

ISSN 2577-0527



# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME III, ISSUE 4

Summer 2011

Young People Taking Action for Social Changes

Worlds  
of WORDS 



College  
of  
Education

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

**WOW Review: Volume III, Issue4**  
Summer 2011  
Young People Taking Action for Social Changes

Table of Contents

<b>Introduction and Editor's Note</b>	2-3
<i>Big Red Lollipop</i>	4-5
<i>The Bite of the Mango</i>	6-7
<i>Annuqtatu Assawdaa (The Black Dot)</i>	8-9
<i>Broken Memory: A Novel of Rwanda</i>	10-11
<i>The Cruisers</i>	12-13
<i>Dark Water</i>	14-15
<i>First Come the Zebra</i>	16-17
<i>Going Going</i>	18-19
<i>Our Secret, Siri Aang</i>	20-22
<i>Traitor</i>	23-24

**Contributors to this Issue:**

Nojood Alsudairi, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
Bart Hill, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM  
Chloë Hughes, Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR  
Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati  
Prisca Martens, Towson University, Towson, Maryland, USA  
Kelli Miller, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, OK  
Judi Moreillon, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas  
Yoo Kyung Sung, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

**Editor:**

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

**Production Editor:**

Richard Clift



WOW Review, Volume IV, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/>

## Introduction and Editor's Note

Contemporary international literature provides rich demonstrations for readers about the variety of ways in which young people take action for social change. This issue of *WOW Review* includes reviews of 10 books that cross ages, eras, and contexts in showing readers the spirit and strength that undergird the many ways of taking action. Challenging situations that involve characters' personal, social, and cultural lives often compel young people to take courageous steps as agents for social change. For younger readers, taking action often happens in a family situation as in *Big Red Lollipop* where one character takes action to create a "fair" situation for her sibling. The young children in *The Black Dot* discover a peaceful way to rid themselves of a potential problem in this metaphorical story.

At times, young people are the ones to bring to light discrimination and prejudice. *Dark Water* is a love story between the niece of a wealthy land owner and a young migrant worker—a situation where the "forbidden friendship" begs answers to questions about discrimination, family loyalty and love. *The Cruisers* tells the story of a group of teens who because of their negative actions are placed into a situation where they are asked to be peacemakers between the North and South in a social studies lesson—a situation that provides the opportunity to understand the complexity of the issues and "dehumanization" of people on both sides of a conflict. *First Come the Zebras* offers insight into how young people, coming from two conflicting African tribes, find common ground for peaceful existence.

Young people around the globe are often stirred to anger and action, such as the protagonist in *Our Secret*, *Siri Aang* who secretly watches over a mother and baby rhinoceros and takes action when the mother is killed by poachers. *Going Going* tells the story of a young girl in San Antonio, Texas, who takes it upon herself to save small businesses by educating the public. Taking action is often demonstrated as a result of the atrocities of war. *Broken Memory, A Novel of Rwanda*, is the story of a courageous young girl who must overcome the tragedy of the death of her family in the Rwanda genocide and who takes action as a young adult by reaching out to others. *The Bite of the Mango* is a personal account of a girl who loses her hands during the brutal civil war in Sierre Leone, and how she uses her voice in the refugee camp and beyond to speak out against the horrors of war. *Traitor* takes readers on a historical journey to World War II where another young female protagonist harbors a Russian POW and begins to question the Nazi regime and her own brother's involvement.

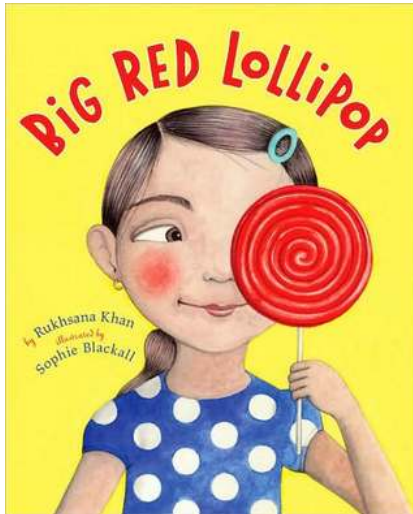
The titles reviewed in this issue provide diverse and powerful stories of young people taking action for social change. For readers of *WOW Review*, they most certainly bring to mind other stories on this theme that have the potential to speak to readers of all ages. We welcome your insights and additions to these stories that remind readers of the strength of youth to make the world a better place.

Janelle Mathis

© 2011 Janelle Mathis



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Janelle Mathis at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/2/>



**Big Red Lollipop**

Written by Rukhsana Khan

Illustrated by Sophie Blackall

Viking, 2010

ISBN: 978-0670062874

Rubina runs home from school excited that she's been invited to a birthday party. She explains to her mother, Ami, what birthday parties are since Ami is not familiar with them, while her younger sister Sana screams, "I wanna to go too!" When Ami insists that Rubina take Sana with her, Rubina has no choice. Sana's behavior at the party embarrasses Rubina but all seems to be forgotten when the sisters receive goodie bags that include candies, toys,

and a big red lollipop when they leave. Sana's goodies are gone or lost by bedtime. Rubina places her lollipop in the refrigerator to save until morning and dreams of eating it all night long. When she goes to get it the next day, all that's left on the stick is a little triangle. Sana! Rubina is angry and chases Sana around the house, waking up Ami who maintains that Rubina needs to share with her sister. The worst part for Rubina is that she isn't invited to any more parties because her friends know Sana will come too. Time passes and when Sana is invited to a birthday party, their younger sister Maryam begs to go. Ami tells Sana it's only fair that Maryam go, since Sana went to a party with Rubina. Rubina is torn as to whether or not she should intervene, but finally "takes action" and asks Ami to let Sana attend the party by herself. After the party, Sana knocks on Rubina's door and hands her a big green lollipop..

