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# WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES  
VOLUME VII, ISSUE 3

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Open Theme

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**WOW Review: Volume VIII**  
**Issue 3 Spring 2016**

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### Volume VIII Issue 3

#### Introduction and Editors' Note

An open theme allows for reader and reviewer creativity in selecting books and themes to highlight. There are ten books in this issue that touch upon celebration, connection, self-identity, and seeing others. Several of the books share bicultural experiences, with *Falling into the Dragon's Mouth* by Holly Thompson, *My Two Blankets* by Irena Kobald, and *Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir* by Margarita Engle focusing on young people negotiating a new culture while holding onto what they know about themselves. Through these three narratives, readers view the themes of connection and identity in bicultural contexts.

The Newbery Award winning *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña presents a young man learning about connection to his community. This wonderful narrative complements the provocative picture books, *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago and *I am a Bear* by Jean-François Dumont. All three books address issues of seeing others and valuing each person as someone who matters. In addition to these remarkable books, the stunning graphic novel *The Only Child* by Guojing and the wonderfully-rendered *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* by Amrita Das illustrate life in global cultures through artistic expression and highlight aspects of each author's identity.

Finally, we are invited to celebrate with books, such as *It's Time for Holi!* by Amita Roy Shah and Diane Lucas and the delightful *Norwegian Adventures with Waffles* by Maria Parr. Holi is the festival of color in India, and Shah's text tells the story of connecting to one's roots when living in another country. *Adventures with Waffles* celebrates life on a small Norwegian island and how children create their own outlandish adventures. Actually, all of the books in this issue are celebratory in some way. They celebrate community, identity, connection, and how seeing others transforms those who see as well as those who are seen. And, in essence, that is the hope we all share.

It is my hope that as you continue reading global literature, you will consider writing a review for Volume VII, Issue 4: *Literature as Key: The Power to Unlock Potential, Open Possibilities, Close Doors, Discover Knowledge, and Set One Free* due May 15, 2016. How do pieces of literature from across the world serve as keys to readers? What pieces have you read recently that have had you thinking about doors opening or closing? What possibilities exist for characters within the books you have read recently? And how do authors unlock potential for their characters or for their readers? These questions and more can be addressed in the next issue of *WOW Review*.

Holly Johnson, Editor



Book Review: *Adventure Waffles* Written  
by Maria Parr Illustrated by Kate  
Forrester Translated by Guy Puzey  
ISBN: 9780763672812 Candlewick Press,  
2015, 240 pp.

Those who love Pippi Longstocking will be enamored with the young heroine of *Adventures with Waffles*. Lena is the female half of an adventure-seeking duo in the small Norwegian village of Mathildewick Cove. She is Trille’s best friend, although Trille often wonders if he is her best friend. Both children are nine-years-old, yet Lena is the source and inspiration behind the duo’s pranks and adventures, including creating and using a ropeway between their houses and jumping over the main road on the sled—their two *safest* adventures. These escapades, along with others, however, quite often include concussions and backside pains. But they will also delight readers!

Living on a small island off the shore of Norway connected to the mainland only by ferry, Lena and Trille create a kingdom that will hold them forever. Trille has a large family: his two parents, his Grandpa, and his three siblings. Lena lives next door with her mother, who is an artist and a cashier at the local store. On the island, however, is also Auntie Granny, Grandpa’s older sister, a substitute grandmother for the children. She is the one who makes waffles, and “Auntie Granny’s waffles really are the best in the world, seriously.” (p. 19).

One day the two friends decide to build Noah’s Shark (an improved version of Noah’s Ark; a shark is a Norwegian fishing boat). They collect available animals to bring on board—insects in the glass jars in twos (even though it is very difficult to find who is she and who is he in the bumblebees), two rabbits, a hen and a rooster, one big fat cat (so big that he can count as two), a goat and... a moody “adolescent” cow. As anyone can imagine, a major disaster follows. Their next big project is to find a father for Lena. Fathers are very important, “they eat boiled cabbage” (p. 45), and boiled carrots too. Amazingly, this project ends up nicely. The doctor who constantly needs to treat Lena after her multiple dangerous adventures falls in love with her mom, and Lena happily says “yes” to his marriage proposal.

