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Vera Zinnel taught third grade and is currently teaching 4th grade at Bowling Green Elementary School in East Meadow, New York.

## **Using Global Literature to Build Understandings for All Students**

Carol Gilles and the Saturday Morning Book Group

This email demonstrates a teacher's reflection on interactions among students in our Global Literature Project:

*I introduced the Burma books to my class yesterday. It was a great learning opportunity, and it gave my students a chance to ask questions of and get to know better my two students from Burma. The student from Burma that has been here all year (and has enough English to communicate pretty well at this point in the year) was so happy that her culture was being brought into the classroom. It was tough to pull her away from the books during math.*  
Christie (Grade 5 teacher)

We are a community group of classroom teachers and professors from around the mid-Missouri area, who are all Teachers Applying Whole Language (TAWL) members. For the last twelve years we have been reading new children's literature, using those books with children, writing reviews and then sharing the information with our group as well as other teachers. We conduct a number of service projects each year, including reading and reviewing the books nominated for Missouri awards (Show Me, Mark Twain, Gateway and Truman) and then sharing those books with over 100 teachers at the January TAWL meeting. We decided to be involved in this project because we saw a need for more global literature in our community. As we pursued the project our group members also learned more about global literature and how to use it.

### **Why Use Global Literature?**

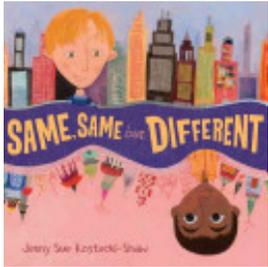
We decided to pursue our project because one of our group members, Tara, a second grade teacher, said, "I wish I could do more for my newcomers. At times, they seem so alone. . . I don't know their unique histories, their pasts and their cultures." Tara reminded us that teachers often may appear insensitive to the issues of newcomers simply because they don't understand their cultures. We discovered that there are over 40 languages spoken by newcomers in our district. Many of their teachers have not learned about these various cultures in their teacher preparation classes, nor do they have the time to research each culture. Likewise, because these children come from distant places like Myanmar or Somalia, they rarely see books that reflect their cultures. We wondered if using global literature picture books highlighting particular cultures would help to make our newcomers feel more welcomed, as well as teach the other students about the cultures of their classmates and promote understanding.

We selected two elementary schools that had a large number of ELL students in which to concentrate our work. Based on the input from the ELL teachers, we chose to highlight Myanmar (Burma), Somalia, Cuba, Russia and the Pacific Island cultures since there were many students from those countries and resources were difficult for classroom teachers to find. Our plan was to purchase picture books through the grant to highlight these particular cultures, and create sets of books complete with guides to help classroom teachers and their students enjoy and learn from the books.

### **Our Process**

Researching web sites, perusing book reviews and talking together, our book group located picture books. We found for some countries, like Somalia, few books were available. Others countries, like Russia, had many books and we had to sift through the reviews to choose appropriate texts for our project. We also were sensitive about what kinds of books we would choose. We didn't want to ignore conflict and wars in the countries, nor did we want the representation of the countries to

only be about war. We decided to include a book of photographs of the current country, a book of more historical/geographical material, a folktale, and a book that emphasized something that the country was famous for (baseball in Cuba, music in Russia.) To round out the set, we included books that added detail and reality to the set, such as a cookbook to the Cuba set.



Once the books arrived, we decided that we needed continuity from set to set, so we included the book, [\*Same, Same, but Different\*](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011) in each set. In this book, an American boy and an Asian (Indian) boy become pen pals and compare their families, interests, and cultures through their letters. The story starts in an art classroom, and includes captivating illustrations contrasting similarities and differences. This book provided a visual introduction to the notion that cultures may be far apart and look different, but have similar components.

