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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME IV, ISSUE 1

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WOW Review: Volume IV, Issue 1
Fall 2011
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Introduction and Editor's Note

This issue of *WOW Review* focuses on books that offer images of young characters confronting challenges in a variety of life events. Many of the story contexts involve survival, such as *Black Radishes*, in which the young Gustave joins his family in the French Resistance, or *Yellow Star*, as Sylvia and her Polish family barely escape death at the hands of the German Nazis. Survival in the hands of an abductor is the focus of *Stolen: A Letter to My Captor*, a first-person narrative of Gemma, a young girl kidnapped and taken to the Australian outback. Survival, in the case of Akash, a young boy from India in *Saraswati's Way*, involves escaping from his life as an indentured worker and struggling to achieve his dream of studying mathematics. There are many challenges to confront in schools, such as maintaining one's identity among peers, as seen in *Something for School*, in which Yoon learns to accept her unique boyish looks. *No and Me*, a story that begins with a school project in a Parisian school, takes the reader into the world of homeless teens. Through Lou, a 13 year old school girl, and No, a homeless girl, readers realize the challenges each faces as they become friends.

Not uncommon among young people everywhere is the tension confronted when individuals are straddling two cultures. *Karma*, set in tumultuous 1984 India, shares the experiences of a teen girl from Canada who is returning to her family's homeland of India. She must struggle for physical survival as well as that of her bi-cultural identity. In a more contemporary setting, *Naming Maya* focuses on the personal tension of a young girl traveling from her home in the United States to visit family in India for the summer. Her resistance to taking the trip and irritation at the lack of amenities in her grandfather's house is met with developing insight and acceptance of her Indian culture.

Some of the challenges faced by characters involve their families and cultures. *My Rows and Piles of Coins* is about a generous young Tanzanian boy, Saruni, who saves his money to buy a bike so he can help his mother deliver goods to the market. *Cattle Kids, a Year on the Western Ranges* provides an authentic look at the American Cowboy through the lives of several children whose responsibilities are important to their families' ranches. *Buffalo Dreams* shares the story of Native American children, Sarah and Joe, who make a pilgrimage to visit a baby white buffalo—a trip that calls for Sarah to face the mother bull to protect her young brother. *My Abuelita* shares a young boy's perceptions of how he helps his Abuelita, especially as she prepares for her storytelling role.

From powerful stories of survival to the efforts of young children in supporting their families, a complexity of threads weave serendipitously together as well as into the lives of young readers across the books reviewed in this issue. A tapestry of resilience, ingenuity, and hope is created by and for young people around the globe.

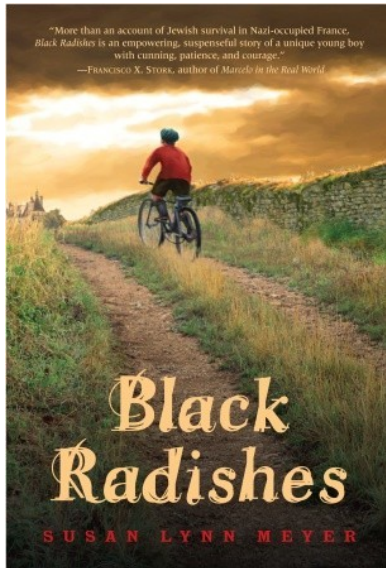
Janelle B. Mathis

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Black Radishes

Written by Susan Lynn Meyer
Delacorte Press, 2010, pp. 228
ISBN: 978-0385738811

The Eiffel Tower was ugly. That was the only word for it, Gustave thought, gazing upward. It used to soar, a vivid red-brown, up into the sky over Paris. But now, quickly coated in dirty gray camouflage paint to disguise it from Nazi bombers, it somehow looked squat and sinister. From farther away in the city, earlier on this cool March afternoon, it had been hardly visible, melting eerily into the iron gray of the sky. But that was the point, of course. (p. 1)

Black Radishes tells the story of eleven-year-old Gustave Becker, a French Jew, and his family during the time period of March 1940 to January 1942. Although the story begins with an ordinary Boy Scout meeting, the tone quickly changes when Gustave finds the words “La France Aux Francais!...Juifs Hors de France!” [France for the French! Jews out of France!] painted on his street. The simple life he enjoyed with his mother, father, aunt, cousin, and friend must be left behind as the family seeks safety on their way to hopeful freedom.

Gustave and his family leave Paris in the spring of 1940 to stay in the quiet countryside of Saint-Georges. The quiet is quickly disrupted a few months later when Germany invades France. Gustave’s family joins the exodus to Spain; however, Nazi planes cancel their plans. After returning to Saint-Georges to continue their secret life as Jews, France is split with the Demarcation Line to separate occupied from unoccupied France. Luckily, the Beckers are just south of the line and continue their fragile existence in Saint-Georges, trying to determine who can and cannot be trusted. When Gustave starts school, he must discreetly discern between trustworthy and untrustworthy. When he meets Nicole and Philippe, they both strengthen and challenge his maturity and resolve.

Because Gustave’s father has Swiss papers, he bravely makes many trips across the river into Nazi-occupied France to barter for needed food. Gustave and his stuffed monkey, one piece of his childhood from Paris, accompany Papa on these trips. He learns the value of “black radishes,” a term that refers to the bribes his father offers to German border guards.

In October, 1941, Gustave unwittingly accompanies his friend Nicole on a dangerous mission and sees the Menier castle which straddles the Demarcation Line in Chenonceau. As events unfold, Gustave and his father become a part of something larger than they could have imagined at that time. Gustave hopes for the moment when he can safely get his family and the families of his two close friends safely on their way to America. It is a journey filled with danger, joy, and sorrow that sits like a lump in the throat of Gustave and the reader.

A map of Europe in 1940 is placed at the front of the book for the reader to keep track of the movements of the Nazis during the war, although Gustave also marks the movements on his own map in the story with red watercolor paint. French and German words are scattered throughout the text but are easily negotiated with either direct translations or generous context clues. The Author's Note at the end reveals that the route taken by Gustave and his family was the route followed by the author's father who was born into a Jewish family in France in 1929. The Author's Note and Acknowledgement detail a long list of written resources and interviews the author used to establish the factual content that is woven throughout the story. Meyer carefully details the life of fear for Gustave's family but also portrays their strength in charting their own course to freedom. She cleverly disguises plot events that are slowly revealed to be a part of the French Resistance movement, a group that saved thousands of lives during World War II.

