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WOW STORIES

LEARNING ABOUT OURSELVES AND OTHERS:
DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS
THROUGH GLOBAL LITERATURE

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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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One of the most powerful ways to grow professionally as an educator is to participate in a study group or learning community. This type of professional development brings together a group of people who engage in sustained inquiry on a question related to their teaching.

In this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*, one learning community shares their inquiry into how to help children connect with global literature through connecting art and culture. Now in their second year, the Pot Springs Elementary community consists of classroom teachers from the primary grades, the school art teacher, and university professors. Their work this past year was supported by a grant from the Longview Foundation for World Affairs and International Understanding. The vignettes from their first year can be found [here](#).

As you read this issue, think about how you connect students of all ages with literature in ways that promote intercultural understandings. Consider sharing your innovative practices 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.

Janine M. Schall

Editor, *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*

Learning About Ourselves and Others through Global Literature

Prisca Martens and Ray Martens

In 2011-2012 our literacy community came together to investigate the intercultural understandings young children develop about themselves, others, and the world through experiences with global picturebooks and their use of art to express those understandings. Our community included eight teachers from Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland: Christie Furnari teaches pre-kindergarten; Elizabeth Soper and Darlene Wolinski teach kindergarten; Stacy Aghalarov teaches art; and Michelle Doyle, Jenna Loomis, Laura Fuhrman, and Margaret Clarke-Williams teach first grade. We, Prisca and Ray Martens, are professors/researchers who teach literacy and art education, respectively, at Towson University. As a team, the ten of us met monthly over the year to discuss readings and develop understandings about intercultural learning and global picturebooks, share what was happening related to global literature in each classroom, look at examples of children's written and artistic responses to the literature, and plan for the coming weeks. Our work was supported by a *Literacy Communities: Global Gateways to Innovation Grant* from Worlds of Words and by a *Learning & Leadership Grant* from the National Education Association Foundation.

In this vignette we provide background information about the school, the children, and our work to contextualize the vignettes that follow. In those vignettes, the teachers share specific books and experiences they had with their students around global picturebooks.

Setting the Context

The growing interconnectedness of our world economically, politically, and socially makes it essential that children develop intercultural understandings to foster and support their respect for and appreciation of different cultures and ways of life and realities around the globe (Allan, 2003; Banks, 2004). Pot Spring's diversity provides added richness for developing these understandings. With 41% of the 550 students being European American, 29% African American, 17% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 13% Hispanic, the school is a small microcosm of the world. Each of the seven classrooms included at least one child (usually more):

- who was born in another country; for example, China, Pakistan, El Salvador, Columbia, Senegal, and India;
- whose family immigrated to the United States within the past 10 years from places such as Guatemala, Kenya, Trinidad, Mexico, Zambia, Iran, and Egypt; and,
- whose family spoke a language other than/in addition to English at home, including Persian, Punjabi, Urdu, Polish, Kiswahili, Arabic, Greek, Mandarin, and Khmer.

The children lived and breathed diversity daily! Global literature provided opportunities to build on and highlight this diversity (Freeman, Lehman, & Scharer, 2007; Short, 2011). This literature depicts cultures, regions, and people outside the reader's country and includes books published first in another country then translated and published in the United States and books published first in the United States but with settings outside the United States (Hadaway, 2007; Short, 2007). Good books, as Rochman (1993) states, break down barriers and let readers "know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict" (p. 19). We knew that with global literature the children would "immerse themselves in story worlds [and gain] insights into how people feel, live, and think around the world. [Children would] also come to recognize their common humanity as well as to value cultural differences" (Short, 2009, p. 1). We were confident that through discussions of and experiences with global literature the children would broaden their understandings of culture, develop a pluralistic perspective, value ways of living/being in other parts of the world, and understand interdependence among people/nations (Allan, 2003; Banks, 2004; Short, 2009).

Developing Intercultural Understandings

We had two over-arching goals for our work over the school year. One was to explore the intercultural understandings the children developed about themselves, others, and the world

through global picturebooks and the other was to examine how art helped the children express those understandings.

Learning About Ourselves and Others

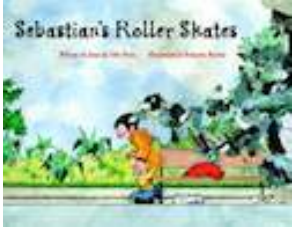
We began our exploration of children’s intercultural understandings with a focus on identity/self-awareness. As Banks (2004) states, “Self-acceptance is a prerequisite to the acceptance and valuing of others” (p. 302). To help the children begin to explore who they are and their family heritage, the teachers asked the parents to complete a survey about where/when their families immigrated to the United States. We wanted all of the children to understand that while some of their classmates moved here recently, all of their families, unless they are Native Americans, originated in another country. While conceptually this was difficult for young children to comprehend, it was a way to help them begin to develop global awareness. The teachers plotted the survey information on a world map in their classrooms, attaching a string from a picture of the child on the outside of the map to their country of origin (when children had multiple countries of origin there were multiple strings). The children took pride in putting up their string and naming their country. Throughout the year the teachers at times referred to the maps to reference where particular global picturebooks were from or the location of a certain place. The photo below is an example of one of the maps.



Figure 1. Class map showing family origins of students.

The teachers tried to read a global picturebook focused on identity every one to two weeks. The usual procedure was to read the book on a document camera so the children could follow along on the written text and read the art. The children responded to the stories, sometimes orally and sometimes first in writing or in sketches that they later shared. Through these discussions the

children constructed rich meanings together, building on each other's insights and connections. Often the teachers went back to the book to closely examine two or three of the artist's works and talk with the children about why the artist made the particular decisions to represent story



meanings. These explorations of the art further enhanced the children's understandings of the stories. In "Getting to Know Ourselves through Global Literature," Laura shares how she used [*Sebastian's Rollerskates*](#) (de Deu Prats, 2005) to help her children think about who they are and how they grow and develop confidence.

As the teachers continued to read books related to identity and self-awareness in their classrooms, in our study group we talked about how to plan for the remainder of the school year. We read and discussed "Developing Intercultural Understandings through Global Children's Literature" by Kathy Short and Lisa Thomas (2011) which outlines a curriculum framework for intercultural learning. Through this discussion the first grade teachers decided to move from a focus on identity to an in-depth study of another cultural group. Short and Thomas point out that explorations of personal cultural identities complemented with cross-cultural studies encourage students "to examine the complexity and diversity of that culture and to recognize that their personal perspective [is] only one way to view the world" (p. 152).

We decided to study India because in the fall we had read [*Same, Same But Different*](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011). It is the story of two boys, one in America and the other in India, who become pen pals and share information about where they live. While we and the children enjoyed the story, as teachers/researchers we were concerned about the simplistic stereotypic views of both countries that came across. Since none of us knew much about India and Margaret had two students who were born there and another with ties to India, we decided it would be a good learning experience for all of us. In "Crossing Cultural Borders: Our Study of Indian Culture," Margaret discusses how she immersed her children in learning about India. Then, in "Empowering Young Writers as Authors and Illustrators through a Study of India" Michelle shares how her children pulled their learning together to write and illustrate a nonfiction book on India. While this study was rich and meaningful to the children and to us, we know there are areas in which we can and will grow in future similar studies. For example, discussions around such topics as the interdependence among people and nations, India's place in the world, and challenges India faces emerged and were addressed but we want to highlight those more in the future.

For their pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children, Christie, Elizabeth, and Darlene felt strongly that rather than focus on one particular cultural group, they wanted to continue to look across cultures with a focus on helping their students understand themselves and their relationships with others, including distinguishing between and celebrating how they, their families, and their lives are similar to and different from others. Since this understanding is a major concept, the teachers

wanted to spend the year reading, discussing, and inviting the children to respond to global picturebooks related to this focus. In “Learning about Ourselves and Others in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten” they provide examples of their work with their students around these books and some of the exciting things that happened in their classrooms.

Sharing Understandings Through Art

Art is one of a range of modes through which humans communicate meaning. Other modes include music, movement, oral and written language. While some modes may be foregrounded over others at particular times and not every mode is viable for communicating in every instance, all modes are equally valid and significant for sharing meaning (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). Schools and society, however, tend to consider written and oral language to be the modes central and primary to communication and place much less value on other modes (Kress & Jewitt, 2008).

For the past several years we have been examining ways to support children in reading meanings in art as well as expressing their understandings and ideas through art (Croce et al. 2009; Maderazo et al., 2010; P. Martens et al., in press; R. Martens et al., 2010). In our work we have learned that young children understand the multimodal nature of picturebooks and how meanings are embedded in both the written language and the art. They move easily and seamlessly between both to construct meaning of the whole as they read. We have seen how reading multimodally challenges children to think critically, attend to details, and make strong inferences. Our respect for picturebooks and the rich and powerful meanings they simultaneously offer through multiple modes motivate us to help children appreciate meanings expressed through art.

The art teacher, Stacy, and the classroom teachers collaborated to plan art concepts to share with the children through picturebooks. Sometimes Stacy introduced a picturebook and art concepts and had the children explore and create art using that concept. Other times the teachers introduced the picturebook and then Stacy explored the art with the children. Often, back in the classroom, the teachers had the children write a story to go with their art.

We have found that introducing art concepts to young children with global picturebooks is sometimes difficult. While the art is beautiful and the stories are rich, sometimes for young children both are complex, making it hard for the children to focus on a particular art concept. Introducing concepts in other ways, then looking at how artists in global picturebooks use them, has been more successful. In “Learning to Read and Compose Meaning in Art Using Picturebooks” Stacy shares how she used work by Molly Bang (2000) and other artists with the first graders to introduce art concepts and express emotions in art. Jenna, in “The Art in Writing: Analysis of Two Different Types of Writing Samples,” examines the differences in her children’s personal narratives when their writing is based on art they created or completed as an assessment.

We had a rich and exciting year working together and with the children, reading, discussing, and responding to global picturebooks. We hope the vignettes convey that excitement.

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Learning About Ourselves and Others in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

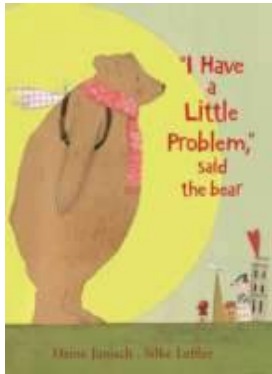
Christie Furnari, Elizabeth Soper, and Darlene Wolinski

As teachers of very young children, we know how important it is for our children to distinguish and celebrate how they, their families, and their lives are similar to and different from others. In this vignette we each share how our children grew in their understandings of themselves and others through our readings, discussions and experiences with global literature in our classrooms. For an overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, "[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature.](#)"



A New Focus: Understanding Ourselves through Global Picturebooks: Christie Furnari

In fall 2011, I joined a literacy community comprised of four first grade teachers, two kindergarten teachers, an art teacher, Prisca, and Ray. I teach pre-kindergarten in two half-day sessions of about 20 children. Our literacy community focused on using global children's literature to help young children respect or "be kind" to others and appreciate themselves and each other. As the months progressed I decided to build on the theme of kindness and broaden it to include being responsible for yourself and your actions and helping each other.



We read and discussed a range of books including *I Like Me* (Carlson, 1988), *Whoever You Are* (Fox, 1997), *Spoon* (Rosenthal, 2009), [*I Have a Little Problem*](#) (Janisch, 2007), and *Spaghetti on a Hot Dog Bun* (Dismondy, 2008). In these books we focused on how to have fun with ourselves, how to take care of ourselves, how wonderful we are, what to do if we fall down, what to do if we make a mistake, and what to do if we are sad. Sometimes the children drew a picture to go with the story and often I interviewed them.

One book that was particularly meaningful was *Marvelous Me* (Bullard, 2003), the story of young Alex who is like other children in some ways (i.e., imaginative, feeling sad or happy) but in other ways is very unique and special (i.e., his smile, his hug). After reading and talking about this book I asked the children to draw a picture showing what was marvelous about each of them. Then I interviewed each child, asking about their picture, what they did if they had a problem and what they did if they got sad. The questions were to help them think about being responsible for themselves. I also asked them to complete the sentence, "You are ...", telling me what I should say about them.

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Figure 1. Carmelita's picture showing why she is marvelous.

