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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME V, ISSUE 1

Fall 2012
Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume V, Issue 1
Fall 2012
Open Theme

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Introduction and Editor's Note

It is always interesting to discover the connections among books included in the unthemed issues of *WOW Review*. Needless to say, frequently there are universal themes that weave through each story and uniquely join together within the imagination of readers' minds. Sometimes, the titles reviewed cluster in paired sets or triplets with themes so strongly aligned that one title offers perspectives that extend the insights of another title reviewed. This first issue of *WOW Review* Vol. 5 reflects the latter with several potential connections throughout the nine titles reviewed here.

Five novels in this issue share stories of young people coming of age in different eras and facing unique and complex challenges. Political turmoil provide the context for two books, *My Brother's Shadow*, a World War I story set in Germany, and *Never Fall Down*, a novel that takes place in Cambodia, 1975. Both books reveal the toll that war takes on the minds, spirits, and lives of youth whether they are at home or on the "killing fields." Perspectives on the U.S. Civil Rights era are found in *No Crystal Stair* and *One Crazy Summer*. *No Crystal Stair* documents the story of Lewis Micheaux who as a young man migrates to New York and opens an influential book store predominantly for Blacks during a time of racial injustice. *One Crazy Summer* provides the perspective of a naive young African American girl who travels with her sisters to visit her mother in California in 1968—a journey that finds them eventually confronted with the Black Panther movement and its ideologies. Facing challenges in a contemporary era, *Stoner and Spaz* brings readers into the life of a teen with Cerebral Palsy and his struggles to shape an identity within the confines of his personal perceptions of how he is viewed in society.

The picture books reviewed in this issue of *WOW Review* are connected with threads of family and community sharing, the environment, and distinct insights into global cultures. *Out of the Way! Out of the Way!* follows over time the bustling, changing life around a tree growing in India. A strong sense of place makes the tree a symbol of home and family for the boy who grows into older adulthood within the story. *Carolina's Gift: A Story of Peru* places the reader in a bustling market as a young girl searches for just the right gift for her grandmother. South Africa is the setting for yet another family story—*Meerkat Mail*. This humorous contemporary fantasy reminds readers that other families are working together within the environment beyond human communities. And, *The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families*, relates the work of biologist Gordon Sato, whose efforts to support community and the environment in Eritrea, Africa, invite readers into a fascinating story that links biology, history and social studies. It links to the African setting in *Meerkat Mail* but also to the notion of change over time in the first book mentioned and how this change in some instances creates the need for environmental planning to maintain and sustain the land that supports our families and communities.

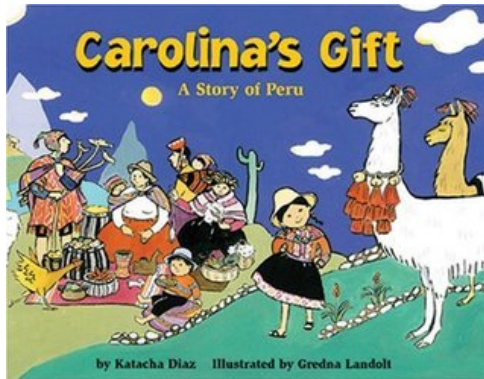
Each title offers images and stories of the global community and serve collectively as a reminder of the uniquely diverse array of books that share the potential to open borders among global communities.

Janelle Mathis

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Carolina's Gift: A Story of Peru

Written by Katacha Diaz
Illustrated by Gredna Landolt
Soundprints, 2002, 32pp.
ISBN: 978-1568996998

It's Sunday and Carolina travels with her mother to the market at the plaza of Pisac, a village in the Andes Mountains of Peru. Monday is Abuelita's birthday and Carolina is determined to find the perfect gift to give her.

To the festive sounds of flutes and pipes, Carolina searches through stalls selling flowers, hats, birds, blankets, purses, ponchos, and other items. None of them, though, is just right for Abuelita. Then Carolina spies the perfect gift...a walking stick with a hummingbird carved on the handle. Carolina knows that Abuelita can use the walking stick to go with her and her mother to the market in the future. Carolina happily pays the wood-carver. When she gives the walking stick at the birthday celebration, Abuelita is thrilled!

This touching story shows a young girl's love for her family, especially her grandmother. Though other items Carolina saw were nice, she only wanted what was perfect for her grandmother and searched until she found it. The love, joy, and warmth of the whole family are evident in the illustrations.

Carolina's Gift invites readers to experience the bustling market of a Peruvian village. Each page turn is a double page spread that draws readers into displays of food, pottery, clothing, and other market products that provide a rich glimpse into this culture. The bright saturated colors and patterns in the art add to the feelings of joy and love throughout the story.

