

**WOW Review: Volume XI Issue 3**

Spring 2019

Hope

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## Volume XI Issue 3: Hope

### Introduction:

Hope is a frequent theme in children's and adolescent literature. As we looked at the titles that reviewers thought and wrote about, the diversity of topics or genres is wide, ranging from Korean New Year dresses to West African fantasy. Each title is complex with layers of themes, but a unifying element across these books is hope in its different forms.

In *Return to Sender/Devolver al Remitente*, Mari and Tyler hope for safety and a bright future for their migrant and farming families. Two novels set in Africa portray the hope teens hold on to as they face corrupt rulers in *Children of Blood and Bone* or the tension between traditional and modern healing with the AIDS epidemic in *This Thing Called the Future*. Two other novels, *A Story Like the Wind* and *The Night Diary*, portray the slim threads of hope when homes are abandoned, and families are forced to move countries.

The picturebooks in this issue also engage with hope in different ways. *The Stuff of Stars* and *New Clothes for New Year's Day* examine hopeful 'beginnings' while *The Fox on the Swing* considers the hope for an unlikely friendship. Finally, *Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans* and the graphic novel *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans* provide accounts of the commitments of people in New Orleans to each other in the face of natural disaster and their hope of restoring their homes.

We invite readers to submit reviews for our upcoming issues of *WOW Review*. The Summer, 2019 issue will focus on **Global Nonfiction/Biographies**. We welcome reviews of recent nonfiction books and biographies. Rich informational nonfiction books and biographies are continually being published and we look forward to having a strong issue that examines a range of topics. **Submission deadline: May 15, 2019**

**Fall, 2019: Open Theme.** We welcome reviews of recent children's and young adult books that highlight intercultural and global perspectives. **Submission deadline: August 15, 2019.**

Susan Corapi & Prisca Martens, Co-Editors



***Children of Blood and Bone***

Written by Tomi Adeyemi

Holt, 2018, 544 pp

ISBN: 978-1250170972

This fantasy novel is set in the fictional land of Orïsha and is told from the perspectives of three teenagers who are pulled together on a quest to change the fate of their world. Zélie Adebola is the main protagonist, telling her story from the perspective of the oppressed cultural group of the maji, adult members of her culture. Zélie is a diviner, a child chosen by the gods to wield magic after the age of 13. She has silver eyes and white hair that are striking against her dark skin and are signs of her heritage. Zélie is hot tempered and suffers greatly from the trauma of watching her mother’s murder. She longs for the freedom to celebrate her family’s cultural practices, which have been made illegal. Amari is the daughter of the brutal tyrant King Saran who executed thousands of maji when their magic mysteriously vanished. Amari lives a stifled life, rigid with restrictions and obligations, including chemically lightening her skin so that she better represents the color of the royals. Amari passively accepts her existence, until her father goes too far and executes someone dear to her. The last perspective is Inan, prince of Orïsha. Inan has the most inner turmoil to wade through, truly believing in the work of his father, seeing the mass killings of maji and diviners as retribution for crimes caused by an overreach of power. Inan struggles to see why his father’s actions are more than just claiming justice, and how his father’s choices have created a generation of people like Zélie and her brother Tzain, who mourn family members tragically lost because of the king.

Adeyemi’s ability to build multifaceted characters with flaws and faults makes this book a valuable addition for young people of color looking for literature where they can see themselves in fantastical settings, doing incredible things like Zélie and Amari. Adeyemi paints a brilliant masterpiece of a believable, yet wildly imaginative, world filled with beauty and darkness. From amazing creatures to detestable slurs, Adeyemi leaves no stone unturned when it comes to detail. In the Author’s Note, she makes it clear that she intended to tell a fantasy story with allegorical aspects that reflect the trauma inflicted on the Black community in the United States due to unchecked police brutality. Adeyemi unflinchingly describes the terror and heartache felt by survivors of systemic violence through the agony that Zélie endures, as a parallel to the agony of real survivors in our world. The themes of oppression and violence are hot topics that need to be discussed with students. The tones in this novel can be very dark at times, which gears the text toward students aged 14 and up. Adeyemi provides a novel study-guide on her website; teachers of many academic areas can easily utilize this tool.

*Children of Blood and Bone* is a great example of fantasy that centers on African-based culture and characters. There has been a growing urge among writers and readers for more books like this to shed light on the fact that the fantasy/science-fiction genre is for everyone and can be about anyone. This book can be paired with those by other authors who have created fantasy with similar themes and settings. *Beasts of the Night* by Tochi Onyebuchi (2017) is another ex-

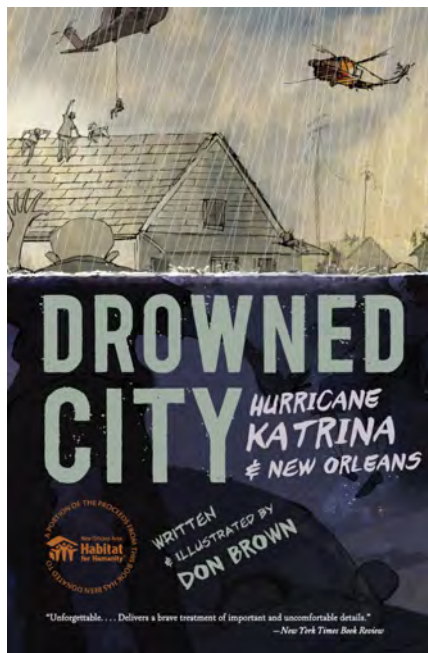
ample of fantasy with West-African roots. Onyebuchi's mother is Nigerian, and her experiences inspired many aspects of his work. *Who Fears Death* by Nnedi Okorafor (2010) is another example of West-African inspired fantasy, with a focus on science-fiction dystopia. This novel is very intense and is definitely for older readers, as is *Children of Blood and Bone*, due to violence and traumatic elements.

Tomi Adeyemi draws on the knowledge of her heritage as a Nigerian-American and her education. Adeyemi studied English Literature at Harvard University and then West African Culture and Mythology as a graduate fellow in Salvador, Brazil. Dr. Jaye Winmilawe (2018), author, professor, and priest of Yoruba, praised Adeyemi for her use of Yoruba references throughout her novel. The author masterfully blends real aspects of the religion with the repurposing of words from Yoruba to mean different things, or as names of cities and landmarks. This powerful use of fact adds more layers of meaning, that can be used in teaching students about West African culture and world religion.