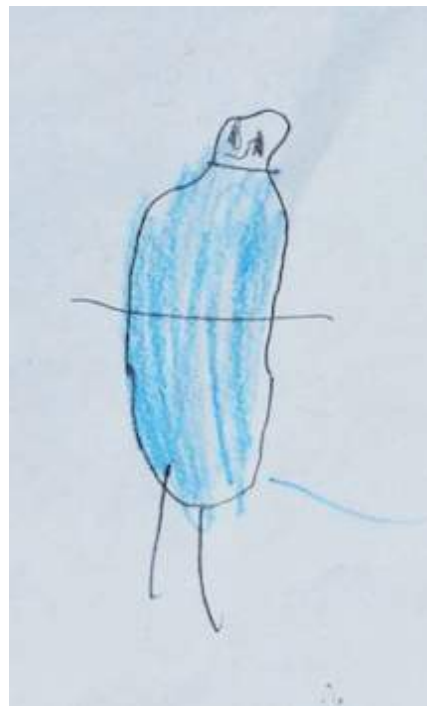


Figure 2. Talon's picture showing why he is marvelous.

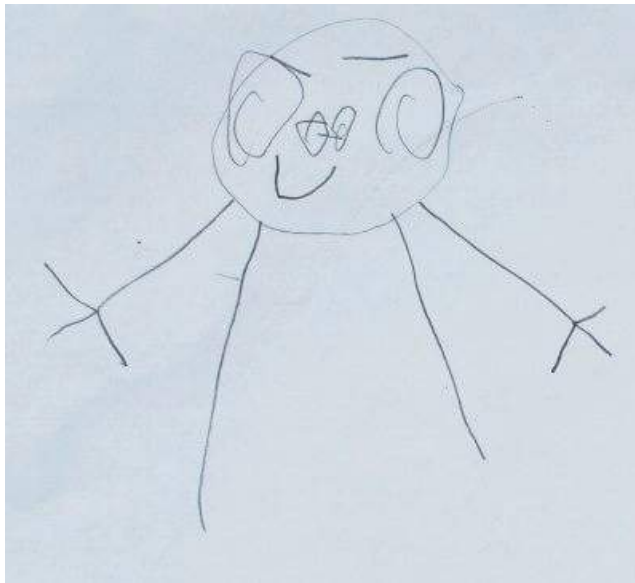


Figure 3. Leila's picture showing why she is marvelous.

The children's pictures and responses to my questions allowed me to see the range of ways my students thought they were marvelous. For example, Carmelita, a second language learner, said "I like play my bicycle in my house. I like to play with my jump rope in my house. I like to eat too much fruit." If she has a problem, she said she "pick myself up" and if she is sad she "stop and think." She told me that what I should say about her was "You are important." Talon, a high energy

friend I had to interview on the move, said he was marvelous because “games...I like playing with my friends. I like playing with my family. I love my mother, my father, my sister, and my grandmother and everybody in the world.” If he has a problem, “pick yourself up and give another chance.” If he gets sad “somebody always cheer me up.” Leila said that if she gets sad, “Pick myself up and get my smile back.”

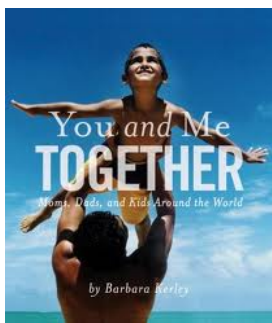
It was a rich year that brought on a deeper understanding of ourselves, others, and literature. Students were aware of how to be kind and could communicate how they felt and thought. Next year I will use these same ideas but include more speaking and listening experiences in small group meetings. I am excited to use literature from last year and add new books focusing on self-awareness. After last year I can tie the concept of same and different even further into science to focus on a respect for living things and our world.



Celebrating Our Families: Elizabeth Soper

Throughout the year my kindergarten children and I read global picturebooks that helped us think about the lives of children and families in other cultures around the world. Even though my classroom was very diverse, the children seemed unaware of the differences between them. While I was glad the children were so accepting of each other, I also wanted them to realize and appreciate their differences. I wanted them to recognize and celebrate how unique, beautiful, and special they each are and value and respect that specialness in each other.

We read many fiction and non-fiction global picturebooks over the year that helped the children understand that there are other cultures in the world beyond their reality. These included



Waiting for the Biblioburro (Brown, 2011), [*For You Are a Kenyan Child*](#) (Cunnane, 2006), and [*Our Grandparents: A Global Album*](#) (Ajmera, Kinkade, Pon, & Tutu, 2010). The last book we read was also one of the first: [*You and Me Together: Moms, Dads, and Kids around the World*](#) (Kerley, 2010). This

nonfiction book displays color photos with brief phrases describing parents and children in places around the world involved in such everyday activities as work, play, prayer, conversation, or travel. I read the book on the document camera so the children could see the photos. As we read, the children commented on the clothing the families wore, their work, and the range of activities they were engaged in, such cooking, dancing, talking, and taking a walk. They could see that children around the world were like them in similar yet different ways. When we finished the book, Charlotte suggested, “Why don’t we make a book like that about us?” How could I resist that?

I read the story again, this time asking the children to think about something that they do with a

family member. When we finished reading, I invited the children to illustrate their thoughts on paper. To further build on Charlotte's idea, I emailed the parents and asked them to send a photo of their child and a family member (that they did not need returned) engaged in an activity so we could create our own photo book. We had been studying text features in nonfiction books, specifically related to photographs, and I knew our book would be a wonderful connection to those discussions for the children. As the photos came in, I put them into our "book" (which was a PowerPoint presentation). Since time was short (we were literally in the last few days of school), I interviewed each child about their photo and added their words to their slide. For the few children who did not bring a photograph, I took a photo of them engaged in activity they chose to do in the classroom.



Figure 4. Class book ([pdf download](#)).

Our book was amazing and highlighted the uniqueness of each child and family. We read it many times in those closing days and the children were very proud of their book. It was a powerful way to end year and celebrate the richness of the diversity in the children and their families.

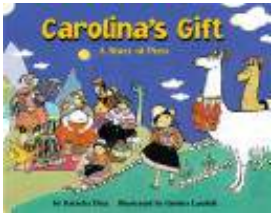
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Crossing Cultural Borders through Global Picturebooks: Darlene Wolinski

During this past year the teachers in our literacy community focused on helping our students understand who they are as cultural beings. We started by connecting a photo of each student to their country of origin on a world map so they could conceptualize their cultural heritage. I had students with family origins in places like Poland, Greece, Cyprus, Pakistan, El Salvador, and Africa.

We read a range of global picturebooks set in different countries to increase students' awareness of themselves and others throughout the world. Whenever we read a book associated with a place where any student had family origins, we talked about and celebrated that cultural heritage.

Each story we read shared children’s lives and experiences that crossed cultural borders and made students aware of similarities among people despite differences in backgrounds, families, and where and how they live. For each story, students drew and wrote a response that connected to the story and/or an art concept shown in the illustrations. For example, in *Dear Juno* (Pak, 1999) Juno’s parents are too busy to read him a letter he receives from his Korean grandmother. Juno opens the letter himself and, even though he cannot read Korean, he gleans information from a dried red and yellow flower and a photograph of his grandmother and a cat that were enclosed. Juno corresponds with his grandmother through his drawings. My students wrote letters and drew pictures to send a relative as a response, experiencing the importance of communication and family. In *Unique Monique* (Rousaki, 2003), when Monique feels constrained by her Greek school uniform, she finds creative ways to maintain her individuality. This generated a class book in which students drew and wrote about their unique traits.



Of all the stories we read, *Carolina’s Gift* (Diaz, 2002), set in Peru, made the biggest impression. Carolina, in search of the perfect gift for her Abuelita, picks a walking stick with a carved hummingbird from the Sunday market. The illustrations of village life in the Andes Mountains encompassed the entire society through pictures. We saw clothing, vendors, plants, musicians, buildings, crafts, and customs different from our own. We also talked about the beautiful patterns in the clothes and other artifacts that were representative of that culture. As Carolina traveled through the market, the class traveled with her and understood much of what composed their material culture. The students could then apply this knowledge to their own lives, making their global awareness relevant to them personally.

<p>Figure 5. Picture showing what Alisa would like to give her aunt.</p>	<p>Figure 6. Picture showing what Monica would like to give her mother.</p>



Figure 7. Picture showing what Jacob would like to give his mother.

In response to *Carolina's Gift*, the children drew and wrote about what they would like to give their family members. They talked about giving such things as flowers, Girl Scout cookies, a game, and a bull dog to their mothers, brothers, sisters, and fathers. In her drawing, Alisa chose to give her aunt a hat with a flower, connecting to the part of the story that mentioned that in Peruvian culture hats are worn by unmarried women. Alisa so well grasped an understanding of the custom that she made a connection to her own family. Monica drew herself with her mother and wrote, "I give my mommy a ring." Jacob drew himself carrying flowers and wrote, "I'm giving my mom flowers." Both Monica and Jacob included patterns on the clothing in their pictures, picking up on the patterns they saw in the story.

Through the books we read, students' global understanding increased. They found that they have much in common with the characters regardless of the geography, ethnicity, or background. Those differences allowed them to appreciate other cultures and grow in compassion.

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Getting to Know Ourselves through Global Literature

Laura Fuhrman

In 2011-2012 our Learning Community at Pot Spring Elementary School in Timonium, Maryland, focused on the intercultural understandings young children develop about themselves, others, and the world through experiences with global literature and how the children express their

understandings through art. For an overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, “[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature](#).” We started the year helping our students understand themselves as cultural beings so they developed an appreciation of the role culture plays in their own lives, as well as the lives of others. As Short and Thomas (2011) state, focusing on personal cultural identities encourages students “to realize they have a perspective and to value the role that culture plays in their own lives and worldviews in order to understand why culture matters to others” (p. 155).

In this vignette I share how my students and I explored our cultural identities. To contextualize this focus, I begin by discussing some of the books we read. Then I examine my students’ responses in art and writing to *Sebastian’s Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2005) in more detail.

Understanding Who We Are

In the fall my class and I read and discussed books in the text set on identity (A sampling is found in the chart). After reading a story, my students usually responded first in their sketchbooks by drawing and writing about their thoughts and what they considered to be the ‘big idea’ and meaning of the story. Students shared their art and writing as we discussed the story further.

<u>Title / Author</u>	<u>Aspect of Identity</u>	<u>Art</u>
<i>The Featherless Chicken</i> by C. Chen (Taiwan)	Accept and be proud of who you are; don’t judge yourself or others by outer appearances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Color: Warm/cool ● Movement: shown with repeated lines and shapes
<i>Suki’s Kimono</i> by C. Uegaki Illus. by S. Jorisch (Canada)	Be yourself despite what others think and stand up for what you believe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Color: primary colors, emphasis on red (cultural) ● Movement: shown with repeated lines and shapes
<i>Guji Guji</i> by C. Chen	Be yourself despite what others think and stand up for what you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Color/line: Warm colors/ rounded shapes for Guji

<p>(Taiwan)</p>	<p>believe</p>	<p>Guji; cool colors/ pointed shapes for the mean crocodiles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement: shown with repeated lines and shapes
<p><i>You Be Me, I'll Be You</i> by P. Mandelbaum (France)</p>	<p>Accept and be proud of who you are; don't judge yourself or others by outer appearances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast / Emphasis
<p><i>Those Shoes</i> by M. Boelts Illus. by N. Jones (Urban Area)</p>	<p>Being confident in who you are and putting others' needs before your own</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast / Emphasis
<p><i>Sam and the Lucky Money</i> by K. Chinn Illus. by C. Van Wright & Y. Hu (Chinese Americans)</p>	<p>Being confident in who you are and putting others' needs before your own</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast / Emphasis
<p><i>Pedrito's Day</i> by L Garay</p>	<p>Being confident in who you are and putting others' needs before your own</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast / Emphasis

Table 1. Selected Books from the Identity Text Set ([Download in Word](#))

We read and discussed a range of books. For example, *Pedrito's Day* (Garay, 1997) is the story of a young boy who is saving the money he earns by shining shoes to buy a bicycle. When he loses Tia Blanca's money while running an errand for her, he decides to give his bike money to Tia Blanca. My students loved the story but were sad for Pedrito. In his sketchbook, Jason wrote "[Pedrito] did what he had to do. He replaced the money [with] the money he was using for the bike." Avery wrote, "He was brave. He told the truth."