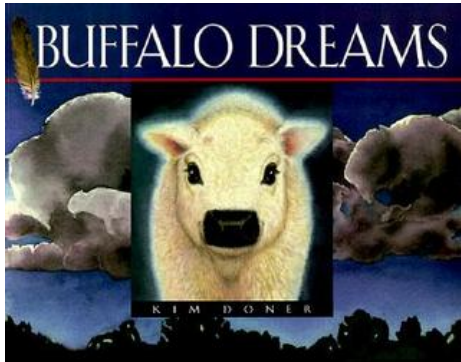
Students in fourth through eighth grades would benefit from *Black Radishes* in a study of World War II and the Holocaust. Other titles can be partnered with this book as they relate to events of the war in France, Resistance movements, and the Jewish experience of the war: *A Pocket Full of Seeds* by Marilyn Sachs (1972), *Sky: A True Story of Resistance During World War II* by Hanneke Ippisch (1996), *Greater Than Angels* by Carol Matas (1998), *Good Night, Maman* by Norma Fox Mazer (1999), *The Good Liar* by Gregory Maguire (1999), *Tamar* by Mal Peet (2008, see WOW Review Vol. 2, 1), *A Faraway Island* by Annika Thor (2009, see WOW Review Vol. 2, 3), and *Resistance: Book 1* by Carla Jablonski (2010, see WOW Review Vol. 3, 2).

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Buffalo Dreams

Written by Kim Donor
Westwinds Press, 1999, 40 pp.
ISBN: 978-1558684768

Maybe magic doesn't make you do something special. Maybe you do something special, and it makes magic (p. 27).

While watching T.V. and adding to the dream catcher she's had since childhood, Sarah Bearpaw hears the news of the birth of a white buffalo, the only one in the world. Because of tribal stories that have been passed down, Sarah knows that the baby buffalo is a sign of good things to come. Sarah and her family quickly prepare to make the trip to visit the new baby buffalo. Sarah has decided to give the feather from her grandfather's headdress as a gift to the buffalo. Sarah's father is impressed with her unselfishness because the feather is a symbol of strength. He tells Sarah that to give away strength has rewards.

Upon reaching the campground where the white buffalo roams, Sarah's family pitch their tents for the night. The next day, they plan to take their gifts and hang them from the tree for the white buffalo. Joe, Sarah's younger brother, wishes that he could touch the buffalo so that he could become magic. Sarah secretly wishes the same. During the middle of the night, Sarah wakes up and notices that Joe is gone. She knows exactly where to look for him. Sarah finds Joe climbing over the fence into the buffalo pen. Angry and in fear for her baby calf, the mother buffalo bellows as she moves toward Joe. Sarah jumps in front of Joe, protective of her little brother, and asks the mother buffalo to please let them go safely. Suddenly, the baby white buffalo walks past his mother and places his nose in Sarah's hands. Sarah has touched magic.

The white buffalo is a sacred symbol for many American Indian Nations. The chances of a white buffalo being born are one in ten million. The author wrote this book based on the story of a real white buffalo, Miracle, born in 1994, whom people drove many miles to see (<http://whitebuffalomiracle.homestead.com/>). Although the white buffalo is an important symbol for Native Americans, the dream catcher also has significance within the culture and around the world. An authentic tradition to the Ojibway tribe (<http://www.nativetech.org/dreamcat/dreamcat.html>), the legend of the dream catcher is that bad dreams will not be able to pass through it, keeping children safe from nightmares. Sarah's dream catcher had hung above her bed since she was born. She even hung it from a tree as she slept in her sleeping bag on her trip to see the white buffalo.

The story is significant because the author wrote it as contemporary literature. The characters in this story wear modern clothing, live in a modern house, watch T.V., and drive a vehicle as well as camp out in a sleeping bag, not a tipi. It is important for all readers to see Native cultures represented in modern stories since often they are trapped in history and, in particular, in Thanksgiving stories. While the family names in the story are ones that might be considered stereotypes, these names are found in contemporary settings. Sarah's family's last name is Bearpaw and a friend is Greg Little Wolf.

The author wrote this story based on the legend of “White Buffalo Calf Woman.” Although the legend has been transformed as it has been passed through generations and among different tribes, the common belief is that a helpful spirit becomes a white buffalo and continues to help others prosper. The author and illustrator, Kim Doner, uses realistic paintings to bring the story to life with many of the plains tribes represented in the gifts left for the calf. These gifts are found in art from the Sioux, Kiowa, Potawatomi, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Cherokee, Osage, and Ojibway tribes. Doner explains that she chose not to make the Bearpaw family a part of a specific tribe because the real white buffalo, Miracle, was visited by all tribes and so many other people from around the world. She states that she wanted to keep it open for people in hopes that they would focus on the meaning of the story, not the specifics (Kim Doner, personal communication, September 19, 2011). Doner is originally from Oklahoma where she still lives and works as an artist. She has Cherokee roots and her interest in Native American life is evident in her work.

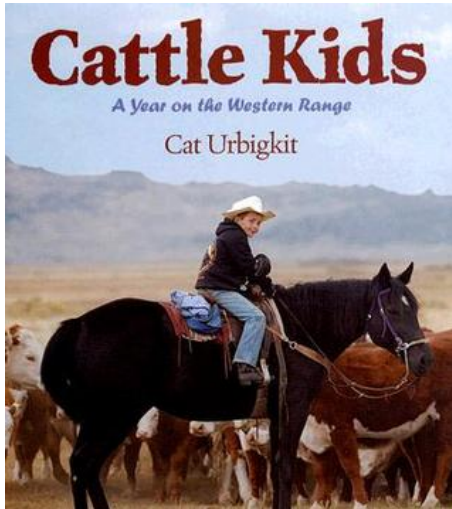
This book is great for discussion on a variety of topics in Native American literature along with other books. For more information on the American buffalo, read *They Came from the Bronx* (2001) by Neil Waldman, a story of how buffalo were saved from extinction. For another example of contemporary Native American literature, read *The Good Luck Cat* (2000) by Joy Harjo. To extend the topic of Native American legends, read *The Legend of the Buffalo Woman* by Paul Goble (2002).

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Cattle Kids, a Year on the Western Range

Written by Cat Urbigkit

Boyd's Mills Press, 2007

ISBN: 978-1590785089

When searching for quality literature for children, books that are culturally authentic to the cowboy culture are difficult to find. Many books exaggerate the life of a cowboy, sending the wrong message to children. It is even harder to find books about the present day life and culture of cowboys, and so children may believe that cowboys are a part of America's past, instead of the present. This book provides a much needed portrayal of cowboys today.

Cattle Kids tells the story of several children on their family ranches in the western part of the United States. These children live on ranches primarily in Wyoming and the book follows their daily life as they help their families throughout the course of a year. Readers can see the different events that take place, such as raising cattle, rounding them up, and shipping them to markets. All of the ranches in this book are beef cattle ranches with a focus on two kinds of cattle ranches, cow-calf outfits and yearling operations. Families who own a cow-calf outfit ranch have cows and calves. Once the calves are raised, they are sold. Families living on a yearling-only operation buy yearlings and raise them until they are old enough to be sold.

The book shows the different types of cattle and the work that goes into taking care of them. Readers will learn about branding, which is when the rancher burns the ranch's symbol into each cow's hide, for the safety of the herd. The first cowboys did this too; however, with technology this job is a little easier today. The author includes photographs from various ranches of the duties ranchers must perform and many of the children are in the photographs.