Yet, some adventures are of the heart, and not everything is that simple in the “kingdom.” Auntie Granny dies, and Trille starts thinking about the meaning of life and death. Soon afterwards, Lena and her mother move to town, and Trille is so sad that he stops enjoying the most beautiful snow days and his favorite foods. But all’s well that ends well. While Lena may have a new father, she will also get to stay on the island with Trille’s family

until her mom and her new husband return from their honeymoon. Trille learns how to make wonderful Waffle Hearts that he can make almost as well as Auntie Granny used to do since he needs to cheer up his Grandpa who is missing his sister.

The book may be paired with Astrid Lindgren's *Seacrow Island* (2015) and with Jeanne Birdsall's *The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy* (2007) and other books from the The Penderwicks Series.

Maria Parr's *Adventures with Waffles* was originally published in 2003. In 2009 she published her second book for children, *Tonje Glimmerdal*, for which she won the 2009 Brage Prize, a Norwegian literary prize. Maria Parr has been named by many as a new Astrid Lindgren, a high level of approval for European children's literature.

*Adventures with Waffles* is beautifully translated into English by Guy Puzey, a translator of Norwegian literature from Edinburgh, and illustrated by a British artist Kate Forrester.

Olga Bukhina, International Association for the Humanities, New York City, NY



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Book Review: *Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir*  
Written by Margarita Engle  
Atheneum, 2015, 193 pp.  
ISBN: 9781481435222

In her author's note, poet Margarita Engle, who has published many award-winning novels in verse, shares that she never thought she would be "brave enough to write about (her) life as a Cuban

American child growing up in the United States during the hostilities of the Cold War" (p. 191). She explains that she framed the poems in this book in terms of travel as a "magical experience" that help travelers "see how others live" and teaches compassion.

The author paints poems with beautiful language and rich imagery as she describes her familial connection to Cuban people and culture. She also shares her heart-felt confusion and anger as she lives through the sorrows of separation from half of her family during the Cold War and experiences discrimination as a Cuban American. From the first poem that describes her first airplane flight to meet her mother's family in Cuba to the last poem in which she makes a final plea for normalizing diplomatic relations between her two countries, her verses extend the travel imagery to emphasize her hope for soaring on wings to unite her family and both halves of her identity.

The poems portray the first fourteen years of the poet's life. Margarita's family lives in Los Angeles near her Dad's Ukrainian-Jewish relatives who fled Europe from Holocaust pogroms and tell brief, vague stories of leaving their loved ones behind. In contrast, Margarita's Mami recites Spanish poetry and fills the air in her childhood home with vivid stories of relatives who live in Cuba on the tropical island where her mother grew up. Engle writes, "Apparently, the length/of a grown-up's/growing-up story/is determined/by the difference/between immigration/and escape" (p. 29).

When young Margarita visits Cuba, she discovers her "second self, the invisible twin who belongs to this wild tropical farm instead of a modern city" (p. 31). For several summers, the family visits the island, but when it becomes difficult, they travel to Mexico instead. In a poem called "What Am I?," the young teen Margarita wrestles with her identity. When the tensions between the United States and Cuba are escalating, she shares a memory of feeling guilty when a teacher remarks: "WE WERE LIKE SANTA CLAUS/ON THAT POOR LITTLE ISLAND" (p. 43). Then, the teacher whispers directly into Margarita's ear to personalize her accusation that Cubans are ungrateful. After FBI agents come to their home to question Margarita's mother, she writes about this experience in the poem titled "Investigated." Later, she deals with the terror of the Cuban Missile Crisis and finds hope by immersing herself in books. In "My Library Life," she writes: "I never find any books/about the beautiful green/crocodile-shaped island/that throbs/at the center of my being,/like a living creature,/half heart/and half beast" (p. 129).



With lovely language, an insider's view of growing up in two cultures, and many historical and political issues to question, Margarita Engle's *Enchanted Air Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir* is a powerful gift to readers. Educators will be grateful that she chose to write and publish it at this time in the history of U.S.-Cuban relations. The book includes a Cold War time line as well as the author's note and a poem by Cuban poet José Martí that Margarita remembers her mother reciting by heart.

*Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle under Castro* written by Eduardo F. Calcines (2009) would be a perfect book to pair with *Enchanted Air*. (See WOW Review, Volume 1, Issue 4). During the Cuban missile crisis and onset of the Castro regime, Margarita Engle worries about her Cuban relatives and experiences a profound sense of loss of connection to her island heritage. Eduardo Calcines' boyhood experiences living under the Castro regime show the same time period from another perspective. Readers of both books will experience how these two young people deal emotionally with adult actions and the politics of their time.

Margarita Engle's previous novels in verse have taken a longer view of Cuban history: *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom* (2008), *Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba* (2009), *The Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey to Cuba* (2011), and *The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist* (2013). Along with *Enchanted Air*, these titles create a rich historical novel text set that could help today's readers learn more about Cuba, particularly since the start of normalizing relations between Cuba and the U.S. is a current events topic.

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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: Falling Into the Dragon's Mouth

Written by Holly Thompson

Holt, 2016, 352 pp.

ISBN 9781627791342.

This novel told in verse tells the story of Jason Parker, a sixth grader, who is an American teen living in Japan because his parents are employed there. He has a younger sister Cora whom he often babysits and with whom he takes secret adventures. He finds it difficult to go to a Japanese school and make friends. In fact, it is way more than just difficult. It is absolutely miserable as his Japanese classmates verbally and physically abuse him. For Jason, the school is literally like entering into a dragon's mouth with sharp teeth and blasting fire. Jason wants to transfer to an international school with the hope that he will meet students more like him and avoid the Japanese bullies, but transferring to the international school costs money and time. Told in vivid detail, readers may be shocked to discover how much Jason suffers and the seriousness of school bullying.

Readers who have background knowledge of Japanese culture will find Thompson's descriptions of Japanese culture accurate. She uses Japanese words appropriately in context, which reveals how well she has interwoven Japanese culture and words into the story. Thompson is an American who has lived in Japan for nearly 20 years and so is not an outsider to Japanese culture. For those who are not familiar with Japanese culture and words, the glossary and the cultural guide at the end of the book explains not only the meaning of the words, but also Japanese cultural practices.

Holly Thompson has written verse novels such as *Orchards* (2012) and *The Language Inside* (2013) revealing the strong inner voice she employs with many of her protagonists. *Falling into the Dragon's Mouth* reveals Jason's strong inner voice which allows readers to feel Jason's pain. Their hearts will go out to him. Other verse novels like *Rhyme Schemer* (K. A. Holt, 2014) and *Addie on the Inside* (James Howe, 2012) can be paired with *Falling into the Dragon's Mouth*. These verse novels also deal with protagonists struggling at school. It would be especially interesting to compare and discuss bullying within *Rhyme Schemer* (2014) as this book narrates the bullying issue from a different perspective. All three verse novels will lead teens to a discussion of bullying, fitting in, and finding their identities.

In addition to introducing readers to a world of verse and the beauty of the language, Thompson's books show readers struggles of bicultural teens—especially between Japanese and American cultures. Thompson's books also pose questions about serious issues that teens confront regardless of their cultural identities, including bullying, suicide, and fitting in with peers. Not all of Thompson's books deal with heavy topics, however. She has a picture book for children, *The Wakame Gatherers* (2007) that presents the benefits of being a bicultural child.

There is no doubt that Thompson's authentic descriptions of bicultural characters come from her personal experiences. She has developed a bicultural identity as an American and who is a  
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long-term resident in Japan, and her experiences are well reflected in her books. Thompson's believable characters help readers to experience the struggles of living within and between two different cultures. Visit [hatbooks.com](http://hatbooks.com) for more information on Holly Thompson and her books. An interview at Doshisha International High school, Kyoto, Japan is also available on her website.

