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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME XIII, ISSUE 1

Fall 2020  
Open Theme

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**WOW Review: Volume XIII Issue 1**

Fall 2020

Open Theme

Table of Contents

<b>Introduction and Editor's Note</b>	2-3
<i>Anklet for a Princess</i>	4-5
<i>Brother's Keeper</i>	6-7
<i>El Deafo</i>	8-9
<i>Flowers in the Sky</i>	10-11
<i>In Search of Safety</i>	12-13
<i>A Suitcase of Seaweed and Others</i>	14-15
<i>When Stars are Scattered</i>	16-18

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## Introduction and Editors' Note

*Resilience: noun signifying inner toughness, the capacity to adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats and significant sources of stress.*

Living in a pandemic with the limitations of lockdowns, quarantines, face masks, and virus-inspired or stress-related anxiety has meant that many of us have had to draw on inner resilience more than normal. The collection of titles in this issue are stories that examine human resilience in difficult times.

Our issue opens in India in a fairy tale world. *Anklet for a Princess* is a Cinderella story in which Sora's unjust treatment by a stepmother and stepsister is checked by a magical Godfather snake. From an imagined world in which resilience is aided by magic, we shift to the harsh realities of war and being a refugee when there is no magic and resilience is demonstrated in everyday living and survival. *In Search of Safety: Voices of Refugees* profiles the stories of five young people who had to flee their home countries due to threats on their lives, religious persecution, terrorist groups, civil war and genocide. *Brother's Keeper* takes a historical look at a sister and brother escaping North Korea in 1950, while *When the Stars Are Scattered* is a graphic memoir of two brothers fleeing civil war in Somalia and the subsequent years in a refugee camp in Kenya.

Resilience is called on in three titles about identity construction in challenging situations. *El Deafo* is the memoir of Cece Bell as she learns to cope with her hearing loss through an assistive hearing device. Through the power of microphones and amplified sound, Cece constructs a super hero self that can, among other things, warn students of a teacher approaching. In *A Suitcase of Seaweed and Others*, Janet Wong uses sparse verse and background stories to portray the identity juggling she does as a Los Angeles-born Asian American with a Chinese father and a Korean mother. Finally, *Flowers in the Sky* is the story of a young sister heading to New York from her small town in Trinidad to join her brother. As she struggles with relationships including with her brother, she constructs a sense of self that includes elements of her old and new homes.

Please consider submitting a review for our future issues. The editors welcome reviews of any children's or YA book that highlights intercultural understanding and global perspectives around these themes:

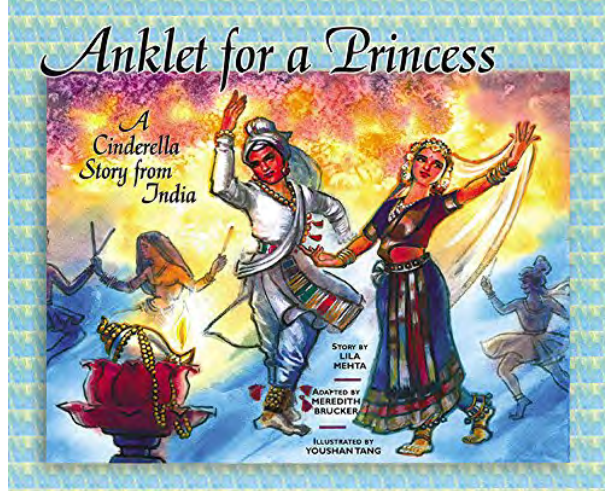
**Volume 13, Issue 2** – Bilingual Books (Winter 2021) - submission deadline: November 30, 2020. The editors welcome reviews of books that feature another language. The author may insert another language into the text (She said "Voilà!" as she drew une grande ligne with a flourish), or may include two languages next to each other (He glanced at him / Il lui a jetté un coup d'oeil).

