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Exploring Culture and Art with Young Children

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WOWStories: Volume VII Issue 2
Exploring Culture and Art with Young Children

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Editors' Note:

Exploring Culture and Art with Young Children

Global Literacy Communities are small groups of educators who engage in professional inquiry around innovative practices in using global children's and adolescent literature to build intercultural understanding. These communities meet regularly to consider global literature, world languages, and ways of using these books in preK-12 classroom contexts. Although the communities may be school-based, district-based, community-based, or university/school collaborations, they share a commitment to thinking together as a professional learning community and to transforming their practice in classrooms.

In 2019-2020, eight Global Literacy Communities received grants from Worlds of Words to support their work with global literature. The members of these communities shared their work with each other on Padlet and were supported by Cynthia Ryman as the Global Literacy Coordinator. All of these communities had their work cut short with the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, but found ways to continue some of their work. Each community has written at least one vignette for *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*. Over the next several months, we will publish these vignettes in several issues of the journal.

This effort by Worlds of Words is supported by CERCLL, the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy, at the University of Arizona. This Title VI Language Resource Center supports research related to language teaching and learning and provides quality teaching resources and professional development to encourage the meaningful integration of culture, literacy and world language study.

This issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* focuses on the Vail Global Literacy Community, a community of educators in a faith-based school for young children, ages 2 to 7, in Vail, Arizona. Their vignettes demonstrate the possibilities of a global curriculum with very young children and the ways in which teachers can invite young children to explore culture through literature, art and writing. In addition, these vignettes reflect the opportunities within private faith-based schools to open their curriculum to engage children with the world, including connections to both local and global communities.

In the first vignette, Prisca Martens and Ray Martens provide an overview of the goals and context of their Global Literacy Community, along with an overview of engagements and book lists around children's identity, a cross-cultural study of Mexico, and Storying Studio. Four vignettes written by classroom teachers provide descriptions of their curricular engagements and many examples of children's work and the books that supported their interactions. Lacy Elisea and Christy Reller share their work with kindergarteners and first graders to explore their identities and Mexican culture. Jane Metzger, Jennifer Hook, and Vanessa Ruiz share their explorations with pre-k children of their Sonoran Desert environment.

Cassandra Sutherland shares how she invited two-to-four-year-old children to tell their stories through art, while Vanessa Hoang describes the integration of a Chinese Lunar New Year's celebration for two- and three-year-old children.

We invite you to read these vignettes and be inspired by the thinking of young children, who are so often underestimated, as they consider and celebrate their worlds.

Kathy G. Short, Guest Editor

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Developing Understandings of Culture for Young Readers, Writers, and Artists through Global Literature

Prisca Martens and Ray Martens

Our goal as a global literacy community is to create a global curriculum in our school context to facilitate the development of young children's intercultural understandings. We believe that young children can move toward a "stance of openness to multiple ways of thinking and being in the world and to differences as resources for our shared humanity and responsibility in working together to create a better and more just world" (Short, 2016, p. 10).

We organized our curriculum around a global framework (Short, 2006), creating experiences with global literature around the cultural identities of both students and children from global cultures, along with ways to act to help the world locally and beyond. Specifically, through readings, discussions, and experiences, we hoped to enrich and deepen students' understandings of themselves as complex cultural beings; their respect for cultural perspectives and ways of living different than their own; their desire to learn about others and the world; and, their concern for issues in the world and will to make the world a better place.

An additional intent was to provide art and writing experiences that invited students to create their own meanings multimodally. Learning the language of art and integrating expressions of meanings in art with meanings in written language, we would challenge students' imaginations and creativity and expand their abilities to compose meaning (e.g., Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Eisner, 2002; Martens & Martens, 2018; Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, Fuhrman, Stout, & Soper, 2018).

Our School Context

Creation School is a Lutheran school located in Vail, Arizona, southeast of Tucson near the Rincon Mountains in the heart of the Sonoran Desert. According to the 2010 census, Vail is 69.76% non-Latinx White, 3.27% Black or African American, .85% American Indian, 2.44% Asian, .15% Pacific Islander, 4.98% other races, and 4.1% mixed race. People of Hispanic or Latinx origin made up 19.43% of the population.

The school, which has just completed its seventh year, has classes for students in preschool (beginning at age two), pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. It provides a Christ-centered environment that nurtures children's faith, strengthens families, and invites children to explore and discover their world through rich learning experiences. The outdoor classroom space includes chickens that children help raise, a butterfly garden, and a natural playscape (i.e., tires, crates, boards, natural elements), all of which extend students' opportunities to inquire about their world, learn, and grow.

Our Vail Global Literacy Community included nine teachers: Vanessa Hoang, Cassi Sutherland, Nicole Martinez, Amanda Ortega, Jane Metzger, Vanessa Ruiz, Christy Reller, Lacey Elisea, and Jennifer Hook (also the school Director). In total these teachers taught about 50 students.

We, Prisca and Ray, facilitated our literacy community. Most of the teachers had worked together for several years but we were new to the school. The school was about 50% Latinx heritage and 50% European American and Asian/other groups. A few teachers and students spoke Spanish, but English was the primary language used.

In the past, Creation School did not have a formal curriculum. Teachers used Bible stories as the base and designed lessons in other areas by drawing on the Arizona Early Learning Standards. Children's literature was primarily used for read-alouds. In 2019-2020 our Worlds of Words Global Literacy Communities Grant opened possibilities for developing curriculum using global literature. Since this literature depicts cultures, regions, and people from other countries, it provided opportunities to build on understandings and highlight appreciations of diversity in our world that were already integral to the Christian/Lutheran beliefs in the school (Freeman, Lehman, & Scharer, 2007).

It was an exciting and rich year of learning and growing. When school closed for COVID-19 in March, we shifted to online learning with students through Zoom meetings. While these meetings were good, they did not provide the opportunities to do all that we intended through the end of the year.

Our Vail Global Literacy Community

Our literacy community met every few weeks throughout the year. In our meetings we discussed professional readings on global literature, intercultural understanding, and meaning-making in writing and art. Our readings included *Exploring International and Intercultural Understanding Through Global Literature* (Short & Corapi, 2015); "Engaging Young Children With Global Literature" (Acevedo, Pangle, Kleker, & Short, 2017); and, *In Pictures and In Words: Teaching the Qualities of Good Writing Through Illustration Study* (Ray, 2010). In each meeting we also shared happenings in classrooms and samples of students' work; planned for the coming weeks; discussed problems/issues that arose; and, generated ideas to use in our classrooms.

Our Work in the Classrooms

We (Prisca and Ray) were at school three mornings a week to visit classrooms, due to time and schedules, primarily for pre-kindergarten (pre-k) and kindergarten/first grade (K/1). We developed a Storying Studio (Martens & Martens, 2018; Martens et al., 2018), where we read and discussed global literature, examined how the artist created meaning in the art, and provided experiences that encouraged students to reflect on the story, their learning, and/or the art. Over the year, our major foci were understanding and knowing ourselves as cultural beings; knowing, appreciating, and respecting the cultural identity of others (specifically, Mexican culture); and, composing personal meanings/stories through writing and art.

Identity: Knowing Ourselves

Our focus on identity and self-awareness invited students to think about and realize what makes them unique cultural beings, which is critical to accepting and valuing others (Banks, 2004).

The books we read considered such aspects of identity as family, emotions, confidence, fears, and standing up for yourself and for others. Since particular geographical regions influence our cultures and personal perspectives (Corapi & Short, 2015), we also included a focus on the Sonoran Desert. We knew this would deepen students' understandings of the unique area in which they lived and how it influenced them and their ways of living, thinking, and being in the world.

Figure 1 is a sampling of the books we read and art concepts we examined in the illustrations that artists used to convey meaning. With each book we read, students had opportunities to reflect and share their thinking and connections orally and in writing (journals or on other paper through writing and/or art). Through this focus on personal cultural identities students began to realize they have personal cultural perspectives and understand and appreciate that others also have cultural perspectives (Short & Thomas, 2011).

Selected Books from the Identity Text Set

Title / Author	Aspect of Identity	Art
<i>The Featherless Chicken</i> (Chen, 2006)	Accept and be proud of who you are; don't judge yourself or others by outer appearances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Color: Warm/cool Movement: Shown with repeated lines and shapes
<i>Guji Guji</i> (Chen, 2004)	Be yourself, not who others think you are; stand up for what you believe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Color/line: Warm colors/ rounded shapes for Guji Guji; cool colors/ pointed shapes for the mean crocodiles Movement: Shown with repeated lines and shapes
<i>The Invisible Boy</i> (Ludvig & Barton, 2013)	Be a friend and reach out to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast: Color vs. black/white Color: Emotion
<i>When Sophie Gets Angry ...Really, Really Angry</i> (Bang, 1999)	Learn to handle your emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Color: Warm colors for anger, cool colors for calm Line: Movement and emotion
<i>Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match</i> (Brown & Palacios, 2011)	Be proud of who you are and your likes/dislikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line: Emotions Contrast: Pattern, color Art: Collage

<i>My Name is Sangoel</i> (Williams, Mohammed, & Stock, 2009)	Be proud of your name and who you are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Art: Collage, using photographed faces, newspaper objects, etc.
<i>Sebastian's Roller Skates</i> (de Deu Prats & Rovira, 2005)	Overcome your fears; don't give up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast: Color, line, and shape Art: Collage
<i>All the Ways to Be Smart</i> (Bell & Colpoys, 2018)	Be proud of who you are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast: Color, pattern
<i>Mary Wears What She Wants</i> (Negley, 2019)	Think and stand up for yourself and your ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrast: Color, shape, pattern
<i>You Can Do It, Bert!</i> (Könnecke, 2015)	Overcome your fears; don't give up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movement: Line
<i>The Seed and the Giant Saguaro</i> (Ward & Rangner, 2003)	Appreciate life and the culture of the Sonoran Desert where we live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space: Foreground/middle ground/background
<i>Desert Giant: The World of the Saguaro Cactus</i> (Bash, 1989)	Appreciate life and the culture of the Sonoran Desert where we live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space: Foreground/middle ground/background

Figures 1 & 2: Selected books from the Identity Text Set, including art concepts discussed.

