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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME XVI, ISSUE 3

Spring 2024  
Open Theme

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**WOW Review: Volume XVI, Issue 3  
Spring 2024  
Open Theme**

Table of Contents

|                                                                       |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Introduction and Editors' Note</b>                                 | 2-3   |
| <i>Different: A Story of the Spanish Civil War</i>                    | 4-5   |
| <i>Empty and Me</i>                                                   | 6-7   |
| <i>Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion</i>    | 8-9   |
| <i>Lost in the Clouds</i>                                             | 10-11 |
| <i>Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir</i>                                      | 12-13 |
| <i>The Moon from Dehradun: A Story of Partition</i>                   | 14-15 |
| <i>Out of the Blue</i>                                                | 16-18 |
| <i>Safiyyah's War</i>                                                 | 19-20 |
| <i>Small Places Close to Home: A Children's Declaration of Rights</i> | 21-22 |

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## Introduction and Editor's Note

Generally, we appreciate some form of stability in our lives. It is nice to know how much money we have in the bank, and that the authority figures in our lives are caring no matter what the situation. But what happens when life as we know it is upended? This collection of titles looks at children whose lives drastically change and how they react.

Several books describe children who lose a parent. Both *Empty and Me* and *Lost in the Clouds* portray the varying emotions involved in grieving a death. Several titles portray historical conflicts and how children survive the uprooting so they can put new roots down in a new place, whether moving from Spain to Venezuela in *Different*, or moving from India to Pakistan in *The Moon from Dehradun: A Story of Partition*. Some families choose to stay and resist consequences. In *Safiyah's War* the protagonist works with her father, the Director of the Grand Mosque in Paris, to save Jewish families during WWII.

Not all challenges are on a political scale but are still significant and impact how children grow up. In *Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir*, young Pedro goes on an epic 2000-mile trip in an RV with his parents and eight siblings to pick up his grandfather who lives in Mexico. Along the way he hones his skills as an artist, but also learns about who he is as a Mexikid, a kid who is not all Mexican or all American. *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion* tells the extraordinary story of Glennie who lost her hearing completely as a young girl yet grew up to become a world-class percussionist. She discovers that when she plays percussive instruments in her bare feet, she can feel the vibrations of the music through the floor. In contrast, *Out of the Blue* describes the imaginative wonder of a surprise. A young boy lives in a house where there is a high degree of stability. But what happens when a huge bear shows up and wants to play?

This issue concludes with the work of Eleanor Roosevelt and the hope for stability through the UN Declaration of Human Rights. In *Small Places Close to Home: A Children's Declaration of Rights*, Deborah Hopkinson and Kate Gardiner take the rights afforded to everyone and talk about what those rights mean in everyday life to children around the world.

We invite you to read and think with these titles and submit a review for future issues.

**Volume 16, Issue 4 (Summer 2024- submission deadline June 1, 2024)** – Themed issue on technology and inventiveness in our lives. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children's or young adult books published within the last three years that address technology and human invention in daily life, books that approach technology as the practical application of scientific knowledge to solve problems and fulfill human needs, and science fiction that integrates future technologies.

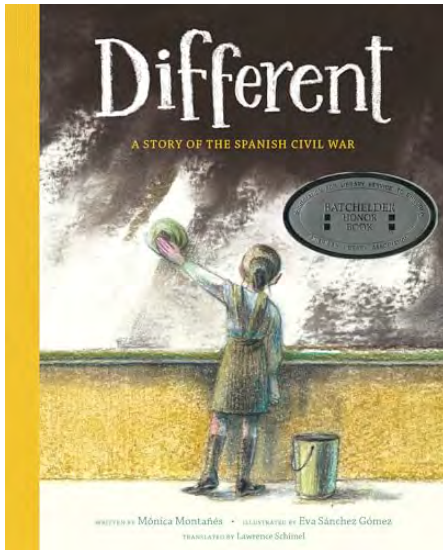
**Volume 17, Issue 1 (Fall 2024 – submission deadline: August 15, 2024)** – Open theme. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children's or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

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

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***Different: A Story of the Spanish Civil War***

Written by Mónica Montañés

Illustrated by Eva Sánchez Gómez

Translated by Lawrence Schimel

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2022, 79 pp

ISBN: 978-0802855985

Set in the Spanish Civil War, *Different* presents the profound impact of historical and political turmoil on children’s lives. This book vividly portrays the fear and oppression imposed by the war and an authoritarian political establishment. It narrates the story of two siblings, Paco and Socorro, whose lives encounter adversities when their father is forced to flee Spain because of his political beliefs. Forced to conceal their identity in an environment where

political dissent is forbidden, the children endure extreme hardships. Their lives again change when they travel halfway around the world and reunite with their father in Venezuela. In their new home, they find joy in a place where their differences still exist but do not create fear.

This story presents the concept of difference in various aspects. Paco and Socorro are different in that Paco is a boy and Socorro is a girl. Paco assumes the role of head of the house and stays with his mother, while Socorro is left alone in a relative’s pueblo. Paco has a hearty appetite and is even tempted to steal a classmate’s lunch. In contrast, Socorro shows a strong aversion to eating. This difference is amplified through the narrative technique of alternating chapters to tell Paco and Socorro’s story. This book also presents the profound impact of political and ideological differences on children’s ordinary lives. Due to their father’s political perspectives, Paco and Socorro are subject to adversity, poverty, and a need for secrecy in their lives, forcing them to conceal their identities.

