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Nurturing Critical Space with Stories and Communities

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**WOW Stories: Volume XI, Issue 1**  
**Nurturing Critical Space with Stories and Communities**  
**Summer 2024**

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## Introduction and Editors' Note

This issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* presents a collection of articles that explore a diverse array of community literacy practices. Teacher educators from different communities share narratives that highlight the significance of space within school district professional development, heritage language schools, school-based heritage celebrations, teen reading ambassadors, and home literacy contexts. Throughout these articles, the concept of space, as theorized by Henri Lefebvre (1991), emerges as a central theme. Lefebvre views space as a social product, shaped by a three-part dialectic involving everyday practices and perceptions, representations, and the spatial imaginary of time. The physical space is shaped by a myriad of actors, including developers, architects, and state entities. Representations of space encompass discourses about social spaces, which can exist independently of their physical presence. Conversely, representational space embodies the lived experiences of individuals who interact with the space, reflecting the unique social dynamics of each environment.

The first vignette examines a year-long study conducted in a community-based book club at a southeast U.S. Chinese Heritage Language school. Wenyu Guo provides insights into using children's literature to teach racialized history and facilitate race conversations, offering a selected list of picturebooks and resources focused on Chinese American stories. The second vignette explores a home-based literacy community created by Eun Hye Son and Yuwen Chen, emphasizing early literacy-friendly picturebooks that promote inclusivity and social-emotional learning among children, especially in the post-COVID-19 era.

The third article delves into a community-based Korean-English bilingual church space, where family literacy practices utilize culturally relevant picturebooks to foster young heritage language learners' cultural knowledge and experiences. Jongsun Wee and Denise Dávila illustrate how Korean American children display their transcultural knowledge and experiences when they are invited into a culturally and linguistically diverse space where young language learners and their families engage in a journey to affirm being Korean. This church space serves as a representational space in which diverse Korean people interact with each other. Koreanness is rearticulated by young language learners and mixed ethnic caregivers who widen Korean diversities.

The fourth article discusses classroom teacher-driven inquiry on censorship, underscoring the importance of authentic professional development (PD) that meets teachers' needs and fosters student-centered learning environments. Junko Sakoi, as a PD developer in her school district, demonstrates the importance of creating a safe space for teachers' growth and learning, which extends to their teaching in classrooms and students' learning around censorship and challenged books. When teachers experience teacher-driven PD, they are able to create a learning space that is student-driven and student-oriented inquiry in their classrooms. The article also shows how Yoo Kyung Sung's involvement from a local university provided a space for a college student to engage with the learning. Creating a safe space where teachers' voices are recognized in an authentic PD that meets teachers' needs exemplifies the importance of a safe space where teachers share their challenges and their learning with students.

The last featured article by Cynthia Ryman and Rebecca Ballenger is about the Teen Reading

Program (TRAP) at Worlds of Words: Center of Global Literacies and Literatures in the University of Arizona College of Education. Through TRAP, high school teens who have a love of literature gain university experience and share their experience with their peers by promoting reading in their school communities. This program shows the TRAP program's growth from a new initiative to recent reflections on the hurdles teen ambassadors overcame along the way, including the arrival of COVID-19 and the need to quickly adapt to an online format. This vignette reflects various challenges which grew to be enriching opportunities for imagination, adaptation, and growth. Teen ambassadors show the representation of a space where teens show their power in promoting global literature for young people.

Finally, we are excited to feature the first WOW Visual Stories written by Mikayla Carter. Mikayla recalls the excitement she felt as she was assigned her first classroom—half of the students spoke Spanish as their first language, a language she was not fluent in. Mikayla engaged students in a culturally enriching curriculum and the class become more adventurous during Hispanic Heritage month by selecting Guatemala as a focus Latin culture. A Guatemalan student became a resource for their inquiry study. This vignette sums up their classroom as a produced social space that is physical and representational. Mikayla's reflection dismantles discourse on and about the classroom as a perceived space that started awkwardly but grew within their journey as a classroom.

In this issue, we noted a notable increase in the representation of transnational Asian authors, even though it was not a deliberate focus for the call for manuscripts. The diverse voices of teacher educators invite us to experience various types of communities, resources, and the importance of creating safe and accepting spaces for diverse communities. These spaces recognize voices, heritage languages, challenges, and diverse texts through different forms of power dynamics. As we continue to explore community literacy practices, let us remain mindful of the rich diversity of voices and experiences that contribute to the fabric of our educational landscapes.

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Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Editions Anthropos.

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## Interrogating Anti-Asian Racism: Children’s Literature as a Nexus for Racial Literacy

Wenyu Guo

This article draws on my reflections from a year-long study in a community-based book club in a southeastern U.S. Chinese Heritage Language (CHL) school during which I read and discussed Asian American picturebooks with local Chinese immigrant children for nearly four years. These experiences demonstrate that children’s literature depicting authentic racialized history fosters students’ understanding of race, provides suggestions for using children’s literature with supplemental material to teach racialized history, and facilitates race talk. This article also includes a select list of picturebooks along with relevant resources.

### Children’s Literature with Supplementary Material as Tools to Foster Race Talk

Studies have shown that children are already talking about race and questioning racial inequities in school (Falkner, 2019). However, the school curriculum frequently falls short in providing an authentic accounting of racial conditions, thus neglecting to empower communities and offer strategies for dismantling racism with the so-called “white social studies” (Chandler & Branscombe, 2015, p. 63). Given the minimal support from the school and the pervasive deficit-oriented narrative surrounding Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and immigrants, there is a large potential for children, especially ones who come from minoritized groups to recycle and internalize these racialized messages (Boutte & Muller, 2018). Hass (2017) found that students provided reasons for unjust gender-related experiences and developed hypotheses around race and gender inequalities. Similarly, An (2020) observed that her elementary-aged daughter perpetuated stereotypes while reading, such as associating “whiteness with Americanness” and viewing “racism as a thing of the past” (p. 179).

Furthermore, during nearly four years of book club meetings, I observed that students from Chinese immigrant families often generated hypotheses to rationalize and validate racial inequities. These hypotheses included framing racism as a mental health issue and regarding racism from a Black/white binary, viewing racism as an outdated concern, justifying racism toward immigrants due to English language proficiency, and employing colorblindness to sidestep discussions about skin color and race (Guo, 2023).

One of the functions of children’s literature is “to explain and interpret national histories – histories that involve invasion, conquest, violence, and assimilation” (Bradford, 2007, p. 97). Typically, reading and discussing historical fiction is a common curricular tool used to initiate talk about race and address racism in the early childhood and elementary classroom (Boutte & Muller, 2018; Boutte et al., 2011; Brooks et al., 2018). Many studies have demonstrated that reading racialized narratives about students’ historical counterparts supports minoritized students in reflecting on their racial experiences and taking a sociocultural stance (Bishop, 2007; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Browne; 2012). Concerning the absence of Asian American experiences and narratives in K-12 schools (An, 2016, 2022), children’s literature is a major teaching venue to

examine diverse beliefs, values, and histories of Asian Americans in the United States. Prior research demonstrates that children’s literature featuring cultural attributes and authentic experiences of Asian Americans fosters children’s understanding of their real-life issues and facilitates children’s critical awareness of social inequity and injustice (Chen, 2019; Son, 2021).

However, historical picturebooks alone without supplementary materials on historical background are not sufficient to support students in developing their critical awareness around race and racism (Daly, 2022; Price-Dennis et al., 2016; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). From extensive experiences reading these books with students, I was astonished by the diverse interpretations of students. For example, when we read *Coolies* (Yin, 2003), students’ understanding of racism partially disrupted dominant racialized narratives, while other stereotypes were solidified and reproduced. Students enacted and solidified master narratives, including English proficiency as the reason for racial segregation, and failed to see the underlying racism behind the stories (Guo, 2024). Although we read and discussed the characters and plots together, these stories inadequately depict the pertinent historical context and lack explicit engagement with the concepts of racism and systemic power dynamics. As a result, they offer an ambiguous representation of the social landscape, casting Asian Americans as passive victims subjected to discrimination without explicitly acknowledging external factors contributing to their experiences.

Thus, solely reading and discussing historical picturebooks is not sufficient for students to understand racism as a social construct. Students required multiple resources and a gradual process to untangle their interpretations, simultaneously confronting their assumptions shaped by the daily racial and social realities they encounter. Crucially, this process needed to be consistent and repeated over time with a variety of texts (e.g., children’s literature, authentic historical texts, images, documentary films, etc.). Thus, it is crucial for educators and parents to offer additional materials to help children comprehend the historical context intertwined with complex socioeconomic factors and international diplomacy. This support is essential to empower children to confront anti-Asian discourse on a broader scale, moving beyond the individual level and fostering an understanding of institutional racism.

### **Suggestions for Educators and Parents**

Two key suggestions to K-12 educators and parents are offered based on my extensive literacy engagement with Asian American students, including exploring Asian American histories and addressing anti-Asian racism through the use of children’s literature and supplementary materials. Firstly, educators should purposefully diversify their classroom libraries with Asian American children’s literature that not only represents diverse narratives but also consciously avoids perpetuating stereotypes, considering the limited attention given to Asian American communities and narratives in addressing anti-Asian racism within school curricula (An, 2022). Secondly, in addition to selected children’s literature, educators should integrate supplementary material including extended readings, images, and videos to enhance students’ understanding of the history and realities of Asian Americans.

## Choosing Children's Literature to Disrupt Anti-Asian Racism

Given the historical presence of slurs, stereotypes, and assumptions in children's literature (Au, Brown, & Calderon, 2016; Mo & Shen, 2003), the selection of culturally authentic Asian American literature becomes crucial. Aoki (1981) stressed that such literature should authentically reflect the day-to-day realities of Asian American lives and transcend stereotypes, particularly those portraying Asian Americans as the model minority. While the past two decades have seen a substantial increase in Asian American literature, many texts continue to reinforce stereotypes, such as the overachieving model minority and Asian Americans as exotic foreigners, failing to capture the rich diversity within Asian America. For example, in *Lissy's Friends* (Lin, 2007), about a Chinese American girl's schooling experience is isolated, Lissy is depicted as the "other" through dressing and speaking distinctly different from classmates who are white and students of color in the narrative, making it challenging for students to connect with her.

Drawing on a cultural insider perspective (Bishop, 2003) and teaching experiences, I present the following criteria for selecting Asian American texts which foster talk about race and disrupt anti-Asian racism in classroom and families. Some of the suggested Asian American children's literature is provided in Table 1.

- Choose stories depicting the racialized experiences of Asian Americans. Some examples of Asian American racialization are building the Transcontinental Railroad, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the imprisonment of Japanese Americans, the creation of harsh immigration policies, the history of detention at Angel Island, and the Model Minority Myth.
- Avoid stories solely depicting Asian Americans as victims.
- Choose stories that highlight Asian American contributions and heroism.
- Choose stories that highlight Asian American activism within the Civil Rights Movement.

Cover	Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Grade Level	Contents
	<i>Coolies</i>	Yin	Philomel (Penguin Putnam)	2003	2-5	(Earliest Chinese Contract Laborers, Contributions of Chinese Americans) The journey of two brothers from China to work on the transcontinental railroad in America. An excellent introduction to the overlooked history of Chinese Americans and their role in building the nation.
	<i>Brothers</i>	Yin	Philomel	2006	PreK- 3	(Racial segregation & Multiracial solidarity) In this sequel, Shek's younger brother, arrives in San Francisco to help run their Chinatown store. Ming explores outside Chinatown and befriends an Irish boy. Their friendship aids in language learning and boosts business for their store.
	<i>Paper Son: Lee's Journey to America</i>	Helen Foster James & Virginia Shin-Mui Loh	Sleeping Bear Press	2013	1-4	(Chinese Exclusion Act) The story depicts the racialized experience of a 12-year-old boy from a small Chinese village detained in Angel Island immigration station as a "paper son" in San Francisco.
	<i>Kai's Journey to Gold Mountain: An Angel Island Story.</i>	Katrina Saltonstall Currier	Angel Island Association	2004	4-6	In 1934, twelve-year-old Kai returns from China to reunite with his father, undergoing weeks of detention on Angel Island.
	<i>Landed</i>	Milly Lee	Farrar, Straus and Giroux.	2006	1-3	Sun's challenging immigrant experience in the U.S. includes detention and examinations at Angel Island.
	<i>The Fearless Flights of Hazel Ying Lee</i>	Julie Leung	Little, Brown	2021	PreK - 3	The racialized experiences of Hazel Ying Lee, the first Asian American female pilot, navigating identity as an ethnic minoritized female within her family and the military. Highlights her bravery and heroism in the face of challenges.
	<i>I Am an American: The Wong Kim Ark Story</i>	Martha Brockenbrough & Grace Lin	Little, Brown.	2021	PreK - 3	A determined young man challenged the Supreme Court for his right to be an American citizen—and won, thereby confirming birthright citizenship for all Americans.
	<i>Mountain Chef</i>	Annette Bay Pimentel	Charlesbridge	2016	1-4	True story about Tie Sing, a Chinese American mountain man, renowned as the best trail cook in California although faced with racial inequities. Sing Peak in Yosemite National Park stands as a tribute to his legacy.

