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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME I, ISSUE I

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Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume I, Issue1
Fall 2008
Open Theme

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Introduction and Editor's Note

Wow Review: Reading Across Cultures is an electronic publication containing in-depth critical reviews on the literary excellence and cultural authenticity of children's and adolescent books that highlight intercultural and global perspectives. Intercultural understanding is essential in a time when many see the global community through fleeting visual images of war, disaster, and political controversy. Literature can provide a vehicle for insight, understanding, and awareness of existing misconceptions. We want to encourage thoughtful dialogue around international literature so that children can reflect on their own cultural experiences and connect to the experiences of others across the globe. To accomplish this, however, we realize the significance of identifying excellent literature about children's lives around the world. As children immerse themselves in literature, authenticity becomes paramount to their connections, perspectives, and conceptual understandings about everyday life, historical events, and social issues in global cultures. This authenticity goes beyond accuracy and avoiding stereotypes, to involving the values and practices that are accepted as norms within that social group.

The books reviewed in this journal have been carefully evaluated, using criteria representing authenticity as well as excellence in literature. These reviews invite readers to consider the particular aspects of a book that make it a significant resource for teaching about the global society. They are written from a critical perspective on the book's authenticity, supported by a critique of other literary criteria that focus on genre and literary and visual elements. The criteria used to evaluate cultural authenticity are complex and include issues of accuracy, cultural values, and diverse lifestyles and perspectives within a cultural group as represented in text and illustration.

A committee of advisors in ongoing discussions about WOW Review, found a range of resources useful in considering the authenticity of particular texts:

- Valuable professional resources, such as *Stories Matter, The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature* (Fox & Short, 2003);
- Journal articles and conference presentations on authenticity by scholars;
- The perspectives of insiders from the countries and cultures within a particular book;
- Primary interviews, discussions, and presentations by authors and illustrators;
- Author and illustrator notes included within the books;
- Internet sites for further research about people, places, and events;
- Current, reliable news resources;
- Discussions among colleagues as they read and respond to books.

The committee also identified the following criteria as significant to the creation of the reviews:

- High quality literature
- Culturally authentic uses of language, characters, contexts, and events
- Authentic approaches inclusive of a broad definition of culture
- A consideration of whose perspectives and voices are represented
- Relationship to other books
- Response of “insiders” to the story
- Accessibility for children and adolescents as readers.

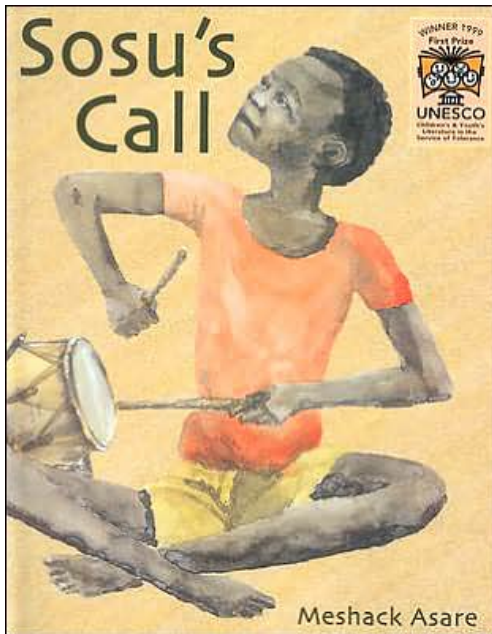
The intent of these reviews is to identify specific works of literature that have the potential to invite readers to immerse themselves into story worlds where they can experience the ways in which people around the globe think and live. This potential is created through literature that tells a good story in a culturally authentic manner. We hope that these reviews will provide demonstrations of ways to examine and select literature that invites readers to make personal connections throughout the global society to which they belong. WOW also encourages the submission of reviews of children’s and adolescent literature to the journal that reflect insights into intercultural understandings and global perspectives in response to the call for reviews.

Janelle B. Mathis

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Sosu's Call

Written by Meshack Asare

Kane Miller, 2002, 40 pp

ISBN 13: 978-1-929132-21-8

Sosu lives with his family on a small island between the sea and a lagoon and all he wants is to feel like a normal boy. “What use is a boy without a pair of good strong legs?” His dad does all he can to include Sosu in the routines of the village, but the elders worry that his presence will displease the Lagoon Spirit. Sosu can not walk to school and so stays home and plays with Fusa, the family dog, while his family goes off to work or school. Sosu prepares lunch for his brother and sister when they return from school and they teach Sosu everything they learn at school. When a storm threatens to destroy the village, Sosu has to think of a way to call everyone back as the only people left at home are

the elderly and the very young. He remembers the drums and, with Fusa at his side, Sosu finds the strength and courage to drag himself to the shed where the village drums were kept. He beats out a loud warning that brings the village running back to rescue those left behind. Sosu's stature rises as media attention puts him and Fusa in the spotlight, and with the attention comes a wheelchair that allows Sosu to attend school.