This story is special to Rukhsana Kahn because, other than the green lollipop, it's true. Khan was Sana (note the similarity of the name to Rukhsana) and demanded to accompany her older sister to a birthday party, much to her sister's dismay. In personal communication, Khan explained that the context of the story is a Muslim family in Pakistani culture, living in North America. Kahn was born in Pakistan and immigrated to Canada when she was three years old. While many Pakistanis now celebrate birthdays, that was not the case years ago and some still do not. When Khan was growing up, Pakistani children would not go somewhere alone; invitations always included the family. That also has changed within some Pakistani-Muslim families in the west.

In the story the clash between sisters, cultural traditions, and a parent's response to a child's view of what's "fair" are quite powerful. The humorous telling prevents this from becoming too intense, however. Tensions are resolved by the end as the sisters become friends, each with deeper understandings of themselves, each other, and what's important.

Blackall's illustrations are watercolor and pencil, with minimal background, drawing attention to the characters and their emotions. Red and green colors are included in the illustrations throughout the story. The pages are also rich with colorful patterns, which Blackall repeated on the endpapers.

This book would work well in a text set on how birthdays are acknowledged in different cultural

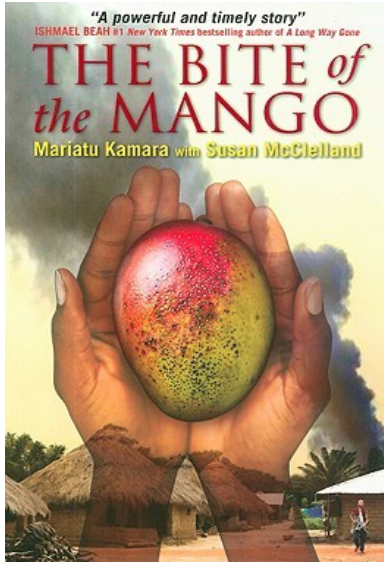
traditions. Other books in that text set might include: *What Will You Be, Sara Mee?* (Kate Aver Avraham, 2010), *Happy Birthday, Jamela!* (Niki Daly, 2006), *Birthdays around the World* (Mary Lankford & Karen Dugan, 2002), and, for very young children, *Birthdays in Many Cultures* (Martha Rustad, 2008).

Prisca Martens, Towson University, Towson, Maryland, USA

© 2011 Prisca Martens



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Prisca Martens at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/3/>



### The Bite of the Mango

Written by Mariatu Kamara and Susan McClelland

Annick Press, 2008, 216 pp.

ISBN: 978-1554511587

Mariatu Kamara begins her memoir by recounting everyday village life in Sierra Leone. It is an arduous agrarian existence; food is scarce and families are too poor to school their children. Female circumcision and polygamy are traditional, as is communal living where everyone helps each other. But Mariatu's life changes irrevocably when a brutal civil war rips through the country. Armed rebels, many no older than twelve-year-old Mariatu, rape, maim, or murder villagers. After forcing her to witness these atrocities, the rebels chop off her hands, jeering that she will not be able to vote for

“the President.” Mariatu does not even know what a president is or does. Mariatu takes the reader on a haunting journey through the war-torn bush to a rudimentary hospital and then on to a refugee camp in Freetown. While at the refugee camp, she encounters other youth, who in the face of dire adversity, cling to hope, courage and life itself. Together they beg, share food and even start up a drama company as a means to speak out about the horrors of war and the need for reconciliation. Interviewed by journalists, Mariatu's story spreads and eventually leads to asylum and formal education in Canada. Her powerfully understated narrative is alive with courage, hope and advocacy for social change. “I may not have hands, but I have a voice,” declares Mariatu.

The book's title and cover illustration depicting hands offering a mango, echo a pivotal scene from the story where a man, caught in the crossfire, takes pity on the near-dying Mariatu. He gives her a mango, directs her to the hospital and encourages her to look forward rather than back, saying, “It's the only place to go, my sweet child.” Mariatu's real-life disorientation is mirrored at times by tangible gaps in the narrative, particularly concerning her sexual assault and bewildering relocation in Canada. These gaps in the memoir also suggest that co-writer Susan McClelland has carefully avoided the major pitfalls of ghost writing— those of intrusion into and interpretation of another person's story. This book is testament to the truth that we live at a time when we depend upon each other to uphold each other's stories, especially during times of conflict. Major themes in this book are war and its impact on children and women, community dislocation, disability and resilience, and friendship and advocacy.

End notes include historical and contemporary information about Sierra Leone and the civil war that raged from 1991- 2002 as well as information about both authors. Susan McClelland is a journalist who writes predominantly about children's and women's issues, and was the recipient of the 2005 Amnesty International Media Award. Mariatu Kamara has worked with several NGOs (non governmental organizations) and became UNICEF Canada's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict. She established the Mariatu Foundation (<http://www.mariatufoundation.com>), which seeks to provide shelter and healing to women and children in Sierra Leone. Kamara has also been the recipient of several awards including the 2009 Voices of Courage Award in honor of her advocacy work. She is currently studying to be a

counselor at George Brown College in Toronto. For further information about her work with UNICEF visit <http://www.unicef.org>. A lesson plan written by both authors to aid discussion about the book and civil war is available at [www.annickpress.com](http://www.annickpress.com).