Both author Katacha Diaz and illustrator Gredna Landolt drew on their personal experiences in Peruvian culture. While Diaz currently lives in the United States, she grew up in a suburb of Lima, Peru. Landolt was born and still lives in Lima. Following the story the book provides a map and information about Peru, a note about the Sunday market, and a list of Spanish words woven through the story that readers might hear spoken in Peru today.

This book would work well in a text set related to markets around the world. Other books in this text set might include: *How Much?: Visiting Markets Around the World* (Ted Lewin, 2006), *Grandma and Me at the Flea: Los Meros Meros Remateros* (Juan Felipe Herrera, 2002), and *To Market! To Market!* (Anushka Ravishankar & Emanuele Scanziani, 2007).

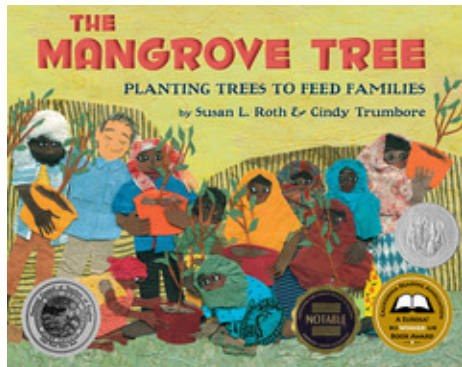
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The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families

Written by Susan L. Roth

Illustrated by Cindy Trumbore

Lee & Low, 2011

ISBN: 978-1600604591

The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families is a visual delight that tells the story of Dr. Gordon Sato's quest to change the lives of the Hargigo people of Eritrea, Africa.

Susan Roth, well-known for her textually-rich collages, and Cindy Trumbore team up to create an exquisite, textually-rich visual text. This two-pronged, descriptive, written text tells the story of how one man set about to help the people of Hargigo Village in Eritrea, Africa, a place where the people lacked enough food to feed themselves and their animals. On the left side of each page is a cumulative text; on the right side is the narrative of this one man's vision. Dr. Gordon Sato, an American cell biologist, had an idea—planting mangrove trees by the shore of the salty Red Sea. Dr. Sato realized the mangrove tree was the perfect delivery system for helping the environment and the Hargigo villagers. The trees would remove carbon dioxide and give off oxygen; the roots would hide small creatures and attract bigger fish for the fisherman; the dry branches would serve as fuel for cooking fires; the leaves would provide food for the animals; and, in turn, well-fed animals would produce more livestock for milk and food for the villagers. Dr. Sato set out to make his idea a reality.

Readers will want to know more about Gordon Sato and the villagers of Hargigo. As a teenager, Sato and his family were sent to Manzanar, an internment camp, during WW II. There, he learned how to grow vegetables in that desert region to supplement the canned Spam they were fed three times a day. Sato saw Hargigo as the perfect place to intersect his interests, knowledge, and desire to help others. The plantings along the shoreline near Hargigo became known as the Mangrove Memorial Garden, where one tree was planted for every villager killed in a 1975 massacre. Since the start of the Manzanar Project, as the mangrove tree project is called, nearly one million mangrove trees on the coast of Eritrea have been planted and Sato has become a “maritime Johnny Appleseed” (National Geographic, February 2007, retrieved July 2, 2012) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_H._Sato).

Other books that share this theme of helping communities improve their lives through environmental and agricultural projects include: *Beatrice's Goat* (Page McBrier, 2004), *One Hen—How One Small Loan Made a Big difference* (Kate Milway, 2008), *Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the Trees of Kenya* (Donna J. Napoli, 2010), and *Ryan and Jimmy and the Well in Africa that Brought Them Together* (Herb Shoveller, 2008). Further sources for information regarding The Manzanar Project can be found at the following websites:

The Manzanar Project (<http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/manzanar/default.htm>)

YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoEQi7-EJGI>)

National Geographic (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/02/mangroves/warner-text/5>)

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Meerkat Mail

Written by Emily Gravett

MacMillan, 2006, np.

ISBN: 978-1405090759

Author/illustrator Emily Gravett has created another endearing story full of humor and authentic insight to the natural world. *Meerkat Mail* is contemporary fantasy that personifies a meerkat family while keeping their story within the natural habitat and lifestyle of these animals.

Sunny lives in the very hot and dry Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa within a very close family group. He decides to try living somewhere else, so leaving a note, he departs to visit other meerkat relatives in different environments. Each day for the next week he visits a different relative and readers learn of the many differences in lifestyle between the family groups: differences in food, climate, and terrain—desert vs. swamp, diurnal vs. nocturnal, and sedentary vs. nomadic. Even the family motto, “Stay safe, stay together,” doesn’t always apply to how another group deals with its predators. Sunny becomes aware of the many different types of meerkat family groups, including the mongoose family. Finally, experiencing these different environments, Sunny returns home where things are just right in the dry desert.

