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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME X, ISSUE 3

Spring 2018

Where Hope and Courage Meet

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**WOW Review: Volume X Issue 3**

Spring 2018

Where Hope and Courage Meet

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## Volume X Issue 3: Where Hope and Courage Meet

### Introduction

This issue introduces books that inspire hope and present tales of courage, including folktales, fantasies, realistic stories, and legends. Several are picturebooks, including *Glass Slipper*, *Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella* and *The Knight, the Princess and the Magic Rock: A Classic Persian Tale*, two books of folklore that address familiar stories in unfamiliar ways. Two other picturebooks, *Love* and *Sisters in Blue/Hermanas de azul*, give readers a chance to ponder love in multiple manifestations. For young adults, *In Between Worlds* blends fantasy and realistic fiction from a Sámi cultural perspective. Other fantasies for adolescents include two connected chronicles from Nigeria, *Akata Warrior* and *Akata Witch*. The contemporary novel, *Escape from Aleppo*, invites readers to think about what is happening currently in Syria, while *Coming to England* and *Refugees* present narratives about the very real and immediate crises that create distressing circumstances for those affected by political or natural phenomenon.

You are invited to travel across both genres and places in the world to experience what hope and courage create!

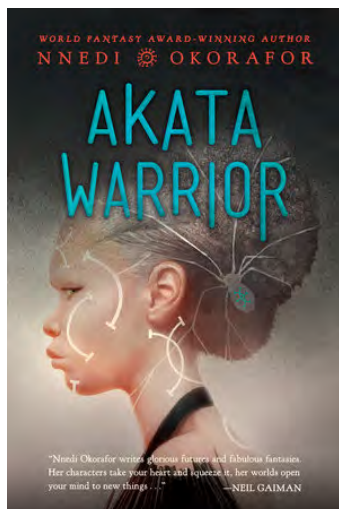
Holly Johnson, Editor

The next issues are:

Summer, 2018: Moral/Ethical Dilemmas: Books that highlight dilemmas of conscience or situations that present aspects of communities and societies that conflict with traditional thinking or ways of behaving. Deadline: May 31, 2018

Fall, 2018: Open theme. Share with us books that have inspired you this year. Deadline: September 15, 2018.

Winter, 2018: Issues Connected to Trauma. The world and those within it, past and present, have created situations or phenomena that result in trauma. What can we learn from reading about such situations? Books addressing trauma—in its broadest terms—have much to teach us. Think about sharing what you have learned from reading about such events. Deadline: November 30, 2018.



### *Akata Warrior*

Written by Nnedi Okorafor

Viking, 2017, 496 pp.

ISBN: 978-0670785612

*Akata Warrior* is the continuation of *Akata Witch* and presents Sunny Nwazue's adventures a year and a half later. She is now 13 ½ and must lead a dangerous mission to stop the apocalypse in her visions. The creature who is plotting the end of the world is Ekwensu, a masquerade of horrific power and determination. A masquerade is a creature in the Leopard world that can wreak havoc on those it chooses. Sunny is supported in this venture by her three friends, Orlu, Chichi, and Sasha, as well as her spirit face, Anyanwu. Her mentor, Sugar Cream, gives her a book, *Fun Facts for Free Agents*,

which says that Leopard people are known by many names around the world for those with mystical abilities, but is derived from the West African Efik term 'ekpe.' Unlike other Leopard People, however, Sunny and her spirit face, Anyanwu, have been able to separate without causing Sunny's death, thus giving them additional powers.

Sunny first encounters Ekwensu after she saves her older brother, Chukwu, from a gang at the University and is punished by the council at Leopard Knocks for revealing her Leopard self to the Lamb, Capo, of the gang. Lambs are the regular people who do not have Leopard powers. It is a serious offense to the Leopard community to reveal your identity, and so she is put in the basement of the Obi Library for three days, receiving food and water once daily. It is here she first encounters Ekwensu. After her three days, Sugar Cream explains to Sunny that she must travel by road to the town of Osisi with her friends. Chukwu agrees to drive them out of appreciation for what Sunny has done for him. The drive is fraught with dangers and once there, they will travel through worlds visible and invisible as they strive to save humanity.

In *Akata Warrior*, Okorafor masterfully reveals a deeper understanding of the relationships between and among the main characters who are dealing with issues faced by many teens and young adults—loyalty, romantic love, friendship, destiny, purpose, and intrigue. With the exception of Chukwu, these characters also hold magical powers.

While the sheer adventure is worth the read, the depth of the human endeavors provides a powerful and lasting experience. Other books to read with *Akata Warrior* could include *The Book of Dust* (2017) by Philip Pullman or *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi, both of which combine fantasy with realistic elements.

Okorafor, who is Nigerian-American, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio to Nigerian immigrant parents. She resides in Buffalo, New York where she is a professor of creative writing at SUNY-Buffalo. She writes African-based novels for both young adults and adults and has won several fantasy awards for her books, including the World Fantasy Award. More about her can be found at: [www.nnedi.com](http://www.nnedi.com)

Lauren Freedman, Kalamazoo, MI



### *Akata Witch*

Written by Nnedi Okorafor

Viking, 2011, 368 pp.

ISBN: 978-0670011964

Blending fantasy with reality, this young adult novel tells the story of Sunny Nwazue, a Nigerian American girl who lives in Chicago until her family (parents and two older brothers) move back to Nigeria when she is nine. They live in a village in Southeastern Nigeria near the city of Aba in what is known as Igboland. The word “Akata” is a pejorative label used by Nigerians to refer to African Americans or other foreign-born blacks. In addition to being Akata, Sunny is albino. While very athletic and an excellent soccer player, she is limited by not being able to be in the sun for very long and

because she is a girl.