This story highlights the resilience of children. While young children are often regarded as innocent and in need of protection (Young-Bruehl, 2012), Socorro and Paco are acutely aware of their surroundings. Socorro is aware of the unspoken judgments at school about her father’s political beliefs. Her narrative states, “They made me feel it” (p. 24), showing how adults use their power and position children as powerless. Despite the challenges, Paco and Socorro maintain their integrity and strong will. Paco resists the temptation to steal his friend’s lunch. Socorro does not succumb to her difficult circumstances. Her determination and hope drive her to excel academically.

This book stands out for its meticulous attention to historical detail. The book encapsulates the era of the Spanish Civil War by providing detailed historical information. It also offers political interpretation by using politically specific terms, which are rare in children’s literature. Furthermore, the Spanish Civil War has rarely been presented in children’s literature so this book broadens the repertoire of war narratives. The interrogation of the context of the Spanish Civil War offers insight into the intricate international relations of the era and enhances global understanding. The appended historical context and resources at the end of the book significantly increase its educational value. The book is a helpful resource for understanding the compelling narrative and a gateway for young readers to interrogate and grasp the complexities of historical conflicts and their lasting impacts.

This book pairs well with *The Composition*, written by Antonio Skármeta and illustrated by Alfonso Ruano (2000), which portrays life under a dictatorship in Chile through the eyes of Pedro, a nine-year-old boy, who is asked to spy on his parents. *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin (2011) is also a good companion. The book follows ten-year-old Sasha, whose world is shattered when the secret police arrest his father during the Stalin era in Russia. Reading these books together offers readers insights into the complexities of ideology and politics and their impact on the lives of ordinary people. *Different* can also be read alongside *Mexique: A Refugee Story from the Spanish Civil War*, by María José Ferrada and Ana Penyas (2018), about a ship full of children sent from Spain to Mexico during this war.

Mónica Montañés is a multifaceted writer with a journalism, playwriting, and screenwriting background. This book was inspired by her family's experiences during the Spanish Civil War and their eventual move to Venezuela.

Eva Sánchez Gómez's (<https://www.evasanchez.cat/about-me/>) dramatic oil-pastel illustrations add a rich layer of emotional depth to the narrative. With their somber tones, these illustrations effectively capture the mood and experiences of the characters, offering visual empathy for their journey. This collaboration has resulted in a book that tells a powerful story and visually captivates its readers, making *Different* a unique and impactful read.

This book was translated from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel and received the Mildred L. Batchelder Honor in 2023.

## Reference

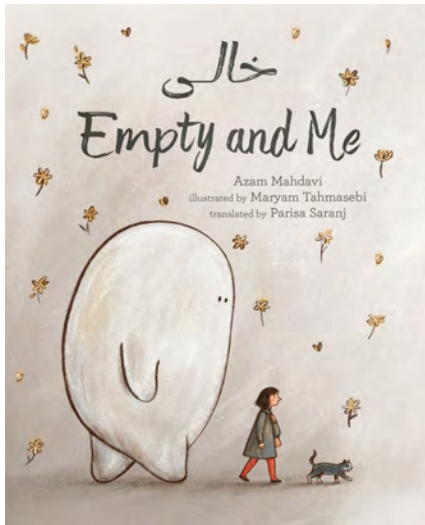
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***Empty and Me***

Written by Azam Mahdavi

Illustrated by Maryam Tahmasebi

Translated by Parisa Saranj

Lee & Low Books, 2023, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1643796222

*Empty and Me* is a bilingual exploration of loss and grief, narrated in both Persian and English, delving into how a child navigates these experiences. The protagonist is a young girl who loses her mother, and the story starts with a picture of her potting a plant with her mother for the last time. The girl finds herself adrift in a sea of sorrow when she loses her mother; her world is forever altered by the absence of

the one who gave her life meaning and warmth. Suddenly, a huge gray creature fills the empty space left by her mother. This creature sleeps next to her, comes between the girl and her father during dinner, accompanies her to school holding her hand, spends time with her at school and home when she is completely alone or thinking about her mother, and even goes to the amusement park with the girl and her father.

Once the plant that she and her mother potted together flowers, the narrator gives one of the flowers to the creature; after that, everything changes. The flower gives birth within the creature to more and more flowers. The flowers fill the emptiness in the creature, helping the girl deal with the grief of the loss. The last page of the book shows a picture of the girl, the father, the creature, and the pot with the plant. Although the creature is smaller, it remains next to the girl. The story shows that the grief of losing a loved one will not be forgotten even during good times, like seeing a funny play or going to an amusement park. A picture on the wall, which includes a flower, holds symbolic significance within the context of the story. The flower represents a cherished memory of the girl's mother, capturing a moment in time when they were together, keeping her memory alive and close to her heart. It also symbolizes the enduring cycle of life and the potential for growth and renewal even in the face of loss, referring to the girl's journey through grief and healing.

