

ISSN 2577-0527



# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME VI, ISSUE 1

Fall 2013  
Open Theme

Worlds  
of WORDS 



College  
of  
Education

[wowlit.org](http://wowlit.org)

WOW Review: Volume VI, Issue 1  
Fall 2013  
Open Theme

Table of Contents

<b>Introduction and Editor's Note</b>	2
<i>Crazy Loco</i>	3-4
<i>El Moto</i>	5-6
<i>Endangered</i>	7-8
<i>The Greedy Sparrow</i>	9-10
<i>The Herd Boy</i>	11-12
<i>Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War</i>	13-14
<i>The Language Inside</i>	15-17
<i>The Milk of Birds</i>	18-19
<i>My Family for the War</i>	20-21
<i>Parrot in the Oven</i>	22-23
<i>The Tsunami Quilt: Grandfather's Story</i>	24-26
<i>The Wakame Gatherers</i>	27-28

**Contributors to this Issue:**

Melissa Ann Becerra, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX  
Yecenia Campos, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, TX  
Michele Ebersole, University of Hawaii-Hilo, Hilo, HI  
Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, OH  
Blanca Leal, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, TX  
Avis Masuda, University of Hawaii-Hilo, Hilo, HI  
Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX  
Judi Moreillon, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas  
Woman's University, Denton, TX  
Lisa Marie Ochoa, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX  
Junko Sakoi, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ  
Vanessa Saladini, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX  
Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona, Tucson  
Cathy Stearns, University of North Texas, Denton, TX  
Melissa B. Wilson, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, LA

**Editor:**

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

**Production Editor:**

Richard Clift



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/vi-1/>

## Introduction and Editor's Note

As *WOW Review* begins its sixth year of sharing insights into culturally significant global texts, the World of Words Review Committee wishes to thank the many reviewers who have contributed their time and expertise to its publication. Each review has offered personal response supported by a wealth of information to address authenticity of character and context. Readers also have found issues to contemplate and challenge and other books to extend the themes offered by the various titles reviewed. These features continue to characterize *WOW Review* in this issue. The submissions for this unthemed issue brought together twelve books from various genres and reflecting diverse parts of the global community. The themes represented here offer invitations for a variety of personal connections as well as intertextual connections with other books.

To identify one theme that weaves throughout all is rather challenging but in reading these reviews, a new respect is evident for the complexity of people, events, and beliefs that intersect in many ways to build identity and agency in the youth throughout the global community and across historical eras. While family is acknowledged as a primary resource in building one's identity in these titles, the specific ways that families support identity development is unique to each story shared. Families that are biracial and bilingual provide the context for the young protagonists in *Endangered*, *The Language Inside*, and *Wakame Gatherers*, all of whom encounter very different experiences when visiting or living within the two cultures that make up their identity.

*The Milk of Birds* tells of a young girl with learning disabilities whose mother encourages her involvement in a pen pal program resulting in a sense of agency as she connects to a young girl from Sudan. *Crazy Loco* shares family stories of Mexican American young people on the Texas/Mexico border as they deal with cultural challenges. Similarly, *Parrot in the Oven* describes the struggles of a young Mexican American boy dealing with family issues, however his hopes and dreams in light of facing challenges hold potential for shaping his identity and, thus, a sense of personal agency. *Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely through a Never Ending War* and *The Herd Boy* each reflect this hopefulness as well.

With characters impacted by historical and cultural events, *My Family for the War*, *Tsunami Quilt*, and *El Moto* each demonstrate the influence of political and social events on one's sense of identity. *Greedy Sparrow* does not focus on a family within the story, however, it is a traditional Armenian tale that has been handed down in the author's family to sustain a sense of Armenian cultural identity. Of course, each book reviewed offers multiple points of connection for readers. We welcome your response and insights as part of the WOW community.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Janelle Mathis at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/2/>

1430 East Second Street, Tucson, AZ 85721 520.621.9340 [wowlit.org](http://wowlit.org) © 2013 by Janelle Mathis



### **Crazy Loco**

Written by David Rice

Speak, 2001, 135 pp.

ISBN: 978-0142500569

This collection of stories set in the Rio Grande Valley provides insight into the unique life of children along the US-Mexico border. The nine stories highlight the importance of family through heart-warming and often humorous accounts of first love, tragedy, and everyday life.

In one story, Romero and Luis portray the lengths that young people go to for their first love. Romero crashes a high school dance for a chance to dance with the most beautiful girl in his class, Veronica. Luis makes his mother buy him an extra special Valentine card for Nina. Both boys lose their friends before the story is over—Romero when he tries to get them to join him where they don't belong and Luis when he betrays his friends to defend Nina's virtue.

Another story tells of Loco, a dog full of adventures that range from trying to take over the wheel to chasing cuetes (firecrackers). Loco dives into a pool that prohibits animals and taunts the lifeguards before they kick him out. He runs into a nopal (cactus) and bravely deals with the pain of hundreds of thorns being removed from his shoulder. Loco delivers laugh after laugh until Dad leaves the keys in the car and someone takes off with Loco from the McAllen Mall.

In a third story, when the California Cousins come to visit Juan and his family, we clearly see how Mexican-Americans from outside the Rio Grande Valley feel about this border culture. The California Cousins look down at the Valley family and call them small Texas Mexicans. Juan and his brother decide to get even by almost blowing up the outhouse with a cuete.

The main characters in the stories represent the differing experiences of Mexican-American children in the Rio Grande Valley as they deal with issues in everyday life. The stories offer young adults ways of dealing with embarrassing family situations and overcoming obstacles to achieve their ultimate goals. Readers experience the stubbornness and passion of the culture through Uncle Roy, Papa Lalo, and Milagros' dad. As longtime residents of the Rio Grande Valley, we easily identified with the majority of the characters. We could see our fathers, uncles, and cousins within the stories. We are familiar with cousins from out of town thinking of us as "Texas Mexicans" implying that we are somehow less worthy than they.

*Crazy Loco* is an emotional rollercoaster with humor, sadness, and a mixture of emotions throughout the different stories. The language includes code switching prevalent in the Tex-Mex style of speech from the Rio Grande Valley. Aunts and uncles are Tios, firecrackers are

cuetes, and crazy is loco. Readers from this area will find familiar phrases like estan locos, n'hombre no, and huercos sonsos.

Author David Rice was born in Weslaco, TX in the late 1960s. He grew up as a Mexican-American with an adoptive Anglo grandfather. He gathers inspiration for his books from his South Texas and Mexican American cultures. He grew up in Edcouch, a small town in South Texas, and presently divides his time between Austin and his hometown.

The winner of the 2001 ALA Best Book for Young Adults and a 2002 PEN USA Children's Literature Award finalist, *Crazy Loco* could be effectively used in the classroom with emergent bilinguals to address the cultural issues and hardships coming from their Mexican-American culture. Students from every culture would be able to identify with any of the characters as they deal with family and teenage problems.

*Crazy Loco* can be paired up with other stories about life in South Texas. *Under the Mesquite* (Guadalupe Garcia McCall, 2011) chronicles the life of Lupita who has to take over caring for her family after her Mami is diagnosed with cancer. *Summer of the Mariposas* (Guadalupe Garcia McCall, 2012) depicts the journey of four sisters who are trying to return home after delivering the body of a drowned man they found in the Rio Grande River. They encounter a number of Mexican-American legends including La Llorona along the way. Both stories by Guadalupe Garcia McCall give light into the Rio Grande Valley culture and its beliefs.