The story begins when Sunny is 11 and has a fight with Jibaku, a bully who taunts her for the way she looks. With several of her cohort, Jibaku beats Sunny until Orlu, a boy in their class, steps in. It is Jibaku who calls Sunny “Akata witch” because she is both African American and albino. Through Orlu, Sunny meets Chichi who lives in a seeming hovel near Sunny’s house. Through her friendship with Orlu and Chichi, she discovers that she is a Leopard Person with magical powers. Unlike Orlu and Chichi, however, whose families are also Leopard People, Sunny is a free agent. Together, the three go to Leopard Knocks, a place where the Leopard people can be together away from the Lambs (regular people) and learn about their magical gifts. It is here that Sunny first meets Anatov, a teacher who accepts her as one of his pupils along with Orlu and Chichi. They also meet Sasha who is also African American/Nigerian. The four become friends and rely on one another as they learn juju, the magical art that they each have an affinity for as Leopard people. As they continue to visit Leopard Knocks, Sunny has to use juju to keep her parents, especially her mother, from worrying about where she goes and what she is doing. Her father and brothers can’t be bothered with her at this point.

As the story unfolds, each of the four friends is chosen by a mentor and spends a great deal of time learning who they are and their individual gifts. The goal is to pass Ndibu, the third level, but few ever reach this level. Each of them receives a spirit face that they can call upon when appropriate. Sunny’s mentor is Sugar Cream, the librarian at Obi Library. Through their lessons and adventures with their mentors, the four friends have a variety of exhilarating and frightening experiences. The greatest challenge given to them is to track down the Black Hat, Otokoto, who has been terrorizing the village and kidnapping the children.

This book is fast paced and beautifully written. The characters are irresistible and make readers cheer and enter into the story. While there are many themes in the book, such as diversity, friendship, family, responsibility, love, honor, and trust, they are expertly woven into the story. Other books with similar themes include *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) by Madeleine L’Engle, the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, and His Dark Materials series by Philip Pullman.

Okorafor, who is Nigerian-American, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio to Nigerian immigrant parents. She resides in Buffalo, New York where she is a professor of creative writing at SUNY-Buffalo. She writes African-based novels for both young adults and adults and has won several fantasy awards for her books, including the World Fantasy Award. More about her can be found at: [www.nnedi.com](http://www.nnedi.com)

Lauren Freedman, Kalamazoo, MI





*Coming to England*

Written by Floella Benjamin

Illustrated by Michael Frith

Macmillan, 2016, 126 pp

ISBN: 9781509835492

This memoir is about the author's relocation from her home in Trinidad, an island in the Caribbean, to England. Benjamin writes about her colonial experience, illustrating the importance and power of family in overcoming challenges, as well as the identity crisis West Indian children face when they attempt to integrate into British society but find themselves as the "Other." Floella, the narrator, is one of six children from the tight-knit Benjamin family that is split up for close to two years when their parents migrate in search for

economic uplift.

The story is set in the late 1950s to 1960, shortly before Trinidad gained its independence in 1962 from the United Kingdom—the Mother Country. During this time, England welcomed people from their commonwealth to live as citizens in England because of the depletion of the workforce after World War II. *Coming to England* is told with passion and verve. Readers get a true sense of the author's love for her homeland through the colorful words used to describe Trinidad and its vibrant culture. In the first five chapters, readers learn about life in Trinidad through the eyes of a child. From education, to food, to carnival, to religion, Floella intrigues readers with her happy, idyllic life in Trinidad. So, when Floella overhears her father talking about leaving for England to make a better life and pursue his goal of being a musician, she is unpleasantly surprised. In the remaining ten chapters, she details her family's separation and relocation to England. The separation is hard for the children, and Floella describes a very unhappy time in her beloved Trinidad as through child shifting, she and her siblings stay with various family friends who mistreat them. When they are finally sent for by their parents, readers sail on the Spanish ship with the four siblings and other West Indians from different islands on their way to the 'Mother Country', a process described by postcolonialist Louise Bennett as "colonization in reverse."

Upon arrival in England, Floella finds herself utterly disappointed by the grim, grey weather, the unwelcome interactions and "Othering" by the British. At school, she has to assimilate through language as she is forced to speak with a British accent instead of her Trinidadian accent. She learns about racism and experiences it through her teachers and schoolmates, but her biggest culture shock is the food at school in stark contrast to what Floella was accustomed to eating in Trinidad. In England, Floella finds herself navigating a double identity—British at school and Trinidadian at home. Floella hybridizes to survive—a common practice among West Indians who often suffer from double personality when they migrate. Additionally, Floella's strong and supportive family unit provides a cushion for hurt and becomes a source of motivation as Floella and her siblings rise above cultural, economic, and racial challenges to become successful, positive individuals.



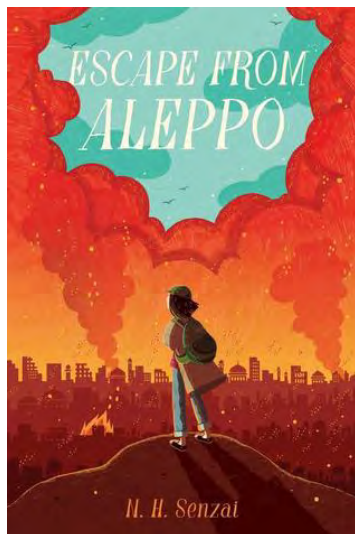
Integral to the story are the watercolor images by Michael Frith. Congruent with Floella’s happy life in Trinidad, the brightly colored images of Trinidad’s food, culture, and environment capture the carefree lifestyle Floella experienced as a child. Likewise, Frith represents Floella’s unpleasant experiences in England using darker, less expressive colors. Some images contain lines that symbolize confinement—an emotion that Floella was free from in her homeland. Frith’s illustrations contextualize significant moments in the narrator’s life and visualize her journey from Trinidad to England.