Other elements of the book also convey the girl's grief, such as the dominant use of yellow, black, and dark colors which illustrate the emotional atmosphere and thematic elements of loss and sorrow. Dark colors symbolize the heaviness of grief and the overwhelming sense of loss experienced by the girl. The illustrations, created digitally by Maryam Tahmasebi, further amplify these emotions through the manipulation of colors and shapes. At the end of the story, different colors are used to illustrate scenes that depict the interplay between moments of lightness and darkness in the girl's life. Both the narrative and illustrations provide a healing perspective for children who have lost someone. The loss will not be forgotten over time; however, they will learn how to cope with the sadness of the circumstances.

Based on the main theme of the book, the loss of a loved one, *Empty and Me* can be paired with other titles that explore similar themes. For instance, *One Day* by Juck Lee and Seung-youn Kim (2021)

dives into the inner world of a child who suddenly loses his grandfather, pairing real-life emotions with imaginative storytelling. Similarly, *Dadaji's Paintbrush* by Rashmi Sirdeshpande and Ruchi Mhasane (2022) depicts a young boy in India who, after losing his grandfather, no longer wants to paint because it reminds him that his grandfather is no longer with him. *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake (2005) illustrates the feelings of Rosen who lost his eighteen-year-old son and describes his sadness as a cloud that comes along and covers him up. Each of these books offers unique perspectives on loss and healing, inviting readers to explore the complexities of bereavement through the lens of storytelling and imagination.

Azam Mahdavi is an author, artist, translator, and graphic designer born in Tehran, Iran. She has published numerous books for children and young adults in Iran, which have been translated into different languages. Several of her books have received awards in different national festivals, like the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults' Festival. *Empty and Me* is her first book to be translated into English and published in the United States.

Maryam Tahmasebi is an Iranian illustrator and designer, with a graphic design degree from the University of Tehran. She has illustrated six books published in Iran, which have been translated into Korean, Turkish, and Chinese. She has always been captivated by lines, colors, and shapes playing on paper. What she likes most is watching carefree children sit around and read a book she has contributed to.

The translator, Parisa Saranj, was born in Isfahan, Iran. Her writings and translations have been published in different magazines and journals, like *Ms. Magazine*, *Two Lines*, and *Consequence*. Related to this book, she states that she lost her mother at a young age, and she wishes there was a book like this when she was going through the early stages of her grief. She currently resides in Baltimore with her cat.

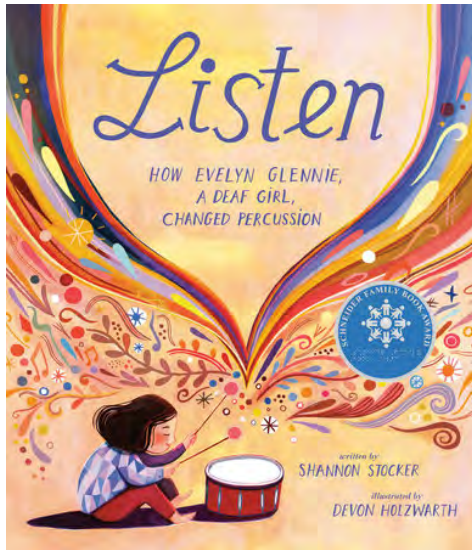
Narges Zandi, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

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***Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion***

Written by Shannon Stocker

Illustrated by Devon Holzwarth

Dial Books for Young Readers, 2022, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0593109694

*Listen* is a nonfiction picturebook that shares the inspiring story of a talented Scottish girl, Evelyn Glennie, an exceptional percussionist who loses her hearing ability as a young child.

Despite facing disability and detractors, she remains determined, refusing to let anything hinder her from achieving her musical goal. Through her determination and the support of her parents and teacher, Mr. Forbes, she learns to perceive sound differently by feeling the sound vibrations in her body. *Listen* avoids

romanticizing deafness or portraying the loss of typical hearing experiences. It shows a battle, joy and persistence to feel the world differently. Despite prevailing skepticism about the musical abilities of deaf individuals, Evelyn shattered stereotypes and became a beacon of change for people with disabilities. Through her pursuit, music schools in Great Britain revised their policies to embrace individuals with disabilities. Her achievements are extraordinary, including becoming the first deaf student at the Royal Academy of Music in London, becoming the world's first full-time solo percussionist, and winning a Grammy Award.

Shannon Stocker, author of the book, beautifully depicts the story of Evelyn Glennie's musical journey from her joyful moments playing the piano and clarinet as a young girl to her deep connection with music in all its forms. Stocker's note in the book provides additional insight into Evelyn's life by quoting her words: "Create your own story... you must make your own opportunities." Evelyn found a sea of sound that belonged only to her.

The words and illustrations in *Listen* create a wonderfully immersive experience, evoking the poetic essence of music with stunning visual emphasis. Author Shannon Stocker and illustrator Devon Holzwarth cleverly represent sound using words like "WHUM!" and "WAH-WAH-WAHHHH," making the auditory experience more vivid for readers.

