

Using Global Literature to Think about “Home” with Teacher Candidates

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When thinking about young people and their reading, more often than not young people can't name authors and stories from around the world, nor do they know when they are reading global literature. The *Harry Potter* series is one of the most ubiquitous international book series in the world, yet students don't know they are reading globally while doing so. And while we are delighted that young people know and love the *Harry Potter* series, there is so much more to discover. To discover not only others from around the world, but who they are in response to the Other they may find in literature from another country, another situation, another social world. To find great stories from around the world it often takes a teacher, but what if teachers don't know what is available?

In the Fall of 2019, I conducted the first iteration of a literature course that would highlight children's and young adult literature from around the world. The course met twice weekly for 15 weeks, and students were invited to not only embrace the literature, but the Other who may be found within that literature. In essence, when reflecting on my goals for the class, I wanted students to discover ways they might become more reflective and socially responsible readers. Determining an umbrella or universal theme that would allow for such development became a critical aspect of the class.

Contemplating a universal theme, I wanted a concept that would resonate with students while also incorporating an opportunity for addressing what I valued as a teacher educator and as a citizen. I valued the concept of cosmopolitanism, especially the aspects of being “reflectively loyal” and “reflectively open” to the Other (Hansen, 2017), in which individuals are able to embrace and reflect upon their own beliefs and values while also being open to considering and reflecting on other ideas and values. I also appreciated the concept of “hospitality” to the stranger, a Kantian idea from 1795 that embraces the idea that the stranger or foreigner not be treated with hostility upon entering somebody else's territory (Kant, 1795). The concept of hospitality includes “feeling for the other—feeling sympathy for, compassion for, sorry for, distressed for, concerned for, and so on” (Bateson, 1991, p. 11), which directly considers the Other and embraces the idea of what Bateson suggests is to be “other-oriented.”

To encompass these ideas, I selected the umbrella concept of “home,” which seemed especially fitting for students who were in the midst of one of the greatest transitions of their lives—moving from their own sense of home into a wider and often more diverse world or territory than they had previously experienced. Many students were, in multiple ways, becoming Other, far from the familiar and becoming a stranger in need of hospitality.

With the umbrella concept of home in place, I developed a course that incorporated readings and discussions of children's and adolescent literature as well as professional articles. I prepared presentations on issues related to teachers knowing about and using global literature in their classrooms. I also determined a way for students to respond to what they were learning and pondering through a weekly journal that specifically addressed the concept of becoming socially responsible readers. The journal included developing a metaphor that encapsulated their thinking of home, the Other, and their social responsibility as readers as they negotiated

and discussed the world and their geographical, psychological, social, and political locations. As a final project, I asked groups of students to research a region of the world, which included a booklist about that region. By researching various regions of the world with the intent of becoming more familiar with not only what those regions might be like geographically, politically, and socially, but also the literature of that region or about that region, students had an opportunity to expand their ideas of home or to consider ways in which an Other's concept of home was similar to theirs. I encouraged them to find texts written by authors from the region when possible and to address the issues of authenticity and accuracy.

The groups were encouraged to especially consider the issues faced by the region's inhabitants and how those issues might be global in nature. In this article, I attend particularly to the books I used and their general reception by students who participated in the course. As an IRB is in progress, I cannot report individual student responses or on their specific work in the class, but rather only general knowledge from the course. In addition, I use the term "student" for all class participants while noting that some were sophomores not yet accepted into the professional cohort of teacher candidacy, and others were already teacher candidates.