The author lives on a ranch near Big Piney, Wyoming, with her family. She gets her inspirations from her life on the ranch and the nature surrounding her. As a writer, photographer, and news reporter, she has written numerous books for children about life in the West. What makes her books authentic and interesting is that she incorporates her photographs. Readers love looking at the photographs and seeing children like themselves.

This book is a great way to teach children about the importance of ranch life and how cowboys still participate in the same jobs as a hundred years ago. The photographs are especially beneficial to young readers because they can see what a ranch looks like, the different kinds of cattle, and the ways that ranchers provide for their cattle. The story is centered around these vivid photographs so that readers can understand the activities. Besides being an excellent representation of ranching families, the book is also an example of families working together.

Preschoolers will enjoy this introduction to the ranch culture through illustrative photographs, and elementary students will enjoy learning about how the ranches are run and being introduced to ranch culture. For additional reading, Roxie Munro's book, *Ranch* (2004) is an

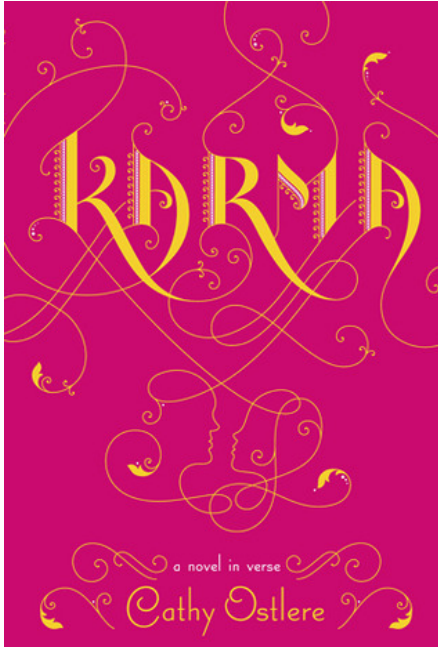
excellent picture book that explores the different activities of a ranch. *Amazing Grazing* by Chris Peterson (2011) can extend this inquiry to include the recent efforts of cattle ranchers to make environmental concerns part of their daily existence.

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Karma

Written by Cathy Ostlere
Razorbill, 2011, 517 pp.
ISBN: 978-1595143389

Karma, a novel written in verse, oscillates between scenes in Elsinore, Canada, and several cities in northern India. The tumultuous rioting and religious clashes between the Hindus and the Sikhs that erupted in late 1984 at the assassination of India's Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards form the backdrop to the novel. Maya, the protagonist, is a cultural straddler — she is of Indian origin but Canadian by birth. The novel is her coming of age story and traces her struggles to understand the motives of her parents; the crazed passions, beliefs, and violence of people of her heritage; and the confused longings of teenage romance.

On her website, <http://cathy-ostlere.com/>, Ostlere provides details about her travels through India in 1984. India was to be the last country that she visited on her yearlong tour of the world at the age of 27. India did leave an indelible print on her psyche and she is able to provide a remarkably vivid description of the customs, landscapes, and peoples that Maya encounters in her journey. The India that Ostlere portrays in the novel is not the fare of travel brochures or elite documentaries but rather that of a nation still struggling with deep-rooted traditions and attempts at modernization. Ostlere's struggles to ward off strange men from touching her walkman in the train while traveling in India seems to be reproduced in the chapter of the novel when she describes Maya's attempts to get away from the crowds at the Jodhpur train station by kicking and hitting anyone and everyone in sight.

Karma begins in late October 1984 (three days before Mrs. Gandhi's assassination) on an airplane with a diary entry. Maya is flying to India with her father, Bapu, and her mother's ashes in an urn. Through the entries in Maya's diary, we learn about her parents' marriage—a Brahman woman marrying a Sikh man—in the face of family opposition, and their life in Canada as well as her mother's suicide. Maya and her father are traveling to India to empty the ashes into the Ganges so that her mother's soul will attain peace. But they are unprepared for the violent passions and rage that circumstances unleash upon them at the assassination of Gandhi in Delhi, the capital of India. As Sikhs are hunted in the streets by Hindu mobs seeking revenge, Maya is separated from her father and boards a train to Jodhpur in the Western part of India, away from Delhi, in the guise of a young boy. From Jodhpur, her journey takes her further west to the yellow city of Jaisalmer on the border to Pakistan, after she is rescued from a mob by a doctor named Parvati. Maya is sent to live with Parvati's family until she can recover from the trauma that has temporarily rendered her mute.

Maya's counterpart in the novel is the young, 16-year old, adopted brother of Parvati, named Sandeep. He was found in the desert as the only survivor of a sandstorm and was willingly given a home by Parvati's father, Barindra, and unwillingly accepted by her mother, whom Sandeep

addresses as “Amma.” The second half of the novel focuses on Sandeep’s attempts at befriending Maya, his realization that he is falling in love with her, and the tribulations faced by Sandeep’s adopted family in harboring Maya under their roof. The novel finally ends with Maya being reunited with her father but at a great cost. In the process, she has grown from being a naive 15-year old to an emotionally mature young woman, who is torn between love and loyalty.

Despite the historical accuracy and the detailed descriptions, certain cultural tidbits intertwined into the novel jar the senses of a cultural insider. At times, one almost gets the sense of the exotic portrayed through Western lenses along with the appeal and melodrama of a Bollywood film. One such jarring aspect of the novel is the author’s choice and spelling of linguistic terms. For instance, Maya’s address of her deceased mother as “Mata,” is unusual. Typically, the commonly-used term would be Maa. Mata is most commonly used with the honorific suffix ji, so addressing the mother with respect would be “mataji” and father would be “pitaji.” While the latter term of address is relatively common in Hindi-speaking households, the corresponding term of address for the mother would still be Maa. This should be understood not as being disrespectful of the mother but rather indicating a greater bonding and informality with her as opposed to the patriarch of the house. Mata is also used as a suffix for denoting something or someone who is bigger than the mere mortal, e.g. the homeland as Bharatmata (Bharat refers to India and Mata is mother); or in singing the praises of a goddess such as Santoshi Mata ki jai (or in praise of Santoshi Mata)! Surprisingly, Ostlere did not choose to have her Punjabi-Canadian protagonist speak even a smattering of Punjabi; rather she speaks Hindi!

Similarly, in the second half of the novel, when we are introduced to Sandeep, his choice of address for his foster mother is intriguing. Sandeep addresses his foster mother as “Amma,” a term of address that is common in southern India! Considering that Jaisalmer is located in the heart of the Thar Desert in the western state of Rajasthan, this term of address seems unusual and in fact, rather unlikely. Linguistically, the closest borrowing for “mother” might come from the local language, Marwari, and any associated dialects, or possibly even Punjabi or Gujarati, and/or most commonly, Hindi.

