

ISSN 2577-0551



# WOW STORIES

CONNECTING TO GLOBAL CULTURES THROUGH  
LITERATURE, ART, AND COLLABORATION

Volume IV, Issue 7  
December, 2013

Worlds  
of WORDS 



College  
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Education

[wowlit.org](http://wowlit.org)

**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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## **Connecting to Global Cultures through Literature, Art, and Collaboration**

In a poignant article about the importance of the arts in developing and transforming the minds of students, Eliot Eisner (2003) makes the following claim,

Given the value we accord artistry in our work, we might even say that the major goal of

education is the preparation of artists, people who can think artistically about what they do, who can use their imagination, who can experience their work as it unfolds, who can exploit the unexpected, and who can make judgments about its direction on the basis of feeling as well as rule. (p.343)

The Artists Reading and Thinking Literacy Community is a powerful example of what happens when the goal of literacy learning is expanded beyond conventional, language-based curricula to include the preparation of artists in the fullest sense. This unique, three year collaboration between teachers, artists, students, and university professors represents the incomparable potential of teacher inquiry that is rooted in collaboration, problem-posing, and commitment to a community of inquiry.

In the following vignettes, members of the ART Literacy Community at Pot Spring Elementary School describe how they continue to explore the relationship between art, global children's literature, and inquiry into global issues for the purpose of developing intercultural understandings to prepare globally minded citizens. Their work over the last three years has been supported by grants from Worlds of Words, made possible by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding. The vignettes from their first year can be found [here](#), and their second year [here](#).

As you read this issue, we invite you to consider how to engage students of all ages with literature, art, and cross curricular collaborations that promote intercultural understandings. We at *WOW Stories* hope you will consider sharing your innovative practices by submitting a vignette to this journal that describe engagements with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.

Eisner, Eliot W. (2003). The arts and the creation of the mind. *Language Arts*, 80, 340-344.

Tracy Smiles, Editor, *WOW Stories*

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## **Artists Reading and Thinking: Developing Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature**

by Prisca Martens and Ray Martens

2012-2013 was an exciting year for our ART (Artists Reading and Thinking) Literacy Community! Our purpose was to explore the development of young children's intercultural understandings through experiences with global picturebooks, children's views of themselves as agents of change in the world, and children's representations of their understandings/ideas through art. Teachers and

students read lots of global literature and had numerous rich discussions. The students wrote and illustrated their responses to stories, as well as created their own picturebooks. It was a busy year!

### **Focusing Our Work as a Community**

Our ART Literacy Community included nine teachers. Eight of the teachers taught at Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland. They included pre-kindergarten teacher Christie Furnari; kindergarten teachers Elizabeth Soper and Robbie Stout; art teacher Stacy Aghalarov; and first grade teachers Michelle Doyle, Laura Fuhrman, Margaret Clarke-Williams and Joan Balog. Additionally, Jenna Loomis, first grade teacher at Seventh District Elementary School in Parkton, Maryland was on our team and taught first grade. We, Prisca and Ray Martens, facilitated our community. We are professors/ researchers who teach literacy and art education, respectively, at Towson University.

As a team, we met monthly over the year to discuss readings and develop understandings about intercultural learning and global picturebooks, share what was happening related to global literature in each classroom, look at examples of children's written and artistic responses to the literature, and plan for the coming weeks.

We named our literacy community ART, an acronym for Artists Reading and Thinking, because it reflected the value we place on art as a mode for communicating meaning, just as we value oral and written language (as well as other modes). Modes are socially and culturally agreed upon resources for making meaning (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). General types of modes include linguistic (i.e., language), visual (i.e., art, moving images), auditory (i.e., sound, music), gestural (i.e., movement, dance), and spatial (i.e., layout, design) (Kress & Jewitt, 2008). While all modes are equally valid and significant ways of communicating meanings, schools and society tend to consider language/linguistics to be the mode central to communication and place lesser value on other modes (Kress & Jewitt, 2008). In our community, we highlighted art as a valued means of communication and taught the language of art and how to communicate meanings through art.

To help the children explore art, we never focused solely on the written text when reading picturebooks. Picturebooks, by definition, are multimodal texts that weave together meanings provided in multiple modes, particularly linguistic (written language) and visual (art). When the teachers read picturebooks in their classrooms, they highlighted the art and the ways the artist communicated meanings. They had rich discussions about the stories and the children often composed responses through art and writing. To further provide opportunities for the children to explore making meaning through art, they wrote and illustrated their own picturebooks. The teachers' vignettes highlight the global literature they read, how they used these books in the classroom with students, and how they helped students value art as a means of communication.

The classroom teachers collaborated closely with Stacy, the art teacher, to learn each other's curricular plans and coordinate projects. Sometimes Stacy designed a project that supported the focus of study in the classrooms and sometimes when the children got back to their classroom from art instruction they wrote a story about artwork they'd created. Examples of how Stacy collaborated with the teachers are embedded in Elizabeth Soper's portion of the kindergarten vignette and in Laura Fuhrman's first grade vignette.

One significant aspect of our work this year was how we wove art into our study of identity in all of the classrooms at the start of the year.

### **Learning About Ourselves through Global Literature**

In Fall, 2012, the teachers again started the school year with a focus on identity to help children understand and appreciate who they are as cultural beings. The focus on personal cultural identities is at the core of a Curriculum that is International, a curriculum framework developed by Kathy Short (2009). As children explore their cultural identities they begin to understand the significance of culture in their own and other's lives (Short & Thomas, 2011). Accepting and understanding themselves encourages children to accept and value others (Banks, 2004).

To begin the focus on personal cultural identities, the teachers sent a survey home to the parents, requesting information about their families. Figure 1 shows the survey that we used.

In the coming months we will be reading a range of picturebooks from or set in different countries to support the children's understandings of themselves and others in the world. To get started, we will explore and celebrate our cultural heritages and where our families originated. Some children might share, for example, that their families immigrated to this country in the 1800s and others might talk about being born in another part of the world and then moving here. We will be plotting where each family originated on a world map in our classroom (be sure to look at it when you visit!). Where possible I will read books that connect to where our families originated. I would appreciate it if you would complete and return this survey as soon as possible. THANKS!

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Where was your child born? \_\_\_\_\_

In what country/countries did your family originate before immigrating to the U.S.?

\_\_\_\_\_

Approximately when (year or century) did your family/families move to the United States?

\_\_\_\_\_

For what reasons did they leave their home countries to come to the U.S.?

\_\_\_\_\_

What language(s) are spoken in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

How/why did you decide on your child's name? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does his/her name mean? \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1

The survey included questions about where and when the child's family immigrated to the United States. While this is a hard concept for young children to understand, we found that it generated conversations between parents and children about family history that continued in the classroom. It also helped children develop an understanding of their own place in time and history. The teachers plotted this information on a world map in their classrooms, connecting a photograph of the child around the outside of the map with their country/countries of origin with a string. (See Michelle Hassay Doyle's vignette for a photograph of her class's [map](#))

The teachers read picturebooks related to identity in their classrooms, often using a document camera so the children could follow along and to facilitate discussions about the art. The children responded orally in discussions as well as through artwork. Figure 2 shows examples of books we used, how we connected the books to identity, and the art concepts we explored.

Grade	Book	Connection to Identity/Art
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K	<i>Mom, It's My First Day of Kindergarten</i> (Yum, 2012)	Picture of self and things they like/don't like <b>Art:</b> size/color to show emotion
K	<i>When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...</i> (Bang, 1999)	“Things that make me happy /angry” sheet <b>Art:</b> line/color to show emotion
K	<i>Watch Me Throw the Ball!</i> (Willems, 2009)	“I can.../I will learn to...” sheet <b>Art:</b> line to show movement/emotion
1	<a href="#"><u>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</u></a> (Brown, 2011)	Picture of self and things they like/don't like <b>Art:</b> line to show emotion
1	<a href="#"><u>My Name is Sangoel</u></a> (Williams, 2009)	Photo face and kids draw their bodies, newspaper object(s) glued on <b>Art:</b> collage
1	<i>Just Behave, Pablo Picasso!</i> (Winter, 2012)	“I am proud that I.../I want to learn...” sheet <b>Art:</b> size/line to show emotions

Figure 2

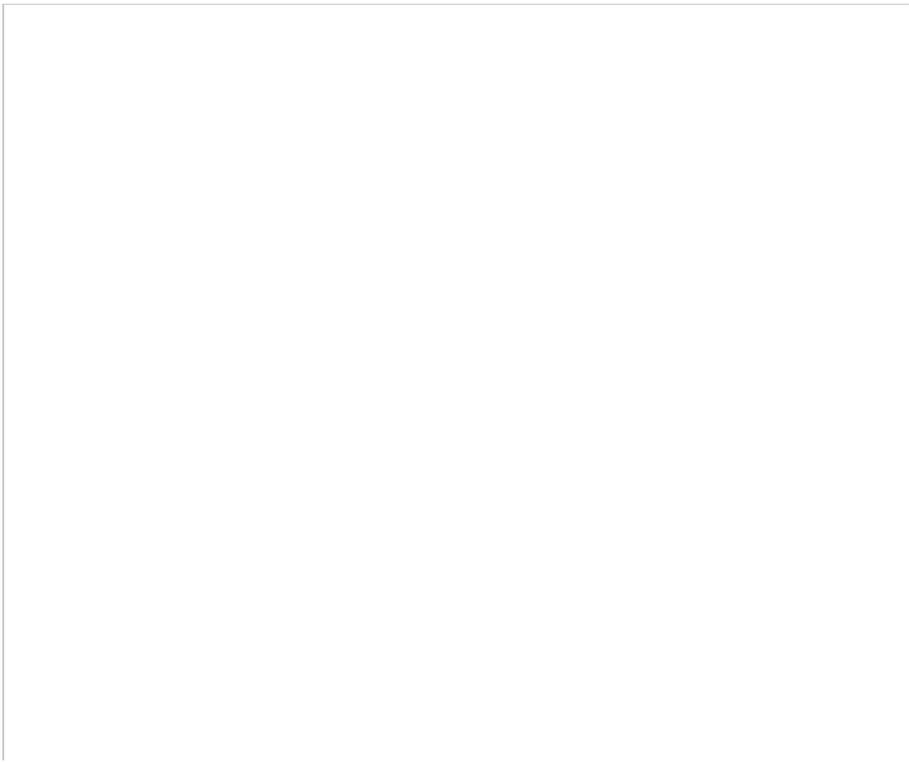
We quickly realized the rich possibilities that “Me” books had for revealing aspects of students’ personal cultural identities. We collected children’s responses and information about their identities that we were gathering together from various engagements. Each child created an *All About Me* book. While there were particular pages that all teachers included, some had their students add pages that other teachers didn’t. Below are examples of the kinds of information included in the first graders’ books:

- A page describing where/how the child got his/her name. Parents provided this information on the survey. Teachers typed the information on the bottom of a piece of paper and glued on the face of the child cut from a photo. Children drew their bodies and included other information. The first graders had read *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (Brown, 2011) and

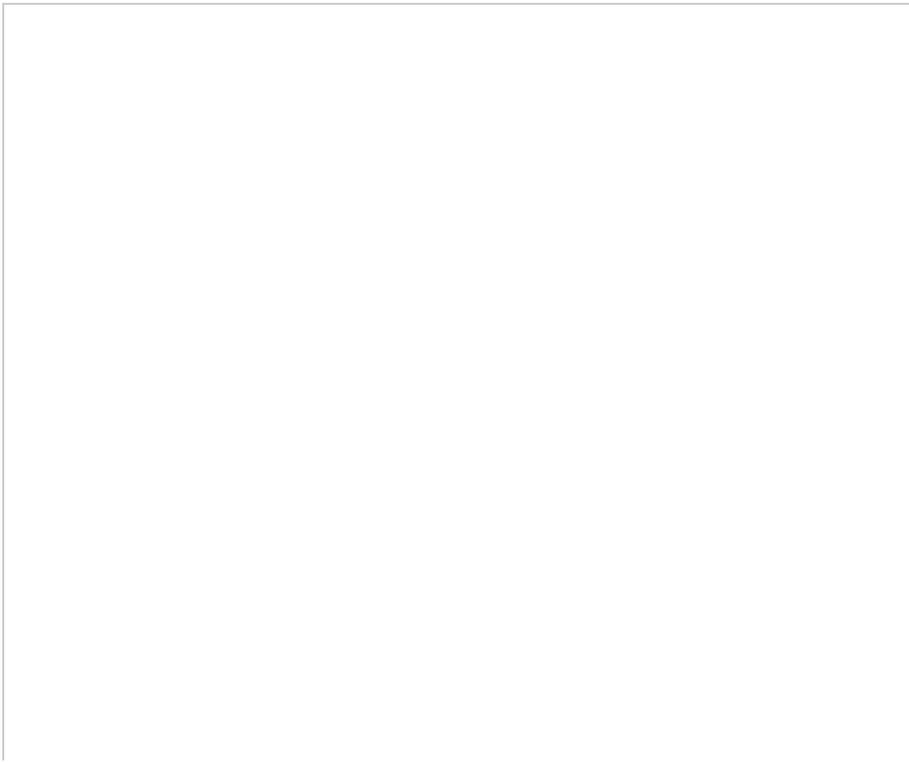
included an object made from newspaper in their art, as artist Sara Palacios had done in the book's illustrations.

- A page on which the children drew a picture of their families after read alouds about family.
- A page with a world map that, using information from the parents, indicated the countries from which the family originated and why they came to the United States. The children colored their family's countries on their maps.
- A page on which the children drew/wrote about things they are proud of, and on the other side, things they wanted to learn. The first graders completed this page after reading and discussing *Just Behave, Pablo Picasso!* (Winter, 2012), a biography of Picasso that describes how he was proud of his art even though others wanted him to paint differently.
- A page on which the first graders described in writing and art the kind of person they are, after reading *One of Us* (Moss, 2010)
- A poem each first grader wrote titled "I Am Not a Color," a poem based on *Am I a Color Too?* (Cole & Vogl, 2005). Their poems named things about them and the kind of person they thought they were.
- A drawing of themselves when they're angry, completed after discussing *The Day Leo Said I Hate You!* (Harris, 2008) in art class with Stacy.
- A cultural x-ray of themselves on which they drew and wrote physical and outwardly visible characteristics around the outside and what was important and valued inside their hearts. The x-rays helped children distinguish between visible and inner aspects of their culture and who they are (Short, 2009).

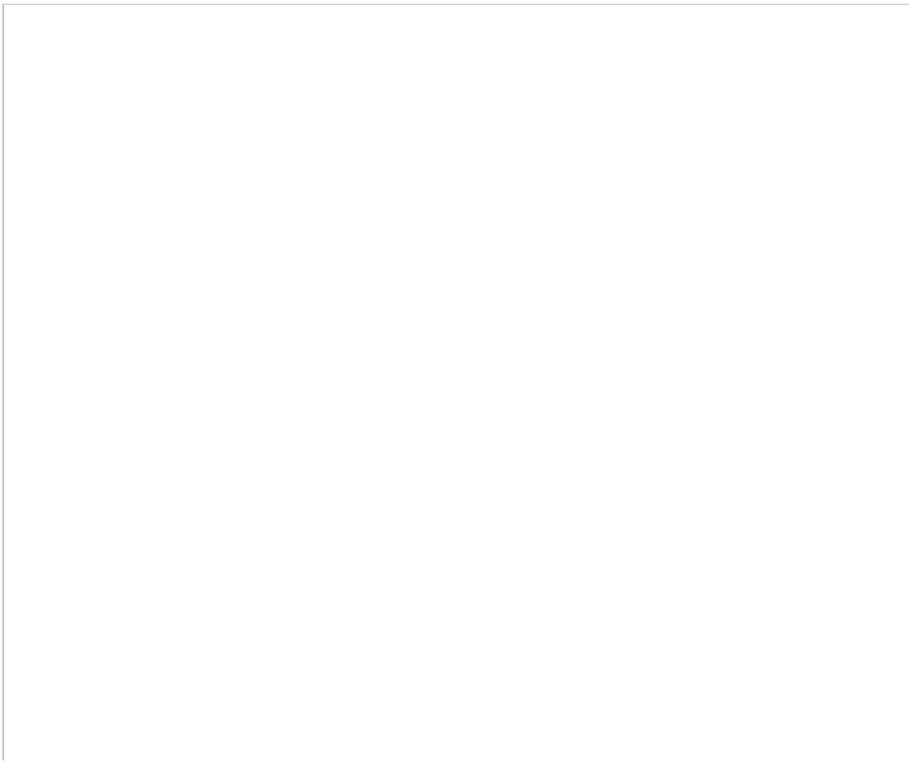
Ronnie's, Jayden's, Clair's, and Rashmi's first grade "All About Me" books are included below in Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6.



Ronnie's "All About Me"



Jayden's "All About Me"



Claire's "All About Me"



Rashmi's "All About Me"

### **Overview of Our Vignettes**

We had a rich and fruitful year in our ART Literacy Community. Students and teachers learned with and from each other about ourselves and others in our diverse world. The students grew in

their understandings of themselves as cultural beings and in their appreciation of the aspects of who they are that are similar to and different from others in ways that make everyone unique.

In the vignettes in this issue, Christie Furnari describes how she helped her pre-kindergarten students know and value themselves and tell their unique stories. Robbie Stout and Elizabeth Soper share their focus on friendship and a cross-cultural study of Mexico in kindergarten. Laura Fuhrman discusses the first graders involvement in a cross-cultural study of India including how that was integrated into the special areas. Finally, Michelle Doyle and Jenna Loomis take readers into their individual classrooms to experience the different ways they helped their students assume responsibility to take action and make the world a better place. We hope the vignettes provide readers with a sense of excitement and learning that occurred this year.

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## **Everybody Has a Story: Telling Our Stories in Pre-Kindergarten**

by Christie Furnari

In Fall, 2012, I began another year working with our ART Literacy Community. I have been teaching pre-kindergarten for 8 years. This past year my linguistically diverse classes included up to 21 students in the morning and 19 students in the afternoon. The 40 students included 25 girls and 15 boys. Sixteen of these spoke primarily Spanish in their home and seven other children spoke one of five other languages in their homes.

