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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME XVI, ISSUE 1

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Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume XVI Issue 1
Fall 2023
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Introduction and Editor's Note

This exciting issue, consisting of eight picturebooks and a pictorial information book, invites readers to reflect on the importance of building, maintaining, and belonging to a community. A community brings people together to support each other in facing challenges. We have a natural desire to belong, and being part of a community fulfills that need by connecting us in a variety of relationships.

Relationships are created quickly through crisis, as demonstrated in *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* by Christina Soontornvat. The detailed text describes the incredible community of multinational rescuers, cave divers, medics, engineers, hydrologists, military specialists, farmers, and volunteers who collaborated exhaustively to save Coach Ek and his team of teenage boys from the flooded caves of Tham Luang Nang Non, the Cave of the Sleeping Lady in northern Thailand.

Four picturebooks explore the community built with familiar friends and family. In *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior* by Heather Gale and Mika Song, community is built among dancers who accept everyone, particularly Ho'onani who sees herself as a mähū (in between) with the desire to take on a role usually reserved for kāne (boys). In *The World Belonged to Us*, Jacqueline Woodson reminisces about summers in Brooklyn, where children playing outside together was a celebration of the culturally and linguistically diverse community they lived in. In *A Day with No Words*, Tiffany Hammond draws on her own experience of being a person with autism to tell the story of a young boy living and participating in a community that normalizes the use of augmentative communication devices to support verbal communication. In *Hundred Years of Happiness*, Thanh Hà Lại draws on her own family relationships to write about memory loss in a grandparent and the efforts family members make to stay connected and help Bà remember.

The remaining four books describe the process of building community when everything that was home has changed. In *The Arabic Quilt: An Immigrant Story*, Aya Khalil and Anait Semirdzhyan use the perspective of a young Egyptian girl to describe how her teacher in her new homeland builds an affirming classroom community that supports linguistic diversity. In *This is Not My Home*, Eugenia Yoh and Vivienne Chang address Lily's reverse immigration experience as she moves to Taiwan, where her mother grew up, and seeks ways to find herself and belong to Ah Ma's beloved cultural community. In *The Words We Share*, Jack Wong portrays Angie and her father as language brokers for each other, using their linguistic skills to problem-solve as they adapt to living in a community of immigrants in Canada. In *Me and My Fear*, Francesca Sanna introduces a young girl who learns that while fear can protect her from harm, when uncontrolled it can prevent her from growing, learning, and enjoying her life in a new community.

We invite you to read and reflect on the diversity of communities represented in these stories, and how a sense of community is created or maintained.

Please consider submitting a review for our future issues. The editors welcome reviews of children's or young adult books that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives around these themes:

Volume 16, Issue 2 – Themed issue on multicultural or global biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and/or fictionalized biographies (Winter 2023) – submission deadline December 15, 2023. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight multicultural or global biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and/or fictionalized biographies.

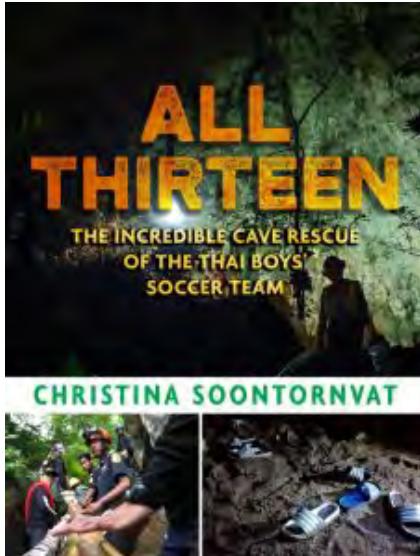
Volume 16, Issue 3 – Open theme (Spring 2024) – submission deadline: February 15, 2024. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

María V. Acevedo-Aquino and Susan Corapi, Co-editors

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All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team

Written by Christina Soontornvat

Candlewick Press, 2020, 280 pp

ISBN: 978-1536209457

In this picture-packed nonfiction account of a breaking news story that took place in 2018, Christina Soontornvat relays the unbelievable details of a lost soccer team that turned into a global rescue mission. The tween-to-teenage Wild Boar soccer team from Mae Sai, Thailand, decided to take a few hours in the afternoon one day to explore the region's famous Tham Luang cave system, known in English as The Cave of the Sleeping Lady. What they didn't expect, however, was the unseasonable rain that was about to drench the entire region for months to come. The strong rain continued for days,

trapping twelve soccer players and their coach a mile deep into Tham Luang. Because the cave itself was overfilled with water, regular caving experts were not able to retrieve the boys, so cave diving specialists were brought on the scene from around the world. Soontornvat describes what a truly international effort it became, bringing in cavers from Thailand, British sump divers, and the US Air Force, plus search-and-rescue experts from Vietnam, China, and Australia. Along with those professional workers, thousands of volunteers pooled their resources, time, expertise, and care into the mission. Over the course of the 18 days that the boys were trapped inside the cave, the story transformed from a local catastrophe into a worldwide, 24/7 news thriller televised in most countries across the world. After the boys made it out of the cave, everyone wanted an opportunity to talk with the bravest soccer team ever, including Christina Soontornvat.

One of the most significant and expectation-defying aspects of this book is the way in which it reinforces the cultural difference between the U.S. and many other countries in the world. American culture is highly individualistic, with a sharp and innate focus on the self, for better or worse. This story highlights the fact that not all the world is like that, with Thailand being a prime example. The way the entire country banded together with a sense of urgency, as though every citizen had a son stuck in that cave, was remarkable, and Soontornvat captured this phenomenon distinctly and beautifully. In chapter 21, she writes "the mountain now swells with ten thousand people: rescue workers, divers, military personnel, monks, medics, and the scores of volunteers supporting them." Soontornvat also does a great job identifying the ways in which news and media companies tracked the story.

