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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME VII, ISSUE 4

June 2016

Unlock Potential, Open Possibilities, Discover Knowledge, and Set One  
Free

Worlds  
of WORDS 



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**WOW Review: Volume VIII Issue 4**  
Summer 2016

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## Volume VIII Issue 4

### Introduction and Editors' Note

In this issue, reviewers considered the theme of how literature has the power to unlock potential, open possibilities, discover knowledge, and set one free, as well as to close doors. The twelve books reviewed in this issue address those capacities in both the characters in the books and the readers who enter the world of the narratives. Sometimes, when dealing with loss a door is closed but possibilities for new beginnings emerge. *Raymie Nightingale* by Kate DiCamillo, *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad* by M.T. Anderson, and *Anna and the Swallow Man* by Gavriel Savit, are engaging narratives that address loss and possibility, perhaps even the potential of becoming free. Then there are those books where possibilities are manifest in the actions of advocates for freedom, such as *The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson and *My Brother's Secret* by Dan Smith. *The Book Itch* is an account of the life of Lewis Michaux and the Harlem bookstore he established that sold only books by African Americans. *My Brother's Secret* gives readers a narrative that piques their curiosity about the Edelweiss Pirates of WWII.

The books in this issue also give readers the opportunity to discover knowledge, often right along with the characters within the books. *The War that Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, *Trouble the Water* by Frances O' Roark Dowell, and *Carlos and the Cornfield, Carlos y la milpa de maiz* by Jan Romero Stevens present young protagonists who are learning about the world and themselves. *The War that Saved My Life* portrays a young girl transplanted to the "country" from London during WWII, and learns about the world, including words and feelings that sometimes overwhelm her during this relocation, while *Carlos and the Cornfield* helps readers come to know that doing a job well develops one's integrity and self-esteem. *Trouble the Water* takes readers back to the 1960s where closed doors were opened through knowledge and appreciation of the other. In addition to knowledge, readers can also discover new ways of thinking about the world. In *The Girl who Saved Yesterday* by Julius Lester, there is the unlocking of our connections to the living and the dead, while in J.J. Austrian's *Worm Loves Worm*, readers explore the idea that our connections to each other do not need to fit into a tidy predetermined box. Readers can also discover the potential of ideas in Kobi Yamada's *What Do You Do with an Idea?*

And finally, there is *Little Tree* by Loren Long, a picturebook that presents a metaphor of letting go of fear and accepting change. By doing so, we have the potential to unlock closed doors, pursue knowledge, and embrace the possibility of greater life discoveries. This is a wonderful set of books. Enjoy!

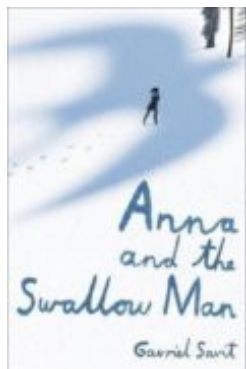
The deadline for submissions for Volume IX, Issue 1 is August 1, 2016. This is an open-themed issue, so share your summer reading with the *Worlds of Words* community!

Holly Johnson, Editor



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Book Review: *Anna and the Swallow Man*

Written by Gavriel Savit

Penguin Random House, 2016, 232 pp.

ISBN: 978055351334

Anna Lania, the daughter of a linguistics professor, lives in Kraków, Poland when the story opens in 1939. Life with her father is full of interesting people and multiple languages. Everything changes, however, when her father doesn't return one day and is taken with other intellectuals to a concentration camp. Wandering around Kraków, Anna meets the Swallow Man, so named because of his ability to speak to birds, and he summons a swallow to cheer Anna. Drawn to this mysterious tall stranger who, like her father, speaks many languages and appears to be a man of knowledge, Anna begins a life of walking in order to never be found for "To be found is to be gone forever" (p. 16). Carrying very little, avoiding their given names, and living off whatever food they find around them, they travel as father and daughter, enacting whatever roles are necessary to avoid being found. Their journey over several years includes lessons on life and the language of "Road", an unlikely Jewish companion, and journeys amidst the front line battles when Hitler invades the Soviet Union. The identity of linguistically talented Anna, who is brilliantly conscious of personalities and her surrounding contexts, is challenged by the Swallow Man's need to avoid names, his strategy to take on various persona, and their continuous walking to avoid detection.

A unique work of historical fiction, *Anna and the Swallow Man* is a key to discovering knowledge about World War II, as revealed through people whose lives are forever changed when war rips through communities, separates families and disrupts individual lives and dreams. Portrayed through the perspectives of a child, unique but authentic characters develop the themes of relationships, identity, language, and war. Each of these themes reflects a key to unlock potential for the context in which it is found. This book parallels and pairs with the journey during this time period depicted in *The Book Thief* (Markus Zusak, 2005). Of course, it fits well within a text set of books on World War II and the Holocaust. Many of these texts can be found within *WOW Review*, with one issue especially dedicated to this theme: **Volume 3, Issue 2, "Holocaust around the World"**.

