



WOW REVIEW

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Open Theme

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Open Theme

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Volume IX Issue 3: Open Theme

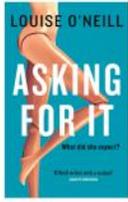
Editor's Note:

In this volume's open theme, reviewers share their thoughts about narratives that introduce new ideas about the world, new actions to take, and new ways of knowing.

Books such as *My First Book of Korean Words: An ABC Rhyming Book* and *Samira and the Skeletons* delight while presenting new ways of seeing the world. Not all ways of knowing are easy, however. Some are quite painful, as in *Asking for It, Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story*, *The Raven's Children*, and *Bone Gap*, exceptional books for older readers. Others invite us into magical worlds or reality touched by magic, as in *The Head of the Saint* and *The Lie Tree*, two novels that highlight what can be learned through the discovery of truths often hidden. And then there are books for middle readers such as *Somewhere Among* and *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* that highlight intercultural experiences both enlightening and thoughtful.

This issue presents a number of deeply moving books that will touch your heart and compel you to think about the world as it is as well as inspire you to take action to create a better world. Enjoy and think about submitting for our next issue! Due: May 15, 2017.

Holly Johnson



Asking For It

Written by Louise O'Neill

Quercus, 2016, 324 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1681445373

They are all innocent until proven guilty. But not me. I am a liar until I am proven honest. (p. 270)

At eighteen, Emma O'Donovan is the most beautiful girl in her quiet Irish town of Ballinatoon--and she knows it. Accustomed to being the object of everyone's attention, she is vain and selfish, hiding her insecurities behind her perfect appearance. When she and her friends go to a party, she is determined to attract the most impressive boy. In the process of trying to get what she thinks she wants, she becomes intoxicated and takes prescription pills. The next thing she knows, she is awakened by her parents on her own front porch, disheveled and disoriented, with no memory of what happened the night before. Then she sees the photos.

Photos are posted all over social media and tagged under a fake account named "Easy Emma" -- horrifying, graphic, incriminating photos of Emma, unconscious and violated, for all the world to see. As the photos go viral and vicious comments spread like wildfire around her small community, Emma finds herself swiftly and mercilessly ostracized by friends and peers. Shocked and in a panic at hearing the word rape mentioned by her guidance counselor, Emma reacts defensively and claims she was pretending to be asleep in the photos -- a fact that does not help her later when she comes to terms with the fact that what happened to her was in no way consensual. By that point, a year has passed and she is so engulfed by shame that she no longer feels like Emma, but rather "the Ballinatoon Girl," the moniker given to her by the international press, who dissect her impending court case ruthlessly on the nightly news and online. Ostracized by her community that rallies behind the boys, Emma doesn't feel that even her parents believe she wasn't asking for it on some level. Disgusted with herself and deeply depressed, she retreats into herself and barely manages to function as the trial looms closer and closer.

Asking For It raises hard questions about how society treats rape victims in a way that few other YA books on this subject tend to do. O'Neill's writing is unflinching in its depiction of Emma's pain: raw and harrowing and terribly real. It is provocative in its brave and honest exploration of rape culture and victim-shaming; for in her bold decision to introduce Emma as an unlikeable character at the start of the book, O'Neill forces the reader to confront the same uncomfortable questions facing Emma's tight-knit community in the aftermath of her rape. As readers, we have the distance to realize that nobody deserves what happens to Emma. In its chilling details, O'Neill's ripped-from-the-headlines tale bears echoes of real-life rape cases closer to home.

Emma's story takes place in a quiet Irish town with all the details of small-town Irish

life and the cadences of Irish teenagers portrayed with pitch-perfect verisimilitude by O'Neill, herself a native of a small Irish town. This is a story, however, that could happen anywhere. Emma's story contains traces of Steubenville and Maryville in its portrayal of a close-knit community who regards the local sports team as heroes incapable of wrongdoing. As readers' hearts break for Emma, it is impossible to forget that this sort of thing happens all too often, the world over. O'Neill offers no easy answers, but she leaves readers with plenty to think about. This powerful book begs to be discussed, and will stay with readers long after they put it down.

Pair *Asking For It* with E.K. Johnston's *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* (2016) for another distinctive look at an individual's experience with rape. Laurie Halse Anderson's classic novel *Speak* (1999) offers another perspective, that of a victim whose trauma is suffered secretly in silence. Each individual victim has her own story, and each situation is distinct in its details and outcomes; it is our responsibility as readers to listen to them, and to follow O'Neill's lead by always asking ourselves the hard questions.