Soontornvat crafts an engaging reading experience that subverts the status quo for chapter books of this length. The book is 280 pages long, yet packed with vivid photographs, illustrations, maps, and diagrams that—coupled together with the gripping narrative—keep the reader fully immersed in the story. The supplemental materials give the book more potential educational value and cement the book as a strong single candidate for learning about the story that so much of the world was watching when it happened.

This book would pair well with other books that fit into similar themes and topics, such as books about collectivist Thai culture or the power of family in Thailand. Books about natural disasters or

the power of community to respond to those disasters could be useful as well, such as Don Brown's graphic novel *Drowned City* (2017) or Jesse Joshua Watson's *Hope for Haiti* (2010), a picturebook about the resiliency of a culture's response to earthquakes. One more potentially compatible topic could be the various kinds of first responders, as lots of niche examples of those appear in this book.

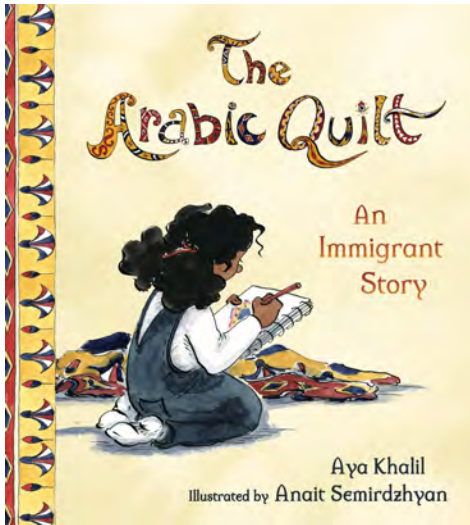
Christina Soontornvat (<https://soontornvat.com/>) is a Thai-American writer and lifelong-learner in various fields. She holds a B.S. in mechanical engineering and a master's degree in science education and has won awards such as the Newbery Honor Award, The Washington Post Best Book of the Year award, and Kirkus Prize for Young People's Literature. She loves the STEM field and wants to continue serving her readers through a diverse array of topics.

Ethan Ashworth, Trinity International University

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The Arabic Quilt: An Immigrant Story

Written by Aya Khalil

Illustrated by Anait Semirdzhyan

Tilbury House Publishers, 2020, 36 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0884487548

Kanzi, a young Egyptian American girl, moves to a new town at the start of third grade. As she is immersed in the school environment, she experiences the challenges many children navigate when encountering cultural differences. When her father packs her a kofta (spiced meatball) sandwich for lunch, she secretly wishes it was peanut butter and jelly for the sake of not being different, a feeling many immigrant children can

relate to. Kanzi forgets her sandwich at home and her mother shows up to school wearing a hijab and calling her “habibti,” an Arabic term of endearment meaning beloved. Some of her classmates tease her and laugh because her mother’s language sounds funny to them. Kanzi has an emotional reaction and her teacher pulls her aside to tell her that being bilingual is beautiful, affirming her identity. Later that night, Kanzi wraps herself in her grandmother’s quilt and writes a poem about how she’s feeling regarding her identity. After her teacher sees her poem and quilt, she takes the opportunity to create a class project making a quilt or paper arrangement, with the help of Kanzi’s mother who writes the students’ names in Arabic. Kanzi states how beautiful her mother looks, emphasizing the pride she feels to see her mother. The paper quilt project excites her classmates who initially teased her about her biliteracy and soon everyone is excited to see their name written in a new language. The teacher hangs the quilt outside their classroom and inspires a celebration of multilingualism across the school as other classrooms decide to write classmates’ names in other heritage languages.

This book uses Arabic words to translanguage when speaking about cultural staples. Instead of saying lentil soup, the author makes a point to call it shurbet ‘ads. There is also a glossary of Arabic-English words that are mentioned in the text with the transliteration included. The word teita (grandmother) is included as well, which feels especially authentic because it is in the Egyptian dialect, not Modern Standard Arabic.

The family in this story appears to be an accurate representation of an Egyptian American household. The father is reading a newspaper written in Arabic print that reads akhbar masr (Egyptian news). Also, Kanzi’s family speaks to her in both Arabic and English. It’s especially endearing that the family is diverse and accurately represented with Kanzi, her brother, and father having darker skin tones and her mother having lighter skin. Egyptians are diverse and it’s refreshing to see Black Arabs represented in this way. This book dives into heavy topics in a way that is comprehensible and relatable to students, regardless of their heritage. It emphasizes the importance of acceptance, self-love, and the richness of diversity and inclusion.

Some texts that are similar in theme would be *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010), which is a bilingual book that follows an Australian child and a Moroccan child through their day. This book highlights

similarities and differences between the Western and Eastern world (Editor: see a critical review (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii3/10/>) of this book for another perspective). Another connection is to *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2003), because of the pressure the main character feels to fit in, contemplating changing her name before deciding on being brave and unapologetically claiming her identity. This book connects to *The Arabic Quilt* because the main character, Kanzi, also grapples with her identity after immigrating to the United States.

This text feels especially authentic because the author, Aya Khalil, immigrated from Egypt herself as a child. Khalil draws from personal experiences as she reflects on what it was like to live in a country where her heritage language is a low-incidence language. *The Arabic Quilt: An Immigrant Story* is the author's first published text and it's been internationally recognized by winning awards like the 2021 Arab American Children's Book, the Children's Africana Book Award (CABA) 2021 Honor Book, and a 2021 Notable Social Studies Book (NCSS). More information about her can be found on her website (<https://www.ayakhalil.com/>).

