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WOW REVIEW

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VOLUME X, ISSUE 4

Summer 2018

Moral and Ethical Dilemmas

Worlds
of WORDS 



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WOW Review: Volume X Issue 4

Summer 2018

Moral and Ethical Dilemmas

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Volume X Issue 4: Where Hope and Courage Meet

Introduction

In the past reading materials for young people were often didactic and less enjoyable than the books reflecting the world that currently fill the shelves of libraries and bookstores. In this issue, reviewers consciously looked for pieces of literature containing characters who wrestled with moral and ethical situations in ways that would provoke thought, reflection and perhaps action within readers.

Two of the books in this issue are young adult novels that present current sociocultural events with diverse perspectives, *America Street* and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, introduce readers to young women working through conflicts brought about by cultural adjustments and family expectations. Others, such as *Dear World* and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* reflect the Syrian genocide, giving readers the opportunity to not only understand the horrific events occurring in Syria, but ways they might be able to take action to support those who are caught up in that situation. *Lost Girl Found* and *The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl* chronicle the decisions two young girls make as they negotiate the world in which they find themselves. *Pandas on the Eastside* and *The Hate U Give* address the ethical dilemmas that two teens must address so as to right the wrongs of situations within their communities. There is also *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, the Newbery Winner that presents readers with the moral choices one must make when confronted with political and social oppression. Then there is the picturebook *Vacío*, a book written in Spanish, about emotions. Through this book, young people can come to understand their own emotions and the emotional manifestations of others without judgment.

Books that have us reflect upon our own moral and ethical stances while presenting other ways to think about the world allow us a better understanding of ourselves and the world. We cannot hope for more!

Thoughtful reading!

Holly Johnson, Editor

The next issues are:

Fall, 2018: Open theme. Share with us books that have inspired you this year. Deadline: September 15, 2018.

Winter, 2018: Issues Connected to Trauma. The world and those within it, past and present, have created situations or phenomena that result in trauma. What can we learn from reading about such situations? Books addressing trauma—in its broadest terms—have much to teach us. Think about sharing what you have learned from reading about such events. Deadline: November 30, 2018.

Spring, 2019: Open theme. An opportunity to share books that you read over the winter or new books that resonate with you. Deadline: February 27, 2019.

"A poignant meditation on one girl's struggle to find her way in a new world."
—Nicola Yoon, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Everything, Everything*

IBI ZOBOI



**AMERICAN
STREET**

American Street

Written by Ibi Zoboi
HarperCollins, 2017, 324 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-06-247304-2

The American dream. This dream prompted Fabiola Toussaint and her mother to leave their beloved homeland of Port-au-Prince, Haiti and travel to the United States, in search of a better life, free schools and honorable work. Fabiola and her mother are eager to unite with their extended family in Detroit, but shortly after arriving in New York, their dream quickly becomes tarnished. As Fabiola and her mother go through customs, Fabiola's mother is detained by the United States Immigration, forcing Fabiola to continue the journey alone. In Detroit, Fabiola is united with her aunt and cousins, but

quickly realizes this land of Detroit is very different from Haiti. Her cousins Chantal, Princess (Pri) and Primadonna (Donna), are loud, boisterous and outspoken. Known as the Three Bees, her cousins have a reputation of royalty and power at school. They are known to do anything for family. Even with family surrounding her, loneliness begins to set in as Fabiola desperately misses her mother. With her extended family forbidding Fabiola from speaking her Creole language and wearing her clothing from Haiti, Fabiola finds herself trapped between two cultures. With deep roots in the Haitian Vodou tradition, Fabiola is soon mesmerized by Bad Leg, the crazy man on the street corner who sings songs into the night. One night as Fabiola watches Bad Leg, she witnesses a cruel act of violence. This cruel act unveils the harsh realities of life for this neighborhood plagued with drugs, violence and death.

Pressure is also building within the community to find the drug dealer responsible for selling drugs to a teenager who recently died from a drug overdose. The community is looking for someone to blame, and this is what brings Detective Stevens and Fabiola together. Detective Stevens wants Fabiola to find out information about Dray Carter, the neighborhood drug dealer who is also Donna's boyfriend. By agreeing to help gather the information, Detective Stevens promises to get Fabiola's mother released from the immigration detention center. Fabiola agrees to help the Detective to not only to get her mother released, but to free Donna from her toxic and violent relationship with her boyfriend, Dray. Fabiola develops a romantic relationship with Dray's best friend, Kasim, and the web of deceit and violence continues to expand. Relying on her Vodou culture, the magical songs of Bad Leg and steadfast loyalty from her family, Fabiola discovers the harsh truths of the American dream.

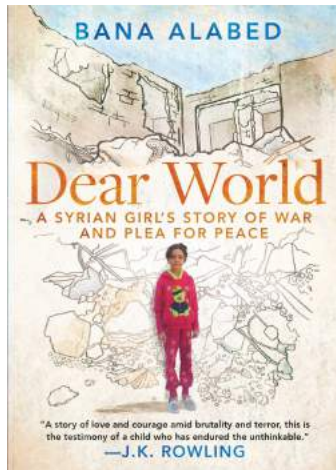
Ibi Zoboi brilliantly and realistically portrays the joys and struggles of Fabiola Toussaint's journey in her new world. Based on Zoboi's own personal experiences of immigrating from Port-au-Prince, Haiti to the United States at the young age of 4, she delves into the realities of life in urban neighborhoods where families struggle with poverty, violence, drugs and social injustices. By incorporating Zoboi's rich traditions of the Haitian-Creole culture, Zoboi develops realistic and authentic characters. The Creole language and dialect are infused throughout the story as Fabiola references Vodou tradition as well as characters such as Bad Leg, Papa Legba, Manman and Matant Jo. By including these references and language throughout the story, readers

are able to see how Fabiola bridges the Haitian and American cultures. Other texts with similar themes that would complement *American Street* are *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo.

American Street is Ibi Zoboi's first published novel. Prior to writing, Zoboi conducted extensive research into the violence committed against Black teen girls. This research is reflected throughout *American Street* as Zoboi exposes the harsh realities of life, oppression and social injustices faced by each of the characters. Zoboi is able to reveal such truths by periodically inserting chapters revealing each character's back story. By doing so, the audience is able to gain a glimpse into the difficulties and harsh realities of life for the various characters.