Asking For It was named a 2017 Printz Honor Book by the American Library Association, as well as one of School Library Journal's Best Books of 2016 and one of New York Public Library's Best Books of 2016. It was the 2015 winner of the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Award in its native Ireland. O'Neill's previous book, *Only Ever Yours* (2015), was the recipient of multiple awards and critical acclaim. O'Neill lives in Ireland and writes a weekly column for the Irish Examiner. She has worked on a documentary, "Asking for It," about rape culture in Ireland.

Jenny Zbrizher, Morris County Library, Whippany, NJ



Bone Gap

Written by Laura Ruby
Balzer and Bray, 2015, 345 pp.
ISBN-13: 9780062317629

Laura Ruby’s chilling yet heart-warming young adult novel, *Bone Gap*, traverses time and space into myth and magical realism, exploring issues related to beauty, loss, perseverance, place, and connection. With expressive language, vivid imagery, and a moving plot told through multiple narrators, this narrative is a fast-paced, page-turning read. It begins with the appearance of Roza, a lovely but reclusive young woman who teenage Finn and his brother Sean find in their barn. With no place to go and too frightened to share her story, Roza accepts the invitation to stay with the brothers until she figures out what to do. The story unravels after Finn O’Sullivan witnesses Roza’s abduction from their home. He recalls the movements of a mysterious tall man as Roza is led to an ominous black SUV, yet he cannot recall any details about the man’s face. With no other witnesses to the incident, no one in town—not even his brother Sean, who loves him and Roza dearly—believe the truth in Finn’s story.

Although the townsfolk were smitten with Roza for her beauty and light, they feel that they didn’t really know her. She carried her past silently after mysteriously appearing in the O’Sullivan’s barn battered and bruised. She was foreign, from Poland, and different from the rest of the town. Because they didn’t know much about her, they don’t delve into questions regarding the mystery of her disappearance—perhaps she wanted to leave. However, Finn cannot shake the vision of the terrified and wide-eyed Roza as the black SUV drove out of sight and he resolves to find a way to bring her back. In the meantime, Roza is held captive, trapped in a castle by the mysterious man, whose “icy eyes on fire” make her fight for her “breath, as if that stare was incinerating all the oxygen in the room, as if she would be consumed along with it” (p. 26). Servants are at her beck and call to fulfill any worldly request she desires, while the man awaits, asking the constant question, “Are you in love with me yet?” (p. 23). Like Persephone, Demeter’s daughter in the Greek myth, Roza is a daughter of the earth who longs for the gentle hills of the Polish countryside of her childhood and the garden she cultivated on the O’Sullivan’s land. Paralleling the myth, plants wither in Roza’s absence. Unlike Persephone, however, her captor does not allow her to periodically return home. There is no escape for Roza, and when she wonders why this is her fate, she is given the answer: “You are the most beautiful” (p. 88).

On his journey to find Roza, Finn begins a relationship with “Petey” Willis, who tames bees and climbs out her window to join him on magical horse rides. Petey leads Finn to understand why it was that he couldn’t see the face of Roza’s abductor. Eventually, Finn learns to trust what he knows to be true in order to bring Roza back.

At a time when adolescents are questioning their identity and sense of belonging, this

novel speaks to the human need to connect with those who see you for who you truly are—past the appearances and assumptions that others may have. The text is for a mature audience, as it includes some violent and sexual content. This could make a nice pairing with books such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chboskey, 2012), *The Art of Being Normal* (Lisa Williamson, 2016) and *We are Okay* (Nina LaCour, 2017), all of which address issues of identity and acceptance.

Bone Gap is the winner of the 2016 Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature and was recognized as a National Book Award Finalist. Laura Ruby has written for audiences ranging from upper elementary children to adults. Her children's titles include the award-winning *Lily's Ghosts* (2011), *The Chaos King* (2007), and *The Wall and the Wing* (2006). Her other works of Young Adult fiction include *Bad Apple* (2009), *Play Me* (2008), and *Good Girls* (2008). She currently resides in Chicago with her husband and two cats, and is on the faculty of Hamline University's Master's in Writing for Children Program.

Monica Yoo, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, CO



The Head of the Saint

Written by Socorro Acioli
Translated by Daniel Hahn
Delacorte Press, 2016, 192 pp.
ISBN-13: 9780553537925

You can't leave here without lighting the candle your mother asked you for.
(p. 149)

One of USBBY's Outstanding International Books for 2017, this novel delves into the beauty of magical realism and how the mystical is an ever-present part of the everyday. Samuel is 14 years old and an orphan. Before his mother dies, she asks Samuel to light candles at the feet of three saints—statues that can be found near the home of his absent father. Samuel makes the trek—16 days' walk—and finds his father's family home. Receiving no welcome at his grandparent's home, Samuel is directed by his grandmother to a dry space in the forest near the village. Starving, homeless, and weak from his pilgrimage, Samuel finds the dry space—the concrete head of St. Anthony, a part of a giant statute created to honor the saint. The head was never placed on the concrete statue because it was too heavy for a crane to lift. Soon Samuel is befriended by teenage Francisco, who uses the head for illicit reading. Francisco brings Samuel food and Samuel shares that he hears the prayers of villagers within the head. Samuel and Francisco decide to “answer” the prayers of villagers, who call the answers miracles. What transpires from these miracles fits entirely within the genre of magical realism as family secrets are revealed and lives are restored.