Elsewhere in the novel, the author’s choice of spellings is confusing. To the outsider who has no knowledge of the Hindi words, the incorrectly spelled transliterations could be problematic. For example, the Hindi word for foreigner is phirang (sometimes also written as firang) and not farange. Farang, though, is the term for foreigner in Thai. And then, in the desert, when Barindra addresses Maya, he says, “Maya-bati”; this should have read as “Maya-beti.” Beti in Hindi refers to daughter and is typically used by elders when addressing young girls, whether their own children or strangers.

Although Ostlere’s descriptions of cultural details are meticulous, she seems to have lost sense of the real and tried to portray the exotic side of India in some places. For instance, her choice of the deity that Maya’s mother worships – Munsa Devi, is not a common everyday deity worshipped in Hindu households. And her choice of spelling seems to be

incorrect. The true name of the goddess seems to be Mansa or Manasa Devi, the goddess who fulfills your wishes and desires. Mansa Devi is a Tantric goddess of serpents! She does have shrines in the northern states where people pray to her, especially barren women who are praying for a child or unmarried women who are praying for a husband. In southern India, similar deities exist albeit known by different monikers.

The Hindu pantheon has about 30,000 gods and goddesses. Of those, the choice of Mansa Devi seems very unusual, especially considering that the author references her only once in the novel. Also, the author's choice of this particular goddess from the huge pantheon of much more powerful deities is one reason for the argument about eroticizing the characters. Mansa Devi is pretty low in the hierarchical structure, and is believed to be one of the forms of the divine feminine power or the Shakti principle.

Another issue is the title itself – *Karma*. In Hinduism, Karma refers to a deed or act that ultimately results in the unending cycle of birth and rebirth through the principle of cause and effect. Very simply put, we are born on this earth in order to evolve spiritually so that at the end of one's life, the soul gets united with the Creator. But this union is not quick and easy because of "free will." Because of our free will, we might tend to go astray and get lost in the clutches of the materialistic world, which itself is nothing but an illusion or "Maya." In the process, we lose sight of our purpose of evolving spiritually. In a way, the idea of Karma may be understood as earning merits by doing good deeds and earning de-merits by committing bad or sinful deeds. The belief is also that we are not always born as humans; if we are human in this lifetime, we must have done a lot of good in our past lifetimes. The idea of Karma is also that each individual is responsible for her/his own deeds and reaps the result of the same. Karma is not earned or inherited by proxy.

Both Hinduism and Sikhism subscribe to *Karma* and reincarnation in order to fulfill the effects of past actions. It is a little confusing therefore to see Amar's father warning him of getting caught up in the "cycle of life, death, and rebirth" (p. 23) by lusting after a Hindu woman because "he will be bound to the Wheel of Existences" (p. 23). Lust is one of the Five Sins that a true follower of Sikhism tries to eliminate from his mind in order to evolve as a spiritual being.

Also, when Sandeep says that his adoption is supposed to save or improve the family's "karma," the concept that resonates most is that of social standing rather than "earning spiritual merit." Each individual has her own "karma" to work off in every lifetime; so in Sandeep's case, since Barindra is the one who readily adopted the child, it is he who is earning the merit. The mother grudgingly adopts him, so she might earn a little merit too but then at every available opportunity, she wishes him back in the desert and constantly reminds him that he is adopted and not really a member of the family. This would only earn her more de-merit, which would weigh down what little merit she might have earned in the first place!

In sum, while *Karma* is an interesting read, the author has gone a little overboard with all the different scenarios. Also, there is a certain Westernization of the characters that smacks of Bollywood influences. Another novel that offers perspective on the conflicting identity of immigrants in western countries is *The Latte Rebellion* (2011) by Sarah Jamila Stevenson.

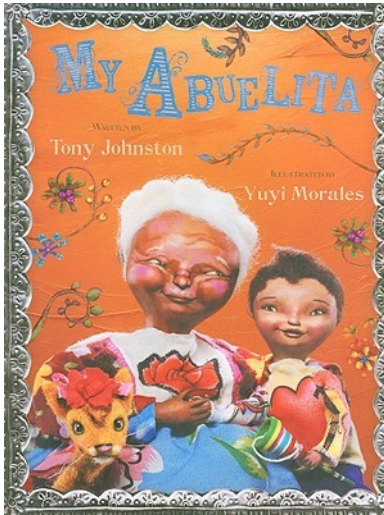
Several titles invite readers to explore the Indian culture: *Secret Keeper* by Mitali Perkins (2009, WOW Review Vol. 1, 8), *Climbing the Stairs* by Padma Venkatraman (2008, WOW Review Vol. 2, 5), *Keeping Corner* by Kashmira Sheth (2007), and *Saraswati's Way* by Monika Schroder (2010) that is reviewed in this issue.

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My Abuelita

Written by Tony Johnston

Illustrated by Yuyi Morales

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009

ISBN: 978-0152163303

My Abuelita is a touching story of a little boy who lives with his grandmother, whom he calls Abuelita. The strong relationship between the grandson and his Abuelita is evident from the beginning, “She is my Abuelita. I love her. And she loves me” (p. 2). Written from the perspective of the little boy, he vividly tells about his adventures with his Abuelita during their morning routine as he helps her get ready for her important job. His admiration of her comes through as the little

boy eagerly helps his Abuelita. “Abuelita arranges her things. I help. She arranges herself. I help. Last of all, I crown her with a sweep of stars” (p. 23). This important job remains a secret until the last page. Readers are kept on the edge of their seats as they try to figure out Abuelita’s important job—a storyteller.

Tony Johnston lived in Mexico with her husband and children for fifteen years. Her experiences lead her to write many books which focus on the Mexican culture. She carefully weaves Spanish words throughout the book, sharing the definitions. The descriptive words show the fondness the little boy has for his Abuelita. The illustrator Yuyi Morales, who was born and raised in Mexico, uses several media to create her pictures. She used polymer clay to create the bodies of the main characters. The clothing and other details were created using wire, felting wool, fabric, wood, acrylic paints, metals, and Mexican crafts. The illustrator photographed the layouts and digitally manipulated the photographs. The illustrations are somewhat quirky but nonetheless detailed and poignant. Cultural Mexican elements can be found in the details of the illustrations. The illustrations should be looked at several times, as each time one can find something new. The facial expressions on each of the characters emphasize the love and strong bond Abuelita and her grandson feel for each other. *My Abuelita* has received many honors including a Pura Belpr Honor Book and an ALA Notable book.