Jongsun Wee, Winona State University, Winona, MN



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit*  
 Written and Illustrated by Amrita Das  
 Translated by Gita Wolf and Susheela  
 Varadarajan Tara Books, 2013, n.p.  
 ISBN: 9789383145027

*Some things are given, but it is a question of how life changes and how we walk into the future—I'm unsure, but unafraid, and I have some hope (np).*

A visual journey into the Mithila traditional folk art of North India, this autobiographical narrative reveals smaller stories within each of the book's illustrations. Amrita Das tells of her own venturing out to become an artist and discovering, within observations of a young girl traveling to Chennai on the same train, a story that reflects the promise for many women in everyday situations who fulfill their own hopes through choices as simple as selling fruit near the train station. Translated from the Hindi original, "the text is gentle, but it is also resolute: unflinching in the way it looks at the confines of women's lives, and persistent in its search for choices" (Gita Wolf, 2013).

As Amrita's personal story unfolds through her observations of those around her, readers acknowledge philosophical insights that are universal in nature. Notions about the difficulty of girls' lives, their freedom or lack thereof, and personal pride in spite of poverty. Contemporary issues are revealed in both illustration and text – both employing metaphors to share the life of an Indian woman.

Mithila art, or Madhubani paintings, originated in rural communities with each community having distinctive variations. Originally painted on walls and floors of homes, the traditional designs and symbols have become a voice for contemporary issues. The detailed, patterned pictures are created with natural dyes and instruments such as twigs and brushes. Used for ceremonies, festivals, and other major life events, the pictures consist of geometric patterns within which figures and objects tell stories or carry themes. *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* is comprised of twelve illustrations that are autobiographical in nature. Positioned in the center of each two-page spread, each image is a carefully constructed composition. Brief text is positioned on the outside margins. Final pages include a note from Gita Wolf of Tara Books in which she provides further information regarding the author, Amrita Das. A final two page spread features all 12 images in a display of the illustrations side-by-side.

Books that might be paired with this one include *The London Jungle Book* by Bhajju Shyam (2014), *I Saw a Peacock with a Fiery Tale* by Ramsingh Urveti (2012), and *The Enduring Ark* by Joydeb Chitraker (2013). In each of these, the artist depends upon ancient, traditional art to convey the theme of the story.

Amrita Das is a young artist whose work frequently uses a theme of female freedom and choice. Her own autobiography reveals this theme as well. She strives for authenticity in her art as revealed at the beginning of the book where she creates a picture of her childhood only to state that her childhood was far from idyllic as perceived in her images. Her personal insights of the lives of many females in India is also considered realistic in contemporary society.

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: I am a Bear

Written by Jean-François Dumont

Translated by Leslie Matthews

Eerdmans, 2015, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780802854476

*I don't know how I got here . . .* (n.p).

Bear finds himself alone in the city. He does not know how he got there or how to find help. People ignore him or worse, they run away from him. They do not listen to him before they judge him. As Bear becomes more and more disenfranchised from those around him, he is also more and more alienated from himself and the potential of who he is or could be—until he is seen by a young girl who does not fear him. From that moment, his life begins to change.

Jean-François Dumont has written and illustrated a powerful book about a homeless bear and a curious little girl, but astute readers will note the metaphor of homelessness and the possibilities that exist when one is visible to others—to see and be seen. Filled with engaging illustrations that take readers to the alley where Bear lives, to his hopelessness and confusion, and then to the possibility of hope, this lovely narrative reminds us that we all have the potential to see others and to acknowledge them as part of our community and the human family.

*I am a Bear* would make a terrific addition to a text set on the concept of alienation or disenfranchisement and what it means to be othered. Other books that would make thoughtful companions to this book could include *Like a Wolf* by Géraldine Eischner (2015) and Fiona Roberts' (2015) *A Tale of Two Beasts*, both of which highlight the importance of perception. *Like a Wolf* is more serious, but both would make wonderful additions to discussion starters on how our perceptions can be both damaging and beneficial to others. If interested in books about compassion, *I am a Bear* would make an interesting addition to a text set containing narratives such as *Thank You, Jackson: How One Little Boy Makes a BIG Difference* by Niki Daly (2015) and JonArno Lawson's (2015) *Sidewalk Flowers*, two books that show how even little actions can make a big difference within our communities. In addition, pairing this book with *The Lion and the Bird* by Marianne Dubuc (2014) would make for interesting discussions about friendship born out of helpfulness.