#### References

Winmilawe, J. (2018). Sankofa reads [Review of the book *Children of blood and bone*]. *Africa access*. Retrieved <http://africaaccessreview.org/2018/11/children-of-blood-and-bone/>

Kaitlyn DeMoney, Western Washington University



***Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans***  
Written and Illustrated by Don Brown  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015, 96 pp

ISBN: 978-0-544-15777-4

In this graphic novel, author/illustrator Don Brown relates the story of Hurricane Katrina and its impact on New Orleans. The narrative begins in Africa with a breeze escaping the continent. As it travels across the Atlantic, the wisp of a storm develops into a category 5 hurricane that kills six people in traveling across Florida. As it moves across the Gulf of Mexico, it decreases to a force 3, but is 400 miles wide and heading for a vulnerable New Orleans. Eighty percent of the residents evacuate but left behind are the people who have no money or transportation and no way out, or who refuse to leave. Brown introduces one of the many communication mishaps, as empty buses and trains departed from the city

with no passengers, leaving behind people who did what they could to prepare for the hurricane and survive. No one foresaw the devastation that occurred as the winds and water pounded the city, eventually breaking the levees and flooding most of the city, some parts in water 20 feet deep.

What could be a grisly book describing over 1800 deaths and the massive destruction of property, instead has a journalistic and factual style describing the dangers and the failures. Don Brown relates how city and federal government officials failed to coordinate rescue efforts and help the thousands stranded in houses and the Superdome. Help was agonizingly slow in coming as officials ignored news footage, argued over control of the Louisiana National Guard, and made promises that took days to materialize. The graphic novel also relates the way people tried to help each other, and the early rescue efforts of employees of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries who took it upon themselves to use their flat-bottom boats in the choppy waters and flooded streets to rescue thousands of people. Rescuers were on their own, with no leadership or communication. The focused look at humans helping, rescuing, and caring or not caring makes this book the winner that it is. In a *Booklist* interview Brown describes the way he kept the narrative centered on people, and the reader gains a sense of the heroic deeds, strengths, weaknesses, and failures of people as they cope with the magnitude of the disaster.

The illustrations are rendered in pen and ink with digital paint in an earth-toned palette. The drawings are done in a minimalist style so that Brown can accurately describe and draw the destructive wind and flooding of the city while, at the same time, distancing readers from the raw fear and anger of stranded people, the danger of contaminated water full of dead bodies and debris, and the lack of help for days. The result is a journalistic style that tells the story in a matter of fact way, but with an undercurrent of frustration at the politicians and service providers who failed to help fast enough. Brown states that “In a graphic novel, art contained in

panels can examine details only hinted at in a larger scene or follow the components of an action. In so doing, elements of the story can be emphasized or enlarged, heightening drama and sharpening the narrative tension” (Jesse Karp 2016 *Booklist* interview). The graphic novel concludes with the statement of a young builder who is sinking piles deep into the ground to prevent houses from floating away in a similar storm. The young man grew up in New Orleans and declares “We’re coming back. This is home. This is life” (p. 90-91). The book has extensive source notes and a rich and diverse bibliography from government reports to interviews and newscasts.

Award-winning authors and illustrators have published books about Hurricane Katrina that pair well with the non-fiction *Drowned City*. National Book Award winner Jesmyn Ward (2011) describes a poverty-stricken family’s preparations for the approaching hurricane in *Salvage the Bones*. In *Ninth Ward*, Jewel Parker Rhodes (2012) writes about a 12-year-old girl surviving the hurricane with her caretaker. In both *A Storm Called Katrina* (Myron Uhlberg and Colin Bootman, 2011) and *Hurricane Song: A Novel of New Orleans* (Paul Volponi, 2009) the authors describe a family’s sojourn in the overcrowded Superdome. Finally, in *Zane and the Hurricane: A Story of Katrina*, Rodman Philbrick (2014) narrates how a boy and his dog survive the storm.

Don Brown has published over 20 picture book biographies ranging from well-known scientists (*Odd Boy Out: Young Albert Einstein*, 2004) to lesser known adventurers (*Far Beyond the Garden Gate: Alexandra David-Neel’s Journey to Lhasa*, 2002). His non-fiction illustrated books for older readers range from graphic novels of natural disasters (*The Great American Dust Bowl*, 2013) to his award-winning description of the Syrian refugee crisis (*Unwanted*, 2018). He won the 2016 Orbis Pictus award for this book. Besides his works of nonfiction, he has published several historical fiction novels. He lives in New York with his family. More information can be found at <https://www.booksbybrown.com/>

## References

Karp, J. (2016, September). Talking with Don Brown. Retrieved from <https://www.booklistonline.com/Books-and-Authors-Talking-with-Don-Brown-Jesse-Karp/pid=8325056>

Susan Corapi, Trinity International University





***The Fox on the Swing***  
 Written by Evelina Daciute  
 Illustrated by Aušra Kiudulaite  
 Thames & Hudson, 2018, 48 pp  
 ISBN: 978-0500651568

Winner of the 2019 Batchelder Award for translation, this unusual picturebook was originally published in Lithuania. The award recognizes an American publisher for the most outstanding translated book originating in a country outside of the U.S. and in a language other

than English. The award was originally established in 1966 to encourage American publishers to bring more translated books into the U.S. Given that only 3-4% of the children's books published each year in the U.S. are translated books, the award serves as an important resource for high quality translations.

On the surface, the book depicts the relationship between a lonely boy looking for adventure and a fox that he encounters on his way home from school. On the first page, readers are told that Paul and his parents are a fairly normal family--apart from the fact that they live in a tree--an immediate signal that this book has unexpected twists. The story explores the frustrations, loneliness, and fears a child experiences as a result of adult decisions. Paul's conversations with the moody fox, whom he encounters regularly, are deep and philosophical. The book is illustrated with mixed media and digital collages with fonts that change in size and color to reflect the changing moods of the boy and fox. The unexpected ending of this fresh, original story brings satisfaction for the reader, even after the boy's family moves away and the boy wonders if he will ever be happy again.