Table 1. Suggested Children's Literature on Chinese American Experiences



## Incorporating Supplementary Material to Facilitate Race Talk

Contrary to the common practice of using a single text to initiate critical conversations, Daly (2022) and Price-Dennis et al. (2016) found that incorporating supplementary texts along with children's books proved beneficial in scaffolding students in discussing racism as both historically and contemporarily relevant. They documented increased participation in critical discussions of race and racism. This rise in engagement was attributed to the innovative curriculum, providing students with diverse entry points for discussing the topic.

Guo (2023) developed an innovative Asian American curriculum centered on dismantling anti-Asian racism and exploring Asian American activism. This curriculum integrates children's literature with supplementary materials to enhance the learning experience, cultivating active engagement among Chinese American students and fostering students' learning about racism in a critical way. For example, while reading *Paper Son* (James, 2013), teachers can add extended reading, such as "Bound for Gold Mountain," a chapter from *Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain* written by Russell Freedman (2013), and documentary films, such as *The Dark History of the Chinese Exclusion Act* by Robert Chang, and *Breaking Ground*, one of the episodes of *Asian Americans* which is a five-hour film series that centers on Asian American history. These supplementary materials scaffold students' learning about the racialization of Chinese Americans under Chinese Exclusion Act with sufficient historical background.

The incorporation of multimodal texts that offer historical context allows students to access relevant information while constructing their understanding of contemporary issues. As revealed in my findings, most participants generated master narratives about racial injustices based on their own limited experiences with racial stereotypes and mistreatment of racial minorities. Due to the limitations of their personal experiences, the interpretations they formed often downplayed anti-Asian racism and created explanations and presumptions for a whitewashed perspective. Therefore, it is essential for researchers and teachers to carefully choose extended texts that offer historical context, enabling them to comprehend current events as products of the persistent beliefs and practices that have been carried forward from the past.

Thus, I suggest educators incorporate supplementary materials and include extended readings on historical context and social events, authentic photographs, documentary films, educational videos, as well as contemporary cartoons or artwork in their curriculum. All these materials should authentically depict the racial experiences of Asian Americans in the United States with both historical and contemporary relevance.

### More Resources

This section contains recommendations for primary sources pertaining to Asian American history as well as websites with lists of Chinese American picturebooks. These sources are selected for their capacity to accentuate the heroism and activism of Asian Americans while acknowledging the ways Asian Americans have been racialized. For example, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center website has lessons linked to objects and artifacts in Smithsonian collections as well as links to

videos and books about Filipina female resistance fighters during World War II. Similarly, the resources for finding Chinese American picturebooks include book lists selected by using critical scholarship. For example, the Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books (Derman-Sparks, 2016) urges readers to select books that avoid stereotypes and tokenism, and to choose books that will help children feel represented and seen.

### *Primary Sources About Asian American Histories*

- Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (<https://apa.si.edu/>)
- Primary Source Set about Japanese American incarceration at the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/japanese-american-internment/>)
- History of Angel Island Immigration Station (<https://www.aiisf.org/history>)
- Asian American history by PBS (<https://www.pbs.org/weta/asian-americans/episode-guide/>)
- South Asian American Digital Archive (<https://www.saada.org/>)

### *Asian American Picturebooks*

- Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (<https://www.apalaweb.org/>)
- We Need Diverse Books (<https://diversebooks.org/>)
- Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books (<https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>)
- Chinese American Family: A parent's guide to Chinese American children's books (<https://www.chineseamericanfamily.com/childrens-books/>)
- American Writers Museum: 14 Picture books featuring Asian families by 14 Asian American authors (<https://americanwritersmuseum.org/14-picture-books-featuring-asian-families-by-14-asian-american-authors/>)
- Represent Asian Project: 12 Children's books by Asian authors (<https://representasianproject.com/asian-owned/asian-childrens-books/>)

These resources are intended to aid in selecting both fiction and nonfiction texts to share with children, thereby fostering their development of antiracist perspectives. Children's literature serves as a valuable starting point for discussions surrounding heritage, race, and ethnicity, laying the foundation for the development of racial literacy.

### **Conclusion**

This article explores the reactions of Chinese American children to picturebooks portraying the Asian American racialized experience in the United States. It delves into how merely reading and responding to these texts does not suffice in cultivating antiracist attitudes and racial literacy. To effectively foster antiracist teaching and learning, students require exposure to diverse perspectives and insights from various sources, including fiction, trade books, and primary materials.

With these insights and the recommended resources, I advocate for educators to carefully choose authentic children's literature that accurately depicts the realities of Asian Americans, both of

historical and contemporary relevance, and to integrate diverse resources in their classrooms. In this way, educators can effectively foster meaningful discussions about race and the experiences of Asian Americans, both past and present, with their students. It's important to recognize that combating racism is an ongoing process, not a one-time effort. Consistent reading and reflection are essential components in this journey.

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## Using Picturebooks to Promote Home Literacy and Social Emotional Learning

Eun Hye Son and YuWen Chen

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and public libraries were shut down for the safety of social distancing, which changed the dynamics and platforms of children's learning. Many young elementary students struggled to concentrate on virtual learning, and the lack of physical interaction delayed students' social emotional development (Watts & Pattnaik, 2023). Moreover, distance education has risen to the challenge of students' social literacy, which is "a critical component in the elementary classroom, helping children to interact and communicate effectively during class activities" (Alsubaie, 2022, p. 2). With these burning issues in mind, we, as mothers and researchers, became concerned about children's literacy development and social interactions in such a challenging time. After researching through extensive scholarly articles, educational news, and other educational forums, we found home literacy practices as a way to engage children and parents/caregivers in literacy activities related to live experiences (Chamberlain et al., 2020). Keeping in mind that not all parents/caregivers have the confidence required to lead their children in the practice of literacy at home (Steiner et al., 2022), we wanted to share our experiences to help them understand how to foster children's social literacy skills and social emotional learning at home.

To start, we created a home-based literacy community based on the concept of a home literacy environment (HLE), which refers to "a wide range of home activities and experiences that promote literacy development" for children (Van Tonder et al., 2019, p. 87). HLE involves family literacy practices whereby parents/caregivers do shared readings and use dialogic reading strategies, ask and respond to open-ended questions related to events read about in the books, or do writing activities (Read et al., 2022). Our home-based literacy environment was formed in the summer of 2021 by inviting six elementary students (Dino, Greninja, Nya, Cutie Bear, Hana, and Aliyah) ranging from kindergarten to 2nd grade, to be part of this learning community at either the researcher's or children's home.

To plan a curriculum for the home-based literacy community, we selected picturebooks that highlight differences and similarities among people, various elements of different lifestyles and cultures, and acts of inclusion. Considering children's ages and grade levels (ages 5–8), we chose books that contained clear and engaging storylines with the appropriate vocabulary for them to read and relate to. After reading the books aloud with children, we encouraged them to reflect on the differences and similarities that they had come across in their own lives. In doing so, they learned to demonstrate respect and appreciation for the range of cultures and diverse people through guided discussion questions (i.e., What was your favorite part of the story? What did you learn from the characters and their experiences? What connections such as text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world did you make?) and literacy activities (i.e., writing, drawing, pair or group work, discussions, and presentations).

In this article, we discuss how we designed this project and facilitated children's participation in the home-based literacy community, based on the following three themes: recognizing our similarities and differences, learning about various elements of different cultures, and embracing diversity for inclusion and social emotional learning.

## Recognizing Our Similarities and Differences

We believe that recognizing people's similarities and differences is a gateway to understanding who we are, which is the foundation of social emotional development. We presented two picturebooks to help children become more aware of the similarities people share in addition to their differences. *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 1997) shows that people around the world have similarities inside even though they might look different on the outside. Despite differences in schooling, language, lifestyle, and physical appearance, they share common emotions and feelings. Next, we read aloud *Same, Same but Different* (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011), which portrays two boys, one living in the United States and one in India. The boys share similar life experiences and interests, including schooling and outdoor activities, but these occur in different ways.

After reading this book, we provided an activity to help children think about their personal preferences and to discover similarities and differences with others. We surveyed their preferences of outdoor activities and invited them to color the activities they like on a poster graph (see Figure 1). During this activity, children were excited to learn about their peers' preferences of outdoor activities. Instead of using their real names on the poster graph, they decided to use their favorite animation characters (Nya and Greninja) and stuffed animals (Dino and Cutie Bear) to represent who they are in this particular activity. Nya was surprised by Dino's choice, exclaiming, "You like playing in the sand! I thought you like climbing trees." Greninja was able to summarize their commonalities, "Wow, all of us like swimming and ice-skating. Perhaps we can go swimming and ice-skating together." Finding shared interests allowed children to connect with one another. As they sometimes realized that their assumptions on their peers' preferences of outdoor activities were wrong, they were able to further deepen their friendships in this lively community environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public facilities, such as ice-skating rink and swimming pools, were temporarily closed. Finding that their interests connected them, they became excited about what other potential outdoor activities they could explore together once the pandemic was over. This provided them with hope to sustain their social emotional well-being during such a challenging time.





Figure 1. Survey of preferences of outdoor activities

We also brought magazines, catalogs, store flyers that included playgrounds, toys, food, animals, nature, etc. and asked children to cut out items they like. Then, we asked them to pair up with a partner to share with each other why they like the items they chose by comparing and contrasting their preferences. After that, they completed a Venn diagram by gluing down the items they had cut out. When Cutie Bear and Nya were collaborating on the sameness of their preferences, they enthusiastically asked each other questions in order to complete the task. Nya asked, “Do you like shrimps?” Cutie Bear responded, “Yes! I love shrimps! They taste so good.” Nya, “Yes! Shrimp is also good for our body.” Cutie Bear added, “Cherries are good too!” Nya joyfully nodded in agreement. This activity not only increased children’s awareness of their own preferences, but also gave them an opportunity to help them find commonalities with their fellow classmates (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Cutie Bear is cutting the food he likes from grocery store flyers, putting them on a plate before discussing with his partner.



Figure 3. Venn Diagram. Cutie Bear and Nya discussed their personal preferences of food.

### Learning about Various Cultural Elements People Have

Recognizing their similarities and differences not only helps children understand their own individuality and identity but also lays a foundation of learning about the various cultural backgrounds of people. First, we encouraged children to learn more about their family because that is one of the initial places for them to develop their identity and to shape who they are. We shared the following two books, *Where Are You From?* (Méndez, 2019) and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (Martinez-Neal, 2018). The main characters in the two books have questions about who they are. In response, their family members (i.e., abuelo and dad, respectively) tell them stories about their origins and their names.

After sharing these books, we asked children to reflect on themselves and to come up with lists of where they are from using sentence frames, i.e., I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (place, family, tradition, everyday items, memory, food, etc.). Afterwards, we asked them how they spent their leisure time with their family. This inquiry helps children elaborate more on why they selected the words, sharing stories about their family cultures. Then, we asked them to share the meaning of their names and interests in either free drawing or writing to help them genuinely reflect on who they are and understand the name given by parents/caregivers. Hana, an American-born Japanese child, explained her name: Hana (はな) means flower in Japanese. She said, “My parents gave me this name. I was born in the spring season. Flowers bloom in the spring.” When she shared her drawing, she explained her name is

like a delightful melody flowing in the river in the spring. She drew a butterfly that enjoyed the beautiful sound by joyfully flying near the river. Hana named her drawing “Sound of Spring” (see Figure 4A). Another child, Aliyah, a second-generation, American-born Taiwanese, said that her father likes a singer named Aaliyah, so she was named after her. Aliyah shared that she actually likes singing like the singer Aaliyah. Her middle name is Faith because her parents hope she has faith in life. She further elaborated on the foods she likes and the sports she likes to do (see Figure 4B). These activities open the door for children to understand an array of family stories and cultures that shaped and influenced who they are.