This disturbing memoir, devoid of self-pity, is suitable for older adolescent readers, aged 14 and over. Its brilliance lies in simultaneously revealing the shocking brutality of war and the immense will and courage of youth to rise up for justice. To extend thinking about the civil war in Sierra Leone and for a male perspective on the complex causes that compel children to take up as well as put down arms, a natural companion to this book is *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (Ishmael Beah, 2007). Beah's graphic descriptions highlight how hunger, fear and ignorance work in unison to undermine the humanity in many other regions in Sierra Leone. Memoirs by Kamara and Beah could also be paired with *Secrets in the Fire* (Henning Mankell, 2003), which retells the story of the spirited Sofia in Mozambique as she tries to build a new future for herself in the aftermath of genocide, and in a landscape littered with landmines. Parallel experiences of war and the power of young people to resist hatred to become seeds for peace can also be found in: *Thurma's Diary: My life in Wartime Iraq* (Thura Al- Windawi, 2004), *Out of War: True Stories from the Front Lines of the Children's Movement for Peace in Columbia* (Sara Cameron, 2001), and *Bamboo People* (Mitali Perkins, 2010).

Chloë Hughes, Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR

© 2011 Chloë Hughes



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Chloë Hughes at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/4/>





**Annuqtatu Assawdaa (The Black Dot)**

Written/Illustrated by Walid Tahir

Dar Ashorooq, Egypt, 2010

ISBN: 978-9770926115

Children wake up early one morning to find a big black dot landing on their playground. When they cannot find out where it came from, they start thinking about how to get rid of it. They try several things but nothing works so they all decide to live with it and play the only game they can—hide and seek. All the children are satisfied with this

solution, except for Marwan. While the children are playing, Marwan keeps thinking about the big black dot and finds a way to demolish it peacefully. He starts working on his idea by himself when the other children refuse to listen to him. After days of hard work the children notice that Marwan's idea is working, so they join him one by one. They finally knock down the big black dot with one of the children still wondering where it came from. Now it becomes the ants' problem.

The writer/illustrator of this children's book, Walid Tahir, works as an illustrator for a magazine in Cairo, Egypt. *The Black Dot* won the writer his second prize, Alettisalat 2010, the top prize for children's books in the Arab world (from Asharga, UAE).

The final sentence in the book states, "Whether hard or easy, the most important thing is that there is a solution." This book relates to the events taking place in Egypt recently. It is a call for the youth not to accept the status quo and to do something to change it. Eventually, the change will take place when one person finds a solution and keeps working at it. Although the idea seems to be too big to be digested by young children, the writer makes it simple in a funny way.

Children of all ages like this book. The aim of the story for Ahmed, an eleven-year-old boy, is that nothing is too hard if one has determination and faith. He did not like the character that kept asking the dot, "but who are you?" Another child, Khaled, found the character that kept asking funny questions and liked the solution that worked out for Marwan. A nine-year old girl, Mada, commented that she liked collaboration to get work done, but most of all she liked the happy ending of the story. None of the children we talked to related the book to the political events taking place in their part of the world.



The illustrations of this book are unique in their detailed simplicity. The illustrator uses simple lines and colors to show feelings of wonder, sadness, boredom, happiness and pride. No adult is shown in this world of children, either in the text or in the illustrations indicating, perhaps, that change can only come from the young who are less harmed or cynical. Readers can only wonder if this writer was aware of what was going to happen in Egypt!

Although *The Black Dot* is a picture book, this book might have greater meaning for older children than for younger ones, because of their ability to grasp the theme in light of larger global issues. A search for other Arabic books on social change to be paired with this book was not successful. However, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993) was translated to Arabic. *Alwaheb (The Giver)*, tackles the same subject in a similar way. Jonas, who lives in a world of similarity, starts to notice the unfairness of not having a choice. In the end, he single-handedly decides to make the change that no one thought of making.

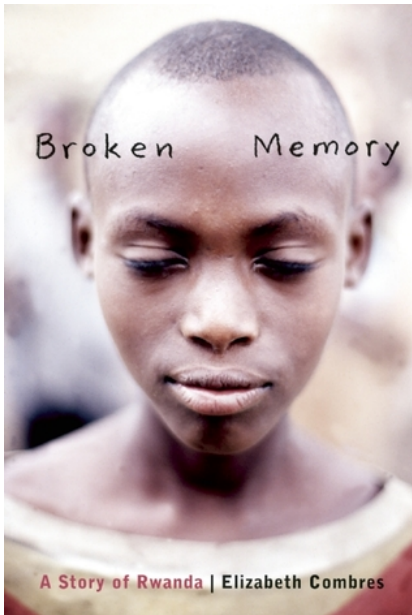
An ethical question always comes to mind when talking about change: How far can we push children against their families' will? Who determines whether this is a call of change or a call for creating rebels that can work against their own societies?

Nojood Alsudairi, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

© 2011 Chloë Hughes



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Nojood Alsudairi at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/5/>



**Broken Memory: A Novel of Rwanda**

Written by Élisabeth Combres

Translated by Shelley Tanaka

Groundwood Books, 2009, 139 pp.

ISBN: 978-0888998927

*Slide behind there, close your eyes, put your hands over your ears. Do not make the slightest move, not the slightest noise. Tell yourself that you are not in this room, that you see nothing, hear nothing, and that everything will soon be over. You must not die. (p.17)*

This historical fiction novel focuses on the life of a young survivor of the Rwanda genocide in 1994. Emma was five years old when she lost her mom at home, a supposedly safe and happy place. Emma

barely survives by hiding herself behind the door. Even though Emma doesn't "see" the event, but the rest of her senses vividly witness her mother being murdered. Even though her mom says "everything will soon be over", ironically her nightmare just begins and haunts Emma until her memory of her home and mother grows weak and even broken. Luckily an old Hutu peasant woman, Mukecru, takes Emma in, risking her own life to hide her. Nine years later, those who were responsible for the massacre in Emma's village are brought to trial. Emma unavoidably faces them in town. The journey to recovery for Emma starts when she must recall what happened. She has to look back in order to look ahead.