This picturebook has many layers of meaning that support connections ranging from a child's need for friendship to much deeper life issues, inviting readers to linger in the book over multiple readings. The many layers to the story support a wide audience; children will enjoy the surface story about the need for a friend and a child's frustration at parental decisions, and older readers will connect to the philosophical discussions. One important life lesson for the boy is how to be a friend in ways that are appropriate to the widely changing daily moods of the fox. Their philosophical discussions focus on the nature and complexity of happiness. In fact, the original title of the book in Lithuanian is translated as "Happiness is a Fox."

The multiple themes of this book provide for a range of possible connections. The philosophical dialogue between the fox and the boy can be connected to the classic *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943), as well as to picturebooks with many layers, such as *Cicada* by Shaun Tan (2019). *The Forest* by Riccardo Bozzi (2018) and *Up the Mountain Path* by Marianne Dubuc (2018) are other philosophical pairings. Another interesting pairing is books which challenge adults who make decisions for their children, instead of respecting a child's ability to think, such as *The Composition* by Antonio Skarmeta and Alfonso Ruano (2000). *Jerome* by

*Heart* by Thomas Scotto and Olivier Tallec (2018) is a book for younger audiences about a boy's love for his friend and the happiness his friend brings to his life, despite his parent's disapproval. All of these paired books are translated, except for *Cicada*, which comes from Australia.

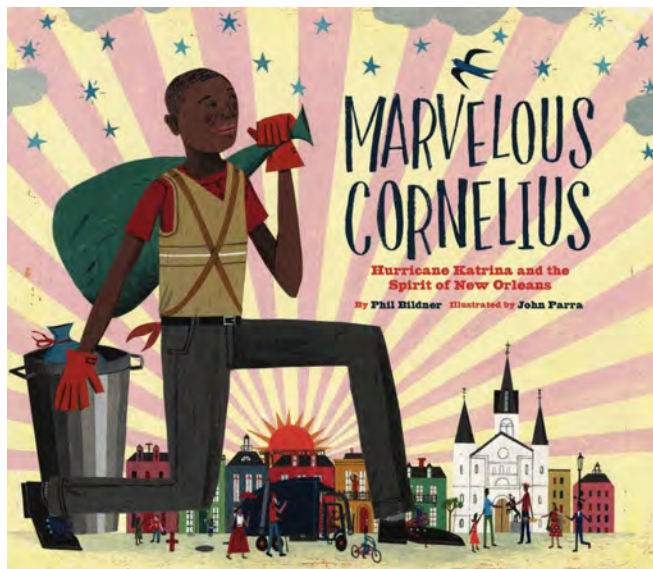
One of the criteria for the Batchelder is that readers should be able to sense that the book comes from another country. *The Fox on a Swing* is a good example of a fantasy picturebook where a specific cultural context or community is not immediately evident in the text or illustrations. Instead, the sense that this book is from another country grows out of the unusual nature of the story and the philosophical dialogues not typically found within books written and published in the U.S.

The author is a writer and poet from Vilnius, Lithuania, who has spent time in Southeast Asia where her husband has been involved in diplomatic service. The mother of four children, Daciūte studied journalism and worked in the field of show business, telecommunications, child protection, and public relations. She has published short stories, poetry and novels for both adults and children, but is drawn to the ways in which stories encourage children to explore deeper understandings about life. She has tremendous respect for children as thinkers, arguing that they should be communicated with in the same way as adults. *The Fox on a Swing* is her most successful book in Lithuania.

Aušra Kiudulaite is an illustrator and artist who lives and works in Lithuania, with some of her work created under the name of Menulis Ranulis. She says that her inspiration to become an illustrator was her own children because she wanted to teach them how images can transmit and communicate the strange and funny stories that compose the universe. Her artistic influences include children's vintage books, old movie posters and graphics, and Japanese printmaking. She has illustrated several picturebooks in Lithuania and worked in many different aspects of the field of illustration.

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona.





**Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans**

Written by Phil Bildner

Illustrated by John Parra

Chronicle Books, 2015, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1452125787

This book tells the tale of a real-life garbage man of humble origins who made a difference to the city of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Phil Bildner tells the tale of Cornelius Washington, a street cleaner who lives in the French Quarter section of New Orleans and sees the

street cleaning of his local area as his calling. Cornelius takes to heart Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s proposition that whatever job we do, we should do it well. Cornelius makes his town sparkle and takes great pride in his job. He dances up one avenue and down another. Then hurricane Katrina hits, and the Mississippi River rises and floods New Orleans, leaving trash, death, and decay in its wake, "a gumbo of mush and mud." After a period of mourning, Cornelius and others from New Orleans and around the country worked to make New Orleans sparkle again.

*Marvelous Cornelius* is a story of an everyday hero, demonstrating how an ordinary man can better all of us through example. Cornelius is a regular guy who is committed to his community. He does not have any extraordinary talent or power but takes pride in his home town of New Orleans and works diligently in his job as a garbage collector to make sure the streets 'sparkle.' He does his job with finesse and entertains while he cleans, shouting to locals and marching up and down the streets. Cornelius betters his community not only by doing an exemplar job cleaning the streets, but also by bringing the community together. This story is also a wonderful exemplar of figurative language such as alliteration and repetition.

Illustrator John Parra uses primary and pastel colors in a folk style approach that fills the entire page with outdoor illustrations. In an interview with Lee Wind from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Blog he stated that he was influenced by many of the regional folk artists around New Orleans. He was especially influenced by Clementine Hunter's use of color and tone to make feeling exude from her paintings. Hunter has become one of the most well-known self-taught artists, often referred to as the Black Grandma Moses, depicting life on a southern plantation in the early 20th century.