An Expanding Sense of Home

On the first day of class I asked students to explore the concept of home by doing a short write of their ideas of home and reading aloud Patricia MacLachlan's (1995) *What You Know First* to address the concept of reflective loyalty (Hansen, 2017). From our discussion of the book and our ideas, many students suggested home included concepts of the familiar, which was comprised of the comfort and safety that came from family and friends. Many considered a particular neighborhood, family home, or city as home with very few students noting home as a concept remaining solidly within the realm of the physical. They also considered the transitioning of home as they were living away from their childhood homes on their own for the first time. As we went through the course, I asked students to return to the concept of home as they read the selected pieces of global literature. Students responded to exit tickets that asked questions such as, "How does this impact your concept of home?" or "What metaphor would you use to address your concept of home?" In their responses, students embodied the possibilities of reflective loyalty and openness (Hansen, 2017). By the end of the term, many shifted their thinking from home as a physical space to ideas that included "being their own home," which resulted from discussions of literature that included the tragedy of having home destroyed or characters being displaced. Seeing the self as home, and with it a certain sense of autonomy in thought and behavior, began to make more sense as they noted that their movement from their childhood locations was a type of disruption, a concept found in class novels.

One particularly powerful discussion was based on the concept of a cosmopolitan ideology from the perspective of a physical map, a globe, and then a photo of the earth (Choo, 2013). Using language such as "inhabitants" and "citizens" (Hanson, 2017) as different concepts also created new ways of thinking about "home" and all living things within a region or place. In addition, the idea that Others embraced their "home" locations—including their values and beliefs that grounded them—as places of comfort, family, and safety was eye-opening to students who assumed immigrants did not love their home countries. The distance between "the Other" and themselves began to close as they read about lives—and home—from around the world. Some students embraced the concept of Other as all living things that had rights to

comfort and safety. A smaller group of students remained closer to loyalty than openness, but that loyalty included a more appreciative stance to those within their families and communities that might have been Othered in the past.

Contemplating Loyalty and Openness through Literature

To create reading experiences that addressed both the familiar and the strange and allowed for the practice of reflective loyalty and openness, we read novels, picturebooks, and websites that engaged students in lived through experiences that could ground them and expand the ground beneath them. By starting with the picturebook *What You Know First* (MacLachlan, 1995) as a way of substantiating the idea of reflective loyalty, I was able to move to reflective openness (Hansen, 2017) through class novels and the frequent use of picturebooks.

Required Reading: Novels

The first book students read was a novel with magical realism, *The Head of the Saint* (Acioli, 2016), about Samuel, a Brazilian boy who becomes homeless after the death of his mother. Samuel's promise to his mother leads him to travel to the small village of Candeia where he lives within the head of a large statue of a saint that never quite got off the ground (think the statue of Christ the Redeemer overlooking Rio de Janeiro). Discussing the concept of home in relation to this novel and *What You Know First* created possibilities of loyalty and openness and awareness of the reality of change, perhaps to a sense of homelessness (both in their lives and in the lives of the characters), and to responsibilities toward realities unlike their own they might be willing to embrace.

As we moved through the course, we read more novels from various parts of the world, including *Moon Bear* (Lewis, 2015), *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (Hitchcock, 2016), *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* (Abawi, 2018), *A Year Without My Mom* (Tokstikova, 2015), *This Thing Called the Future* (Powers, 2011), and *The Night Diary* (Hiranandani, 2019). As we read each book, we brainstormed themes and topics that could be addressed in connection to each book, and narrowed that list as we created intertextual connections to the previous novels. We constructed a list of concepts such as displacement, family love and alienation, connection, acceptance, power, and Othering.

As students' feelings of familiarity and connection associated with home were echoed in the books, their thinking about and response to the books broadened, yet remained relatively close to "home." When they were asked to rank the novels read within the course, they highly rated *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (Hitchcock, 2019), a coming of age story set in 1970s rural Alaska that tells the story of four teenagers, most of whom were displaced either physically or emotionally. The four learn to overcome individual obstacles and navigate towards adulthood, and was the book that was most relatable to students. It was also the book they read right after *The Head of the Saint* (Acioli, 2016), which some resisted due to the metaphysical and religious aspects of the storyline. *Other People's Houses* set the standard due to its similarity of experiences in respect to family, growing up, and becoming

independent. Because it was one of the first books students read, the sense of familiar became a palatable foundation of other-orientedness as they encountered the less familiar and their ideas of hospitality to the stranger in subsequent reads.