Cross-Cultural Study of Mexico: Knowing Others

An important aspect of cultural identity and intercultural understandings is seeing ourselves as part of the world community (Banks, 2011). To further develop an appreciation of others we moved to a cross-cultural study of Mexico. We chose Mexico because of our proximity to it and the heritage and traditions some students shared with that culture. The Sonoran Desert's extension into Mexico made a nice transition.

The Mexico study was an opportunity to explore the culture and country more deeply, including language, geography (i.e., desert, beach, mountains, rainforest), native peoples/ history, customs/traditions, families, beliefs, etc. A sampling of books we read is found in Figure 2.

Selected Books from the Mexico Text Set

Krebs & Corr (2006)	<i>Off We Go to Mexico! An Adventure in the Sun</i>
Roberts (2018)	<i>A Kid's Guide to Mexico</i>
Moon (2017)	<i>Let's Explore Mexico</i>
Thong & Parra (2014)	<i>Green Is a Chile Pepper: A Book of Colors</i>
Thong & Parra (2013)	<i>Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes</i>
Cordero (2007)	<i>M is for Mexico</i>
Cohn & Cordova (2002)	<i>Dream Carver</i>
Tonatiuh (2010)	<i>Dear Primo</i>
Garza (1996)	<i>In My Family/En Mi Familia</i>
Donohue (2018)	<i>Little Kids First Big Book of the Rainforest</i>

Figure 3: Selected books from the Mexico Text Set.

The pre-k students usually documented important information we read and discussed that they wanted to remember in their Mexico journals. Sometimes, though, they recorded information on other paper, as they did for the plants and animals in the different layers of Mexico's rainforest (see Figure 3).



Figure 4: Pre-k students drawing plants and animals in different layers of Mexico's rainforest.

In K/1 students also used sticky notes to document information they thought was important (see Figure 4). They shared these notes in class discussions and placed them with other notes in their journals for future reference.



Figure 5: K/1 students writing information about Mexico on sticky notes.

Our study of Mexico deepened students' understandings of culture and helped them realize that "their cultural perspectives were only one of many ways to view and live in the world" (Short & Thomas, 2011, p. 156).

Storying Studio: Making Meaning by Composing Through Story

In Storying Studio we celebrated stories, both in literature we read related to identity, Mexico, or other stories, as well as students' stories/reflections about themselves, their lives, and their responses to read-aloud books. We also explored diverse ways of making meaning through art and written language. Students learned the language of art ("Art Smart" terms) and how to think and compose as artists. As authors and artists, they learned to seamlessly weave together their meanings in two different symbolic systems (i.e., written language, art). Sometimes students' stories were on separate sheets of paper, sometimes in journals or sketchbooks, and sometimes in books they created.

Students in kindergarten and first grade composed numerous stories on a range of student-selected topics/themes. To plan and organize their stories, they created storyboards and/or story dummies before composing their final stories (see Figure 5). Several of these stories were typed and published more formally.



Figure 6: K/1 students using storyboards and making dummies for their books.

Through experiences in Storying Studio students learned they have voices that are valued and important stories to tell and they identified themselves as readers, writers, and artists. Their stories evidenced their thinking, problem solving, decision making, and creativity (Martens et al., 2018).

An Invitation into Classrooms

In the vignettes that follow, we invite you into the classrooms as teachers share details of how they developed curriculum with global literature. The vignettes particularly highlight how students came to understand their identities and who we are, appreciate other cultures, and compose their own stories through writing and art.

- In “Learning About Identity in Kindergarten/First Grade through a Global Literature Lens,” Lacey Elisea and Christy Reller describe how they guided kindergartners and first graders in an exploration of their own identities and the identities of those in Mexico to strengthen the development of their intercultural understandings.
- In “Identity through Global Literature: Pre-Kindergartners Learn About Themselves in the Sonoran Desert,” Jane Metzger, Jennifer Hook, and Vanessa Ruiz explain how they used learning experiences in the Sonoran Desert to help pre-k students not only appreciate where they lived but also deepen their understandings of themselves in their environment.
- In her vignette “Preschoolers Write Their First Stories through Art,” Cassandra Sutherland shares how, through discussions of characters in literature, she helped two-to-four-year-old students realize they have voices and stories and to tell their stories through art.
- In “Chinese Lunar New Year: A Celebration of Culture,” Vanessa Hoang details how she integrated a Chinese Lunar New Year’s celebration into the curriculum for Early Learners (two and three year olds) to help them understand the traditions and ways of life in another culture. She also includes how pre-kindergarten and kindergarten/first grade classrooms celebrated.

The 2019-2020 school year was one of learning and growing for all of us. We hope that our vignettes provide a taste of our excitement and offer insights into ways to develop students’ understandings of culture, themselves, and others through global literature.

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Learning About Identity in Kindergarten/First Grade Through a Global Literature Lens

Lacey Elisea and Christy Reller

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year our Kindergarten/1st grade class at Creation School began a journey into reading and learning with global literature. We wanted students to explore their own identities and develop an understanding of different cultural perspectives. “Global literature also creates opportunities for children to explore outside their life experiences in order to understand, respect and value diversity and to create new experiences from which they can draw upon in the future” (Acevedo, Pangle, Kleker, & Short, 2017, p. 24). Our class was culturally diverse (primarily European American but also Latinx and Brazilian) and consisted of nine students, six girls and three boys; five first-graders and four kindergarteners. Students resided in two-parent homes where English was the primary language spoken. Creation School is an early learning school with classes for students from two-years-old to first grade. We, Christy Reller and Lacey Elisea, were co-teachers in the Kindergarten/1st grade classroom.

Creation School is located in Vail, Arizona, a suburb of Tucson, 68 miles from the United States/Mexico border. The school offers a unique educational experience for students with its rural location in the Sonoran Desert. This allows the teachers to integrate many outside authentic experiences into the curriculum. Our goal this year was to integrate global literature across content areas as much as we could. The main time for this, though, was during Storying Studio, three times a week for one hour.

In this vignette, we describe our cross-cultural study of Mexico and how we contextualized it within a global perspective to integrate into our curriculum. To understand other cultures, though, it’s important to first understand ourselves as cultural beings. We begin by sharing our study of personal cultural identities, including our Sonoran Desert environment, before discussing our Mexico study.

Learning About Ourselves

Our journey with global literature began by inviting students to explore their personal cultural identities to help them know and understand themselves as cultural beings. Global literature offers students opportunities to broaden and enhance their perspectives of themselves and others (Acevedo et al., 2017).

Learning Where We’re From

One of the first books we read to explore cultural identity was *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams, Mohammed, & Stock, 2009). In this story, Sangoel, a refugee, leaves his homeland of Sudan with his mother and sister and moves to the United States. Sangoel must make many adjustments to his new home and is concerned that people have difficulty pronouncing his Dinka name, which is very special and important to him. Eventually, Sangoel finds a way to help others remember his name.

To help our students think about the importance of their names and understand that in the past members of their families, like Sangoel's, immigrated to the United States, we had them find out where their families originated. When students shared that information, we located the place on a world map (see Figure 1). Together, we discovered that a majority of their ancestors came from Eastern European descent. Ella, for example, was from European descent and her mother was a Belgium citizen whose first language was Dutch. Emily's mother was from Brazil and Emily was learning to speak Portuguese. Our goal was for students to realize that who they are reaches beyond Vail, beyond Arizona, and beyond the United States. Realizing their families were similar to Sangoel's helped students begin to explore their identities, consider their own uniqueness, and think about themselves and their families more deeply.



Figure 1: World Map showing the students' family origins.

Exploring Our Names

We also used *My Name is Sangoel* to invite students to ask parents about the origins of their names. We added this information to a self-portrait they created by drawing a body on a photo of their heads, similar to art found on several pages in the book. Students surrounded their drawings with items they liked. Figure 2 shows two kindergarten examples. For her name, Ella (left) said, "My parents named me Ella because it's part American and part European. Ella means 'healthy' and my middle name Valentina means 'strong'." Around herself Ella drew and pasted pictures of pizza (her favorite food), dogs, a music note, an airplane, and a whale. Ella said she included the whale because she had recently been to the ocean and enjoys water. Katrina (right) said, "My parents like the name Katrina and the nickname Kat. Katrina means 'pure'." Katrina pasted pictures of cheetahs (her favorite animal) and dinosaurs around herself.

She drew a big heart and said she has “lots of love in her heart.” Each child shared the information about their names and why they chose the items around themselves.