The novel has received numerous awards and honors. Some of the awards received include the National Book Award Finalist, a New York Times Notable Book, School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, and ALA Booklist Editor's Choice of 2017. Ibi Zoboi holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College where she received the Norma Fox Mazer Award. She has published several short stories, fables and papers, receiving numerous accolades, awards, and was named a Pushcart nominee. Ibi Zoboi will release two additional young adult novels in the fall of 2018 and the winter of 2019 titled *Pride* and *Black Enough: Stories of Black Teenhood in America*.

Aimee Hilton, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



Dear World: A Syrian Girl's Story of War and Plea for Peace

Written by Bana Alabed

Simon & Schuster, 2017, 205 pp.

ISBN: 9781501178443

Bana Alabed, a young Syrian girl, became a symbol of the 21st century Syrian civil war at the age of seven. We see the war in Syria depicted on the news, yet we feel disconnected to it. Bana has written a memoir that takes the reader into the heart of the deadly Syrian war. In 2016 in Aleppo, Bana and her family were caught in a siege between the Syrian government and rebel forces. In her memoir, she describes her life before, during and after fleeing the country to escape the siege. During the war, instead of spending

time outside her home, Bana was barricaded inside in the midst of a war zone. Instead of learning about the history of Syria, she learned to identify types of bombs due to the incessant airstrikes. Instead of passing time playing dolls with her friends, she hid for hours in the basement of her apartment building as bombs exploded around her, her family and her friends.

Although Bana is the only author credited on this book, Bana's mother, a teacher, begins the memoir with the story of Bana's birth. Bana and her mother have alternating chapters throughout the memoir. Her mother's voice is distinguished by pages with peach borders and cursive writing whereas Bana's thoughts are in print and her chapters are filled with photographs. The photographs taken by the Alabed family enhance the memoir by providing an insight into Bana's life during the war. We can read her tweets and see pictures of herself, her family and places in her neighborhood destroyed by bombs.

During these tumultuous years, Bana yearned for peace and felt cut off from the world. One day her mother allowed her to use her *Twitter* app to communicate her feelings to the world. Bana shared the dire situation of the Aleppo civilians in her tweets, "We are dying" and "We are not armed, why do you kill us? – Bana #Aleppo" (p. 151). Fear, hunger, death and destruction were aspects of the war that ended the innocence of her childhood and caused daily suffering for herself, her family, her friends and the citizens of Aleppo.

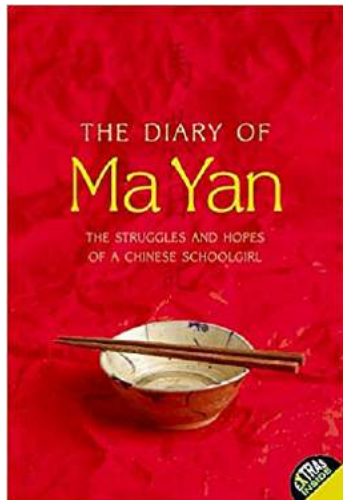
The prevalent themes of this memoir are showing courage in the face of adversity, the importance of family and the plight of the refugee. Bana and her family became refugees first within their own city and then in another country. Bana's memoir, *Dear World*, would interest both middle and high school readers. The middle grades historical fiction book *Escape from Aleppo*, by N. H. Senzai (2018) and the young adult book *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*, by Atia Abawi (2018) could be paired with *Dear World* to show other perilous journeys of refugee families fleeing worn-torn Syria.

Other heartfelt young adult memoirs are by refugees that struggled to escape oppression, war and poverty include *The Lightless Sky* by Gulwali Passarlay (2017); *Every Falling Star* by Sungju Lee and Susan McClelland (2017); *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to*

Reunite with His Mother by Sonia Nazario (2007); *The Girl Who Escaped Isis: This is My Story* by Farida Khalaf and Andrea C. Hoffmann (2016); and *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana (2018). In *The Lightless Sky*, a twelve-year-old Afghan refugee fled the Taliban and crossed eight countries in search of a safe place to live. In *Every Falling Star*, an eleven-year-old refugee survived and escaped the rough gang ridden streets of North Korea. In *Enrique's Journey*, a young Honduran refugee left his country in search of his mother in the United States. Along the way, he encountered thieves, corrupt police and bandits. Farida Khalaf's memoir, *The Girl Who Escaped Isis*, describes her kidnapping, captivity and escape from an ISIS training camp. Finally, in the memoir, *How Dare the Sun Rise*, Sandra escaped the Gatumba massacre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and immigrated to the United States where she has become a brave, strong voice for refugees.

The young author of this book, Bana Alabed, was born in 2009 in Aleppo, Syria. She continues to wish for peace and the end of war in Syria. Although she spent four years living through the horrors of war and barely escaped Syria alive, she hopes to return to live in Aleppo when it is safe. She loves to read and write. According to the author's description on inside jacket cover, she would like to become a teacher when she grows up.

Amy Romero, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



The Diary of Ma Yan: The Struggles and Hopes of a Chinese Schoolgirl

Written by Ma Yan

Edited by Pierre Haski

Photography by Wang Zheng

HarperCollins, 2004, 167 pp

ISBN: 978-0060764975

The Diary of Ma Yan reveals the hopes and dreams of a 13-year-old girl in Zhangjijashu as she suffers the hardships of crippling poverty and fights to continue her education. From the very first entry, Ma Yan reveals volumes about her situation. The family has one income. She has two brothers also in school. Her mother and father take Ma Yan out of school because she is a girl and because the

family prioritizes the boys' education. The reader learns Ma Yan yearns for an education and, eventually, her mother recognizes this. Ma Yan's mother, although her health is poor, travels 250 miles away to work for extra income. Her mother's hard labor and poor health haunt Ma Yan. She is fully aware of the sacrifices her family makes on her behalf; nearly every entry references her parents' labors and her duty to "pay Father back...and give him and Mother the gift of a better life" (p. 64). Struggling with this burden of debt is not the only thing plaguing Ma Yan. She barely has enough food to survive during school. Her eyesight grows poor, but she cannot afford to get glasses. She and her brothers even lack the money, a mere yuan, to ride a tractor to school, so they must walk and brave the weather and bandits. Moreover, Ma Yan knows she must get top grades in her class to bring honor to her family and garner a successful job. Stark in her simplicity, Ma Yan's diary takes the reader through her trials and tribulations as she struggles with the issues of extreme poverty, starvation, dangerous journeys to and from school, pressures to succeed and dreams of creating a better life for her and her family.