The third novel read during the term was Atia Abawi's (2018) *A Land of Permanent Goodbye's*. Set during the Syrian Civil War, readers are lead through teenage Tareq's horrific encounters as a refugee. When most of his family is killed in a neighborhood bombing and his brother is lost, the remaining members of the family make their way to Turkey, where Tareq's father remains when they lack the money for the water crossing to Greece. Filled with the trials faced by Syrian refugees as they seek safety, students responded to the book's emotional impact and commented on their own lack of knowledge and superficial experiences from media stories. They confronted the idea of losing their own homes and how that would impact their sense of home and identity. This book created the greatest sense of "home as self" for students and the greatest sense of reflective openness.

Veera Hiranandani's (2019) *The Night Diary* was the fourth book we read. This novel chronicles the experiences of motherless 12-year-old Nisha and her family in the days leading up to and during their forced journey to India during the Indian-Pakistani Partition in 1947. It was a favorite for many. They appreciated the diary format and the knowledge they gained about an historical time period and event, noting the journal-like format was familiar to them and the story evoked a sense of family comfort and empathy. This book further developed students' sense of Other-orientedness because of Nisha's struggle with feeling both Indian and Pakistani, Muslim and Hindu. Being both created otherness that Nisha attempted to negotiate during her journey, heading to and from "home."

Students also expressed appreciation for Gill Lewis' (2015) *Moon Bear*, the story of Tam and his care of and love for a baby moon bear that was abducted from its mother to be "milked" for bile. In this case, the relationship between the bear and Tam resonated with those who loved animals, while others noted Tam's agency and willingness to risk his life for something beyond himself. Many were drawn into the phenomenon and plight of bears abused throughout the world for their bile. It was one of students' favorites.

Two other novels read during the semester were *A Year Without Mom* (Tolstikova, 2015) and *This Thing Called the Future* (Powers, 2011). While not considered favorites for many students, the texts still enlightened them about realities they had not faced, but for which they had empathy. Both were read toward the end of the term, which may be part of the reason for not appreciating them in ways similar to the other texts. Students noted they did not read these books as "deeply" as other books due to additional academic responsibilities and time limitations. Only *A Year Without Mom*, however, was not selected as a personal favorite by any student.

Read Alouds and Picturebooks

Another venue for contemplating the concept of "home" was the picturebook read alouds. Each week I selected at least one picturebook that created space for either stretching our

thinking about home as a cosmic sensibility or developing an other-orientation. These books included places and emotions close and far from our own cultural locations and most were pieces of global literature or had a setting from countries other than the U.S.

Toward the beginning of the course, I introduced books about names students especially appreciated, including *My name is Gabito: The life of Gabriel García Márquez/Me llamo Gabito: la vida de Gabriel García Márquez* (Brown, 2007), *Archie Snufflekins Oliver Valentine Cupcake Tiberius* (Harnett, 2016), *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (Martinez-Neal, 2018), *My Name is Bilal* (Mobin-Uddin, 2005), *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams & Mohammed, 2009), and *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits, 2003). Using books about names introduced the familiar in respect to naming and loyalty to families and the importance of our names, but also created an opening to think more critically about how unfamiliar names have been received by many within dominant U.S. culture.

We also addressed the concept of location and who has what through books such as Temple and Temple's (2019) *Room on Our Rock*, Lucas's (2015) *This Is My Rock*, Trottier's (2011) *Migrant*, Nuño's (2016) *The Map of Good Memories*, and Orbeck-Nilssen's (2016) *Why Am I Here?* This last book addresses the philosophical idea of why this place and not somewhere else. Ultimately, readers are asked to contemplate the notion that because they are where they are, perhaps that is the way it is supposed to be, but it doesn't relieve one of responsibility toward the Other.

