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WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom is a regular on-line publication of WOW containing vignettes written by classroom educators about children's experiences reading and responding to literature in the classroom setting.

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Developing Engagements with Global Literature

This issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* focuses on eight global literacy communities that engaged in professional inquiry on global literature. Each group explored strategies that would engage their students in making connections with these books. The ways in which students interact with global literature has a tremendous influence on the kinds of intercultural understandings that students create. A good book is only the first step. Student interactions with these books can actually perpetuate stereotypes or misunderstandings rather than challenging students to consider new perspectives and alternative ways of living and thinking in the world. Students can come to see cultures that differ from their own as strange or exotic and feel pity or relief that they don't live in that culture.

The educators in these eight communities took on the challenge of creating broader contexts of inquiry and classroom engagements. Within these contexts, students critically engaged with literature and moved from cross-cultural understandings to global issues and social action. Two communities focused on developing empathy and caring. Jennifer Carey shares the strategy of persona dolls that third, fourth and fifth grade teachers at [Aveson Charter School](#) in California used to encourage empathy and perspective with their special needs students. The [Garden Hills Literacy Community](#) from Illinois shares their focus on kindness and the books and strategies that were effective with elementary students in exploring kindness.

Several communities describe how they embedded literature within an inquiry unit that provided students with many different experiences to support their understandings of global cultures. [Genny O'Herron](#), a third grade teacher in New Mexico, is part of the ACLIP Literacy Community in Albuquerque. She describes an in-depth inquiry on South Korea in which students used a wide range of primary sources in addition to fiction and nonfiction literature. [Mary Ann Conrad](#) from the Chinle Junior High School Literacy Community shares a unit developed around world geography and literature in a middle school in the heart of the Navajo Nation in Arizona.

A number of communities focused on book studies where students examined books in-depth within a supportive classroom context. [Amanda Villagomez](#) from the Eastern Oregon Literacy Community describes the literature unit in her rural middle school classroom in Oregon that highlighted the use of book clubs and written responses. [Dara Bradley](#), along with members of the Douglass High Literacy Community from Columbia, Missouri, describe a book study around an Australian novel that led to a range of student inquiries on language, Australian culture, and social action. [High school English teachers](#) from the LSHS English Lions Literacy Community in Atlanta describe the many different ways they integrated global literature into their courses. Finally, the [Cunningham Colts Literacy Community](#), a group of elementary teachers in Nevada, shares their use of strategies such as literary letters and postcards to encourage students to take social action by publishing their own books to send to children in Cambodia.

Global Literacy Communities are small groups of educators who are committed to professional inquiries about how to build international understanding through global children's and adolescent literature. These communities meet regularly to immerse themselves in global literature and consider strategies for using these books effectively with students in K-12 classroom contexts. The communities are school-based, community-based, or university/school collaborations whose members have a shared commitment to thinking together as a professional learning community in order to transform their practice.

In 2012-2013, thirteen Global Literacy Communities received grants from Worlds of Words to support their work and to encourage their explorations of innovative practices. Community members also participated in an online forum where they shared their explorations and resources with each other. Each literacy community also committed to sharing their work with other educators through writing vignettes for *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*. This effort by Worlds of Words was supported by the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding, an organization that has been helping young people in the United States learn about world regions and global issues since 1966. The vignettes from the rest of these communities were published in Volume IV, Issues 6 and 7.

We will be publishing an unthemed issue of WOW Stories in the spring of 2014. Consider sharing your innovative practices around global and multicultural literature by submitting a vignette to *WOW Stories*. We are interested in descriptions of interactions with literature in classrooms and libraries at preschool through graduate levels. [See our call for manuscripts and author guidelines for more information.](#)

Kathy G. Short, Director of Worlds of Words

Developing Empathy and Perspective through Global Literature and Persona Dolls

by Jennifer Carey

We live in a challenging world that calls on educators to make difficult choices every day. The intensity that surrounds our decision-making processes is firmly rooted in the simple yet profound question, "What is best for our students?" This inquiry calls on educators to act as change agents in the lives of students by taking on the challenge to know each student's authentic self and to create and sustain a community. We invite students to practice being compassionate and empathetic human beings in order to be innovative peacemakers in the world. Our tension was how to wade gracefully into such a task with elementary age students.

As literacy teachers, we were excited to embark on a project that would align our shared belief that