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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME I, ISSUE 4

Summer 2009
Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume I, Issue 4

Summer 2009

Open Theme

Table of Contents

Introduction and Editor's Note	2-3
<i>Artie and Julie</i>	4-5
<i>The Book Thief</i>	6-7
<i>The Braid</i>	8-9
<i>Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom</i>	10-11
<i>The Fold</i>	12-13
<i>Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle Under Castro</i>	14-15
<i>Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit</i>	16-18
<i>Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You</i>	19-20
<i>Reaching Out</i>	21-22

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Introduction and Editor's Note

WOW Review invites readers to the fourth issue of its first volume. Rich with insights to books you may have read or will want to add to your summer reading list, this issue's theme of "Through the Eyes of a Child: Resiliency and Hope across Cultures" offers a universal glimpse of the strength of children across many nations. Naturally, the perspective presented in much literature for young readers is that of a childhood protagonist; and, while this is appealing to children and adolescents, it also provides insights into childhood across the globe for readers of all ages, insights that may prove quite different from the ideological childhood expectations of many citizens of western nations. Literature that depicts the challenges of childhood can offer fresh insight into the potential of children everywhere—insight into the resiliency of children whose stories are told in these books but also insight into the potential for children outside such experiences to critically read and develop understandings about children of other nations. Such insights are the fabric of future citizens of a democratic and caring global society.

The children you will meet in the 4th issue of WOW Review come from a range of times and places. In the midst of World War II Germany, Liesel, the main character in *The Book Thief*, leaves her family to hide from the Nazis and finds solace and escape from loneliness in books. *The Braid* reveals the inner strength of two sisters who are separated when the family emigrates from Scotland to Nova Scotia during the Highland Clearances of the mid-19th century. *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom* tells the story of Little Mo and Martha Tom and the friendship that resulted in the Choctaw tribe of Martha Tom helping Little Mo's family and other escaping slaves to freedom. In a contemporary setting, Joyce, the Korean-American protagonist in *The Fold*, deals valiantly with the challenges of teenage life and her identity struggles within a diverse society. Eduardo Calcines shares his resilience growing up in Castro's Cuba in *Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle Under Castro*. This autobiography relates the significance of family in trying times as does the autobiographical account of Francisco Jiménez in *Reaching Out*, a book that offers a hopeful glimpse of education as a way to move out of poverty and into a successful career. *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* introduces readers to Jeanne whose memoir of coming of age during the genocide in Rwanda reaffirms the strength of young people in dire situations. And, even in the world of fantasy, young readers can observe resilient and hopeful spirits in the unlikely friendship of a young lion and rabbit in the wild in *Artie and Julie*. Also, *Moribito*, an epic medieval fantasy set in an Asian context, shares the survival of Chagum, a royal child whose own father was seeking to kill him. While the main focus is on the strong female warrior and body-guard, Balsa, Chagum's role and endurance is significant as the bearer of the "egg of the water spirit."

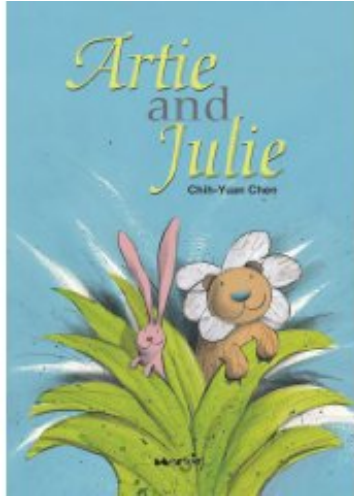
As you take time to meet our hopeful and resilient youthful characters who represent diverse eras and areas of the world, perhaps you will be inspired to respond to the insights presented here or share your own favorite resilient child. Your responses are appreciated! WOW also invites you to submit a review of an international book. The call for submissions for Volume II provides the guidelines as well as the focus for upcoming issues. We accept reviews on an ongoing basis and look forward to your submissions and comments.

Janelle B. Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

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Artie and Julie

Written and Illustrated by Chih-Yuan Chen

Heryin, 2008

ISBN: 978-0-9787-5503-4

Artie, a young lion, lives in a hill with his mother and father who tell him that he will grow to be a ferocious lion. One day, Artie's father says that he is old enough to find food (i.e., delicious rabbits) for himself in the grasslands. Before Artie ventures out, his father instructs him on what rabbits look like, how to move silently, and how to roar loudly. Living in the ground just below Artie's family is Julie, a young rabbit, and her family. Julie's father tells her that she will grow to be a clever rabbit who outsmarts

lions. Before Julie goes out to find food for herself for the first time, her father teaches her what lions look like, how to jump high and run fast, and how to listen for tiny sounds. Simultaneously, Artie and Julie set off from home and end up in the jellyberry patch, unbeknown to each other. When it starts to rain, they both run into a cave where they meet and become fast friends. Julie learns that not all lions are ferocious and Artie learns that not all rabbits get scared. They spend the afternoon playing together, with Artie learning how to jump like a rabbit and Julie learning how to roar. When they say good-bye and head home, they each share about their new friend with their surprised parents.