As in the previous year, I read lots of global literature to the children. Nine of the books were particularly strong and so I decided to revisit these books with students throughout the year. I created a book wall above our chalkboard by the carpeted area so that the books were available to use as a reminder, to compare, and to reread as a favorite read aloud. By the end of the year we had a line of books on our wall. I taped a sentence strip to the book that included board maker pictures and summed up the message in one sentence (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

The children shared responses to these books and other books throughout the year through artwork, discussion, dictation of ideas, drawing/writing in journal books, and finally creating their own stories. In this vignette, I share our experiences with some of the books and how I used them to help students grow in their appreciation of themselves and others, to explore imagination and story, and to tell their own stories.

## **Learning About Ourselves and Others**

The first half of the year I focused on broadening the concept of same/different in objects, characters, themselves, thinking, etc. We read books such as *I Like Me!* (Carlson, 2009) and children drew self-portraits and shared information about their likes and their lives. They used words and pictures to communicate what they liked to do at home and school and with family and what they liked to eat. This was the beginning of our investigation into ourselves and noticing similarities and differences with classmates. We also read *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons* (Litwin, 2012) and discussed ways we react in situations, how to take a deep breath, and what choices we can make when we lose objects or need help so we can keep on singing.

As we continued to focus on ourselves and our similarities and differences, we moved into the theme of family. We used many nonfiction books to build on our understanding of ourselves and others in the context of our families. *Families* (Easterling, 2007), *Homes* (Mayer, 2007), *Loving* (Morris, 1990), *Shades of People* (Rotner & Kelly, 2009), and *You and Me Together* (Kerley, 2005) were read-aloud books. We discussed these books and students responded in different ways, including creating an early year drawing response book about ourselves and our families.

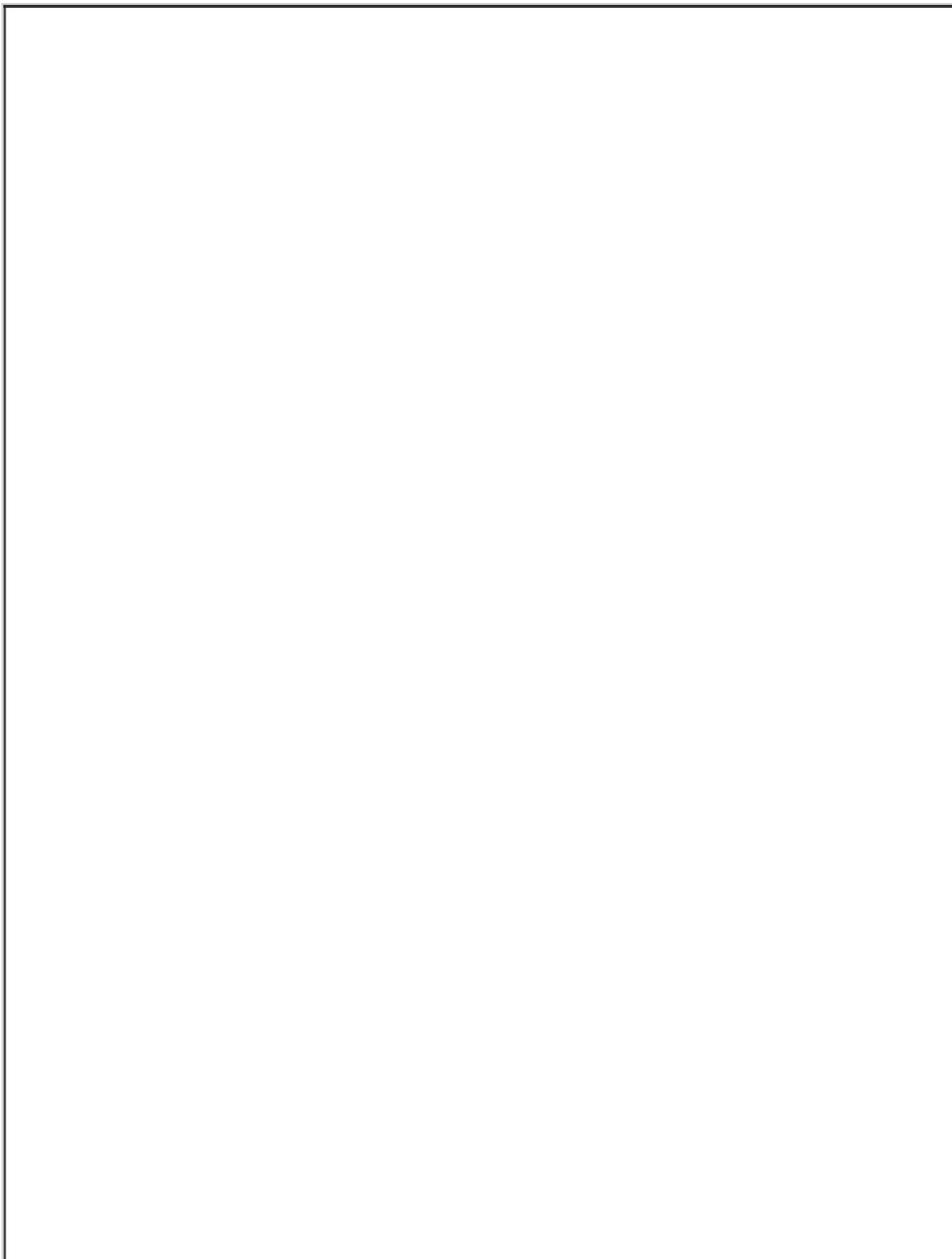
As we expanded our discussions to look at peers and friends, we read *Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog* (Willems, 2004) and talked about sharing. We also talked about the speech/thinking bubbles Mo Willems used so the Pigeon could share his thoughts. When we read *Dear Daisy, Get Well Soon* (Smith, 2000), we discussed how we can take care of friends. *Taking Kindness With Me* (Chappell, 2007) was a nonfiction book that provided examples of kindness that helped children understand what it means to be kind. We also read *How Does Your Brain Work?* (Curry, 2003) to learn information on our amazing brains. We built on this book often as the year continued.

Throughout our exploration of these themes we used a Velcro chart created for sign-in (attendance) for the day. Each day I wrote a question at the top of the chart and under the question were picture choices. When the students understood the question of the day, they made a selection by placing their name under the picture representing their choice, thus organizing our responses into a picture graph. I selected questions that allowed the students to share information about ourselves (i.e., our favorite food, animal, letter, color, shape, number of family members, homes, etc.). As we looked at the picture graph each day, we talked about whose responses were similar and whose were different. We celebrated our different choices and differences because our differences make us unique. We also revisited books from our book wall such as *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 2006), *Spaghetti on a Hot Dog Bun* (Dismondy, 2008), and *The Orange Splot* (Pinkwater, 1977) that celebrated differences. Throughout these discussions we recognized and used speech bubbles or thinking bubbles in our classroom as a

way to share and celebrate special thoughts and words.

### **Exploring Imagination and Story**

The second half of the year, the read-aloud books focused children on using their imaginations to tell their special and unique stories. We talked about using facts and fiction in our stories. Sometimes I gave sentence starters to children to help them get going. For example, as part of our transportation unit, we shared *Changes, Changes* (Hutchins, 1987). At the art center students followed picture directions to make a boat picture out of paper shapes and add drawings and writing to complete their pictures. They dictated their responses to sentence starters using their imaginations to tell a story about their pictures. I wrote exactly what the children said. Sometimes they responded in sentences and sometimes with a few words. Taya's and Amaya's drawings and stories are in Figure 2.



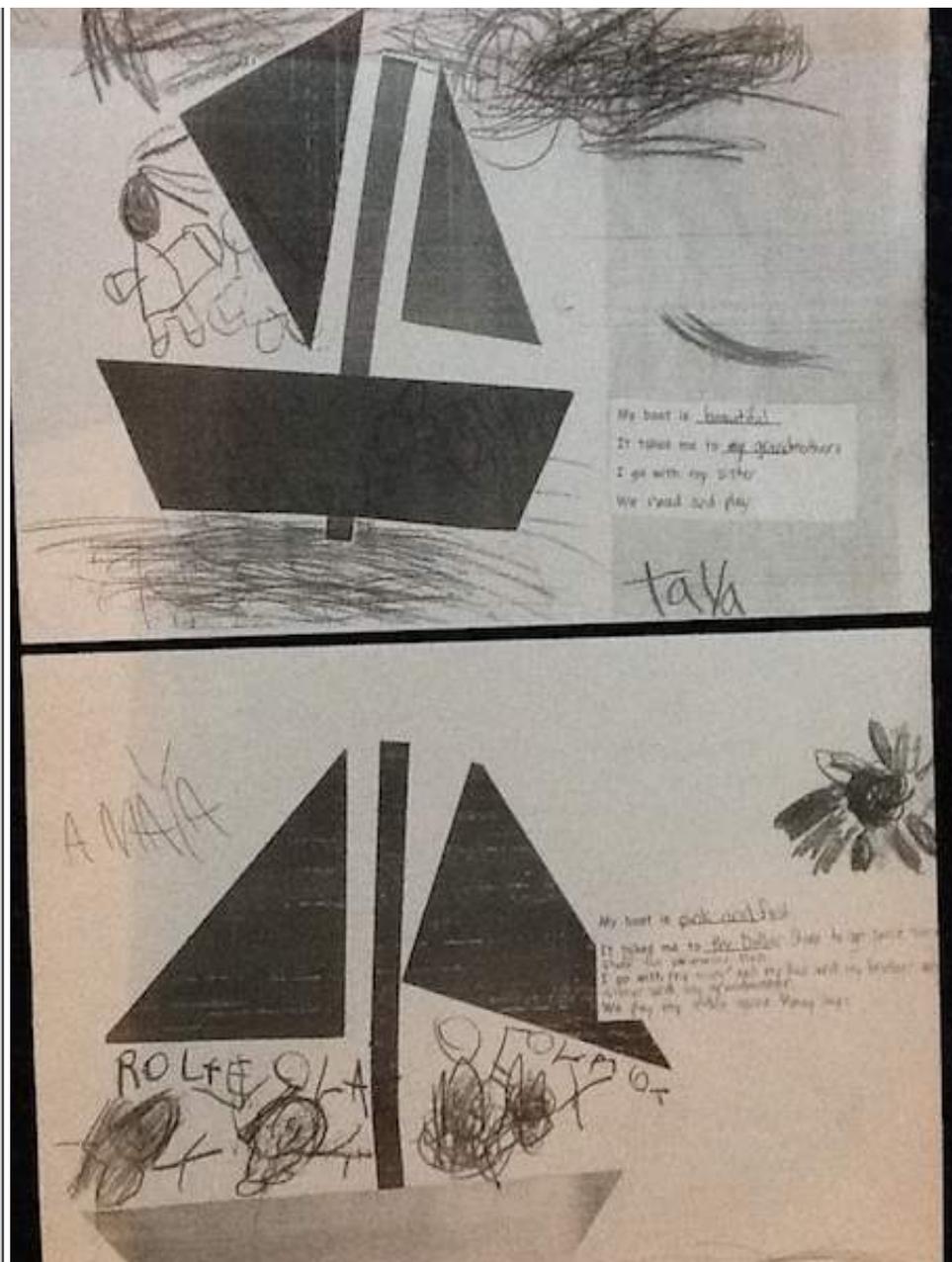


Figure 2

Taya wrote, “My boat is beautiful. It takes me to my grandmother’s. I go with my sister. We read and play.” Amaya wrote, “My boat is pink and fast. It takes me to the Dollar store to get some swim stuff for swimming class. I go with my mom and my dad and my brother and my sister and my grandmother. We play my video game Pokey Says.”

After reading *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Willems, 2003) students chose a form of transportation they thought would be fun to drive. They used their imaginations to respond to question words (who, where, what, how long) as prompts to create their stories (see Figure 3).



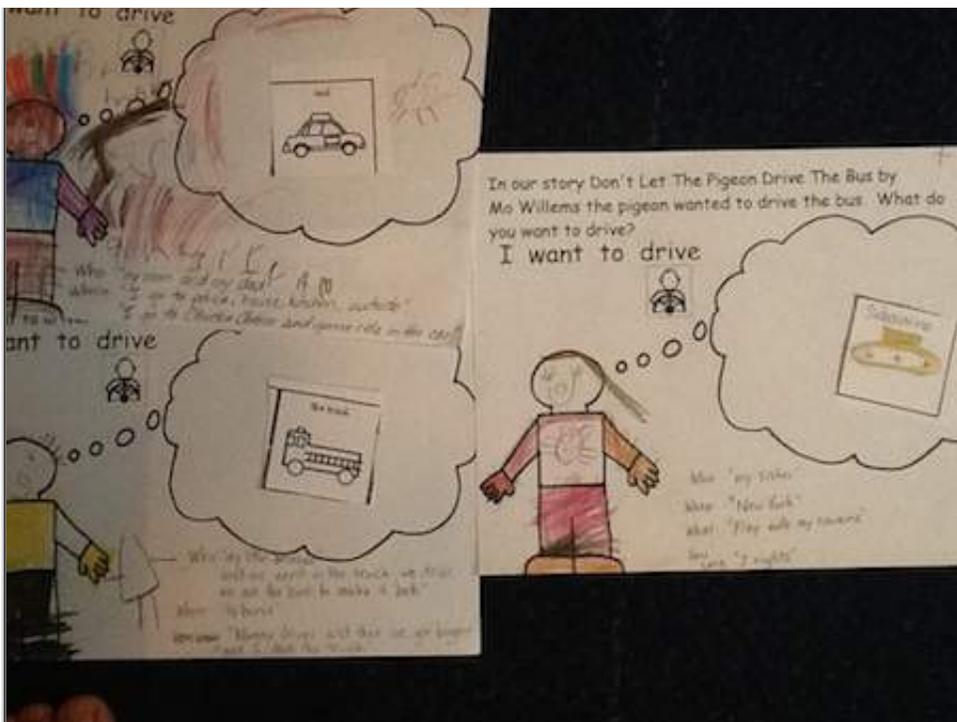


Figure 3

Finally, we read *Amelia's Fantastic Flight* (Bursik,1992) and talked about how that book was Amelia Earhart's story and that *every person has a story!* We then read *If I Built a Car* (Van Dusen, 2005) and the children decorated their own cars. The children dictated their stories by responding to question words that I attached to their cars. Taya's car is in Figure 4.

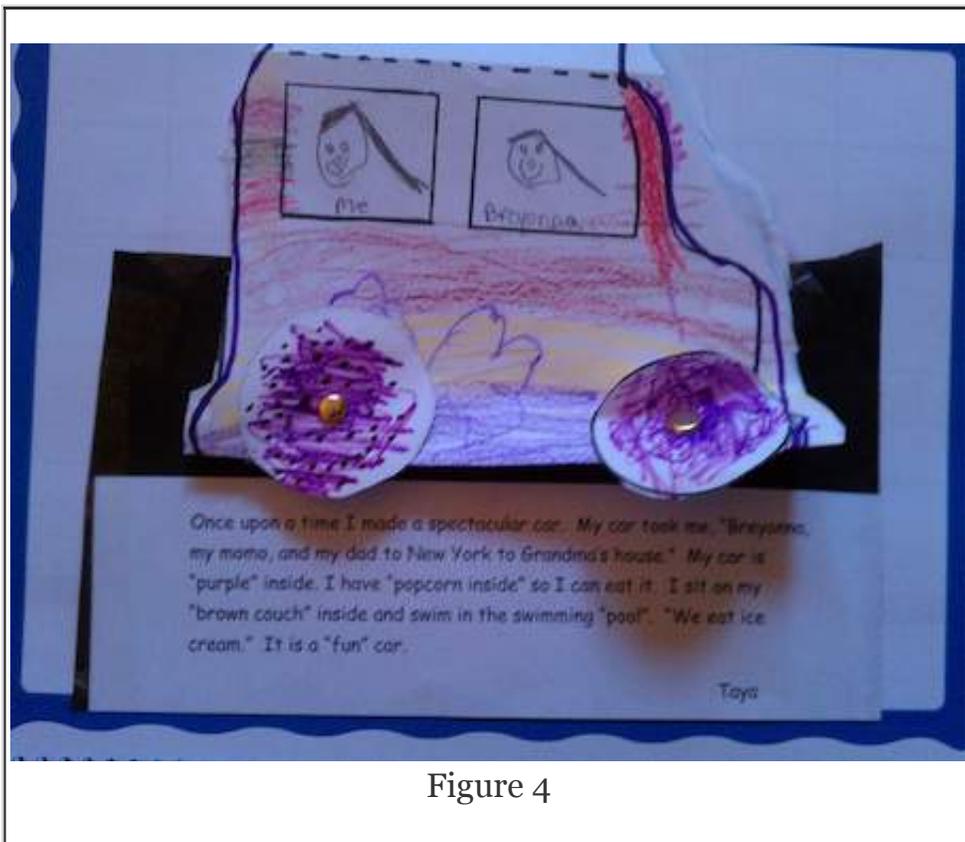


Figure 4

Her story was, “Once upon a time I made a spectacular car. My car took me, Breyanna, my momo, and my dad to New York to Grandma’s house. My car is purple inside. I have popcorn inside so I can eat it. I sit on my brown couch inside and swim in the swimming pool. We eat ice cream. It is a fun car.”

These experiences helped children recognize that everyone has a story and apply this thought to artists we studied in our Baltimore Museum of Art program on Language through the Arts. We realized that we can all be artists and authors and tell our own stories. Later in the year, at the end of our unit on the senses, the children chose a picture of a place (their home, McDonalds, Walmart, Target, grandparents’ home, etc.) as their setting and drew other parts of their stories. They told their stories by sharing what they would see, hear, taste, touch, and smell in the setting they chose. Jeremiah’s story (see Figure 4a) was, “Once upon a time I go to McDonalds. It yummy. The hamburger hot and my mom talking quiet. That’s my little brother. His name Isaiah. I wear my superhero shirt. I got that. I go to school.” Amaya’s work is in Figure 5. Her thinking bubble says, “Hearing the ocean. I can hear the sea shells swimming.” Through all of these experiences the students realized they were writers and artists.