There are two authors to this story. The primary author is Ma Yan in her diary entries. Interspersed between her entries are chapters from the editor, Pierre Haski, who was a journalist traveling through her region. From his chapters, Haski provides the context and background information to aid the reader in true understanding of Ma Yan's situation. For example, Haski paints a clearer picture of their poverty as he states, "To pay for the ballpoint pen she used, we later learned, she had deprived herself of food for fifteen days" (p. 5). Haski also explains details of daily life and culture that Ma Yan references but does not define, such as the *kang*, the large cement family bed that takes up the majority of space in their one room house. The state of their poverty is quite extreme; the "average annual income of the inhabitants of Ma Yan's village is around 400 yuan...a miserable sum compared to the Chinese average of 6,000 yuan" (p. 29).

Ma Yan's diary first appeared in a French newspaper. Reaction was immediate; readers wanted to help this girl and others like her. In response, the journalists created the Association for the Children of Ningxia, a fund to assist needy families seeking education. Haski later published this book with the corresponding information and effects of Ma Yan's diary on her future and those of others in her village. Though the book has not won awards, it has launched Ma Yan

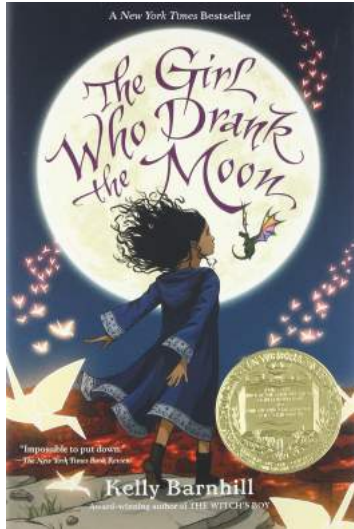
and her family to fame and, most importantly, comfort. After gut-wrenching poverty and struggle, Ma Yan and her family have enough food to eat. She and her siblings can finish school. Chinese national TV has hosted her three times, asking for details about her story, a story that tugs at the heart strings and brings to light a corner of the world rich in heritage, struggles and hopes.

Books that would pair with this text include *Bronze and Sunflower* by Cao Wenxuan and Meilo So (2017) and *Goodbye Sarajevo: A True Story of Love, Courage and Survival* by Atka Reid and Hana Schofield (2011). Other books could be *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) or *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* by Hanna Jansen and Elizabeth D. Crawford (2006), all of which deal with situations where children must overcome dire circumstances with courage.

Pierre Haski's career revolves around international journalism. A member of the French press, he worked on the staff of *Liberation*, where he first posted about Ma Yan. Not only has he traveled to China on assignment, he also has worked in South Africa and Jerusalem. He worked with others to found the Association for the Children of Ningxia, which became so successful it has helped Ma Yan and at least 250 others at the time of printing. More information regarding Pierre Haski can be found by searching his name on Wikipedia.com.

Ma Yan's diary changed her life. Her perseverance and strength won and she continued her education and supported her family with the royalties from this book. In a letter to Haski included in the end of the book, she mentions that she plans on attending a university and donating some of her proceeds from her book to help others.

Rebecca Thomason, Denton Independent School District, Denton, TX



The Girl Who Drank The Moon

Written by Kelly Barnhill

Algonquin Young Readers, 2016, 386 pp

ISBN: 978-1-61620-567-6

"A story can tell the truth, she knew, but a story can also lie."
--Ethyne, p.309

Each year one child is sacrificed to the evil witch in the forest so as to keep the Protectorate safe. But is that the real story? Is that the truth? Each year the youngest member of the Protectorate is left in the woods and they do not return, so the story is considered true. Yet, babies are not taken by an evil witch, but by wise and magical Xan, who takes each baby, feeds them starlight and promptly adopts them to families in the Free Cities on the other side of the forest. What is wrong with the people of the Protectorate who would leave a child out in the forest to die? This is the dilemma at the center of the marvelous Newbery-winning novel that has readers thinking over and over again about the ways of the world, the issue of power and what deceitful people will do to keep their power.

One year when Xan rescues a baby girl from the forest, she is distracted by the baby's soulful eyes and inadvertently feeds the baby moonlight and not starlight, which Xan has fed to every other child left in the woods in the past. The moon is magical, so much more magical than starlight, and Luna, whom Xan adopts as her own, is a truly magical child. Luna's magic is too strong for such a young child so Xan casts a spell to keep Luna from understanding or knowing about magic until she turns 13. As Luna grows, so does the balance of life within the Protectorate as significant individuals make life choices that will change the world.

Through *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, readers enter a magical world that may seem very different from their own, but upon closer examination, is all too familiar to the way "news" and stories often serve hidden agendas. With scenarios and characters that present both faulty decision-making and questioning of the status quo, readers see the impasse between ethical action and evil. Each of the major characters is given at least one opportunity to make a positive change in the world. What each decides to do, and for what reasons, gives readers insight into their own lives and communities as well as the world.

In addition to a plot that explores how power and perspective work together to create reality, readers will be enchanted by the wondrous characters that inhabit Luna's and Xan's world. Glerk, the swamp monster who created the world, and chipper Fyrian, a perfectly tiny dragon, help Xan raise Luna to become a thoughtful and cheerful young magician who must carry on the knowledge she knows about the good in the world.

Works that would complement this text include *The Lie Tree* by Frances Hardinge (2016) and *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi (2018), both of which address hidden agendas, magic, lies and truth, but perhaps for older readers. The book is a great example of a modern

fairytale, and would pair nicely with *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow* by Jessica Townsend (2017), which also features a young girl who finds herself in a magical place where her hidden talents must be discovered. *Girl Who Drank the Moon* would also pair well with *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate (2017) or *The Witch's Boy* also by Kelly Barnhill (2015), as both could be determined modern fairytales.