Benjamin’s republished memoir is a relevant text to the present culture of globalization in the 21st century. It portrays the intricacies and nuances of immigration that still impact immigrant families today. Importantly, Benjamin’s memoir is a reminder of the Windrush Generation—the first groups of Caribbean people who sailed on the German ship, *Empire Windrush*, from their islands to the “Mother Country” in the hope of securing a better life. These immigrants played a significant role in the development of Britain from the 1950s onwards. Additionally, this republished version of Benjamin’s story contains a note from the editor that provides historical information about the time period the book represents, making the memoir not only entertaining but also informative. Benjamin’s memoir details the resilience of Caribbean people and their motivation to conquer their obstacles.

Books that complement this text include *Barrel Child* by Pamela Marshall (2011) and *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago (1994), both of which show the effects of immigration on children of similar age groups, along with the trauma of being separated from the family unit and the difficulties of assimilating in a new culture. Floella Benjamin is an actress, writer, producer, presenter, and an advocate for the welfare and education of children. She was born in Trinidad in 1949 and moved to England in 1960. She is well known for her shows on BBC’s children’s television: *Play School* and *Play Away*. Benjamin has received a Special Lifetime Achievement BAFTA and OBE for her children’s programs, and she was appointed Baroness in the House of Lords in 2010. She received the J. M. Barrie Award by Action for Children’s Arts for her ongoing contribution to the lives of children through her craft.

Michael Frith is a watercolor illustrator who lives on the south coast of England. He has done national and international work in newspapers such as *Newsweek*, *Time Magazine*, *The Times*, and *The Sunday Times*. He has produced twenty-five solo exhibitions, some of which were in London; the most significant at Smith’s Gallery.

Renee Latchman, Howard University, Washington, D.C.



*Escape from Aleppo*

Written by N.H. Senzai

Simon and Schuster, 2018, 330 pp

ISBN: 978-1-5344-1189-0

“With shaky legs, she leaned against the Jeep, amazed that she’d survived another bomb attack” (p.28).

Just as Nadia turns fourteen, she experiences the 2010 Arab Spring, in which uprisings and civil wars erupted throughout the Middle East. In Syria, the entire country is in upheaval as the corrupt government attempts to contain rebel groups desiring a new way of living and relief from government oversight. Nadia’s family must flee their home as bombs drop around their city of Aleppo.

As they flee, they must avoid both the Syrian Army and roving rebel groups who kill anyone they determine could be the enemy.

The night the family leaves their home, a bomb falls, and Nadia, the last one to leave the house, disappears in the blast. Her family must continue to safety but sends back a cousin to look for Nadia. While they are gone, Nadia awakens to discover that she is alone. Knowing where their family was to meet, she forges on. Befriended by a man who promises to get her to her destination, Nadia is grateful for his help but wonders about his need for a donkey and cart, which constantly slow her progress toward her family. Finally arriving at the family’s meeting place, Nadia finds only a note telling her to continue northward to the Turkish border. Because he promised to get her safely to her family, Ammo Mazen, her fortuitous but mysterious companion, leads her across the city and eventually to the border. Along the way they encounter danger and helpful others who have agendas that often seem to delay Nadia’s escape. As she journeys across Aleppo, Nadia begins to wonder about Ammo Mazen. Is he the simple man he says he is? And how does he know so many people from across political, social, and military boundaries? And just what is in his donkey cart that seems so important to him? Nadia’s feelings about Ammo Mazen seem to change at each encounter with others along the way providing a tension that keeps readers guessing as he helps Nadia escape Aleppo.

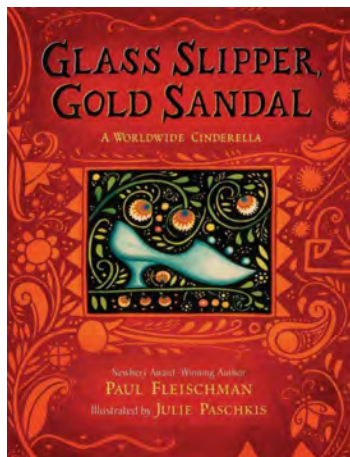
A riveting narrative that provides valuable insights into the situation in Syria, *Escape from Aleppo* is perfect for middle and secondary readers who enjoy realistic fiction, and especially those who want to better understand the effects of national conflict on individuals, families, and specific communities. The use of an adolescent protagonist invites young people to join the conversation about global politics; Highlighting the plight of family is a reminder that war involves not only soldiers in faraway places, but everyday citizens when their neighborhoods are destroyed in the struggle for power. Engaging and powerful, Nadia’s journey through Aleppo creates an edge-of-your-seat adventure that will leave you better educated and deeply satisfied.

Two pieces of fiction that would complement this text include *Dance of the Banished* (2015) and *Daughter of War* (2008) by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, both address the region around

Aleppo during the Armenian genocide of the early 20th century. Books like *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017), *The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2014), and *A Land of Permanent Good-byes* by Atia Abawi (2018) bring into stark relief the plight of the displaced as their countries become too dangerous for them to live in safely.