**Volume 13, Issue 3** – Open theme (Spring 2021) – submission deadline: February 15, 2021. The editors welcome reviews of children's or YA books that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

Susan Corapi and Prisca Martens, Co-Editors



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*Anklet for a Princess: A Cinderella Story from India*

Written by Lila Mehta

Adapted by Meredith Brucker

Illustrated by Youshan Tang

Shen's Books, 2002, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1885008466

Lila Mehta and Meredith Brucker tell a Cinderella story set in ancient India. After the death of her father, Cinduri lives with her stepmother and stepsister, Lata. Her duties include cleaning the house, milking cows, and tending to the vegetable garden and farm animals. One day, she meets a snake with whom she develops a valuable

relationship. Due to the snake's presence and intervention, she eventually breaks free of her stepmother and Lata's rule.

Youshan Tang's watercolor illustrations can be described as concise. They do not contain much detail about the setting but focus on just the character(s) who are active at that point in the story. They reinforce, rather than augment, the written text.

Scholars Botelho and Rudman (2009) state, "Since there is estimated to be over 1,000 versions across the world, the criteria for beauty vary" (p. 227). In this book, Cinduri is described as wrapped in cloths of the purest gold threads, while magnificent jewels adorn her hair and throat. At the Navaratri Festival, she catches the eye of the crowd, most importantly the prince. In her culture, riches are the standard of beauty. This standard of beauty mirrors Western culture in that jewels and expensive items are often deemed attractive. The authors offer the audience a mirror to reflect upon their individual standards of beauty and how society sways these standards.

Mehta and Brucker provide the audience with a window to access Cinduri's journey. When reading the picturebook, the audience must take into consideration how the ideologies of gender and Indian culture shape her journey. She meets a snake who takes on the role of her Godfather and acts as a magical advisor, providing her with fresh water and supplying the riches which win the prince's heart. The snake is a traditional Hindu symbol of strength and might. Of all the Asian Cinderellas, according to Botelho and Rudman (2009), this story is most reminiscent of European tales. The European ideology of gender, therefore, shapes this Cinderella story. In such stories, "Cinderella is deliberately and doggedly kind, as if these qualities function as resistance along the path for acquiring agency" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 224). Cinduri remains loyal and submissive to her stepmother and Lata, despite their continued abuse. The snake rewards her loyalty and rescues her from her oppressive stepfamily. The story ends with her happily married to the prince, but has she achieved true agency? After their wedding, the prince informs her, "My father has built us a beautiful palace." Although Godfather Snake

may live in their palace, Cinduri does not seem to have a voice in choosing her home. Since men hold the power, she is seemingly beholden to the agency of her husband. After accessing Cinduri's world through windows, the audience can engage with questions about gendered expectations, class, and beauty.

To compare gender roles and beauty standards, upper-elementary teachers can pair An Anklet for a Princess with Robert San Souci's (1998) *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* and Tomie de Paola's (2004) *Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story*. Students can use these comparisons to create a multimedia collage of representations of gender across such media as magazine clippings, social media ads, and TV commercials (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 236). The unit can culminate with students re-imagining one of these Cinderella stories through modern-day norms and ideologies.

Lila Mehta was born in India and settled in Canada with her family. Before becoming an author educator, she worked as a nurse and midwife. Meredith Brucker lives in Southern California. In addition to writing books for children and adults, she has written for TV networks, newspapers, and magazines. Youshan Tang was raised China and settled in San Francisco. He holds degrees in art and literature. He has illustrated many children's books pertaining to Asian culture.

Reference:

Botelho, M.J. & Rudman, M.K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature: Mirrors, windows, and doors*. New York, NY: Routledge.

LaShanda Francis, University of Houston-Victoria



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*Brother's Keeper*

Written by Julie Lee

Holiday House, 2020, 314 pp

ISBN: 978-0-8234-4494-6

Imagine North Korea in 1950. Perhaps we cannot because we do not know much about the country currently, and little about what it was like in the past. In 1950, North and South Korea entered into war when North Korea invaded South Korea. This is history, but what was life like for those within the countries? *Brother's Keeper* gives readers some insight into life in North Korea prior to the war. Twelve-year-old Sora Pak and her family are living with more and more limits. They need permission to travel, they must

go to "community meetings," and are forced to repeat slogans of support for an ever-increasing oppressive government. There seems to be no escape, yet some of their village members try. If caught, they are either taken to prison or killed, yet others still attempt to escape. Sora's family is divided on whether to attempt escape or remain under an oppressive rule. When war breaks out, they are given a chance to escape and join a river of refugees attempting to flee to South Korea and what they hope is safety, freedom, and better living conditions. Along the way, however, the refugees are attacked and in the melee that follows, Sora and her brother Youngsoo are separated from the rest of the family. Are they the only survivors? Did their family turn back? Sora is left to decide what to do to ensure her brother's safety. The journey they make together will have readers on the edge of their seats, and hoping along with Sora that the decisions they make will bring them home.