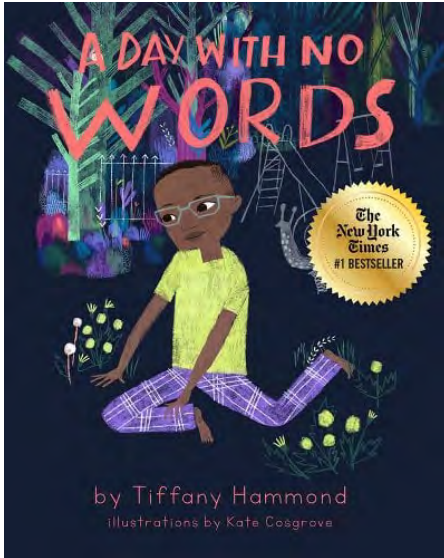
The illustrator, Anait Semirdzhyan, was born in Kazakhstan, grew up in Armenia, and now lives in Seattle with her family. She used pencil sketches and watercolor to illustrate this book. By using this method on a white page, she creates a focus on Kanzi's family and the world around her. More information about her can be found on her website (<https://www.anaitsart.com/>).

Douha Abbasher, Texas Woman's University

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A Day with No Words

Written by Tiffany Hammond

Illustrated by Kate Cosgrove

Wheat Penny Press, 2023, 44 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1736949795

This beautiful picturebook chronicles the day of a young boy and his mom in the U.S. through the eyes of Aiden, a loving and curious boy with non speaking autism. Though he is unable to speak, the written text and illustrations show how he and his mother communicate through the use of a tablet. The story also describes additional characteristics that are unique to Aiden’s experience with autism, like his sensitivity to sound, attention to people’s voices (“Daddy’s voice is like air”), and how he likes to

look at the world through the parted fingers of his right hand. The descriptions of Aiden’s childhood preferences, like going to the park, ordering chicken nuggets, and enjoying a special bond with his mother, help the reader connect to this lovable character while also building an awareness and acceptance of children with autism.

The author writes in poetic narrative verses and includes vivid descriptions and relatable metaphors to help the reader understand Aiden’s perspective, as well as his mother’s experience. In one scene of the story, Aiden and his mom encounter a group of other children and their parents playing at the park. When Aiden “jumps and flaps,” the group turns to stare and talk about him, “That boy is handicapped.” The mother wants to lash out at them but instead closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and calms herself first. She stands up for Aiden by explaining to them that he does not speak but can still hear what they are saying, “The words you say go straight to his mind.” This scene offers one example of how the book provides an opportunity for discussion with children about empathy, fairness, and sensitivity to others who may be labeled as different by society.

The pictures are harmonious, colorful, and warm, extending to the full page of the book and inviting the reader to join in as mother and son travel to the park, encounter other children, spin in the wet grass, and order lunch at a favorite restaurant. The pictures beautifully extend the text and normalize how Aiden communicates through the pictures and words on his tablet. At different times of the story, the illustrations depict colorful images and letters flying off the tablet as Aiden and his mom communicate with each other and with others. The colorful endpaper design of the book includes these bright vivid letters that float off of the tablet in the story.

A Day With No Words provides an affirming perspective of autism and lays the groundwork for understanding and acceptance. The book addresses Aiden’s uniqueness while highlighting universal childhood joys and wonder that every reader can relate to. Books that would pair well to create a text set and launch further discussion and connection about the differences that make us unique could include *Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, written by Sonia Sotomayor and illustrated by Rafael

Lopez (2019), and *Different: A Great Thing To Be*, written by Heather Avis and illustrated by Sarah Mensinga (2021).

As a mom of two autistic boys herself, Tiffany Hammond shares her authentic perspectives in this meaningful story. She is an advocate for individuals with autism, a consultant and public speaker. She is also the creator of the online platform, Fidget and Fries (<https://www.fidgetsandfries.co/>), and this is her first book. In the Author's Note, she refers to this book as a call to action, "We all have a role to play in helping foster understanding, acceptance, love, and accommodations for those like Aiden."

Kate Cosgrove is the illustrator of *And the Bullfrogs Sing: A Life Cycle* (2020) and *The Dirt Book: Poems About Animals That Live Beneath Our Feet* (2021), both written by David L. Harrison. Cosgrove has exhibited her artwork online and in galleries across the United States, Australia, Canada, Colombia, England, France, Switzerland and the Ukraine.

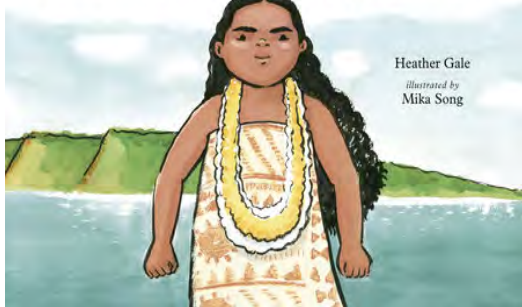
Angela Ward, Texas Woman's University

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HO'ONANI HULA WARRIOR



Ho'onani: Hula Warrior

Written by Heather Gale

Illustrated by Mika Song

Tundra Books, 2019, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0735264496

This book transports readers to the islands in Hawai'i. When a child named Ho'onani does not see herself as either wahine (girl) or kāne (boy), but more like in-between the two societal gender norms, she feels content with herself. When she finds out that her school will be putting on a performance of her cultural and traditional heritage, she longs to be a part of it.

The only problem is that it is a traditional kāne hula chant. Not only does she want to be a part of it, but she also has a burning passion and desire to lead the all-male cast. In response to her desire, she auditions for the role. She is strong, sure, and steady. Ho'onani pursues her calling, she does not quit and knows she can earn this position. She continually practices memorizing every emotion and history that this dance holds for her community, her warriors, and Hawai'i's history. Ho'onani receives the position, though when the time comes to announce the good news to her family, not everyone is accepting. Her Kumu (teacher) respectfully warns her that some might not appreciate a wahine leading a kāne chant. Nevertheless, Ho'onani is determined and has the self-awareness that she is in the middle of wahine and kāne, which she states does not make her less wahine. On the day of her big performance, Ho'onani is strong, sure, and steady; she is nervous that people will perceive her as not kāne enough and protest. Arriving on the stage, feet stomping to the beat of the ipu hula (like modern-day drums) and the clacks of the kāla'au (sticks), Ho'onani stomps across the stage, followed by her warriors. Facing the crowd, Ho'onani feels the desire she is yearning for. Her voice thunders through the audience, captivating everyone, and she knows where she belongs. Ho'onani finds her place – “not as a wahine, not as a kāne, but as a hula warrior.”

