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# WOW STORIES

DEVELOPING ENGAGEMENTS WITH GLOBAL  
LITERATURE

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of WORDS 



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**WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom** is a regular on-line publication of WOW containing vignettes written by classroom educators about children's experiences reading and responding to literature in the classroom setting.

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**Developing Engagements with Global Literature**

This issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* focuses on eight global literacy communities that engaged in professional inquiry on global literature. Each group explored strategies that would engage their students in making connections with these books. The ways in which students interact with global literature has a tremendous influence on the kinds of intercultural understandings that students create. A good book is only the first step. Student interactions with these books can actually perpetuate stereotypes or misunderstandings rather than challenging students to consider new perspectives and alternative ways of living and thinking in the world. Students can come to see cultures that differ from their own as strange or exotic and feel pity or relief that they don't live in that culture.

The educators in these eight communities took on the challenge of creating broader contexts of inquiry and classroom engagements. Within these contexts, students critically engaged with literature and moved from cross-cultural understandings to global issues and social action. Two communities focused on developing empathy and caring. Jennifer Carey shares the strategy of persona dolls that third, fourth and fifth grade teachers at [Aveson Charter School](#) in California used to encourage empathy and perspective with their special needs students. The [Garden Hills Literacy Community](#) from Illinois shares their focus on kindness and the books and strategies that were effective with elementary students in exploring kindness.

Several communities describe how they embedded literature within an inquiry unit that provided students with many different experiences to support their understandings of global cultures. [Genny O'Herron](#), a third grade teacher in New Mexico, is part of the ACLIP Literacy Community in Albuquerque. She describes an in-depth inquiry on South Korea in which students used a wide range of primary sources in addition to fiction and nonfiction literature. [Mary Ann Conrad](#) from the Chinle Junior High School Literacy Community shares a unit developed around world geography and literature in a middle school in the heart of the Navajo Nation in Arizona.

A number of communities focused on book studies where students examined books in-depth within a supportive classroom context. [Amanda Villagomez](#) from the Eastern Oregon Literacy Community describes the literature unit in her rural middle school classroom in Oregon that highlighted the use of book clubs and written responses. [Dara Bradley](#), along with members of the Douglass High Literacy Community from Columbia, Missouri, describe a book study around an Australian novel that led to a range of student inquiries on language, Australian culture, and social action. [High school English teachers](#) from the LSHS English Lions Literacy Community in Atlanta describe the many different ways they integrated global literature into their courses. Finally, the [Cunningham Colts Literacy Community](#), a group of elementary teachers in Nevada, shares their use of strategies such as literary letters and postcards to encourage students to take social action by publishing their own books to send to children in Cambodia.

Global Literacy Communities are small groups of educators who are committed to professional inquiries about how to build international understanding through global children's and adolescent literature. These communities meet regularly to immerse themselves in global literature and consider strategies for using these books effectively with students in K-12 classroom contexts. The communities are school-based, community-based, or university/school collaborations whose members have a shared commitment to thinking together as a professional learning community in order to transform their practice.

In 2012-2013, thirteen Global Literacy Communities received grants from Worlds of Words to support their work and to encourage their explorations of innovative practices. Community members also participated in an online forum where they shared their explorations and resources with each other. Each literacy community also committed to sharing their work with other educators through writing vignettes for *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*. This effort by Worlds of Words was supported by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding, an organization that has been helping young people in the United States learn about world regions and global issues since 1966. The vignettes from the rest of these communities were published in Volume IV, Issues 6 and 7.

We will be publishing an unthemed issue of WOW Stories in the spring of 2014. Consider sharing your innovative practices around global and multicultural literature by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. [See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.](#)

Kathy G. Short, Director of Worlds of Words

## **Developing Empathy and Perspective through Global Literature and Persona Dolls**

by Jennifer Carey

We live in a challenging world that calls on educators to make difficult choices every day. The intensity that surrounds our decision-making processes is firmly rooted in the simple yet profound question, "What is best for our students?" This inquiry calls on educators to act as change agents in the lives of students by taking on the challenge to know each student's authentic self and to create and sustain a community. We invite students to practice being compassionate and empathetic human beings in order to be innovative peacemakers in the world. Our tension was how to wade gracefully into such a task with elementary age students.

As literacy teachers, we were excited to embark on a project that would align our shared belief that

all students should have ample learning experiences that support empathy consciousness through a focus on perspective taking. For our project, we utilized thoughtfully selected literature, in particular, contemporary writings that introduced students to global cultures, religions and ideas as the main vehicle for developing empathy. Students read, discussed and wrote responses to the texts. Then students chose a character from their selection of readings to turn into a Persona Doll.



## Teaching Empathy in School Contexts

A wide body of research supports the positive benefits of teaching empathy in school settings. While working on this project, we became intrigued by the ways each individual student responded to their text in an empathetic context. We used the psychologist Paul Ekman’s viewpoints on empathy to guide us in determining if an authentic empathic response was experienced. According to Ekman (2003) there are three kinds of empathy: cognitive, emotional and compassionate. We found that most of our students had displayed cognitive empathy using a definition by Daniel Goleman, co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,

*Cognitive empathy is simply knowing how the other person feels and what they may be thinking. Sometimes perspective taking, this kind of empathy can help in negotiation and or in motivating people. Emotional empathy is when you feel physically along with the other person, as though their emotions were contagious. With compassionate empathy, we not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed. (p. 180)*

After a written response, in order to further the personal interaction with the texts, we decided that Persona Dolls would be a natural means of expression in which the students could express their empathy for a particular character in a manner that allowed for student choice within the teacher selected texts. The creation of Persona Dolls involves work with a variety of media to form a unique character, which in turn becomes the vehicle for telling a story. We had experienced that dolls are ideal vehicles through which to communicate depersonalizing memories and sensitive issues that might be difficult to discuss. The process is relevant for therapists, educators, and human service professionals. The elements of the Persona Doll creation process support development of voice, identification with the “other,” and the exchange of narratives as a foundation for perspective taking.



In regards to perspective taking research, we used Selman's (1980) theory of the five stages of perspective taking to help us better understand the developmental stages children go through when they are maturing through the perspective taking process. Selman's theory of perspective taking works as a developmental continuum, which illustrates appropriate expectations as students mature. It was extremely beneficial to come across such research because we could better scaffold our support of students

### **Our Classroom and School Context**

Our teacher group consisted of four third through fifth grade teachers and 150 third through fifth grade students. Our school has a high special needs population that challenges us to personalize learning in an authentic way. We serve a wide range of academic and behavioral needs. Within the 8-12 age range, we have emergent readers, at grade level readers and readers at an adult level. We work with students with a variety of unique needs: autism, Asperger syndrome, sensory integration disorder, oppositional defiance disorders and attentional and impulsivity challenges. This population constitutes between 25% and 35% of our classroom make-up. There are roughly 25 students in each classroom. The economic diversity of our families is broad. We serve families in every economic situation; however a larger percentage of our community can be classified in the low and middle class strata.



### **Collaborating to Develop Our Curricular Plans**

This project started with teachers meeting over a two-month period to analyze what texts would be

used. We used the Worlds of Words book lists as our main resource. Each teacher selected two selections from the W.O.W Language and Culture Book Kits and the W.O.W Thematic Lists. Then each teacher presented the books they believed would be of value for our students. Our discussions included critiques centered on lifestyles, heroes, promotion of healthy and positive self-images, copyright date, storyline and illustration. When we had the physical copies of the books, we further determined which books would be appropriate for whole class discussions and for individual students. Across each classroom, common anchor texts were utilized in order to support a common experience among students.

We used the following common anchor texts:

| <b>Title</b>                          | <b>Author</b>                          | <b>Publishing Year</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Brothers in Hope</i>               | Mary Williams                          | 2005                   |
| <i>Four, Feet, Two Sandals</i>        | Karen Lynn Williams and Karen Mohammed | 2007                   |
| <i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i> | William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer     | 2010                   |
| <i>The Librarian of Basra</i>         | Jeanette Winter                        | 2005                   |
| <i>The Unbreakable Code</i>           | Sara Hoagland and Julia Miner          | 2007                   |



The foci of our meetings were:

- Overall project vision and implementation
- Individual needs of our students.
- Identifying books that best fit our students' interests and developmental levels

- Carefully reviewing books that would be used for individuals and for read alouds
- Read purchased books and selected books for specific classrooms based on student need
- Created worksheets to complement the objectives of the project
- Wrote our own Persona Doll stories and made our own Persona Dolls
- Whole group and small group lesson collaboration
- Shared and received feedback on student work
- Reflected on sensitive issues that came up in class discussions in regards to race and stereotypes



Mollie Murphy, explains the book selection process.

The next stage of the project occurred over a three-month period during which we engaged in the following experiences:

- Global literature read alouds and discussion groups in whole and small group settings occurred
- Students participated in discussions that highlighted recognizing perspectives, communicating connections and pattern analysis.
- Students responded to texts in written formats such as summaries, compare/contrast essays, literary response essays, “I Am” poems, and journaling
- Students composed narratives for their Persona Dolls
- Students created Persona Dolls
- Students shared and responded to each other’s dolls
- As the project progressed we continued to meet monthly for 1 hour.

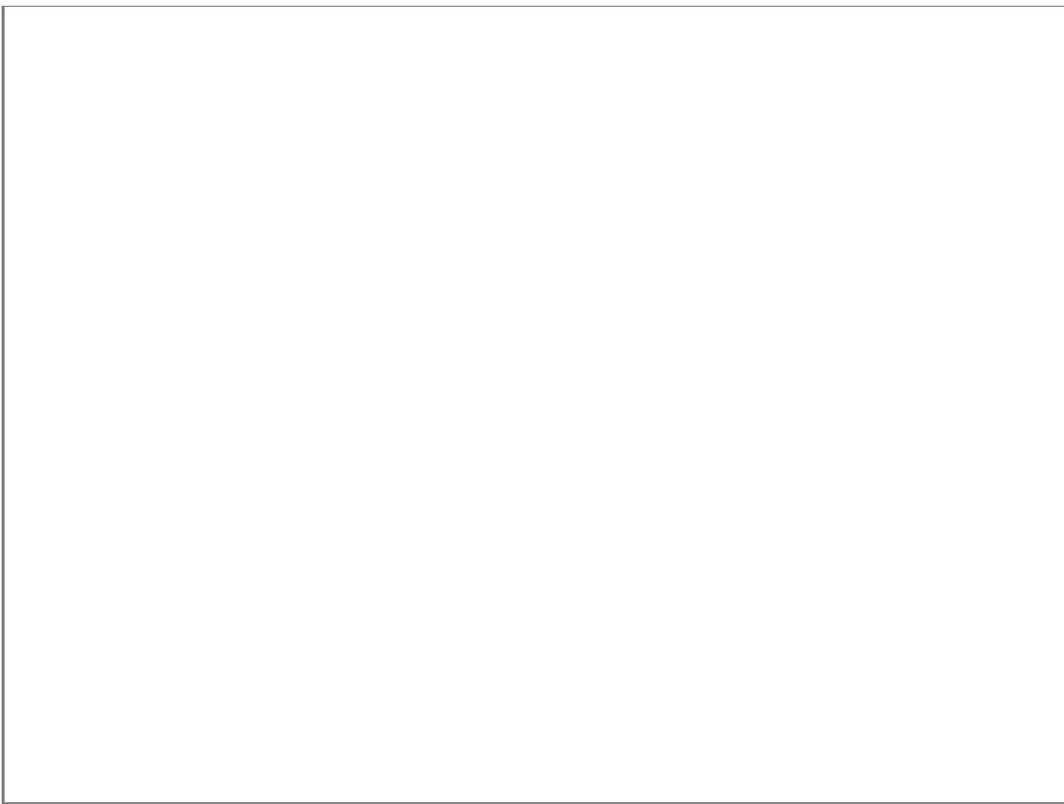
### **Persona Doll Introduction, Construction and Reflection**

The Persona Dolls were introduced after the students had sufficient time to interact with the texts through reading and writing. It was extremely important to us that an authentic connection was made between a character and the student through the intimacy of reading and writing. We wanted that special connection between the character and the student to be a gift that the student was mining for amidst literature exploration. We used our observation to discern when the time was right to switch the focus from exploring the books to inviting the students to explore one character. This was a good decision because it injected fresh energy into the project. We simply stated that each student would choose a character that had most affected him or her and turn that character into a Persona Doll.

We told students:

You will create a Persona Doll about a person or character from your global literature experience. You will compose an appropriate text that will accompany the Persona Doll that will bring the Persona Doll subject to life. Most likely, the texts will be written in the narrative genre.

After we had described what a Persona Doll was, we showed several examples of dolls made with the materials that would be provided to the students. We shared examples of narratives that we authored to accompany these Persona Dolls. After the teacher demonstration, students immediately had their characters in mind. This was exactly what we wanted. We knew that authentic connections were cultivated. Students wrote narratives in the form of essays or poems to capture or continue moments of their characters' lives. Once the texts were in a final draft form, students created their dolls, using scrap material, wooden doll heads, pipe cleaners and markers. In an author's chair setting, students shared their narratives and Persona Dolls with their peers.