Sam and the Lucky Money (Chinn, 1997) is another book my students enjoyed. In this story Sam receives money for the Chinese New Year and is faced with the challenge of spending his money wisely. In the end he gives his money to a homeless man in order for him to buy some socks. My children were fascinated with the homeless man and how caring Sam was by helping the man. Ava wrote in her sketchbook, "[Sam] gave his money to him and told him he can get some socks. Sam is the lucky one because he has money and his family."

In *The Featherless Chicken* (Chen, 2006), a chicken born without feathers is looked down upon by other chickens who have feathers. In the end, all of the chickens laugh and play together and accept each other for who they are. My students didn't have a problem understanding the message in the story about outer appearances. Tytianna, for example, wrote in her sketchbook, "He was sad because he did not have feathers like the others. Then they just did not care because they were having fun."

As we read and discussed each story in the identity text set, as a class we created character x-rays (adapted from cultural x-rays in Short, 2009) for the main characters. I felt that creating these x-rays together about the characters would help my students understand that identities are complex and involve inner values and feelings as well as outer characteristics. To create the character x-rays following a story, students suggested visible physical characteristics of the person which I drew/wrote around the outside of the x-ray and what was important and what the person valued which I wrote on the inside the person's heart.

Sebastian's Roller Skates

Sebastian's Roller Skates (de Deu Prats, 2005) was my students' favorite book. It is the story of bashful Sebastian who wants desperately to communicate with others but is too shy to speak. The artist, Francesc Rovira, represents Sebastian's numerous shy thoughts in thought bubbles made of a collage of black and white pieces of paper/newspaper. Just by chance Sebastian learns to roller

skate which builds up his self-confidence and he begins to speak. Rovira shows these thoughts and speech in a collage of brightly colored pieces of paper. As a class we spent time discussing the mood found in the illustrations and how Rovira represents changes in that mood from the beginning to the end of the story with collages of newspaper and colored construction paper.

Because *Sebastian's Roller Skates* provides numerous opportunities to talk about identity and confidence and ways to express those feelings and emotions through art, I decided to spend several days exploring the book with my students. After reading the book the children and I retold the story and discussed how Sebastian changes during the story and why. We talked about this change and how “then” (in the past) Sebastian wasn’t confident, represented with black and white pieces of pictures and newspaper, and “now” (in the present) he was confident, shown with colored pieces of paper/pictures. I asked the children to think of something they couldn’t do at one time (then) that they could do now. I modeled this with my own picture. My “then” picture showed when I was little I couldn’t play musical instruments. My speech/mood bubble was made with newspaper musical notes. My “now” picture showed that I took lessons and learned how to play a clarinet and viola and participated in orchestra and band and my speech/mood bubble was made with beautiful colored pieces of tissue papered musical notes.

The children created their own pictures. I gave them the option of creating a “then and now” like Sebastian and me, or “now and then” set of pictures which would show something they couldn’t do now and want to be able to do in the future.

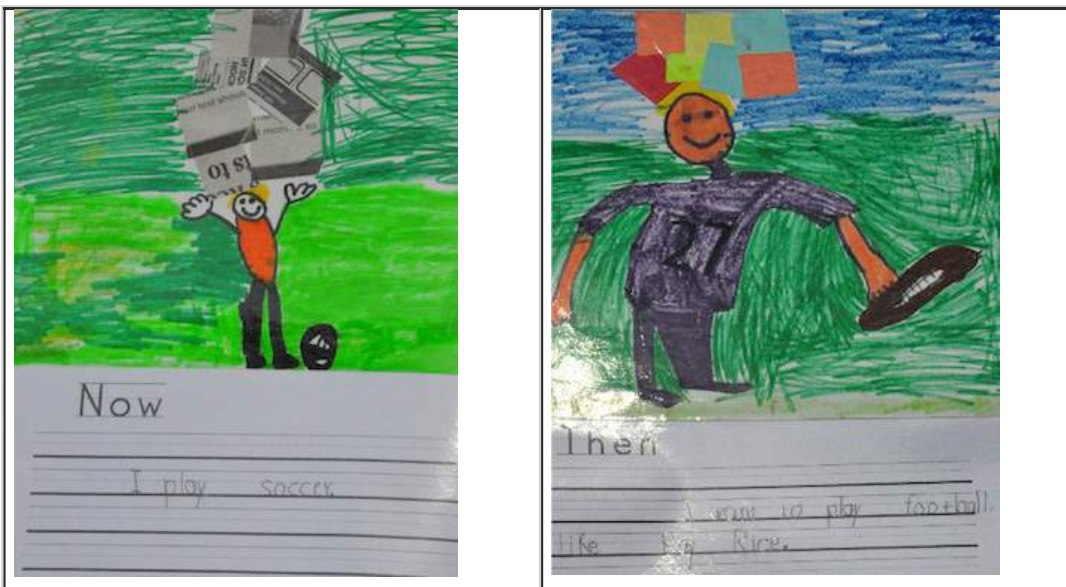


Figure 1. Ryan’s “Now” picture.

Figure 2. Ryan’s “Then” picture.

Ryan drew a picture of himself “now” playing soccer now with black/white thought bubbles. He wrote, “I play soccer.” His “then” (in the future) is him playing football wearing a Baltimore Ravens

uniform, Ray Rice’s number 27 to be precise, with a brightly colored speech bubble. He wrote, “I want to play football like Ray Rice.” Ryan told me he knows how to play soccer now but hopes to be like Ray Rice “then”.



Figure 3. Avery’s “Now” picture.

Figure 4. Avery’s “Then” picture.

Avery’s now-then picture dealt with her learning to play the violin. Her “now” picture was in black and white picture of herself in her home with a newspaper mood bubble: “Now, I do not know how to play the violin. I want to learn to play the violin.” Her “then” picture was the same picture full of color and colorful tissue paper with designs, showing her playing the violin. Avery wrote, “Then I know how to play the violin.”

The following day we again discussed the connections we had with Sebastian and how he grew so much through the story and learned to do something on his own. Several children shared life experiences similar to his. I also showed the children my “Then and Now” pictures again, shared my story for my art, and allowed them time to ask me questions. I then modeled how today they would write about their art. To help them organize their thoughts, I gave the children time to turn and talk with a neighbor and tell the stories for their art. Then the children went to their seats and wrote.

On the third day the children added any final details and shared their art and writing. I was amazed how the children related to Sebastian. Jay, for example, said, “I practiced and practiced like Sebastian and learned something new” and Dylan said, “I was shy and didn’t raise my hand like Sebastian.”

Character X-Rays

When we finished reading books in the identity text set, the students had the opportunity to create a character x-ray of their identities. I gave the children a large blank character x-ray outline and

asked them to write what others see about them on the outside and what is important to them inside the heart. The children showed insightful understandings of who they are through their x-rays.



Figure 5. Jason's character x-ray.

Figure 6. Aeshah's character x-ray.

Jason's love of sports is really clear on his x-ray. Around the outside he drew different pieces of sports equipment, such as a soccer ball, a baseball bat, a baseball, and a lacrosse stick, and even drew black lines under his eyes like football players have when they play. He also included his age, skin and eye color, and that his ancestors came from Germany. In his heart, he described himself as smart, active, kind, caring, happy, and truthful.

Around the outside of her character x-ray Aeshah shared such information as her age, her love of playing games, her desire to be an artist, and her hair, eye, and skin color. On the inside of her heart she wrote brave, helpful, thoughtful, happy, loving, and kind.

Through the many books in the identity text set that we read and discussed, the responses students created to the stories, and our character x-rays, students grew in their understandings of themselves as cultural beings. I also came to know and understand them, as well as myself, as cultural beings. They began to understand that who they are as people is complex, involving the type of person they are inside, as well as external characteristics.

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Crossing Cultural Borders: Our Study of Indian Culture

Margaret Clarke-Williams

Through our focus in the first part of the school year on self identity, as Laura described in "[Getting to Know Ourselves Through Global Literature](#)," our students developed understandings of themselves as cultural beings, including their outer visible characteristics as well as inner feelings and values. Cultural identity, though, also involves a global perspective and seeing ourselves as part of the world community (Banks, 2011). Cai (2002) states that when we "cross cultural borders [we] broaden our vision and shape ourselves to fit into a pluralistic world" (p. 118) and develop intercultural understandings. My first grade teammates and I decided to cross cultural borders through a study of India. We chose India because in the fall we'd read [*Same, Same But Different*](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011), the story of two pen pals, one in the United States and the other in India, who write to each other, sharing information about where they live. While we and the children enjoyed the story, we were concerned about possible stereotypes that emerged, especially since I had three students with ties to India. We thought an in-depth study of India, as an example of

another culture, would help the children appreciate not only the complexity of Indian culture but also of American culture. I also thought that my Indian students' families would be good resources. We believed that a study of India would help us move from self identity and knowing our personal cultures to understanding and appreciating other cultural perspectives (Short & Thomas, 2011).

For an overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, "[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature](#)." In this vignette, I describe our study of India and how my students and I were immersed in learning about that culture. Michelle, in "[Empowering Young Writers as Authors and Illustrators through a Study of India](#)," will share how the children pulled their learning about India together into nonfiction books that they wrote and illustrated.

Learning about India

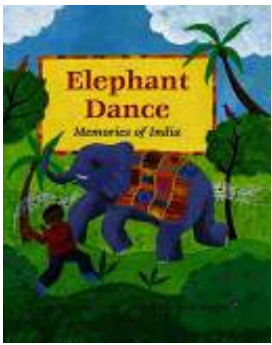
We all started our studies by reading and discussing [Elephant Dance: A Journey to India](#) (Heine, 2004). We decided to begin with this book because it provides a rich general overview of Indian culture, foods, animals, and traditions through a series of questions young Ravi asks his grandfather about life in India.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Culture and Traditions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>India the Culture</i> (Kalman, 2010) ● <i>Prita Goes to India</i> (Das, 2005) ● <i>India</i> (Apte, 2009) ● <i>T is for Taj Mahal</i> (Bajai, 2011) 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>People and Families</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>India the People</i> (Kalman, 2010) ● <i>Monsoon</i> (Krishnaswami, 2003) ● <i>Chachaji's Cup</i> (Krishnaswami, 2003) ● <i>Mama's Saris</i> (Makhijani 2007)
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Cities and Villages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Off to Class: Incredible and Unusual Schools Around</i> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Land, Resources, and Animals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>I is for India</i> (Das, 1996) ● <i>India the Land</i> (Kalman,

<p><i>the World</i> (Hughes, 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Geeta's Day</i> (Das, 1999) ● <i>The Children of India</i> (Hermes, 1994). ● <i>Out of the Way! Out of the Way!</i> (Krishnaswami, 2010) 	<p>2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Sacred River: The Ganges of India</i> (Lewin, 1995) ● <i>Lily's Garden of India</i> (Smith, 2003)
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Figure 1. Text Sets about India.

Before reading *Elephant Dance*, as a team we gathered resources, including numerous fiction and nonfiction books, about the country and culture of India. We grouped the books into four text sets: Culture and Traditions; People and Families; Land, Resources, and Animals; and, Cities and Villages. There was overlap among the sets but that allowed us to review some concepts we'd already discussed and keep them fresh. (See Figure 1 for a sampling of the books in each text set.) We decided to rotate the text sets so each of the four classes had a different set to study each week.



During the week, to help the children organize their learning, we gave each of them a large (3' x 3') piece of chart paper to be their graffiti paper for making notes and drawings about information they wanted to remember. To make the large sheets more manageable for the children (and us), we folded them into fourths so the children could use one section for each text set. The students had time each day to write notes on the topics of their choice that they found interesting. Examples of the graffiti notes are provided in the sections that follow. The children then used their graffiti notes to write their individual books about India. Below I describe how my class interacted with and responded to each text set.