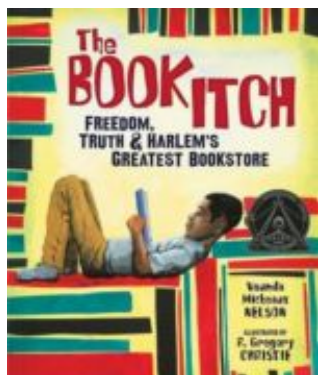
Gavriel Savit, author of this compelling story that gives WWII and the Holocaust yet another fictional face in an authentically created context, is also an actor based in New York City. Regarding this, his first book, he says, "*Anna and the Swallow Man* is a book about the magical uncertainties of war and childhood, and it aims to ask more questions than it answers." His web site includes four interconnected essays about Jewishness, ambiguity, and story that form the context for his writing of this book. On his website, he addresses his efforts to maintain historical accuracy of setting and character development.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



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Book Review: The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore

Written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson

Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

Carolrhoda, 2015

ISBN: 9780761339434

*Knowledge is power. You need it every hour. Read a book.*

This picture book biography of Lewis Michaux, founder of the National Memorial African Bookstore in Harlem, directly addresses the theme of literature as a key to unlocking potentials and opening possibilities. *No Crystal Stair* (2012), which received a Coretta Scott King Author Honor award and a Boston Globe-Horn Book award. While *No Crystal Stair* has more than 30 narrators and was written for a teen audience, this picture book uses one narrator, his young son Lewis, to tell the story of a man who believed that books can change lives.

Lewis Michaux's dream was to establish a bookstore in Harlem that only sold books written by African Americans. The bookstore became a gathering place where many African Americans came to read, talk and purchase books, including Malcolm X, Mohammed Ali, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin. The bookstore was founded in the 1930s but this picture book focuses on the tumultuous 1960s and Michaux's close relationship with Malcom X. Lewis Jr. invites readers into his interactions with his father, famous visitors, and the patrons who made the store a success over a 40 year period. Lewis' pride is evident as he talks about his father's perseverance, financing the store from his own money and sleeping at the store when customers stayed late, and his determination to educate the community about African American history and the racial and political issues of that time. The vibrancy of the bookstore is conveyed along with an emotional climax around the assassination of Malcom X. The book integrates Michaux's catchy slogans, such as "Don't get took! Read a Book!" and "Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything. If you're a man, you take it" into the text and endpapers. His words convey both his belief in books and his commitment to black pride.

The richly textured expressionistic paintings by Christie contain bold strokes of color to depict scenes of strong emotion at the bookstore, on the streets and in the family home and to convey the role of the bookstore in the midst of the racial tensions in the 1960s. The browns and grays on the faces are contrasted against orange and yellow backgrounds to capture the strong emotions of both the famous and the ordinary people who came in contact with the bookstore. The book has back matter that includes a list of sources, author's note, and biographical notes.

The author, Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, knew little about her great uncle but was intrigued with his life story and spent years shifting through library collections, examining family archives, listening to audio recordings, and interviewing people who knew him. Her primary source was Lewis Michaux Jr. who had many memories of working alongside his father in the shop, and so she selected his voice as the narrator for this picture book follow-up to *No Crystal Stair* (2011). A

librarian who lives in New Mexico, she is the author of historical picture books that feature the lives of African Americans, including *Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshall* (2009) and *Almost to Freedom* (2003). R. Gregory Christie has won several Coretta Scott King Honor awards for his illustrations and was named to the *New York Times*' annual Best Illustrated Children's Book list. He is a freelance illustrator who has done artwork for over 50 children's books, including *Nelsons' Bad News for Outlaws*, along with album covers, newspapers, and magazines. He lives in Decatur, Georgia where he operates a children's bookstore.

This book provides many possibilities for pairings. One possibility is books about famous African Americans who visited the bookstore, such as *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly* by Walter Dean Myers (2003), *Malcom Little: The Boy Who Grew Up to Be Malcolm X* by Ilyasah Shabazz and A.G. Ford (2014), *Langston Hughes* by Alice Walker (2001), and *The Greatest: Muhammed Ali* by Walter Dean Myers (2001). Another pairing is picture books that raise issues of race, such as *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson (2001), *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles (2000), *Freedom on the Menu* by Carole Boston Weathford (2007), and *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni (2007). The book could also be paired with books about Harlem, such as *Harlem* by Walter Dean Myers (1997), *Harlem Renaissance Party* by Faith Ringgold (2015), *The Block* by Langston Hughes and Romare Bearden (1995), and *Jakes Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence, an Artist in Harlem* by Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts (2015).

The idea of an author finding one book embedded in another could be explored by pairing *The Book Itch* and *No Crystal Stair* with *The One and Only Ivan* (2012) and *Ivan: The Remarkable Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla* (2014) by Katherine Applegate, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* (1998) and *The Cod's Tale* (2014) by Mark Kurlansky, or *Hitler Youth* (2005) and *The Boy Who Dared* (2008) by Susan Campbell Bartoletti.