Both heartfelt and heartbreaking, *Brother's Keeper* is a one of those rare books that is a one-sit read. And if readers have to put the book down, they will think about it not only between reading sessions, but once they are finished, it will stay with them for a long, long time. Well-written with well-developed characterization, this survival story is both historical and timely. Readers will feel every step, every precarious situation, and every nuance of Sora's existence as a girl in a Korean family in 1950. What a lovely and harrowing novel that reveals a time and place seldom known by middle school students.

One book that especially complements *Brother's Keeper* is *My Freedom Trip* (Frances Park, Ginger Park, & Debra Reid Jenkins, 2010), a picturebook about a child's flight from North Korea just before the outbreak of the Korean War. Other historical Korean survival experiences include *When My Name Was Keoko* (Linda Sue Park, 2012), *Across the Tumen: A North Korean Kkotjebi Boy's Quest* (Moon Young Sook, 2013), and *Prairie Lotus* (Linda Sue Park, 2020). While different time periods, these books flesh out historical aspects of how people from the Korean peninsula survived and were treated either by the Japanese prior to WWII, as refugees attempting to get to China, or as immigrants to the US during the late 1800's.

Another book set in 12th century Korea is *A Single Shard* (Linda Sue Park, 2011), a novel for middle school students that won the Newbery Award. Two additional picturebooks are *The Name Jar* (Yangsook Choi, 2003), about a young Korean girl who wrestles with the possibility that no one at her new school will be able to pronounce her name, and *My Name is Yoon* (Helen Recorvits & Gabi Swiatkowska, 2014), which also addresses a Korean child's name, bringing to bear the reality that the concept of survival may include all types of experiences.

Julie Lee is Korean American and lives in Georgia with her family. In the notes at the back of her novel, Lee notes that *Brother's Keeper* is ultimately a family story that resonates with universal themes about families anywhere. Yet, it is also a story about her mother, who fled from North Korea when she was 15 years old. Lee used research to complete her work, including interviews with those who also fled North Korea during the Korean War and became refugees in different parts of the world. Lee was a history major at Cornell, and then worked in marketing research prior to writing *Brother's Keeper*. She is currently earning an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults at the Vermont College of Fine Arts, and is working on her next novel. More information can be found at her website: [www.julieleeauthor.com](http://www.julieleeauthor.com).

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati



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*El Deafo*

Written and Illustrated by Cece Bell  
Harry N. Abrams, 2014, 233 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1419712173

Cece is four years old when a bout of meningitis leaves her severely deaf. In this captivating graphic memoir and Newbery Honor Book, we follow author Cece Bell through her early childhood and elementary school years. We see her trying to make sense of confusing doctor's visits, acclimating to hearing aids, experiencing the wonder of finding other children like her during her year at a school for the Deaf, and navigating the trials of integrating into a hearing school. Although Cece is faced with many challenges, the author keeps the tone light by sharing many funny moments, such as her misunderstanding of her friend's offer of cherry pop, juice or a Coke to be "Jerry's mop, shoes or a goat" (p. 25).

Cece's big discovery comes when she is fit with a Phonic Ear, a powerful hearing aid that has a receiver box on a strap around her neck, wired earpieces, and a microphone worn by her teacher. To Cece's delight, she finds that she can hear her teacher when she leaves the classroom, talking in the teacher's lounge and even using the bathroom! Suddenly, Cece has an ability the other children don't have, and with this, her imagined super-hero self, El Deafo, is born. El Deafo uses these new-found powers to her advantage and prevents her class from being surprised by their teacher's return when she has left the classroom, impressing her classmates. Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing readers alike will find themselves able to relate to Cece's desire to fit in and her search for a true friend. The experience of wanting to be accepted by our peers makes this story widely relatable.