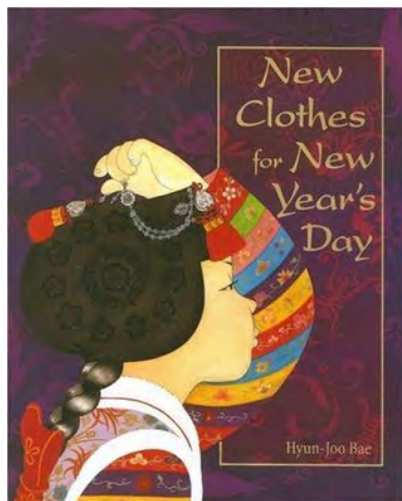
Two books that could be paired with *Marvelous Cornelius* and also have an African-American hero or folk hero are *Wind Flyers* by Angela Johnson and Loren Long (2007) and *John Henry* by Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney (1994). *Wind Flyers* tells the tale of a band of undercelebrated World War II heroes, the Tuskegee Airmen. The book tells one boy's story of his love of flight that takes him on a journey from the back roads of Alabama to the war-torn skies of Europe. The Tuskegee Airmen are an underappreciated group of brave young men and their contribu-

tion to American history should be shared. *John Henry* is based on the famous African-American folk ballad. The story tells of the legendary contest between a spirited young man with a hammer and a steam drill to build a tunnel through the Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia. The story shows what one individual can do when he is determined.

Phil Bildner was born and raised in New York in the town of Jericho on Long Island. Though he holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science from John Hopkins University and a Law Degree from New York University he quickly knew that law was not his calling. He returned to school after practicing law for a short time and got a degree in education and became a teacher. Phil taught for over ten years in New York City public schools but left the classroom in 2006 to write full time. He currently lives in Newburgh, New York, and visits many schools each year to promote writing and reading.

John Parra was born and raised in California though he currently lives with his wife, Maria, in Queens, New York. He is an award-winning illustrator, designer, and painter whose children's books have earned numerous awards. His original artwork has been displayed in numerous galleries and museums. In 2015, John had a special event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York showcasing his art and illustrations. In 2017, John's art was used to create six Forever postal stamps for the United States Postal Service titled "Delicioso." John also creates and sells his art to private collectors.

Megan McCaffrey, Governor's University



***New Clothes for New Year's Day***

Written and Illustrated by Hyun-Joo Bae

Miller Books, 2007, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1-933605-29-6

“A New Year, a new day, a new morning. New clothes. We start the year with new things. New things, for the year-older me. (n.p).”

One of the holidays celebrated universally is New Year's Day. Every country around the world welcomes the beginning of a new year in its own special way with cultural traditions, anticipating what the future may hold with excitement. It is usually the time to make resolutions and plans for better lives as we grow a year older. Such a celebration also brings family mem-

bers together, but the time when the New Year is celebrated is not necessarily the same in every culture. Some countries celebrate according to the lunar calendar, which is different from the solar calendar. Korea celebrates according to both calendars, though most people observe the Lunar New Year's Day.

Originally published in Korea in 2006, *New Clothes for New Year's Day* is a story told in a first-person narrative by the young girl protagonist. Although her name is unknown, she takes readers to Korea on a Lunar New Year's Day during what appears to be the Joseon Dynasty. The story begins as the young girl arises and waits for the sun to appear in the sky on the very first day of the New Year. Her clothes are white, but as she gets ready, she puts special garments on top of what she is already wearing. Her outfit becomes rich and colorful as the story progresses. The book ends with the girl dressed in her beautiful warm Korean traditional clothing, ready to wish everyone good luck as she steps outside where new snow is falling for New Year's Day.

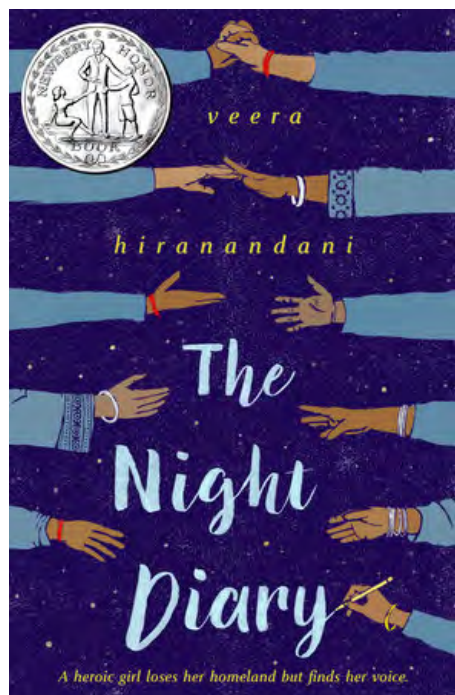
The book is written with the young girl explaining to readers how to dress in a traditional Korean New Year's outfit, describing each part of the challenging process in a humorous way. The book also emphasizes the word 'new' repeatedly, which expresses the young girl's excitement. Her mother made the new clothes she wears, and the shoes are a gift from her father, so her overall outfit shows her parents' love for their daughter. Although there is no illustration of the parents, the picture shows the girl's feelings of pride and joy as she puts on her special outfit, which manifests her family's devotion for her. Some of the pages show pieces of traditional Korean clothes and accessories, which provide the reader with hints and clues for what the girl will wear next as she dresses herself for the New Year. The detailed background also represents the interior design of a traditional Korean house in the Joseon Dynasty.

This book is a great way to share how young Korean girls dress in their traditional Korean clothes, especially because this very outfit is still worn during the New Year holidays in modern day Korea. Korean culture is authentically represented in both the texts and illustrations. Additionally, the pictures that show the protagonist's new skirt and jacket hung on a traditional hanger are historically accurate. The last two pages at the end of the book provide readers with an in-depth detail of the entire outfit the main character is wearing.

*New Clothes for New Year's Day* would pair well with *This Next New Year* (Korean-English Bilingual Edition) by Janet S. Wong (2014), *Dumpling Soup* by Jama Kim Rattigan (1998), and *Happy New Year!* by Emery Bernhard (1996). These books can be used together to explore how children with diverse racial backgrounds celebrate the New Year with their family and friends. These books also introduce how the New Year celebration takes place at various times and how people engage in celebrations with their traditional cultures. Although the New Year is celebrated in so many different ways, these books remind us that the beginning of a new year is a holiday when we gather together to let go of the negative past and to endeavor to make improvements with a joyful spirit for the future in starting anew. Moreover, these books may provide an opportunity for educators to have their students share their unique cultures of celebrating the New Year and engage in a class discussion about their special family traditions.