Finally, the powerful message about books as a key to possibility could be further explored by pairing this book with *More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby and Floyd Cooper (1995), *Richard Wright and the Library Card* by William Miller and R. Gregory Christie (1997), and *Tomás and the Library Lady* by Pat Mora and Raúl Colón (2000).

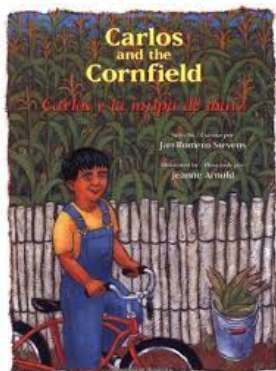
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Book Review: Carlos and the Cornfield/*Carlos y la milpa de maiz*  
Written by Jan Romero Stevens  
Illustrated by Jeanne Arnold  
Rising Moon, 1995. 32 pp  
ISBN: 9780873587358

A young boy named Carlos learns to appreciate hard work after not listening to his father's advice on how to properly plant sweet yellow corn. Jan Romero Stevens' story takes place in New Mexico and begins with Carlos admiring a red pocketknife he hopes to buy from Señor Lopez's store. Without enough money to purchase the knife, Carlos pedals home on his bicycle to help his father in the field. When his father offers to pay him five dollars for planting a large bucket of corn seed, Carlos feels excitement and eagerness to start the job. He knows that with those five dollars he is going to be able to afford buying the red pocketknife.

After many hours pass while working in the field, Carlos worries that he will never finish his job because of the countless rows in the field. In order to finish more quickly, he decides to put six seeds in each hole disregarding his father's instructions of putting only three seeds per hole. After a while, Carlos pours entire handfuls of seeds in each hole for the last few rows of the field to finish even faster. Once Carlos finishes, he quickly runs to his father to get the money promised to him and rushes to Señor Lopez's store to buy his red pocketknife.

Months later, the corn starts growing and Carlos is disappointed in seeing that his job was not done right. The sweet yellow corns of the last few rows are not growing properly. Reluctantly, he makes the decision to sell his red pocketknife back to Señor Lopez so he can buy a new bag of corn seed. With this bag of corn, Carlos replants the last several rows of corn properly overnight. Waking up one morning, Carlos receives blue corn cakes for breakfast from his mother. Surprised about the blue corn cakes instead of yellow, his father tells him he planted blue corn seeds rather than yellow the second time. Embarrassed, he reminds his father about what he had told him before planting the corn seeds. His father stated, "*Cosechas lo que siembras*-you reap what you sow" (Stevens, 1995). With that, Carlos understood the importance of working hard and listening to his father's instructions.

This book is appropriate for children between grades K-3. The translations are accurate and consistent throughout the text and the story emphasizes the cultural values of Mexican Americans. A related text to this tale is *Carlos and the Squash Plant/ Carlos y la Planta de Calabaza* (1993) that also depicts the diverse lifestyle of Mexican American culture. The author sends a clear message to young children that listening to instructions is important. This is an excellent book for possibilities of discussion as children talk about cases where they did not listen to their parents and the consequences. This simple yet engaging story shows how children can learn through valuable lessons about listening.

The author, Jan Romero Santos, enjoys the Latino culture through writing children's books and learning the Spanish language with her two children, Jacob and Paul. Jan grew up in New Mexico and Arizona and also writes for newspapers and magazines as well as children's books.

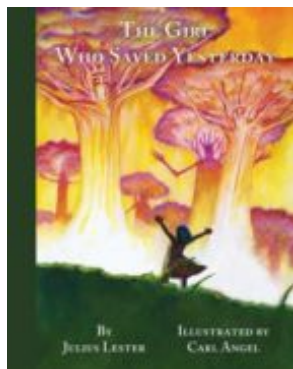
Jeanne Arnold's illustrations portray the Española Valley in northern New Mexico. She was inspired by Mexican painters such as Diego Rivera to illustrate this book. Through these texts and illustrations, the cultural authenticity of the book depicts accurate daily experiences of Mexican American culture and history of the Southwest. The drawings are large and clear so all students in the classroom are able to see them when the book is read aloud.

Cindy Amador, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



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Book Review: *The Girl Who Saved Yesterday*

Written by Julius Lester

Illustrated by Carl Angel

Creston Books, 2016, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9781939547248

Award winning author Julius Lester pays homage to ancestors in this fable about a girl named Silence who is exiled to the forest by villagers for attempting to find her deceased mother and father. The villagers fear that if Silence climbs to the top of the mountain where the dead are buried, fire will be sent down to destroy them. Left deep in the forest as a small baby, Silence is adopted and raised by personified trees. There she stays, nestled in their branches, until Wonderboom, the most ancient of trees sends her back to the village to save Yesterday.