British author Emily Gravett’s humor and appealing lessons in the natural world occur through her art as well as the text. A winner of the 2005 Kate Greenaway Medal for *Wolves*, Gravett’s artistic style is unique for each book she creates, as seen in *Little Mouse’s Big Book of Fears* (2008) and *The Rabbit Problem* (2010). In *Meerkat Mail*, charcoal and sandy illustrations include a variety of communicative forms—family photos, newspaper clippings, postcards, and notes. Each page showing Sunny’s visit to a particular relative includes a representative laminated postcard with further information for the reader regarding that species of Meerkat. Sunny’s writing on the back of each adds a personal bit of insight as well. And, with a slight allusion to the jackal, a natural predator of the Meerkat, early in the story, readers will watch for the jackal to appear on each page of Sunny’s journey—as well as a final appearance in a travel photo at the end.

Obviously, Gravett has well researched her topic since readers can find support for the information in *Meerkat Mail* through Internet research as well as other information sources to support the qualities that may seem merely personification. For example, early in the story Sunny’s family is shown as living closely in working, eating, playing, learning, and sleeping. Readers can access an Animal Planet series of YouTube videos (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_eVEW_YO2o) that report a 10 year study by Cambridge University. The lifestyle of this actual Meerkat family is narrated in such a way that readers realize the family within the book to be accurately represented—within the fantasy notion that allows animals to speak and travel in a human manner! These authentic videos and other sites such as that of National Geographic (<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/meerkat/>) are intriguing and invite readers to explore further the tidbits of information that Gravett has included throughout her picture book.

Given the title, *Meerkat Mail*, it is no surprise that writing postcards to send home is part of this text. With a focus on this particular theme of letter writing, other books to read alongside *Meerkat Mail* might be *The Gardener* (Sarah Stewart, 1997), *Dear Mr. Blueberry* (Simon James, 1996), or *Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe* (Vera Williams, 1984). Of course, the theme of families and community—both that of working together and of being diverse—are also potential connections for young readers. Books that relate to this theme through animals include *Stellaluna* (Janell Cannon, 1998/2008) or *Calvin Can't Fly, The Story of a Bookworm Birdie* (Jennifer Berne, 2010). One might also share the story *A Blue So Blue* (Jean FranCois Dumont, 2005) in thinking about the notion of traveling in search of some quest only to find it at the starting point—home.

Part of learning about the global community is discovering the natural resources and ecosystems of different geographical contexts. *Meerkat Mail* provides a story that invites inquiry, laughter, and perhaps a new beloved animal, the meerkat, that will lead curious readers into global communities and geographies previously unknown to them.

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My Brother's Shadow

Written by Monika Schröder

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011, 211pp.

ISBN: 978-0374351229

It's 1918 and Moritz, a disillusioned sixteen-year-old, struggles with his loyalty to his brother and the memory of his father as he watches the protesters on the streets of Berlin. These protesters fight for justice for the civilian population, determined to end Germany's involvement in World War I. With little money for medicine or meat, Moritz's mother was unable to save his little sister who lost her life to a respiratory infection. His older brother Hans is fighting on the front while his mother and sister risk indictment for treason and imprisonment for their involvement with the social democrats. Moritz is coming of age in a confusing time in history.

When his print shop boss gives Moritz the opportunity to write articles for *Daily Berliner*, this young man gets a close-up view of the changing political landscape in the German capital. As a reporter, he witnesses clandestine meetings, demonstrations, and arrests. He learns that his mother is not just involved with the social democrats; she is one of their leaders. While this work repeatedly calls his worldview into question, it isn't until Hans returns home, severely wounded, bitter, and angry that Moritz begins to question the Kaiser and the wisdom of the war.

It is through Hans's war stories and nightmares that Moritz learns what war is really like. Moritz begins by feeling sympathy for his brother's loss of an eye and part of an arm that will keep him from returning to practicing his skill as a watchmaker. But Hans's hatred of enemies within and without and his scapegoating of Jews frighten Moritz. He sees that the future his older brother envisions for Germany will involve more hatred and yet more loss.

Along the way, Moritz gets involved with a street gang and ends up snitching on them to save a friend. He fights off Hans when his brother pulls a revolver on him. Moritz also meets Rebecca and falls in love with her. He learns she works for a lawyer, a member of Parliament, who later helps Moritz when his mother is arrested. When Moritz learns that Rebecca is Jewish and is also involved with the social democrats, the young man's fears for the future of Germany come into even sharper focus.