Culture and Traditions

My class started with the topic of Culture and Traditions. Among the books we read were *India the Culture* (Kalman, 2010), *Prita Goes to India* (Das, 2005), and *India* (Apte, 2009). As we read and discussed these books, Yash, Sarvesh, and Leah added to our learning by sharing their personal experiences with us. When we read about Diwali, the festival of lights, Leah brought in a couple of diyas (clay pots for the lights) and stories about Lakshmi (the goddess). She also described the puja (prayers) that are said. Yash brought in a picture of the Rangoli (art made from colored powder) that his family created to decorate his home. Sarvesh explained his participation in Holi, the festival of colors that takes place in the spring. He described the happy festivities where bright colored powder and liquids are thrown on the celebrants and onlookers. Daniela's graffiti notes for this text set are below.

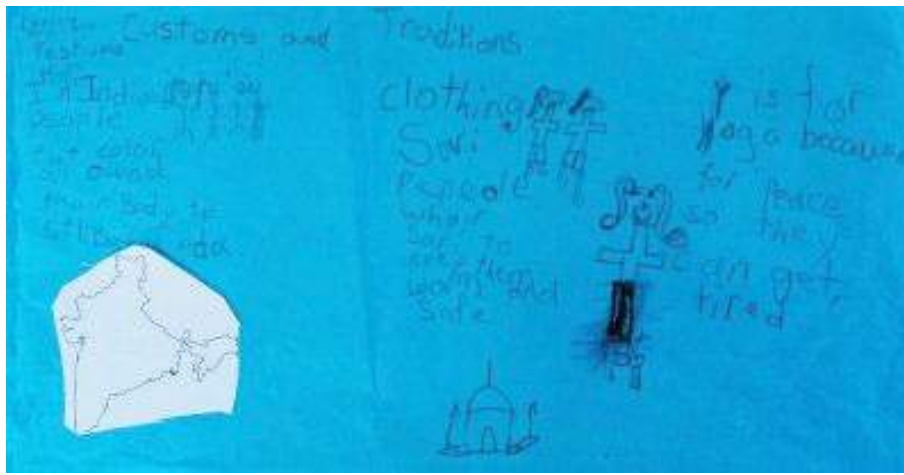


Figure 2. Daniela's notes for the Culture and Traditions text set.

She included information about Holi, saris, and yoga.

People and Families

We went on to read about the People and Families. In *India the People* (Kalman, 2010), we learned about the various groups of people in India and the major role religion plays in their lives. The major groups are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian. We discussed the visible attributes of these religions, such as their clothing, places of worship, and the sacred symbols of the various groups. For example, cows are sacred to the Hindus, and they are expected to bring good fortune for those who honor and protect them. During the festival of Pongal, cows are decorated and are part of the parades. Likewise, for the Sikhs, items of clothing hold special significance. Headdress is of particular importance. One of my students wanted to know more about the turbans that are worn by the Sikhs. I invited a second grade student, who was in my class last year, to come in to show his turban and to explain the importance of it to my class. We learned that Sikhs do not cut their hair, but wear it coiled on the top of their heads covered with a turban. This particular form of headdress is used to identify a person as a Sikh. Alex's graffiti notes for the People and Families text set are below.

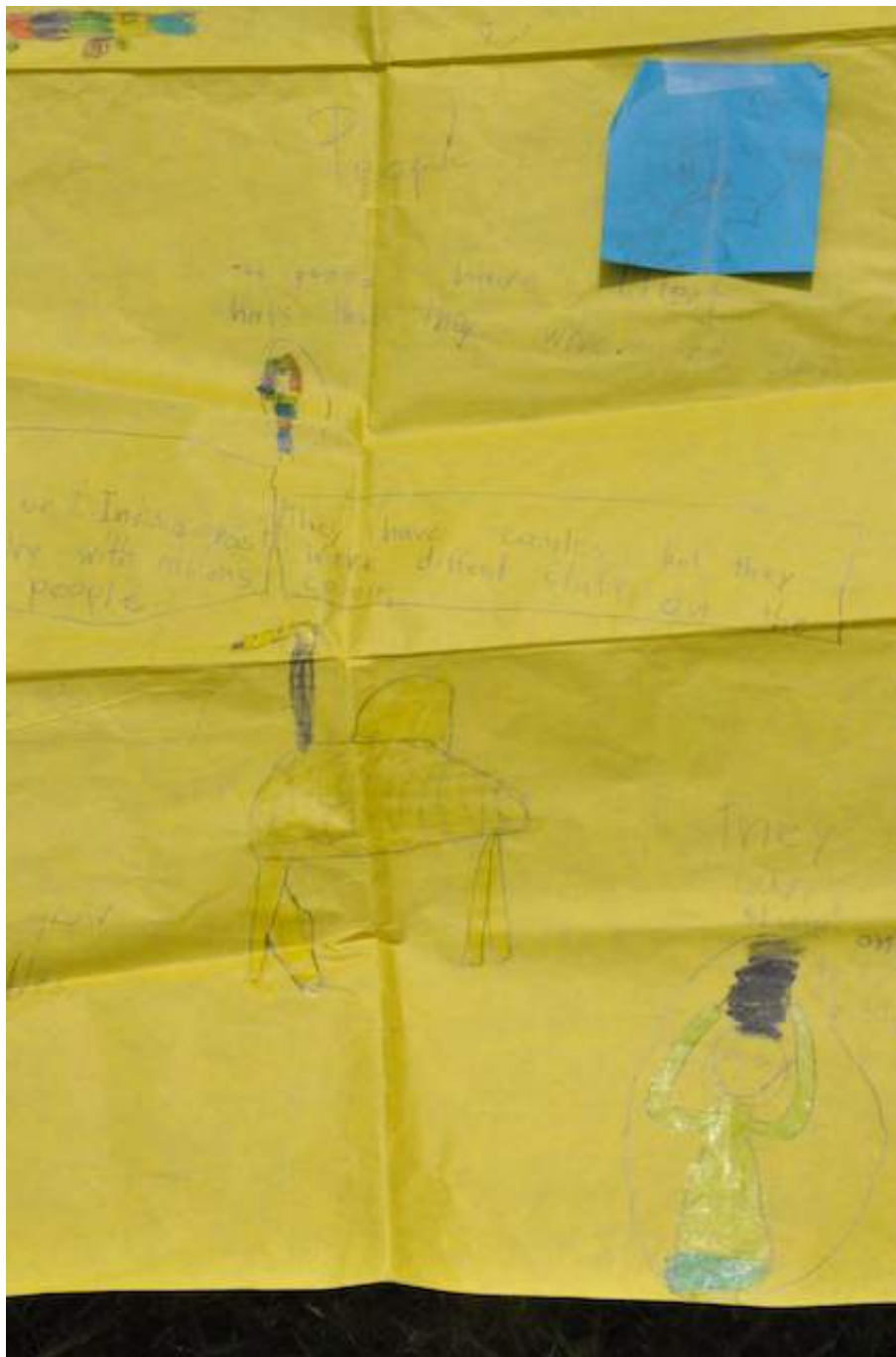


Figure 3. Alex's notes for the People and Families Text Set

She noted that India has millions of people and the people ride camels, cover their heads, and carry things on their heads.

Cities and Villages

As we studied life in the cities and villages, we learned that family life is very important in the Indian culture but there are big differences between life in the cities and in the villages. The cities are denser with modern conveniences and the villages are sparse with very few, if any, modern conveniences.

We compared and contrasted how in India many generations of a family may live together as joint families while in America nuclear family units tend to live in single family dwellings. Several books, like *Off to Class: Incredible and Unusual Schools around the World* (Hughes, 2011) and [*Geeta's Day*](#) (Das, 1999), gave us glimpses into schools in India. Some areas have school buildings and other times classes are held in places like train platforms. Sometimes teachers travel to villages so the children can attend school. Karl's graffiti notes for the Cities and Villages are below.



Figure 4. Karl's notes for the cities and villages text set

He noted that people eat on the ground, drew different types of buildings, and identified some different forms of transportation.

Land, Resources, and Animals

Our last text set was Land, Resources, and Animals. In this set we read books like [*I is for India*](#) (Das, 1996) and *India the Land* (Kalman, 2010). My students found it interesting that the ears of Indian elephants are in the shape of the country, with the Arabian Sea on the west and the Indian Ocean on the eastern side. They were also interested in learning about the Himalayan Mountains and the Ganges River that begins there and flows 1,557 miles to the Bay of Bengal. My students were curious about the sacred importance of water in the religious beliefs of the people. They asked many questions about the celebration of The Khumb Mela in the Ganges as well as the custom of scattering the ashes of cremated relatives there. Joshua's graffiti notes for the Land, Resources and Animals text set are below.

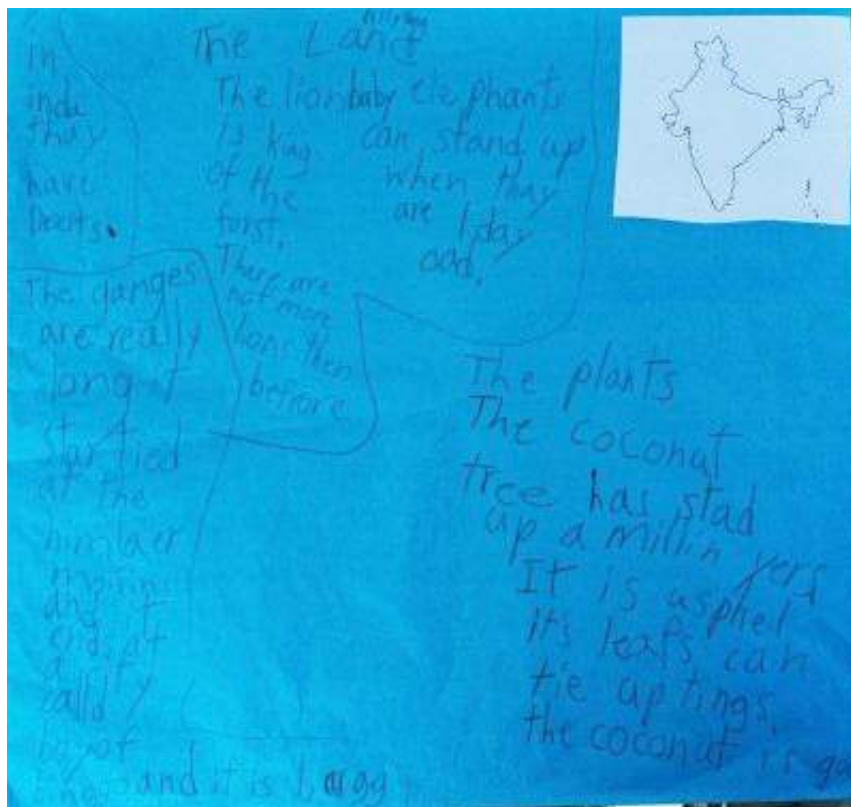


Figure 5 Joshua's notes for the land, resources and animals text set.

He included information on the Ganges River, lions and elephants, and coconut trees.

Learning from Families

Our interest in learning about India was peaking. Yash, Leah and Sarvesh wanted to have their parents involved. I contacted these parents, who were eager to come in to share their perspectives with all of the first grade students. Sarvesh's parents gave a detailed presentation about the land, weather, people, languages, school system, foods, sports and the animals. His mother discussed the traditional clothing and described the sari (dress), dhoti (pants), dupatta (scarf) and sherwani (jacket). She explained the shalwar kameez (shirt and pants) that she was wearing as well as the kurta (shirt) that Sarvesh wore. There were many questions from the students about the Taj Mahal and the Qutub Minar, both special monuments in India. Students also learned about some of the inventions from India, like the digit zero, the game of Snakes and Ladders, and Chess. They also wanted to know more about the Neem tree whose branches are used as toothbrushes. There was a lot of interest in the bindi worn on her forehead and why families sit on the floor to eat their meals.

Yash's father gave an in-depth look at the Indian baby naming ceremony - Namakaran. He explained that this is usually done on the 12th day after the baby's birth. The name is given based on the time, date and position of the planets when the child is born. It is written with rice grains and whispered into the baby's right ear four times. He explained that Yash's birth name is Neal.

Leah performed a fusion of Folk and Classical Indian dance. She wore a brightly colored costume called a Lehenga Choli. She wore many bangles and had a bindi (jeweled decoration) on her forehead. She danced to a joyful Indian folk song and used a dandiya (colorful stick) to enhance her movements. Her mother explained that some types of dance are deeply religious and some are done on happy occasions. Here is a short video of Leah's dance:



When we returned to our classroom, the students were eager to learn more from Leah, Sarvesh and Yash. Leah demonstrated the use of the mudra (hand gestures) that she used in her dance. These with facial expressions are used as a sign language to narrate the story. She then presented the girls in the class colorful bangles like hers and placed a jeweled bindi on each of their foreheads.