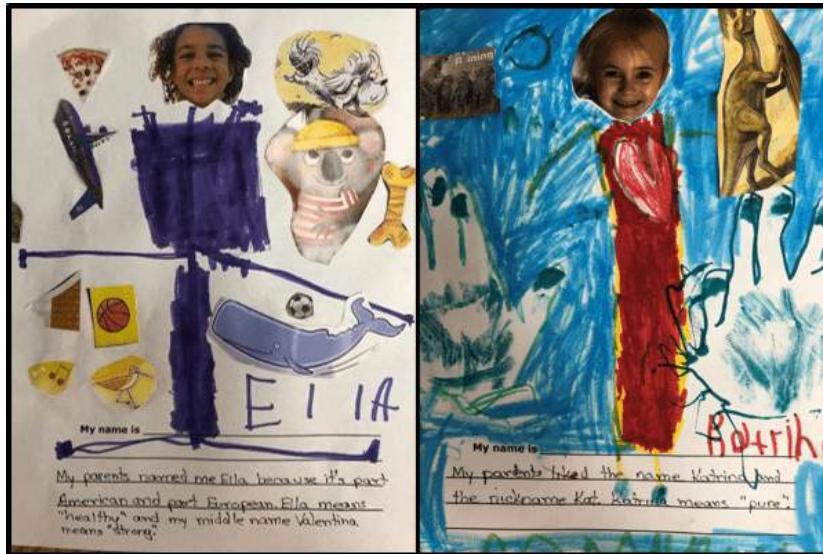


Figure 2: Ella's (left) and Katrina's (right) self-portraits telling about their names and who they are.

Additional favorite books about identity were *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (Brown & Palacios, 2011), *Mary Wears What She Wants* (Negley, 2019), and *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig & Barton, 2013). [Figure 1 in the Martens and Martens vignette in this issue lists additional books on identity.] These books encouraged students to think about who they were as cultural beings.

Creating Cultural X-Rays

Cultural awareness plays an important role in helping young children develop a positive sense of identity, build their own self-esteem, and understand that who they are is more than how they 'look' outwardly. It includes the kind of person they are. Since this is a difficult concept, we used cultural x-rays (Short, 2009) to help students understand. A cultural x-ray is a look at the layers of a person: what is seen on the outside and what is inside someone's heart. It consists of drawing/writing what is known about someone on the different layers. To begin, we worked together as a class to make several cultural x-rays for characters in books we read.

For example, in *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match*, students noted she had red hair, brown skin, and liked to wear clothes that didn't match, such as polka dots and stripes, which we drew on a cultural x-ray of Marisol. Then we asked, "What can you tell me about Marisol that you cannot see?" Students replied, "Marisol wants to be herself, do what she wants, and wear what she wants, draw, play." And, "She loves family, Kitty, and friends". These we wrote in Marisol's heart.

After making several cultural x-rays together students created one of themselves. Logan's (kindergarten) cultural x-ray is found in Figure 3. Around the outside, Logan wrote "bike" and "Ryan" (brother) and drew a monkey (Ryan's favorite animal) and a soccer ball (his favorite sport). In his heart he wrote "family, God, and others [his favorite animal]" for what he loves and values most.

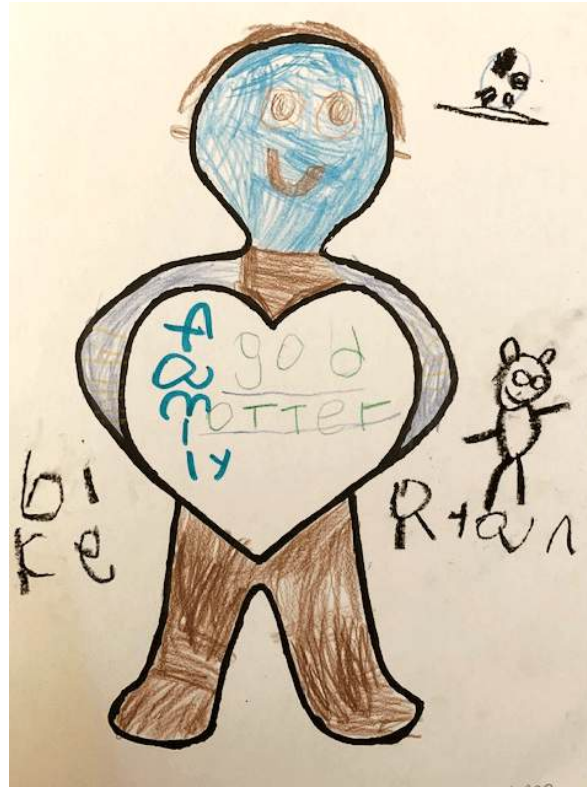


Figure 3: Logan's cultural x-ray showing what is visible about him on the outside and what matters most in his heart.

Through our focus on identity, students demonstrated deeper understandings of themselves. From there we moved into a study of Mexico.

Learning About Others: Our Cross-Cultural Study of Mexico

We transitioned from our study of identity to our cross-cultural study of Mexico with an exploration of the Sonoran Desert. All of us at Creation School live in the Sonoran Desert which makes it part of our identities and who we are. The Sonoran Desert is an area in the United States that extends into Mexico and includes many unique plants and species. We read and discussed books such as *Desert Giant* (Bash, 2002), *Creatures of the Desert World* (National Geographic Society, 1987), and *The Seed and the Giant Saguaro* (Ward & Ranger, 2003) to study the plants and animals. Students easily related to the landscape, plants, and animals since they'd actually seen many of the species, such as saguaro cacti, prickly pear cacti, coyotes, bobcats, and rattlesnakes.

Learning About Mexico

We began our study of Mexico by examining a map to see where and how we shared the Sonoran Desert. Since Vail is close to the Mexican border, many Mexican traditions and customs have blended into our own cultural fabric. The first book we read was *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* (Tonatiuh, 2010). In the story, an American boy writes to his cousin who lives in Mexico. Lacey speaks Spanish and talked about the language and read the Spanish text. Students began to see differences and similarities in the United States and Mexico, even though for us, many of the Mexico pages in the book were familiar, such as pinatas and traditional foods like tortillas. Students also connected with the story because the characters were around their age. McKenzie stated that she hoped to start writing to her cousin who lives in Mexico.

We included several other experiences in our study of Mexico. One was inviting students to explore a text set of nonfiction books over several days. The text set included books about Mexico that focused on topics such as geography, animals, customs, history, families, and rainforests. [Figure 2 in the Martens and Martens vignette in this issue lists a sampling of these books.] Students partnered together to read the text and examine the pictures. On sticky notes, they wrote or drew what they found interesting and then marked the page. After picking two or three interests, they presented their findings with their partners. Katie Wood Ray (2010) writes in her book, *In Pictures and In Words*, “getting their hands on actual books connects children to the study in a tangible, meaningful way, so much more than if the books stay safely tucked in a basket under the teacher’s care” (p. 83). This interaction with nonfiction sparked many discussions about what students found interesting and why, and allowed us to know their interests to build on in subsequent weeks.

Our strong interest in art and illustrations lead to a study of Oaxacan art. Oaxacan art is an art form from an Indigenous culture in one of Mexico’s southern states. Many bright colors and patterns are used in Oaxacan art. Oaxacan artists mostly use representations of animals but also have other figures. We introduced the focus on this art by reading *Dream Carver* (Cohn, 2002) and examining many Oaxacan (large and small) art pieces we brought from home. Students noticed the artists’ different patterns, brush techniques, and bright colors and created their own figures by drawing/painting (see Figure 4). Katrina (kindergarten) kept referring back to the illustrations in *Dream Carver* as she worked on her animal. She used the book as a resource for her animal but said, “Mine is a cheetah not a jaguar like the book. But I like the design.”



Figure 4: Oaxacan-style figures the kindergarten and first graders created.

Reflecting on Our Learning

To pull our learning together and help students reflect on what they'd learned about Mexico, we invited them to create books. The books were comparisons of how life for us in the United States was similar to and different from life in Mexico. We knew that exploring cultural connections and differences would deepen students' intercultural understandings (Acevedo et al., 2017).

We began by having students look at the sticky notes they'd taken from the text set and think about their learning from other experiences. We then had them share U.S./México similarities and differences they noticed and listed these on a chart. The chart included the topics such as Independence Days, foods, animals, flags, celebrations, geography, and other comparisons.

Students choose from the chart what to write about and, over several days, created flip books with one side of the book on Mexico and the other side on the United States. The U.S. page began with "In the United States..." and the Mexico page with "En México..." Students completed each sentence starter and drew a picture to accompany their writing. They also decided on titles for the two sides of their books and made cover pages and end papers.

Katrina's titles, for example, were "Let's Go Learn About Mexico" and "Let's Go Learn About USA" (see Figure 5, upper left). The first page of each side was a North American map, where students colored the area for Mexico and the United States (see Figure 5, upper right). They also choose a different color for Arizona to show where they lived.