N. H. Senzai notes that she grew up speaking two languages, eating tandoori chicken and hot dogs side by side. She currently lives in San Francisco, but grew up between Jubail, Saudi Arabia and San Francisco with her family, whose origin is from South Asia. She attended boarding school in London, England and has traveled extensively throughout the world. Other works include *Ticket to India* (2015) and *The Kabul Chronicles: Shooting Kabul* (2011) and *Saving Kabul Corner* (2015), which are based on her husband's experiences escaping Soviet-governed Afghanistan. Deeply concerned about children who are displaced as refugees, more information about her and her work can be found at: <http://www.nhsenzai.com>

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati



*Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella*

Written by Paul Fleischman

Illustrated by Julie Paschkis

Henry Holt, 2007, 32 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-8050-7953-1

“And on the girl’s feet appeared a pair of glass slippers...diamond anklets...sandals of gold” (np).

Most people around the world have heard the story about a young woman who endured harsh mistreatment from her stepmother and was rewarded for her kindness by marrying a man from a wealthy household. There are multiple versions of this story from culture to culture, and many involve the main character losing a slipper which a prince uses to find the shoe owner to make her his bride. This fairy tale has been popular since long ago. Depending on the variation, the protagonist’s name is different; however, many people today describe such tales as a ‘Cinderella story.’ Although every version appears to be similar, the variations contain diverse cultural and global aspects. In *Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella*, the author creates his own retelling of the tale, intermingling parts of the plot across seventeen cultures. The book tells how a widower’s daughter suffered cruelty by her stepmother and two stepsisters, but she maintains kindness. Her stepmother and stepsisters attend a ball, but the widower’s daughter receives help that enables her to meet a handsome young man who eventually marries her. The plot briefly interweaves the variations from seventeen different cultures throughout the story, while the bright and colorful illustrations portray each culture in visual panels that match the culture highlighted in each section of the plot.

Both the author and the illustrator show how the well-known Cinderella story crosses global cultures. However, there are some problems regarding the texts and illustrations in this version. Although the idea of weaving seventeen cultures together into one story is creative, the method used to portray each culture is quite vague. The texts do not provide the names of each protagonist in the book, so if the reader has read *Cinderella*, they might remember each main character as Cinderella from another country or region. When a reader opens the book, the dust jacket does mention six names of the main characters from different versions, but their nationalities are omitted, so it is unknown where each protagonist originated. This also might cause the reader to generalize each version by assuming they have the same plot because only pieces of the cultural variations are put together into one tale which focuses on Cinderella. The rich and vibrant illustrations on each page represent a scene from another culture, but how they are relevant to each culture is not addressed. Also, the country or region names are written on the background of each illustration in the same color as the background, so they are not always noticeable. Overall, the reader is able to have a glimpse of each culture, but not in depth.

Another problem regards the cultural authenticity of the Korean version of the story. Although parts from the Korean variant appear only three times in the plot, two are portrayed inaccurately. The text implies that the main character has more than one stepsister, but in the original Korean variant *Kongjwi Patjwi*, the protagonist, whose name is Kongjwi, only has one stepsister

called Patjwi. The illustrations also have two unhappy characters who appear to be her stepsisters in the scene where Kongjwi tries on the slipper. Moreover in this scene, Kongjwi is portrayed as wearing a traditional outfit with multicolored sleeves and a bright red dress instead of rags when she tries on the shoe. The drawing of her long black hair is not in braids, which is inauthentic, because in Korean culture hairstyles represent marital status. During the time period of the Joseon Dynasty when the Korean variant takes place, long hair that is completely untied as in the illustration was actually for a funeral.

Nevertheless, *Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella* would make a great pair with *Cinderella Stories Around the World: 4 Beloved Tales (Multicultural Fairy Tales)* by Cari Meister (2014), *Cinderella Tales from Around The World* by Ila Lane Gross (2001), and *Cinderella (The Oryx Multicultural Folktale Series)* by Judy Sierra (1992). Other cultural versions that are not included in these collections such as *Sootface: An Ojibwa Cinderella Story* by Robert D. San Souci (1994) and *Kongi and Potgi: A Cinderella Story from Korea* by Oki S. Han and Stephanie Haboush Plunkett (1996) would also make excellent additions. Furthermore, it would be helpful for educators to ask students to share what they know of various versions and variants so they can bring their expertise and enrich their knowledge of global cultures in the classroom through discussions regarding these stories.

The author of *Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella*, Paul Fleischman, grew up in Santa Monica, California. He received the Newbery Medal for *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* in 1989 and a Newbery Honor Award for *Graven Images* (2005), in addition to the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for *Bull Run* (1995). He was the United States' candidate for the international Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2012. He currently lives with his wife in Santa Cruz, California. More information about the works by Paul Fleischman can be found online at: <http://www.paulfleischman.net/>

The illustrator, Julie Paschkis was born in 1957 and grew up in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. She has been painting and illustrating full time since 1991. She attended Germantown Friends School, Ringerike Folkehogskole in Norway, Cornell University and the School for American Craftsmen at RIT. Currently, she lives in Seattle with her husband. More information about Julie Paschkis can be found at: <https://juliepaschkis.com/>

Hyunjung Lee, University of Arizona



*In Between Worlds*

Written by Máret Anne Sara

DAT, 2016, 215 pp.

ISBN 13: 978-8290625851

“Luck is like that. You have to know it is coming to see it when it does” (p. 178).