Several themes from other books can be paired with *Listen*. The award-winning graphic novel *El Deafo* is a graphic autobiography of the author, Cece Bell (2014), who grew up deaf in the 1970s. Also, the theme of disability can be found in *Henry Like Always* by Jenn Bailey and Mika Song (2023), a story of a young boy with autism grappling with changes in school routines. *Playground Lessons—Friendship and Forgiveness: Harley and His Wheelchair* (Brent Poppen, 2012) is another book that explores the author's own experiences and emotions as a quadriplegic.

One particularly powerful picturebook pair that encourages childhood aspirations is *The Wonderful Things You Will Be* by Emily Winfield Martin (2015). This picturebook honors the limitless possibilities within children and encourages them to aspire to great dreams. Supportive teachers is

also a theme with *Thank you, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (1998) as a good match. The story is about a girl with dyslexia and a teacher who encourages her to believe in herself and overcome her disability. This book is also based on the author's own experience in school.

Shannon Stocker, an award-winning children's author, in an interview with Kaitlyn Leann Sanchez (<https://kaitlynleannsanchez.com/2022/07/30/author-interview-and-giveaway-with-shannon-stocker-author-of-listen-how-one-deaf-girl-changed-percussion-illustrated-by-devon-holzwarth/>) shared, "I have a disability. My son has ADHD, and my daughter has brain cancer. These kids deserve to see themselves in books, too." In January 2019 she attended a conference where the message was "Write what you know." Stocker realized she could draw from personal experiences, so researching musicians with disabilities led the author to Evelyn, whose story captivated her. Stocker is also the author of the picturebook *Can U Save the Day?*, illustrated by Tom Disbury (2019), an alphabet book with bullying, friendship, and forgiveness themes. She also wrote *Together We Can* (2021), an eight-book early reader series on healthy living in a pandemic, and *Warrior: A Patient's Courageous Quest* illustrated by Sarah Turner (2023), a story of a brave girl who prepares herself to fight a monster in a dangerous land. This story is for children battling cancer, their own monsters. More information about Shannon Stocker and her books can be found on her website (<https://www.shannonstocker.com/>).

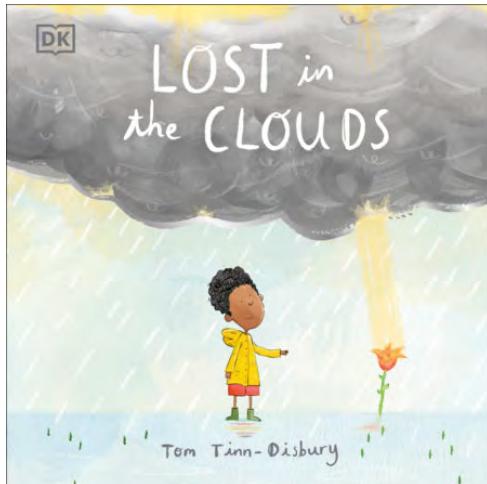
Devon Holzwarth is a picturebook illustrator, painter, and author. She is a recipient of the Schneider Family Book Award for *Listen*, and a notable Sydney Taylor Award for *Tia Fortuna's New Home*, illustrated by Ruth Behar (2022). She was born in Washington D.C but grew up in Panama where she was surrounded by beautiful nature and her father's art materials. She has illustrated several picturebooks including *Everywhere With You* illustrated by Carlie Sorosiak (2022), *The Story of a Book* illustrated by Joy McCullough (2023), *All that is You* illustrated by Alyssa Satin Capucilli (2022), and *Papa, Daddy, & Riley* illustrated by Seamus Kirst (2020). Information about her books and illustrations can be found on her website (<https://www.devonholzwarth.com/>).

Rana Taheri, Montana State University

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***Lost in the Clouds***

Written and illustrated by Tom Tinn-Disbury

DK, 2021, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0744036596

Billy once lived happily with his parents, until one day his mother died. Billy believes that his mother has turned into a cloud in the sky. It's a magical cloud; sometimes it asks the sun to make his sky sunny and full of beauty, and sometimes the cloud grows bigger when Billy misses her. The cloud becomes black when his day is bad: the sun disappears and the sky turns stormy. Billy is tired of these days, tired of only being able to

imagine his mother in the clouds. He decides to go find his mother, so he sets up a very long ladder that is tall enough to help him touch that cloud. However, he falls off the ladder and feels like he is falling forever. Luckily, his father catches him and teaches him the importance of confiding in others. He tells Billy about strategies for coping such as talking about his feelings and memories about his mother with trusted adults or friends. After that, the sadness begins to decrease, the rain finally stops and a rainbow hangs in the blue sky. The rainwater causes a flower in the yard to sprout, one that he and his mother had planted together in the yard. Brown-skinned Billy and his father prepare to plant another flower so that the plants can grow side by side in the storm and sunshine, symbolizing the growth and beauty that can come from difficult times. Billy realizes that his mother will always be there to protect and bless him in the clouds and finds a connection to his mother in the windy storm.