Many times during the term I asked students about how the picturebooks I selected addressed the concept of home or why they thought I shared this book with them. And finally, there were times when I shared books because they related to professional readings or addressed an issue we had discussed in class. One such book was *Mirror* (2010) by Jeannie Baker. Upon first read, students found the book a wonderful comparison of two cultures' ideas of home. But when thinking about the stereotypical aspects of the book, many realized they needed to think about how the Other is represented as well as remember that a single story (Adichie, 2009) never tells the whole story about any culture. Other picturebooks we used are listed in the appendix as well as other books I have added to the collection for use in subsequent semesters.

An additional way picturebooks were used was through the regional study, where students found picturebooks that highlighted the region of the world they selected for their final projects. Learning where to access such works was also an important aspect of the course. Students had to first accept the use of picturebooks in middle grade classrooms, but once they realized the power of these narratives, they recognized the importance of utilizing them for critical knowledge their own students could access while becoming socially responsible readers.

Contemplating Socially Responsible Reading through Reading

As part of the course, students addressed the concept of becoming socially responsible readers (Johnson, 2016). Developing as a socially responsible reader compels us to enter into a space of *nepantla* (Dávila, 2014), which is to hold two competing ideas in an attempt to understand both. By reading outside of their own cultural locations, students needed

to attempt understanding an author's text while also holding off from embracing those ideas prematurely so the author's voice could be heard as separate from their own ideas of what they believe the author is saying. In addition, socially responsible readers codify their responses to literature so they could investigate those responses critically. Thus, a socially responsible reader is aware that the Other does not need to conform to the reader's sense of the world while also committing to hearing the voice of that Other. In many ways, they could practice reflective loyalty and reflective openness, which requires the ability to name why they hold certain ideas and resist others, and how those actions are tied to their own cultural understandings and values.

I often asked students to give a book a chance, remembering there is an author behind each story, and to explore which values and beliefs they embrace that might create a barrier to their appreciating or understanding the book. Through it all students needed to realize that what matters to an author has to be addressed in their thinking through the author's text as they reflect upon their meaning-making. In addition, they can act intentionally in:

- **creating an openness** to what the text could teach with a spirit of acceptance of difference, while simultaneously
- **acknowledging their individual limited knowledge** of the culture combined with the certainty that one text cannot represent an entire culture, and
- **recognizing their unique and cultural positioning** as only one of many, and finally
- **investigating the biases** we bring to the text as a means of embracing social responsibility.

In essence, socially responsible readers come to realize that a reader's transaction with the text will create something new, what Rosenblatt (1995) refers to as the poem, and thus they need to accept the risk that their thinking might change them in ways they may not anticipate. This risk is an opening that allows them "to take the fullest possible account of—to respect, safeguard, and learn from—the otherness and singularity of the other" (Attridge, 1999, p. 28).

These concepts were introduced toward the beginning of the term, and students were asked to respond to the course literature through a socially responsible lens. For many, these concepts helped them approach hospitality to the Other by hearing the voices of both characters and those who created the characters. Students noted that the Other became familiar to them through global literature; this familiarity resonated through struggles of alienation represented in the texts as well as issues of displacement, family, and separation

experienced by the characters. For other students, global literature was the connection that helped them understand kindness, empathy and gratitude towards the represented Other in the narratives.