Kelly Barnhill has written a number of other books for young people as well as a volume of short stories for adults. She lives in Minneapolis, MN, and is married to an architect and has three children. Prior to her life as an author, she was a park ranger and a teacher, among other things. When she is not writing, a couple of her pastimes include running and hiking. More information about Kelly can be found at: www.kellybarnhill.com.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



The Hate U Give

Written by Angie Thomas
HarperCollins, 2017, 444 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-06-249853-3

The Hate U Give, Angie Thomas' writing debut, was inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. This is a riveting young adult novel that stirs emotions in all readers. The story takes place in an urban neighborhood where the protagonist, 16-year-old Starr Carter, is an African-American teenager who is torn between two worlds: the familiar neighborhood she calls home and the upscale, predominantly-White prep school she attends. Starr does her best to balance both worlds until the fateful evening she and her childhood best friend Khalil are pulled over by the police and the unarmed Khalil is shot. Starr can do nothing but watch helplessly as Khalil's life drains from his body and he takes his last breath.

After Khalil's death, Starr is thrown into a world of confusion and chaos and begins her trek on the emotional rollercoaster that has become her life. The death of a defenseless African-American teen at the hands of a Caucasian officer has become a national headline and no matter how hard she tries, Starr cannot escape the flashbacks of that fateful night, now burned in her mind. She struggles with the realization she could easily be dead, just like Khalil. She has to cope with terrible gossip and implications about Khalil's death. Even her best friend at school insinuates Khalil may have gotten what he deserved.

As Starr attempts to deal with untruths about Khalil's death, she is faced with the reality of having to testify in court as the only witness to his shooting. Public awareness over the lack of an investigation into the officer responsible for firing the fateful shot is increasing and so are tempers. The apathy of the authorities to hold the officer accountable causes turmoil and division in the community. The fact that Starr's uncle is a police officer does not help matters. Her family is torn, protesters are gathering, and her neighborhood is quickly escalating into a battle zone.

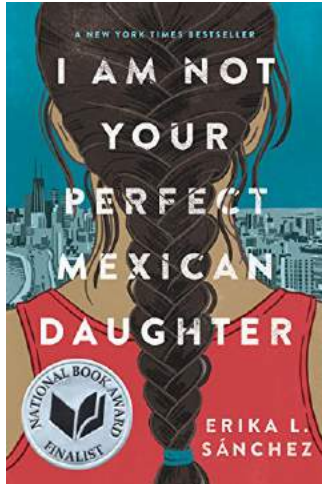
The Hate U Give, also known by the acronym *THUG*, is a page turner for anyone seeking a realistic story covering the topics of race, interracial dating, friendship, police brutality, political activism, grief, addiction, wealth disparity and the media's depiction of African-Americans. The novel touches upon recent and past instances of police shootings. While there is a high degree of harsh language in the book, Thomas deploys it in a way that makes it authentic to the time and location of the story. This text can be paired with other young adult novels dealing with the issues of justice and freedom. Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017) is about an innocent student wrongfully convicted. Afterward, he starts a journal, penning letters to Martin Luther King, Jr., to help him try and figure out what happened and how it impacted his own morals and beliefs. *Anger is A Gift* by Mark Oshiro (2018) shares the story of a young man who is being intimidated by the Oakland Police Department, the same police force that murdered his father.

The Hate U Give was a #1 *New York Times* Bestseller. It was also the William C. Morris Award

Winner, Michael L. Printz Honor Book, National Book Award Longlist, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction, Goodreads Choice Awards Best Young Adult Fiction, Walter Dean Myers Grant Winner 2015, and Edgar Allan Poe Award Nominee. It has been published in over twenty countries and is available in Spanish. A feature film based on the book is currently in production.

Angie Thomas is an African-American writer from Jackson, Mississippi. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from Belhaven University and is a former teen rapper. She claims her greatest accomplishment was having an article about her in *Right-On!* magazine. She is currently working on her second novel, *On the Come Up*.

Laurie Kinne, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter

Written by Erika L. Sánchez

Knopf, 2017, 344 pp.

ISBN 9781524700485

Julia, not Joo-lee-uh, is a senior in high school in Chicago with plans to attend college in New York and become a writer. She is not a perfect Mexican daughter, like her dead sister Olga. Olga was 22 when she was hit by a bus crossing the street while texting. Their parents approved of Olga working in an office, taking one class at a time at the local community college and helping the family cook and clean. Olga's top social event was an occasional movie night with a girlfriend. Julia thought Olga's life was dreadfully boring, until Julia discovers a hotel key, the sexy thong underwear and several emails of meet-up plans Olga had with a mysterious man.

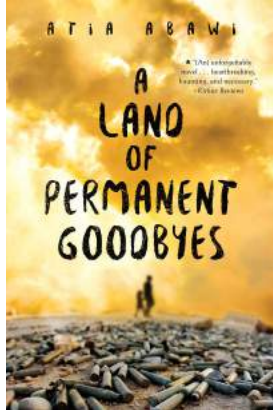
After Olga's death and Julia's discovery of Olga's secret life, Julia is surprised that she did not know her only sister better. Ignoring her own grief, Julia is consumed with finding answers. She cannot share her suspicions or findings with her parents since Olga was practically a saint in their eyes. Besides the grief, Julia's stressors include others typical in the senior year--college applications, studying, friendships, alcohol, marijuana, hookups and sex, and the reader cringes at times while she clumsily navigates them. Yet, her greatest perceived stressor is her suffocatingly nosy and strict Mexican mother, Amá, whose grief is so overwhelming that she fails to hide that she blames Julia for Olga's death, while always pointing out Julia's multiple shortcomings.

