

[Encouraging Intertextual Thinking in the Classroom, by Kathryn Bolasky, third grade teacher](#)

[Re-Visioning the World through Multiple Perspectives, by Amy Edwards, fifth grade teacher](#)

[Taking Action with Young Children, by Jaquetta Alexander, second grade teacher](#)

[Exploring Action and Responsibility through Literature, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher](#)

Part 4: Exploring Taking Action

[Young Children’s Explorations of Multiple Perspectives, by Jaquetta Alexander, second grade teacher](#)

[Taking Action through Emotional Connections, by Kathryn Tompkins, fourth grade teacher](#)

[Exploring Voice and Responsibility through Literature, by Kathryn Tompkins, fourth grade teacher](#)

[An Inquiry on Taking Action: Exploring Human Rights, by Jennifer Griffith, first grade teacher, and Derek R. Griffith, Filmmaker. \(Direct to video\)](#)

[Exploring Culture and Connection through the Fine Arts, by Jenny Cain, Arts Integration Specialist](#)

## **Editor**

Kathy G. Short, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

## **Production Editor**

Rebecca K. Ballenger, Worlds of Words

## **Introduction: Opening the World through Literature**

Building bridges across cultures through global inquiry and the arts is the school-wide focus of Van Horne Elementary School in the Tucson Unified School District, Arizona. Teachers, students, administrators, and university collaborators are working together to explore the challenge of developing intercultural understanding and global perspectives through inquiries in which international literature plays an integral role. Research at the school for the past two years has been supported by a grant from the [National Council of Teachers of English](#). One component of this grant supports teacher participation in a summer writing workshop to examine field notes and student artifacts to determine and write about significant themes in their data.

This special issue of WOW Stories contains vignettes in which teachers reflect on the ideas and

issues that they identified as most significant during the 2007-2008 school year. These vignettes focus on four areas of professional growth and learning. The first section includes several vignettes on the different components in the school that have worked together to create a powerful context for professional learning. The second section highlights the significance of conceptual thinking and includes vignettes that reflect on the ways in which this focus influenced children's understandings and the instructional strategies that were most effective in encouraging the development of conceptual thinking. The third section focuses on vignettes about the role of the arts and text sets in challenging children to consider multiple perspectives on social issues. The final section of vignettes emphasizes the instructional strategies involved in thoughtfully engaging children in taking action for social justice, including a vignette in the form of a video documentary about a school-wide inquiry on human rights.

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their world views as they come to understand their current lives and imagine worlds beyond themselves. Students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer educators and students the potential for enriching and transforming their lives and views of the world.

As you read through these vignettes, consider sharing your own experiences of using literature with K-12 students to build bridges across cultures. See our [call for manuscripts](#) for more information on how to submit your vignette to WOW Stories.

**Kathy G. Short, Editor**

## **Creating a Vision of Possibility as Professional Learners**

by Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary School

The district states that my responsibility as an instructional coach is to facilitate the implementation of state and district initiatives and to build teacher capacity for effective instruction by establishing professional learning communities within our school. While the district has trained instructional coaches in a range of prescribed professional development protocols, the ways in which we each go about our work has largely been left up to us and our principals, and so the job looks a little different at each school. Our monthly meetings provide much needed chances to talk together about our developing roles within our schools and to share the ways that we are going