The graphic novel format is well-suited to provide an inside look at Cece's experience. To reflect moments when she struggles to hear, some speech bubbles are empty, filled with nonsense words or filled with faded partial sentences. In one instance, a failing hearing aid battery is cleverly illustrated using words fading to nothing. The illustrations are colorful and inviting and the facial expressions give depth to the story. The author has explained in interviews that she chose to depict all the characters as rabbits because their large ears emphasize the role of hearing in the story, and allow the cords of the Phonic Ear to stand out, making them look as conspicuous as she felt they were when growing up.

Cece Bell's story is just one of many experiences of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, as described in the author's note. As a child, Cece rejected attempts by her mother to introduce her to American Sign Language, and she now relies solely on lip reading and hearing aids. For many, hearing aids are not an option, as there is not enough or no sound transmission ability. Even if amplifying sound is an option, some members of the Deaf community do not choose to do so. In this way, the story cannot be generalized as representing the experience of all deaf individuals; however, the author explains that the challenge to communicate is shared. As a result, Bell's story has been embraced by many deaf and hard of hearing children (Bayliss, 2017).

This text is recommended for ages 8-12, but can be enjoyable and instructive to older readers as well. Educators might pair this book with the video, *A View from the Window*, depicting the school day of third graders at California School for the Deaf. Cece Bell has created a series of in-depth YouTube videos about *El Deafo* in which she describes the experiences on which the story is based, as well as how she chose to tell the story. Another autobiographical graphic novel depicting the experience of living with a disability is *Guts* by Raina Telgemeier (2019) illustrating her struggle with anxiety and panic attacks. For slightly older students, *El Deafo* would pair well with Canadian author Jean Little's (1987) autobiographical novel *Little by Little: A Writer's Education* about growing up legally blind and finding herself through writing. Another option for older students is Ruth Behar's (2017) novel *Lucky Broken Girl* based on her own childhood experience as a Cuban-Jewish immigrant to the United States who was confined in a body cast for months after a car accident. Each of these pairings can offer a new perspective to students, offering windows into another experience, or, in some cases, mirroring their own.

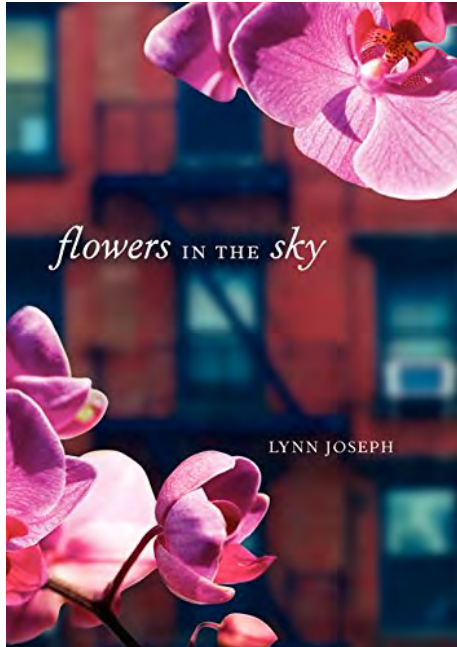
Reference:

Bayliss, S. (2017). *El Deafo to the rescue!*: The graphic memoir empowers kids and enlightens educators. *School Library Journal*, 63(3), 12-13.

Nina Reiniger, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign



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*Flowers in the Sky*

Written by Lynn Joseph

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

Harper Teen Publishing, 2013, 240 pp.

ISBN: 978-0060297947

“In this new world, people were not at all what they appeared to be” (Joseph, 2013, p. 108).

Nina Perez is a teenager from the Dominican Republic who enjoys the simple, tourist village life and keeping up with her flower garden. Her village life and garden bring her immeasurable joy since her older brother Darrio’s departure to New York when Nina was six years old to provide for the family after their father passed away. Nina’s mother wants more for her than the small Dominican village can offer and sends her to New York to live with her brother. Upon her arrival, Nina finds that the life portrayed by her mother and

stories shared by those who returned aren’t the reality she experiences. The transition causes internal stress and strains the relationship with her brother. As a means for survival, her brother is involved in a lifestyle that neither he nor Nina ever anticipated. This is a beautiful story of the fight to create, hold onto, and regain identity in a new place.