Julia's focus on searching for answers about Olga, a brief romance with a rich white boy and the loyalty of her best friend fuel her for a short time. Despite the distractions, despair eventually envelops her. After her suicide attempt, her parents respond appropriately by seeking medical intervention and low-income accessible counseling to address her anxiety and depression. Culturally believable, Amá and Apá send Julia to Los Ojos, Mexico, to stay with her abuela and tías, who simply plan to love Julia so much that her sadness disappears. Despite apprehensions that Mexico will derail her future plans of graduation and college due to absence, Julia ultimately is pleased that the two weeks she spends there allow her to relax, regroup and discover more about her parents and the luxuries she enjoys living in a tiny apartment in Chicago. In what seemed like another life, stoic Apá was a talented artist before his monotonous factory job in the U.S.; beautiful Amá endured a rape at their second attempt crossing the border. Los Ojos is a town with drugs, crooked police and danger after dark. Indeed, Julia's time in Mexico allows her to see her parents with a fresh, adult perspective. Julia acknowledges her parents' sacrifices with subtle loving actions that ironically resemble those of a good Mexican daughter. Julia finds the truth about Olga that further contributes to Julia's ability to redefine herself, a Latina daughter who loves and respects her family and yet yearns for independence. The reader is left sharing Julia's confidence that she will thrive at NYU in the fall.

Any high school senior facing college transition angst would identify with this book and find inspiration in Julia's character. The story provides a realistic setting unique to a Mexican immigrant family. While many U.S. families consider high school graduates attending a university away from home a rite of passage, the reader learns that vision looks different for many in the Mexican culture. This text is for a mature audience as it includes profanity, sexual content and illegal drug use, however they are used in a realistic way and their absence would detract from the authenticity. This text could be paired Francisco Jiménez's autobiographical journey from Mexico to University in *Reaching Out* (2009) and *Taking Hold* (2015); Melissa de la Cruz's (2017) *Something in Between*, about Jasmine, a Filipino whose full college scholarship is jeopardized by her newly discovered undocumented status; or Frank Bruni's (2016) non-fiction *Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be* which advocates that a wonderful college education is possible at hundreds of universities.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter is a *New York Times* bestseller, a National Book Award Finalist, and exactly the kind of book author Erika L. Sánchez wanted to read when she was an adolescent. She is the daughter of undocumented Mexican immigrants and grew up in Cicero, Illinois on the southwest side of Chicago. Sánchez's spunky spirit is evident in her character, Julia, who also hates smelling like fried tortillas and has been dreaming of being a writer since age 12. Erika was also the sex and love advice columnist for *Cosmopolitan for Latinas* from 2012-2015 and her poetry collection *Lessons on Expulsion* was published by Graywolf in July 2017. She is currently working on a collection of personal essays.

Beth Hughes, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas



A Land of Permanent Goodbyes

Written by Atia Abawi

Philomel, 2018, 276pp

ISBN 978-0-399-54683-9

"Your borders were devised by man. A rain cloud or even a bird does not recognize the barriers created by the human mind."

--p. 73-74

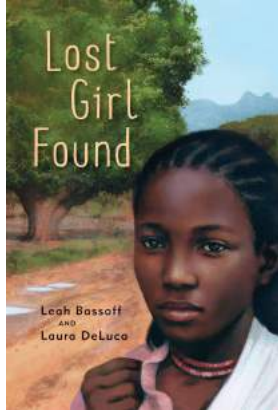
The struggle for survival tests all who attempt to find safety outside of Syria. The journey is painful, harrowing and seemingly never-ending, at least to Tarek, as his family is torn apart, first by the bombs that destroyed his home, and then by the journey to Germany. Happiness may never be in the plan for his life as he loses his mother and one of his sisters in the bombing. He cannot find his younger brother, but he must leave the country with his father and younger sister before it is too late. They leave without knowing the fate of Tarek's brother. Their travels highlight actual circumstances of those who flee Syria in hopes of finding safety in Europe.

Tarek and his family represent the terror many Syrians experience as they first travel to territory held by the Daesh (Al-Khada) to borrow money from family members willing to wait out the civil war. It is in this place that Tarek and his cousin witness a public beheading. Dashing back to his uncle's home, the family, along with Tarek's cousin, narrowly escape a further encounter with the Daesh, who suspect anyone who does not profess loyalty to their cause. The family travels to Turkey, but discover they have too little money to travel further. Working for months to garner additional funds, the family decides that Tarek and his young sister will be the first to traverse the rough seas to Greece where international aid workers can help with relocation. Tarek's cousin also decides to stay in Turkey, closer to Syria, which will always be their home. The trip across the Aegean Sea is especially treacherous as the rafts hold too many people wearing life vests that do not work. It is from there that Tarek and his sister encounter further disaster on their way to safety. What they encounter along their escape include elements of both terror and compassion. Looking for "helpers" along the way gives Tarek, and readers, hope.

A Land of Permanent Goodbyes pairs nicely with *Escape from Aleppo* by S.N. Sensai (2018). Both address escapes from Syria but while *Aleppo* ends with crossing the border into Turkey, *Permanent Goodbyes* takes readers to Europe and the further struggles encountered by Syrian refugees at a time when parts of Europe begin to close their borders. This would make a wonderful addition to a text set about the current situation in Syria that could also include *The Dance of the Banished* by Marsha Skrypuch (2015) and the graphic novel *Escape from Syria* by Samya Kullab (2017). Additional pairings could include *The Girl from Aleppo: Nujeen's Escape from War to Freedom* by Nujeen Mustafa (2017) and Christina Lamb or *Dear World: A Syrian Girl's Story of War and Plea for Peace* by Bana Alabed (2017). If readers want to read more about refugees from across the world, the books *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) and the picture-book *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna (2016) would also be of interest.

Atia Abawi is a foreign news correspondent for NBC and CNN who has lived and worked in the Middle East and Asia for over 10 years. She was born to refugee parents who escaped to West Germany after fleeing Afghanistan, but grew up in the US. She currently lives in Jerusalem with her family while she covers news from the Middle East, but was based in Kabul, Afghanistan for over five years. She wrote another novel for teens entitled *The Secret Sky: A Novel of Forbidden Love in Afghanistan* (2015), and she contributed to the collection *Hope Nation: YA Authors Share Personal Moments of Inspiration* (2018) edited by Rose Brock. More information about Atia can be found at her website: www.atiaabawi.com.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



Lost Girl Found

Written by Leah Bassoff and Laura DeLuca

Groundwood Books, 2014 192 pp

ISBN: 978-1554984169

As noted by the co-authors of *Lost Girl Found*, the stories about the Lost Boys of Sudan are most commonly recognized when one discusses the constant struggle in that war-torn part of Africa. The story is a first-person narrative that brings to light 12-year-old Poni, who would be considered a child in most places but is thrust into adulthood by the difficulties she faces in her country. Many of the difficulties Poni faces

throughout the story, including forced child-marriage, inequities between men and women and staying in school despite the start of menstruation, are predicaments that are still issues in many developing countries. Unfortunately, this reality is one that many students in the United States fail to recognize unless they experience it through literature or other informative resources. Poni endures hardships following the bombing of her village and the multi-day walk to Kenya to reach the refugee camp, Kakuma. However, the camp holds more assaults including rape, theft and gender inequities. The authors created Poni's worldview in the hopes that a connection can be made between young adults who read this story and the young adult who is telling the story.