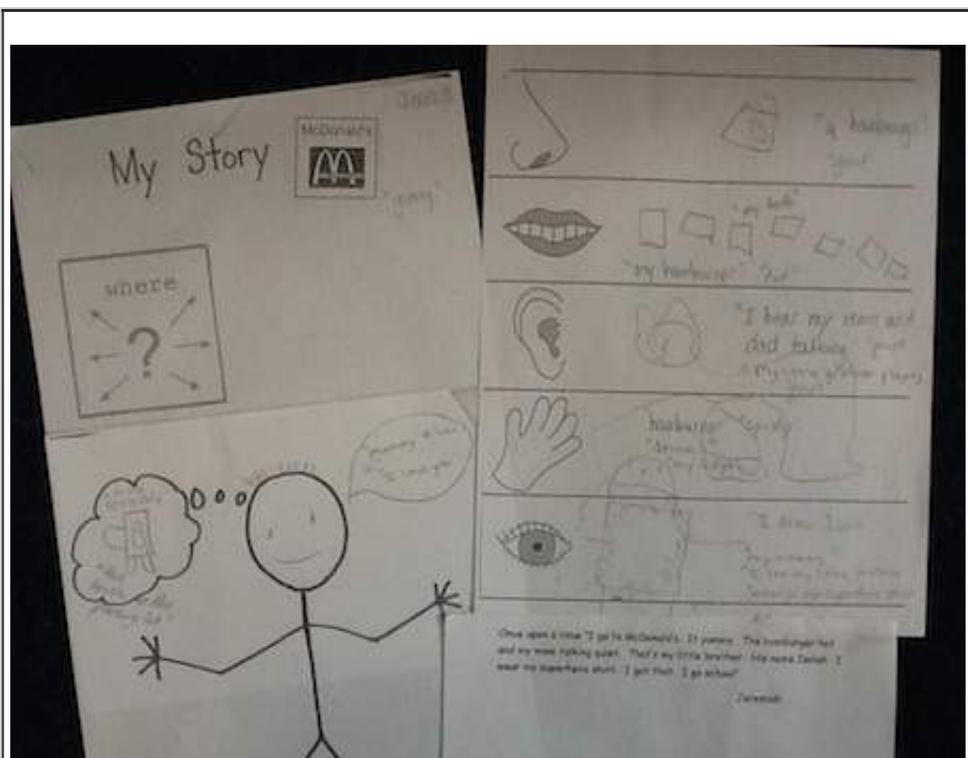


Figure 4a

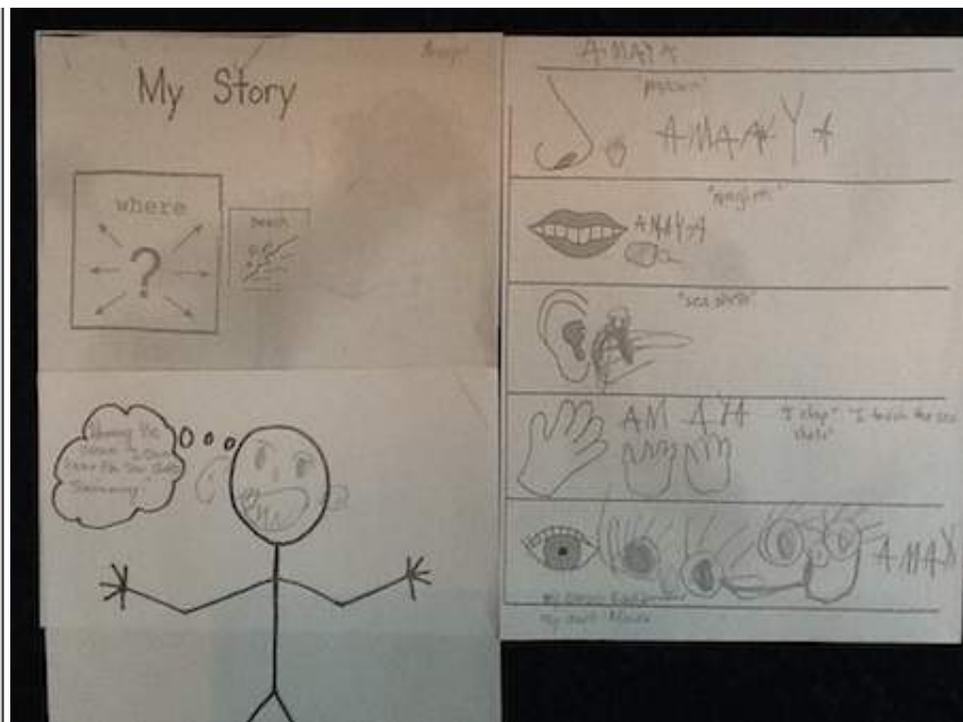


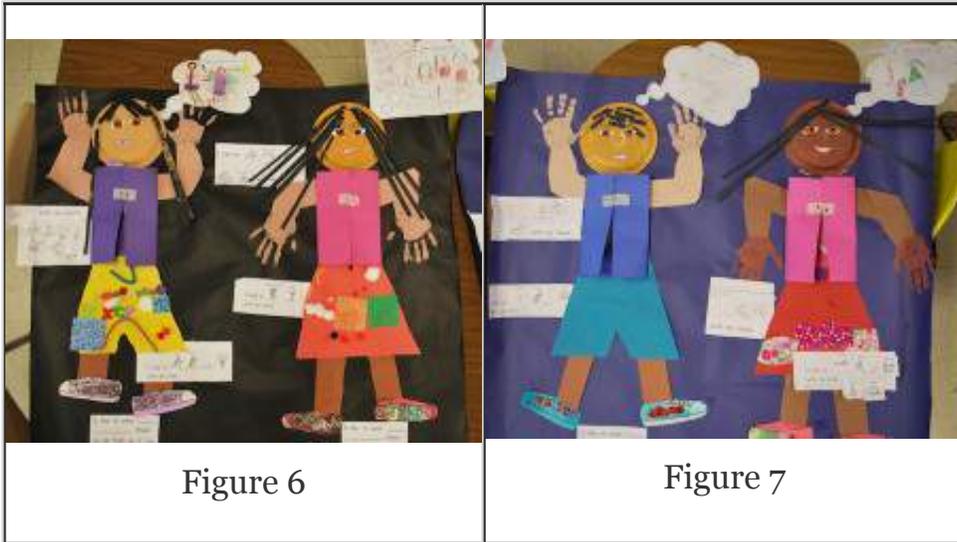
Figure 5

The last six weeks of school I pulled together what we had talked about all year with the books on our book wall to encourage children to share what they know about themselves to tell their stories. I worked with our pre-kindergarten art teacher Katie to help the children each construct our pre-kindergarten version of their own “cultural x-ray” (Short, 2009). Each week the children worked on a different part of their bodies and told a story related to that part:

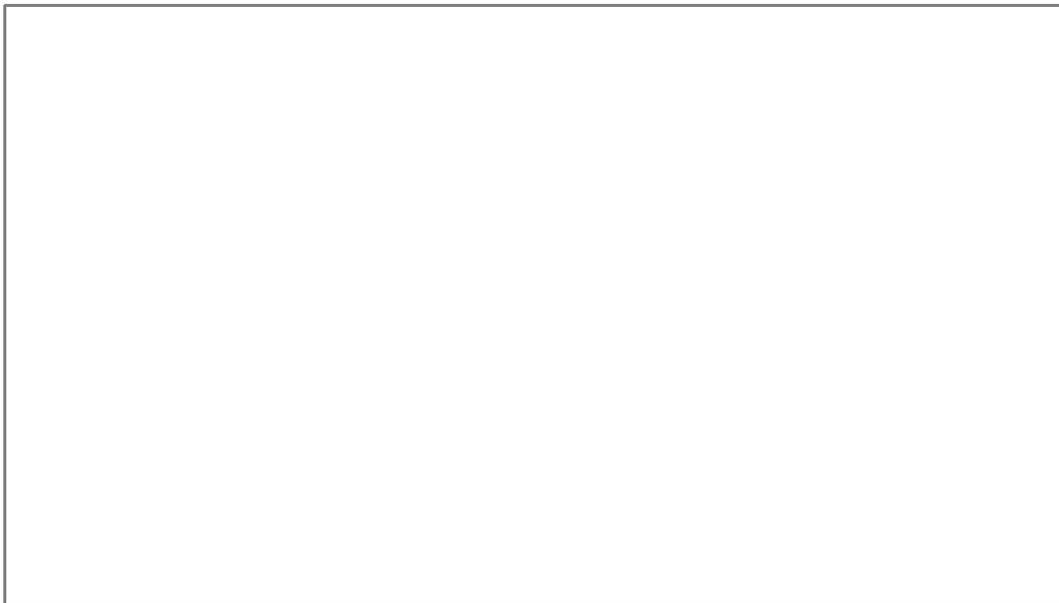
- We started with our feet/shoes, reading [Shoes, Shoes, Shoes](#) (Morris, 1998) and *New Shoes, Red Shoes* (Rollings, 2001). The children painted and glittered their favorite shoes and completed sentences to tell about their favorite shoes.
- We read *Come Out and Play* (Ajmera & Ivanko, 2001) and [I Like to Play](#) (Konrad, 2010) and talked about what we can do with our bodies. In art the children created shorts/skirts and legs, connecting their legs to their shoes.
- After reading [These Hands](#) (Price, 2007), the children chose pictures of things they like to do with their hands. We revisited *Shades of People* (Rotner & Kelly, 2009) to match skin tones to make handprints.
- We talked about how everyone likes different things and that’s ok. We revisited a number of books, including *Spaghetti on a Hot Dog Bun* (Dismond, 2008) and *The Big Orange Splot* (Pinkwater, 1977). Children made their hearts and added pictures, letters, and words of things they love. To make these things they like pop out of their hearts, we accordion-folded small strips of paper that attached the hearts to the back of the shirt. The hearts were now inside the shirts which folded over them and were fastened to keep them closed.

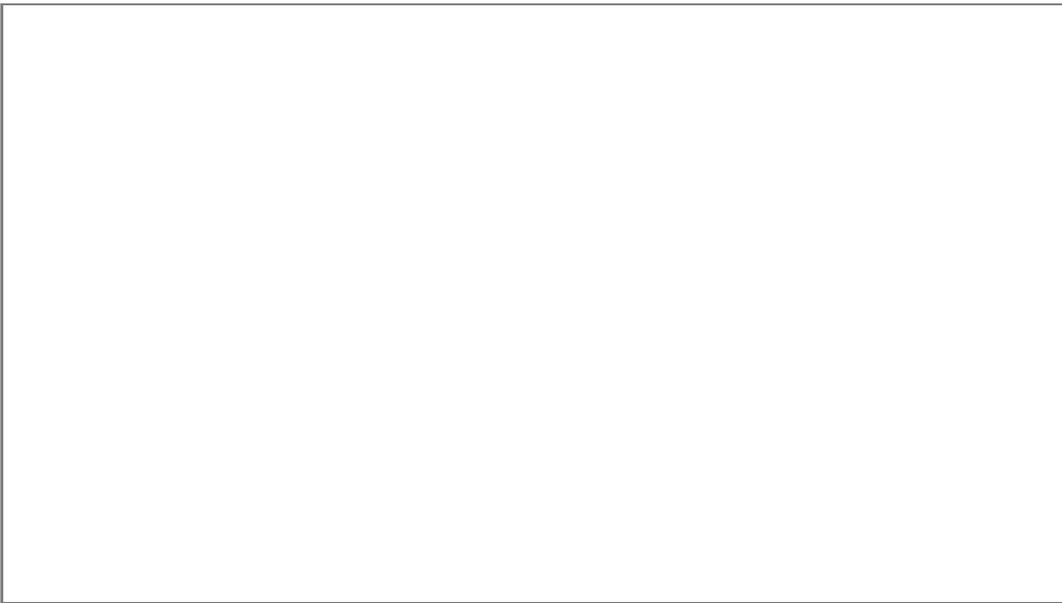
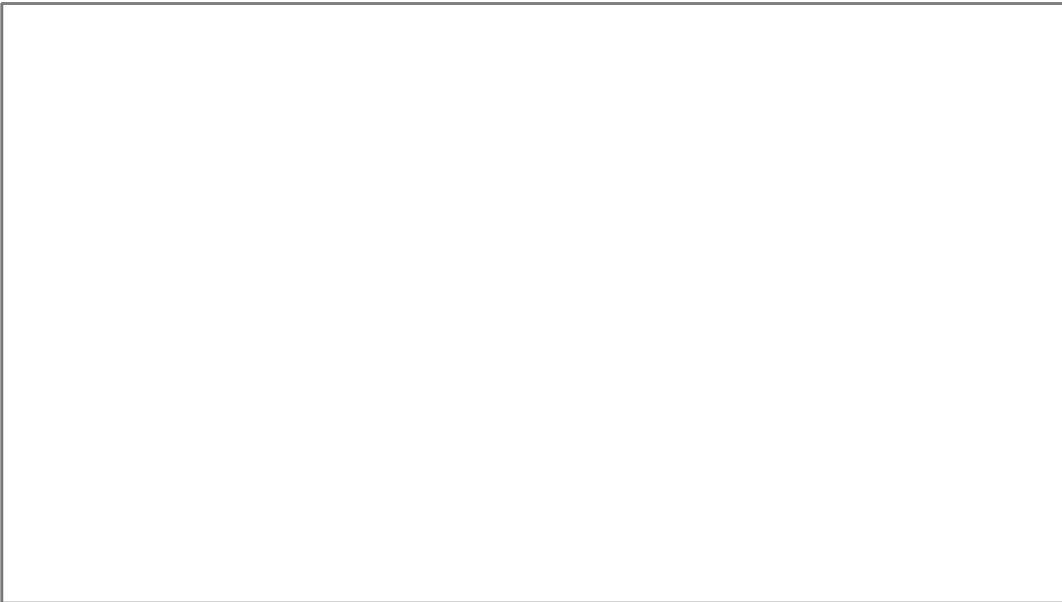
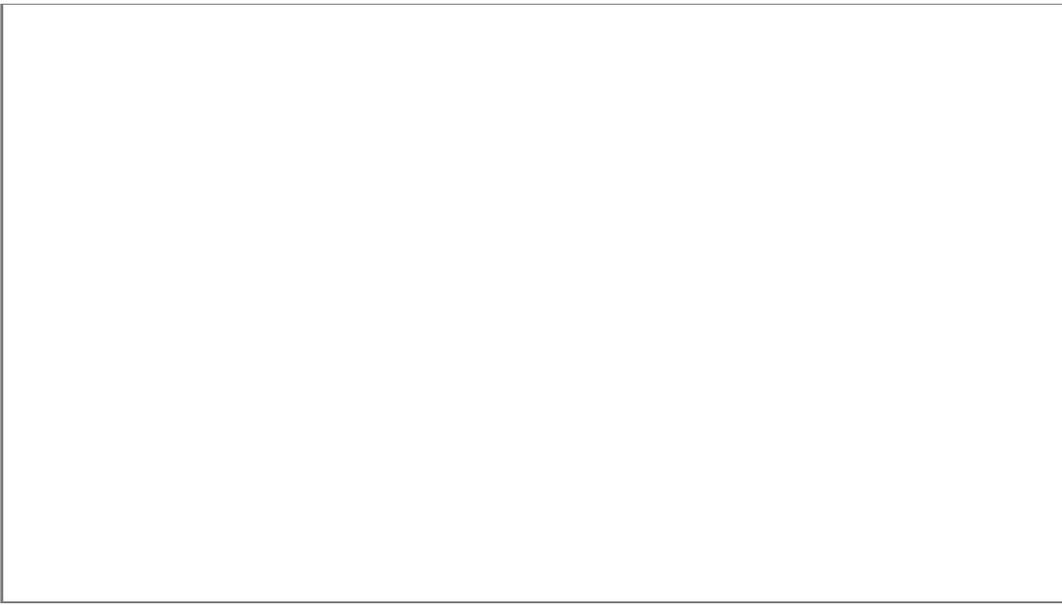
•The last week, we talked about heads and the children made the head for their figure in art. We used paper plates, paint, tissue paper, white paper with black for eyes, and yarn for hair. We read *Someday* (Spinelli, 2007) and discussed all the amazing things each of them could choose to do when they grow up. Each child drew pictures, used their writing, and dictated words to share what they wanted to do when they grew up.

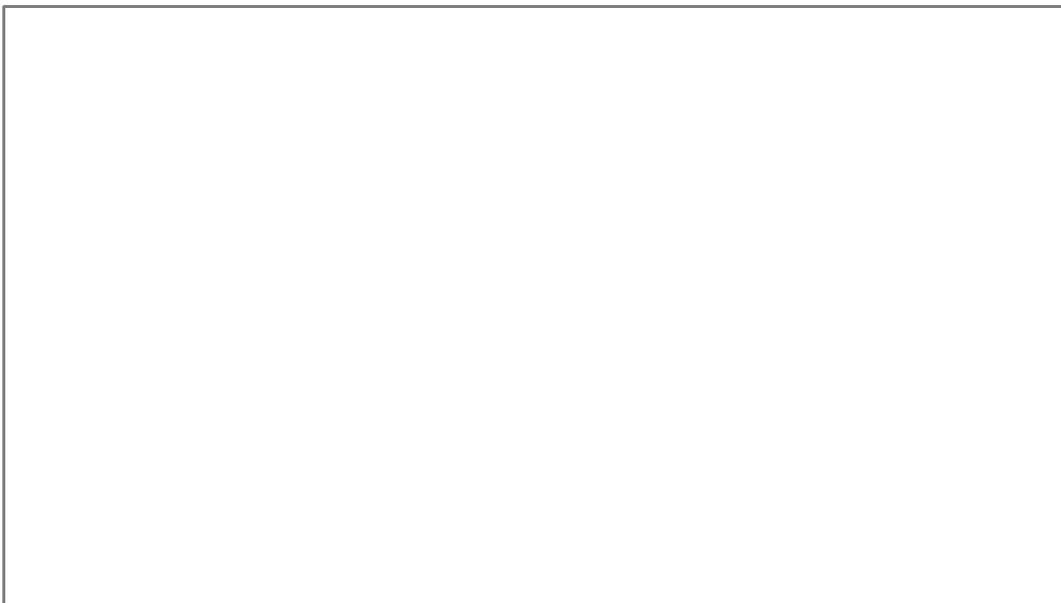
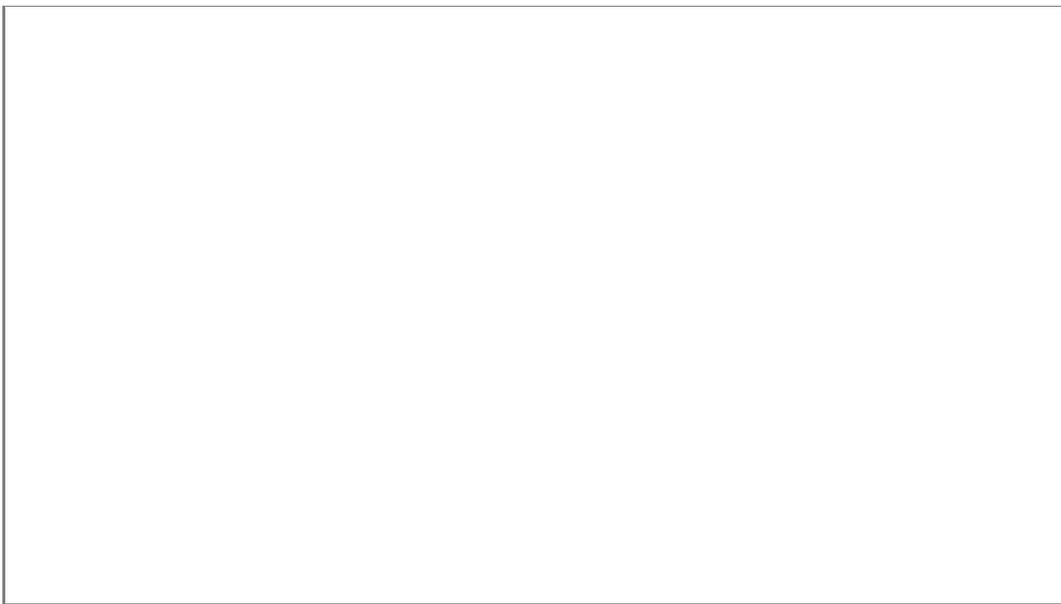
At the end of the six weeks, each child had a 2 foot figure of themselves with lots of stories in writing and art. Figure 6 and Figure 7 show some of the figures.