Chen cleverly designed the book to highlight the parallel stories that come together and then separate again. When the book begins, the pages are split across the center, with Artie's story being told on the upper pages and Julie's on the lower. Readers can choose to read the two stories individually or concurrently. When Artie and Julie come together in the cave, their story is told on full pages that split again when they say good-bye and go to their separate homes. While the split pages make the book difficult to share with large groups of children, this story of unusual friendship is appealing to all. This book was originally published in Taiwan where two different Chinese versions are available. The stories begin in the same way but Artie and Julie's adventures in the middle and the endings of the stories are different. The United States edition, reviewed here, draws on aspects of both of the Chinese stories.

Chen grew up in Taiwan and lives there today. The strong family support and security he felt growing up comes through in this book and in his other books. In *Artie and Julie*, Chen uses a variety of media, including watercolors, pastiche, and pencil, to create his playful characters and scenes. His use of rubbings, cut paper, and paint splattering add richness to his work. Many illustrations have animal families in smaller scenes, which add to the joy the book offers. The front and back endpapers show Artie and Julie in the grasslands, which they learn about but never reach in the book.

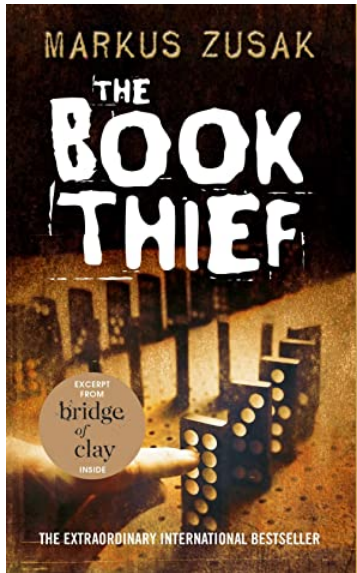
Artie and Julie invites discussions about making friends with others who are different. This book would work well in a text set that could include *Yo! Yes?* (Raschka, 1993), *Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship* (Hatkiff, Hatkoff & Kahumbu, 2006), and *Little Beauty* (Browne, 2008). For students interested in moving to more complex discussions, books such as *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom* (Tingle, 2008) and *A Good Night for Freedom* (Morrow, 2003) would work well.

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The Book Thief

Written by Markus Zusak
Knopf, 2006, 576 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-375-83100-3

The Book Thief has a lot in common with *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In each, a young girl is forever changed by the events of World War II; both books illustrate the terror of living under Nazi rule; and both could be considered adult books due to their difficult subject matter. Anne Frank is a Dutch Jew who goes into hiding in Amsterdam, while the heroine of *The Book Thief*, Liesel Meminger, is a German citizen living in Molching, a small town outside of Munich. While Liesel doesn't experience the dread of being discovered by Nazis or the hopelessness of the concentration camps, she does experience the constant fear of being discovered by German authorities for hiding a

Jewish friend, and she empathizes with the Jews who are marched through Molching on the way to the camps. *The Book Thief* documents the gloom that many German citizens felt about what was happening in their neighborhoods, and the despair they felt while living under Nazi rule. Neither book is optimistic that the world will return to rightness, but *The Book Thief*, like *The Diary of Anne Frank*, leaves the reader with the knowledge that the human spirit can survive horrible times.

This touchingly funny and heartbreakingly sad novel contains many memorable characters: Hans, Liesel's foster father; Rosa, her foster mother who curses to show her love; Rudy, Liesel's best friend; and Max, the Jewish son of Hans' friend from the first world war who Hans decides to hide in their basement. It also has an unlikely narrator: Death. This Death is not a triumphant presence eagerly awaiting the opportunity to snatch humans from this life; this Death is instead worn down from the work the war has created for him. He first meets Liesel when she is traveling with her mother and younger brother to Molching, where she and her brother will live with a foster family; her brother dies on the train before they arrive. Death witnesses Liesel stealing her first book – a book on grave digging techniques dropped by one of the men who bury her brother by the side of the tracks. This Death is not scary, offering tips on living, insights into the characters, foreshadowing of things to come, and even comes away changed from knowing Liesel.

Liesel acquires several more books during the course of the story; some are gifts and some are stolen. Books provide an anchor for Liesel; the act of reading becomes a liberating event, even if the book isn't one she would choose for herself. Hans helps her overcome her loneliness by reading with her late into the night. When she and Rudy have the opportunity to steal from the rich mayor's wife, she chooses to steal not food, not shoes, but a book. While living in their basement, Max spends his time painting over the pages of a copy of Mein Kampf and rewriting the book to give Liesel hope for a better future. During air raids, Liesel reads books to the frightened neighbors cowering in the bomb shelter to calm them. At the end of the story, Liesel is saved from the bombing that destroys her neighborhood by the book she has decided to write to document her experiences.

