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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME VII, ISSUE 3

Spring 2015
Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume VII, Issue 3

Spring 2015

Open Theme

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Introduction and Editors Note

WOW Review, Vol. VII (iii), offers reviews of books that reflect a diversity of characters, contexts, and global communities. While certain strands or themes often emerge from the titles selected for unthemed issues, there are often those stand-alone treasures that point to the many ways readers can explore the world through story. This issue includes chapter books that reflect variations on the theme of youth resistance and resilience while the picture books provide universal experiences to which young readers around the world can connect.

History offers many examples of youth taking action for self and others, such as *Graffiti Knight* by Karen Bass, the story of one youth's efforts to resist Hitler's regime and *Playing for the Commandant* by Suzy Zail, another WWII Holocaust story about a young pianist whose playing spares her life and helps provide food for others. Resilience in more contemporary situations are depicted in *Across the Tumen* by Young Sook Moon, the fictional story of young people illegally leaving North Korea to find food for their families in China. Resisting the social factors that suppress one's identity is the theme of *Playing a Part* by Daria Wilke, while *My Cousin's Keeper* by Simon French reveals a young person extending his identity to include a family member who needs support. *Summer of the Mariposas* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall is another family focused story in which sisters journey into Mexico and are able to resolve family problems as they grow in their own identity. In *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* by Katherine Rundell, a young girl must leave her beloved life in Zimbabwe after the death of her parents and is challenged to maintain her own spirited identity which differs from others at her school in England. *Beyond the Door* and the sequel *The Telling Stone* by Maureen D. McQuerry take readers into a fantasy world where a good versus evil quest of the young protagonists weaves throughout mythic figures from British, Celtic, and Welsh mythologies.

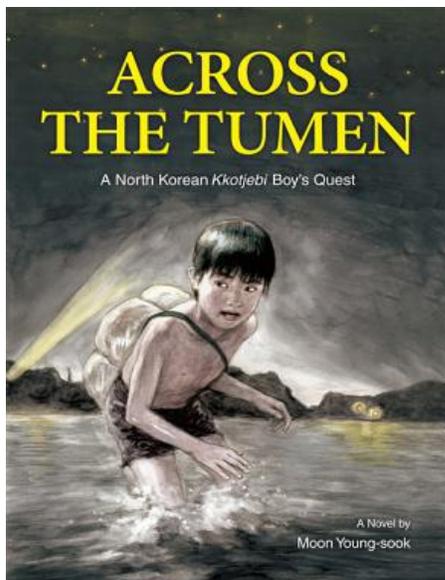
The picture book gems in this issue include *Hannah's Night* by Komako Sakaii that invites readers to share a young girl's activities when others in the house sleep. *The Black Rabbit* by Philippa Leathers is another delight as young readers relate to a black rabbit fearful of his shadow. *All the Way to America: The Story of a Big Italian Family and a Little Shovel* by Dan Yaccarino is an immigration story that speaks to family values and the unique artifacts that symbolize these values. Continuing the theme of migrating from one place to another, *From There to Here* by Laurel Croza focuses on a child's acceptance of the differences in cultures when the family moves from Saskatoon to Toronto. These four picture books invite personal connections for all readers as they recognize their own experiences within each story.

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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Across the Tumen: A North Korean Kkotjebi Boy's Quest

Written by Young Sook Moon
Seoul Selection, 2013, 263 pp
ISBN: 9788997639328

This contemporary realistic fiction novel is about the survival journey of a North Korean boy, Yeong-dae. The Tumen is a 324 miles long river that forms roughly a third of North Korea's border with China. The name Kkotjebi (fluttering swallows) is a term for "teenagers who temporarily fled to China in search of food and went back to North Korea when they had fed themselves" (Song, 2013, p. 162)

so the Kkotjebi and the Tumen are two symbolic icons for North Koreans' last chance for survival.

As the story begins Yeon-dae is a fourth grader, but as he gets older, his life turns upside-down. His life is considered "normal," which is almost the same as privileged during the time he lives with his parents and siblings in North Korea. Soon, however, he loses his supposedly normal privileged life after he experiences a series of family tragedies. His father, after he cannot get food in exchange for the food stamps he received from his work, is hurt during his first attempt to pick wild mushrooms. His mother is sent to prison for stealing goods at her work to pay Yeong-dae's school fees and buy food for her children, and she is killed in the prison. Eventually Yeong-dae has no other option but to become a Kkotjebi in order to survive and remain emotionally and physically independent. When Yeong-dae learns that his grandmother also has passed away from starvation, he realizes that there is nobody who can shelter him. Even his baby sister, Young-ok, who always cheers him up and is his purpose to live, dies from starvation. After he loses his baby sister, it becomes clear that he needs to find his older sister. Yeong-dae decides to cross the river on the border to go to China to find his sister, Young-rahn, who ran away to seek work in China and support her starving family.

Yeong-dae takes tremendous risks crossing the river to search for his sister. He is repeatedly told that Young-rahn might be a victim of human trafficking and forced marriage in China. With the help of another Kkotjebi member, Yeong-dae successfully arrives in China, but North Korean agents arrest him. Accused of being a South Korean spy, he is put in jail and tortured in extremely painful ways despite being a child. The ending remains hopeful, yet leaves mixed feelings of hope and concern for Yeong-dae and other people in North Korea since this is a realistic contemporary issue. Kkotjebi's story and survival journey mirrors layers of human rights issues in North Korea. The harsh living conditions in North Korea, officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), reveals how this government fails to protect its people. The idealism of the government cannot save or rescue people from harsh reality—daily suffering from poor quality and irregularly distributed small amounts of food, insufficient essential necessities, and basic human rights.

Kkotjebi is a symbol of a failing government. In International Migration studies, groups like Kkotjebi that leave a country because of food shortages are called “environmental refugees” (Song, 2013, p. 162). Interestingly, few North Korean migrants are recognized as political refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) argues that North Koreans in China are refugees since no matter what their reason for leaving their country (food or economic opportunities), when they return, they face the fear of persecution (Song, 2013). The story does indicate what is like to live as a North Korean refugee in China, living in ways that are secretive and dangerous due to the risk that they might be caught by North Korean agents or Chinese police. Such secretiveness makes it more difficult for Yeong-dae and Young-ok to find each other since North Korean refugees cannot openly reveal their real names and identities.

Although this book may seem too harsh and depressing for teen readers in the U.S. due to the difficult realities, the book also shows humanity’s good side through concerned people who care, support, and cry together despite the challenging situations. For example, a neighbor shares corn powder when Yeong-dae and his baby sister lose their parents. She checks on them and serves an adult’s role in society even though her life is difficult as well. His aunt also shares her food although she and her family suffer from a shortage of food and essential necessities. When Yeong-dae and his friend cross the river, an elderly Korean-Chinese couple provides food and shelter. Yeong-dae is able to meet a Korean pastor who helps North Koreans for their successful journey of “Seoul Train in Underground Railway,” which is North Korean defectors’ migration routes that include North Korea, China and five South-East Asian countries before they reach South Korea.