The promises of a white woman to get Poni to a nun along with her drive to be a successful, well-educated woman who does not kneel at the feet of her husband is what keeps Poni going throughout the story. Readers are not only entranced by Poni's perseverance, but are given the opportunity to see the first-hand tribulations of a young woman who is orphaned and how she pushes beyond these challenges in order to be successful. DeLuca and Bassoff give a realistic viewpoint on how the West, as well as white individuals, have a powerful privilege--especially in a place like the Sudan. Not a subliminal message at all, the reader is forced to see how being white has an advantage in this world as whiteness grants power.

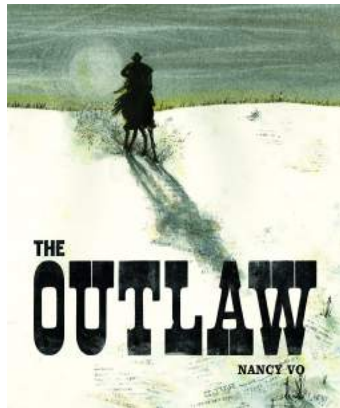
Lost Girl Found provides insight to the struggles of Sudanese women and how their roles in rebuilding the government of Sudan are just as important as the men. It is no surprise that this book, albeit a fictional tale produced from the culmination of many stories of Sudanese women, is the winner of the Colorado Book Award for Young Adult Literature, an ALA Notable Children's Book, a USSBY Outstanding International Book, and a Parents' Choice Award for Fiction (Gold). This novel would be appropriate for students who want to have a realistic view on the world, especially in the area of current events. This book would fit well in a text set or a unit plan around global inequities, power injustices, race relations or perseverance. Young adult novels often show a male protagonist overcoming adversities in a time of great difficulty, such as the character Eli in the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel (2006) or Arn in *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick (2013). This book emphasizes the importance of female endurance in similar, yet unique circumstances. *Lost Girl Found* would make a notable and distinct addition to any classroom looking to include a non-traditional point of view on conflict.

The authors are both activists and have a focus on the empowerment, acknowledgement and

improvement of the lives of the Lost Girls of Sudan. When Bassoff presented at a Denver conference in 2007 that brought together female Sudanese refugees from around the world, Deluca was there for research. This connection created the opportunity to connect with and hear the stories from some of the female refugees permitted into the United States. Deluca and Bassoff soon discovered that of the nearly 4,100 refugees resettled into the United States in 1999, only 89 of those refugees were female. It is apparent through Poni's story that the women who contributed to this character's generation went through similar, yet untold horror stories of being a woman in war-torn Sudan. Deluca and Bassoff's description of Poni's experiences and willpower to survive is vivid and realistic, thus giving the reader an opportunity to see life through those tired, yet determined, eyes.

The Author's Note creates an opportunity to learn about Poni and how this character came to fruition. Deluca and Bassoff state that Poni "is a created, composite character, but she is based on the resiliency and perseverance of all the women we spoke with. These women possess a determination to survive, get an education, and give back to their nation--a determination that inspired and continues to inspire us." The authors also have chosen to dedicate all of the proceeds of *Lost Girl Found* to Africare, a charity that strives to improve the quality of life for Africans. They encourage readers to go to Africare.org to learn more about this organization.

Amanda Szwed, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



The Outlaw

Written and Illustrated by Nancy Vo

Groundwood Books, 2018, 42 pp.

ISBN: 9781773060163

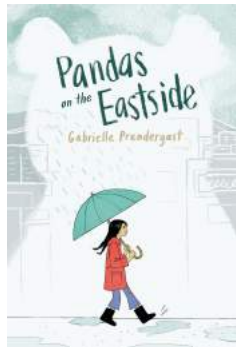
Set in the Old West, this picturebook tells of a town terrorized by the regular appearance of an outlaw and his deeds. Eventually, he ceases to visit the town and fear subsides. Enter another character who engages in acts that improve and repair the small town, such as mending roofs, building needed horse troughs and repairing railway ties. One image reveals a young boy with bread and sausages running from a woman; the turn of the page reveals an implicit story of the stranger supporting the boy as the food has been returned to the woman. Eventually, someone recognizes the stranger as the outlaw and the fear returns as a crowd gathers to cast blame. The young boy stands up for the former outlaw and demands of the adults, "Leave him alone. He's trying." Eventually the crowds disperse and the stranger "continued to make amends." The somewhat passive ending leaves readers reflective of the final words, "And maybe that was what mattered in the end"--an open ending that begs thoughtfulness about the difficulty and ultimate purpose of making restitutions.

The striking illustrations are created with ink, watercolor and transfer of newspaper clippings and fabric patterns from the mid-1800s scattered subtly on each page. The neutral and sepia images focus on the simplicity of the acts and the sleepy nature of the town. The sparse text and use of white space add meaning to reading the illustrations that capture the characters, context and tone of this story.

In an interview with Heather Camlot, Canadian Nancy Vo describes her beginnings in children's book illustration as inspired by Jon Klassen. The main character in *The Outlaw*, she shares, is modeled after the Eli Sisters in *The Sisters Brothers* (Patrick deWitt, 2011). Vo researched the setting of *The Sisters Brothers*, 1850s Oregon and California at the height of the Gold Rush, as she created illustrations of pen and watercolor with "acetone transfers, which allowed her to transpose period textile patterns, bottle labels and reprinted newspaper clippings" (www.quillandquire.com). With degrees in chemistry, fine arts and architecture, Nancy Vo currently works as a facility planner while drawing and illustrating at night.

