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# WOW STORIES

GLOBAL LITERACY COMMUNITIES: PURSUING  
CRITICAL QUESTIONS USING GLOBAL LITERATURE

Volume V, Issue 2  
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Worlds  
of WORDS 



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WOW Stories: Volume V, Issue 2  
*Global Literacy Communities: Pursuing Critical Questions using Global Literature*  
April 2017

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### Editors' Note:

Julia Hillman, an English Language Development teacher, aptly expresses a sentiment we hear from many teachers who have seen their professional autonomy stifled under the pressure of top down policies and testing performance:

Teaching and learning were beginning to feel meaningless. I started to question the purpose of education.

However, when presented with an opportunity to collaborate with other educators for a common purpose, she found herself energized as she positioned herself as a learner within a literacy community. Together, this community of educators explored the instructional potential of using global literature as a means for students to pursue critical questions around issues such as immigration, social movements, and the recent, highly contentious US presidential election. This collaboration was transformative for both Julia and students.

It wasn't until I learned new strategies and started using multicultural and global books to develop text sets that I became excited again. This felt like a natural way to teach.

This special issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom* presents vignettes authored by educators who engaged in inquiries with their students into issues many teachers feel insecure about examining within their school contexts. Fear that raising such issues will create discord in and among students, administrators, and parents, coupled with insecurity about their knowledge of culture, history, and social issues, often discourages educators from examining provocative questions significant to children. Within this special issue educators tell stories that demonstrate how together they felt empowered to innovate, and includes detailed descriptions of instructional processes will that provide educators with ideas and strategies to engage in similar inquiries with students in their respective contexts.

It is with great excitement we present this issue featuring the work of a literacy community in the Tucson Unified School District and how they discovered, together, ways of engaging in critical inquiries with purpose, efficacy, and enthusiasm.

Tracy Smiles and Mary Fahrenbruck, Editors

## Using Literature to (re) Consider Politicized Issues

Desiree Cueto

Political issues in the United States have become increasingly polarized over the past decade. The 2016 presidential election was characterized by distrust and intolerance. Hostile campaign rhetoric positioned citizens in “ideological silos,” creating an *us against them* climate across the nation (Suh, 2014). Even seasoned teachers and those who routinely engage in critical conversations with their students have become fearful of backlash from administrators, parents, and community members. hooks (1994) writes that it is often difficult for teachers to challenge the status quo and do something different, especially when it can be seen as risky. However, avoiding potentially divisive political issues or watering them down also comes at a cost. Schools are places where students come to understand civic engagement and to develop their own political identities (Syvertsen, Stout, Flanagan, Mitra, Oliver, & Sundar, 2009). The role that teachers play in providing students with opportunities to exercise their voices, take responsibility, and consider collective action is inimitable.

In this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*, we share three vignettes in which teachers use literature to support inquiries into controversial issues and show that books can create safe spaces for political discussions in the classroom. The first vignette features fifth grade teacher, Shannon Clowes, who introduces Kenneth Braswell’s (2015) *Daddy, There’s a Noise Outside* to support a class discussion about the Black Lives Matter Movement. Next, Julia Hillman explores immigration and forced journeys using a global text set with her fourth and fifth grade English Language Learners. Finally, Multicultural Curriculum Coordinator Junko Sakoi conducts a thoughtful and reflective interview with Julia Hillman following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Their vignette highlights the books Julia used to introduce students to the *American’s Creed* (Page, 1918) as well as students’ responses to current public and political discourses.

As the Director of Multicultural Curriculum and a co-researcher in this inquiry, it was my goal to consider, document, and interpret the ways in which literature supported intercultural understanding and increased students’ political efficacy. When our group started this project, we had no idea how it would evolve. We only knew that it was an exciting time to work in the Tucson Unified School District located in Tucson, Arizona.

### Setting and Context

From 2014-2016, the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) was focused on curricular revision and the climate was more agreeable to multiculturalism than it had been in previous years. The Multicultural Curriculum Department included myself as the Director and three Multicultural Curriculum Coordinators (Dorea Kleker, Junko Sakoi and Susan Osiago). We were given the distinct honor of spearheading the district’s efforts to integrate diverse perspectives into the broader curriculum. The impetus for our work came primarily from a revised desegregation plan for Unitary Status (USP). The USP required the district to continue to develop and implement multicultural curricula. It outlined specific mandates for students to:

- conduct research
- improve critical thinking and learning skills
- participate in a positive and inclusive climate in classes
- build respect
- develop a sense of civic responsibility

Based on the mandates, it seemed appropriate and necessary to turn to children’s literature. Short (2009) writes, “Children’s engagements with literature have the potential to transform their worldviews through understanding their current lives and imagining beyond themselves” (p.10). To begin, we engaged in a multistep process to evaluate the districts’ texts and resources, create core book lists for all grade levels, and research award-winning multicultural literature. Samplings of the district’s books were evaluated at each grade level using “10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Racism and Sexism” (The Council on Interracial Books for Children) and “Evaluating Literature for Authenticity” (Worlds of Words, <http://wowlit.org/links/evaluating-global-literature/>). The data reflected a dearth of contemporary multicultural literature in TUSD’s classrooms and libraries. The average publication date of these books, district-wide, ranged between 1997 and 2000. Moreover, the literature that was available in many schools contributed to maintaining negative cultural stereotypes or over-simplifying the teaching of diverse cultures. We used this data to write a proposal requesting that the district update its inventory of multicultural and global books.

Our work received an added boost from the incoming State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Diane Douglas, who, unlike her predecessor, said, “If any child educated in Arizona is not exposed to the suffering, trials and triumphs of all ethnic groups who have contributed to our state’s rich cultural mix, then we are failing to teach accurate history” (Huicochea, 2015). Instead of restocking classic books and outdated basal readers, our department worked with district leadership to purchase more than 400 current titles in multiple copies, reflecting the experiences of African Americans, American Indians, Latinos and Asian Americans as well as other marginalized groups and identities in our community such as refugees and immigrants.