Student explains her thinking about The Librarian of Basra.

These two examples samples from a third and fourth grade student clearly use an empathetic thought process in order to take on the perspective of the character.

**I AM POEM inspired by *My Name is Keoko*** I am thoughtful and inquisitive.

I wonder if I will ever learn Korean

I hear the stifled screams of conflict

I see cultural adversity

I want the war to be over

I am thoughtful and inquisitive. I pretend I am my thoughts

I feel worried about Tae-yul

I touch my diary with my ink

I worry Tae-yul will die while fighting

I am thoughtful and inquisitive. I understand that Korea was once free of adversity

I dream of a free Korea and my uncle

I hope my family will be strong

I am thoughtful and inquisitive.

**Why William from *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* is**

**my Role Model**The most inspiring character to me is William in *The Boy who Harnessed the Wind*. In my opinion, William is inspiring because he is wise, smart, and curious. I think William is wise because in the beginning of the story because I believe he knew deep down inside of him there was a solution to a big challenge in his community. William is wise because he used all his resources to find the solution. He used his smarts, common sense and his observational skills to bring solve a problem in his village. He is wise because he is patient and is willing to wait until the right thing happens. Lastly, William was wise because he did not worry about what other people thought of him. I believe that William is smart because he figured out how to make a windmill. Not only did he design and build a windmill, but he made it out of the junk and trash in his village. William was smart because he used his resources and did not look at the trash as trash but as something to use in an invention. I think that William was always thinking about why things work the way they do and that his brain wheels were always turning. In my opinion William is curious. I think that William is curious because he wondered how a radio worked. He wanted to know how the radio parts worked together to create a sound. I bet that we he looked at something he was trying to see through it with x-ray vision like Superman. Another reason he is curious is because he wondered how an engine worked instead of just looking at one, he took his time to figure it out. For these reasons I think William is curious. I think William is wise, smart and curious because he used all his resources, figured out how to make a windmill, and wondered how an engine worked. He was a problem solver and an inspiration to his community and to me! For all these reasons, William will always be role model for me when I come across a difficult problem or want to explore something I do not understand.

This example is a Persona Doll narrative about a student's experience of being bullied.

My name is Sam. I'm in 4th grade. When I was in 1st grade that's when people started making fun of me. They were saying I was fat, slower than everybody and stupid. I tried to not believe them. I just

ignored, ignored and ignored until I finally snapped. I started bullying those kids and they stopped bullying me. I felt really bad for doing mean things to them. I finally said, "I'm sorry that I did that to you guys." They said in reply, "We are too." After that school year, I moved to a different school. I was scared as HECK. Throughout the year I did pretty good until 3rd grade when this kid came and he started bullying me saying I ate way too many donuts. It started to make me so mad so I pushed him off the monkey bars and I got in big trouble. He just kept on going and going. I got so embarrassed being laughed at every day at school, but a friend stood up for me. The next year my friend left my school and I was scared that I was going to get bullied again. I stayed away from the boy who teased me, but my other friends started playing with him. Two weeks later the bully comes to me and says he's sorry for doing all the bad things he did. But you know what I said, "I am sorry but I can't accept that after all the things you did to me and know you want me to say sorry. Are you kidding?" "That's where I made a giant mistake not taking his apology. I should've manned up and forgot the past. I finally walked over to the bully and I was scared that he wasn't going to accept me forgiving him and bully me again. I saw him and said, "I accept your apology." Me and that bully agreed not to tease each other any more. We actually became friends and we still hang out. I learned that sometimes people who are bullies have been bullied themselves. I do not want to be a bully or get bullied. I don't like to be scared at school. I believe that you should treat people the way you want to be treated. P.S. Don't be a bully and tease people because they are going to do the same thing and you're going to want them to stop.

## **Evidence of Empathy and Perspective Taking in our Students**

Perhaps the most meaning-filled parts of this project were the rich discussions that invited students to challenge political choices that resulted in violence. After reading *The Librarian of Basra*, students' questions and comments circled the room.



When the teacher asked students what they thought of this story, they responded:

- You mean they are dropping bombs right where they live?
- How could anyone do anything if they were afraid of a bomb dropping on their head?
- Why did these people who did nothing wrong have to have their lives destroyed?
- I can't believe our country was dropping bombs on her library!
- It must have been so scary for everyone to not know what was going to happen.
- If I were Alia, I would have done the same thing because I love books like her.
- Wow, I am so amazed she was so brave for her books.
- I think Alia is very smart because she was able to really focus on her goal and she did not let anything stop her. I think she has a very strong heart.

This discussion led many students to question the thought of war, leading to a series of connections and even further questions. Most of the connections were centered around WWII because one student in the class was a WWII buff and loved to share his knowledge with his peers. Their responses focused on:

- Did you know that we dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese during WWII? It even happened two times. I know this because I saw a documentary on it. [*The student goes on to explain the attack in detail.*]
- Yeah, I just read a book about that. Her name was Sadako.
- Oh, I have read that book too and in the second grade we made the cranes.
- This just has to stop.... it has to stop! How could this happen? We do not have to fight like this!

The discussion concluded with a sharing of strategies and tools students have observed people use in order to not go to war.

There were many moments where we as teachers had to carefully construct our responses to the student's inquiries after reading texts that dealt with sensitive issues and provide examples of peacemaking entities i.e.: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa. In these moments when we thoughtfully chose to silence our viewpoints, we saw deep, raw and transforming discussions take place.

After the Boston Marathon bombing, two students were using derogatory comments against Muslim people in the hallway. One girl, coincidentally, the only practicing Muslim in her class, was within earshot of the remarks. She listened and told a teacher what she had heard. This conversation led the class to a discussion that exposed incorrect beliefs that were held by the students' families about the Muslim community. This was tough stuff! The approach we took was to educate the class on vocabulary terms that would help all the students communicate with each other. We defined Islam, Muslim and other terms that would support our comprehension of the issues. We used maps to show countries that followed Islamic religion and talked about the different belief systems that are within the Islamic world. We brought in newspaper articles of how Muslim Americans have been treated in connection to their chosen faith. Lastly, Muslims from our school described their belief systems to our classes. And of course, throughout the entire time we read pertinent literature that built bridges of connections. The WOW booklist for children's books from Arabic speaking nations of the Middle East was a valuable resource for appropriate texts. After the immersion period, the students who made the comments changed. They saw how their statements were hurtful and destructive, saying, "I really didn't know what I was saying before. I see things very differently now."

Not long after this experience, a student shared a derogatory joke putting down people of another race and culture. The person who heard the offensive joke decided to use this as an opportunity to create a Persona Doll that was teased because of her background. Struggling to put the ideas into a written piece, the student verbally shared a story with her class about a student who was teased by her classmates because of her background. This became such a powerful moment for the student. "I was feeling really bad about what he said. That is me he is making fun of! That is my mom too! Then when my Persona Doll told her story, she was brave and said things I could not have said. I could stand up to my friend and show him that what he did was wrong. He is still my friend and now he has a different way of seeing things from my eyes."

Most students in the assessment interview process spoke of an awakening of new knowledge and of how people struggle. "I didn't realize that kids have to go through these ordeals and obstacles. I thought that things like this just happen in the mind, but they are real." Other student's responses circled around a theme of gratitude. "I feel so lucky to have a house, school and clean water." "I am so lucky that I can go to school. If I was a girl in this village I would have to work and maybe even be married."

We started this project on the heels of a Caldecott study that analyzed Caldecott illustrations and story lines throughout the decades. At the end of the school year an observant young girl made a remark, "You know, I just realized there weren't any people who were gay, Muslim or that had special needs in any of the Caldecott books we read. I hope that will change in the next decades." Clearly, some students were able to transfer their experience from the project and apply it to into

real world situations.

## Conclusion

Our students were able to exercise their empathetic muscles by reading and responding to contemporary global literature and by creating Persona Dolls. The project invited students to connect with their own stories, the stories of their classmates and the characters in the selected texts. We learned that a classroom culture of interconnectivity is possible when students are given authentic opportunities to practice perspective taking. Thus, our challenge now becomes to facilitate learning experiences that invite our students to practice becoming, “good perspective takers who display empathy and compassion and are better at thinking of effective ways to handle difficult social situations that reflect multiple perspectives” (Eisenberg, 1987, p. 152).

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## **Persona Doll Resources**

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Jennifer Carey holds a master's in literacy development and a bachelor of arts in human development from Pacific Oaks College, a Quaker institution. As a literacy, science and history teacher, Jennifer designs and implements projects that invite students to identify and pursue their passions, develop their voice and apply this critical knowledge to become “change agents” in their own lives as well as their communities.

## **Creating Global Awareness through Collaboration between the Public School and the University**

by Garden Hills Global Literacy Community

The Garden Hills Elementary School Teacher Group was a public-school-based group of teachers that received support from a university professor. The teachers were dedicated to extending their abilities to work in equitable and just ways within their recently adopted globally-focused International Baccalaureate Americas (IBA) program. This internationally themed, multilingual magnet school is located in a high poverty crime area of a small urban school district in a university city. Group members included literacy specialists, classroom teachers, and other educational specialists in all three strands offered by the school (bilingual education, gifted education, and native English language education).

The group had two key goals: (1) to increase the global awareness of the school community while working to become fully accredited by the PYP-IBA and (2) to continue to work to decrease the ethnic achievement gap at the school by increasing the use of culturally relevant literacy instruction using authentic materials. Teachers wanted to “increase both our access to and knowledge about culturally authentic and engaging global literature so we can more effectively incorporate it into

our students' learning experiences at Garden Hills." In addition, teachers were also intent on becoming a fully accredited PYP-IBA school. These goals remained the focus of our reading, discussion, and book list suggestions at each meeting.

Over the course of the school year, teachers worked hard to expand their literature choices and use. Each monthly meeting was devoted to sharing literature and literature teaching ideas by all participants. Key monthly activities included reading and discussing chapters in *Growing up Global* (Tavanger, 2009) and chapters about teacher study groups in Birchak, et al. (1998), along with other readings that became relevant (e.g., articles in *Language Arts*) and a lot of children's literature. Teachers discussed readings and shared children's responses to classroom activities as well as ideas for lessons teachers wanted to try. They shared book recommendations, discussed their school's progress on their PYP-IBA application, brainstormed a list of books to order, planned activities for the coming month, and shared questions and concerns. In addition, they invited international visitors and gained new perspectives from their own staff members' experiences with international travel and living.

All of this discussion was tied to ways to include authentic, engaging books that would inspire children to adopt an international focus. Teachers strove to create experiences and to include literature that would engage their students in learning about and appreciating unfamiliar customs, becoming familiar with people who have made a difference in communities across the world, comparing across information in picture book text sets to encourage reflective thinking—all the while maintaining not only an international but also a multilingual focus that mirrored the multiple languages spoken by children in this widely diverse school.

### **Opening Our Eyes: Karla J. Möller**

Garden Hills Elementary School was highly impacted by two books read at the beginning of the year that led to a year-long school focus on what one can do for others to make the world a better place. The first three vignettes describe how two books *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler* by Margery Cuyler (a picture book read to all the students in the entire school) and [\*Each Kindness\*](#) by Jacqueline Woodson (a picture book read to selected classes), set the stage for an exploration of what it means to "give back" to one's family, community, nation, and world over the course of the school year. The final vignette by Mrs. Borgeson takes us to the end of the academic year and to the final novel she read to students across a number of classrooms: [\*A Long Walk to Water\*](#). This two-voiced novel by Linda Sue Park, written with support and guidance by Salva Dut, alternates between the experiences of a Sudanese boy forced into the long walk to safety during the extended and violent Sudanese civil war period and the experiences of a young girl from a different tribal group in more recent, but still tumultuous, years. Dut, a Sudanese man who himself participated in the long walk of the lost boys of the Sudan as a child, has become an international humanitarian

who reaches across formerly antagonistic tribal and kinship groups to bring access to clean water to a number of Sudanese communities.

In between these vignettes that bookend the school year at Garden Hills Elementary School, students studied a number of other people from across the world who surmounted odds to make a difference in their communities, nations, and the world. Some of the many books that were used that engaged and inspired the Garden Hills students include those that focus on other Africans who have made a significant difference, often in the face of significant danger as well, such as 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the Kenyan Greenbelt Movement Wangari Mathaai and Malawian inventor, humanitarian, and author William Kamkwamba.

Through their hard work this past year, the Garden Hills teachers have gained insights into how to further globalize their instruction and have shared and learned about many books and other media they can use to enhance their instruction. They now have book sets on everyday people who have made a difference for their communities in Iraq, in Colombia, in Appalachia, in India, and across the United States historically and in the present, just to name a few areas of focus. They have used text sets we created that focus on food availability as well as eating habits and choices across the world. They have sets focused on Central and South American experiences, on African and African American experiences, and on Asian and Asian American experiences that offer their students in their internationally populated school multiple examples to see people who look like them as well as people who may have different experiences reflected in a wide range of authentic ways across a range of text genres. They have created sets of books featuring international athletes, sets of connected picture book biographies, and sets that focus on specific injustices that are more recent, such as a fiction and nonfiction text set that addresses issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.