Figure 4. Children’s artifacts showing who they are: Hana’s drawing, “Sound of Spring,” reveals the story behind her name (A).



Figure 4. Children’s artifacts showing who they are: Aliyah’s description of who she is (B).

### Embracing Diversity for Inclusion and Social Emotional Learning

We believe greetings are a good initial topic to make the abstract concept of culture more concrete and relatable when teaching children how to respect and embrace differences to foster social emotional learning. *Say Hello!* (Isadora, 2010) is a great book to introduce young readers to different languages. As Carmelita, the main character, walks through her neighborhood and encounters her culturally diverse neighbors, she exchanges hellos in their respective heritage languages. We used this book to talk about how different cultures have different languages to convey the same meaning, and we encouraged children to learn to say hello in different languages. Additionally, we talked about how people coming from different countries make different gestures

when greeting each other such as air kisses on the cheek, handshakes, bow, etc. To practice greetings of different countries, each child randomly drew a flashcard of a national flag and then led everyone in practice of that country's greeting word with a particular gesture. If children forgot how to make a particular greeting gesture and the greeting itself, they could just smile. This helped children become aware that nonverbal facial expression, smiling at people, is also a kind way to greet others when people do not know how to act and say greeting words appropriately.

To extend the discussion of greetings and gestures, we introduced a humorous picturebook, *How Do You Hug a Porcupine?* (Isop, 2011). It provided a great starting point for the children to open up a conversation about understanding differences. This book has a repeated question-and-answer structure: The question, "Can you hug {insert specific animal here}?" is followed by the answer how to hug different animals in appropriate ways. We used this question—How do you hug a porcupine?—multiple times throughout the story to facilitate a discussion on finding solutions to hug a porcupine without getting hurt based on other appropriate ways to hug different animals. We also expanded the discussion to talk about how to become friends with others whose actions and cultures differ from their own and who may seem difficult to develop a relationship. In addition, we brought up the idea that people have different ideas about physical boundaries and touch during greetings, and so we need to respect people's comfort zones.

**Researcher:** How do you become friends with people who are difficult to get close to?

**Cutie Bear:** Maybe this person is angry about something.

**Researcher:** What would you do?

**Cutie Bear:** I will ask this person what happened and try to talk to him in a friendly way. If this person doesn't like a hug, I definitely won't do it. I don't want this person to feel uncomfortable.

**Researcher:** Great! I agree with you, Cutie Bear! As you know, a social and physical distance policy has been introduced in public due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Cutie Bear:** I see. So, if the person is not comfortable to shake hands with me or hug him when I greet him, I won't do that. I will give him a smile.

As seen in this conversation, Cutie Bear tried to be compassionate and find a way to understand the person with whom it seems difficult to establish a relationship or who needs physical boundaries when interacting.

We also introduced realistic picturebooks that are set in schools where children are involved in daily activities and social interactions with others: *The Invisible Boy* (Ludwig, 2013), *I'm New Here* (O'Brien, 2018), and *All Are Welcome* (Penfold, 2018). These books tell stories about the interrelatedness of students, including those with a variety of personalities, hobbies, strengths, and linguistically and culturally diverse origins. The stories highlight how children might become more aware of fellow classmates who may need a friendly, helping hand to navigate cultural adjustments, language barriers, or social interactions. We asked children to make personal connections to the books by asking the following questions: (1) Have you ever felt fear in a new environment? How do you overcome your fear? (2) In the past, have you had any new transfer classmates in your classroom?

How do you become friends with them? Children discovered that most experience fear in a new environment. This shared experience allowed them to understand the importance of having empathy and showing kindness to others. We used these books to encourage children to foster inclusive and welcoming classroom communities and to create a sense of belonging for all.

Last, we shared books focusing on intergenerational family relationships, *Drawn Together* (Lê, 2018) and *Grandfather Counts* (Cheng, 2000), portraying how American-born Asian grandchildren and Asian (Thai and Chinese) grandfathers feel frustration over language barriers, generational gaps, and differing cultural experiences. Using mediums such as drawing and counting, they bridge intergenerational gaps and language barriers and rekindle their kinship with mutual understanding and love. The beautiful illustrations help children relate to their intergenerational experiences, understand cross-cultural differences, and learn how to communicate with others with compassion. After reading the book, we asked the following questions: “How would you interact with someone who is very different from you? For example, they speak a different language from you or likes food/toys that are different from yours.” And, “Have you ever felt frustrated or mad and gotten into a fight with somebody because you did not agree with the person? If so, how did you solve the problem?”

These questions encourage children to recognize their emotions when things do not go as they expected and learn to find acceptable ways to solve their problems. Cutie Bear shared his experience of his grandmother’s visit. She does not speak English, but she knows how to make delicious dumplings. Cutie Bear excitedly said, “Grandma’s food is so good!” However, sometimes he could not understand what his grandmother was saying, and sometimes he did not know how to respond to her in Mandarin Chinese. He felt a bit frustrated but tried to use his body language to communicate with her. When it did not work, he asked his mother or father for help with interpretation. These books inspired children to recognize the barriers created by differences and to find ways to connect to diverse people despite any linguistic and cross-cultural differences.

Theme	Book Title
Recognizing similarities and differences that we all have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Whoever you are</i> (Fox, 1997)</li> <li>• <i>Same, Same but Different</i> (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011)</li> </ul>
Learning about various cultural elements people have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Where Are You From?</i> (Méndez, 2019)</li> <li>• <i>Alma and How She Got Her Name</i> (Martinez-Neal, 2018)</li> </ul>
Embracing diversity for inclusion and social emotional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Say Hello!</i> (Isadora, 2010)</li> <li>• <i>How Do You Hug a Porcupine?</i> (Isop, 2011)</li> <li>• <i>The Invisible Boy</i> (Ludwig, 2013)</li> <li>• <i>I’m New Here</i> (O’Brien, 2018)</li> <li>• <i>All Are Welcome</i> (Penfold, 2018)</li> <li>• <i>Drawn Together</i> (Lê, 2018)</li> <li>• <i>Grandfather Counts</i> (Cheng, 2000)</li> </ul>

Table 1. Book titles used for instruction of three themes

## Conclusion

We believe that this home-based literacy community created a great space for children to learn, explore, and embrace this world and express their thoughts with confidence. During the social literacy activities, they heartily shared their opinions and stories; consequently, they learned not only about others, but they learned more about themselves. They came to love to read, but also looked forward to continuing these home-based literacy practices.

We hope that this home-based literacy community enables children, parents/caregivers, and families to find connectedness and social interaction and maintain social emotional well-being through social literacy activities (Fisher & Frey, 2020). It helped children to understand that people around the world faced the same challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic, and how people arise from the innate characteristics of kindness, compassion, and empathy to make this world a better place in the post-COVID-19 era.

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## Displaying Heritage Knowledge in a Korean-English Family Literacy Exploration

Jongsun Wee and Denise Dávila

What is the potential of bookplay activities for young Korean American children and their families? This article discusses the outcomes of bookplay activities within the context of a secular intergenerational biliteracy storytime program for newcomer and first- and second-generation Korean American families in a major city of the U.S. southwest. Our program was inspired by the family storytime work of Dávila and colleagues (2017; 2022a; 2022b) in which young children mobilized their linguistic and transcultural knowledge during mealtime-related bookplay activities.

The objective of our family program was to foster young Korean American children's learning and maintenance of their heritage language and culture. Although we worked in consultation and collaboration with families at a Korean church, the program was entirely secular and was not associated with any forms of religious education. As a community, the families were interested in opportunities for their children to listen to Korean stories and language. They wanted to spend time together, reading about and talking about their homeland, Korea, and Korean culture. In turn, we facilitated seven bilingual sessions on Sunday during the lunch hour. This article focuses on two of the sessions in which families responded to picturebooks by Korean Americans about Korean food and mealtime rituals.

### Background: A Glimpse into Bilingual Family Programs

Bilingual family literacy initiatives are not universal. Varying formats and settings reflect different objectives. For example, in Hirst et al.'s (2010) study, teachers visited bilingual families' homes and provided resources for them to support their young children's literacy learning at home. Zhang et al. (2010) conducted a study in three different community centers with the objective of documenting changes in families' literacy activities through their bilingual family literacy program. Dávila and her colleagues (2017) fostered linguistically- and culturally-inclusive literacy experiences for Spanish-speaking families within the space of an English-dominant public library. In Louie and Davis-Welton's (2016) study, elementary school teachers and teacher-candidates partnered with families and community members to implement a bilingual picture book project to produce "student-authored and student-illustrated bilingual picturebooks in the classroom setting" (p.598-599).

Across family literacy studies, findings reflect common outcomes. First, no matter the venue, the project benefited families by promoting children's biliteracy development in their heritage language and English (Hirst et al., 2010; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016; Zhang et al., 2010). Second, the family's heritage language and culture were valued and respected, and as a result, facilitators increased their understanding of bilingual families' culture while developing relationships with them (Hirst et al., 2010; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016). Third, families' funds of knowledge functioned as valuable resources since culturally familiar content was highlighted (Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016). Fourth, families expressed a sense of belonging to the new school or new country (Dávila et al., 2017). Finally, families enjoyed the programs as indicated by high participation rates (e.g., Zhang et al., 2010), which can be challenging due to "issues such as transportation and babysitting" and parents' ability to attend after long work hours (Timmons, 2008, p. 99).



## Creating a Korean American Storytime Program

Our creation of the Korean American Storytime Program was a collaborative, community-based effort. At the time, Jongsun was a faculty member at a midwestern university. Denise was a faculty member at a local university and sponsored Jongsun's research visit to the southwest. Denise engaged the generosity of colleagues and community members to establish the program at a local Korean church. Together, we met with church leaders and parents to discuss the project. We learned that as members of a diasporic Korean American community, church families were concerned about cultivating and maintaining their children's emergent bilingual and bicultural Korean identities. For this reason, many of the children attended heritage culture classes at the church.

Augmenting the heritage culture classes, we developed our program to provide a third space in which families' linguistic and cultural identities are fluid (Bhabha, 2004). According to Bhabha (2004), when diverse cultures or identities collide, there is a space where no one particular culture or identity is clearly linked. This is called a third space, and it exists in-between. The third space offers an educational moment for a person to create an innovative hybrid identity that might contradict traditional cultural practices.

Open to all families with children in grades preK-5, we featured picturebooks about Korea, Korean culture, or Korean American families and communities during each of the seven weekly sessions. The selected books were written in English, all authored or co-authored by persons of Korean heritage. We facilitated family-centered activities to engage the children with their siblings and parents. The books included: *Bee-bim Bop!* written by Linda Sue Park and illustrated by Ho Baek Lee (2008), *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix* written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and June Jo Lee and illustrated by Man One (2017), *Juna's Jar* written by Jane Bahk and illustrated by Felicia Hoshino (2018), *New Clothes for New Year's Day* written and illustrated by Hyun-Joo Bae (2002), *Sumi's First Day of School Ever* written by Soyoung Pak and illustrated by Joung Un Kim (2003), *The Green Frogs: A Korean Folktale Retold* retold by Yumi Heo (2004), and *엄마마중* *Waiting for Mama* written by Lee Tae-Jun and illustrated by Kim Dong-Seong (2007).

We designed each session to follow a common structure. Jongsun facilitated each session in Korean and English. Sessions began with an introductory activity to activate children's cultural knowledge. Next was an interactive read-aloud (Fountas & Pinnell Literacy blog, n.d.) in which children and parents shared their thoughts and knowledge associated with the focal text. Sessions concluded with a literature response activity intended to surface children's linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge about their Korean American identities (Moll et al, 1992). For example, during the session featuring the picturebook, *New Clothes for New Year's Day*, the families discussed New Year celebrations in Korea. Corresponding with the New Year's tradition of wearing the traditional Korean dress, Hanbok, and wishing a New Year's blessing to family members, children and their parents created Origami Korean dresses. Children also learned and practiced bowing to elders on New Year's Day.