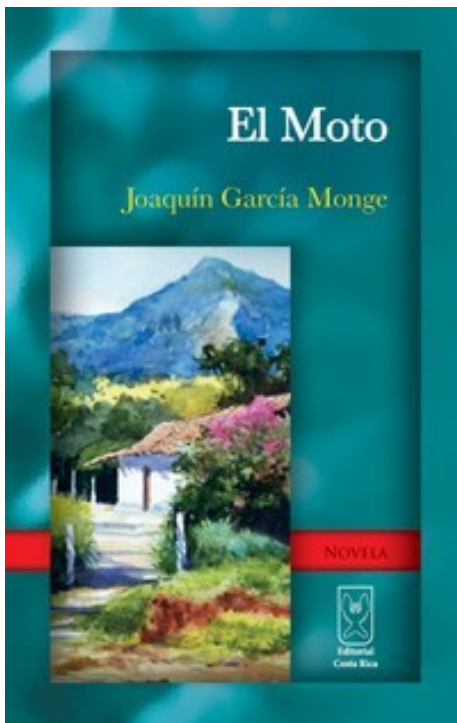
Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, TX

© 2013 Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Blanca Leal & Yecenia Campos at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/3/>





### **El Moto**

Written by Joaquín García Monge  
Lehmann, Costa Rica, 2011, 69 pp.  
ISBN: 978-9977949147

A realistic fiction novel published originally in 1900 recounts pressing moral and social issues faced by the people in Costa Rica at the beginning of the 20th century. García Monge brings to the surface topics such as the marked differences among social classes, the injustices of the rich against the poor, and the customs and moral principles of the time. *El Moto* is considered by many as a forerunner of Costa Rican literature. It is required reading for upper elementary students in Costa Rica, which evokes feelings of a past with which most students can identify.

Jose Blas was given the nickname of “El Moto” during

his elementary school years. He is an orphan who lost both his mother and father by the age of six years old and is brought up by his godfather Don Sebastian Solano, a widower with no children and of good economic standing in the community. Don Soledad Guillen is the richest man in town. He has an only daughter, Secundila Guillen. Besides being beautiful and talented at the required female duties of the time, she is the most eligible bachelorette in Desamparados. This neighborhood is on the outskirts of San Jose, the capital city, a fertile and prosperous land for the gamonales—the landlords of the time.

*El Moto* falls in love with Secundila Guillen. Although the feeling is reciprocated, the customs of the time limit their interaction to a couple of religious celebrations a year and the occasional look and smile exchange. Yet, there is an understanding between them and some of their closest friends about the nature of their relationship. Don Soledad and Doña Micaela, Secundila’s parents, are unaware of their daughter’s feelings towards Jose Blas.

Without Jose Blas’s knowledge Don Sebastian, his godfather, places his eyes on Secundila. *El Moto*, who is around 21 years old, decides it is time to formalize the relationship and ask Secundila’s parents for her hand in matrimony. But how can he face Don Soledad? He decides to look for an ally in el padre Yanurio, the town’s priest, who agrees to help him and talks to Don Soledad. After his visit with the priest, Don Sebastian asks his godson to go look for one of his horses which hasn’t been ridden in a while. Early the next morning *El Moto* is on his way, still unaware of the intentions of his godfather toward his girlfriend. He is thinking of Secundila and planning a happy future with her. He finds the horse and tries to rope it but the animal goes wild. In an effort to dominate it, Jose wraps the rope around his waist. Unfortunately, the horse turns furious and drags him through rocks, trees, and thorn bushes leaving him severely injured and unconscious. While Jose recovers from his

injuries in the care of his best friend, Don Sebastian marries a distraught Secundila. Once recovered, Jose is informed about the misfortune by the priest and leaves, never to return.

Joaquin Garcia Monge was born in San Jose Costa Rica in 1881. He graduated high school from one of the most prestigious boys-only schools in the capital and traveled to Chile to obtain his college degree and became an educator. At the time Costa Rica was a relatively new country since it had only declared its independence from Spain in 1821. The society was still greatly influenced by the European and American families who had immigrated to the new lands during the colony years. Garcia Monge wrote *El Moto* when he was only 19 years old, inspired by what he had witnessed in his own neighborhood. This novel tells the story of the injustices and marginalization suffered by the poor in a place and time in which they had no voice, no rights, and no advocate.

Garcia Monge's formal education allowed him to play an important role in shaping the education system of Costa Rica. He is considered by many as the father of the Costa Rican costumbrismo (the telling of the customs). Following this literary genre he wrote other novels like *Hijas del Campo* [Daughters of the Field], and *Abnegacion* [Abnegation]. Besides pairing *El Moto* with other of Monge's works, readers might find useful the works of writers who continued this trend such as *Mamita Yunai* (1940) by Carlos Luis Fallas and *El Jaul* [The Chest] (1937) by Max Jimenez. Monge worked as a high school principal and served in public offices as the director of the National Library and as the Minister of Education. One of his most significant jobs was as the editor of the *Repertorio Americano* [American Repertoire] magazine which became the unifying communication medium for the Latin-American intellectuals of the early 1900's. Unfortunately, much of his work was not compiled after his death in 1958; yet, his influence is still felt in the Latin-American literature.

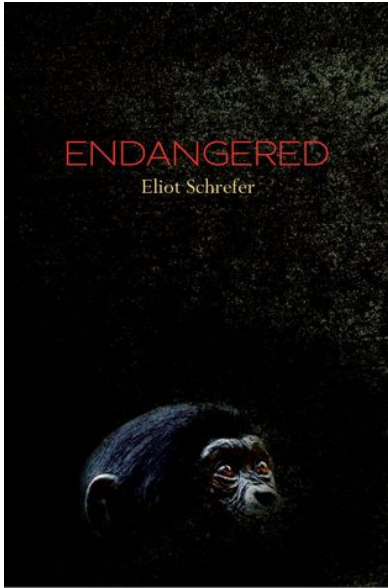
As born and raised in Costa Rica, I remember when my 4th grade teacher introduced us to *El Moto*, its complex characters, its setting, and tragic plot as well as its writer and his accomplishments in the history of our country. *El Moto* played an important role in helping us understand our cultural heritage. It showed us how much we had evolved as a society, the customs of the time, the use of the language, and how different life was for us at the other end of the century. This short novel is so rich in imagery and content that it is still required reading for students in Costa Rica today.

Vanessa Saladini, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX

© 2013 Vanessa Saladini



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Vanessa Saladini at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/4/>



### **Endangered**

Written by Eliot Schrefner  
Scholastic Press, 2012, 272 pp.  
ISBN: 13-9780545165761

Sophie, a fourteen-year-old girl, travels to “The Democratic Republic of Congo: Where Even the Bullet Holes Have Bullet Holes” (pg. 1), each summer to visit her mother. School and teenage life with her Italian-American father in Miami is different from her summer life with her Congolese mother, whose “life’s project” is establishing and maintaining a sanctuary for rescued bonobos (a type of ape that is similar to humans in DNA). Sophie figures this will be a typical summer, but upon her arrival, her decision to buy an injured and starved bonobo from an illegal trader (breaking

her mother’s fundamental rule), leads to a life-altering trip which sets her on a different path in life.

Sophie arrives at the sanctuary and quickly bonds with the young bonobo, whom she names Otto. She nurses him back to health and learns about the other bonobos in the sanctuary as she readjusts back to life in the Congo. Schrefner seamlessly weaves in detailed information about bonobos, their habits, and their relationships with each other for the reader. Through Sophie’s teenage eyes, he also explains the political and historical context so middle-aged readers can understand the unrest that exists within Democratic Republic of Congo.