I continue to be in awe of teachers' focus and drive as they work to meet the needs and expand the interests of their students. I am confident that they have already—and will in the future— move forward as a school team in raising issues of global awareness.

### **Kindness is Cooler!: Olga Halpern**

Mary Borgeson, our bilingual literacy specialist, came to my second grade bilingual class and read aloud *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler* (Cuyler, 2007). The book is about a teacher who wants to teach her students how important it is to be kind, and what being kind is about. After reading the book, she opened the floor to the children for discussion, asking them what they could do to show kindness. The children came up with a list, and were asked to write any acts of kindness they performed or that someone did for them on a red paper heart. The hearts were displayed around bulletin boards and walls around the room. Children reflected on the activity, and as a group,

discussed the different ways they showed kindness, and how they felt as a result. This activity was a wonderful way for children to self-reflect and to internalize a quality, which will make them better, and more fulfilled people.

### **The Golden Rule: Susan Dilley and Dawn Beyler**

We introduced the Golden Rule to a classroom of multicultural third graders. We posted the following six examples of different religions version of the Golden Rule and had a lively discussion on the similarities, cross cultures, languages and geographical distances. Students were excited about the common language and illustrated each poster to represent an image reflecting the meaning.

- None of you believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. Islam
- Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. Baha'i
- This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. Hinduism
- Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Judaism
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Christianity
- Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. Buddhism

Later that week, we read *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012). This beautifully illustrated and wonderfully written story is told from the perspective of a young girl who misses the opportunity to show kindness to a new girl in her class before she moves away. After reading the story, each student placed a shiny pebble (the kind you get in the bottom of floral arrangements) into a glass pie pan of water. As we did this, we made a pledge of a kindness we would carry out or shared a kindness we have done. It was simple and meaningful. Placing the pebble in the water illustrated the rippling effect of how doing a good thing impacts the recipient. When a good deed is done to you, then you can turn and do a good deed to someone else, then they turn to someone else, creating a rippling effect. All it takes is the initial pebble.

Here are a few samples of how students responded to the prompt during the activity:

- "I'm going to help my mother with the dishes."
- "I'm going to walk with my brother to school."
- "I will share with my sister."
- "I will help my teacher in the classroom."

I noticed that most of the third graders' responses focused on doing a good deed for another person. Their idea of being kind was through action, not just words.

This experience would be a great activity to do in the first week of school, so I have made a notation

to myself to use it again next year! I would like to help students expand this concept of kindness to things they think and say. Using it at the beginning of the year would be helpful as we begin forming a class community of learners. It would show my new students this is something we value at the beginning of the year. The culture of kindness, demonstrated in what we do and say, is what we will value all year.

### **Caring for One Another: Hallie Sturdyvin**

During the school year students worked on being kind to one another. We incorporated our PYP attribute of caring from the Learner Profile into our daily lives in a variety of different ways, including helping someone on the playground or during math or working together on a project in order to get something done. One day during shared reading time, a time in which students are brought back to the carpet to listen and share in a story, Mary Borgeson, one of our literacy specialists came into our classroom to share a story, *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler* (Cuyler, 2007). Right away the students pointed out that kindness was something that we have been trying to work on in and out of our classroom.

Throughout the story, the characters tried to carry out different acts of kindness at school, on the bus, at the park, in their homes-- wherever they were. When they got to school they took a red construction paper heart and wrote what they did on the heart. The heart was then put on display in the classroom. They made a goal for themselves to reach one hundred hearts.

After listening to this story, of course students wanted to do the same thing as the kids in the story. So, we made hearts and when students did something kind for a family member or a friend, they filled out a heart and put it up on the bulletin board. The students talked about the book, the hearts, and their acts of kindness for the whole school year. I think they were as proud of themselves as I was of them.

### **Engaging Upper-Elementary Bilingual Students: Mary Borgeson**

Garden Hills Elementary School is in the process of applying for acceptance to become an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Project School. Our work with global literacy was perfect for our monthly learner profiles which include: Caring, Thinker, Risk-Taker, Knowledgeable, Inquirer, Open-Minded, Reflective, Balanced, Communicator and Principled. We met monthly to discuss chapters from *Growing Up Global: Raising Children to be at Home in the World* (Tavangar, 2009). This author touched upon each of our Learner Profiles in one way or another. Her chapters were filled with ideas and her own vignettes about how to be a friend, greet friends, play, going to school, what do people believe, celebrating with the world, sustaining friendship, service and giving, and widening our circle of compassion. She lived for some time in Africa with her children and realized that positive experiences with the world's cultures enhance

our lives.

Our school was lucky enough to have the expertise of Karla Möller from the University of Illinois who teaches children’s literature. Each month, she brought in many, many globally themed books which dealt with the specific learner profile in focus for the specific month. She explained the content of each book, compared and contrasted themes among books and gave us all a bit of history of the different cultures involved in each book’s story and struggles. These books opened our minds and our hearts to the struggles that people face each day of their lives and we became better people for having experienced this knowledge.

I decided to introduce the book *A Long Walk to Water* (Park, 2010) to our fourth/fifth grade bilingual students (Spanish/English). My goal was for them hear about other children who have been displaced from their homes and need to establish themselves in a new community and sometimes a new country. In part, this two-voiced novel book tells the story of a boy from Sudan who has to walk with other boys to safety leaving his war-torn country. As I read aloud each chapter, the students were spellbound, listening to each word, imagining what it was like not to have water or food to eat on the trip. It took me five days to read the entire book—and each time I had to stop for the day, the students groaned and pleaded: “Please, please, tell us what happened next!”

The main character Salva valued education more than anything in the world and I took the opportunity to remind students how lucky *they* were to have a free education and beautiful equipment in their class like a Smartboard and computers. They could turn on a faucet and get clean water whenever they wanted. When we finished the book, we had many discussions of what they could do to help other children in the world who did not have what they had. We went to Salva Dut's web page and heard him talk about his projects in Sudan to bring water to villages that did not have wells. The students were *thrilled*—amazed and totally engaged—to see and hear Salva talk about his long walk as one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” and hear his stories of how he went to school in America and started his foundation to bring water to the villages of Sudan—even to villages in which other tribes lived with whom Salva’s tribe had negative relationships in the past. Salva was about peace and working for the betterment of all those he could impact positively in his homeland—not just about his own specific tribal group. This book transformed many students, and inspired them to want to read more about the struggles of other students. This is a book and an experience we will treasure and that will lead to many other experiences as we continue to focus on what is happening in our larger, international world of different and yet closely linked communities.

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## Appendix

The aim of all International Baccalaureate programs is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world. IB learners strive to be:

**Inquirers** They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.

**Knowledgeable** They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.

**Thinkers** They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.

**Communicators** They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.

**Principled** They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.

**Open-minded** They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.

**Caring** They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.

**Risk-takers** They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and

articulate in defending their beliefs.

**Balanced** They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.

**Reflective** They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.

**Dawn Beyler** has taught in the Champaign school district for 8 years, including kindergarten, 3rd grade, 2/3 gifted, 3/4 gifted, and 3rd gifted. Dawn worked in the preschool and child care field for 18 years before returning to work in elementary schools.

**Mary Borgeson** is a Reading Recovery Teacher/Descubriendo La Lectura (Spanish Literacy), who taught for 26 years in Champaign Unit Four schools, and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in El Salvador for three years. She received a Fulbright-Hays grant to Japan and India.

**Susan Dilley** is an instructional coach who has been teaching for nearly twenty years in elementary schools throughout Illinois.

**Olga Velasquez Halpern** is a second-grade bilingual classroom teacher. She came to the United States as a student in the Intensive English Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and stayed. She has been teaching since 1986 in both early childhood and elementary schools and was also an elementary school Spanish teacher.

**Karla J. Möller** is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois. Her research and teaching focus is on the selection and use of multicultural literature and on conceptualizations of struggling and capability with regard to school-based reading events. She conducts collaborative research with local teachers.

**Hallie Sturdyvin** is a third grade bilingual teacher in her fourth year of teaching. Born and raised in Champaign, she loves to travel in the Caribbean.

## **Legos in the Land of the Morning Calm**

by Genny O'Herron

A small group of educators in Albuquerque, New Mexico came together around the shared passion of global and international children's literature. Our group was diverse, consisting of classroom teachers, a university professor, a theater educator and a documentary film maker/substitute teacher. Calling ourselves the Adolescent and Children's Literature Inquiry Project (ACLIP), we

met monthly to discuss literature, individual projects, and classroom ideas. When we were awarded a Global Literacy Communities Grant, we decided to acquire global and multicultural literature about South Korea and Korean Americans and create a traveling collection of books that would benefit each ACLIP member in distinct ways. For example, one member used the books with her young theater students for script writing; one member shared the books with her Korean Mother's Support Group; and one member shared the books with her Children's Literature course at UNM. When it was my turn with the books, I used them with my third-grade students, and all of the ACLIP members supported me in this endeavor.

This vignette reflects some of what happened during that experience and demonstrates the capacity that young children have to explore issues of cultural authenticity and accuracy in books. This was my first year teaching third grade after teaching Kindergarten for six years, so not only was I learning about how to effectively integrate global and international children's literature, I was also learning a lot about the spunk and spirit of eight and nine year olds! In the end, I also learned a lot about myself as a white middle class woman in the teaching profession who is trying to become more culturally competent and committed to a pedagogy of equity and diversity.

In all honesty, I was apprehensive about facilitating an in-depth cultural inquiry about a culture that I was not familiar with. I felt deeply insecure about my skills and how to do it "the right way." That is where the collaboration and support from the other ACLIP members was essential, both to embolden me to stretch and grow as a teacher and to brainstorm about how to best present material so that I was not reinforcing stereotypes or misinformation. We began our study with what is frequently called the "five fs" (food, fashion, festivals, famous people, and folklore). This was very straightforward, and it is probably the only information I would have provided if had not been for the help of the ACLIP members to contact guest speakers, connect with pen pals from Seoul, and organize simple language lessons. With their support and guidance, the pieces started to come together—there was an organic unfolding of information, inquiries, and excitement on behalf of all of us (students, teacher and the ACLIP members). The students began reading an abundance of literary and informational texts. They watched a number of travel videos and You Tube clips of South Korea. They learned a lot! We learned a lot!



South Korean visitors expanded students' knowledge about Korean culture

The single most important thing they learned was that children in this high-tech nation on the other side of the globe are similar to them as well as different. This may sound simplistic and cliché, but watching curious, creative youngsters become so knowledgeable—and concerned—about another group of people was profound for me.

According to the U.S. Census, 2.6% of the Albuquerque population identifies as Asian American (1.4% of the state population). On the first day that we dove into this project and looked at picture books and nonfiction texts about South Korea, most of the children had little or no background knowledge about this area of the world. I remember the lesson clearly. There were three distinct reactions: interest, indifference, and aversion. One child kept repeating, “This is freaky, this is so freaky,” as he paged through pictures of a people and place that were completely foreign to him. Another child insisted, “I don’t want to learn about this place. I hate Korea!” (he had just admitted that he knew nothing about South Korea). Yikes! What was I in for, I wondered: Is this what uncensored xenophobia, embodied in little third grade personalities, looks like? How does one teacher penetrate this type of resistance to intercultural understanding?

Through books, of course! (And collaboration with other educators committed to educational equity and diversity). Stories humanize. Information contextualizes. As Kathy Short (2013) wrote, “Through story, students understand the human emotions and struggles related to issues, and, through nonfiction, they explore the broader world context of those issues. Books are a powerful beginning point for expanding awareness and empathy.”

### **Expanding our Understandings through Using a Range of Literature**

So, on the same day we began our unit about South Korea and Korean culture, I started our new lunchtime read aloud and made sure I tied the two together with the Newbery Medal winner [\*Single Shard\*](#) by Linda Sue Park (2001). After the initial resistance from some, twelfth-century Korea came alive for us as we followed the story of Tree-Ear over the next few weeks. We also explored the career of Linda Sue Park by reading *Linda Sue Park: An Author Kids Love* (2009) by

Michelle Parker-Rock after children began to devour her books.

I remember the enthusiasm about Linda Sue Park’s writing so well (it caught me by surprise; teaching third grade for the first time, I didn’t know which authors and literary works had strong appeal). “I like the book you gave me,” shared Seth who had just finished [The Kite Fighters](#) (2010), a book I lent him from our Park pile. “Can I get [Archer’s Quest](#) (2008) as soon as it comes back?” he begged, frustrated with his friend for forgetting it at home—the unbridled reading passion was palpable. This was the first time kids were practically fighting over the books they wanted to read in our classroom. They couldn’t get enough of Linda Sue Park during their independent reading time, and this dovetailed perfectly with our Korean inquiry.