The author and illustrator, Hyun-Joo Bae, was born in South Korea and graduated from Ehwa Women's University. She studied at the Hankook Illustration School and is very fond of traditional Korean culture and folktales, which are also her hobbies and interests. She enjoys working on picturebooks about traditional Korean culture and folktales. More information about Hyun-Joo Bae can be found online at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/children/scholarly-magazines/bae-hyun-joo>

Hyunjung Lee, University of Arizona



***The Night Diary***

Written by Veera Hiranandani

Dial, 2018, 258 pp

ISBN: 978-0763674588

This epistolary novel is set in India in 1947, at a time when the country is on the brink of independence from British rule. The protagonist, 12-year old Nisha, receives a diary from Kazi, her family's house help, on her birthday in July 1947. She decides to start writing letters to her deceased mother because she wants to explain things to her mother as if she's "writing a storybook." She wants to make it real so she can imagine it and "remember what everyone says and does" (p.3). Nisha writes in the diary every night, gradually revealing to the reader the events that unfurl not only in her own home, but also in her country that is becoming independent and partitioned into two nation states.

Nisha tells her Mama about her twin, Amil, who is dyslexic; her father, who is still bemoaning the death of his wife and is distant; her grandmother (Dadi) and about Kazi. Four days after having received the diary, when Nisha's family has three unfamiliar visitors, the protagonist discloses to her mother how she eavesdropped on Dadi's conversation with the strangers and uses the diary to process her thoughts. She "heard bits and pieces of sentences, words and names" she has heard her father talk about to Dadi and seen in the headlines of newspapers -- "*Pakistan, Jinnah, independence, Nehru, India, British, Lord Mountbatten, Gandhi, partition*" (p.15). As the story moves along, readers learn how and why these words and names fit together and what implications they have on independent India as well as on Nisha's family.

Religion plays an important role in Hiranandani's narrative as the protagonist and her family navigate the secular tensions that underlie the riots that occurred during the partition of the subcontinent. India was freed from British rule in August 1947 and new boundaries drawn to create a Hindu-majority nation (India) and a Muslim-majority one (Pakistan). As a result of this sudden splitting of the subcontinent, millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, including Nisha's family, are suddenly displaced. They are forced to cross the newly-established borders and embrace citizenship in one of the two nations based on their religion. With a Hindu father and a late Muslim mother, Nisha does not understand which side of the border her family should be on. She battles her doubts and fears as her family is suddenly torn away from their home on the Pakistan side of the border and forced to migrate to the Indian side. As a refugee, Nisha not only struggles with the loss of her homeland but also wrestles with her own identity. Although a large portion of *The Night Diary* deals with the trauma of refugees making a long and arduous journey across the borders of India and Pakistan, the novel concludes on a hopeful note.

As noted in a recently published study, there are few English-language books that address the topic of the Partition of 1947 (Sivashankar, 2019). *The Night Diary* is an essential read for those



who are interested in learning about this significant historical event that not only impacted the South Asian landscape but also the global one. This novel provides a window into what Hiranandani (2018) refers to as “the largest mass migration in history” (p.256). Considering how vital the discussion surrounding immigration, refugees, and forced displacement is in today’s world, this historical novel will be a valuable addition to the existing conversation about borders and boundaries. It will provide readers with insights into what forced migration looked like in the past and how it was experienced by people in the countries of India and Pakistan.

*The Night Diary* can be paired with the middle-grade series, *The Surya Trilogy* by Jamila Gavin (1992, 1997, 2001), as well as the young adult novel, *A Beautiful Lie* by Irfan Master (2011). Picturebooks such as Nina Sabani’s *Mukand and Riaz* (2007) and *Stitching Stories* (2011) can also be used to explore the topic of the Partition in a classroom. Parents and teachers can use resources such as the 1947 Partition Archive (<https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>) and the journal article included in the references to provide information on this issue for children.

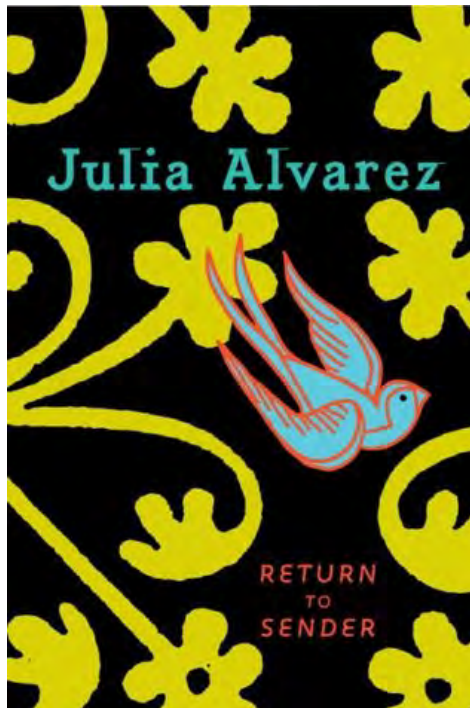
Veera Hiranandani received the Newbery Honor Award (2019), the Walter Dean Myers Honor Award (2019), and the Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children’s Literature (2018) for *The Night Diary*. The novel was inspired by her Indian father’s personal experiences during the Partition of India and Pakistan. After a short stint in marketing at a corporate law firm, Hiranandani went on to study fiction writing and eventually become an editor at Simon and Schuster. Subsequently, she worked as a Montessori teacher and a college admissions counselor and is currently a teacher of creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College’s Writing Institute. She is also the author of *The Whole Story of Half a Girl* (2013), a Sydney Taylor Notable Book and a South Asian Book Award Finalist.

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Nithya Sivashankar, Ohio State University





*Return to Sender*  
Written by Julia Alvarez  
Cover art by Ana Juan  
Yearling, 2018, 352 pp  
ISBN 978-0375851230

*Devolver al Remitente*  
Written by Julia Alvarez  
Translation/Traducción de Liliana Valenzuela  
Yearling, 2010, 368 pp.  
ISBN 978-0375851247

*Return to Sender* (2009; 2018) is a 21st century coming of age story, a fictional novel cast against the real backdrops of the modern lived experiences of migrants in the U.S. and farm families whose livelihoods are increasingly on the brink as corporations replace small family operations. Beyond the expected coming of age themes

such as growing self-awareness, developing autonomy, making hard choices, and experiencing disappointment and joy, Mari and Tyler confront a divided America and must rely on their friendships to persist through small town--and big city--misunderstandings about who migrants really are and why migrants make the treacherous journey to and through the U.S.