We also decided to make a packet to help guide the teacher that included:

- 1) A bibliography of the books, along with pictures of the covers and a short annotation of each book.
- 2) Overview of the Text Set included suggestions for integrated activities for a culture study using the books, including day-by-day plans.
- 3) A detailed lesson plan of two books (one fiction and one non-fiction) with before, during and after reading questions and strategies. These strategies and activities were aligned with Common Core State Standards and suggestions for revisiting the books and websites were provided.
- 4) A brief “fact sheet” in each folder about the country on items such as the capital, area, languages, religions, currency, a map and other details were compiled to help teachers have a better understanding of the country and the cultures. On-line resources were listed for additional information.

The complete packets for [Cuba](#), [Myanmar \(Burma\)](#), [Somalia](#), [Russia](#) and the [Pacific Islands](#) are available here as downloads for educators who would find these useful.

We began circulating the books among the teachers in February. We included eight teachers who used at least one set of books with a few incorporating multiple sets of books. Most used the books for two-three weeks. Book club members offered to help the classroom teachers, to read books aloud to students, to take notes of how students used the books and to move the books from classroom to classroom.

## **The Cycle of the Project**

These five vignettes highlight the natural rhythm of the project – introducing the book sets through read aloud with small groups, as well as read-aloud and discussion with the whole group, exploring the concepts, especially through art, and reflecting on what has been learned. Jean Dickinson and Missy Morrison explore how the book sets were introduced to first graders in various ways. Linda Wycoff with Janice Henson and Gennie Pfannentsteil with Linda Aulgur highlight the ways in which discussion and art were used to integrate these books into the curriculum. Finally, Tara Gutshall reflects on what her second graders learned as they engaged in text sets about Russia and Somalia.



## **Introducing the Text Sets: Investigating Myanmar (Burma) with First and Fifth Grade Buddies**

Jean Dickinson

[Myanmar \(Burma\) Packet Download](#)

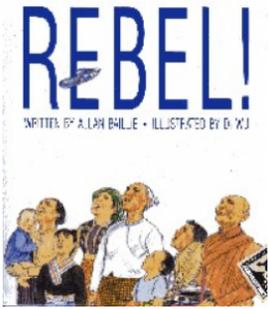
Ms. Woods decided to use read aloud and small group discussions to introduce the books from Myanmar. She first began with her first graders and the following week invited the fifth grade class to act as scribes for her students in the small groups.

To begin, Ms. Woods gathered her first graders on the carpet. She talked briefly about the text set and reminded the class that they had two classmates from Myanmar. In the focus lesson, Ms. Woods read aloud *M is for Myanmar* (Rush, 2011). In this book one sister explains to the other what she remembers about Myanmar. The story is told in vignettes and poems, written in English and Burmese. Poems tell about the holidays, the lifestyles, the buildings, and foods of Myanmar. Vibrant artwork and expressive typefaces add to the short, simple poetic style.

Ms. Woods slowly paged through the text and asked students to share their observations about the text and illustrations, emphasizing the importance of looking at the illustrations and/or photos in their books. She asked the students to think about questions they had about Myanmar. Children asked about people speaking different languages and questioned if the country was as hot as Missouri.

When asked what they noticed in the book, students first responded with comments about differences. They noticed that the houses didn't look like their houses. Several students noted pictures of elephants and of people riding elephants. One student described the buildings she saw as golden castles. At this point the children were focusing more on the differences between the two cultures.

After dividing the students into four groups of five or six, Ms. Woods gave each group one of the books from the Myanmar set and asked students to look through the books. Since they were first graders with limited reading skills, she stressed the importance of looking at the illustrations and/or photos in their books and instructed the students to think about their questions.



One book that grabbed the attention of the first graders because of the illustrations was [Rebel](#) (Baillie, 1994). This fiction story is based on a true incident that occurred in Rangoon, when an arriving army destroys a school’s playground as part of controlling the town. One child rebels by throwing his sandal and hitting the general on the head. When the general orders the students to stand before him in an effort to determine the culprit, the students and their teachers remove their shoes, and the general’s plan fails. The theme of unity in the face of adversity is enhanced by the full-page watercolor and pencil illustrations.