Silence is carried to the outskirts of the village by ThunderSnow, and placed at the foot of a tree that was made ill by Yesterday. Illustrator Carl Angel paints a vivid picture of what happens to a village when its ancestors have been forgotten. The Sun disappears and Darkness spreads across the pages of the book. Wild animals seek refuge in blackened caves and the topography turns a muted gray. Once in the village, Silence has to trust her intuition to reunite the living with the dead. Reprieve does not come until she makes her way to the top of the mountain to the gravestones of the ancestors. The villagers follow Silence with scythes and uncover stones that reveal bright lights, “like lost memories, happy to be found” (p. 30).

While Julius Lester does not name a specific tribe, in many African kin groups ancestors are believed to be intermediaries or to have mystical powers that could help their living kinsmen. Like other world cultures, Africans across the diaspora revered and communed with the dead. However, the pre-colonial status of African ancestors was challenged and dismissed by western missionary religions that considered these practices to be idolatry. In the author’s note, Lester dedicates this story to, “the Ancestors who have lived with and in me since I was born.” He emphasizes the importance of remembering and of being remembered.

Different cultures have unique ways of remembering their ancestors. One of the best ways to help students understand and respect the beliefs and practices of global cultures is to introduce them to books rich with stories and pictures. Books that would pair well with *The Girl Who Saved Yesterday* include *The Day of the Dead/El Dia de Los Muertos* by Bob Barner (2011); *Sori’s Harvest Moon Day : A Story of Korea* by Lee Uk-Bae (1999) and *A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts: A Collection of Deliciously Frightening Tales* (Ying Change Compestine (2009), all of which address the connection of the living with their ancestry.

Julius Lester is an African American writer and an academic. He published his first two works of children’s literature, *To Be a Slave*, a Newbery Honor Book, and *Black Folktales* in 1969. Over the course of his career, he has written more than 30 books for children. He has received the Boston Globe-Horn Book, The New York Times Outstanding Book Award and Coretta Scott King Book Award among others.

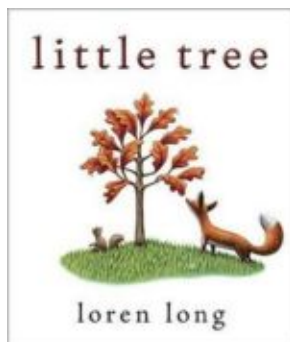
Carl Angel is a Filipino-American illustrator who grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is also the illustrator of *Xochitl and the Flowers* (2013), *Sky High: The True Story of Maggie Gee* (2009), *Lakas and the Manilatown Fish* (2003), and *Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel* (2006).

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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-viii1-issue-4/>



Book Review: Little Tree

Written & Illustrated by Loren Long

Philomel Books (Imprint of Penguin Group), 2015.

ISBN: 9780399163975

Little Tree is growing in a grove with other saplings. During the summer heat his leaves keep him cool and he enjoys having squirrels and doves visit him. As autumn approaches, Little Tree's leaves turn to orange, red, and yellow. The other trees begin dropping their leaves, but Little Tree holds onto his tightly, even through winter, afraid to be without them. When spring arrives, the other trees are taller, grow new leaves, and have animals playing in their branches. As the seasons come and go, Little Tree continues to hold onto his leaves even though the other trees let go of theirs each autumn and grow. One summer, with the other trees towering above him, Little Tree realizes he can no longer feel the sun. That winter, Little Tree looks at the other trees, remembers they had once been his size, and lets go of his leaves. Though he feels the bitter winter cold, in time he grows new leaves and grows in size. By letting go of his leaves each year, Little Tree becomes tall and strong like the other trees.

This simple but provocative story demonstrates that letting go of fear and accepting change allows growth to occur, rather than stunting it. The anxiety associated with making difficult decisions that lead to an unknown future are concepts to which all readers can relate. Just as Little Tree feels the bitter cold when he lets go of his leaves, decisions may be uncomfortable but eventually lead to growth. Little Tree was afraid but, when he dropped his leaves, he flourished.

The illustrations, like the story, are simple but meaningful. The white space that initially spans each page shrinks as the other trees, and eventually Little Tree, grow and fill it. Rendered in acrylic, ink, and pencil, the art shows Little Tree in the same place in each illustration with the seasonal changes occurring around him. This book would work well in a text set of books focused on overcoming fears and accepting change to grow. Other books in this set could be *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson (2015), *Nana in the City* by Lauren Castillo (2014), and *Lenny & Lucy* by Philip Stead and Erin Stead (2015).

Loren Long grew up in Kentucky. Though he liked drawing and art, as a younger child he favored sports. His passion for art developed as he grew older and he decided to become an artist while at the University of Kentucky. Upon graduation he worked for greeting card companies and freelanced for clients such as Sports Illustrated, Time, and Reader's Digest. He began doing covers for novels and eventually was called to be an artist of picturebooks.

Prisca Martens, Towson University, Towson, MD



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-viii1-issue-4/>



Book Review: My Brother's Secret

Written by Dan Smith

Scholastic Press, 2015, 296 pp.