Mari's version of this period is revealed through letters she writes, mostly to her missing mother, and later through her diary entries. Tyler's story, on the other hand, is told in third person limited narration. Through Mari and Tyler's stories, the book poignantly explores what it means to cross literal and figurative borders of country and friendship, to seek refuge in the goodness of others, and to take significant personal risks, even those that are life threatening, to carve out a way of life or to be a good friend. As Alvarez deftly explores relationships between young Mexican and American family members and new friends in rural Vermont, she includes portrayals and adventures of groups who are often silenced; the elderly, migrants, women, children, and teachers are all given space to speak and to be heard. Alvarez gives readers an intimate view into the day-to-day lives of a migrant family, affirming the love, support, and cultural practices that sustain people through hardship, loss, and new experiences. Mari's writing, for example, switches between English and Spanish and includes a small Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos celebration as both families have recently lost a grandparent. She also discusses how Tío Felipe plays La Golandrina on his beloved guitar, Wilmita, to remind the Cruzes of home in Mexico.

Tyler also narrates cultural practice, by describing how the family gathers for Thanksgiving, children prepare to care for aging parents, and spirituality can take the shape of looking at the stars. Alvarez juxtaposes the normality of the Cruz family's lives with the treatment of immigrants and migrants living in America. The normalcy is also challenged by harrowing instances.

In one of the most compelling portions of the story, Mari and Tyler work together to rescue Mari's Mamá from rogue Coyotes, or human smugglers, after which Mari and her family privately endure the story of Mamá's traumatic captivity. Mari and Tyler's stories, however uncertain at times, continue to detail parallels between young people's hopes, dreams, and fears for their families, futures, and countries, making visible how similar they truly are.

Ana Juan's (2018) cover art for *Return to Sender* (Alvarez, 2009) captures the youthful bond that develops between the book's protagonists, Tyler and Mari, framed in a starry silhouette of a swallow. The swallow becomes a topic in the course of the novel and serves as a catalyst for illustrating migration and the beauty and difficulty of returning home. The stars that fill the swallow silhouette are another shared interest that deepen the cross-cultural friendship between Mari and Tyler through the course of the book.

While *Return to Sender* has been popular with readers since it hit the shelves in 2009, its message is more urgent a decade later than ever before. As Alvarez mentions in an interview in the book, her hope is to highlight the human aspect of the stories she tells: "This is something the world of story teaches us: how an action or situation affects a specific life. At the heart of a story there is a character. At the heart of a political issue there is a person who is not very different from us" (p. 338).

Teachers wanting to use this book in their classrooms may look at themes of friendship, citizenship, immigration, or migration with companion texts like *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* (Gloria Anzaldúa & Consuelo Mendez, 1995); *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Muñoz Ryan, 2002); *Inside Out and Back Again* (Thanhha Lai, 2011), *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card* (Sara Saedi, 2018); *La Linea: A Novel* (Ann Jaramillo, 2008); *Miss Marvel Volume 1: No Normal* (G. Willow Wilson & Adrian Alphona, 2014) and *Undocumented: A Dominican Boy's Odyssey from a Homeless Shelter to the Ivy League* (Dan-el Padilla Peralta, 2016). Poetry written by Latinx authors can be explored at the *Mommy Maestra: Discoveries of a Latina Homeschooler* blog (Olivera, 2012).

Julia Alvarez was born in New York City and is a renowned Dominican-American author and poet. She received the Pura Belpré Award for *Return to Sender* in 2010. Alvarez's publications cover a wide range of Latinx experiences through fiction and nonfiction and are written for audiences of all ages. In the author's notes and in an interview at the back of the book, Alvarez discusses her commitment to raise awareness about the Latinx population in the U.S., especially in Vermont where *Return to Sender* is set and where Alvarez currently lives. She also discusses the realities of Operation Return to Sender, "the dragnet operation carried out by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2006" (p. 337).

Ana Juan is a prolific illustrator, born in Spain where she currently resides. She has lived in countries across the globe and her illustrated work includes book covers, children's books, and covers for *The New Yorker Magazine*. Of her home studio, she says, "But what I love in my studio is the north light it has. When you are living in a sunny city like Madrid that is quite important—I am not able to wear sunglasses while working." (Newman, 2017).

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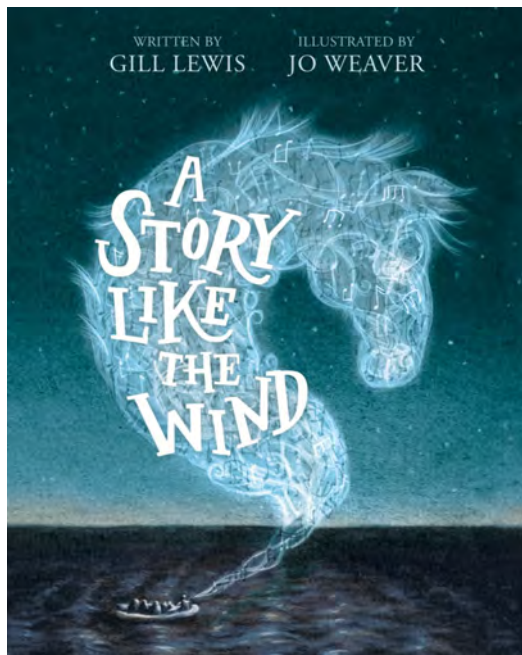
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Lillian Reeves, University of South Carolina



***A Story Like the Wind***

**Written by Gill Lewis**

**Illustrated by Jo Weaver**

**Eerdmans, 2018, 80 pp.**

**ISBN: 978-0802855145**

*A Story Like the Wind* is the account of a small group of seemingly unconnected people trapped together on a small boat in the wide expanse of an unknown sea, following them through one night of their journey together. Rami, a proud boy with a silk scarf around his neck, seems to have nothing to share with the rest of the passengers but ends up bringing the cluster of people huddled in the boat closer together through his music and the story of a wild and free horse.

At the beginning of the book, the other members of this small group introduce themselves emphasizing their Muslim names as if wanting to be remembered in case something were to happen to them, which seems inevitable under the circumstances. The group has fled in desperation. Some bringing food and clothes on the journey. Others bring just one thing: Muhammad a dog and Rami beloved fiddle. Each member tries to share with the others, but Rami refuses each item as he thinks he has nothing to give back. As the dark night wears on, Nor, a young mother with two children, asks Rami to play his fiddle to take their minds off the choppy sea, and, as he plays, the music tells stories. Each segment of that story prompts members of the group to recall and tell parts of their own stories.