One student determined from one of the illustrations that the children might be scared of the soldiers and another noted that they lived in a country where soldiers tell them what to do. Adding to the discussion, another student inferred that the people didn’t have liberty. As a group, the first graders decided the students in the story were afraid of the soldiers. This book offered students an alternative view of soldiers.

By prior arrangement two fifth graders who were from Myanmar joined the class and one small group. The group sharing the book *M is for Myanmar* came across several pictures in which children had a white substance on their cheeks. The two fifth graders from Myanmar who were the experts explained that the white substance was sugar used to prevent sunburns. Giving older children from the country the opportunity to be resources for the first graders benefitted both groups.

When the students completed their investigation of the books, two main ideas emerged from the closing discussion: elephants are important to the people in Myanmar and their homes are different from the students’ home. The group reviewing [Same, Same but Different](#) (Kosteci-Shaw, 2011) used their book to remind classmates that indeed, people everywhere are alike in many ways and yet each of us is different.

Later in the week, the fifth-grade class joined the first-grade students on their cultural journey. Both classroom teachers along with a mentor teacher facilitated these students in their exploration and conversation revolving around noticings and questions from the text sets. The fifth graders recorded the observations and the questions on sentence strips. The teachers moved among the eight groups and helped facilitate the discussions. The lesson concluded when each group shared their noticings and questions.

Looking over the notes scribed by the students as they worked with a partner, several categories emerged. The students were addressing the topics of culture, housing, schools, and the kinds of work done by the people of Myanmar. Students commented about connections they made between their own backgrounds and what they saw in the books. The students noted issues of politics and in particular the involvement of the army in the lives of the people.

At this point the groundwork had been laid and the context had been set in both classrooms. The books were kept in a common spot and each teacher could use the books and revisit them in ways that were appropriate to their classroom. The books had touched the children from Myanmar, who had seen pictures and words of their culture, as well as the other first and fifth graders, who began to consider a culture different from their own.



## First Grade's Introduction to Cuba

Missy Morrison

[Cuba Packet Download](#)

Mrs. White, a first grade teacher, was interested in using a set of books about Cuba to help make a newly arrived Cuban child feel more at home, as well as to help other children in the classroom gain an understanding of Cuban culture. She decided to introduce these books through whole group read-alouds and discussion. Unfortunately the Cuban student, who we will call Luis, was absent the morning the unit began.



To help prepare the students for immersion into the text set about Cuba, Mrs. White began by reading [Martina, the Beautiful Cockroach](#) (Deedy, 2007). This story is a common Cuban folktale with Deedy's own unique humorous twists. Mrs. White halted when reading some of the Spanish words within the text and her students suggested that if only Luis was at school, he could help with the pronunciation! The children had already noticed one of Luis's strengths and

how, given his knowledge of Spanish, he would have contributed to the classroom community. This is important because often international students may be embarrassed that they speak another language.

Mrs. White invited the children to choose a character from the story and write three important facts about the character. As the children worked at their pods, they helped each other with spelling and locating needed words like *abuela* for their writing. Using a map, Mrs. White guided the students in locating Cuba and explained that it is an island. In response to the question, "What

do we know about islands located near the equator?” the students responded, “It’s hot!”

Later in the day, Mrs. White shared another book from the Cuba text set, *Countries of the World: Cuba* (Mara, 1999). This nonfiction book discusses the history, landscape, people, animals, food, sports, and culture of Cuba. The last few pages of the book provide information about playing Cuban games, learning Spanish, or finding books and internet sites that provide more information.

As the class discussed the book, the children were especially surprised that some middle school-aged children in Cuba move away from their families to attend boarding school. Several children seemed shocked and thought that they wouldn’t want to do it. But, one girl thought it sounded a lot like what happened at college – a big slumber party!

Mrs. White continued reading from various topics using the table of contents as a guide. All children contributed to the discussion, which consisted mostly of comparisons between what they were familiar with in Missouri and the United States and how it was different or the same from what they might experience if living in Cuba. At the end of the exploration time about Cuba, students shared their understandings, while the teacher recorded it on a chart:

- Baseball is the most popular sport;
- Cuba’s an island and surrounded by water;
- They eat a lot of rice;
- Kids have to wear uniforms;
- They play guitars and drums;
- If you go to middle school, you have to live there.