As a former classroom teacher and school librarian, author Monika Schröder knows that readers, especially boys, have a hunger for reading about war. While there are no battle scenes in *My Brother's Shadow*, the atrocities of war are vivid in young Moritz's imagination and in the stories his brother Hans tells when he returns from the front, maimed and embittered. Also the constant struggle by civilians for food, heat, and safety

show a tangible side of war. And perhaps most importantly, the wars within Moritz himself for who and what to believe make an impact on readers' responses to this novel.

Author Monika Schröder grew up in Germany. Through her family's history, she has an insider's knowledge of the toll that frequent political transitions and upheaval can take on the civilian population who bear the brunt of their leaders' decisions. In her research for this book, Ms. Schröder consulted many primary source documents, especially newspapers, to gain insights not only into the facts of World War I as presented to the German people, but also into the social and cultural impact of the war on average Germans. One of her compelling discoveries was the integral role of German women in the social democratic movement which followed World War I. *My Brother's Shadow* serves as a prequel to Ms. Schröder's first published novel, *Dog in the Wood* (2009), which is set in Germany during World War II.

This middle grade novel can be paired with other international books about the effects of war and political turmoil on children and youth. Eight-year-old Lucky and his ten-year-old sister Nopi who were kidnapped to serve as child soldiers tell their story in *Son of a Gun* by Anne de Graaf (2012). In their "kill or be killed" reality, readers see the Liberian civil war through the eyes of these two children and their constant fears for their lives even after escaping the grips of their captors. In *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin (2011), ten-year-old Sasha eagerly anticipates his induction into the Soviet Young Pioneers. When his "good Communist" father is arrested the night before the ceremony, Sasha, disillusioned, spends two days in emotional turmoil, and is no longer willing to buy into the party line. In *Between Shades of Gray* author Ruta Sepetys (2011) details the inhumane conditions in which forced labor camp prisoners struggle after the Soviet invasion of Lithuania. The story is told from the point of view of fifteen-year-old Lina who uses her sweet memories of normal life and her drawings for the father from whom she has been separated to survive unimaginable deprivation while imprisoned with her mother and younger brother in Siberia.

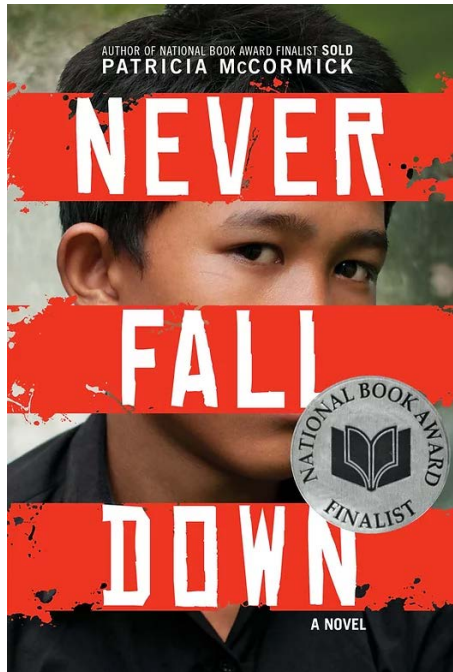
These books can expand readers' understanding of the emotional and physical toll that repressive regimes and war take on youth and their families. Reading and responding to *My Brother's Shadow* and these additional texts can help readers access a non-U.S. worldview of the events depicted. International novels such as these create the possibility for empathy and a deeper understanding of the negative consequences of war and tyranny on all people, especially, impressionable youth who are developing their identities during times of great political upheaval and injustice.

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Never Fall Down

Written by Patricia McCormick
Balzer & Bray, 2012, 224 pp.
ISBN: 978-0061730931

When soldiers from the Khmer Rouge arrive in Battambang, Cambodia in 1975, Arn is an eleven-year-old boy who dances, sings and sells ice cream to earn a little change. But life soon changes for Arn and his people who are herded into the countryside, separated from family and forced into labor camps, dying en masse from starvation, exhaustion, malaria, torture, and execution. Arn learns to become numb and invisible to avoid the attention of the brutal Khmer Rouge. “I see some kids die in the field...They fall down, they never get up. Over and over I tell myself one thing: never fall down” (p.42).

After weeks of grueling work in the rice paddies, soldiers ask if any of the children can play an instrument. Never having played a note, Arn volunteers. Urgently mastering the khim, a traditional dulcimer-like instrument, Arn smiles, sings and plays the propaganda songs that the soldiers demand, knowing that his life depends on it. He also artfully steals food to keep other children alive. But when the Vietnamese invade to liberate Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge force Arn to take up the instruments of war and become a soldier. This haunting novel transports readers from Arn’s music-filled hometown to the heart of the tragedy where a quarter of Cambodia’s population perished in what would become known as The Killing Fields. The page-turning drama moves to overfilled refugee camps in Thailand and finally to America where Arn becomes involved in human rights activism.