*Lost in the Clouds* is a poignant, gentle story with meaningful illustrations that help children understand death and grief. Every child will experience loss at some point in their lives. Where does the life essence of the loved one go? In this book, the child protagonist starts to find answers by himself but turns to the omniscient adult who has the answers when he is helpless. This book serves as an agent of emotional healing, letting children know that they can navigate their feelings of loss independently but can also seek help from an adult. This increases the possibilities for children's courage and emotional growth rather than simply relying on adults to deal with sorrow.

The gorgeous illustrations, full of emotion and memories, show children the different faces of grief: it can be a heavy burden when sadness washes over us without warning, but it also can be an anchor to keep our lives from capsizing in a storm of emotion. The colors throughout the book enhance the mood and atmosphere, and are consistent with the main character's feelings. For example, when Billy misses his mother, the colors are blue and gray, evoking a sense of emptiness. When he feels happy, the colors are green and white. The use of cool colors in the sky evokes a more calm and serious tone, aligning perfectly with the book's theme. The author also uses bold shadows to create the big dark clouds that pop off the page, giving readers an image of Billy being overwhelmed by sadness. When explaining death, the author avoids using vague phrases or euphemisms but uses the word "died" directly, which helps children accept death as a natural process of life.

The story focuses on facing tragedy with the support of others and turning it into love. The way Billy and his father reminisce about his mother in the book gives young readers who are in similar situations a chance to meditate on the loss and rejoice in the life that was shared. This sensitively written and illustrated book offers a simple way for adults to start a conversation about the difficult topic with children at different levels of thinking and abstraction. The imaginative twist in the story helps children process and overcome their feelings of loss. *Lost in the Clouds* reminds readers that the people we love remain in our hearts, even if they are gone from our sight. While we may never be fully healed, we can transform our sadness into strength and continue to move forward.

Possible book pairs that talk about the sadness of losing a loved one include *The Memory String* by Eve Bunting and Ted Rand (2000) which tells the story of a memory string that records the history of a young girl's family. The story explores the value of memories both old and new. An additional picturebook that deals with sadness and remembering the deceased is *Cry, Heart, But Never Break* (Glenn Ringtved, 2016). Other book pairs tell stories of children dealing with strong emotions. *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst with new illustrations by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff (2018) explores the intangible but unbreakable connections between loved ones. The bright and bold colors of the illustrations form a sharp contrast, seemingly telling the reader that our lives are full of different emotions (sorrow or happiness), but they are full of vitality because love is the armor to fight all of life's battles. *The Rabbit Listened* (Cori Doerrfeld, 2018) emphasizes the importance of listening to children express their emotions.

Author and illustrator Tom Tinn-Disbury comes from Rugby, Warwickshire, United Kingdom. He previously worked in the production of films and animation. He published his debut author/illustrated picturebook *The Caveman Next Door* in 2019. His work can be found on his website (<https://www.tomtinndisbury.com/about>).

Yimei Xiong, Purdue University

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Being a graphic memoir, Martín’s portrayal is specific to his own experiences and viewpoint, yet in doing so reveals and reflects on the complexities of being bicultural in the U.S. and Mexico. No issues of cultural accuracy or authenticity seem to have been raised by readers, and the graphic memoir has been widely lauded and appeared on numerous best of lists. It was also named a Newbery Honor book and was awarded the Pura Belpré awards for both author and illustrator, and the Tomás Rivera Children’s Book Award. The memoir appeals to monolingual and bilingual readers alike, as English translations of the many Spanish words and phrases are asterisked and rendered at the bottom of the page, ensuring a smooth reading experience.

This graphic memoir could be read alongside *Land of the Cranes* (Aida Salazar, 2022), a novel in verse that considers issues of immigration, language, hope, and culture through a young girl’s experience in the inhumane conditions of a migrant detention center, and *I Was Their American Dream* (Malaka Gharib, 2019), another graphic memoir that follows a young woman’s attempt to balance her immigrant parents’ cultures and her own yearning and love of American culture as well. These three books offer children an interconnected yet diverse look at the struggles and strengths of being a culturally diverse young person in (and out of) the United States, and the place family holds in navigating this reality.

A former Hallmark artist of 27 years, *Mexikid* is Pedro Martín’s debut graphic novel. More stories about his experiences growing up Mexican American can be found in his online series of the same name. Find more at his website (<https://pedromartinbooks.com/>).

Nick DePascal, University of New Mexico

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***The Moon from Dehradun: A Story of Partition***

Written by Shirin Shamsi

Illustrated by Tarun Lak

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2022, 40 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1665906791

Set in 1947 joint India, *The Moon from Dehradun* is the story of Azra, a young girl who, along with her family, is forced to flee at a moment's notice when external foreign forces and internal unrest make living in that specific region impossible. Dehradun (a region in present-day India) has been home to

her family for generations. They love their home, know no other place to call home, and live peacefully with their neighbors. Azra loves her doll 'gurya' (made by her grandmother) very much and does not appreciate her younger brother who is a nuisance. The book begins with Azra telling her doll that they must leave in five days. Following the decision of Britain to divide the country up according to majority religion, bloody riots break out.