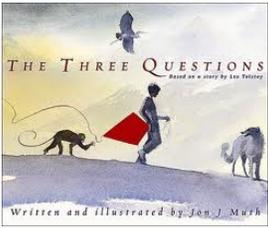
Listening to these books and discussing them formed a firm foundation for revisiting the books later and Mrs. White continued to revisit these books throughout the next couple of weeks. Throughout this study, her first graders developed a deeper understanding of their classmate’s home country, Cuba, and Luis was able to share his expertise to add to their insights.



### **From *The Three Questions* to about a Million More: Kindergarteners Explore Russia**

Linda Wycoff with Janice Henson

[Russia Packet Download](#)



In Mrs. Kruse's kindergarten classroom, one student native to Russia and a number of other cultures were represented. As a first activity, she chose to focus on how her kindergarteners view themselves and then used those insights to help them open up to a more global study. On the day she read aloud [\*The Three Questions\*](#) (Muth, 2002) there were seventeen students present. In the book,

based on a story by Tolstoy, Nikolai wants to know the answers to his three questions: *When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?* He finally asks Leo, the old turtle, to help him and through a series of circumstances he learns, "Remember then that there is only one important time, and that time is now. The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side. For these, my dear boy, are the answers to what is most important in this world. This is why we are here" (np), The watercolor illustrations draw children into this lovely story about compassion.

The concept of another country and culture was a big idea for kindergarteners to begin to understand. During the interactive read-aloud, I noticed that the kindergarteners had a vague concept of how far away Russia was. When Mrs. Kruse told her class the characters were from Russia and asked if Russia was close to us, the students responded in unison with a resounding, "NOOOOOO!" One student thought it might take about two hours on a small plane to get to Russia.

Commonalities that kindergarteners shared with young children around the world are the concepts of friends, family, and helping. Mrs. Kruse asked the children to answer a big question just like the boy in the story. When she asked, "What is important now?," students talked about their friends. She then asked how this answer might change if the children were at home. The students responded with answers about their families. She then asked how the answer might change if they were at work. The responses shifted to the job – to whatever they were doing. In this discussion the students seemed to be conceptualizing a big idea that important changes depend on the context.

Another example of kindergarteners trying to grasp a big idea from a narrow lens was shown at the close of the session. Mrs. Kruse, looking at me, stated that this book is a good book no matter what your age. The children commented "like six" "or seven." They had missed the teacher's implication that this book is ageless and were commenting about their own ages.

As a follow-up, Mrs. Kruse asked them to respond to the three questions from the book: When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do? She suggested their responses could be watercolor illustrations for the class bulletin board. Again the patterns of friends, family, and helping emerged:

"When I played with my friends at recess... The most important one was my classmate. The

most important thing to do was play with him because he is sad and does not know anyone at our school.” By Annie

“When I helped my brother climb a tree... The most important thing to do was help my brother climb the tree. I lifted him up with my hands and helped him so he did not fall.” By Mira

“When I helped my little sister walk home, the most important time was helping my sister walk safely home. The most important one was my little sister... I had to hold her hand so she did not walk in the street.” By VanRun

“The most important time was when I helped my teacher make flowers for the bulletin. The most important one was my teacher.” By Kelsey

The ideas of family, friends, and being a helper seem to be common threads interwoven throughout the discussions and in answer to the big questions. Kindergartners stepped outside their safe worlds where any age is six or seven and all day is about two hours. They grappled with, thought about and questioned the big idea of Russia and its nearness and “far-awayness” as a result of their experiences with this book and teacher facilitation. Starting with the similarities from the Russian folktale, the teacher could then later build on these experiences to help them learn more about the Russian culture.