This story is based on the real person Ho'onani Kamai who was born and raised on O'ahu, loved music, and played the ukulele. This picture book is authentic and based on the documentary *A Place in the Middle* (<https://aplaceinthemiddle.org/>), which describes ancient Hawaiian culture in which the mähū, people who embraced both feminine and masculine traits, were valued in society as healers, caretakers, and teachers of ancient traditions. The spirit of Hawaiian tradition makes room for all people, whether you identify as wahine, kāne, or mähū, and everyone deserves the same unconditional acceptance and respect.

In the book, Ho'onani is depicted as having strong masculine features such as thick, bushy eyebrows, a rounder face, and wearing longer shorts and dark-colored tops, compared to her sister who has thin eyebrows and wears colors associated with girls such as pink and yellow. Even in the book, tensions rise when Ho'onani is auditioning with only kānes in the room who question “wahine?” “She held her place,” letting her soon-to-be warriors know that she was “strong, sure, and steady.” Throughout the story of Ho'onani's request to lead the chant, readers are invited to think about the respect and acceptance she gained from the audience and how everyone can have a

place. Though societal norms of the past may have lost their value in modern society, these ancient roles are teaching the keiki (children) that there is a place for everyone in society and that they should be treated with the same respect and acceptance. As Ho'onani performs, the audience realizes the impact of what a mähū can provide. Ho'onani gained her place in the middle, standing "strong, sure, and steady" despite the initial adversity; she "held her place."

In the documentary *A Place in the Middle*, Ho'onani describes how her kumu (teacher) says some wahine have more kāne and some kāne have more wahine. The documentary discusses the history of native Hawaiian roles before foreigners came for kāne, wahine and mähū. The front cover of the book aligns with the documentary, in which Ho'onani is given both the kāne lei (yellow) and the wahine lei (white). Ho'onani wears both leis because she is both. The documentary explains how Ho'onani was in a high school kāne hula team because she had the most ku (male energy) even though she is biologically wahine. It also provides insight into Ho'onani's family who are missing in the book. In the documentary, Ho'onani is seen as the leader of the kāne hula group just as Gale and Song depict and illustrate through the book.

This book would pair well with titles that explore gender identity in a two-gender normed society such as *It Feels Good To Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity* (Theresa Thorn & Noah Grigni, 2019). It would also pair well with titles that are set in Hawai'i and explore Hawaiian culture. *Kapaemahu* by Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson and Daniel Sousa (2022), explores the legend of four mähū who brought healing arts from Tahiti to Hawai'i, introducing the traditional role of mähūs in society. *Ohana Means Family* by Illima Loomis and Kenard Pak (2020) narrates the process of growing taro for a traditional luau, emphasizing the importance of family unity. Finally, *She Persisted: 13 American Women Who Changed the World* (Chelsea Clinton & Alexandra Boiger, 2017), addresses female empowerment and how these 13 women were trailblazers for many women and did not give into societal and cultural norms.

Heather Gale (<https://heathergale.net/>) is a former orthotist and author from New Zealand and currently lives in Canada. She is a children's nonfiction writer who loves to make stories that feature real people, such as *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior*, which was a Sakura Medal 2021 nominee. She fell in love with storytelling as a young girl during long drives in which family members told a story that reflected the scenery they had just passed.

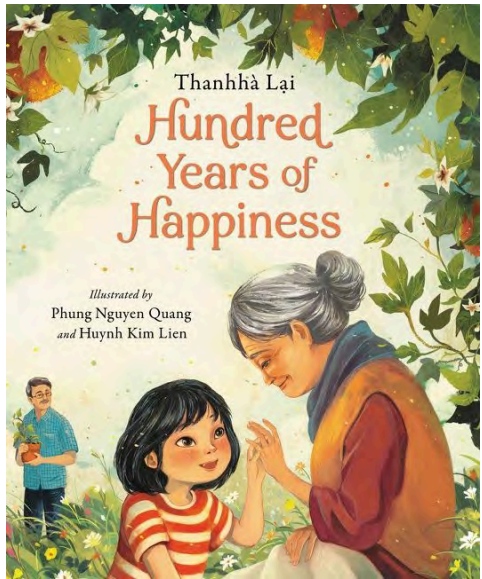
Mika Song (<https://www.mikasongdraws.com/>) is a Pacific Islander who grew up in the Philippines and in Hawai'i and currently lives in New York. She is a children's writer/illustrator who makes stories about outsiders. She has a passion for comic strips and even has a free newsletter website which she started alongside Jen de Oliviera that sends weekly comic strips for students to read. She has received the Portfolio Award from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

Cresencia Kerr, Trinity International University

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Hundred Years of Happiness

Written by Thanh Hà Lại

Illustrated by Phung Nguyễn Quang and Huynh Thi Kim Liên

HarperCollins, 2022, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0063026926

Thanh Hà Lại draws on the relationship of her own mother and daughter to tell the story of An and her grandfather Ông's efforts to bring back a memory to her grandmother Bà. An greets her grandparents every day in Vietnamese. She sings familiar songs to Bà to help her stay present, but after a while "a blankness claims her expression and a thin smoke clouds her eyes." While Bà may not be able to describe her snack as a persimmon or remember An, one thing she never forgets is Ông. "The two of them are always next to each other, breaths swirling into one." An and Ông take on a project of helping Bà

remember her wedding in Vietnam through tasting her favorite dish from that special day. Traditionally, Vietnamese relatives serve xôi gấc and wish newlyweds to have a hundred years of happiness. Ông hopes the special dish will help his wife untangle her memories and remember their wedding. An and Ông patiently wait for the wrinkly gấc seeds to arrive, and then carefully sprout them, plant them, and watch them grow and mature into spiky globes. After they harvest the fruit, they cook the fruit with rice, and after burning the first attempts, make xôi gấc and serve it to Bà. As she takes bites of the red sticky rice, the smoke dissipates for a short time from her eyes and she remembers the wish for a hundred years of happiness. An and Ông are thrilled, and encouraged to start sprouting more seeds to help Bà remember again.