War soon turns Sophie and Otto’s world upside down. Sophie’s mother has left the sanctuary to visit a bonobo release site and, during the conflict, the sanctuary is overtaken by rebels, leaving Sophie to fend on her own with Otto. Instead of saving herself, she sacrifices her own safety and flees to the jungle with Otto. There they face dangerous situations and experience the atrocities associated with war.

The author, Eliot Schrefner, conveys Sophie’s and Otto’s physical and emotional struggles in a straightforward, yet powerful way that pulls readers into the story. He masterfully portrays the bond that can exist between a human and another living creature. The book was well researched and includes an informative question and answer section with Schrefner indicating his interest and perspective on writing the story. Some readers who have lived in different parts of Africa have commented on Schrefner’s ability to craft an outstanding book about the Congo. Others have commented that some of the events, such as the rebel capture, do not seem believable.

The book is the 2012 National Book Award Finalist for Young People’s Literature. It is a fast-paced read and may be particularly inviting for middle school readers. It is nail-biting and suspenseful, yet an incredibly heartwrenching story that could be paired



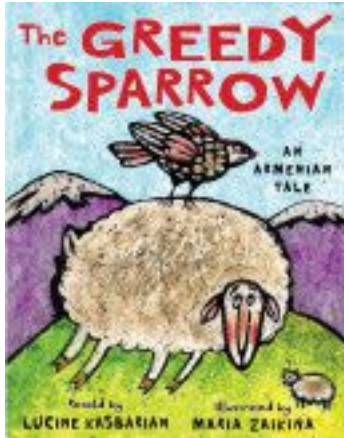
with the 2012 Newbery award winner *The One and Only Ivan*, which is told from the point of view of a gorilla who is kept in a cage, or it could be used to discuss mistreatment of animals during war by pairing it with *Faithful Elephants: A True Story of Animals, People, and War* by Yukio Tsuchiya (1997).

Michele Ebersole, University of Hawaii-Hilo, Hilo, HI

© 2013 Michele Ebersole



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Michele Ebersole at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/5/>



### The Greedy Sparrow

Retold by Lucine Kasbarian

Illustrated by Maria Zaikina

Marshall Cavendish, 2011, n.p.

ISBN: 978-0761458210

*Once there was and was not. (n.p.)*

With this traditional Armenian beginning “to suggest that fantastical tales may be real or imagined,” the story opens with a small sparrow with a thorn in his foot. He goes to a friendly baker who removes the thorn only to return later to the baker and demand that she give him the thorn or a loaf of bread in its place. Of course, the thorn was thrown away so the small bird leaves carrying a fine loaf of bread. The story continues as he asks a shepherd to watch the bread and returning, he demands a sheep when he finds out the shepherd has eaten the bread. The plot continues to build as the sparrow collects a bride and a lute and only ends when he eventually falls from a tree, losing the lute and gaining another thorn in his foot. This tale of the outcomes of greed is part of Armenian oral traditions and was originally written down by Hovannes Toumanian, an Armenian poet who lived from 1869 – 1923, according to the author’s note.

The authenticity of this story as part of Armenian oral traditions can be traced to author Lucine Kasbarian’s grandmother who was a celebrated storyteller within her culture. Following the Armenian genocide in the early 20th century, the author’s family fled Armenia with only a few papers and their knowledge of the songs, dances, foods and other cultural artifacts that represented their heritage. Retelling traditional stories such as *The Greedy Sparrow* provided one way to maintain a piece of Armenian culture for generations that followed. The illustrator, Maria Zaikina, is Russian; however, she researched the Armenian culture even before being selected to create the rich representations of traditional life that the reader finds in *The Greedy Sparrow* (<http://www.lucinekasbarian.com/files/GreedySparrowRelease.pdf>).

*The Greedy Sparrow* has won several awards, including the Silver Nautilus Award in the children’s book category, an award given for positive social change. The press release for this award states, “Author Kasbarian and illustrator Zaikina convey ethnic authenticity in their adaptation of this tale from the Armenian oral tradition.” It was also an honor book for the 2012 Storytelling World Resources Award.

True to the nature of storytelling, the text of *The Greedy Sparrow* is simple. Narrator lines are provided at the top of each page while speech bubbles emphasize the voices of the characters. True to the nature of picture books, Maria Zaikina’s bold, colorful, folk-style illustrations help relay the meaning and humorous tone of the story. The illustrations are

created with oil paint and layers of wax while characters, landscape, and cultural artifacts are each outlined in thick black lines. Each page is similarly outlined.

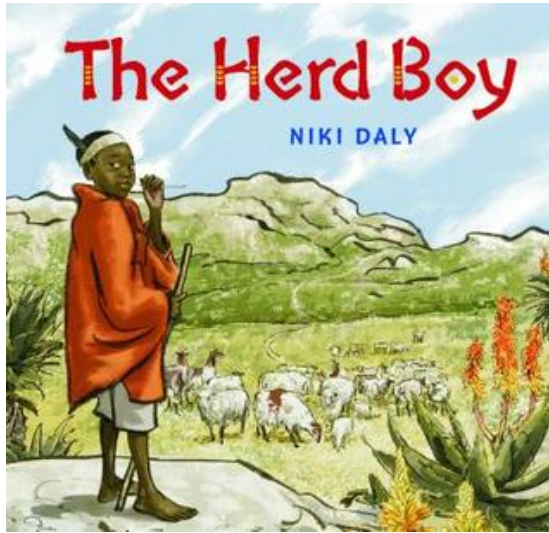
Creating a text set of Armenian picture books would be one way to both enjoy the traditional lore of Armenia as well as make readers familiar with the traditions of this particular culture of the global community. Other books that might be included are suggested on Kasbarian's website, such as *Once There Was and Was Not, A Modern Day Folktale from Armenia* (Page McBrier, 2008); *A Drop of Honey* (Djemma Bider, 1989); *A Donkey Reads* (Muriel Mandell, 2011); *Gadoo the Cat, Armenian Folktale* (Susan Kadian Gopigian, 2008); *The Flower of Paradise and Other Armenian Tales* (Bonnie Marshall, 2007) and *One Fine Day* (Nonny Hogrogrian, 1971). Older students might want to explore *Armenia: A Rugged Land, an Enduring People* (Lucine Kasbarian, 1997) to learn more of this culture. Readers might also enjoy visiting other traditional tales in which morals are embedded within the outcome, such as *Aesop's Fables* or *Fables* by Arnold Lobel (1983).

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

© 2013 Janelle Mathis



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Janelle Mathis at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/6/>



**The Herd Boy**

Written by Niki Daly

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2012, n.p.

ISBN: 978-0802854179

*You have to be awake, and you have to be brave, to be a herd boy. (n.p.)*

South African author-illustrator Niki Daly shows readers a day in the life of Malusi, a young boy who cares for his grandfather's sheep and goats. He awakens early to guide them up to the grazing slopes, watching out for poisonous snakes resting in the bushes. This young boy observes and interacts with the natural world. He notices the hard-working termites that march in two columns. He collects dung to be used by the shopkeeper in his garden; dung that the family will trade for fresh vegetables.

Malusi also makes time to play with his friend and fellow herder Lugisa who is a champion footballer (soccer player) and stick-fighter. The boys talk about what they want to be when they grow up. Lugisa wants to play football for a famous team. Malusi wants to be the president, which makes his friend laugh and laugh. How can a herd boy grow up to be a leader in his country?