## Using Arts/Literacy Integration with Global Literature

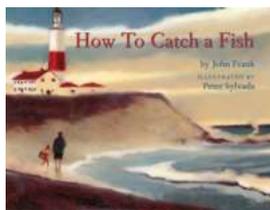
Gennie Pfannenstiel with Linda Aulgur

Linda, a group member, helped Gennie, an art teacher, use text sets with a variety of elementary students to integrate cultural understandings in classes with students who have recently immigrated to America from the Truk Islands and Somalia. These literature text sets were shared with kindergarten/first, second, fourth and fifth grade classes. In this vignette we hear Gennie's voice.

[Same, Same, but Different](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011) was used to introduce all of the classes to their particular cultural study. After reading this book aloud, the children were asked to draw a response using the title cover as a model, with one culture represented on top and the other culture on the bottom. The children used this format to draw and discuss how things can be same, yet different, in terms of their lives within family, school, community, and geographic regions. The book provided a venue for examining differences and the children referred back to the book's title often, whenever a certain culture was discussed. It served as a reference for discussions about living with blended families, moving from school to school, visiting relatives in other states, as well as understanding classmates who came from other parts of the world.

### **Learning about the Pacific Islands through Art**

During art a first-grade class looked at the book *The Hawaiian Alphabet*, (Phillips, 2004) and discussed how one of the girls in their class was from this part of the world, and that there are different languages spoken there. Although this girl was not comfortable saying any of the words out loud in front of her classmates, the rest of the class was intrigued by the colorful alphabet representations. Thinking about Hawaii served as a background for discussion of island life in other parts of the world.



The class then reviewed parts of [How to Catch a Fish](#) (Frank & Sylvada, 2007).

This book demonstrates fishing around the world through lush paintings. I asked the children to note how many different kinds of fish there were and that people all over the world fished. After looking at more pictures in [Children of Micronesia](#), (Hermes, 1995), a picture-book of life on various islands between

Hawaii and the Philippines, I demonstrated how the children could make a print fish, using rubber models. This art method, Gyotaku (fish-rubbing) comes from the Japanese culture, using real fish to print. The children eagerly painted and printed. The girl from the Pacific Islands, although very shy, seemed happy to nod in response to the pictures from the alphabet book and when asked if she had seen fish like the print models, she said yes. Another girl in the class explained how she and her dad went fishing the previous weekend. This experience sparked further fishing stories from a lot of the students. The class gained important concepts regarding similarities among different

cultures. The children often interjected a choral response from the introductory text, “Same, same, but different!” This influenced me as well in planning future lessons to incorporate the fishing traditions of children from this predominantly African American school.

I presented the same lesson to the fifth-grade class and the girl from the Truk Islands was too shy to talk about her culture so her African American friend told the class about the Truk culture for her. Another class member asked why the girl from the Truk islands didn’t tell this herself, and he was reminded by this friend that kindness and patience is needed for people to be comfortable sharing. This important lesson represents how children benefited from this interaction with multicultural literature.

### **Exploring Connections with Somalian Students**

Early in the year the Somalian families from our school had brought cultural artifacts and food to the classroom to share. This served as background knowledge that the class utilized when discussing the books in the Somalia text set.

On Good Friday, kindergarten/first grade children wearing bunny ears, arrived in the art room. They looked at pictures from [\*The Color of Home\*](#) (Hoffman, 2002), a book about Hassan, a newcomer in America, who recounts his journey from Somalia to America. The book shows Somalian women wearing the headdress, *hijab*. Two members of the class, both Somalian boys, excitedly pointed out that the women and girls in their families also wore the hijab. One boy stood up to demonstrate how his mother folded her hands under her hijab when praying, and then how she knelt. But he also explained that the men and boys did a different prayer position, and he and the other Somalian boy then got up to demonstrate the call to prayer from the mosque, and how one bows and the leader calls the prayer, using a microphone. The rest of the class listened respectfully, and talked some about other ways to pray. The boys circulated around their classmates, shaking hands in a friendship gesture. It was a spellbound moment of multicultural sharing, with everyone present visibly connected to one another despite differences.