### **Political Polarization in the District**

Purchasing the books was the first step in a long process. A change in curriculum meant a change in district culture, which required commitment, collaboration and new understanding. In its prior attempts to re-engineer the curriculum, the district vacillated between two ends of the political spectrum. Culturally responsive teacher training and anti-racist discourse stood in contrast to the dominance of Euro-American perspectives in the standard curricula. Specific courses dedicated to the study of people of color delivered promising outcomes. That was, until critics protested that these courses “promoted resentment” (Reinhart, 2011). Culture was then removed entirely from the equation and the Ethnic Studies program was dismantled. For a long time, the political climate in TUSD mirrored the divide across the nation. This polarization was summed up neatly by two headlines that popped up on a Google search of the district. One beckoned the district to press forward toward the goal, “Want More Evidence that Mexican-American Studies Works?” Opposite, another shouted, “Liberalism is killing us!” There

has always been a question for teachers of which path to take. Most teachers in the district have floated safely down the middle, attempting to *not make waves*. Therefore, the manner in which teachers developed the new curriculum and their ability to help students make significant connections to the literature were of primary importance as we began this work.

The district paid teachers in grades K-12 (two per grade level) to participate in the curricular revision process. The work outlined for this project included integrating newly purchased books into K-12 ELA and 6-12 Social Studies Maps and also establishing lab classrooms to document exemplary practices. Based on the district's history, it was equally important for us to invite teachers to explore their own assumptions and attitudes about culture, read professional literature and learn new strategies for engaging students from diverse racial, ethnic, ability and gender groups.

### **Adopting Frameworks for Understanding; Embracing Inquiry as a Stance**

The Multicultural Curriculum Department partnered with Worlds of Words and Dr. Kathy Short served as our project consultant. Hoping to move away from a hierarchical model of curriculum development, and instead to provide a more grassroots environment for teachers to think, talk and write, we met regularly at WOW. We brought together teachers from different schools and gave them time and frameworks through which to consider the work. We introduced them to Kathy's content framework for intercultural understanding along with her processing framework for engaging students in inquiry.

The content framework includes four, fluid and overlapping components: (1) personal cultural identities (2) cross cultural studies (3) intercultural understandings and (4) taking social action (Short, 2009). The processing framework outlines the Inquiry Cycle (Short, 2009). Both frameworks draw upon and are intertwined with democratic education, critical pedagogy, and social justice, and they were exactly what the teachers needed to focus their work.

### **Lab Classrooms**

The second component to this project included establishing and monitoring four lab classrooms. The lab classrooms were utilized to pilot new resources and to document the impact of alternative teaching strategies on student engagement. The lab teachers received stipends from the Multicultural Curriculum Department for their work beyond the school day. Preference was given to teachers with diverse student populations and some experience with multicultural education. The classrooms were located at Steele, Blenman, Peter Howell and Manzo Elementary Schools. Members of the Multicultural Curriculum Department conducted observations during the ELA block and teachers met with us face-to-face weekly after school between September 2014 and June 2016. Data collected during this time included lesson plans, curricula vetting rubrics, booklists and proposed units, student work and teacher reflections. The data was used to document a range of culturally responsive teaching strategies as well as students' responses to this work.

We found that, irrespective of the school context or grade level, students' ability to consider human complexity and to see their common humanity with people who were both similar and different from them increased as they emerged through engagements with books. The vignettes in this issue represent three examples drawn from our lab classrooms. Our hope is that this work will inspire others to be courageous in their teaching and in their resolve to usher in a new generation of thoughtful and compassionate citizens

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## Freedom and Justice for All: Exploring Black Lives Matter and the Significance of Civil Disobedience

Desiree Cueto and Shannon Clowes

Not since the Civil Rights Era has national attention been as focused on issues concerning the African American community as it is today. Over the past five years, a significant number of wrongful death cases and those involving the use of force by police have played out in the media. Most notably the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Freddie Gray dominated news headlines and spurred unrest between the African American community and the criminal justice system (Tatum, 2015). Black males are 21 times more likely to be shot by police than are their White male counterparts. In response, #BlackLivesMatter became a trending topic on social media and has since grown into a widely recognized movement.

Because schools do not exist in vacuums, highly politicized issues such as racial injustice often find a way into classrooms (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). It was not surprising that some of Shannon Clowes' fifth grade students wanted to discuss what they knew about the Black Lives Matter Movement and what they had heard about the untimely deaths of so many African Americans. When Shannon and I met to discuss what was happening in her classroom, she shared:

My students read news stories and we regularly discuss current events in class. They get into impassioned conversations about what is happening in the world. Some students are enraged that innocent people are being killed and I know this is a topic we need to address.

Despite being a new teacher—only in her second year—Shannon is committed to teaching for social justice. Inspired by Jonathan Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities*, she entered the profession believing that effective teachers empower their students to take action. With that in mind, she embraced inquiry as a stance toward teaching. Short (2009) defines inquiry as “a collaborative process of connecting to and reaching beyond current understandings to explore tensions significant to learners” (p.12). Shannon shared that, “the unit was inspired by students' genuine interest in the subject.” The African American students in Shannon's class prompted the conversation about #BlackLivesMatter. However, she believed that racism was an essential issue to address with all students. When I asked her if she had any reservations about presenting this unit she shared:

I have a few concerns about discussing racial issues. Once we start to really talk about it (race), I don't not know what they might say, do, or feel. My primary concern is that they talk with each other, and learn from one another. They are beginning to form opinions about a topic that is extremely complex, bringing to the table with them very different life experiences and knowledge.

While the Caucasian students in Shannon's class had heard about the Black Lives Matter Movement, many of the African American students and other students of color had a deeper understanding of racism based on their own personal encounters. A challenging

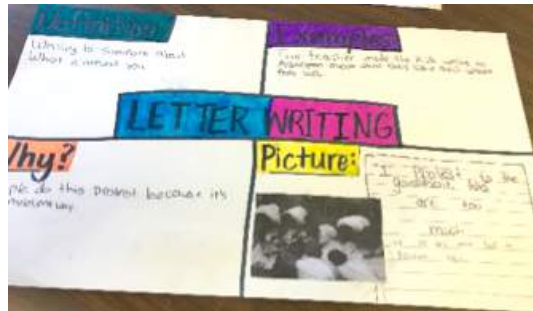
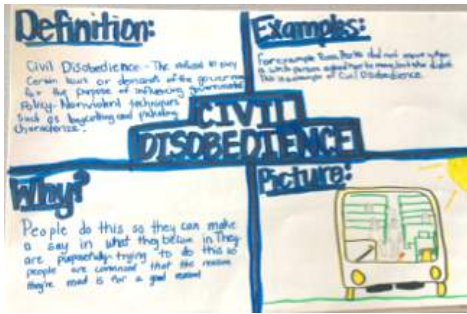
aspect of doing this work for Shannon was to educate every student (and herself), and at the same time ensure that all students felt safe and respected.