Markus Zusak was born in Australia to an Australian father and German mother. He grew up listening to his mother's stories of her experiences as a child in a small German town, surviving the bombings and watching as Jews were marched to the concentration camps. He wrote *The Book Thief* to allow readers to witness another side of Germany during World War II, one where not all Germans belonged to the Nazi party and where some German citizens were willing to defy Hitler and risk their lives for their Jewish friends.

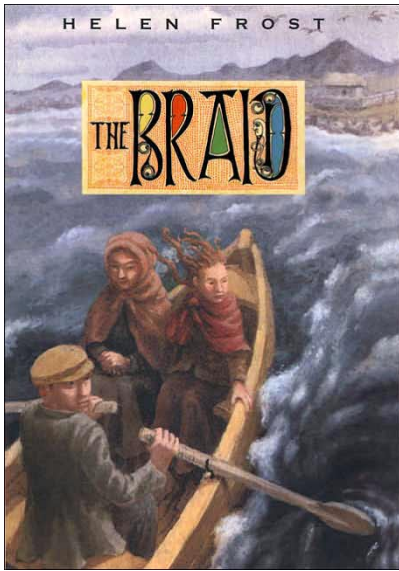
While *The Book Thief* could provide an interesting contrast with the experiences of Anne Frank and her family, it could also be read along with two books that document the experiences of German citizens during the war. Both are by Susan Bartoletti: *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler's Shadow* (2005) and *The Boy Who Dared* (2008). The first is a historical account that documents the German youth movement and follows several young people as they get caught up in it; the second is a fictional account of one of those boys, Helmuth Hübener, a young German who joined Hitler's Youth only to become disillusioned with the Nazi party. He was eventually executed for his support of the German resistance. These books allow readers to learn about the experiences of German citizens, not all of whom were willing members of Hitler's regime.

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The Braid

Written by Helen Frost

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006, 88 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-374-30962-6

“Mussels in that bay we’re told, are bait of English fishermen, not food for Scottish children like ourselves.”

A historical novel told through the interweaving of narrative and praise poems, *The Braid* is set toward the end of the Highland Clearances. This story presents one experience out of the thousands involving Highlanders who were moved off the land they farmed and tended, but did not own, so

sheep could be raised for greater English profit. Told in the alternating voices of two sisters, readers follow the struggles of one family separated by the Atlantic Ocean when one of the sisters decides to stay with their grandmother in Scotland while the other ventures with the rest of the family to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. At the beginning of the novel, both sisters are expected to leave. The night before the boat sets sail, 15 year-old Sarah playfully braids their hair together, making both girls laugh. As 14 year-old Jeannie sleeps, Sarah cuts off the braid and leaves half for her sister as she slips away to hide so that she can’t be forced from her homeland. Through short excerpts, the story shows how both sisters, and by extension other members of the family, learn to live in their new environments—Sarah in Scotland, on the small island of Mingulay, and Jeannie in Cape Breton. The braid becomes the central motif of those who are both woven together by love, but separated by distance and circumstance.

Written in short excerpts divided by the praise poems, *The Braid* is a middle grade novel that will encourage readers to question not only the reasons for immigration, but the ways in which people are treated even when they have been residents of a place for generations. The characters of Sarah and Jeannie are well developed and allow young readers to think about the place of family, the necessity of relocation, and the possibility and pain of new beginnings. A novel ultimately about courage, the power of family, and the pain of separation, *The Braid* brings to life the opportunity for readers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of immigration, both historic and current, and of the variety of reasons for emigrating. Thematically, other texts that could be used on a unit about immigration would include *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2006), *Kezzie* (Breslin, 2002), *La Línea* (Jaramillo, 2002), *A Step from Heaven* (Na (2003), and *Grab Hands and Run* (Temple, 1995). An excellent use of narrative and praise poems, the forms of which are explained in the author’s notes, *The Braid* will also inspire young readers to try these forms for their own enjoyment.

Helen Frost relied upon the experience of her great-great grandparents’ immigration for the genesis of her story. Working with consultants from Cape Breton and exploring the island of Mingulay, Frost brings her family’s story to life for young adolescents who have little or no knowledge of the Highlands or the potato famine that caused the historic immigration numbers of the mid-19th

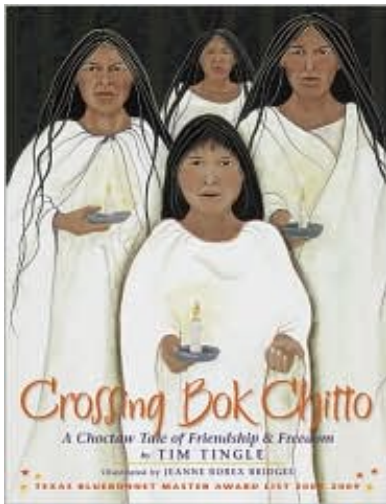
century. Frost includes a brief explanation of the events of the Highland Clearances, but readers of *The Braid* will want to know more about the time period and the two settings of Cape Breton and the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.