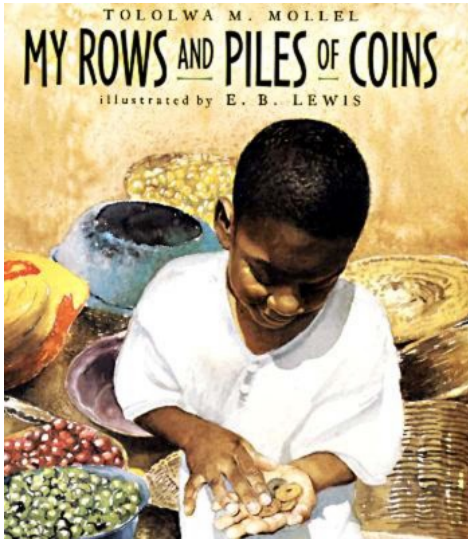
My Abuelita can be used to explore intergenerational relationships, learning about the Mexican culture, and teaching similes and metaphors. This book would work well paired with other multicultural books that support the intergenerational relationships. *Grandma’s Gift* by Eric Velasquez (2010) shows a growing relationship between a Puerto Rican grandmother and her grandson as they spend his Christmas break together. Other books such as, *Little Mama Forgets* by Robin Cruise (2006) and *My Dadima Wears a Sari* by Kashmir Sheth (2007), show strong intergenerational relationships. *My Abuelita* is mixed with many enjoyable similes. Some examples of similes that are found in the text are: “Her face is as crinkled as dried chile” (p. 2); “My Abuelita is round. Robust, she says, like a calabaza. A pumpkin” (p. 6); and “She says the words should be as round as dimes and as wild as blossoms blooming” (p. 16). This wonderful use of text by the author makes this book a great tool for teaching this aspect of writing but also to encourage visual cultural images of Abuelita.

Jill R. Duran, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

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My Rows and Piles of Coins

Written by Tololwa M. Mollel

Illustrated by E. B. Lewis

Clarion Books, 1999

ISBN: 978-0395751862

A young boy, Saruni, who lives in Tanzania in the 1960s, helps his mother take items to the market to sell. He is given five ten-cent coins for his effort. As he walks the market looking at the goods that are for sale he eyes a bike that he would like to buy.

Throughout the story he saves his small earnings so he can buy a bike of his own in order to help his mother deliver her goods to the market. After months of working and saving his money, Saruni takes his coins to the bicycle seller. He very proudly tells the man

that he has three hundred and five shillings to buy the bike. The man responds with humiliating laughter and walks away. Saruni walks away deeply disappointed. He tells his mother and she is touched that he was saving money to help her. The next afternoon his father comes home with a pikipiki, motorbike. He tells Saruni that he can buy his bicycle from him since he no longer needs it. Saruni's parents give him his money back as a payment for his help. Saruni continues to save his coins. This time he wants to buy a cart to pull behind his bicycle to further lighten his mother's load to the market.

Determination and generosity are at the heart of this story. The story contains universal experiences, such as, the pride in working hard and saving what you've earned, gaining a new skill, and doing things for others rather than yourself. Mollel integrates the boy's goals throughout the story, making these experiences flow naturally and never seem overly moralistic or preachy. Children can connect to the character and learn about a culture that may be unfamiliar. They will learn that in Tanzania it is chilly during our summer months in the U.S., that women play an important economic role within their family, and that something as simple as a bicycle can be an important economic asset. In his author's note Mollel explains that even today bicycles are too expensive to buy for recreation and that a family might purchase a bicycle for work or as their only means of transportation. This book also contains a useful glossary which shows children how to pronounce the native words as well as what the words mean.

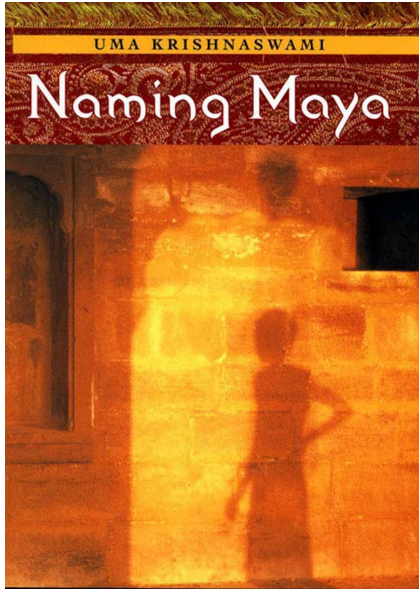
Tololwa Mollel draws from his personal experience of living in Tanzania as a young boy. Mollel gives the references for historical background at the end of the book and weaves the language of the area within the text. He captures the importance of family that is apparent within this African community. The illustrator, E. B. Lewis creates pictures using watercolors that capture the feel and details of a rural Tanzanian community. The beautiful illustrations depict an African country in a non-stereotypical and authentic manner. Some of Mollel's other books include, *The Orphan Boy* (1995), *Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Supper* (2000), *Song Bird* (1999) and *Dinner, for Dinner* (2000). This collection of stories, heard by the author as he was growing up, can be shared with young readers as they consider the tales that may have influenced Saruni in the book reviewed here. Mollel's books have been published in Canada, the U.S., Australia, England, and Tanzania where he was born. His books have also been translated into various South African languages and into Korean.

Laura Salzyn, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

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Naming Maya

Written by Uma Krishnaswami

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004, 178 pp.

ISBN: 978-0374354855

"Maya's gone away. I'm Preeta" (p.39).

Maya believes the trouble between her divorced parents began with her naming. Her father's parents refused to accept the name her mother had chosen for her, which added to the chasm between her parents. Maya learned to use the names "like weapons" (p.39), which adds to her feeling of guilt after the divorce. Twelve-year-old Maya is spending part of her summer vacation in India despite having tried to

avoid the trip. She and her mother have traveled from their New Jersey home to Chennai, India to sell the house of Maya's grandfather after his death. They are joined at the house by her grandfather's old housekeeper, Kamala Mami, who is suffering from the early stages of dementia. While Mami is struggling to remember, Maya is flooded with memories that she struggles to understand.

Naming Maya is set in the present in southern India. Maya brings a camera to record her trip. Her grandfather's house is absent of the amenities to which she is accustomed, such as a shower with hot and cold running water. Maya bathes in a bathtub after mixing cold water from the faucet with boiling-hot water from a "little heater thing that hangs on the wall and needs to be turned on half an hour before bathing" (p.103). She has to share the bathroom with a gecko. There is no phone or computer access in the house. Maya and her mother have to go next door to make a call or to the Cyberconnexions store in town to surf the net. Chennai comes across as a mixture of the present and the past with its rickshaws and buses.

Although Maya attends Hindu culture camp in New Jersey, she is Americanized and notes that "every time she comes to India it's like entering another world, a world that gets on fine without me in between my visits" (p. 17). Throughout her visit, she becomes more familiar with Tamil and Hindu languages, traditions and legends (including the true origin of her name). Maya is torn between the two cultures to which she belongs much the way she is torn between her two names and the parents who have chosen to end their marriage. The issues Maya deals with will be familiar to the novel's targeted audience of readers who are ten-years and older. For upper elementary and middle school students, *Naming Maya* would make an excellent companion to Kashmira Sheth's *Blue Jasmine* (2004), which depicts the main character leaving India to live in the United States. Both books address the mixture of cultures while intertwining issues that many adolescents encounter.