The author, Young-sook Moon, has published a wide range of children’s fiction and biography books in Korea. Most of them have powerful social justice themes in terms of rights for teenagers and children during the WW II Japanese compulsory occupation era in Korea. Moon invites children and adult readers to think about themes of enforced labor against children and their forced relocation to Siberia, Russia, Mexico, and Japan. In the author’s note in *Across the Tumen*, Moon notes that she wrote this book after she traveled the border area between North Korea and China. In her note, she recalls her memory of looking at the North Korea side near the Amnok River. During her trip, she was told that factories in the North Korea side have stopped working and most of the trees were cut and consumed as last resources. Most of land now is used for cornfields, which is a main food resource. Characters in this story reveal a great sense of romanticism for simply eating white rice since people in Young-dae’s community must eat things that are not considered edible in order to give small comfort to their empty bellies. Most importantly, the author learned that many people were killed when they attempted crossing the Amnok River. Seeing dead bodies under the frozen river surface is not a rare experience.

Moon highlights the need to raise awareness of the issues of the harsh living environment and human rights in North Korea. Many teenagers choose to be Kkotjebi for a living and many of them also die from starvation or are victims of persecution if they are caught. Female refugees are often the targets of human trafficking for forced marriage or sexual

exploitation in addition to forced labor. Moon talked to a number of writers who are Korean defectors and studied essays written by Korean defectors for this book. Unfortunately, Yeong-dae's story is quite contemporary and realistic. *Across the Tumen* is Moon's first chapter book translated into English and republished in the U.S.

Across the Tumen could be read alongside books about environmental refugees and political refugees. *Like Water on Stone* by Dana Walrath (2014) depicts the journey of twins fleeing from the Armenian Genocide that orphaned them in 1914. *Walking Home* by Eric Walters (2014), set in the slums of Kenya, tells of two children, Muchoki and Jeta, who lose their home and parents due to political violence and begin a journey to look for their last remaining family. *La Linea* by Ann Jaramillo (2008) is about environmental refugees, Miguel and his sister Elena, who live in extreme poverty and attempt to journey across the desert into California.

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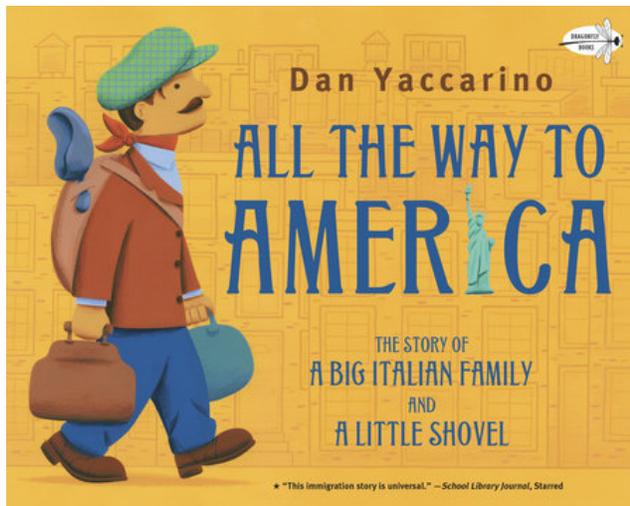
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All the Way to America: The Story of a Big Italian Family and a Little Shovel

Written and Illustrated by Dan Yaccarino

Dragonfly Books, 2011, 40 pp.

ISBN: 9781596430877

Work hard, but remember to enjoy life. And don't forget your family. (p. 4)

This intergenerational story of an Italian family begins with their journey to America from Sorrento, Italy, and includes the legacy of a shovel passed down through the generations. Through this family memoir, the author tells the story of his great-grandfather, who, as a young man working the family farm in Italy, yearns for more in life. He ventures to America in hopes of promised opportunities and prosperity. As he leaves, his father hands him a shovel and speaks the words quoted above. This shovel becomes symbolic of the family's values and their legacy. The shovel is a cultural reminder of what is important to the family, and so becomes a central part of each generation, reflecting their belief in hard work as a pathway to success.

Yaccarino illustrated his narrative with colorful and complementary paintings. The illustrations depict various facets of Italian culture, including clothing, traditional foods, and the lively family gatherings and relationships. The author's positionality as an insider to the culture provides an authentic depiction of Italian culture both in their Italian homeland and as immigrants to America. For instance, the illustrations depict Italy as it actually appears when traveling through the countryside. He also portrays the people immigrating to America with a somber demeanor but also ready for a new start and this comes through the images in a vibrant way.

All the Way to America is relevant and appropriate for all ages; however, younger students are more likely to appreciate the style of illustrations and the reading level and structure of the text. This book would pair well with other texts thematically related to immigration or family, such as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2007), a wordless picture book utilizing distinct images with great depth to depict immigration and the strangeness of a foreign culture and land. Pairing this book with *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco (1988) has the potential to spark valuable conversations about cultural artifacts and cultural symbols in readers' lives. Students will be able to make a number of connections to this text, particularly those related to family, cooking, and intergenerational traditions.

Dan Yaccarino lives in New York with his family. An internationally-acclaimed author

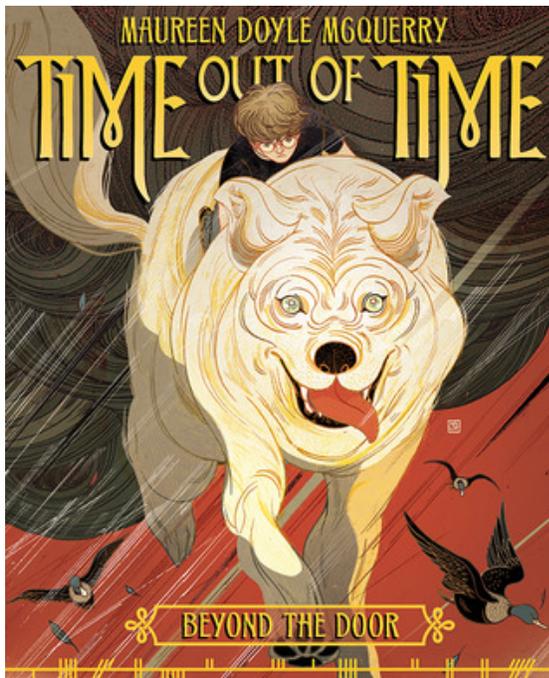
and illustrator, he has written and illustrated many children's books, including *Lawn to Lawn* (2010), *Unlovable* (2002), *Trashy Town* (1999), *Birthday Fish* (2005), and the informational text, *The Fantastic Undersea Life of Jacques Cousteau* (2009). He has been instrumental in creating two well-known television series, "Oswald" and "The Backyardigans." *All the Way to America* has received many honors, including the IRA Teachers' Choice Award for 2012, Kirkus' Best Children's Books of 2011, Irma Black Honor Book for 2012, and Bank Street Best of the Year for 2012 with Outstanding Merit. More information can be found at Dan Yaccrino's website.