I video-interviewed the children about their work and their thoughts about messages we discussed this year. It was interesting to learn each student's favorite author's message from the book wall book in these clips. Here are some student video clips.







I had two amazing classes of students who left pre-kindergarten with a better understanding of themselves, respect for others, the importance we each have in the world, and the knowledge that they have lots of wonderful stories to tell that matter. They will enter kindergarten knowing their brains are the same as others but also different, allowing them to think, imagine, talk, and create in unique ways that make them special.

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## **Developing Art, Language, and Writing through Discussions of Friendship and Culture in Kindergarten**

by Robbie Stout & Elizabeth Soper

We started the year helping our kindergarten students know themselves as cultural beings through stories and discussions about culture. As Kathy Short (2009) states, “All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them” (p. 3). As teachers we understood the need not to push too hard at the beginning of the year so that students could develop skills and confidence, which proved to be a positive road for us to take. The children made tremendous progress and we delighted in their involvement in the ever changing projects over the year. During the first half of the year we focused on the art of authors such as Mo Willems so the children could learn how artists represent emotions, movement, and feelings through color, line, and shape to convey meaning. The children had opportunities to use this learning in their own work.

After exploring our identities, we spent the second part of the year reading and writing stories about friendship. We discussed the character traits of friends and how to be a good friend to others. We also did a cross-cultural study of Mexico to help the children “consider points of view beyond their own” so they came to understand that “their perspective is one of many ways to view the world” (Short, 2009, p. 4). Throughout the year we worked as a team to share ideas but we each explored those ideas independently in our own classrooms, since each class had different strengths and challenges. The following vignette shares what we did in our classrooms to explore friendship through art and literature. First, Liz discusses her class’s experiences around our focus on friendship. Stacy Aghalarov, the art teacher, shares how she integrated friendship into her art instruction. Finally, Robbie discusses her class’s study of Mexico.

### **Elizabeth Soper: Friendship is Everywhere and in Everyone**

In kindergarten we focus on friendship as a theme to build our team of learners. We explore how each of us has a unique identity, but we can be friends with everyone. The children in my class had diverse cultural backgrounds (i.e., Iran, Iraq, Mexico, India, Mali, etc.) which added to the richness of our discussions around friendship being everywhere and in everyone.

We read many books on friendship from within our immediate world and that reached beyond

our own parameters to worlds that are unfamiliar. For example, we read the art in *A Circle of Friends* (Carmi, 2003) about a boy who shares his muffin with a homeless man which starts a circle of caring and helping others. We also read [\*The Sandwich Swap\*](#) (Queen Rania & DiPucchio, 2010) about two girls who learn they can be friends even though they like different things. Through our discussions and personal connections, students deepened their understandings of friendship, learned different ways they can be a friend to others, and expanded their language about friendships. We have found that confidence in language plays an important role in opening up opportunities for children to become inspired and motivated.

We believe that art is a way for students to communicate more easily, regardless of oral language strengths. We worked closely with Stacy Aghalarov, the art teacher, to connect what we were discussing in our classrooms with what the students were doing in art. As part of our focus on friendship, we collaborated with Stacy around [\*Listen to the Wind: The Story of Dr. Greg & "Three Cups of Tea"\*](#) (Mortenson & Roth, 2009). Below, Stacy shares what she did with this book during art instruction with our students:

*In my kindergarten art classes, I started by reading the book Listen to the Wind: The Story of Dr. Greg and 'Three Cups of Tea' (Mortenson & Roth, 2009). After we read the story together, I asked the students how Dr. Greg was a friend to the people of Korphe, a Himalayan village. "Dr. Greg helped them build a school for the children," Cory answered. Brian added, "He helped some of the people feel better when they were sick." Susie said, "He built a bridge to their village so they could bring the wood for the school." After we thought more of friendship, I had students use the remainder of our class time to draw a picture of how they show friendship to another person, a family member, or an animal.*

*The next week, we first focused closely on Susan Roth's art in the book and how she created the pictures. The students decided that the pictures were not created just with paint, but that Susan Roth added other materials like cloth or paper. I explained to the students that when an artist uses other materials like cloth, paper, paint, etc., in one picture, it is called a collage.*

*I showed the students a bin of paper that my fifth grade classes had created and not used in a project. Each piece of paper was filled with different colors of paint. The students chose three different pieces of paper that had similar colors and started cutting quarter sized shapes. They glued these shapes on paper to create the sky for their backgrounds. After the sky was complete, they used green construction paper to cut out hills.*

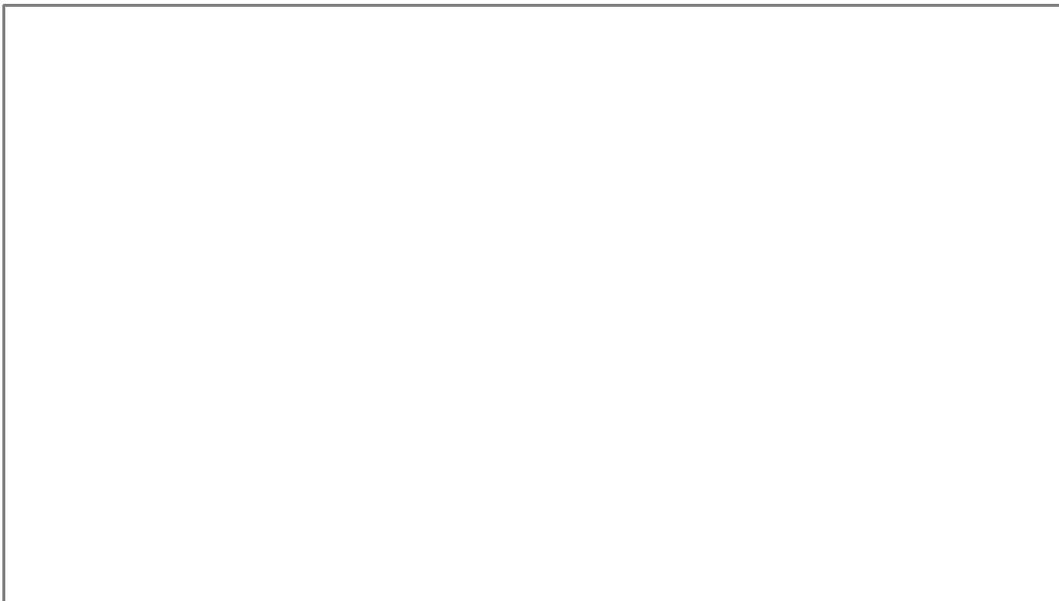
*In our final class for this project the students created a self-portrait in Roth's style from*

*the book. I showed them how to cut out shapes from patterned paper to create their body and then add arms, legs, and a head. After they drew their faces, I pulled out a bin of buttons, ribbon, yarn, beads, and little pieces of cloth and invited the students to use these materials to create cloths, bows, accessories, and hair. They worked for the rest of the class period to complete their self-portraits.*

Back in our classroom, I interviewed the children about the decisions that went into their choices in creating their art work. Jacob, Nevaeh, and Julian are examples of what went into their personal decision making on creating the art.



Nevaeh also discussed her reasons for creating the art that she created.



Julian discussed his process as well. Julian was shy and exhibited confidence issues, so his

conversation was rewarding because he seemed enthused.



The children worked on the stories to accompany their art for a few days. They engaged in sustained independent writing and we provided opportunities for children to manage their time and story line from beginning to end. They loved writing and Writer’s Workshop, as evidenced by their stories.

Jane’s art is in Figure 4. She wrote, “Once upon a time the girl got missing. There was too many clouds so she couldn’t get home and then she found her way home.”

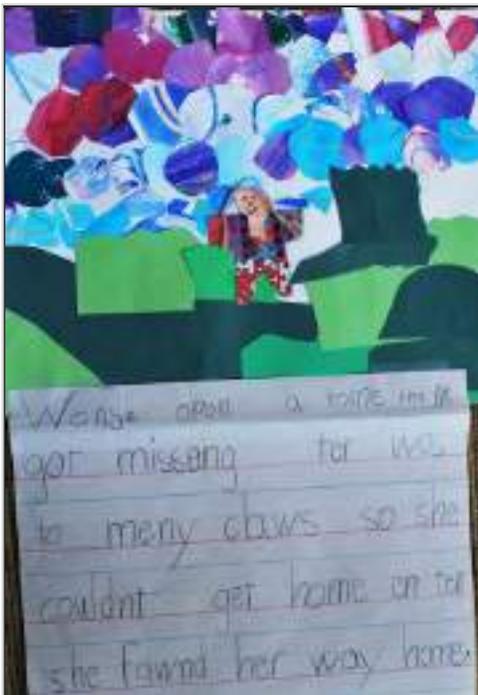


Figure 4



Figure 5

In her story, Lori wrote, “One time I was playing with my mom and I was having fun. I love flowers and I took it home” (see Figure 5).

Nevaeh’s art and story are in Figure 6. She wrote, “The Nice Girl. Once upon a time there was a girl that loved flowers and she picked up a flower and she wanted to show it to her family and they put it in their back yard. They love it so much.”



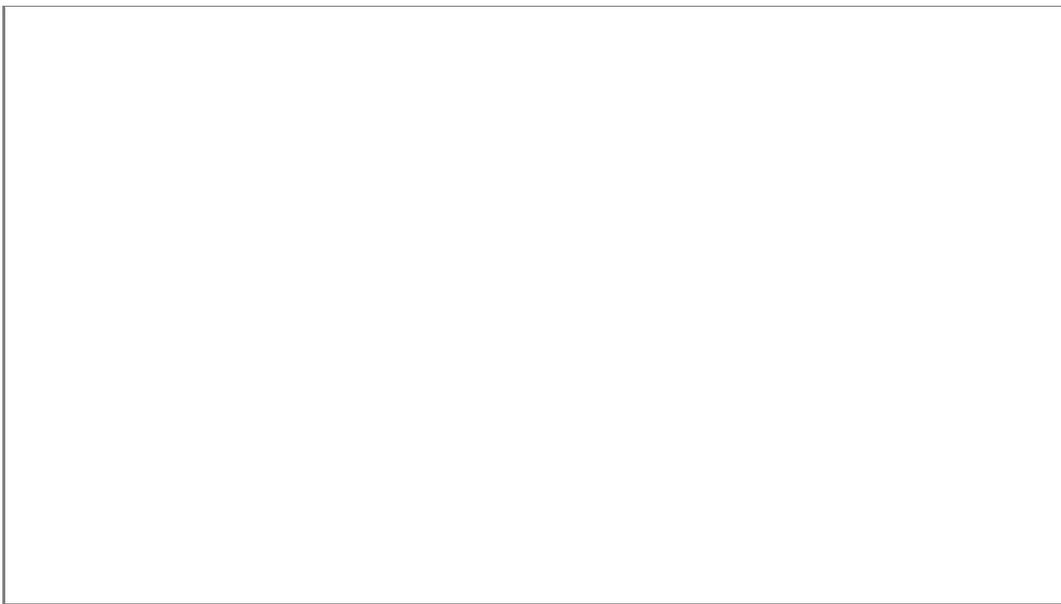
Figure 6



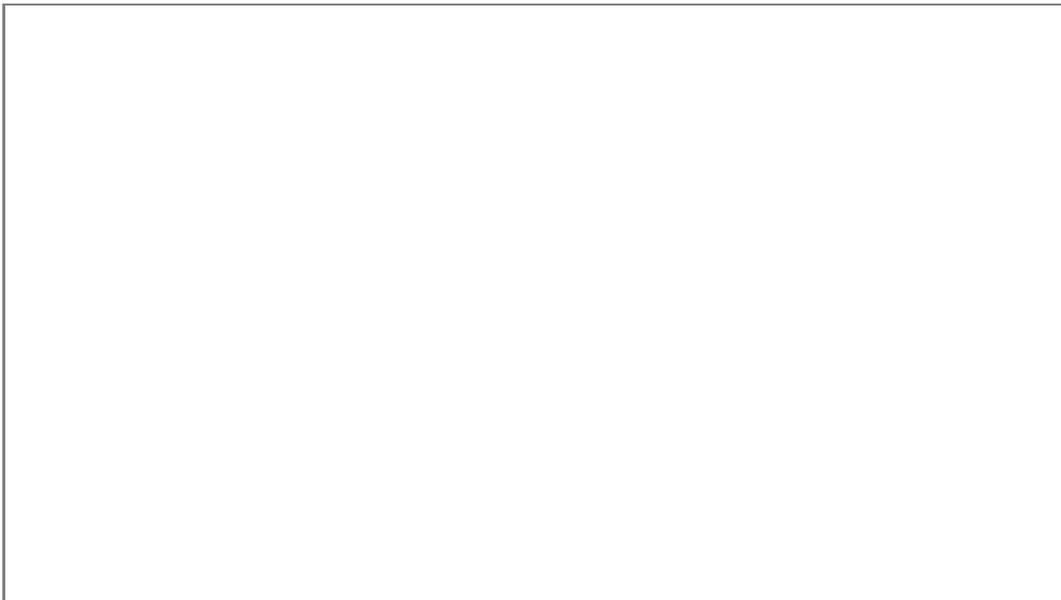
Figure 7

For his art, Emmanuel wrote, “Once upon a time there was a boy that had a ball and he lost his ball at home in his room in his closet under his toy box” (see Figure 7).

To pull together our focus on friendship, we made a video. I had the children work in pairs and used question prompts to record what “Friendship in Everyone” means to them personally in their everyday lives. I gave them time to share ideas with each other first, then interviewed them as partners. Emanuel and Alex examined some attributes of friendship in this video.



Arshin and Ella carry on what they feel is important in a friendship:



Through our reading, writing, and discussions of friendship the children grew in their understandings of who friends are and what it means to be a friend. They demonstrated a stronger sense of self-confidence and were motivated to be better friends to each other which in turn decreased problems in their interactions with each other. I look forward to exploring friendship again with my class next year.

### **Robbie Stout: Our Study of Mexico**

We started the year by talking with our students about identity and connecting to the places in the world where our families originated on a world map. We read global picturebooks about self and families and invited the children to share stories of their lives and experiences,

followed by our focus on friendship as described by Liz.

After friendship, we decided to move to a cross-cultural study on Mexico. In my class of 18 students, four Spanish-speaking students received services from our ELL teacher and two additional students spoke Spanish. To capitalize on this connection to Mexican culture, Liz and I decided to look for global literature that would help us explore this culture in more depth. I found several books about Mexico that were age appropriate and that had interesting art as well as text. Since it was early May, we started with Cinco de Mayo. By this point in the year, students' writing was more developed and I wasn't taking as much dictation to get down their ideas. I wanted to see if reading books about Mexico would create an interest in writing.

Before beginning our study, I had students share what they knew about Mexico and we wrote their thoughts on a classroom anchor chart. Their thoughts included "Mexico is a place", "They speak Spanish there," and "Butterflies live there." Then I had students write about Mexico. I was looking to see if students would write about their own ideas from the anchor chart and if they would incorporate others' ideas in their writing.

During Writer's Workshop, we read books about Mexican culture, such as *What Are You Doing?* (Armandi, 2011) about a family and their love of reading. We read *Gracias/Thanks* (Mora, 2009) about a Latino family and their use of Spanish and English words. We also read *In My Family* (Garza, 2000) about a Latino family and their traditions.

As we read these books, we wrote information we wanted to remember on a chart, using it as our Graffiti Board on which to take notes. As I read, the children took turns writing down information they wanted to remember. Students were interested in Spanish words. Some students were familiar with piñatas and excited about the candy. Students were also fascinated to learn that people eat cacti. The photos in Figures 10, 11, and 12, show the children taking notes while I read.





Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

After we made notes, students helped me divide the information into food, holidays and traditions, clothing, and things families do for fun.

Towards the end of our study, the students completed a drawing and watercolor about what they learned. I invited them illustrate with pencil and then watercolor. Cactus and pottery were popular choices. Several students illustrated scenes with piñatas. I wanted the children to write about their art and learning as well. Before they wrote we went back to *Dear Primo* (Tonatiuh, 2010). In this book two cousins, one in Mexico and one in the United States, write to each other comparing what they do, where they live, etc. We reviewed the notes on our chart from reading the books and the children used our notes or other things they remembered to compare their lives with the lives of children in Mexico.