Emma's ways of taking action are personal but necessary for social change. Often taking action for social change is assumed to be some kind of resistance to fight against injustice. This isn't the case for genocide survivors like Emma. Emma's actions start from the small but universal requirement—courage. How can a young child change society when masses of people have already been killed because of who they are? How can a young child take action for a social change when that child is the only surviving member of her family, yet her life can be extinguished at any time? *Broken Memory* seeks the meaning of taking action in such devastating conditions. Hope is a luxury for the surviving children of the Rwanda genocide. The meaning of taking action for Emma is to have courage to face the internal pain and trauma in her memory.

It takes a long time until Emma is ready for taking her first critical step toward social change. Emma's story begins with the voice of a young five-year-old child and ends with that of a 24-year-old woman. She suffered so much that her focus is on her own security, but her gradual yet incomplete recovery affords room for others. The small but powerful form of taking an action is reaching out to another young Tutsi victim, Ndoli, who is accused of the deaths of his relatives. They grow together as friends and companions.

*Broken Memory* shows what it takes to overcome trauma yet not remain defeated by it. Also, the book emphasizes the survivors' hope for social change in the epilogue. For instance, Emma couldn't

read well when she was younger and she becomes a teacher who is “now at peace with her past and looks to the future with confidence” (p.131). The old man who helped Emma works for children who have become orphans because of AIDS.

Emma’s story reflects the voices from massive massacres, but at a deeper level it shows the tragedy of human classification. The author’s note provides historical contexts of Rwanda and is informative to a young audience. Rwanda genocides were the consequence of the Hutu government’s anti-Tutsi discrimination practices, which eventually led to the genocide of the Tutsis by Hutu in 1994. It is sad to learn that the trigger of such tragedy originated from the colonizers’ policy of human classification.

The author, Combres, is a former journalist and current reporter in France, Latin America, and Africa. She conducted research around the Rwanda genocide from a wide range of sources—interviewing genocide survivors, psychologists, and humanitarian aid workers who work with child survivors suffering from trauma. That may explain how the portrayed tensions and fear against other human relationships differentiates this book from typical depictions of war victims as an innocent group. A collection of different stories from genocide survivors is reflected throughout the story. The narrative style—telling such a sad story in a matter-of-fact manner—provides strong realism.

*Broken Memory* was originally published in France, and then Shelley Tanaka translated it into English. Tanaka has a long history of working in the publishing business and has edited numerous books for authors, such as Deborah Ellis. She is also a writer and illustrator. Several of Tanaka’s nationally recognized, award-winning books are nonfiction books.

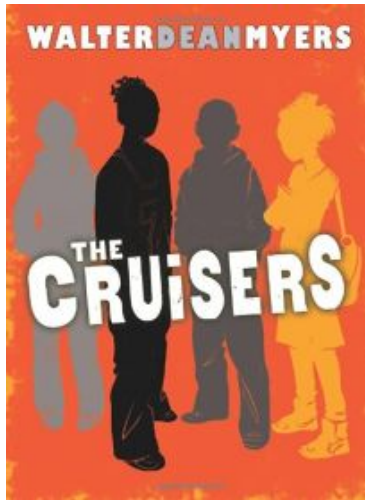
This novel can be read alongside *Speak* (Laurie Halse Anderson, 2001), *The Killers Tears* (Anne-Laure Bondoux, 2003) and *Our Stories and Our Songs: African Children’s Talk about AIDS* (Deborah Ellis, 2005). Protagonists in *Speak* and *The Killers Tears* both experience traumatic events and their journeys to face their pain are the door of overcoming their difficulties through relationships. In *Our Stories and Our Songs*, every day is painful and traumatic for children who lose their family members to AIDS and will soon be victims of AIDS themselves. However, their courage and hope for social changes resemble other characters in *Speak*, *The Killer Tears* and *Broken Memory*. These books may open a powerful discussion about the meaning of taking action and questioning what you can do when there seems to be no hope.

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

© 2011 Yoo Kyung Sung



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Yoo Kyung Sung at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/6/>



### **The Cruisers**

Written by Walter Dean Myers

Scholastic, 2010 126 pp

ISBN: 978-0439916264

Youth can be motivated to engage in social action that affects the learning community within their schools. The eighth-grade students at the DaVinci Academy for the Gifted and Talented are role-playing in a unit on the Civil War, The four students who call themselves “The Cruisers” are once again in trouble for low academic performance. Although the assistant principal would prefer to kick them out of school, the principal has another idea. She instructs her assistant to assign the Cruisers the role of serving as peacemakers between students who are taking the part of Union sympathizers and those who are Confederate sympathizers. The Cruisers’ tenure at DaVinci Academy may depend on their successfully brokering a peace.

African American students are a minority at this prestigious Harlem middle school; three of the Cruisers, including their leader Zander Scott, are African American. When the “Sons of the Confederacy” (white athletes) write a guest editorial in the school newspaper, the Cruisers take offense and call them out on the racist implications of their writing. After conducting a bit of research (and finally reviewing their social studies assignments), the Cruisers print a rebuttal in their own publication, *The Cruiser*. The “peacemakers” question the statements of the Sons of the Confederacy on the grounds that people who enslave others cannot claim moral superiority.

Things get out of control. A white student pretends to auction off a “slave” (an African American student) and threats of violence between the Sons and the Cruisers accelerate. One criticism of this book is that school administration would not allow this level of tension between groups of students in the name of free speech or in the pursuit of academic learning. Still, the principals are monitoring the situation and these types of experiences go on in many schools without the watchful eye of the administration.