Rebecca Gasiewicz, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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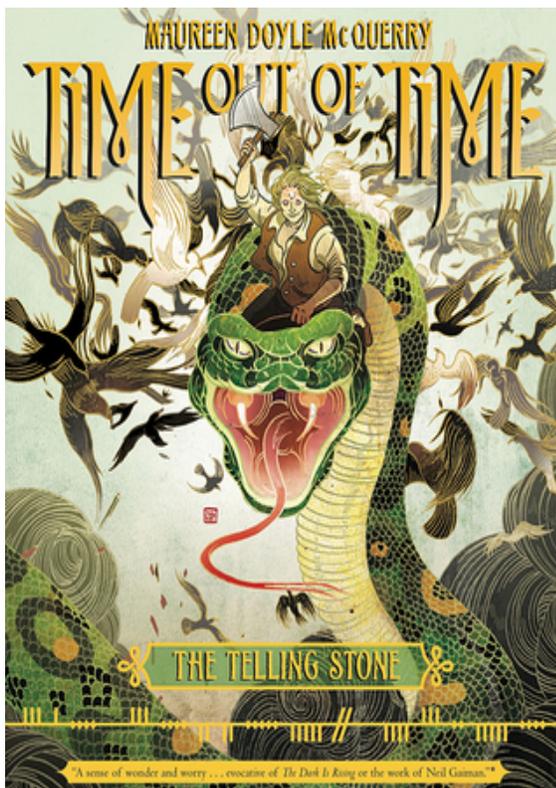


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Beyond the Door

Written by Maureen Doyle McQuerry
Amulet Books, 2014, 376 pp.
ISBN: 9781419710162



The Telling Stone

Written by Maureen Doyle McQuerry
Amulet Books, 2015, 353 pp.
ISBN: 9781419714948

Beyond the Door and *The Telling Stone* are the first two books in the Time Out of Time Series. McQuerry has woven an intriguing and complex fantasy about Timothy, his sister, Sarah, and their friend, Jessica. The three become involved in a quest that propels them from their middle school and high school lives into combat between the Light and the evil powers of the Dark. The characters travel between their world and a parallel one through portals. The actions of all the characters affect people and places in both worlds

as they engage in a struggle to save themselves and their worlds in the age-old conflict between good and evil.

These high fantasies makes compelling reading because the adventures involve mythic figures from British, Celtic, and Welsh mythologies who guide and support the children in their quest to overcome evil. Mc Uerry writes in her entry in the Authors Corner feature on the WOW website, “Students are often exposed to Greek myths in middle school curriculum, but rarely learn about other mythologies. This book became a chance to tell some of those stories.”

Mc Uerry also explains the inspiration for these books in her Authors Corner feature saying, “The story began with a trip to Oxford, England in 2009 when I discovered ancient carvings of the Greenman, a foliate head with leaves for hair and vines sprouting from his nose and mouth, in many of the churches. As I imagined the process of turning from human to tree, skin splitting to bark, vines pushing up my throat, I scribbled in my notebook. I was hooked. I needed to know more about the origin of Greenmen and more about Celtic mythology, a subject that echoed from childhood stories from my Irish ancestors. The Greenman spans cultures from India to Ireland and appears in medieval poetry. I spent months reading stories of the Wild Hunt, Taliesin and the famous Battle of the Trees.”

The narratives introduce the reader to these mythic creatures and the traditions that enrich the telling. The deliciously evil and beguiling warrior and magician, Balor, is the scary monster that leads the forces of the Dark. Cerridwyn is a Welsh goddess of inspiration and wisdom. Her character is an example of how the mythic creatures in the book take different identities in the parallel worlds. In the children’s world she appears as Timothy’s trusted baby sitter and Jessica’s aunt. In the parallel world she takes different forms, but when the battles occur she is sometimes an archer and sometimes a healer. The Greenman, a pre-Christian symbol that portrays the interdependence of nature and man, provides steady, loving guidance to the children. Herne, the British version of the horned god figure, leads a hunt that pursues Timothy, who by riding Gwydon, a magical wolf, escapes. Gwydon is another mythic character from Welsh mythology.

In her second novel, *The Telling Stone*, Mc Uerry gives a comprehensive explanation of the mythic characters. She writes, “I have used legendary names for some of my characters and ignored other traits that did not fit my story. So, while the characters aren’t completely true to their mythology, none are completely foreign to it, either,” (p. 344). Mc Uerry’s decisions about how she shapes her mythic characters propel the action forward. The only drawback about the Mythic Glossary is that it would have been helpful to have it placed at the end of the first book to illuminate the mythic characters and traditions also featured in that book, *Beyond the Door*.

Stemming from Irish tradition, Timothy is destined to become a Filidh, an inherited rank that has been passed down in his family. However, no one in his family has been a Filidh for many generations and so Timothy is unaware of his heritage. In Book II, Mr. Twigs, a professor of mythology, tells Timothy that, “A Filidh is a keeper of the word, of memories, tasked with reminding people of the true stories, and in that way the Filidh is a guardian” (p. 82). How Timothy earns the role of Filidh consumes both books.

Mc Uerry is masterful in her characterizations of the three children. Her ability to ground them in the realities of school, friendships, and their interests makes them believable. For example, Sarah, a ninth grader, is devoted to ballet and wins a scholarship for a two week summer class with the New York Ballet. Seventh grader, Timothy, savors words that specifically describe his situation. He especially enjoys thinking of how each word would win him Scrabble points. He loves researching and learning. The local librarian is his friend and guide who helps him find books, like *Chaos Theory*, to discover more about his passions. Sarah and Timothy are two years apart and very close siblings. Jessica, an excellent student who wants to hide that fact, is one of the popular girls in seventh grade. In the first part of *Beyond the Door* she is a bully who torments nerdy Timothy. As the story progresses, Jessica gets pulled into the quest and joins Sarah and Timothy, becoming their friend. One of the most positive aspects of these books is how Mc Uerry shows the characters' growth over two years through experiences that require their intelligence, humanity and bravery. The changes Jessica makes are believable and inspiring. Timothy and the girls discover their special gifts through the sacrifices and perils they experience in their battles against the evil creatures of the dark.

Some of the settings in both books are similar. However, in the second book the children travel to Scotland during the Christmas season because Timothy and Sarah's father is going to speak at a conference on climate change. The children are at first reluctant to travel, but then they learn that Scotland may have clues to advance their quest. The colorful setting of the Edinburgh Christmas German market, the huge Ferris wheel and seasonal displays as well as the famous Edinburgh castle at the center of the city become the focus of solving the puzzles that will give them a way to triumph over the evil forces of Darkness.

To further entice young readers, Mc Uerry has also included a secret code based on an ancient system of writing, Ogham, developed in Ireland in the fourth century, and provides a key to the code at the end of the Book I. A note to the reader gives background on the ancient language. The author also explains the background about Ogham in her Authors Corner entry. "When I discovered the ancient Ogham writing system based on the tree alphabet, I was fascinated to learn you can still find Ogham carved on stones today in the British Isles. I wanted young readers to share my fascination. Timothy discovers Ogham on an ancient map and readers can experience the discovery as they read. An Ogham font runs along the bottom pages (Book I) and can be decoded, giving more information about the myths." Book II gives the reader an opportunity to work along with Timothy and the girls as they solve the Ogham code on an ancient map that is a key to making their quest. The second book also contains a map that will help readers understand the action.

The audiences for these books are sixth through tenth graders. The books make terrific read-alouds that engage listeners. Clearly, Mc Uerry's background as a teacher makes her aware of how teens talk and engage with each other as well as with contemporary issues. Readers who have enjoyed Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series will be eager to discover other mythic powerful figures. The books of Susan Cooper in the *Dark is Rising* series also feature epic struggles between the Light and Dark. *The Wee Free Men* series by Terry Pratchett is another series to recommend to young people who enjoy Mc Uerry's books.