All of my students were able to compare the two cultures, even those who wrote only one word responses instead of sentences. Ryan's painting is in Figure 13.

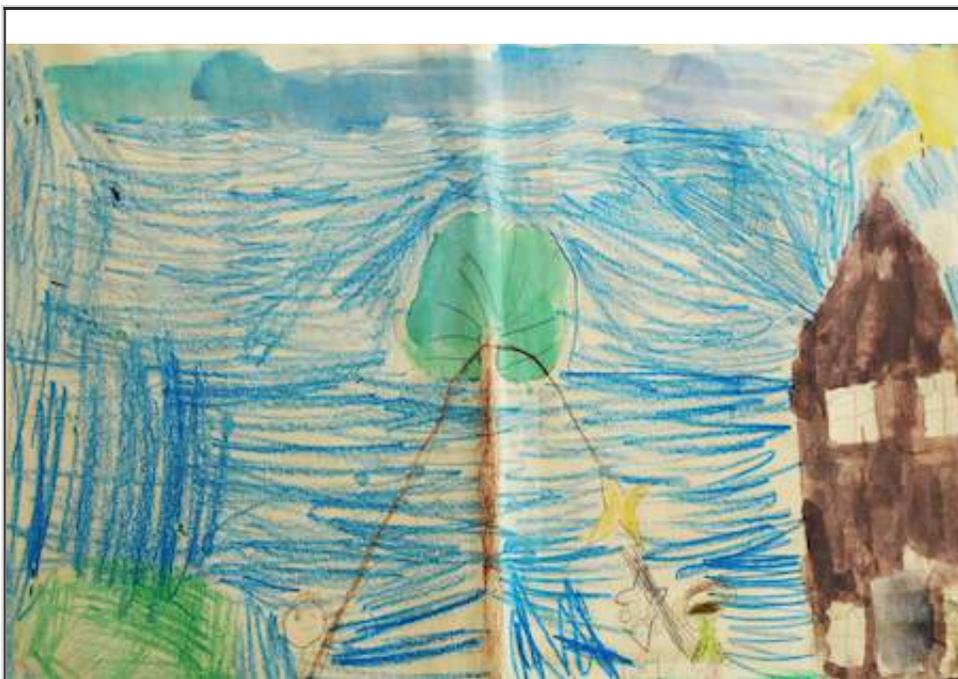


Figure 13

Ryan wrote this about Mexico, "In Mexico we eat fish and cactus and did you know that have to take off the pricklers [barbs or needles]? In Mexico they have drums. In Mexico they have bull fighting." About America he wrote, "In America we eat pizza and coconut. In America we have clarinets. In America they have parades."

Sarah's painting is in Figure 14.

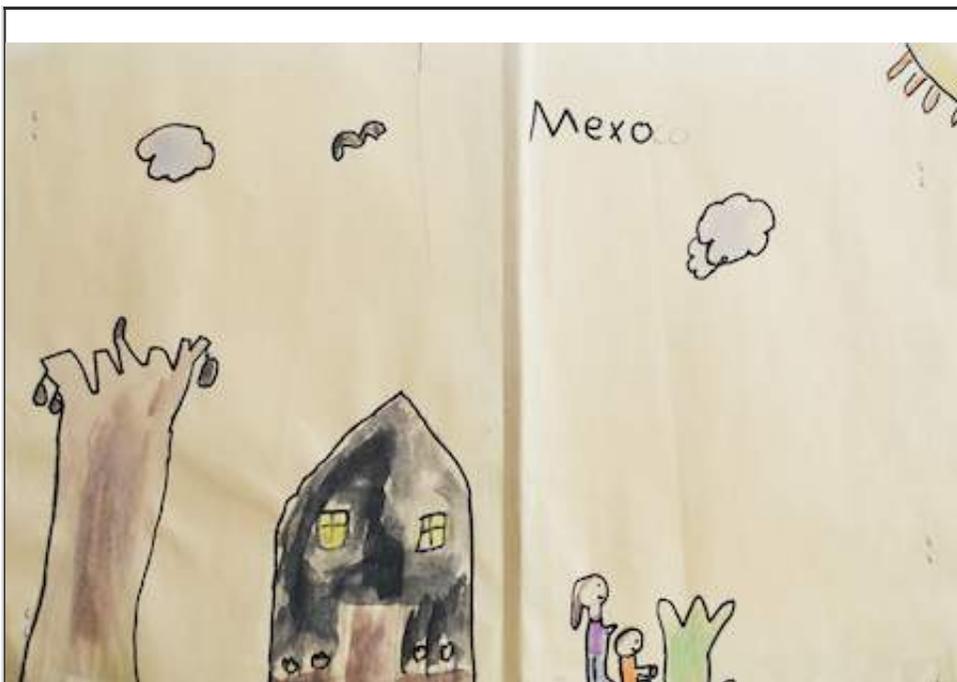


Figure 14

She wrote, “In Mexico they eat grasshoppers and corn and peppers and fish and chocolate. In Mexico they like the Day of the Dead. Art. They make planters. In America we eat pizza and Twizzlers and fries and ice cream and watermelon and corn. Halloween. Thanksgiving. Art. They make pictures.”

Raseel’s painting is in Figure 15.



Figure 15

Raseel wrote, "In Mexico they eat corn. In Mexico they have a party. In Mexico they have bull fighting. In America we eat pizza. In America we have Halloween. In America we have basketball."

The last book we read was *Dream Carver* (Cohn, 2002) which introduced Mexican wood carving to students. Prisca brought Mexican wood carvings for me to share. Students loved the carvings and the art work in the book. I had them watercolor an animal using the style from the book, replicating the patterns and dots in the art, then write stories about their paintings. Joy's picture is in Figure 16. She wrote, "Turtle can't find a friend. He is going looking."



Figure 16

Ryan's picture is in Figure 17. His story read, "One morning Matteo and his dad were carving animals and Matteo said, 'Why do we have to do little pony carvings? I want to do big carvings,' Matteo said to his dad.' 'You'll see,' he wrote." It's interesting that Ryan chose a Latino name for his story.





Figure 17

The children in both of our classes made tremendous progress and their involvement in the ever changing projects over the year were rewarding to us as their teachers, and affirmed the

importance art and literature play in the development of confident literacy learners. Students learned about themselves and others and celebrated the rich diversity in the world. As teachers, we learned a lot too, and look forward to exploring global literature with our future classes.

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### **Crossing Cultural Borders More Deeply: Integrating a Study of India Throughout the Curriculum**

by Laura Fuhrman

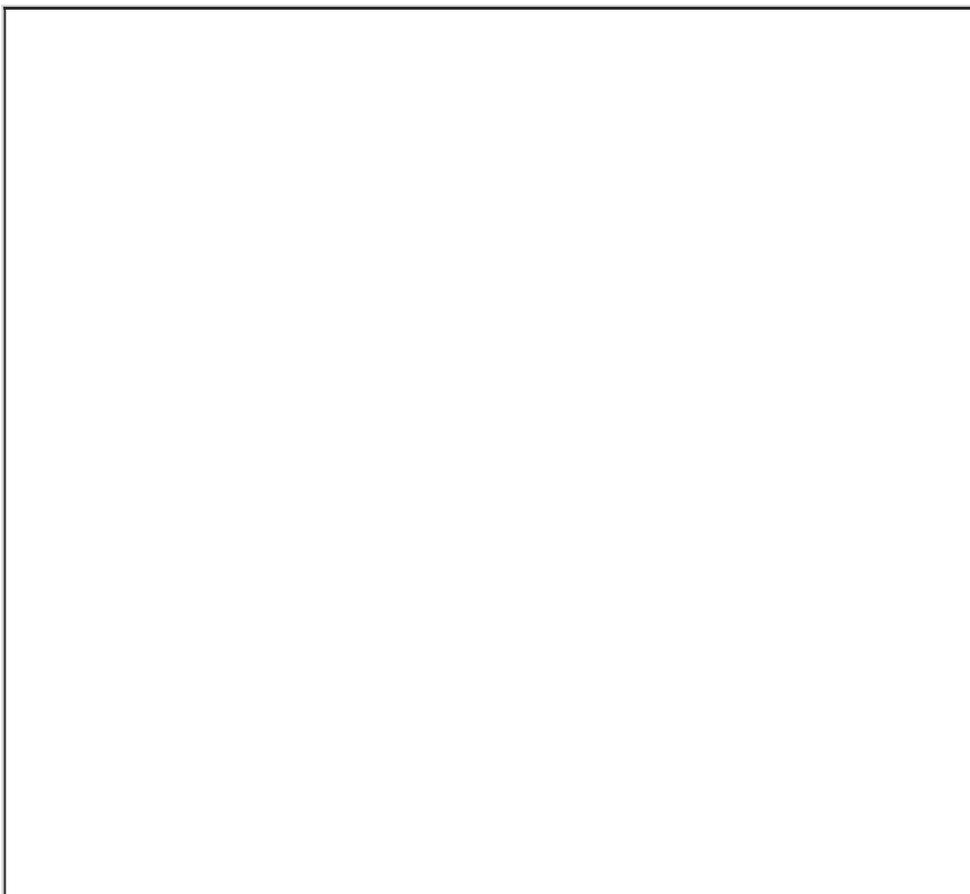
Our first grade team started the 2012-2013 school year helping students explore who they were as cultural beings and developing an appreciation of their own and others' uniqueness. With that understanding we moved to a cross-cultural study of India as we had the [previous year](#) (Clarke-Williams, 2012). In 2011-2012 we found our cross-cultural study of the ways people live and think in India helped students come to respect and appreciate "what it is to be human" (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998) as well as the differences that make Indian and American

cultures unique (Doyle, 2012). We wanted to explore this further with our first graders in 2012-2013. This vignette describes our India study in my classroom and how, with the help of the special area teachers, we integrated this cross-cultural study more fully into the curriculum for all of the first grade classes.

### **Learning About India in First Grade**

Building on our previous work, we decided to add more literature to the India unit by including materials we had from our school library along with enriching materials from the previous year. We divided the books into six text sets and stored them in tote bags, which we rotated among all the first grade teachers. The text sets included sets of literature organized around the following themes: Culture and Traditions, Cities and Villages, Land and Resources, Animals, People, and Children. Each text set included nonfiction books, folktales, and one art book that highlighted an Indigenous group in India and had illustrations that used a specific artistic technique.

Each of the teachers had a text set for one week. During the week we read books to the whole class and children used the books for research in small groups. The children recorded information they found important in “graffiti notes” on large pieces of paper divided into four sections on one side with two additional sections on the other side (Clarke-Williams, 2012). The slides in Figure 1 show examples of graffiti notes for the Land and Resources text set.



### Graffiti Notes: Land and Resources



Figure 1

At the beginning of each week I started text set inquiries by sharing the books I felt provided context and information the entire class needed to understand for that particular topic. As a class, we kept a web on India that we added information to weekly. I also shared the folktale for that week and children summarized by using Sketch-to-Stretch (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996) to show their understandings. The following days the children met with a partner to find and discuss information they learned in the books and to decide what to draw and label on their graffiti notes, adding details independently to their own notes.

### Learning About and Experiencing Indian Art

Each text set had a book that presented an art form from India. Due to time constraints no class was able to go into depth with each of the art books, but we read and experienced two art forms in depth in my classroom.

The first book we explored artistically was *Do!* (Wolf, 2009). Each page of the book has a verb representing actions taken in the Warli tribe. The verb has several drawings in brown and white Warli art that show aspects of the tribe's daily life. My class decided to make our own book after reading and discussing *Do!* together. Each child took a verb, such as *play*, *work*,

wash, etc., that showed their daily actions and illustrated it with Warli art figures using white crayon on brown construction paper. The photographs in Figure 2 show pages from our book.

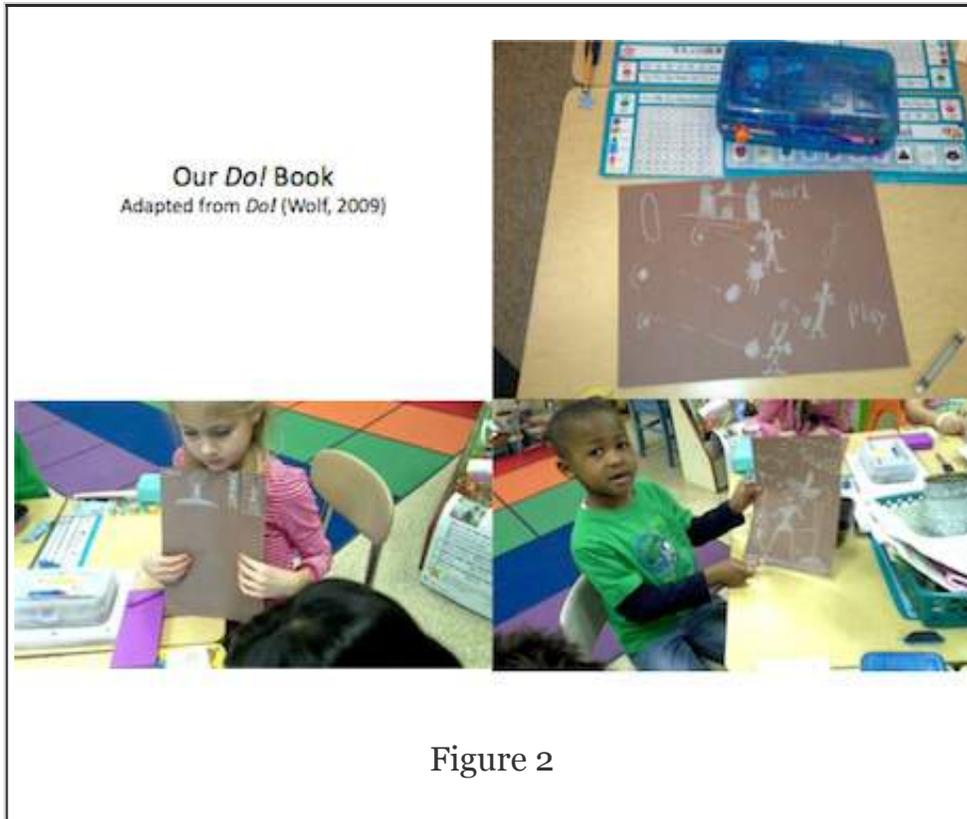


Figure 2

The second book we explored artistically was *That's How I See Things* (Wolf, 2007) about looking at things in a different manner. Wolf, the author, saw animals with two different animal body parts. The book's artists, Rao and Shyam, created illustrations using many colors and added details with only black. After we read and discussed the story and illustrations, students created their own animals on white construction paper using different animal body parts and the same art technique. They named their animals and wrote about where they lived and what they ate. Examples from Nate and Ronnie are below.



Figure 3

Nate created a "Shark-tiger" (see Figure 3) and wrote, "Shark-tiger is wild. And it is scary. It can hunt very fast and snatch its' food very fast. It can even go in loopy-loops. It lives in a shark-tiger den. It eats squid and cheetahs. There's one in the water and one on land. "

Ronnie made a "S-Wolf" (see Figure 4). He wrote, "My animal is called S-Wolf. It eats meat and crabs. It drinks water. It lives in the middle of the seawoods. It has the legs of a squid and

the heads of a wolf."

In addition to the text set books related to art in India, we worked closely with Stacy, our art teacher, to explore different types of art in India. Stacy describes her focus on art in India in her curriculum:



Figure 4

*In my first grade classes, we started the India unit by looking at an art form in India called rangolis. Rangolis are a form of decoration created by dropping a rice flour mixture on the ground commonly found in front of houses or steps. They can be created with just a white color or different patterns of bright colors. We read Rangoli: Discovering the Art of Indian Decoration written by Anuradha Ananth (2011) and illustrated by Shailja Jain.*

*We talked about the kinds of lines and shapes we saw in the rangolis and practiced a simple rangoli on a worksheet. This rangoli was created by using a grid of dots in a square shape. After students engaged with this guided rangoli, they created their own designs using the same grid of dots. The next few rangolis the students drew were created without using the grid of dots. They had worksheets to look at while they created their own rangoli that had a design filled with Indian decorations. At the end of class, students chose their favorite and most successful rangoli design.*

*In the next class, students took their small rangoli design and redrew it on a larger paper. They took oil pastels and traced the lines. Once they were finished with oil pastels, they filled in the rest of the design with watercolor. We looked at the book once more and decided it would be best to use bright colors and patterns since the rangolis we studied used bright colors and patterns as well. Examples of rangolis are below..*



Figure 5



Figure 6

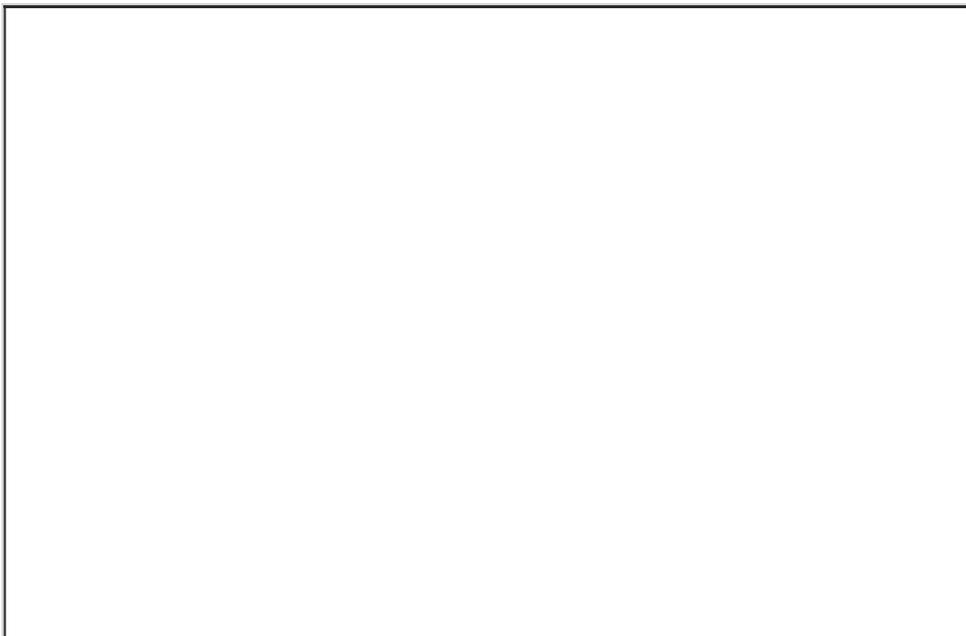
*Students drew an Indian house and apartment building and then a car, person, and an*

*animal somewhere in the foreground of their cover. In the next class, they drew shapes on their ground and painted them in with watercolor. They also painted in one of their houses. Once the paint was dry, they took permanent black marker and outlined everything. In the final class, students took construction paper and cut out a tree to include on their cover. Titles were glued onto their cover and the cover was bound to their book.*

As Stacy mentioned, students wrote books about India based on what they'd learned.