Participants in the program included newcomers and first-generation Korean American children and their families. Among the families, varying factors included their arrival time in the U.S., their Korean and English language proficiency, and their immediate family member's ethnicity. Every participant

was Korean American. Some children had parents who were both Korean, while some were from interracial families: one parent was Korean, and the other was non-Korean.

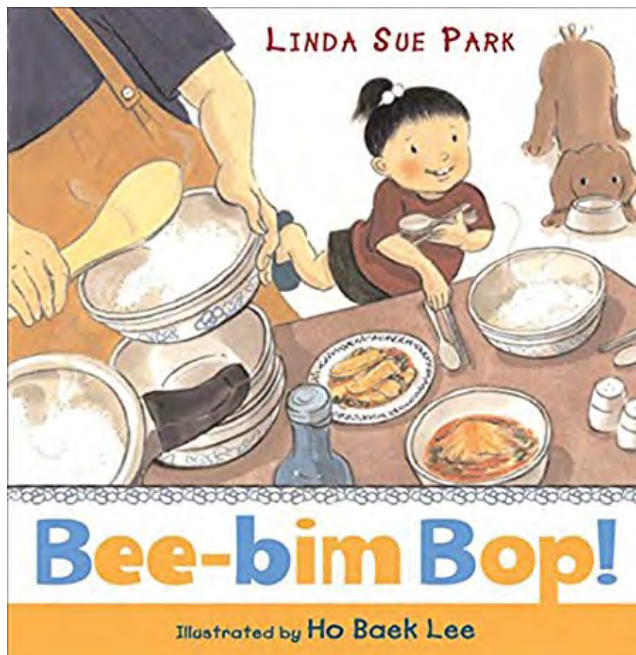
The children’s ages ranged from grades preK-5. The number of participants varied across sessions. Table 1 shows the number of participants in the two sessions we highlight in this article: *Bee-bim Bop!* and *Chef Roy Choi* sessions.

Session	Number of Children	Number of Parents
<i>Bee-bim Bop!</i>	19	8
<i>Chef Roy Choi</i>	22	10

Table 1. Number of Participants

### Focal Picturebooks

In this article, we share observations from two sessions when we explored *Bee-bim Bop!* (2008) and *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix* (2017). *Bee-bim Bop!* is a story written in verse by Korean American author Linda Sue Park, who won the 2002 Newbery Medal for *A Single Shard* (2001). *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix* (*Chef Choi* hereafter) is a 2018 Orbis Pictus Award honor book for outstanding nonfiction written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and June Jo Lee, and illustrated by Man One.



## Bee-bim Bop Activity

In the session featuring *Bee-bim Bop!*, after conducting an interactive read-aloud, Jongsun invited the children and their families to draw their own Bee-bim-bop on paper using colored pencils and markers. We observed parents' thoughtful engagement in the activity as they sat with their children and discussed the ingredients children could include in their unique Bee-bim-bop creations (Wee, 2020). Correspondingly, children's choice of ingredients for their Bee-bim-bop displayed their funds of knowledge as seen in fourth-grader Jessica's drawing. (All children's and family members' names are pseudonyms). Moll and his colleague (1992) used the term funds of knowledge in their study to connect students' funds of knowledge and classroom instruction. They explained that it has "its emphasis on strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households' functioning, development, and well-being" (p.139) and suggested teachers need to incorporate students' funds of knowledge in their teaching.

During the Bee-bim-bop activity, the families sat with their children. For young ones who needed more guidance, they helped them draw. Some parents talked about traditional ingredients for Bee-bim-bop with the children, including bracken ferns and bellflower roots, which are common in Korea, but challenging to find in U.S. markets. In doing so, they passed along their funds of knowledge about Bee-bim-bop to their children. The parents also watched children drawing their Bee-bim-bop, gave them positive feedback, and praised how well they did (Wee, 2020).

After creating their Bee-bim-bop on paper, children took turns describing to the group the ingredients they most enjoy in Bee-bim-bop. For example, Jared (preK) was a young boy who proudly shared his Bee-bim-bop drawing by saying, "Is my drawing the best?" Jared drew his Bee-bim-bop with different colors (See Figure 2), which suggests he knew that Bee-bim-bop is made with a variety of ingredients. Another young child, Charlie (preK), also used different color markers (See Figure 3) to indicate different ingredients. When Charlie was asked about his drawing, he said yellow was eggs, green was spinach, and orange was carrots, which are the traditional ingredients of Bee-bim-bop. In Charlie's drawing, Jongsun wrote Korean words with Charlie's answers during the activity. Young Jared's and Charlie's drawings reveal the children's funds of knowledge about traditional Korean foods.

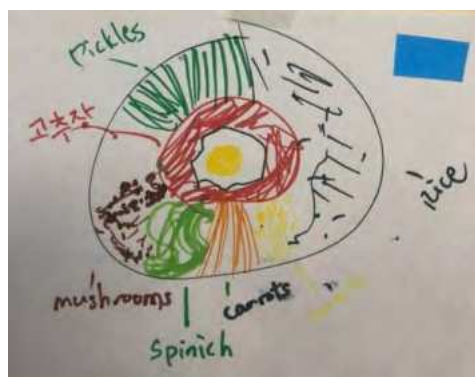


Figure 1. Jessica's Bee-bim-bop Drawing



Figure 2. Jared's Bee-bim-bop Drawing



Figure 3. Charlie's Bee-bim-bop Drawing

Across the group, out of nineteen children at the session, nine highlighted traditional Korean ingredients in their Bee-bim-bop, like Jared and Charlie. Eight children added ingredients that are not traditional of Korean Bee-bim-bop, such as blueberries, sweet potatoes, and pickles. The varying ingredients appearing in children's drawings are suggestive of children's transcultural experiences as members of a diasporic community in the U.S. southwest. This diversity of ingredients sparked comments and discussion among the families when the drawings were shared.

Sara (2nd grade) had a big smile on her face when she shared her Bee-bim-bop drawing, which had blueberries in it. She drew laughter from her mom and other parents. Instead of telling Sara that blueberries were not common ingredients for Bee-bim-bop, the parents complimented her by saying it was a cute idea to include blueberries. After listening to Sara, Sara's mom shared her desire to cook more Korean cuisine at home.

Five children's Bee-bim-bop drawings included Spam instead of ground beef (See Figure 4). We might infer that children's families may substitute ground beef with Spam when they cook Bee-bim-bop. Even though Spam is not the traditional Bee-bim-bop ingredient, no one at the family storytime pointed out Spam as inappropriate. Bee-bim-bop with Spam may be viewed as a transcultural product since Spam was created in the U.S. as budget-friendly meat (DeJesus, 2014).

Interestingly, even though children included Spam, they did not forget to add pepper paste (Gochujang in Korean), one of the key ingredients of Bee-bim-bop. Gochujang is traditionally home-made and can be purchased at a Korean food market in the U.S. At the family storytime, transcultural products like Spam Bee-bim-bop seemed to be understood by the participants who shared the same transcultural experience because no one questioned it.



Figure 4. Bee-bim-bop with Spam drawing

## Food Truck Activity

Before conducting an interactive read-aloud in the session featuring *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix* (2017), the families viewed two short videos about Chef Choi's Korean background and his fusion of Korean and American cuisines in cooking ramen. Alongside the videos, the picturebook highlights Roy Choi's original food truck, in which he served fusion tacos with Korean barbeque. After the interactive read-aloud, the children created images of the kinds of food trucks they would like to visit, complete with menus.

Out of 22 children who shared their food trucks, twelve created food trucks with food that could be considered Korean food. Ten were food trucks with non-traditional Korean food: five dessert trucks, one fruit truck, one pancake truck, one chicken truck, and two trucks with no description. Interestingly, twelve children chose Korean food for their food trucks when the food choice was wide open.

Although the children did not feature fusion cuisine like Chef Choi, their food trucks showed an interesting mix of different foods. For example, one child drew a food truck with different kinds of Korean food and ice cream. This child labeled the names of each food drawn in Korean, such as 떡, 모찌, 전, and 아이스크림.

Ben (4th grade) named the food truck "Kor Merican" and included food such as Bungeoppang (a fish-shaped bun with red bean paste filling), Ramen, and sugar candy. In this drawing, a ladle is drawn for sugar candy. In Korea, a candy made in a ladle is called Dalgona. Inferring from the drawing, it seems that Ben knew about Dalgona and drew it on his food truck (See Figure 5). John (5th grade) created a truck named "K. F. truck," which served Ramen and Galbi, Korean barbeque ribs (See Figure 6). It was an interesting combination because Ramen is considered a cheap instant food, whereas Galbi is gourmet food that takes hours to prepare. Galbi is also often cooked for holidays, but serving Ramen on holiday would be unthinkable.

For this reason, Ramen and Galbi can be seen as an unconventional combination. However, to John, people's typical perceptions of Korean food were not a barrier to creating such a combination. This unconventional combination shows children's playfulness with the Korean food they know (Zhang & Guo, 2015).



Figure 5. Ben's Food Truck Drawing

The playfulness that children exhibited in their drawings made the parents laugh. Observing the parents' comments like "Kids created fun Korean food trucks" and their facial expressions, it appeared that they were pleasantly surprised. Perhaps, they recognized children's knowledge of Korean foods and children's capacities to interpret the meaning of the food names in association with the Korean language.

The parents recognized the wordplay that children displayed on the food trucks. For example, the parents were impressed when John, who created the "K. F. truck," said K. F. stood for Korean Food (See Figure 6). The parents praised children for their witty decorations when they saw Hanah's (3rd grade) drawings of a fist for Jumukbab (See Figure 7) and Ben's drawing of a fish for Bungeoppang (See Figure 5). Jumukbab could be translated into "fist rice balls" in English, and Bungeo in Bungeoppang refers to one type of fish in Korean.

Collectively, children's food trucks were artifacts of their knowledge of Korean food and written Korean words. For example, Ben wrote **붕어빵** next to his drawing of fish (See Figure 5), Grace (4th grade) wrote "spicy rice cake" underneath the Korean word **떡볶이** (See Figure 8), and Hannah wrote **주먹밥** on her rice ball truck. It shows that children understand what Korean words mean and how these foods got their names.

Perhaps these children chose to write Korean words because they knew many participants in the family storytime would understand them. If the same activity had been done in an English-dominant classroom, they might not have chosen to write the words in Korean or draw Korean food trucks.



Figure 6. John's Food Truck Drawing



Figure 7. Hanah's Food Truck Drawing

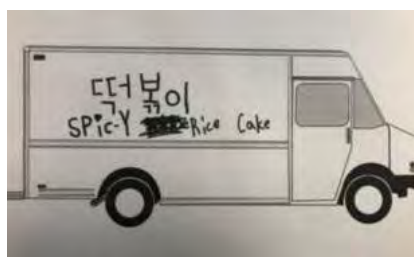


Figure 8. Grace's Food Truck Drawing

## Discussion and Implications

The storytime program created a transcultural third space (Bhabha, 2004) for children and their families to exhibit their hybrid identities and experiences via food-related bookplay activities. As shown in the Bee-bim-bop activity, family participants eagerly welcomed children's merging of traditional Korean ingredients. As shown in the food truck activity, children made their Korean transcultural identities visible as both Korean and American (Hébert et al., 2008). Additionally, during the storytime program children utilized their oral and written Korean language skills as funds of knowledge in developing and discussing the artifacts they created.

Children's active participation in family storytime and their written comments such as "Thank you for reading us books. They were great. The activities were very fun, too!" and "I like storytime because it was fun to listen to you reading books" showed us that children liked to listen to the stories about their heritage culture and participate in after-reading activities like those introduced in this article.

Although the outcomes of our project are exclusive to the families who participated in the program, we see some implications for supporting children's literacy development in school settings and communities by mobilizing their funds of knowledge. This project highlights the significance of recognizing children's identities and transcultural experiences through bookplay activities related to everyday experiences around food and mealtime (Zhang & Guo, 2015).

## Concluding Thoughts

After the final session, families expressed their sadness about the conclusion of the program and eagerness to start a new family series with more books. We hope this project encourages others to engage with local community groups to develop family storytime programs that support and honor young children's transcultural knowledge and experiences and biliteracy development.