Azra's family are Muslims but live in a majority Hindu area. They know that they will have to move to the area that will be Pakistan (a majority Muslim nation). Their move suddenly becomes rushed as their own neighbors come to attack them. The family leaves without taking anything except a few belongings. What is also left behind, in their hurry, is Azra's beloved 'gurya.' They travel night and day and feel sadness as a country and a people break into pieces. The harrowing train journey is captured very well in the visual text/illustrations by Lak. They reach Pakistan and are given a home to stay in because their papers check out. When they enter their new home, it looks like a family had also left there in a hurry. In checking out her surroundings, Azra finds a forlorn 'gurya' left under the bed. The story goes full circle on the second to last spread when another anonymous family with a little girl enters Azra's home in Dehradun only to find 'gurya.' The last spread shows both girls holding their 'guryas,' separated by distance but joined by a shared tumultuous experience.

This book relates to an oft forgotten history of the British colony and the hasty partition that created the individual countries of India and Pakistan in 1947. The story is inspired by Shamsi's own family's journey from India to Pakistan. She draws on her memories of tales told to her from first person accounts that lend credibility to the text. The book also includes notes, maps, and an author's note to situate the reader contextually. This is a powerful story which speaks to the powers that manipulated peoples indigenous to the land by dissecting the land haphazardly and forcing their movement. This story concludes with a message of understanding and peace that is accessible to younger audiences.

Lak does an excellent job of visually representing the chaos during the actual physical partition. There are many photographs available online that authenticate his digital illustrations. He recreates the chaos characters feel through the tangible depiction of dust, the harassed expressions of the characters, and the backdrops of millions of people on the move.

While many books speak to the themes of immigration and forced journeys, another book that is set in the same region and historical forced movement is Veera Hiranandani's (2018) *The Night Diary* where readers get the perspective in reverse. A Hindu family must move from the area designated as Pakistan to Indian regions and the story describes their harrowing experiences. Hiranandani's book is a novel in verse where a young girl is writing a diary to her dead mother who was a Muslim married to a Hindu doctor. Both the books speak to the concerns of trauma for young children when it comes to seeing bloodshed and leaving all that is familiar. Other strong narratives that speak to the same premise are *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2011), *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (2015), *Escape from Aleppo* by N. H. Senzai (2018), *Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga (2019) and the more recent *Ida in the Middle* by Nora Lester Murad (2022). In this last book Murad brings a Palestinian perspective, important to the present day forced movement in Gaza.

Shirin Shamsi was born and raised in the U.K. and now resides in the U.S. She has lived on three continents and sees herself as a global citizen. She shares stories from her life and culture, and in doing so she strives to inspire an appreciation for diversity. She is a member of SCBWI. Shirin is the author of multiple books that include the picturebook *Zahra's Blessing: A Ramadan Story* (2022), and a novel *Laila and the Sands of Time* (2019). She also has an interfaith collaboration in *Planting Friendship* (2021) and educational works in *The Girl Who Dared* (2019), *Nani's Birthday Surprise* (2021), and *Civic Duty* (2021), to name a few. All her books have a message of acceptance and are balanced in the representations of diverse cultures.

The illustrator, Tarun Lak, belongs to the Indian American community with his family hailing from Chennai, India. He was born in Miami and raised in Chennai. He attended Ringling College of Art and Design to study computer animation. He has worked on renowned animations such as *Spiderman: Into Spider-verse* and *Soul and Luca*. He currently lives in San Francisco. This is his first picturebook.

Seemi Aziz-Raina, University of Arizona

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***Out of the Blue***

Written by Rebecca Bach-Lauritsen  
Illustrated by Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard  
Translated by Michael Favala Goldman  
Enchanted Lion, 2024, 84 pp (unpaged)  
ISBN: 978-1592704019

In this picturebook translated from Danish, a young boy follows the same routine day after day to create a well-organized predictable life. The book follows him through his daily routine that never varies as he greets the cactus on his bedside table and does his chores in the house and garden before bidding the cactus goodnight. As the only inhabitant of the house, nothing interferes with his daily routines. One night, he dreams of falling into a pile of fur and wakes to find his cactus tipped over. When he researches

the footprints that disrupt the straight rows of his garden, he identifies the culprit and goes in search of the bear that must be hiding in his house. The bear under his table turns out to be playful and together they romp around the house, playing games until the once-orderly house becomes a scene of joyful chaos. Exhausted, they tumble into bed for a well-deserved rest as the best of friends.

The sparse text frequently uses sounds to convey the boy's feelings and routines, for example, "Dum-de-dum" when the boy is ironing his shirt, and so begs to be read aloud. The visual nature of the book is reflected in the arrangements of words on the page in poetic lines. The book ends with,

*Suddenly, there it was.  
Just like that.  
Out of the blue.*

*But at first it wasn't there.*

The illustrations are in pencil and charcoal with blue colored pen to highlight the orderly lines of the floor that gradually loosen once the bear appears. Blue also plays a subtle role in indicating the boy's feelings as his cheeks gradually develop spots of blue in colored pencil to reflect his increasing loneliness and boredom. After the bear appears in his life, his cheeks become pink and rosy and even the cactus blooms with delicate flowers. The illustrations have an old-fashioned feel that matches the mood of the book with an emphasis on the boy's inner life and feelings.