This wondrous book from Brazil brings together tragedy, destruction, and tradition into a work of beauty. *The Head of the Saint* would be a wonderful way to introduce adolescents to the genre of magical realism, and so could be paired with other pieces of magical realism such as *The Book Jumper* by Mechthild Gläser (2017) or *The Walls Around Us* by Nova Ren Suma (2016). It would also make a nice addition to other books on traditions, miracles, and secrets such as *All We Have Left* by Wendy Mills (2016) or *The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog* by Adam Gidwitz (2016).

Socorro Acioli was born in Brazil and works as a journalist. She received a master's degree in Brazilian literature, and was encouraged to attend a workshop conducted by Gabriel García Márquez (one of the premier authors of magical realism in the world) based on her idea for *The Head of the Saint*. She has won the Jabuti Prize for children's literature in Brazil and is currently earning a Ph.D. in Literary Studies at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, where she also teaches literary theory and works as a translator. Daniel Hahn works as a translator of literary fiction. He translates books from Portuguese, Spanish, and French. He is part of the UK

translation community and served as chair of the Translators Association.

Meet Socorro Acioli: socorroacioli.wordpress.com

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



The Lie Tree

Written by Frances Hardinge

Amulet, 2016, 377 pp.

ISBN-13: 9781419718953

In *The Lie Tree*, author Frances Hardinge explores the feminist struggles of fourteen-year-old Faith Sunderly. The Victorian Era provides a perfect context for this captivating murder mystery. During this time period, the scientific community was coming to terms with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and society treated women as second-class citizens. Belief in phantoms, ghosts, and superstitions abounded and the line between scientific fact and fantastical discoveries was blurred in the minds of scientists and laypeople alike. The historical elements heighten the tension between the fantasy aspect of the story, the tree that lives on lies, and the courageous and bold curiosity of a scientific-minded young woman ahead of her time.

When Faith's naturalist father discovers the so-called Mendacity Tree, or Lie Tree, in China, he learns that it grows in dark or muted light and bears citrus-like fruit with extraordinary properties if fed lies. Mr. Sunderly makes a promise that "in the interests of Truth" he will feed the tree with lies to deceive the world and bring back knowledge that could benefit all mankind. This discovery, his secrecy, and his lies create a scandal and lead to his murder. Her family, her father's colleagues, the servants, and everyone in the small English community of Vane underestimate Faith. Her curious mind leads her to question her father's fatal "accident" and drives her to learn more about the mysteries he was in the process of studying. As Faith negotiates the gulf between the decorum expected of her, including inferiority to all males, and her determination to be recognized for her intelligence, Faith's character shows readers a young woman who is determined and goes to great lengths to learn about her father's discoveries and to solve the mystery of his death.

During this historical time period, the social classes in England were especially distinct. The gossip, rumors, and lies that weave throughout this story are perpetuated by servants and social class "betters" to frighten or seek revenge on members of other social classes. Faith's mother teaches her daughter how to talk to and manipulate servants and then Faith herself takes advantage of the "servants' invisible world" to spread the lies that feed the Lie Tree.

The fantasy aspect of the novel spotlights the disruption in scientific thought that resulted from Darwin's publication of *The Origin of the Species* in 1859. Darwin's work called into question many long-held beliefs and theories about life. Faith's connection to the natural world is one exciting aspect of this story. For example, when Faith and her brother are lowered into a dig at an excavation site, Hardinge writes: "The past was all around her. She could smell it. It did not feel dead. It felt alive, and as curious about her as she was about it" (p. 48).

In her effort to understand the Lie Tree, Faith feeds it lies and overcomes her fear of eating its fruit. “She was a scientist, she reminded herself. Scientists did not give in to awe and superstition. Scientists asked questions, and answered them through observation and logic” (p. 208). Faith learns that ingesting the fruit gives her visions of truth but at a great cost. “A lie was like a fire, Faith was discovering. At first it needed to be nursed and fed, but carefully and gently. A slight breath would fan the newborn flames, but too vigorous a huff would blow it out. Some lies took hold and spread, crackling with excitement, and no longer needed to be fed. But then these were no longer your lies. They had a life and shape of their own, and there was no controlling them” (p. 255).