Patricia McCormick, a former journalist, relinquished a “Walter Cronkite voice” and instead emulated Arn Chorn-Pond’s “distinct and beautiful” patois (p. 216). In doing so, she found she could step back and let Arn convey his experiences more authentically. “When he talks about his childhood it’s as if he becomes that little boy all over again. He speaks with an urgency, a pure terror at times, that is palpable” (p.216). The raw, spare prose feels immediate, troubling and convincing. But perhaps what is unsaid is even more chilling. “The kids who don’t work hard, sometime they get sent to another place they call lazy village. And we don’t see them again....One time I hear a kid ask where is his sister. The Khmer Rouge laugh and say she still working in the field, ‘only now she’s fertilizer’” (p.41).

McCormick, known for her serious research and empathetic treatment of young people in crisis, explains in an Author’s Note how she worked together with Arn to capture his horrific and heroic story. In addition to multiple interviews with Arn, McCormick also spoke with his adoptive family in the United States as well as fellow survivors in remote parts of Cambodia to retrace, authenticate and complete the picture of Arn’s early life. The story behind the writing of *Never Fall Down*, a discussion guide for readers, and a compelling video discussion

between the author and Arn is available at Harper Teen.

Arn not only survived, he went on to devote his life to humanitarian causes, founding several NGOs including Cambodian Living Arts whose mission is to transform Cambodia through the performing and visual arts. Arn is a representative for Amnesty International and has received multiple human rights awards. He now lives in Cambodia, spending part of the year speaking in the United States.

To further explore the author's craft, educators could introduce readers to *Purple Heart* (Patricia McCormick, 2011) where the moral predicaments and human costs of war are closely examined. To extend understanding about The Killing Fields and to further reflect upon the importance art and culture, particularly music, as an antidote to and refuge from violence, go to Jocelyn Glatzer's 2003 documentary, *The Flute Player*, and the Michelle Lord's 2008 picturebook, *A Song for Cambodia*, which are both about Arn Chorn-Pond's experiences. *Never Fall Down* could be compared and contrasted with *First They Killed My Father: A Girl of Cambodia Remembers* (Loung Ung, 2001), where the war is shown through the eyes of a young girl, the daughter of a high-ranking official in Phnom Penh. With its themes of child soldiers, family separation, genocide, borders, immigration, the redeeming power of music, and human rights activism, a natural pairing for this novel would be *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (Ishmael Beah, 2007), set in Sierra Leone.

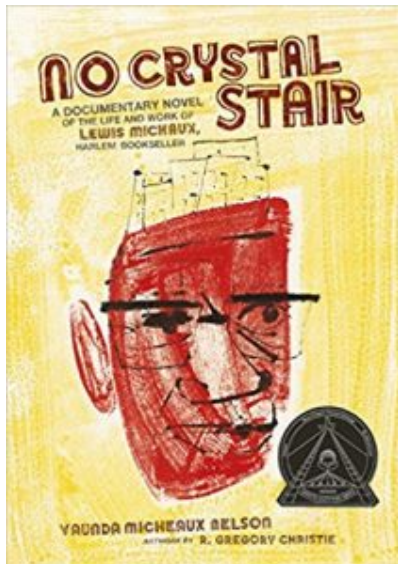
Never Fall Down is a visceral and poignant portrait of war intended for readers aged 14 and older. Arn Chorn-Pond's story is harrowing yet his passion and activism for human rights inspire great hope. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu comments in a book-jacket blurb, this novel can "teach us all about finding the courage to speak our truth and change the world."

Chloë Hughes, Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR

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No Crystal Stair

Written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson
Carolrhoda Books, 2012, pp. 208
ISBN-10-0761361693

“If a man don’t know where he’s come from, he don’t know where he’s going. If you don’t know what you’re worth, you don’t know what to charge for your labor” (p.39).

Lewis Micheaux was a bright child who saw his own worth during a time when Black folks were expected to be acquiescent to the dominant White power structures. He was quick both

socially and intellectually, and thus had problems living in his home community. Migrating to Pennsylvania and then New York as a young man, Lewis Micheaux became the owner of the National Memorial African Bookstore, the most influential bookstore in Harlem during the 20th century. Selling only books by Black authors and for a predominantly Black audience, Lewis fell under investigation by government forces while also an initial entity of scrutiny to the Black community. Micheaux challenged the location of Blacks as “Negroes,” suggesting that such a term was disempowering and disenfranchising. While novelized to fill in some of the gaps in the story, *No Crystal Stair* (from the poem, “Mother to Son,” by Langston Hughes) addresses issues of race and class in a direct and engaging manner that creates spaces for discussion by both young adults and their teachers. It is an excellent text to use with young adults as the narrative puts a face on the timeless issue of racism in America.