Rami's fiddle tells the story of a young Mongolian shepherd, Suke, who nurses back to health an abandoned foal in the frigid mountains filled with snow. The white foal grows up to be a proud, headstrong and exceptional stallion in all its magnificence, strength, and uninhibited soul. Later in the story he is pitted against the 'dark' lord and a 'black' horse. Suke and the 'white' horse win the race that ends up killing the 'black' stallion when his heart gives out. In revenge, the dark lord takes the white horse, raises the taxes of the people, and banishes Suke's family to the mountains. His intent is to break the spirit of the white horse, but to no avail. The white stallion follows his instinct and escapes when the dark lord thinks he has subjugated the horse just as he has subjugated the people. As the stallion runs, he is showered with arrows, many of which pierce his skin. The stallion finds Suke, dying in his arms. Suke later dreams of the stallion asking him to create musical instruments from his bones. The music from these instruments rides on the wind and tortures the dark lord who digs a hole and buries himself to get away from the sound of the lyrics proclaiming freedom. Rami's melodic story is a tale of oppression, flight and freedom, and reminds the travelers that liberty cannot be taken from them because it exists all around them.

This remarkable book invites readers into this story of freedom starting with the cover. Dark and ominous seas surround a small boat in the bottom third of the illustration. An image of a

horse's vapor-like body is rising as if freed from the bounds of the vessel. The title of the book is bound within the horse's neck, along with myriad notes of music. The cover sets the stage for the story as all the necessary components are visually accessible and help the reader know what to expect.

This story is another tale of refugees and their personal and general struggles as they take on harrowing journeys to reach a safe shore where they can begin a new and more secure existence. They want to end up where they do other things besides fight for their lives. What sets this story apart is the distinctive hauntingly monochromatic illustrations set in shades of blue and black to white that add to the overall ambience and mood of the narrative, accompanied by the lyrical text in varied fonts. The author cleverly weaves stories within stories to become an endless tale. The basic message of freedom of the soul is very well articulated.

This story is one of the deluge of refugee tales pouring into the U.S. market. There are multiple issues with this text as the reader is left hanging with unanswered questions. For example, the ticket for an inflatable boat costs \$1000. There is no mention of how they get the foreign currency cash to take this harrowing journey. This group of humans is cast adrift without a guide or even an oar to maneuver their way. The book ends with no definite resolution of their conflict and culminates with a double-page spread with stormy, choppy, seas, with dawn breaking and the boat floating on the lower right-hand side corner of the page. Each of the names of the passengers is definitely Muslim, so the perception of only Muslims as displaced individuals is reinforced. No one in the entire group mentions God's name nor does anyone carry any sacred scripture like the Quran. While necessary, these refugee tales lend themselves to making readers more susceptible to becoming immune to the very real plights of the suffering refugee children. But this is a good book to begin conversations about issues dealing with refugees and displaced individuals, be they from Muslim countries or other regions and religions.

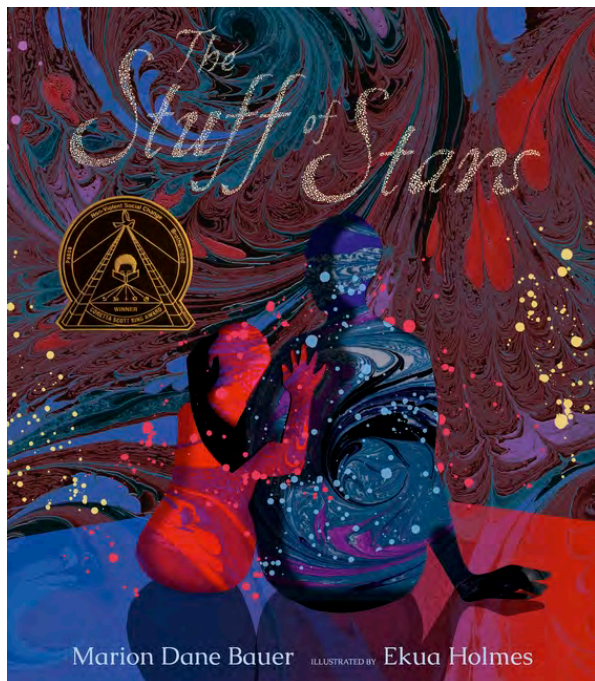
The book has received starred reviews from *Kirkus and School Library Journal* and is on the 2018 OIB list (Outstanding International Books). *A Story Like the Wind* can be paired with other books with the same thematic focus, such as *The Day You Begin* (Jacqueline Woodson and Rafael Lopez, 2018), *The Journey* (Francesca Sanna, 2016), *The Bone Sparrow* (Zana Fraillon, 2017), and *Refugee* (Alan Gratz, 2017).

Gill Lewis is a veterinarian turned writer. She lives in England and writes her stories in a tree house. Other books by Gill Lewis include *One White Dolphin* (2013), *Murphy and the Great Surf Rescue* (2017), and *Gorilla Dawn* (2017), some of which have received prestigious awards. Two of her titles have been on the OIB list: *Moon Bear* (2017) and *A Story Like the Wind* (2018).

Jo Weaver is an illustrator who previously worked in international development and with the homeless. She lives in London with her family and treasures the chance to get outside and appreciate the creativity of the natural world. Her books have been nominated for the Carnegie and Greenaway Medals.

Seemi Aziz, University of Arizona





***The Stuff of Stars***

Written by Marion Dane Bauer

Illustrated by Ekua Holmes

Candlewick, 2018, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7636-7883-8

Through the soft and moving text of Marion Dane Bauer and the gorgeous illustrations of Ekua Holmes, *The Stuff of Stars* leads the reader to grasp the concept of the Big Bang Theory. This informative book commences “in the dark, in the dark, in the deep, deep, dark” and takes the reader on a journey. Readers go through time, through space, through the creation of earth, sky, ocean, animals and then “in the dark, in the dark, in the deep, deep dark” to see the creation of a human through a speck of dust.

Using a scientific lens to view this story, it is an evolution story that provides readers with an entrée into how the universe began and how planets and other life forms were created in a meaningful context. Using a spiritual lens to view this story, it is a creation story and can be used to tell the story of how the world began.