Later the children's classroom teacher shared *The Color of Home* again and the children discussed the story. The children felt scared and worried when Hassan, the main character, had to hide under a bed hugging his pet cat for comfort, when the soldiers came in the night, Later the family had to leave the cat behind and he missed his pet and this made the children sad. But they felt happy at the end of the story when Hassan drew a picture of his cat and learned how to speak English. This particular story helped the children appreciate some of the struggles of a refugee.

In the fourth grade class, two Somalian girls, wearing their hijabs, listened with the rest of the class to two books, *All the Colors of the Earth* (Hamanka, 1994) about different skin tones of all the children in the world, and *The Color of Home* (Hoffman, 2002) about a Somalian boy in a new home in the U.S. who uses colors to express his experiences in his home country. The characters' names in the book were familiar to the class, who knew several Somalian students in the school, and they eagerly pointed this out. They discussed how color could help express feelings. One of the Somalian girls had previously read this book individually with me during recess and had really enjoyed the book, asking if I could read it to her class. We used the other non-fiction book, *Somalia in Pictures*, (Hamilton, 2007) as a resource to check for same and different animals found in Somalia and America. The Somalian students were surprised to learn that there are goats in America as well as Somalia!

After reading *Same, Same, Different*, I invited the Somalian girls to demonstrate some of the alphabet in their native language, like the book showed two languages of writing. The class was supportive of their efforts and applauded them. The girls seemed to be pleased with the positive attention. Later during the class, I invited the children to shape camels, an animal common in

Somalia, from clay.

A younger sister of the Somalian girls in this class also came during recess to the art room to look at the books about Somalia. I wanted her to get her feedback on which of the Somalian books should be shared with the second grade art class. She flopped down the table and cried, “I don’t feel like talking about my country today.” She had just gotten word that her cousin still in Somalia had just died.

“How did this happen?” I asked.

“In my country, mean people come in the middle of the night and kill people.”

I reassured her that I would honor her grieving and wait to talk about Somalia with the whole class. She gave the books back to me so they could be used later. This reminded me that we are not just looking at books and learning about various cultures, but learning about people’s lives.



## **Growing Compassion: Using Global Text Sets with Second Graders**

Tara Gutshall

[Somalia Packet Download](#)

I was fortunate to have a diverse class with three students who were bilingual, two in Spanish, one in Korean. Three students were English language-learners, one from Russia and two refugees from Rwanda and Somalia. Another student’s mother’s family was from Rwanda. This of course, does not reflect children’s different academic abilities, personalities and range of interests. From the beginning, I knew it would be important to embrace our diversity.

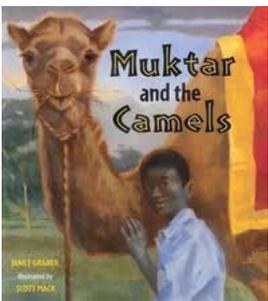
After spring break, we read *Welcome to Somalia* (Schemenauer, 2008) from the *Welcome to the World*, non-fiction series. This introductory book includes information about the land, plants and animals, the people, schools, language, work, food, and holidays. The book is divided into short segments with lists of information, bolded words, and photos of the land and people. Fast facts, a mini-language guide, glossary, and references for additional information are included.

A few weeks earlier, a member of our class who was a refugee from Somalia, Asad, moved away without notice. I found out he would not return to our class through an email. Simply mentioning the name “Somalia” reminded the class of when I shared the news of his moving. Saying the class missed him would be an understatement. At one point, Jackson suggested, “Let’s not even talk about it (Asad’s moving). It’s too sad.”

Prior to the read aloud, students knew there had been fighting between Somalia and Russia. When a group of students learned about this conflict, they worried it would cause conflict between the two students in our classroom from Somalia and Russia. They were also familiar with the location of Somalia. We often pulled down the large map or looked at the globe to locate the different countries our classroom represented.

As we read the book, students learned about Somalia's seasons and animals, which include badgers, jackals, gazelles and antelopes. The suggestion that Somalia had some elephants, giraffes, and zebras, a few big cats and poisonous snakes left the class "oohing" and "ahhing." At the conclusion of the book, children explored the vast differences between the lives of Somalian children and their own, including the school environment, daily work, and food. The new information also made them wonder about the lifestyle of a student, Gahuj, who joined our classroom from Rwanda.

