

articulate in defending their beliefs.

Balanced They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.

Reflective They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.

Dawn Beyler has taught in the Champaign school district for 8 years, including kindergarten, 3rd grade, 2/3 gifted, 3/4 gifted, and 3rd gifted. Dawn worked in the preschool and child care field for 18 years before returning to work in elementary schools.

Mary Borgeson is a Reading Recovery Teacher/Descubriendo La Lectura (Spanish Literacy), who taught for 26 years in Champaign Unit Four schools, and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in El Salvador for three years. She received a Fulbright-Hays grant to Japan and India.

Susan Dilley is an instructional coach who has been teaching for nearly twenty years in elementary schools throughout Illinois.

Olga Velasquez Halpern is a second-grade bilingual classroom teacher. She came to the United States as a student in the Intensive English Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and stayed. She has been teaching since 1986 in both early childhood and elementary schools and was also an elementary school Spanish teacher.

Karla J. Möller is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois. Her research and teaching focus is on the selection and use of multicultural literature and on conceptualizations of struggling and capability with regard to school-based reading events. She conducts collaborative research with local teachers.

Hallie Sturdyvin is a third grade bilingual teacher in her fourth year of teaching. Born and raised in Champaign, she loves to travel in the Caribbean.

Legos in the Land of the Morning Calm

by Genny O'Herron

A small group of educators in Albuquerque, New Mexico came together around the shared passion of global and international children's literature. Our group was diverse, consisting of classroom teachers, a university professor, a theater educator and a documentary film maker/substitute teacher. Calling ourselves the Adolescent and Children's Literature Inquiry Project (ACLIP), we

met monthly to discuss literature, individual projects, and classroom ideas. When we were awarded a Global Literacy Communities Grant, we decided to acquire global and multicultural literature about South Korea and Korean Americans and create a traveling collection of books that would benefit each ACLIP member in distinct ways. For example, one member used the books with her young theater students for script writing; one member shared the books with her Korean Mother's Support Group; and one member shared the books with her Children's Literature course at UNM. When it was my turn with the books, I used them with my third-grade students, and all of the ACLIP members supported me in this endeavor.

This vignette reflects some of what happened during that experience and demonstrates the capacity that young children have to explore issues of cultural authenticity and accuracy in books. This was my first year teaching third grade after teaching Kindergarten for six years, so not only was I learning about how to effectively integrate global and international children's literature, I was also learning a lot about the spunk and spirit of eight and nine year olds! In the end, I also learned a lot about myself as a white middle class woman in the teaching profession who is trying to become more culturally competent and committed to a pedagogy of equity and diversity.

In all honesty, I was apprehensive about facilitating an in-depth cultural inquiry about a culture that I was not familiar with. I felt deeply insecure about my skills and how to do it "the right way." That is where the collaboration and support from the other ACLIP members was essential, both to embolden me to stretch and grow as a teacher and to brainstorm about how to best present material so that I was not reinforcing stereotypes or misinformation. We began our study with what is frequently called the "five fs" (food, fashion, festivals, famous people, and folklore). This was very straightforward, and it is probably the only information I would have provided if had not been for the help of the ACLIP members to contact guest speakers, connect with pen pals from Seoul, and organize simple language lessons. With their support and guidance, the pieces started to come together—there was an organic unfolding of information, inquiries, and excitement on behalf of all of us (students, teacher and the ACLIP members). The students began reading an abundance of literary and informational texts. They watched a number of travel videos and You Tube clips of South Korea. They learned a lot! We learned a lot!



South Korean visitors expanded students' knowledge about Korean culture

The single most important thing they learned was that children in this high-tech nation on the other side of the globe are similar to them as well as different. This may sound simplistic and cliché, but watching curious, creative youngsters become so knowledgeable—and concerned—about another group of people was profound for me.

According to the U.S. Census, 2.6% of the Albuquerque population identifies as Asian American (1.4% of the state population). On the first day that we dove into this project and looked at picture books and nonfiction texts about South Korea, most of the children had little or no background knowledge about this area of the world. I remember the lesson clearly. There were three distinct reactions: interest, indifference, and aversion. One child kept repeating, “This is freaky, this is so freaky,” as he paged through pictures of a people and place that were completely foreign to him. Another child insisted, “I don’t want to learn about this place. I hate Korea!” (he had just admitted that he knew nothing about South Korea). Yikes! What was I in for, I wondered: Is this what uncensored xenophobia, embodied in little third grade personalities, looks like? How does one teacher penetrate this type of resistance to intercultural understanding?