While the animals graze, Malusi protects them from the troop of baboons that threaten the flock. When a baboon attacks one of grandfather's lambs, Lugisa's dog chases away the attacker. Still the lamb is injured, and Malusi must carry it down the slopes in hopes that grandfather's medicine can save it.

At the end of the day, the boys sing to quiet their hunger on their journey home until a shiny new car, kicking up dust, stops beside them. The man in the back seat opens the window and greets the boys. This man tells them he was once a herd boy, too, and asks the boys of their future aspirations. The man notes that "a boy who looks after his herd will make a very fine leader" (n.p.). Readers are treated to a satisfying ending when we learn that the lamb will survive. Grandfather also gives Malusi a puppy that will grow up to help him protect the sheep. The young herd boy falls asleep with the puppy in his arms and dreams of his future election.

In his illustrations, Niki Daly captures the people, culture, and landscape of South Africa. He adds defining black outlines to his watercolor paintings and uses spot art to connect readers with textual references and events not depicted in the larger illustrations. The book includes a glossary with pronunciation guides of Afrikaans and Xhosa words. The use of these words

throughout the story contextualizes it within South African culture and adds a strong element of cultural authenticity.

In his author's note, Niki Daly confirms that the man in the car was none other than former South African President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Mr. Mandela, who spent twenty-seven years as a prisoner under apartheid, negotiated an end to white rule. He was elected president in 1994 in the first election in which all South Africans, regardless of race, were allowed to vote.

After reading *The Herd Boy*, the picture book biography *Mandela: From the Life of the South African Statesman* written and illustrated by Floyd Cooper (Philomel, 1996) provides an extension of this story. This book spans Nelson Mandela's life from herd boy to South African president and will provide young readers with another view of South African culture as well as political history. They can also compare and contrast the mood created by Floyd Cooper's oil wash on board illustrations as compared with Niki Daly's watercolors.

Niki Daly ends his author's note with this question, "What is there in the life of a herd boy that would help prepare him to become the shepherd of a nation?" This is a question that young readers may want to explore. As Daly notes, Mr. Mandela's humble beginnings mirror those of Old Testament David, a shepherd during childhood who grew up to be a king, and Muhammad, the Islamic prophet, who also tended his family's herd. In U.S. society, people such as Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Rosa Parks, and Bill Clinton all came from humble beginnings to become leaders who made a difference in the lives of others.

A thought-provoking contrast could be to think about the life choices of some people who are born in privilege and choose a humble lifestyle as emblematic of their beliefs and social or political action. Mahatma Gandhi is one example. Creating a text set of picture book biographies is one way to inspire readers to explore some of these questions about character traits, life skills, and life choices.

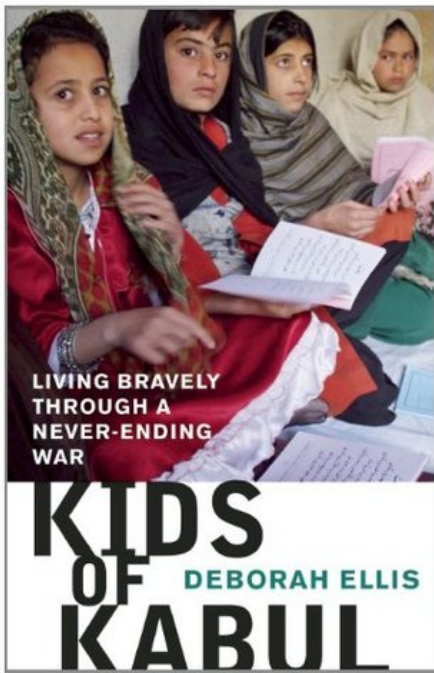
Judi Moreillon, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

© 2013 Judi Moreillon



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Judi Moreillon at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/7/>





### **Kids of Kabul: Living Bravely Through a Never-Ending War**

Written by Deborah Ellis  
Groundwood Books, 2012, 143 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1554981816

Heartache, poverty, pain, hunger, children growing up before their time, and the loss of family members are only some of the tragedies that Afghanistan's children are continuing to experience since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. More than two dozen children share stories of their lives in Deborah Ellis's *Kids of Kabul*. Children relay their hopes and dreams of going to school and becoming doctors or teachers to make the world a better place. Many interviewed have not had the chance to attend schools as they have lost their father and/or mother, forcing these young teens to work to support their families.

Feminist Deborah Ellis believes that men and women are equal, unlike how many females are regarded in Afghanistan, even to this day. Women are beaten or treated poorly. Many females do not go to school because they work to help support their families since there is no father to help. Girls who want to attend schools are often made fun of by male family members. Without an education, females will continue to live in poverty.

Born and raised in Canada, Deborah Ellis has traveled to many places around the world, not just to visit but also to make a difference. As she has spent most of her life as an activist, one important cause is exhibited in her non-fiction book, *Kids of Kabul*. Her passion for children and women's rights in Afghanistan is evident as she donates all of the proceeds from this book to her organization: Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan. This money goes to help women and children by supporting schools, libraries, and literacy programs.

Multi-award winning Deborah Ellis has written twenty books which have been translated into over 25 languages. Most of the royalties from her books are donated to charitable organizations. For example, from her first two books from the Breadwinner Series trilogy, she has donated over \$1 million dollars to Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, which helps fund the education and quality of living for females. In addition, the royalties from the final book from the acclaimed trilogy, *Mud Cities*, raised thousands of dollars that were donated to Street Kids International. Her perseverance to help underprivileged families is what drives her passion as she continues to travel and write.

The authenticity of this story is overwhelmingly easy to access as violence, death, and poverty continues in the country of Afghanistan. Many children still live in the war torn streets, struggling through economic difficulties and are even the breadwinners for their families. At least 30% of Afghan children ages 5-14 are working in some form. First-hand accounts of

children weaving rugs, collecting firewood, shining shoes, selling items, begging for food, and even digging in trash dumps to provide for their families are authentic representations discussed throughout the text and in the news.

This book serves as a great teaching tool for middle school or high school students by highlighting the lives of these specific children in Afghanistan. Additionally, creating book study groups or teacher guided discussions on poverty, loss of a family member, hunger, and hope for the future would deepen the lessons learned from this novel as Ellis brings awareness to the forefront and, hopefully, promotes action among its readers.

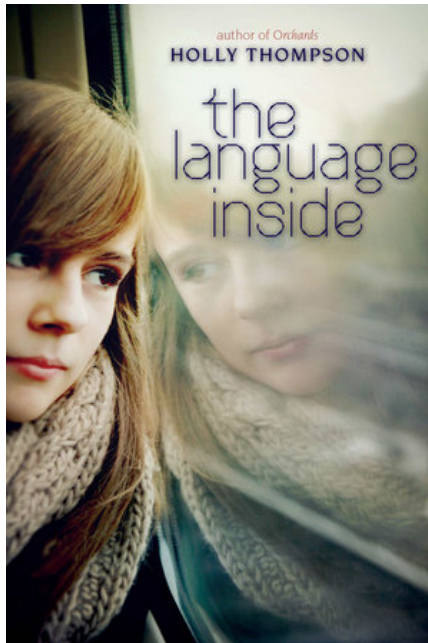
*Kids of Kabul* might be paired with *The Roses in My Carpets* by Rukhsana Khan (2004), the story of a young refugee from Afghanistan living with terrifying memories. Overcome by thirst, hunger, and mud he continues to dream of freedom. Both books tell about poverty, hunger and the hope of a better future and would pair together well in a middle school or high school setting.