Hardinge’s use of language is one of the compelling aspects of *The Lie Tree*. In writing about Faith’s love for her father, Hardinge writes: “But she had loved him. She had loved him too hard and too long to lose her hold even now. She had nailed her very heart and soul to his mast” (p. 160). Lying in bed one night, Faith imagines “her lie spreading silently like dark green smoke, filling the air around the house like a haze, spilling from the mouths of those who whispered and wondered and feared. She imagined it soaking like mist into waiting leaves, seeping like sap down gnarled slender stems, and forcing itself out into a small, white spearhead of a bud” (p. 193).

Issues surrounding feminism, truth-telling, family loyalty, self-respect, justice and revenge are themes that run throughout the novel. This book could be paired with similarly themed titles. *Code Name Verity: Courage, Friendship, and Betrayal in World War II* by Elizabeth Wein (2012) is an historical “feminist” novel that would make a compelling companion to *The Lie Tree*. Two titles in the WOW Review Volume 9, Issue 2 (<http://wowlit.org/volume-ix-issue-2/>) focused on disrupting the status quo would also make thoughtful companion titles: *The Other Boy* by M.G. Hennessy (2016), illustrated by Sfé R. Monster and *Soldier Sister, Fly Home* by Nancy Bo Flood (2016), illustrated by Shonto Begay.

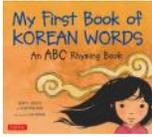
Frances Hardinge was born in Kent and lives in the United Kingdom. According to the biography on her Web site, she has always enjoyed “dark” stories. “When she was six, she wrote a short story that included an attempted poisoning, a faked death and a villain being thrown off a cliff – all in just one page!” (<http://www.franceshardinge.com/>). Hardinge’s other books include *Cuckoo’s Song*, *Face in the Glass*, *Fly by Night*, *Fly Trap*, and more. All feature strong female protagonists. *The Lie Tree* has earned many recognitions. It is on the USBBY 2017 Outstanding International Book List and is an ALA Notable Book 2017, Costa Book of the Year, Costa Children’s Book Award, and Horn Book-Boston Globe Award winner.

Reading this novel made me wonder about female scientists during the Victorian Era. I learned that a few Victorian women managed to push against boundaries by contributing to the scientific research of the day. To my surprise, one of them was Beatrix Potter, who I know as a celebrated British author-illustrator of whimsical children’s books. Potter’s careful observation and detailed drawings of animals and plants led her to a deep interest in mycology. She conducted experiments on how

fungi reproduced and germinated. Potter wrote her first and only scientific paper on her findings, which was introduced by a male friend because women were not allowed to attend scholarly proceedings or present papers themselves. In 1997, the Linnaean Society issued an apology for the sexism they displayed.

[\(http://www.iflscience.com/editors-blog/\)](http://www.iflscience.com/editors-blog/)

Judi Moreillon, Literacies and Libraries Consultant, Tucson, Arizona



My First Book of Korean Words: An ABC Rhyming Book

Written by Kyubyong Park & Henry J. Amen, IV

Illustrated by Aya Padrón.

Tuttle Publishing, 2012, 27pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4629-1030-4 (ebook)

Many languages share and borrow words. Korean borrows “roket” from the English word “rocket.” (p. 18)

How many languages are there in the world? Can you guess? It is not a simple question. Stephen R. Anderson (2005) noted that as of “2009, at least a portion of the Bible had been translated into 2,508 different languages, still a long way short of full coverage” (p. 1). Across the world, people use many different languages. *My First Book of Korean Words: An ABC Rhyming Book* is filled with information about Korean words and culture. This book introduces the Korean language to readers, showing Korean words in alphabetical order from A to Z. Each letter is accompanied by an English sentence with the same meaning. Even though there are differences between Korean and English, readers will easily understand Korean words with the English explanations. In the preface, the authors introduce six basic Korean vowels and three consonants, explaining how they are pronounced.

My First Book of Korean Words: An ABC Rhyming Book is filled with colorful pictures illustrating Korean culture, linking the language with its society. Each page gives cultural information along with the symbols for words such as soccer, moon, and flying—words that young readers would be familiar with in either Korean- or English-speaking cultures. Thus, it seems to be a good book for young children to learn basic Korean words. This book is available in hard copy and e-book versions, to which people can have easy access. It can be used to learn about the Korean language or as an entrée into Korean culture.