Realistic, oft-times humorous, and deeply thought-provoking, *No Crystal Stair* is a fictionalized documentary that presents not only an ingenious man, but the historical time period prior to and including the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Questions about the living conditions, treatment, and equal opportunity of African Americans within the USA both during and post 20th century would be expected by readers regardless of age, and the opportunity for readers to explore the long legacy of racism that is still present in institutions as well as individuals today. This text would make a great pairing with books such as *Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison, 1995; 2007) and *The Chaneysville Incident* (David Bradley, 1990) if working with older adolescents, and texts about Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, or the Harlem Renaissance for younger adolescents. Good companions would include *Harlem Stomp! A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance* (Laban Carrick Hill, 2009); *Getting away with Murder* (Chris Crowe, 2003), and *Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown, and Me* (John A. Stokes, 2007).

No Crystal Stair addresses themes of knowing one’s identity, the blight of racial injustice, and the importance of economic, emotional, and racial freedom in a democratic society. Issues as timely now as they were during Lewis Micheaux’s lifetime, *No Crystal Stair* is an engrossing

and stark reminder of U.S. history that boldly rebuts the mythology of freedom and equality often touted in textbooks and around mainstream dinner tables. This fictionalized documentary creates a space for discussing the triumph of Micheaux's life and work and their effect on our history as a nation. This book is as remarkable as the man.

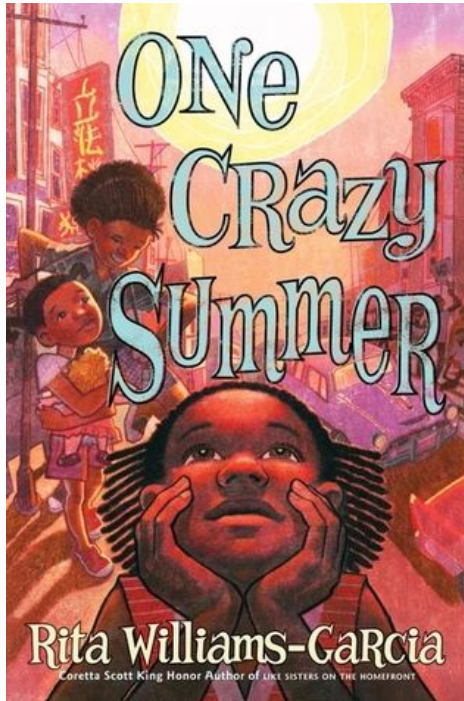
Vaunda Micheaux Nelson is the granddaughter of Lewis Micheaux. She is an author of a number of books for young people, including the picture book, *Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy US Marshall* (2009). She did extensive research for this text but also needed to fill in some of the details of his life that eluded documentation. More information about Ms. Micheaux Nelson can be found at the Adams literary website (<http://www.adamsliterary.com/clients/nelson/nelson.html>) and the website entitled The Brown Bookshelf. (<http://thebrownbookshelf.com/2009/02/16/vaunda-micheaux-nelson/>)

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One Crazy Summer

Rita Williams-Garcia

Amistad, 2010, 224 pp.

ISBN: 978-0060760885

“A name is important. It isn’t something you drop in the litter basket or on the ground. Your name is now people know you. The very mention of your name makes a picture spring to mind, whether it’s a picture of clashing fists or a mighty mountain that can’t be knocked down” (p. 80).

The summer of 1968 was filled with social and political unrest both domestically and abroad for the United States. While Americans were fighting an undeclared war overseas in Vietnam, a war of civil rights was being fought at home.

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia provides readers with a glimpse of these issues from the point of view of an eleven-year-old African American girl named Delphine. Delphine and her two younger sisters make the trip from New York to California to visit their estranged mother, Cecile. Upon their arrival, it is clear to the girls that Cecile really wants nothing to do with spending time with them and prompts Delphine to take on the role of caretaker for her two younger sisters while trying to show some deference to her biological mother. Though Cecile sends the girls to a “camp” each day and decides not to converse with them or provide for their meals, Delphine and her sisters begin to see that their mother is perhaps protecting them from her own involvement in actions of the Black Panther movement of the time.

While the girls struggle with personal relationships with their mother during this summer, they are exposed to many new people and ideas about their own lives while attending the camp. The camp, as it turns out, is run by the Black Panthers and designed to indoctrinate its students in the group’s revolutionary beliefs. It is here that the sisters’ eyes are opened to some of the social upheaval that takes place during that year. Delphine’s vivid reflection on her own role in these events allows the reader to view the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War through the naive perspective of a child.

