

Volume V, Issue 1: *Building Bridges Across Multiple Worlds*

Editor's Note:

It is with a heavy heart that I write this, days after a historic and deeply troubling election that has left many of us reeling, and with questions about how rhetoric centered on hate and fear could appeal to so many. Political analysts, journalists, and pollsters are theorizing on the root causes of an election that went against predictions and the popular vote. On social media, an outpouring of teachers and parents are asking for advice on how to explain these results, and the underlying reasons for such an outcome, to their students and children. A common explanation in the discourse around the election has focused on the notion that many Americans, in response to a rapidly changing and diversifying country in terms of race, immigration, and economy, are feeling fearful and "left behind." As a parent, educator, and language researcher, I wonder how to address the polarizing ideas that have the country divided.

There is one conviction, however, that I am more committed than ever, and that is the mission of World of Words. Its basic tenant, to "build bridges across global cultures through children's and adolescent literature," is more poignant than ever, and this issue of *WOW Stories* presents examples of how this mission plays out in practice across contexts when literature is at the center of inquiry into critical issues. A tricky balance exists between navigating mandates and preparing students for an increasingly diverse global culture that has impacted society, both locally and globally.

Donalyn Miller, a.k.a. "The Book Whisperer," in a conversation about the critical importance of international literature in the classroom, offers both an inspiring vision for why this literature matters in how it addresses the natural curiosity of children about people and cultures around the world, and considerations for how to take up such literature in the classroom.

Kathy Short provides a critical analysis of how educators can navigate the goals of intercultural understanding within the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. Short identifies common misconceptions about how the standards are understood, implemented, and interpreted by educators and the authors of the standards, and offers insights into how to take up international texts that allow growth as readers and global citizens.

Both Donalyn Miller and Kathy Short advocate a vision of literature as central to inquiry into important global issues in the lives of children and adolescents. These two articles are accompanied by powerful examples of how literature impacts teachers and students across contexts.

Julia López-Robertson describes a collaboration between Latina mothers and their children and how culturally relevant children's literature led to powerful dialogue about their personal experiences with border-crossing.

Summer Edward, a student teacher in Debra Repak's middle school classroom in a school serving an ethnically diverse community, describes her inquiry into how Debra locates and utilizes culturally diverse literature. The article presents both important insights into sensitive issues with using diverse literature in the classroom as well as the impressive understandings generated by teachers in the earliest stages of practice when engaged in reflective practice and teacher research.

Lastly, teacher educators Natalie DeWitt and Marie LeJeune offer a framework for using children's and adolescent literature to promote nutrition education that is both culturally sensitive and academically accurate. They provide readers with criteria to consider when teaching nutrition concepts to young learners as well as a list of books that exemplify the features in their framework.

It is my hope that in this issue of *WOW Stories*, educators find themselves affirmed in the important work they do every day to grow intercultural understanding through literature. It is through this important work that, together, teachers and students can address and dispel fears of diversity and globalization prevalent in the public discourse, and engage in conversations that promote unity through knowledge, empathy, and connection.

Tracy Smiles, Editor