Figure 6. Leah's dance.

The students were loaded with information about India when they started writing their books. They were engaged throughout this study, even in the last days of school. They were eager to read more books and they were attentive to their peers and parents. Through the study of India the children developed “conceptual understandings of culture [and] realized that their cultural perspectives were only one of many ways to view and live in the world” (Short & Thomas, 2011, p. 156). They not only learned about India but about themselves which enhanced their appreciation of other cultures as well as their own.

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- Margaret Clarke-Williams teach first grade at Pot Springs Elementary in Maryland.

Empowering Young Writers as Authors and Illustrators through a Study of India

Michelle Hassay Doyle

Cross-cultural studies, such as ours on India that Margaret described in “[Crossing Cultural Borders: Our Study of Indian Culture](#)” provide opportunities for students to learn about cultures very different than their own. By immersing ourselves in Indian culture over time through stories and books, the students moved beyond knowing the external surface characteristics of culture, such as food, folklore, festivals, famous people, and fashion, to beginning to understand beliefs, values, perspectives, and the diversity that exists within Indian culture (Short, 2007). They began to understand that, “their cultural perspectives were only one of many ways to view and live in the world” (Short & Thomas, 2011, p. 156).

For an overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, “[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature](#).” In this vignette, I share some of the happenings in my classroom related to the study of India, with a primary focus on the process of the students writing and illustrating their own books on India. While Margaret, Laura, Jenna, and I tweaked this in particular ways in our own classrooms, we all followed the same general process.

Learning about India

For four weeks my students and I lived and breathed India through reading and discussing numerous fiction and nonfiction books and writing about our learning. For each of the four text sets (a different one each week), our usual routine involved me reading books aloud and/or the students reading and discussing books with their reading buddies. I spread the books out on the carpet and each set of buddies selected a book to read together while I circulated the room to answer questions. When the buddies finished their book, they would add a few notes to the section of their graffiti paper designated for that text set. After a time (or the following day), pairs would trade to get a different book. During a sharing time, students would tell about interesting things they’d learned in their books or raise questions for discussion. At the end of each week, to reflect on their reading and learning, I asked them to draw and write about something significant they’d discovered in their sketchbooks.

It was an exciting few weeks! One of my goals for this study was that my students develop an understanding of and appreciation for the rich diversity in Indian culture and as the weeks progressed, I saw that happen. I knew the students had that appreciation for the diversity in our classroom. From plotting our heritages on the world map, they knew, for example, that Joseph was from Trinidad, Adam and Evan from China, Sharon from Zambia, and Anthony from Germany and Italy. We’d said good-bye to Hassan in February when he went back to his homeland of Egypt for a month and then returned and shared his experiences there. Azka joined our class partway through the year. She came from Pakistan and talked and shared about India too. Just as our classroom was diverse, we continually talked about the diversity in India and how, depending on what part of the

country you visited, you'd meet different people and have different experiences.

Reflecting on Our Learning

The text sets provided the students with lots of information that filled their curious minds about India. Since our study had spanned four weeks, before the students started writing I wanted to review the four text sets so the students didn't focus only on the last week of study. For this review, I hung four large papers across the board and titled them after the text sets: Cities and Villages; People and Families; Land, Resources, and Animals; and, Culture and Traditions. Students first talked with their partners about what they remembered and then took turns sharing with the class what they learned. As students shared, we talked about which chart to put the information on, which itself added to the discussion. For example, when Emely suggested "women wear saris," there was discussion about whether that information belonged with "People and Families," since this was common attire for people in India, or "Culture and Traditions," since this is part of the culture of India. Finally, the children decided that we should write it on both charts since it could fit either place. The chart discussions helped the students think about the range of information they'd learned across the different texts and critically consider how/why to categorize it in a particular way. As examples, the Culture and Traditions and People and Families charts are shown below.

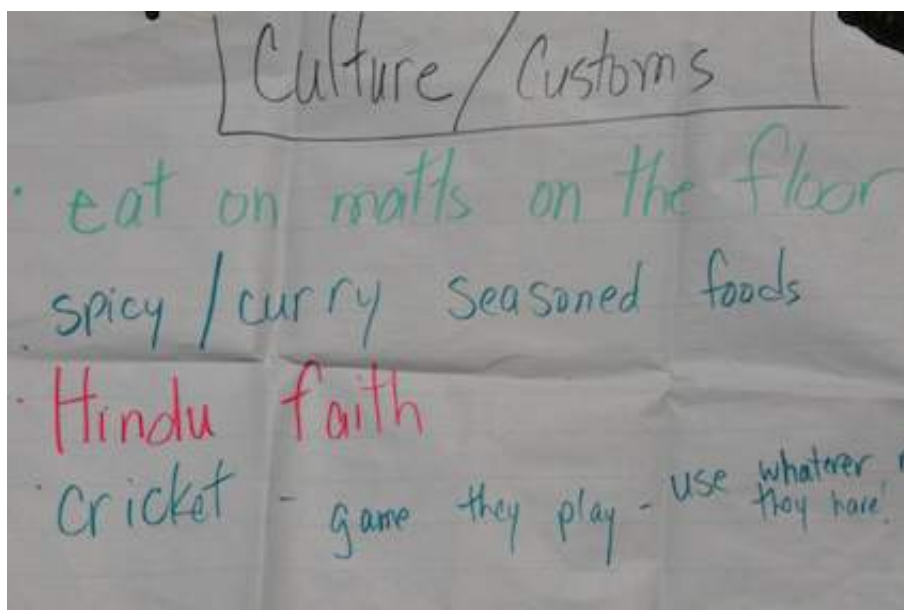


Figure 1. Culture and Traditions Chart

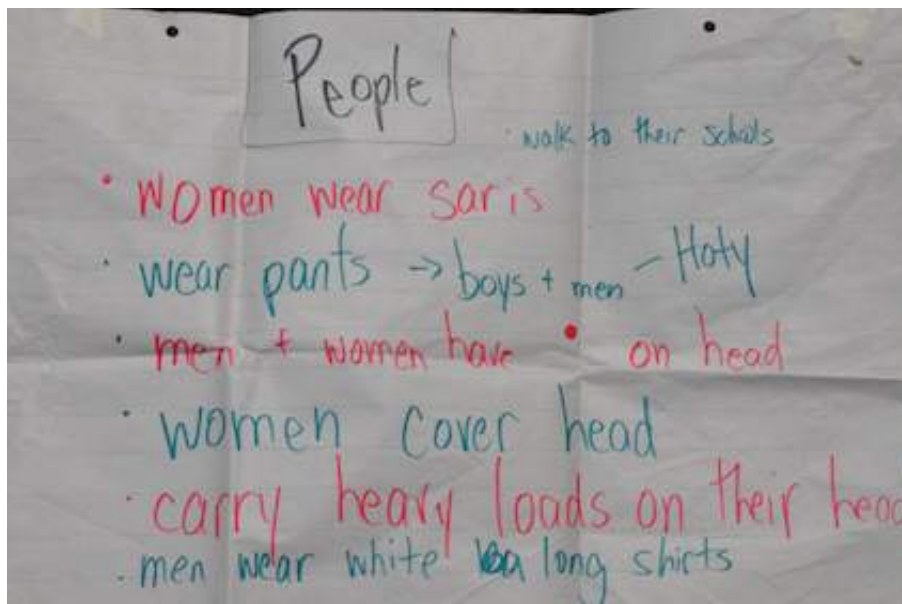


Figure 2. People and Families Chart

After this sharing of what they remembered, I had the students pull out their graffiti notes, which were divided into the same topics as the charts, to see if they found any information we'd missed and could add to our class charts. We filled the charts to the brim with overflowing information. We were ready to start writing.

Writing Our Books

To help the students think about the organization of their books, I decided to reread two books to them visualize possibilities. The first one I read was [Same, Same but Different](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011). This book shares the story of two pen pals, one who lives in America and the other in India, who send letters and pictures to each other about where they live, what they do, their families, etc. While the book is full of good information, the American boy lives in the city and the Indian boy in the country which can set up stereotypes of both countries. We talked about this and how both India and America have many different regions and what people see, do, and experience depends on where they go. Writing their own "Same but Different" book while remembering the diversity in the countries was one possibility the students had. To help display the information side-by-side in a book like this, I showed them how the book could open, with India on one side and America on the other and the pages for each country turning out, similar to the book [Mirror](#) (Baker, 2010).

The other book I reread was [Geeta's Day](#) (Das, 2010), which takes readers through the day of six-year-old Geeta from the time she wakes up to the time she goes to bed. I suggested that the students might want to write a book about the different things they would see if they went to India. One possible title was "If I go to India I will see..." When I made that suggestion, though, Ethan rejected it, pointing out that "will" means you *will* see something and maybe you won't. He said, for

example, “Even if you go to India you might not see an elephant.” His classmates agreed and revised possible titles to: “If I go to India I hope to see...”, “In India I might see...”, and “In India...” Of course, these were just suggestions to help the students get started with writing pages for their books. In the end they needed to decide what would work for their own individual books.

With those two possible organizational formats, the students needed to decide which interested them the most for sharing what they’d learned. I gave each student a large folded piece of construction paper to hold their draft pages and they began to write. When they finished a page, they came to me and we had a conference. I was careful to just help students with their capitalization and punctuation and suggest where they might add details to their writing. I wanted the books to be their own words, thoughts and learning. I acted as the editor, proofreading each draft page. The students rewrote their final book pages. These pages had an area on the top half for art and lines on the bottom half for writing. For students who wrote a lot, the lines continued on the back of the page.

When the students finished writing their pages and the books were bound, work on the illustrations began. Before they started, we reviewed different art concepts like color, use of lines and how to show motion, so they could make more informed decisions while they were creating their illustrations.

My class invited our fourth grade buddy class to visit so my students could read their books to their buddies. The fourth graders helped my students think of good titles for their books. Luke decided to use the title “Exquisite India” that his buddy Henry suggested after reading Luke’s book. The fourth graders enjoyed reading the books and the first grade authors/ illustrators were very proud to show off their work.

The books were amazing! The students were excited and motivated to create their books and share what they had learned. The last days of school were a bustle of activity, with everyone working hard right up to the last day. In these two video clips Hannah and Emely read their books. Hannah’s book provides fact about what she hopes to see in India, while Emely’s book compares similarities between India and America.