Uma Krishnaswami is a native of New Delhi, India and a graduate of the University of Delhi in India. She currently resides in the United States and is a writing teacher and an author of picture books and novels for children. She has written *The Broken Tusk: Stories of the Hindu God Ganesha* (1996), which was given the Scientific American Young Readers Award in 1997, and *Monsoon* (2003) among

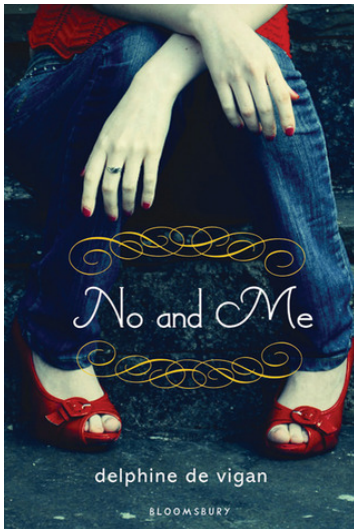
other titles. She has taught writing to both adults and children. She currently teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Naming Maya was recognized in 2005 by the International Reading Association as a Notable Book for a Global Society. Krishnaswami is committed to creating books that are authentically accurate. More information can be found on her website: <http://www.umakrishnaswami.com/> and at <http://www.answers.com/topic/uma-krishnaswami>.

Rhonda Hover, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

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No and Me

Written by Delphine de Vigan
Bloomsbury USA, 2010, pp. 256
ISBN: 978-1599904795

Sometimes I leave her there, in front of an empty beer glass. I get up, sit down again, hang around, try to find something to comfort her. I can't find the words. I don't manage to go. She looks down and says nothing. And our silence is filled with the world's impotence. (p. 51)

Thirteen-year-old Lou is bright. Bright, but shy, however, and that

shyness creates opportunities for her Parisian classmates to delight in any attention given her. So, when challenged to make a presentation at school, Lou decides to say the first thing that comes into her head, which is to present the story of a homeless girl based on interviews of an actual homeless teen. The problem is that Lou does not know any homeless people, much less a homeless girl, and she is warned about approaching someone “unsuitable” that she might see on the street. Nevertheless, Lou decides to search for a homeless girl at the Austerlitz train station, and when she is approached by an older girl who wants a cigarette, she sees her opportunity. From this auspicious beginning, the two embark upon a journey of discovery that leads to friendship and the challenges of surviving in a world without support. *No and Me* ventures into the issues of homeless teens, their survival, and the resources they need to become the people they would like to become. The road is difficult—for those who are homeless and for those who may wish to befriend them. Lou and No are realistic characters, which makes reading this novel both difficult and engaging. It is an excellent text to use with young adults as the narrative really puts a face on the homeless population—a face very similar to the readers’ own.

No and Me presents one of the most difficult realities faced by developed nations—what do we do with those who are abandoned or who have no resources to keep them from living on the streets? It is a question about national morality and ethics as well as the morality of the communities and individuals within a nation. This novel could be read alongside *Make Lemonade* (Virginia Euwer Wolff, 2006) and *How I Made it to 18* (Tracy White, 2010) in a unit on young adults attempting to survive with limited resources. If added to a unit on homelessness, texts like *A Small Kiss Free Kiss in the Dark* (Glenda Millard, 2011) and *Homelessness Comes to School* (Joseph Murphy KerriTobin, 2011) would be nice complements.

No and Me addresses themes about the weight of being alone in the world, the crucial element of family and friends, and the importance of economic and emotional support. It is a stark reminder that life really is fragile and reminds us that our assumptions about life in developed nations are more myth than reality. The novel is bittersweet, bringing readers to reality that sometimes our help isn’t enough. The story widens readers’ understandings of homelessness as well as the hope that there are ways to support those who need it. Delphine de Vigan won the 2008 Prix de Libraries award for *No and Me*, her third novel. She lives in Paris and is interviewed in French on

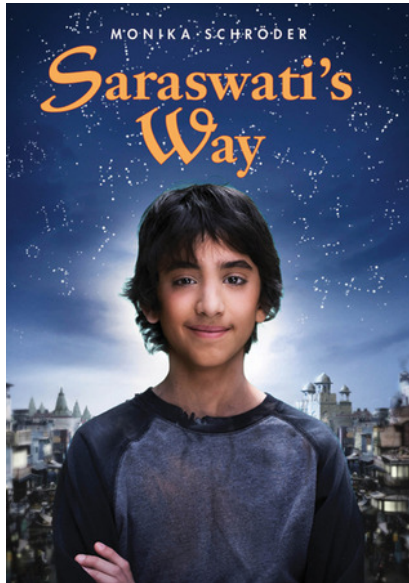
youtube.com at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXsiy5xNa74>. The book was made into a movie in 2010.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

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Saraswati's Way

Written by Monika Schröder
Farrar Straus Giroux. 2010, 224 pp.
ISBN: 978-0374364113

Sometimes a short trickle of rain speckled the ground enough to give off the promising smell of wet mud. But after this cruel teaser the sky didn't open up for a rain downpour, gave no relief from the sticky heat that hung unchanged, like a punishment with no end in sight (p. 8).

With poetic propose, Monika Schröder tells the story of people and fields in Rajasthan, India suffering from drought and the resulting impact on the academic aspirations of twelve-year-old Akash. The family's crop will be too small to feed them all or pay off their debts to the landlord. But each day poor and motherless Akash looks into the eyes of Saraswati, goddess of wisdom and knowledge, and wishes to learn more mathematics. His teacher, Mr. Sudhir, has taught him all he knows and now Akash must find a scholarship or another way to pursue his education. Although Akash's father Bapu believes in the boy's dream to develop his gift for numbers, Dadima, his grandmother, says there is no need "to teach a bucket to sing" (p. 18). "Dreams are like air. They don't feed our stomachs" (p. 20).

When Bapu succumbs to a fever, Akash holds fast to his father's dying words: "What you desire is on its way" (p. 28). But it doesn't seem that Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is working on the boy's behalf. Instead of insisting that Akash's uncle overcome his drug addiction and take up work to support the family, Dadima makes a deal with the landlord to indenture Akash into hard labor at the quarry until the family can pay off its debts.

Still, Akash holds onto his dream; he stuffs his math notebook into his bag as he is forcibly transported to perform hard labor. When an opportunity presents itself, Akash examines the payment book used to record the workers' wages. He uses his number sense to learn that none of the indentured workers will ever be debt-free. Knowing his work cannot help his family and determined to pursue his dream, Akash hops a train in order to make his way in the big city of Delhi. There he meets other desperate children who sleep on the streets and must pay off the police in order to make their living off travelers passing through the train station. One of them, Rohit, introduces Akash to Ramesh, the newspaper seller, who lets the boy work in his stall and sleep each night on the stall roof.