However, this book has several problems, including that it does not show the correct syllable structure of Korean words or how the Korean writing system represents sounds. *Hangul* is a writing system unique to Korean. Each letter is designed to represent a consonant or vowel sound. Korean letters for consonants and vowels are grouped together to form a sort of ‘block’ corresponding to each syllable. What is important for the introduction of the Korean language is the authenticity and accuracy of the information of the language and culture of Korea, which are closely correlated.

While the book has some problems, it is still an interesting way to compare English with Korean, and could be used with books about Korea as well as novels that highlight Korean characters. The Worlds of Words Korean Kit Bibliography would be especially helpful for finding additional resources to use with this book:

<http://wowlit.org/links/booklists/korea/>.

The authors, Kyubyong Park and Henry J. Amen, IV, work for a Korean publishing

company. They are the authors of *Korean for Beginners*. Henry J. Amen, IV, is a freelance writer, who studied Korean while living in Seoul for two years working for a publishing company. Aya Padrón, who also lived in Korea, is a free-lance artist with experience in East Asian languages, cultures and arts. She is also an illustrator of such books as *My First Book of Japanese Words: An ABC Rhyming Book* and *My First Book of Chinese Words: An ABC Rhyming Book*.

Meet Aya Padrón on-line: <http://www.goodreads.com/author/>.

Anderson, S. R. (2005). How many languages are there in the world? Linguistic Society of America. Retrieved from on-line journal: <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/>.

Hyunjung Lee, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ



Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story
Written by Nora Raleigh Baskin
Simon and Schuster, 2016, 197 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4424-8506-8

People would remember that day with all sorts of adjectives: serene, lovely, cheerful, invigorating, peaceful, quiet, astounding, crystalline, blue. Perfect. Until 8:46 a.m., when the first plane struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center and nothing would ever be the same again. (p. 2)

Sergio lives in Brooklyn with his grandmother, resenting the fact that his father is never around. Naheed, from Ohio, is of Middle Eastern descent and has difficulty explaining her cultural tradition of wearing the hajib at her new school. Aimee has recently moved with her family to Los Angeles and struggles to find her niche within the California youth culture. Will has recently lost his father in a highway accident, and his family still mourns as Will tries to fill the void with his friends in Shanksville, PA. *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story* opens on September 9 by introducing readers to these four very different and geographically separated young people whose lives become intertwined on September 11 – as did the lives of people across the globe that day. Their stories are told alternatively within the book in the days leading up to September 11. While none of them lose close family or friends during this catastrophic event, each family is impacted in a way that finds them at the 9-11 Memorial event in 2002 where their lives actually cross physically as the names of the 9-11 victims are read.

While the context of this book is within the US, its place within international literature is significant as young readers who were not alive on September 11, 2001 are situated within the lives of ordinary people impacted by the attack on the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Pennsylvania countryside. Baskin states in an author's note, "I chose the structure of this story to reflect a theme of interconnectivity in our society, in particular between children" (p. 194). The intersection of their lives in intangible ways can be considered as representative of the intersection of lives across the global community following this event--an event that brought about new words, new legal restrictions, new conflicts, and new perceptions regarding certain ethnic groups living both inside the US and in other countries. Terrorism and conflict are often perceived to be outside the boundaries of the US, but books such as this force readers to face the reality that tragic events impacting the global society can occur within any society and the people immediately impacted can be mirrored in any population.

Nora Raleigh Baskin is an award-winning author whose book *Anything But Typical* (2009) won the American Library Association Schneider Family Book Award. On her website, www.NoraBaskin.com, she shares that all her writing involves her life

experiences. In the author's note for *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story*, she describes her own location in Wilton, Connecticut on that day and her reaction during the 9-11 event. Her acknowledgements point to her research and that of others to assure accuracy in the timeline of events, the use of Muslim phrases and ideas, and in seeking individuals who witnessed the crash site of the plane in Shanksville, PA. The stories of the four young people in this book are fictional but universal as they speak to the family challenges that many young teens face even today.

A 9-11 text set could build a context for this historic tragedy and might include: *Towers Falling* (Jewell Parker Rhodes, 2016), *America Is Under Attack* (Don Brown, 2014), *Eleven* (Tom Rogers, 2014), and *September 11 Then and Now* (Peter Benoit, 2011), among others.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



The Raven's Children

Written by Yulia Yakovleva

Illustrated by Vlada Myakonkina

Samokat, 2016, 264 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-5-91759-444-6

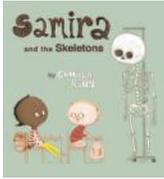
How do you share with the younger generation the truth about difficult moments in the history of their country? In contemporary Russia, a new, open-minded, and factual approach to recent history is especially important when history is told to children. *The Raven's Children* by Yulia Yakovleva is one of the first attempts to depict the most painful period of twentieth-century Russian history in a tween's book. The story is set in Leningrad in 1937, which was the horrible year of Stalin's arrests and executions of innocent people. For decades, this part of history was not told to children in a form they could understand and deal with. *The Raven's Children* is the first book of the series called *The Leningrad Tales*. The second book in the series, *Stolen City*, was also published in 2016. It tells about the Siege of Leningrad during the Second World War. Altogether, Yakovleva, a journalist and a writer, plans to write three more children's books set in Soviet Leningrad.