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## **Inquiry About Censorship and Intellectual Freedom in Professional Development and the Classroom**

Junko Sakoi and Yoo Kyung Sung

Children's right to read, a fundamental human right, has faced increasing challenges due to a notable surge in censorship in recent years. A growing body of children's and young adult literature has faced challenges and discouragement within educational settings (Friedman, 2022). In 2022, the American Library Association reported a record-breaking number of censorship attempts, the highest in its more than thirty-year history of data collection. The media daily report on censorship and its impact on schools across the country. In Arizona, HB 2495 was enacted into law and took effect on September 24, 2022, prohibiting the use of or reference to sexually explicit material without parental consent. This legislation has had a significant impact on educators in the Arizona school district where Junko Sakoi, a district professional development coordinator, is employed. Teachers have become cautious and reluctant to incorporate literature that includes sexually explicit content or that addresses historical and contemporary sociopolitical and cultural issues and events that are part of their curriculum.

In the summer of 2022, Junko participated in a workshop about banned books, which was hosted by a local university. Her motivation was to address the negative perceptions surrounding books that were once beloved by educators, families, children, and teenagers. During the workshop, participants, including classroom teachers and librarians, were given the opportunity to study the historical context of banned books, explore books that are being challenged today, and engage in discussions about the reasons behind these challenges and about the individuals or groups initiating them.

One notable aspect of the workshop was a session with Aida Salazar, where she discussed the current challenges faced by her book, *The Moon Within* (2019), in which a girl questions her changing body and her feelings toward a boy. Through this experience, Junko came to realize that censorship not only infringes on the First Amendment rights of young readers but also impacts authors who seek to share their life experiences and ideas with children and teenagers.

Inspired by the workshop, Junko planned the 2023 Professional Development (PD) to invite district educators to engage in dialogue about censorship issues and intellectual freedom. She also gathered practical classroom resources for teachers to incorporate into their censorship projects. Junko extended an invitation to Yoo Kyung Sung, a teacher educator specializing in literacy and literature courses at a local university, to collaborate as a partner in the PD. Together, they developed teaching concepts and expanded our resources for a classroom project focusing on censorship and methods for encouraging students to engage in critical thinking when reading challenged books. The goal was to create a supportive environment in which teachers and students could engage in critical and meaningful discussions about censorship and its broader implications.

### **Professional Development and Classroom Project**

## Identifying Challenged Books

We began by identifying titles that had been subject to censorship attempts nationwide. Our research involved consulting PEN America’s Index of Banned Books from 2021 to 2023 and the American Library Association’s (ALA) Top 10 Most Challenged Books Lists from 2001 to 2022. We then cross-referenced these lists with the district’s library catalog, revealing a total of 108 challenged titles available in the district as either district-approved texts or supplemental materials. These 108 titles are not challenged in Arizona but are in other states. To better understand the reasons behind those book challenges, we explored local and national news media, public library archives across the country, and the resources provided by PEN America and ALA. Notably, a significant portion of the challenged books did not have specific reasons listed for their classification as challenged literature. This lack of clarity underscores the complex and sometimes arbitrary nature of book censorship.

We also discovered a collection of books that faced censorship in the school district during the 1980s and 1990s (see Figure 1). According to the district’s library cataloger, the reasons for these book challenges included offensive language, violence, and sexually explicit content.



Figure 1. Challenged books in the district during the 1980s–1990s

We compiled a comprehensive book list containing 108 titles, organized into four primary categories: picturebooks, chapter books, graphic novels, and verse novels. Within each category, we further classified the books into two subcategories according to the district policy: district-approved texts (used 70 to 75 percent of the time in the classroom) and supplemental materials (used 25 to 30 percent of the time in the classroom). This approach provided teachers with a clear understanding of how often these materials could be used in their instruction. For each book in the list, we included essential details, such as the author’s name, grade-level suitability, Lexile level, genre, themes, and a concise synopsis. Although we aimed to document the reasons for book challenges, this information was unavailable for most titles.

Although we aimed to document the reasons for book challenges, this information was unavailable for most titles. Despite this gap, the comprehensive book list served as a valuable resource for teachers when planning their lessons, offering them a curated list of books suitable for various grade and reading levels and themes. The list’s structure and additional details enabled educators to select appropriate materials while being aware of their classification within the district guidelines.

## The Inquiry Cycle as a Curriculum Framework

The Inquiry Cycle, as outlined by Short (2009) and Short and Harste (2002) in Figure 2, served as the framework for both the Professional Development and the classroom censorship project. This inquiry approach is characterized by its experiential, dialogic, and collaborative nature, focusing on processes

that foster connections and reflections, encourage conceptual thinking, and transcend current understandings. The cycle aims to explore issues of significance to students, and students are encouraged to take personal, social, and civic action to effect change, as well as to formulate new questions for further investigation. Through this process, we designed learning experiences to explore, discuss, and inquire about important themes related to censorship and intellectual freedom. The inquiry-based approach created a dynamic learning environment in which both educators and students were actively engaged in meaningful dialogue and collaborative exploration.

### Professional Development Session I

The inaugural district-wide Professional Development session, titled “Critical Inquiry About Intellectual Freedom and Censorship,” was conducted via Zoom. This PD session garnered considerable interest, with thirty educators spanning Grades K–12, including classroom teachers and librarians, in attendance. The session began with readings from two picture books: *I Have the Right to Be a Child* (Serres, Fronty, & Mixter, 2012) and *We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures* (Amnesty International, 2016). These books were chosen to start conversations on children’s rights and serve as a springboard for deeper discussions on intellectual freedom, censorship, and human rights. The readings and discussions helped set the tone for the session, encouraging attendees to reflect on their roles in upholding intellectual freedom and fostering inclusive learning environments.

During the PD session, we delved into the history and current status of censorship movements, identifying and exploring who initiates challenges, the reasons for challenging books, and where these challenges occur. One of our guest speakers, a teacher, shared her personal experience of book removal during the attempted ban of the district’s Mexican American Studies program in 2010. Although the time constraints limited a comprehensive discussion of the incident, her story had a significant impact in illustrating the real-world effects of censorship on educators, students, and local communities.

Following her account, a vibrant discussion unfolded in the Zoom chat. Teachers and librarians candidly shared their concerns about censorship and reflected on how the attempted ban of the Mexican American Studies program had affected students and educators. They discussed the broader



Figure 2. The Inquiry Cycle (Short & Harste, 2002)

implications for the community, highlighting the potential loss of diverse cultural perspectives in education. One of the high school teachers expressed her mixed feelings in the Zoom chat, noting that it made her sad to have to seek caregivers' permission for books that she knew her students would love to read. This comment resonated with many participants, reflecting the tension educators face when navigating censorship and its impact on teaching practices.

After the PD session, we analyzed the Zoom chat and collected written feedback from participants, gaining valuable insights into the needs and desires of teachers and librarians. The analysis highlighted a strong interest in further discussions about censorship, along with the need for more resources and strategies to address these challenges in the classroom setting. In response to these requests, we decided to organize another Professional Development session about censorship. This follow-up session aimed to continue the dialogue, address participants' concerns, and share additional educational resources to help educators navigate the complexities of book challenges and promote intellectual freedom in their classrooms. The intention was to create a supportive environment where educators could collaborate, learn from each other, and find effective ways to advocate for the right to read and teach diverse literature.

### **Professional Development Session II**

The second district-wide Professional Development session on censorship was held in person, with K–12 educators invited to attend. A student from Yoo Kyung's censorship and children's literature class, taught at her university, was invited as a guest speaker. The student presented her study on the censorship movement in Florida via Zoom. Her views on the current censorship movement nationwide empowered the educators. We realized that young people's voices, perspectives, and experiences are always missing in our discussions around censorship. We must invite them because these issues directly affect them, their rights, their lives, and their futures.

The original agenda included discussions on book bans and censorship movements in the U.S. and global contexts. However, the session took an unexpected turn when we spent most of the time addressing concerns and confusion surrounding the ambiguous language in HB 2495, which had recently come into effect in Arizona. We also discussed books containing racial terms and racial slurs that have become targets for censorship. Some teachers pointed out how book censorship has impacted young people's understanding of race, racism, peer relationships, and teaching. One visual arts teacher shared her hesitation to even mention the color black in the classroom, noting that some students associate it with racial slurs and respond with laughter.

### **Censorship Project in the Classroom**

Several middle school teachers who participated in the Professional Development sessions launched an inquiry project focused on censorship in the classroom. Yoo Kyung and Junko held Zoom meetings with these teachers to share resources.

Some teachers began their lessons by reading *I Have the Right to Be a Child* (Serres, Fronty, & Mixer, 2012) to encourage discussions about children’s rights. This inspired students to ask why children have these rights and why they are significant. These discussions grew to include the rights children have within and beyond their school community, explored from different viewpoints, including those of young children, teenagers, parents/caregivers, and teachers. To broaden the students’ global perspectives, students were encouraged to explore a text set about children’s rights in various global locations. This text set featured books such as *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi voz* (Binford, 2021), a first-person narrative describing the struggles faced by children in detention at the Mexico–United States border, and *Ten Cents a Pound* (Tran-Davies & Bisailon, 2018), which tells the story of a young girl in an unnamed Asian country who dreams of going to school.

Students then explored a text set of challenged books, identifying connections among the texts and selecting several titles to study closely to understand why they had been challenged. They also shared their thoughts on censorship by responding to questions posed by teachers, such as, Should anything be censored, and who gets to decide? One student highlighted the importance of teachers and caregivers/parents choosing reading materials for children based on age appropriateness, but disagreed with censoring books that discuss LGBTQIA+ identities and war because these reflect our lives.

Additionally, students shared their thoughts, questions, and reflections through free writings. One eighth-grade student closely read *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, Parnell, & Cole, 2005) and expressed his thoughts in writing. The book, an award-winning true story about two male penguins who adopted an orphaned penguin at the New York Central Park Zoo, has been ranked sixth on the list of “Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books: 2010-2019” reported by the American Library Association. It faces challenges due to reasons such as being unsuited for age group, presenting a religious viewpoint, and portraying homosexuality.

In his free writing, the eighth grader referred to the two penguins as gay and addressed the inappropriateness for young children to read the book. At the same time, the student also mentioned that this book would be a great resource for children to learn about gender diversity. This specific feedback from the student made us consider the importance of selecting precise language when describing a book. The use of the LGBTQIA+ label appeared to cause confusion for him, as he found the term “gay” to be somewhat casual and imprecise. This confusion might be linked to a broader issue arising from widespread censorship practices, where book labels can unintentionally misrepresent the complexity and accuracy of the content. For instance, in a book about two male penguins raising a penguin egg to form a family, the term “gay” might not be the most appropriate or accurate descriptor.

Beyond book censorship, students explored censorship across various media, including social media, the arts, music, comics, and movies. Working in small groups, they conducted research on different aspects of censorship. For example, they investigated the movie rating system by posing questions such as what a movie rating system entails, who established its guidelines, and the reasons behind its creation. They also examined music censorship, exploring its historical context, the people or groups responsible for implementing it, and its impact on musicians. As part of the inquiry project, challenged books were displayed in one of the middle-school grade classrooms, providing a tangible invitation to explore the theme of censorship (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Challenged book display in an eighth-grade classroom

Students presented their research findings through diverse formats, including comic books, reports, and posters. Figure 4 showcases a research report created by paired students who read *Ghost Boys* (Rhodes, 2018), which appeared on the American Library Association’s 2019 list of notable children’s books. It is a fictional story about a ghost’s journey exploring racism alongside other ghosts of Black boys killed by race-based violence. This book has faced censorship attempts in school districts in Florida and California due to what censors considered an inaccurate and stereotypical portrayal of police officers in the United States (Kirkus Reviews, 2021). Additionally, several other students wrote letters opposing book banning, intended to be sent to school administrators (see Figure 5).