In terms of racial demographics, Peter Howell Elementary closely resembles the broader school district: White (27.16%); African American (9.85%); Hispanic (56.72%); Native American Indian (6.27%). However, it is above both the state and district averages for the percentage of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. On average, 53 percent of students in TUSD qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while 70 percent of students at Peter Howell do (LaFleur, 2014). The hardships of life have been real for most of Shannon's students, and she knew that each of them would connect on some level with the topic. But, racial issues can be particularly sensitive in nature and difficult to navigate. For that reason, Shannon appreciated the unique space that literature provided to support the discussion.

### What is Civil Disobedience?

There are a number of books that depict acts of civil disobedience and non-violent protests. Some of the titles we located: *The Boston Tea Party* by Russell Freedman (2012), *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel (2013), *Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers* by Sarah Warren (2012), *Gandhi: A March to the Sea* by Alice McGinty (2013), *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull (2003), *¡Sí, se puede!/Yes, we can!: Janitor strike in L.A.* by Diana Cohn (2002), *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2010) and *We March* by Shane W. Evans (2012). However, only one book, *Daddy There's a Noise Outside* by Kenneth Braswell (2015) specifically addressed the Black Lives Matter Movement. This book portrayed an African American family living in an urban community. After the two children are awakened by noises outside their window, they ask their parents to explain what happened. The family sits down to discuss what it means to protest and the reasons why members of their community are currently protesting. Through this conversation, Braswell located the Black Lives Matter Movement within the larger historical context of civil disobedience and the African American struggle for equality and justice.

Because we could find no other children's books about the Black Lives Matter Movement, Shannon downloaded images from the internet. The students also visited the websites, <http://blacklivesmatter.com> and <http://resources.primarysource.org/content>. Shannon asked students to work in pairs to browse the text set and internet resources. First, students were instructed to try to locate the different forms of civil disobedience mentioned in *Daddy, There's a Noise Outside* (boycotts, marches, speeches, sit-ins, petitions, and letter writing campaigns). Next, students were asked to do a quick write answering, "What did you notice?" and "What did you wonder about?" At this point, the goal was simply to get students to explore the concept of civil disobedience. Shannon concluded the lesson by having students web their thinking about the concept of civil disobedience.



The term “civil disobedience” is defined as a strategy of non-violently refusing to cooperate with injustice.

### Exploring Injustice

Shannon revisited ideas from the previous lesson by asking students why they thought some citizens might engage in acts of civil disobedience. Students offered a variety of responses including: “Because they didn’t like the laws.” “They did not agree with what was happening.” “They wanted rights.” Shannon wrote the word “JUSTICE” on the board. She explained,

When our founding fathers wrote the American Constitution, “justice” was a set of laws put in place to make sure that every citizen would receive equal protection under the law. Justice is what guarantees that certain rights can never be taken away or destroyed. Laws of justice are in place to ensure that all people are treated with fairness.

The purpose of the lesson was to encourage students to make deeper connections between civil disobedience and injustice. Additionally, Shannon wanted to move students closer to an understanding of how the African American community has historically and continuously struggled for justice. She shared,

I hoped that students would look at how African Americans have united and mobilized throughout history in order to combat injustice. I also wanted my students to come away from the text set with a deeper understanding of the injustices that continue to take place in our country. Perhaps the books will show them what they can do in the face of it.

The set of books spanned African American history from slavery to the present. Within the text set, authors examined injustice through the protagonist's efforts to either circumvent established law or to change it. Before allowing students to browse the books, Shannon asked them to focus their attention on the **actions** various characters in the books took, and **why**. She felt it was important that the students understand that people were fighting for rights that should have been theirs simply because they were born in America.

While the students browsed the books, Shannon posted the words to the Pledge of Allegiance on the board. As they read, students marked the books with sticky notes, documenting actions and reasons for the actions. They met in small groups to discuss their findings and to web new connections they made to the word "injustice." Shannon wrapped up the session by calling the students' attention on the Pledge of Allegiance. She explained,

As time progressed, Americans realized that all men and women were not being treated equally and something needed to be done to grant the same rights guaranteed by the Constitution and Declaration of Independence to everyone. For example, African Americans, women, and immigrants did not have the same rights as White men. Each of these groups were excluded from this protection because they were not viewed as citizens. People from these groups fought for many years to also benefit from the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Students shared in small groups about what they knew about the injustices experienced by African Americans, women and immigrants. Then they worked together as a class to complete a consensus board about what they had learned: "People were grouped together based on shared similarities such as skin color, gender or immigration status. As a result, these groups were often treated differently and were not afforded equal rights." Before exiting, students were asked read the Pledge of Allegiance and to Free Write their thoughts about whether or not "justice for all," applies to all people today.

### Stepping Back to Scaffold

When we reviewed the students' responses to the previous lesson, it was evident that most understood that there was injustice in world and that certain circumstances warranted protest. However, it did not appear that students were having the kind of "lived through" experiences with the texts that we had anticipated (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 24). Because the majority of the books we presented were set in distant history, we surmised that the students were not easily making text-to-self or text-to-current world connections. Some of the books may have seemed less relevant, even to the African American students. Moreover, we saw little evidence of what Shannon had hoped for in terms of the students' readiness to take action for social change. In one-to-one interviews, students reported feeling powerless to intervene in situations they felt were unjust.

The students needed to draw upon their experiential backgrounds to make sense of the text. Revisiting the Inquiry Cycle (Short, 2009), we knew that we needed to provide a space for them to define injustice in terms that reflected their own cultural and historical

context. For the next lesson, Shannon introduced Memory Maps and guided students in a discussion about places they have either witnessed or experienced injustice in their own lives. The students represented their experiences on large pieces of chart paper. Because the Memory Maps were constructed in a diverse setting, Shannon hoped that the engagement and subsequent small group discussion might also facilitate cross-cultural understanding. She concluded with a forum for students to share their maps and reflect on their current stance about injustice.

My students made personal connections right away and they were quick to share instances of injustice in their own lives – like getting blamed for something they did not do or being treated differently because of their gender or being called names. Some students even mapped out places where they had been referred to in racially derogatory terms.

While conversations surrounding the maps allowed the students to see where their experiences diverged and overlapped, Shannon was not convinced that they were making the kind of critical connections that might inspire them to take action against injustice. When we met again, she reported that students, “Listened attentively to one another. They even demonstrated empathy by looking shocked or angry when a classmate recalled being verbally insulted.” However, racially charged insults did not necessarily register as being significantly different from other kinds of insults. In light of our focus on the Black Lives Matter movement, this was particularly troubling. Lopez (2000) writes, “When people absorb racial ideas cognitively, treating racism as an accepted, expected part of the natural order, race functions institutionally” (p.1806). We wondered how much students had absorbed and how they were processing stories in the news and on social media. With the public’s attention (and our unit) focused on violent forms of racism—wrongful death and police brutality—we also questioned whether students were becoming immune to less overt forms of racism. We wanted to make sure that students understood that all forms of racism are interconnected and that racism is about division and power.