Providing a wide range of books was critical to engaging the students, and in our case, we had to activate imagination first through fiction in order to stimulate intellectual curiosity. For example, while students were intently enjoying the Linda Sue Park books, there was not much interest in the nonfiction books that were available to them. As soon as we began to plan for our culminating project, our “Korean Class Museum,” however, there was strong motivation to consult as many resources as possible. Suddenly students were hoarding these books in their desks. The Museum was open to the entire school during our Winter Festival, and along with book displays, featured student-created dioramas, reports, and experiential activities like coin rubbing, crafts, taste testing and traditional games like Yut. By that point, students had clearly become authorities on many aspects of South Korea and were so proud to share that knowledge publically.



Students shared their learning in displays for a class Korean museum.

In addition to sharing literary and informational texts with students, I also introduced bilingual Korean-English books and books written in Korean that had English counterparts such as [Minji’s Salon](#) by Eun-hee Choung (2008), [My Cat Copies Me](#) by Yoon D. Kwon (2007), [Something for School](#) by Hyung Young Lee (2008), and [The Zoo](#) by Suzy Lee (2007). The third graders loved “reading” the Korean books first and then seeing the English translations. Finally, I pulled out the contemporary children’s picture books purchased in South Korea, written in Korean with vivid,

captivating illustrations.

“I wish I could have these books in my house,” sighed Amy who was infatuated with the unique illustrations of the books. “It’s no fair that we can’t get these books here!” exclaimed Todd as he poured over the collection that the kids had termed the “Naughty Boy” series. While they couldn’t read the text, students carefully studied the illustrations and constructed a storyline for each book. The children who initially were most adamant about Korea being “freaky” and “hating” it came up with the most elaborate storylines.



Children enjoy a wide range of books published in South Korea (written in Korean)

### **Challenging Misconceptions and Making Connections**

As children synthesized information from the nonfiction and guest visitors, they noticed the preponderance of traditional imagery in picture books about Korea. “Why are most of the characters wearing hanbok (traditional clothing) in these books?” they asked, making astute observations about over-representations in books. When we re-read [\*The Trip Back Home\*](#) by Janet Wong (2000), for example, they commented about the rural imagery, noting what they had learned about the urbanization of South Korea (with less than about 20% of the population now living in rural areas). They also compared U.S.-published picture books to Korean ones, which had significantly more urban and contemporary images, including children playing with Legos, which riveted them. They started using words like *traditional* and *modern* very deliberately.



Contemporary images in books from South Korea expanded student connections and understandings.

Children also talked about similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of South Korean children (fictional and real) with much more sophistication. Childhood interests were common points of inquiry. They wanted to know if Korean children had pets and looked for evidence in books. They looked for the kinds of toys that were popular in South Korea and were both tickled and surprised to find illustrations of children playing Legos in the contemporary Korean picture books.

Another question that arose was whether Koreans like sushi. At first the sushi comments harkened me back to the time before we started this unit when my students had extremely limited and inaccurate knowledge about so many aspects of Asia, in general, and about South Korea, in particular. I was perplexed as to why these comments kept coming up, especially after they learned about the difference between sushi and the Korean rice rolls called kimbap. Then I heard stories from several students who held high social peer status and who had elaborate and entertaining stories about “loving sushi with their families,” “having sushi for their birthdays,” and “going out to a sushi restaurant with Grandpa.” The more I listened, the more it seemed that the question, “Do Koreans eat sushi?” wasn’t an ignorant confusion between Japanese and Korean culture but a natural curiosity and point of comparison and of asking, “What do Korean children and I have in common?” They seemed to be seeking understandings about whether Korean children value and enjoy the same things they did. If it’s “cool” to eat sushi, here, (according to many of the dominant personalities in the classroom), then what’s “cool” in South Korea?

Students graphed the amount of traditional and rural images they noted in fiction and nonfiction books about South Korea from the public library. It became clear that if these books were the only exposure that children had to the county and culture of South Korea, many stereotypes and misperceptions would be reinforced. The broader collection of global and international books, along with guest speakers and activities like playing yut and watching videos about Korean celebrities such as Yu-Na Kim (2010 Olympic champion figure skater) and Rain (entertainer, pop

star), gave a more varied, vibrant, and nuanced depiction of South Korea.

By the end of our unit when the third graders wrote to fifth-grade pen pals from Seoul Gangdong Elementary School the orientalism, exotism and “othering” had disappeared. Students shared intimate details about divorces, exciting news about upcoming vacations, and kid-centric reports about best friends, favorite foods and beloved cartoons and video games. They took great care in personalizing and polishing their letters. They asked questions about siblings, sports, gender (they really wanted to know if they were writing to a boy or girl!), entertainment, and school. They labored over their Korean alphabet charts in order to leave little notes in the margin written in Korean. Brian wrote a P.S., “We read a book that showed Korean children playing with Legos. Do you have the Star Wars X-Wing Starfighter? I just got that one for my birthday.”

## **Final Reflections**

The language of childhood is a universal language, despite distinct cultural differences. Our inquiry into South Korea and Korean culture illuminated many interesting facts and findings and many similarities and differences. When similarities were highlighted there was instant intrigue and enthusiasm (do you know they have Dunkin Donuts in South Korea!—this meant the world to a child whose Dad works for this company). The similarities abound beyond Legos and donuts, of course, and as students began to understand this more deeply, their curiosity became connection. These understandings of similar and difference are both needed in a world marked more and more by diversity and complex interdependencies.

I know students learned a lot from this study, but I would have to say I learned more. Not just about South Korea, but about how to bring global cultures alive in a meaningful, thoughtful way through literature and careful examination about what that literature portrays (and/or doesn't portray) about a people. I am grateful for such an amazing learning opportunity, which was made possible through this project and the support of my ACLIP colleagues!

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Genny O'Herron has been teaching at Mountain Mahogany Community School in Albuquerque, NM for eight years. She found her way to the Adolescent and Children's Literature Inquiry Project through her graduate studies in the Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies department at University of New Mexico.

## **Expanding Our World through Global Inquiries**

by Mary Ann Conrad

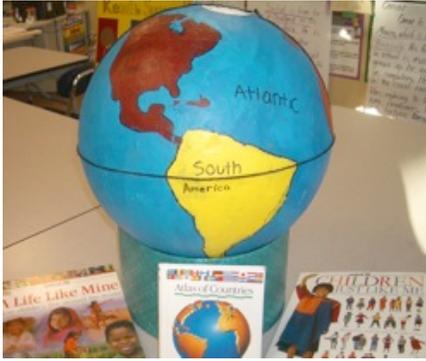
Our group of language arts and social studies teachers, along with writer Nancy Bo Flood, met monthly to reinforce our commitment to promoting global awareness among our students, many of whom have not traveled far beyond their Navajo communities. We were a diverse assortment of young and old, Anglo and Navajo, all teachers under the same pressure to improve progress in our classrooms in an effort to bring up our school test scores.

Chinle Junior High is located in the heart of the Navajo Nation of Northern Arizona. Our students are 95% Navajo, and many have limited command of their own Navajo language and of English as well. Culturally, our students are engaged in rich oral stories that are told in the winter and passed down from generation to generation by those entrusted with them. Their struggles with English and with reading the written word have made passing standardized tests a major challenge for many of students. This challenge has been passed on to us, their teachers.

Teachers met weekly in cluster groups where we focused mostly on teaching academic vocabulary effectively. However, we gathered as a global literacy group at lunch every four weeks and discussed our commitment to global awareness. We decided on a slogan "Alike, yet Different" to describe our approach. In April we hosted a world reading night featuring books representing countries from each continent. Student Council members led attendees from continent to continent where they had their "passports" stamped as they explored the artifacts and local foods. At the same event Nancy Bo Flood signed copies of her new book [\*Cowboy Up\*](#), which features the Navajo rodeo.

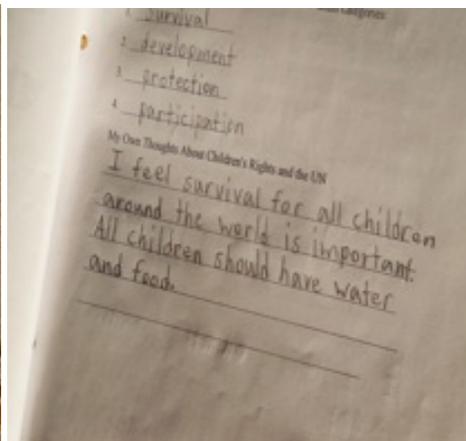
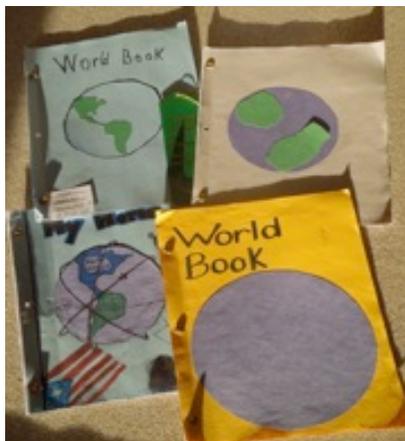
By the end of the school year, half of our group members had moved on. Chantell, one of our youngest teachers, decided to leave the teaching profession to join the Peace Corp. Before leaving, she taught three weeks of summer school with a focus on world geography and literature, saying, "This is the way teaching ought to be."

This vignette tells only part of our story and the impact of our focus on world literature. It begins in a special education classroom when 7th and 8th grade students came back fresh from winter break to find a large paper mache sphere in the center of the room. They were engaged before the bell



even rang! Just before the holidays, this teacher, an avid recycler, had been delighted upon walking into a math teacher's room to find a large ancient globe split in two pieces and without a stand. With the vision of a world-class forager, she pounced. No more need to spend the holidays searching out a large balloon.

During the early weeks of January students in three different writing classes painted and labeled oceans and continents while searching their new atlases for information about each continent. While some painted, others began the covers of their individual World Books. These were eight teacher-created chapters of maps and cloze exercises and questions to assist students in reading the two major books purchased from UNICEF, *A Life like Mine* and *Children Just like Me*. Inside the cover were flags to color--Arizona, US, and the UN to remind them that citizenship which begins in the Navajo Nation expands in an ever widening circle. The blue flag of the United Nations hung just inside the door of the classroom.



Emergent readers worked alone or in pairs to read about the United Nations and its concerns for children around the world. They wrote about the rights of children and about global issues, such as water and food resources, education, cultural belonging, and the need for peace and safety. They learned about food customs, clothing, possessions, values, and religious and family structures across the globe. They learned location. Every child they read about sent them to the political

globes they hauled joyfully into the classroom when they arrived mid-January. They compared their lives and culture to the lives of children from other continents and countries.

This project continued throughout the semester, culminating in final student projects. Each student created his or her own personal double page spread modeled after the pages in *Children Just like Me*.

Other highlights of our world unit included reading about tooth customs around the world, learning about Celia Cruz and salsa dancing, and celebrating the Navajo rodeo with Nancy Bo Flood's gift of a classroom set of books. One student pointed out where he sat, a tiny nearly invisible boy in the rodeo stands. It seemed right after "traveling" so far, to come home and find our places, our homes, our people and to celebrate them in the fresh way one always does after have been away.

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Mary Ann Conrad is a special education language arts teacher at Chinle Junior High and facilitated the global literacy teacher study group.

## Considering Identity through the Lenses of Literature and Writing

by Amanda Villagomez

During the 2012-13 school year I participated in a global literacy community with colleagues in eastern Oregon focusing on using global literature as a means for students to expand their understandings of culture, both their own and those of others. We observed how utilizing global literature impacted students' understanding of events and experiences throughout the world. The books provided access to scenarios that students had not necessarily observed first hand in their rural, high poverty communities.

While we each created a global literacy unit, we had flexibility to do so in a way that aligned with our individual school/classroom philosophies and the needs of our students. We checked in with each other throughout the project to see glimpses into how the units were unfolding, noticing similarities and differences between the two schools and three grades. We expanded our classroom libraries with an intentional global literature focus, benefiting current and future students.

I taught my unit with 8th graders in a K-8 Spanish/English dual immersion charter school. Part of the values of the staff and the vision for the school is to promote social justice and tolerance. This vignette features a general overview of the unit I taught, with a focus on book clubs and responses to reading.

### **The Big Picture: Looking Within/Looking Beyond**

My literacy philosophy recognizes the importance of consistent opportunities to read and write, as well as valuing discussions. Students had 30 minutes of independent reading and 55 minutes of language arts daily Monday-Thursday. I expected them to read for 30 minutes at home Monday-Friday. While they could choose the language in which they read for independent reading, the language arts block rotated between English and Spanish weekly. Throughout the year we talked as a class about the reading-writing link, discussing what it means to read like writers and write like readers.

The Looking Within/Looking Beyond unit spanned 3rd and 4th quarters, with consistent links between reading and writing. Typically, students chose the books they read for their reading requirements. During the unit, options were narrower because of the global literature focus, but students had choice as they participated in four book clubs and selected three books to read independently.

Students frequently wrote about what they were reading in addition to larger genre studies. During the third quarter, state testing and writing work samples impacted the regular language arts time, so students had two shorter writing assignments. In Spanish they wrote multiple identity poems, reflecting on themselves, their culture/values, and who they are as individuals. In English they were able to choose between a personal narrative or a realistic fiction piece incorporating a global experience, a chance for students to apply what they already knew based on genre studies earlier in

the year. Fourth quarter, students explored a new genre of literary essays. Based on suggestions by Calkins and Colleagues from the Reading and Writing Project (2012), students wrote a literary essay that explored a single theme or character in Spanish, while writing about how multiple texts explored a similar theme/concept in different ways in English.