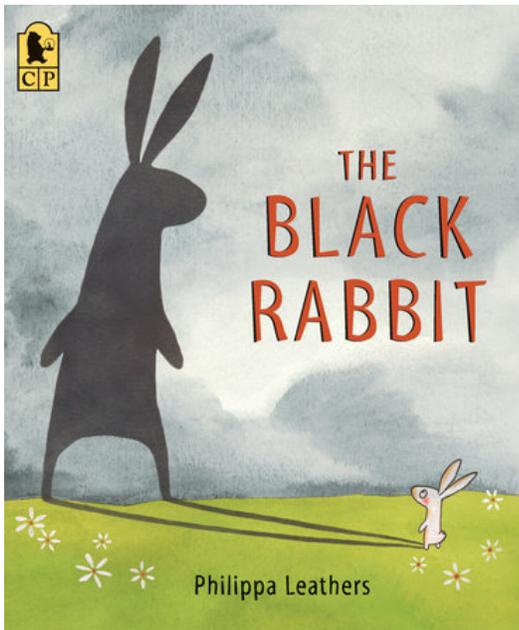
I am eager for the third book in the series because I have enjoyed the theme that good does overcome evil through sacrifice and pain. The theme of how the ancient stories can be guides to our lives in the 21st century can be inspiring to young readers. With these books, Mc uerry takes her rightful place as a writer of high fantasy in the tradition of Ursula Le Guin, Susan Cooper and Phillip Pullman.

Marilyn Carpenter, Professor Emeritus, Eastern Washington University

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The Black Rabbit

Written and illustrated by Philippa Leathers

Walker, 2014, 40 pp.

ISBN: 9781406343687

The Black Rabbit is the story of a rabbit who cannot escape from a companion who follows him everywhere. Rabbit does not know that the large creature following him is his shadow; therefore, he is literally frightened of his own shadow. Rabbit cannot lose his shadow until he enters a dark forest. There, he is able to escape his shadow only to come across something more dangerous.

The Black Rabbit by Philippa Leathers is her debut book as an author. Philippa Leathers studied at Trent

University and focused on Character Animation at Central Saint Martins in London. She has worked as a freelance animator on children's TV series, including the BAFTA-award winners, *Peppa Pig* and *Charlie and Lola*. Currently she works as a freelance animator and illustrator. Philippa previously worked as a visual effects data operator on such big screen movies as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Troy*.

The Black Rabbit's illustrations and text are simple and uncomplicated. The simplicity of the rabbit, wolf, and scenery help to highlight the emotional feelings of rabbit's initial fear and eventual easing of that fear. The illustrations support the text without being overly redundant of the text. The black rabbit first originated from an animation Philippa made years before in college. She liked the small white rabbit she had created so much she wanted to give him his own story. She drew the rabbit with "short, stumpy little legs" so that he moved in a particular way. Philippa has stated, "I loved the way he ran, his short legs meaning he comically wiggled from side to side and had to put in a lot of effort." Philippa illustrated *The Black Rabbit* when her daughter was only a few months old, which she thought was challenging because she only had the opportunity to paint whenever her daughter took naps. The illustrations are mostly drawn with pencil and then painted with watercolor, though she also uses ink and colored pencils.

This story draws mostly a younger audience who may share similar fears. The appeal of *The Black Rabbit* lies in the common childhood experience of being frightened at one time or another by something that later is realized to not be frightening. Its universal appeal points to the authenticity of this experience while framed within fantasy.

Books that can be paired with *The Black Rabbit* having a focus on shadows are *Moonbear's Shadow* by Frank Asch (2014), *Boris and the Wrong Shadow* by Leigh Hodgkinson (2012), and *Lilly and Lucy's Shadow* by Christopher Aslan Kennedy (2007). Another theme that can be

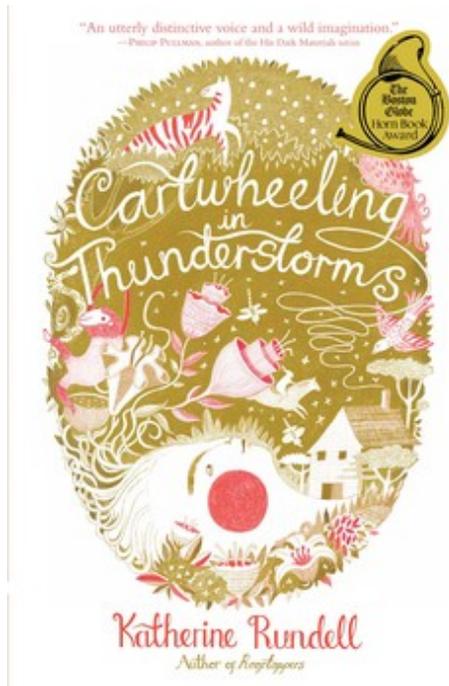
paired with *The Black Rabbit* is friendship. Three book suggestions with the theme of friendship are *Arlo Makes a Friend* by Wendy Wax (2008), *Same Same, but Different* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw (2015), and *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler (2005).

Megan McCaffrey, Governor's State University, Illinois

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Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms

Written by Katherine Rundell
Simon & Schuster, 2014, 248 pp.
ISBN: 9781442490611

In the middle of a particularly good race on horseback, she had just swerved away, over a stack of firewood and off. It was one of the hazards of being her friend, that you might be left for hours, days-even once, a week waiting for her to return, while she rambled over the bush, singing softly, eating fruit, telling stories to the aloe plants and birds. She was a funny one, and there was nothing you could do about it. (p. 11)

Wilhelmina Silver lives a life of complete and utter freedom on Two Tree Hill farm in Zimbabwe. Will, or Wildcat, as she is called by her father, the farm foreman, spends her days riding horses, saving monkeys, roasting bananas over an open fire, fighting and wrestling with her best friend, Simon, cartwheeling and finding beauty and joy in her surroundings. She is loved and adored by all on the farm, including Captain Browne, the owner. She is pure light, hope, and truth.

“It wasn’t until Will’s wildcat life came under threat that she realized how dearly she loved it” (p. 25). Will’s father becomes sick with malaria and dies, just as her mother did several years prior. Her love for her father is fierce and Will is heartbroken. Captain Browne promises to take care of her, but then marries Cynthia Vincy, who has no use for a child who is not like other little girls. Inevitably, Will is sent to Leewood School in England. She has known no other home or way of life than Zimbabwe and is taunted and bullied by the shiny, perfect girls who can’t see past Will’s different exterior and ways. Will shrinks and withers in this new environment, deciding to run away.

Katherine Rundell uses her lyrical and poetic writing to entice the reader into loving Wilhelmina and, in turn, makes us hurt for her as well. We admire her spirit and her joy of life. We root for her because she is uninhibited by the constraints of society. Rundell beautifully takes the reader into Will’s internal dialogue as she is persecuted for her differences. When all hope seems lost for Will, Rundell introduces the reader to tough no nonsense Mrs. James, who sees through Will’s rough exterior and brings to Will, and to the reader, hope that everything is going to be okay. “I do know how difficult school can be, my love. I hated it myself. If you go back, it won’t be like cartwheeling in sunshine. It would be more like cartwheeling in the wind” (p. 231). Rundell deftly weaves a story of the juxtaposition between beauty and ugliness in our world and teaches the reader about the importance of grit, perseverance, and resilience. Doing what is difficult can create beauty.