### **Tackling Racism**

As the unit progressed, Shannon wanted to focus on deconstructing racism with the premise of empowering students to take action and promote a positive change. To accomplish this, we considered how she might present the text set in a way that bridged the gap between historical racism and present-day racism. She also wanted to encourage the students to imagine a world free of racism. Short’s work on critical inquiry, which highlights the need to focus on issues of power and on questioning oppression, was instrumental to the way we considered engaging students in this inquiry. Short (2003) states that, “Readers ought to be challenged to critique and question ‘what is’ and ‘who benefits’ as well as to hope and consider possibility by asking ‘what if’ and taking action for social change.”





We had already spent a good amount of time getting students to think about “what is.” For example, students could define civil disobedience, name historical figures and groups who experienced injustice, and speak about instances of injustice in their own lives. Because the focus of our unit was Black Lives Matter, the texts we selected reflected African American history and highlighted the racial discrimination and ensuing injustices that Black people have endured. After multiple text set readings, students easily made connections between injustice, inequity and racism. A take away from an early lesson was that society tends to group people who look alike and consequently treat them differently as well. Students needed to start to ask the question, “who benefits?”

### Who Benefits?

There are biological reasons as to why people look different from one another. However, race as we understand it today is a social construct. Assigning significance to skin color, with darker skin tones representing inferiority, has been linked to slavery. Negative perceptions of particular races justified inequalities as being natural. Critically examining these ideas with students is important because they shape students’ interactions and attitudes towards different racial groups. Each of the books in the text set provided a space for students to think critically and to question who benefits from social constructs. Short (2003) recommends teaching students to “read against the grain of texts to question dominant messages and uncover the different layers of meanings, beliefs and perspectives embedded in a book.” Shannon modeled this approach, using the book *White Socks Only* by Evelyn Coleman (1996). The book begins,

When Grandma was a little girl in Mississippi, she sneaked into town one day. It was a hot day—the kind of hot where a firecracker might light up by itself. But when this little girl saw the “Whites Only” sign on the water fountain, she had no idea what she would spark when she took off her shoes and—wearing her clean white socks—stepped up to drink.

Based on the previous stories they had read, the students immediately anticipated trouble. Some students gasped. Others shook their heads. This was the empathy we hoped they would express. However, the goal was to move from aesthetic responses to critical analysis. As she read aloud, Shannon paused to ponder questions, such as, “When a big white man accosts the little girl and threatens to whip her, who benefits?” Shannon commented, “The only person who seems to be okay with what is happening is the man who is trying to stop the little girl from taking a drink.” She turned to the class and asked if the man’s actions reminded them of something else that they have learned about. The students connected the man’s action to the word “segregation,” which they had read about in other books. The word “segregation” was also posted on a growing list of words

on the class's word wall. Shannon reminded them that, "The practice of segregation was put into place by the dominant group in order to maintain an imbalance of power. It was used to support injustice."



The issue of power was also important for students to consider. We intentionally selected books that presented a shift in power—a moment when the character or the community resisted being oppressed by the mainstream or dominant group. For example, before “the big white man” in *White Socks Only* was able to remove his belt to whip the little girl, bystanders from the African American community removed their shoes and defiantly drank from the fountain. The actions of the bystanders showed their strength and willingness to fight the injustices that were governing their lives. This action really resonated with Shannon’s students. Most of the students related the question, “who benefits” to bullying and how bullies seek to maintain power. Some students talked hypothetically about unjust situations they

may face and ways that they might positively and constructively deal with them, if they were to occur.

After giving the students the opportunity to question “Who benefits,” we wanted to encourage them to ask, “What if.” Moving forward, the class read selected poems from *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline (2014), coupled with an author study. Short (2003) writes, “Providing brief information about the background of authors and illustrators before reading aloud can raise children’s awareness about the significance of this frame in interpreting literature.”

Shannon stated, “The author study made it feel as if we had a guest speaker. The students read about what was what like for an African American to grow up in the 1960s.” Because *Brown Girl Dreaming* is Woodson’s memoir, students got a first-hand account of the social and political constructs to which the African American community has historically been relegated. At the same time, they were encouraged to imagine a better future. Shannon recognized the unique space this book provided for students to continue to grapple with the question, “what if?” The chapter that immediately caught both of our attention was entitled, “The Revolution.”

The revolution is always going to be happening. I want to write this down that the revolution is like a merry-go-round, history always being made somewhere. And maybe for a short time, we’re part of that history.

The students wrote their own poetry in response to stanzas that struck them. One student drew from Woodson’s (2014) first poem in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, “too many people too many years / enslaved, then emancipated / but not free” (pp. 1-2) writing in her own poem, “stuck in a small cage / you’re set free / only to find out / you’re in a bigger fence.” Writing with and in response to the text prompted students to make deeper connections to their



own lives. Slowly, they began to recognize that racism is part of a continuous cycle that must be broken, and that they have the ability to do so.

In the end, Shannon felt that, because the literature discussions were open and comfortable, students were able to trust each other enough to candidly express their experiences, feelings and thoughts. She said, “The most notable, yet least measurable change I saw within them was their willingness to talk about complicated issues in the world in a more confident and compassionate way.”

After the 2008 presidential election in the United States, much of the public opinion suggested that racism had declined. Many people believed that “a black man in the White House signified that we had finally matured as a nation, embraced diversity, and were forging a future of equality” (Kaplan, 2011, p. xi). However, just eight years later, people seriously questioned what was thought to be progress. The rhetoric leading up to surrounding the 2016 election presented an entirely different picture. What we learned is that fighting racism is a long and difficult battle. What we witnessed is the immense power of books to create safe spaces for our students to resist messages of today and imagine a “merry-go-round” where, “history is always being made” (Woodson, 2014, pp. 308-309).

### Final Thoughts

For white teachers, or any teachers hoping to have open conversations about race in the classroom, honesty, openness and respect are key. Students need a space where they can say what they think and not shut down when others disagree. We came up with air symbols that meant, I agree/I wanted to say the same thing or I respectfully disagree, so students could also non-verbally share their thoughts and feelings. I always made sure to follow-up with students privately who chose to use air signs, to see if there was anything more they wanted to discuss.