Jean-François Dumont lives in France and has written numerous books for young people, including *The Sheep Go on Strike* (2014), *The Geese March in Step* (2014), and *The Chickens Build a Wall* (2013). More information about Mr. Dumont can be found at Eerdmans.

Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: It's Time For Holi  
Written by Amita Roy Shah and Diane Lucas  
Dog Ear Publishing, 2011, 24 pp.  
ISBN: 9781608449439

Holi is the Hindu Festival of Colors. This story begins during the winter season with an Indian-American boy who is anxiously waiting for spring and the celebration of Holi. While the boy waits, signs of spring begin to emerge around him. When Holi day finally arrives, he can't wait to celebrate and

decides to use his colored powders before family and friends arrive. Through his explorations, he learns more about the significance of this colorful festival. Using rhymes, alliterations, and engaging dialogue, readers learn that throwing colored powder on one another is a symbolic way to welcome the spring season.

This book represents a specific bicultural experience of the Indian Diaspora. Indians who have moved to Western countries find ways of celebrating Indian festivals within their homes and/or their respective communities. As they prepare for Holi, the women in the story pick and choose when they want to wear their bindi (i.e. cosmetic dot on their forehead) or gold jewelry (Om pendant, necklaces, bracelets). They are also portrayed wearing Indian, American and bicultural styles of fashion (e.g. Indian tops with jeans).

Collectivistic values are at the heart of this book through depictions of living with grandparents and celebrating special occasions with extended family members, uncles, aunts, and cousins. The illustrator, Diane Lucas, referenced the author's online photo albums to accurately capture how Indian-American families engage in their day-to-day lives. Through the illustrations, children see family members sitting together, drinking tea, and conversing. They also observe common Hindu symbols in the shared areas of the house such as the picture of Ganesha (i.e., God of Obstacles).

This story is an excellent resource for early elementary and can be used to support an interdisciplinary curriculum in Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. Through this story children naturally observe signs in nature and relate them to the changing seasons. This story would work well as an interactive whole-class read aloud or in literature circles. Through the use of the repetitive and rhyming text, teachers can encourage students to participate in the story. Students can actively look for the changing seasons and use hand gestures and movements to represent the signs of spring that appear (e.g., roses blooming, birds singing, grass growing). Teachers and students can also role play the story through the use of dialogue for the Boy, Ma, Papa, and Nani (Grandma). In literature circles, students can share their personal experiences with multicultural festivals that celebrate nature. There are numerous books on Holi, which could be used with this text to broaden readers' experiences. Older readers might also enjoy Michael Balonek's (2013) e-book, *Adventures in India: Holi-Festival of Color, Festival of Spring*.

The author, Dr. Amita Roy Shah, lives in the United States. As an educator, she is passionate about teaching all children about diverse cultures. *It's Time For Holi!* is her first children's book. She received the Kids Are Readers Too! (KART) Book List award in 2011 for creating content that is memorable and enhances the gift of learning for children. More information about the Festival of Colors can be found on this Holi Festival website.

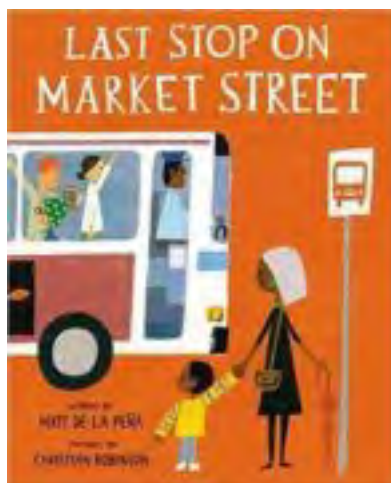
Shaina Khan, Fremont Unified School District, Fremont, CA





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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: Last Stop on Market Street

Written by Matt de la Peña

Illustrated by Christian Robinson.

G.P. Putnam's, 2016, 32 pp.