Thanh Hà Lại has written two of her novels in the rhythm of Vietnamese poetry. This picturebook uses a similar poetic cadence to highlight the emotions of An and her grandfather as they try to help Bà keep her memories from fading. The love between An and her grandparents is palpable, as is the long-lasting love between Bà and Ông. The months that An and Ông work to grow the gấc fruit reflect the long love affair of Bà and Ông that began as children as they crafted turtles from the gấc seeds. Ông tries many foods, photographs, and stories to help his wife remember, and finally tries the special dish served at their wedding, recalling the vow he made on their wedding day to sweat and plan to fulfill their relatives' wish for their happiness. When asked about the focus on food, Thanh Hà Lại explains in an interview that "Memories return easiest on the tongue, which records what tastes good, whom we were with, the feelings of warmth and satisfaction. Memories flood the tongue, glide down to the heart, rise up to a smile, all without saying a word" (Shim, 2022). So it was a natural decision to use red sticky rice, a dish served at Tet and other special occasions, to help Bà remember her wedding and her family.

Along with the poetic language, the digitally-created illustrations add layers to the story. The team of Vietnamese illustrators use motifs from Vietnamese culture to convey the strong sense of history and place within a family. Spreads depict not only their current home, but also the family celebration of a wedding. The double-page spread that depicts Bà as she eats the red sticky rice, with smoke fading from her eyes, has cameos nestled in the leaves and flowers of the gấc vine, showing Bà and Ông as children, young adults, and newlyweds at their wedding.

Titles that would pair well with this story highlight the efforts that family members or friends go through to help elderly people remember. Mem Fox and Julie Vivas (1985) wrote and illustrated the classic *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* in which a young boy tries to help 96-year-old Miss Nancy regain her memories. Newer titles include *The Remember Balloons* written by Jessie Oliveros, illustrated by Dana Wulfekotte (2018) and *Dad's Camera* by Ross Watkins, illustrated by Liz Anelli (2018). Other book pairs include titles that feature memories brought on through tasting particular dishes. Linda Sue Park and Ho Baek Lee (2005) wrote about the warm family time around a table in *Bee-bim Bop!* in a Korean-American home. *Ohana Means Family* (Loomis & Pak, 2022) portrays the process of growing taro to make poi, a traditional food served at Hawaiian luaus.

Thanh Hà Lại was born in Vietnam and currently lives in New York. Her verse novel *Inside Out & Back Again* (2011) won the National Book Award and a Newbery Honor, and is a fictionalized account of her family's journey from Vietnam to Alabama and adaptation to life in the United States. The sequel is *When Clouds Touch Us* (2023). She also wrote about reverse cultural adaptation in *Listen Slowly* (2015) and the language learning process in *Butterfly Yellow* (2019). More information can be found on her website (<https://www.thanhhalai.com/>).

Phung Nguyễn Quang and Huynh Thi Kim Liên (<https://www.kaaillustration.com/>) are two author-illustrators from Vietnam who work under the pen name KAA. Their collaborations have won numerous awards (e.g., CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young Readers). The stunning *My First Day* (2021) chronicles the trip in a small boat taken across the Mekong Delta by a young boy on his way to school, a visual feast of the beauty of the Vietnamese landscape. Their vivid action-packed style has also illustrated legends from the Eastern and Western world, and real life adventures like *The Floating Field: How a Group of Thai Boys Built Their Own Soccer Field* (Scott Riley, 2021).

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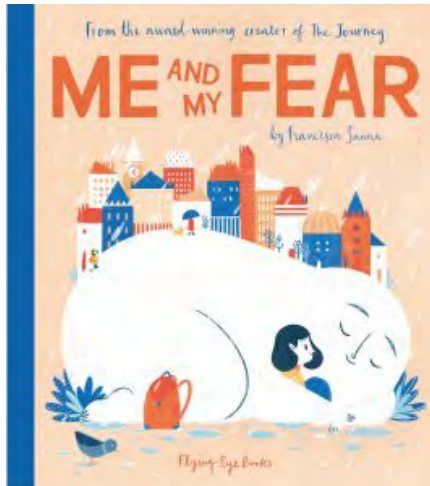
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Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

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Me and My Fear

Written and illustrated by Francesca Sanna

Flying Eye Books, 2018, 36 pp

ISBN: 978-1911171539

In *Me and My Fear*, readers are reintroduced to the young girl who fled her country because of war in the award-winning book *The Journey* (2016) (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/wow-review-volume-ix-issue-4/15/>). She has now moved to a new country with her family and her secret friend called “Fear.” Francesca Sanna personifies the emotion of fear, picturing it as a white, soft, cloud-like person and positioning it as the young girl’s best friend. Originally

smaller than the girl, Fear always does a good job of protecting the girl from dangerous things when the two of them go on adventures together. However, ever since moving to a new country, Fear has grown significantly. With the daunting task of moving to a new country, going to a new school, making new friends, and learning a different language, Fear has grown so much that it begins to isolate her. Fear tells her lies, saying no one likes her and that she should just stay by herself.