ISBN: 9780545771559

*It was as if she'd given me a small lump of electricity. The piece of paper seemed to come to life and tingle in my palm. I wanted to open it up right then and discover its secrets. I wanted to know what was written on the back and I wanted to see the picture again, the one of the Fuhrer standing among the bodies of our dead fathers. (p.117)*

As the war in Europe rages on, twelve-year-old Karl notices that his 16-year-old brother Stefan is keeping secrets. Prior to this revelation, Karl believed that what his government is doing—what his father died for—is right. He plays war games and is excited to join the Hitler Youth. With the death of his father at the Russian front, however, Karl begins to wonder about what is right, the purpose of the war, and the meaning of the small white flower inside his brother's jacket. With the help of his new friend Lisa, Karl learns that his brother is part of the Edelweiss Pirates, a group of German young people who defied Hitler and the Hitler Youth during WWII.

With his new knowledge of his brother's activities, the Fuhrer's callous and destructive policies, and his neighbors' suspicions, Karl must learn how to behave in a society that no longer trusts its citizens as well as a community that believes compliance to governmental policies must be followed at all costs. Additionally, Karl needs to rethink his own ideas of the war and his brother's activities. Following his brother one evening, Karl realizes just how dangerous his brother's activities are. When his brother is caught and held by the local Gestapo. Karl feels the need to help his brother and begins his own activities against the Hitler regime.

Thinking of how literature can be a key to unlocking possibilities, *My Brother's Secret* opens up readers' minds to how young people have taken courageous steps to right the wrongs perpetrated by their governments. This exciting middle grade narrative would make a great companion to books such as *Traitor* by Ruth Pausewang (2006) and *Black Radishes* by Susan Lynn Meyer (2011), novels that present remarkable stories of youth who defied the Nazi regime during WWII. This book would make a great addition to any text set that addresses internal conflict regardless of circumstances, and would make an interesting companion to *My Cousin's Keeper* by Simon French (2014) in which the young protagonist must decide whether to protect his cousin from bullying or go along with the popular group that does the bullying.

Dan Smith writes for both teens and adults. His books for teens include *Boy X* (2016), *Big Game* (2015) and *My Friend, My Enemy* (2014). *Big Game* has been adopted for the big screen starring Samuel L. Jackson. Dan Smith typically writes survival stories, a practice that began when he was in boarding school and more interested in adventures than his classroom environment. He lives in the United Kingdom, and more about him and his work can be found at his website. The book was named a USBBY Outstanding International Book in 2016.

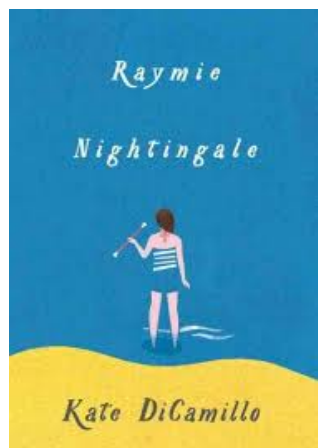
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Book Review: *Raymie Nightingale*

Written by Kate DiCamillo

Candlewick Press, 2016, 272 pp.

ISBN: 978076368117

Ten-year-old Raymie Clarke lives in Lister, Florida and has a plan to get her father to return home. Raymie's father left with Lee Ann Dickerson, a dental hygienist, and Raymie believes that if she can win the 1975 Little Miss Central Florida Tire contest she will get her picture in the paper and her dad will be so proud he will return home. Not surprisingly, Raymie's plan does not go as desired. After showing up at her friend Ida Nee's home to take a baton twirling lesson, Raymie meets Louisiana and Beverly, two other girls who plan to compete in the contest, and an unexpected friendship develops as each deals with the loss of a parent(s).

*Raymie Nightingale* is written as a third-person narrative. The tale is shaped by Louisiana, Beverly, and Raymie's simple yet deeply felt heartbreak and a longing to amend the loss of their parents in some way. Kate DiCamillo states on her website that "writing is seeing. It is paying attention." She allows readers to 'see' each of the characters in their own idiosyncrasies which make them unique by providing explicit details of the visual, affective, and personal traits of each character. The book deals with loss in a subtle manner and shows what wonder can occur when a new door is allowed to open.

Kate DiCamillo was born in Philadelphia and moved to the warmer climate of Florida with her mother and older brother at the age of five to help combat her chronic pneumonia. Though she now lives in Minneapolis, many of her books make obvious her deep affection for her Southern roots through her choice of characters and settings. Kate credits her illness in part for her desire to write. She spent a lot of time in bed alone growing up and became an avid reader and eventually wrote her own stories. Kate majored in English at the University of Florida in Gainesville where she excelled at writing. Kate realized when she began writing for a career that talent did not matter as much as working at writing. She normally writes five days a week and her goal is to write two pages a day. She has stated that she never wants to write, but she is always glad that she did.