ISBN: 9780399257742

Immediately after church services each Sunday, CJ and his nana take their weekly trip on the bus. CJ's trip is as much a spiritual passage as it is a physical trip. CJ and nana encounter a variety of sights and sounds on the bus that help CJ see and hear the

world through his nana's cultivated understanding of the world. Initially CJ questions why he must make the trip each week, but in the end, appreciates the trip in a meaningful way. The story is filled with a love of diversity that unfolds organically over the course of the story. CJ learns from his nana how to find beauty in unexpected places.

Known for trying all sorts of mediums and techniques, Christian Robinson's illustrations combine paint and collage to create distinctively beautiful, bold, and colorful images. The artwork works well with the story to convey the book's important lesson of finding beauty in all kinds of places and within all kinds of people. Robinson's paintings contribute to the story's simplicity and his use of many shapes and colors provide for a visually enticing read.

There are many ways to pair this book. Books highlighting life on a bus could be *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Mo Willems, 2003), any of the *Magic School Bus* books by Joanna Cole, which combine information with a narrative, or *I Spy: A School Bus* (Jean Marzollo, 2003), which is an informational text. If looking for stories about young people and their grandmothers, good choices would be *Abuela* (Arthur Dorros, 1997), *Mango, Abuela, and Me* (Meg Medina, 2015) or *Snowed in with Grandmother Silk* (Carol Fenner, 2005). Two books highlighting music include *The Bat Boy and his Violin* (Gavin Curtis, 2001) or Hana Hashimoto, *Sixth Violin* (Chieri Uegaki, 2014). *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen* (DyAnne Di Salvo Ryan, 1997) speaks to community service and taking care of one another. Novels involving community action that would pair nicely with *Last Stop on Market Street* include Sid Fleischman's (2004) wonderful novel *Seedfolks* or *The Seventh Most Important Thing* by Shelley Pearsall (2015).

Matt de la Peña began publishing in 2005 with his first novel, *The Ball Don't Lie*. Since then Matt has won acclaim as a young adult novelist, and in January 2011 de la Peña ventured into picture books with, *A Nation's Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis*, illustrated by Kadir Nelson. *Last Stop on Market Street*, is de la Peña's second picture book and won the 2016 Newbery Book Award. He has also published short fiction and essays in newspapers and journals including: *The New York Times*, NPR.org, *The Writer*, *Pacific Review*, and the *George Mason Review*.

Christian Robinson makes his home in San Francisco and works out of a warehouse divided into artist studios. He earned a BFA in Character Animation from the California Institute of the Arts in 2008. He has illustrated several books and won the Ezra Jack Keats in 2014 for *Rain* by Linda Ashman. He received a 2016 Caldecott Honor Award for his work on *Last Stop on Market Street*.

Megan McCaffrey, Governors State University, University Park, IL



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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



Book Review: My Two Blankets  
Written by Irena Kobald  
Illustrated by Freya Blackwood  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015, 32 pp.  
ISBN: 9780544432284

*My new blanket grew just as warm and soft and comfortable  
as my old blanket. (p. 27).*

This picture book recently secured a spot on USBBY's 2016 Outstanding International Books list, which comes as no surprise. Told through poetic verse with simple yet vivid language, the story of Cartwheel, a young girl—presumably a

refugee from an African nation—chronicles her move to a strange and distant world where the language is like a rough blanket. Kobald’s descriptive language positions readers in such a way that they can imagine what it feels like to be separated from all that one has ever known.

Every night Cartwheel returns home to her blanket, which represents the only place she feels secure. While feeling so alone in her strange new world, however, she is eventually befriended by another, who is determined to help this newest arrival understand the meanings of the strange words in Cartwheel’s new location. Through these encounters, Cartwheel begins to feel more at home.

Freya Blackwood’s illustrations are beautiful, colorful sketches that bring the text to life. The illustrations enhance the narrative, and both written text and illustration play a critical role in bringing this moving story to life. The imagery adds to the reader’s understanding of what it must feel like to be an immigrant to a new land, and what the blossoming relationship looks like between the girls within the story. The depiction of the two blankets is particularly crucial in demonstrating the intricate weaving and delicate process it takes to be yourself in a new world.