The story presents a difficult life of growing foods and fishing for survival. There are few “outside influences” apparent throughout the story until the end when video cameras and microphones appear. Why does it take a heroic act to find a wheelchair that will totally change the quality of life for this child? Yet these situations exist everywhere — children with no access to good health care, communities with little or no communication systems to call for help.

The authenticity of this story is difficult to assess as no specific place or people are named. The story was originally published in 1997 in Ghana and is set in a nameless West African village. Meshack Asare is a popular African children's author who lived in Ghana for many years, but now resides in Degenfeld, Germany. This book won the 1999 UNESCO First Prize for Children's and Young People's Literature in the Service of Tolerance.

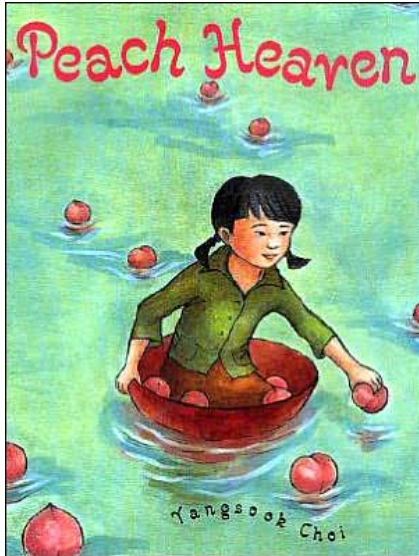
What is authentic is the ease with which people assume that a disability renders a person unable to contribute to the community at large. Despite the ill feelings sent his way, Sosu's thoughts were not of himself, but of the other members of his community. This is what motivated his actions. It is human nature to need to belong to a group. Sosu found a way that others could recognize his belonging. Other titles in which main characters, despite a challenging disability, contribute to the communities in significant ways include *The Printer* (Uhlberg, 2003), *Kami and the Yaks* (Stryer, 2007), and *Hurt Go Happy* (Rorby, 2007).

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Peach Heaven

Written by Yangsook Choi
Francis Foster, 2005, 30 pp
ISBN 10: 0-374-35761-7

Peach Heaven is the author/illustrator's own recollection of a childhood memory. Told from the perspective of a young Yangsook, she shares her love for the peaches grown in the mountains behind her home, Puchon. The peaches grown there are famous for being the best in all Korea. This tale begins with Yangsook admiring her vision of heaven, a picture of children playing in a peach orchard, when she is suddenly summoned by her grandmother. A heavy rain storm hits and she investigates to find beautiful peaches coming down from the sky—it is raining peaches. Surprised by the good

fortune of being bestowed so many expensive juicy peaches, Yangsook and her family members feast on as many peaches as they can. Friends and neighbors join in to fish for more peaches, however, Yangsook is soon troubled by the thought of the poor farmers who lost their harvest. She decides that the children must help them.

This simple yet appealing story shows how children can make a difference. It is an excellent book for beginning to take on the perspective of others and in this case discuss how one person's fortune may be another's misfortune. The author's clear message makes it accessible to young children and opens up possibilities for discussion about how they might make a difference.

Yangsook Choi's beautifully crafted illustrations enhance the readers' enjoyment of the story. In the author's note, Choi expands upon the significance of the peach in Korean culture. Korean readers have commented on the accuracy with which she writes about and illustrates Korean culture and thinking. The traditional home, clothing and representation of Koreans in the story are authentic and appealing. Choi also depicts the warmhearted nature of Korean people by showing their concern for one another. This book could be used as an example of a personal narrative to encourage children to write their own stories. It can also be read in an author's study of Choi. Some of her other notable books, which she has written and illustrated, include *The Name Jar* (2001), a story of moving to another culture; her first book, a *Korean Folktale*, similar to *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Sun and Moon* (1997); and recently, *Behind the Mask* (2006).

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Duke's Olympic Feet

Written by Ellie Crowe

Illustrated by Mark N. Brown

Island Heritage, 2002, 44 pp

ISBN 10: 0-89610-392-7

This biographical picture book of Hawai'i's Olympic swim champion and internationally recognized surfer Duke Kahanamoku chronicles five key events which occurred in his life between 1911 and 1914. This historical description highlights Duke's accomplishments as the first person of native Hawaiian ancestry to win an Olympic gold medal and distinguishes him as the "Father of Surfing." In the opening story, the reader experiences Duke's whirlwind of emotions as he breaks a world

record for swimming the 100 yard freestyle and is soon crushed when the Amateur Athletic Union refuses to accept his time and tells him, "What do you use for stopwatches over there in Hawai'i — alarm clocks?" To prove his talent as a swimmer Duke travels to unfamiliar and faraway places — Chicago, Pittsburg, and Stockholm, where he must overcome the obstacles presented to him. Unprepared for the cold weather, Duke stuffs cardboard under his thin jacket to keep warm. Fatigued by the lengthy travel, he nearly sleeps through the Olympic competition. Despite the challenges faced, Duke returns to Hawai'i with a gold medal. The last story describes Duke's travels to Australia and details how he introduced the Aussies to surfing.

As a picture book, *Duke's Olympic Feet* is a fascinating historical look at Duke Kahanamoku's life made accessible to young readers. This story emphasizes humility in victory, courage of traveling to new places, perseverance in the face of adversity. The chronological structure of the story allows the reader to experience several important moments in Kahanamoku's life that take place over a period of time. The structure of the story also allows the author to juxtapose Kahanamoku's travel experiences with his laid back lifestyle in Hawai'i. Crowe raises the issue of proving oneself and representing his/her race through sport. She provides the reader with opportunities to empathize with the challenges such as racial name calling, yet provides the reader with hope in including positive experiences with others who help.

Readers of native Hawaiian ancestry have not raised issues of cultural accuracy or authenticity and have been pleased with the presentation of the Hawaiian lifestyle and with how Kahanamoku's attitudes and values are woven throughout the story. Readers also appreciate that the book ends with Duke's thoughts on aloha, "In Hawai'i we greet friends, loved ones or strangers with aloha, which means love. Aloha is the key word to the universal spirit of real hospitality, which makes Hawai'i renowned as the world's center of understanding and fellowship. Try meeting or leaving people with aloha, you'll be surprised by their reaction. I believe it and it is my creed."

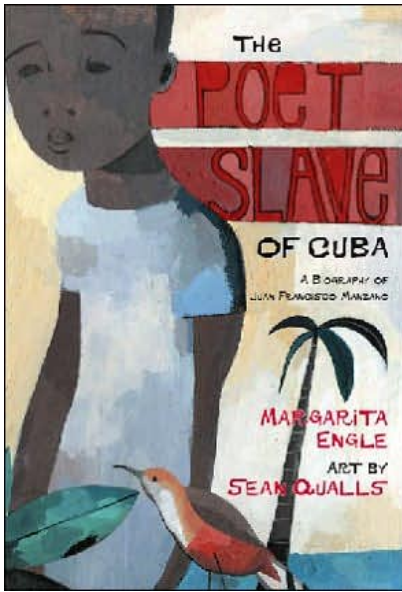
This book can be read with the story of baseball player Jackie Robinson's, *Teammates* (Golenbock, 1992) which describes Robinson's challenges as an African American trying to break racial barriers through sports. Both books emphasize good sportsmanship as the characters struggle to prove themselves as athletes in a world that can be filled with racial discrimination.

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The Poet Slave of Cuba, A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano

Written by Margarita Engle

Art by Sean Qualls

Henry Holt, 2006, 183 pp

ISBN 13: 978-0-8050-7706-5

With haunting images and the simple text that reveals a complex life and historical era, Margarita Engle has created a passionate biography for those familiar with Juan Francisco Manzano and for those new to his work. Juan’s story is that of a child born into slavery in 1797. Denied an education, this Cuban poet naturally used poetry as the vehicle “to find beauty and goodness in a world filled with hideous cruelty.” As a Cuban-American writer, Engle’s own language and work as a poet give authentic voice to this poet of the Cuban people. Through her choice of words and phrasing, so reflective of

Juan’s own, we come to know this poet’s mind and soul. At the end of the biography, she provides several verses written by Juan in the original rhymed, 19th century Spanish, and she speaks of her efforts to retain the mood and meaning in her translation rather than meter and rhyme. Her knowledge of both this era in Cuban history and of the life of Juan is evident as she created a story told from multiple perspectives – Juan and those with whom his life intertwined. The cruelty of slavery, in a scenario perhaps new to the reader, is powerful. This is in keeping with Engle’s brief historical note in which she shares that poetry has always been powerful to the Latin American people – so powerful that the government often regarded poets as dangerous. Engle describes her own work when she says, “This perception has arisen because so many poets choose to describe simple truths that affect both the emotions and the social awareness of readers and listeners.” In the early 19th century, people gathered in homes to hear Juan read his images of hope and he was arrested due to his ability to influence people and the perception he might stir up a rebellion among slaves.

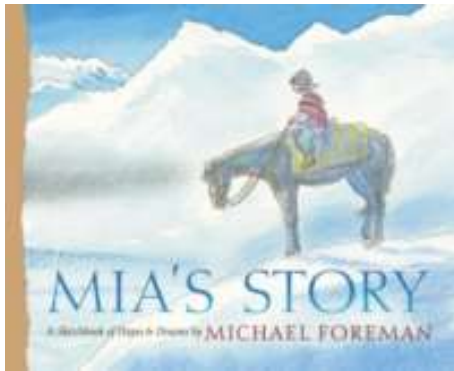
passionate brilliance of this story. With such highly regarded names acknowledging how this aspect of the Latino culture has been portrayed, the “insider” perspective is acknowledged multiple times. This book has also been shared with Cuban American’s who are versed in the historical events of their country although now residing in the United States. They believe that fellow countryman, Engle, has well portrayed this significant voice of the Cuban people – a voice that continues to be held up in admiration due to the ongoing suppression from which many escaped in the 20th century. Because of strict censorship by the Cuban government at this time, Juan was unable to write his own autobiography. Centuries later Engle has given an authentic perspective and voice to his life story through this highly readable and moving book. For further insight into Cuba’s struggle for independence, Engle has created a poetic history in *The Surrender Tree, Poems of Cuba’s Struggle for Freedom* (2008). Yet another point of inquiry might be that of Latin American poets who were also political figures. When *I Was a Boy Neruda Called Me Policarpo* (Delano, 2006) and *The Poet King of Tezcoco, A Great Leader of Ancient Mexico* (Serrano, 2006) are titles that can continue such an exploration.

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Mia's Story: A Sketchbook of Hopes & Dreams

Written & Illustrated by Michael Foreman

Candlewick Press, 2006, 32 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7636-3063-8

“I will never forget the day I met Mia.” So begins this contemporary realistic fiction picture book based on Michael Foreman’s travels in Chile. Mia lives with her parents in Campamento San Francisco, a trash dump in the Andes Mountains. While she goes to school, plays,

and explores their village with her friends, her father drives his truck to the city to sell scrap he’s harvested. He dreams of one day having a house of bricks to replace their home of odds and ends in the dump. One day he returns home with a puppy he found wandering the streets in the city. Mia names him Poco and the two become fast friends. When Poco disappears one winter day, Mia rides Sancho, her horse, all over the village and high into the mountains to look for him. She doesn’t find Poco but does find beautiful wildflowers in the natural beauty of the mountains. Mia brings flowers home, plants them, and under her care, the flowers grow and spread throughout the village. Even the splendor of the flowers don’t ease her memory and longing for Poco, though. One spring day, Mia convinces her father to take her along to the city so she can sell some of the flowers that came “from the stars.” Mia’s flowers are so popular with the customers that her father eventually stops selling scrap to help Mia each day and their dream of building a house of bricks grows closer to reality. Then, one day, a dog veers away from the pack running through the streets, races over to Mia, and licks her face.

This compelling story offers rich possibilities for discussions on the strength of human spirit. It is told with a respect that honors the dreams of people facing difficult life challenges. Mia, the main character, is portrayed as an intelligent, imaginative, caring, courageous female who demonstrates strength, resourcefulness and resilience in the face of numerous adversities and brings hope to her family.

The illustrations are captivating and effective. Integrated with the story narrative and watercolor landscapes are handwritten captioned sketches on scraps of paper or on travel journal pages. These add authenticity to the writing as well as provide rich information and deeper peeks into Mia’s world. Foreman adds to the authenticity by providing a glimpse of contemporary Chile, with Mia and the market vendors dressed in hats and ponchos and her father in jeans and a baseball cap. The story begins with the cover, showing Mia and Sancho high in the clean air of the pristine mountains overlooking the valley with a dark cloud hovering above the city. The front endpapers depict the desolate browns and grays that initially surround Mia’s village while the back endpapers show that view with the ground covered with “flowers as white as the mountain snow.” Foreman’s dedication to Manuel and his family, who he met in that village, is found on the last page. It reads, “May you have a house of bricks one day.”

In a text set focused on families working together for a common goal, this book would work well with *Castle on Viola Street* (DiSalvo, 2001), the story of a family that dreams and works together to move

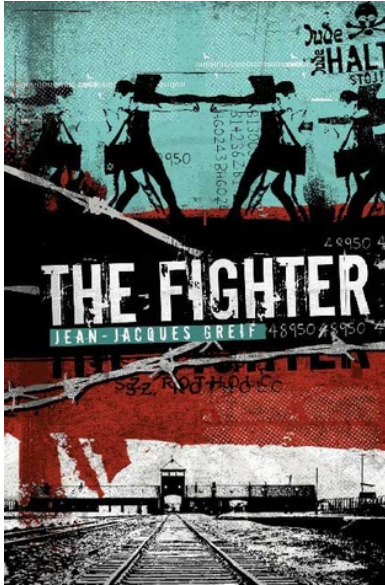
from their tiny apartment into a home of their own. With a dream of going to school, *Babu's Song* (Stuve-Bodeen, 2003) and *Beatrice's Goat* (McBrier, 2001) describe children selling wares in the market and eventually earning enough to attend school.

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The Fighter

Written by Jean-Jacques Greif
Bloomsbury, 1998, 206 pp
ISBN 13: 978-1-58234-891-9

The earth rotates around the sun, undisturbed by the terrible pain human beings inflict upon each other (p. 149).

From Warsaw, Poland as a child, to Paris, France as a young adult, and then to a series of work camps under the Nazi Regime, Moshe Wisniak is a fighter. He fights to establish his right to exist and then fights to stay alive, because as a Jew in the first half of the 20th century, Moshe is not respected, not wanted, not considered fully human. As a young child in Warsaw, Moshe had to fight because of the harsh sentiments the Poles harbored against Jews and because he had no father to protect him. When his family moves to Paris in an attempt to create a better life without the racism they experienced in Poland, Moshe changes his name like the rest of the members of his family in the hopes of fitting in. As Maurice, he becomes a recreational boxer and attempts to make a life for himself and eventually his wife and small child. He soon gives up boxing to concentrate more on the good life he is beginning to lead as a family man. The Nazi insurgence into Paris destroys this hope as Maurice is forced to participate in a work camp outside of the city, where brutality is the norm. As the war progresses, the workers in the camp are moved to Auschwitz/Birkenau (the Auschwitz complex consisted of three main camps, Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz) where Maurice realizes that he is only attempting to survive, not live through the war. Working a number of jobs to stay alive, Maurice begins to wonder if he can ever return to the person he was becoming in Paris.

Told as a first person account, this piece of fiction holds the reader hostage to the cruelty and horror of the Jewish Holocaust. As Maurice's job responsibilities change, the reader is presented with the enormity of the Holocaust and the myriad ways the Nazis devised to achieve the genocide of Jews in Europe. The horror, however, is balanced by the humor and the resilience of the Moshe/Maurice character. This high school text reads quickly, chapters are short, and the prose well written and accessible to young adult readers. The novel is more than storytelling, the reader is drawn into the drama and just as expected, pulling for "the fighter" that is the central metaphor for the text. Readers will also find that they not only root for the fighter, but begin to question the reasons for why such atrocities and prejudice occurred and still exist in the world. Because the character of Maurice is well-read and aware of the politics of the era, the reader is also educated on aspects of the Holocaust often not addressed in schools. Additionally, Maurice is a truly likable character, and students interested in the Holocaust will find the book staying with them long after the last page is turned.

Based on incidents from Maurice Garbarz's text, *Un Survivant* (1984), *The Fighter* is a blending of the author's memories and Maurice's experiences as a Holocaust survivor written for high school

students. It broadens the extensive events and experiences well documented through other literature and research on the Holocaust. Many of the incidents, both everyday life in Paris prior to the war as well as the atrocities experienced by those in the camps, are part of either the author's life in Paris or Maurice Garbarz's existence in the Nazi camps. Complementary reading to this text would include *The Book on Everything* (Kuijer, 2004), *Night* (Wiesel, 2006), *The Cage* (Sender, 1997), and *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1993) *Tamar: A Novel of Espionage, Passion, and Betrayal* (Peet, 2007) is another fine piece of adolescent literature that addresses the French Resistance. Adding to the variety of perspectives on those most affected by the Holocaust, *The Fighter* brings another family account to the books available to young adults.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

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Traction Man Is Here

Written by Mini Grey
Random House, 2006, 33 pp
ISBN 13: 978-0-375-83191-1

Never Fear! Traction Man will save the day! Or at least the toast... or the spoons. In the world of school, play seems to have lost its value. Sometimes it feels like an uphill battle to encourage imaginative play when the forces that be push drill and grill under the guise that children need to prepare for life in a global community. Perhaps that is the reason that Traction Man Is Here has such grand appeal. It embraces the events and episodes of super heroes generated by young minds across the globe. A young boy receives his Christmas wish — an action figure named Traction Man. From the moment he

unwraps the package, Traction Man moves into action in many different settings. He saves the farm animals from the Evil Pillows. He uncovers the Lost Sieve while cleaning up after breakfast. In the process, he is attacked by a poisonous dishcloth and rescued by Scrubbing Brush who then becomes his faithful companion. Traction Man survives numerous adventures, but the one Granny presents is most odious — a hand-knitted green “romper suit” with matching hat. How Traction Man survives the mortification of wearing this get-up is heroic indeed.

This story by British illustrator/author Grey will appeal to children in many parts of the world who experience gift giving within warm family relationships. It might be paired with Galimoto (Williams, 1991) in which the child creates not only the events and episodes, but the toy itself. While the situations are culturally diverse, the idea of creative play crosses the boundaries.

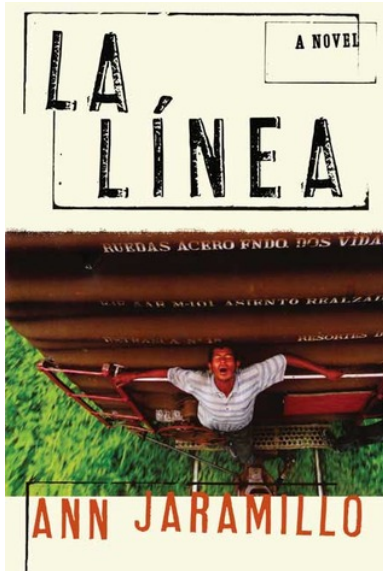
Encouraging children to imagine is something we should be doing on a global scale. It is the imagination of the youngest that will play an important role in developing solutions to the problems that plague all who share this planet. The story presents situations that none of us particularly enjoy participating in such as cleaning up after a meal. It notes the importance of developing relationships and working together. It reflects on our own responses to things we are really not all that excited about — like green romper suits — an experience many of us have had. Is this story authentic? Its setting mirrors many homes in the world, but certainly not all. Children who know nothing but war and violence may have difficulty relating to the setting. They still need the invitation to play. There is great caring in this story offered in subtle ways. This caring is what feeds imagination, free thinking, problem solving, and viewing the world as a place of opportunity.

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La Línea

Written by Ann Jaramillo

Roaring Brook Press, 2002, 125 pp

ISBN 13: 978-1-59643-14-7

I stared out at the land and kept my thoughts to myself. The only thing that mattered was making it across la línea. If the stories were true, the worst was yet to come. Once we crossed la lí-nea, everything would change. Everything (p. 84).

A realistic novel set in Mexico, *La Línea* addresses the controversial issue of illegal immigration into the United States and the reasons Mexican nationals may wish to cross the border. Fifteen year-old Miguel and his younger sister Elena must wait their turns to make the passage to California. Living in extreme poverty with his abuelita (grandmother), Miguel has waited years for his father to make enough money to pay for the journey. In the meantime, Miguel spends his time dreaming about the future and helping his grandmother to improve the ranchito where they live. Finally, the day comes when Miguel can leave San Jacinto, but his sister Elena must wait until there is more money to pay the coyote who guides “illegals” across the desert border to safety in California. Riding on the bus that will take him closer to the U.S. border, Miguel is aware of others who are also on the journey to the north, all of whom must keep their intentions secret. On a routine check stop by the Mexican federales, who attempt to deter illegal immigration from within Mexico, Miguel finds that his sister Elena has stolen away from San Jacinto in an attempt to join her brother on the journey north. Caught up in the intervention of the federales, the siblings are transported back into the interior of Mexico and robbed of the money they were to use for the coyote, the two must make the journey across the desert into California with a fellow traveler who is making his third attempt to get the U.S.

Unfolding with intensity and prose that flow, *La Línea* is a middle grade novel that will have readers questioning not only the reasons for immigration, but the ways in which people are treated as they make attempts to create better lives for themselves. Miguel and Elena are both likable and relatable characters who allow young readers to make connections to their own dreams and the price they would be willing to pay for making those dreams come true. A novel about courage, the power of family, and the pain of separation, *La Línea* brings to life the opportunity for readers to develop understanding, connection, compassion, and ultimately a more comprehensive understanding of those mata gente who make the attempt to cross the border. In terms of theme, other texts that could also be used on a unit about immigration could include, *Ask Me No Questions* (Budhos, 2006) and *Grab Hands and Run* (Temple, 1995). Readers interested in texts that also explore the plight of children in developing nations could also read *I Am a Taxi* (Ellis, 2006) and *Iqbal* (D’Adamo & Leonori, 2005).

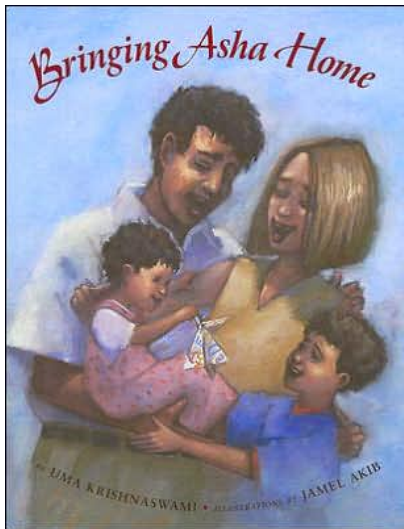
Ann Jaramillo is a middle school ESL teacher in California who has worked with young people who have either experienced the same plight of Miguel and Elena, or who have had family members who crossed the U.S./Mexican border illegally. Wanting to find a story to which her students could relate, Jaramillo researched the experiences of Mexicans who have crossed the border, and this book is based on real events of one such account. Married to a Mexican American, Jaramillo has a rich appreciation for Mexican American families who have shown her how “there are many ways to be Mexican and American, culturally and linguistically” (p. 127). Jaramillo also includes a brief explanation of the events that have lead to the more dangerous attempts migrants from Mexico have needed to take to reach what they still believe is the land of opportunity.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

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Bringing Asha Home

Written by Uma Krishnaswami

Illustrated by Jamel Akib

Lee & Low, 2006, 36 pp

ISBN 13: 978-1-58430-2599-9

It is Rakhi, a special Hindu north Indian holiday celebrating the bonds between brothers and sisters where they promise to be good to each other. Arun wishes his soon-to-be-adopted sister could tie a shiny bracelet on his wrists. But it takes nearly a year to receive governmental approval to bring Asha home and the wait is unbearable for Arun. Throughout the year Arun finds special ways to bond with his new sister.

This story touches on some of the feelings that adoption can bring to families through its tenderness and sincerity. These feelings range from joy to frustration. Many families who adopt international children deal with the ever changing laws, policies and requirements which make the extended waits excruciating. The realistic feeling many families experience with international adoption are approached in this book. Author Uma Krishnaswami pairs up with illustrator Jamel Akib to create an honest and moving book about an adoption story. Not only will the reader sense the longing of the wait through Arun's perspective but we can sense the hopes of a boy and his family as they await their newly adopted daughter.

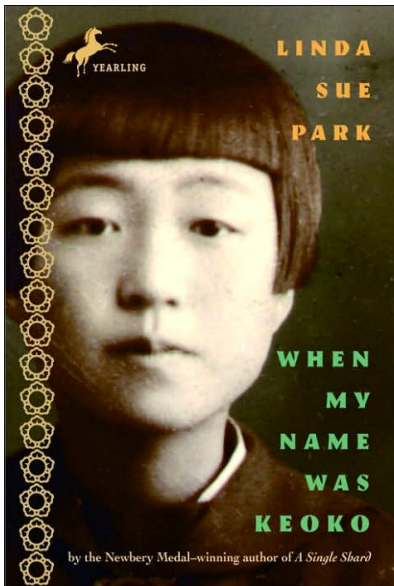
Rakhi is woven throughout the story to bring in a culturally authentic issue of this Indian adoption. We are introduced to the importance of this festival of tying of a rakhi, or holy thread, by a sister on the wrist of her brother and how they traditionally feed each other sweets. This traditional holiday is told throughout Indian history. The author does not delve into some of the major issues to consider with international adoption such as the importance of names, race/culture, language, the child's birth history. Because this is a universal story about the hopes of a boy and his family, hopefully it will be read outside of the adoption community. Other perspectives on adoption can be found in *Jin Woo* (Bunting, 2001), *My Mei Mei* (Young, 2006), and *Ryan and Jimmie and the Well in Africa that Brought Them Together* (Shoveller, 2006).

Kathleen Crawford-Mckinney, Wayne State University, Troy, MI

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When My Name Was Keoko

Written by Linda Sue Park

Clarion, 2002, 208 pp

ISBN 13: 978-0-168-13335-6

This historical fiction novel focuses on the lives of a brother and sister in Korea during the Japanese occupation in the 1940s. Life is difficult because the Japanese are forcing Korean people to give up their culture, their language, and even their names, to be replaced by all things Japanese. The story is told in the alternating voices of Sun-hee and Tae-yul, who describe the hardships their family faces as Japan becomes immersed in World War II, offering complementary and sometimes differing versions of events. Sun-hee, the obedient daughter, is in the last year of elementary school and loves studying, while her older brother, the favored son, loves speed and machines.

Tension mounts as Uncle publishes an underground, anti-Japanese newspaper and Tae-yul takes a drastic step to protect the family. Sun-hee is forced to take on the Japanese name of Keoko, and takes refuge in her writing, worrying that she can only write her Korean thoughts in Japanese; only to have her diary burned by Japanese soldiers. Her father reminds her that they can only burn her paper, not the words or thoughts. Both Sun-hee and Tae-yul develop subtle ways to resist the enemy. Like the Rose of Sharon tree, symbol of Korea, which the family hides in their shed until the country is free, they endure and grow.

This beautifully crafted and moving middle-grade novel of a close-knit, proud Korean family addresses issues of courage, injustice, and determination in the face of oppression. It is an excellent novel for discussing cultural identity because the characters struggle with the obliteration of their culture and language. The structure of the novel in two voices is quite effective in providing two sometimes-opposing points of view and to witness two different paths to resistance. Park provides insights into the complex minds of both characters. The structure also highlights issues of gender as Sun-hee struggles to resist gender restrictions on her participation as a female within the family context.

Linda Sue Park includes an author's note in which she details her research and the specific historical events and people, including the connections to stories by her parents. She lists additional fiction and nonfiction resources. No issues of cultural accuracy or authenticity have been raised by Korean readers, except in the spelling of Keoko. The actual Japanese spelling is Kyoko, but Park was concerned that the name, which was her mother's name during the occupation, be pronounced accurately by English-speaking children and so used an alternative spelling. This novel can be read alongside *Year of Impossible Good-byes* (Choi, 1992), a more harrowing Korean perspective of the same events, and *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* (Watkins, 1986), a memoir of fleeing as a Japanese child from Korea at the end of WWII. Reading the three books together provides children with an opportunity to see how each author takes a different perspective on the same historical event. *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* is a controversial book because the author has many historical inaccuracies and negative portrayals of Koreans, but the

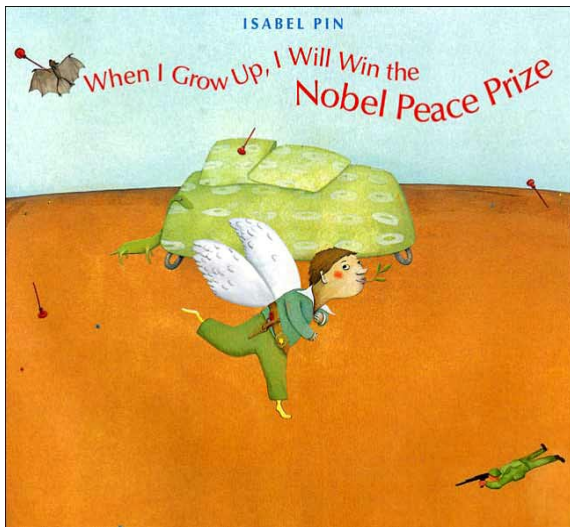
book provides an important alternative Japanese perspective and accounts of Korean acts of revenge.

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When I Grow Up, I will Win the Nobel Peace Prize

Written by Isabel Pin

Translated from the German by Nancy Seitz

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006, 28 pp

ISBN 10: 0-374-388313-8

The universal phrase “When I grow up” frames the daily life experiences of one child who has high aspirations to be good and wants to be recognized for this accomplishment. The simple text and almost naive illustrations relate his understanding that grown people love their neighbors, care for the poor and unfortunate, and protect animals and the environment, among other

characteristics of good citizens. However, this young man’s daily life events, as pictured here, reflect the changes that must occur for his hopes to be accomplished. Comical scenes depict him not being kind, brave, or standing up for injustice. At the end, the reader leaves the boy who realizes he has much to do and hurries to begin by untying his sister (or neighbor) who is seen bound under his bed.

Capturing both the humor and the irony of a child considering what it means to be a peace-maker while tempted to behave otherwise, this book presents an authentic universal theme through the specific events in the life of one child. Contrasting thought and action, despite the child’s awareness of how he would like to act, might also be paralleled to the adult world – the struggle for peace begins now with the little everyday episodes that reflect acts of kindness. Such a text, providing connections for many readers, reflects an authentic view of human rights and the notion that the preservation of these rights is a responsibility of all people. The brief history of the Nobel Peace Prize, provided at the end, provides support for the belief that the values of many people throughout the global community are reflected in this simple narrative. A website for further examination of this valued prize is given. Paired with books such as *Paths to Peace* by Jane Zalben (2006) and *A Little Peace* by Barbara Kerley (2007), young readers can potentially realize that the notion of peace is a cultural value shared by many people within the global community.

The author of this book grew up in France, studied in Strasbourg, and lives in Germany. Her experiences in many countries and with diverse people have provided her a life context within which to identify the simple, shared complexities of human nature.

Janelle B. Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

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