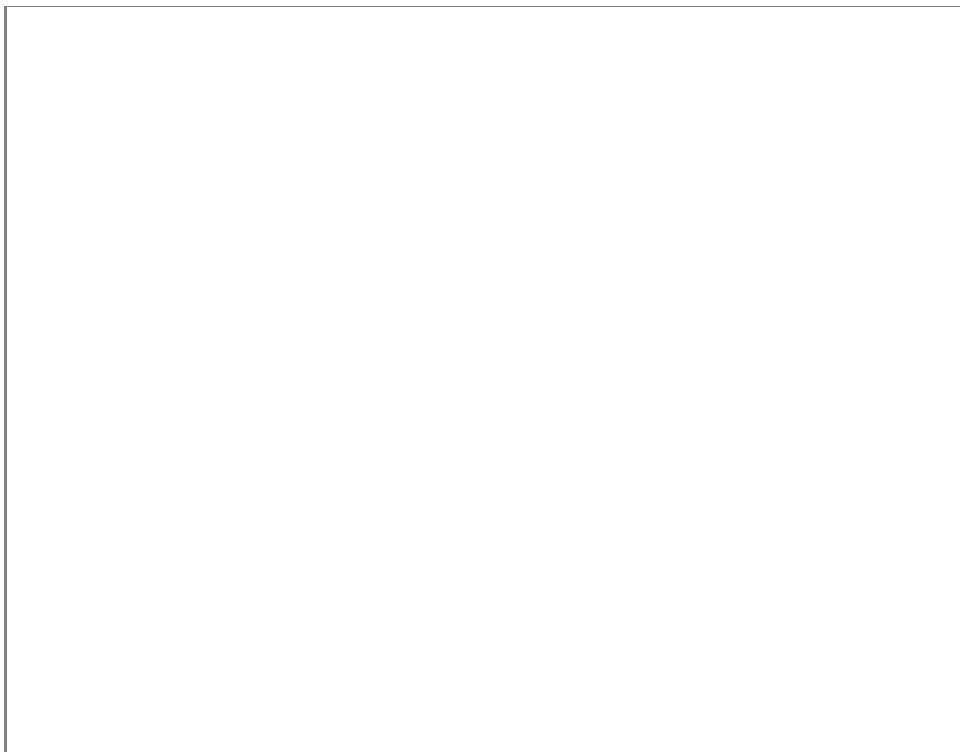


Figure 3. Emely reading her book

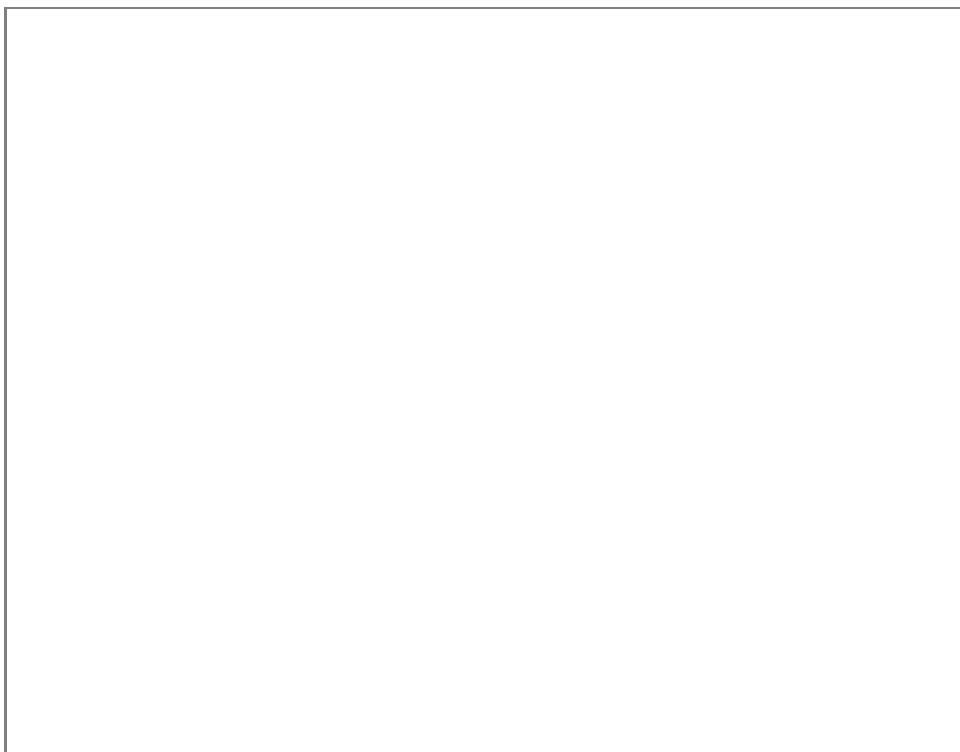


Figure 4. Hannah reading her book

Because of differences in the students in my classroom, I'm always conscious of differentiating to meet the needs of particular students. This book project, I found, was naturally differentiated by the length and the amount of pages. I told all of my students, including those with an IEP or who were ESOL students, that they needed to write a minimum of three pages and as many pages as

they desired beyond that. Students worked to their own abilities with impressive results. For example, Anthony, who was shy and didn't share his work or write much on his own throughout the school year, was empowered. He had an extensive IEP with math, reading, and writing goals but was an extremely intuitive and bright young man. Not only did Anthony write a wonderful book, four pages in length, but he was so proud of his accomplishments that he shared it with the entire class on the document camera, something he hadn't done with his work before this. Although Anthony's work was differentiated he was motivated to exceed expectations, as this video clip of him reading his book shows.



Figure 5. Anthony reading his book

Leah, who has an IEP for speech and reading, is another student who accomplished much. Throughout the year it was often difficult to understand some of Leah's speech but at the end of the year she read her book (six beautifully illustrated pages) clearly. Please listen for yourself.

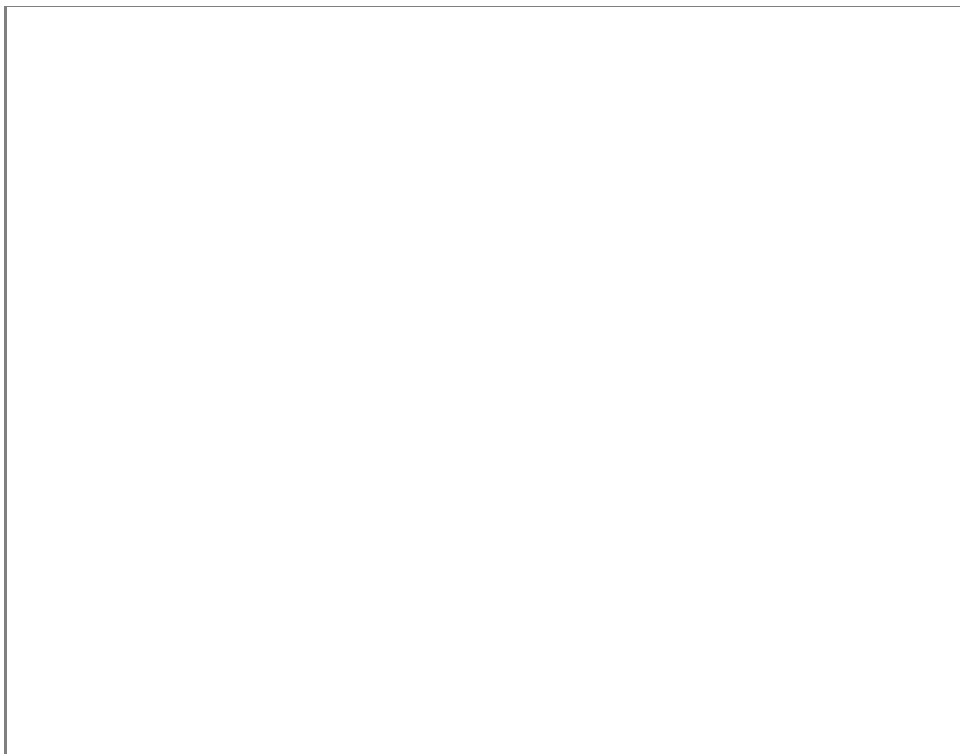


Figure 6. Leah reading her book

Developing Intercultural Understandings

As a team, one thing we were all interested in learning was whether and how studying another culture, such as India, helps students understand themselves and others as cultural beings more deeply. To get at this, once the students completed the content of their books, they created two character x-rays (adapted from the cultural x-rays in Short, 2009); one of themselves which served as their author's page, and another of a character from one of our India-themed books. Character x-rays examine and detail both external and internal features of someone. On and around the outside of the character x-ray is what is clearly visible about a person (for example, hair, eye and skin color). The heart on the inside shows what the person values, what is important to him/her, and what kind of person they are. We talk about what we know about the character based on their actions and make inferences about the kind of person they are. For example, if the character does a kind act we might say they are helpful or compassionate. Since creating a character x-ray of a "general" Indian child would be difficult, the other teachers and I decided to have the students focus on the young girl who is the main character in the book *Monsoon* (Krishnaswami, 2003) or Geeta in *Geeta's Day*, (Das, 2010). The character x-ray of themselves and the Indian child were included in the students' books. As Laura described in her vignette, a couple months earlier all of our students had completed a large character x-ray to reflect their unique identity and culture. We decided to have the students complete another one after studying India to be their author page and to learn if they gained any insights about culture, others, and themselves.

Prisca and Ray interviewed students about their books to discover what they learned about India as well as their understandings of themselves and children in India. It was clear that through our study of India that students began to see that while there are external differences in such areas as clothes, customs, food, and language, many internal feelings and values are similar. For example:

- Emely: “Geeta and I are both loving and beautiful...and we have the same hair, the same smile, and the same skin ...[but] she has different clothes and shoes than me.”
- Ethan: “We’re both happy...and care for other people...[but] [people in India] have brown skin and we have white skin.”
- Sharon: “We both like to play ...[but] [in India extended] families might live together and ours don’t live together.”
- Jamie: “Sometimes we can both feel sad ...[but] I don’t wear a sari and [girls in India] do.”

Our cross-cultural study of India was rich and meaningful for all of us, students and teachers. As we studied similarities and differences that make Indian and American cultures unique, we learned “what it is to be human” and that others may have perspectives that are very different than ours (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998, p. 314). “Children’s ability to understand, value, and celebrate diversity evolves from recognizing their places and their particular experiences as part of the universal whole of humanity” (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010, p. 19). Students gained an appreciation and understanding of India and made connections between their lives to families in India.

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Learning to Read and Compose Meaning in Art Using Picturebooks

Stacy Aghalarov

Illustrations are pictorial representations of meaning (Kiefer, 1995). The illustrations in picturebooks are more than pictures that accompany the written text; they are rich examples of meaningful texts that artists create using the elements of art and principles of design. Artists use these elements and principles to create pictorial meaning just as authors of written texts use words and grammar to create meaning.

In my art instruction, I regularly use picturebooks for a number of reasons. Picturebooks show that the art techniques, art elements, and principles of design are used in other places than the art room. Students begin to understand that what they are learning during art instruction is important and can be used in other contexts. For instance, if the reading teacher asks them to illustrate a story they have written, the students can (and do!) think beyond drawing about what they wrote. Often they add more details in their drawing than what they included in their written text. As students learn to read the illustrations in picturebooks, they see little details not mentioned in the written text which enriches their understandings of the story. I have also noticed that students who study illustrations in picturebooks create richer meanings in their artwork.

For an overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, "[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature](#)." In this vignette I share how I help children learn to represent meanings in art. I begin with how I use Molly Bang's work to explore basic art concepts and then discuss how I help children think about how to represent emotions and feelings in their art. I also share how my work with the children supported the India study in the first grade classrooms.

Molly Bang's *Picture This: How Pictures Work*

I like to begin by using Molly Bang's (2000) *Picture This: How Pictures Work* with students. In

this book Molly Bang walks readers through an in-depth process of how to use basic shapes and color to create certain feelings for the story of Little Red Riding Hood. This year I read this story, as Bang tells it through her art, to the students and we discussed how different shapes and colors made us feel as readers. For example, Molly Bang represents Little Red Riding Hood as a red triangle. When she adds the triangle to the forest scene, the trees do not look as scary because the triangle is too big compared to the black rectangular tree trunks. To make the woods really scary, Molly Bang makes a smaller red triangle against the looming dark forest. Some students reacted with, “Woah! I would not want to walk in that forest!”

After discussing the other decisions Molly Bang made to create the story, I asked the first graders to illustrate a scene that showed birds chasing something, using basic shapes and a limited choice of colors: red, purple, white, and black. They needed to decide what that “something” was and why the birds were chasing it. Students also needed to decide which colors to use and why they would use them. After the illustrations were completed, the students took them back to their classrooms where the teachers had them write stories about their illustrations.

The art and stories the children created were creative and thoughtful. I interviewed students about their art so I could understand their thinking and decision making. Below are some examples.

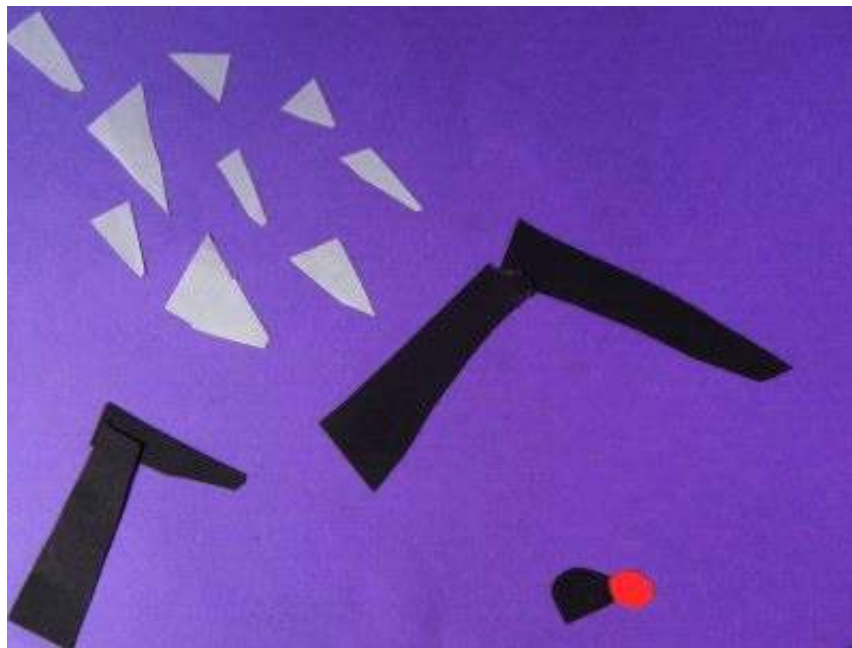
In Mary’s illustration birds are chasing a person because the person took their eggs. Mary wanted the trees to look scary, so she made some of them on a diagonal instead of vertical. Mary also explained that the purple and red triangles at the top represent thunder.