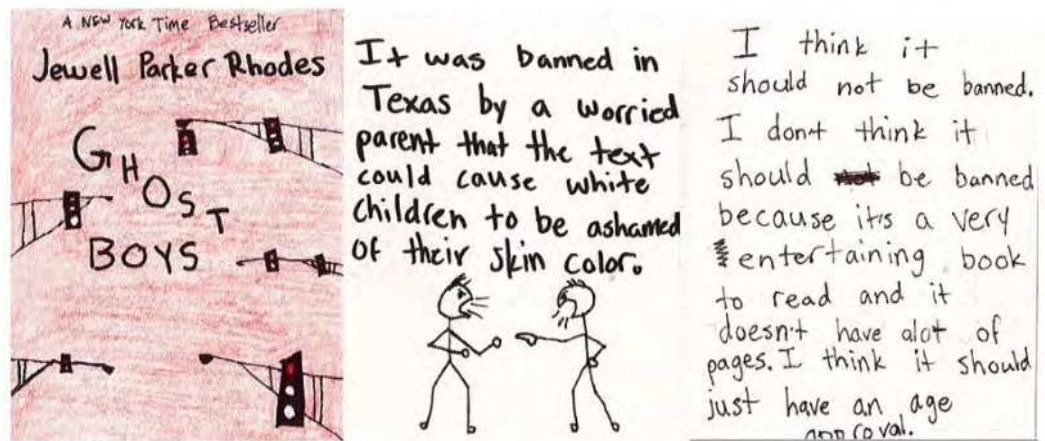


Figure 4. Book report in a comic style

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Why would someone ban a good book? We understand you are trying to ban the great *Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Patterson. If you do not already know what the book is about, it is about a foster girl who does not like her living conditions and tries to move back with her mom. Overall, the book has a good message and should continue to be available to kids all over the world.

We believe part of the reason you banned/tried to ban this book is due to foul language. Not only does she use rude terms but she, at one-point, cusses. We get that to some people this can offend them or make them think their kind will start using that word/term. Although I am not saying it is okay to say that word, kids have been around someone who has cussed. Eventually, kids will learn the word, and it may disturb them, but it does occur.

Another problem you may have with this book is that at times she could be seen as racist. We get that this can really offend some people but there is racist people and kids will encounter them. You will not always be able to protect your kid. We would also like to mention the fact that she does change her ways in the end. So, we think it shows that people can change their ways and become better people.

Some may say that the book insinuates that *Gilly* is racist. This can not only offend African Americans but also other races. She was not only rude to Mr. Randolph but also her teacher Ms. Harris. This is bad but, in the end, she not only learns to love Mr. Randolph like a grandpa but builds a good relationship with her teacher Ms. Harris.

To conclude we would like to say that you should rethink banning the great *Gilly Hopkins*. We have reviewed the reasons we think you are trying to ban it and honestly, they are not too bad. There are books with bad things in it but this one shouldn't. We want this book to be available to kids all over the world. Please do not ban the great *Gilly Hopkins*.

Sincerely,

Figure 5. A letter against book banning to be sent to school administrators, written by students

A group of seventh graders read *Attack of the Black Rectangles* (King, 2022), a fictional story based on true events. The story depicts a group of sixth graders who confront a censorship attempt of blacking out certain words and phrases in *The Devil's Arithmetic*, a novel by Jane Yolen about the Holocaust. Following the reading, the book's author, A. S. King, was invited to the classroom via Zoom. She discussed her book, and students were given an opportunity to ask her questions, such as what inspired her to write *Attack of the Black Rectangles*. They learned that this was based on true events that happened to A. S. King's son at school, who took action against censorship. Meeting the author was a wonderful, authentic experience for the students. In their reflective writings, one student expressed feeling empowered by A. S. King and mentioned that she would talk to her parents, who had been preventing her from playing soccer because of her gender, despite her desire to join a soccer team and play.

### Concluding Thoughts

These are challenging times for many educators, children, and teens. In our school district, we have noticed an increase in self-censorship, particularly regarding topics related to the Civil Rights Movement and LGBTQIA+ themes. These subjects are increasingly viewed as controversial and are often avoided in classroom discussions. This environment of ambiguity and confusion generates fear and promotes self-censorship among educators and students. For the sake of critical literacy, it is crucial that educators and students engage in discussions about censorship and explore the complexities of these issues. The following questions can help us reflect on book censorship and inspire us to take action to drive positive change (Short, Lynch-Brown, & Tomlinson, 2017, p. 209):

1. Do we allow outspoken special interest groups to influence the removal of valuable yet controversial books from library or classroom shelves, or do we stand firm in our convictions and book selections?
2. Are we engaging in self-censorship by exclusively choosing books on safe topics, or do we make selections based on quality and age appropriateness?
3. Are we actively listening to young readers' responses to books, or are we limiting our interactions to comprehension questions only? If not, how can we do better?
4. Do we permit children to reject books they dislike, or do we insist that they read our chosen selections?
5. Are we involving children in critical analyses of books for authenticity and the presence of stereotyped representations?

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## Teen Reading Ambassador Program: Captivating Teen Readers

By Cynthia Ryman and Rebecca Ballenger

In 2018, Worlds of Words, Center of Global Literacies and Literatures in the University of Arizona College of Education, initiated the Teen Reading Ambassador Program (TRAP). The goal of this program is to provide an opportunity for high school teens who have a love of literature and reading to gain a university experience and share their experience with their peers by promoting reading in their school communities. As with all new initiatives, it began with a thought, grew into an idea, and led to months of planning. As TRAP completes its sixth year, the program creators reflect on the hurdles they overcame along the way, including the arrival of COVID-19 and the need to quickly adapt to an online format during the 2020-21 school year. Each challenge provided opportunities for imagination, adaptation, and growth. This article provides an overview on the beginnings of TRAP, its essential components, challenges faced, and some lessons learned.

### The Origins of TRAP

Worlds of Words has for many years sponsored programs that bring children and books together to “open windows on the world.” School field trips and Saturday morning workshops provide an opportunity for introducing elementary-age students to global literature. While high school groups sometimes visit the center and have partnered on exhibits, no specific programs had been developed for teens—a significant missed opportunity.

Rebecca Ballenger, the Associate Director of Worlds of Words, had some familiarity with what was available in terms of programming for high school students from sitting on scholarship award committees, volunteering to support the college and career counselors at a local high school, and raising her own two teenagers. She knew of early entry, dual credit, and other ways high school students can experience academic college life. She also was aware of summer camps, institutes, seminars, and conferences offered by universities around the country. Most of these programs are geared toward the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields and provide brief encounters, lasting from a single day to a few weeks. She had seen internships on college campuses for high school students in science and business fields. However, Rebecca did not find many university programs that provide experiences with children’s and adolescent literature.

She formulated an idea for an outreach program that would invite rising first-years through seniors in high school to the university campus for an academic year of in-depth literature studies around books written specifically for young adults. This would not be a book club. Yes, it would incorporate reading and discussing literature, but the experience would include something more. Teens would learn how to talk about literature and take what they learn into their school and home contexts. This would make the link to “leadership” that is part of virtually every college application. The focus would be around opening teens to viewing literature on a different level and sharing their enthusiasm around literature with others. In this way they would become an “ambassador” engaged in diplomatic efforts to turn other teens who are not actively engaged in reading into readers—one book at a time. This programming

would help teens get comfortable with the college setting, give them something to talk about in their college applications, and inspire new perspectives on children's and adolescent literature and the education field. Worlds of Words would fulfill their mission statement and possibly recruit a few students to pursue degrees in education. At this point in the programmatic formulation of this initiative, the big question was how to attract participants. Programs for teens are notoriously difficult to run and to maintain as teens have busy schedules that become increasingly more complicated as they approach graduation.

Even so, the idea was big enough to present to Worlds of Words' director, Kathy Short, which occurred during a road trip. With Kathy as captive audience, Rebecca outlined the initial program planning. As the field expert, Kathy recognized key ways to polish the plan by capitalizing off existing outreach that had proven successful, such as author/illustrator visits to the center. This programming is especially popular because everyone wants to meet a published book creator. What if Worlds of Words invited the authors of the books read by participating teens to the center? The teens could interact one-on-one with the authors and ask questions about the writing process and topics covered in the novels, as well as make a personal connection. This was the draw that the program needed. TRAP had a vision and a way to draw interest, excitement, and engagement.

With a green light from Kathy, a modest budget, and the spring semester looming, Rebecca moved quickly to launch a pilot program. Rebecca created a webpage that outlined the program and provided an online application, incorporating policies from the UArizona Office of Youth Safety (<https://youthsafety.arizona.edu/>). She promoted the program on social media, listservs, e-newsletters, and any other available platforms. She personally contacted local high school librarians and English department heads to ask them to encourage their teen readers to apply.

It's one thing to administer programming, it's another to inspire thoughtful discussions around literature to expand understanding. Rebecca asked Kathy for an experienced educator to act as a partner in the work. Kathy recommended a college of education doctoral student and an instructor of an upper-division children's literature class who had experience as a high school librarian. Less than three weeks later, Rebecca stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Cynthia Ryman in front of a group of eight teens at the orientation of the pilot program and first cohort of Teen Reading Ambassadors. The pilot program would last just one semester, but it proved that teens could be captivated by literature and the excitement of sharing their passion for reading with others.

### **TRAP Programming**

The Ambassadors meet once a month during the school year. The program offers teens an opportunity to explore books through in-depth dialogue around critical social topics and diverse ways of seeing the world. Each book cycle occurs over the course of two months. Ambassadors first discuss the book and create plans for how to share the book with peers. The following month they meet the author. Monthly meetings rotate between book discussions and ambassador training followed by author events.



The first meeting of each year is set aside for an introduction to the program and book selections. Teens who attend this orientation are given the opportunity to vote on the books that they will read during the year. Approximately fifteen to twenty books are set out during this first meeting as potential reading selections. These selections are based on several factors. One of the primary factors is the availability of the author to attend an author event and meet with the Ambassadors. When the program first started, these authors were mainly based in the Southwest within driving distance from the Worlds of Words Center. One of the unexpected outcomes of having virtual meetings during the 2020-21 school year was the ability to open the selection of books and authors to those living outside the Southwest.

A second important factor that goes into the book selection is the goal of providing a diversity of genres, social issues, and cultural perspectives. This includes being sure to include authors who represent diverse perspectives. Publication release dates are another factor that impact the book's selection. Books that have been recently published or will be published during the school year are prioritized. After tallying the teens' votes, the top four to five books are selected for the program's reading list. The order that the books are read is based on the dates that authors are available for meeting with the teens during the year. Books are purchased through grants and



donations for the program and distributed free to the teens. Each teen also receives a free book to share with their high school librarian or English teacher if there is no library.

During the first half of a typical book discussion/reading ambassador training meeting, the teens come together to reflectively and critically dialogue around the selected novel. A dialogical approach allows for connecting the texts to the reader’s life and the realities of the various issues confronted in the texts. Table 1 lists several of the dialogue strategies that were used during the early book discussion meetings. Prior to introducing the dialogue strategies, Cynthia provides a brief introduction to a literary or critical issue addressed in the novel. These brief introductions provide the teens with a college-level experience on considering literature through multiple perspectives and various aspects of critical literacy. Critical literacy “melds social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interest” (Luke, 2012, p. 5). The dialogue strategies that are used provide opportunities for the teens to unpack the problems, issues, and relevant cultural ideologies within the texts they have read. The novels selected for discussion provide ample opportunity for reflective dialogue on issues related to social justice, civil rights, the environment, and cultural locations.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Dialogue Strategy</b>
Jan-March 2018	<i>Refugee</i>	Alan Gratz	Graffiti Board: Teens sketched their connections to the events of the three refugees’ experiences.
March-May 2018	<i>The Porcupine of Truth</i>	Bill Konigsburg	Consensus Board: Teens discussed the issues confronted in the novel and then selected one issue to research and explore.
May-July 2018	<i>Sad Perfect</i>	Stephanie Elliot	Sketch to Stretch: Teens created a symbolic sketch capturing the meaning they made from the novel.
Sept-Oct 2018	<i>Walk on Earth a Stranger</i>	Rae Carson	Reimagining Book Cover Design: Teens designed a cover for the book depicting the most impactful scene or personal connection to the novel.

Nov-Dec 2018	<i>Glitter</i>	Aprilynne Pike	Heart Map: Teens drew an outline of the main character and considered the character's values and loyalties as well as the outside influences on her worldview.
Jan-March 2019	<i>Watch Us Rise</i>	Renee Watson & Ellen Hagan	Found Poetry: Teens created a poem using the text from the novel to capture their connection to the novel and compiled them in a 'zine.
April-May 2019	<i>Barely Missing Everything</i>	Matt Mendez	Save the Last Word: Teens selected a section/quote from the book that impacted them most. These quotes were shared in small groups. Each group member shared their reaction to this quote/section and the selector of the quote gets the last word.
Aug-Oct 2019	<i>Echo North</i>	Joanna Ruth Meyer	Hero's Journey and Memes-units of information that are replicated culturally (Dawkins, 2016): Teens discussed the aspects of the journey made by the hero and the memes they connected with most.