However, one day a boy in the class holds out a picture he made, inviting the girl to draw and paint together. Fear begins to shrink as the young girl creates art with her new friend and agrees to play with him at recess. While playing together, a dog barks and the boy hides behind his own personified emotion of fear. The young girl then notices that everyone else has a fear just like her’s; she is not the only one who experiences times of overwhelming fear. As time goes on, the girl’s Fear gets smaller and smaller in size. She learns that while fear is a normal emotion that can protect, she should never let it get in the way of exploring new things and growing.

Francesca Sanna acknowledges in an Author’s Note that she is a very anxious person and needed the support of others to finish the research and the creation of *Me and My Fear*. Her research started by talking to many children in schools and libraries, listening to their fears “about being the new one, the different one, the one from another country.” She also benefited from collaborating with The Reluctant Internationalists (<http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/>) at the University of London. As a result, she was able to depict fear through words and illustrations, demonstrating the impact fear can have and what fear does to isolate people. Initially Fear protects the girl from danger, keeping her safe. But as her Fear grows larger with a move to a new country, Fear does not let her explore her new home. Fear transforms into anger when the girl’s name is mispronounced. Fear keeps her from building bridges to new friends and creating cross-cultural understanding. Fear suppresses her appetite. Fear loudly inhabits her room at night, keeping her from getting the rest she needs. Ultimately Fear prompts her to see herself as unlikable, therefore blaming her loneliness on her new home. As the young girl responds to the friendliness of the boy, Sanna gives readers hope for reducing the paralyzing effect of Fear. She acknowledges in her Author’s Note the necessity of surrounding oneself with

caring people and, in her Dedication, describes how her parents helped her deal with her own anxiety. She acknowledges the impact of her mother listening to her fears and her father sharing his own fears.

The illustrations in *Me and My Fear* effectively convey the young girl's emotions before and after moving to a new country. Her home country is depicted as very colorful, full of nature, and surrounded by other people that resemble the girl. In her home country Fear is pictured as "a tiny friend." As the story progresses and the young girl immigrates to a new country, Fear "isn't so little anymore." This is when the illustrator begins to increase the size of Fear, representing the growth of the young girl's anxiety about her new surroundings. Her new surroundings are also illustrated with a lot of rain, in contrast to the young girl's sunny home country. The weather throughout the story changes, illustrating the emotions that the character is feeling at the time. As fear "keeps growing and growing" the other children in the class are pictured as unwelcoming and judgmental of the girl and the character of Fear is so huge it bleeds off the page. Eventually, with the help of a friend, the girl notices that everybody has a friend called Fear, and all the other characters are suddenly more relatable and pictured as friendly.

Books that would pair well with *Me and My Fear* are books that show the difficulties and hardships that come with immigrating to a new country. These books all specifically focus on the experiences of immigrant children in going to school, making friends, and attempting to adapt to their new environment. In *My Two Blankets* (Kobald & Blackwood, 2018) two girls connect through art, using drawings to help each other learn the other friend's language. In *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2013), the protagonist feels forced to take on an "English" name to make it easier for her classmates until a friend helps her realize her Korean name is beautiful and she should help classmates learn to say and use it. Finally, in *I Hate English!* (Levine & Bjorkman, 1989), Mei Mei struggles to learn English and, similarly to the girl in *Me and My Fear*, she isolates herself until an English language tutor reaches out and helps her see some of the joy of a new home and language.

Author-Illustrator Francesca Sanna is from the Italian island of Sardinia, but now resides in Switzerland. She studied and received a degree in illustration, sparking her interest in storytelling. Her illustrations and books have won many awards including the Amnesty International CILIP Honor and the Ezra Jack Keats Honor. More information about Francesca Sanna and her work can be found on her website (<https://francescasanna.com/>).

Payton Siragusa, Trinity International University

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This Is Not My Home

Written and illustrated by Eugenia Yoh and Vivienne Chang

Little Brown and Company, 2023, 44 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0316377102

Adjusting to unfamiliar places can wreak havoc on oneself, and we get a first-hand look at this experience through the eyes of Lily. Lily is perfectly content where she is—in her perfectly playful bedroom, nestled inside her perfectly built home, that is perfectly surrounded by backyard barbecues, fireflies, and her U.S. friends. Mama suddenly turns Lily’s perfectly familiar world upside down by announcing that they are moving to Taiwan to take care of

her Ah Ma. Readers can immediately see that this is not the news that young Lily was expecting as she points out that the unfamiliar places and people that surround her grandmother’s home are not the same as her’s. The double-spread illustration shows Lily lying down in comical protest as Mama drags her through the bustling streets of Taiwan. Further into the story, the duo of Taiwanese American authors describe Lily’s first day of school as uneventful, filled with drab classrooms contrasted by brightly illustrated classmates who don’t speak English. Lily begins to find resolution with her new surroundings when Mama points out that although these new places look unfamiliar to Lily, they represent where Mama came from and where she calls home.

The concept of home exceeds physical boundaries, also encompassing experiences, relationships, and emotions. It represents a place where people embrace their cultural heritage, express their individuality, and find a sense of belonging within that community. This picturebook invites readers to embark on the journey of a young Taiwanese American girl, raised in the United States by parents who immigrated from Taiwan, as she finds a place for herself amongst unfamiliar surroundings in Taiwan. An illustration depicting crowded Taiwanese streets filled with dismayed onlookers reiterates the feeling of not being culturally the same. The visual image marvelously portrays Lily’s feelings, creating a connection from the illustration to the reader’s heart. This is not what readers may expect to see from someone who is surrounded by their culture of origin, yet this is where the real social issue lies, as Lily faces the difficulties of navigating a culture and language that are significant to her parents and grandparents but not to her, creating a distraught sense of not belonging. This infused tone lies directly at the roots of the picturebook authors as they creatively express their own journey through its pages.