Finally, Ganesha removes all obstacles, and no one is more grateful than the boy on whom "trouble hangs... like a bad smell" (p. 95). A doctor who fixes Ramesh's broken arm helps Akash meet the principal at the St. Christopher School. In five months, the boy will sit for the math exam with the goal of earning a scholarship. Readers will infer a positive future for Akash and wish for this resourceful boy's hard-won success.

In this character-driven story, Schröder sets an emotionally-intense tone that clearly conveys the desperate situation of India's poverty-stricken rural families and urban homeless children who must survive through any possible means. Hindu cultural beliefs create the context for the story and are thoughtfully and respectfully conveyed. More than superficial aspects of culture, readers learn about the roles of various gods and goddesses in the daily lives of Hindu people. The centrality of the Ganges River in Indian life, the Hindu cremation ceremony and mourning period, signs of respect exchanged between generations, and more are woven into the plot and authenticate the setting and conflict. The Vedic mathematics system is also explained and will intrigue readers who have not used these math operations shortcuts.

Monika Schröder, who grew up in Germany, has taught internationally in several countries and most recently has served as an elementary school librarian at the American Embassy School in New Delhi. In her author's note, she talks about the impact of poverty and child labor on children in India. She says that street children have a slim chance of success in life, but wanted to write a hopeful book. In *Akash*, she has created a determined and courageous boy with strong religious beliefs, who earns a bit of help from others and experiences more than a small amount of luck in order to achieve his goals.

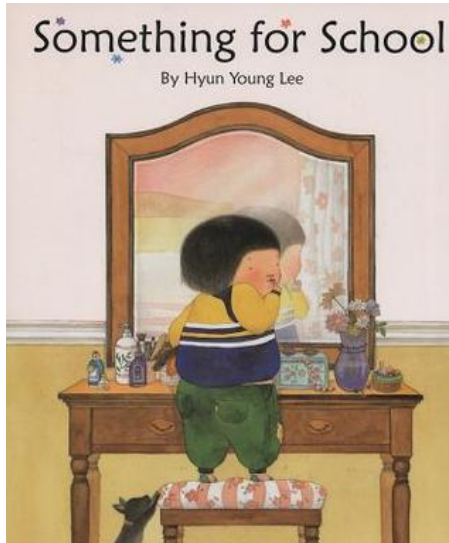
This middle grade novel can be paired with other books rich in cultural contexts in which young people strive to get an education. In *Keeping Corner* by Kashmira Sheth (2009), twelve-year-old Leela, a child widow living in Gujarat, India, in 1918, must "keep corner" after her young husband dies. During her one year confinement, her school teacher comes to Leela's home prepare her for her scholarship exams and to raise the young girl's consciousness about Indian traditions and politics. *Wanting Mor* by Rukhsana Khan (2009, see WOW Review Vol. 2, 2) tells the story of Jameela, an orphaned girl who against great odds succeeds at getting an education in Afghanistan. *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Journey to Change the World... One Child at a Time* (The Young Reader's Edition) adapted by Sarah Thomson (2009, see WOW Review, Vol. 2, 1) from the adult book by Greg Mortensen and David Oliver Relin recounts how an elder, a mountain climber, and a village work together to make formal education a reality for young girls in Pakistan. In *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate (2007), a young Sudanese refugee named Kek finds kindness and experiences racism in his fifth-grade ESL classroom in the United States. All of these books offer views of students' yearnings and struggles for learning through formal schooling.

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Something for School

Written and illustrated by Hyun Young Lee

Kane/Miller, 2008

ISBN: 978-1933605852

Yoon is nervous rather than excited on her first day of kindergarten. The boys and girls are asked to line up in two lines order to take a picture with teachers to celebrate their entrance into school. Yoon lines up with the other girls; however, girls mistake her for a boy and ask Yoon to move to the boys' line and the boys welcome her as a boy. When a boy who lives in the same building with Yoon tells others that Yoon is a girl, she bursts into tears. Her first picture in the kindergarten is taken while she is crying.

In order to look like a girl, Yoon tries on her mother's handbag, sunglasses, and high heels. Finally, she thinks that her sister's headband with pretend curly hair could make her look like a girl. With the special headband, Yoon has a wonderful day with friends in the kindergarten. No one calls her a boy; however, the next day, her sister retrieves her headband and Yoon must go to kindergarten without it. She is worried that other boys and girls would again mistake her for a boy. This time, however, no one considers her a boy, and they want to play with Yoon, accepting her as she is. She does not worry about the special headband and about being mistaken for a boy. Yoon truly enjoys going to the kindergarten and playing with her friends.

This picture book was originally written in Korean, 곱슬곱슬머리띠 [gopseulgopseulmeritti] and published in 2006. Hyun Young Lee wrote and illustrated this picture book. Before this book, she illustrated several picture books by other authors, but this is the first book for which she was the author as well. As she had experienced illustrating several books about children's experiences in kindergarten and nursery school, she was well aware of how children feel before coming to school. In this picture book, she succeeds in showing children's feelings within a new environment in a simple story. Her illustrations are colorful and attractive and can arouse children's curiosity about different aspects of South Korean culture.

In spite of the simple plot, the story includes many issues, such as gender and self-esteem. The gender issue is clearly described in the book. The reason Yoon is mistaken for a boy on the first day is her appearance. Yoon has short hair and wears pants while other girls have long hair and wear skirts. At the end of the story, although Yoon does not change her appearance, the boys and girls accept Yoon just as she is. The illustration on the last page clearly reflects the author's message about gender and self-esteem. There are two pictures of Yoon—one taken on the entrance ceremony and one taken later in the kindergarten. In both pictures, although Yoon wears pants with short hair, she is with both a boy and a girl. This book could provide a chance to think about gender and self-esteem within different cultures. During the reading, teachers will need to be careful that parents do not impose preconceptions about gender, such as a girl should wear a skirt and have long hair.

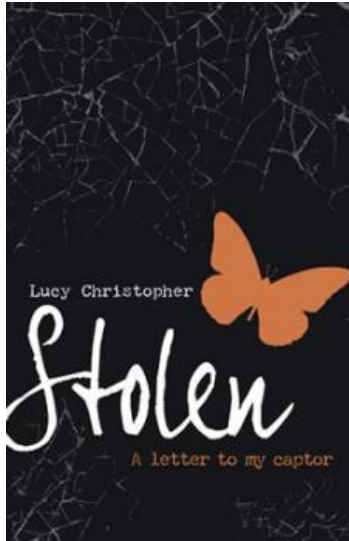
Even though this book does not clearly describe Korean cultures, it might be an entry book for Korean cultures, especially contemporary Korean life. By focusing on a general theme, readers are more likely to find commonalities with different cultures. The theme of self-esteem within Korean culture is found in *The Name Jar* (Yangsook Choi, 2001) and the theme of food can be found in *Bee-Bim Bop!* (Linda Sue Park, 2008), which has interesting rhymes that are easy for children to follow and a recipe for making Bee-Bim Bop, the traditional Korean food. The theme of holidays can be found in *Sori's Harvest Moon Day* (Uk-Bae Lee, 1999) and *New Clothes for New Year's Day* (Hyun-jooBae, 2007). The former book is about the traditional Korean holiday, Chu-sok, similar to Thanksgiving. The latter book is about welcoming the lunar New Year in Korea and introduces the ways in which Koreans spend their time and wear new clothes during the holiday. Family issues can be found *The Zoo* (Suzy Lee, 2007) and *Behind the Mask* (Yangsook Choi, 2006). The latter book introduces not only family relationships but also the Korean mask dance.