Through books, of course! (And collaboration with other educators committed to educational equity and diversity). Stories humanize. Information contextualizes. As Kathy Short (2013) wrote, “Through story, students understand the human emotions and struggles related to issues, and, through nonfiction, they explore the broader world context of those issues. Books are a powerful beginning point for expanding awareness and empathy.”

Expanding our Understandings through Using a Range of Literature

So, on the same day we began our unit about South Korea and Korean culture, I started our new lunchtime read aloud and made sure I tied the two together with the Newbery Medal winner [*Single Shard*](#) by Linda Sue Park (2001). After the initial resistance from some, twelfth-century Korea came alive for us as we followed the story of Tree-Ear over the next few weeks. We also explored the career of Linda Sue Park by reading *Linda Sue Park: An Author Kids Love* (2009) by

Michelle Parker-Rock after children began to devour her books.

I remember the enthusiasm about Linda Sue Park’s writing so well (it caught me by surprise; teaching third grade for the first time, I didn’t know which authors and literary works had strong appeal). “I like the book you gave me,” shared Seth who had just finished [The Kite Fighters](#) (2010), a book I lent him from our Park pile. “Can I get [Archer’s Quest](#) (2008) as soon as it comes back?” he begged, frustrated with his friend for forgetting it at home—the unbridled reading passion was palpable. This was the first time kids were practically fighting over the books they wanted to read in our classroom. They couldn’t get enough of Linda Sue Park during their independent reading time, and this dovetailed perfectly with our Korean inquiry.

Providing a wide range of books was critical to engaging the students, and in our case, we had to activate imagination first through fiction in order to stimulate intellectual curiosity. For example, while students were intently enjoying the Linda Sue Park books, there was not much interest in the nonfiction books that were available to them. As soon as we began to plan for our culminating project, our “Korean Class Museum,” however, there was strong motivation to consult as many resources as possible. Suddenly students were hoarding these books in their desks. The Museum was open to the entire school during our Winter Festival, and along with book displays, featured student-created dioramas, reports, and experiential activities like coin rubbing, crafts, taste testing and traditional games like Yut. By that point, students had clearly become authorities on many aspects of South Korea and were so proud to share that knowledge publically.



Students shared their learning in displays for a class Korean museum.

In addition to sharing literary and informational texts with students, I also introduced bilingual Korean-English books and books written in Korean that had English counterparts such as [Minji’s Salon](#) by Eun-hee Choung (2008), [My Cat Copies Me](#) by Yoon D. Kwon (2007), [Something for School](#) by Hyung Young Lee (2008), and [The Zoo](#) by Suzy Lee (2007). The third graders loved “reading” the Korean books first and then seeing the English translations. Finally, I pulled out the contemporary children’s picture books purchased in South Korea, written in Korean with vivid,

captivating illustrations.

“I wish I could have these books in my house,” sighed Amy who was infatuated with the unique illustrations of the books. “It’s no fair that we can’t get these books here!” exclaimed Todd as he poured over the collection that the kids had termed the “Naughty Boy” series. While they couldn’t read the text, students carefully studied the illustrations and constructed a storyline for each book. The children who initially were most adamant about Korea being “freaky” and “hating” it came up with the most elaborate storylines.



Children enjoy a wide range of books published in South Korea (written in Korean)

Challenging Misconceptions and Making Connections

As children synthesized information from the nonfiction and guest visitors, they noticed the preponderance of traditional imagery in picture books about Korea. “Why are most of the characters wearing hanbok (traditional clothing) in these books?” they asked, making astute observations about over-representations in books. When we re-read [*The Trip Back Home*](#) by Janet Wong (2000), for example, they commented about the rural imagery, noting what they had learned about the urbanization of South Korea (with less than about 20% of the population now living in rural areas). They also compared U.S.-published picture books to Korean ones, which had significantly more urban and contemporary images, including children playing with Legos, which riveted them. They started using words like *traditional* and *modern* very deliberately.



Contemporary images in books from South Korea expanded student connections and understandings.

Children also talked about similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of South Korean children (fictional and real) with much more sophistication. Childhood interests were common points of inquiry. They wanted to know if Korean children had pets and looked for evidence in books. They looked for the kinds of toys that were popular in South Korea and were both tickled and surprised to find illustrations of children playing Legos in the contemporary Korean picture books.