When tensions further escalate, Zander has an idea for students to wear signs that say “I Have Been Degraded.” The Cruisers print a sarcastic article in which they claim to have come to an agreement with the Sons, agreeing that slaves’ feelings didn’t matter and that their descendants “can still be degraded today within the halls of DaVinci Academy.” The invitation to wear a sign goes viral and many students, from all ethnic and racial backgrounds, wear the signs on campus. When the administration calls off the experiment, the assistant principal holds an assembly and people from both sides have the opportunity to speak. When Zander speaks for the Cruisers, he shows that students on both sides have learned to think about other people’s feelings before they speak or write. Zander wisely includes himself when he notes that people have to own, take responsibility for, what they say. The administrators and social studies teacher feel the unit is a success because students learned about their First Amendment rights and the complexity of the political and social issues surrounding the Civil War. They also learned that all sides in the war became victims of the dehumanization that resulted from the institution of slavery.

Walter Dean Myers, the author of *The Cruisers*, is known for his authentic and vivid portrayals of the human experience and particularly the experience of African American youth. Among other awards, Myers has earned the Coretta Scott King Author Award and Honor Award five times each. In 1994, Myers earned the Margaret A. Edwards Award for his outstanding contribution to literature for young adults. His memoir, *Bad Boy* (2002) provides his life story of growing up in Harlem.

*The Cruisers* can be paired with other young adult books in which students take action within their school communities. In *After Ever After* by Jordan Sonnenblick (2010), the entire class stages a protest when Jeffrey is expected to take the 8th-grade exit exam even though he is suffering cognitive challenges, late after effects of cancer treatment. In *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by John Green and David Levithan (2010), both boys named Will Grayson motivate their classmates to show their appreciation of a unique individual, the “world’s largest person who is really, really gay.” At the end of Tiny’s school play, the entire school community testifies, “I appreciate you Tiny Cooper.” Penacook student Chris “Bridge” Nicola, the protagonist in Joseph Bruchac’s (2001) *Heart of a Chief*, leads his social studies inquiry group mates to raise awareness on campus of how Indian names for sports teams demean native students. In *Geography Club* by Brent Hartinger (2004), gay and bisexual students meet secretly to share their lives and feelings, including the pain of being bullied by classmates and in the end, develop the courage to come out and form a Gay-Straight Alliance Club in their school.

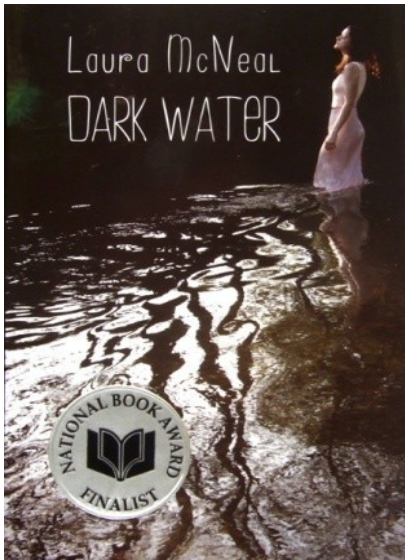
When students read and discuss books in which taking social action is an essential aspect of the plot, readers have opportunities to explore issues of inequity, power, and discrimination. Living through these characters’ experiences, young adult readers may realize their own power and the potential of taking action to improve their world—beginning in the context of their own school learning environment.

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

© 2011 Judi Moreillon



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Judi Moreillon at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/7/>



### Dark Water

Written by Laura McNeal

Alfred Knopf Books, 2010, 285 pp.

ISBN: 970-0375849732

*It wasn't wrong in theory. It wasn't forbidden. But I understood that it was very strange and different, someone like him and someone like me. The people who have nothing aren't allowed to touch the people with cars and houses. They can work here. That's all. (p. 171)*

Fifteen-year-old Pearl is caught between two worlds. The world of her old life where she had everything she ever wanted and her new

reality where she lives with her mother in the old guest house on her uncle's avocado ranch. Her father has left her mother for another woman and as part of his new life has decided that it is time for Pearl's mother to realize what it means to make a living. As a result, Pearl's new existence is substandard while still on the periphery of the wealth she once knew. Pearl's confusion and sense of imbalance is heightened when she comes to further realize that even her current situation is divided between those who come from wealth and those who do not. For, even as she and her mother are barely surviving on her mother's wages as a substitute teacher and her own part-time work in town, Pearl is reminded that a relationship with one of the migrant workers is strictly taboo. Pearl, however, cannot stop thinking about Amiel, a young migrant worker who lives in a makeshift hut along the Agua Prieta Creek. She decides her friendship and budding romance with Amiel is worth pursuing, and thus she begins to meet with Amiel secretly while also attempting to understand the discrimination that is ever present in their relationship.

A National Book Award Finalist, *Dark Water* is a sensitive, gentle love story between a Mexican migrant worker and the niece of a wealthy landowner. Set in California when the 2007 wildfires ravaged the state, this novel is a contemplative and timely coming-of-age story that addresses the issues of class and ethnicity that reflect the current political climate of the West and Southwest United States. *Dark Water* is a story that adolescents will find easy to relate to as well as engaging. Amiel's lack of voice will resonate with their oft-times silencing experienced by teens, as well as allow them to note its use as metaphor in the novel. The setting is crucial to the evolving plot, which young readers should be encouraged to address along with the climatic ending and sparse communication between Pearl and Amiel.

Within a unit on discrimination, border crossing, intercultural connections, or forbidden friendships, *Dark Water* would make a nice complement to books such as *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Muñoz Ryan, 2002), *Seedfolks* (Paul Fleischman, 2003), *If You Come Softly* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2000), or *Summer of My German Soldier* (Bette Greene, 1973). There is also *La Línea* (Ann Jaramillo, 2008), *Illegal* (Bettina Restrepo, 2011), and *Grab Hands and Run* (Frances Temple, 1995). *Dark Water* would make an interesting lead into Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet*.

*Dark Water* contains themes about the price of loyalty, the loss of family and love, and the uncertainty of risk-taking during dangerous times. It will have readers struggling over the conflicts inherent in growing up, the questions of discrimination and family allegiance, and the consequences of actions made with the best of intentions. The ending is both satisfactory and ambiguous, but was foreshadowed throughout the novel.