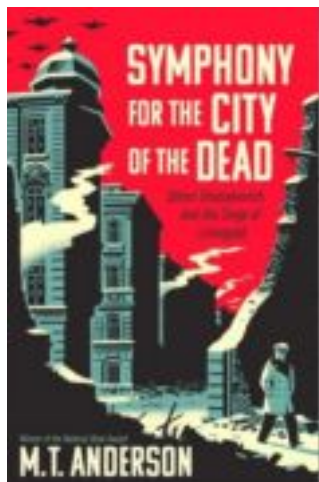
Three books to pair with *Raymie Nightingale* around the theme of closing doors and being open to other possibilities are: *The Great Good Summer* (2015) by Liz Garton Scanlon, *Each Little Bird that Sings* (2016) by Deborah Wiles, and *Because of Winn Dixie* (2009) by Kate DiCamillo. Each of which includes new friendships while also dealing with loss.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, Chicago, IL



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Book Review: *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad*

Written by M.T. Anderson

Candlewick Press, 2015, 456 pp.

ISBN: 9780763668181

*For our generation, kindness was an old-fashioned, vanished quality, and its exponents were as extinct as mammoths. (p.372)*

*Symphony for the City of the Dead* is filled with accounts of those who lived through the horrific events of the Nazi siege of Leningrad between September 1941 and January 1944. This documentation includes the reasons for the siege, the events that led to the siege, the relationship of Stalin to the Russian people, and the life of composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who wrote the famous symphony for Leningrad during the siege. Meant to kill the morale of Russia and the “sub-humans” that inhabited Russia, the siege of Leningrad was one of the most critical moves of Nazi Germany in Hitler’s attempt to conquer Russia. Shostakovich, a citizen of Leningrad and a composer, was asked to write the symphony as a way of boosting morale as well as inspiring other nations (including the US) to come to Russia’s aid. Because of the fear-based society the book documents, there will always be questions about the veracity of the accounts, but this is a fascinating and informative read that portrays the misery humans will inflict upon each other and the atrocities committed during war. The book also portrays the generosity and attempts to remain human under extremely inhumane conditions.

Shostakovich’s life presented within this narrative creates a microcosm of the larger conditions experienced in Russia during the late 1930s through the late 1940s. Readers will gain a real sense of the fear the Russian people experienced under Stalin’s dictatorship, as well as the events that weakened Russia just prior to World War II. These events are not only shocking, but give a real sense of individual lives as their communities and country deteriorated under a regime that trusted the very leader who was plotting the destruction of Russia. Shostakovich remained kind and generous even as his life was threatened by Stalin and Stalin’s policies that destroyed the Russian arts, military, and sense of community, but embraced the belief that Hitler was honorable. Readers will discover the importance of the symphony Shostakovich wrote about Leningrad, its reception within Russia and across the world, and then its eventual demise as the political environment changed and suspicion ruled governmental decisions. The adage of the “tallest poppy” certainly pertains to this account of Leningrad and Russia during this time period.

This narrative for adolescents would make a great companion to books such as *A Night Divided* by Jennifer Nielson (2015) and *My Brother’s Secret* by Dan Smith (2015), the first of which portrays life in East Berlin after WWII while the second presents the circumstances of a family that does not agree with Hitler’s policies during WWII. Additionally, this would make a great addition to any text set that addresses how communities across the world respond to governmental policies that pit citizen against citizen and neighbor against neighbor. A story that will evoke great discussions about one’s own actions in silencing others based on fear and

power, *Symphony for the Dead* will engage readers in the extreme circumstances of WWII and the nature of war as well as what it means to live under conditions that attempt to destroy both individuality and freedom by any means necessary. Well-written and well documented, this informational text is both disturbing and enlightening.

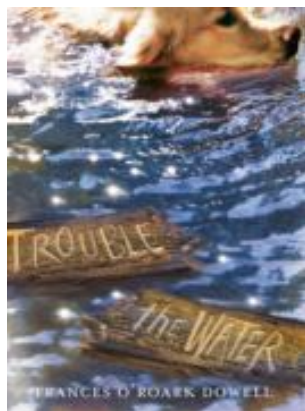
M.T. Anderson is the author of *Feed* (2012), which won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation Volume I: The Pox Party* (2008) won a National Book Award and was a *New York Times* bestseller. *Octavian* and its sequel, *The Kingdom on the Waves* (2009), were also named Michael L. Printz Honor Books. Meticulously researched and documented, *Symphony for the Dead* is a 2016 YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Finalist. M. T. Anderson lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and more about him and his work can be found at his website.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



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Book Review: *Trouble the Water*

Written by Frances O' Roark Dowell

Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016, 288 pp.

ISBN: 9781481424639

In 1953, whites and blacks in the small town of Celeste, Kentucky do not mix socially. Despite the racial divide in their town, Callie, an 11-year-old black girl, and Wendell, a white boy, join forces to track a mysterious dog. Although the townspeople of Celeste do not approve of them spending time together, they develop a bond of friendship. As they search for the dog's owner, they come upon an old haunted cabin in the woods inhabited by the ghosts of two boys. Their adventure allows Callie and Wendell to learn about the history of the cabin as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The ghosts and the cabin force them to consider the past and present of their town. Callie and Wendell confront issues of racial prejudice that include a past of slavery and a present of segregation. This story addresses how past and present social injustices affect communities and the individuals who live in them.