As noted, a key component of being a socially responsible reader is to turn a critical lens inwards towards analyzing the reader's own response to the text. In reading student journals, it was clear that the concept of social responsibility took time and effort for them to understand how their particular social conditions, family situations, and cultural mores and values were brought to their transactions with the readings (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995). Other points made in the journals included student reflections on how empathy and its representation were not easy for them to find within the books they typically read, yet engaging in these pieces of global literature and the class discussions helped them learn to empathize with those who differ from themselves. A common theme across the journals was that the use of global literature and a focus on representation was lacking in middle level classrooms. Representation was also tied to the concepts of authenticity and "a single story" (Adichie, 2009) with students commenting on how the proliferation of literature from a range of global cultures helps readers address questions of stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Throughout the course, students reflected on their future as teachers and the role of using global literature in their classrooms. Students were encouraged to think about the concept of *nepantla* (Davila, 2014), or inbetween meeting spaces, which could be a type of third space to create in their classrooms. Many considered the theme of "home" and the possibility of opening up their classrooms as home or the inbetween meeting space, recognizing that the concept of home differs from one individual to another and that their own students might not have positive associations for "home." Thus, while at the beginning of the semester many associated literature and home with reflections of themselves, with each subsequent novel and discussion, their responses within the journals took on an understanding of themselves and home that expanded outward to include those different from themselves and their realities.

Final Thoughts and Suggestions

Upon reviewing the course and the documents such as exit tickets, student journals, and regional studies from the course, I noted that many of my academic and social objectives for the class had taken root, but growth, especially in respect to socially responsible reading and becoming more reflective in respect to students' own loyalty and openness toward the Other, still remained elusive. One student did reach out and ask for the journal template to use with middle school students, and another emailed to note that she was thinking about the concept of social responsibility as we all go through the Covid-19 pandemic.

There will be changes to the course that need to be made going forward. One of those changes is to determine which books might be replaced, and what other ways I might use

picturebooks. I am also thinking of creating book groups rather than requiring whole class reads. With the attention to issues faced by inhabitants across the world, I now know to spend more time on addressing those issues and how each of us might think more globally and with a greater other-orientation. I also created a booklist for students on our umbrella concept of home and how it can be addressed from multiple and global perspectives (see appendix).

Ultimately, starting a course that highlights global literature and using an umbrella concept such as home, or responsibility, or walking with the Other will engage and perhaps provoke students to deeper thinking in respect to who they are in the world, their place within it, and the responsibility we have toward each other, regardless of political, cultural, or geographical boundaries. It is, after all, a view from space or a global event, such as our current pandemic, from which we see that the earth is our collective home, and we are each other's neighbor.

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Temple, K., & Temple, J. (2019). *Room on our rock*. Illus. T. Baynton. Kane/Miller..
Tolstikova, D. (2015). *A year without mom*. Groundwood.
Trottier, M. (2011). *Migrant*. Illus. I. Arsenault. Groundwood.
Williams, K., & Mohammed, K. (2009). *My name is Sangoel*. Illus. C. Stock. Eerdmans.

Appendix: Recommended Books to Use for the Umbrella Concept of Home

Novels

- Abawi, A. (2018). *A land of permanent goodbyes*. Philomel Books.
Acioli, S. (2016). *The head of the saint*. Delacorte.
Adele, F., & Frosch, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Coming of age around the world: A multicultural
anthology*. The New Press.
Bolden, T. (1994). *Rites of passage: Stories about growing up by Black writers from around
the world*. Hyperion.
Cisneros, S. (1989). *The house on mango street*. Random House.
DeWoskin, R. (2019). *Someday we will fly*. Viking.
Dimaline, C. (2017). *The marrow thieves*. Cormorant.
Hiranandani, V. (2018). *The night diary*. Dial.
Hitchcock, B. (2016). *The smell of other people's houses*. Random House.
Jaramillo, A. (2006). *La línea*. Roaring Brook Press.
Killeen, M. (2018). *Orphan Monster Spy*. Penguin.
Kuklin, S. (2019). *We are here to stay: Voices of undocumented young adults*. Candlewick.
Lewis, G. (2015). *Moon bear*. Atheneum.
Marsh, K. (2028). *Nowhere boy*. Roaring Brook.
Mckesson, D. (2018). *On the other side of freedom: The case for hope*. (excerpt on pp.
98-102). Viking.
Mead, A. (2007). *Dawn and dusk*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
Park, L.S. (2002). *When my name was Keoko*. Houghton Mifflin.
Pausewang, G. (1995). *Traitor*. Trans. German by R. Ward. Lerner.
Philbrick, R. (2000). *The last book in the universe*. Scholastic.
Pinkney, A.D. (2014). *The red pencil*. Illus. S.W. Evans. Little Brown.
Powers, J.L. (2011). *This thing called the future*. Cinco Puntos.
Raúf, O.Q. (2018). *The boy at the back of the class*. Delacorte.
Rivera, R. (2008). *Tuk and the whale*. Groundwood.
Rodkey, G. (2019). *We're not from here*. Crown.