When interviewed as part of the National Book Awards, McNeal noted the following in response to the subject matter of her novel:

*For years and years, I've watched migrant workers ride their bicycles up steep hills to work in avocado groves, yards, or plant nurseries. I've seen them on our street going grove to grove, locked gate to locked gate, pushing the call buttons to ask, "Any work for me?" I've driven past the corners where they wait to be hired, hour after hour. I've seen how they swarm cars that pull over, and I have been inside one of those cars. About 14 years ago, I was led by a friend into a migrant camp that was completely invisible from a major street in Fallbrook, in a thick stand of trees 200 yards from a school. My friend told the men living there that I was a journalist who had come to help them. If they talked to me, he said in Spanish, their lives would get better. I have always felt this was a promise I didn't keep; the article ran in a newspaper, but what did it change for them? I'm still trying to make good on my word.*

She has also written other books for adolescents with her husband Tom, including *The Decoding of Lana Morris* (2010), *Crushed* (2007), and *Zipped* (2004), all of which deal with ethical and family issues. She spent much of her youth in Air Force towns in the West and Southwest and was a high school English teacher in Utah before pursuing writing full time. She currently lives in Southern California with her family. *Dark Water* is her first solo publication.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati

© 2011 Holly Johnson



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Holly Johnson at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/8/>





**First Come the Zebra**

Written/Illustrated by Lynne Barasch

Lee & Low Books, 2009

ISBN: 978-1600603655

The rainy season has passed and the animals begin to migrate into Kenya from Tanzania to graze on the lush tall grass. First come the zebra, then the wildebeest, and finally the gazelles, each eating what they need, nothing more. Abaani, a young Maasai boy, takes his family's cattle to graze also. The Maasai herd cattle and depend on them for their existence. In the distance Abaani sees Haki from a Kikuyu farm setting up a fruit and vegetable stall

along the road. Conflicts between the Maasai and the Kikuyu over land for cattle and farms are on-going and deep-seated. Abaani and Haki argue about the land, echoing their tribes' rivalry. The argument ends when Kamba women stop to trade their baskets for some of Haki's fruits and vegetables and a baby wanders into the grass near where some warthogs are grazing. Abaani sees the danger for the baby and knows he and Haki need to act quickly. He yells to Haki to grab the baby while he distracts the warthogs. Together they successfully rescue the child but don't speak for many days even though they continue to see each other. Eventually they wave, speak, and get to know each other over a game of mancala. Slowly they become friends and decide to begin trading milk from Abaani's cows and fruit and vegetables from Haki's farm in the hopes that their families too will become friends.

This story highlights hope, sharing, and cooperation. As the animals share the richness that the grasslands provide, so tribes with different traditions and ways of life can develop an appreciation of each other and what each offers, learn to share resources, and work together. In an Author's Note Barasch explains that the story was inspired after her trip to Kenya in 2007 where she met Kenyan people, talked with guides, and experienced life in different areas of the country. The Author's Note includes information about the Maasai and the Kikuyu and how their present day youth are working to bring people together in a peaceful coexistence. The book also contains a map, a pronunciation guide, a glossary, and a list of sources.

Barasch's illustrations, done in pen and ink watercolors, bring the text alive. Many are double page landscape spreads and highlight the vast grasslands, the animals' yearly migration, and the beauty of Africa. Barasch's use of soft colors emphasizes hope and peace for the future.

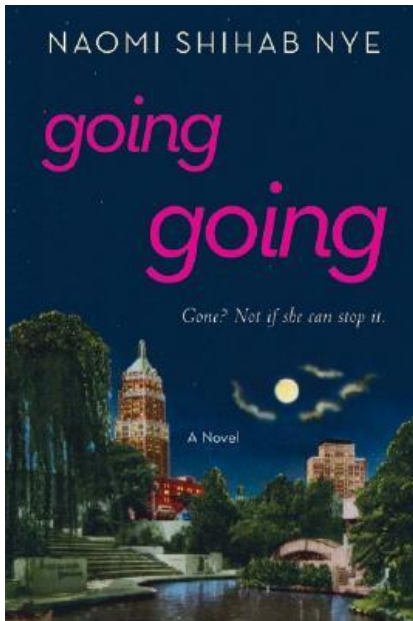
*First Come the Zebra* would work well in a text set on resolving prejudices and friendship. Other books in this text set might include *Teammates* (Peter Golenbock, 1990), *Smoky Night* (Eve Bunting, 1999) *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship & Freedom* (Tim Tingle, 2006), and *The Other Side* (Jacqueline Woodson, 2001).

Prisca Martens, Towson University, Towson, Maryland, USA

© 2011 Prisca Martens



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Prisca Martens at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/9/>



### Going Going

Written by Naomi Shihab Nye  
Greenwillow Books, 2005, 240 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0688161859

This realistic fiction novel set in San Antonio, Texas centers around sixteen-year-old Florrie's campaign to support small independent businesses forced to close due to the emergence of large, money-driven chain stores. With the help of her family, who run a small Mexican restaurant, and her friends, Florrie embarks on a mission to educate townspeople that small businesses have given San Antonio its distinctiveness. If these small businesses are driven out by big corporations, then San Antonio will resemble most other cities that have been overrun by franchises. Her campaign begins when she makes a wish on her sixteenth birthday that her family will not shop at any chain stores for the rest of the calendar year.

Encouraged by her family's agreement (although her brother, True, has many reservations about it), she enlists the help of close friends. She organizes an after-school meeting where each person is assigned a certain task in preparation for a rally that Florrie will organize. At the rally, which takes place during a busy Friday afternoon at the courthouse park, supporters hold up posters that say, for example, "WE LOVE INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES!" and "SAY NO TO FRANCHISES." A news crew arrives and the reporter interviews Florrie. When asked if she truly thinks her small campaign could create a positive effect, Florrie answers, "Why not? Everything starts small!" (p. 83). That night, her friends watch the news report and say that it looked terrific.

