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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.

Table of Contents

Introduction

by Tracy Smiles

“Is Pokémon Japanese?": Fifth Graders' Intercultural Learning through Japanese Pictorial Texts

Junko Sakoi and Trinkia Hall

Nudging Young Adults' Readings of Gendered and Cultured Texts: What is the Role of the Adult in a Reader Centered Space?

Marie LeJeune

A Mirror and a Window: Read Aloud Multicultural Books for Adult EFL Learners

Yang Wang with Yuebo Zheng

Names, Objects, Histories: Intercultural Learning in Action

Kinga Varga-Dobai with Ze Moua and Sarah Kelley Campbell

Teaching through Story: Using Narratives in a Graduate Ethnicity Course

Michele Ebersole, Huihui Kanahel-Mossman, Alice Kawakami

Stories as Invitation and Transformation: Global Literature Integration across Multiple Contexts

Tracy Smiles

Kathy Short (2012) argues that, “If we step back from the pressure of tests and standards and consider why story matters and the ways in which story is thinking and world making, we have time to reconsider and recapture the role of story and literature in our classrooms” (p. 9). This issue of *WOW Stories* presents five articles demonstrating the impact of stories, both personal and those found in children's and adolescent literature, and how they can invite students to explore

their cultural identities, develop awareness and respect for different cultures, examine personal, local, and global issues, and guide students in taking thoughtful new actions as a result of their expanded perspectives. These vignettes show how literature integration across a range of educational contexts, including elementary school, high school, and university courses can foster intercultural understanding, and how stories and literature that portray cultures, cultural perspectives, and critical issues can develop curiosity and a caring perspective on those with multiple ways of being in the world. The student participants in these vignettes, whether twelve or twenty, came to recognize a common humanity they share with people they read about in the literature, a first step to making the world a better place for all (Short, 2009).

In “[‘Is Pokémon Japanese?’: Fifth Graders’ Intercultural Learning through Japanese Pictorial Texts](#),” Junko Sakoi and Trinkia Hall share what happened when they introduced Japanese culture through reading and discussing Japanese pictorial texts and picture books in Trinkia’s fifth grade classroom. Initial responses to the texts revealed ethnocentric perspectives in Trinkia’s students for other cultures. However, through carefully scaffolded discussions and interactions with Junko, a Japanese native, students were able to move beyond their initial judgements of Japanese culture as strange and exotic to recognizing they were making these judgements from their own cultural perspectives and that culture is part of everyone’s human experience.

Similarly, Marie Lejeune, in “[Nudging Young Adults’ Readings of Gendered and Cultured Texts: What is the Role of the Adult in a Reader Centered Space?](#)” wondered what would happen when reading books that explored issues of the body with high school girls in an after school book group. She focuses on *Sold* by Patricia McCormick, which not only deals with the victimization of women and girls but does so in an unfamiliar setting to the book group’s participants. The vignette addresses the challenges of embracing a reader response perspective on using texts and the desire to push readers beyond initial, often superficial, perspectives on the stories they take up. In this case, the girls’ perspectives on the victimization of women in India and their victimization of women as something occurring somewhere else was a viewpoint that LeJeune wanted to challenge. She “nudged” the girls to consider the global issues and the victimization of women within their local context. She uses her experience of engaging students in explorations of critical issues to offer suggestions as to how to “nudge” students into considering critical perspectives without taking control of discussions or diminishing students’ initial responses to difficult texts.

Yang Wang and Yuebo Zheng present a unique perspective in that the “other” their students explore through literature are people in the United States in “[A Mirror and a Window: Read Aloud Multicultural Books to Adult EFL Learners](#).” In a university course on English as a Foreign Language in China, Wang and Zheng read aloud children’s literature about the United States and China that were produced in the United States and encouraged student participants to reflect on their experiences while identifying cultural differences as well as connections they shared with

people in the United States through stories and traditions. Students began to see that learning a language is learning a culture, and were able to critically analyze texts about themselves and pose questions about representations of themselves and other people in the world in contemporary texts and media.

The last two vignettes demonstrate how children's and adolescent literature can be implemented in teacher preparation and graduate professional development programs to effectively engage preservice and inservice teachers in critical explorations of diversity. Kinga Varga-Dobai in "[Names, Objects, Histories: Intercultural Learning in Action](#)" describes using the short story "My Name" by Sandra Cisneros (1991) as a springboard for students to explore their personal cultural identities. This story allowed preservice teachers to recognize how issues of diversity have personal, local, and global relevance to their work in their clinical placements and future classrooms. Similarly, Michele Ebersole, Huihui Kanehele-Mossman, and Alice Kawakami in "[Teaching through Story: Using Narratives in a Graduate Ethnicity Course](#)," wondered if their graduate course on ethnicity and education was presenting teacher participants with meaningful experiences that would in turn encourage teachers to explore and implement culturally responsive practices within their teaching contexts. Disappointed with past course results, the course instructors situated the course in story in order to facilitate critical explorations of the participant's *experiential knowledge, academic knowledge, and reflective knowledge*. Through discussions of children's and adolescent literature, field trips to local historical sites, and guest speakers within the community, teachers were able to recognize their stereotypes of students from particular cultural groups in their schools. They came to see that culturally responsive practice is not something they "do," but rather a disposition that that guides their decision-making and reflection.

The vignettes in this issue present readers of *WOW Stories* with examples of the potential of stories, literature, and inquiry for transforming how teachers and students engage with themselves and others living around the world. We hope you find through the innovative projects presented in these vignettes inspiration to integrate global stories and literature in your teaching contexts, and that you share those experiences with readers of *WOW Stories*.

References

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