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Stolen

Written by Lucy Christopher
New York: Scholastic, 2010, 304 pp.
ISBN: 978-0545170932

A masterpiece first novel for Lucy Christopher, *Stolen* is a breathtaking story of survival. The story takes the form of a letter from captive to captor, drawing the reader in from the very beginning. It explores the harsh, unforgiving outback of Australia, the will to survive, and the tumultuous, sometimes confusing, relationship between kidnapper and captive.

Gemma, a British sixteen-year-old girl, is traveling with her parents when she meets a vaguely familiar handsome young man during her layover in the Bangkok airport. His captivating blue eyes make it impossible for Gemma to resist, and she quickly becomes smitten. Gemma's blind attraction and trust is natural, but she will soon regret her initial instincts as this entrancing man becomes her kidnapper. Gemma is horrified when she awakes in a hot little house and learns that her kidnapper, Ty, has spent years watching, planning, and waiting for her to come live with him. He has hopes she will understand his love, love him in return, and accept her new life. Gemma is tested in many ways, as she learns to live in the desert with a man she finds hard to hate, but should. Because of the poetic feel to the landscape and the romanticized image her captor has of her, Gemma slowly accepts what is happening and eventually begins to accept Ty's love. The conflicting feelings within Gemma are reflected in her letter, which leaves the reader conflicted as well until the very last page. This brilliant piece blurs the boundaries of friend and captor, contempt and love, reality and fantasy.

Christopher creates a novel with a disturbing plot that mirrors the unruly setting. It is beautifully written which conflicts with the reality of the story. Christopher has managed to explore a situation that is usually horrific, and show many more dimensions. The story is a reflection on events that have already happened, which gives the reader insights into Gemma's emotions, thoughts, confusions, and desperation. The reader is transfixed by the horror of the kidnapping, but finds that they also slowly fall in love with the kidnapper.

Christopher grew up in Australia, spending a lot of her time living, traveling, and working in the bush. She uses her feelings and personal experiences from being in the outback to develop the essence of the setting and to create Gemma and Ty's characters. More about her life is found at <http://www.lucychristopher.com/about>. The authenticity of Christopher's portrayal of the Australian outback is reflected in many ways. She describes the landscape as desolate, barren, hot, and unmapped, which is how many Australians would describe it as well. The animals and plants are native to Australia and that particular region. Brown snakes are prevalent throughout Australia and are feared due to their potent venom; this is the same snake that bites Gemma and ends Ty's fantasy. Information about Australia's Outback can be found at <http://www.outback-australia-travel-secrets.com/great-sandy-desert.html> and at Google books.

Ty is the only character representative of Australia, so does not provide an accurate insight to the peoples of this country. However, Ty does possess characteristics and traits that reflect Australian life and uses words and phrases that are common in Australian's phraseology.

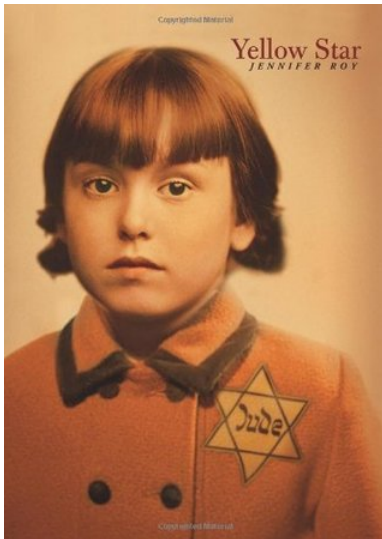
Books that would complement *Stolen's* capture and captive relationship are John Fowles's *The Collector* (2006) or Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto* (2008). These two highly acclaimed young adult novels address issues of kidnapping and the main characters' struggles with Stockholm Syndrome.

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Yellow Star

Written by Jennifer Roy
Marshall Cavendish, 2006, 227 pp.
ISBN: 978-0761452775

Using free verse poetry, Jennifer Roy presents a remarkable story of childhood innocence, courage, and hope during the Holocaust. With a season by season timeline of World War II events and the Nazi Regime, this gripping retelling of Jewish survival is unforgettable.

Sylvia Perlmutter, Roy's aunt, is one of the twelve child survivors who emerge from the Lodz, Poland ghetto. Beginning each section with a brief synopsis of the new year's occurrences, Roy does an excellent job of revealing what is to come while simultaneously drawing the reader into

Sylvia's story. Sylvia is only four years old when German Nazis invades Poland, sending her family on a journey to Warsaw in search of refuge. Unsuccessful, Sylvia's family returns to Lodz. In February of 1940 the Perlmutter family is relocated from their apartment into the ghetto. With six years of worries ranging from getting shot with no reasonable explanation, being called to board a train headed towards "a better arrangement," starvation, freezing to death, and being buried alive, Sylvia's life is a true testament of courage.

As the war progresses so does the diminishing number of ghetto inhabitants. Isaac Perlmutter, Sylvia's father, is a quick witted man with acute observation skills. He outmaneuvers the Nazi guards and is the saving grace for several families. On January 19, 1945 Sylvia awakens her family because of bombing and they flee to the ghetto courtyard where they are met by others in hiding. As the smoke disperses, Russian soldiers on horseback ride in to greet the crowd. Due to the stars of David patched on their clothing, the Jewish Russian major who was ordered to demolish the entire camp abandons those orders to rescue the lone survivors. The Perlmutter family along with Isaac's brother, his wife, and their son were seven of approximately 800 Jewish survivors liberated from the Lodz ghetto.

As the niece of the narrator within the story, Jennifer Roy has the connection of being a Jew and the personal insights of Sylvia. The authenticity of this novel is supported with a timeline of events between 1939-1945— before, during, and after World War II. *Yellow Star* and *Daniel Half Human: and the Good Nazi* by David Chotjewitz (2004) note the same occurrences for each year. *Daniel Half Human* would be an excellent novel to pair with *Yellow Star* in a Holocaust study. Chotjewitz offers dual perspectives through a German Nazi soldier and his best friend who is half Jewish. Although many individuals revel in the retribution that Jews received after liberation when most of National Socialist (Nazi) Party were imprisoned, killed, or committed suicide, Chotjewitz made me debate whether to blame the German soldier in *Daniel Half Human* for treating his friend in that manner in order to save his life. How does one define selfishness and compassion? These two novels offer different outlooks on the Holocaust, one based on surviving as a Jew and the other surviving as a German.

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