The birds were chasing
the prsin because
the prsin took the
birds egg.

Figure 1. Mary's illustration and description.

Anna titled her art "Birds Chasing a Black Cat". In her story she wrote, "The birds were chasing a cat that was taking their fish. The birds are called winter birds. It is in the spooky woods."



The birds were chasing that was
The birds were chasing a cat took
taking their fish. The birds are called winter birds,
the fish. The birds are called winter birds.
It is in the spooky woods
is in the spooky woods.

Figure 2. Anna's illustration and description.

After Anna completed her illustration and story, I interviewed her about her work.

- Tell me about your story. *The white birds are winter birds and they are chasing the black cat. The fish is red.*
- What colors did you use and why those colors? *I didn't want to use the purple again, because I didn't want things to be camouflaged. I used purple for the background because purple is kind of like a spooky woods!*
- What shapes did you use and why those shapes? *For the black cat, I used a little circly and a little point because it's some nice, some mean. The fish is all the way nice so I used a round shape. The birds are angry and that's why they're pointy.*
- Were you trying to make your picture scary? *Yes.*
- How did you make it look scary? *The trees, I ripped some of them at the top so they look like they're breaking. I wanted them to be black to make them more spooky.*
- Other information. *Some of the birds are aiming in the right direction, four of them will fly through the trees. The other five are aiming at the trees and their beaks will get stuck. It's funny!*

I was impressed with Anna's illustration and how much detail she included beyond what her picture and story told. Her use of colors and shapes were intentional in creating a scary atmosphere. She even had a story for what happened next.

Exploring Emotions

After this introduction using Molly Bang, I used other books, particularly books by Mo Willems that showed characters and their change in emotions. At this same time the first grade teachers were reading global picturebooks that focused on helping the children think about who they were and their identities, of which emotions are an important part. The children used their understandings of how to represent emotions through art as they created personal responses to these books in their sketchbooks.

One of the books I used for emotions is *The Day Leo Said I Hate You!* (Harris, 2008), illustrated by Molly Bang. In this book Leo gets so angry because his mother responds "No!" to everything Leo does that he finally screams, "I hate you!" to her. In art class we talked about how Molly Bang showed that Leo was furious. The students pointed out things like small pointy eyes, large open mouth, diagonal eyebrows, and spiky almost "scribbly" hair. We also talked about how Bang drew an exaggerated head that was larger than the body and fiery speech coming out of the mouth. I asked the students to think of a time they were angry and furious with someone and draw how they looked. Then we talked about color and how our faces feel hot when we're furious and they colored

in their drawings. In their classrooms the teachers had the students write stories about why they were angry. Below are some examples.



Figure 3. Marcus's picture of a time he was angry.

Figure 4. Tony's picture of a time he was angry.

Marcus wrote, "It made me mad because my mom did not buy me a toy but I did a good job at school. I got ten blues and some greens and no yellows [part of the school behavior program] and my mom was happy but she didn't buy me a toy. And the next day she bought me a toy." Marcus drew himself with a large open mouth, angled eyebrows, spiky hair and fiery speech. He also included small parallel lines around his fist to show he was moving it and drew himself on a diagonal.

Tony wrote, "When I was playing with my brother, my brother took my Lego Ninja toy. I was so not happy that he took my Lego Ninja and played with it." In addition to spiky hair, diagonal eyes and eyebrows, fiery speech coming from his mouth, and moving his arms, Tony drew his mouth on a diagonal also, adding to the tension in his art.

Student Illustrated Books

To help them pull together their understandings of emotions, the first graders wrote their own stories in their reading class. They had the choice of making their characters animal or human but the main character had to show a change of emotions. Once the stories were written, students came to art class and illustrated their books, using the ideas we learned from the various illustrators. The students showed great pride in their stories and illustrations as they worked on their books. I again interviewed children to understand their thinking and decision making.

John's book about a cow is below. The cow is sad because she isn't at the farm but after she runs there she is happy. I interviewed John about his book after it was complete. His responses are below.

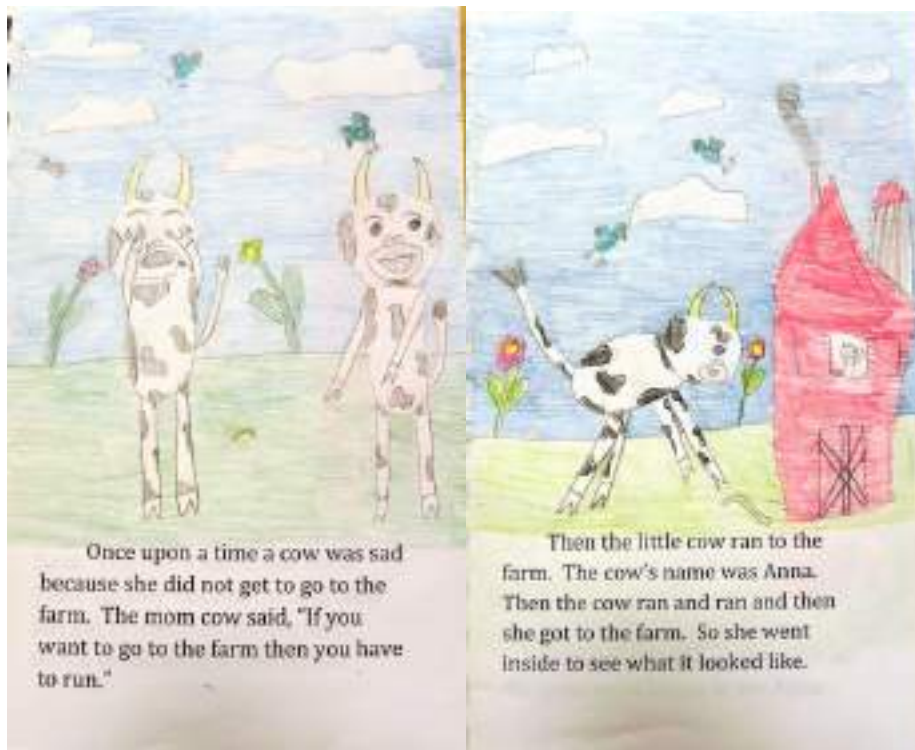


Figure 5. John's book about a character that changes emotions.

Page 1

- How did you make the cow look like she was sad?
Tears and hands up to her eyes. Her mouth is open to look like she's crying.
- Why did you place the bird on the horn of the cow?
Just wanted to place it there.

What is the mom feeling?

Happy because she has a smile on her face.

Page 2

•Who is in the barn window?

The girl farmer. She is waving at Anna.

•How did you make the cow look like she was running?

I drew her legs apart to look like she was running.

•Other information.

Anna is feeling a little happy and tired. The blue birds traveled with her, but the worm is different!!!

Page 3

•Who is the other cow?

Her friend who is feeling happy.

•How did you show the cows looking happy?

Big smile and their arms are up in the air.

•Other information.

There is a different worm on every page. The butterfly on page 3 is different than the butterfly on page 1. The farmer is still waving.

Heather's story was about Adum the monkey, Alexis the rabbit, and Jessica the cat. Adum hid and scared Alexis and Jessica but in the end they were friends.



Figure 6. Heather's book about a character that changes emotions.

Page 1

•Tell me about your animals.

Adum is the monkey, Alexis the rabbit, and Jessica is a cat. The bunny is brown and the cat is yellow.

•Other information.

The tree is far away and that's why it's small. I layered colored pencils on each page.

- What are the lines around the bunny and cat? *That shows they're scared and jumping up.*

- How did you make the bunny and cat look scared?

I turned their mouths down. Their eyes are really wide.

- Other information.

Adum's body is behind the tree. He's trying to scare them and he's laughing. He's mean! But then he's nice. Now they're close to the tree.

- How did you make the bunny and cat look like they are happy?

I put their eyes just like a little curvy line. I turned their mouth back to normal.

- Other information.

Monkey is feeling happy because they're all friends again. The monkey is up in sky because he's holding onto invisible vines on page 1 and 3. He's holding onto the tree in page 2.

First Graders' Study of India

The work on art concepts I had been teaching all year was instrumental in the first graders' study of India. Though many of the books on India that the teachers used their study were illustrated with photographs, I found some books to weave into my art instruction. *That's How I See Things* (Rao & Shyam, 2007), for example, is the story of an artist who drew things and animals as he saw them, though his representations looked strange to others. The art in the book is rich with pattern and bright colors common in Indian culture. I read and discussed the book with the children and then had them draw animals, following the ideas, patterns, and art in the book. In the classrooms, the teachers built on the art concepts I had been teaching when they read books with art illustrations. In books such as [*Elephant Dance: A Journey to India*](#) (Heine, 2004), [*Monsoon*](#) (Krishnaswami, 2003), and [*Same, Same but Different*](#) (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011), for example, they and the children talked about how the artists used art concepts like color and line to represent meanings which enhanced the children's understandings of the stories.

Conclusion

Using picturebooks in the art classroom improves the detail and meaning in students' artwork. This also enhances the meaning students construct when they read both the art and written text in picturebooks.

I have learned the importance of interviewing students about their artwork to discover their thinking, reasoning, and decision making. I would not know certain details by looking at students'

artwork if I hadn't interviewed them. Art also helps students think through their stories. Students often told me what was going to happen next after their illustration and story. They took great pride in telling me about their work and the meaning behind certain parts of the story.

Connecting literacy and the arts is important. The teachers talk about how the students' writings are more creative and meaningful when they're writing about their art. Students understand that art, like writing, is a means of communicating meaning.

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The Art in Writing: Analysis of Two Different Types of Writing Samples

Jenna Loomis

For the past two years I have been exploring the use of global literature in my classroom and ways to help my students read and understand the meanings artists (illustrators) embed in their art to support and enhance the story. During this time my teammates and I have noticed a higher quality in our students' writing when it is connected to global literature and art compared to when they are writing for other assignments.

I decided to analyze some of my students' writing to better understand this difference. In this vignette I share my analysis of writing for two personal narrative writing assignments. For an

overview of our literacy community and school community, please see the first vignette in this issue, "[Learning about Ourselves and Others through Global Literature](#)." While I decided to do this analysis after my students had completed both writings, meaning there were differences in the contexts of the writings, I think my findings raise important issues for teachers to consider. The first assignment was the students' art and writing in response to *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2005) that I will call Art-Based Writing. The second was from the personal narrative writing prompt in the Houghton Mifflin Integrated Theme 5 Skills Test that I will refer to as Test-Based Writing. First, I will describe the two writing prompts and assignments and then discuss what I learned.

Two Writing Assignments

Art-Based Writing

The personal narrative based on the original artwork students created after reading *Sebastian's Roller Skates* was the first of these two narratives we completed. The daily morning journal prompt read, "Tell about a time that you couldn't do something you really wanted to do. Tell how you felt and what happened." After writing, students read their response to a partner on the carpet and a few students shared with the class on the document camera.

We then read the beginning of *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. In the beginning, young Sebastian has big ideas, but is very shy and lacks the confidence to share what he thinks and knows with adults in his life. Francesc Rovira, the artist, shows Sebastian's lack of self-confidence and frustration by creating thought bubbles with black and white newspaper trailing from Sebastian's mind. The phrase, "What Sebastian really wanted to say though, was that..." repeats throughout the beginning of the book.