Will's story is one of cultural differences bringing intolerance. The girls at Leewood are fearful of Will because she is so different. Will does not know the cultural code and is ostracized and belittled. This story will resonate with middle grade readers as they struggle with being understood. Other texts complimenting *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* are *Stargirl* (Jerry Spinelli, 2002), connecting intolerance of differences; *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Munoz Ryan, 2000), connecting the sharp contrast in cultural and socioeconomic differences; *Each Kindness* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2012), and *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1945). These last two address similar themes of intolerance to difference, but show the reader that you may not be able to make it right if you choose to hurt with words and deeds.

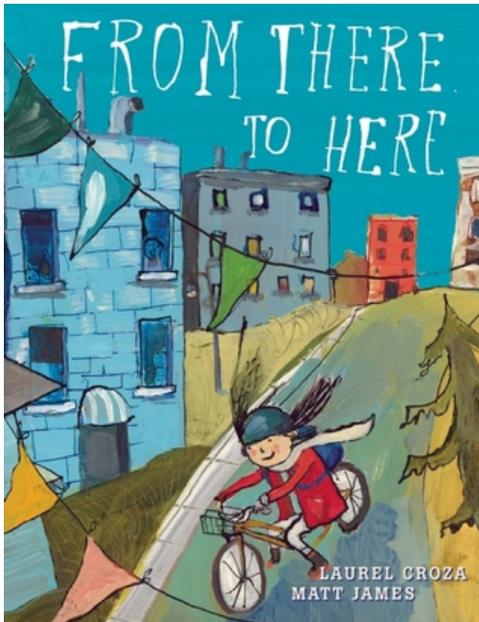
Katherine Rundell spent her childhood in Zimbabwe, Brussels, and London. She is the author of *Rooftoppers* (2013), winner of the Waterstones Children's Book Prize and the Blue Peter Book Award. Rundell is a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. Her childhood in Zimbabwe was the inspiration for *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms*. According to her biography, she begins each day with a cartwheel! More information about Rundell can be found on her website.

Ally Hauptman, Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN

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From There to Here

Written by Laurel Croza

Illustrated by Matt James

Groundwood Books, 2014, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9781554983650

It's different here, not the same as there. (np)

Moving from one place to another is a common occurrence for many young people. As part of an ever growing mobile society, a young Canadian girl finds herself leaving Saskatchewan when her father's work requires the family to move to Ontario. Comparing her new life in Toronto to her life in Saskatoon, the young narrator notices that

her father's work is different, that her mother uses different words to describe their world, and that even the name of where her new home is located, on a street not a road, is different. The environment and the family activities are different. Life is different between there and here, but eventually the young protagonist learns that life is different there from here. The subtlety of language portrays her acclimation to her new home.

This is a terrific book for anyone who has experienced changes from one place to another. The juxtaposition of how the protagonist's world has changed from one location to another, including the environment, the language, and family cultural experiences, allows readers to ponder how culture is an essential part of a place and cultural understandings change from place to place. Learning those differences can be helpful in making the transition from location to location easier. In fact, 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 stance to the other. The book has colorful illustrations that aptly portray some of the differences suggested by the written text. A lovely picture book with illustrations done in India ink on panel and then colored using acrylic paint, the book is available in both paper and electronic formatting.

A wonderful book that simultaneously celebrates a child's roots as well as her growing understandings of her new home, this would make a great addition to a text set on understanding how differences make a much more interesting world. It would pair nicely with books such as *Norman, Speak!* (Caroline Adderson, 2014), *The Geese March in Step* (Jean-Francois Dumont, 2014), *Not My Girl!* (Christy Jordan-Fenton, 2014) or *Cuckoo!* (Jeannie Robertson, 2014).

Laurel Croza lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. As a child, she moved nine times and attended numerous schools. *From There to Here* follows her first book, *I Know Here*, which was the Winner of the 2011 Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award; the 2011 Ezra Jack

Keats New Writer Award; and the 2010 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Excellence in Children's Literature: Picture Book. More information about Croza can be found her website (<http://laurelcroza.com/home.html>).

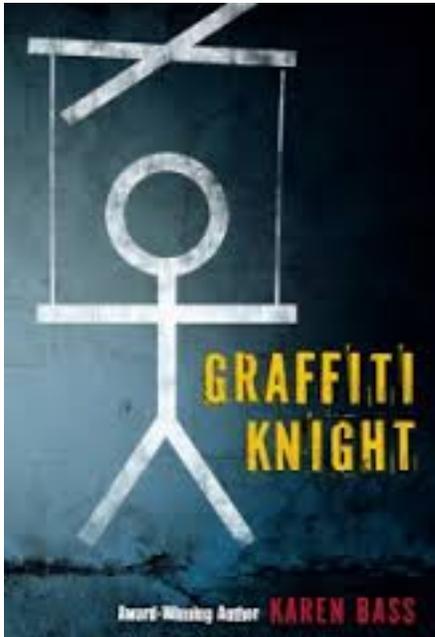
Matt James is a painter, musician, and illustrator who also lives in Toronto, Canada. He has illustrated a number of picture books, including *Yellow Moon*, *Apple Moon* (2008) and *Northwest Passage* (2013), which won the Governor General Award for Illustration. More information about James can be found at his website (<http://www.mattjamesillustration.ca/>).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Graffiti Knight

Written by Karen Bass
Pajama Press, 2014, 287 pp.
ISBN: 9781927485538

I know about Soviet justice. My father is experiencing it in one of their prison camps,” Karl whispered and turned his attention to the water. “You’d better hope you don’t get it. (p. 59)

Wilm is 16 years old, living in Soviet-controlled southeast Germany right after World War II. He watches the injustice around him as the German police become puppets for the Soviet soldiers who brutalize

the citizens of Leipzig. His father is angry, his mother cautious, and his sister has become a shadow of herself. Wilm decides that he can no longer sit by while his city, his family, and his friends remain under siege. He plasters political messages around the city center, most often on government buildings, in protest against the cruelty and oppression he can no longer tolerate. His two best friends begin the work with him, but as Wilm becomes more and more daring, his friends worry that Wilm will get caught, or worse yet, endanger those around him. Either option could be deadly for those involved or for those who are related to him.

A well-told story with a dynamic protagonist, an edge-of-your-seat plot, and a satisfying outcome, *Graffiti Knight* is a great example of how the aftermath of war can be as harrowing as war itself, especially for vulnerable populations—women, the disabled, or those under control of outsiders. Wilm aptly portrays how young people have a role to play in the defense of their own and others’ rights as citizens on their native soil even as they are treated as the conquered. This theme is especially timely and thought-provoking as this type of situation is currently being played out across the world. Adolescent readers will have much to ponder in response to Wilm’s behavior, but in many ways, he is the hero of his own life. Additionally, he becomes a hero to others who were too frightened to strike out against the German police who seem willing to collaborate with the Soviets. In many ways, this story reflects the situation experienced by the Jewish population as the Nazis took control of Europe, which could widen the discussion to addressing how conquering forces that have political domination set up circumstances that often result in further violence and human upheaval.