As a new creator of children's books, her illustrative style can be seen on her website (www.nancyvo.com). *The Ranger*, scheduled for fall of 2019, is an upcoming companion picturebook to *The Outlaw* and she is currently planning yet another, *The Priest*, to follow. Until these books arrive, other books to pair include *Each Kindness* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2012) that supports discussion about remorse, kindness and opportunities to make amends vs opportunities lost. *The Outlaw* can be paired with books on bullying such as *The Juice Box Bully: Empowering Kids to Stand Up for Others* (Sornson, 2010) in which a would-be bully is shown a different way to act by his friends. This book also reveals the importance of standing up for others, as did the child in *The Outlaw*.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



Pandas on the Eastside

Written by Gabrielle Predergast

Published by Orca Books, 2016, 172 pp

ISBN: 978-1-4598-1143-0

In 1972 the Chinese government shipped two giant pandas, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, to the people of the United States as gifts. This historical fiction novel is based on the premise that the traveling pandas are in danger as the relationship between China and the U.S. deteriorates. The author, Gabrielle Predergast, tells this unknown history through the perspective of 10-year-old Journey Wind Song, who attempts to save two pandas from a warehouse in her beloved and poverty-stricken neighborhood in Vancouver and get them to their intended home at the zoo in Washington D.C. She does so by relying on the many interpersonal connections she built with others in the Eastside community. In essence, this is a story of a young girl's community activism.

Journey Song's story starts with her thoughts on her community. "Some people call the Eastside a slum. That's because they are describing buildings and roads instead of people" (p.1). The Eastside community has all types of marginalized people (i.e. the homeless, alcohol-addicts, schizophrenics, hardworking-yet-poor people etc.). However, Journey calls them friends who share with her interesting things like the best swearwords, drug names, and dimes to buy pop-sicles. Journey also describes her racial identity by saying that her black hair and golden brown skin lead people to think she belongs to a golden brown ethnic group. For example, Kentucky Jack says Journey looks like a pure "Indian" on the "rez" and Kellie Rae says, "Aloha" because Journey looks like a Hawaiian princess and sometimes even Journey's mom, Bird, says, "Scheherazade" to her. Journey learns her father is black and a Cuban photojournalist when he shows up in her neighborhood.

Historical fiction about 1970s global contexts is not as common as 1940s WW II in children's literature in the U.S. In the 1970s, North America experienced great changes in social values and norms. Predergast illustrates 70s turmoil through the stories of community members and Journey's understandings of each person on the Eastside in Vancouver, Canada. Predergast's ability to develop intriguing characters within a little-known history is well crafted with her sense of humor, and Journey's Eastside community is full of stories that invite audiences to think of social values and morals of the times. Such social norms and mindsets link to what people resist accepting.

Journey's interpretations of her neighbors show the perspectives and outdated morals in the 70s and how they challenge the status quo. For example, Journey's teacher is Miss Bickerstaff. Miss Bickerstaff's family does not like her boyfriend Ben because he has the "wrong" skin color and he doesn't want to fight in the Vietnam War. The Eastside community may dislike the fact Miss Bickerstaff lives with her boyfriend, yet the Eastside has no other teacher for their "slum" community. Journey's friend Nancy cannot read or write English words, but she reads Chinese language, not realizing that as literacy. Predergast also shares social knowledge with readers through Mr. Huang's cultural identity. There are many languages in China and he cannot under-

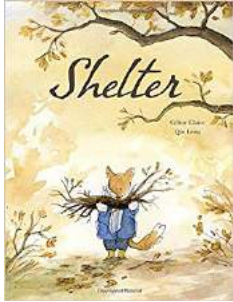
stand the Cantonese language the Panda Boat crew speak. In other words, not all Chinese people can understand each other in one language, challenging surface level social knowledge about new immigrants. Other unique and good-hearted characters make this story joyful and charming. It reminds one of *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo (2001). This historical fiction was nominated for multiple short lists and Canadian children's book awards including:

- Short List for the Diamond Willow Award
- Ontario Library Association (OLA) Best Bets for 2017
- Short List for the Red Cedar Book Award
- Short List for the Chocolate Lily Book Award
- Finalist for the Vancouver Book Award

It can be paired with other books about urban neighborhoods such as Elizabeth Laird's (2003) *The Garbage King*, Jon Muth's (2008) *Zen Ties*, and Carole Weatherford's (2015) *Sugar Hill: Harlem's Historic Neighborhood*. These books are contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction. Another useful theme to pair would be interpersonal relationships in 1970s neighborhoods. Books like *Inside Out Back Again* by Thanhá Lai (2013) and Wendy Wan-Long Shang's (2015) *The Way Home Looks Now* will make good additions to books about young children's agency and community interpersonal relationships.

In the author's note, Gabrielle Prendergast shares this little-known global history. She notes, "The relationship between the US and China in 1972 was somewhat fraught, the US embroiled in the Vietnam War, and China deeply entrenched in communism and anti-American sentiment" (Author's Note). The author's acknowledgement page indicates Journey's Eastside story was inspired by the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she currently lives. The authenticity of urban community life is thoughtfully pursued through the author's experiences and acknowledgement that such urban communities have diverse members, including "artists, business owners, families, new arrivals, students and professionals" (no pg). Prendergast pursues her intention to cast "a gentler and more understanding light of urban areas" (np) through a 10-year-old girl's perspective while reflecting her own observations and research on urban city cultures.

Yoo Kyung Sung, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM



Shelter

Written by Celine Clair

Illustrated by Qin Leng

Published by Kids Can Press, 2017, 42 pp

ISBN: 978-1-177138-927-3

Shelter is a picturebook for our times, illustrating the universal theme of how caring for others is vital. The simple story starts, "It's morning. And as the day stirs, the animals do too." At breakfast everyone catches up on the latest news. When a bird goes from home to home with the news, "A STORM IS COMING!" the animals set to work provisioning their homes with food and firewood. When the wind begins to pick up, they are ready to survive the storm. Only Little Fox wonders, "What if others are still outside?" Soon two bear brothers, one small and the other grown, emerge from the fog, walking towards the animals' homes. "Everyone watches them from their windows and wonders: What are these strangers? What are they doing here? What do they want?" Then the brothers knock, asking to share the warmth, food or light. Each family turns them away, saying they have no fire, no food and no light, and the bears should "try next door." The illustrations in ink and watercolor reveal each animal family is lying. After the brothers are turned away, they try to find shelter from the storm. Little Fox goes out in the storm and gives them a lantern. The snow starts to fall and there is enough for the brothers to make a cozy igloo. Meanwhile, the fox den collapses. The foxes save themselves, but are thrust out into the storm. Little Fox is able to grab a jar of cookies. Then he sees a light and the family follows that light, the lantern that Little Fox gave the bear brothers. Little Fox asks, "In exchange for some cookies would you share your shelter with us?" The brothers invite them in, offering to share their tea and they use the cookies for dipping. The last illustration shows the two families gathered around the lantern enjoying tea and cookies.