In *The Raven's Children*, seven-year-old Shurka and his nine-year-old sister, Tanya, are left alone after their father and mother are arrested. The younger brother, three-year-old Bobka, is taken to the state orphanage at the time of his mother's arrest, but the secret police officers do not notice the two older children sleeping in a hidden room behind the wardrobe. The neighbors in this huge communal apartment whisper among themselves that "last night a Black Raven took the neighbor away" (p. 49). Shurka and Tanya overhear them, but they do not understand that the Black Raven is a nickname for the black secret police car that transports people arrested at night. Many of arrests made during the time of Stalin's purges were made at night to intimidate people even more. The brother and sister imagine that the neighbors are talking about a real bird, an enormous black raven who made their parents disappear. They try to talk to other birds, to crows, to sparrows, to a magpie, and to a swan in a beautiful park near the Neva River. The children want the birds to help them to find the Black Raven. The author skillfully mixes fairytale and reality together in this slowly unfolding story.

The book is centered on the whereabouts of Shurka, who is eventually also taken to the state orphanage for children of "enemies of the people." This is how Stalin and his henchmen referred to anyone they arrested without reason. Everything is grey in that orphanage—gray food, gray walls, and gray days. Everyone looks the same and everyone is changing into the Raven's children. They become children who hate their parents as traitors and enemies. Above all, they love the Raven, the children's best friend—Comrade Stalin. Even though Shurka is able to make his escape from the orphanage, he needs to find and save his younger brother. In the sequel, *Stolen City*, the children, adopted by their aunt, live through the starvation and horror of the siege of the city.

The Raven's Children and *Stolen City* may be paired with *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin (2013), which was translated into Russian several years ago. Another Russian book on Stalin's oppression is *Sugar Kid* by Olga Gromova (2014), which was reviewed in a previous issue: <http://wowlit.org/>. Further recommended reading about the siege of Leningrad might include *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad* by M.T. Anderson (2015). *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* by John Boyne (2016) evokes the topic of the corruption of the child's mind--in this case, by Hitler.

Olga Bukhina, International Association for the Humanities, New York, NY



Samira and the Skeletons

Written and illustrated by Camilla Kuhn

Eerdman, 2016. 34 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780802854636

One of USBBY's Outstanding International Books for 2017, this humorous picture book chronicles young Samira's response to learning about the skeletal system. At first incredulous and then disgusted by the skeletons that live within everyone's body, Samira cannot help but see (and feel) skeletons everywhere. Explaining her new learning to her mother, Samira asks her mother to get rid of the skeleton within Samira. But before her mother can do so, Samira's skeleton dashes away with Samira in it. Eventually, Samira decides having a body full of bones (even with the teeth playing "peekaboo") is not a terrible thing. But then the class moves on to muscles!

This funny, fabulous book from Norway aptly describes a young person's initial response to learning about the "yucky" elements that make up her body. Using pencil drawings that are digitally colored and enhanced, readers will delight in the comical sketches that allow other characters to be seen through Samira's eyes. The illustrations support the written text by showing the written word in action. A small, square shape allows young readers to hold the book while engaged in fun illustrations and an engaging storyline. What is especially wonderful about the illustrations is the diversity of Samira and her school mates, strongly suggesting that even though we may have differences on the outside, human beings are the same on the inside.

Samira and the Skeletons is a great read-aloud for teachers to use while introducing the human body to students in grades 1-4, or as a wonderful example of creative nonfiction for middle grade classrooms. This book would make a nice addition to other books on the human body including *Dem Bones* by Bob Barner (2016); *A Journey through the Human Body* by Steve Parker (2015); and *Bones* by Seymour Simon (2000). This book could also be part of a humorous text set on skeletons that includes *Skeleton Hiccups* by Margery Cuyler (2005) or *Halloween Hustle* by Charlotte Gunnefson (2013).

Camilla Kuhn grew up in Norway, went to art and design school in London, and currently lives in Oslo with her husband and numerous and diverse pets, including guinea pigs and seven walking stick insects. In her spare time she breeds rats, and is known to take a couple on tour with her. This is her first book in English.