This narrative would make a great companion to books such as *My Cousin’s Keeper* (Simon French, 2014) which moves from the protagonist collaborating with bullies to standing up against them, or stories such as *Moon at Nine* (Deborah Ellis, 2014) and *The Declaration* (Gemma Malley, 2011), which also show teens defying systems in defense of

their own rights. An intriguing story that will have readers addressing the way in which young people can be forces in their worlds, *Graffiti Knight* presents a young man who stumbles like many adolescents, yet ultimately grows into his own and provides the leadership so often difficult but necessary to make change.

Karen Bass currently lives in Hythe, Alberta, Canada. *Graffiti Knight* is her fourth book published for young adults and has been nominated for the 2014 Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People and won the Canadian Literature Award (for chapter books) for 2014. More information about Bass can be found on her website (<http://www.karenbass.ca/>).

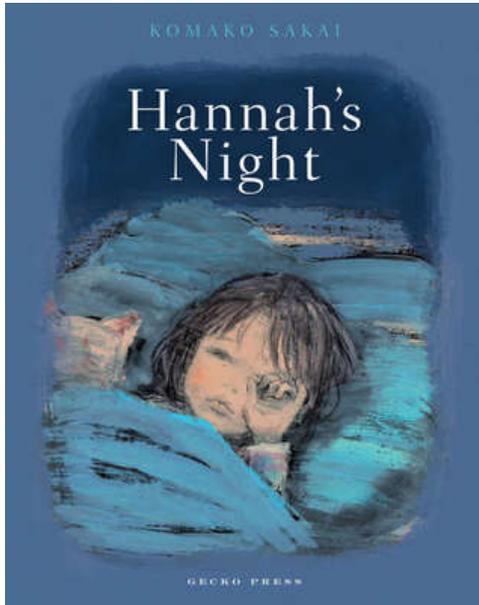
This book was named a 2015 Outstanding International Book (<http://www.slj.com/2015/02/collection-development/usbypresents-its-annual-outstanding-international-books-list/>) by USBBY.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Hannah's Night

Written and illustrated by Komako Sakai
Gecko Press, 2013, 32 pp.
ISBN: 9781877579547

Hannah wakes up in the middle of the night. Her cat, Shiro, is the only one who wakes up with her. Hannah's mom and dad keep sleeping soundly even when Hannah gives milk to Shiro and eats cherries in the kitchen. Hannah's night adventure continues as she plays with a doll, a music box, a notebook and colored pencils. Hannah has so much fun because her sister is sleeping and doesn't know that Hannah is playing with the sister's belongings. The night comes to an end, and so does Hannah's adventure as she gets sleepy and falls asleep again.

Hannah's Night was originally published in Japan in 2012 as, “はんなちゃんがめをさましたら (*Hannachanga me o samashitara, When Hanna Wakes Up* – translated by the reviewer) and was translated into English in 2013. The Japanese version of the book has a different cover than the English version. On the Japanese cover, Hannah is sitting up with a blanket around her, but on the English cover, Hannah is lying in bed. A simple storyline is described with short sentences in *Hannah's Night*. Illustrations are captured in rounded edge frames. Frames in Sakai's illustrations create an illusion that readers are watching Hannah through a camera lens during the night, but Hannah doesn't know that she is watched. Since Hannah plays in the night so quietly, young readers will stay calm while reading or listening to the story and quietly follow Hannah's steps.

Sakai used dark blue colors throughout the book that create a sense of the deep night. Even very young children who cannot yet read will have no problem with experiencing Hannah's adventure as Sakai's illustrations explain the story by themselves. In fact, in one interview, Sakai said that she tries to illustrate so that the illustrations directly tell a story to readers.

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Komako Sakai is a Japanese children's author and illustrator who was born in Hyogo, Japan. She studied at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and worked at a kimono textile design company after graduation. Kaisei-sha publishing company

introduces her as one of the most popular children's book authors and illustrators in Japan. She uses acrylic paints and oil colored pencils as the main art mediums for her illustrations. According to Scholastic (<http://www.arthuralevinebooks.com>), Sakai's work has been recognized around the world with awards and honor titles. In the U.S, *Emily's Balloon* (2006) was selected as an ALA Notable Children's Book and a Horn Book Fanfare title. *The Snow Day* (2009) was one of Publishers Weekly best books of 2009 and New York Times best illustrated children's books of 2009. Other of Sakai's books that are available in the U.S are *Mad at Mommy* (2010), *In the Meadow* (2011, written by Yukiko Kato), and *Wait! Wait!* (2013, written by Hatsue Nakawaki).

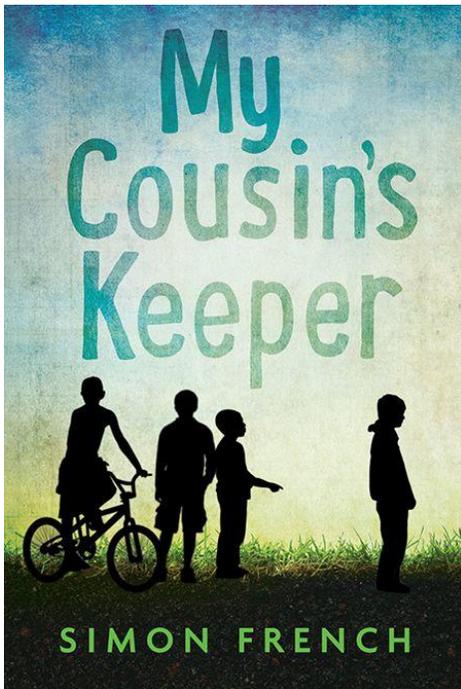
The story shows a universal experience that any child may have regardless of their gender. *Goodnight, Goodnight Construction Site* (2011) by Sherri Duskey Rinker (author) and Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator) can be paired with *Hannah's Night* as a bedtime story. *The Big Book of Slumber* (2014) by Giovanna Zoboli (author) and Simona Mulazzani (illustrator) can be also added to the bedtime story collection. Komako Sakai's books can be grouped with Allen Say's books for a Japanese author study. However, unlike Say's books, Sakai's books do not introduce Japanese culture to readers. As seen in *Hannah's Night*, Sakai's books show more universal experiences and are suitable for young children.

Jongsun Wee, Winona State University, Winona, MN

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My Cousin's Keeper

Written by Simon French

Candlewick Press, 2014, 234 pp.

ISBN: 9780763662790

I knew, though, that I wasn't about to start looking after Bon. And I sure wasn't going to be his friend. (p.51)

Kieran's life is going great as he becomes more popular and hangs out with the soccer team. While not the leader, he is still one of the gang. When his weird cousin Bon returns to town, Kieran worries that his popularity will be jeopardized if his new friends know that he and Bon are related. Bon is a free spirit with a long braid and a great imagination. Rather than play sports, Bon writes adventure stories with characters such as "Kieran the

Brave" and "Bon the Crusader," that spring from Kieran's medieval set of action figures, one of which Bon "borrowed" two years earlier before his mother took him out of town. Bon's stealing of Kieran's knight and horse figures was bad enough, but now Kieran is shocked to find out that Bon has come to live with his family.