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Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom

Written by Tim Tingle

Illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges

Cinco Puntos, 2008, 40 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-933-69320-0

Bok Chitto is a river that runs through Mississippi. In the 1800s, Choctaw Indians lived on one side and on the other side were plantation owners and their slaves. If a slave escaped and crossed the Bok Chitto River, the slave was free. Although a young Choctaw girl named Martha Tom knows better than to cross the Bok Chitto River, one day she disobeys her mother and crosses while searching for blackberries. Now lost, Martha Tom stumbles upon a secret meeting of

members of a black church in the Mississippi woods. An enslaved black father instructs his youngest son, Little Mo, to help Martha Tom find her way back to the river. So begins the friendship between Little Mo and Martha Tom, who continues to cross the river. Several years later, Little Mo's mother discovers that she is scheduled to be sold and separated from her family. The situation seems hopeless, until Martha Tom and the Choctaw women help Little Mo's family walk across the Bok Chitto River to their freedom.

Extensive endnotes provide information about Choctaw history, storytelling traditions and the background of author Tim Tingle. Tim Tingle is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Tim's great-great grandfather (John Carnes) walked the Trail of Tears in 1835. It was his telling of this event that spurred Tingle's interest in storytelling and writing. Tim is now a sought-after storyteller and award-winning author. *Crossing Bok Chitto* was written as a tribute to the Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Seminoles and Indians of every nation who aided runaway people of bondage. As an insider, Tim Tingle provides literary excellence, cultural identity and authenticity. His writing flows with the rhythm and ease of oral tradition. The characters in *Crossing Bok Chitto* belong to the Choctaws and focus on the Mississippi Band. The customs and ceremonies described in the story have been passed down through the oral tradition of that tribe.

The illustrations by Jeanne Rorex Bridges appear realistic and authentic. Bridges is an award winning artist of Cherokee ancestry. She grew up in eastern Oklahoma on a farm. Attending Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, Bridges took classes in Indian art and learned the "flat style of painting" which originated by the Kiowa Five. Over the years, she has developed her own style which includes the basics of flat style painting while adding background work and shading, using many muted, softer colors. Flat style fits the historical and folkloric plot and setting of this story. Bridges uses acrylics on watercolor board paintings to create bold, mural-like illustrations that seem like portraits. Strong, emotion-filled, solid figures stare out at the reader. The scenes are large and clearly drawn so even students in the back of the classroom will be able to see as the story is being read aloud.

After evaluating *Crossing Bok Chitto*, it is clear to see why it was chosen as the 2008 American Indian Youth Services Literature Picture Book Award Winner. In both the writing and illustrations, this picture book authentically presents Native Americans, specifically the Mississippi Band of Choctaw

Indians, in the fullness of their humanity in the past. Paired with books such as *Almost to Freedom* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson (2003), *Night Boat to Freedom* by Margot Theis Raven (2006), and *Freedom River* by Doreen Rappaport (2000), young readers can further explore the issue of escaping slavery and friendship.

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The Fold

Written by An Na
Putnam, 2008, 288 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-399-24276-2

Books about Korean Americans often focus on the identity crisis between Korean and American identities or introduce struggling immigrant families. An Na's previous novels, *A Step from Heaven* (2001, the Printz Award Winner) and *Wait for Me* (2006), fall into the later category, but her third novel *The Fold* (2008) makes a shift from these common topics.

Joyce is from a Korean immigrant family who owns a Korean restaurant. On the last day of her junior year in high school, Joyce wishes to get JFK's (John Ford Kang) signature in her year book. However, it's not even easy for her to look at his eyes. Her heart

beats fast in front of him because he is so cute. Gathering her courage, she gets JFK's signature, but not only does JFK not know who Joyce is, he confuses her with another Korean girl who is not pretty at all. It's all about the Korean eyes, Joyce thinks. She hates her narrow and slanted Korean eyes that cannot get JFK's attention. When her Gomo (aunt) offers Joyce the possibility of plastic surgery, Joyce starts researching eye surgery. If she has bigger and rounder eyes like Americans, will she have more confidence to talk to JFK? Will she be happier? Will her life change? Life seems unfair for Joyce because her beautiful sister Helen has everything. Helen has good looks, a brain, and a promising future. She always gets to use the car and uses the excuse of a "meeting" to get out of work at their parents' restaurant. Joyce never gets to use the car and works at the restaurant all the time. Joyce does not know what is really going on with Helen or what she is going through as a closeted lesbian. On her journey, Joyce grows and discovers herself and her love for her sister.

An Na depicts current Korean and Korean-American culture with her rich detailed words through Joyce's eyes. An Na's descriptions are not from her own imagination. All of the characters are real. Not every Korean woman gets her eyes done, but it is true that eye surgery is the most popular plastic surgery among young Korean women. Like Joyce's mom, middle aged Korean women are getting permanent eye brows or eye lines from unlicensed medical personal for a cheaper price. Along with the plastic surgery trend, the Korean society's attitude towards homosexuality seems accurately described. Helen provides a hot topic of gossip to other Koreans because she is a lesbian. Homosexuality has not been welcomed or openly discussed in public yet in Korean society. It is rare to find gay, lesbian, transgender, or bi-sexual characters in books about Korea or Korean Americans. In fact, *The Fold* is possibly the first book that has a homosexual character in children/young adult literature about Korea and Korean Americans published in the U.S.