Cathy Stearns, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

© 2013 Cathy Stearns



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Cathy Stearns at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/8/>



### **The Language Inside**

Written by Holly Thompson

Delacore, 2013, 521 pp.

ISBN: 978-0385739795

This novel in verse addresses issues of love, loss, choices, language, and identity through the story of a 15-year-old girl who's outside appearance does not reflect her inner reality. Emma appears to be a white middle-class mainstream teen, but that appearance does not match her cultural identity. Emma has spent her entire life in Japan —she thinks in Japanese, finds it hard to find the right English words, and her values and worldview are shaped around Japanese culture. When she is suddenly uprooted to a small New England town, every part of her life is thrown into upheaval. Emma's mother has been diagnosed with breast cancer and so the family goes to

stay with Emma's grandmother while her mother receives treatment. The stress of the move, her longing for Japan, and concern for her mother results in migraines as Emma struggles to adjust. At her grandmother's urging, she volunteers in a long-term care center to help Zena, a patient with locked-in syndrome, write down her poems. She meets Samnang, another volunteer, who assists elderly Cambodian refugees. Her relationship with Samnang gradually develops through weekly visits to the care center and their shared interests in language and dance, but then Emma faces the difficult decision of whether to return early to Japan with her father or to stay in Massachusetts with her mother and brother.

The many strands of issues and plot lines in the book at first seem overwhelming, but the author weaves them together through lyrical free verse. The political and personal tragedy of the Khmer Rouge killing fields in Cambodia, the devastation of the tsunami in Japan, and the frightening reality of cancer are balanced against connections among families and a cautious, quiet romance. Several themes particularly stand out, including a strong focus on taking action to make a difference. The teens' volunteer work in a long-term care center and Emma's efforts to organize a fundraiser for survivors of the Japanese tsunami are two examples of how taking action in authentic ways, both locally and globally, is woven into the book.

The other outstanding theme is language and poetry as ways to explore and express deeply felt emotions and experiences. The novel explores how language, both spoken and unspoken, and poetry cross boundaries to create connections between people. Emma constantly reflects on language because of her own bilingual and bicultural identity. Japanese is her first language and the language in which she speaks inside her head and so there are many reflections on the significance of language across the book. Emma's work with Zena involves learning how to write down her poems since Zena is unable to speak or move. Emma hunts for poems to share with Zena as possible models in form or theme. Both Emma's and Zena's

poems are included in the novel and Emma constantly refers to poems that she shares with Zena. A list of the poems referenced in the narrative along with other recommended resources on poetry writing is included at the end of the book. The sessions with Zena are excellent and provide writing ideas that could be used in a poetry unit with students.

The author, Holly Thompson, writes out of her own lived experiences, having grown up in New England but living in Japan for eighteen years. She currently teaches creative writing at Yokohama City University but spent many years living in Kamakura, Japan. She says that her books reflect the crossing of cultures in her family, among her students and within the communities where she is immersed. She moved back and forth between the U.S. and Japan several times and returns regularly to the U.S. to visit family. Therefore, a bicultural life is a constant theme in her books and a norm in her life. It is no surprise that a favorite book is Allen Say's (1993) *Grandfather's Journey*, with similar themes of bicultural identity. Her first young adult book also picks up on these themes. *Orchards* (2012) is about a Japanese-American teen sent to spend the summer with relatives in Japan after her participation in bullying another teen leads to suicide. She is also the author of *The Wakame Gatherers*, a picture book reviewed in this issue.

Thompson says that she chose to use a novel in verse format because her focus on language, words, and communication was a good fit for this style of writing. She makes the distinction between verse novels and novels in poems, saying that she writes each chapter as a long poem with each page a sub-poem within the poem of a chapter. She carefully plans page breaks and, while each page does not have a stand-alone poem, it is a unit within the larger poem. Her other novels have also been written in verse, but she says that not all stories are suited to the pared down, condensed nature of verse.

A range of books could be paired with *The Language Inside*, including books that pick up on bicultural identity and language, such as *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2011). Another connection, of course, is books where the characters explore poetry such as *Spinning through the Universe* by Helen Frost (2004), *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes (2002) and *Shakespeare Bats Clean-Up* by Ron Koertge (2006). Guadalupe Garcia McCall's (2011) *Under the Mesquite* is a novel in verse in which the main character also deals with a mother ill with cancer. Readers may want to explore *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick (2012) to find out more about the Khmer Rouge and to understand the PTSD of the elderly Cambodians in the long-term care center. Another pairing is books about taking responsibility for action, such as *Antsy Does Time* by Neil Schusterman (2008) and *Notes from the Midnight Driver* by Jordan Sonnenblick (2006).

Holly Thompson has powerfully captured the intense longing and sense of displacement that comes with being in one place but feeling that you belong elsewhere. Instead of being frozen into inaction and resentment by this displacement, this novel inspires teens to consider how they can act to make a difference—a compelling and contemplative read.

Go to Holly Thompson's website (<http://www.hatbooks.com/>) for further information and access to interviews about her work. Read her discussion about novels in verse as well as her life in Japan here (<http://quirkandquill.com/2013/01/28/qa-with-author-holly-thompson/>).

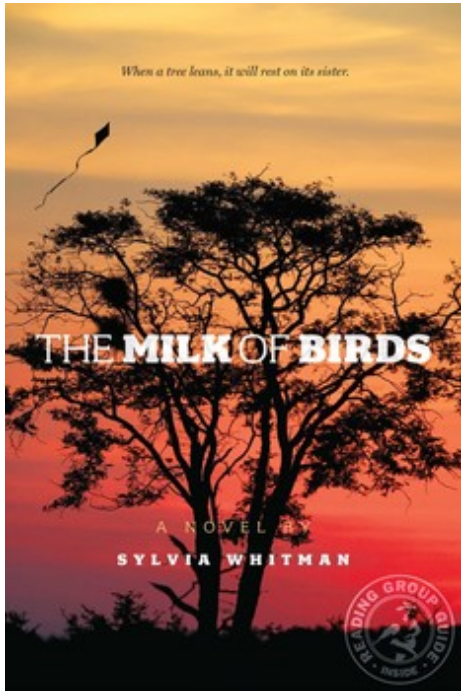
Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona, Tucson

© 2013 Kathy G. Short



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Kathy G. Short at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/9/>





### **The Milk of Birds**

Written by Sylvia Whitman

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2013, 384 pp.

ISBN: 978-1442446823

*It is strange to think of all the people in the world. Most we do not know or ever see, but they grow up alongside us. Nawra, (p. 346)*

Nawra is a 14-year-old Sudanese teenager involved in a “Save the Girls” project through a relief agency that pairs young women from war-torn Sudan with typical American girls. Her pen pal is K.C., who has learning disabilities that make her feel alienated from most of her peers. The two seem an unlikely pairing, and at first, they are. K.C. reluctantly gets involved with the project, propelled by her mother’s desire for K.C. to gain a greater understanding of the world. Nawra becomes involved because her friend, Adeema, brings her to the meeting at the IDP (internally displaced person) camp in Sudan. Adeema writes for Nawra, who is illiterate. K.C., who procrastinates for months before returning any letters, eventually becomes deeply involved in the events of Nawra’s life and the conditions in the Sudan. Both come to rely upon each other as confidantes and distance supporters for each other’s growth through their painful life circumstances.