Energized, Florrie and her friends plot another attention-grabbing statement. This time, she and her friends decide to drape the large Wal-Mart road sign, with its slogan, "We Sell for Less," with white sheets which read: LESS IMAGINATION, LESS INDEPENDENCE, LESS CREATIVITY (p. 122). They execute their plan and the local newspaper prints the story in the center of the front page in the Sunday edition. Even the ever-doubting True tells Florrie that he "can't believe [her] publicity quotient" (p. 148). Things, however, do not always work out successfully. Florrie and her friends plan to float down the San Antonio River in canoes while waving giant protest signs. But before they can reach their final destination, police officers force them to stop. Their protest never makes it onto the news or in the papers, but only lives inside their memories. The novel concludes with a disconcerting situation for Florrie and her family: a Taco Bell is planning to open next to their family's Mexican restaurant and they must work together to ensure that their small enterprise does not lose business to a national chain restaurant.

This middle-grade book is an ideal novel for discussing the successes and failures that arise when young people choose to take action to create social change. It is a complex novel that illustrates there are many hindrances to taking action to promote social change, especially when that action threatens the status quo. Florrie faces many people who are apathetic to her cause. For instance, after telling a passer-by, "Independent businesses need our support!" (p. 79) the man simply shrugs and walks on. To Florrie, this is a serious insult because the person does not want to engage in

dialogue with her. Nevertheless, despite these insults, she shows great perseverance and continues to promote her campaign. Florrie also discovers that fighting for social change means having to face difficult questions and sometimes hostile forces. During a heated discussion, Florrie reminds herself that she needs to “Be Positive. Engage your listeners” (p. 85). By taking action, Florrie experiences how to converse with her opponents; therefore, her strong-willed efforts help her develop into a citizen who is able to engage peacefully with others in her community when social problems arise.

Not only is this novel of high literary quality, infused with Nye’s rich, poetically crafted storytelling, but it also provides authentic descriptions of San Antonio. The unique cultures and residents that inhabit her novel are not stereotypical but contain certain peculiarities that truly put the reader within a deep cultural framework. This is helped in large part by the fact that the author herself has lived in downtown San Antonio for many years. Nye also includes an acknowledgement page at the end of her novel in which she recognizes others who have taken up the cause to preserve small enterprises, thus illustrating that she has obtained input from those who have strived to keep San Antonio’s distinctiveness.

*Going Going* can be read along with other books by Nye in which the young protagonists take action to create change, including the novel *Habibi* (1997), in which the main character seeks to create peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and the picture book *Sitti’s Secrets* (1997), where the main character takes action and writes a letter to the president, asking him to promote peace. Nye’s novels can be read while referring to books that give real-life examples of young adults who have taken action to promote social change, such as Barbara Lewis’s *The Teen Guide to Global Action: How to Connect with Others (Near & Far) to Create Social Change* (2007). This book provides accounts of teenagers who have taken action to help others, such as helping to end modern slavery and assisting young Afghan women to receive a proper education.

Bart Hill, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

© 2011 Bart Hill



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Bart Hill at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/10/>



**Our Secret, Siri Aang**

Written by Christina Kessler  
Philomel Books, 2004, 210 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0399239854

*A silent agreement had been made in the late-afternoon African bush between the Maasai girl and the rhino. . . (p.8)*

This silent agreement serves as the backdrop to Christina Kessler's novel. Set in a Maasai village in Africa, Kessler develops well-rounded, believable characters who are faced with the conflict of staying true to their traditional way of life or converting to western ways. The characters are members of the proud Maasai tribe.

Tradition rules their life, but as the western culture moves into their lands they are faced with difficult choices.

Namelok, the main character, is a young Maasai girl who cherishes her time alone gathering firewood. One day she stumbles upon a black rhino giving birth. She watches the birth encouraging the mother rhino through the process. She immediately feels a connection to the mother and baby rhino. This connection seems to be shared by the rhinos as well. Namelok names the baby rhino Siri Aang, which means "Our Secret." She knows that the rhinos must be her secret. Her family would scold her for being so deep in the bush. They would also view the black rhino as dangerous and not allow Namelok to wander into the bush again. Namelok vows to the mother rhino and Siri Aang to check on them and to keep them safe from all harm.

In this vow Kessler reveals the Maasai belief that they are the protectors of all animals. The Maasai believe they are conservators of the ecosystem and must conserve all that nature has given to them (Hayes, Chong, Casper, & McDonald-Schmidt, 2003). Namelok encounters many obstacles in keeping this vow to the rhinos. Her first obstacle is that the time has come for her emuratare. Emuratare is an important Maasai ceremony when a young girl is circumcised, thus becoming a young woman (Maasai Association, 2011). This ceremony will prevent Namelok from being able to wander off alone; this means her visits to the rhinos will be ending. Namelok struggles to put off this ceremony as long as possible so that she can still have the freedom to wander and visit Siri Aang and the mother.

Namelok's next challenge comes when she wants to go to school. A westernized school exists close to her village and the local teacher encourages her to come. When Namelok makes this proposal to her father, he is greatly angered. Attending school is against the Maasai tradition. This proposal provokes her father to move up the date of her emuratare, and so Namelok's time with the rhinos is once again shortened.