### **A Closer Look: Book Clubs and Responses to Reading**

Before starting the unit, I booktalked the 11 options (see Table 1). While listening, students listed their preference for each book in order to consider interest as one aspect while grouping students. At the start of each book club round, students got into small groups with copies of a book club rubric/calendar. While students knew the date by which they needed to complete their books, they chose where they wanted to read to for the other meetings. They also had the option of deciding as a group to finish the book earlier than required.

| Title                                                                                                     | Author                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <a href="#"><i>Does My Head Look Big in This?</i></a>                                                     | Randa Abdel-Fattah              |
| <a href="#"><i>Ten Things I Hate About Me</i></a>                                                         | Randa Abdel-Fattah              |
| <i>Antes de ser libres</i>                                                                                | Julia Alvarez                   |
| <i>En busca de Milagros</i>                                                                               | Julia Alvarez                   |
| <i>Seedfolks</i>                                                                                          | Paul Fleischman                 |
| <a href="#"><i>Under the Mesquite</i></a>                                                                 | Guadalupe Garcia McCall         |
| <a href="#"><i>Maximilian and the Mystery of the Guardian Angel: A Bilingual Lucha Libre Thriller</i></a> | Xavier Garza                    |
| <a href="#"><i>Inside Out and Back Again</i></a>                                                          | Thanhha Lai                     |
| <a href="#"><i>A Little Piece of Ground</i></a>                                                           | Elizabeth Laird with Sonia Nimr |
| <a href="#"><i>Habibi</i></a>                                                                             | Naomi Shihab Nye                |
| <a href="#"><i>Shooting Kabul</i></a>                                                                     | N.H. Senzai                     |

Table 1: Book Club Books

When we met for the first book clubs, I reminded students of expectations. Ideally, they would have a free-flowing conversation about their books and I would mainly listen. In addition, their comments should reflect that they considered what peers have already stated.

When we began the book clubs for this unit, students were familiar with almost all of the six Notice and Note signposts (Beers & Probst, 2012), mini-lessons that supported students in thinking about

what they should pay attention to as they read in order to have a deeper understanding of the texts. I encouraged students to point out any thinking they did while reading related to these signposts. At times, when it seemed students were mainly making surface level comments about the text, I modeled examples of the signposts in the texts.

If students' comments were largely summarization, I reminded them that everyone had read the same book and as a result, their contributions should focus on going beyond summary. I often asked them to think of the reason why whatever part of the text they were summarizing stood out to them or why they wanted to bring it up in the discussion.

As typical, during the book club meetings, different groups and different students within groups needed a different level of scaffolding to push their thinking about the text. Conferring was a means to provide interim support to some students. For example, while reading *Shooting Kabul* (Senzai, 2010) because of the frequent flashbacks, one student demonstrated confusion about a key aspect. When I noted the confusion, while talking one-on-one, we looked at the text again and discussed signals in the text that would help in determining the transitions in the narration.

Discussions prompted by these books resulted in a range of conversations as students brought up their own reactions to the characters and events. Some texts described scenarios and cultures much different than students' lives, such as *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (Abdel-Fattah, 2005). Details related to the geographical context of Australia and the Muslim religion were completely new to the adolescent girls who participated in this book club; however, they were able to connect to Amal's emotions and respect how difficult it would have been for her to make a choice that would draw attention to something her peers would view as different. Books like *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011) provided readers with a portrayal of their own culture or a predominate culture in their community. Students considered how their families were similar and different to Lupita's, as well as considered the tough choices she had to make that went against some cultural norms or expectations.

Because of the range of experiences and cultures represented in the texts, book club meetings were rich opportunities to learn from each other and to co-construct understandings about texts and culture. Through interacting with peers, students were able to expand beyond their own thoughts and were able to benefit from their peers' perspectives and prior knowledge that supported stronger comprehension of the experiences in the texts.

## **Written Responses to Literature**

Writing is a powerful means to process thoughts and become more aware of thinking about text. As a result, I intentionally incorporated a range of written responses to reading into the unit, starting with informal quick writes and progressing toward more formal text analysis essays at the end of

the unit. In this section, I will outline student examples from in-class quick writes periodically throughout the unit. I use pseudonyms for each of the students and share journal excerpts exactly as they were written. Because they are quick writes, they are not as polished as writing that they have revised and edited.

Before writing the first reading response, I talked to students about the type of writing they should focus on. Similar to book clubs, I told them that their writing should not simply restate what happened in the text, but instead, it should be their thoughts and reactions to what they were reading. They wrote the following in their notebooks:

Example Questions to Consider:

- How is the main character's culture similar and/or different to my own?
- What influences impact the character's decisions? (motive)
- What can I learn from the character's experiences and decisions?

Because the written responses were at different points in the unit, the book club discussions and the book club responses had a reciprocal relationship. The writing could provide a springboard for processing thoughts that students could then share in book club meetings or lingering thoughts from book clubs could influence what was on students' minds when it was time to write.

Looking at different students' entries who participated in the same book clubs provides glimpses into the co-construction of meaning and the range of perspectives that students brought to the discussions. For example, shortly after reading a section of *Shooting Kabul* (Senzai, 2010) in which the events of 9/11 occurred about an event where the main character's mother is surprised, Daniela wrote, "*but what I'm confused of is that I thought she knew that, that was going to happen because she lived in Afghanistan and that's wear the terrorist came from*" (1/25/13). Her comment demonstrates a misconception that simply being from Afghanistan would result in an awareness of the terrorists' plans.

One of her classmates, Henry, loves history and is fascinated with wars. In one of his later journal entries, he wrote:

*just because someone from the same culture and religion as someone else that did something bad doesn't mean that they did it to and that we shouldn't judge there culture and religion because of that bad things. Some examples of what I'm talking about are pearl harbor and 9/11. After pearl harbor a lot of people started making fun of japanese people and started stereotyping them and discriminating them. the exact same thing happened to muslims after 9/11. (n.d.)*

His quote reflects both his background knowledge about other historical events as well as ideas

that the group discussed. His comments and those of others in the group served to clarify Daniela's confusion, expanding awareness that could prevent future stereotypes of whole groups based on the actions of some.

Student entries also demonstrate how the unit helped students strengthen their understandings of the world and interactions. For example, Charlie wrote:

*Another interesting thing I learned is that people judge others just because they are scared of them. I kind of knew that but it's true. I learned more about how it affects that person who's being bullied and how it can really really affect it. (2/18/13)*

In this instance, the text confirmed what he already believed, while also expanding his knowledge of the impact. In another entry Charlie continued to think through judgments that people make of others that he referred to as part of the human experience.

A salient theme in the notebook entries was readers considering relationships in their own lives based on the characters' experiences. For example, some students noted that while overall contexts (cultures or experiences) of the books were very different from their own lives, they could relate to relationships such as those among siblings or between parents and children. Referring to *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (Abdel-Fattah, 2005), Audrey noted:

*Her culture is really different and also her life. She's Muslim but I don't know a lot about Muslims...Also she has these parents that think they are cool. I can relate because my mom says she's "cool". (1/25/13)*

For others, the events or experiences made readers reflect on valuing others in their lives, such as Lizzy who while reading *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011) wrote:

*I also learned that in my life I should stop taking things for granted because her mom passed away and I still have my mom. She doesn't have cancer and she would be willing to do anything for me. Another thing I learned is that I should start caring and being nicer to my sister. Because at times in Lupita's life her siblings were all she had and she had to take care of them. (2/28/13)*

Both quotes demonstrate examples of literature prompting students to think about their lives.

## **Final Reflections**

Being able to plan instruction that incorporated a range of global literature book club sets allowed for a context in which students could better understand themselves and others. In the unit, I included the combination of reading, writing, and discussing in order for students to have multiple

means to consider the experiences portrayed.

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## Making Connections Matter

by Lenny Sánchez, Dara Bradley, and Jessi Spinder Menold.

The phrase “making connections” immediately calls to mind the popular triad of text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections. It would not be unusual to walk into a classroom in almost

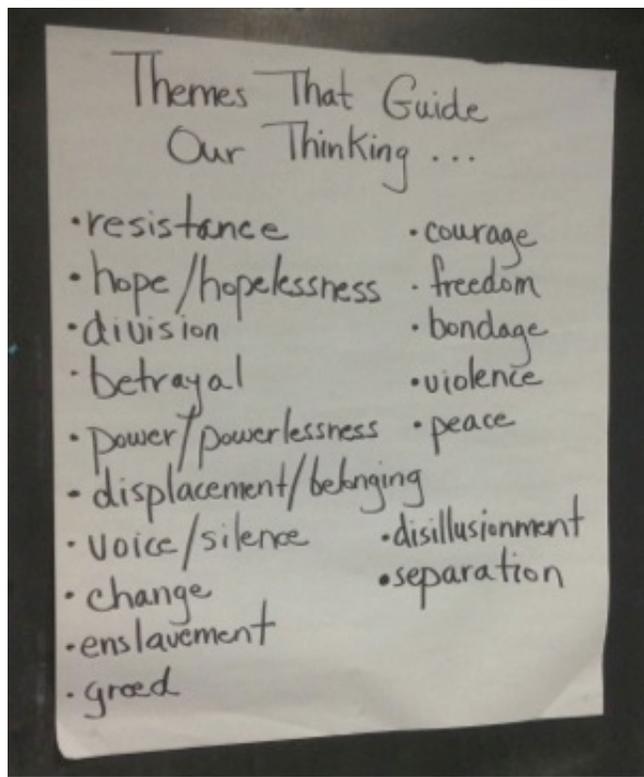
any school across the country and see a poster of these reading strategies tacked up on a wall. Without question, they deserve respectable recognition. Making connections, after all, is what allows reading to *become* personally meaningful. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) describes how a person's life experiences are what enable a text to be accessible and entered into by readers. Experiences break the boundary between the reader's world and the world of the text. Making connections seems to be at the heart of the answer to Rosenblatt's question, "What is the reader's starting point?"

### **Our Group Goals as Educators**

As a group of high school teachers, a principal, a media specialist, and a university professor, we came together as a literacy community for a year-long inquiry and found ourselves returning to this query, growing ever more curious about the role that making connections has for reading and beyond. We began to wonder whether we were teaching this strategy cursorily, even though we recited it frequently in our conversations with students. At its core, what does making connections really mean?

Our group met at an alternative secondary school in Columbia, Missouri where all of the teachers and participating principal worked. The school served around 200 students in grades 9-12, who attended the school because the traditional school system did not support them well. The school was designed to provide work-study experience, GED preparation, and career readiness in addition to its challenging academic program.

Our initial group goals focused on addressing literature instruction through an interdisciplinary stance and to nurture global awareness through literature studies. Although the teachers and principal were either new or fairly new to the alternative high school, they shared a justice-orientated approach to teaching and a desire to restructure the curricular divides between the English and Social Science disciplines. They wanted to co-construct course outcomes so that whether students were studying Pompeii or prepositional phrases, they could engage in similar cross-classroom learning experiences such as open exchange and perspective-sharing. For example, as students read the novel *Sold* (McCormick, 2008) in both their English and Social Studies classrooms, they dealt with questions of: "Whose voices are heard and whose voices are silent? What is the evidence of power? Where are the eyes of resistance seen? How do themes of freedom and bondage surface?" Teachers and students relied on powerful questions such as these, which hung on chart paper in the classrooms, to unveil assumptions, explore point of view, and reflect on relevance to their own situations across both classroom contexts. Photo 1 shows another example of a shared chart created by the teachers, used to support cross-cutting themes found in curriculum across subject areas.



On average, we met once a month as a study group to set curricular goals, select and evaluate literature for classroom use, and share classroom experiences in regards to student discussions and teaching difficulties and surprises. The more we talked and shared about our work during the year, the more we recognized making connections was at the heart of our discussions. In what follows, Dara, an English teacher, describes how one literature study at the beginning of the year, in particular, helped her begin to think more deeply about how connections matter.

### **Connecting to the World through Book Study: Dara Bradley**

As a veteran reading teacher, turned first year high school English teacher, I was trying to find books that students would both enjoy and that would fit into the world literature class curriculum I was expected to cover. More importantly, I wanted students to be able to connect to characters outside of their own understandings of the world. They needed to be able to see themselves as living and practicing citizens who belonged to an ever-changing global society. My tenth-grade classroom consisted of “at risk” secondary students who began their school careers in other buildings around the district. Most of them had sat through years of teaching that minimally addressed their day-to-day concerns. I wanted to help them process their own life experiences while opening up opportunities to look at the world differently. I hoped using literature set in global contexts could instill a greater curiosity of the world and confront them with ideas and practices from differing vantage points.