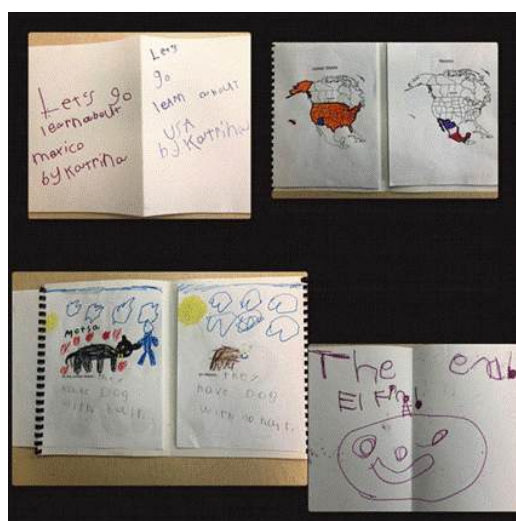


Figure 5: Katrina's cover (upper left), maps of the U.S. and Mexico (upper right), Logan's pages about dogs in the U.S. and Mexico's Xoloitzcuintle (hairless dog) (lower left), and McKenzie's back cover (The End/ El Fin).

In Figure 5 (lower left) are Logan's (kindergarten) pages about dogs in the U.S. and Mexico. On the left he drew a picture and wrote, "In the United States [we] have dogs with hair." On the right he drew and wrote, "En Mexico they have a dog with no hair" [Xoloitzcuintle]. When McKenzie completed her book she asked, "How do you say 'The End' in Spanish?" With assistance from Lacey, she wrote "The End" on the back-cover page in English and "El Fin" in Spanish (see Figure 5, lower right).

For the last pages of their books, students completed a cultural x-ray on themselves one day and on the following day, one for Carlitos, the character from Mexico in Dear Primo. Focusing on Carlitos made this more concrete and real for students in thinking about children living in Mexico. As a class, we discussed Carlitos and what we knew about him. Students identified things such as liking to swim and fly kites, enjoying Day of the Dead celebrations, and helping with his family's animals. Then we talked about what they thought mattered most to Carlitos and would be in his heart. From his interactions with others and letters to his cousin in the U.S., students suggested that Carlitos was kind and loved his family. They then independently created their own cultural x-rays for him.

As an example, the cultural x-rays Ella (kindergarten) created for Carlitos (left) and herself (right) are in Figure 6. She colored his skin and clothes and around the outside drew symbols for the things he liked. In Carlitos' heart Ella wrote 'Loves family' as what mattered to him. For herself she drew a small bun on top of her head (how she often wore her hair). She wrote on the outside that she likes to run, dig, hike, and play in water. In her heart she wrote Leo (her dog), dad and family.

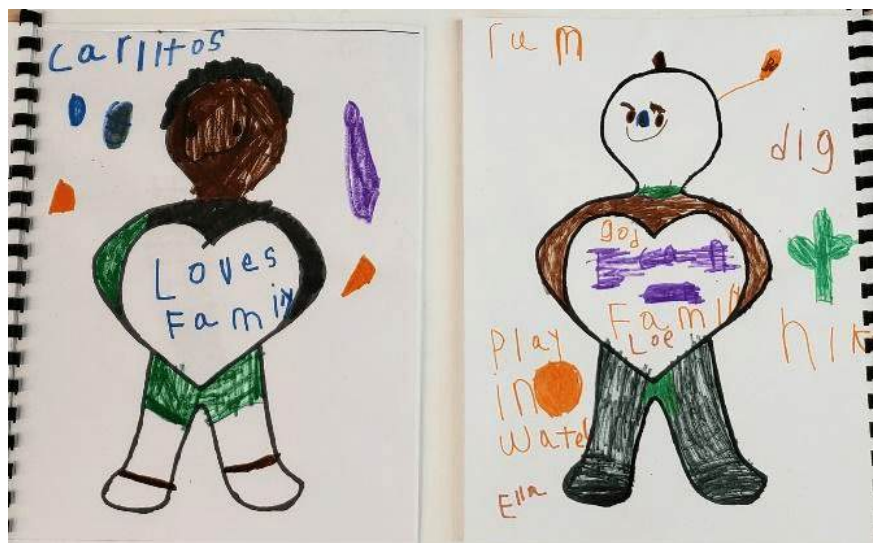


Figure 6: Ella's cultural x-rays of Carlitos (left) and herself (right).

Emily's (first grade) cultural x-rays for herself (left) and Carlitos (right) are in Figure 7. Emily only wrote her family in her heart. She said, "You can tell I'm seven from looking at me" and placed a 7 on the outside. She also added Minecraft, Pokemon, cats, and art around the outside of herself. Together, the class had estimated that Carlitos was about eight years old so she wrote that and also included a kite, bike, a soccer ball on the outside. In Carlitos' heart, Emily wrote that he loves family and is good.



Figure 7: Emily's cultural x-rays of herself (left) and Carlitos (right).

These cultural x-rays revealed their understandings of themselves and others. They saw that even though they looked different and liked different things outwardly, what mattered most to them in their hearts was similar. As Hazel Rochman (1993) says, "The best books break down borders. They surprise us – whether they are set close to home or abroad. They change our view of ourselves; they extend that phrase 'like me' to include what we thought was foreign and strange" (p. 9). Students started to see connections between themselves and others from a different time and place and to extend the concept of self and understand others.

Final Reflections

While our students are young, they developed understandings of their own and another culture and began to think more critically. They saw similarities and differences with other children through our studies with global literature and began to consider and respect perspectives beyond their own. This brought ideas and concepts that were foreign and strange to them into a new light and encouraged them to think and observe more deeply and critically. When an eighth-grade foreign exchange student from Korea visited our class, students asked high-level questions that pulled from prior knowledge.

The exchange student showed them how to write their names in Korean. Emily said, “The letters are different.” Derek noticed the difference in the letters and added that “Spanish sounds different but the letters are the same as English.” Through their experiences with global literature students gained deeper knowledge of cultures and of themselves and others as cultural beings and grew in their intercultural understandings.

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Identity through Global Literature: Pre-Kindergarteners Learn About Themselves in the Sonoran Desert

Jane Metzger, Jennifer Hook, Vanessa Ruiz

Creation School is nestled in the hills of the Sonoran Desert in the Rincon Mountains of southern Arizona, just east of Tucson. We teachers strongly believe that children gain much from connecting with the natural wonder around them. Our guiding philosophy states that children learn through exploration and make sense of the world through intellectual discovery; the physicality of their bodies; an emotional connection to adults and peers; their understandings of themselves and their place in the community; and, the wonder and appreciation for the miracle of creation and its Creator.

The families attracted to what we offer at Creation School tend to be middle to upper class families with many stay-at-home mothers. Parents work as engineers, in the medical field, or the military. The faith curriculum is important to them, and they recognize the value of hands-on learning. Because of the military population, some children have experiences from many geographic locations. English is the first language of the majority of students but a few speak Spanish or another language (i.e., Dutch) at home/school. We have a strong representation of Asian and Latinx students, though the majority are European American.

Growing Identities through Story

We are three pre-kindergarten (pre-k) teachers of four and five-year-old children who attend school three to four days a week. When we first met with the other teachers in our Global Literacy cohort, we were excited about the idea of exploring identity through story. Our theme verse for the 2019-2020 school year was “Let the Redeemed of the Lord tell their story” (Psalm 107). We felt that our identity was first as children of God. The children were developing their own identities through their interactions with their families and communities and we hoped to enhance and deepen their perspectives and understandings of themselves through experiences inspired by the global literature.

When we first looked at introducing identity through the lens of global literature, we discovered that our personal identities are influenced by the multiple cultures in which we live, including families, schools, geographic regions, communities, ethnic backgrounds, and religious affiliations (Corapi & Short, 2015). Up until then we had not considered where we are in the Sonoran Desert to be a culture that influences our identity. Since developmentally we knew our students needed to explore, we were excited to think about finding literature that spoke to the environment where they lived as an important aspect of their cultural identities. As Latinx children’s author, Maya Christina Gonzalez (2007), said about her own journey to identity, “I turned to my environment to search out my reflection and sense of belonging. The amazing desert sunset taught me that there is beauty in the world, and that beauty made a difference” (Foreword).

Exploring the Sonoran Desert

Students began the year exploring and observing the Sonoran Desert enveloping our campus. We found where we lived in Vail on a map of the United States and saw how the Sonoran Desert was located around us and into Mexico and California. Throughout the year, we discussed the heat, the importance of water, the monsoons, and their effect on how we live and who we are.

Keeping in mind that young children learn through their senses, we first focused on the environment out the back door of our classrooms and the stories that accompanied it. We took nature walks and students created drawings which were springboards for them to tell us what they already knew about the desert surrounding our playground (see Figure 1). For example: “You have to watch out for the jumping cactus!” exclaimed Violet, age 4. “Those are spikes,” Caroline, age 4, added.



Figure 1: Students drawing and telling stories on nature walks.

Riley, age 4, drew a story about a “a prickly pear cactus” she saw (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Riley's prickly pear cactus.



Figure 3: Taylor's drawing of a cactus with sharp prickly things.

Taylor, age 4, drew a story about “a cactus with sharp prickly things” (see Figure 3).

We also read many books about the desert. One favorite was *Desert Night Desert Day* (Fredericks & Spengler, 2011). This book is filled with lively illustrations and written in song about desert animals. Fredericks explores the differences between diurnal (e.g. gila monsters, desert tortoise, quail, deer) and nocturnal (e.g. owls, javelina, pack rats, scorpions) animals in the text. The book inspired an energetic discussion followed by a sorting activity distinguishing which species are awake during the day in the desert and which are awake during the night.