~Shannon Clowes

### African American Text-Set

***Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope.*** Nikki Grimes & Bryan Collier (2012). Ever since Barack Obama was young, Hope has lived inside him. Even as a boy, Barack knew he wasn’t quite like anybody else, but through his journeys he found the ability to listen to Hope and become what he was meant to be.

***Brown Girl Dreaming.*** Jacqueline Woodson (2014). A novel in verse, the author shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights Movement.

***Busing Brewster.*** Richard Michelson & R. G. Roth (2010). Bused across town to a school in a white neighborhood of Boston in 1974, a young African-American boy named Brewster describes his first day in first grade.

**Henry's Freedom Box.** Ellen Levine & Kadir Nelson (2007). A fictionalized account of how in 1849 a Virginia slave, Henry "Box" Brown, escapes to freedom by shipping himself in a wooden crate from Richmond to Philadelphia.

**I, Too, Am America.** Brian Collier & Langston Hughes (2012). Presents the poem of Langston Hughes which highlights the courage and dignity of the African American Pullman porters in the early twentieth century.

**Most Loved in All the World: A Story of Freedom.** Tonya Cherie Hegamin & Cozbi A. Cabrera (2008). An authentic and powerful account of slavery and how a handmade quilt helps a little girl leave home for freedom.

**A Place Where Hurricanes Happen.** Renee Watson & Shandra Strickland. (2010). *New Orleans is known as a place where hurricanes happen . . . but that's just one side of the story.* New Orleans friends Adrienne, Keesha, Michael, and Tommy take turns speaking in spare free verse.

**Something Beautiful.** Sharon Dennis Wyeth & Chris K. Soentpiet (1998). A young African-American girl, depressed/oppressed by the ugliness in her inner-city neighborhood, searches for "something beautiful," and finds it in the small details of her community.

**Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom.** Shane Evans (2011) Follows a family's journey toward freedom as they travel along the Underground Railroad.

**When Marian Sang.** Pam Munoz Ryan & Brian Selznick (2002). Marian Anderson is known for her historic concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, which drew an integrated crowd of 75,000 people in pre-Civil Rights America.

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## Seeing Me: Confronting Real and Symbolic Borders through Stories

Desiree Cueto and Julia Hillman

*Some agreed with the fisherman, but others were louder...And they built a great wall all around the island, with watchtowers from which they could search the sea for signs of rafts, and shoot down passing seagulls and cormorants so that no one would ever find their island again. ~Armin Greder (2008)*

Immigration has historically been a “hot-button” issue. Nearly every group that has arrived in the United States, including those from Italy, Ireland, Poland and China, has been met with some resistance. Today is no different; immigration remains an issue brimming with controversy. What is different, however, is the way in which this issue has come to represent the extreme tensions between left wing and right wing politics, and how it is increasingly linked to racial, ethnic and religious intolerance. Current immigration debates have concentrated on building walls across the United States-Mexico border and on the mass deportation of the nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants, including children (Goo, 2015). Descriptions of radical terrorists have been used to represent every member of the Islamic faith. Suggestions have also been made to bar all Muslims from entering this country. Still, many people see America as a land built by immigrants and the Statue of Liberty as a beacon of hope. As questions over whose voices will be louder loom in the air, teachers wonder how to decrease fear and inspire hope in the students they serve.



This vignette extends an invitation into Julia Hillman’s fourth/fifth grade English Language Development classroom. When students in this class saw familiar experiences reflected in literature, they made deep connections, kept the books close and shared them with others. This is illustrated in the following response:

“Ms. Hillman, look! This book shows people like me.” A girl, who had recently come to the United States from Afghanistan, held up *Coming to America: A Muslim*

*Family's Story* (Wolf, 2003). She patted the seat next to her and invited her teacher and fellow classmates to take a look, “This is *my* story,” she said.

Over the course of the unit, many students in Julia’s class made similar connections. As a whole, the students evolved into engaged readers, writers and proud authors of their own immigration stories.

### Julia’s Story—Transforming Practice

For Julia, inspiration to start this work came after she read “Building on Windows and Mirrors: Encouraging the Disruption of ‘Single Stories’ Through Children’s Literature” by Christina M. Tschida, Caitlin L. Ryan and Anne Swenson Ticknor (2014). In the article, the authors highlight research on the importance of providing students with “mirrors” and “windows” that reflect their own experiences and also open their eyes to the experiences of others. Julia admits that prior to engaging in this work, she was not certain that any of this was possible—at least not in a public school setting. Like many teachers, she felt stifled by the rigorous testing and data (test scores) collection that had been driving instruction since No Child Left Behind (2002). She shared,

Teaching and learning were beginning to feel meaningless. I started to question the purpose of education. It wasn’t until I learned new strategies and started using multicultural and global books to develop text sets that I became excited again. This felt like a natural way to teach.

Throughout the eight years she has taught at Blenman Elementary School, Julia has welcomed students from the Marshall Islands, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Nepal, India, Japan, China, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Congo, and Mexico, among other countries. There are currently 7 different languages spoken within her classroom including: Swahili, Farsi, Arabic, Spanish, Marshallese, Nepalese, and English. She says that the opportunity to work with students from diverse countries and cultures has provided her with invaluable experience. Her students are, by far, the greatest inspiration for her work.

Worried about the impact that public discourse might have on her students, Julia decided to join fellow teacher, Amy Edwards, to write a unit that centered on immigration under the broader theme of *Forced Journeys*. Initially, the work felt impossible. One tension that Julia felt was whether an expansive enough collection of books to represent all of her students’ experiences actually existed. To remedy this, Julia applied for a grant to buy additional titles that had not been ordered through the district’s purchase. She shared,

A student once asked why I don’t have any books on Marshallese culture, so I explained that when we ordered books there weren’t any, but that I would look for some or he could write some for this class.

Another problem Julia faced had to do with time. In Arizona, English Language Development classes like the one she teaches are required to follow a 4-hour language block. To solve this issue, Julia integrated literature into every aspect of her teaching.







counter-narrative to negative representations of immigrants portrayed in some media outlets.

As she turned the pages of each book, Julia commented that many of the students in the class had been on journeys similar to those depicted in the books. The students nodded in agreement and she acknowledged the various countries from which they had come—Nepal, Congo, Mexico, and so on. She also talked about how they might have travelled—by boat or plane or foot. Then she paused, allowing students to think about the enduring understanding. She asked, “What is a journey?” and “What kinds of journeys do you know about?” Students shared based on their own experiences and Julia webbed their ideas on a large piece of chart paper with the word JOURNEY written in the center.