Written for young adults, *In Between Worlds* by Máret Anne Sara, is an English language translation of a Sámi language text. This text is a blend of realistic fiction and fantasy that tells the story of teenage siblings Sanne and Lemme. The two teens are trapped in a fantasy version of Sámi folklore while the realistic fiction portion portrays their struggle to understand the colonization that is occurring due to the encroachment of a motocross park on reindeer migration lands. Through a terrifying transformation, Sanne and Lemme learn how to co-operate with one another and navigate their cultural heritage in order to return to their reality and understand that there must be harmony between the reindeer herds and modern technology.

Author Máret Anne Sara expects her readers to understand that Sanne and Lemme are Sámi people living in a time and place where the balance between traditional and modern life brings daily questions. The survival of both cultural inheritance and heritage are challenged by, what the Sámi consider to be, colonizing forces. As cultural outsiders, readers need to understand that the Sámi in this text are considered Reindeer Sámi and are historically nomadic and spread over the nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. The Sámi people live in a large and rough terrain, with nine languages and one creole language, all of which are so distinct that the Northern and Southern languages are not understandable to each other.

This book deals with issues of colonization by outsiders to the traditional life ways of Sámi reindeer herders. The motocross track represents the development corporations that seek to utilize the lands within nation states without taking into consideration the husbandry of the ecology of those lands represented by the reindeer herding and native fishing industries. At risk is the native way of being for an entire cultural group as both their culture and language are in danger of being subsumed by the encroachment of corporations within these nation states, as well as the nation states themselves.

Sara’s views on what it means to be Sámi in a modern world are evident in the story. In writing this text she relied heavily on her traditional knowledge, “Everything has a spirit in the Sámi cosmivision, the Earth, the animals, everything. From the reindeer we get everything we need; food, transport, clothes. The animals depend on nature for their survival and so do we. That is why they are so key and why all is connected in a circle.” She goes on to explain that “reindeer herding is linked to a linguistic abundance. Think of the hundreds of words we have for snow, a different one for every tiny difference in temperature which means a different snow structure which might mean we have to change our herding plans” (Coster, nd).



In writing *In Between Worlds*, Sara used her own knowledge of the Sámi culture as part of her heritage. From her perspective “we urgently need to go into a process of decolonization. All this education through western systems changes our way of thinking without us even realizing it. It is time to be critical, take a step back and analyze things from a Sámi perspective again” (Coster, nd). The text gives readers an understanding of the importance of reindeer herding to the Northern Sámi, not only in terms of the economic or sustenance benefits, but also in terms of the deep connection that the Sámi have to the animals in a spiritual way.

As a blend of realistic and fantasy fiction, the characters convey a jovial, contentious, and teasing brother-sister relationship. They also convey their own internal conflicts and fears to the reader in an honest and understandable manner. They work in tandem with one another and when Sanne needs Lemme he is there for her. Of several adult characters, Bigga is the one who figures most prominently and she is an old, wise, ulda-woman who serves as their spirit guide between this world and the underworld where the ulda-people dwell. Bigga helps Sanne and Lemme focus on the lessons they need to learn in order to come back from the chapadat (a place of darkness and entrapment) with an understanding of their Indigenous heritage and a desire to live a more traditional lifestyle amidst the convenience of technology and modern ways.

*In Between Worlds* is a modern story of cultural myth and belief. This text is a strong representation of culturally authentic beliefs and is translated with the intention of keeping the Sámi culture at the front of the readers mind. Bigga tells Sanne and Lemme, “the ulda-world is just as real as the human world. We live side by side but can’t see each other. We’re connected, but most of us don’t know it” (p. 105). For an outsider to the culture, the moments are in every aspect and woven into the story in such a complex and meaningful manner: we learn of the importance of the ulda-reindeer (the white reindeer), leaving knives in the Arctic landscape, how to treat a myling (children who have passed unbaptized), and the ways of everyday life.

The most successful aspect of the text is the way that myth, culture, and storytelling are woven together. The reader learns enough about the challenges that modern Sámi face in maintaining their cultural heritage and inheritance to make them want to learn more about these Indigenous people. The characters are crafted in a realistic way, and the magic of the text feels like something that could happen. Sara offers lessons that we can learn from ourselves and the reader is left wondering about how to connect in a deeper manner to the natural world and the relationships they share with people.

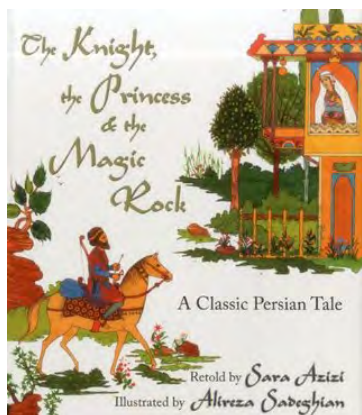
Sámi literature translated into English is difficult to come by, but one useful source is a website called: Back Home Books: Finnish, Swedish, and Sámi Books, <http://www.backhomebooks.net/saami-books>. Other young adult Sámi books that may interest readers are: *The Most Beautiful Dawn* by Elle Marja Vars (2013), and *Antiphony* by Lila Stien (2006). These books also convey the culture and beliefs of these Indigenous people from the north.

Máret Anne Sara is a writer, artist, and activist. She lives and works in her Arctic home town

Guovdageaidnu (known as Kautokeino) in Norwegian. She says that “The Norwegian way of thinking is very different from the Sámi way, and often we are taught to believe that our own way of reasoning, thinking or acting, is wrong” (Coster). *In Between Worlds*, originally written in Sámi, was nominated for The Nordic Council Children and Young People’s Literature Prize in 2014.