Meet Camilla Kuhn: <http://www.camillakuhn.no>

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Somewhere Among
Written by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu
Illustrated by Sonia Chaghatzbanian
Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016, 448 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-1481437868

A BRIDGE

*Papa would say I am
one foot here
one foot there
between two worlds
– Japan and America –
binational
bicultural
bilingual
biracial.*

*There, Americans would say
I am half
half this
half that.*

*Here, Japanese would say
hafu
if they had to say something. (p. 7)*

Somewhere Among is a novel-length work of contemporary realistic fiction, written in the poetic style of free verse. It is the story of Emma, an 11-year-old girl in the year 2001 who has a Japanese father and an American mother. At the beginning of the story, she is living in the United States but preparing for a six-month-stay in Japan. She is packing her clothing, books, and schoolbags and worrying about her long stay overseas, fearing she will miss her friends and American grandparents who will be left behind. Once in Japan, Emma and her parents stay at her Japanese grandparents' house in western Tokyo. Emma and her mother go through a difficult time, facing cultural conflicts and struggling with the dissonant relationship with their Japanese relatives. Emma also has problems with her classmates at school. Reflecting on her own cultural heritage and developing cross-cultural connections that develop her understanding of herself and others help Emma solve these problems.

Cross-cultural connections are significant in the development of Emma's transnational identity. She finds several connections on national holidays celebrated in both Japan and in the United States, such as Japan's Labor Thanksgiving Day and the American Thanksgiving Day. She learns that both take place that year on the same date, November 23rd, although the things that people give thanks for are different: in

Japan, people are thankful for labor and production, while in the United States, they give thanks for the blessings of the harvest. Emma also learns that, like people in the United States, Japanese people celebrate Christmas, though in Japan it is regardless of their religion. There are other things that are familiar to her, such as Pokémon character crayons, Pokémon Christmas trees, and director Hayao Miyazaki's anime movies, which provide her with a space to create connections with Japanese children. Making cross-cultural connections with people's beliefs and values as well as with universal children's culture help her build a sense of belonging to both countries and develop her transnational identity.

Emma's family members, including her parents and grandparents, also show development of their cross-cultural understandings. At first, differences between cultural values, beliefs, and lifestyles cause tensions between Emma's Japanese grandmother and her American mother. Yet, over time, sharing feelings and emotions and caring about each other while facing and solving problems together restores their relationship and builds trust. When Emma's pregnant mother hears about the events of 9/11 taking place in the US, she becomes mentally and physically weak, as she is very worried about her parents, and a Japanese family takes care of her. Respecting her religion, they help her get to a Christian church and pray for healing. When the Japanese grandfather gets sick and becomes hospitalized, both the Japanese and American family members are concerned about him. When Emma's mother gives birth, everyone celebrates the newborn baby. The Japanese grandmother cooks red beans with rice, a sign of happiness in Japanese culture. Going through these experiences together helps the family transfer their stances from misunderstanding and strife to understanding, acceptance, and mutual respect.

Somewhere Among can be paired with cross-cultural stories of transnational children and teens' lives, including Holly Thompson's *The Language Inside* (2013), *Orchards* (2012), and *Falling into the Dragon's Mouth* (2016), Aiko Ikegami's *Friends* (2016), Lynne Barasch's *Hiromi's Hands* (2007), Natalie Dias Lorenzi's *Flying the Dragon* (2014), and Chieri Uegaki and Qin Leng's *Hana Hashimoto Sixth Violin* (2014). This book also can be paired with works that pick up the tragedy of 9/11, such as Jewell Parker Rhodes's *Tower Falling* (2016), Nora Raleigh Baskin's *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story* (2016), and Carmen Agra Deedy, Wilson Kimeli Kaiyomah, and Thomas Gonzalez's *14 Cows for America* (2009).

Somewhere Among is Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu's debut novel. She grew up in Texas and has lived in Tokyo with her family for more than twenty years. Her website provides resources for teachers and librarians using this book (<https://anniedonwerth-chikamatsu.com/>). She also shares her daily life in Japan on her blog for children: (<http://hereandtherejapan.blogspot.com/>).

Meet Annie at: <http://www.fromthemixedupfiles.com/>

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Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey

Written by Margriet Ruurs
Illustrated by Nizar Ali Badr
Orca Books, 2016, 28 pp.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4598-1490-5

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey captures the emotions involved in the experience of leaving home and changing countries. The stone illustrations shout out the happiness of home, the danger of war, the fear of running and fleeing, and the uncertainty of starting over in a new place. *Stepping Stones* is a bilingual book written in English and Arabic. With sparse poetic prose, the author and illustrator tell the story of Rama and her family, who live in a Syrian village along with their animals, garden, extended family, and neighbors. As the civil war draws closer to their home, neighbors pack up their belongings and flee. Rama and her family finally have to make the same hard decision and quickly leave with only what they can carry. Rama, along with her parents, grandfather and little brother, Sami, set out on a walk to freedom and peace. They walk for miles, finally arriving at a port where they cross the sea “on waves of hope and prayer” and arrive in a European country where they begin to build a new home.