During their visit the girls are taken aback by their mothers’ initial coldness toward her own daughters as well as the fervor of racial tensions and rebellious murmurs among the people they encounter in this part of the country. Williams-Garcia focuses on the importance of the meaning of names to tell this story of realizing one’s personal and cultural identity. This novel can be used in the classroom to teach students about the struggle to understand one’s role in society within the context of our country’s own struggle to come to terms with its multi-faceted nature.

This book could be used in conjunction with other multi-cultural, self-actualization novels such as, *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead (2010) and *American Chica* by Maria Arana (2001). Like these recommendations, *One Crazy Summer* takes an authentic look at cultural diversity through the eyes of a girl who is unknowingly a part of the cultural discord that surrounds her.

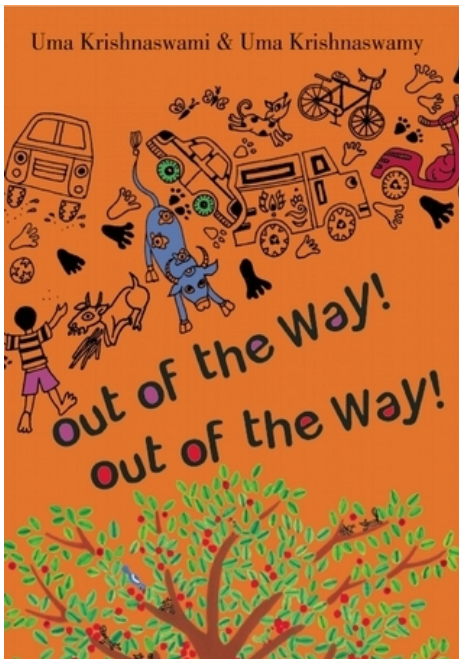
Rita Williams-Garcia grew up in Queens, New York, where she was exposed to some of the civil rights events of the 1960s. She began writing at an early age, attended Hofstra University and published her first book, *Blue Tights*, in the 1980s. *One Crazy Summer* has earned five awards, including the Newbery Honor Award (2011) and Coretta Scott King Award (2011). Follow this link (<http://www.ritawg.com/>) to more information about the author.

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Out of the Way! Out of the Way!

Written by Uma Krishnaswami

Illustrated by Uma Krishnaswamy

Groundwood Books. 2010, np.

ISBN: 978-1554981304

“Out of the way! Out of the way!”

Those are the words yelled by a mango seller, bullock-cart man, and riders on bicycles, motorbikes, and scooters to others passing by a tree in India. The tree begins as sprout in the middle of a dusty path. A young boy spots it and protects it by piling rocks around it. Over time, as the tree grows, so do the path and the boy. The tree matures with a thickening trunk and numerous forking branches that become homes to birds, squirrels, and parakeets. The path gradually transforms into a curving lane around the tree, then a road that is eventually graded by machines and turned into a place that bustles with cars, buses, trucks, vans, and tractors. The area around the tree changes from being a small village where the boy and others live quiet lives to a city filled with traffic and homes with television antennas and satellite dishes. The boy grows and becomes a father who brings his own children to the tree and, later as an old man, he sits under the tree and listens. “Evening breezes rustled the leaves, bringing back stories the man had forgotten he knew – stories his father and mother and grandfather had told him of trees long ago before there was even a road.”

This is a beautiful story about changes that come with the passage of time but also a sense of home and place that remains stable and constant. The tree marks a special place for the boy and is a reminder to him and others of memories of times past, despite the technological advances and fast-paced changes of life.

The art adds to the richness of the story. Artist Uma Krishnaswamy combines pen and ink and lively colors to create art using traditional Indian folk-art styles. The numerous detailed images on each page imply other narratives and highlight the richness of Indian life and culture. From page to page, the art gradually grows until it eventually encircles the written text, emphasizing the completeness of life and the story.

Author Uma Krishnaswami was born in New Delhi, India, and moved to the United States when she married after receiving her master’s degree from the University of New Delhi. She was inspired to write this book based on a childhood experience of planting a mango seed and reading a news story about people planting trees in potholes. Artist Uma Krishnaswamy was born and lives in India and uses Indian arts and crafts as the inspiration for her work.