We drew on what we learned from books we read on other nature walks. We looked for the different species of plants we had identified in *Desert Night Desert Day*, for example, while on the lookout for diurnal animals. On our walks we saw Palo Verde trees, prickly pear cactus, barrel cactus, jumping cholla, Mesquite trees, jojoba, and saguaros. We identified the plants and discussed how they looked and how that might help them adapt to the desert conditions. The children were engaged and made saguaro cactus shadows using their arms and legs. We also saw cottontail rabbits and quick moving lizards living within the shrubs and grasses.

Another favorite book was *Cactus Hotel* (Guiberson & Lloyd, 1993). This book broadened our Storying Studio curriculum by further investigating the saguaro cactus life cycle and the animals that find refuge within its fragile ecosystem. Students studied the grandeur of the saguaro cactus right outside the gates of our Creation School playground (see Figure 4) and integrated what they saw and had learned about it and its inhabitants in drawings in their sketchbooks. Their artwork and narratives about the saguaro and its neighboring flora and fauna connected students with their environment and our school and who they were living in the desert. We published their work in a book published by Studenttreasures Publishing entitled, *Our Sonoran Desert*.



Figure 4: Students studying the saguaro cactus near our playground.

Students also enjoyed reading *Creatures of the Desert World* (National Geographic, 1987), an interactive pop-up book about desert animals. They took turns using the pull tabs and flaps to move and find different desert species and anticipating the next page turn and discovery. We talked about the “art smart” concepts of background and foreground which students used to create their own pop-up stories about the desert titled *Where I Live* to further explore their identities. Figure 5 shows Zoey’s, age 4, drawing of herself in the foreground and a boulder she cut from construction paper and glued to the desert in the background of the page. She informed us that “the desert has snakes” and also drew a snake.

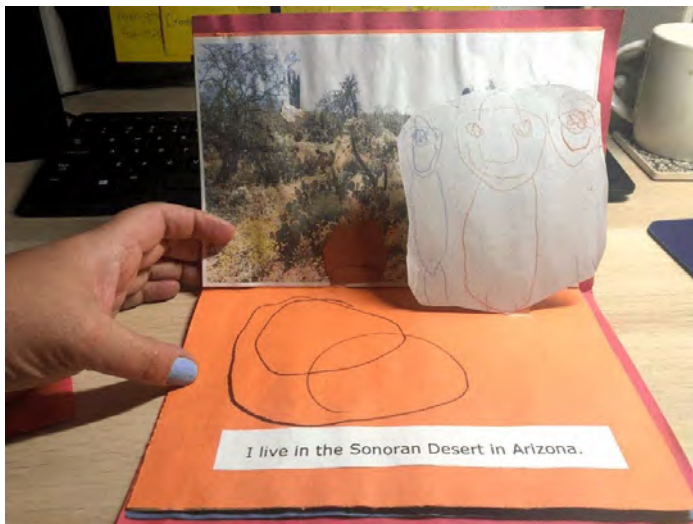


Figure 5: Zoey’s drawing of herself in the foreground of the page, a boulder in the background, and a snake on the ground.

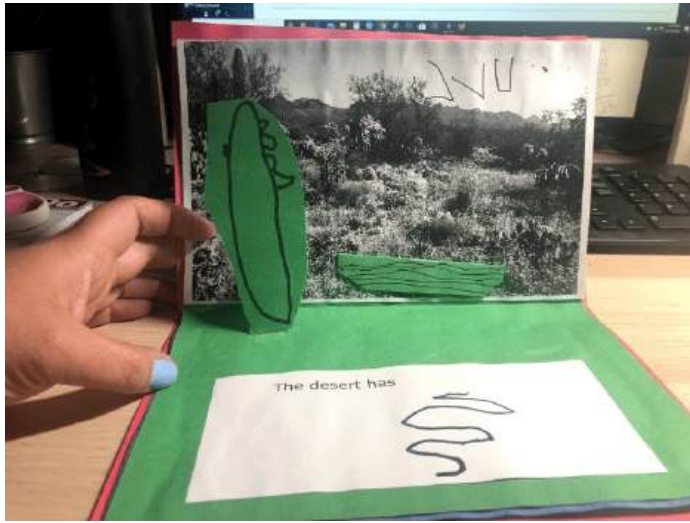


Figure 6: CJ's drawing of a saguaro standing in the foreground, one lying on the ground, and the "s" he wrote for "saguaro". He also drew birds flying in the background.

Various other classroom activities helped us enhance our identity and sense of belonging to the Sonoran Desert. We read *Desert Giant* (Bash, 1989) and *The Seed and the Giant Saguaro* (Ward and Rangner, 2003). Students sculpted 3-D prickly pear cacti out of playdoh (see Figure 7) and we collected plant, insect, and soil samples from the desert. We gently touched "cactus pokies" (Anna and Weston, 4), "spikes" (Caroline and Zoey, 4), and "pointy stuff" (Caiden, 4) while learning the proper name of cactus spines and their functions.



Figure 7: Pre-k children's prickly pear cacti out of playdoh.

In the spring, our desert came to life with the March rains. We planned to use this time of new life to explore our identity as caretakers of the earth.

Renovating Our Butterfly Garden

Spring's promise of new life and new hope in our Sonoran Desert opened up a fresh and exciting project: reclaiming and recreating our Creation School butterfly garden which, unfortunately, was left unkempt due to on-site building construction (see Figure 8). This renovation became a community project for our pre-k classes to meld the uniqueness of our region, their understandings and connections their desert environment, and their cultural identities.



Figure 8: Area for the butterfly garden renovation.

The importance of our butterfly garden grows out of our respect for and appreciation of the American Indian tribes around us. Few regions of the country can match Arizona's wealth of Indigenous history and culture. The Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui Tribes are located near Phoenix and Tucson. The importance of holding onto their unique tribal cultural identities revolves around connections to Earth and each other. These tribes have thrived for thousands of years living on a landscape that receives only a few inches of rain per year. We and our students have much to learn from them about being caretakers of the earth.

Deeply embedded into the heritage and culture of the Tohono O'odhams are the ceremonial rituals, such as rain dancing and the Butterfly Dance. The Butterfly Dance is celebrated because of the migration of the various colorful butterflies that dot the beautiful Sonoran Desert during the spring (McGivney, 2018).

Through the art of storytelling, American Indian traditions have been shared and passed on from one generation to the next. *Hip Hip Hooray, It's Monsoon Day* (Rivera-Ashford & Johnsen, 2007), speaks to sharing traditions through storytelling. *Nana's Remedies/Los Remedios De Mi Nana* (Rivera-Ashford & Miguel, 2002) describes a grandmother sharing remedies with her granddaughter, using native medicinal plants. *Sing Down the Rain* (Moreillon & Chiago, 1997) shares the importance of summer rains to Tohono O'odhams for their crops. As teachers, we had not realized that oral traditions and the stories of the nations living within the Sonoran Desert were aspects of culture and global literature. Ray and Prisca Martens, through our Studying Studio helped us, as Vail, Arizonans, to understand more deeply the interwoven tapestry of our Southwest culture.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, what we had originally planned as a child-inspired/teacher-supported butterfly garden and water harvesting projects changed course over-night in March. Instead, they became an exercise in stretching our imaginations from reality into creating a “virtual” butterfly garden—to be planted later and our water harvesting exploration sometime in the future. The unexpected blessing was that our “whole-child” focused project now became a “whole-family” labor of love!

With distance learning over Zoom as our teaching tool to connect with our families, teachers introduced and explained our project. Together, the pre-k teachers brainstormed activities and ways to include family participation in this project at home. We encouraged parents to research which plants attract butterflies and which desert animals are best suited to co-exist in our butterfly garden.

Our new project began with a Zoom online introduction of the life cycle of plants and families taking sensory nature walks through their neighborhoods. We encouraged families to share photos, videos, and their children’s drawings recounting their experiences. Parents also shared their own vegetable and flower gardens. Through those adventures, we discovered which native plants and special colors invite butterflies to visit and linger among the flowers in our gardens.

To introduce the butterfly garden project to students, we recorded a video on the school campus at the site, showing the areas that we hoped to revitalize. As part of the video, we read *My Colors, My World* (Gonzalez, 2007). The story shares the many colors the young protagonist Maya finds in her home environment, like the beautiful butterfly, and the cheery orange marigolds.

During our Zoom call, we asked students to devise a “plan” for their butterfly gardens to share with their classmates during our next Zoom meetings. Our conversation also included questions like, “What would you plant? What animals should live here?”

Noel (age 4) said, “Crystals and stepping stones. Don’t forget a bird feeder. My Grammy has one to give the school.”

William (age 5), “Tall and small flowers would be nice.”

CJ (age 4), “Penstemon and fairy garden.”

Corinne (age 4), “Small turtles and rabbits...and a horse.”

The next week during our Zoom meetings, teachers provided a webbing activity inquiring about each child’s favorite color that might attract butterflies. Children also shared their sketches with their ideas for a butterfly garden. These included a variety of flowers that ranged in colors from bright red to hot pink to shiny gold to one with rainbow hues! Will’s sketch is found in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Will's idea sketch for a butterfly garden.

During the Zoom meeting, as children shared their favorite colors, teachers created a graph of the flowers. We plan to use this graph when our virtual sketch becomes a real butterfly garden in the future (see Figure 10)!



Figure 10: Sketch and graph of students' favorite colors for flowers in our future butterfly garden.