Namelok's tribe is confronted with many conflicts brought upon by western culture. Tourists stop by the village and offer money to warriors in exchange for photographs, seen as a disgrace by the Maasai elders even though the warriors desire the money. The Maasai elders view it as a selling of one's pride and self-worth. As this conflict unfolds, readers can examine their lives and cultures to discover what they have "sold" to gain a bit of money. Poachers enter the land and threaten to upset the ecological balance. Namelok is challenged to keep her vow to the rhinos when she finds that the mother rhino has fallen victim to the poachers. Determined to avenge the black rhino's death and to protect Siri Aang, Namelok stands tall and proud as a Maasai and enters the African bush in search of the "Beast" who destroyed the mother rhino. Her journey into the African bush also takes her on a journey of self-discovery. Namelok's story ends with Namelok fulfilling her vow to Siri Aang and embracing herself as a Maasai.

Namelok's journey to self-discovery mirrors the same journey that so many have taken throughout life. Readers are able to connect to Namelok and her journey as Kessler describes Namelok's desire to be true to her people and traditions, but at the same time explore a new world. Kessler describes the Maasai world in such a way that the reader is drawn into and feels part of the Maasai world and struggles. The Maasai become the reader's people and readers leave this book with a heightened sense of respect for Maasai people and culture.

The respect for the Maasai and their culture felt by the reader can be credited to the authenticity of the text in portraying the lives and cultures of the Maasai tribe. Living in Africa for 19 years provides Kessler with experiences and knowledge of the African bush that enable her to write with authenticity and accuracy. Though Kessler is not a member of the Maasai tribe, her writing does not betray her as a cultural outsider. Her writing is a window into the Maasai culture and their world. In order to frame the culture correctly, Kessler enlisted the assistance of a young man who is a member of the Maasai tribe (Kessler, 2010).

Due to her vast experiences in Africa and knowledge of Africa, Kessler has positioned other texts in Africa. She continues the theme of the journey to self-discovery in *The Best Bee Keeper of Lalibala* (2006) and the theme of the plight of the rhino in *Jubela* (2004). To continue learning of the Maasai, their valuing of animals, and their unique approach to taking action, *14 Cows for America* (Carmen Agra Deedy, 2009) is a valuable read.

## References

Association, M. The Maasai Association. Retrieved March 30, 2011, from <http://www.maasai-association.org/>

Hayes, J., Chong, J., Casper, B., & McDonald-Schmidt, R. (2003). MERC. Retrieved April 6, 2011, 2011, from <http://www.maasaierc.org/newsandlinks1.htm>

Kessler, C. (2010). Cristina Kessler, Retrieved June 20, 2011, from <http://www.cristinakessler.com/homepage.htm>

Kelli Miller, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, OK

© 2011 Kelli Miller



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Kelli Miller at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/11/>



### Traitor

Written by Gundrun Pausewang  
Translated by Rachel Ward  
Carolrhoda Books, 2010, 224 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0822561958

*It had started with that poem. She had begun to think about things. And she had carried on thinking. The Ultimate Victory, for example, which the Fuhrer was always talking about—was it worth so many lives? (p. 20)*

In 1944, sixteen-year-old Anna spends her weeks going to school in the larger city near her small German village. The war is far away and she has all the comforts she needs. Coming home from school one weekend, however, she notices unfamiliar tracks in the forest snow. As she gets closer to her home, she finds that the tracks lead to her family's barn. Finding a thin, scared man in the loft, she suspects him of being an escaped inmate from the local mental institution. Believing he will be mistreated if found, she decides to secretly help him and brings him warmer clothing and food. She discovers from her family, however, that several Russian POWs have escaped and all but one have been found and shot. While conflicted, Anna decides that she will continue to hide the POW until he can safely escape across the Czech border.

*Traitor* is the story of war and its atrocities becoming reality. Anna was already questioning the Nazi rhetoric and unquestioning allegiance to the Fuhrer, but did so internally, never speaking or acting on her disloyalty. Her older brother is a soldier fighting on the ever-closer front, and her younger brother has taken his oaths as a Hitler Youth to the extreme. As Anna continues to hide the Russian POW, she becomes more and more critical of the events around her while she becomes more suspect to her younger brother. A taut story line will give readers an edge-of-their-seat experience as well as another perspective on the diversity of German people during WWII.

*Traitor* is a great read to be combined in a unit on war or a unit that addresses conflict within one's self, with a book such as *Wundskind: Child without a Country* (Leisel Appel, 2009). In respect to its perspective of German people who did not embrace Hitler's policies, it could be paired with *The Book Thief* (Marcus Zusak, 2006). It could be included in a text set on being confronted with the humanity of the "enemy" using texts such as *Summer of My German Soldier* (Bette Greene, 1973, 1987, 1999); *Weedflower* (Cynthia Kadohata, 2009); *My Friend, the Enemy* (J. B. Cheaney, 2005); and *The Divine Wind* (Garry Disher, 2003).

*Traitor* contains themes about the price of loyalty, the ideology of allegiance, and the insecurity of self-conflict. It allows readers to struggle with questions of family dynamics in a time of war, the importance of understanding the issues of war, and ultimately, the price—and often, the futility—of war. The ending is sad, but not unexpected.



Author Gudrun Pausewang writes for children and young adults. Born in Czechoslovakia, her father was killed on the Russian front in 1943, which is similar to some of the events in *Traitor*. After WWII her family immigrated to West Germany where she became a teacher. She taught in Germany and in several countries in South America. Many of her books focus on what she has found all too familiar in her life and travels—the world’s ills such as war, environmental concerns, and poverty. She has three books translated into English, two of which are on WWII: *Traitor* (2010) and *The Final Journey* (1998). Rachel Ward, who translated *Traitor*, has a Master’s degree in literary translation. A freelance translator, she has worked on several German-to-English texts concentrating primarily on books for children and young people. Some of her other projects include *Red Rage* (Brigette Blobel, 2007) and *How Mommy met Daddy* (Katharina Grossman Hensel, 2008).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati

© 2011 Holly Johnson



WOW Review, Volume III, Issue 4 by World of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work by Holly Johnson at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii4/12/>