Nizar Ali Badr's stunning stone images illustrate the story. Using small rocks, stones, and pebbles found on the seashore at the foot of Mt. Zaphon, he uses different shapes, sizes and colors to express human emotions: tragedy, love, sorrow, hope, and happiness. His images are paired with Rama's first-person narrative of the journey. Using a typical plot line of introduction / rising tension / climax / descending tension / resolution, the author and illustrator introduce young readers to the political tension that has been a part of Syrian history for years. Rama comes to understand the reason her family is considering fleeing from the political turmoil of their country. This is beautifully illustrated when she quotes her Grandfather Jedo's definition of freedom as being able to “sing our songs, dance our dances, and pray the prayers of our choice.”

When war arrives, the events are narrated through Rama's eyes. Even though she realizes that Mama goes hungry when she gives Sami her food, what stands out to the young girl is that war does not impact Mama's hugs. However, fear and uncertainty are also communicated in the story. When bombs fall close to their house, Rama cries even though she is “a big girl.” Then comes the announcement from Grandpa Jedo that they need to join “the river of people” and flee. She describes what she will miss in word pictures; it is the normality of life and the familiar feeling of home that she will grieve: “That night I lay in bed and cried because I knew I would never again hear the crow of the rooster, the creak of the gate, the bleat of our goat.” She also voices her fear of the unknown: “I lay awake and listened to the wind, wondering if the moon rises the same way in other places.”

Even though the events are seen through a child's eyes, the story does not shy away from hard realities. Nizar's illustration of crossing the Mediterranean shows people in a boat, but others lost at sea. Both the words and the stones reflect the sadness of

losing people. When Rama and her family arrive in their new home, they plant a garden with flowers to remember those lost on the journey.

The story behind the creation of this book is as striking as the illustrations. The book was inspired by the stone artwork of Nizar Ali Badr, discovered by chance by Canadian children's writer Margriet Ruurs when she saw examples on his Facebook page. She was immediately impressed by the strong narrative and emotional quality of Badr's work. She wrote in the foreword, "In his art I saw people changing—from happy, carefree children into people burdened and fleeing. There was hurt and sorrow. But ultimately there was also love and caring. And, amazingly, all of this told with stones."

Ruurs contacted Badr to see if she could write a story using many of his artistic creations. However, contacting him proved to be a challenge because he lived in Latakia, a port city of Syria, which was caught up in the Syrian civil war. After months of trying Facebook messages in English and Arabic, a friend of a friend made contact, and Badr agreed. Badr's art, however, is created with stones and he did not have the resources to make his images permanent, so he had to recreate them before they could be photographed and used in the story. The second challenge was funding the book, because they wanted part of the profit to go towards supporting refugees. Ruurs approached Bob Tyrrell, the founder and president of Orca Books, about the project, and he readily agreed to publish the book and donate part of the sales to refugee resettlement organizations.

Books that pair well with *Stepping Stones* evoke the emotions of changing homes and adapting to a new place and language when the heart is still anchored in the old place. *Inside Out & Back Again* (Thanhha Lai, 2011) is a novel in verse that portrays a ten-year-old girl's move from war-torn Vietnam to Alabama. She transitions from being a confident school-girl to being frustrated by a new culture and language until she develops relationships with a neighbor and friends. In *The Color of Home* (Mary Hoffman, 2002), Hassan grieves for his old home in Somalia as he adapts to school-life in the U.K. In *My Two Blankets* (Irena Kobald, 2015), a young Sudanese girl describes the comfortable "coziness" of a known language, and the slow process of becoming comfortable in the language of her new country.

Margriet Ruurs is a Canadian author who has lived in many places. Her book titles reflect her curiosity about the world. She has introduced readers to diverse ways of living and knowing, including the well-known *My Librarian is a Camel*. She currently runs a booklovers B&B on an island near Vancouver, BC.

Nizar Ali Badr is a Syrian sculptor who has created several thousand pictures with stones. He lives in the port city of Latakia (ancient Laodicea). "My dream [is] to reach people's hearts and deliver a message . . . The sole purpose of my art is to serve humanity. I am interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, love, doom, sorrow, hope, happiness." His work can be explored at <https://syriancreativehavens.com/>.

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