With masterful descriptions of events and settings and powerful use of first-person narrative, readers experience and feel the characters’ struggles of adapting to a new place. Joseph integrates Spanish words in ways that authentically enhance the story. Nina and other characters grapple with topics and ideas that are appropriate for young adult readers.

In *Flowers from the Sky*, Joseph directly references Tennessee William’s (1944) *The Glass Menagerie* as a book Nina reads when she enters school in New York. By pairing these two books, readers can explore themes and symbolism through the intertextual connections that Joseph uses in her novel. Other possible book pairs include *Here I Am* by Patricia Hee Kim and Sonia Sánchez (2015) or *Tea with Milk* by Allen Say (2009). The former is a wordless picture book of a Korean child coming to a large American city. The latter is an account of a young girl’s return to a country of origin and culture that is unfamiliar. These two books paired with *Flowers in the Sky* explore an immigrant journey, including the stories characters tell, the struggles they experience, the things they miss, and the things they hold on to.

Lynn Joseph hails from the island nation of Trinidad where she spent her childhood before moving to Baltimore to attend school. She has written short stories and poetry about her home nation but developed a love for the Dominican Republic through her husband who is a native of the country. As she did in her previous Dominican novel, *The Color of My Words* (2006), Joseph spent time with families from the village of Samana where *Flowers in the Sky* begins and explored the New York borough of Washington Heights to weave a realistic fiction story of an immigrant experience.

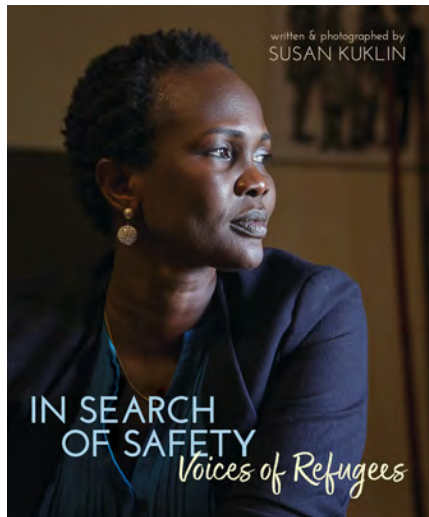
Brett Stamm, University of North Texas



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*In Search of Safety: Voices of Refugees*

Written and Photographed by Susan Kuklin  
Candlewick, 2020, 246 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0763679606



Author and photographer Susan Kuklin creates a space for five refugees to share their stories. Fraidoon from Afghanistan and member of the Tajik ethnic group worked with the U.S. military before applying for refugee status for his family and himself due to Taliban threats on his life. Nathan from Myanmar was persecuted as a member of the Karen religious group; he lived in a refugee camp in Thailand before seeking refuge in the U.S. When civil war broke out in South Sudan, Nyaront's family fled to Ethiopia where they were moved from refugee camp to refugee camp before finding refuge in the U.S. Shireen from Northern Iraq and a Yazidi who fled ISIS is the only participant in this book who resettled

in the U.S. without her family. Dieudonné from Burundi and of mixed Hutu and Tutsi origin escaped genocide for his ethnicity before applying for refugee status in the U.S.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, every minute 20 people leave everything to escape war, persecution or terror. Under U.S. law, refugees are people who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of a "well-founded fear of persecution" due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. The refugees in this book applied for refugee status before leaving their home countries or from refugee camps in other countries. The U.S. laws governing refugees differ from those for asylum seekers, who come to U.S. borders without approved refugee applications.

Kuklin refers to the refugees who contributed to this book as "participants." The relationships she develops with those who contribute their stories for her books are respectful and long-lasting. Interviewees approve of the first-person vignettes she crafts from the testimonials they give about their lived experiences. She honors and respects the language each refugee used in telling their story. These #ownvoices help young adult readers begin to comprehend the magnitude of the pain, suffering, determination, and courage of people who are uprooted by war, persecution, natural disasters, and other intolerable situations.

All five refugee participants in this book were ultimately resettled in Nebraska with the support of Lutheran Family Services, one of nine non-governmental agencies authorized for resettlement work by the U.S. government. Kuklin introduces each refugee's story with a landscape or cityscape photograph taken in Nebraska and a map from the person's homeland or refugee camp location. Color photographs of the participants add depth and richness to their lived experiences.