My students' books compared India and America on facing pages. After six weeks of an extensive learning they began composing their rough drafts comparing India to the U.S.

When starting the writing process I modeled writing my rough draft. I started with the first text set topic and wrote something I learned about people in India by referring to my graffiti notes. Then I wrote a fact on my America page that stated how it was different in my life. All the children started with the same topic on the first page. They used their graffiti notes to think about what they wanted to write and continued at their own pace with the pages that followed, conferring with me individually. Some children received additional assistance when needed. I also had parent volunteers who assisted at times. After all the pages were completed at the rough draft stage children completed final copies at their own pace adding detailed illustrations to each page. Each student had six pages, one for each text set/topic mentioned above, about India and six pages about America. The India pages were bound to the cover on the left edge of their books and the America pages on the right edge. That way when the books opened the India and America pages were side-by-side to create a flip book (see Figure 7). The children created the covers for the India side and America side in art class and were then laminated. A few pages from Sarah's book are in Figure 7.



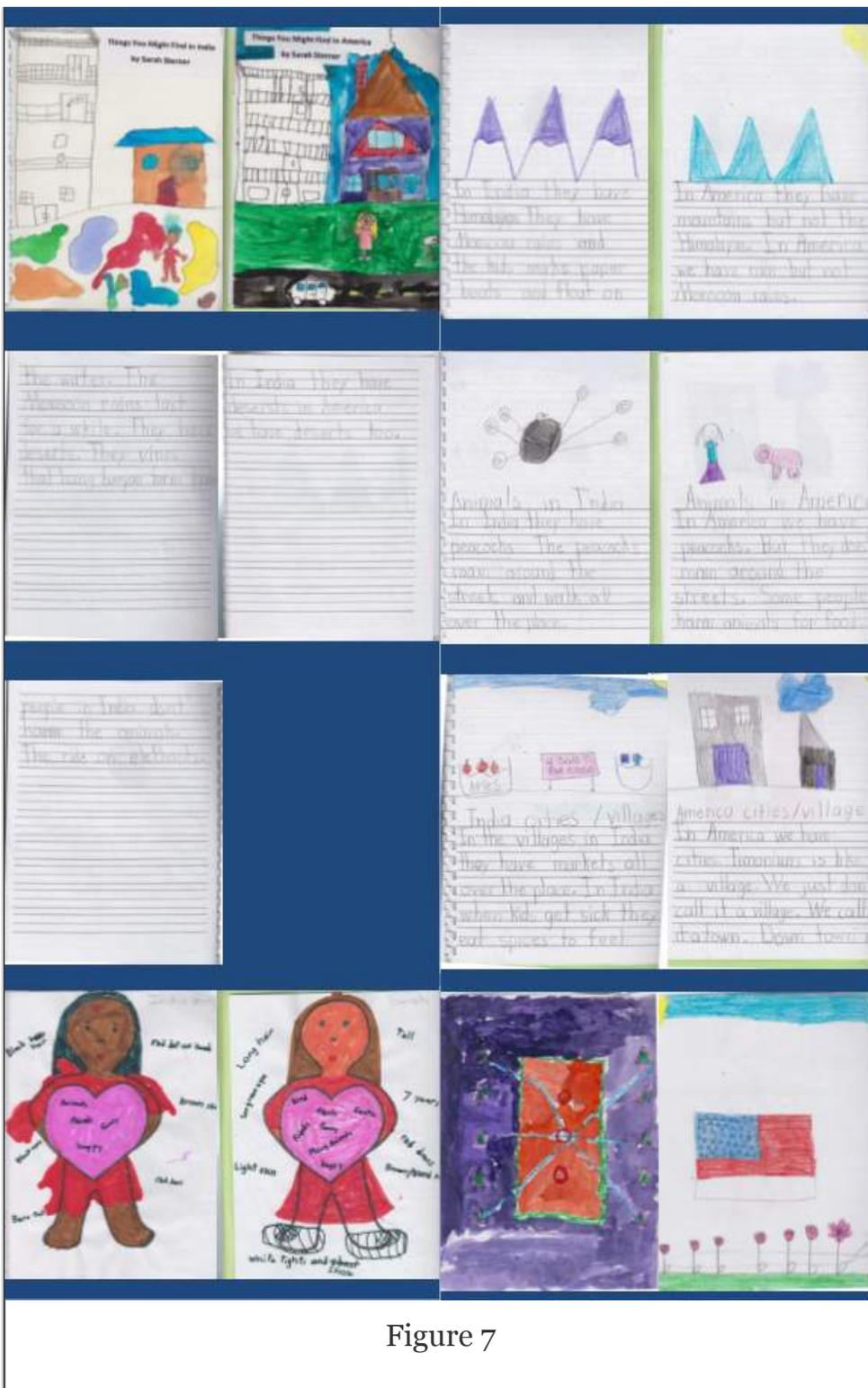


Figure 7

## Celebration Time

We scheduled a morning to use the cafeteria to have an India celebration, inviting parents from India to share information with children. A few days before, children in our classes wrote questions to the parents and the parents used the questions to organize their presentations. For example, Jordian, from my class, asked “What does chapatti taste like?” and “Have you visited the Taj Mahal?” Two fathers and two mothers came wearing native clothes. Three

students also wore native clothing. Two of them, Leah in second grade and her cousin Ariel in fifth grade, danced a contemporary Bharatnatyam Indian dance. Leah's picture is in Figure 8.



Figure 8

Following the presentations, students got into small groups with students in one of the other first grade classrooms to share their India books (see Figure 9). They all enjoyed learning from each other and sharing their accomplishments!





Figure 9

### **Learning About India in Special Area Classes**

To immerse our students more deeply in Indian culture, in addition to working with Stacy for art, I emailed all the special area teachers as the first grade chair this year, explaining our study and asked if they could integrate India into their work with children. The special area teachers were eager to collaborate with us and support our students' learning and found ways to weave aspects of Indian culture into their curriculums.

Music: Tammy, the music teacher, researched Indian music and found a song that children sing in India. She taught our first graders that song and they learned to sing it.

Technology: Bethany, the technology teacher, showed the children how to research India and presented them with a Pixie slideshow about Indian culture that had text and pictures. The text was read to ESL and below-grade level students using a voice recorder. Students then used the information to create their own slideshows. They added graphics to support their self-written text and recorded their voices reading the presentation. They also printed this out into book form. Michael's book is in Figure 10.



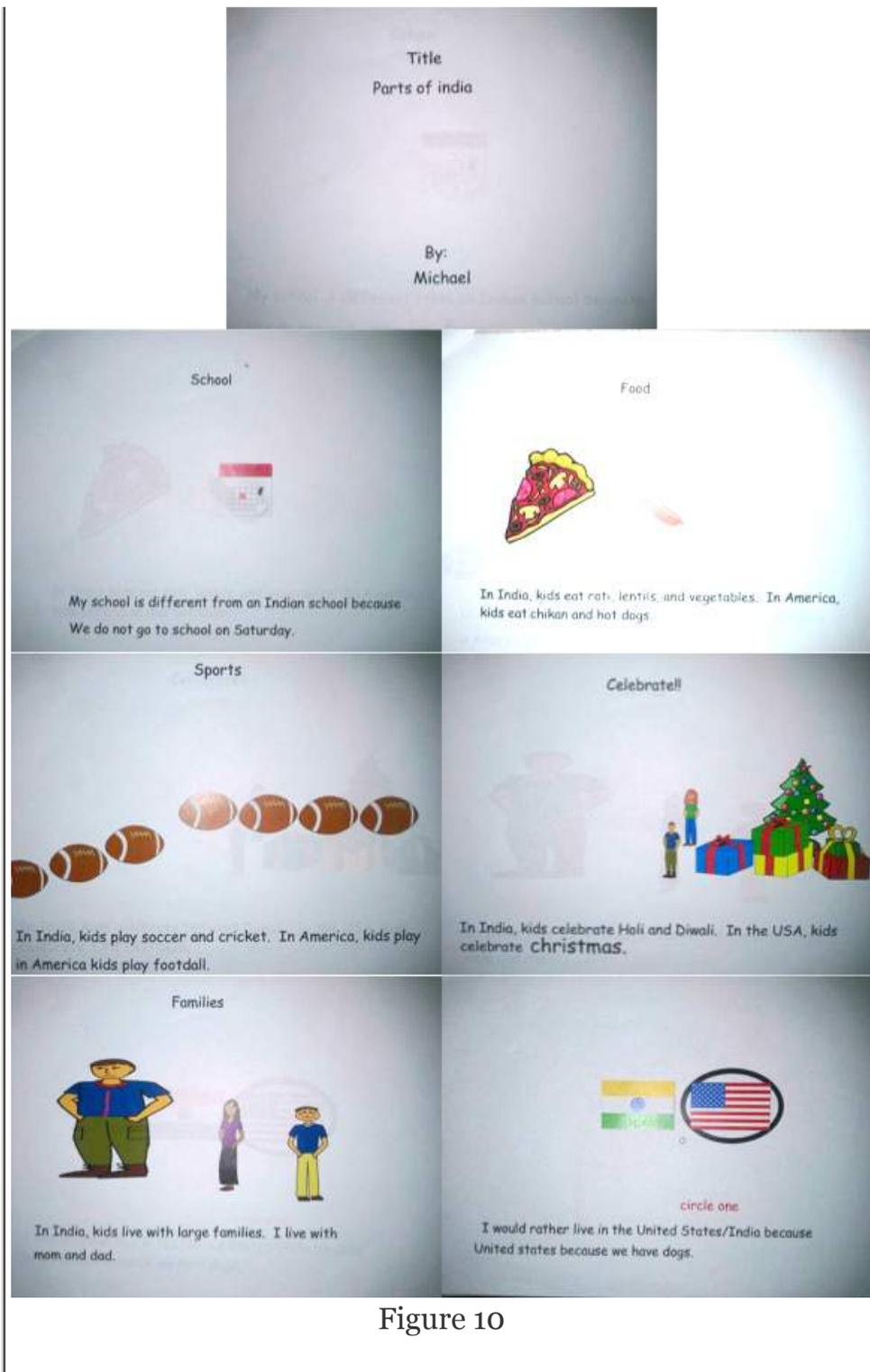


Figure 10

Physical Education: While researching the country of India my students found out the children in India play some different games. During physical education class the student teacher taught the children some of these games.

The children's learning and experiences with India in the special area classes added to their knowledge and understandings of India. Immersed in learning about and experiencing aspects of Indian culture allowed them to cross cultural borders and understand more how they fit into our pluralistic world (Cai, 2002). Through the study of India the children developed

“conceptual understandings of culture [and] realized that their cultural perspectives were only one of many ways to view and live in the world” (Short & Thomas, 2011, p. 156).

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## **First Graders Taking Action in Their Part of the World**

by Michelle Hassay Doyle, First Grade

For the past several years I have been exploring ways of using global literature in the classroom. We have based much of our work as a literacy community on A Curriculum that is International, a curriculum framework developed by Kathy Short (2009). This curriculum offers various ways of engaging with global literature that encourage children to explore their personal cultural identities, ways others in the world think and live in particular cultures, different cultural perspectives related to any topic/subject, and complex global issues which can lead to ways of taking action to address problems. This year we knew we wanted to find ways of helping our students think about how they can make a difference in the world.

In this vignette, I share some of the events in my classroom related to our study of taking action, specifically what we did, and plan to continue to do, to help our part of the world. First, though, I invite you into my classroom to learn about who we are.

### **Welcome to My Classroom**

The 22 first graders in my classroom were an amazing group of children with diverse backgrounds and heritages from all over the world. Two families had moved into the area from India during the last few years. Another family moved from China three years ago. One family that had been in our school for several years was preparing to move back to their native country of Taiwan. Other families had moved from Kenya, England, Jamaica, Germany, Africa, Mexico, and El Salvador within the last decade.

My classroom is a rich literate environment. More than half of the room is filled with picturebooks and chapter books in a reading area that also includes two large carpets, comfy chairs and a small sofa where I hold reading conferences with students. Writing materials are also accessible around the room. Throughout the year we studied various author/illustrators which provided opportunities for students to make deliberate decisions about their writing and art. Our motto all year was “the more you read, the better reader you will become and the more you write, the better writer you will become.” This helped students focus and become stronger readers and writers. In addition, students learned to communicate through art. They were very thoughtful about what they were illustrating, making decisions about, for example, which colors and lines to use to convey particular moods or show emotion.

We started the year with a focus on identity and understanding who we are as cultural beings. I sent home the family survey, asking parents about their heritage, where their ancestors originated and immigrated from, and when/what brought them to the United States. While this was difficult for the children to understand (some say, “But I was born in Baltimore”) it began to give them a sense of their place in time and helped them realize every family was from somewhere else unless they were Native Americans. I took pictures of each child and placed each child’s face on the outside of a world map, with a string connecting them to the country/countries they were from. The students loved this and referred to this map throughout the school year (see Figure 1).

□



Figure 1

Having regular class meetings provided every student with an opportunity to state their opinions. Our meetings were also a place where we discussed issues that arose and how we could solve them together. Our first class meetings at the beginning of the school year focused on getting to know each other and on the kind of classroom we wanted to have. We worked hard to learn each other’s names and interests and discussed how we think we should act towards each other. This past year we decided to have one rule: “Treat others and the environment the way you wish to be treated.” We explored what this meant within our classroom walls, in the school building and in our outdoor classroom environments both on the playground and on the school grounds.

Pot Spring Elementary is a “Green School” in terms of environmental concerns so we have a lot of wonderful areas on our school grounds that evolved out of the school mission, including a meadow, a rain garden, a trail of native trees planted over the years, a Bayscape garden, and a bluebird trail. We simultaneously worked to develop respect for each other and our differences and respect for our outdoor world.

### **Taking Action in the Classroom**

As Laura Fuhrman described in her [vignette](#), our classes did a cross-cultural study of India that was also woven into the curriculum outside of our classrooms in collaboration with the special area teachers, such as art, P.E., and technology. During this study we stayed alert to issues the children gravitated towards. For example, they were very taken with water issues in India and how in some areas families had to get water from wells and carry it to their homes. The children were also interested in how some children attended school, with classrooms being sometimes set up under overpasses on highways or on train platforms when buildings and teachers were scarce. The issues that really captivated students, though, were those related to the environment, including endangered animals and plants. Environmental issues became our focus for “taking action” because it was authentic and significant to the children and related also to their experiences in Maryland (Short, 2011).



Figure 2

Because we are a Green School and had a continual focus on respecting, working with, and helping each other, I realized that we had been finding ways to take action and make our world a better place throughout the year. A primary focus of our action was our school’s Bayscape garden (see Figure 2).

The Bayscape is filled with native plants that were originally placed in this location to control erosion at the bottom of the hill right outside of our first grade classrooms. The Bayscape is located closest to our classroom and is one of the projects that we have helped to maintain over the past few years. After studying the native plants and pulling weeds in the garden children developed a respect and a sense of ownership and protectiveness for this area. Since the

Bayscape is not a fenced in area and sits at the bottom of the field on which the children play, it is a magnet for balls. Students quickly discovered the importance of keeping the area safe from trampling feet so the Bayscape would not be harmed. With partners they made posters to inform others to stay out of the Bayscape. Their posters said things like “Please do not run in the Bayscape, plants are growing there!” and “Do not litter in the Bayscape!” Once the posters

were created students wrote statements about them, then delivered the posters to each classroom in the school to hang as reminders of why it was important to stay out of the Bayscape. They also took turns reminding everyone in the school during the announcements each morning. These actions helped students learn about how they can make a difference and take action to help the world around them. My favorite part of this inquiry was that children became ambassadors for protecting the Bayscape and worked hard to remind other classes to direct their balls and feet in other directions! They had a voice right from the start of the year.

I used global literature to develop students' understandings of the concept of "taking action" and as a springboard for discussions of the range of ways they could make a difference. Often students responded to the books we read by creating a sketch-to-stretch (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996) in their journals. We started with *The Curious Garden* (Brown, 2009), in which a boy who lives in the city discovers an area where plants are growing on abandoned railroad tracks. He nurtures these plants and eventually the whole city becomes a more beautiful and greener place. Students loved this book and were able to understand how the actions of one boy made a difference in his part of the world. In our class discussion, Ben summarized by stating, "One boy helps make the world around him a greener and more beautiful place." Angel, a second language learner, created the sketch-to-stretch in Figure 3.