*Trouble the Water* would make a great book for middle grade readers. Dowell's storyline shifts focus between several side stories and time periods, which could make it difficult for some students to identify the main storyline. With multiple side stories, students could be encouraged to read *Trouble* as part of a literature circle or in paired reading.

The author, Frances O' Roark Dowell, moved often while growing up as the daughter of a career Army officer. As an Army brat, she lived throughout the United States and Europe changing schools frequently. Dowell credits the frequent moving with her ability to easily strike up conversations with strangers. Dowell now lives in North Carolina with her husband and two sons. As a young girl, Dowell's love of writing poetry helped her to make an early decision to become a writer. Dowell's education includes an undergraduate degree in English from Wake Forest University and a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and poetry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She considers herself a Southerner because she spent most of her adult life in North Carolina. Dowell says that living in the South has a strong influence on her writing and so she sets her books in the South with the people, places, and weather she knows best.

Two books that could be paired with *Trouble the Water* are Robin Talley's (2014) *Lies We Tell Ourselves* and Harper Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both Talley and Harper set their story in the Jim Crow South and address the theme of doors opening and shutting in regards to race relations. *Lies We Tell Ourselves* addresses race relations in the South during the early stage of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1959, Sarah, a black girl, and Linda, a white girl, confront school desegregation in Virginia from opposite sides of the event. When Sarah and Linda are assigned to work on a school project together, they eventually face difficult truths about racism. The well-known *To Kill a Mockingbird* paints a picture of a small town in Alabama during the 1930s. Over the course of a summer, siblings Jem and Scout learn that all people are not treated the

same by society. When their father, an attorney, defends a black man jailed on trumped-up rape charges, the trial exposes racism and stereotyping.

Megan McCaffrey, Governor's State University, Chicago, IL



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Book Review: *The War that Saved My Life*

Written by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

Dial Book, 2015, 316 pp.

ISBN: 9780803740815

This powerful historical novel has taken up residence in my heart. It is a story of ten-year-old Ada whose courage helps her overcome heartbreaking circumstances. The novel unfolds in England during World War II where Ada lives in London with her younger brother, Jamie. She has never left their tiny one-room apartment because her mother is ashamed of Ada's twisted, club foot. Her Mam terribly abuses Ada, locking her in a cupboard, withholding food, beating her, and calling her a cripple and worse. Ada is forced to crawl in the apartment—Mam won't even supply her with crutches. From the time he was in diapers, six-year-old Jamie has had Ada as his caretaker. Ada dreams of leaving the room and suddenly gets her chance when children in London are evacuated in 1939 to protect them from the coming German bombing. Mam doesn't intend that Ada will be evacuated. But, while Mam sleeps, Ada with the help of Jamie steals away and boards a train with other evacuees. On the train Ada watches the sights and learns about things she has never known like grass, trees, and churches. Everything she sees is new to her. When the train reaches its destination, the children are placed with Susan Smith, a single woman living on the outskirts of town, who is mourning the death of her housemate and dearest friend. She tells the children that she doesn't know a thing about taking care of children, but she gradually becomes their fiercest protector. It takes some time for Miss Smith, Jamie and Ada to come together as a family but they do. Ada's journey into a new life, demonstrates her perseverance, grit, resourcefulness and intelligence. Along the way Ada learns to read and write, ride a pony, makes friends and proves herself useful in the community. The ending is a cliffhanger. Don't read this one late at night, or you'll wind up not sleeping.

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, the author of another outstanding book, *Jefferson's Sons* (2011), is a gifted storyteller. She creates realistic characters that stick in the memory. In the midst of telling about the difficulties that the British lived through during the War, she explores the themes of what it means to be a family and how a person can survive a terrible beginning in life and yet eventually thrive. Bradley shows us that love can make such a difference. Even though the story is about difficult subjects it is hopeful. It is a story that invites discussion and contemplation. After finishing the book, I reread inspiring parts to savor them again. Read this aloud to fifth and sixth graders to open a window that will make a difference in their understanding of what it means to survive under difficult circumstances. In 2015, *The War that Saved My Life* received the Newbery Honor Award and the Schneider Family Book Award, which is given for a book about a disability experience.

A good pairing for comparison is *Good Night, Mr. Tom* (1981) by Michelle Magorian, which tells the story of a boy, Willie, who was been badly abused by his mother and is evacuated from London to the English countryside. There he also discovers a new world he didn't know about. Mr. Tom, a kind old man, takes him in and gives him a new life and family.

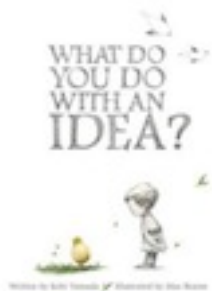
Marilyn Carpenter, Professor Emeritus Eastern Washington University, Spokane, WA



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Book Review: What Do You Do With An Idea?

Written by Kobi Yamada

Illustrated by Mae Besom

Compendium Inc., 2014, 36 pp.