During independent reading time and buddy reading, many students chose to further explore the books about Somalia. After reading a different non-fiction book, Jordan raced up to me and said, "Look! We need to get this book." as he pointed to "Rwanda" which was listed on the back cover with other book titles in the Visual Geography Series. He knew our class would be interested in learning about Gahuj's native country.



Later in the week, I read aloud [\*Muktar and the Camels\*](#) (Graber, 2009), a book about a Somalian orphan boy who dreams about being back with his family and tending to the family's camels. By looking at the front cover, children noticed there was a camel, not a familiar animal to them, and a boy who had darker skin, similar to the classmates from Rwanda and Somalia. They also pointed out the artwork, which seemed to be painted on canvas.

After the read aloud, Jordan asked, "I wonder if Asad's older brother ever helped with the camels because Asad wouldn't be old enough." During the read aloud, we learned 12 to 13 year old boys were sometimes asked to help with the camels. Then the child from Rwanda raised his hand and shared his experiences. Kevin, who was sitting next to him, coached him in sharing his thought, one word at a time as he shared about his brother and camels. The rest of the class patiently waited. When he finished sharing, everyone exhaled, in awe of his words. This was the first time the child raised his hand and verbally shared a complete thought during any of our class experiences!

Throughout the year my class became more compassionate towards one another. New students were not only helped to learn the classroom routines, but they were helped to find a voice, no matter their native language and even it meant coaching them to share one word at a time.

The student from Rwanda transferred schools a week before the last day of school. Two days before he said good-bye, we sat in our Morning Meeting and listened as he shared in halting English he was moving. When he finished, tears streamed down my face. As I looked around the room, many faces were red with emotion; Jordan and Jackson had tears in their eyes. These kids had a unique bond and cared about one another deeply.

In reflection, I think these texts helped our class begin to understand each of our unique histories. Later in the year, a child and her mother took the initiative to teach the class about her family's history. They included facts about Spain's geography, sports' teams, food and more. This study helped me be aware of our class differences and to listen to student questions and attempts to share what made each of us unique. Students are eager to share, listen and learn about each of our differences. It seems our differences are what brought us together as *one* community.



## **Final Reflection: What Did We Learn?**

Carol Gilles

Our book group loved learning more about global literature, creating the curriculum packets for teacher use, and especially witnessing the children's discussions and connections. We noted several "transformational moments" in our study, such as the classrooms that explored Myanmar. We also discovered that these books led to sensitive topics, such as war in Myanmar and Somalia, and political issues in Cuba. Teachers had to negotiate the tensions of trying to be sensitive to these cultures and avoid stereotypes, while at the same time not 'sanitizing' the issues. For example, one class of second graders became concerned that two class members' countries, one from Somalia and one from Russia, might be having a war. They wondered if the two class members would have to be angry with one another if their countries were at war. This question prompted discussion and inquiry.

This was a large project that depended on the interest and good will of the participating classroom teachers. As much as teachers wanted to have the books and use them with their children, there was a tension between what they wished and the school mandates. For example, Gennie, our book club member who is an art teacher, introduced several of the Somalia and Pacific Islands books in art and the children used the books to springboard into art activities. Then Gennie invited teachers to continue using the books and studying these cultures in their classrooms. Unfortunately, only a few teachers responded to this invitation. We also noticed that first year teachers, who were really eager to work with the books, were often so overwhelmed with learning their craft that they were not able to find time to use the books. Visiting with many of the teachers at the end of the project, teachers told us that they would have participated more if the books had been centrally located and

they could access the set when it fit more naturally in their curriculum. We understand and appreciate that logical reasoning and are exploring this option.

Even though we encountered some difficulties, working through these books and having the discussions they provoked transformed our book group members and teachers, as well as the children. As we shared the books, our understanding of the world deepened and became more concrete. We learned that we all are the “Same, same, but different” in everything that matters.

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