In addition to a rigorous interview process, Kuklin conducts extensive research. She documents her process in the back matter for the book. A section called "The Refugee

Process” will help readers understand the arduous resettlement process and the path to U.S. citizenship taken by refugees. Additional resources are an Author’s Note, Acknowledgments, About Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, About the Yazda Cultural Center, Chapter Notes, Time Lines (for the ethnic groups represented in the book), and Resources for Further Reading.

An author study could include other young adult books written and photographed by Susan Kuklin, which were created through a similar process: *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2015) and *We Are Here to Stay: Voices of Undocumented Young Adults* (2019). For a younger readership, she similarly created *Families* (2006) and *How My Family Lives in America* (1998). There is an Author’s Corner interview (<https://wowlit.org/blog/2019/01/01/authors-corner-susan-kuklin/>) with Susan Kuklin on the WOW website that can support students’ study.

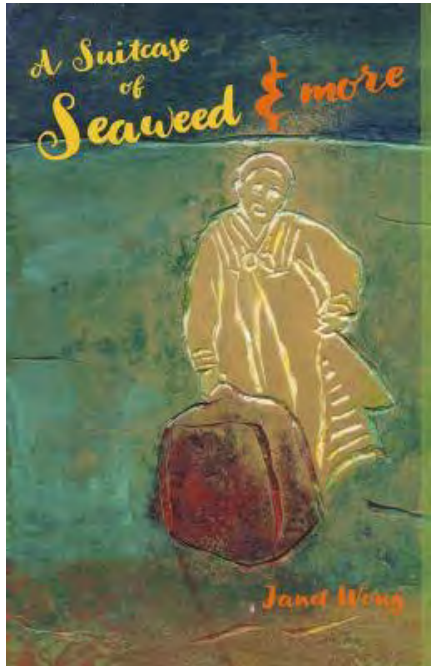
*In Search of Safety* can be paired with *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* by Malala Yousafzai (2019), which includes Malala’s autobiographical account as well as those of nine other girls. Kuklin’s book can also be paired with fictional accounts of refugee experiences. *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) provides an especially strong pairing because it includes the stories of three child refugees escaping from different situations over a longer historical time period. Other middle grade and YA novels about refugees such as *The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2014) and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi (2018) could also be paired with *In Search of Safety*.

Susan Kuklin grew up hearing her grandparents’ stories of how they fled Russia and Ukraine during the Holocaust. She notes that this book is her way of saying thank you to her ancestors (p. 218). The United Nations observes World Refugee Day (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/refugee-day>) every June in order to bring attention to the plight of refugees from around the globe. The 2020 theme was “Every Action Counts,” which was intended “to remind the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society and Every Action Counts in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world.”

Judi Moreillon, Tucson, Arizona



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*A Suitcase of Seaweed & More*

Written by Janet Wong  
Pomelo Books, 2019, 91 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1-937057-33-6

COVID-19 created a crisis of threat for Asian people in global locations. The news media reported incidents of Asian people being attacked in big cities in Europe and North America and accused of causing the coronavirus. Each time the U.S. President called COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” at press conferences, the crisis became even bigger for Asian People. To many Asian diasporas, the word “Chinese” functions nearly synonymously with “Asian” in general. Asian is a convenient label for people with the look of Asians, but it doesn’t say much about the person. *A Suitcase of Seaweed and More* is Janet Wong’s story, told in autobiographical-poetry, demonstrating that the “Asian” label minimally explains who she is and where she is from. In this uncertain pandemic era,

*A Suitcase of Seaweed & More* is meaningful as it explores Wong’s identity and her place of belonging, including her family history in the U.S.

*A Suitcase of Seaweed & More* was originally published in 1996 and republished in 2019 with additional textual features. The facing page for each poem has texts in various genres that reflect Janet Wong’s voice and enhance the reading experience. In gray boxes Wong relates the background story of the poem, and at the bottom of the page asks a thinking/writing question that prompts readers to reflect on their own cultures and invites them to be writers or poets.

The book has three sections of poems reflecting Wong’s three identities — Part 1: Korean Poems; Part 2: Chinese Poems; Part 3: American Poems. The first poem in each section introduces Wong’s connection to that culture: *My Mother is Korean*, *My Father is Chinese*, and lastly, *I am American*. Though Wong is Asian, her American side is her dominant cultural identity.

