed back home” (p. 21).

The emigration from East Germany to West Germany was a special case of immigration. A person needed just to cross a checkpoint to get to a new life, but at the same time, both Germanys had been one country, and people spoke the same language. The story in the book goes back and forth between the new life in West Berlin and reminiscences of the past. To make it easier for American readers, the book has a glossary and a timeline of the Berlin Wall.

This is the first book by Simon Schwartz, and is clearly based on the author's own experiences. The book takes the form of a memoir of Simon's childhood and, at the same time, gives a realistic portrait of life in East Germany under the Socialist regime. The pictures in *The Other Side of the Wall* are similar to the well-known graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood* (2004) by an Iranian author Marjane Satrapi. This novel is also about a coming of age in a different country after an emigration from a country with a totalitarian regime. Both graphic novels clearly take root in Art Spiegelman's famous *Maus* (1986). Another book which could be paired with Schwartz' book is *The Wall: Growing Up behind the Iron Curtain* (2007) by Peter Sis, a Czech-born American illustrator and writer of children's books. More about Simon Schwartz and his work is available on his website.

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Book Review: *Touched by Fire*

Written by Irene N. Watts

Tundra Books, 2013, 197 pp.

ISBN: 9781770495241

Told from the perspective of a young teenager, Miriam, *Touched by Fire* takes readers on the journey of a family who flees from the pogroms of Russia in 1905 to Berlin where Jews do not have a peaceful existence and finally to America where discrimination is again a challenge. Along this journey the family faces many social issues—disregard for human life, family separation, the stressful conditions faced by immigrants entering the US, and the lack of laws regulating workplace safety. These issues are approached in an engaging manner with details to support authenticity and invite questions and further research of readers; however, although the author does not shy away from the events, the details are described in a suitable manner for readers age 10 and above.

Fire is a theme that connects events of Miriam’s life since the story begins with her recurring memories of the pogroms burning their houses and barns and reaches a culminating part of the plot when 146 people, mostly girls on the 9th floor of a factory, die due to lack of safety measures. These historical events provide an authentic framework for readers as the author, Irene Watts, explains terms such as *pogroms* and Shirt waist within the characters’ dialogue. Through the personal experiences of Miriam, her family, and her friends, readers realize the many challenges faced by those fleeing from discrimination in search of a better and safer life. As Miriam makes the journey alone to America due to her baby sister’s health that delays family members from traveling with her, readers get a keen sense of the unpleasant days on board the ship. Those days are followed by the joy and freedom she feels when she arrives in New York where her father has been for a long time, especially as she passes the many examinations that make entering the country stressful.

Despite the negative experiences and challenges Miriam faces, including the factory fire that takes the life of a dear friend, she demonstrates the persistence and courage of the immigrants who came to America, “The Golden Land,” for a better life. As her father says following the fire, “You have been spared, and now you owe it to those who were not to live a full life” (p. 175). The final chapter, the Epilogue, takes the reader forward 22 years to Berlin and it is here one learns of the fate of Miriam and her family. Peter, the son of Miriam’s brother who never joined the family in New York and later died, becomes the narrator and shares his situation, living with a step-father who is German and seemingly detests Peter. The theme of fire appears again as Peter observes book burning by Hitler Youth. Enter Miriam and her husband, a Russian who fled to America with her family, and their success in business is revealed as they negotiate with Peter’s mother to take him back to the United States to escape the dangerous situation in Germany. The story ends on a note of hope as Peter begins his journey to America.

Born in Germany and an immigrant herself, Irene N. Watts now lives in Vancouver, Canada. She has written numerous award winning books that have been translated into Italian, French, and Dutch as well as other languages. Her experiences leaving Germany as a child on a Kindertransport create a keen sensitivity for the experiences of the characters in her book. She has also written plays for professional theater. More information about Irene can be found on her website.

Rich pairings of books that speak to the resilience and courage of children facing challenges that displace them from families can be found within the author's own works and include *No Moon* (2010) and *Goodbye Marianne* (2008). Global connections among countries can become significant for young readers as they realize the stories of early immigrants and explore their own family's heritage as found in the journeys of earlier generations. Other books that encourage readers to consider their own heritage though the global links within the stories include: *Bridge to America* (Linda Glaser, 2005), *Letters from Rifka* (Karen Hesse, 2000), and *A House of Tailors* (Patricia Reilly Giff, 2006).

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