The use of sounds on many pages instead of a narrative opens the book to multiple interpretations. There are many stories that readers might imagine due to the ambiguity in both the words and the visual images. Early in the book, the boy has a framed picture on his wall that includes a bear, who later disappears from the picture—so is the bear an imaginary friend or real? The boy has a blue state of mind but is that depression or loneliness or something else? Parents never appear in the book, but their absence is not significant. The book is about a "feeling" and the importance of embracing change that comes "out of the blue," rather than an action-oriented adventure. This is a book that invites readers to revisit over and over, and each time uncover new possibilities. In fact,

the book itself has a strong message of being open to possibility in our lives, inviting readers to linger in the visual images and sounds in new transactions of meaning-making each time they return to the book. Author Rebecca Bach-Lauritsen and illustrator Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard spoke at the Tucson Festival of Books in March 2024 and indicated that they went through a long process of collaboration between the two of them before they pulled together text and image into this final picturebook version.

Given this range of themes and ambiguity, *Out of the Blue* could be paired with a variety of texts. The theme of loneliness could be explored by pairing it with *Alone Like Me* by Rebecca Evans (2022) about a girl who moves to a large city in China where she is unable to attend school and so has no friends. *The Only Child*, a visual narrative from China by Guojing (2015), moves in and out of fantasy as a lonely child sets off to visit her grandmother. The theme of a bear appearing in a child's life can be explored through *Bear Island* by Matthew Cordell (2021) in which a girl dealing with grief and loss visits an island and finds healing by interacting with a bear, which may or may not be real. Another interesting pairing is *Coffee, Rabbit, Snowdrop, Lost* by Betina Kirkjær and Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard (2021) about the loving relationship of a boy and his grandfather who is gradually losing his memory. This Danish translation also uses sparse and ambiguous text.

The author Rebecca Bach-Lauritsen (<https://rebeccabachlauritsen.dk/>) is a bestselling Danish writer from Copenhagen who has won many awards and has had her books translated into multiple languages. *Out of the Blue* is her first book translated into English for a U.S. audience. She hosts a children's TV show in Denmark and is Head of Education for the Cross-Media School of Children's Fiction. She says she is interested in what you can do with language as well as how to use sounds and pictures to convey what cannot be done with language. *Out of the Blue* is an excellent example of how she uses language in unusual ways and works with an illustrator to play with meaning in visual images.

Anna Margrethe Kjærgaard (<https://www.amkjaergaard.dk/>) is a Danish illustrator who has illustrated many books and received many awards. *Coffee, Rabbit, Snowdrop, Lost* was her first book published in the U.S. and was named a 2022 Batchelder Honor Book. She lives with her family on Bornholm, a small island in the sea.

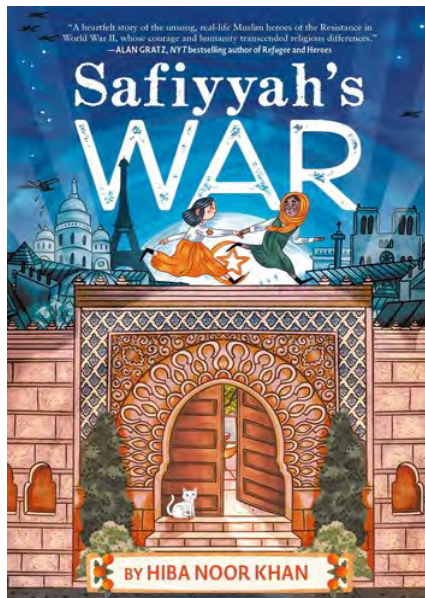
The translator, Michael Favala Goldman (<https://michaelfavalagoldman.com/>), is a translator of literature, a poet, an educator, and a jazz clarinetist. Given the book's reliance on sounds, his background as a poet and musician is particularly significant. He has extensive experience as a translator from Danish to English, but this is his first children's book. Rebecca read this book aloud to him over zoom so he could hear the sounds in Danish before he did the English translation. He lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona

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### **Safiyyah's War**

Written by Hiba Noor Khan  
Andersen Press, 2023, 336 pp  
ISBN: 978-1839133138

France has just been invaded by the German army, and people in Paris are preparing for the occupation of their city. For Safiyyah, a bookish 10-year-old who lives with her family in the Grand Mosque, this means having to say goodbye to her Jewish best friend whose family is fleeing the Nazis. As life becomes more difficult and dangerous under the occupation, Safiyyah first observes the injustices heaped on the Jews of her city and then begins to help them with small and large acts of defiance and courage. She is not the only hero in her family. Her baba (father) helps to run the Grand Mosque, and with the Imam and Rector, manages to rescue many Jews.

*Safiyyah's War* is based on a lesser-known true story of the leaders of the Grand Mosque of Paris protecting Jews from the Nazis. They did this by hiding the Jews in the Mosque, supplying them with forged Muslim identities, and then ferrying them out of Paris through the catacombs on ships in wine caskets. This text celebrates this story as it grapples with themes of home and belonging and doing the right thing.