Coster, L. (nd).Maret Anne Sara: Art & reindeer. Leaves of Lien. Retrieved from <http://www.leavesoflien.com/?p=714>

Amber Gordon, University of New Mexico – Taos, Taos, New Mexico



*The Knight, the Princess and the Magic Rock: A Classic Persian Tale*

Retold by Sara Azizi

Illustrated by Alireza Sadeghian

Wisdom Tales, 2012, 32 pp

ISBN 978-1-937786-01-4

This picturebook presents a classic Persian folktale of two young adolescents of royal class who face a big obstacle that keeps them from being together. At the beginning of this book, a grandfather shares this folktale with his grandchildren to introduce Bijan and Manijeh. Manijeh is the princess of Turan and Bijan is a knight who fights for Turan's enemy kingdom. The two cross paths one day and naturally fall in love. Their love is not approved by their Manijeh's family since Bijan is from an enemy kingdom. However, they believe that their love is strong enough to overcome anything. Manijeh secretly has Bijan drink a magical potion that puts him to sleep so that he can be carried to her father's palace without suspicion. Their love faces another hurdle when the king discovers Bijan and becomes enraged. He has Bijan stuffed into a large pit that is covered with an irremovable magical rock. Princess Manijeh is completely devastated and is banished from the palace for betraying her father. Eventually, the king of Persia discovers the events in Iran and has another knight, Rostam, go to Bijan's rescue. Rostam finds Bijan and begins praying once he realizes that the rock cannot be removed. The power of his prayer lifts the rock and frees the brave knight. Bijan and Manijeh are finally able to rejoice and get married. The story ends with the two children begging their grandfather for more Persian folktales.

As a Persian American, I heard this classic folktale as a young child. This retelling accurately portrays the tale of my childhood. Books that would pair nicely with *The Knight, the Princess and the Magic Rock* would be *The Legend of the Magic Carpet* by Tomie DePaola and illustrated by Claire Ewart (1993) and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* by Claudia Venturini (2008). These books can be used together because they share a classic Persian folktale origin that can be relatable to Persian American students. The books also highlight a protagonist or multiple protagonists who overcome some sort of difficulty in their journey, a theme relatable to all students who encounter some sort of hardship whether they are Persian or not.

Azizi is an award-winning author that grew up surrounded by literature at a very young age. She loved to write stories and act them out with her family when she was a child. Azizi was born and raised in Iran, which heavily influenced her writing. She continued her education when she moved to Canada with her husband. Her studies included different languages, like German and Latin at the University of Toronto. Azizi focuses on writing literature that is centered on Persian culture.

Alireza Sadeghian, the illustrator of this classic children's book, is Iranian as well. Sadeghian is half Persian and half Arabic. This adds to his understanding and the authenticity of his knowledge of Persian clothing, historic sites, and styles in *The Knight, the Princess and the Magic Rock*. The author's and illustrator's backgrounds help them depict this classic folktale in

its original Persian manner and style. Sadeghian continues to live in Iran with his wife and two children. He knew that he wanted to pursue illustrating children's literature when he began to teach elementary art. Sadeghian was particularly inspired by the simplistic point of view that children had when it came to creating their interpretations of art. His main goal for his illustrations are to depict and preserve different cultural heritages for years to come.

Manijeh Rustomji, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



### Love

Written by Matt de la Peña

Illustrated by Loren Long

Putnam, 2018

ISBN: 978-1524740917

This exquisitely illustrated picturebook takes the reader on a journey to explore love in all of its imperfect and beautiful ways. The story takes on a lyrical quality as the reader moves through the sensory and emotional experience that is love. In the beginning, the story explores the sounds of love at home, in a cab, and on a summer day and moves on to explore love in moments of fear, such as a fire alarm in the middle of the night or adults shielding a child from frightening news on the television. Next, the story explores the love others give through care, time, and fun. In the end, the story focuses on the love we have for ourselves and the love we carry with us, so we are never truly alone.

In our current social and political climate, love is frequently overshadowed by the conflict in our society. This timely picturebook provides children with an exploration of the universal theme of love and reminds us that love is all around—if we take the time to look. The illustrator, Loren Long, includes colorful images that include culturally diverse characters. Most of the images are in urban environments, but the images also capture scenes of love in quiet places such as a trailer park and a suburban backyard.

One of the most compelling characteristics of this book is that the day-to-day examples of love feel so real. In one image, a burned piece of toast represents love of one sibling caring for another. For most of us, the love we experience day-to-day is not perfect. Instead, we do our best to care for those around us and to find beauty—to find love—in our many imperfect ways. This book honors those small, but powerful, moments when we are both human and loved.

This text could be paired with *The Only Child* by Guojing (2015) or *Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea* by Joyce Carol Thomas and Floyd Cooper (1995) to examine unconventional love and the importance of individuality through a lens of diverse cultures and experiences (Ebe, 2012; Fox & Short, 2003). The quality of craftsmanship in this book would also make it a powerful resource in the language arts classroom as a mentor text for sensory language, the influence of art on text, and theme. Additionally, this text could be used for social studies and lessons to explore diverse communities, families, and relationships.

Matt de la Peña is an award-winning biracial author from California. He is the author of several books for young adults, as well as picturebooks including the Newbery Award winner, *Last Stop on Market Street* (2015). His novel *Mexican White Boy* (2010), has been part of curriculum scrutiny even as it encourages young people to be proud of their heritage (Winerip, 2012). He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Katie Walker, Coastal Carolina University

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### *Refugee*

Written by Alan Gratz

Scholastic, 2017, 352 pp.