*The Milk of Birds* is quite simply a beautiful story that presents readers with two stories that intertwine and remind us of the delicate balance that is often a part of life regardless of geographical or political location. Readers come to know about the devastation of Darfur and the Sudan as well as the stigma of learning disabilities through the letters and life narratives of these young women. As the stories on both sides of the written relationship unfold, readers are introduced to strong young women who find courage to face their individual circumstances—one horrific, the other perhaps less so but with the potential of long-lasting damage to the psyche. The author maintains a balanced approach to the painful stories with the use of humor by both the protagonists. The use of proverbs is a delightful addition to the text and could be very useful for reframing readers’ thinking about their circumstances. Equally important in the story are the two supporting friends, Emily and Adeema, who have significant roles to play and serve as a model of female friendships that weather the backlash that often accompanies alienation and stigmatization by peers.

The explanation at the end of the book of the connection to author Sylvia Whitman allows readers insight into Whitman’s purpose for writing and her writing process, which is as enlightening as the text itself. She notes her love of proverbs, which are sprinkled

throughout the book, and make for excellent discussion with young people about the richness of language and the profound messages that can be relayed in shorter passages. Written for middle and high school students, *The Milk of Birds* would make a great companion to *A Long Walk to Water* (Linda Sue Park, 2011) or *A Long Way Gone* (Ishmael Beah, 2008) to address the topic of the Sudan and Darfur. It could also be used in a text set with books such as *Make Lemonade* (Virginia Euwer Wolff, 2006) and *Child of Dandelions* (Shenaaz Nanji, 2009) as a way of examining friendships across cultural borders.

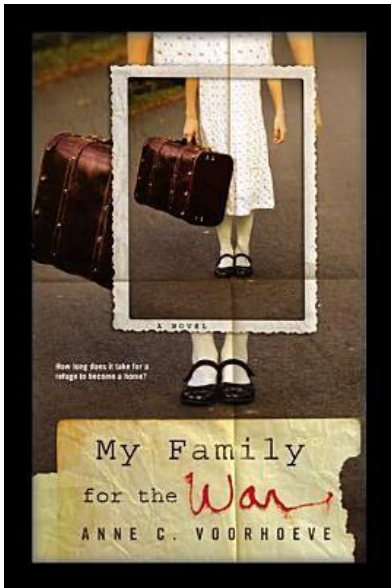
Sylvia Whitman is a writer and writing specialist who lives in Arlington, Virginia and works at Marymount University. She has also taught undergraduate seminars on the Middle East and North Africa. *The Milk of Birds* is her first young adult novel, but she has written informational texts for young audiences about issues of war and poverty. More information about Whitman can be found on her website (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/10/www.sylviawhitmanbooks.com>).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, OH

© 2013 Holly Johnson



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Holly Johnson at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/10/>



### **My Family for the War**

Written by Anne C. Voorhoeve

Translated from German by Tammi Reichel

Dial, 2012, 412 pp.

ISBN: 978-0803733602

*But Professor Shueler shook his head energetically. “You are not responsible for your mother, Ziska. It’s the grownups who have to make the decisions. At one point, your parents made what seems to have been a bad decision, to stay in Germany. But the wonderful thing is that they also made another, very good decision- they were able to save you! Now it’s your job to do everything in your power to make sure the good decision prevails.” (p. 207)*

The winner of the 2013 Mildred L. Batchelder Award, *My Family for the War*, is not really concerned directly with the Holocaust. The action mostly takes place in England and the protagonist (and the reader) never witnesses Nazi atrocities firsthand. Instead, the story takes on the themes of self-discovery and how to live a happy life with the events of the Holocaust as the background.

The plot is sweeping. We follow Franziska Mangold from 1938 until 1947. Ziska is from a comfortable middle class family in Berlin; but because her parents are both “racially” Jewish (her grandparents converted to Christianity), the family is in danger. Unfortunately, like so many of their peers, Ziska’s parents do not realize the extent of the danger until it is too late. The Mangolds have last minute tickets to escape to Shanghai when Mr. Mangold is unexpectedly arrested. Instead of escaping with Ziska, her mother, Margot, decides to stay in Berlin and wait for her husband. Ziska is sent on a Kindertransport to England.

This is where the story really begins. An Orthodox Jewish family, the Shepards, foster Ziska, now Frances, and they become her family for the war. But in reality, because she is with them from the age of 10 until 17, their role becomes that of her real family. This is bittersweet as it forces Frances to go on with her own life while her actual parents struggle for their survival.

There are no easy endings or neatly wrapped lessons in this novel. Ziska’s relatives who survive the Holocaust survive in body only—their spirits are broken. Ziska develops into a practicing Jew who still believes in Jesus. At the end of the novel, she is left to sort out how to live a happy life in spite of Holocaust. It is her job “to do everything in [her] power to make sure the good decision prevails.”

While I admire this novel for its breadth and its realistic endings, I am troubled by its inaccuracies about Judaism. The foster mother, a convert from Ireland, speaks Yiddish in

the novel. Conversion lessons include Hebrew, not Yiddish! Ms. Voorhoeve gets much wrong about Jewish customs, from gravestones to sexual taboos. But where the text fails most is in its absence of Yiddishkeit (Jewish sensibility). Ziska's foster family seems more British than Jewish. While the foster mother speaks excellent Yiddish, there are no Yiddish expressions thrown into their English that are so common with Jews in the U.S and England. The foster grandparents, who are supposedly "super Jews" read like a copy of the Queen and Prince of England. While the kitchen is kosher, its cuisine is British.

As a novel about living with the guilt of being alive, *My Family for the War* is a good read. But it is not a Jewish book. This would not be an issue, except for the fact the author chose to write about a Jewish family without knowing what it means to be Jewish/Yiddishkeit.

This novel could be a part of a Kindertransport text set grouped with, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, 2000; film by the same title, 2000), *Ten Thousand Children: True Stories Told by Children Who Escaped the Holocaust on the Kindertransport* (Anne Fox & Eva Abraham-Podietz, 1999), and *Kindertransport* (Olga Levy Drucker, 1992). Teachers could also include this text in a thematic set that deals with children who left their biological families during the Holocaust and group it with *A Faraway Island* (Annika Thor, 2011) and *The Upstairs Room* (Johanna Reiss, 1990). Another idea would be to use this novel in a text set that examines survivor guilt and read it with *Night* (Elie Wiesel & Marion Wiesel, 2006) and *Man's Search for Meaning* (Viktor E. Frankl, 1984).

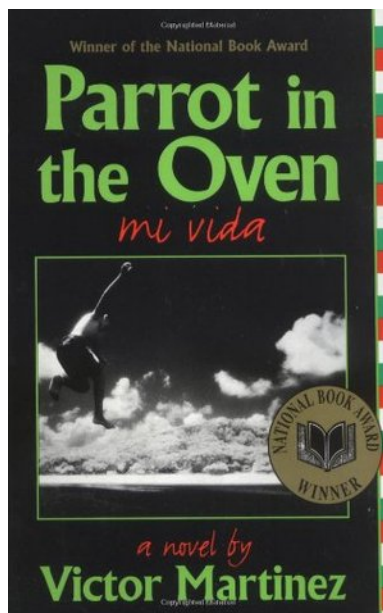
The author, Anne C. Voorhoeve, is a German screenwriter and author. *My Family for the War* is her first novel that has been translated into English. There is scant information on Ms. Voorhoeve in English on the Internet, but according to Wikipedia Deutsch, she has written other novels that take place during the Holocaust.