*My Two Blankets* is an exemplary book to show young students the pairing of narrative and illustration as well as compassion and friendship. Students in first through fourth grade would enjoy this text, but deeper understandings and themes present in the text make it appropriate for older students as well.

This picture book would pair well with *The Lion and the Bird* by Marianne Dubuc (2014) and *Arto’s Big Move* by Monica Arnaldo (2014) as both present children in unfamiliar surroundings building friendships. With older students, *My Two Blankets* could be used as a metaphor for introducing *The Secret Side of Empty* by Maria Andreu (2014), a young adult novel that presents a young girl’s challenges in trying to find her place within the US.

Irena Kobald is from Australia, and while careful to not distinguish the geographical location of the book, she explains in the author note that the book was inspired by her daughter’s relationship with a Sudanese child and she is an immigrant herself. Winner of the 2015 CBCA Award, this is the only picture book available by Kobald in the United States.

Blackwood is an award-winning illustrator who has illustrated many other children’s books including the award-winning *Harry and Hopper* (Margaret Wild, 2011), *Half a World Away* (Libby Gleeson, 2007), and *Banjo and Ruby Red* (Libby Gleeson, 2015). She wrote and illustrated *Ivy Loves to Give* (2010). Prior to her illustrating career, Blackwood worked as an effects technician in the making of “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy. More about Blackwood can be found on her website.

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Based on a work at <http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/volumeviii1-3/>



**Book Review: The Only Child**

Written by Guojing

Schwartz & Wade Books, 2015, 112 pp.

ISBN: 9780533497045

In her award-winning debut, Guojing presents a wordless picture book/graphic novel that explores the inner-world of an only child in China. Guojing's artwork is uniquely beautiful in both design and storytelling. The story opens on a young child waking and bidding her mother a hesitant farewell as her mother goes off to work.

Alone in the house, the child occupies her time watching television and playing with her toys. After a valiant attempt at self-sufficiency, she succumbs to loneliness and decides to visit her grandmother. The little girl prepares herself by combing hair, getting dressed, and dropping a few coins into a purse. Then she ventures into the snowy city.

At first, the adventure is a delight! The snow-falling, the commotion of the city with the smell of food carts, and the companionship of people is enthralling to the young child. She boards a bus and delights in the view of the city passing by. As happens with children, the excitement is tiring and she drifts off to sleep. When the child awakes, she has missed her stop, panics and dashes off of the bus. She begins to walk, looking for something familiar that might lead her home, but instead wanders deep into the snowy woods. With nothing familiar in sight, she begins to cry. Suddenly, a stag appears from the woods and the child follows it into a dreamlike wonderful world not quite like the child's own. Led by the stag into the clouds to a beautiful fantasy world, she discovers new friends and adventures. The imagery of the stag as protector and guide invokes a sense of mysticism for the reader. As comforting as her time with her new friends has been, at the end of the day, when she curls on the clouds to sleep, the child misses her mother.

Using the light left on by the child's parents in the window as they frantically search for the missing child, the stag leads her home. The child bids the stag a loving farewell, and walks into the warmth of her family's home. In the end, she curls in bed with her mother, a book, and a toy stag, leading the reader to wonder if the story every happened at all. This question of where truth lies between the world of fantasy and reality invokes the words of Dumbledore, "Of course it is happening inside your head . . . but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling, 2007, p. 723).

In this imaginative story of childhood, the reader recognizes elements of China's one-child policy. Guojing's artwork reflects everyday life in a Chinese home and town and a mesmerizing fantasy world. Guojing, herself, is of the generation of children brought up in China during the one-child policy and the story is based on an experience she had as a young child who lost her way. Through the story, Guojing offers hope—if we keep our eyes open, there will always be something to lead us back home.

Readers of all ages can enjoy this book for its richly layered story. Readers will be captivated by the depth of emotion and societal consequences. *The Only Child* adds wonderful depth and a unique perspective of childhood to the collection of wordless picture books through a mesmerizing story that will resonate with people of all ages. Young children who enjoyed Raymond Brigg's (1978) *The Snowman*, Ezra Jack Keats's (1976) *The Snowy Day*, and Chris Van Allsburg's (1985) *The Polar Express* will enjoy the wonder and hope evoked by the enchanting artwork and brilliant story-telling in this book. Older children and adolescents who appreciated the blurred lines of reality as well as the socio-historical allusions of the dynamic worlds of Lewis Carroll's (1865) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, J.K. Rowling's (1999) *Harry Potter* Series, and Neil Gaiman's (2015) *The Sleeper and the Spindle*.