ISBN: 978-0545880831

Alan Gratz's novel highlights three brilliantly articulated simultaneous stories of refugee children separated by time and space. The stories feature Josef, a Jewish boy in 1939 Nazi Germany, who is escaping an imminent threat of a concentration camp by boarding the MS St. Louis for Cuba; Isabel, a Cuban girl in 1994 who belongs to a devout Christian family and must leave her homeland for Florida due to political upheaval; and Mahmoud, a Syrian boy in 2015, who leaves his homeland in Aleppo because of the violence and destruction, finding refuge in Europe.

This novel, written in the third-person narrative, frames the harrowing journeys these children undertake filled with life-threatening dangers. Each faces these challenges in different regions of the world and in different times, but their struggles are similar and their wish for a safe refuge are identical. Each traverses regions governed by dictators. Their initial journeys are by boat, where they face drowning, being eaten by sharks, and foreign coastguards ready to kill them. They are rejected time and again in various ways but get up and move on within their circumstances with a responsibility to family and friends that demands respect from the reader.

Visibility and invisibility are the stronger themes within these narratives. For Josef, while in Berlin, "It was like they were invisible" (p. 18) and Mahmoud realizes, "they only see us when we do something they don't want us to do" (p. 214). Later, while trying to hide during his stay in the tent cities, Mahmoud decides being visible is the only way to be seen and heard; therefore, no more hiding as he walks with other children across borders to reach Austria and then Germany.

These narratives are about migration under compulsion, forced journeys none of the protagonists wants to take, but all need to take, as they have no other choice. All three lives, unexpectedly, come together and intertwine at the end. Thus, in a way, this novel is about a shared history of forced journeys and a narrative that comes full circle, ending with a message of hope: Hope of religions and regions coming together, hope for providing a home for the homeless millions.

This novel is timely and much needed as it addresses issues of immigration and refugees. Gratz achieves brilliantly interwoven narratives joined seamlessly, while weaving in historical well-researched data and events. This book can introduce the topic of immigration, war, and upheaval and address the ways in which history repeats itself. Similar thematic threads can be found in other recent books about immigration and refugees, such as *Salt to the Sea* (Ruta Sepetys, 2017); *The Bone Sparrow* (Zana Fraillon, 2016); and *The Lines We Cross* (Randa Abdel-Fattah, 2017).

Alan Michael Gratz was born in 1972 in Knoxville, Tennessee. He is the author of 14 novels for young adults. His novels have won numerous awards, including ALA's 2007 top Ten Best Books for Young Adults, 2008 ALA Quick Pick for Young Adult Readers, ALA's Top Ten Sports Books for Youth and Top Ten Historical Books for Youth, YALSA's 2014 Best Fiction for Young Readers, and YALSA 2016 Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers. Gratz, who holds a College Scholars degree with a specialization in Creative Writing and a Masters in English Education from the University of Tennessee, currently resides in North Carolina.

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Alan Gratz. Retrieved from [https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/68794.Alan\\_Gratz](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/68794.Alan_Gratz)

Seemi Aziz, Tucson, Arizona



*Sisters in Blue: Sor María de Ágreda Comes to New Mexico/Hermanas de azul: Sor María de Ágreda viene a Nuevo México*

Written by Anna M. Nogar and Enrique R. Lamadrid

Illustrated by Amy Córdova

University of New Mexico Press, 2017, 76 pp

ISBN: 978-0-8263-5821-9

“Maria cultivated hope in the same way she grew the flowers in her garden” (p. 5). “You are the flower of our youth, of our

new beginning” (p. 14).

This bilingual Spanish/English book with occasional usage of Indigenous words from New Mexico is a retelling of the legend of Sor María, focusing on the historical background of two strong female characters, María and Paf Sheuri. It incorporates the accounts of Sor María’s travels via bilocation (being in two places at the same time) which assisted in establishing a relationship between the Indigenous peoples of central New Mexico, the Jumanos at Cueloze, now abandoned. The events of this text take place on June 23, during the Fiesta de San Juan in Spain, on the Midsummer Feast in New Mexico in the early 1600’s.

This text is constructed with very specific intentions by the authors. The first nine pages are dedicated to orienting the reader to the historical facts framing this story of two strong women who share similar views of hope and longevity for their respective people and communities. The rest of the text mingles their individual experiences during their own community feast days until the point when they are brought together to share a conversation about their concerns for the future. In presenting this text to modern readers, an Acknowledgement and Editor’s note precedes the story. The authors make clear, “our aim for this story is to tell a tale of communication between cultures and languages. The bilingual format puts two colonial languages – English and Spanish – side by side” (p. x). Following the story is a supplemental essay by Nogar, a bibliography for further research, and a glossary of words used with their current language and source language denoted.

The look of the text clearly takes into account the language concerns of the authors. Each page sets English in the left-hand column and Spanish in the right-hand column to give the reader a balanced representation of these languages. Additionally, they use Spanish with direct translation occasionally in the English portion, as well as words from the Tomprio, Southern Tiwa, Northern Tiwa, Tewa, and Keres languages, in order to “honor the Pueblo heritage, language, and history of New Mexico” (p. X). Nogar and Lamadrid further explain, “in our contemporary linguistic landscape, English dominates and subordinates the languages that surround it in true imperial fashion” (p. X). It is worth noting the Northern Tiwa language spoken in Taos Pueblo does not have an agreed upon written version nor orthography and is considered sacred by the people who live in Taos Pueblo.