Teenagers will easily sympathize with Joyce no matter what their ethnicity. They will find similar interests, such as getting boys' attention, concerns about their appearance, and not knowing what they want in life. Another good book with a middle school age character and a similar topic is *Slant* (Williams, 2008). Teachers will find that *The Fold* offers important discussion topics for students,

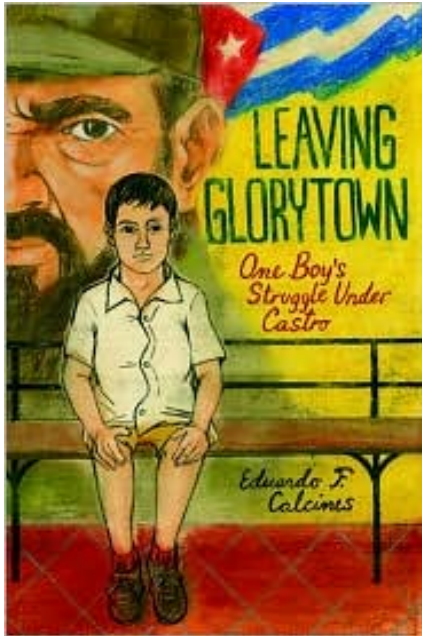
such as what it means to be beautiful, how different ethnic people can be beautiful in their own way, what is most important in life, what it means to be a lesbian in our society, and other related issues. For more information about An Na, visit her website www.anwriting.com.

Jongsun Wee, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

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Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle under Castro

Written by Eduardo F. Calcines

Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2009, 221 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-374-34394-1

In this memoir, Eduardo Calcines shares how, as a child, he had to deal with the harsh realities of daily life in Communist Cuba. In January 1959 when Fidel Castro comes to power, Eduardo is a three year-old living on San Carlos Street in the barrio of Glorytown in the city of Cienfuegos. He has the special love of his Abuelo Julian and Abuela Ana who spoil him and protect the boy when his mother gets angry. Aunts, uncles, and neighbors congregate around the Calcines home. Eduardo has countless cousins and friends with whom to play. Holidays like Noche Buena at Christmastime are feasts of food, dancing, and laughter. But on that holiday in 1961, a gang of henchmen invade the party and call the family members

“worms,” traitors to Castro’s cause; the ensuing brawl signals the end of an era. Shortly after, Cubans are no longer allowed public meetings.

Eduardo becomes more and more aware of the hardships his family faces under Castro’s government. Food is rationed; his mother stands in long lines for dry bread, tins of Russian horsemeat, and a bit of sugar. Eduardo’s father, Felo, is not a Communist and speaks out loudly against the regime. The Calcines begin to talk of emigrating. To do so they must leave behind their beloved family and friends and never return to their home country. They will also suffer persecution by the government until their exit visa is granted. Eduardo is seriously harassed and humiliated by his teachers and classmates. Felo is sent to a prison camp where he works the fields 14 or 15 hours a day.

This discrimination and suffering is counterbalanced by Eduardo’s dreams and his family’s stories. Eduardo imagines that in the land of blond people, the United States, there are giant hams, nice neighborhoods, a place where his father will have a good job and where kids never get into fights. Abuela Ana and Eduardo’s father Felo tell funny and tender stories that ease the pain of the family’s suffering. One of Abuela’s often repeated stories is about how she once spared an intruder the loss of his fingers by intentionally striking the floor with her machete rather than cutting his hands. Felo’s best stories are about his own difficult childhood; he dropped out of school in the third grade when his father died and went to work. Felo also tells sweet stories like the one about his courtship of Eduardo’s mother. All of these stories within the story communicate values and messages of compassion and hard work, and the importance of God, family, and country.

Calcines’ memoir draws to a close when the long-awaited telegram arrives, giving the family permission to leave the country. Fortunately, this happens just before Eduardo’s fifteenth birthday when he would have been drafted into the Cuban army. The wrenching parting scenes and a heart-stopping moment when an official claims there are no seats for them on the airplane will engender empathy in readers. Some will come to understand the conflicting emotions of many immigrants,

some of whom would rather stay in their home countries if they had a choice. The author's descriptions of neighborhood happenings are rich with culturally-specific details that paint a colorful portrait of this close-knit neighborhood. Readers will remember the unique characters of Glorytown and the high hopes Eduardo and his family have for their new life.

Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle under Castro raises issues of social class and forms of government. Readers learn little about what life was like for the Calcines and Espinosa families before Castro ascended to power. Conducting an investigation into previous Cuban leaders, such as dictator Batista, may invite readers' questions about why Cuba has been vulnerable to dictatorships. Educators can guide readers as they ask critical questions about access to power, justice and human rights for average citizens in Cuba and beyond. In the epilogue, Calcines tells about his life after his family's arrival in the U.S. Like many ex-patriot Cubans, he longs to return to his home country, to walk in his old neighborhood and see his long-lost friends. Students may ask why the author cannot visit the island of his childhood and want to learn more about Cuban/U.S. relations. Questions such as these may spark an inquiry that could be supported by current newspaper articles.

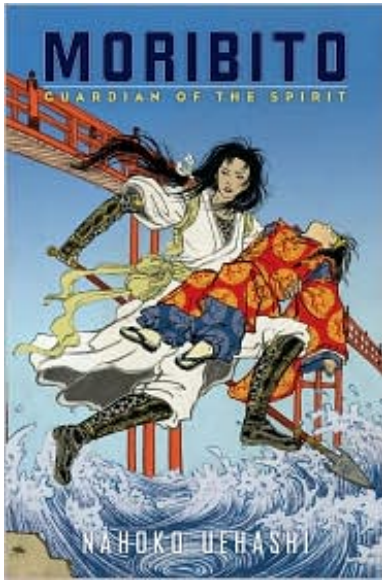
This memoir can be paired with other coming-of-age memoirs that are shaped by the politics of the times such as *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* by Zlata Filipovic (1994), *They Poured Fire On Us from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, with Judy Bernstein (2005), *Revolution is Not a Dinner Party* by Ying Chang Compestine (2007), and *Stealing Buddha's Dinner: A Memoir* by Bich Minh Nguyen (2007).

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Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit

Written by Nahoko Uehashi, translated by Cathy Hirano
Arthur A. Levin, 272 pp., 2008
ISBN: 978-0-545-00542-5

This Asian fantasy epic takes place in an imaginary country, New Yogo. The story starts with a female warrior's rescue of the Second Prince, Chagum, when he is nearly drowned in a river. Chagum's mother, the queen, hires Balsa as a bodyguard. Since Chagum is bearing an egg of the Water Spirit, his father, the king, attempts to kill Chagum in order to keep the secrets of the empire. Balsa and Chagum flee from the palace at night. While they travel across the country, they come to know about the spirit and the secret of the empire. If Chagum fails to carry the egg and deliver it to its home in the distant sea, New Yogo will have a serious drought. In this dangerous journey, Chagum and

Balsa hide themselves from the Egg-Eater, Rarunga, and the hunters who are hired by Chagum's own father. Chagum has to protect the egg until it hatches to save the empire from a drought that would last for over one hundred years.

Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit is a fantasy epic focused around Chagum's quest to safely deliver the egg. The plot of the story has several conflicts among characters, but the conflicts are seamlessly connected to each other. While finding the answer to the major dramatic question, readers can learn about Balsa's life and the secret of the empire. The story is believable because the details of the setting resemble Japan in the Middle Ages. The names of the characters and the places are from the languages of the imaginary world. Those names of characters and places are not contemporary Japanese, and the clothes of the characters on the book jacket do not seem to be Japanese traditional clothes. However, the culture depicted in the story is influenced by Japanese culture and lifestyle, as seen in some of the characters bathing in a hot spring, engaging in martial arts using a spear and swords, and interacting with the water spirit and the earth spirit.

The concepts of these extraordinary worlds are not easily understood, but the glossary of the characters, places, and terms are helpful. Until the end of the story, there is no clear explanation about why Chagum is carrying the egg in his chest. Uehashi's writing style is easy for young readers to read. While the main character is female, male readers will be drawn to the story due to the martial arts and adventure and girls will be attracted to the strong female protagonist. The themes of this story are a non-traditional family and a strong woman's rescue of a country. Chagum is a prince of New Yogo, but his own father attempts to kill him to keep the secrets of the kingdom. Instead of his family, his bodyguard, Balsa, and others protect and love him. The relationship between Chagum and Balsa is emotionally bonded and Balsa is portrayed as a mothering figure. Balsa's father was killed by the king of her country due to a secret. Balsa was raised by her father's friend. She learns that her foster father's destiny is similar to her own, and she eventually comes to understand him. Because of her difficult life, Balsa becomes a warrior even though women were not allowed to be warriors culturally or physically in her country. Her strong image and wisdom protect Chagum and eventually save the country. Traditionally, in Asian cultures, women have not been

portrayed as strong figures because of stereotypes, but the author is female and wanted to write about a strong, smart woman.

This book was originally published in Japan for Japanese readers. Uehashi did not intend to inform an outsider audience about Japanese culture, but readers can immerse themselves in a specific cultural experience through this story. In Japan there are many kinds of spirits, such as the water spirit and the earth spirit, and these are well-portrayed in the story. Other cultural experiences, such as bathing in a hot spring, riding in an ox-drawn carriage, and a warrior who looks like a samurai are depicted.