The undergirding focus of the text is the idea that by saving one life you save humanity. We learn in the historical notes that this tenet is shared by both Muslim and Jewish traditions. In the novel, this value helps to guide Safiyyah and her family to act as if the Jews are themselves. Safiyyah's Setti (grandmother), herself a refugee from war, tells Safiyyah, "the cries from broken hearts speak only one language" (p. 63). The characters hear these cries and do what needs to be done, such as join the army, take in refugees, and rescue cats and birds.

Through reading this novel, the reader is introduced to the role the Grand Mosque of Paris and its people played in helping to rescue hundreds of Jews. Safiyyah, according to the author's notes, represents "all the unlikely heroes...whose courage and action changed our world forever" (p.256). Safiyyah is a fictional character who rescues fictional people. The reader does not get to know any of the Jews that she helps. Other than her best friend, the other Jews are written about without agency and with little substance. This may be because this is a story about the rescuers, not the rescued. As in *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (1989), the Holocaust is a problem to be fixed, with little to no input from the Jews who are greatly affected by the problem.

To give an agentive voice to this, the novel could be paired with *Alias Anna* by Susan Hood and Greg Dawson (2022), a book that chronicles how a young Jewish girl saved herself from the Holocaust, or *Masters of Silence* by Kathy Kacer (2018), the story of how the Jewish mime, Marcel Marceau, helped Jewish children flee France to Switzerland. It could also be read with *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust* by Karen Ruelle and Deborah DeSaix (2009) to explore more about this time.

Hiba Noor Khan is a British-Muslim author who is also a teacher and an advocate for child refugees. This is her first novel.

Melissa Wilson, Cardiff, Wales

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***Small Places Close to Home: A Children's Declaration of Rights***

Written by Deborah Hopkinson  
Illustrated by Kate Gardiner  
Balzer + Bray, 2023, 40 pp (unpaged)  
ISBN: 978-0063092587

*"In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world." (Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958)*

*Small Places Close to Home: A Children's Declaration of Rights* opens with a "Before You Begin" section. In it, author Deborah Hopkinson provides historical background regarding Eleanor Roosevelt's campaign to spread the idea of basic human rights for all people in all nations. Coming on the heels of World War II, Roosevelt's commitment to this idea was timely and heartfelt. On December 10, 1948, she succeeded when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. *Small Places Close to Home* was written to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Declaration.

The brief lyrical print in the book is divided into three sections: Me; My School and Community; and My Country and World. In the "Me" section, Deborah Hopkinson begins with children's understanding of their place within biological and chosen families as well as the larger global family. Children around the world have the right to freedom, equality, safety, and the expression of their culture as well as their private thoughts. This section concludes with the responsibility to respect the bodies of others and "act toward them with gentleness and goodwill."

In the "My School and Community" section, Hopkinson spotlights the right to learn and get an education. She revisits the idea of safety inside the home as well as throughout the community. The author stresses the obligation to speak kind words and "act toward others with an open, generous heart."

In the "My Country and World" section, Hopkinson opens with the right to be free from persecution and to gather with others to protest and use one's voice to create change. In addition to the right to live in peace for all people as well as the plants, animals, and the planet, the author includes the right to dream of a better world. This section ends with the declaration that these rights are children's individual and collective rights shared by others "in this vast, wide world, and in small places, close to home."

The book's back matter provides a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt and information about the adoption of the Declaration. The resources provided focus on Roosevelt's life and work.

Kate Gardiner's double-page spreads in gouache and pencil are imbued with variation in terms of race, ethnicity, heritage language, and culture. Her artwork gently reinforces the text. She uses red and yellow accents to add interest and emphasis on each page. Every illustration captures the diversity of global communities.

This book can be paired with *For Every Child: The Rights of the Child in Words and Pictures*, text adapted by Caroline Castle (2001) with a foreword by Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu. This book is illustrated by fourteen children’s illustrators including John Burningham, Shirley Hughes, and Jerry Pinkney. Both books make a case for a global society that actualizes more caring, compassion, and protection for the world’s young people.

When including these books in a text set, educators can capitalize on the need for protest and activism when people, politicians, and governments do not live up to the rights of children as documented in these books. *What Can a Citizen Do?* by Dave Eggers and Shawn Harris (2018) and any and all of the books listed in the WOW Dozen: A Dozen Books on Activism (<https://wowlit.org/blog/2022/02/01/a-dozen-books-on-activism>) collected by Deanna Day-Wiff to provide ways for youth to take action.

Educators may also want to access the full text of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>) and the “U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child,” (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>) which was adopted in 1989. It is included in the backmatter of *For Every Child* and is available online.

Deborah Hopkinson is an award-winning author of over seventy books for young people. She writes in multiple genres from picturebook biographies to middle grade historical fiction. Readers can visit her website (<https://deborahhopkinson.com/>) to learn more.

Illustrator Kate Gardiner is a member of the Chaubunagungamang band of the Nipmuck Indians. She also has Polish roots. *Small Places* is her debut picturebook and reflects her strong connection to the natural world. Her illustrations will appear in three forthcoming titles in 2024 and 2025. Visit her website (<https://www.kategardinerillustration.com/>) to learn more.

Judi Moreillon, Tucson, AZ

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