In addition, Bon's newest friend is the new girl that Kieran secretly likes. He wishes that Julia would pay as much attention to him as she does to Bon. The soccer boys bully Bon for being different, and Julia stands up to them. She eventually learns that Kieran is Bon's cousin, and as she comes to know Kieran better, she confronts him about not standing up for his own family. As the soccer boys become more hurtful, Kieran has to decide about standing up for his cousin or ignoring the bullying and letting Bon suffer.

This middle school narrative makes a great companion to books such as Jerry Spinelli's *Loser* (2003), *Stargirl* (2002), or *Crash* (2004), as well as *Where I Belong* (Mary Downing Hahn, 2014), all of which deal with bullying. Additionally, this would make a great addition to any text set that addresses internal conflict and doing what is right, which could include books such as *Little White Lies* (Katie Dale, 2014) and *Whirligig* (Paul Fleischman, 2010). A story that will create great discussions about wrestling with your conscience, determining what is popular or normal, and how those who need help the most are frequently silenced by the more powerful, *My Cousin's Keeper* has the potential to engage young readers in building their own sense of worth as well as the worth of those around them. Well written and deeply felt, this is a wonderful novel.

Simon French lives in Australia where he works as a teacher. He grew up in Sydney, published his first book while still in high school, and has won numerous awards for his books in Australia. He is also the author of *Change the Locks* (2012) and *Cannily Cannily*

(2012). *My Cousin's Keeper* was originally published in Australia under the title, *Other Brother* (2012). More information about French and his work can be found at goodreads (https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/45415.Simon_French).

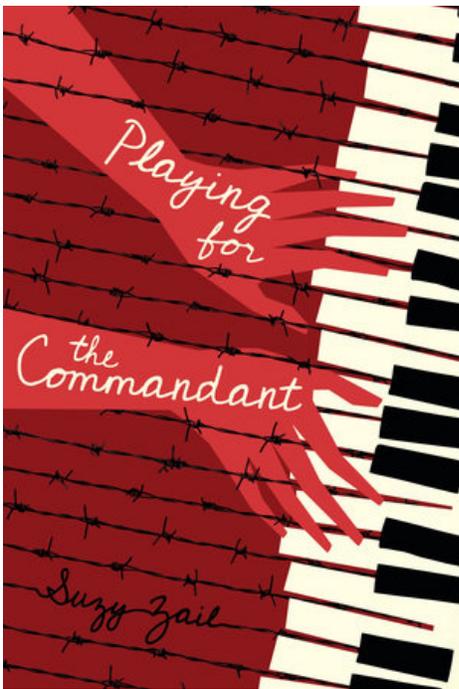
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Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Playing for the Commandant

Written by Suzy Zail

Candlewick Press, 2014, 245 pp.

ISBN: 9780763664039

Why would a boy who had everything risk it all for a few Jews? The rest of the world wasn't interested in saving us. Why would Karl be any different? (p.130)

Fifteen-year-old Hanna considered herself a normal Hungarian teenager who, like many girls her age, had dreams. She loved the piano and dreamed of being a concert pianist, but she also dreamed of dancing with a boy and wearing pretty clothes. Her dreams are shattered, however, when the Nazis enter Hungary and start sending Jewish

families to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Forced to leave their home at midnight, Hanna's family has only enough time to gather a small case of items to take with them. One item Hanna takes is a black C sharp piano key that she hides in her skirt. She takes this small token to remember her dreams, her family, and her life before the concentration camp. Once at the camp, however, Hanna's talent at the piano is what separates her from the other prisoners. Hanna auditions to play piano for the Commandant. She is selected and discovers that as long as her playing is pleasing, her life will be spared.

Playing for the head of the camp, however, places her within sight of the Commandant's son Karl, who does not have the same feelings about Jews as his father. While his father is cruel, Karl is compassionate. When his father is not looking he passes food for Hanna to take back to the barracks. He talks with her about music and life before the Nazis took power. One night when Hanna inadvertently starts to play a forbidden piece of music by Mendelssohn, the Commandant demands to know the composer. Karl swiftly explains the piece is by Franz Hirsch, who does not exist, but Karl asserts was not popular except with musician students and critics. Saving Hanna's life that night marks the beginning of a deeper friendship that eventually turns to love. Hanna and Karl know these deep feelings, if discovered, jeopardize both their lives. These feelings also create dissonance in Hanna, who wonders if she is betraying her family and her Jewish community.

This harrowing as well as romantic narrative would make a great companion to books such *Rachel's Secret* (Shelley Sanders, 2012) and *Rachel's Promise* (Shelley Sanders, 2013), or *Between Shades of Gray* (Ruta Sepetys, 2012) which detail the extent of anti-Semitic governments and the plight of Jews under such regimes. *Playing for the Commandant* would also make a nice addition to a Holocaust text set. An interesting story that could help students transition to some of the themes in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, this narrative will prompt discussions about wrestling with your conscience, determining how far people will go to

survive, the atrocities and kindnesses shown in the worst time periods within history, and how often those who need help the most are silenced by the more powerful. This book has the potential to engage secondary readers in a study of caring across ethnic, geographical, and political barriers. This is a compelling story that will engage secondary readers.

Suzy Zail is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and lives in Melbourne, Australia. Published in Australia under the title, *The Wrong Boy, Playing for the Commandant* is her first book for young adults, although she is the author of children's books that have been published in Australia, Canada, and the United States. More information about her work can be found at Walker Books.

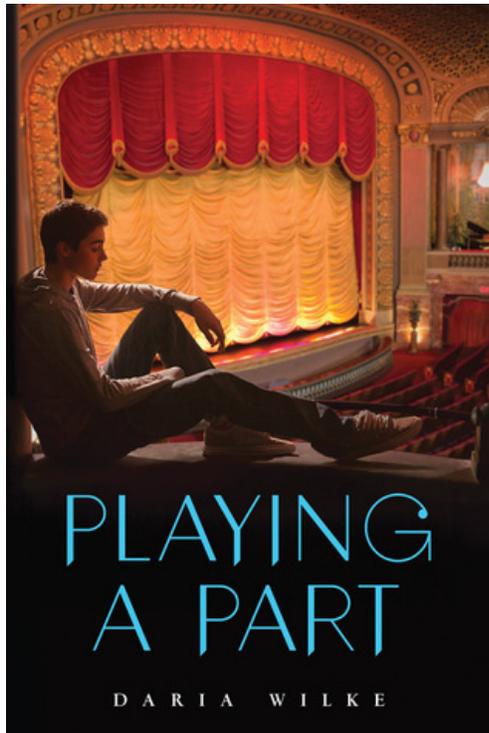
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Holly, Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Ohio

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Playing a Part

Written by Daria Wilke

Translated by Marian Schwartz

Arthur Levine, 2015, 176 pp.

ISBN: 9780545726078

It is difficult to be different, to fight constantly for your right to be different, and to play the part of a jester instead of living your life. Originally published in Russia in 2013, Daria Wilke's *Playing a Part* is published by Arthur A. Levine Books (Scholastic) in a translation by Marion Schwartz. The main character of the book is Grisha whose parents are actors in a puppet theater in Russia. Grisha is a theater kid who spends half of his life behind the stage. In the book, the puppet theater becomes a symbol of the whole world with its rights and wrongs, love and hatred, care and betrayal.