Wong’s poems tell the story of her mother and father becoming a family in a Koreatown community. The stories in her poems invite readers to look at past and contemporary Korean-immigrant cultures. Koreatown’s growth in Los Angeles is a part of California history and Korean women’s dynamic role in beauty salons is still mirrored in today’s socializing culture of hair salons. Her Chinese side has more of her grandfather’s (GongGong) story. GongGong brought his wife and his son after World War II to the U.S. In the 1950s, they opened up a restaurant, “Wong’s Café.” Wong’s GongGong and his community tell a story of friendship, family business, and Chinese relatives’ interactions with Wong’s family whom they assume are rich Americans. Finally, in Part 3, Wong starts her American story with her birth in Los Angeles. Her bicultural identity, half Chinese and half Korean, brings her unpleasant memories. She notes, “Some non-Asian people look at Asians and lump us all together. Japanese, Chinese, Korean: They think we are the same. There are some similarities among these cultures, but there are also enormous differences — and a history of war between Japan, China, and Korea. Even today, a Japanese person is likely to encounter some bias in China, and a Korean person

might feel discriminated against in Japan” (p.67).

*A Suitcase of Seaweed & More* contains stories that reflect many of us. We are part of a family, community, and country. American youth with immigrant (grand)parent stories can read similar stories in books like *I'm OK* by Patti Kim (2018), *Clara Lee and Apple Pie Dream* by Jenny Han (2011), and young adult books like *This is My Brain In Love* by I.W. Gregorio (2020) and *Frankly In Love* by David Yoon (2019). Children and adolescent readers will appreciate these books that allow them to reflect on their intersectional cultural identities and rich heritage cultures through intergenerational relationships and family dynamics. Most of all these books challenge readers to think about what it means to be American.

Wong is a significant author of children's books and poetry who has been advocating for classroom use of poems for young readers and teachers over the years. Her recent poetry anthology books include *Great Morning! Poems for School Leaders to Read Aloud* (2018), *Here We Go* (2017), *Pet Crazy* (2017), *You Just Wait* (2016), and *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series (authored with Sylvia Vardell). These are widely read in classrooms and help young readers to embrace their cultural and linguistic identities through poetry. *A Suitcase of Seaweed & More* was selected as one of the NCTE Outstanding Children's Poetry books in 2019.

Yoo Kyung Sung, University of New Mexico.

Editor's note: Janet Wong commented on a poem that did not make it into the original text or the reprint, but that communicates the intricacies of straddling different cultures. See the blogpost (<http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.com/2019/07/extra-extra-janet-wong-and-suitcase-of.html>).



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*When Stars are Scattered*

Written by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

Illustrated by Victoria Jamieson with color by Iman Geedy

Dial, 2020, 257 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-525-55391-5

This compelling graphic memoir was created collaboratively to tell the story of Omar, a Somali boy growing up in a refugee camp in Kenya as he tries to make a future for himself and his brother. When soldiers attack his village in Somalia, he and his brother are separated from their mother and eventually make their way to Dadaab, a crowded camp in Kenya. Omar and Hassan, who has a seizure disorder and is mostly nonverbal, live with Fatuma, a kindly elderly woman assigned to take care of them. The book covers six of Omar's 15 years in the camp,

capturing significant moments in Omar's life as he struggles with trauma, uncertainty, and boredom while also experiencing the love and support of his community. Omar is faced with decisions about attending school and the reality that only a few opportunities exist to leave the camp and be resettled in a new land. Although the last page portrays Omar and his brother on a plane to the U.S, other characters depict the range of realities for refugees who are trapped in the camp, including teen girls who are married to older men, children who bring hope and possibility to their lives, and others who give up in depression and anger.

This absorbing story is told with honesty, revealing the tremendous difficulties and desperate situations that Omar and other refugees experience along with the loving moments that allow them to remain compassionate and carve out meaningful lives. The graphic format uses full-color panels created by Jamieson with colors by Iman Geedy to capture the camp setting and the deep purple skies of stars. The illustrations portray the complex and confused emotions of the characters, who come alive and stay with readers long after the book is put down. The back matter includes photographs of the brothers and an authors' note about how Omar and Victoria collaborated and details about Omar's life since leaving the camp. They also indicate which parts of the book are fiction, for example, the secondary characters are composites of people in the camp.