The illustrations in this book are exceptional as they flow from double-page spread to double-page spread throughout the entire book with each page more spectacular than the previous one. Ekua’s illustrations consist of hand-marbled paper and collage with dark color hues and soft moving abstract shapes before the Big Bang. Then, using vibrant colors and more precise shapes, Ekua illustrates the explosion of the BANG with fireworks from the exploding stars. Images of “Jellyfish, spiders, into ferns and sharks, into daisies and galloping horses” are visible. On one page toward the end of the book there is a feeling of a timeline with dinosaur skeletons below the earth and human shapes above, depicting a change over time. The illustrations are truly a unique experience. This book is a well-deserved recipient of the 2019 Coretta Scott King Award for illustrations.

*The Stuff of Stars* is a perfect book for topics such as the cosmos for older readers or space and time for younger readers. Because it looks at creation through two different lenses, texts with themes of creation stories from multiple perspectives and change over time would pair well. One example is *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* by Virginia Hamilton and Barry Moser (1991). This book has multiple stories within the anthology that tie well with both creation and evolution. Another story, *Who Came Down that Road* by George Ella Lyon and Peter Catalanotto (1992), helps young readers visualize earth from the beginning of time to the present, examining the evolution through change over time. Eric Rohmann’s (1994) Caldecott Honor book, *Time Flies*, is a wordless picture book that examines the theory that birds come from dinosaurs and provides readers with a way to examine evolutionary theory.



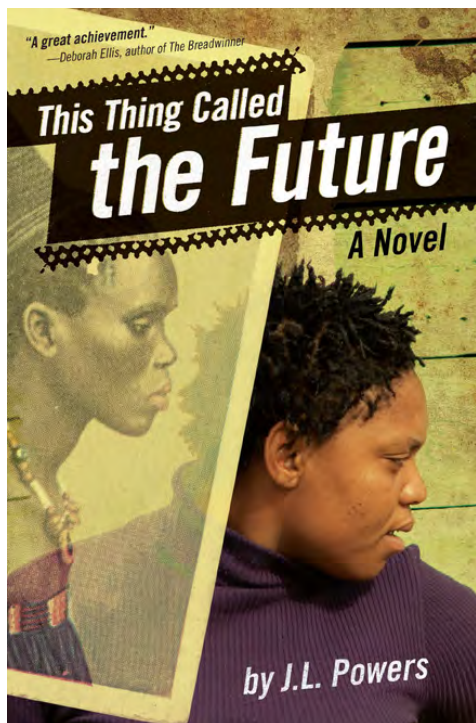
George Ella Lyon and Peter Catalanotto (1998) pair up again in *Dreamplace* to take us back in time to look at a vanished culture.

Marion Dane Bauer has won multiple awards and has written more than one hundred books. Her awards include the Newbery Honor Book for *On My Honor* (2012) and the Kerlan Award for her body of work. She taught at Vermont College, but has moved to Minnesota where she now devotes her life full time to her writing.

Ekua Homes has also won several book awards for her illustrations including the John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award, a Caldecott Honor, and for two consecutive years, the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award. Ekua grew up in Boston and takes her inspiration for her collages from her life collection of moments shared with family and friends. She is currently the Assistant Director of MassArt's Center for Art and Community Partnerships in Boston.

These two award winning women have taken this book to new levels of "best." Author and illustrator work together to create an exemplary picturebook in which the message of the book is displayed equally between text and illustrations. They both tell the story of the Big Bang Theory exceptionally well.

Kathleen Crawford-McKinney, Wayne State University



***This Thing Called the Future***

Written by J.L. Powers

Cinco Puntos Press, 2011, 213 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-933693-95-8

“As for me, I feel a sense of power and energy, like we’re going to beat this thing, this curse, even that we might find some luck to carry us through these sad days” (p. 157)

In her neighborhood and across much of her region around Pietermaritzberg, South Africa, the curse of HIV and AIDS is destroying families and communities, including Khosi’s. Teen-ager Khosi is smart and loves science, hoping to use her knowledge to make needed changes to ensure healthier conditions for her community. But Khosi is also a girl from a family split between traditional medicines and contemporary thinking that shirks traditional ways of being. Wishing to remain true to her own ideas

while honoring tradition, Khosi thinks it may eventually take both ways of thinking to find a way through the AIDS epidemic sweeping South Africa.

More than health issues plague Khosi; she is also interested in a boy and having fun, but it is dangerous for a young girl to walk alone in a place where men do not honor young women’s rights to themselves. Khosi must also evade several other dangers—the woman next door who is intent upon disrupting Khosi’s family, and the witch woman down the street who targets Khosi for her intelligence and perhaps eventual ability to heal through contemporary medicine. In many ways, Khosi is at the intersection of the dilemmas and decisions any young person would need to make during adolescence, but the context under which she comes-of-age is culturally unique and intriguing for readers, especially those who are unfamiliar with South Africa and life within many Black neighborhoods within it. The traumas that weave through Khosi’s life and by extension many areas of South Africa are both harrowing and insightful.

*This Thing Called the Future* is well written and researched. The dialogue and events are authentic and create a real sense of Khosi’s dilemmas and life circumstances. In many ways, the narrative is a visit to the community, and readers will feel as though they are right there with Khosi as she attempts to negotiate the personal strain she experiences as a result of her mother’s resistance to tradition, her grandmother’s (Gogo) balance of tradition and religion, and her own changing feelings about life and love.

Books that would complement this text include the sequel to this book by Powers, *Under Water* (2019). Books set within the continent of Africa that incorporate traumatic circumstances include *Walking Home* by Eric Walters (2014) and *Golden Boy* by Tara Sullivan (2014), as well as *The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2015) and *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (2011).

Author J.L. Powers is a writer and editor who lives in Northern California. She has written several books including *Amina* (2015), which was included in the USBBY's Outstanding International Books List for 2016. Her stories focus on social issues. When writing this book, she worked with several community members in South Africa to gain a better understanding of the issues around HIV and AIDS, and the community's response in respect to traditional and contemporary medicines. She is the founder and regular contributor to the blog, *The Pirate Tree: Social Justice and Children's Literature*, which is found at the following website:  
<https://www.thepiratetree.com/>

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati