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WOW STORIES

POWER OF LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM AND
THROUGH TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

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WOW Stories: Volume V Issue 4
Power of Literature In the Classroom and Through Teacher Preparation Programs
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Table of Contents

Introduction and Editor's Note	2
<i>A Book's Impact on a Rural Village in Nepal</i>	4
<i>"But I've Never Been to Lebanon..." and Other Reflections on "Unrelatable" Texts</i>	7
<i>"Who's Big Mama?" Building Community in Math through Story</i>	14
<i>Creating More Windows to the World: Exploring Amish Themed Children's Literature</i>	25
<i>Finding Stories that Need to be Told</i>	36

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Editor's Note:

The Power of Literature

One summer Tracy was asked to teach a language arts class for middle school students who had performed poorly in writing and literature during the academic year. Seeing this as an opportunity to earn extra spending money, Tracy accepted the invitation. On the first day of meeting the small class of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students she was convinced she had made a terrible mistake—Tracy was not prepared for the resistance they collectively demonstrated toward reading, writing, and her. Because summer school was outside the pressure to deliver the “required” curriculum, Tracy decided her most important task would be to engage this group as readers, and the best resource at her disposal would be to provide these impervious adolescents with high quality literature and choice. Tracy brought in boxes of novels and picturebooks, poetry, and collections of short stories. She read aloud every day, gave students ample time to browse and read independently, and they discussed their reading daily. Tracy saw firsthand the transformation powerful children’s and adolescent literature can evoke. While this took place many years ago, Tracy remembers one student in particular who “found himself” as reader when he read that perfect book at the perfect time. Taylor, an adolescent boy with a long history of academic struggles, picked up Ursula LeGuin’s *The Wizard of Earthsea*. He became completely consumed with the book and insisted Tracy find the rest of the series for him. She can bear witness to the lasting effect reading that novel had on his identity as a reader and learner because she was his Language Arts teacher the following year.... Taylor not only excelled in the Language Arts class but in his other subjects, too.

As readers, we all experience “that book” that impacts us so deeply our perspectives on life and ways of being in the world forever changes. As literacy teachers, we desire to present our students with literature that will impact them in the ways we have been touched by the powerful stories that have become deeply rooted in our identities. And while this desire is noble and important, it is not always easy. As teachers, few of us would argue that the most satisfying and exhilarating aspect of the job is seeing students find and experience a story that affects them with a force that signals growth in their understandings and perspectives of themselves and their worlds.

This issue of *WOW Stories* presents vignettes that highlight the power children’s and adolescent literature can have in both classroom settings and as part of teacher preparation programs. This issue opens with a vignette that takes us to Nepal, where volunteers working in rural villages provide feminine hygiene kits to girls so that menstruation will not interfere with their school attendance. The volunteer team used a rare but culturally accessible children’s book about sexual development and then observed the impact of the book on both the girls’ and boys’ perspectives about

an otherwise taboo subject. Mark McCarthy, Laura Apol, and Bevin Roue describe the resistance confronting them when they extend invitations to pre-service teachers to read and respond to global literature that does not, on the surface, reflect their culture and world views. In describing their experiences, they address the ethical considerations for them as teachers when it comes to reading multicultural texts. Additionally, this issue presents the power of literature as providing springboards for inquiries into the content areas. Amy Corp describes how the use of global literature supported students in learning and applying complex mathematical concepts, and Kristen Noll and Darryn Diuguid review a range of children's fiction that presents Amish themes and information. We end our issue with a slice of larger study done by Maria Elena Salazar on how she used multicultural literature with preservice teachers to inspire reflection on individual cultural experiences and the importance of culture when teaching children in school settings.

We hope you are inspired by these stories from the field about the power of literature, which for us reaffirms the late Ursula LeGuin's (1980) assertion, "We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become" (p. 31).

Best,
Tracy and Mary

Co-Editors, Wow Stories: Connections from the Classroom

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Le Guin, U. K., & Wood, S. (1980). *The language of the night: Essays on fantasy and science fiction*, New York: Ultramarine Publishing, p. 31.

A Book's Impact on a Rural Village in Nepal

By Carol Lauritzen

Books can have a powerful influence, but can a compelling book increase school attendance and combat gender discrimination? My recent experience in Nepal suggests this might be the case. I visited schools in the Gorkha District of Nepal with a team representing the Gorkha Foundation, “a nonprofit, grassroots organization whose purpose is to support initiatives that reduce poverty and inequality by making sustainable improvements to the living conditions of the poor and marginalized in the Gorkha region of Nepal”

The Gorkha Foundation is active in rebuilding schools in the Gorkha District, the epicenter of the 2015 earthquake. These new schools are well-constructed to withstand tremors, though the classrooms are simple, consisting of four bare walls and furnished with bench-style desks. Near the end of a visit to one school, I observed a huddle of nine-year-old boys that attracted my attention and came across a similar cluster of boys in another classroom. There were about ten boys in each group and their attention was focused on something hidden in the center of the group. My curiosity got the best of me, and I had to stop to investigate. What was so captivating to these boys that they ignored the foreign visitors in the courtyard? What I found in the middle of each cluster was a teacher reading from a book we had given to her earlier, *Ravika: It Happens at this Age* (unknown author, undated).

This comic-style booklet tells the story of a young girl going through puberty. Puberty and menstruation are rarely mentioned publicly in Nepal, and yet in this small rural school, teachers bravely presented this information to boys. Menstruation is one of the many barriers to girls' education. In Nepal, menstruation is not openly discussed and many people are uncomfortable or embarrassed with any mention. Even though it is illegal in Nepal to deny girls an education because of menstruation, in some areas menstruating women and girls are banished to isolation sheds or rooms. Sanitary pads are not readily available outside urban areas. Women in rural and low-income areas of Nepal don't have access to feminine hygiene products and, even if they did, the used products would cause pollution since there is no method of disposing of them. Local customs, coupled with a lack of sanitary pads and (often) inadequate school bathrooms, cause girls to skip school at that time of the month. It is estimated that girls miss as much as 50 days of school each year due to their periods. The net attendance ratio for girls in secondary schools is 66% —much lower than boys' 74.2% attendance (UNICEF, 2013). Since girls who are missing schools hesitate to openly admit that menstruation is one of the reasons for skipping school, the actual absenteeism due to menstruation is not easy to determine.

Our group had purchased feminine hygiene kits through two sources: Mountain People and a local women's cooperative. A kit typically consists of a carry bag (often made from silk sari fabric) containing two waterproof pad holders, soft washable pads, underpants, and a waterproof purse to carry the pads. At the beginning of our

school visit, we met with the teachers and principal to ask if they would support the distribution of the kits to their adolescent female students. The four female teachers were willing to sit with us as we explained, through our leader's fluent translation, the purpose of our offering. At first the teachers were hesitant, reflecting the overall reticence about the subject of menstruation. They confessed that they had little knowledge of the causes of absenteeism and said that the girls never gave explanations as to why they were gone. However, after more information was shared, the teachers agreed to help us present the kits to the girls with no males present. That meant my friend and I, lacking a shared language with the girls, had to depend on the teachers to give accurate and supportive information. We held up each part of the kit and demonstrated how to use the contents and how to wear the products. These demonstrations brought shy laughter. However, the girls were positive about receiving the kits and gave us many smiles and words of thanks. Then we gave each of the teachers a copy of *Ravika: It Happens at This Age*.

Ravika: It Happens at This Age is the only story book available in Nepalese that addresses the topics of sexual development and menstruation. The man who directs Mountain People and who had introduced us to the sanitary kits had provided the books to give to the teachers. We have since learned the book is currently out of print and a new book is in the early stages of preparation. I offered to edit the English version of this book, but it is just in initial stages. I asked both Mountain People and our group leader about the author and publisher and learned no additional information about the book. This is indicative of the issues that arise in Nepal in regard to access to education and information.

The book, it seemed, was the most significant aspect of our offering. At the end of our visit, one of the teachers said that the book gave her the vehicle she needed to talk about menstruation. "Now we have a way to discuss it openly," she said, "and even if the boys don't totally understand, they have been exposed to the topic." On their own initiative, the teachers decided to begin that conversation with the boys the very day they agreed to give the kits to the girls. The book, they thought, could be a wedge used to open the door and engage in a conversation that could have a great impact on the lives of girls in Nepal. The book, we realized, had the potential to overcome old taboos, bring freedom from oppressive practices, instill pride in being a girl, and, in this particular case, help girls attend school.

Neither the short-term nor long-term effects of *Ravika: It Happens at This Age* are known for these boys in this village, just as the impact of providing the kits to the girls is unknown. We provided assistance with the hope and belief that it will make a difference and the teachers' actions in sharing the book supported these hopes and beliefs. Government regulations may lead to some change of women being accepted during their menstrual cycles. But, it is the use of powerful stories that can change hearts and minds. Recent research has shown that the sharing of stories can change our thoughts. Empathetic story response can lead people to behave differently in their lives (Kidd & Castano, 2013; Mar, 2011; Stephens, Silber & Hasson, 2010). These research studies support the WOW community as proponents of using global

literature to build intercultural understanding or, as in this case, to engender understanding within a specific culture. My work in Nepal reinforced for me the potential of a book to transform students and adults.

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**“But I’ve Never Been to Lebanon...” and Other Reflections on
“Unrelatable” Texts**

Mark D. McCarthy, Laura Apol, and Bevin Roue

In 2014, our teaching team piloted a “globally-infused” section of a required children’s literature course intended to meet the needs of the teacher education program’s global educator cohort. The instructional team consisted of a faculty member, the graduate instructor of the section, and a graduate assistant attending class as an observer and occasionally participating in small group book discussions. One such book discussion centered on the graphic novel *A Game for Swallows* (Abirached, 2012), a memoir set in a cramped apartment in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war. The students in one of the observed groups found this text particularly distant from their experiences, with a student exclaiming in frustration: “But I’ve never been to Lebanon. How am I supposed to get it? They should have a page with background info.”

The student’s response gave voice to a disheartening but all-too-common expectation among our students that texts must provide everything for the reader, and that readers are passive recipients of what the text has to offer. We found this particularly troubling because the student (a U.S. reader) expected a book set in Lebanon to be accessible to her with no effort on her part—even though she was enrolled in a program that explicitly focuses on global education. In the small-group interaction, the graduate student observer stepped into the discussion to pose two questions to the group: “Did you look up the things you didn’t understand?” and “Do you think you are the intended audience for this book?” Although impromptu, these questions were meant to suggest that readers sometimes need to work to understand texts, especially those that are unfamiliar; to “get it,” there needs to be an awareness of the text’s implied reader, of the reader’s own subject position, and of the subject position of the author. On the surface, such a reaction would suggest that without such effort, the student’s frustration toward, and ultimately, her giving up on, a text because she had never “been to” its setting would limit her future literary possibilities to a handful of local authors who wrote in ways and about experiences that were largely familiar to her.

In conversations following the observation, we came to joke that the student had never been to Hogwarts and speculated about why popular fantasy or dystopian series are not so easily dismissed as *A Game for Swallows*, despite their settings also being distant from the experiences of students. Our discussion led us to explore the concept of “relatability”—a term that students bring up often in a number of our literature classes, and one that we as instructors decided to investigate more fully. In a 2014 article in *The New Yorker*, Rebecca Mead attributes a widespread rise of relatability to readers looking for character identification, explaining:

Identification with a character is one of the pleasures of reading... though if it

is where one's engagement with the work begins, it should not be where critical thought ends... to demand that a work be 'relatable' expresses a different expectation: that the work itself be somehow accommodating to, or reflective of, the experience of the reader... The reader... remains passive in the face of the book... she expects the work to be done for her.

For our students, relatability is often a necessary characteristic for a text to have value. As Mead posits, the texts students view as relatable exhibit familiar characters and recognizable narrative features. Drawing upon our collective experience with students' responses to a variety of books, we observe that "relatability" as an evaluative measure frequently stems from students' identities as white, middle class, able-bodied, mostly suburban, and cis-het. They find it easy to engage with books that include white, middle class, able-bodied, mostly suburban, cis-het narratives, or narratives that fit that worldview, and thus, they determine these texts to be relatable—even when they take place in a fantasy or dystopian setting. A story set in the real-world political and cultural environment of Beirut requires more. Understanding student responses through the lens of "relatability" helps explain some of their resistance to unfamiliar global literature. It also is in direct conflict with our pedagogical and ideological goals as instructors—for students to pursue active, critical engagement, no matter what the text, rather than insisting on facile understandings or easy recognition. We want distant texts to be meaningful, not overlooked, and we want to ensure students feel equipped to do the hard work necessary to bridge any gaps between "unrelatable" texts and their own world views.

Literary and Educational Commitments

Scholar Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) articulates a commitment to diversity in, and engagement with, literature when she suggests that readers be provided texts that are both mirrors and windows—literature that allows them to see themselves (as in a mirror) and others (as through a window). Obviously, in a diverse classroom what is for one student a mirror is for another student a window. Yet the notion of "relatability" imagines a single set of experiences that are always mirrored (and therefore "relatable") for the reader. As a result, a (mostly positive) desire to make literature relevant (without the follow-up questions for whom, and under what conditions?) leads students, time and again, to evaluate books using their own sense of relatability, expecting books to be a personal mirror.

Given that prospective teachers' future classrooms likely will include multiple cultures, most students need to imagine children, contexts, and texts that are quite different from their own experiences and perspectives. Consequently, mirror-texts—that is, texts that are relatable to them because they reflect their own experiences—often will not be relatable to their students as well. However, our observations regularly indicate students evaluate a book using relatability as the main criterion, a measure that overlooks the diversity of their students' experiences and the need to provide both mirror-texts and window-texts for a range of readers. Our goal, then, has been to nudge students away from relatability toward multiple forms of valuing texts, while also instilling values of multicultural education.

Introducing a variety of texts and authors is central to the broader goals of multicultural education, particularly when envisioning multicultural education for social change (Nieto, 1992). In fact, working with mostly white, middle class, able-bodied, mostly suburban, cishet undergraduate prospective teachers to build intercultural understanding means the texts we select—windows by intention—will be inherently less relatable because they have been selected to depict multiple experiences. Through literature, teachers (both teacher educators and the teachers they prepare) can negotiate meaning with students and influence beliefs. According to Robyn McCallum and John Stephens (2011):

The literature of multiculturalism... can be read as an ongoing exchange among ideologies or discourses... a dialogic relationship between... what the writer conceives of as a current and dominant situation or attitude and... a desirable direction of change for society (p. 370).

This critical dialogue shapes social values and beliefs, providing teachers with opportunities to enact change through text selection and discussion. Teachers might use texts as part of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012), leading them to incorporate literature that reflects a range of cultures. Prospective teachers should value and select texts that represent more than their own self-reflective experiences, which means they need to learn to navigate texts written by or about cultures they may know only as “outsiders”—texts that are perhaps not explicitly relatable or that may be deliberately unrelatable.

One such body of diverse literature is global literature. Deborah Lo (2001) explains that global literature “not only illustrates and reflects the culture from which it comes, but it also gives us insights into the reasoning and belief systems of people whose outlooks and life experiences may be far different from our own” (p. 84). The very value of this experience is what makes the texts unrelatable. However, the pedagogical value we find in experiencing distant cultures is not necessarily enough to encourage students to do the hard work necessary to find the texts meaningful—despite their interest in becoming global educators.

Teaching with “Unrelatable” Texts

The following semester, we used *A Game for Swallows* to explore another group of students’ reactions. This set of students were more diverse; however, it was still the case that none of them could read this book as a cultural insider. To facilitate the students’ reading, the instructor explicitly addressed how relatability might not be useful to them as teachers. Instead, he foregrounded the connections that existed between the text, current events, and students’ lives, encouraging students to engage in research to fill gaps that come with “outsider” positioning. In the class session preceding the book discussion, student groups researched the Lebanese civil war. They found information about the complicated sectarian divisions in Lebanon; made connections to Israel and Palestine, creating an intertextual dialogue with previous texts read in class; learned about U.S. military involvement; and saw how the

narrative of Muslim majorities governing Middle Eastern nations was insufficient. To further expand their consideration of the role of religion in the war and in contemporary times, the instructor shared an article about the first sect-less child born in Lebanon (Pizzi, 2013). This time, the hope was that discussion would go beyond limited or dismissive remarks about their lack of familiarity with a book's setting, characters, events, or narrative style. This is, admittedly, hard work. Yet it is, we feel, a necessary disposition to instill in students, and therefore we wanted to scaffold their attempts at building a more active understanding of the text. Directly addressing (un)relatability might help students recognize its limits and move past it, so following the book discussion, the instructor asked students about experiences of their own that might (or perhaps might not) parallel those represented in the story. It was assumed the story was not relatable to most students, so the instructor encouraged them to embrace this unfamiliarity.

One student's response did refer to an inability to relate to the characters, but despite this lack of familiarity, the student did not dismiss the text:

Experiences I have had may be superficially similar to the book, but I have by no means lived through anything similar to the characters in this novel... These small experiences help give me only a glimpse of the cooped up feeling that hiding from a war must convey.

The "glimpse" this student was given required her as a reader to work to know more; she begins by acknowledging that her point of connection to the story is superficial and inadequate for real understanding, perhaps taking the absence of relatability as an invitation to find other modes of engagement.

Many students referred to their own emotional response when they found the book not to be relatable. However, for many other readers, it was character identification that remained a primary means to relate to the text, as in another student's comment:

... [the book] made me feel stressed. I put myself in Zeina's shoes and felt terribly sorry for her. They lived in one room and were surrounded by warfare. They weren't allowed to leave and their only interaction was the few neighbors they had. It sounded like a terrible childhood.

While the previous student speculated that the text might not provide all the information needed for understanding, in this comment the student arrives at a set of conclusions based on this same partial knowledge. In our classes, this happens dismayingly often, given that hasty generalizations (not far from stereotyping) are more likely when considering the unfamiliar, particularly when the image becomes the identity (Bhabha, 2012). This reader's negative conclusions about a character's childhood arise from emotion as well as from character identification and are understood relative to the privileged experience of a war-free childhood.

We were concerned that students might be inclined to make these sorts of unfavorable comparisons between unfamiliar cultural representations and their own

lived experiences if they insisted on using a lens of relatability with window-texts. It may be the case that these responses were prompted in part by the instructor's question about students' own experiences; yet the question served to make explicit the notion of "relatability" that was often an unexamined lens through which students viewed literature. Making it visible created a space to counter this nearly-automatic response on the part of students. "Relatability" is often problematic because it begins with the notion that the experiences of the reader (in this case, a prospective teacher) are normal, allowing that reader to make comparative judgments as part of an engagement with cultural difference.

Another student identified the narrative features of the novel as unrelatable, writing: "The book did not have any main events really, it revolved around the idea of making the audience feel how the author felt when living in the civil war in Lebanon." Like her groupmates, this student noticed emotion was central to experiencing the text. However, the cultural standards of narrative to which U.S. readers are accustomed emphasize plot and action, which seemed less prevalent in this book. In class, this group's note-taker recorded this part of the discussion in the following way:

The book doesn't give us much in terms of character development or plot but provides us with images that take on their own meaning, like the tapestry. In this way, the book challenges us to consider meaning other than what is written in the book.

Importantly, the group explicitly states that in the absence of recognizable character development or plot, readers need to make their own meaning—an affirmation of active reading and a first step in breaking through the constraints of relatability. Another student comment reiterated the struggle to make meaning despite unfamiliarity with the narrative style and the layout of the graphic novel: "Blank pages are strange because they are purposefully put in the story. Maybe they signify emptiness, or the part of the children's lives that we do not know." These comments indicate an engagement with the unfamiliar and with authorial intent; the window-text becomes a place for speculation and consideration, rather than conclusions, certainty, or dismissal.

Reflections on Relatability

Our initial response to a student saying, "But I've never been to Lebanon. How am I supposed to get it?" was concern that a reader might not have any sense of the tools required to "get" a challenging text. We came to realize that often these tools may not be taught, though they are particularly necessary when readers engage unfamiliar texts. The texts we use are unfamiliar by design as window-texts for the prospective teachers enrolled in the globally-infused section of the course. Although initially unaware that students would have little access to unfamiliar texts like these, our goal was (and continues to be) to prepare those readers for the world of unrelatable window-texts that offer them insight into cultures outside their experience. Inspired by connections across the texts read in class, one student demonstrated this broader cultural engagement in this way:

The little girl in the book grew up in a Christian household during the war. I wonder what the Muslim families were feeling during this time period, too. When we were reading about the conflict with the Palestinians and the Israelis, we had a chance to read about many different points of view, but in this case we did not.

This student went beyond the text to wonder about a world in which the text takes place, in the process interrogating the text itself; a skill that is perhaps most important when interacting with unfamiliar and unrelatable texts. Her “wonder” implies a desire to know or read more.

When students move from frustration to engagement with unfamiliar texts, they leave behind an uncritical attachment to the notion of easy relatability. As a part of teacher preparation, then, literature courses should intentionally provide students with texts that offer layers of unfamiliarity—unrelatable characters and settings, as well as narratives that do not follow Western patterns. In this way, rather than simply seeking out familiar storylines and characters, students may engage with diverse literature writ large and, in the process, make meaning in broader life contexts. We found modeling and encouraging research to build background knowledge supported this engagement and suggest contemporary connections can facilitate this process.

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“Who’s Big Mama?” Building Community in Math through Story

Amy Corp

My first years of teaching were in urban classrooms where children of color comprised the majority of the students. As a white, middle-class female, much of the culture was new and differed from my own. I immersed myself in the community and found a wealth of cultural capital and connections to integrate into my classroom. I tried my best to represent these connections through art on the wall, literature in the classroom library, family photos on students’ lockers, and posters with inspirational quotations from famous African Americans. Years later, when working on my Ed.D., I thought about ways to capitalize on culture when teaching specific mathematics content. I knew how to create a culturally affirming classroom environment from my previous experiences, but I struggled with the idea of affirming culture in mathematics. The struggle was connecting the mathematics content and processes to culture. Traditionally I followed the district curriculum that taught concepts in isolation and asked students to apply their problem-solving skills on test-like word problems. None of this content connected to culture or students home lives. After reading and researching ideas, I decided to harness the wonderful power of stories. Stories have a rich history for engaging students. In mathematics instruction, stories can introduce a concept, demonstrate mathematics in real life, or be utilized to practice a concept, skill, or problems from the story (Whitin & Whitin, 2004; Wilburne, Keat, & Napoli, 2011). Stories with African-American characters have been used to engage African-American children in language arts (Altieri, 1993; Heflin & Barksdale Ladd, 2001), literature, and social justice (Copenhaver, 2001; Tatum, 2006). However, there was no research on using culturally responsive (Gay, 2002) stories in mathematics. I wondered if using culturally responsive stories where the characters reflect the race and/or culture of students would affirm culture and potentially engage all students in mathematics. I had to find out by doing my own research.

A 12 Week Experiment

During my dissertation research, I had the privilege to work with Mrs. Daniels (pseudonym) and the children in her two third-grade mathematics classrooms. The semester before the study we explored how using stories that affirm a non-dominant culture would build community and teach mathematics. Mrs. Daniels and I had piloted the idea with three stories, all featuring non-white characters, and concluded that all students had enthusiastically engaged in the stories. They also seemed to have common understandings from the stories and worked together quite eagerly on the mathematical activities from the stories. We believed that the stories also gave students a space to talk about similarities and differences in culture and decided to test our idea with a full study.

Over the summer we vetted 12 stories using criteria from Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) for selecting high quality literature with African-American characters to mirror the dominant culture in the school. We also looked for stories that would resonate with students from lower SES homes. Next, we developed lessons to draw

attention to the mathematics in each story and aligned them with state standards (similar to Common Core State Standards for Mathematics). In the fall, we implemented these lessons in Mrs. Daniels' two sections of mathematics. There were 42 students: 18 African American, 7 Latinx and 17 White. There were 25 females and 17 males all from low SES homes (WISD district records, 2013). One of the district and school goals was to increase student engagement in mathematics, especially with African-American students. As a result, I decided to observe all students and especially focus on the African-American students in Mrs. Daniels' classrooms. Each Wednesday Mrs. Daniels implemented one of the crafted lessons with students in each mathematics class in three distinct parts: reading the story, discussing the mathematical connections to the story, and facilitating mathematical activities or problems connected to the story. I sat to the side and scripted what I saw and heard during each lesson. All students filled out a reflection sheet at the end of each lesson. Students' responses to the reflection questions showed that they enjoyed the stories, and the stories helped them think about mathematics to varying degrees (Corp, 2017). The responses also showed that students gleaned social benefits while engaging in the lessons. For example, students made connections to each other and to the story through questions about food, vocabulary and other commonalities found in the stories. Additionally, students bonded around shared memories of lesson activities like tasting soup (described below). Mrs. Daniels sometimes heard them reminiscing about an activity or making connections to one of the stories during recess.

This vignette illustrates the mathematical engagement we experienced in this study. *Just Right Stew* (English, 1998) is the story of a secret kept by Big Mama (the matriarch and main character of the story), who cooks with love, and of the strong family bonds between members of the African-American culture. In our problem-solving portion of the lesson students connected mathematics to Big Mama's following the recipe with fractions and varied measurements of different ingredients, and to how the stew was dished out (subtraction or division). Students extended the math by thinking about who they would invite to such a celebration, and about purchasing the ingredients to create their own "just right stew." As you read our story imagine simmering broth and excited children awaiting a read aloud.

Our Story

As the first class ambled in the room, students noticed an aroma right away. Soon we heard comments like, "I'm hungry, what are we making?" and "That smells like my mom's chicken soup." As soon as the morning "business" was done, Mrs. Daniels called the students to sit criss-cross on the carpet in front of her. Students quickly got to the carpet and began to discuss the book she held as she waited for them to settle. "*Just Right Stew*, oh, we're gonna have stew?" commented one boy.

Mrs. Daniels invited students to share what they knew about stew or to predict what the story would be about with a partner for a few seconds. Several students said stew was like soup. Some students claimed it sounded like Carne Guisada (Mexican beef stew) and others commented about cooking with their grandma, mom, or aunt. As Mrs. Daniels enthusiastically read the story aloud, I recorded students' behavior.

Students interacted by acting out the story, talking to the characters, making comments about the characters or story plot, asking questions, reacting with laughter and/or surprise, and clapping loudly at the end. At the beginning of the story students all sat criss-cross but as the story continued many (especially those in the back) were up on their knees or leaning over toward the book. Body posture suggested that students were eager to learn Big Mama’s secret ingredient for her stew and were highly entertained by the interaction of the women in the family, as well as the warm relationship between granddaughter and grandmother.

Analysis of my focus group observation data showed that 86.6% of students had eye contact on the story or the teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the read aloud. Seventy-five percent of these students made comments or noises during the story. When analyzed, these comments were categorized as finding humor, making a connection, or inquiry (see Figure 1). Mrs. Daniels stated that these same students were not often interested or engaged in her mathematics class unless she called on them.



Figure 1. Themes that emerged from observing them during the reading of the story.

Discussion Time

When the clapping died down Mrs. Daniels asked, “What are some things in the story that go with our objective for this week?” The objective was written on the board: Solve one and two step problems using adding, subtracting, and/or multiplying, and dividing. Many hands shot up as she gave students time to think. When she called on students, most students commented on using addition and subtraction with the amounts of certain ingredients going into the stew. Others mentioned adding to find out the number of guests coming to the party. Several students mentioned dividing the stew into portions for the guests. A student connected the story to money, “You have to buy the ingredients, that’s adding and subtracting.” Another student mentioned, “Well, there are probably fractions in the recipe.” These comments showed us that students identified some of the mathematical thinking that happens in the real-life situations of food preparation and service at a family gathering. Students would soon solve some of these very problems during their practice time.

Practice Time with Activities and Problems from the Story

Mrs. Daniels complimented students on their thinking about the use of mathematics to plan and create recipes, meals, parties, etc. for families. Then, with a few instructions from Mrs. Daniels, students received their activity page and smiled as they went to their tables to work. In developing the activity pages, Mrs. Daniels and I took care to scaffold the problems from review of simple addition to more complex reasoning and operations. As I observed students working on different parts of the activity, I noticed students talking about the problems. One of the problems required students to divide the leftover stew (See Figure 2). Some students used three numbers that added up to the total amount, some drew a picture, and one student said she used the number line on the wall. The example below shows a student decomposing the amount using base ten.

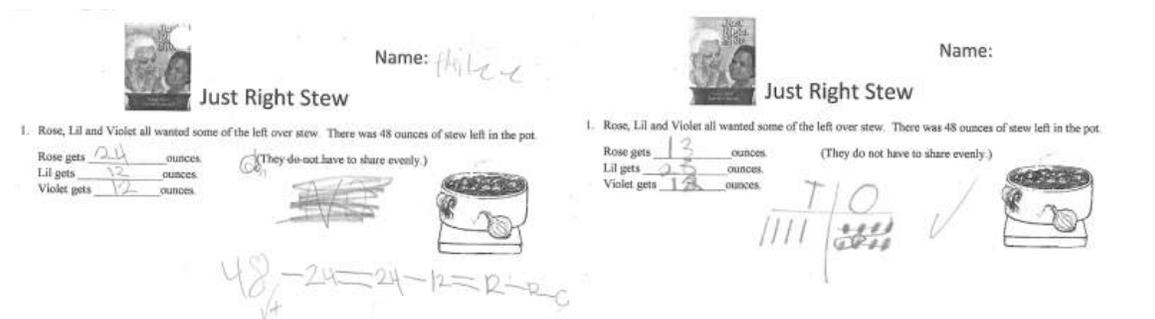


Figure 2. Problem 1 from student work: division of the leftover stew.

This variety of responses also occurred when determining how many people were coming to the party (see Figure 3). Students’ work frequently showed erasures, and often a supplemental or second way of trying to solve the problem.

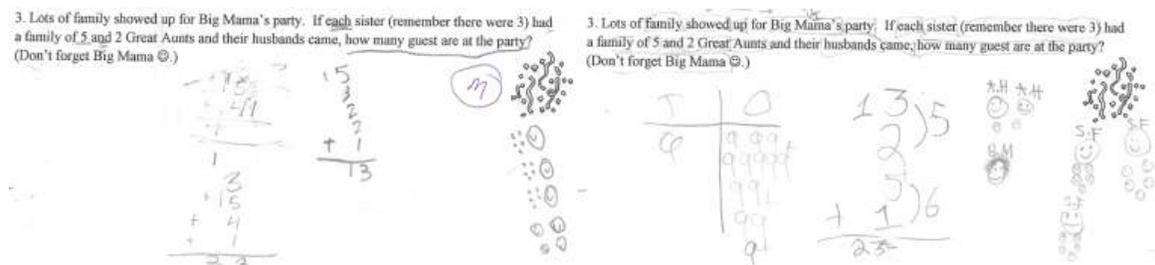


Figure 3. Problem 3 from student work: multiple step problem with operations.

Because students reworked their solution and/or tried another strategy to solve the problem, we concluded that students were persisting. In Problem 3 (see Figure 3), students already knew that everyone came to the party with their own family, and like the characters in the story, they would need to total the number of guests. Most students went straight to drawing circles as they worked through the list of families that attended. No one seemed stuck on where to start or confused about what they needed to do. Mrs. Daniels was especially delighted because in the past, students had not put much effort into the word problems from their workbook or homework. The challenge problem seemed to elicit the most reasoning. Students wrote their plan, drew out the needed coins, combined \$1.00 amounts first, then the change, and glued their choices to the bottom of the page (see Figure 4).

4. Victoria and her mamma did the shopping for the meat and vegetables. How much did they spend if they bought 2 lbs. of ground beef, and 1lb. of mixed vegetables?

Item	price per lb.
ground beef	\$1.50
mixed veg.	.75

Challenge! Garlic, Cumin, Lemon Pepper and Red Pepper come in little jars but some stores (like Sprouts) will let you buy them by the ounce. If Victoria's mom only had \$3.00 to spend on spices, what could she buy?

Spice	price per ounce
Garlic	25 cents
Cumin	85 cents
Lemon Pepper	75 cents
Red Pepper	\$1.00

4. Victoria and her mamma did the shopping for the meat and vegetables. How much did they spend if they bought 2 lbs. of ground beef, and 1lb. of mixed vegetables?

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Cumin	85 cents
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Red Pepper	\$1.00

Figure 4. Challenge problem: Garlic, cumin, lemon pepper, and red pepper come in little jars, but some stores (like Sprouts) will let you buy them by the ounce. If Victoria's mom only had \$3.00 to spend on spices, what could she buy? Glue your choices at the bottom of this page.

Results

Mrs. Daniels and I recalled student behavior during the lesson and reviewed my observation protocols. We concluded that all students were engaged and we thought the story made them think about mathematics. But we wanted to find out what the students thought. Since students had reflected on their learning at the end of each lesson, we looked at this data to determine our conclusions. Figure 5 shows the reflection students completed and Table 1 shows students' responses. None of the students wrote in a response for the first three questions in this week's lesson with *Just Right Stew*.

Reflection of stories in math: What do I think?

Circle your choice and write if you want to explain.

How do you feel about the story this week?	It was boring. 	It was ok. 	It was interesting. 	It was awesome. 
Did the story help you think about math?	Not at all. 	It did some. 	It did a lot. 	
Did the story make you think about math in your life (like outside of school)?	Not at all. 	It did some. 	It did a lot. 	

Do **you** think **your** teacher should use this story with next year's class?
Yes/No

Why or why not? _____

Does it matter to **you** that the main characters were African American?
Yes/No

Why or why not? _____

Figure 5. Student reflection page.

Students	Question 1: How do you feel about the story this week?	Question 2: Did the story help you think about math?	Question 3: Did the story make you think about math in your life (outside of school)?	Use it again?
African American*	Awesome= 14 Interesting= 1 Ok/boring= 0	A lot=11 Some=4 Not =0	A lot=9 Some=3 Not =3	Yes=15 No=0
Latinx	Awsome=5 Interesting=1 Ok/boring= 0	A lot=4 Some=1 Not =1	A lot=4 Some=1 Not =1	Yes=5 No=1
Caucasian*	Awsome=10 Interesting=5 Boring= 1	A lot=9 Some=6 Not =1	A lot=8 Some=6 Not =2	Yes=15 No=1

Note: *3 absent, -1 absent, -1 absent

When reviewing the class as a whole, it was clear from responses to question one (“How do you feel about the story this week?”) that students liked the story: 96.4% thought the story was either Awesome or Interesting. The analysis revealed that all but one student rated the story positively (see Table 1). We concluded that students had connected to cooking, family dynamics and the humor in the story. We believed

the results from African-American students was due in part to the affirmation of family bonds, the playful language and reactions that seemed similar to their family experiences. I was surprised by the one student who circled “boring” as a response. We thought he seemed attentive during the story and he participated in the activities and problems. When Mrs. Daniels asked him about his response, he told her that he only reads chapter books, not story books.

Questions 2 and 3 asked students how they felt the story helped them think about mathematics. The results from their reflections show that overall 94% of the students thought it helped them think about math to some degree [It did a lot (64%), and It did some (30%)]. When asked if the story helped them think about math outside of school, 83% indicated it did to some extent [It did a lot (55%), and It did some (28%)]. Since students in general see mathematics as school math, (Boaler, 2016), we were pleasantly surprised to see such positive responses on how the story impacted their thinking about mathematics outside of school.

Of course, one limitation of the study is that students knew their teacher would eventually see their reflections. Although they were told by the counselor while obtaining informed consent that their reflections would not impact their grades, students may have marked them more positively with hopes to please her or to encourage her to do these types of lessons more often. At the time of the study we did not have a way to verify if students connected the mathematics from the stories to their home life except for what they said in class. In retrospect, we could have asked students to create their own problems based on cooking in their own homes. This would verify that the application of mathematics transferred to their experiences. The home connections that emerged were told in stories on the playground. Mrs. Daniels recalled students conversing about family get togethers and overheard some one ask if anyone had really eaten oxtail soup before (mentioned in the story). Unfortunately, none of the students’ connections seemed to include a mathematical component.

Question 4 asked students if this story should be used again for next year’s class. As Table 1 portrays all but two (94%) said Yes, you should use it again. Nearly all students provided a rationale for their responses. Fifteen wrote how next year’s students would enjoy the story. Nine students mentioned the stew (how to make it, tasting it, or liking it), and eight mentioned learning mathematics in general. Among those eight, two specifically wrote adding and subtracting. Two students wrote no. One wrote it was a fun book but it did not help her with mathematics, and the other (the same boy who told Mrs. A later he only read chapter books) wrote, “It was forribal.” I believe he meant horrible.

We also asked, “Can you make a personal connection to this story? Why or why not?” We received a variety of answers since we purposely did not model an answer for fear of influencing their thoughts. Overall, 70% of the students, including all African-American students, said yes and wrote a connection. Most connected to a family bond and/or cooking with statements like, “One time I made soup with my grandma” and “I

always make soup with my mom.” Another said, “Yes, because I made cupcakes with my grandma.” A Caucasian boy said, “I always color under the table like Lil (a secondary character) and I cook stew.” As in all good stories, students, regardless of ethnicity, seemed to see themselves reflected in the story. We also read some unexpected comments like, “No, because I don’t like red pepper in my stew” and “No, because the main characters is just a family with husbands and wives.” Students’ comments led us to believe that most were thinking about the actions of the story as well as connecting to the family in the story.

Conclusions

Our analysis of students’ work and reflections along with our observations revealed that using high quality stories like *Just Right Stew* was certainly powerful in engaging students and encouraging them to spend time thinking mathematically. As seen in the students’ work samples, they completed the activities with enthusiasm and effort. Students also practiced thinking and talking mathematically during practice time, and even strongly indicated through their reflections that they thought the story helped them think about mathematics. Although we could not say conclusively that students felt the story affirmed African-American culture, this story was highly rated by almost all students. The data revealed that students were engaged in the story during the read aloud, and most connected to the family bond and act of cooking. Reviewing the data also led us to believe that all students, including the African-American students, enthusiastically worked on the connected mathematical activities.

We determined that incorporating high quality culturally responsive literature into mathematics instruction was a powerful way to bring in real life mathematics to the typical tradition of isolated skills in repeated computation or word problems. Using the story also leveled the playing field for problem solving since students could use their background knowledge from hearing the story to understand the context of the problem and ultimately to understand what the problem was asking.

We learned that using these stories helped students connect to the process of doing mathematics and reinforced the cognitive development from using concrete to representational to abstract representations. In the past, Mrs. Daniels noted that students often complained of not knowing what to do. They just guessed at what to do and moved onto the next problem. Conversely, students in this lesson were eager to solve the problems based on the stories because they had seen and heard the context of the problem. For example in Problem 3, Big Mama had determined the number of guests coming to her party because the illustration shows that she had enough soup and enough places at the table for everyone. This was the concrete. Most students drew symbols to represent the people. Some students moved to abstract by using only numerals.

We also learned that students used peer-assisted learning (Van DeWalle, 2013) because some who were confused about how to use the mathematical operation compared their work to a classmate’s work and many tried another way to solve the problem. Students had the same experience of hearing the story to compare and this prior knowledge seemed to lead students to talk about it more and assist each other in solving the problems. Since the story lead students to learn from each other and to

develop concepts through cognitive development (concrete to representational to abstract thinking), we strongly recommend using stories as a platform for problem solving.

We believe using these stories was instrumental to helping students see mathematic word problems as stories with real mathematical action, instead of calculations in isolation. Prior to our study, students struggled to understand the mathematical action of word problems because they did not know the story behind the problem. Since students knew the context of the mathematical action in the story with Big Mama, they were able to connect to the mathematical action in the word problems from the story. We are hopeful that this experience with problems from the story will help students to visualize or draw the action in other problems they encountered in other contexts (e.g. standardized tests).

Mrs. Daniels and I also recommend using multicultural stories in mathematics instruction because it was enjoyable. We revelled at how engaged students were in each lesson and by how well they were getting along with each other. We believe this strategy is a strong attempt at culturally responsive teaching by affirming a marginalized culture and providing time for students to learn about the positively portrayed traits as illustrated in the story. Since students connected with each other about themes from the story (e.g. food, words, family relationships of joy and struggle), students realized that they had more in common with each other than they had previously thought. This promotion of inclusion and community is what we hope to see in all classrooms, including mathematics. Figure 6 lists the story titles and math connections we used in this study.

Title and Author	Mathematical Connections
<i>Wilma Unlimited</i> (Krull, 1996)	Measuring distance, rounding, devising an exercise routine, addition, multiplication, subtraction
<i>Salt in His Shoes</i> (Jordan, Jordan & Nelson, 2003)	Scoring (addition) real and possible, graphing, open-ended questions
<i>Gettin' Through Thursday</i> (Cooper, 1998)	Using money (adding/subtraction) budgeting a meal, financial literacy standards
<i>Just Like Josh Gibson</i> (Johnson & Peck, 2007)	Measuring distance, graphing, 3 digit subtraction from historical statistics (real life)
<i>Just Right Stew</i> (English, 1998).	Word problems from the story, dividing amounts of stew, determining number of guest, devising a plan for buying ingredients for stew
<i>Auntee Enda</i> (Smothers, 2001)	Building arrays, multiplication, portions, ratios
<i>My Rows and Piles of Coins</i> (Mollel, 1999)	Building arrays, grouping in sets, counting, using money, financial literacy standards
<i>Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County</i> (Harrington, 2007)	Using arrays to determine multiplication facts, multiples of chicks per hen, working with quantity of a dozen, open-ended questions
<i>Beatrice's Goat</i> (McBrier, 2012)	Designing a pen for goats, area and perimeter, word problems (using multiplication/division) from the story
<i>Lucky Beans</i> (Birtha, 2010)	Estimation, proportional reasoning, open-ended questions, <u>5 digit</u> subtraction, multiplication, equivalent amounts (fractions) and devising a plan for spending
<i>Sweet Potato Pie</i> (Lindsey, 2003)	Devising a plan to sell pies (determine expense vs. profit) multiplication/division with visuals related to the story, fractional reasoning, and financial literacy standards
<i>Mim's Christmas Jam</i> (Pinkney, 2001)	Drawing fractions, seeing fractions (as parts of a set), using a recipe with limited tools (equivalent fractions), multiplication/division problems from the story, designing train tracks (using fractional pieces to make amount equivalent to 6 wholes)

Figure 6. Stories used in this study (Corp, 2017).

My next steps are to continue the effort to encourage culturally responsive teaching in mathematics. I am creating a longer list of stories that lend themselves to connections to mathematics while promoting cultures, particularly Latinx and African-American cultures. I also plan to research students' responses to stories that promote Latinx characters (particularly Mexican-American characters) in Southwestern public schools. My hope is that our stories inspires teachers to use a story that reflects various cultures as a way to connect to mathematics, and to promote inclusion and affirmation of all students.

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Creating More Windows to the World: Exploring Amish-Themed Children's Literature

By Kristen Noll and Darryn Diuguid

Because the U.S. population is greatly diverse, educators are tasked to teach their students about the many cultures in the United States. One of the most important skills teachers strive to develop in their practice is an ability to build on the knowledge students bring into classrooms, particularly knowledge shaped by their families, community, and cultural histories (Hughes, 2012). Many classrooms are comprised of students of differing ethnicities and religions, and as such, it is important for teachers to understand their students' cultures so they can embrace their cultural assets. Additionally, understanding a student's culture enables a teacher to communicate more effectively with that student's family. On the flip side, students, too, benefit from learning about what people in cultures that differ from their own value and believe. One group, the Amish, is a distinct ethnic and religious group that has lived in the United States since the 1700s and has an extraordinary culture and history few mainstream Americans know much about. Studying the Amish along with other cultures represented in schools enables students to explore and compare their own culture and values with those reflecting a range of ways of being in the world.

Incorporating the Amish Culture in Your Classroom

There are many ways educators can incorporate Amish-themed children's books to support students in making connections to broader understandings of cultural diversity, while simultaneously addressing the Common Core State Standards. For instance, one of the key features of the Common Core State Standards is a push to include more informational texts in the classroom; in fact, the Common Core states that "students need sustained exposure to expository text to develop important reading strategies, and that expository text makes up the vast majority of required reading in college and the workplace" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 3). Zapata and Maloch (2014) also state that when students are given opportunities to use informational texts, they "grow in their comprehension of such texts and in their use of these genres, strategies, and structures of their own writing" (p. 27). Language arts teachers use these books as mentor texts in writing workshops, as read alouds, and as texts in reading workshop or literature units. These books can also be used across the curriculum as thematic units, to build community, or to teach about diversity throughout the United States.

We decided to review Amish-themed children's literature to better expand our knowledge of the culture and to see if, and what kind, of trade books were available. Our initial questions included: what are the values and beliefs of the Amish, in what ways do Amish value education and educate their children, and how do Amish children's lives differ from mainstream society? When first starting this project, we searched via the school's library using key words such as "Amish" and "children's literature." From there, we decided to review the books listed below to see if there were themes which existed across the fifteen books that came up in our initial search.

After reading the texts, we grouped the books according to themes and found overarching categories. Upon further research about the authors and publishers, we realized some of the publishers and authors were from the Amish culture or Mennonite culture, while others were considered cultural outsiders; that is, authors who research and write about a variety of cultures they are interested in but not necessarily a member of. The publishing dates of the children’s books ranged from 1976-2009, and so we wondered if the traditions presented still exist today.

Title	Author	Publisher
- <i>Teen Life Among the Amish and Other Alternative Communities: Choosing a Lifestyle</i>	David Hunter (writes about a variety of cultures)	Mason Crest Publishers
- <i>Just Plain Fancy</i>	Patricia Polacco (writes about a variety of cultures)	Dell Publishing
- <i>Amish People: Plain Living in a Complex World</i>	Carolyn Meyer (writes about a variety of cultures)	Atheneum Publishing
- <i>Just Like Mama</i>	Beverly Lewis (write predominately about the Amish culture)	Bethany House Publishers
- <i>Raising Yoder’s Barn</i>	Jane Yolen (writes about a variety of cultures)	Little, Broan and Company
- <i>Reuben and the Quilt</i> - <i>Reuben and the Fire</i> - <i>Reuben and the Blizzard</i> - <i>Reuben and the Balloon</i>	Merle Good (writes about the Mennonite and Amish cultures)	Good Books
- <i>The Wisdom of Solomon, A Solomon Lapp and Friends Amish Storybook</i>	Wanda Brunstetter (writes predominately about the Amish culture)	Barbour Publishing, Inc.
- <i>The Amish</i>	Jean Kinney Williams (writes about a variety of cultures)	Franklin Watts
- <i>Down Buttermilk Lane</i>	Barbara Mitchell (writes about a variety of cultures)	William Morrow and Company
- <i>The School Picnic</i>	Jan Steffy (writes predominately about the Amish culture)	Good Books
- <i>An Amish Year</i>	Richard Ammon (writes predominately about the Amish culture)	Boyd’s Mills Press
- <i>Growing Up Amish</i>	Richard Ammon (writes predominately about the Amish culture)	MacMillan Publishing Company
- <i>Out of Control</i> - <i>Just Plain Foolishness</i> - <i>A Happy Heart</i>	Wanda Brunstetter (writes predominately about the Amish culture)	Barbour Publishing, Inc.

Figure 1. Amish-themed children’s literature with authors and publishing companies.

Values and Beliefs of the Amish

Like all cultural groups, the Amish have values and beliefs that are of great importance to them. *Teen Life Among the Amish and Other Alternative Communities: Choosing a Lifestyle*, a nonfiction children's book written by David Hunter (2008), explains that Amish life is dictated by a list of unwritten or oral rules, known as the Ordnung. The Ordnung directs everything in Amish life, including religious rituals, family life, clothing, use of technology, and farming techniques (Hunter, 2008). "More so than in most other communities, the Amish Ordnung is extremely important for the identity, growth, and vitality of the Amish community" (Hunter, 2008, p. 38). We learned that each Amish community decides on its own rules so Ordnungs vary. If members of the Amish community do not follow the rules, they may be shunned.

A fiction picturebook authored by Patricia Polacco (1990), *Just Plain Fancy*, suggests that Amish children are concerned about following the rules. Because the Amish embrace simple living, plain dress and a hesitancy to embrace modern technology for its convenience are important. Two sisters named Naomi and Ruth are afraid that their peacock they named Fancy is too fancy because of his vibrant colored feathers. One afternoon Naomi and Ruth overhear their family talking about a woman in a neighboring Amish community being shunned because she dresses too fancy, and so start worrying that Fancy could be shunned in their community. At the end of the story, Naomi and Ruth are relieved when they learn that Fancy will not be shunned because he was blessed naturally by God with his beauty.

Family is another value that is important in the Amish culture. Amish have large families because they rely on one another for the success of their rural lifestyles. Children are instrumental in helping with chores such as maintaining the farm and house. Carolyn Meyer (1976) explains in her award winning book *Amish People: Plain Living in a Complex World*, "From the time of birth, Amish children are prepared for their roles in the family and in the Amish community: girls are welcomed as 'little housekeepers' and 'dishwashers,' boys are 'little woodchoppers' and 'farmers'" (Meyer, 1976, p. 119). Amish children learn their roles from their parents. *Just Like Mama*, a fiction picturebook authored by Beverly Lewis (2002), tells the story of a little girl, Susie Mae, who wants to be just like her mother. The illustrations depict Susie Mae following her mother around and doing chores such as collecting eggs, picking berries, cooking meals, and milking cows. Her brother, Thomas, explains, "you can cook and clean, milk and pick berries, but...Aw, Susie Mae, there's a whole lot more to Mama than what she looks like and what she does" (Lewis, 2002, p. 27). Susie Mae realizes that she wants to be patient and kind just like her mother. Our analysis identified another theme in the literature and stories in the Amish helping each other in hardships and caring for each another. Jane Yolen's (1998) *Raising Yoder's Barn*, another fiction picturebook for young readers, tells the story of the Amish coming together to help rebuild a neighbor's barn after it burned when struck by lightning. The Amish consider it an honor to participate in a barn raising. An Amish boy explains in the story, "And sixty feet by forty feet, to the sound of many

hammers ringing, that barn grew like a giant flower in the field all in a single day” (Yolen, 1998). As described in Merle Good’s (1993) *Reuben and the Fire*, a “barnraising is like a holiday” (p. 25). While the men work on the barn, the women cook all day to feed the men; everyone in the community helps (Yolen, 1998; Good, 1993).

Another aspect of the value the Amish put on helping each other can be understood in how the Amish handle conflict. In *Amish People: Plain Living in a Complex World* (Meyer, 1976), the author reveals that the Amish are pacifists, and, therefore, avoid violence and practice forgiveness. *Reuben and the Quilt* (Good, 1999) provides a powerful example of the intersection between pacifism, forgiveness and helping those in need. This story is about a family making a quilt to donate to an auction for a neighbor who is injured when a car crashes into his buggy. The community comes together and has an auction to help pay for medical expenses. The quilt the family makes in the story is stolen off of their porch. The children have a difficult time understanding how someone could steal the quilt until their father explains that “maybe the thief is really poor and needed it.” The father suggests that they leave the matching pillowcases outside for the thief to take, because he needs something to lay his head on while he is sleeping with the quilt. They do just that, and to their surprise, the next morning they find the quilt returned.

Another fiction picturebook featuring Reuben titled *Reuben and the Blizzard* (Good, 1995), tells a story about the Amish helping a non-Amish family. In this story a husband explains to his Amish neighbors that his wife is having a baby and he cannot get his car through the snow to take her to the hospital. The Amish family use their horse and sleigh to take the couple to the mainroad to meet an ambulance. Another story supporting Amish helping non-Amish is found in Wanda Brunstetter’s (2009) *The Wisdom of Solomon*, A Solomon Lapp and Friends Amish Storybook, a compilation of short stories about a little boy named Solomon. In “A Friend in Need,” Solomon learns during a sermon one Sunday morning that if he is generous, he will be blessed. He then tries to figure out what being generous means. After a few misconceptions about the idea of being generous, he realizes what it means when his English neighbor, David, declares one morning at the bus stop that he is not doing so well lately because his father lost his job and so he does not have food for lunch, and so Solomon gives David his lunch. Later that evening, Solomon shares David’s news with his family. Solomon’s mother explains they need to help David’s family. They take David’s family a basket of food, and Solomon’s father speaks with other members of their community to help with more food and money. From reading these children’s books, the message is conveyed that even if the Amish live in a way that differs from mainstream society, they do not hesitate to help in a time of need.

Amish’s View on Education

The Amish view education differently than mainstream society; that is, they go to school to learn what is needed to be a practicing farmer, laborer, carpenter, or carriage maker. Albeit they begin schooling their children at the age of five as most parents do in the U.S., they cease formal schooling after the eighth grade so their children can help at home and on the farm. By doing so, they learn the work traits

that are expected as adults. Hunter (2008) explains, “One of the more frequently quoted verses of the Bible among the Amish when they are speaking of education comes from 1 Corinthians 8:1 ‘Knowledge puffs up [makes us arrogant] but ... anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge” (p. 63). Meyer (1976) explains how Amish children who attend school wake up early to work on their chores before school and continue chores when they return home. Richard Ammon’s (2000) fictional picturebook for younger children, *An Amish Year*, describes a year in the life of Lizzie, an Amish school girl. Lizzie explains that students (or scholars as they are referred to in the book) are never assigned homework because the need for them to complete chores at home is more important.

An illustration in *An Amish Year* depicts a classroom with a chalkboard, old chairs, and a wood burning stove. The simplicity of the classroom reflects their chosen lifestyle. On the opposite page, Lizzie explains, “Our day begins when Sara rings the bell...After taking attendance, she reads verses from the Bible, but we do not say the Pledge of Allegiance. There is no flag in our school” (Ammon, 2000, unpagged). In the Amish culture, saying the Pledge of Allegiance is thought of as placing an allegiance to country above everything, even God, and that is why the pledge is not practiced in schools. *Growing Up Amish*, a biography written about an Amish girl also written by Richard Ammon (1989), reveals that the Amish do not believe in submitting to any government, federal or local, because of their mistreatment long ago by European governments. Interestingly, although most Amish children do not attend public schools, their parents are still required to pay school taxes in most communities (Hunter, 2008).

The Amish, a nonfiction children’s book by Jean Williams (1996) explains that Amish children learn mathematics, English, and some history, geography, and health. They do not teach religion because it is the responsibility of parents to do so (Williams, 1996). Their textbooks even support their lifestyle. “The Old Order Amish have developed their own texts in which readers will find no sex education, fairy tales, or stories with talking animals or mention of magic” (Williams, 1996, p. 79). Amish school teachers do not attend college or even graduate from high school. Their education ceased after eighth grade just like their students’ education will. Those who are good students in school are asked to be school teachers (Ammon, 1989). Williams (1996) explains that teachers serve as apprentices before they have their own classrooms, and younger teachers learn from teachers who have more experience. Amish teachers from other districts meet during the school year to discuss schooling. In addition, Amish teachers refer to a magazine published by a company in Ontario, *Brushing Up on Pronunciation*, to share ideas and techniques (Williams, 1996). A few Amish children attend rural public schools, but most attend one-room schools constructed by the Amish. Mirroring early education in America, the teacher is responsible for keeping a controlled environment with a wide range of ages and grade levels (Hunter, 2008). School teachers are always single; when they marry their responsibility shifts to the home.

Competition is discouraged among students because the Amish believe in unity.

Hunter (2008) explains that, “Independent thought and critical analysis—the sort of questioning that many mainstream teachers try to encourage in their students—are frowned on” (p. 62). Students who are more intelligent than others do not receive enriched instruction as students would in mainstream society. The sole purpose of schooling in the Amish community is to teach students what they need to know to participate in the community. However, they learn the most important skills for participation in the Amish culture from their parents and other adults in the community (Meyer, 1976). “Nevertheless, tests taken by Amish and non-Amish students alike show that the Amish students do just about as well as their mainstream counterparts in those subjects they have in common” (Hunter, 2008, p. 62-63). The Amish believe that hard work, humility, and honesty make a better person, not education.

The Amish did not always have the right to educate their children in their own parochial schools. Until courts became involved, the Amish had to send their children to public schools. Laws governing education became more prominent in the 1920s and 1930s. Rural schools were consolidated into one central location, and the Amish were against this; they wanted their children to attend school close to home. Moreover, the Amish did not want to send their children to high school (Williams, 1996). Their practice of a shortened formal education caused controversy among the Amish and various state governments. “In 1921, Ohio legislators passed a compulsory education law requiring schooling through age eighteen” (Williams, 1996, p. 70). “There were many unpleasant incidents when truancy laws were enforced by school districts unwilling to lose state subsidies based on attendance; Amish fathers were often arrested and jailed for refusing to send their older children to school” (Meyer, 1976, p. 46). Most of the Amish families eventually complied with the Ohio law and applied for work permits for children when they turned sixteen (Williams, 1996). In the 1930s, the Pennsylvania legislature made it mandatory to stay in school until age fifteen, thus requiring a year of high school. For two years, Amish men lobbied for religious freedom to have their children educated as they choose so that by 1937, “many Amish fourteen-year-olds were literally hiding at home, and one father was jailed” (Williams, 1996, p. 71). The Amish eventually won the right to apply for work permits for their children, however, by 1949 Pennsylvania raised the compulsory education age to sixteen, resulting in more arrests of Amish parents (Williams, 1996). In 1955, the State of Pennsylvania and the Amish compromised so that compulsory attendance laws would not be broken and Amish religious beliefs would not be violated. Amish children were compelled to attend vocational school after their completion of eighth grade on Saturday for three hours to study hygiene and more advanced subjects such as arithmetic and English than they would in regular school. They were also required to keep journals of the work done in their homes and on their farms each week (Meyer, 1976). The State of Iowa also had a conflict with the Amish in 1965. In lieu of sending their children to a public school, an Amish community in Buchanan County established their own elementary schools with Amish teachers (Williams, 1996). An authentic photograph taken by the media in *The Amish* depicts a police officer watching Amish children running away for safety in response to a command by an Amish adult, when a school bus arrived to transport

them to the public school. This photograph was nationally published, and the Amish received support from many non-Amish nationwide. However, conflicts continued. Eventually, the nation's highest court became involved. The Supreme Court ruled in *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* (1972) that Amish children could not be forced to attend school past eighth grade. In other words, the State of Wisconsin's interest to educate its children was not more important than the rights of the Amish to practice their way of life. Amish children were no longer required to attend school on Saturday and keep journals of their farm work in Pennsylvania or any other state. To this day, Amish have a shortened educational career. In fact, Fischel (2012) states:

Their children did not have to complete more than eight years of formal education, and the Amish could establish their own parochial schools with Amish-approved teachers. In Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, where the majority of the Amish reside, a program of home-based vocational education was required for another two years, but most of this involved homebased training that Amish teenagers would have received without state compulsion. (p. 114)

The Lives of Amish Children

The literature we examined also revealed that an Amish child's life differs from that of a child in mainstream society, but not as drastically as one may think. While there are obvious differences, Amish children have many similarities to children of mainstream society, especially those who live in rural areas.

Reuben and the Balloon, a fiction picturebook authored by Good (2008), suggests that Amish children are just as curious as other children. This book presents another story about Reuben, who is enamored with hot air balloons that he sometimes sees flying over his family's farm. One afternoon he suggests to his grandfather that they should race one of them in their buggy. They are unsuccessful in beating it and go back to their farm. Another afternoon he watches a balloon descend from the sky. Reuben decides his chores can wait and goes to see where it landed on a nearby farm. The pilots asked for something to drink, and the Amish give them water. The pilots then take Reuben and two other Amish boys for a ride, and the illustrations depict Reuben smiling during the ride and happily waving to the horses and chickens below him.

Barbara Mitchell's *Down Buttermilk Lane* (1993) is a fiction picturebook that tells the story of Amish children shopping with their parents just like children in mainstream society. This book tells the story of an Amish family who take a trip one fall morning into town to shop; instead of parking a car, they park their buggy. They purchase food and clothing from different stores in town. After they finish shopping, they visit Dawdi (Grandpa) and Mammi (Grandma) for a home-cooked meal. After they are finish eating, the Amish children take a walk to the pond with their Dat (Dad) and Dawdi.

Just as children in mainstream society, Amish children look forward to the last day of

school before summer vacation begins. In Jan Steffy's *The School Picnic* (1987), a children's fiction picturebook, the reader can feel the excitement as the Amish children wait for lunchtime when they get to enjoy a picnic with their families and teacher. After they eat, children read poems and present a program. The children enjoy the rest of the day playing games, such as softball with their parents and competing in egg relay races.

In An Amish Year (Amman, 2000), Lizzie cannot wait to fly a kite on a spring day, but she must finish her chores first. This book references activities that Amish children enjoy during the seasons just as children in mainstream society, such as: fishing, playing softball and volleyball, running around barefooted, sledding, ice skating, and playing board games like Monopoly.

Amish children also fabricate stories and cover up mishaps just like mainstream children. The wisdom of the fictional character, Solomon, supports this notion in the short story, "Stretching the Truth" (Brunstetter, 2009). Solomon's sister, Sarah, struggles to admit guilt when she does something wrong, and does not always tell the complete truth. For example, when she and Solomon wash dishes one afternoon, Sarah drops and breaks their mother's favorite dish. Instead of telling their mother, she buries the dish in the trash can. Solomon explains to his sister that stretching the truth is almost the same as telling a lie. Later that day, Sarah lets her friend play with Solomon's yo-yo, which she breaks. Instead of telling Solomon the truth, Sarah throws the yo-yo into the haystack in the barn to hide it. When Solomon finds it and questions her, she proclaims she does not know who broke it. In the end of the story, Sarah realizes that telling the truth is always the right thing to do.

To further support the idea that Amish children get into trouble and make mistakes, a reader can enjoy a series of books written by Wanda Brunstetter about Rachel Yoder, an Amish girl who always finds trouble. For example, in *Out of Control* (2008), Rachel is determined to beat her friend in a sled race during recess so she waxes the runners. Her rope breaks during the race, and because she is going so fast due to the waxed runners, she crashes into a creek. She returns to class in soaked clothes, and her teacher scolds her for waxing her sled runners, explaining that she does not always have to win. Rachel is sent home for the day so she will not catch a cold. Rachel's day does not improve. After she takes a warm bath, she helps her mother make a shoofly pie, and Rachel gets to make another pie with the leftover dough. She learns that evening during dinner that she must not have measured the ingredients properly because her brother exclaims, "This is the worst shoofly pie I've ever tasted! It's not even fit for a fly!" (Brunstetter, 2008, p. 31). Rachel bursts into tears and leaves the room.

Rachel finds trouble again in *Just Plain Foolishness* (Brunstetter, 2008). In this story, Rachel experiences jealousy over the birth of her new baby sister, Hannah, born on her birthday. All Rachel wants for a gift is to visit Hershey Park, an amusement park. Rachel's family is too consumed with the baby to take Rachel to Hershey Park, so she decides to visit with two of her English friends, without permission from her parents.

What starts out as an exciting trip turns out to be frightening. Rachel decides to wander around the park while waiting on her friends to finish riding a roller coaster and gets lost. She starts to miss her family and worry if she will even see them again. She eventually finds her friends. Wiping away tears from her face, Rachel says, "I'll never go anywhere again without my parents' permission" (p. 153). When Rachel gets home and explains the situation to her parents, Rachel's English friends explain that they also need to get home because they do not want their parents to worry either. Stories about the Amish show that children tease each other just like children in mainstream society, especially brothers and sisters. *In A Happy Heart* (Brunstetter, 2008), Rachel gets eyes glasses. She does not want to get them until she tries them on and realizes she can see much better. She is feeling better about wearing them until her brother tells her, "I didn't realize your glasses would be so thick. Ha! Now you have four eyes instead of two" (p. 95). Rachel is apprehensive about wearing her glasses to school the next day. Their mother warns her brother, Jacob, not to tease her sister anymore. Rachel asks her mother what she should do if anyone else teases her. Her other brother, Henry, answers that she should tell the teacher. Rachel explains she will be called a tattletale and Jacob tells her she already is a tattletale. The bickering continues between Rachel and her brother. Just as Rachel predicted, she is teased at school about wearing glasses. The teacher intervenes and announces to the class, "Poking fun at someone and making rude remarks is wrong. I won't tolerate anyone in this class making fun of another person for any reason at all" (p. 136). Rachel's experiences with her brother and classmates reflect issues with which almost all children can identify.

The life of an Amish child does have differences from many children in mainstream society. For example, Amish children may have more chores to do, and are often educated differently. Hunter (2008) explains, "Amish teens are usually thirteen years old when they finish their schooling. At that point, many of them go to work, usually either at home or for a relative" (p.63). However, they are still not considered adults, and must obey their parents. They do gain more freedom when they turn sixteen because this is the age Amish children can decide whether or not they would like to be baptized, which officially makes them a member of the Amish church. This time of independence in an Amish child's life is referred to by the Amish as Rumspringa (Hunter, 2008). This period allows the Amish child to "experience the life of a non-Amish person" and "to do things normally forbidden among the Amish" (p. 65). During this time, Amish children may wear different clothing, listen to music, play video games, and other things mainstream teenagers enjoy. "In some cases, young people might even experiment with alcohol and drugs...those extremes are rare, however. Most Amish teenagers never stray far from their upbringing" (pp. 65-66). Their strong family and community values most often prevail in their decision to remain Amish.

Final Thoughts

In most Amish schools, children transport themselves to school in a horse and buggy, and they responsibly secure their horses to the hitching rail. They enter the schoolhouse and greet the teachers, not moving until they received a reply. They then

venture out into the schoolyard to play until class commences. Instead of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, they begin their day by singing hymns, reading passages from the Bible, and reciting the Lord's Prayer. The teacher takes attendance by asking each student what chores he or she did before coming to school that day. Grades one through four are in one room, and grades five through eight are in the other. Both rooms have wood burning stoves and old chalkboards. The schoolhouse has a bell that one of the teachers rings by pulling on the rope when it is time for school to begin. The teachers work with each grade at a time using various supporting materials, such as workbooks and flashcards. The children sit quietly and respectfully, and they do not speak unless directed to do so.

Non-Amish will continue to be intrigued with the Amish, and books about them will continue to be written for children and adults to enjoy. K-12 students who may find this culture interesting due to the dress, traditions, and daily activities will learn, as we did, through reading this set of texts, the values and dreams that they share with Amish people as well as what makes their culture unique. The Amish are simple, hardworking, and caring people and the children's books we read about this culture supported these perceptions. Additionally, we learned they value educating their children, but in a different manner than children are educated in mainstream society. These books portray Amish children enjoying many of the same activities that other children do and so students will be able to understand similarities and embrace differences. Such knowledge, we argue, enriches us all.

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Finding Stories That Need to be Told

Maria Elena Salazar

Children’s books offer gateways into unfamiliar worlds for readers, providing avenues for classroom discussions surrounding difficult topics. In my Early Childhood Education (ECE) methods course for pre-service teacher candidates, children’s literature is a central learning tool. Moreover, in this course, I use literature to critique labels like “at risk” that are placed on students based on their cultural identities. I feel such labels cause some students to be viewed by educators and others as less likely to succeed. Instead, I encourage candidates to see students as “at promise” (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995), a belief that students’ cultural identities foster academic success. Therefore, many of my course activities nudge candidates to examine their own beliefs. For instance, I invite them to visit a toy store and document characteristics of toys, such as the ethnicities, abilities, and economic statuses represented, along with differences between toys labeled for girls and toys labeled for boys. Candidates present their findings in class and explain how these will affect their future practice. Another assignment to help candidates gain experience with culturally responsive pedagogy invites them to explore historical educational obstacles of non-mainstream students through the creation of their own multicultural children’s books.

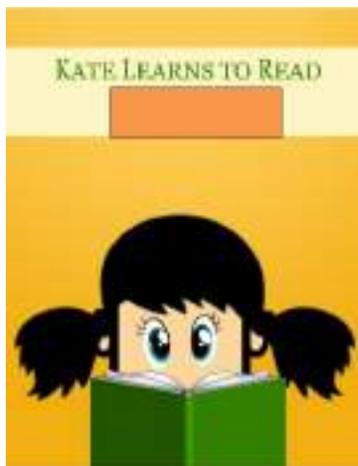


Figure 1. Student-created MCL.

The following vignette describes the journey candidates and I took as we explored this assignment for the first time during the fall 2016 semester. Although we faced issues that need to be resolved, this experience became a worthwhile opportunity, helping candidates understand multicultural children’s literature and exposing them to complex real life issues U.S. students regularly encounter.

Our Learning Community

At the university where I teach, preservice teacher candidates take a core of classes called a “block.” The block consists of core methods classes taught at an elementary

school and a practicum component in which candidates partner with a classroom teacher for one semester. For two hours each morning candidates shadow a teacher and work in her/his classroom. At mid-morning they gather for two hours in an on-site classroom for methods instruction. I teach the Early Childhood Education (ECE) course in the block. I designed the course to help candidates understand practices, legislation, licensure, and other content in ECE. Although the course is centered on ECE, I funnel this knowledge through Multicultural Education (MCE). For instance, if the week's topic is "assessment," I address cultural bias in tests. In this way, candidates are better prepared to enter American classrooms which are increasingly diverse with regards to student heritage, family structure, and socioeconomics (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014).

The Fall 2016 ECE course was composed of 20 candidates, 14 female, 5 male. Approximately half were Latinx, half were Anglo; all but one was in their early twenties. Most candidates were from the geographic region in which the university resides. As the course progressed, candidates gained familiarity with ECE and MCE. Personal ideologies became more apparent and, aided by children's literature, helped guide our discussions. In addition, this semester was the candidates first supervised practicum, so they had many questions regarding policy and practice. For example, candidates sometimes found themselves in positions where they had difficulty talking with students, such as when they overheard one student making fun of another student's clothing. I advised them that one way to dialogue with students about difficult topics is by sharing multicultural children's literature. However, I realized that while candidates could easily name books by Dr. Seuss and well-known titles like *Little Red Riding Hood* (Galdone, 1985), they were less familiar with multicultural literature and/or some of its authors.

Pre-service Teacher Candidates' Knowledge of Multicultural Children's Literature

Teacher unfamiliarity with multicultural books is consistent with research (Salazar, 2017; Brinson, 2012), partially because multicultural children's literature comprises only 10% of all children's literature (Horning, 2013). Further, exclusion of multicultural literature is often the norm in U.S. classrooms due to curricular mandates and/or teacher discomfort in addressing difficult issues (Salazar, 2017; Botelho & Rudman, 2009). This is detrimental to both students and teachers because these books provide classroom spaces for discussing real world issues, such as immigration (Fránquiz, Avila & Ayala Lewis, 2013). These texts are also useful for introducing new ways of thinking, as well as aiding comprehension and interpretation of unfamiliar texts. For instance, students can read social justice-themed texts with topics like parental incarceration and homelessness, without being frightened or negatively influenced. Their cultural schemata allows them to connect to texts and "take an aesthetic stance that contributes to gains in comprehending elements of these stories" (Pilioneta & Hancock, 2012, p. 7).

Coursework that includes candidates' reflections on their personal histories, cultures,

and socioeconomic status, coupled with chances to explore historical and current race relations, better equips them for increasingly diverse classroom contexts. For instance, professional development about books featuring characters of color can increase teachers' knowledge of non-dominant narratives and help them build non-exclusive classroom libraries (Brinson, 2012). Teachers can also use children's books to see similarities between cultures (Villegas & Lucas, 2007) and to find out about culturally-specific ways of communicating, learning styles, home/school differences, and build classroom community (Sleeter, 2013).

I created this assignment to give candidates experience with multicultural literature, simultaneously providing opportunities to critically analyze all children's books. I also sought to improve my own practice by creating more choices in candidates' writing assignments. I wondered if and how personal interest increases candidate engagement when they decide who and what to write about in literary genres of their choosing.

Setting the Stage for Creating Multicultural Children's Literature

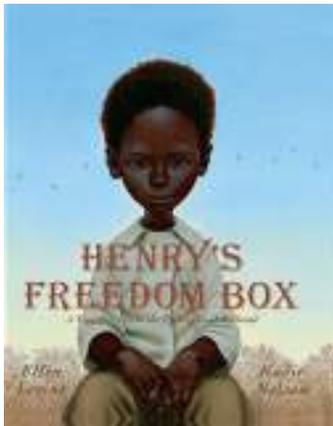


Figure 2. Levine (2007)

Throughout the semester, we critically examined children's books pertaining to the course topics. For example, when the topic focused on the pedagogy of ecology, *The Great Kapok Tree* (Cherry, 2000) influenced talk on environmentalism. *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) was another book that provided an opportunity to explore how the topic of slavery could be discussed with children using literature.

We sometimes used Botelho and Rudman's (2009) Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA) framework to see if books' messages may lead to bias against certain groups. CMA critically examines how race, class and gender are portrayed in children's literature, and how power is distributed. For instance, when looking at gender roles, who the protagonist is and what activities female and male story characters are engaged in contribute to analysis of messages transmitted to readers about gender norms. We analyzed genre, written text, perspective, authors, and storylines. *Henry's*

Freedom Box (Levine, 2007) presents the reader with a character of color who is full of agency in dire circumstances. However, the author and conglomerate publisher show an appropriation of the stories of people of color as told by those with power, a common critique within multicultural literature (Cai, 2002).

By the end of the semester, we had critiqued many children's books, including those classified as multicultural. This activity supported candidates' knowledge of multicultural literature, and helped them see how text elements, such as a sociopolitical stance, affects storyline. Additionally, course dialogue challenged me to be a reflective practitioner. I learned new perspectives from candidates that I may have overlooked based on my own identities. I began identifying my own gaps in knowledge, like unfamiliarity with Asian American children's literature. Students then began creating their own books.

Creating Multicultural Children's Books

We began the assignment by interviewing an adult or child. Candidates created a list of interview questions (See Figure 3) to conduct a semi-structured interview (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). A semi-structured interview was chosen because it invites conversation-like dialogue and ensured candidates collected the data while letting them pursue avenues of interest during the interview.

Who is she/he? How old? What is their level of education? Current educational status? Family? Geography? Highlights of education? Downfalls of educational experience? What identities and social constructions does your participant bring? In what ways does he/she embrace or understand diversity and multiculturalism? How does your participant make sense of their agency and their roles in a socially constructed world?

Figure 3. Sample interview questions.

Candidates posed questions about the interviewee's experiences with ECE and then selected one educational event that had a profound effect on the interviewee. An example is one interviewee's experience as a monolingual Spanish speaker in a U.S. school. Her teacher tutored her, created community-building activities in the classroom, and otherwise helped her ease into the new school environment. This led to a lifelong student/teacher relationship.

Next, candidates chose a book format that they felt could help them effectively tell these stories. They could follow the traditional fairy tale format, beginning with, "Once upon a time..." and incorporating magic, wicked, good, and royal characters, as well as a happy ending (Green, 2003). This format was intended to help candidates organize their thoughts, keeping in mind that the books sought to be asset-oriented (Cramer & Wasiak, 2006) and promote agency. Other genre formats included poetry, wordless books, postmodern picturebooks and more. Genre and medium were left up to the candidates, but the book could not exceed 15 pages. At the end of the semester, candidates read aloud their books to classmates.

The Read Alouds

Reading the stories aloud provided for multiple early childhood experiences to be shared. Many candidates completed their practicum in classrooms where the read aloud was not a common literacy activity because other mandated reading curricula caused the read aloud to become rushed or pre-scripted (Copenhaver, 2001). Gaining their first experiences with read alouds in our methods class versus classrooms was worrisome to me. Yet the assignment helped these candidates understand the potential power of read alouds in promoting reading as pleasurable while modeling reading performance, among other benefits (Sipe, 2002). This knowledge additionally caused me to rethink how often I use read aloud in my courses, and how I can better teach candidates about this as a curricular tool with countless uses and benefits. Most of the readings provoked a strong emotional response, such as when candidates applauded the story of a male kindergarten character who was finally permitted to wear pink clothes to school. They reflected on the benefits of reading aloud multicultural literature for themselves and for their classmates (all names are pseudonyms):

During the actual presentation of the book to our class... the entire class was really engaged with the book and provided me with excellent feedback. The presentation was important as we were able to see many different perspectives... Everyone had their own unique story. (Gerónimo)

The read aloud portion of the bookmaking was also an important role in getting our topic across to the class. When we read books it really made a difference in the way you read it. I know my book personalized the reading by making the reading more engaging and dramatic, keeping my audience focused. (Roberto)

I almost cried because hearing my story aloud really makes it real and brings that awareness. As I read aloud, I looked at everyone's faces and I could see the impact the story had on some people. I really enjoyed being in front of the class presenting because I felt very passionate about it. I had a sense of pride telling the class about my amazing sister and all she has gone through in her life. (Rica)

The benefits cited by candidates included increased student engagement, culturally responsive pedagogy, awareness of societal issues with an avenue to discuss them, and hearing unique stories. Most importantly, the candidates recognized texts like these exist for young readers. Moreover, they experienced the utilization of the Author's Chair as a powerful practice (Graves & Hansen, 1983). The Author's Chair occurs when students read aloud a text they have written before audience of their peers and the audience provides questions and feedback. Graves and Hansen (1983) contend that authoring and then reading one's texts improves understanding of the writing process, literacy skills, and candidates' meaning making of texts. By reading their books aloud, candidates tapped into these benefits, as well as other Author's Chair attributes, such as confidence and voice in public speaking, working with peers, and realizing their stories have value. This activity caused me to reflect on my pedagogy and whose perspectives need more inclusion in my teaching contexts. It reinforced my belief that creating and telling stories empowers candidates as well.

In-class talks about the student-made books featured protagonists overcoming obstacles, saving the day, etc. However, one teacher candidate, Kerry, approached me the week before we were to present the books and wondered about sharing an interviewee's story that did not have a happy ending.



Figure 4. Estevan's Song (Kerry, 2016).

Spontaneously, I told Kerry to try her best. When she read her book, *Estevan's Song*, I realized these parameters are not always compatible with the real world. The other candidates and I sat silently as Kerry read her tale of an academically unsuccessful boy who plays his guitar in his bedroom as an emotional escape. Although a teacher recognizes his artistic talents, the book concluded with him retreating to his room, playing his guitar, and grudgingly awaiting another academic year in remedial classes. Multicultural books, by definition, should include these perspectives so that candidates can think critically about real life issues. Thanks to Kerry, I have modified this assignment so that more accuracy, including unhappy endings and a lack of agency can be shared.

The Results

Using Botelho and Rudman's (2009) framework to aid in creation of stories and peer-

assessment, candidates exceeded my expectations. Experiences recorded during this semester encompassed gender bias, bullying, and single parent homes. One book, with minimal color and graphics, moved candidates to tears. Sparse, first person text about an orphaned girl too shy to speak in school was met with sighs. The ending spoke to inner courage as the girl takes a deep breath before she enters a spelling bee. Another especially powerful story centered on Rica's sister's lived experiences with mental impairment. First person narration with childlike drawings on lined notebook paper led to reading this book through a child's eyes.

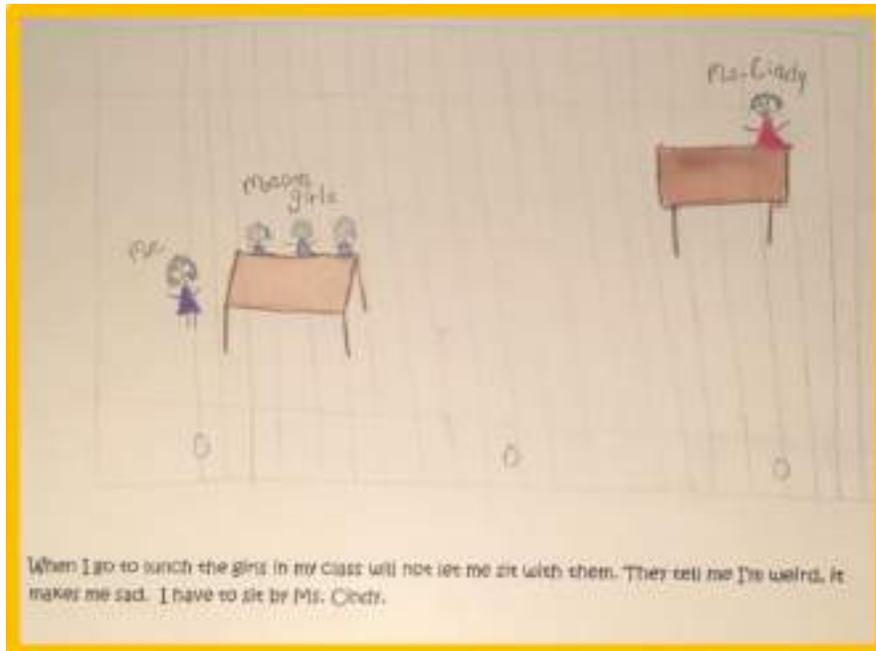


Figure 5. A page from Rica's book.

The protagonist sat alone on the playground because the other children “did not want to catch her disease.” Rica stopped reading often to highlight her sister's strengths; the book epitomized the power of the written word.

Genre was considered in text production. Diego said, “The genre I think worked well with the simplicity of the book. The picture book is great for young readers who can draw meaning from the images and help with the text.” Alejandra noted, “I chose nonfiction because gender stereotypes have been occurring and still do occur every day. I wanted children to see themselves within the book and be able to connect with it based on their real-life experiences.” Others, likewise, noted that nonfiction is a relatable genre for many students.

Linguicism, or discrimination based on one's native language, was especially salient. This might be connected to these candidates' practicum experiences in a dual language school in the southwest border region of the US.



Figure 6. A page from Ruby's book.

The prominence of this issue and the current U.S. sociopolitical climate devaluing Latinx identity reflected a historical issue. The books made visible and led to debate surrounding public discourse, policy and practice for emerging bilinguals in U.S. schools. Though many candidates presented texts about Mexican American/Chicanx peoples, their books offered many viewpoints of this group. For example, Matilda wrote about her grandmother, whose family has lived in New Mexico since long before it became a U.S. territory and then a state. Her tale illustrated the foreignization of this native population.

Cristina chose to write her book in Spanish to “honor the voice of the interviewee,” a woman whose father was a doctor in Mexico but became a manual laborer upon entering the U.S. due to discrimination and other barriers. She explained,

Learning about what happened to them early in their life was so eye-opening since her story was so similar to mine. She told me how she lost her identity due to the bullying of her native culture. As she grew up and became in-tune with herself through the acceptance of others she vowed to never let the ignorance of others affect her identity. The topic of my book was how common it is even nowadays to lose native culture and language because of bullying and how hard it is to accept one's own identity once it's been frowned upon by society.

*Gracias le doy primeramente a Dios, por haber fielmente
llevado a mi familia de la mano por el desierto y por
siempre mantenernos unidos.
Le dedico con mucho amor este libro a mis padres que
con todo su amor nos han enseñado a mí y a mis
hermanos que la excelencia se alcanza con la
perseverancia. Tambien por habernos enseñado que lo
mas importante no es lo que uno ve con los ojos sino lo
que vemos con el corazon.*

Figure 7. Cristina's book dedication.

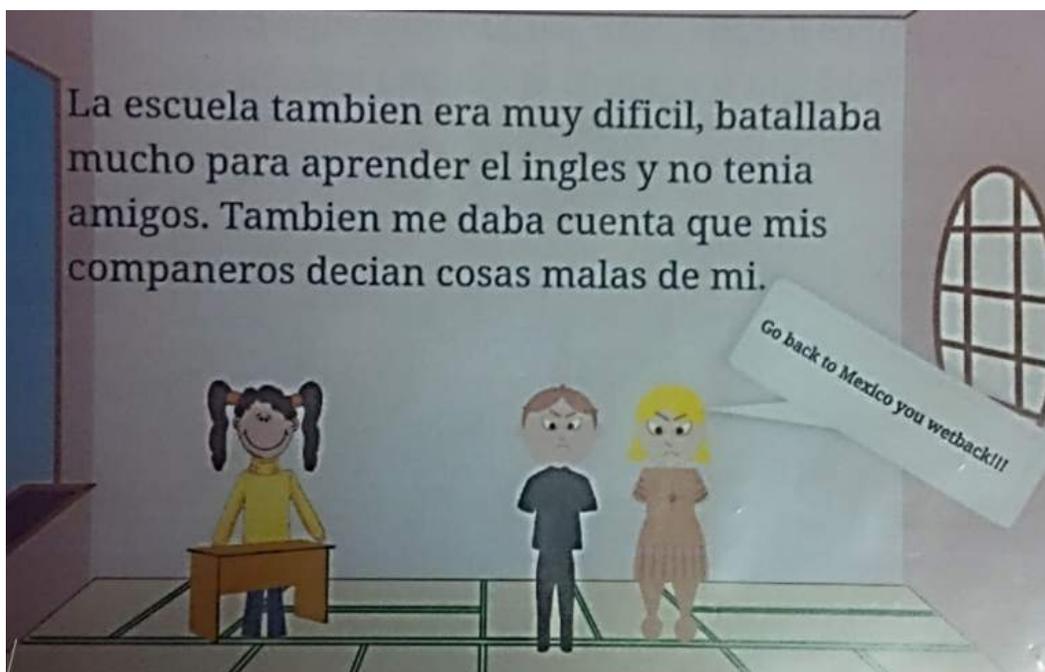


Figure 8. Disrupting the foreignization of Chicanos and Mexicans.

Various stories disrupted biases of immigrants as poor, underclass hoards wanting to come to the U.S. (Sung, Fahrenbruck, & López Robertson, 2017). Instead, pre-service teachers realized immigrants are not a static group who all strongly desire to leave what they know to become strangers in a foreign land. In all, the books prompted discussions that connected to candidates' lived experiences and caused self-reflection. Because of these collaborations, candidates cited a desire to transform their pedagogies to include more acceptance of others.

The interview was especially profound for Diego: "I think the interview was the most important part of this process. It really gave me a purpose for the book..." Elizabeth said of her interviewee, "He told me he never really talked about those years because it was a difficult time in his life. I was thankful for the opportunity to learn about his life." Ruby said:

We had talked about her experiences a while back, but never got too in-depth about her feelings about these experiences. I was glad to have the opportunity to see someone else's personal perspective about how teachers have the power to create positive and/or negative environments.

Other Gains

Candidates learned more about ideology in children's books, the power of illustrations, and how written words and images work together from this activity.

Sofia said,

The topic of my book was social anxiety... I do believe that I could have conveyed the story better. In books that I have read, some of them have information in the back about the topic to help readers better understand the books. This is something that I would do the next time I write a book.

These insights show how learning about text features help educators read the messages various genres are prone to convey. Illustrations were noted as difficult to create, partly due to the message an author wants to send. "I gained appreciation for illustrators... I enjoyed looking at my work and taking pride in my drawings" (Alejandra). Another student, Janice, added, "It was harder than I thought it would be to try and match the drawing to the text and to show meaning... Illustrations provide a lot of meaning and insight into the text so they are important."

Candidates mentioned texts as difficult to create. Beverly wrote:

The text was hard for me because I had a hard time figuring out what information to keep in the book and what to leave out. I also had a really hard time simplifying the text for early childhood education. I wanted to put a lot more text on each page, but I knew that there could not be much text on each page for young readers.

Candidates consciously reflected on the intentionality used to create a children's book. Overall, candidates said that this assignment was a rewarding experience.

Leticia said,

The children's book project was enjoyable for me... it made me more aware of my interviewee's struggles growing up... It made me appreciate her as a friend and person that much more. Although struggles are never fun, they do help us grow and I would like to implement that in my classroom and with my students one day.

Beverly wrote:

I really liked the multicultural topic to write about because I believe that most people keep their multicultural experiences to themselves... stories need to be told and shared because it helps people become aware of the struggles children go through.

Multicultural texts endearing to their author was perhaps an ultimate gain for some.

The responses from candidates indicated the need to improve their knowledge base in sociopolitical and historical contexts. Some have since taken initiative by assembling their own text sets, or a collection of books on a specific topic, for their practicum classrooms. My hope is that they will strive for variety in the literature they share with their future students and create diversity-inclusive classrooms. I will use this assignment again in anticipation of being astonished with student outcomes. In the future, however, I will have candidates share and revise their drafts in small groups before they present their books to the class. In this way, candidates can act as peer editors, learning to critique each other's work. They will also have the chance to clarify and revise areas in their work that may be unclear to readers.

Final Thoughts

The idea of student-created multicultural literature arose while I was a graduate student assisting in a multicultural education course. The syllabus was packed with activities but left little time to deeply explore multiculturalism in ECE classrooms. Further, I wanted candidates to have multicultural texts in their hands that they could share with students in their future classrooms. I have learned much from the candidates creating multicultural children's books. One important take-away is that student choice in writing assignments increases student engagement and quality of work (Welner & Cohen, 2007). Another is the value of the Author's Chair (Graves & Hansen, 1983). Student voice, respect, community-building, learning from peers, and honoring students' lived experiences are but a few of its pedagogical assets. With this experience, candidates constructively immersed themselves in multicultural education and critical dialogue. Books helped candidates see students as human beings who come to school and face many obstacles, often associated with their forms of difference. Megan said,

I enjoyed the topic a lot. I have been learning a ton about learning disabilities and how important it is to be inclusive. Students love being with their peers, and they really want to learn. Teachers should always try to keep all the students as included as they can be... Students can learn if they are in an environment that fosters and cares for them as a person.

Rica realized, "Bringing these topics into light is important and demonstrates how reality is constructed every day." I encourage other teachers to make books in their classrooms.

Phillip noted,

By making a book it gave me a greater appreciation for children's books. The other aspect of this book is that it gave me a chance to make a project for my students. I think that it was great and I would do it in my own classroom.

The assignment put many differences into perspective, but ultimately spoke to

providing “every student with the best education they DESERVE!” (Gerónimo).

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