The theater is a refuge for Grisha when the outside world is less hospitable. His relationships with former school friends are falling apart; they constantly bully him for being, as they see it, a sissy. His true friend and role model is Sam, an actor who is about to emigrate from Russia because he is bullied as a gay man. He is the best puppeteer in the theater and plays the part of a jester in one of the theater productions. Sam is an old friend of Grisha's parents. When Grisha was a baby, Sam was his babysitter and later he helped Grisha with his homework. Grisha struggles to find his identity amidst the bullying, although he does not yet know whether or not he is gay. What Grisha is fighting for is right to be himself. Joining him in his fight is brave tomboy Sashok, the daughter of actors-puppeteers.

The jester is Grisha's favorite puppet; he hopes to own it when the production of the play is over. Grisha himself often feels like a jester; he makes constant jokes and is playing a part because it is easier to avoid being mocked and bullied. But one day the jester puppet is sold to a rich collector. Despite feelings of personal loss, Grisha is determined to make a new jester puppet for Sashok who is about to have a serious operation. For the sake of friendship, he is ready to sacrifice his wants and needs for those of his friend.

The gay theme is quite significant in the book. This is a first book for young readers in Russia which openly involves gay characters, and may be the last because of the new Russian law that prohibits mentioning a gay theme in books for readers under 18. The designated age is to be displayed on the cover of all books. This book is clearly addressed to young readers, and in the United States the suggested age is 12 and up.

In this coming of age novel, the focus on being gay stands for the many choices adolescents need to make. First of all, is freedom of choice, any choice, not only of sexual orientation. It is also about the need to stand against the peer pressure and to search for one's individual way.

The book can be read together with John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2005) and Louis Sachar's *Holes* (1998). In terms of the puppet theater theme, it can be paired with *The Master Puppeteer* (1975) by Katherine Paterson.

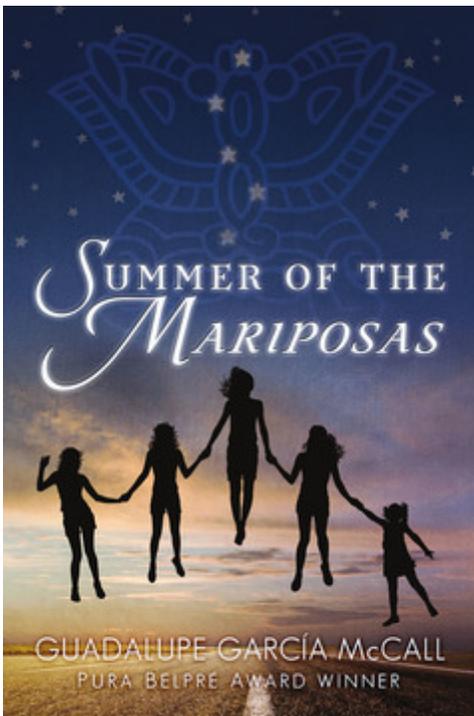
Daria Wilke was born and raised in Moscow in a family of puppeteers, just like her main characters, Grisha and Sashok. Now she lives in Vienna, Austria. She has written other pieces of fiction and plays for children, although her books have not yet found their way to American readers. *Playing a Part* is translated by Marian Schwartz for whom this is a rare venture into the realm of young readers' literature. She is well known for her excellent translations of classics and contemporary Russian authors, such as Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Bulgakov, Yuri Olesha, and Mikhail Shishkin.

Olga Bukhina, International Association for the Humanities, New York City

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Summer of the Mariposas

Written by Guadalupe Garcia McCall

Tu Books, 2012, 352 pp.

ISBN: 9781600609015

It was a magical time, full of dreaminess and charm, a time to watch the mariposas emerge out of their cocoons, gather their courage, and take flight while we floated faceup in the water. And that's exactly what we were doing the morning the body of a dead man drifted into our swimming haven. (p. 4)

Odilia, Juanita, Velia, Delia, & Pita are “the five little sisters, cinco hermanitas! The Garza Girls! Together forever! No matter what!” (p. 11). The girls have gone wild, struggling to find happiness in the hot Texas

summer after their father has abandoned them and their mother for la sirena, a temptress. While swimming in the Rio Grande, the girls find the body of a dead man who had attempted to cross the river. They find his identification documents and realize that he is from a town close to the home of their father and their Abuelita (grandmother). The girls are determined to take his body back to his home without the knowledge of their mother, and visit their grandmother. The eldest sister, Odilia, is against the idea, feeling that this betrayal of their mother is going too far. McCall weaves elements of Greek and Mexican mythology as Juanita is described as an “Amazonian” (p. 14) and Odilia is guided by La Llorona, the feared yet misunderstood crying lady, who was believed to have murdered her children. La Llorona tells Odilia she must work with her sisters to complete the task of returning the dead man to his family if Odilia wishes to save her own family from self-destruction.

Using a magical earring given to her by La Llorona, Odilia manages to sneak the cinco hermanitas and the corpse across the border into Mexico. The girls find the family of the man, only to realize they have arrived on his daughter’s quinceanera. As the girls agonize over how to handle the situation, the dead-man’s son approaches the car and the girls discover that the dead-man was not the long lost husband and father they had imagined, but a man who had abandoned his family many years before as their own father had abandoned them. The Garza girls leave the man behind with his family and continue on their journey to find their Abuela. Along the way, the girls must learn kindness and purity of heart and Odilia must embrace her heritage and the gifts of the curandera (a mystical healer) that come with it. They must survive the insanity that loneliness can cause when a bruja (witch) tries to poison them with sweets to keep them with her forever, a nagual (warlock) disguised as a donkey tries to cook them to release himself from his curse, lechuzas (witch owls) taunt the girls with their deepest fears and try to tear them to

shreds, and finally a chupacabra befriends and then attacks them.

A fresh morning leads them to their destination, their Abuelita's home. She treats their wounds, both physical and emotional, and helps the girls return to their mother. She also helps them realize what is most important by leading the girls to the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary, who guides them on a journey through a celestial passage. The guidance from Mother Mary sheds light on the secrets of the Garza family and helps the girls understand how their family may become holy once again. The girls' return to Texas is highly publicized as the girls have been reported missing.

Their father returns with his new family and tries to force the girls out of their home, causing deep wounds that cannot be mended. However, his return further tightens the bond, not just among the girls, but between the girls and their mother as their mother finally shows her strength, stands up for her girls, and drives this hateful man from their home. The story ends happily, as the agent who helped the girls in their return to Texas falls in love with their mother, marries her, and the girls move forward with their new families and find forgiveness in their hearts, after all.

Guadalupe Garcia McCall was born in Mexico and grew up in a border town in Texas. Her descriptions of the places are vivid and honest, while her inclusion of Mexican mythology offers new twists and interest to her audience. McCall is one of five sisters and her descriptions of the interaction of the varied personalities of the sisters, different yet dedicated to one another, reflect the sisterhood and friendships vital to adolescent girls. Information about McCall can be found on her website.

Any reader who enjoyed the twinning of American and Mexican cultures in Alma Flor Ada's (2013) *Dancing Home* or the mythical elements that guide the story of the young girl in Ann Cameron's (2005) *Colibri* will enjoy the adventures of the Garza girls, cinco hermanitas, together forever.

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

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