I only read the first half of the book so students could connect to how Sebastian felt and focus on the newspaper illustrations, Rovira's intent in creating those illustrations, and how the newspaper showed Sebastian's feelings. I tied these feelings to the character x-rays (Short, 2009) that Laura discusses in her vignette. Students then created their own artwork that told a story about something they really wanted to do but couldn't. They chose to use either what they had written about in their journals that morning or to use another idea that had been shared.

Below are three students' illustrations. Joshua's illustration shows when he was not able to pass the deep water test at his pool. Maia depicted a time when she was not able to do a sit-spin and Sophia's illustration tells the story of when she really wanted to go to the park but her mother said, "No."



Figure 1. Joshua's illustration showing his attempt to pass the deep water test at his pool.



Figure 2. Maia's illustration showing a time when she could not do a sit and spin.



Figure 3. Sophia's illustration showing a time her mother refused permission to go to the park.

The second day, we read the rest of the book in which Sebastian finds a pair of roller skates and slowly learns to skate, although it is very difficult. As he improves, he gains confidence and pride in himself. He finds that he is able to do other difficult things, like talking to the adults and telling them what he thinks and knows. He is even able to talk to the little girl in his class who he thinks is very special! Rovira uses colorful paper in similar thought-bubble formation to show Sebastian's feelings. My students created another picture to show when they could do what they weren't able to in their first picture, using colorful paper in a similar way to Rovira.

Below is Joshua's illustration of himself passing the deep water test when he devised a "secret" way; Maia's illustration showing that she practiced so hard that she did the sit-spin; and, Sophia's artwork depicting her finally playing at the playground.



Figure 4. Joshua's illustration showing himself passing the deep water test.



Figure 5. Maia's illustration showing how she practiced for the the sit and spin.



Figure 6. Sophia's illustration showing her playing at the playground.

I decided to use the students' art as "prewriting" for our personal narratives. Their stories were already well-developed in their imaginations from beginning to end, so additional prewriting was unnecessary. I provided a writing packet which included pages with lines for the beginning, middle and end. I also provided a Writer's Checklist to clearly establish expectations. We completed the writing over three days, one for each part of the story.

Name:

Personal Narrative Checklist

- My story is about something I learned how to do or wanted to do.

Beginning

- My beginning starts with a description of the setting or dialog.
- My beginning tells what I wanted to do.
- I described my feelings when I could not do it.

Middle

- My middle tells what I did to be able to do it.
- My middle has at least 2 sentences.

End

- My end tells how I felt when I was able to do it.

- My end has at least 2 sentences.

Editing

- I checked for capitals.
- I used punctuation to break my ideas at the ends of sentences.
- I used my *Words I Use* dictionary to spell common words correctly.

[Download the Writer's Checklist](#)

Test-Based Writing

The second personal narrative assignment was the Houghton Mifflin Integrated Theme Skills Test for Unit 5, part of our county reading program unit assessment. The prompt read:

“Think about your own life. Write a story about something special that happened to you. Remember to stick with just one story and use details to help the reader picture what happened. Plan your writing with a story map. Use the boxes on the next page. Draw what happened first, what happened next, and what happened last.”

I chose to give my students this part of the test on a different day from the reading and written response parts so they were fresh. Because this was a unit assessment, after reading the prompt, we did not share ideas. As with similar unit assessments, I gave them two minutes to sketch their ideas in the three-box organizer (beginning, middle, end). As they wrote, I put the writing checklist on the document camera so they could refer to it. I typically do not give my students a checklist for their writing on the test. I did it this time because the personal narrative was so close to the writing they had done ten days earlier for *Sebastian’s Roller Skates* and they had been so successful with using it then. Students were given as much time as needed to write and they could use additional paper if necessary. We completed this writing in one sitting.

Analyzing the Writing

To analyze these two writings I divided my students into three groups based on the writing I knew they typically produced. The groups and characteristics I used to create them are listed below:

Proficient (7 Students)

- Well-developed ideas with details and descriptions
- Focused writing
- Use of complex sentences (more than one verb or clause)

- Consistent sentence variety

Developing (6 Students)

- Some idea development
- Loss of focus at times, rambling, repetition or changing ideas
- More simple sentences, occasional complex sentences
- Some sentence variety

Emerging (6 Students)

- Little idea development
- Basic information communicated
- Simple sentences
- Little sentence variety

For each group, I analyzed the number of words students wrote and the craftsmanship of the students' writing, which I discuss below.

Analyzing the Number of Words

I started by counting the number of words each student wrote. The chart below shows the mean number of words for each group and assignment.

	Art-Based Writing (1 st Writing: over 3 days)	Test-Based Writing (3 rd Writing: in 1 day)
Proficient (7 students)	85	48
Developing (6 students)	87	57
Emerging (6 Students)	59	21

Table 1. The Test-Based Writing was completed 10 days after the Art-Based Writing.

All students wrote significantly more for the Art-Based Writing. The difference in time, three days to write the Art-Based Writing and one to write the Test-Based Writing, was definitely a factor, as was the Writing Checklist for the Test-Based Writing being posted rather than provided to each student. Also, important is the substantial difference in the artwork and sharing that happened before each.

These supports and structures clearly had an impact, but those differences are normal in the life of a classroom. The writing students do on a test, for example, is often much less supported than other writing. That being the case, I began to consider which of the assignments gave a more accurate picture of a student’s abilities. Which showed what students, especially struggling writers, were capable of: Art-Based Writing or Test-Based Writing?

Daniel was in the Emerging Writers group. His writing below highlights the differences in students’ writing between the two assignments. (I corrected spelling and punctuation for readability.)

Daniel’s Art-Based Writing	Daniel’s Test-Based Writing
“I wonder if I can play basketball,” I said. I asked them and they let me. It took a long time to get the ball into the basket, but I did it. I was happy I [scored]. I was happy when I made a new friend.	One day I was opening presents and my mom said, “It’s time to go.”

Table 2. Comparison of Daniel’s Writing.

Analyzing the Craftsmanship of the Writing

Another way I reflected on the writing samples was to look at the craftsmanship of my students’ writing. To do this, I identified two different types of sentences. One described the sequence of events and the other told details about those events. If a compound sentence contained both sequence and details, I recorded those sentences once for each type.

The chart below summarizes my analysis of the craftsmanship of my students’ writing.

	Art-Based Writing (1 st Assignment: over 3 days)	Test-Based Writing (3 rd Assignment: in 1 day)
Proficient (7 students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4+ sentences with details ● 3.1 more sentences with details than Test-Based Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0-3 sentences with details

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0-3 sentences with details 	
Developing (6 students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4+ sentences with details ● 2.7 more sentences with details than Test-Based Writing ● 1-4 sentences with details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1-4 sentences with details
Emerging (6 Students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2+ sentences with details ● 3.3 more sentences with details than Test-Based Writing ● 1 student had one sentence with details ● 5 students had 0 sentences with details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 student had one sentence with details ● 5 students had 0 sentences with details

Table 3. Craftmanship of Writing.

The data in the chart shows that in each group of writers, the sentences in the Test-Based Writing were considerably less detailed and descriptive, especially in the Emerging Writers group. Only one student in that group wrote a sentence giving a detail. Many of the Emerging Writers and a few Developing and Proficient Writers used the “first, next, last” formula. While “first, next, last” is a supportive structure for emerging writers, I know from the data that these students’ writing for the Test-Based Writing it is not an accurate assessment of what they are capable of as writers. For the Art-Based Writing, the Emerging Writers wrote an average of 3.3 sentences with details. This increase in the number of sentences with details is greater than the increase in the Proficient and Developing Writers’ samples.

Below is an example of how Kazia (Emerging Writers group) included more sentences with details in the Art-Based Writing:

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Kazia's Art-Based Writing	Kazia's Test-Based Writing
<p>When I came to school I was really shy because it was scary. So I did not want to go to school. The next day I [brought] a teddy bear with me. And then the day after that I got used to it because I talked to people [who are] kids. And I talked to Mrs. Loomis. And then I got really used to it because I talked to everyone in the classroom. And then everyone talked to me. It made me feel surprised.</p>	<p>First I ate dinner with my family and then I listened to music with my sister. Then I go to sleep. And on the last page I go outside.</p>

Table 4. Comparison of Kazia's Writing.

I wondered if my students could write with such details in their Art-Based Writing, why didn't they produce that same quality of work for the Test-Based Writing? The difference in time (three days vs. one day) and the sharing were again key factors. Despite these differences, for both narratives the students had opportunities to think and plan before they wrote. While sketching the beginning, middle and end organizer for the Test-Based Writing intends to be helpful, upon reflection, it also seems to constrain students to think linearly. While narratives read linearly, the linear structure of the organizer did not encourage the richest ideas and inspirations for the young writers in my classroom.

For the art-based writing related to *Sebastian's Roller Skates*, my students thought intentionally about lines, colors, and details to add to their drawings. Through this creative decision-making process, they formed descriptions in their minds that fed their writing. They were invested, felt a personal connection and purpose, and wrote the Art-Based personal narratives for themselves, not me. The same thinking, planning, and investment did not happen with the Test-Based Writing so my students' writing was not as developed. They wrote the Test-Based Writing for me, not themselves.

The following are examples of student work, including the artwork that inspired students' writing, their personal narrative stories, and the interviews in which students describe the details they have included in both. While not all students were able to articulate how their artwork inspired their writing, it is clear that the details they include in their artwork are present in their writing.



Figure 8. Examples of Alexis' work.

Interview with Alexis[cincopa AsCAxB7f77dD]

Alexis wrote:

It was a beautiful spring day. Mom and I went out to try to ride my bike. I was nervous to ride my bike. I tried by myself. I did not get it. So I asked for help and my mom said, "I'll help you Alexis." We practiced until sundown and went home. Then on the boardwalk I did it. I was a little scared but really happy. Then we went to the beach and had happy hour after that.



Figure 10. Examples of Julia's artwork.

Interview with Julia[cincopa AMEADBrQ7b1F]

Julia wrote:

"I can't do it!" said Julia. I cried and cried. I was really sad. "I'll help you," said Rolaend. "OK. I'll try again to ride my bike," said Julia. I tried again. My dad was holding me so I don't fall.

I tried to balance on my bike. I kept on practicing. "I did it!" shouted Julia. I felt very happy. I went for walks all the time. Now I can go super fast.



Figure 12. Examples of Imani's artwork.

Interview with imani[cincopa AsHA3D7v-XG4]

Imani wrote:

On the first day of kindergarten school I was really shy to talk. When people said, "How are you today?" I would say, "Fine," but they would not hear me. I would feel awkward because I could not talk. But then I told my mom and she said that she will take me somewhere that will teach me how to talk in front of people. It was somewhere in PA but the title of the place is teach you how to talk. It was pretty nice in there. Then when I came back to school I still feel like I can't talk. But then when I went inside and someone said, "How are you today?" I said, "Extreme expert." They would say, "That's nice to hear from Imani." I would say, "Yes, they can hear more now!"

Closing Thoughts

Throughout the years as my colleagues and I have been engaged in our work with art, literature, and writing, we have often remarked about what we thought was a noticeably higher-quality in our students' work when it was connected to the art and the literature texts sets as compared to their writing for other assignments. The data I shared in this vignette was my effort to document whether that really was indeed the case and, if so, to explore and understand the factors that influence my students as they write.

As I detailed above, the Art-Based writing produced better quality writing than the Test-Based Writing in different areas. These findings were significant to me and to ensure that I support my students and get their best work in the future, I carefully considered and reflected on the factors

influencing each writing experience. My reflections resulted in the following actions I am taking in my classroom:

- I am making sure that the writing topics are meaningful to my students so they develop a deep personal connection and have an authentic purpose for writing.
- I am providing adequate time so my students can develop each part of the assignment (e.g. focusing on the beginning of the story one day, the middle the next day and the end on the third day).
- I am offering a variety of prewriting experiences that encourage my students to think about and develop the details they will include in their writing.
- I am providing a variety of writing experiences over the year so that my students' interests and creativity are peaked and challenged in different ways, allowing them to showcase their best work.
- I am assessing my students' writing through different lenses rather than a single, test-based document.

My goal is to provide the support and motivation for all of my students to produce their highest quality work. Through my study I've learned the best ways to do that. As I plan my writing program in the coming years, connections to global literature and art will continue to be at the top of my list.

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