The horizontal shape of this picturebook gives the reader a sense of movement and travel. Hand-sketched illustrations, digitally colored in PhotoShop, burst from the pages. This hybrid technique blends expressionistic colors and thick brush strokes to help the reader feel the emotions of displacement that pour from the main character Lily. Selected illustrations are framed with softened edges to show how the main character is challenged by the conformity of Taiwanese culture. There is a distinctive line drawn between the narrative text moving the story forward in a black typeface-font and the emotional statement conveyed by the hand-lettered pink speech bubbles. This creative tug-of-war plays out between the book’s pages, saying both “let’s move along” from page to page and “I need your empathy” because “I don’t belong here.”

The often-muted backgrounds tell the other side of the story; the story of what surrounds Lily. Using the front jacket as an example, readers see a wailing child clothed with intense shades of yellow and red, grabbing the attention of the reader immediately. The title *This Is Not My Home* is boldly displayed in her mouth, pleading with the reader to notice her feelings, despite the soothing sketches of her background.

Picturebooks that touch on similar social issues are *Same, Same, But Different*, by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw (2012). The book tells the story of two pen pals, boys living in different countries who find friendship through noticing similarities. Another great picturebook pairing would be *Amah Faraway*, written by Margaret Chiu Greanias, illustrated by Tracy Subisak (2022). This book tells the story of a young girl who is nervously anticipating her upcoming visit with her grandmother in Taipei. Little by little Kylie experiences cultural differences and connections that bring her even closer to her Amah.

The author-illustrator duo Vivienne Chang and Eugenia Yoh (<https://www.vivienneandeugenia.com/>) met while studying at Washington University in Saint Louis. The humdrum seclusion of the pandemic, plus the digital age of online communication, inspired the pair to draft a picturebook “about their own tale about reverse immigration, a phenomenon that is not entirely uncommon” (Mendoza, 2023). They drew inspiration from the Taiwanese-American community through interviews and through their own personal experiences. They both dream of pursuing a long-lived career in telling stories that “simplify seemingly universal ideas through humor” (Chang & Yoh, 2023). Meanwhile, Eugenia is a book designer at Chronicle Books and Vivienne works in a bank in New York.

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The Words We Share

Written and illustrated by Jack Wong
Annick Press, 2023, 32 pp (unpaged)
ISBN: 978-1773217970

This portrayal of a child who serves as a language broker for an immigrant parent is a tender story of the love between a father and daughter and how language can be a tool that both separates and unites. Angie and her father are Cantonese-speaking immigrants from China who recently arrived in Canada. Angie uses her English skills from school to aid her father in navigating situations, such as reading menus in restaurants and making signs for the office building where he works as a janitor. Her experiences inspire her to start a new business—creating English signs for the Chinese-speaking business owners in their neighborhood. She makes a deal to

create a sandwich board for a local café and a warning sign for customers who fail to pick up their shoes at a repair shop. Everything is going well until Mr. Chu complains about Angie’s signs describing how to use the machines in his laundromat, leading to a situation where her father uses his language skills in Hakka to resolve the situation. His bilingual linguistic ability in Cantonese and Hakka surprises Angie and strengthens their bond. They are both bilingual but in different languages, all of which have usefulness in navigating life in their community. Angie and her father hold the mantle of language for each other in an expression of love.

Cartoon-style illustrations that integrate bilingual dialogues bring the story to life, particularly in conveying the loving relationship between Angie and her father. The illustrations were created by making swatches of texture and color with acrylic paint or printmaking ink rolled on paper, as well as line drawings in pencil or crayon. All of these were scanned and digitally collaged in Photoshop. The dialogues in the illustrations provide a multilingual experience through the use of simplified Chinese characters and italicized English translations.

A note from the author points out that Hakka and Cantonese are different varieties or dialects of the family of languages called Chinese. The two varieties in this book are from Southern China and Southeast Asia. He also notes that speakers of varieties of Chinese read and write using the same written Chinese characters, even though they are pronounced differently based on the dialect. Chinese characters are therefore not used for Hakka, since they would appear the same as Cantonese. Instead, the language is described by Angie as “musical sounds” she does not understand. The cover has a title in Chinese characters as well as in English. Wong explains that his mother translated the English title, *The Words We Share*, into Cantonese to say something close in meaning to “The Same Heart in Different Languages.”

Previous books about children as language brokers, such as *Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita habla dos veces* (Ofelia Dumas Lachman, 1995) focus on translation into English as a burden for bilingual children. This book instead portrays multilingualism as a strength and as occurring across multiple languages, instead of focusing only on English as the status language. Other examples of books highlighting multilingualism include *My Mother’s Tongues* by Uma Menon and Rahele

Jomepour Bell (2024), highlighting Malayalam and English, *The Day Saida Arrived* by Susan Gómez Redondo and Sonja Wimmer (2020), highlighting Arabic and English, and *Spanish is the Language of My Family* by Michael Genhart and John Parra (2023).

The warmth of the father-daughter relationship in this book radiates out to readers so pair this with other books depicting this relationship. Possible pairings include the classic *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen and John Schoenherr (1987), *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isable Quintero and Zeke Peña (2019), and *Days with Dad* by Nari Hong (2017). Each of these books focus on a daughter sharing a special walk or ride around the neighborhood with a father and reflect different cultures. Jack Wong says that, for him, this book is really about the love between a parent and child, before it's about language or immigration.