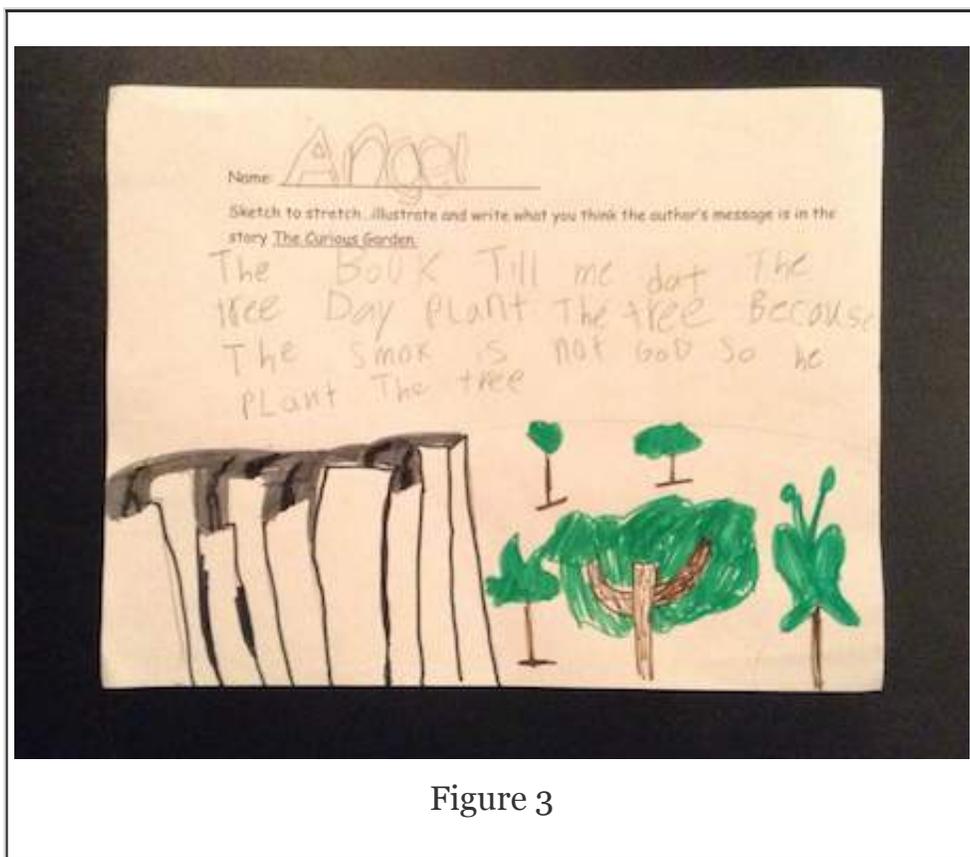


Figure 3

Angel uses the illustrations from the picturebook as an example to depict the area as very gray due to the factories nearby. By the end of the book the boy has inspired the community to plant

trees and plants, replacing their drab world with beautiful colors.

In *One Child* (Cheng, 2000) the illustrations are a powerful part of telling the story. The images are very dark and gray in the beginning, because the girl, the “one child”, is saddened by her discoveries of a world filled with pollution, people killing animals, and people fighting. As the story progresses and the girl talks about her dreams of making the world a better place, Woolman, the artist, incorporates more and more color. Students picked up on this immediately. In her sketch-to-stretch Kayla shows this concept and incorporates the feeling of the girl at the beginning and end of the story (see Figure 4).

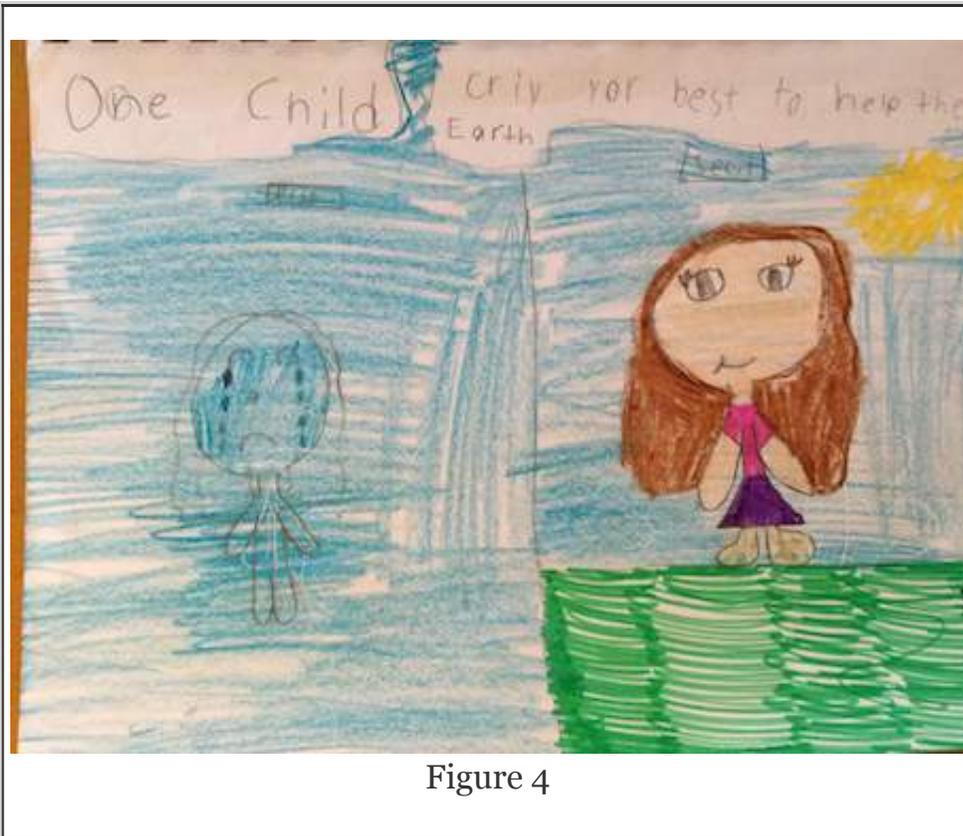


Figure 4

Through her use of color Kayla shows the sadness the girl feels at the beginning of the story and the joy by the end of the story as the girl thinks of ways she can make a difference. Claire went a step farther by adding a series of examples of things people could do right now (see Figure 5).

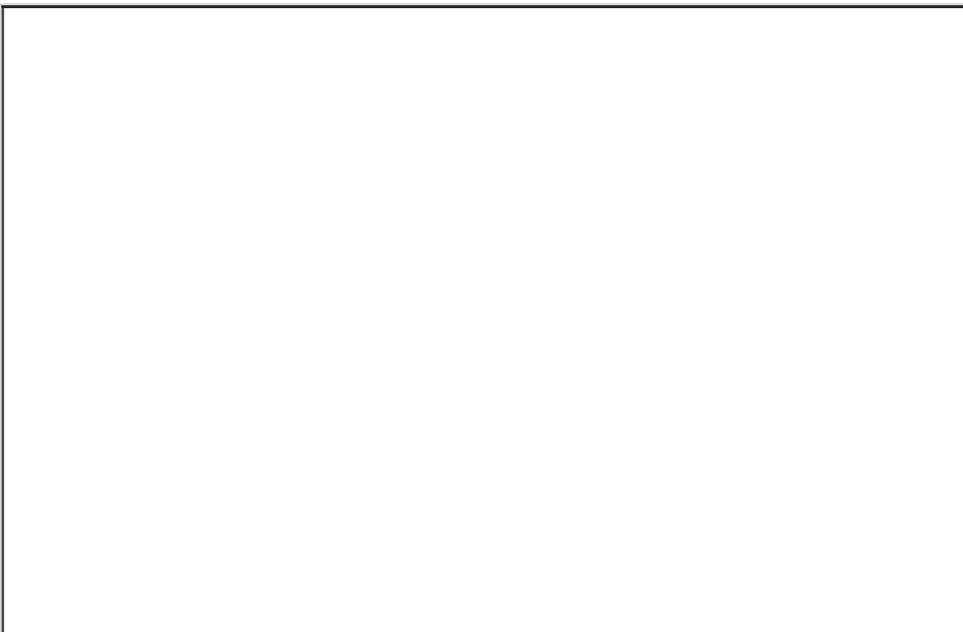




Figure 5

Claire wrote about turning off lights when they are not needed, walking when you are able, planting a seed and throwing away trash. Khyree summarized *One Child* by saying, “One girl’s world was gray and she realized that if you stop littering and start planting you can make a difference in the world. If you can IMAGINE, anything can happen.”

Another book we read was *First Come the Zebra* (Barash, 2009) about two neighboring tribes in Africa that did not get along. Two young boys, one from each tribe, work together to help save the life of a toddler who wanders into harm’s way. Christina’s sketch-to-stretch showing her understandings of this book is in Figure 6.



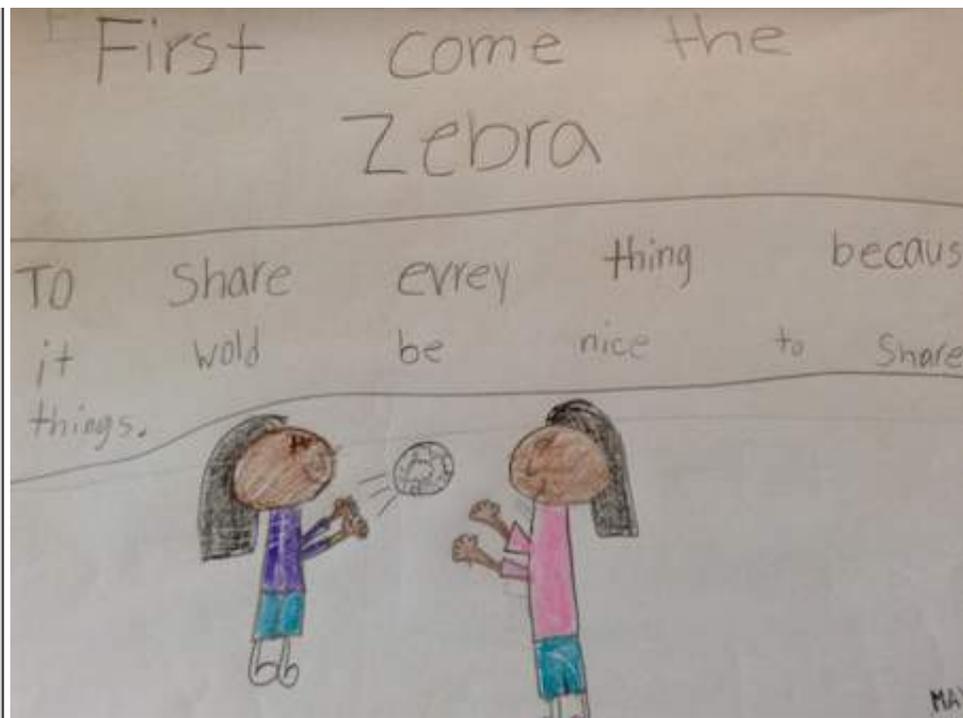
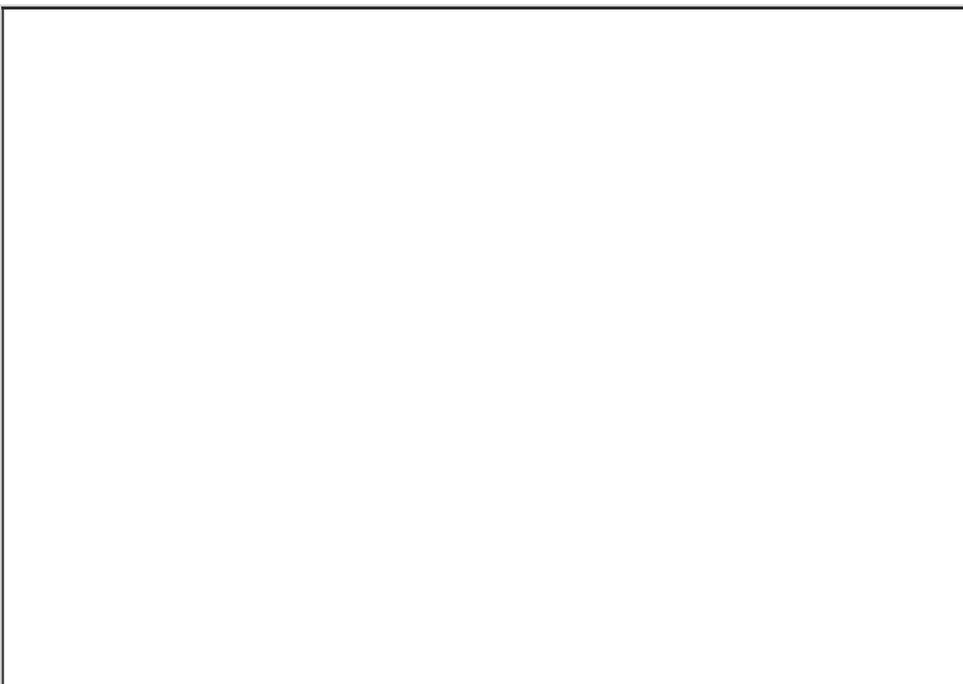


Figure 6

Christina picked up the concept of sharing with each other because it is “nice to share things”. During our class discussion, Christina stated, “we should treat others the way we want to be treated, we should be nice to each other and share” to which Alex added, “that is our golden rule, to treat others and the environment the way we wish to be treated!”

Jessie related this story to her own life (see Figure 7). Jessie wrote that “the book told me to share” and she illustrated this marvelously by showing children sharing their glue and pencils with each other.



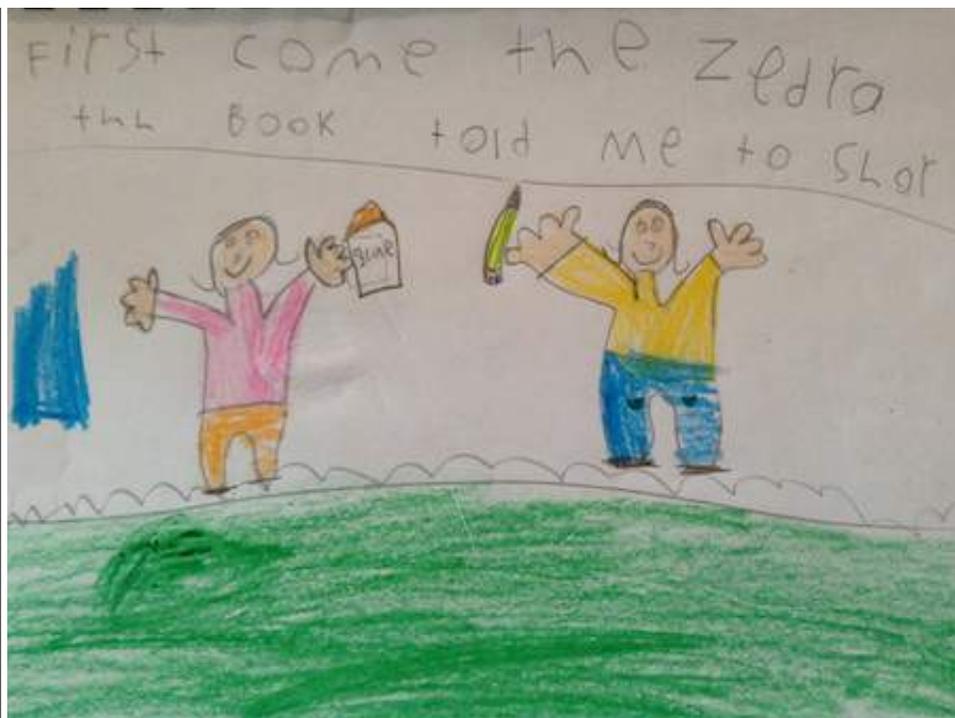


Figure 7

A final example of a book we read about taking action was *The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to feed Families* (Roth & Trumbore, 2011). Khyree summarized the book during a class discussion by stating, “One scientist lead a project to plant mangrove trees so that a village could survive and not starve.” In his sketch-to-stretch (Figure 8) he wrote, “Help others so they won’t starve”. He represented his understanding by drawing a giant Mangrove tree reaching to the sky for all to share.





Figure 8

To pull together our thinking about the taking action books we had read, we created a chart identifying common characteristics of these books. During our discussions children shared ideas, such as how the books were about making the world better, how people were able to make changes in the world, and how we, too, were making the world a better place by pulling weeds and mulching our Bayscape. Rashmi summed up everything when she said, “In each world [the character] made the world a better place,” which is at the heart of taking action.

### **Reflecting Back and Thinking Forward to Take Action**

As the year wound down, I wanted to find a way to reflect back on our thinking about taking action and help students look forward to what they would continue to do. To start the reflection process, I first had students write about things we’d read about and done over the year to make our world a better place. They wrote on their own first, then I made the list from their ideas on a chart and we reviewed them. Their ideas included picking up litter and trash and cleaning up their neighborhoods; mulching and weeding our Bayscape; protecting endangered animals; and, helping birds by feeding and providing houses for the Bluebirds, a native bird of Maryland, perhaps referencing the Bluebird trail on the school property that was created over the years as part of our Green School project. Students helped to maintain and

monitor the bird houses during the spring. Students also included ideas from a science unit we'd just completed that focused on our endangered state butterfly, the Checkerspot. We learned that deer are eating the Turtlehead plant that the Checkerspot needs to live and so planted Turtlehead plants in the Bayscape. Students realized that they were already doing a huge amount to take action to help our part of the world!

After our brainstorming, we read *10 Things I Can Do to Help My World* (Walsh, 2012) and decided to make our own class book, titled *22 Ways to Help the Earth*. Children thought of ways that they could help the world and provided a reason for why their action was important. A sampling of the pages from our book are in Figure 9.

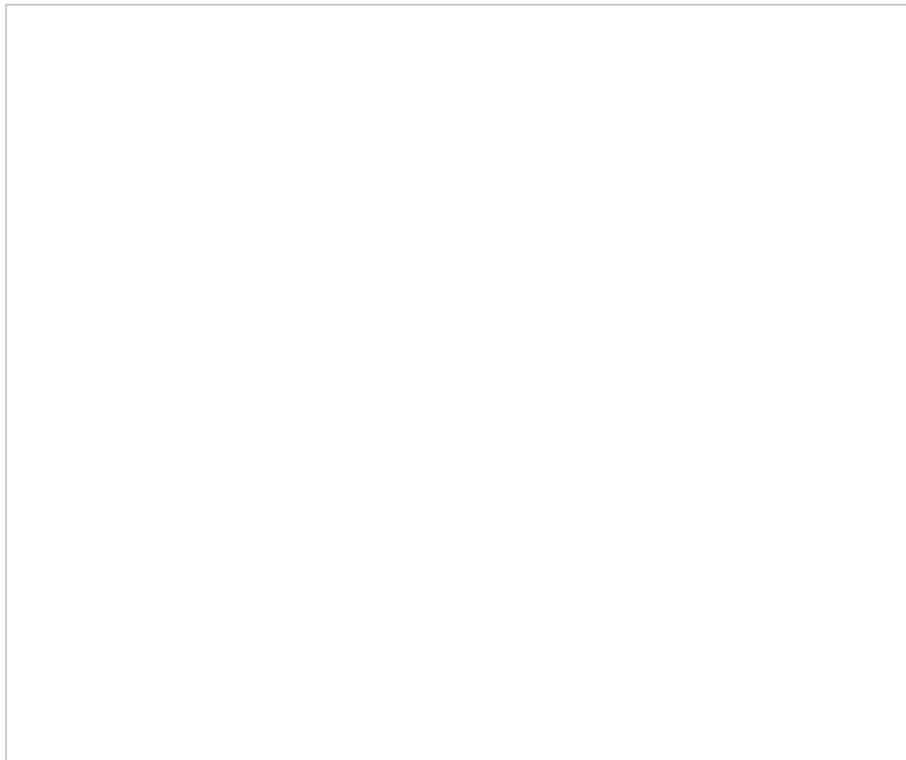


Figure 9

This year was magical. Students were perceptive, persistent and extremely motivated to do their very best to make a difference. The theme of taking action was woven throughout our year and so they grew in their understanding of its importance and their role and responsibility in making a difference in our world. I truly feel that the seeds were planted and hope they take root as these children grow throughout their lives. I feel lucky to have been with them on the beginning of their journey.