Nov-Dec 2019	<i>Making Friends with the Dark</i>	Kathleen Glasgow	Chart a Conversation: Teens used a chart divided into connections tensions to free write their responses to the book. They used their written responses to guide dialogue.
Jan-March 2020	<i>Dread Nation</i>	Justina Ireland	Written Conversation: Several large charts were placed around the room labeled with various issues from the novel. Teens selected the issues that they wanted to address and wrote out their perspectives. Time was allotted for several rotations so that each person could read and respond to other perspectives.
April-May-2020	<i>Day Zero</i>	Kelly Devos	Dystopian Connections: This was the first online meeting due to COVID. The online dialogue connected the novel to the issues and feelings of the teens toward the current dystopian reality.

Sept-Oct 2020	<i>The Voting Booth</i>	Brandy Colbert	Post-Full Thinking: As teens read novel, they posted their reactions to events in a Padlet page. During the Zoom discussion, another Padlet page was opened for listing issues that continued to cause tension.
Nov-Dec 2020	<i>Anger is a Gift</i>	Mark Oshiro	Webbing What's On Your Mind: Formed breakout rooms during the Zoom meeting and groups discussed most salient issues. As a group they recorded the issues discussed to share in large group.
Jan-March 2021	<i>Ancestor Approved</i>	Cynthia Leitich Smith	Read-A-Thon: Posted online prompts each hour during a 4-hour virtual read-a-thon to which ambassadors responded using photo imagery.
April-May 2021	<i>The Bridge</i>	Bill Konigsburg	Sense of Self-Cultural Location: Teens selected 4-5 artifacts to share during the online meeting that symbolized their sense of self and cultural location. Discussion focused on the importance of listening to perspectives of others and what can be learned.



During the second half of each meeting, the focus turns toward the ambassador aspect of the program. While teens have many opportunities through their school context to read and respond to literature, they may not have as much experience with navigating social and communication skills in the adult world. It is uncommon for teens to proactively seek adulting opportunities (Buckley et al., 2021). These types of opportunities create an opening for teens to develop a comfort level speaking to people, especially adult people, whom they do not know, a useful skill in college. As likely as it is that teens feel uncomfortable and awkward in high school, it's even more likely they are not comfortable on college campuses. The ambassador portion of the meetings addresses these issues.



Rebecca developed multiple avenues for the teens to become involved in promoting literature and reading within their schools and community. In presenting these ideas she seeks the direction of the Reading Ambassadors as much as possible. For example, the pilot cohort decided that instead of having a private meeting with the authors, they wanted to open the author visits to their friends and community. This provided an opportune way for the teens to develop skills in promoting events and understanding the complexity of event planning. The teens learned how to design and distribute event flyers, promote events through social media platforms, create book displays for their libraries, and practice proper etiquette in marketing. The ambassador piece gives the teens invaluable skills related to not just promoting an event, but also coordinating and running an event. When an author visits the

reading ambassadors in Worlds of Words, the teens plan how to set up the space, what types of refreshments to provide, and contact a bookseller to partner with. They welcome everyone to the event and introduce the author. They prepare questions and determine who will moderate the event. They also decide who will close the event. These types of skills may not be typically associated with a literature program, but they have become a cornerstone to what it means to be a Teen Reading Ambassador.

Self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) plays a major part in programming for the teens. In addition to selecting their books and planning their author events, ambassadors also choose what online platforms they use for organizing. Over the years, they tried multiple platforms. For example, after using Google Docs while getting established, they decided it felt “too much like work.” They chose to try Padlet and, later, Discord. This control over their experience gives the teens a feeling of accomplishment and boosts their confidence, providing them with motivation to share with their peers and to continue in the program.

Reading ambassadors also experience the work that goes into partnering with other organizations. For example, they met up with students from the UArizona English Department's Pine Reads Review to ask questions about how to do well in college. Afterwards, they recorded a podcast (<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pine-reads-pod-reviews/id1277438819?i=1000438289236>) with the Pine Reads Review students around a YA novel that was not on their reading list. Additionally, each year the Ambassadors moderate a session in conjunction with the Tucson Festival of Books.



Because they are engaging in trial and error, Ambassadors are more likely to experience setbacks that they must adjust to (i.e., they are more familiar with rejection or failure and understand that everything will be fine). They are more adept at planning and organizing. They understand the different level of preparation required from asking a friend to participate versus a cold ask of the school librarian. They have to balance being star-struck by an author while also facilitating a public discussion. No longer confined to familiar contexts (school, sports, religious), Ambassadors are better equipped to interact with adults in professional environments.


The final meeting of each year is a celebration, which is typically spent with an invited author. During this meeting, ambassadors receive a certificate of participation, play the fortune-telling game of MASH recapping the books they read, receive superlatives voted on by fellow ambassadors, and share their thoughts in an exit interview.

**WOW Teen Reading Ambassadors**

# TRAP'D 2021/22

**A Customized Game of MASH**

<i>Setting</i>				
	MERRICK'S OBSERVATORY	PAN AMERICAN GAMES	SWIMMING POOL	MS. LEOLA'S HOUSE
Feat Authors:	ENGLE	SÁENZ	ELLE	MEYER
BEST FRIEND FOREVER	The Singing Dog	Gina Navarro	Bri	Rheinallt
SWORN ENEMY	Hunger	Hate	The Chancellor	Queen Gwydden & King Tarian
TRANSPORT	Walking	1957 Red Pickup Truck	Zap Via Watch	Train
RESOLUTION	Cure Hunger with Hope	Take a Trip to Paris	Take Your Magic Back	Your Heart & Soul Return

**Worlds of WORDS** 

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Tucson, AZ 85721  
[wowlit.org](http://wowlit.org)

## DIRECTIONS:

Turn this sheet over & ask your partner to close their eyes while you draw a spiral. Ask your partner to tell you when to stop drawing. Bisect the spiral by drawing a line through the center & count each time your line intersects with the spiral. Use this magic number to cross out fields as you count through all the categories--from MASH through author and BFF, all the way to Resolution. Continue until only one option remains in each category. (Example: If your magic number is 8, you will cross off every 8th item & start counting the next item at 1, skipping already crossed off items.) The remaining items in each category, tells your partner their mashed-up YA story!

Figure 1. MASH game.

## Challenges and Opportunities

TRAP aims to provide an opportunity for any high school teen to participate in a humanities-based university experience. In planning the program, Rebecca and Kathy did not want finances to be a barrier. There is no charge for joining the program and the cost of books provided to the teens and to their high school is covered by the program.

One of the challenges the program has faced is getting word out to the high school teens who may have never considered investigating programs like TRAP. This is where the need for creating strong school contacts becomes imperative. Over the course of the last six years, the program has gradually expanded and attracted teens from multiple area high schools.

Another challenge faced when the program began and met in Worlds of Words was transportation. At times, Reading Ambassadors have been unable to attend meetings because they don't have a car or a ride and public transportation was inadequate. The program has hosted Reading Ambassadors from as far away as Baboquivari High School located in Sells, Arizona, approximately seventy miles from Tucson. Ideas to ease transportation constraints included paying for city bus fares or creating formal clubs within high schools with an on-site sponsor who could use school vans. Despite these efforts, transportation is likely to be an ongoing challenge.

During the closure of Worlds of Words due to COVID, the entire program moved to a virtual environment. This solved transportation issues while opening an unforeseen opportunity to expand the outreach of TRAP beyond local high schools. During the 2020-21 school year, reading ambassadors from Texas and as far away as London, England joined the program.

This discovery of the advantages of providing a virtual membership opened the door for new explorations and challenges. An international Reading Ambassador program has exciting potential in providing expanded outreach and broadened perspectives for considering global issues; however, expansion also brings challenges. Novels available in the United States are not necessarily available abroad. It also creates a challenge in shipping cost and timely deliveries. Time zones for teens living in other countries create a scheduling challenge. And, as every educator teaching during the pandemic has experienced, the teens had vastly different access to the internet and connective devices.

In creating TRAP, the hope was that reading ambassadors would open channels to discuss books with their friends and engage with educators in their schools. When teens took this one step further to make presentations in their classrooms, this felt like a win. One Reading Ambassador centered the program as part of her senior capstone, which they presented to a committee for a scholarship. In that presentation, they asserted that, "everyone has the right to read and ... the ability to think critically about what they read."

After four years working with teens, Rebecca adapted the program for middle school readers. This group has a more robust membership that requires additional support for the Reading Ambassadors as they

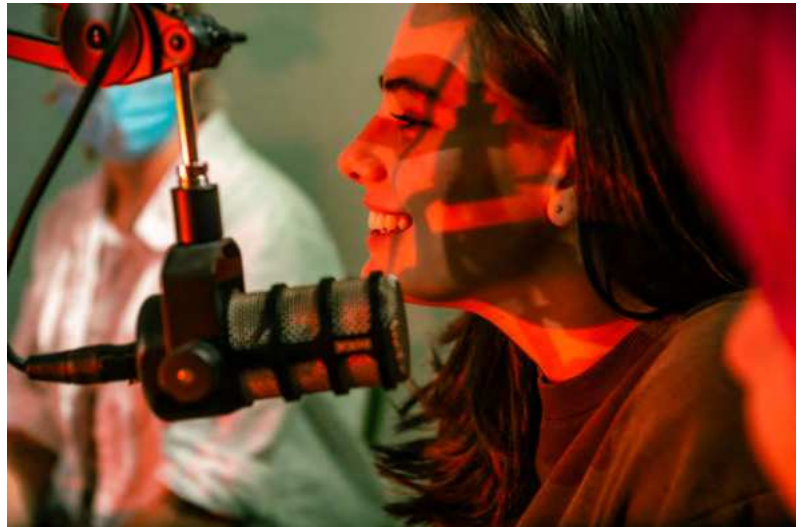


gain independence and extensive communication with parents that is not common for teen programming. Another development has been the launch of the WOW Reads podcast (available on Apple, Spotify, and other podcasting platforms) with regular episodes around the books and author interviews and bonus episodes on a variety of topics related to children’s literature. Some reading ambassadors have been asked to serve as beta readers for authors interested in a teen reader’s perspective. Challenges and opportunities will continue to be explored as the program evolves and the group considers how the mission and vision of the Teen Reading Ambassador Program will grow.

### Lessons Learned

Along with the challenges and opportunities, there have been many lessons learned. Maintaining, and more importantly growing, a program requires a reflective consideration of which aspects of the program work well and which aspects should be changed. The essential elements of the program focus on quality literature, the tools for ambassadorship, and interacting with published authors have worked well in attracting teens interested in literature and writing. Attracting teens to the program and maintaining involvement are two very different challenges.

During the first two years, the program struggled to create a cohesive sense of community within the program. This was an aspect that we knew needed to change. Exit interviews with Reading Ambassadors indicated that monthly meetings are not enough to maintain consistent enthusiasm or meet the desire for the teens to just talk to one another. Within each cadre there has been a select group of teens who felt comfortable engaging in discussion during meetings and helping to lead the author events. Other members were observers who did not develop a connection to a group identity. Ownership of the process is a cornerstone of the program and that requires Reading Ambassadors to build social ties within the group.



This cohesion was especially challenging the first year of the Middle School Reading Ambassador group when a partnership was attempted with a junior high in a different state. On the surface, all the

elements appeared to be in place — funding, official agreements and administrative buy-in, a shared planning process, and technological tools. Additionally, both groups existed in communities that included strong local authors. However, the two schools had combined membership that spanned sixth to ninth grades, which created a challenge for book selection and engagement during the literature discussion. And although technology used included high-quality virtual meeting spaces, telepresence robots, and a collaborative web platform, the two groups had little successful interaction. Even with all the tools and good intentions, the collaboration didn't work as hoped and was not pursued a second year.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into social identity theory, it seems reasonable to assume that the teens who apply to TRAP hope to find a group that shares similar values and interests to their own. According to Stets and Burke(2000), group identity fulfills a need to not only feel valuable and worthy, but also competent and effective. For this to occur, the program has to provide a safe space for the teens to freely share their personal perspectives and feel supported by the group. This sense of connectivity and acceptance takes time to build and requires the development of strong social ties through relationships.