- Svingen, A. (2016). *The ballad of the broken nose*. Trans. Norwegian by K. Dickson. Simon & Schuster.
- Thomas, J., Shapard, R., & Merrill, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Flash fiction international: Very short stories from around the world*. Norton.
- Tolstikova, D. (2015). *A year without mom*. Groundwood.
- Uwiringiyimana, S., with Pesta, A. (2017). *How dare the sun rise?* (excerpt on pp. 123-128). HarperCollins.
- Vanderberg, H. (2009). *Growing up Latino: Teens write about Hispanic-American identity*. Youth Communication.
- Venkatraman, P. (2019). *The bridge home*. Penguin.
- Vermette, K. (2018). *The Break* (excerpt on pp. 300-302). House of Anansi Press.

Picturebooks

- Bradby, M. (2000). *Mama, where are you from?* Illus. C.K. Soentpiet. Orchard.
- Brown, M. (2007). *My name is Gabito: The life of Gabriel García Márquez/Me llamo Gabito: la vida de Gabriel García Márquez*. Illus. R. Colón. Luna Rising.
- Buitrago, J. (2015). *Two white rabbits*. Illus. R. Yockteng. Groundwood Books.
- Buntig, E. (2001). *Gleam and glow*. Illus. P. Sylvada. Harcourt.
- Chanchani, V. (2015). *The house that Sonabai built*. Photographs S. Huyler. Tulika.
- Christie, R. G. (2015). *Mousetropolis*. Holiday House
- Coffelt, N. (2007). *Fred stays with me*. Illus. T. Tusa. Little Brown.
- Croza, L. (2010). *I know here*. Illus. M. James. Groundwood.
- Croza, L. (2014). *From there to here*. Illus. M. James. Groundwood.
- Dahl, G. (2003). *Angry man*. Illus. S. Nyhus. Trans. from Norwegian T. Chace. NorthSouth.
- Davies, N. (2018). *The day the war came*. Illus. R. Cobb. Candlewick.
- de Arias, P. (2018). *Marwan's journey*. Illus. L. Borrás. minedition.
- Dubuc, M. (2014). *The lion and the bird*. Enchanted Lion.
- Dumont, J. (2015). *I am a bear*. Eerdmans.
- Garland, S. (1993). *The lotus seed*. Illus. T. Kiuchi. Houghton Mifflin.
- Harnett, K. (2016). *Archie Snufflekins Oliver Valentine Cupcake Tiberius*. Flying Eye.
- Hathorn, L. (1994). *Way home*. Illus. G. Rogers. Crown.
- Herrera, J. (2000). *The upside down boy/El Niño de cabeza*. Illus. E. Gómez. Lee & Low.
- Hessell, J. (1989). *Staying at Sam's*. Illus. J. Williams. Lippincott.
- Jordan-Fenton, C., & Pokiak-Fenton, M. (2013). *When I was eight*. Illus. G. Grimard. Annick.
- Kullab, S. (2017). *Escape from Syria*. Illus. J. Roche. Color by M. Freiheit. Firefly.
- Lucas, D. (2015). *This is my rock*. Flying Eye.
- Martinez-Neal, J. (2018). *Alma and how she got her name*. Candlewick.
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