While we were not able to complete and renovate our butterfly garden this year, we look forward to using the children's plans and ideas for it in the future. Fulfilling our identity as caretakers of the earth will begin in August while the monsoon rains are still fresh on the ground. Along with our study of the Sonoran Desert as a natural backdrop—providing magnificent vistas—our newly re-designed, child-inspired beautiful Creation School Butterfly Garden should exist in perfect harmony!

Final Reflections

Although the school year did not end as we had planned, we had some important realizations:

1. Young children learn best when experiences are tangible. They gain a sense of who they are by touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing. Our students used tangible experiences to tell their stories about our Sonoran Desert. Telling their desert stories helped them to think, organize their experiences, and learn (Corapi & Short, 2015).
2. Literature that speaks from a different time (like stories from Indigenous peoples) and the culture within our environment gave students a sense of their identities in place and time and being part of something greater than themselves.
3. Even in times of uncertainty, the human spirit can engage in beautiful things. Having some control over one's environment (like planting seeds and watching them grow and re-creating a butterfly garden) can bring peace and advocacy.
4. One thing that doesn't change is that we are all God's children.

We created, we wrote, we narrated, we authored, we published, and through art and literature our identities as Creation School students, Vail, Arizonans, Sonoran Desert dwellers, and children of an awesome God were connected. We look forward to living our stories together again.

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Preschoolers Write Their First Stories through Art

Cassandra Sutherland

My co-teacher Elizabeth Stokes and I were both first year teachers who co-taught a class of children ages 2–4 at Creation School. I had been a stay-at-home mom for eight years with an engineering degree and Elizabeth had just received a bachelor's degree in physiology and molecular and cellular biology. The only experience I had with young children was raising three of my own and teaching a week of Vacation Bible School. As for teaching, I had tutored college students throughout life as a job or a hobby. Miss Elizabeth had babysitting and Vacation Bible School nursery experience. We were mentored in teaching young children by the experienced, excellent Creation School preschool teachers.

My classroom consisted of five girls and four boys. Children were mostly of European American background. We had twin boys who were adopted and a girl from South Africa who spoke her native language. Our preschool is located in Vail, Arizona, 24 miles southeast of Tucson in Pima County in the heart of the Sonoran Desert.

I started the Global Literacy Community to satisfy a requirement for continued learning per my teaching contract. I never realized that it would inspire me the way it did. I didn't know anything about global literature before this. We began by reading *Exploring International and Intercultural Understanding Through Global Literature* (Corapi & Short, 2015) and “Engaging Young Children With Global Literature” (Acevedo, Pangle, Kleker, & Short, 2017) which helped me understand the importance of global literature in developing children's understandings and appreciations of others in the world. I included books about different families, ways of life, traditions, etc., in my read-alouds to support children in expanding their views and understanding of themselves, others, and the world (Acevedo et al., 2017).

We also read books about the Sonoran Desert, such as *Footprints in the Sand* (Benjamin & Rogers, 1999) and *Creatures of the Desert World* (National Geographic Society, 1987) and thought about the desert culture in which we live (Corapi & Short, 2015). Through books like these and our discussions I wanted children to learn and be aware of where they live and understand the unique aspects and culture of the desert. Since our school and teachers wanted to learn more about children's writing and art, we also read *In Pictures and In Words* (Ray, 2010), which really excited me and pushed my thinking in new directions.

Learning from *In Pictures and In Words*

As I read *In Pictures and In Words* (Ray, 2010) for our Global Literacy Cohort, I was inspired to get my students to write their own stories. I learned that storytelling was important for children's thinking, understanding, and learning (Corapi & Short, 2015). From my readings, I also believed it would give them confidence, teach them to sit and focus, help them develop stamina, and give them an outlet for their imaginations. Teaching writing was new to me and I made it my goal for the year to inspire my students to “write” a story through illustration. We worked the whole year to achieve this goal.

As Katie Wood Ray (2010) points out, since image is a universal language, drawing is a good way for young children and English language learners to tell their stories.

As we read stories, we discussed the characters. We talked about what the characters were doing and what they could be thinking and feeling. For example, we read *You Can Do It, Bert* (Könnecke, 2015), a book from Germany about a bird, Bert, who was afraid to fly. Children talked about how at first Bert was scared and thought he might get hurt. Then after he jumped off the branch, they talked about how he was brave and happy. We also talked about times they felt like Bert did. In our weekly visits to the library, Miss Darcy also read books and engaged children in discussions and related games and songs. Through all of these experiences I wanted children to realize they too had stories to tell and want to write/illustrate their own books.

Because our children were young, we first focused on getting them to sit and attend to what we were doing. Ray (2010) says children need to develop stamina to read and write, to look at a blank piece of paper and “make *something out of nothing*” (p. 21, emphasis in original). We discovered that snack time was a great time to read books because children were sitting already. This helped them stay in their seats and focus on the story. As they ate, we read, asked questions, and added comments to keep their interest in the book.

Snack time is actually where I got the idea for the books that children would write. As we prayed before snack, children shared what they were thankful for and what made them happy. This led to them talking about their favorite things. Since the children loved to talk about their interests, I decided it made sense that they would illustrate a book about their favorite things.

Writing Stories Through Art

As a preschool class, we engaged in art every day. I encouraged children to have a plan when they started their art and to think about what the finished product was going to be. As children drew or made art with other mediums, Elizabeth and I asked them questions about their work. “What are you drawing?” “What do you like about it?” “What is the story you’re trying to tell?” My hope was that through these questions, children would think about their art as more than just lines on a paper or “nothing.”

Throughout the school year, children participated in many art activities. Gradually they started naming their artwork. Haydynn said, “It’s a big green monster!” Jaclyn shared, “It’s a car.” As children started creating things instead of just “nothing,” it was apparent that they were on their way to writing a story.

Creating Valentine’s Day Books

The first book each child created was a Valentine’s Day gift for their parents. I wanted them to create books that they would get much praise for and which their parents would adore, in order to create confidence in them as writers and illustrators.

To create the books Elizabeth and I asked children questions about their parents and transcribed their responses. The method and tone of their responses to our questions varied. Some children were very interested, sat, and answered the questions easily. Others would run around and play while Elizabeth and I followed them, asking questions and hoping for answers. Once the books were put together, most children really enjoyed decorating them and making them beautiful for their moms and dads.

As an example, below is an excerpt from the Valentine's Day book that Jaclyn, age 3, made for her parents (See Figure 1). Children had choices of a variety of materials to use and Jaclyn chose different kinds of stickers and marker. While her book had little of her drawing or art, I hoped this first experience would inspire her confidence for making more books.

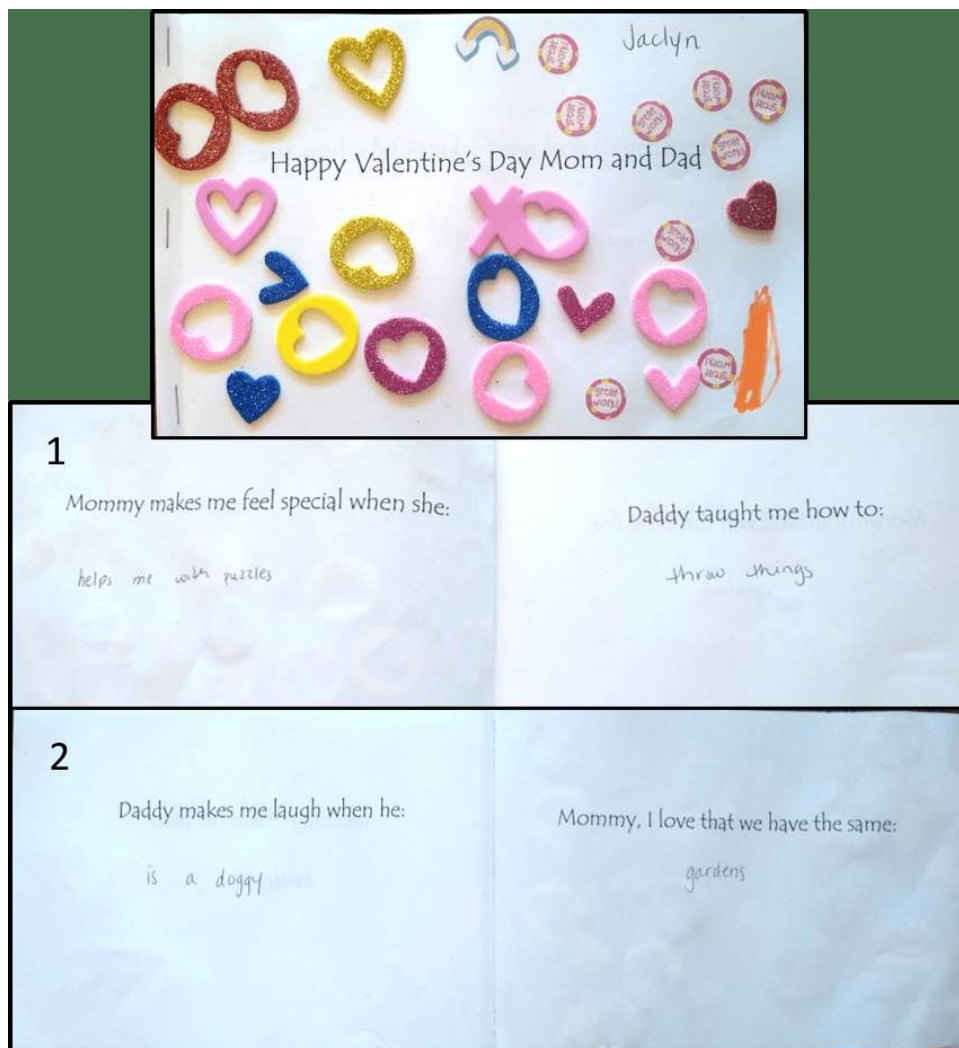


Figure 1: Jaclyn's Valentine's Day book for her mother and father: Cover; p. 1, "Mommy makes me feel special when she helps me with my puzzles. Daddy taught me how to throw things."; p. 2, "Daddy makes me laugh when he is a doggy. Mommy, I love that we have the same gardens."