A couple of things became evident. Ambassadors responded better to text messages than email and they had robust private discussions outside of the program over Instagram messaging. The traditional form of communication used in programming just didn't connect. But knowing these things and having the time to invest are two different things. Worlds of Words employed interns working on a number of projects in the center, including TRAP. But a partnership with the Leadership and Learning Innovation major in the UArizona College of Education, whose focus is on teaching in non-traditional settings, gave Rebecca an idea on a new type of internship—one that focused less on operations and more on relationships.

Rebecca invited undergraduate interns to join TRAP leadership team during the 2020-21 school year. These interns were tasked with creating a group text chat, following up with Ambassadors individually on their assignments, and creating dynamic e-blasts to replace traditional email messages. The teens formed an immediate and strong bond with these interns. Their closer proximity in age and relatability to the teens seemed to draw them into feeling freer to interact and share their perspectives with the interns and with each other. The interns maintained close contact with the Reading Ambassadors and encouraged their participation in online postings through Instagram, then Padlet, and finally with Discord. The interns' role as mentors became invaluable in developing and maintaining social ties.

As the teens developed comfort with their social identity within the group, they also showed greater confidence to take on roles within the program. Each of the teens freely volunteered to post invitations to the author events on the TRAP Instagram account. Those with experience moderating and closing author events, willingly acted as peer mentors to who volunteered for the first time. The group members became highly supportive of each other and excitement in participation grew. Adding undergraduate interns to the team as mentors to the teens provided an important missing element, a generational bridge that encouraged the teens to invest in the program in a more dynamic and committed way.

## Final Thoughts

The best way to summarize TRAP and the impact of this program for teens is through the words of the ambassadors themselves. In their exit surveys, we ask them to indicate what they like most about being in TRAP. Here are some the responses:

- I liked the people because normally it's hard for me to feel comfortable around new people, but this group made me feel welcomed and comfortable instantly and I love talking to them.
- When we meet authors and ask important questions that help in our understanding of books and the writing process.
- The connection through the pandemic.
- It was something fun to experience and enjoy and I never had a safe place to talk and rant about books, so this was my favorite time in the year and the books chosen are amazing.
- I liked the opportunities to learn and explore various books through this program.
- I liked the excitement of discovering new things about books we'd read and the accomplishment of creating flyers I felt proud of. I enjoyed whenever I felt I had come up with a better way to ambassador.
- I just really like trying to get others to read, especially teens because so little do enjoy reading for fun.
- I really liked how in this program we went beyond just reading. We share our love of reading in our community and met the people who wrote each book. We got to know both the book and its creator.
- I liked the environment it was a healthy and balanced one I felt like I fit in and I had such a fun time it was one of the things I will cherish forever.
- I really enjoyed my time in this program. It taught me to look at things in multiple perspectives and share my joy of reading.
- Keep the program going, I'm hoping it will be around long enough for my brother to join!
- I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know others who share my love of books and reading. I'm also thankful for the chance to improve my social and speaking skills.

Deploying a program similar to this one in a classroom or school library is possible. For example, middle and high school librarians who can have students enroll as library aides may decide that part of the student aide's learning can be around learning how to host community events. However, it seems most likely that a similar program would take form as an afterschool club. Because of the current climate of book challenges, book selection for a school program like the Reading Ambassadors will most certainly come under a more critical eye. Additionally, funding would have to be secured as books alone cost about \$2000 per year, and then snacks, printing, and other materials must be factored in. To find local authors, educators can consult with their nearest chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (<https://www.scbwi.org/>). Virtual author visits broaden the range of authors available, but those visits don't always have the same engagement level. To compensate, Worlds of Words requests signed bookplates from the authors we meet virtually so that those can be distributed in the room towards the end of the author event.

The experience of developing a program that supports and encourages the importance of literature in the life of teens and having the opportunity to learn from their perspectives has been extremely rewarding. We view this program as a *Bildung* (von Humbolt, 2012), a process of harmonization in which experiences in transacting with literature and group dialogue lead to broadened perspectives and these broadened perspectives lead to growth and transformation. The program provides an opportunity for teens to experience a diversity of perspectives through literature. They are challenged to reflect on literature in new ways and discover ways to share their insights and love of literature with others as ambassadors. We hope that the teens who participate in the program begin to recognize the power of literature to transform perspectives and view themselves as ethical agents for positive social transformation in their worlds.

### **Additional Resources**

For more information on the Worlds of Words Teen Reading Ambassador Program, including a full reading list: <https://wowlit.org/wow-teen-reading-ambassadors/>

Permissions Paperwork for TRAP: <https://wowlit.org/wow-teen-reading-ambassadors/#PAPERWORK>

Teen Reading Ambassador's Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/wowteenambassadors/>

Worlds of Words' Middle School Reading Ambassador Program: <https://wowlit.org/wow-teen-reading-ambassadors/middle-school-reading-ambassadors/>

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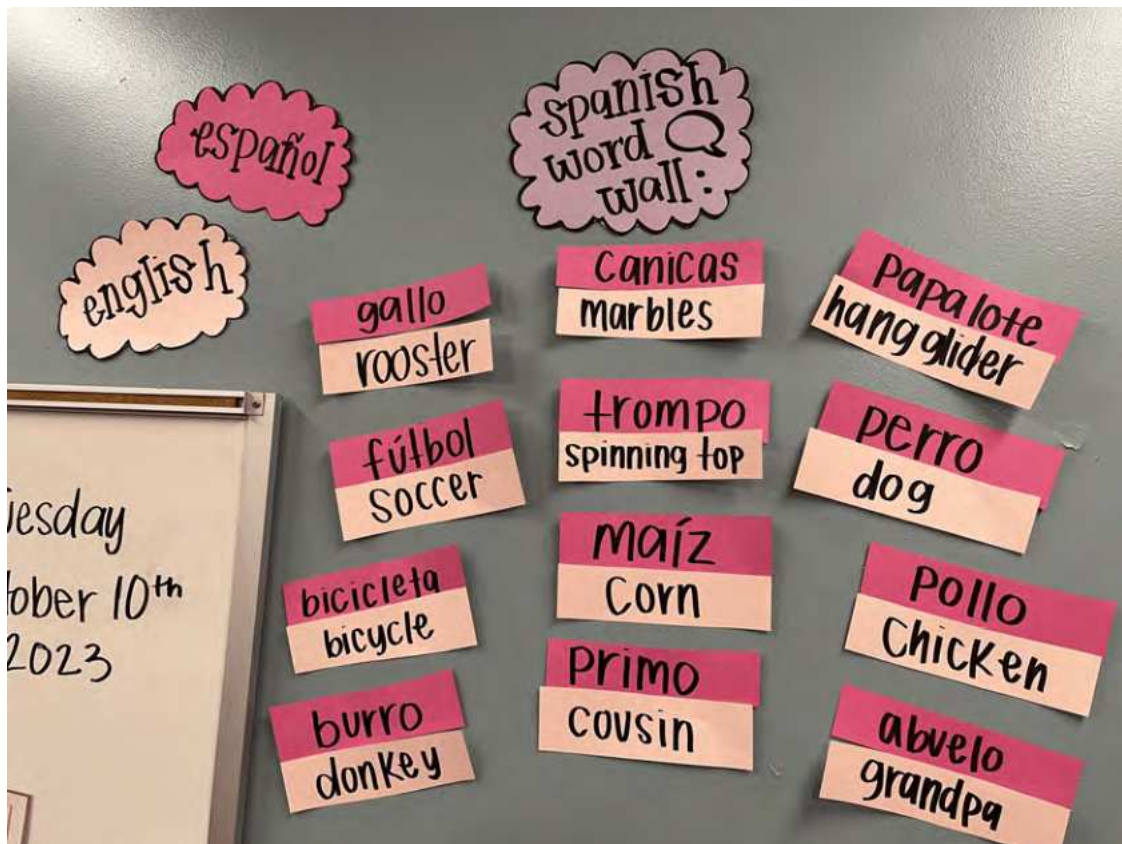
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## Embracing Guatemalan Cultural Heritage: Classroom Celebrations during Hispanic Heritage Month

Mikayla Carter

I graduated from the University of South Carolina in spring 2023 eager to have my own classroom. I had already signed a contract with the school I wanted to work for, and from the moment I experienced its culture, I knew it was the perfect fit. When I received my first third-grade roster, I expected a diverse group with various backgrounds, but the reality was even more challenging than I expected. Out of fourteen students, seven spoke Spanish as their first language, and three of them knew very little English. This made me nervous because I wasn't fluent in Spanish. On the first day of school, students arrived with shining faces, eager to learn. Their enthusiasm and attentiveness inspired me. Despite the language challenges, we managed to learn from and understand each other. Our differences in language did not hinder the formation of strong relationships; instead, they enriched our experience together.

Since that first week, I've been eager to buy more Latinx literature, learn about various Latinx cultures, and truly get to know students. I believe our time together is not random; we were meant to be in this classroom together. My classroom has transformed into their classroom. We now have a Spanish word wall, labels in Spanish throughout the room, engage in Spanish conversations, and share family photos and pictures of our hometowns. The classroom has become a space where they can appreciate themselves and their cultures.



Picture 1. Español and English Bilingual Word Walls

For Hispanic Heritage Month, our school organized a school-wide gallery walk. Teachers collaborated with their students to explore various cultures, countries, and heritages within their classrooms, then displayed their findings outside their rooms. This allowed us to visit other “neighborhoods” (the way our school creates communities within grade levels) and learn about even more cultures.

Our class chose Guatemala as our country of study, and it wasn’t by chance. We had all our Latinx students write down their countries of origin on pieces of paper, placed them in a cup, and drew one at random—Guatemala! One student is from Guatemala, which made the choice even more special. (Don’t worry, the other countries are never overlooked.) We eagerly began planning our study of Guatemala.

The following week, students arrived at school to find passports on their desks with their photographs inside. They filled out the passport information and colored their passports to prepare for our “trip” to Guatemala. We “arrived” in Guatemala by watching videos about the country, learning about its president, and coloring the Guatemalan flag. We even made postcards in Spanish, the native language of Guatemala, to send to our friends “back home.”



Picture 2. Fostering Bilinguality through the Classroom Environment

Next, we read the books *Rainbow Weaver/Tejedora del arcoíris* by Linda Elovitz Marshall and Elisa Chavarri (2016) and *Abuela's Weave* by Omar S. Castañeda and Enrique Sanchez (2013). We explored the tradition of rainbow weaving and even wove our own squares. We also studied traditional Guatemalan clothing and drew ourselves wearing these clothes, simulating a “shopping” experience. Later in the week, we had a special guest, Señora Herron, my former coaching teacher. She taught us how to make tortillas from scratch, a staple in many Guatemalan dishes. The students were able to take their homemade tortillas home along with a recipe to cook them.



Picture 3. Making Guatemalan Tortillas with Señora Herron

The last activity we did together was making “Worry Dolls.” I saved this for the end because it was the most meaningful part of our study. In Guatemala, children create Worry Dolls and place them under their pillows to protect them from harm. From day one, I reassured students that they are safe at school and in our classroom. We gathered in a circle to paint, thread, and create our own Worry Dolls. This moment was special because we simply sat together, enjoying the present. We took turns singing songs, discussing our cultures, and learning phrases in Spanish. It was a bonding experience that strengthened our classroom community, and it’s something we still talk about today.



Picture 4. Crafting Guatemalan Worry Dolls

Since our Guatemala trip, I have transformed my teaching approach and how I represent students in the classroom. They now bring items from their countries and cultures to share with the class, and we have weekly show-and-tell sessions during morning meetings. Within these four walls, we have become a family, evident in everything we do. We have won trophies and competitions among other classes, always supporting each other no matter what.

As an educator, I have learned that my role is to help students appreciate themselves and others. Regardless of the languages we speak, nothing can stop us from growing and learning together.

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Mikayla Carter completed her first year of teaching third grade at Jackson Creek Elementary School. She is a graduate of the University of South Carolina and is pursuing her MEd in Language & Literacy with a focus on Multilingual Learners. She is passionate about contributing to her school community and creating a safe space in her classroom for young learners. She was named 'Rookie of the Year' by her school.

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