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Providing the Books for Literacy Community Classrooms

By Marilyn Carpenter

I take joy in sharing children's books with teachers, my university students and children. When I became part of the Spokane literacy community for the Worlds of Words Grant, I was pleased to be able to provide books for the teachers in our literacy community to share in their classrooms. Our group has seven teachers from three school districts in the Spokane area. There are six primary teachers and one student teacher. In this vignette I explain my role in providing children's books for each classroom.

Our literacy community wanted to address the lack of diversity in our local schools by increasing students' awareness and understanding of our world. We strongly believed that exploring children's literature that focused on diverse cultures would enable us to increase students' empathy for people different from them living in places across the globe. It would also provide children with rich experiences since "...international children's literature can spark the imagination, nurture curiosity, and delight the heart and mind" (Freeman and Lehman, 2001, p. 12).

We planned to begin by sharing books to promote responses regarding personal cultural identities. We based this decision on the "Curriculum that Is International Framework" (Short, 2007). Kathy Short writes, "All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them" (p. 3).

My main role for our literacy community was the selection of the books. My extensive collection of quality children's and young adult literature was used to initiate our study and would be augmented with books purchased through the grant funds. For each of our monthly meetings I furnished books that matched the themes and topics of our inquiries. I believed that careful selection of the books would be beneficial to the children. "When teachers share these books with their students, they bring the world into their classrooms and open up limitless opportunities for

discussion and response” (Freeman and Lehman, 2001, p. 24).

Since the first classroom explorations focused on building personal cultural identities, I selected books about families, play, neighborhoods, homes, relationships, traditions, and children for our first meeting. The books were mainly picture books, but also included non-fiction photographic essays like *On the Go* (Morris, 1994), *Houses and Homes* (Morris, 1995) and others in the Around the World Series to give children a view of how other cultures were similar to their own.

At our second meeting in February I brought books that included settings in other parts of the world. Several teachers brought children’s work to show responses to the books they were reading aloud. We were inspired to see how children constructed their understandings of their personal cultures. The teachers showed books that were most successful in deepening those understandings. Here is a sample of those titles (others are listed in the references):

- *Clive Eats Alligators* (Lester, 1991)
- *Uncle Jed’s Barbershop* (Mitchell, 1998)
- *Karate Girl* (Leary, 2003)
- [*One Green Apple*](#) (Bunting, 2006)

The discussion at our first meetings demonstrated that we needed to slow down our process of book distribution. Since every teacher had started with at least forty books, they needed more time to enjoy and utilize the resources already provided. Therefore, for our April meeting I brought far fewer books. I carefully selected titles to match topics that I knew the teachers were working with. For example, three teachers were studying Japan in their classrooms. Those teachers grabbed all the books I had brought on Japan.

One of the benefits of using the books from my collection was apparent when it came time for the teachers to order books for their classrooms using the grant funds. Because the teachers had been reading aloud the selected books in their classrooms, guiding the children in response activities and then discussing titles in our meetings, they already knew which books were most successful with their students and ordered those. At our last meeting they were pleased to have the grant books delivered.

I learned, relearned and affirmed ways to share books with teachers through the process of providing books for our literacy community. First, I relearned how important it was for the teachers to have time to browse, read, chat about the books and make choices of those they wished to use in their classrooms. Second, I learned that too many choices of books overwhelmed teachers. “Less is more,” should have been my mantra. Since our meetings were held after school for only an hour it was important to focus on fewer books. Finally, I affirmed what a joyful process it is to connect teachers and children with excellent choices of children’s books. It was a highlight of this

experience to hear about children's responses to the books. One teacher told us, "My class is on fire with their study of culture and the books that they have been reading!"

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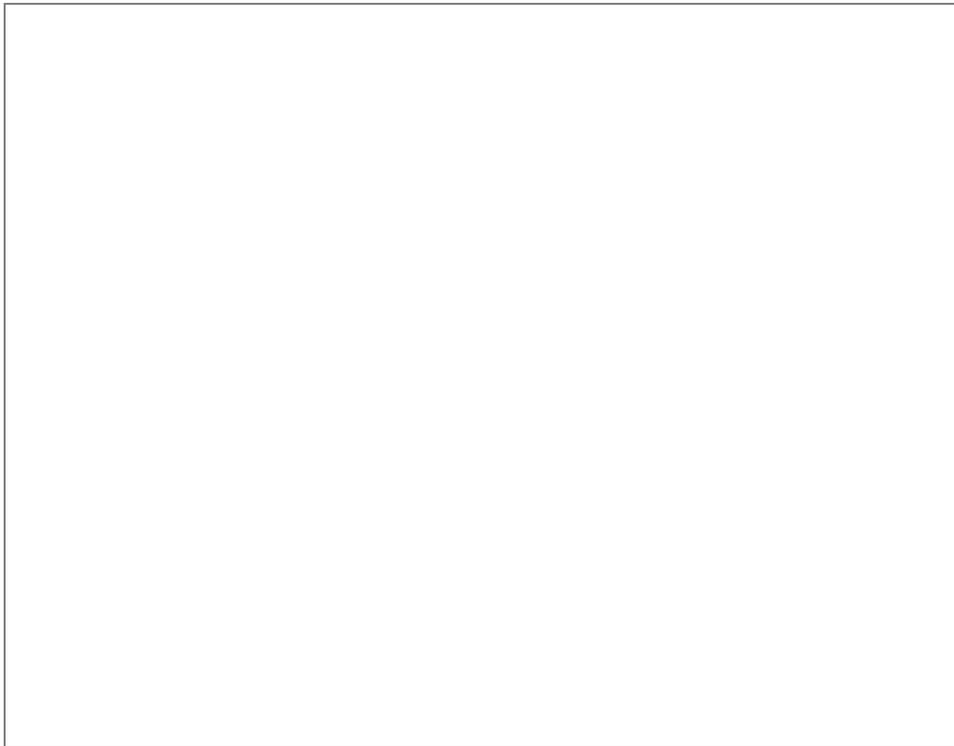
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Redefining Normal in the Lives of Second Graders

By Melissa Carpenter

This vignette describes engagements with students that arose from a literacy community in Spokane, Washington. Please see [Providing the Books for the Literacy Communities](#) by Marilyn Carpenter for an overview of this group's work.

During the students' book choice time I placed a cart full of books from our literacy community meeting in the middle of our shared literacy space and did some "kidwatching" to see the children's responses to the new books. This was the beginning of our investigation of personal culture. I was pleased to see that students recognized familiar authors like Bob Graham and made text to text connections with books that we had previously read. The excitement over the books Matt called, "BookMAS! Like Christmas but with books."



Unpacking the Books!