I decided to start with a book that I thought would be out of students’ comfort zones, hoping that getting them used to risk-taking from the beginning of the year might encourage questions and

sharing as natural responses to text. As I later recognized, these types of interactions operate as necessary gateways that enable readers to link their experiences to texts and, therefore, gain new perspectives and understandings. I selected Markus Zusak's (2006) [\*I Am the Messenger\*](#) as our first book study.

This book is set in an unnamed Australian city where the main character, Ed, age nineteen, inadvertently stops a bank robbery. Subsequently, he receives mysterious tasks that send him around the town with specific instructions to decipher. These tasks intersect him with the lives of strangers and friends with whom he must accomplish meaningful acts of goodness. For instance, he finds himself consoling a lonely elderly woman and a depressed teenage girl, and he repairs a broken relationship between a father and daughter and between two brothers. Over time, he gains confidence that he can accomplish anything and recognizes that he has the ability to change lives. Ed, in fact, transforms his own life from one burdened with discouragement and bad luck to one that illustrates how the smallest deeds make the world a better place.

I divided the book into sections to engage the class with the text through read alouds, whole group readings, and independent reading. Together, we explored conventional literary elements such as foreshadowing, flashback, subplots and dialect along with our interpretations and connections with the book. Students also experimented with developing narrative writing as they examined Zusak's writing strategies and craft.

As we read, students began sharing topics of interest they wanted to further study such as language variances and the cross-cultural commonality of what it means to be an underdog. These interests surfaced through "aha" moments when students either suddenly understood something they did not know before or when they began drawing parallels between their lives and the life of Ed.

This book was the first time that these students had been exposed to Australian dialects, which piqued an interest in learning more about the language differences between Australian English and American English. Discussions led to investigations on cultural dialects to further reflect on how people form assumptions based upon how one talks. The students shared stories of judgment that they had experienced and spoke about their initial reactions to Ed's speech.

Moving beyond language and dialect, several students shared an interest in learning more about Australia as a national entity so we stopped reading and writing for a short while to engage in research. We hopped on computers to gather information on Australian culture and society. Looking back at this decision, I am so thankful we took a "break" from reading in this way. Matt, for example, wanted to learn more about a barefoot soccer game in the book called sledge game. He wondered if it was another name for soccer, rugby, or even a different description for American football. We all researched this topic for part of a day and ended up finding ourselves looking into

sports in other countries. I realized that putting the book down literally was an important part of our book study because it gave us the opportunity to appreciate national differences, such as sports, and to examine stereotypes, as with our discussions on dialect, and understand them as superficial knowledge that engenders prejudice. Taking time to nurture these types of connections, ones that might on surface appear to be trivial, enabled students to read more deeply and confront what could otherwise be a conflict of understanding between them and the text.

One of my favorite conversations occurred when students discussed the meaning of “underdog” and valued it as an underlying message of the book. Jevon referenced research he conducted about Australia, sharing “Australians like to root for the underdog because of its history of unjust authority.” His comment, astutely made, certainly confirmed to the class that our observation of the underdog theme was perhaps a correct assessment of the author’s intentions. Although the discussion did not lead into grand inquiries on the early settlements, Indigenous wars, or industrial unrest of Australia, his remark added a new way for us to connect to the text, to imagine the possibility that Ed may represent more than a single person in his desire to live a life free of restraint.

Within these conversations, the class also participated in several discussions about what it means to be a passive member of society versus doing something about the problems one sees within a community. In the book, Ed constantly found himself at this decision point as he witnessed his relationships changing with his friends and relatives. Ed forced us to think about the ways we wanted to participate in our communities and if we would act to make a difference.

Across the book study, dialogue emerged in ways that differed from a regimen where students are forced to relate the text to their experiences as dictated by a predetermined scope and sequence. Rather, there was room for ambiguity. I was excited to see which paths our reading would take, and I was more than pleased to find us on the trails of human values, national past times, and language. I would not suggest that their reading of this text translated into transformative global awareness where they understood the interrelationships between the past, present, and future of global issues. However, their questions and curiosities encouraged them to think critically about the text and to connect creatively in ways that helped them care about the decisions Ed made for his life.

We did not approach the text through equal fascination, but our various interests and experiences invited all of us to engage in the text in unpredictable ways. For example, it was not difficult to recognize that not all students enjoyed focusing on dialects, but our conversations about talk did expose us to being analytical about the language used in the text and to see how Ed was shaped by it.

## **Final Reflection**

Throughout the year, Dara's class continued reading other novels set in various parts of the world such as *In Darkness* (Lake, 2012), *Slave: My True Story* (Nazer & Lewis, 2005), and *Saving Francesca* (Marchetta, 2006). Each text was connected by a theme centered on teenagers as the protagonists who faced their horrifying pasts or everyday drama. The book studies were often tempered with humor as they addressed life-changing moments.

Very similar types of book studies occurred in the other teachers' classrooms involved in the year-long inquiry group. The teachers carefully selected texts, including *I Am Nujood Age 10 and Divorced* (Ali, Minoui, & Coverdale, 2010) and *First crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants* (Gallo, 2007), which they hoped would not only expand students' views of the world but would inspire them to see themselves differently within their own communities. Just as Dara listened closely to her students' questions and interests, our inquiry group gave attention to our own individual uncertainties and wonders related to using these texts in the classrooms. We considered how to encourage author critique with well-defined assumptions and beliefs, nurture rigorous discussions, and focus on issues of difference while instilling a culture of inclusion. These conversations led us to thinking about the meaning of connections.

As educators, we wanted our students to make connections to texts because we hoped the characters and storylines would provide opportunities for self-reflection as students witnessed how others navigated dilemmas and successes. Although we could not predict exactly how the students would relate to the texts, we organized our teaching so that opportunities could emerge. Just as in Dara's classroom, students linked themselves to stories through their questions and queries. Giving attention to these through whole-class discussions and time for research allowed their connections to be perceived as more than just an automatic response to a text but as genuine life reflections. In this way, making connections involved an examination of experience, figuring out what was similar and different between one's perceptions of the world and a world that at times seemed unusual.

In our inquiry group, what we ultimately relearned was that making connections is at the heart of all learning. Not just in reading a text or classroom learning, but in how we relate to one another, develop empathy for what we see, and form a worldview different than our own. Encouraging students to make connections to a text is just a stepping stone to the ways they need to make connections to ideas, people, and circumstances intersecting the world in which they live. Even though we live in a world in which everything seems accessible, we must be diligent in reaching out to make connections.

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## **Integrating Global Literature into the High School English Curriculum**

by Lithia Springs Global Literacy Community

Lithia Springs High School is a medium sized secondary school situated in Douglas County, Georgia just to the southwest of the city of Atlanta. The geographical position of the school affords some interesting characteristics that other schools in the county or further from the city do not experience. Our student population is constantly shifting in numbers, ethnic mix, and socio-economic groupings. Teachers often experience new students with only a week or two left of school at the end of an academic year or students leaving for unknown reasons and then reappearing months later. The county allows for families to reposition their children in school after school depending on behavioral or tension issues. If students are not doing well in one school because they cannot get along with others or teachers, they can move to another school, so it not unusual for upper-level students to have attended more than two or three secondary schools within the county. Then, there are always those students who are found out-of-district and told to leave; they often return when the proper paperwork presents itself.

The demographics of our high school are quite common for this part of the south: 60-65% Black, 13-15% Hispanic, 20-25% White, and a mixture of Asian/Islander. The socio-economic indicators are as diverse as the student population itself. We have students who come from affluent families

and students who know what it is like to sleep in the car or van. Diversity is as good a word as any to describe our population – fluctuating is a close second in word choice.

## **Our Teacher Study Group**

As English teachers, our goal was to integrate global literature into our regular curricula at all grade levels, including AP Language and AP Literature. We located new titles that became part of our classrooms and developed strategies for reading the literature and writing about the literature. We also began to integrate more use of technology into these experiences, especially our newly installed Promethean boards. The use of global literature was particularly important to us because our population is so diverse with students from many different countries and parts of the world and a large ESL population.

In our meetings, we discussed classroom activities and strategies with global literature and the inclusion of real-world connections and engagement tools. In our classrooms, we focused on technology to support global literature and encourage cultural connections, strategies to incorporate added content in the lesson plans, excerpts from literature to promote student engagement, unit assessments, and technology enhancements. In particular, we increased our use of YouTube, realizing that we could find almost anything we wanted in regard to teens in other countries engaged in a range of experiences that allowed our students to see both similarities and differences. We also encouraged discussion between students of their own life experiences as compared to those in the global literature and integrated more primary sources to research first-hand knowledge related to the global literature we were discussing. Students kept journals of their observations and responses to the literature and wrote personal reflections about their experiences in reading, discussing and learning about global cultures.

In the following sections, each teacher from our group is introduced and then gives a brief reflection on her/his work with global literature.

### **Robin Farmer - 12<sup>th</sup> Grade British Literature/Composition**

Robin has been teaching for eleven years in the same high school. She holds a double major in English and Social Studies with added course work in both areas. She is also Honors and AP certified. For the last few years, she has taught British Literature/Composition regular education and collaborative special education. Her interests are steeped in the language of the foundations of British literature, and that commitment transitions to her senior students.

**Robin:** British Literature by its nature focuses on the more traditional Western canon with strong ties to American literature. There are, however, opportunities to make connections with other cultures. We read “Federigo’s Falcon” of Italian origin during our medieval studies. The themes of

chivalry and courtly love are still relevant in today's modern society, particularly in the realm of dating which is of utmost interest to teenagers. Our class discussions offered students the opportunity to analyze how perceptions that originated during the Middle Ages are still present in our society. Students also had the chance to think critically about the code of chivalry and work in groups with graphic organizers to categorize the elements of the code by determining if they were still present in our society, are not present in our society but should be, or thankfully are no longer a part of our society. Students were required to defend their answers, and then presented their conclusions to the class which sparked some lively debate and a high level of student engagement.

### **Wesley Miller—American Literature/Composition & Yearbook/Journalism**

Wesley has been teaching for two years. His degrees are in journalism. He grew up in Africa which gives him an unusual perspective on literature and writing. He took over the duties of the yearbook mid-semester and produced a book worthy of praise. His energy and enthusiasm is magnetic with his students.

**Wesley:** I facilitated literature circle conversations on our country's approach to civil disobedience. We read Thoreau, Martin Luther King Jr. and Occupy Wall Street materials. The students were especially engaged in class conversations after viewing clips and pictures from the Birmingham Civil Rights campaign. The fact that many of the victims were in high school made the conversation more urgent as students grappled with ideas of systematic inequalities. It seemed to me that this is something that they have always heard about, but never had the opportunity to engage at a deeper intellectual level.

In another unit, we explored various Native American creation stories. We discussed the nature of creation stories and students identified their own beliefs about creation and how they related to the Native American stories. We extended this conversation to include the importance of these beliefs to self-definition. Students worked in pairs to create their own stories which specifically reflected cultural viewpoints.

### **Caitlin Hanzlick – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Literature/Composition & American Literature/Composition**

Caitlin had taught for six years prior to coming to our school. She had taught abroad and at an alternative school and so came to us quite qualified and prepared to teach our students. She holds a degree in English Literature and is working on her Masters in English Education. Her knowledge of the content of the literature, American and World, is unmatched, and her ability to reference and allude to other works provides a wealth of information and interest for her students.

**Caitlin:** In Georgia, the traditional focus of the 10th grade English curriculum is World Literature.

While the district where I worked this past year rejected this notion (unlike other places I have worked), I nonetheless selected my texts with the traditional focus in mind despite the flak I received for doing so. Since the history course also taken by 10th graders is World History, it seemed only logical to me to select texts that make cross-curricular connections.

I organized my text selections around country- or region-specific units that aligned with the history curriculum as much as possible, including Greece, Asia, Italy, the Middle East & North Africa, Russia, Germany, and the U.S. Within each unit, every text I selected was about, set in, or written by a member of that area. Along with teaching the literature standards, I provided extracurricular opportunities to explore language and culture. For example, during the Russian unit, I taught the students how to pronounce the Cyrillic alphabet and spell their names using it as well. In previous years when I have taught this course, I also included culinary connections. For students who excelled on the end-of-unit test, I provided a feast featuring the cuisine of the culture whose literature we'd just read. The Middle East unit was quite telling; few students have heard of hummus, falafel, feta cheese, or couscous--things I eat quite frequently. I also shared photographs of my own personal travels to places in the literature we read.

As a person who has traveled extensively and given the reality of today's global economy, I believe *very* strongly in the importance of exposing students to the diversity of the world and teaching them to appreciate rather than fear that diversity. They harbor so many false impressions and misconceptions about simple things, especially in regard to the Arab world, that if perpetuated could have severely negative consequences on our future. Students need to know about the world around them, and literature is a highly effective vehicle.

Among the major texts I incorporated into the course this year were: *Antigone* by Sophocles (Greece), *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (Asia), Dante's *Inferno* (Italy), *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (Iran), *Anthem* by Ayn Rand (Russia), selected fairy tales by The Brothers Grimm (Germany), and *The Ballot or the Bullet* by Malcolm X (US). Even though this list is extensive, in the future I'd like to include units on South America because I feel the Latina/o culture and literature were somewhat neglected.