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### **“They saw something that wasn’t right and they fixed it.”**

by Jenna Loomis

The title of this vignette is a comment by a first grader during a discussion of books in our “taking action” text set. We’d read about 12 books over three weeks and were reflecting and thinking about common themes within the books. Landen’s comment reveals that he understood the characters and the big ideas in our text set. He realized that the characters all saw a problem that somehow touched their hearts and they chose to act. I was excited that Landen and his classmates recognized that the characters in the books took action. That was an excellent start - but my undertaking was to inspire my students to find what touched *their* hearts enough for *them* to take action.

My interest in taking action grew out the curriculum framework, A Curriculum that is International (Short, 2009), that our ART Literacy Community has organized our work with global literature around for the past three years. In their vignettes, colleagues in our community described other parts of the curriculum, for example, explorations of cultural identity (Prisca and Ray Martens; Christie Furnari) and cross-cultural studies (Laura Fuhrman; Robbie Stout). Our ART Literacy Community also focused on helping students learn the language of art and how to communicate through art, which is also discussed in other

vignettes. In this vignette, I describe my students' experiences with taking action.

Taking action involves recognizing a problem and assuming responsibility to do something to bring it towards resolution. I wanted our year-end focus on taking action to be a true culmination of our learning, with students using what they learned about themselves, others, and art. My goal was to use a global literature text set of books around issues and problems, our literature discussions, and cultural x-rays of the characters in the books as mentors for students to identify problems they cared about and plan to take action to resolve the problem. In this vignette, I describe our exploration of the characters' motivations for taking action, the types of action they took, examples of our work together as a class, and how our taking action projects linked our learning across the year.

### **Moving Through the Text Set with an Eye on Motivation**

As I thought about people in our world and characters in books who take action, I realized those who take action have a strong sense of self and a personal connection to the problems with which they choose to engage. For example, in *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown (2009), Liam is a boy who loves exploring, nature, and being outdoors, even in his gray and dreary world. When he finds a "lonely patch of color," a small bunch of wildflowers and plants, the love of nature in his heart connects him to these plants. When he looks closely at them, "it became clear that the plants were dying. They needed a gardener." The love of nature and the outdoors was within his heart, and he took action.

Reading books from our Taking Action text set became part of our daily read-aloud time. As we discussed the books, and referred to the character x-rays (Short, 2009) we had created earlier in the year, we talked about the traits inside the heart as "what's in the heart of the character who took action." Rather than create a complete x-ray for each character, we focused our discussions on the character's heart and how those elements inspired the character to take action. Students' understandings of this connection were essential to the culminating taking action project, so to make it visually clear, we created a "heart chart". Figure 1 shows the two stories at the beginning of our chart.





Figure 1

As a group, we worked together to add the elements on the white heart for the first two stories. Then I divided students into small groups to reread a story and identify what was in those characters' hearts and the actions they took. The chart in Figure 2 shows a sampling from our Heart Chart.

<b>Character and Book</b>	<b>What Was in the Character's Heart</b>	<b>Action</b>
Mrs. Peterson in <i>The Junkyard Wonders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Feels like she needs to help her kids because they are being bullied</li> <li>•Cares about helping her kids</li> <li>•Feels proud of her class and their hard work</li> <li>•Thinks all of her kids are great</li> </ul>	Shows them that the junkyard can be great Helps them see that they can do great things
A child in <i>One Child</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•cares about nature</li> <li>•cares about helping the world</li> <li>•loves making a better place</li> <li>•cares about the animals</li> </ul>	She is making the Earth a better place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Picks up trash</li> <li>•Plants a tree</li> <li>•Turns off lights</li> <li>•Writing about the problem</li> <li>•Making signs</li> </ul>

		•Singing
Lina and Feroza in <i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•cares about her friend</li> <li>•she feels bad because she has to get her stuff from a truck</li> </ul>	Gave up her sandals to Lina [at the end]
The boy in <i>A Child's Garden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•lives in a place of ruin</li> <li>•cares for gardens</li> </ul>	When he planted it [cared for the green shoot] it made his ruined place a better place to live
Sama in <i>The Forgiveness Garden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•cares about both sides</li> <li>•wanted to stop the fighting</li> <li>•felt the same way as her side (she felt that the people on the other side were like the people on her side)</li> </ul>	Dropped the rock Made a garden for both sides

Figure 2

### Taking Action Ourselves

To make our focus on taking action a true culmination of our year-long learning, I planned for students to identify a problem that spoke to their hearts and identify an action they could take to resolve or improve the problem. Because we were at the end of the school year, there wasn't time for them to take action before school ended, so I designed a taking action poster with four sections that would allow students to use their knowledge of art, character x-rays, and taking action (see Figure 3). The four sections were: Identifying the Problem through Artwork; Connecting the Students' Hearts and Their Problems; Taking Action: Identified and Illustrated; Showing "After the Action" Through Artwork.





Figure 3

### Section 1 – Identifying the Problem through Artwork

The first section of the poster incorporated artwork depicting a problem that was important to each student. We began with a close reading of the text and illustrations in *Sebastian's Rollerskates* (de Deu Prats, 2005). I chose this book as a mentor text for the artwork but my students noted that Sebastian took action. Colin explained, "Sebastian [took action on] something that was his own problem." At the beginning of the story, Sebastian is shy and cannot express himself to others. In the illustrations, Roviera used newspaper to depict the problem by filling Sebastian's thought bubbles with gray, dark colors to depict his sadness and frustration with being shy.

As a class we reflected on the books we'd read and journal prompts about problems in school,

our classroom and town, as well as our India research to brainstorm a list of problems. Figure 4 shows the problems we identified.



Figure 4

I asked the students to choose a problem that was important to them and create artwork like Roviera's to show that problem. The students selected and depicted in their artwork a wide range of problems. For example, Reid's artwork was about the tornados that devastated parts of Oklahoma at the end of the school year (see Figure 5).

Our school had collected school supplies to send to students in affected schools, and Reid had brought in a bag of items to donate. Her artwork was "a bird's eye view"(as she described it) of the people stuck in the tornado. She used the newspaper to show "stuff that got destroyed...and if it is all destroyed, it is really sad." She identified *A Child's Garden* (Foreman, 2009) as a story that her artwork reminded her of because in that story, the destroyed ruins where the boy lived were in muted, drab colors as was her newspaper.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Colin identified his problem: “I don’t think it’s good that people cut down trees because it’s taking away all the air and some trees can give you food” (see Figure 6).

Colin spent many hours climbing in trees in his yard, and his mother often had a hard time getting him to come out of trees. He explained his artwork, “I made leaves and some leaves are different colors, because when you cut trees down, leaves get old and start dying...I was trying to make it sad.” The newspaper on the side of the tree is the branches that were being cut.

## Section 2 – Connecting the Students’ Hearts and Their Problems

The second section of the poster established why students’ problems were important to them, based on their identities. They created a new heart for themselves based on the elements they had added to two previous personal x-rays. To link what was in their heart to their problem, they attached two sticky notes to their heart, as we did when we created the Heart Chart. Many students had a strong connection between their hearts and the problems they chose for taking action.

Maya’s heart shows the development of her sense of self throughout the year. She includes such descriptions of herself with traits like “strong, loving, cool, confident, brave, awesome, and important” (see Figures 7a & 7b).





Figure 7a

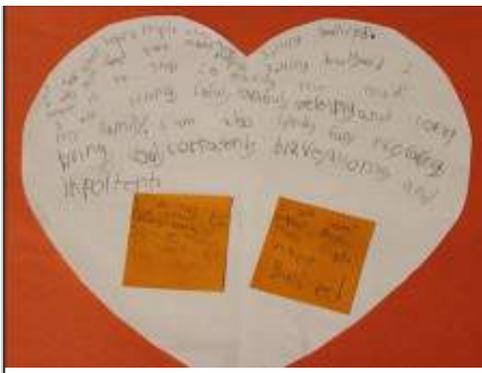


Figure 7b

When connecting what was in her heart when she thought about taking action with the problem of bullying that she identified, she wrote on her sticky notes, “I do not feel good about people bullying each other because it makes me mad and I want to help them. I care about helping people when they are getting bullied.”

Jonathan wrote that he “loves the outdoors and I love my pet” on his heart (see Figures 8a & 8b). He identified the problem that people were killing animals when they went hunting and he wanted to take action so that those animals wouldn’t be killed.



Figure 8a

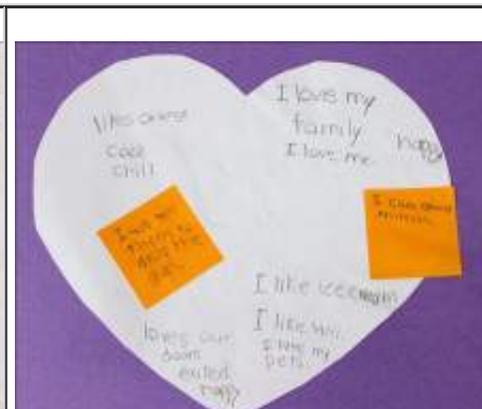


Figure 8b

### Section 3 – Taking Action: Identified and Illustrated

Before completing the third section of the poster, we returned to the Heart Chart to review verbs. We went back to the actions the characters had taken and circled the verbs in the Action column to clarify the students’ understandings of what it means to take action. They drew themselves taking action to solve the problem they identified and wrote the action they would take.

Students chose a variety of different ways to take action on their posters. The confident, brave

Maya would stand up to the bullies and tell them to stop (see Figure 9).

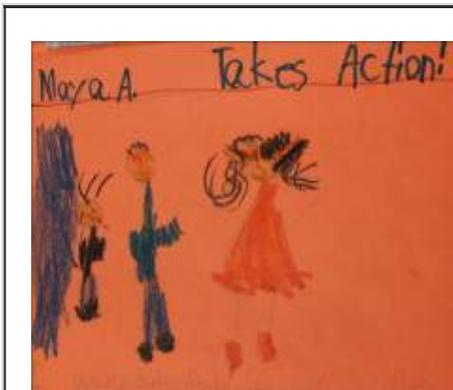


Figure 9



Figure 10

Ryan, who thinks “it is terrible that dolphins are getting stuck in nets and are dying,” decided to make signs to stop people from throwing nets in the sea (see Figure 10).

Mia’s action was to plant more trees because when trees are cut down, animals lose their habitats (see Figure 11).

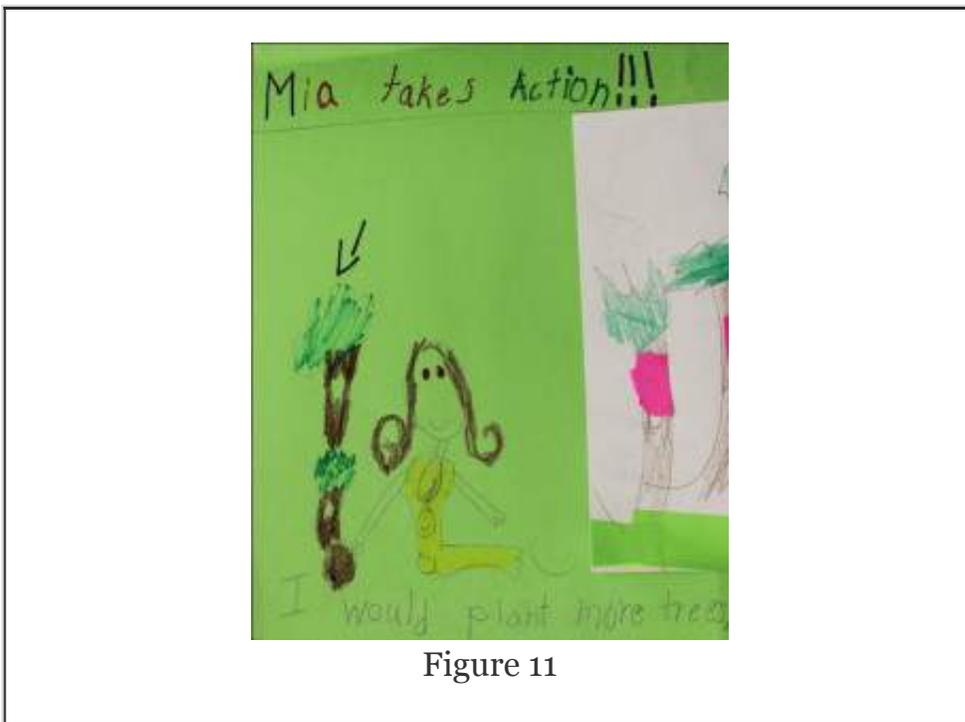


Figure 11

#### Section 4 – Showing “After the Action” Through Artwork

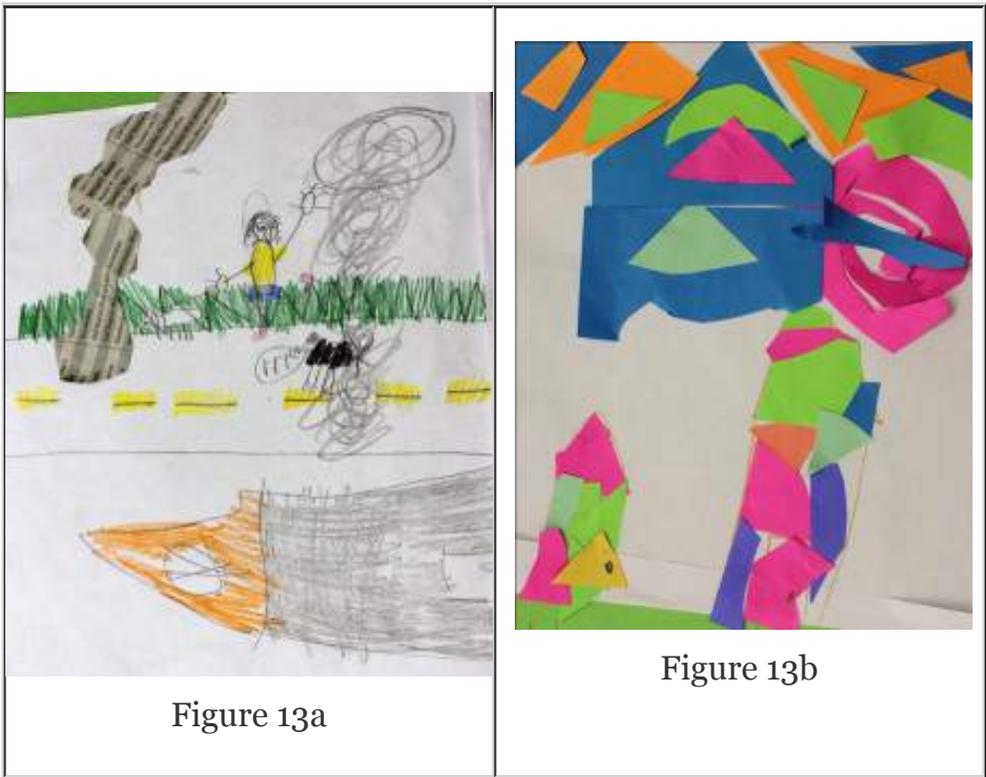
For the last part of their posters, students created another piece of artwork to contrast with their first piece that identified the problem. In *Sebastian’s Roller Skates*, when Sebastian takes action and gains the confidence to say and do all he wants, the artist Roviera used brightly colored paper for Sebastian’s speech and thoughts to indicate his problem was resolved.

Students' task was to show how their problems might be resolved after they take action to make their world a better place.

Landen's original artwork identified the problem that too many products we have in the U.S. are being made in China (see Figure 12a). In contrast, his resolution artwork is a tissue box made in the U.S. (see Figure 12b). "It is colorful because it is happy that everything is made in the USA, not like the Made in China picture."



Reid used the colorful paper to create the sky and the sunset after the tornado had gone, and she filled in the house and the building with colorful paper to show that they had been "fixed up" (see Figures 13a & 13b).



I interviewed some of my students and learned their connections and depth of their understandings. As an example, Claire's poster (see Figure 14) and her interview are below.



Figure 14

Jenna: What problem did you choose?

*Claire: I chose [that] monk seals were getting tangled in nets because monk seals are important to the world and if they keep [being an] endangered species, then that wouldn't be very good.*

Jenna: Why not?

*Claire: Because we need animals on Earth because it wouldn't be a good place to live [without them].*

Jenna: How does your illustration show that it's a problem?

*Claire: The monk seal is choking and nobody can help it because it [the net] has been there for a long time and nobody noticed.*

Jenna: Tell me about the lines coming from the monk seal's mouth.

*Claire: I did lines that were sound lines that showed that he was choking.*

Jenna: What was in your heart when you thought about the problem?

*Claire: I added I care about monk seals because I really do. They are my favorite animal.*

Jenna: What action did you choose to take?

*Claire: I could make a sign and I could march. These are postcards that I made into a book for endangered animals so you can see it is important to save these animals [too]. If you are saving other animals [like the monk seal], they are getting better, but then if you are not saving these animals [the additional animals she pictures on her postcards], they are not getting saved and they are going to die out.*

Jenna: Tell me about your artwork that shows what it will look like when the problem is solved.

*Claire: A monk seal is going to come on the beach and it has a wound. You can see that this part [with the yellow paper] is almost done healing, this part [with the orange paper] still has a little time. This part [with the red paper] hasn't been healing but it's coming up and it will be healed soon. So my sign says "Stop throwing nets into the sea." That's no good because they will get stuck and they might drown or hurt the monk seals.*



Figure 15

Claire's interview shows how she connected her personal identity, her concern for other living beings, and art. I was proud of the ways that students connected their learning with their own lives and interests. Figure 15 shows all of their posters. It was an exciting year! The next challenge is to take it one step further –help students put a plan into action.

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