Melissa B. Wilson, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, LA

© 2013 Melissa B. Wilson



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Melissa B. Wilson at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/11/>



**Parrot in the Oven: Mi Diva**

Written by Victor Martinez

HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, 216 pp.

ISBN: 978-0064471862

*You could be a thousand-dollar person or a hundred-dollar person-even a ten-five-, or one-dollar person. Below that, everybody was just nickels and dimes. To my dad, we were pennies. (p. 25-26)*

An award-winning, realistic novel that takes place in the Valley Central Projects, *Parrot in the Oven* addresses how a young fourteen-year-old Mexican-American boy struggles to find himself. This book focuses on the difficulties of being part of culture that is often plagued with stereotypes, such as unemployment, laziness, alcoholism, poverty stricken, gang members, sexually active teenagers, teen marriage and criminals. This novel follows Mexican-American teenager Manuel “Manny” Hernandez who lives in poverty with his unemployed, alcoholic father, his overworked, stressed out mother, his lazy older brother, Bernando, his sexually active older sister, Madga, and his baby sister Pedi. Manny struggles when faced with his family’s financial situations since his jobless dad spends all their money on alcohol. He is fearful of the neighborhood.

Manny’s mother wants him to attend a different school where the “white” children go so that he can obtain a brighter future. Although Manny is hesitant to go to a new school, he doesn’t disagree with his mother. He goes to obtain his transcript at his current school when he finds his old teacher. The teacher, seeing his poor dress attire, offers him a ride home and gives him twenty dollars for “school supplies.” Unfortunately, his dad finds the money and he goes on a drinking spree for two days. He ends the spree infuriated with his wife’s behavior as she drags him out of a bar. He then goes on a rampage and chases her with a rifle only to end up in jail. Manny’s life is anything but dull. His struggles only continue and he realizes all he really wants is to be respected—a vato firme. Will Manny fall into temptation? Will he pull away from gangs and rise above his family or will he be lured in by the promise of feeling like a family and plenty of pollitas willing to make out?

The Hernandez family members are real characters whose experiences are ones that many readers can relate to. Manny’s experiences in particular speak to kids who feel that they don’t belong, whether they have to put up with others looking down on them because of their ethnic background or their social economic status or whether they simply just long to be someone else- someone smarter, richer, whiter or someone stronger than other



people would respect. Readers may find themselves questioning why some people are faced with cultural discrimination.

*Parrot in the Oven* brings to life the opportunity for some to see their lives in print and for others to develop an understanding of the difficulties of growing up with cultural discrimination. Residents of the border town Rio Grande Valley, where the majority of the population is Hispanic, commonly see families going through issues such as the ones in *Parrot in the Oven*. Through our own experiences, we can relate to having families that work in the fields, living paycheck to paycheck, sisters who are pregnant at 16, and experiencing peer pressure while wanting more for our personal lives and working to overcome the stereotypes.

Author Victor Martinez was born as the fourth child in a migrant family of twelve in Fresno, California on February 21, 1954. He attended California State University at Fresno and Stanford University. He worked as a field laborer, welder, teacher, and office clerk. He wrote culture reviews for *El Tecolote* and published a magazine called *Dinton*. His poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in several journals and anthologies. Later, in life he became a full-time author. His books include *Caring for a House* and *Parrot in the Oven*. He died of cancer on February 18, 2011 at the age of 56.

The winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 1996 and the Pura Belpré Award, *Parrot in the Oven* could be used in a high school classroom to discuss the stereotypes that have been imposed on Mexican culture. While some of the stereotyping may be considered brutal and offensive it successfully demonstrates the struggles faced by some Mexican-American children.

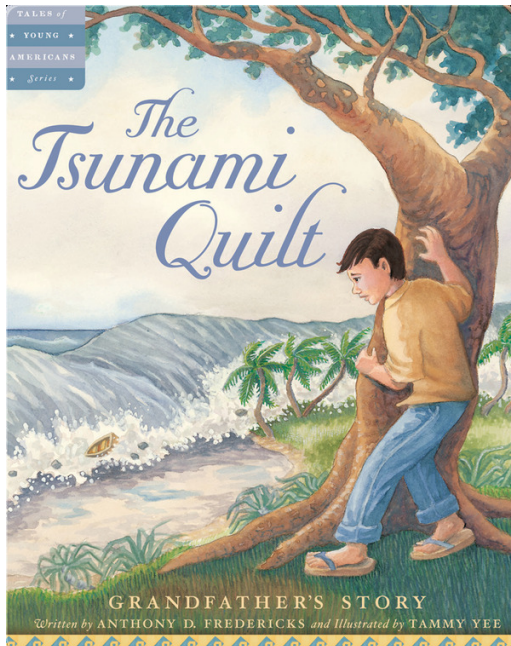
Readers who are interested in reading a coming of age story in which a Mexican American boy struggles to follow his dream despite distractions might enjoy *Living Up the Street* (Gary Soto, 2012). Another book on this theme is *Buried Onions* (Gary Soto, 2012), the story of a 19-year-old Mexican-American boy living in a violent barrio in Fresno, who is trying to walk a straight line despite the temptations.

Melissa Ann Becerra and Lisa Marie Ochoa, University of Texas Pan American, Edinburg, TX

© 2013 Melissa Ann Becerra and Lisa Marie Ochoa



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Melissa Ann Becerra and Lisa Marie Ochoa at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/12/>



### **The Tsunami Quilt: Grandfather's Story**

Written by Anthony D. Fredericks

Illustrated by Tammy Yee

Sleeping Bear Press, 2007, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-1585363131

April 1, 1946 is a day not forgotten by people living on the Big Island of Hawaii and throughout the state and world. This was the date when a devastating tsunami hit the island of Hawai'i off Laupahoehoe Point. Tsunami survivors and their descendants cannot forget how their lives were changed from this day on.

*The Tsunami Quilt: Grandfather's Story* is a fictional rendition of this catastrophic event, as told

through the eyes of young Kimo, a nine-year-old boy who deeply loves his grandfather. Kimo and his grandfather spent lots of time together as the best of friends who share stories and enjoy each other's company. As the story opens, the reader is introduced to an annual ritual—Grandfather and Kimo drive to Laupahoehoe Point. They do not talk much and Kimo senses it is a time for quiet solitude and reflection. Grandfather always walks slowly to the marble monument, gazes out at the ocean and places a flower lei on the monument. “He would stand there a long time watching the surf roll in” (p. 4).

We find out that Grandfather is usually a talkative person who spent his entire life as a fisherman. He and his fisherman buddies “talk story” about their experiences; Kimo notices the difference in Grandfather's demeanor at this annual visit to Laupahoehoe Point. Grandfather shares it is a place of both tragedy and remembrance and cautions Kimo that the ocean can be both friend and foe.

Sadly, before Kimo can find out about the place from Grandfather, he passes away. Kimo begs his father to tell him why Laupahoehoe Point was so meaningful to Grandfather and the people of the Hamakua area. We find out that when Grandfather was a child, he and his younger brother attended a school built at the Point. On April 1, 1946, Grandfather, his brother, and all the children noticed there was no water in the ocean! When the children realized it was a giant tsunami, they tried to run to higher ground. Twenty-four students and teachers were killed. Kimo learns the sad truth that Grandfather's younger brother died in the tsunami. Grandfather was helpless as he watched the ocean carry his brother out to sea. He could never forget the tragedies of that day. Kimo then understands what the annual ritual meant to Grandfather. He and his dad carry on the remembrance and make the annual trip to Laupahoehoe Point.