This engaging heartwarming memoir is filled with empathy and compassion that challenges our perspectives about life in an unfair world. Omar leaves readers with the admonition to never give up hope no matter how desperate the situations in which we find ourselves. The sensitive story exemplifies the resiliency of the human spirit and our need for relationships and purpose. Education is depicted as a highly sought-after opportunity, not available to all, that makes a tremendous difference in people's lives. The book has received multiple starred reviews and was named a National Book Award Finalist for 2021.

Victoria Jamieson lists the following resources on her website for readers who want to explore the background of this book in greater depth:

- **Dreams From Dadaab** : A clip from the Dadaab Animation project. A short film featuring young students from Dadaab and their animation work. (3 1/2 minutes; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6xq2htNSvs&feature=youtu.be>)
- **Educational Challenges**: A glimpse into a primary school in Dadaab, and the challenges facing young people who want an education. (2 minutes; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CN4XSzuusVs>)
- **Dagahaley Tour**: A tour through some of the streets, homes, and markets in Dadaab. (3 1/2 minutes; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tM1fj2j\\_8nA&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tM1fj2j_8nA&feature=youtu.be))
- **Ifo Market**: A tour through the market in Ifo camp (where the story takes place) (3 minutes; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFHjS6vuFIO&feature=youtu.be>)
- **Dadaab Stories**: A collection of films made by residents of Dadaab. <http://www.dadaabstories.org/#categories>)
- **A Conversation with Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson**: A presentation filmed for the virtual book launch. (8 minutes; <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/victoria-jamieson-omar-mohamed-when-stars-are-scattered/register>)

This book is unusual in that the entire book is set within a refugee camp, with several flashbacks to the events in Somalia and ending with Omar on a plane to the U.S. The book could be paired with other novels in refugee camps, such as *The Bone Sparrow* (Zana Fraillon, 2016) about a Rohingya refugee boy from Myanmar who has spent his entire life in a refugee camp in Australia and *The Milk of Birds* (Sylvia Whitman, 2013) about two teens who are pen pals, one in a Sudanese refugee camp and the other in Richard, Virginia. Another interesting pairing is books about internment camps in the U.S. such as *Weedflower* (Cynthia Kadohata, 2006) set in a Japanese-American internment camp during WWII and *Internment* (Samira Ahmed, 2019), a dystopian novel in which Muslim Americans are forced into internment camps.

The novel could also be read alongside a picturebook text set on refugee camps, including *My Beautiful Birds* (Suzanne Del Rizzo, 2017) about a Syrian boy who misses his birds, *The Roses in My Carpet* (Rukhsana Khan & Ronald Himler, 1998) about an Afghan boy worried about his sister, *Lubna and Pebble* (Wendy Meddour & Daniel Egnéus, 2019) about a Syrian girl whose friend is a pebble, *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, & Doug Chayka, 2007) about two Afghan girls who share a pair of sandals, and *The Banana-Leaf Ball* (Katie Smith Milway, 2017), a nonfiction book about a camp in Tanzania where a coach organizes soccer games as an alternative to gangs.

Victoria Jamieson has created other middle-grade graphic novels, including *All's Faire in Middle School* (2017) and the Newbery Honor book *Roller Girl* (2015). This book grew out of her work as a community volunteer, greeting refugee families at the airport and working as a cultural liaison. Both she and Omar live in Pennsylvania and met through his position at a resettlement center for refugees. At the time, he was looking for a co-author to write an adult memoir and, after several conversations, they decided to work together on a children's book. In an author's note, Victoria describes meeting every few weeks with Omar and the strategies she used to remain true to his memories and experiences. She notes her shift in thinking about how to tell stories to learning how to listen to stories.

Omar initially resettled in Tucson, Arizona where he graduated from the University of Arizona and then married and moved to Pennsylvania as a resettlement case manager. His non-profit organization, Refugee Strong (<https://www.refugeestrong.org/>) delivers school supplies and other resources to children living and attending school in Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya.

The third member of their team is Iman Geddy, the colorist for this book (<https://www.imangeddy.com/>). She is an Atlanta-based designer and illustrator committed to using the graphic arts for social good.

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