Jack Wong (<https://jackwong.ca/>) is an author/illustrator who was born in Hong Kong and raised in Vancouver. He currently lives in Nova Scotia. In an interview with Andrea Wang (https://picturebookbuilders.com/2023/10/the-words-we-share-interview-with-jack-wong-a-giveaway/?doing_wp_cron=1701194340.4053750038146972656250), he says that many of the scenes in this book were inspired by his own childhood experiences in moving from Hong Kong to Canada and translating for his parents. He compared childhood memories with his older sister in writing this book, particularly around Angie's feelings of pride, frustration, and being wronged about having major responsibilities at a young age. His sister is an ESL assessment coordinator and wrote the educator's guide for the book.

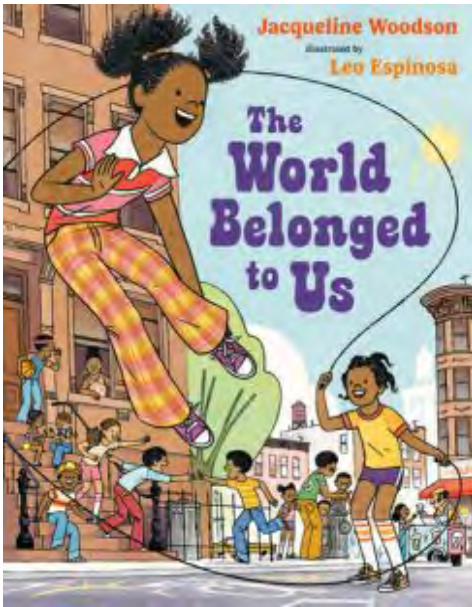
Jack Wong's debut picturebook, *When You Can Swim* (2023), won multiple awards, including the 2023 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award and the 2023 Governor General's Literary Award in Young People's Literature. He has a new book being released in March 2024, *All That Grows*. Jack describes himself as a Jack-of-all-trades who has tried his hand at bookkeeping, teaching art, managing a psychology research lab, and running his own bicycle repair shop. He says that he seeks to share his winding journey with young readers so that they can embrace the unique amalgams of experiences that make up their own lives.

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona

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The World Belonged to Us

Written by Jacqueline Woodson

Illustrated by Leo Espinosa

Nancy Paulsen Books, 2022, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0399545498

As summer approaches, children in Brooklyn, New York have plans for the best summer yet. With parents not around, they must tap into their creative headspace in order to entertain themselves and the neighborhood during the long summer months. Jacqueline Woodson shares a story about how adventures begin the moment schools let out for the summer as children are now “free as air.” What will a group of children come up with to fill the daylight hours? Throughout this joy-filled summer, Woodson highlights the beauty of imagination, creativity and being out in the neighborhood with friends.

This story captures the beauty of getting outdoors, creating new activities, and interacting with a diverse group of children. On each page throughout the story, characters come from many different backgrounds, but each is drawn in a positive light. The front cover gives a glimpse into the diversity that can be found in Brooklyn. Smiles are on every child’s face conveying the curiosity and joy going through these young children’s minds as they make the most of their summer vacation. The illustrations were done by Leo Espinosa. On each double-page spread, he utilizes a detailed drawing technique with a page filled with color. The text overlaps the illustrations which allows readers to see the full image from end to end on each page. Espinosa is able to bring Woodson’s message to life through the bold color choices on each page. Woodson is aiming to portray a story of joy, excitement, and creativity, and by using the colors that pop on the pages, the reader is able to experience the author’s goal.

This book challenges the notion that children are only up to no good without parental guidance in the summertime. Instead of depicting children getting into trouble and showing little discernment, this book illustrates how children can let their imaginations run wild as they come up with creative ways to find entertainment in the summer months. This book also challenges the idea that within city streets, crime runs rampant and poverty is all that can be seen. This book shows the richness of human interaction between children living in Brooklyn, and that there is more to be found in the city streets of New York than what many outsiders initially see. Beyond this notion, the idea of a strong sense of community among diverse people is prevalent. Woodson writes, “So we called out to each other in Spanish, in English, in Polish, in German, in Chinese and we ruled the block in all of our languages.” The status quo in society has been to interact with like-minded peers, but this story shows the beauty of coming together within diversity. The power of play and imagination comes through as all of the children experience the joy of summertime without having to speak the same languages.

Books that pair well with *The World Belonged to Us* include titles that inspire creativity such as *Idea Jar* by Adam Lehrhaupt and Deb Pilutti (2018). Other connections include titles that inspire the imagination and outdoor play, such as *The Thing Lou Couldn’t Do* by Ashley Spires (2017) or

It Began with Lemonade by Gideon Sterer and Lian Cho (2012), a title that can inspire summer adventures and independence.

Jacqueline Woodson, a U.S. award-winning author, grew up loving to write. She always loved to create fiction stories with realistic perspectives. As she grew older, she fell in love with writing about experiences and using those experiences to empower others. She has been a key author in inspiring diversity in children's literature. Her essay about the struggles of being a Black writer in a majority white field raised the issues of the importance of representation within children's literature. *The World Belonged to Us* is based on events from Woodson's life growing up in Brooklyn, New York. She used her childhood experiences to inspire children to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and to enjoy childhood. *The World Belonged to Us* is an authentic story from the eyes of someone who grew up in Brooklyn. Woodson's unique perspective allows the reader to understand what life in Brooklyn may have been like in the past. Woodson continues to write books for young children up to young adult novels, each with a moving theme and story line to promote representation and diversity. She is the recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, The Astrid Lindgren Award, and the Margaret A. Edwards Award, all awarded for an influential body of work. More information can be found on her website (<https://jacquelinewoodson.com/>).

Leo Espinosa (<https://studioespinosa.com/>) is an award-winning illustrator from Bogota, Columbia, currently residing in Salt Lake City, Utah. Espinosa spends his time drawing and creating new characters for publications. Something that he is passionate about is giving children the opportunity to see themselves in the books that they read. With his passion for diverse representation, he teams up perfectly with Woodson to create a powerful read for children.

Allison Chally, Trinity International University

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