According to the author's note, Uehashi was inspired by a movie in which a woman saved a boy's life when they escaped from a burning bus. She wanted to write a story about a 30 year-old woman protecting a child. She came up with the bodyguard image before writing the story. That vision was drawn for the book jacket wherein Balsa is dressed like a warrior or wanderer and carrying a spear. She is holding a boy who does not look like her own son. This story is not based on experience, but Uehashi captured the images based on her imagination.

Uehashi is an author and professor at Kawamura Gakuen Women's University in Japan, which specializes in Australian aboriginal studies. She writes unique fantasy novels from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology. Because her field of study is cultural anthropology, she believes that people universally want to tell stories of any variety and kind and are interested in writing stories. Her career as a novelist began in 1989. *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* is an Asian fantasy epic, and this first book in the series was written in 1996. It is still expanding; so far she has published ten volumes of the Guardian series, which has received many awards in Japan. This book is popular among Japanese readers, and the Guardian series volumes have been recreated as mangas and animations.

Cathy Hirano has translated several Japanese books into English. She is a two-time Batchelder winner for *The Friends* (Yumoto, 1998) and *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* (Uehashi, 2008). The biggest change she made while translating *Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* was to add the founding myth of New Yogo. In the original, the myth was not related to the characters' actions and experiences. Uehashi wrote a new introductory section to weave the myth into the thoughts of the young star reader, Shuga (Ikegami, 2008). One of the challenges that Hirano faced was the different style of conversations by the characters in terms of differing social status (Ikegami, 2008). In the original, the Prince Chagum speaks in a formal and royal tone, but it is hard to express the tones in English. So, Hirano did not use the contraction in Chagum's speech in the beginning. As the book went along, the contractions were purposely used in Chagum's speech to show that he changes to speak in the everyday language of commoners. Hirano (2006) also wrote an article on the pleasures and difficulties of translating from Japanese into English.

Based on the theme of creating a non-traditional family with emotional bonds, this book could be used along with *Becoming Naomi León* (Ryan, 2005) and *The Graveyard Book* (Gaiman, 2008). Another way to utilize this text as cross-cultural experiences is to read it along with *The Friends* (Yumoto, 1998), *The Spring Tone* (Yumoto, 1999), and *The Letters* (Yumoto, 2002). These three books were originally published in Japan and translated into English by Cathy Hirano. These books show contemporary life styles and cultural experiences in Japan. The second book, *Moribito: Guardian of the Darkness*, is scheduled to be published in the United States.

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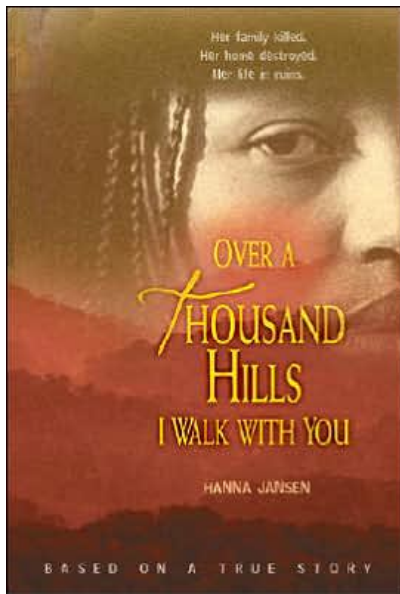
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Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You

Written by Hanna Jansen
Carolrhoda, 2002, 332 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-575-05927-3

“They were Tutsis. Jeanne knew now that all Tutsis were supposed to die. Without exception. But why?”

A memoir told by Jeanne d’Arc Umubyeyi through her adoptive mother, Hanna Jansen, *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* is an accounting of eight-year-old Jeanne’s experience of the genocide in Rwanda. As the sole survivor in her family of five, Jeanne was also one of the few who survived from Kibungo-Zaza, the town in which

she was born and raised. The story begins with Jeanne sharing her life as a child in her family’s compound, where she played with her two sisters and listened to the stories of her grandmother. As the story unfolds, readers follow Jeanne as she hears the rumors adults whisper about the violence growing around her and wonders what it means. Eventually the rumors become reality and Jeanne watches as her family succumbs to the violence targeting the Tutsi tribe within Rwanda. For two years, Jeanne is moved from place to place by caring adults who make sure she is not killed simply because of her heritage. Filled with intensity, pain, and hope, *Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You* is an account of one young girl’s struggle to understand and overcome the senselessness of genocide and war.

While a memoir, the text also includes the voice and observations of Hanna Jansen who gives readers a glimpse of Jeanne as the young girl attempts to reconcile her past and present. Readers will question the reasons for genocide, and why it continues to plague our world. They will get a glimpse of life in Rwanda before the Hutu uprising as well as how people respond to war and its aftermath. Because this is a memoir, readers will also ponder how often the very youngest are the greatest victims of war. A book about survival under the most dire of circumstances, *Over a Thousand Hills* creates a space for contemplating civil war, political unrest and its deadly results, and how to survive when most around you do not. Thematically, other texts that could be used on a unit about war and genocide could include any number of Holocaust texts along with *The Fighter* (Grief, 1998), *Zlata’s Diary* (Filipovic, 2006), and *Stolen Voices: Young People’s War Diaries from World War I to Iraq* (Filipovic, Challenger & Otunnu, 2006). A harrowing, two-year account from the life of the youngest of victims, *Over a Thousand Hills* will keep readers thoughtfully engaged long after they have finished the book.