In an interview with Baccin (2017), Nogar and Lamadrid explain the historical background of this text. While it may seem fantastical that Sor María was able to use bilocation to communi-

cate with communities in the Southwest, there is ample documentation that she provided to the Catholic Church; in fact, “the inquisition examined Sor María twice because they had doubts about this mystical travel” and found her claims to be true. Nogar states, “what we present of her comes from the history that we know about her. She turned out to be a very prolific writer during her lifetime” and even had dealings with the Spanish Crown. Through the interview, Lamadrid states that they “developed the story, and a lot of the details, from the archeology and the ethnography of these pueblo people at Cueloze.” One of the most enjoyable parts of the research process for these writers was developing the respective menus of the feast days.

There is a great deal of careful research that went into the writing of this text and the authors view the focus of the book as language recovery, saying “It is about bringing these stories to light that we can learn so much from...and this is what joins us to pueblo people, as well, they are very, very, concerned with language loss, as we are, and they are working very, very, hard on it and this is a story that is very attractive to pueblo people because it shows them in such a positive light” (Baccin, 2017). The authors agree, “it is a story about the conquest. But [they] have brought it down to earth, and decolonized it as much as [they] could. Not to change it, but to show how important communication [is] between cultural groups.”

In an email conversation with Lamadrid and Nogar, I asked the authors what they enjoyed most about the research and writing process for this book. Lamadrid (personal communication, February 7, 2018) said, “What I enjoyed the most is the longevity of a personally and intellectually rewarding project twenty years in the making. It began in 1998, New Mexico’s Cuartocentenario, when Anna was my undergrad student. Now she is my colleague – a very long journey! As Nuevomexicanos and Hispanistas (students of the Spanish language and Ibero-American cultures, including our beloved Nuevo México), Sor María’s visits validate for us what we already know – that New Mexico is a special and very spiritual place.”

Nogar (personal communication, February 7, 2018) followed this statement by saying, “I loved working on this book both for the reasons Enrique mentioned earlier (it really did start out as a term paper for Enrique’s class in 1998!) and also because Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda has been my primary academic research interest for many years. I wrote a Master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation on her presence in New Spain (Mexico and the Southwest) from the 17th century on and have recently completed a book on her that will be published in June with the University of Notre Dame Press [called] *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628-the Present.*”

Amy Cordova (personal communication, February 11, 2018), an award-winning illustrator known for her accuracy of cultural context and the illustrator of this text, stated, “In all of the books I prepare my mind, hand, and heart. It is imperative to the story and to me personally, that I depict as many aspects of the tale, as authentically as possible. The historical context, clothing, landscape, architecture, and small details, must reflect the period in which the story takes place.” I find her illustrations to be an emotionally expressive companion to this complex story by Lamadrid and Nogar.

This text deals with the issues of colonization of the Indigenous population in New Mexico by Spanish Conquistadors from a unique perspective. Lamadrid states, “the story is all involved with the great historical trauma of the entrance of Coronado. He came on a feast day in Zuni and he killed all of their priests on their feast day. And so a lot of those people moved to Cueloze to get as far away from Zuni as they could” (Baccin, 2017, np). *Sisters in Blue/Hermanas de azul* includes the pain of colonization through the representation of warfare, fear, and loss of life. Yet the story focuses on the legend of a Franciscan nun who traveled across space and time from her convent in Ágredda to visit with the people of the Southwest in order to introduce them to the teachings of the Holy Roman Catholic Church (Mary of Agreda, 2011, np).

As a work of historical fiction, the text brings the reader an understanding of deep spiritual connection for both of the female protagonists. María is youthful, curious, and invested in a sense of service to both her community and her religious beliefs. Paf Sheuri is reflective, hopeful, and protective of her sense of community history and ways of being. When they meet, they are surprised at how well they understand each other. They share stories of their origin and discuss the things they have in common. Together they are in a moment of time when history and action is suspended.

The most successful aspect of the text is the manner in which the audience is considered. This is not a religious retelling of a story, nor is it whitewashed with current dominant culture and language features of English. Instead, this text is gentle in its treatment of the historical value of this legend and the fictionalization the legend brings to the text. While one would be remiss not to know the story of biolocation and the importance of Sor María’s to the Kingdom of Spain, one does not need to know this in order to value the idea of two cultures meeting in genuine and mystical ways, in order to understand and share their values of community and family. This text intertwines colonizer and colonized with a female perspective seeking unity, courage, and collaboration.

Texts like *Sisters in Blue/Hermanas de azul*, which would appeal to readers are: *Juan the Bear and the Water of Life/La Acequia de Juan del Oso* by Enrique R. Lamadrid, Juan Estevan Arellano, and Amy Córdova (2008); *The Mother Ditch/La Acequia Madre* by Oliver LaFarge and Karl Larsson (1978); *Cuentos de Cuanto Hay/Tales from Spanish New Mexico* by J. Manuel Espinosa (Transcriber) and Joe Hayes (Editor and Translator, 1998); and the English book *The Boy Who Made Dragonfly: A Zuni Myth* retold by Tony Hillerman (1993). These books give readers an understanding of the cultural values and heritage of the Hispanic people of New Mexico. Additionally, Nogar’s forthcoming book written for adults, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Agreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* (2018), may be of particular interest to those who enjoy *Sisters in Blue/Hermanas de azul* and want to learn more about this fascinating historical figure.

*Sisters in Blue: Sor María de Ágredda Comes to New Mexico/Hermanas de azul: Sor María de Ágredda viene a Nuevo México* is a winner of the 2017 Southwest Book Award by the Border Regional Library Association.

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of Spanish and Portugese, at the University of New Mexico. Lamadrid is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Spanish at the University of New Mexico. Córdoba is an award-winning children's book illustrator, author, and educator.

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