One of the several formal writing assignments focused on the benefits of reading world literature. Each student had to generate three specific reasons why reading literature from around the world was better than not doing so. Because of the way I structured my class and emphasized the importance of the cultural context for each piece of literature, I felt it was crucial for students to self-reflect on this focus. I wanted them to ask themselves, "Why is Ms. Hanzlick making us read all this stuff from around the world?" and I didn't want to just give them the answer. Both the metacognitive and multicultural components of this assignment--in conjunction, of course, with the Common Core standards also addressed through the task--provided an authentic assessment of

their learning and global awareness.

### **Shelly Mitchell – 9<sup>th</sup> Literature/Composition & 10<sup>th</sup> Literature/Composition & Pre-AP®**

Shelly came to our high school after teaching in one other school. She has eight years of experience and holds degrees in English and Literature with extra course work in Education. She is currently working on her Masters in Secondary English Education. She is one of those rare individuals who have the patience for the younger high school students and the compassion to teach them in the face of their own adversities and challenges. She has a keen awareness of real-world connections between the literature of the studies and the current issues and outside literacy of her students. Relevancy runs rampant in her classes.

**Shelly** - As students met in literature circles discussing their group's particular text, it amazed me how much they had to say about the world around them. Most students do not have an opportunity to discuss their misconceptions about a certain culture or country with peers, or have civilized debates about social issues that are handled differently in America than in other nations. One incident in particular that really stands out in my mind is when a group was reading [\*Night\*](#) by Elie Wiesel and the entire group was amazed at how one man could cause so much pain and suffering for an entire race of people. They were angry, confused, sad, and then something amazing happened; they began to bring in modern examples of genocide without me having to prompt them to do so. This kind of event can only happen when students are engaged in their reading and can relate to it; this seems to be best prompted by using multicultural texts. Since we live in such a diverse country, classrooms will benefit from more multicultural texts.

### **Phil Fowler – 10<sup>th</sup> grade Literature/Composition Honors & AP® Literature/Composition**

Phil is a graduate of LSHS; after time in the military and business, he decided to use his degree in English & Literature to procure his teaching certificate and return to high school. He also is involved in student government and is the school's track coach. His room seems to always be filled with students for assorted reasons. His insights into the materials and into what students need afford him connections to his students.

**Phil:** I never taught the former World Literature class, and this was my first year teaching this particular curriculum to 10<sup>th</sup> grade honors students. I think it is very beneficial and important to encourage students to become familiar with the larger world, and literature courses provide excellent opportunities. I hope this year, with a more established professional learning community and better understanding of the curriculum, to be able to spend time on broad cultural knowledge.

Below is a brief overview of what I did teach last year in relation to world literature and general knowledge.

- The first extended text of the year was *Anthem*: Read brief author bio and contemporary history of Russia to include rise of communism. Read excerpt from *The Jungle* to contextualize popularity of communism as opposed to capitalism. While majority of class discussion focused on identity, freedom and personal choice, there were a few discussions of modern communism – China, Cuba, and especially North Korea. Also, some discussion of topics in a summer reading book, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.
  - Political debate: Assigned teams to three candidates – Democrat (Obama), Republican (Romney), and Libertarian (Johnson). Also assigned analysis teams to various topics, such as economy, health care, social issues, etc. During the research process and actual debate, had many discussions of other areas of the world through topics such as national defense and foreign relations, especially concerning the Middle East, North Korea and China. Some students who read *Splendid Suns* responded to issues related to Russia, Middle East, communism and radical Islam. Research and debate presented several Ah-ha moments as students were surprised to realize the extent of America’s role in aspects of other nations’ affairs.
  - While viewing *Pleasantville*, read several texts concerning identity and freedom, including excerpts from NSC-68, detailing America’s response to communism. While most students felt this document was boring and too difficult, several found it interesting and illuminating of that historical period and America’s role during the Cold War.
  - Read *Copper Sun*: Some students read and provided additional contextual/historical information regarding the slave trade and Africa. One first-generation student from Africa brought an example of the type of fabric described by the main character and was even going to bring one of the traditional African dishes but did not have time.
- Malcolm X*: While the unit built around this film was primarily concerned with rhetoric, we were able to bring in a slight amount of Islamic history and a fair amount of contemporary Islam.
- Short works: Tolstoy, Chekhov, Grimm, Dante, mythology.

This was only my second year teaching AP literature, and I focused mainly on American and British works and did not really “branch out” to include works from the larger world. However, I did include the following items of interest:

- *The Poisonwood Bible*: Set primarily in Africa. Small groups had different assignments related to issues in this book. One group researched African history, specifically the colonial era and the contemporary period, and presented this information and its relationship to issues in the book. While all students had taken relevant history courses (often at Honors and AP

level), many found the literary representation illuminating.

- *Hamlet*: We focused primarily on the text, but did discuss Renaissance thinking and how it affected Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, and how it was presented in the play.
- I realized too late that students lacked adequate knowledge of classical mythology, so we did a very brief overview that will likely be expanded next year.

## **Robert Clemente – 9<sup>th</sup> Literature/Composition**

Robert was English Department chair during this project. He has taught in the K-12 system for twenty years and the Georgia two-year college system along with adjunct teaching for two universities. From year to year, he has taught every grade level and a myriad of subjects. His student-centered approach and interactive style carries great acceptance by his students. He holds two degrees in English and Education, a Masters in Secondary Education, and a Specialist degree in Secondary English Education. He currently is completing a Ph.D. in Literacy and Learning at Georgia State University.

**Robert:** We were studying *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps not normally considered global literature, but to a predominantly American 9<sup>th</sup> grade audience, a different time, place, and culture. Because of my awareness of our group's focus on global literature, I realized that reading and studying this play would afford the opportunity for serious considerations about the culture of the time. Certainly, the language itself would be challenging with this early high school age group. On one particular occasion, I had the students in pairs working on language matching activities and character analyses of the play. Melissa, who usually likes to work alone anyway, called me over to be part of her "group." I complied and joined her in the desk across from hers. She began talking about the correlations between then and now... as we talked back and forth, she got bright-eyed and exclaimed, "I've got it. Roslyn was a player and was giving Romeo a hard time and never expected to respond to his advances. If she had serious concerns for Romeo that would have created a loose end in the story that Shakespeare would have had to deal with in his writing." She went on to say that she did not see it right away until she got past the difficulty in the language. When I said in class that the way to read a play or a story is to consider the characters as real people, she began to put things together. She went on to explain to me that she understood the time a little better now and that daughters would have been expected to obey and get married to whomever was chosen by the parents. She also made comments about social climbing. The play and the story opened up to her and she saw things she never would have imagined. And, of course, the overall insight is that Shakespeare touches the human condition in all time periods. The lights turned on for this student, and throughout the remainder of the study, she was engaged and participatory in the activities. She was usually a very quiet girl, but I found her to be quite expressive and voluntary with her thoughts and expressions about the play and its plot, characters,

and themes. Her engagement would have never happened without that extra awareness I brought into the study because of the direct influence of having written the proposal for our global literacy community and the meetings/discussions we had as teachers regarding the literature.

## **Final Reflections**

Our students did reach new levels of global awareness as evidenced by their journals, writing, and discussions. They also increased their tolerance of one another and their willingness to meet new people within the school. Students began to recognize and realize that all cultures share in common family structures, education, religion, entertainment, and social frames—we are all different and yet we are all the same.

Our use of global literature was integrated into the curriculum we were developing to meet our new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, which is one reason why we put a focus on students writing about the global literature. Our department not only met our federal student improvement goals but surpassed them two times over on the final end-of-course tests. As teachers, we believe that our new emphases of reading and writing and talking about global literature helped students attain increases in their test scores.

## **Creating a Window to the World**

by Jennifer Crosthwaite and Tiffany Altman

*The speaking child has the ability to direct his attention in a dynamic way. He can view changes in his immediate situation from the point of view of past activities, and he can act in the present from the viewpoint of the future. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 36)*

At the beginning of our literary journey, our team decided it was critical to create a strong foundation for student dialogue. In an era of high stakes testing and an overwhelming focus on teaching specific skills in order to meet the necessary standards, educators have become the *masters* of information while the students have become the passive recipients of our knowledge. As a result, student-centered learning is often pushed to the side in order to make room for drilling of skills. Educators tend to forget and not pay heed to the importance of encouraging students to take ownership of their learning through dialogue.

An important part of empowerment is allowing students to embrace their thoughts, responses, and opinions and building such knowledge through peer-to-peer interaction and dialogue. As Vygotsky states, student speech and dialogue is the foundation of student learning, connecting their past, current, and future knowledge. Undoubtedly, children are able to change their perspective on situations depending on their past experiences, while also taking into account future possibilities.

Dialogue allows this shift to occur in a way that supports the dynamic nature of reflection, thought processes, and development of perception. The following activities allowed students to embrace their experiences and bring literary dialogue to the forefront of their education through picture books and read alouds as a steppingstone to global connections.

The Cunningham Colts, a community in Henderson, Nevada, was built on the passion, dedication, and drive of five third-grade teachers. We embarked on a journey in the 2012-2013 school year to bring world literature to students. As a grade level, we had already been working cooperatively together the past few years. We valued the importance of supplementing our required reading series with exceptional literature that connected with math, science, and social studies to provide our students with a richer foundation about the community and world they live in.

As a grade level, we met formally and informally. We sat together daily during our lunch hour, which provided an opportunity to share stories we had read, activities we had done, and student reactions. During these short yet productive sessions, we discussed our initial hesitations of sharing stories that touched on sensitive issues such as poverty, hunger, and other global issues. These hesitations mostly stemmed from our fear of how our students might react and the questions they might ask. Through conversation, practice, and support of each other's goals, we came to realize that the dialogue that would emerge and questions that would be asked from sharing these stories were the foundation for helping students understand their important role in the world and the changes they can make to make the world a better place.

Our formal meetings provided opportunities to discuss the book we had chosen, *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action* (Bomer and Bomer, 2001). Such meetings allowed us to make connections and provide classroom examples of what we had done in our classrooms and how these experiences connected to this text. Finally, these formal meetings provided an opportunity to plan and eventually reflect on our classroom experiences--an essential aspect of our practice.

### **Student Guided Questions as a Basis for Inquiry**

Children are naturally curious, inquisitive, and bubbling with questions. With every read aloud, dozens of questions emerged in our classrooms. With every turn of a page, children's hands rose in an excitement of wonder. With every illustration observed, students curiously leaned forward to talk about all aspects of the pictures including character's facial expressions, actions, and feelings evoked as readers. As educators, we constantly nurtured and celebrated their excitement and curiosity and often contributed our own questions and wonderings. Throughout the school year, we recorded our questions in large poster paper and showcased them around our classroom. Students often referenced these questions during their journal responses and served as a means for deeper

and more reflective responses.

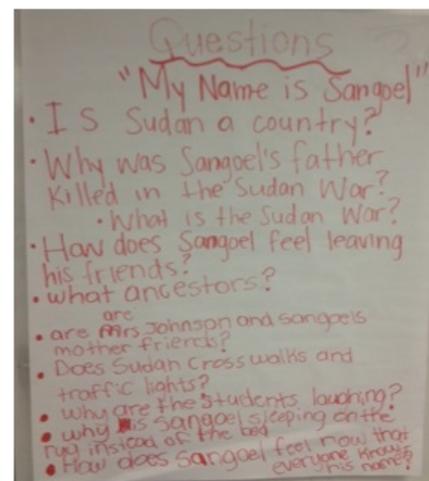
The process of asking questions was also an important part of our classroom environments. In fact, the act of reading is a social process; it is a phenomenon that not only occurs to an individual, but can also exist within a greater context that includes interpersonal aspects of community learning. The types of opportunities given to students to engage in collaborative learning greatly affect their academic achievement. Eun (2010) states:

*A collaborative culture would value common learning goals that are shared by the students as each contributes to the overall classroom learning. Competition would be devalued as the achievement of the shared learning goal would serve as a common purpose toward which everyone strives. (p. 408)*

Throughout our classrooms, a sense of camaraderie and support was exemplified as students agreed and nodded when others asked a question. For example, while reading [\*My Name is Sangoel\*](#) (Williams, 2009), Michael, “Is Sudan a country?” Immediately, this comment created a domino effect of other questions. As students agreed, supported, and encouraged each other through their dialogue, questions were recorded on chart paper, as seen in the following figure.

“My Name is Sangoel”

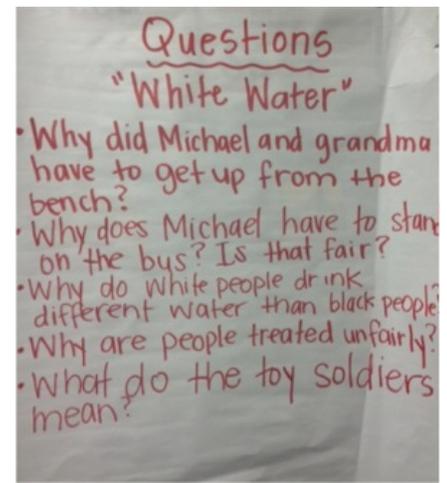
- Is Sudan a country?
- Why was Sangoel’s father killed in the Sudan war? What is the Sudan war?
- How does Sangoel feel leaving his friends?
- What are ancestors?
- Are Mrs. Johnson and Sangoel’s mother friends?
- Does Sudan crosswalks and traffic lights?
- Why are the students laughing?
- Why is Sangoel sleeping on the rug instead of the bed?
- How does Sangoel feel now that everyone knows his name?