“Writing” Favorite Things Through Art

After completing the Valentine’s Day books, I focused on children generating their own stories through art. To do this I invited children to illustrate the favorite things they’d been sharing. I met with each child individually to talk about their personal favorite things and then encouraged them to illustrate their stories about them. As they drew, I transcribed what they said so that I could remember and share with their parents and my peers.

After making her Valentine’s Day book (see Figure 1), Jaclyn, age 3, was excited to create a story about some of her favorite things (see Figure 2). While drawing she said, “My favorite color is pretty pink. My favorite thing is Mom and princesses,” and colored pink and drew her mom (right) and the princess (left) in green. As she continued telling her story she colored over both figures with blue, explaining, “The princess’s name is Ariel. Ariel is a mermaid.” That’s where her story ended and she went back to play.

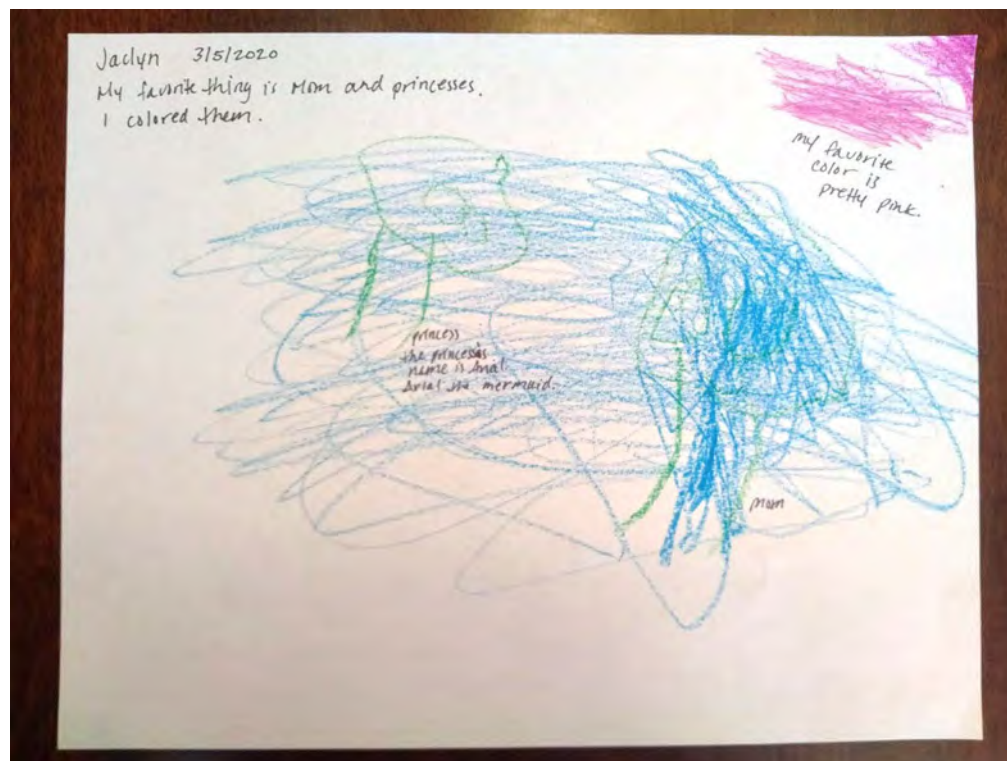


Figure 2: Jaclyn’s picture and story about her favorite color pretty pink, her mom (green figure on the right), and the princess mermaid Ariel (green figure on the left).

Haydynn, age 4, really liked Ed Emberley’s book *Go Away, Big Green Monster* (1992). As she drew, she told her story (see Figure 3) saying, “My favorite thing is monsters! He is green. He is saying ‘GAR!’”

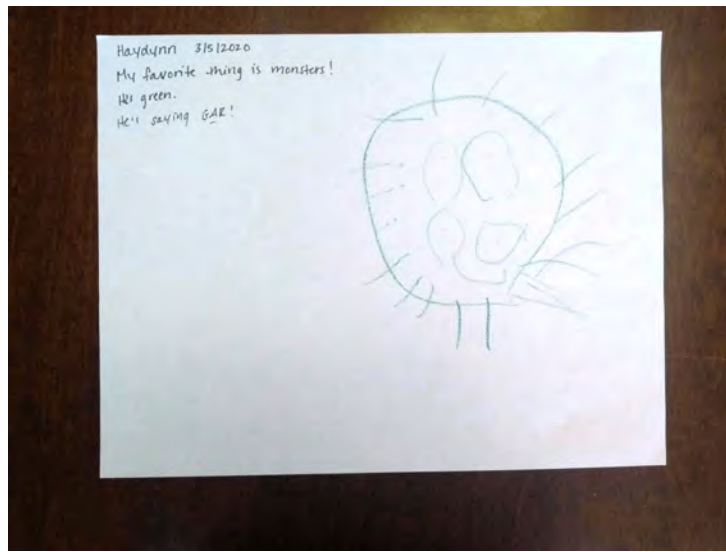


Figure 3: Haydynn's picture and story about a green monster.

I was particularly proud of Matthew, age 4. Matthew wanted his story to be about a lion (see Figure 4). At first, he asked me to draw everything for his story and said he couldn't do it. I encouraged him and asked him what he wanted to draw. As he told me, I supported him by asking questions and suggesting how/what he might draw. For example, I asked, "What do eyes look like?" When he replied, "Two circles," I said, "OK, draw two circles." I asked, "What does a lion's mane look like?" He said, "Lots of hair," and I responded, "Draw lines around his head like a sun." I encouraged him by saying things like, "Look, you're doing it!" Matthew ended up illustrating his whole story and even elaborating the story completely on his own. He added the fireman, gave him an orange hat, and drew a lion scaring the fireman! His story was, "I like lions. He's scaring a fireman. He has an orange hat." It was truly exciting to witness that moment when Matthew realized he had a new skill and his own voice to tell his story.



Figure 4: Matthew's story about a lion (left) scaring a fireman with an orange hat (right).

Blaise, age 2, also had a story to tell. I really enjoyed how Blaise continued to elaborate on his story (see Figure 5). He began by stating that his favorite color was orange. With an orange crayon he continued to draw, telling his story as “a guy with a stick, a crown, and three ‘mouses’ [mice]”. He also added blue. I particularly liked that as he made dots, he called them out. This reminded me of *The Dot* (Reynolds, 2003) which we read early in the year.

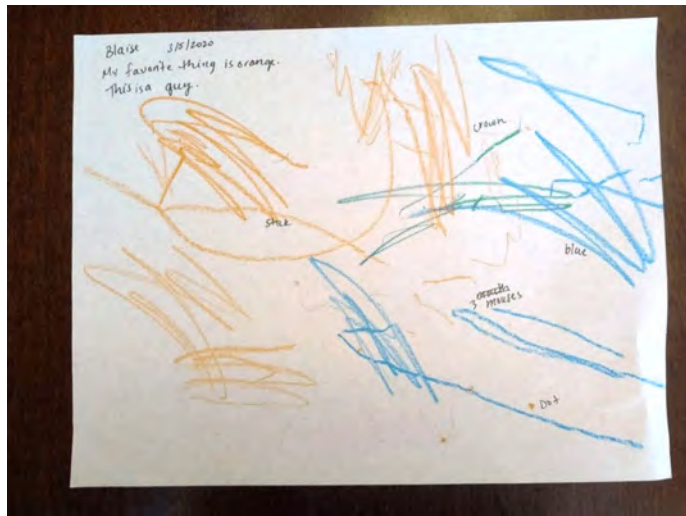


Figure 5: Blaise's story: "My favorite thing is orange. This is a guy."
Clockwise, in orange he drew a stick and a crown and in blue three mice and a dot.

Lia-May, age 4, explained that her favorite thing was playing. She was very descriptive in her story and added details. She not only drew herself playing but she drew herself playing with a toy, her iPad (see Figure 6.). She said, “My favorite is playing. I’m playing with my iPad.”



Figure 6: Lia-May's story about her playing with her iPad.

I believe that by writing their stories through art these young children grew in several ways. One is they learned to sit and focus and begin to develop stamina as they created on a blank piece of paper. All of the children, particularly Blaise, Lia-May, and Haydynn, continued to add details and elaborate on their stories as they sat, focused, and worked. It was exciting to see their thinking and imaginations appear on paper. Children also began to confidently see themselves as writers and storytellers. Their growing confidence emerged as they excitedly talked and worked. This is true especially for Matthew and Jaclyn, whose story particularly contrasts with her Valentine's Day book. Finally, I believe children learned they have a voice and stories to tell and that their stories are valuable. By sitting with them, listening to their stories, asking them questions, and encouraging them, children saw their stories are important and matter to others.