Author Anthony D. Fredericks captures the love and special relationship between a

grandfather and a grandson. The reader is drawn into the powerful sense of place. The events of the tsunami's imminent impact are slowed down as he describes the events from the time the children arrive at school. Fredericks tells the story in a way that young readers can understand how dangerous the ocean can be. He is able to convey the fear and panic that occurred with the rapid progression of waves, receding and surging, from the first wave to the final third wave that left the Hamakua townspeople with destruction and tragedy. Factual events are woven throughout the story, lending authenticity and knowledge about such a catastrophic occurrence, still a realistic possibility in present-day Hawaii. Fredericks is an award-winning author of more than 40 children's books. He is a frequent visitor to Hawaii and it is evident that Fredericks took time to research tsunamis and the Laupahoehoe location. An Author's Note page is provided at the end of the book, and can be easily read for teachers' background information to introduce the book, including information about the Pacific Tsunami Museum.

The museum and its website are an abundant source of information. Teachers can find stories from tsunami survivors that can help students understand a tsunami's devastating impact. There is also a special section for students, which provides factual and interesting information about tsunamis. Local families and visitors can visit the Pacific Tsunami Museum, located in downtown Hilo on Hawaii Island to explore the extensive archives of tsunami survivor accounts and photographs. The museum continues to educate the public about the continued threat of tsunamis in Hawaii.

Hawaii-born illustrator Tammy Yee does an outstanding job of depicting Kimo's and Grandfather's time together, the tsunami event, and how Kimo and his family are able to honor Grandfather. Her detailed watercolor illustrations work harmoniously to help the reader visualize the family's connection to the island. She deftly portrays the tsunami's destruction, without frightening young children who may read the book. Her illustrations connote a respect for the island place and ocean. Yee helps readers understand how Kimo is able to cope with the loss of Grandfather through illustrations of his family's support.

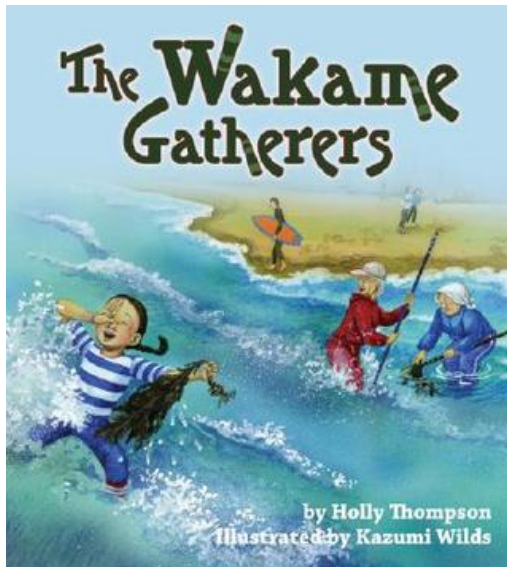
For children in Hawaii, a tsunami can never be taken lightly and is still a present-day possibility. In light of recent global events, such as the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, *The Tsunami Quilt* is an excellent addition to a classroom library and can provide an authentic depiction to help children understand how an ocean can be both "friend and foe." The book might be paired with an older picture book, *The Big Wave* by Pearl S. Buck (1986). Both books speak to the contrast of devastation and danger against a renewal and appreciation for life. Other pairings might be with books recounting the stories associated with the Tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean, such as *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of an Remarkable Friendship* (Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu, 2006); *Elephants of the Tsunami* (Jana Laiz, 2007); and *A Walk across the Sun* (Corban Addison, 2012).

Avis Masuda, University of Hawaii-Hilo, Hilo, HI

© 2013 Avis Masuda



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Avis Masuda at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/13/>



### **The Wakame Gatherers**

Written by Holly Thompson

Illustrated by Kazumi Wilds

Shen's Books, USA, 2007, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-1885008336

This contemporary realistic fiction tells the story of an intergenerational family relationship between Nanami who lives with her family in Kamakura, a coastal town located southwest of Tokyo, and her two grandmothers. Her paternal grandmother, Baachan, is Japanese, and her maternal grandmother, Gram, is American. The story begins with Gram's first visit to Japan from Maine during March break. Baachan asks

Gram to try gathering wakame seaweed, which is Baachan's favorite job. Nanami serves as a translator for her grandmothers' conversations and is the bridge between their different cultures.

Baachan is curious about wakame harvesting in Maine since, like Kamakura, the state has cold waters along its shore, which is a perfect environment for wakame. When Baachan learns that people in Maine don't usually eat wakame the way Japanese people do, she simply says "Strange." Her reaction seems to be a negative attitude towards this cultural difference. However, sharing experiences such as gathering wakame, telling childhood stories, and living at the seaside help Baachan and Gram accept and respect their cultural differences.

The story also presents Baachan's and Gram's different perspectives on their childhood memories from World War II. After Baachan tells her traumatic story, Nanami expresses confusion about her cross-cultural identity: "I come from both of them" (p. 20). Later, she says, "'I'm sorry,' I finally say to one. 'Gomen nasai (I'm sorry),' I say to the other" (p. 21). With this, she seems to understand and embrace her identity. Against the backdrop of the waves, surfers, a young happy-looking couple, and a wakame gatherer on the beach, Baachan says "Nanami-chan, always protect this peace" (p. 21), conveying the message that she hopes young people like Nanami keep a peaceful world and have a broad mind like the sea. Pages 23 and 24 show dynamic illustrations of Nanami, Baachan, and Gram standing with their arms high in the sky while holding each other's hands and with hopeful smiles on their faces. These illustrations represent their relationship, mutual understanding, and bright future. At the end of the story, Nanami and Baachan receive letters from Gram with airplane tickets to Maine. They are very excited about the tickets and Gram's generous invitation to experience marine life on the other side of the world.

The last two pages of the book include information and illustrations on wakame, including the process of gathering, preserving, and preparing it for eating. Wakame recipes, such as miso soup, salad, and lobster sandwiches, are provided. There is also a glossary of Japanese words used in the text, alongside a pronunciation guide.



*The Wakame Gatherers* is an excellent resource for learning about the perspectives of people from different countries. It may also open up discussions about bicultural identity, intercultural and intergenerational family relationships, ecologies and food resources, and different coastal lives around the world. While the story focuses on Baachan's view and experiences of war, it also provides opportunities for readers to engage in an exploration of people's war experiences from various perspectives. Illustrator Kazumi Wilds' colorful and vivid watercolor paintings provide realistic details of the daily life of the Japanese people in their coastal environment, such as the use of chopsticks, typical houses, fish shops, and seaweed gatherers.

Based on the themes of cross-cultural identity and intergenerational family relationships, this story can be paired with *Take Me Out to the Yakyu* (Aaron Meshon, 2012), about a biracial Japanese-American boy enjoying baseball games in Japan and America with his grandfathers; *Suki's Kimono* (Chieri Uegaki & Stephane Jorisch, 2003), about a Japanese-American girl excited to wear a Japanese traditional cloth kimono from her Japanese grandmother; and *Less Than Half, More Than Whole* (Kathleen Lacapa & Michael Lacapa, 1994) about a half-Caucasian and half-Indian boy's exploration of his identity.

The review of *The Language Inside* in this issue provides further information about Holly Thompson and her background as a bicultural American living in Japan.

Junko Sakoi, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

© 2013 Junko Sakoi



WOW Review, Volume VI, Issue 1 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Junko Sakoi at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-6-issue-1/14/>