ISBN: 9781938298073

I liked being with my idea. It made me feel more alive, like I could do anything. It encouraged me to think big...and then, to think bigger. (p. 23)

This must-read book is a story that will stay with you forever, impacting young and old alike. Kobi Yamada carefully and thoughtfully tells the story of a little boy who has an idea. He is not sure what to do with his idea and ponders a plan. Should he abandon it, nurture it, believe in it? While trying each path, he realizes he is happier and more content with his idea by his side. He comes to understand that his idea does as much for him as he can do for his idea. While there is only one character in the text, he is a neutral character and anyone could likely identify with him. The focus is on the idea that is growing and becoming ever-present. In the end, Yamada sends a deep yet direct message suggesting the importance of our ideas, no matter how big or how small.

Mae Besom's illustrations could not be more complimentary in bringing the text to life and adding to the story. Besom illustrates the idea as an egg waiting to hatch. This allows the reader to engage with the story and think deeply about what it is like to carry around an idea. The illustrations become more colorful as the idea develops and is more alive and powerful in the little boy's life. The whimsical appearance of the illustrations opens the door imagination and creativity. The illustrations become more colorful as the text develops, demonstrating that the idea becomes more alive and powerful in the boy's life. Their whimsical appearance opens the door to imagination and creativity.

What Do You Do With an Idea? is an exemplar text, mentoring students in the pairing of text and illustrations, creativity, perseverance, and staying true to yourself. Students of all ages will appreciate this text because of its applicability to a variety of contexts and its invitation to thoughtful response. Other texts may pair well with What Do You Do With an Idea? to deepen students' thinking and creativity. For example, *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires (2014) is a fun story of a little girl, her dog, and her uncultivated creativity to make the most magnificent thing. Her ability to stay true to herself is a life lesson and a parallel to the young boy and his egg. *Going Places* by Peter Reynolds (2014) is about a young boy and young girl who use creativity to tackle a school project as a team instead of working by themselves. While they are faced with their own skepticism and self-doubt along the way, they overcome the obstacles to find success and feel good about themselves. In July of 2016, Yamada will release a new text titled *What Do You Do With a Problem?* This would make an interesting pairing.

Yamada is the CEO and president of Compendium Inc., a company that is a successful business, but also cares about people and contributing to people's lives. Mae Besom began her art career in China and in 2007 decided to become a full-time children's book illustrator. This was

Yamada's first children's book. Besom will illustrate Yamada's next book as well. More about Yamada can be found at his website: [More about Besom can be found at this web address.](#)

Rebecca Gasiewicz, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volume-viii1-issue-4/>



Book Review: Worm Loves Worm

Written by J.J. Austrian

Illustrated by Mike Curato

Baalzer & Bray, 2016, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780062386335

This delightful romp of a picture book explores traditional gender roles in the marriage ceremony. When Worm and Worm declare their love and that they will marry, their friends tell them that there are certain cultural marriage customs that must be observed. “That’s how it’s always been done.” claims Cricket who asserts that he will marry them. Beetle says, “You’ve got to have a best beetle.” Three Bees say the Worms need bride’s bees. The Worms at first agree with their friends’ requirements. There is the matter of rings, music for the ceremony, clothes, cake and flowers. At first the Worms make accommodations by agreeing to go along with “how it’s always been done.” When they are told, “You’ll need to get rings to wear on your fingers...” Worm points out that they don’t have fingers, but the other Worm comes up with a solution—they can wear the rings as belts. The Bees ask, “But which one of you is the bride?” Each Worm agrees to be both bride and groom. The one wearing the bridal dress wears the top hat and the one wearing the tuxedo wears the bridal veil, with the help of Spider who attaches the head apparel with her sticky web. Finally, when Cricket who clings to traditional ways, repeats “That isn’t how it’s always been done,” the Worms, dressed for the ceremony, assert, “Then we’ll just change how it’s done.” “And so they are married ... because Worm loves Worm.”

J.J. Austrian demonstrates his writing talent in creating this groundbreaking book that will challenge children’s perceptions of gender roles. There are few, if any, simple picture books that explore same sex weddings or practices. The story is mainly told with dialogue between the characters. The story demonstrates the silliness of requiring certain traditions for all weddings. The humor in the text demonstrates how a wedding can be a celebration that matches the needs and desires of the couple uniting in love. In this way, *Worm Loves Worm*, is a book that tells a universal story.

Books that could be paired with this picture book would include Leslie Newman’s *Donovan’s Big Day* (2011) and Cynthia Chin Lee’s *Operation Marriage* (2011), both of which address same sex marriage from a young person’s perspective.

The illustrator, Mike Curato, sets the expressive characters off with a white background that makes them stand out. Simple touches add to the characterizations. For example, the Cricket wears a vest and glasses and consults a book when making his declarations about how it’s always been done. Droll touches increase the humor, such as when Spider winks at the reader about an inside joke.

Marilyn Carpenter, Professor Emeritus Eastern Washington University, Spokane, WA



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