Closing Reflections

I started the school year with no teaching background and have learned a lot. For example, I learned that children learn about people, places, and things through global literature, conversations about them, and play associated with the ideas in books. Global literature is more than simple stories about people like themselves: it introduces them to a variety of places and cultures. Through global literature children "meet" new people and have new "experiences" that open their minds and understandings about themselves, others, and the world (Acevedo et al., 2017; Corapi and Short, 2015). Discussing the literature, characters and events, and relating those to the children helped them connect to the books and think about their own stories. I also learned that young children can and do tell their own stories through art (Ray, 2010). Drawing and illustration is an easy way for them to start writing books. Asking children to tell me their stories valued their voices and helped me learn more about them. In only a year of school, children grew significantly in their art, drawing, conversation, and storytelling abilities.

As a teacher, I learned most importantly that if I sit back and let children take the lead in their own learning experiences, they will engage each other, as well as the teachers, in learning more than I ever thought I could teach.

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Chinese Lunar New Year: A Celebration of Culture

Vanessa Hoang

Vail, Arizona, is a suburb of Tucson, with a population of less than 11,000 persons, only 3% of whom are Asian (U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts, 2010-2019). I am part of that 3%. I was born in Seoul, South Korea. My parents adopted me when I was six months old and I grew up with American and Latinx traditions. To be honest, I know very little about my Asian heritage, until I married my Vietnamese husband and had children. The year 2020 was my first year attending a Lunar New Year celebration. The sights, the sounds and even the smells of Vietnamese cuisine were a new experience. As a second-year preschool teacher (my degrees are in business areas), I was excited to share these experiences with my students.

Creation School is an early learning school with classes for students from two-years-old to first grade. Our school celebrated National Lutheran Schools Week and Lunar Year simultaneously. We introduced, shared, and inspired our young students to learn about a new year's tradition from across the globe – Chinese Lunar New Year – through hands-on experiences, storytelling, and personal experiences. Our hope was that through reading and discussing global literature on Chinese New Year along with these experiences students would appreciate and begin to understand the connections, differences, and complexities in our world (Acevedo, Pangle, Kleker, and Short, 2017; Corapi and Short, 2015). In this vignette, I share our school's experiences with this cultural celebration which is not widely observed in our area.

What is Lunar New Year?

Lunar New Year is a festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year, based on the traditional Chinese calendar or lunar calendar, when there is a new moon. This festival is typically celebrated over fifteen days and is also known as Chinese New Year, Spring Festival, and Lunar New Year. Each year in the Chinese lunar calendar is named for one of 12 animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, rat, and pig (Otto, 2015). After 12 years the cycle begins again. This year, 2020, is the year of the rat.

Figure 1 details our school plans for our weeklong celebration. To help students understand Chinese beliefs, ways of life, and the “whys” of traditions and celebrations, we started the week with cleaning and sweeping the grounds. Similar to our own traditions of spring cleaning, Chinese cultures clean their homes prior to each new year, symbolizing washing and cleaning away the bad from previous year, and starting the new year fresh. We discussed this tradition with students and they helped us clean our classrooms by sweeping the floors or wiping down tables and chairs. Participating in these practices built on “universal aspects of [the] children's lived experiences while also looking at unique aspects” of our own and Chinese communities (Acevedo et al., 2017, p. 24). Cleaning for the new year also helped students gain a sense of community and responsibility. Students and staff were encouraged to wear red, symbolizing good luck and fortune. The week concluded with a lantern festival and dragon dance with students who were on campus on Friday. Throughout the remainder of the vignette, I share snippets of how my class of early learners and the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten/first grade classes introduced aspects of Chinese culture and explored Chinese New Year.



Figure 1: Schedule for National Lutheran Schools Week and the Lunar New Year Celebration.

Celebrating Chinese New Year in Our Classrooms

Since we knew students living in the Arizona desert had limited experiences with Chinese New Year celebrations, we relied heavily on children's literature to introduce it to them and provide information. While the information was new, themes in the books, such as families, friends, and celebrations, helped students connect their lives and experiences to it (Acevedo et al., 2017). The stories (both fiction and nonfiction) engaged students and helped them make sense of their new learning (Corapi & Short, 2015). A sampling of the books we used in our classrooms is found in Figure 2.

Compestine, Y. C. (2011)	<i>The Runaway Wok: A Chinese New Year Tale</i>
DK Publishing. (2018)	<i>Baby's First Chinese New Year</i>
Eliot, H., & Chau, A. (2018)	<i>Lunar New Year</i>
Holub, J., & Huang, B. (2003)	<i>Dragon Dance: A Chinese New Year Lift-the-Flap Book</i>
Lee, J. S. (2017)	<i>Chinese New Year: A Celebration for Everyone</i>
Lin, G. (2013)	<i>Bringing in the New Year</i>
Otto, C. (2015)	<i>Celebrate Chinese New Year</i>

Figure 2: Sampling of the children's literature used for our Chinese New Year's celebration.

Early Learners

As the Early Learners preschool teacher, my class had five students, ages two to three years at the time of our celebration. Of the two girls and three boys, three were European-American and one each were African American and Latinx. My hope when teaching is to always include the five senses in any topic/theme experiences which is a challenge when we only meet two times a week.

On the first of our two days, I introduced Chinese New Year, explained the basics of the celebration, and read *Baby's First Chinese New Year* (DK Publishing, 2018). This book shows bright colors, basic elements of the holiday, and the various yearly animals. To encourage students to use their fine motor skills, I set up a sensory bin with red and "golden" (plain) cooked spaghetti noodles. Students used different utensils, tools, and their hands to pick up the noodles (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Sampling of the children's literature used for our Chinese New Year's celebration.

We explored art by creating our own egg carton dragons with red and gold paint (see Figure 4). I used the book *Celebrate Chinese New Year* (Otto, 2015), mostly for the photographs, so students could visualize aspects of Chinese culture. Students were mesmerized by the colors and various dragon costumes throughout the book. Towards the end of this book was a map which showed where the Chinese New Year originated.



Figure 4: Egg carton dragons.

I also showed a video I had taken of a dragon dance from the Vietnamese New Year celebration I had attended the previous weekend with my family. Students enjoyed the sights and sounds of the dragon costume. Our oldest student suggested we make a “plane” with our chairs and travel to see the dragon dance. She even remembered seeing the map and told me, “Let’s go to the place on the map, like in the book” (see Figure 5). I grabbed the book and went to the map and we flew across the world (with our stuffed animal friends) for our dragon dance.

On our second day that week, we listened to the beat of the drums from a YouTube video. We danced with our dragon creations and attempted to follow the drumbeats, slow versus fast movements. We also did a food tasting of white steamed rice and oranges, two popular foods found in lunar celebrations. I shared that rice is a staple food at every meal and oranges symbolize the full moon.



Figure 5: Our chair “plane” flying us (and our stuffed animal friends) to see the dragon dance.

Over the course of our two days that week, I explored many facets of the Chinese New Year with these two and three-year olds. I wanted to help them begin to realize that while we all share some things, like families and traditions, not everyone in the world lives, acts, and celebrates like we do in Vail, to encourage the development of their intercultural understandings (Acevedo et al., 2017). While our days were filled, I was captivated by how engrossed students were in this new celebration. A few weeks after our celebration students continued to incorporate “flying” in their daily dramatic play, often referring to our trip across the world.

Pre-Kindergarten Classes

The two pre-kindergarten classes (four and five year olds) explored and read a variety of books about Chinese New Year, including *Dragon Dance: A Chinese New Year Lift-the-Flap Book* (Holub & Huang, 2003), *Bringing in the New Year* (Lin, 2013), *Lunar New Year* (Eliot & Chau, 2018), *Celebrate Chinese New Year* (Otto, 2015), and *Chinese New Year: A Celebration for Everyone* (Lee, 2017). Many students commented on the bright colors in the costumes. Students also discussed ways their lives were like and different from those portrayed in the books. The photographs in some of the books provided them with a realistic sense of the Chinese New Year. With the Chinese New Year’s books as their guide, students also created egg-carton dragons. When Ricky commented, “I don’t know how to do this,” my son Noel (who had attended the Vietnamese celebration with me and seen a dragon), replied, “just follow mine, I know what they [dragons] looks like.”

Kindergarten/First Grade Class

The kindergarten/first grade class explored the book, *The Runaway Wok: A Chinese New Year Tale* (Compestine & Serra, 2011), which tells the story of a poor family and their adventure with a runaway wok during Chinese New Year. Through the use of colorful and vivid illustrations, students learned the importance of Chinese New Year and generosity. The reading of *The Runaway Wok* also brought a discussion of character traits and behaviors that may be different in other cultures.

The class had a visit from a local Korean exchange student, who taught students how to write their names in Korean. Students discussed how difficult the characters were compared to writing their names in the English alphabet. Students mentioned how they felt like they were drawing their names rather than writing them.

Final Reflections

Our school's week-long celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year provided different cultural experiences for young students. Through our explorations of the similarities and differences in culture, traditional practices, celebrations, foods, symbolic color meanings, and alphabet writing, students learned about other ways of living and being across the globe which strengthened their intercultural understandings. Sharing Chinese New Year with students in the Sonoran Desert will have a lasting impression on both them and us.

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