Enduring Understanding: Journeys are movements along a pathway (e.g. physical, emotional, or cultural)  
Essential Questions: What is a Journey? What do you know about journeys?

After writing the enduring understanding and essential questions on the board, Julia invited students to select books to which they felt a special connection, or books that reflected their personal experiences in some way. Students spent a good amount of time browsing the books and commenting to one another about the connections they were making. Julia documented the ways in which they selected their books. Some chose books that had familiar images. For example, several students selected *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting and Ted Lewin (2006). On the cover, a young girl is wearing a hijab. They also chose books that contained familiar languages. Two boys, who emigrated from Mexico, opted to read *My Diary from Here to There: Mi diario de aqui hasta alla* by Amanda Irma Perez (2002). The boys shared the book, alternating pages and languages as they read aloud. Still others gravitated toward books featured in the opening engagement, like *Two White Rabbits*, a Mexican migrant story by Jairo Buitrago (2015) and *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai (2011), which explored the immigration experience of a family fleeing Vietnam.

Once students selected and read their books, they were given time to engage in an adapted version of the Book Pass engagement (Worlds of Words, 2012). For the purposes of this lesson, Julia wanted to provide students with exposure to a range of immigration stories and also allow them to talk about their own experiences in relation to the books. She wrote the following prompts on the board:

- This book is about (book summary)
- This book reminds me of (something in your life)
- You may find it interesting to know (something the book made you think about)

Throughout this engagement, students shared a great deal of excitement, connected the stories to personal experiences they each wanted to share and explored topics of interest to them. Julia observed as one group of students made an intentional decision to examine how closely the books reflected their own experiences. The following is a conversation that occurred when one student passed the book, *Name Jar*.

Student 1: In this book the girl wants to change her name. Well she's thinking about it. Has anyone ever wanted to change your name?

Student 2: I have.

Student 1. Why?

Student 2. Because no one could say it right. People, like, they don't even try.

Student 3. I never wanted to do that, but I wanted to change other things. Like I wanted to change my clothes.

Student 2. You wanted to change your clothes?

Student 3. Yes. Cause if you wear this [pointing to the hijab on the cover of *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006)], they look at you strange.

Student 2. They look at you strange for everything...

As the reading block came to a close, Julia informed students that they would be creating a Life Journey Map to reflect their own experiences as part of that day's writing block. She shared an example of her own life journey map, but told students that all of the maps would look different. She instructed them to represent their lives in creative ways on the life journey map. They could choose to represent their lives literally or conceptually. Students were also told that the maps could be a timeline, bar graph, line graph, highway, garden, iceberg or any other creative way to represent the journey they are on. She told them that they would share these maps with other students in class when they were finished. Below are some of the maps the students created.



## Engaging with Complexity

### Essential Questions

- What are the causes and effects of forced journeys?
- How are forced journeys similar to and different from one another?

The next time I visited Julia’s classroom, the students were engaging in a strategy that Kathy Short developed called, “Comparing to Understand” in which students search for similarities and differences between cultural communities and for the reasons behind those differences. Julia and I talked about how she might use this strategy to help students think about differences between the immigration stories they had previously read, and the stories of those who had been on forced journeys (refugees, detainees and deportees). Julia intuited that the Forced Journeys theme might be difficult for some students, but she also understood the importance of allowing them to grapple with the complexity of their experiences. Of all the schools in the district, Blenman Elementary School and its feeder pattern to Doolen Middle School and Catalina Magnet High serve the highest number of international students and those who have refugee status. According to *Tucson Weekly*, “These schools are safe havens, mini-societies where all the students get nurturing, mentoring and guidance to adapt to and appreciate difference” (Bustamante, 2009). Julia wanted to be conscious and intentional in the way she went about exploring differences. More than anything, she wanted students to leave the engagement feeling empowered.

To start the lesson, Julia explained that sometimes we don’t have choices in life, and we are forced to do things we don’t want to do. She asked the students to give examples of things they have been forced to do. They came up with examples such as going to bed early, doing homework, and moving to a new country, among others. Julia held up *Brothers in Hope* by Mary Williams (2005), which tells the story of the Lost Boys of Sudan. Many of these young men ended up in Tucson and are currently living in the same central neighborhood as Julia’s students.

The next book Julia added to the text set was *Anna & Solomon* by Elaine Snyder (2014), a love story about a young Jewish couple forced to flee Russia in 1897. The third addition was *Landed* by Milly Lee (2006), about a young Chinese man eager to arrive in America, only to be detained at Angel Island until he is able to pass an oral language examination. Finally, she presented the students with *Mama’s Nightingale* by Edwidge Danticat (2015). This book portrays a young girl’s deep concern about her mother who has been taken away to a detention center and is facing deportation to back to Haiti. Julia gave each group in her class one book to examine closely. After studying the books, the students were instructed to have one representative from each group to add new thinking to the class’s Journey Web. Students contributed words like:

- Difficult
- Harsh
- War
- Sad

- Afraid
- Homeless
- Alone

In small groups, students were more expressive about their observations of the books, and began connecting what they read in the new books to what was portrayed in the immigration text set. They used the words “stereotypes,” “racism,” “injustices” and “status” to discuss their connections between the two sets of books. One student also referred to book characters as “invisible” because “they don’t speak English.” As Julia listened to interactions between her students, she noted, “The students are very aware of what is happening to these characters. They are sensitive to their needs and feelings.” This conversation provided a segue into the Comparing to Learn Engagement. Julia had photocopied a page from *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005) for each student. The caption below the page read: “Some of the boys were only five years old. The oldest boys were not more than fifteen. We were children, not used to caring for ourselves. Without our parents we were lost. We had to learn to take care of one another.” On another sheet of paper, she gave each student a photocopied image taken from *Home at Last* (Elya, 2006). The text on this page read: “That night, Papa asked, ‘Do you like school?’ ‘Yes, I like it.’ Her parents smiled. Mama made supper while Papa told them about his new job. Papa had to start with sweeping and cleanup work, unlike Uncle Luis, who had been at the factory longer and could run a machine.” The students worked independently to answer the questions outlined on the Comparing to Understand strategy sheet.