Another question that arose was whether Koreans like sushi. At first the sushi comments harkened me back to the time before we started this unit when my students had extremely limited and inaccurate knowledge about so many aspects of Asia, in general, and about South Korea, in particular. I was perplexed as to why these comments kept coming up, especially after they learned about the difference between sushi and the Korean rice rolls called kimbap. Then I heard stories from several students who held high social peer status and who had elaborate and entertaining stories about “loving sushi with their families,” “having sushi for their birthdays,” and “going out to a sushi restaurant with Grandpa.” The more I listened, the more it seemed that the question, “Do Koreans eat sushi?” wasn’t an ignorant confusion between Japanese and Korean culture but a natural curiosity and point of comparison and of asking, “What do Korean children and I have in common?” They seemed to be seeking understandings about whether Korean children value and enjoy the same things they did. If it’s “cool” to eat sushi, here, (according to many of the dominant personalities in the classroom), then what’s “cool” in South Korea?

Students graphed the amount of traditional and rural images they noted in fiction and nonfiction books about South Korea from the public library. It became clear that if these books were the only exposure that children had to the county and culture of South Korea, many stereotypes and misperceptions would be reinforced. The broader collection of global and international books, along with guest speakers and activities like playing yut and watching videos about Korean celebrities such as Yu-Na Kim (2010 Olympic champion figure skater) and Rain (entertainer, pop

star), gave a more varied, vibrant, and nuanced depiction of South Korea.

By the end of our unit when the third graders wrote to fifth-grade pen pals from Seoul Gangdong Elementary School the orientalism, exotism and “othering” had disappeared. Students shared intimate details about divorces, exciting news about upcoming vacations, and kid-centric reports about best friends, favorite foods and beloved cartoons and video games. They took great care in personalizing and polishing their letters. They asked questions about siblings, sports, gender (they really wanted to know if they were writing to a boy or girl!), entertainment, and school. They labored over their Korean alphabet charts in order to leave little notes in the margin written in Korean. Brian wrote a P.S., “We read a book that showed Korean children playing with Legos. Do you have the Star Wars X-Wing Starfighter? I just got that one for my birthday.”

Final Reflections

The language of childhood is a universal language, despite distinct cultural differences. Our inquiry into South Korea and Korean culture illuminated many interesting facts and findings and many similarities and differences. When similarities were highlighted there was instant intrigue and enthusiasm (do you know they have Dunkin Donuts in South Korea!—this meant the world to a child whose Dad works for this company). The similarities abound beyond Legos and donuts, of course, and as students began to understand this more deeply, their curiosity became connection. These understandings of similar and difference are both needed in a world marked more and more by diversity and complex interdependencies.

I know students learned a lot from this study, but I would have to say I learned more. Not just about South Korea, but about how to bring global cultures alive in a meaningful, thoughtful way through literature and careful examination about what that literature portrays (and/or doesn't portray) about a people. I am grateful for such an amazing learning opportunity, which was made possible through this project and the support of my ACLIP colleagues!

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Genny O'Herron has been teaching at Mountain Mahogany Community School in Albuquerque, NM for eight years. She found her way to the Adolescent and Children's Literature Inquiry Project through her graduate studies in the Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies department at University of New Mexico.

Expanding Our World through Global Inquiries

by Mary Ann Conrad

Our group of language arts and social studies teachers, along with writer Nancy Bo Flood, met monthly to reinforce our commitment to promoting global awareness among our students, many of whom have not traveled far beyond their Navajo communities. We were a diverse assortment of young and old, Anglo and Navajo, all teachers under the same pressure to improve progress in our classrooms in an effort to bring up our school test scores.

Chinle Junior High is located in the heart of the Navajo Nation of Northern Arizona. Our students are 95% Navajo, and many have limited command of their own Navajo language and of English as well. Culturally, our students are engaged in rich oral stories that are told in the winter and passed down from generation to generation by those entrusted with them. Their struggles with English and with reading the written word have made passing standardized tests a major challenge for many of students. This challenge has been passed on to us, their teachers.

Teachers met weekly in cluster groups where we focused mostly on teaching academic vocabulary effectively. However, we gathered as a global literacy group at lunch every four weeks and discussed our commitment to global awareness. We decided on a slogan "Alike, yet Different" to describe our approach. In April we hosted a world reading night featuring books representing countries from each continent. Student Council members led attendees from continent to continent where they had their "passports" stamped as they explored the artifacts and local foods. At the same event Nancy Bo Flood signed copies of her new book [*Cowboy Up*](#), which features the Navajo rodeo.