Another book, *White Water* (2011) by Michael Bandy, is a true story about the experiences of the author who lived during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. Bandy discusses how he fantasized about tasting water from the “Whites Only” water foundation because it seemed more refreshing, cool, and tasty. At the end of the story, he learns that both water fountains receive water from the same pipe and that many of the challenges in his life were merely part of his imagination and so could be overcome. The following questions were generated by students during the read aloud:

“White Water”

- Why did Michael and grandma have to get up from the bench?
- Who does Michael have to stand on the bus? Is this fair?
- Why do white people drink different water than black people?
- Why are people treated unfairly?
- What do the toy soldiers mean?

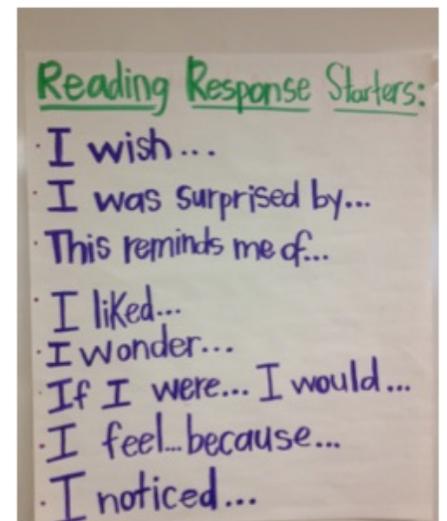


## Literary Letters as Written Dialogue

Literary letters were used throughout the year as a way to engage students in written dialogue with their peers in a formal, yet non-threatening way. In the beginning of the school year, we recognized that students often do not know how to *talk* about a book. They are constantly concerned with making sure they answer a question about a text. In other words, students are accustomed to reading a text and answering literal-level questions. The purpose of literary letters is to go beyond this thinking and more importantly, beyond *I liked this book*. As a means to help support students, we posted anchor charts of Response Starters. Response Starters were also an important resource for ELL students, as well as those students in special education, since it allowed them an opportunity to have a specific reference point for their thoughts. Students were often observed looking up at this chart and sometimes getting out of their seats to better see the chart paper. Giving students a safer form of responding by providing ideas to generate their thinking, as well as reminding them that they had the freedom to create their own response starters was a successful way of improving student participation and metacognition during the writing process. The following is one of the anchor charts posted in the room throughout the year:

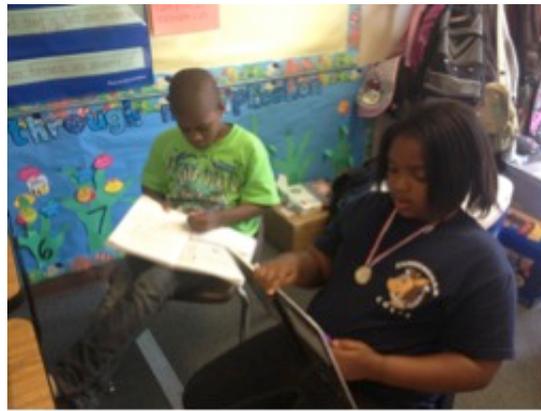
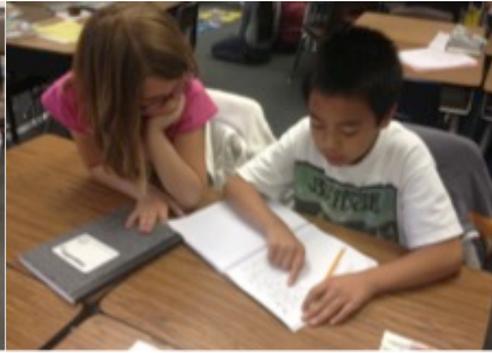
### Reader Response Starters:

- I wish...
- I was surprised by...
- This reminds me of...
- I liked...
- I wonder...
- If I were...I would...
- I feel... because...
- I noticed...

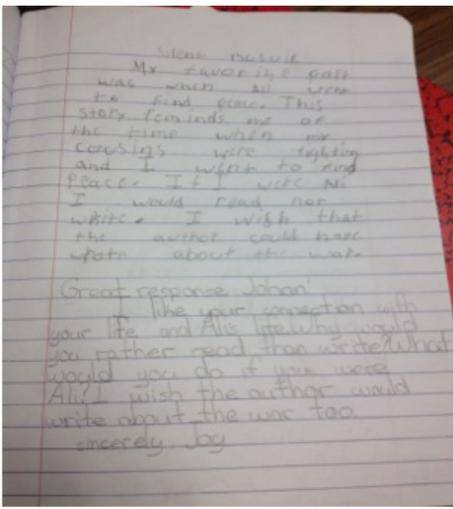


After each read aloud, students were asked to respond in their journals. Students then partnered with another peer (usually predetermined by the teacher) to read aloud their response. Once they read their responses, students were asked to switch journals with each other and begin their literary letter. Finally, students read their letter to their peer and

returned the journal. The following pictures were taken during these exchanges:



The following is an example of a literary letter from a book called [\*Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad\*](#) by James Rumford (2008) about a young boy living during times of war who finds peace by writing in calligraphy.



The literary letter reads:

“My favorite part was when Ali went to find peace. This story reminds me of the time when my cousins were fighting and I went to find peace. If I were Ali I would read not write. I wish that the author could have wrote about the war”

“Great response Johan! I like your connection with your life and Ali’s life. Why would you rather read than write? What would you do if you were Ali? I wish the author would write about the war too. Sincerely, Joy”

This letter, along with the others created throughout the year, showed that students were able to make connections with characters and understand the experiences of others. Literary letters was an activity that all students enjoyed because they were able to share their thoughts about a book, while also learning how their peers responded to the same story.

### **You’ve Got Mail: Perspective Postcards**

Another engagement that we decided to do was to write postcards using the characters of the books we read. We found that it was important to teach students about point of view and perspective. By doing so, students developed a sense of empathy towards others. The ability to experience the unknown or unfamiliar through literature widens our understanding of the world, particularly important when the unfamiliar pertains to opposing and divergent views. Acquiring an empathetic perspective towards the distant and unfamiliar allows students to better cope with our increasingly diverse and interconnected world. In a globalized world, students should begin to value those who may be different, which will encourage them to become mindful and develop kindness, positive cooperation, and appreciation of all. Students created postcards using the point of view of a character they chose. They were also given the choice to write to another character from the same story or a character from a different story, since many of the books we read had similar themes.

This postcard was written from the point of view of the character Zero from *Zero* (Otoshi, 2010), who always felt like he was not worth as much as the other numbers. He eventually realizes, through the help of supportive friends, that he can be worth a great value when joined with other numbers. This book illustrates the importance of cooperation, being yourself, and respecting others.

“Dear Zero, I know why are sad. You are sad because you are the least number. By the way you can still be a big number with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. I know you are sad, but remember you are the first number! Sincerely, Blue”





“Freedom to think what you want to think” “The best color is brown,” “The best color is violet,”  
The best color is blue,” “The best color is red,” and “The best color is black.”

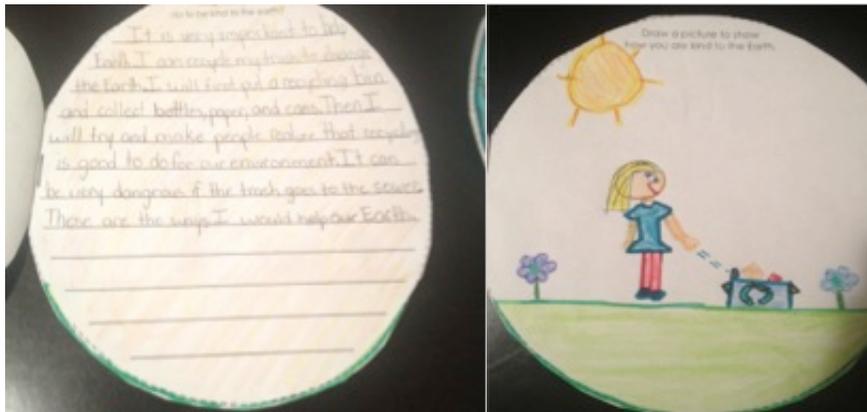


“Article 27: Everybody has the freedom to become anything they want. You can do anything”

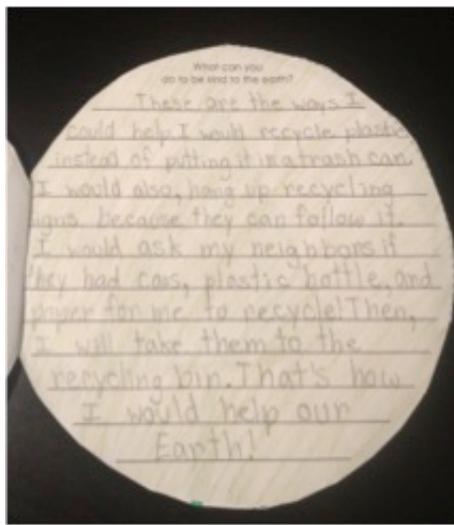
## Environmental Awareness

One particularly important unit was environmental awareness. Bomer and Bomer (2001) state, “The teacher’s role is to help children hone one topic, delve into it more deeply, perhaps sustaining discussion over several days and feeding it with written responses and rereading” (pp. 49-50). We began with student-generated questions and ideas about recycling and taking care of our earth. This led us to read several books about the earth, compost, recycling, renewable energy, and many nonfiction texts about the earth’s composition. It was an engaging way to connect literature, science, and social studies. One book in particular sparked amazing curiosity among students, [\*Energy Island; How One Community Harnessed the Wind and Changed their World\*](#) by Allan Drummond (2011). This story tells about a small Danish island decided to become energy independent by using renewable resources to reduce carbon emissions and so has both a narrative and informational components. It led students to engage in inquiry about whether or not our country and state use renewable resources, and the effects of using them for our planet. We believe that these are the type of stories that genuinely engage our students, create a love for learning, and most importantly, can change the world.

The following are a few pictures from activities during our unit.



“It is very important to help Earth. I can recycle my trash to change the Earth. I will first put a recycling bin and collect bottles, paper, and cans. Then I will try and make people realize that recycling is good to do for the environment. It can be very dangerous if the trash goes to the sewer. These are the ways I would help our Earth. “



“These are the way I could help. I could recycle plastic instead of putting it in a trashcan. I would also, hang up recycling signs because they can follow it. I would ask my neighbors if they had cans, plastic bottles, and paper for me to recycle! Then, I will take them to the recycling bin. That’s how I would help our Earth!”

### **World Literacy: Making a Difference**

Our culminating project brought together the reasons we read world literature--learning about the experiences of others, widening our perspectives of the world, and building empathy and care for those who differ from our own cultures. Our students decided to write, illustrate, and publish books to donate to a third world country in hopes of improving education and world literacy. Throughout the year, we constantly referred to [The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq](#) by Jeanette Winter (2005), [Nasreen’s Secret School](#) by Jeanette Winter (2009), and *We are all Born Free (2011)* by Amnesty International (2011). These books instilled a strong sense of what the world is like for children and education.

Upon reading these texts and referring to the article of human rights concerning education for all individuals, one student asked the important question, *what can we do to help?* It was as though all of our read alouds, dialogue, questioning, and wonder had come together to bring about this important question about advocacy, change, and agency. Although we had already thought about having students write books to donate, they initiated the idea, giving them authentic ownership over this endeavor. After our discussion and brainstorming ideas, we decided to use our own literacy and knowledge to publish books for other children. Through a long process and many revisions, we were able to donate over 80 children’s books published by our very own authors and world advocates. Books, along with school supplies that we collected, were donated to an organization called Teach Cambodia for a school being built in the small village of Boeng.

As in other units, this activity led students to learn more about Cambodia, other world problems such as hunger and malnutrition, and ways to combat such problems. As world advocates, our

students learned about peanut butter as a new and effective way of helping those who are malnourished in other countries (Project Peanut Butter), leading them to also engage in a peanut butter drive to send to Cambodia along with the books and school supplies. Undoubtedly, our students became change agents and world advocates. Through engaging in world literature, we made a difference in the world. A true education is making a difference for ourselves and the world we live in.

The following are pictures from our book showcase event:





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Jennifer Crosthwaite is a teacher for the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada and is pursuing a doctoral degree in literacy at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Jennifer is committed to social justice education and integrating world literature across the curriculum.

Tiffany Altman is a lead teacher at Rocketship Brilliant Minds Academy. Tiffany is the third grade English Language Arts teacher at her school and is passionate about instilling core values among her students, focusing on respect, responsibility, persistence, empathy, and initiative.