### **Global Thinking: Comparing to Understand**

Intercultural understanding involves a willingness to engage with complexity by exploring both how we connect to people in a specific global context and how we value what makes each culture unique. Compare two groups of people engaged in a similar activity but in different cultural contexts with these questions:

- **Looking for connections and similarity**  
What are the connections across these two situations?  
What about these two situations looks similar?
- **Looking for uniqueness and difference**  
What is unique about each situation?  
What about these two situations looks different?
- **Asking deep questions**  
What deep questions or big ideas might help us understand what is going on?  
What are possible reasons *why* these actions are occurring in each situation?
- **Going beyond**  
What questions do we still have?  
What do we need to know more about to understand these situations?  
How can we go beyond our current understandings?

After a time, Julia focused the students' attention to the board, where she had written the questions across four panels. The students' responses were as follows:

**Connections and Similarities:**

- They all came from another country
- They all came here (the United States)
- They are children

**Uniqueness and Difference:**

- The girl has parents
- The boys just have each other
- The boys are their own family
- The girl has a mother who cooks
- The girl has a father who works
- The boys have to work and cook for themselves
- The boys walked everywhere
- The girl (we think) she came to America on a plane, car or bus

**Asking Deep Questions:**

- Where are the boys' parents?
- Why does the girl's dad have to sweep floor?
- Why did the boys leave their country? Was there a war?
- Why did the girl and her family leave their country?
- Did they want to stay in their country?

**Going Beyond:**

- The students decided that they wanted to know more about what happened to make each of the characters leave their home countries. Some students were familiar with the story of the Lost Boys, but they wanted to know more. Another issue that came up for students centered around war. They wanted to know why the fighting had occurred in Sudan. To find out more, they made plans to interview people and to Google, "War in Sudan."

Julia continued teaching this unit into the third quarter. Whenever I checked in with her, she shared something new and exciting that happened in her classroom. Her stories often reminded me of words of wisdom shared by Jerry Harste and Kathy Short (1996), "Classrooms are not here to silence children, but to hear from them. In a democracy schools are not here to marginalize some children, but to hear all voices" (p. 17). The most powerful events in Julia's classroom centered on students writing and telling their own stories. Indeed, the books had served as a source of inspiration. In the process of articulating what they read in books, students came to develop and recognize their own voices. They realized that there was power in sharing their stories with one another and with the world.



## Final Thoughts

More than anything, I wanted my students to feel empowered. I wanted them to know that they have rights and they can use their voices to fight for their rights. Our unit—the books we read and the stories they wrote—became a way to speak truth to power.

~Julia Hillman

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**“I’m Making Changes in My Classroom by Welcoming the World”:  
An Interview with Julia Hillman**

Junko Sakoi

Julia Hillman is the fourth/fifth grade English Language Development (ELD) teacher at Blenman Elementary School in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) located in Tucson, Arizona. As a multicultural curriculum coordinator, I observed her teach in the classroom and became interested in her use of multicultural literature with students. Students in this classroom are predominantly from working class families and are first-generation immigrants and refugees from Mexico, Central American, the Middle East, Southeast Asian, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. Many of these students are English Language Learners (ELLs). Julia has worked hard to integrate multicultural and international children’s literature within the curricular framework for a curriculum that is intercultural (Short, 2009).

Julia works to create a classroom where students feel valued, respected, and embraced by displaying literature that reflects students’ cultures and experiences. She also implements response strategies such as cultural x-rays that show students’ cultural identities and displays world maps documenting each student’s home country and language. I became interested in Julia’s experiences and perspectives on multicultural literature, so interviewed her. She reflected on her teaching and shared her beliefs, insights, and teaching journey with the literature. The conversation has been edited for publication.

**Why Multicultural Literature?**

Julia shared her beliefs about multicultural literature, its role in her classroom, and its importance in providing access to diverse representations of people, culture, and language.

Julia: My purposes for using multicultural and international books are to offer students access to the world and its people, including examples that show empowering portrayals of their cultures. Also, students who belong to groups that have been marginalized should be included, encouraged to pursue their education, and develop their talents. How encouraged would you be if (as a student) you only saw yourself portrayed as a villain, or slave and never as a hero, scientist, or doctor? How encouraged would you be if the stories you read about your culture were inaccurate, demeaning and degrading, or if your culture was invisible within the school’s curriculum? Would you feel dis-identified with school or as part of the school culture? When groups that have been marginalized continue to be excluded from the curriculum, what does that say about us, as educators, and what messages does that send to our students? Those are some of my reasons for using multicultural literature.

Through literature, students have become familiar with multicultural and international characters, and have connected to them, their stories, experiences, and lives. This is important to me and to students. I want to promote familiarity

across cultures, and encourage respect across cultures both within my classroom and generally speaking. The message I would like to send is one that has transformed the way I see the world. There are many ways of living in the world; my way is normal to me, but it is not the norm when you consider the world's diverse population. This approach helps me feel connected to all people, and inspires empathy, compassion and understanding for different ways of life. This understanding has made teaching more interesting and meaningful. There are times I feel like teaching is too difficult for too little pay, but when I reflect on my purposes in education I find comfort in knowing that I'm making changes in my classroom by including and welcoming the world and its people both in my classroom which is very culturally diverse, and through literature.

### Critical Inquiry through Multicultural Literature

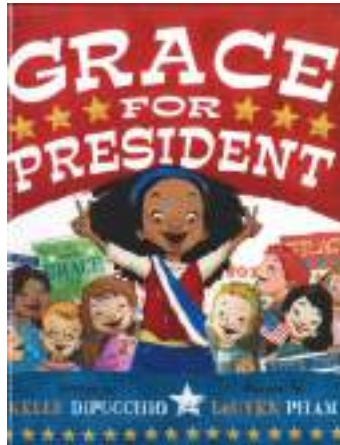
I asked Julia about her current teaching practice using multicultural literature.

Julia: I use multicultural literature as part of thematic units across subjects and as part of literacy, specifically for silent reading, partner reading, literature circles, writing, math, homework and inquiry. What surprised me was the role that books played during our 2016 Election Unit. Many of my students had background knowledge from exploring multicultural literature on Civil and Human Rights, heroes, art and artists, scientists, innovators, books about war and peace, and other multicultural and international books. Several books students referred to during our Election Unit were *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni (2005), *White Socks Only* by Evelyn Coleman (1996), and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (1995).



During the Election Unit, students read Scholastic articles about the electoral college, the candidates, third parties, and more, and a chapter book, *The Election Book: The People Pick a President* (Jackson, 1992), a picturebook *Grace for President* (DiPucchio & Pham, 2008), a variety of newspapers, listened to the candidates' speeches and debates, and discussed the election from their perspectives. Students were put off by Trump's use of stereotypes when talking about Mexican immigrants, Mexican people, Muslims and his sexism toward

women. Later, it occurred to me that students had the vocabulary to describe this behavior from their background with multicultural literature and the many discussions we had.