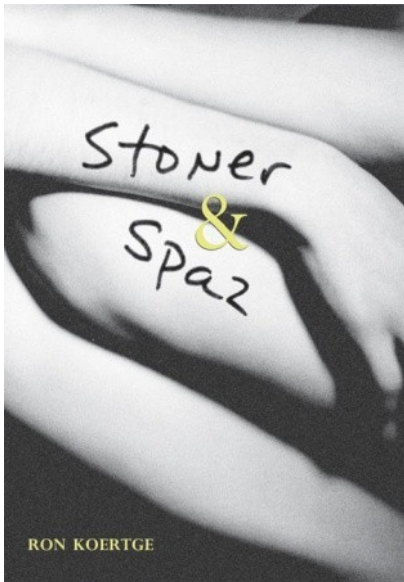
Out of the Way! Out of the Way! would work well with other books on sense of place. These might include *I Know Here* (Laura Croza, 2010) and *Amelia's Road* (Linda Jacobs Altman, 1995). With books related to changes over time, it could be paired with *Window* (Jeannie Baker, 1991) and *The House on Maple Street* (Bonnie Pryor, 1987).

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Stoner & Spaz

Written by Ron Koertge
Candlewick Press, 2002, 169 pp.
ISBN: 978-0763616083

"...everybody, and I mean everybody, stands in front of the mirror and wishes they were different" (p. 128).

Ben Bancroft goes to movies at the Rialto Theater by himself a couple of times a week. It's not a supercinema; it plays movies that people have already seen or never wanted to see and Ben has seen them all. As a teenager with Cerebral Palsy, he doesn't seem to have many other social options, and besides he loves watching the classic films and noting how the directors suck him into the larger than life stories. It seems he knows what he is, a spaz, and has come to some sort of terms with this. He does what he can to make his grandma happy: gets good grades, wears the preppy clothes she buys him, and stays out of trouble (not that anyone has ever offered him a chance at trouble). Ben is funny, but his smart aleck quips are wasted on the regular ticket taker and usher he speaks to a few nights a week on the way in and out of movies. One night Colleen, the girlfriend of their high school's toughest drug dealer Ed, shows up next to Ben at the crumbling concessions counter. Colleen is forward and a bit rude, and probably under the influence, but unlike everyone else, she talks to Ben without any hesitation or pity, and although Ben has no idea why, he allows himself to carry along in Colleen's drug-fogged current and enjoy the company. Both find safety in each other's polar lives, but their burdensome family backgrounds and accepted spots in teenaged hierarchy threaten to push Ben back to the seclusion of feature films and Colleen to her purse full of narcotics.

Stoner & Spaz is a short and darting novel that would likely appeal most strongly to high school readers, and its content points towards mature themes. It is not organized into chapters, but is simply spaced into short sections that allow the reader to continue seamlessly through the pages and finish the story in a sitting or two. The main characters Ben and Colleen are so well portrayed that they are able to present the life of a high school student with a disability and addiction without the shock value or melodrama of made-for-television movies played in the middle of weekday afternoons.

Although there is a fairly deep dark pool of the murky side of teenage life revealed within the pages of *Stoner & Spaz*, it is refreshing to see the main characters finding themselves and making their way through it in ways that are not glorified or horrific, but tangible and realistic. Ben's self-deprecating humor involving his Cerebral Palsy helps to reveal some of the physical limitations that at times frustrate and burden him; but over time he must come to admit that some of his social alienation and boundaries are self-imposed due to

where he assumes a “spaz” in high school fits. Ben’s rise and fall of self-confidence and anxiety in living with CP creates an authentic glimpse into his world for the reader and also allows for the universal connection with the up and down ride of the high school experience.

Companion books that explore the topic of young people facing physical challenges, specifically Cerebral Palsy, can be found in *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper (2010), *Reaching for Sun* by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer (2007), and *Small Steps* by Louis Sacher (2006). Possible companion books that approach self-discovery and addiction topics for *Stoner & Spaz* include *Go Ask Alice* by Beatrice Sparks (1971) or *Crank* (Ellen Hopkins, 2004), a more contemporary story similar to the Sparks’ classic. *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher (2001) also carries a theme of addiction.

Ron Koertge (<http://ronkoertge.com/>) is the author of several young adult novels although he never intended to write for teens initially. As self-declared “old” guy, a friend of his pointed out he was “chronically immature” and he must have agreed in some way, because he began writing for teens and has been highly successful. Koertge’s focus on Cerebral Palsy in this novel was the outcome of his wife, who works with individuals with disabilities, sharing about a young man with Cerebral Palsy she had encountered who had a great sense of humor. On the same day, he writes, he had engaged in conversation with a former student who had recently been in rehabilitation for addiction. Koertge’s creative author’s mind began wondering “what if those two knew each other?” His ability to weave such a situation into story is evident in his many recent young adult novels including; *Lives, Knives, and Girls in Red Dress* (2012), *Now Playing: Stoner and Spaz II* (2011), *Shakespeare Makes the Playoffs* (2010).

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