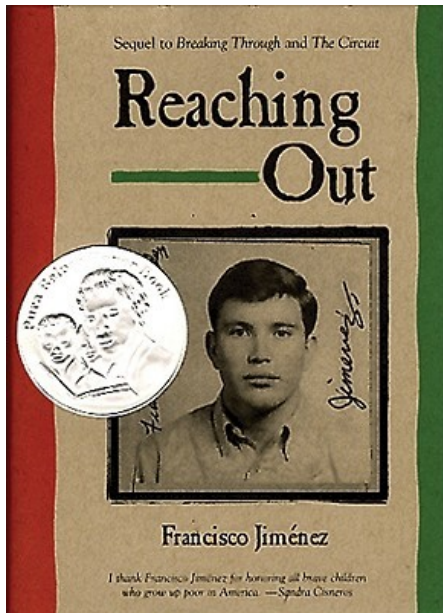
Hanna Jansen relayed this story as Jeanne wrestled with her own survival. Working from Jeanne’s memories, Jansen also includes a timeline of Rwandan history and a glossary of terms that include both French and indigenous phrases. Jansen and Jeanne live in Germany with 12 other family members, most of whom are war orphans.

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Reaching Out

Written by Francisco Jiménez
Houghton Mifflin, 2008, 208 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-618-03851-0

The first person narrator of *Reaching Out* is Francisco Jiménez, who realistically recounts his experiences as an underprivileged undergraduate student in this sequel to his two other memoirs, *The Circuit* (1999) and *Breaking Through* (2002). With the same clarity used in these previous books, Jiménez begins this autobiography by reminding readers of his close relationship to his family and introducing the internal conflicts that drive the decisions he makes throughout the novel—the need to reach out from the poverty and backbreaking work of his childhood and the extreme guilt and sadness of leaving behind the family that needs him.

Other conflicts are explored as Jiménez takes the reader from his family’s dilapidated migrant farm camp to the beautiful gardens and buildings on the campus of Santa Clara University. The juxtaposition of this setting reflects how drastically Francisco’s life has changed from when readers first met him through the stories of his childhood in a migrant family to his first year as a first-generation college student. Jiménez reminds the reader of his long hours of hard work as a janitor and diligent studying as a high school student that made his university opportunity possible, but he also portrays how under-prepared he felt for life at the university. Jiménez does not seem to exaggerate or try to evoke sympathy from the reader with these stories; he simply describes the changes in his world in an honest way. Just as in his other works, Jiménez makes the reader see and feel with him.

The action of the story builds to the climax, where Francisco’s internal conflicts of guilt are intensified. When he learns that his father has suffered a nervous breakdown and returned to Mexico, Francisco feels a heightened sense of guilt for not putting the needs of his family first. His worry for the welfare of his family overwhelms him, and he contemplates leaving the university to ensure the well-being of his mother and brothers and sister. The way this major conflict is addressed and resolved creates suspense for the reader who remembers Francisco being held back in the first grade for not being able to speak English and hopes for his success in completing his bachelor’s degree.

Jiménez infuses this story of his early adult years with memories of his childhood and the themes of extreme poverty experienced by his family and other migrant farm-working families. In doing so, he realistically portrays the poor conditions of his family’s life, but avoids stereotypes by not generalizing poverty across the entire Mexican-American culture. While some of Francisco’s problems seem to be solved by Anglo-Americans, it is his own resilience, perseverance, self-reflection, and genuine good-nature that help him resolve the conflicts he faces. The range and complexity of these conflicts are depicted authentically and not handled superficially. Authentic aspects of Mexican and Mexican-American culture represented in Jiménez’s novel include the importance of religion and family, mutual cooperation within the family as each member contributes to the family’s welfare, respect for elderly members of the family, the expectation that children be respectful, the rewarding of cleverness and sharing, and the punishing of greed and evil actions. The natural use of the Spanish language in

the story also enhances the cultural authenticity of the text. The book's translation pattern effectively integrates the use of Spanish in conversations. Most of the Spanish is literally translated, but a monolingual reader is able to use the context of the story to infer or predict the meaning of the words that are not translated. Because Jiménez has both academic and life knowledge of the Spanish language, the reader trusts that the language was used correctly by this bilingual author.

Jiménez retells his experiences in a genuine, simple voice, without excess sentimentality; however, this does not keep the reader from feeling his pain and pride and holding hope in our hearts for his success. *Reaching Out* is an honest, well-crafted memoir, deserving of its 2009 Pura Belpré honor as a book that “portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience.” The story can be read alone or as part of a series of Jiménez's other notable books, including *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (1999), *Breaking Through* (2002), and *La Mariposa* (2000).

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