Post-election, students became disenchanted with the election process and results. This feeling was expressed the day after the election, when a student ran up to me and said, “I told you Trump was going to win! I told you Americans hate Muslims!” I asked, “Is it fair to say that for all of an entire group of people? Where have you heard stereotypes like the one you just offered me before?” She looked at me and said, “Okay, okay, not ALL but A LOT of people voted for Trump! I wasn’t surprised Ms. Hillman.” We discussed the popular vote versus the electoral vote, and how many people voted against Trump. The message I tried to send this student was that we have respect for religious freedom, such as Muslims, despite the election results.

Our plan that day was to watch Clinton’s concession speech and Trump’s acceptance speech. We got through the concession and had small group discussions. I observed a group of students crying as they discussed the election results. “At least I’ll have a few more weeks with my dad,” a student commented. Students created heart maps to express their feelings, we discussed them, and took a break.

Once we started listening to the acceptance speech, students began to groan. A student asked me to turn it off. Then several more yelled out, “Turn it off!” The first student to complain said he didn’t want to hear what Trump had to say. He continued, “He said Mexicans are rapists.” Students continued to add comments they had heard Trump say during speeches and debates. “He wants to BUILD A WALL!” they said. “He calls women fat and he is fat! He doesn’t think it’s okay for women to be fat but he thinks it’s ok for men to be fat.” “He keeps talking about Muslims and Mexicans. That makes people think we’re bad.” Students continued with comments like, “I can’t believe he won. Why did people vote for him? We don’t want to watch this. Can we do something else?” “Hillary is bad, too!” a student commented. “She deleted all of those emails. They are both bad. I voted for Bernie!” The same student asked, “What about heroes? Can we study people who

have made things better, and how they did that? Can we study Civil Rights again?" Several students agreed so we discussed and voted on what to investigate next.

Now that I'm reflecting on the role of multicultural literature, it seems clear that the literature provided students with the background knowledge of various social issues and injustices. Students developed an understanding of the danger of hateful rhetoric. They developed a disdain for unfair policies and racism to the point of disgust with the election results.

After we investigated the theme of *Movements* (see Figure 1) for several weeks after the election, students became empowered to participate in the Election Unit once again. I asked, "What questions do you have now?" "How did Trump win?" was a common question, so, as a group, we reflected on the election by identifying battleground states and reviewing the promises Trump made to the people of those states. After investigation, we revisited the question- "Why do you think these states voted for Trump?" "He promised these people jobs," students answered. "Some people who lost their jobs were blaming immigrants and they liked how Trump blamed immigrants," a student commented. They began to see Trump's win as a result of a confluence of factors including promises he made to battleground states, people not voting, misinformation about the candidates, and the DNC rigging the primaries.



Figure 1: Students investigated "how are movements similar and different?" using articles on the Dakota Access Pipeline.

I had the opportunity to observe in Julia's classroom during this 2016 election unit. Her students were immersed in the unit and had heated discussions. They showed tensions and confusion, and they explored the election and the social structures, norms, misconceptions, and stereotypes from critical and open-minded perspectives that impacted their understandings of the election cycle. Their strong background knowledge and broad understanding of social issues led them to in-depth inquiries based on their explorations of multicultural literature and various other resources such as newspapers, magazines, and films before and during the election unit. I observed that Julia always encourages her students to engage in critical inquiry about the social and cultural issues portrayed in stories by making connections to the students' own

lives, asking questions like what the story is for, who writes the story, what messages are portrayed in the story, and whose voices are not heard in the story.

### **Suggestions for Multicultural Literature Integration in the Classroom**

Finally, I asked Julia for instructional advice. Here are Julia's suggestions about how to integrate multicultural literature into the classroom:

Julia: Students explore multicultural and international books of interest to them, engage in critical discussions and action, and respond to the texts in various ways. Sometimes, they read several picturebooks a day, aside from *Avenues* stories (the basal reader), such as *If the Shoe Fits* (Soto & Widener, 2002) and *Honoring Our Ancestors: Stories and Pictures by Fourteen Artists* (Rohmer, 2013). Some students read multicultural chapter books, too. During art, I pass around a collection of multicultural and international literature about art and artists that include drawing books, music books and poetry. Students can investigate the books and draw, paint or create something of interest to them, or in connection to the unit we are investigating.

From my view, best practice means that the books are integrated, and students have access to multicultural literature for silent reading, homework assignments, and across subjects. Students should both have access to books written about diverse scientists, mathematicians, writers, artists, and historical figures and should also have books written by diverse authors. Having a wide range of books offers students opportunities to inquire about the world and its people, world events, and areas of interest to them. Here are some simple ways I have found to integrate multicultural literature:

- Display multicultural literature around the classroom so that students can begin observing and exploring.
- Allow students time to browse the literature before recess, lunch or dismissal every day or several times per week.
- Read one or two books aloud per day. Students can discuss the stories in small groups and record any questions they have.
- Include student read-alouds across subjects, such as famous artists, scientists, and mathematicians.
- Include small group student read-aloud and discussions.
- Offer students 20 minutes per day or twice a week to partner read, discuss and engage with the literature.
- Choose a day for students to read the literature with partners or in small groups, then discuss and present their connections to the class.
- Have students choose a multicultural chapter book from a list of books from the Worlds of Words ([wowlit.org](http://wowlit.org)) website. Students can read the book for homework and respond in a format of their choice.
- Students can choose a multicultural book to read aloud before dismissal.

### **Final Thoughts**



Students come into the classroom with their identities, abilities, and experiences. Julia has learned about her students: who they are, what their backgrounds are, and the value they place on their home languages and cultures. Using this knowledge, she encourages them to challenge injustice and stereotypes and value diversity. Together with students, she has thought through the integration of inquiries, response strategies, and engagements using multicultural literature and various forms of texts such as newspapers, magazines, and media.

Since the 2016 election unit, her students, who are mostly immigrants and refugees, have expressed tensions, confusion, and concern about their lives and their families' lives. An Afghan student expressed in her writing, "I don't belong here." Like her, many of these students feel treated as if they are "others" in this society. Julia's story demonstrates how significant it is to bring literature and students together, thus giving them time to reflect on themselves and foster a sense of inclusion as members of society, thus providing insight into the world beyond their homes.

Our classroom doors need to display "a great big 'welcome' sign" for all students in our schools, communities, and society (Sung & O'Herron, 2016). As Julia found, multicultural literature is a powerful resource for promoting this kind of welcome.

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