Qin Leng's illustrations embrace and enhance the story with pictures that show the cold and icy nature of the storm, but also the warm and cozy homes of the animals when they are ready for the storm. Leng uses white effectively as background when she shows several pictures of the busy animals on one page. Subtle colors highlight other pages where an individual scene is shown. The final image of the two families sharing food and shelter extends the loving message of the story. The raging wind and heavy snow fall provide the background for the scene of the two families gathered around the light and enjoying tea and cookies together. The last words provide a satisfying ending, "And that is how two strangers come to share their humble shelter on a storm winter's night when the moon could not be seen."

Celine Claire lives in a small village in France where she taught elementary school. While she has written many books for children, *Shelter*, a Charlotte Huck Award for Fiction recommended book for 2017, is the first to be translated into English. The illustrator, Qin Leng, has illustrated many books. She was born in Shangahi, lived in France, and now currently lives in Toronto, Canada, where she works as an animation designer. That experience is demonstrated in her illustrations where the animals engage in lively activities.

Shelter is an excellent read-aloud. The story is primarily for young children in preschool through

second grade. However, it has possibilities for all ages in exploring and evaluating moral values. Reading it aloud to a variety of age groups would provide an opportunity to explore the theme of caring for others.

Several other books also feature this theme. Sharing them as a textset would allow even more opportunities for consideration and discussion. The following titles would work in a textset: *Wolf In the Snow* by Matthew Cordell (2017) was the Caldecott Winner for 2018; *Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown (1947) was a Caldecott Honor Book from 1948; and finally, *Love* by Matt de la Pena (2018) would other books to pair with *Shelter*.

Marilyn Carpenter, Literature Consultant, Spokane, WA



Vacío

Written and Illustrated by Anna Llenas

Published by Barbara Fiore Editora, 2013, 76 pp

ISBN-13: 978-8415208723

While children experience a wide spectrum of human emotion, the intensity and frequency varies by individual. School contexts often introduce emotions in isolated ways. Although separation can support exploration, life

takes a more integrated approach, and one event can trigger an emotional journey that begins with a sense of *Vacío*... emptiness.

Julia was a happy girl, until one day everything went away, leaving her a big "vacío." Her "vacío" was huge; cold came through it, and monsters emerged from it. She tried to fill it with food, social media and medicine, but nothing helped. In a moment of extreme frustration and tiredness, Julia collapsed and cried without comfort until falling asleep. Suddenly, a voice coming from the ground told her to look through her "vacío." When she did, she saw and felt colors, melodies and magic worlds that gave her a sense of connection to herself, to others and to nature. She began approaching people differently and noticed that they also had their own "vacíos" and wonderful worlds. Julia's "vacío" started to shrink, but rather than disappearing, it remained as a window into Julia's magical worlds; a reminder of the importance of feeling connected to the world.

Vacío can provide a safe space to inquire about the range of emotions that emerge from the complex, and at times, traumatic experiences framing the lives of many young children. Whether Julia's "vacío" was caused by death, change, illness, natural disaster or war, readers will be able to connect to the emotions that Julia experiences, including sadness, loneliness, anger, despair, anxiety, grief, distraction, etc. The "vacío" is portrayed as a human experience that supports Julia discovering the power of two often-overlooked experiences: silence and connection. These two become essential elements in restoring individual and collective balance and hope. Julia's ability to re-connect allows her to continue developing as a spiritual and resilient being.

There is abundant literature that addresses emotions and feelings for young children, but a limited number of children's books that explore socio-emotional disabilities. While not suggesting that Julia is experiencing a disability, *Vacío's* story line can encourage conversations around the idea of "being or feeling normal" and the approaches characters take while "going back to normal." This is also an exciting book to explore the role of loss, grief and emptiness from the individual, as well as a community, perspective. Readers will find similar plots in *The Princess and the Fog*, by Lloyd Jones (2012) and the *Red Tree*, by Shaun Tan (2001). The pattern of main female characters in these texts can foster explorations around the intersection between gender, age, culture and socio-emotional development.

The collage artistic style of the illustrations show Julia's journey of finding a way to feel better. This search leads her to consider different alternatives, including a Martini cocktail and a plug "aparentemente bueno," depicted as a young and muscular male who just graced a gold medal.

While these options might turn on the "appropriateness" radar in the context of the United States, in the socio-cultural context of Spain, *Vacío* has been acknowledged as a story that can support students' education in "valores" (positive character traits). This layer of complexity can create spaces to inquire about cultural values and ideologies in written and pictorial texts; a reminder that children's books, as well as notions of appropriateness, are culturally grounded and situated. Books by renowned British children's author Babette Cole will surely enhance these kinds of explorations.

Anna Llenas is a graphic designer from Barcelona, Spain who publishes in Catalan and Spanish. *Vacío* represents "el vacío existencial," an existential emptiness that sometimes results from the loss of a beloved object, person, place, territory or even a dream. Her artistic mixed technique integrates an acrylic base with cardboard, paper and strings. Llenas' collage cartoon-style illustrations have given life to other characters exploring emotional journeys, such as *Topito terremoto* (2017), *El monstruo de colores* (2012) and *Què et passa Miola?* (2011). Further information can be found at www.annallenas.com

Vacío can be further paired with other books by Anna Llenas. It can also be part of a text set about loss and grief, with titles such as *A Bug in a Vacuum*, by Melanie Watt (2015) and *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me*, by Daniel Beaty (2013). Another potential pair could be with stories that explore interconnectedness, like *Love*, by Matt De La Peña (2018) and *You Are Stardust*, by Elin Kelsey (2012).

Maria Acevedo, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA