CHAPTER 1

Reading Multiculturally, Globally, and Critically in Literacy Education

Books as Messengers for Diversity

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Read a book about a character who doesn't look like you or live like you.
—GENE LUEN YANG, author and National Ambassador for Young People's Literature

Children's books are messengers, according to French critic Paul Hazard (1944), from the "universal republic of childhood" (p. 146). Jella Lepman (1969/2002), founder of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), viewed children's books as bridges to understanding, and noted scholar and teacher educator Rudine Sims Bishop (1994) likened literature to potential windows into the lives of other people. As mixed as these metaphors may be, they all convey the ideas of reaching out, viewing lives beyond our own, and making connections. These attributes are at the heart of multicultural and global literature for children, the focus of this chapter.

In the decades since Hazard's (1944) assertion, the need for cross-cultural messengers is more urgent than ever, with recent massive human migrations and reactions to those worldwide population shifts. The United States itself is growing rapidly more multicultural. National census estimates for 2016 show the white (non-Hispanic) proportion of the population dropping to about 61%, while percentages for persons of color are rising, especially for Hispanics/Latinos, now about 18% of the total population (*https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/*

US/PST045216). Moreover, much of the increase in diversity is due to immigration: it has been estimated that 13% of American residents are foreign born—a 3 million (or 7.7%) increase from 2010 to 2014 (*www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/data/tables.2014.html*; *www.census.gov/topics/population/foreign-born/data/tables.2010.html*). A majority of new immigrants today are from Latin America, and unsurprisingly, Spanish is by far the second most widely spoken home language after English—by more than 37 million persons in 2013 (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2013; *www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/08/13/spanish-is-the-most-spoken-non-english-language-in-u-s-homes-even-among-non-hispanics/*). Many, if not most, teachers see these demographics reflected in their own classrooms and recognize the need for literature that reflects and capitalizes on this diversity. Humans need to know each other in order to understand and appreciate, rather than distrust and misjudge, one another.

Many newer children's books subtly promote cross-cultural affinity and compassion. For example, *Towers Falling,* by Jewell Parker Rhodes (2016), portrays the friendship among three diverse characters in a school in contemporary Brooklyn, New York, studying the events of September 11, 2001, which happened before they were born. Relatedly, in Leza Lowitz's *Up from the Sea* (2016), a biracial Japanese teen recounts his experience of the March 2011 tsunami and aftermath, which eventually—as part of his healing process—leads to his travel to New York to meet with persons who, as young people, had lost parents in the 9/11 attack. Finally, in Ruth Ohi's 2013 picturebook *Kenta and the Big Wave* (also about the tsunami), a soccer ball that migrates from Japan across the ocean is returned by a boy who understands how much the ball would have meant to its owner. Reading these companion books invites consideration of how much the characters have in common and have to offer one another. Titles such as these illustrate the remarkable ability of literature to generate empathy and insight toward others—to help people *know* each other better, which makes it a valuable resource for crossing cultural boundaries and building a "universal republic of childhood."

Multicultural and Global Children's Literature

Luckily, there is a rich and growing body of literature that accurately and honestly portrays our diversity while also showing our common humanity. In addition to books published in the United States, there also are many imports that expand perspectives beyond our national boundaries to include the whole world. This global literature represents the places from where both current and past immigrants have come—that is, nearly all Americans (or their ancestors) with the exception of Native peoples. We are truly an immigrant nation—with all the richness, complexity, and tension it engenders—a fact that we should acknowledge and celebrate rather than fear and resist.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center publishes annual statistics about the number of children's books by and about people of color published in the United States. To view current and past figures since 1985, which show that we still have much room to grow, visit their website (*https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp*).

As readers, we all need literature to reflect and affirm our own lives and experiences. This way literature serves as a mirror (Bishop, 1994). However, being exposed only to this kind of literature can distort and restrict our view of the wider world. In particular, Bishop notes that reading only about others like ourselves teaches us "that [our] culture and way of life is the norm, and that people and cultures different from [us and our culture] are quaint and exotic at best, and deviant and inferior at worst" (p. xiv). This perception creates a kind of literary apartheid (noted by Christopher Myers in a 2014 *New York Times* op-ed piece), in which we assume that readers will only want to read about characters like themselves and their experiences. All readers, especially those from a society's dominant culture, also need literature that opens windows onto realities different from their own, as Gene Luen Yang noted. This is the role and value of multicultural and global literature.

Multicultural literature is named and defined in various ways, according to Botelho and Rudman (2009). They note that many scholars characterize it as "literary works that focus on African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans" (p. 77). These cultural designations, however, are race and ethnicity driven, and some definitions have been expanded to include religion, sexual orientation, gender, class, age, region, and disabilities. Still other terms, such as *literature from parallel cultures, culturally diverse literature,* or *cross-cultural literature,* are favored by critics. Kiefer (2010) subscribes to "literature of diversity" (p. 85) as a more inclusive term. Regardless, all these names signify such common elements as marginal status, historical underrepresentation, and exclusion from literary canons.

Cai and Bishop (1994) also offer a classification within multicultural literature of "world literature" (p. 62), which broadens the focus to literary works from outside the United States. Some scholars (e.g., Tomlinson, 1998) call this "international literature" and define it as "that body of books originally published for children in a country other than the United States" (p. 4). However, Freeman and Lehman (2001) prefer "global literature," which can include

> books written and published first in countries other than the United States . . . , books written by immigrants . . . about their home countries and published in the United States, books written by authors from countries other than the United States but originally published in the United States, and books written by American authors . . . with settings in other countries. (p. 10)

I use the term *global literature* in this chapter and distinguish it from *multicultural literature,* which, although closely related, portrays cultures within the United States.

Finally, while definitions are important and can be helpful, we also must be wary of their limitations, which can include divisiveness (perpetuating literary apartheid) and essentializing, or reducing the complexity of all human beings to single attributes. At their best, these terms and definitions enable us to clarify our thinking but also broaden our awareness of the rich diversity of literature for and about all children.

Perhaps one of the best ways to grasp this diversity in literature is to see it demonstrated, and fortunately there are numerous quality examples, a few of which I highlight here. Excellent multicultural books include Jewell Parker Rhodes's *Ninth Ward* (2010), an account of 2005's Hurricane Katrina from the perspective of a girl living with her elderly caretaker in New Orleans's Ninth Ward because she has been rejected by her birth mother's wealthy family. This title won both a Coretta Scott King Award and a Jane Addams Children's Book Award. It is complemented by Don Brown's graphic nonfiction book *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans* (2015), named a Robert F. Sibert honor book and an NCTE Orbis Pictus Award winner. The graphic novel *Hidden: A Child's Story of the Holocaust* (2014) by Loïc Dauvillier (illustrated by Marc Lizano and Greg Salsedo) offers a Jewish grandmother's experiences being hidden in Nazi-occupied France during World War II honestly but in an audience-appropriate manner. The book's quality was acclaimed by its selection as an American Library Association's Mildred L. Batchelder Award honor title. *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011), Thanhha Lai's novel in verse, movingly depicts the journey (similar to her own) of a child who flees Vietnam in 1975 at the end of the war and immigrates to the United States, where she faces the challenges of culture shock and prejudice against people who look and speak like her. This excellent work deserved both its National Book Award and Newbery honor. The action of *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* (2014), a nonfiction picturebook by Duncan Tonatiuh, takes place several decades earlier, but it shows that discrimination extended to American citizens of Hispanic/Latino heritage, who were barred from attending whites-only schools in California. Among multiple award recognitions, this title received the Carter G. Woodson Book Award, a Pura Belpré Honor Book citation, and a Jane Addams Children's Book Award. Finally, two notable titles from Ghana may resonate well with all readers. *Emmanuel's Dream* (2015) by Laurie Ann Thompson portrays the true story of a boy who cycles 400 miles across his country with only one good leg to raise awareness of disabilities and the need to protect the rights of disabled citizens. *Gizo-Gizo!: A Tale from the Zongo Lagoon* (2016) by Emily Williamson, together with students and teachers of the Hassaniyya Quaranic School in Cape Coast, demonstrates how a collaborative, community-created retelling of a traditional story in a predominantly Islamic area of the country can address environmental problems and spur

collective involvement to solve them. The first title was a Children's Africana Book Award (CABA) Notable Book, and the second was a CABA Award winner.

As noted, these titles or their authors have received major awards and appeared on lists of recommended books. The American Library Association sponsors some of the most prominent prizes beyond the Newbery and Caldecott medals. The Coretta Scott King Book Award, established in 1970, recognizes African American authors and illustrators whose work is published in the United States. Since 1996, the Pura Belpré Award has honored Latino writers and illustrators for outstanding portrayals of the Latino cultural experience. The Stonewall Book Award has been presented since 2010 to meritorious books that represent the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender experience. Finally, the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, founded in 1966, acknowledges translation and publication of quality literature first published in other countries.

Additional organizations also sponsor relevant prizes. The Association of Jewish Libraries has sponsored the Sydney Taylor Award since 1968 for outstanding children's books that authentically portray the Jewish experience. The Carter G. Woodson Book Award is presented annually since 1974 by the National Council for the Social Studies to distinguished children's books that depict ethnic and racial minorities. Since 1953 the Jane Addams Peace Association has been recognizing works that promote peace, social justice, equality, and world community through the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. As identified in the description of this award, a global focus is part of its scope. The Notable Books for a Global Society, awarded annually to 25 books representing all genres, have been selected since 1995 by the Children's Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Literacy Association as "outstanding trade books for enhancing student understanding of people and cultures throughout the world" (*http://clrsig.org/nbgs.php*). The International Literacy Association also sponsors the Children's and Young Adults' Book Awards to recognize new, promising authors from any country whose books are published in English. Finally, We Need Diverse Books is an organization that advocates for literature that "reflects and honors the lives of all young people" (*http://weneeddiversebooks.org/mission-statement*). Its Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature (the "Walter"), initiated in 2016, honors "a diverse author (or co-authors) whose work features a diverse main character or addresses diversity in a meaningful way" (*http://weneeddiversebooks.org/about-the-walter*).

Two other noteworthy prizes specifically recognize international children's literature. The IBBY has been presenting the Hans Christian Andersen Awards biennially since 1956 to authors and illustrators whose work has made a lasting contribution to world literature for children. Two Americans, Maurice Sendak and Katherine Paterson, have been recipients so far. Since 2003, the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, bestowed by the Swedish government, recognizes international children's literature authors, illustrators, storytellers, or reading promoters. The Children's Africana Book Awards are presented annually by Africa Access and the

African Studies Association "to the authors and illustrators of the best children's and young adult books on Africa published or republished in the U.S." (*africaaccessreview.org*). Finally, the United States Board on Books for Young People (the U.S. national section of IBBY) selects an annual list of outstanding international books to honor the best children's literature from other countries. (See Table 1.1 for the websites of the awards mentioned.)

TABLE 1.1. Multicultural and Global Children's Literature Awards

Organization/Sponsor	Award	URL
Africa Access/African Studies Association	Children's Africana Book Award	*www.africanstudies.org/awards-prizes/children-s-africana-book-award*
American Library Association	Coretta Scott King Award	*www.ala.org/rt/emiert/coretta-scott-king-book-awards-all-recipients-1970-present*
American Library Association	Mildred L. Batchelder Award	*www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward*
American Library Association	Pura Belpré Award	*www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal*
American Library Association	Stonewall Book Award	*www.ala.org/awardsgrants/stonewall-book-awards-mike-morgan-larry-romans-children's-young-adult-literature-award*
Association of Jewish Libraries	Sydney Taylor Award	*http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=Sydney_Taylor_Book_Award*
Children's Literature and Reading SIG	Notable Books for a Global Society	*http://clrsig.org/nbgs_books.php*
Government of Sweden	Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award	*www.alma.se/en/*
International Board on Books for Young People	Hans Christian Andersen Award	*www.ibby.org/index.php?id=273*
International Literacy Association	Children's and Young Adults' Book Awards	*www.literacyworldwide.org/about-us/awards-grants/ila-children's-and-young-adults'-book-awards*
Jane Addams Peace Association	Jane Addams Children's Book Award	*www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/*
National Council for the Social Studies	Carter G. Woodson Book Award	*www.socialstudies.org/awards/woodson*
United States Board on Books for Young People	Outstanding International Books	*www.usbby.org/list_oibl.html*
We Need Diverse Books	Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature	*http://diversebooks.org/our-programs/walter-award/*

All of these awards have developed their own criteria for evaluation and selection of their honorees, but common important elements for judging multicultural and global children's books include the following:

- *Literary merit*: These titles should reflect high literary quality in terms of well-constructed plot, worthwhile themes, believable characters, an engaging style, an appropriate point of view, well-executed illustrations, and excellent design.
- *Authenticity and accuracy*: Especially important in contributing to this are the author's background relative to the culture being depicted; his or her other qualifications, such as expertise on the topic; and his or her attitude toward the book's topic. Additional considerations include accuracy of the material presented and culture portrayed; avoidance of stereotypes in characterization, relationships among characters, values and practices, settings, and illustrations; and how readers from within the culture view the book. References can help to document authenticity and accuracy.
- *Translation*: For works originally written in another language, translation must preserve the integrity of the original work, yet sound natural and be understandable to the target audience.

A complete discussion and list of these criteria are found in Lehman, Freeman, and Scharer (2010), and using them will help when reading multicultural and global children's literature.

Reading Multicultural and Global Literature

As readers may quickly discern from the evaluation criteria above, an issue arises when we read books—as we often should—outside our own culture. How can we judge, especially, the accuracy and authenticity of books that relate to cultures and settings with which we are unfamiliar? What may seem innocuous to outsiders can be very controversial for cultural insiders. What may be puzzling, distasteful, or simply incomprehensible to readers can be entirely acceptable to persons from within the culture. How do I evaluate material if my own values are opposed to it? How do I keep my biases from interfering with my judgment of a book? Is that even possible?

The answer to these and other conundrums is not to give up and retreat into one's own comfort zone. Rather, we need more than ever to read, read, read, but do so responsibly. Hade (1997) called for what he termed "reading multiculturally" when encountering multicultural literature, and my colleagues and I (Lehman et al., 2010) extended that concept to "reading globally." We defined this type of reading in two ways: (1) reading *widely* and (2) reading *critically*. First, reading widely simply means reading a lot. No single book (no matter how authentic) or

author (no matter how much of a cultural native) can represent or speak for an entire culture. Mistakenly thinking that they can—known as "the danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009)—contributes to essentializing as described earlier. Therefore, one of the best ways to learn about both a culture and its literature is by reading quantities of it. As readers, we gain knowledge about the history, values, practices, settings, and ways of life that define a culture and a good sense about its literary traditions if we immerse ourselves in as many titles as possible. Reading widely provides a better sense of what is authentic and accepted by the culture. This is a threshold upon which we can then begin to read fairly and critically.

Botelho and Rudman (2009) use the term "critical multicultural analysis" to describe this type of reading, in which we bring to bear our ability to recognize our own biases and to think about literature through a different lens. It involves reading against the grain of our taken-for-granted assumptions about what seems "normal." It requires consideration of what the author's biases and ideology may be and his or her intentions, often as revealed through the focalization of the story (i.e., whose story it is), what is included and what is omitted, what are the power relationships in the story, and how the reader is positioned by the author. It also incorporates recognition of the social contexts of the author, subject, and reader.

All this is harder work than simply absorbing more books unquestioningly and passively, but it is essential and worth the effort as we grow in our ability to be critical readers, a vital aspect of becoming literate. Every set of educational standards for literacy learning includes critical reading as an important competency and one that most assessment systems try to measure. Fortunately, literature of diversity offers many opportunities, as well as challenges, for continually practicing and improving in this important kind of reading. Ultimately, thinking and reading critically is at the heart of becoming informed citizens and democratic participation and can lead to action for social justice.

Paired Books: A Strategy for Reading Multiculturally, Globally, and Critically

Critical multicultural and global reading *can*—and does—happen when we read single texts, but often it works better when reading and comparing texts. "Paired books" is a strategy for juxtaposing two books that invite thought-provoking comparisons across one or more dimensions (Freeman, Lehman, & Scharer, 2007). (Grouping several books in this manner makes a "text set," which also creates rich potential for critical reading but is more complex to develop and manage.) In this context, pairing two multicultural or global books can help illuminate similarities and differences across cultures and make the "foreign" seem more familiar. This is particularly important for young readers, whose knowledge base is more limited and who may relate better when they identify commonalities with their own experiences. In turn, teachers may find that pairing books helps them teach students how to naturally read more critically. Here I introduce the paired book reading

strategy by first describing in detail two titles that share a number of intriguing similarities.

Comparing a Book Pair

Thank You, Mr. Falker (1998) is beloved author Patricia Polacco's tribute to her real teacher, Mr. Falker. In this story, Trisha loves books as a young girl and can't wait to learn to read when she enters school. However, that goal is thwarted as she struggles to make sense of print. Each year in school, she falls further and further behind her classmates, who begin to treat her cruelly, her disability becomes more acute, and she becomes more discouraged and convinced that she is "dumb." None of her teachers seem able to help her overcome—or perhaps even notice—her lack of reading ability. Even moving to a new school across the country does not solve Trisha's problem. One boy, in particular, torments her daily and makes her dread going to school, and Trisha begins to believe the demeaning names he calls her. It isn't until her fifth-grade year that she encounters Mr. Falker, a different kind of teacher who not only does not tolerate the bullying but also praises her artistic talent. He also isn't fooled by Trisha's coping strategies to pretend that she can read. He finds help for her with a special reading teacher and works tirelessly with her every day after school, always believing that she can succeed. Then one day, she finally breaks through and becomes a reader, an event that literally changes her life.

In a story that resonates with many of Trisha's experiences, Niki Daly presents Sarie's dilemma in *Once Upon a Time* (2003). In the Little Karoo of South Africa, this young girl also struggles with reading and dreads going to school, where her classmates make fun of her when she stumbles over words during reading aloud. In this case, however, it is a boy, Emile, who befriends her and does not join the teasing. The person who ultimately helps Sarie the most is her neighbor Ou Missus, with whom Sarie loves to spend time sitting in an old car listening to stories and sharing her troubles at school. One day they find an old book of stories, which Ou Missus helps her learn to read by repeating the stories many times and gently supplying words when Sarie needs assistance. Overall, Ou Missus conveys her confidence that Sarie will succeed, and indeed, with practice, Sarie does. On the day when she demonstrates her newly acquired mastery in school, Emile accompanies her home, and they both join Ou Missus in an imaginary game of "once upon a time."

A major theme in these books is the power of literacy, both to open realms of knowledge and imagination for readers, but also to be used by others as a weapon to humiliate those who lack it. Thus Botelho and Rudman (2009) assert that literacy is "a sociocultural, multiple, and political practice" (p. 44) with the power to both transform and repress or silence individuals (or groups of people) depending on who is wielding it. For example, many states denied African Americans the right to literacy in order to maintain their status as slaves before the Civil

War and their lack of access to political and economic power afterward. In the case of struggling readers such as Trisha and Sarie, all too often school policies maintain the status quo and actually contribute to their reading disabilities, rather than help to provide a solution. For critical readers, these texts invite examination beyond the individual, personal level of dealing with bullies—which of course is an important concern for many children—to the institutional context of neglect or the use of inappropriate practices and standardized mandates that may actually exacerbate struggling readers' problems. Children are not too young to think about these issues if teachers help them notice what the adults are doing (or not) in the stories.

Another important theme is the agency of the protagonists. Who is the problem solver? Although initially both Trisha and Sarie appear to be victims and their problems require adult intervention to solve, their strengths also ultimately support their success. In the case of Trisha, her artistic talent garners praise from Mr. Falker as he publicly recognizes her ability. That encouragement may help her trust him when he launches a plan to teach her to read, and his belief in her undoubtedly contributes to her self-confidence and sense of agency. Likewise, Ou Missus encourages Sarie's gift for imagination and dramatic play, which would help her feel successful and, beyond that, strengthen her sense of story, a good foundation from which to build her interest in reading and ability to read.

Furthermore, these adult characters are not only sympathetic assistants to the protagonists, they also reject the status quo by challenging the girls' and others' assumptions about their lack of ability. They employ strategies that help rather than hinder the girls' literacy acquisition. Young readers will have enough experience to recognize how these adults are different from others in the stories. These stories also offer positive models of intergenerational relationships in which adults pay attention to and treat the child characters with respect.

Another literacy-related theme in *Once Upon a Time* is the existence of other valid means to literacy acquisition outside school and the importance of building upon Sarie's competence with imaginary play to support her literacy learning in school. Children such as Sarie come to school with many skills that provide a foundation for learning school discourse. Teachers need to recognize, honor, and capitalize upon these language modes.

For many young readers, the protagonists are characters with whom they can identify. Eagerly anticipating something—learning to read (like Trisha) or something else—and then finding it a struggle is an experience many children share. Dreading going to school—or any setting where one feels unsuccessful—is a common response. Fearing and facing bullies is another typical childhood experience. And seeing characters overcome obstacles to finally succeed can provide catharsis and insight to nearly everyone. These two girls—both with similar challenges and one from another country and culture—share many commonalities with children around the world, even if their specific circumstances differ from those of readers.

However, focusing only on similarities between the two books overlooks an important opportunity to compare the different settings. Trisha first lives in Michigan on the family farm, and it's clear that her extended family includes grandparents and probably other relatives. Later, her mother moves Trisha and her brother to California to take a teaching position there. For many American children, these will be familiar locations, as is the ethnic diversity portrayed in Polacco's illustrations. Clearly, Mr. Falker, with his flair for stylish clothes, is not the stereotypical teacher, either.

The first sentence of *Once Upon a Time* identifies its setting as the Little Karoo, and the double-page illustration shows Sarie trudging on an unpaved road across a vast dry plain with rocky outcrops reminiscent of the southwestern United States. But here the ranching is with sheep, the plain is referred to as the "veld," Sarie wears a school uniform, and the steering wheel in Ou Missus's old car is on the right-hand side. In addition, if one is reading the South African version of the text rather than an American imprint, there will be different spellings and names (i.e., "Ou Missus" instead of "Aunty Anna"). So where are we? some readers may wonder. All the characters, except possibly Ou Missus, are clearly depicted as nonwhite, and Sarie's family works "long, hard hours on the sheep farm," but these attributes are similar to those of many settings in the United States. And the story Sarie reads with Ou Missus is identified as "Cinderella." Paying close attention to all these clues and doing a bit of research provides a fertile opportunity to look through a cultural and national "window" into another place and to expand what we know about the world. Thus, if we only consider the similarities between these paired books, we miss the chance to critically analyze their cultural and geographic contexts and to gain new knowledge.

Finally, it is essential to examine the authors' qualifications in general and with respect to these titles. Patricia Polacco is a prolific author-illustrator whose books are hugely popular with children. She also has received numerous awards and honors for her work, including the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Sydney Taylor Award. *Thank You, Mr. Falker,* a Parent's Choice Award winner, is an authentic representation of reading disability because it is an autobiographical account of her own struggle with learning to read. Thus Polacco is widely acclaimed by literary critics and young readers, and this title meets the criterion of authenticity and accuracy.

Author-illustrator Niki Daly, likewise, is prolific and widely known in South Africa and internationally. His talent has been recognized with many prestigious citations, both within South Africa and abroad, and this title received a Children's Africana Book Award honor. Being a native South African, he is well qualified to create books set in that country. He knows its cultures and landscapes well, although he is not of the same ethnicity as that portrayed in *Once Upon a Time* and doesn't live in the Little Karoo. In this instance, he must rely upon his experiences with persons from Sarie's culture, as well as research. Since I am a cultural

outsider—albeit one who has visited the Little Karoo—I have to count on South African readers to address the criteria of accuracy and authenticity. My own Internet search of book reviews uncovered no objections based on the title's cultural content. I must remain mindful, however, that such opinions may exist.

Implementing the Paired Books Strategy

Having discussed these two titles in detail, I now use that background to describe how to implement this elementary literacy instruction strategy. (For a detailed study of these two titles being used in a third-grade classroom in the United States, see Wee & Lehman, 2016.) First, I would introduce the two books (possibly on different days) and draw out children's prior knowledge of and experience with the authors. For example, if we have read other books by these authors, I would make sure the students recalled those. I would ask children about their frustrations with trying to learn something and what they did to succeed. Before reading *Once Upon a Time,* I also would introduce them to the location of South Africa on a map and show photographs (the Internet offers plenty of examples, if needed) of diverse scenes from that country, but also ones specific to the Little Karoo region.

Next, I would read the books aloud—first *Thank You, Mr. Falker* and then *Once Upon a Time*. Listeners could ask questions at any point during the reading, and at the end, we would discuss whatever the children had to say about the stories, including their personal connections to them. After rereading both stories on another day, we could discuss any questions children raise and then together develop a T-chart to compare and contrast the stories' features: plot, characters, problems and solutions, settings, and so forth. (Alternatively, small groups of students could each focus on a different feature and then report back to the whole group.) Once the chart is complete, we would discuss our findings, which could lead to more critical questions.

Here, the teacher's strategic and sensitive guidance, emerging from students' queries, can lead to deeper analysis of some of the issues posed in the previous section: the power of literacy and who wields that power; how to deal with bullying; the agency of characters and why some have more than others; how school helps or hinders that agency; how school-based literacy learning and use compares with children's literacy experiences outside school; how readers identified with the protagonists and why; how much readers knew about each setting; how authentic the stories seem and how effectively the authors created them. Such analysis could lead to further reading and research in other sources.

This would be a good point to introduce a text set of additional titles related to various aspects of the original book pair (exploring more about South Africa, other examples of learning to read or of the portrayal of teachers in children's books, works by these authors, or ones addressing similar themes, etc.), thus expanding the intertextual connections readers make between texts. For example, multiple

award-winner *Last Stop on Market Street* (2015; written by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson) and Niki Daly's *Not So Fast, Songolo* (1985) both depict a young boy and his grandmother embarking on an expedition by bus in a city. These portrayals of intergenerational love (one very recent and the second an older title) echo the relationship of Sarie and Ou Missus. Students could read additional books in small groups, pairs, or individually and report back what they learned or experienced to the whole class. The culmination of this study could lead to further actions, as described below.

Additional Paired Books

A theme of migration and immigration would relate to demographic diversity in the United States (reflected in the statistics at the beginning of this chapter) as well as around the world and is one with which many children will have firsthand experience. Additionally, if children's books are ambassadors, they also migrate from one location and culture to another. Here I focus on that theme, using additional pairs of books as examples.

The story of some of the first immigrants to North America, the Pilgrims, is recounted from two perspectives in Jean Craighead George's *The First Thanksgiving* (1993) and in *Squanto's Journey: The Story of the First Thanksgiving* (2000) by Joseph Bruchac. George's account, written in an objective voice by a European American, begins with a focus on the Pawtuxets and Squanto, but it then shifts to the Pilgrims' story until they come together several years later. In contrast, Bruchac, of Abenaki descent, tells Squanto's story from a first-person point of view and includes an extensive author's note in which he also addresses his relationship to the Native American culture being depicted. The difference in these two books' perspectives is clearly symbolized by the front-cover illustrations: for *First Thanksgiving,* the European immigrants are placed in the foreground with Indians approaching from the distance (almost as if they are arising from the sea behind them), while for *Squanto's Journey,* Squanto is pictured in the foreground with the *Mayflower* sailing in the background. This book pair will invite thoughtful critical discussion regarding the sociopolitical implications of their different presentations of one of our most iconic national stories.

A more recent immigrant and a second-generation American, as featured in *Return to Sender* (2009) by Julia Alvarez and *Full Cicada Moon* (2015) by Marilyn Hilton, face experiences that invite comparisons. In the first title, set in 2005–2006, Tyler (a boy living in Vermont) discovers that the Mexican migrants hired to work on his family's farm are undocumented. The story has dual narration from his perspective (in third person) and from the Mexican girl Mari's (in first person through letters), allowing readers to identify with the viewpoints both of native-born citizens and of new, hardworking immigrants who seek to find a better life in the United States but often under the threat of deportation. In the second title

set in 1969, Mimi (a mixed-heritage girl from California whose father is African American and mother is a Japanese immigrant) moves with her family to Vermont. This novel in verse portrays Mimi's challenges with cultural identification and fitting into her new location. Together these books present multiple perspectives on topics of migrant/immigrant experiences, acceptance of cultural diversity, and finding identity.

Finally, because stories migrate too, especially folktales, different variants of the same tale offer fruitful comparisons. Stories that originate in one culture often are retold in another, with both benefits and potential problems, as noted by Hsieh and Matoush (2012) in their critical analysis of retellings of the Mulan ballad published in the United States. Two versions—*The Ballad of Mulan* (1998), retold by Song Nan Zhang, and *Fa Mulan* (1998), retold by Robert D. San Souci—highlight some essential differences when stories are conveyed by persons from within the culture (Zhang) or an outsider (San Souci). Hsieh and Matoush explore these issues and note that Zhang's version shows careful attention to historical accuracy, even including the Tang poem in Chinese calligraphy alongside the translated text, while San Souci's version is a much more freely adapted story. In particular, San Souci's account emphasizes Mulan the "woman warrior" and possible romance motifs—both themes that resonate well for an American audience. On the other hand, Zhang centers his retelling on the "filial piety" theme. The books' illustrations convey these differences as well. Beyond these two versions, as noted by Hsieh and Matoush, even more remarkable comparisons can be drawn with Disney's fairytale princess version of the story. Young readers can easily grasp the issues surrounding different variants by examining books such as these. Once they begin to engage in this type of critical reading, they may see a need for further action.

Reading the (Real) World: Literacy Learning and Action for Social Justice

When critical reading inspires children to take social action (see Short, 2012), the endeavor can be a valuable means of linking literacy learning with the real world. Continuing to build upon the migration/immigration theme, which impacts nearly every community in the United States in some way, I offer here a few examples that may initiate action for social justice. For younger readers, *The Color of Home* (2002) by Mary Hoffman recounts Hassan's experience as a refugee from Somalia, where his family had to flee violence. Although first published in Great Britain, this story is equally relevant in the United States, where large immigrant communities of Somalis reside. It is a poignant depiction of the terror that drives many migrants from their homelands and their deep longing for the place they left behind. It also is a narrative that may lead students to explore how they can reach out to these recent immigrants and make them feel more accepted in their new country. These actions may include "adopting" a new immigrant family, inviting immigrants to share their experiences with classes, researching what services are most needed by

new immigrants and how well those are provided in the community, and taking other actions to help create a more open, welcoming environment.

At the higher end of the reading and interest level, Christopher Paul Curtis's *The Mighty Miss Malone* (2012), set during the Great Depression, is a powerful, moving account of migration within the United States due to lack of employment opportunities. Deza and her family slip from a marginal, but manageable, economic status into poverty, which disrupts the formerly strong family unit and poses serious safety risks for all members of the family. Their struggles are not far different from those of many poor and homeless people today and most certainly can be a catalyst for exploring ways for students to take action, such as visiting homeless shelters, working in food banks, and even seeking ways to redress the causes of poverty in our local and broader society. As Paul states in the Afterword, "I want this [book] to be a springboard for young people to ask questions and do more research on some of the themes the book explores, . . . the Great Depression and poverty in general. . . . I hope that Deza can serve as a voice for the estimated fifteen million American children who are poor, who go to bed hungry and whose parents struggle to make a dignified living to feed and care for them" (p. 303). This text can be linked to a 2012 global title, *My Heart Will Not Sit Down,* by Mara Rockliff, illustrated by Ann Tanksley, that is based on a real girl in Cameroon in 1931 who hears about hungry Americans during the Great Depression, decides to take action, and inspires her community to donate money to help the needy in a faraway country. Such an example of generosity might inspire students to find a cause to which they can contribute today.

This is real-world literature study, and it would make literacy learning relevant for contemporary young readers. Children gain agency if they understand an issue in society, believe they can make a difference, and take action to be part of the solution. Often books are the best messengers of these issues.

Conclusion

Great literature portrays the enormous diversity of our world, not only reflecting readers' own lives but introducing them to other experiences that enrich and enlarge their vision and understanding. Jacqueline Woodson's *The Other Side* (2001; illustrated by E. B. Lewis) aptly symbolizes how a fence that is meant to separate people who believe the other side is unsafe can be a position for two girls from different ethnicities to become acquainted and gain broader perspectives. Like them, through literature we can scale the walls that divide us and even use these high barriers to see into others' lives. However, to benefit most from such literature, we must read multiculturally and globally—that is, both widely and critically. The world will be a better place if every generation strives to meet this challenge, and literacy teachers have a vital role to play in nurturing such development.

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Additional Recommended Books Related to the Theme of Migration/Immigration

Multicultural

Cofer, J. O. (2004). *Call me Maria: A novel in letters, poems, and prose*. New York: Orchard.
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