Guojing grew up as the only child of a family in China as a result of China's 1980 one-child policy. Her parents, as in many families, both had to work to support the family. Guojing describes how she was often left home alone or with her grandmother. The intense loneliness that she felt was part of her whole generation of children. These are experiences that shape her work. As an adult, she studied at an art institute and began working in the game and animation



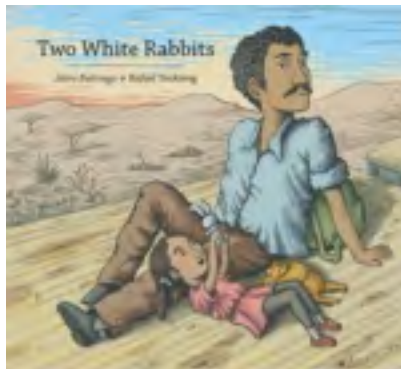
industry. She is now a professional illustrator and concept artist and is planning her next picture book. More about Guojing can be found at the Creative Authors website.

Katie Walker, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX



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**Book Review: Two White Rabbits**

Written by Jairo Buitrago

Illustrated by Rafael Yockteng

Translated by Elisa Amado

Groundwood Books, 2015, n.p.

ISBN: 9781554987412

A young girl and her father travel north towards the United States border, a grueling journey that regularly occurs in various Central American countries and Mexico. While readers do not know the exact origin of the journey within this book, the end pages of the book show a tiny basket with a string of worry dolls—typical of Guatemala. The father and child travel by foot, water, train and truck accompanied, in most pictures, by a reappearing coyote. Typical of childhood, the little girl counts everything, looks for cloud formations in the sky, and plays along the way with other children. A boy gives the little girl two white rabbits that symbolize the migrant travelers as they continue their journey. The symbolism attunes readers to the contemporary issue of border crossing when the rabbits are freed near the border without anyone to accompany them and yet with no real way to go over the fence pictured in the illustration—a betrayal of hoped

freedom. The innocence of childhood is apparent in the counting, questions, and obvious confidence in her father's plan for their travels.

Patricia Aldana, President of the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) Foundation, shares a passage at the end of this story that relates it to the reality of refugees, especially those thousands who have arrived at the US/Mexico border from Central America. She reminds readers that they do not know why children and parents embark on this journey and asks readers to consider our role in helping people who may not have safe comfortable lives.

*Two White Rabbits* has received numerous awards, such as selection for the Kirkus Best Picture Books of the Year 2015, School Library Journal Best Picture Books of the Year 2015, NCTE Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children Recommended Book 2016, USBBY 2016 Outstanding International Books, and 2016 Notable Books for a Global Society.

*Two White Rabbits* can be paired with Maxine Trottier's (2011) *Migrant*. Both books reveal the imagination children use to make sense of their current life situations. *Migrant* by Jose Manuel Mateo (2014) can be used to realistically share the challenge of migration. In Mateo's book, readers will find detailed pictures in Codex that describe the treacherous journey to the US/Mexico border. Other immigration titles that can enhance an understanding of the migrant life can be found in the themed issue of *WOW Review, Vol. VII, Issue IVu*.

Author Jairo Buitrago resides in Mexico and has authored numerous books. He captures the simple child language in the first person telling of *Two White Rabbits*, yet the text carries a depth of insight for those keenly aware of the dangers faced by those hoping to cross the US border. His other written works can be found on this website.

The illustrations express the simplicity of the scenario. Digitally created and frequently on a white background, these colorful pictures divert the reader from the issue at hand and focus on the child's perspective. Rafael Yockteng, illustrator, lives in Columbia and has collaborated previously with Jairo Buitrago on other titles such as *Jimmy the Greatest* (2012)

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX



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