



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 3

Spring 2022
Open Theme

Worlds
of WORDS 



College
of
Education

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)

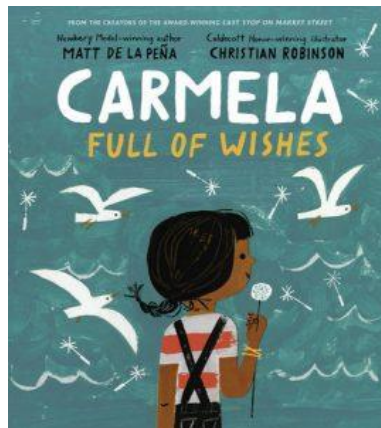
WOW Review: Reading Across Cultures

Open Theme

Volume XIV, Issue 3

Spring 2022

[Introduction and Editors' Note](#)



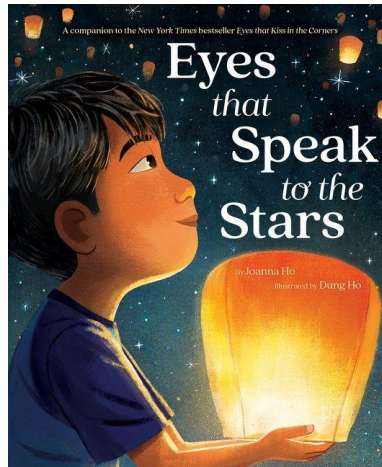
[Carmela Full of Wishes](#)

Written by Matt de la Peña
Illustrated by Christian Robinson



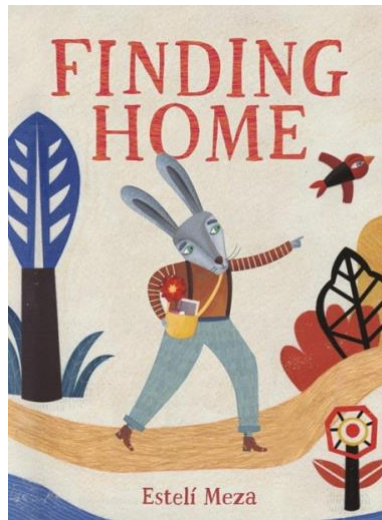
[Comings and Goings](#)

Written by Anna Kontoleon and Manos Kontoleon
Illustrated by Fotini Tikkou



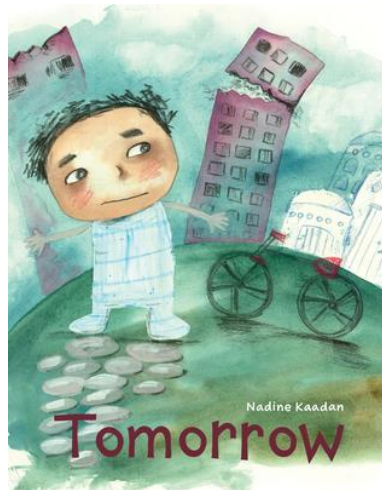
[Eyes that Speak to the Stars](#)

Written by Joanna Ho
Illustrated by Dung Ho



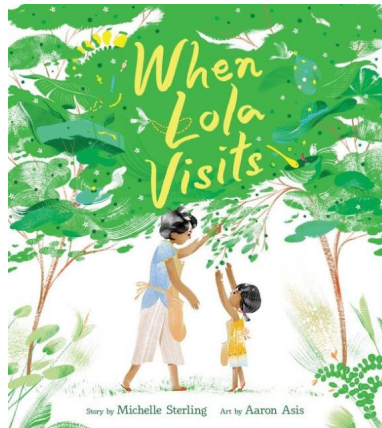
[Finding Home](#)

Written and illustrated by Estelí Meza



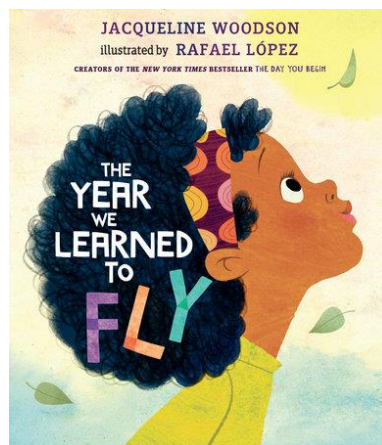
[Tomorrow](#)

Written and illustrated by Nadine Kaadan



[When Lola Visits](#)

Written by Michelle Sterling
Illustrated by Aaron Asis



[The Year We Learned to Fly](#)

Written by Jacqueline Woodson
Illustrated by Rafael López

Contributors to this Issue:

María V. Acevedo-Aquino, Texas A&M-San Antonio
Rocio Almanza, Texas A&M-Commerce
Susan Corapi, Trinity International University
Elizabeth Isidro, Western Michigan University
Judi Moreillon, Tucson, AZ
Rebecca Rader, University of Nevada-Reno
Tracy Smiles, Prescott, AZ

Editors:

Susan Corapi, Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL
María V. Acevedo-Aquino, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

Production Editors:

Rebecca Ballenger, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
Liam Arias, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Review Board:

Nojood M. Alsudairi, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Seemi Aziz, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
Nancy Hlibok Amann, Arizona School for Deaf and Blind, Tucson, AZ
Kathleen Crawford-McKinney, Wayne State University, Troy, MI
Desiree Cueto, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA
Michele Ebersole, University of Hawaii, Hilo, HI
Holly Johnson, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH
Gloria Kauffman, YIES School, Brianza, Italy
Janelle B. Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
Gail Pritchard, Texas A&M University, Bryan, TX
Jean Schroeder, The IDEA School, Tucson, AZ
Tracy Smiles, Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR
Celeste Trimble, St. Martin's University, Lacey, WA
Yoo Kyung Sung, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
Melissa Wilson, Leeds Trinity University, Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)

Introduction and Editors' Note

Once again, we are amazed by how seemingly unrelated titles come together as a collection addressing an underlying theme, this time finding home and finding ourselves. Each of these texts has a way of making readers think and reflect about the universal emotion of longing for home and the experience of discovering and rediscovering oneself across time and space.

Several of the books highlight the importance of inter-generational relationships as sources of knowledge and connection to home and self. In *Eyes that Speak to the Stars* (Ho & Ho, 2022), a young Chinese American boy discovers that his eyes are like his Baba (father), Agong (grandfather), and Di-Di (baby brother). Their eyes are visionary, powerful, and “hold the wisdom of generations.” Similarly, in *The Year We Learned to Fly* (Woodson & López, 2022), grandma’s ancestral stories support two Black siblings as they navigate universal emotions like boredom and anger and learn “that nobody can ever cuff your beautiful and brilliant mind.” In *When Lola Visits* (Sterling & Asis, 2021), summer smells like a Filipino grandmother’s sampaguita soap, suman rice cake, Kalamansi pie and lumpia, and sounds like her “soft, sweet singing in Tagalog and Ilocano.” Exploring a different perspective in *Comings and Goings* (Kontoleon, Kontoleon & Tikkou, 2021), a young Greek boy is excited, but also anxious and scared about traveling far away by himself to meet Grandpa Leander, Grandma Phoebe and other relatives for the first time. Can you feel at home and yourself with people that you have never met? Do you still belong even when you live far away? This story explores home and familial connections that travel through long distances. Thematically connected, *Carmela Full of Wishes* (de la Peña & Robinson, 2018) describes a young Mexican American girl who is discovering herself through the kind of wishes she asks for. Should she wish for candies for herself, a comfortable bed for her hard-working mother, or to be reunited with her father? What if she makes the wrong wish? What if she loses the opportunity to make her wishes? Will she also lose herself?

Other books invite readers to reflect upon the role of a relocation in the journeys of finding home and finding oneself. For Conejo, the main character in the Mexican story *Finding Home* (Meza, 2021), that includes taking a long walk, climbing a tree, and having a cup of coffee with a friend. His journey also encompasses time alone with sadness as he dives into what it means to rebuild the house he lost during a storm. However, finding home and oneself may not involve a relocation as in *Tomorrow* (Kadan, 2018). In this story Yazan, along with his Syrian parents must redefine home as they struggle with not being able to leave their house or feel safe due to war. Together, they rediscover each other and invent new ways of spending time together during difficult times.

We invite you to savor these books and consider writing and submitting a review for future issues.

Volume 15, Issue 1 – Open theme (Fall 2022) – submission deadline October 1, 2022. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

Volume 15, Issue 2 – Themed issue on inter-generational relationships (Winter 2022) – submission deadline November 15, 2022. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives, especially highlighting perspectives that might change as children and young adults interact with other generations (e.g., grandparents).

Volume 15, Issue 3 – Open theme (Spring 2023) – submission deadline February 15, 2023. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

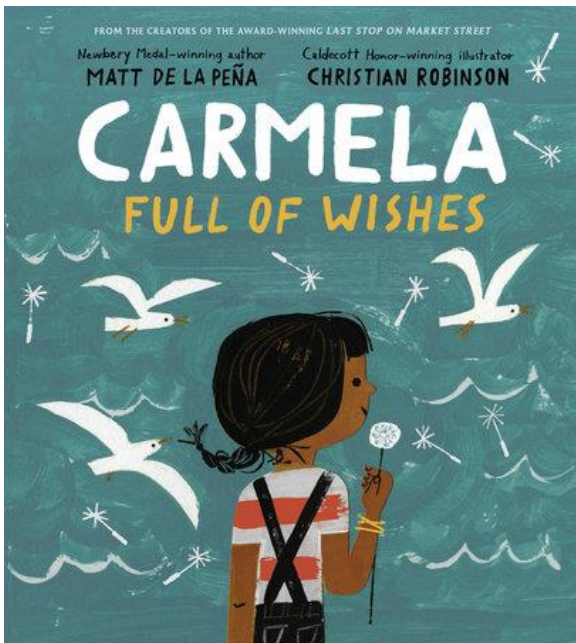
María Acevedo-Aquino and Susan Corapi, Co-editors

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](https://www.worldsofwords.org/) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/2>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



[Carmela Full of Wishes](#)

Written by Matt de la Peña

Illustrated by Christian Robinson

[G. P. Putnam's Sons](#), 2018, 40 pp

ISBN: 9780399549045

Matt de la Peña carefully words this simple and lyrical text to introduce Carmela as she celebrates her birthday with her mother and older brother. Now that Carmela is older, she can run errands across their farming town with her brother, but he is not happy about having Carmela tag along. Carmela picks a dandelion that she finds outside the laundromat and is quickly informed by her brother that she must make a wish. The condescending tone of her brother's voice leads Carmela

to lie and respond that she has already wished for something. Now that Carmela is ready to make a wish the possibilities are endless, and she considers potential wishes. At first her wishes are ordinary and playful dreams of candy but soon those wishes focus on her family. She wishes that her mom could sleep in a fancy bed like the one in the hotel where she works, that her dad can fix his papers (obtain legal documents such as residency or citizenship so the family can be reunited) or even that her brother will transform into something undesirable. The potential wish feels more like a responsibility, and she dreads making a choice for fear of a wrong decision. Then, the unexpected happens and she falls. She can endure the pain of the fall, but it is the destruction of the dandelion and the unexpected inability of making a wish that breaks her heart. Carmela is devastated but her brother sets aside his frustrations with Carmela to provide comfort and the possibility of new wishes.

Carmela Full of Wishes can encourage young readers to relate to the excitement of growing up and learning to do new things or arguing with siblings but still loving each other unconditionally. The story also addresses complex social issues related to rivalry between siblings and the cultural experiences of immigrants and migrant workers. The book also delicately presents the topic of deportation and how it results in painful family separation, anxiety, and first-generation trauma. Another social issue explored is the working conditions of marginalized individuals with low wages and job instability. *Carmela Full of Wishes* has a powerful message that transmits the love of immigrant families and their struggles. The perseverance of Mexican American migrant workers, hard working parents, and loving siblings are what drive Carmela's wishes.

The colorful and sophisticated acrylic and digitized illustrations by Christian Robinson capture the attention of children by providing ample information about the setting and Carmela's wishes and emotions. Thus, the illustrations are just as central to the text as the written story to construct meaning and capture the setting and Carmela's wishes. The first pages depict the fields of Watsonville, California as the backdrop to Carmela's story. Through the illustrations the reader can experience and walk through a farming community. The colorful illustrations are representative of Mexican American culture (for example, the wishes that Carmela imagines are represented in papel picado or the color paper banners used in Mexican celebrations).

Carmela worries about making the wrong wish and has conflicted emotions about what to wish for herself and her family. Her wishes are centered on her family reunification and financial opportunities. A book pair that discusses the topic of family separation is *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* by Edwidge Danticat and Leslie Staub (2015). A book pair that touches on the first-generation immigrants is *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales (2018) and is a suitable companion book to discuss themes of community and family. The theme of family unity and siblings providing unconditional support and love can be further explored with *Maple and Willow Together* by Lori Nichols (2014).

Mexican American author Matt de la Peña has published seven novels and six picturebooks that explore issues around diversity, inequality, injustice, and immigration, among others. He is a New York Times Bestselling author and recipient of the 2016 Newberry Medal Award and 2016 NCTE Intellectual Freedom Award. He teaches creative writing and visits schools to promote literacy. The text is congruent with his philosophy that children should not be shielded from complicated topics because literacy is a path to help children share their experiences to support their emotional development. He suggests that multicultural books also need to address complex issues to identify universal human experiences (de la Peña, 2018; 2021).

Christian Robinson has illustrated several honored books and a solo project that was named New York Times Best Illustrated Book of 2019. He has two additional collaborations with Matt de la Peña including *Last Stop on Market Street* (2016) and *Milo Imagines the World* (2021). Robinson believes that sharing personal experiences, specifically those that are painful and confusing, can be healing opportunities, initiate conversations, and help children develop empathy (The Art of Fun, n. d.).

References

de la Peña, M. (2021). Bio. <https://mattdelapena.com/bio/>

de la Peña, M. (2018). Why we shouldn't shield children from darkness. *Time*.
<https://time.com/5093669/why-we-shouldnt-shield-children-from-darkness/>

The Art of Fun. (n. d.). About Christian Robinson. <https://www.theartoffun.com/about>

Rocio Almanza, Texas A&M-Commerce

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/3>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



Comings and Goings

Written by Anna Kontoleon and Manos Kontoleon

Illustrated by Fotini Tikkou

Translated from Greek

[Star Bright Books](#), 2021, 48 pp

ISBN: 9781595729200

Comings and Goings invites readers to consider a young boy's experience in a nuclear family that lives at a distance from their extended family. Presented in alternating locations – north and south – it tells the story of Alex who lives in the “north” and is preparing to travel alone to visit relatives in the “south.” In the opening pages, the illustrations show a rainy “north” and a sunny “south,” but the exact location of the families is never specified. The book was published in Greece and then translated for publication in the U.S., so the assumed

location might be Europe.

In the north, Alex is excited and nervous about flying on his own. He carefully selects his favorite toys, books, and games to pack in his new suitcase. He shops with his mother for gifts to take to his relatives. Alex draws pictures for each of his family members living in the south and picks out clothes for visiting a warmer climate.

Meanwhile in the south, Alex's relatives prepare for his visit. Grandpa Leander checks the weather for Alex's flight day. While Grandma Alexia makes the bed where Alex's mother used to sleep, she thinks of stories she will tell Alex about his mother when she was a child. Aunt Sophie finds a perfect book, and Uncle Mike rehabs a bicycle for his nephew. Alex's cousins buy a train set so they can play with it together.

At this point in the book, there is a brief break in the alternating pattern with a set of double-page spreads for the final preparations in each location. The alternating pattern returns until Alex arrives in the south. The remaining double-page spreads focus on his arrival, ending with a group hug with Grandma Alexia, Aunt Sophie, and the twins and the “welcome” banner held by Grandpa Leander and Uncle Mike.

The illustrations capture the anticipation of meeting distant loved ones through a mix of collage, colored pencil, photographs, and charcoal. The opening portraits of the characters set the stage and the contrast between “north” and “south” environments is carried effectively throughout the story. Illustrator Fotini Tikkou includes a compass rose in the corner of each page; one representing the north in the upper left-hand corner and one representing the south in the lower right-hand corner of the alternating double-page spreads. The endpapers are world maps with North America on the upper left and Europe and Asia on the right.

A critical view of this book could include the non-specific locations portrayed in the *Comings and Goings*. The lack of cultural specificity in the story and illustrations could be a criticism of the book; it may also allow global readers to identify more readily with Alex’s journey. Reading left to right and high to low, a reader could see “privilege” in the north and think of the south as less privileged by the placement of the south icons at the bottom of the right-hand pages. However, the story itself contests that assumption. The strong familial ties and loving extended family portrayed in the book may convince some readers that although Alex will miss his father, mother, and dog in the north, he will thoroughly enjoy landing in the caring arms of his family in the south.

Comings and Goings can be paired with picturebooks that are culturally-specific and center on children traveling distances to be with family members. In *Amah Faraway* by Margaret Chiu Greanis and illustrated by Tracy Subisak (2022), Kylie and her mother travel from the U.S. to be with Kylie’s amah/grandmother where she learns more about her family’s heritage culture and the Taiwanese language. *Where Three Oceans Meet* written by Rajani LaRocca and illustrated by Archana Sreenivasan (2021) tells how a young girl named Sejal, her U.S. immigrant mother, and Indian grandmother/Pati travel from Bangalore to the southern tip of India sharing languages and other cultural connections along the way. In *The Yellow Suitcase* by Meera Sriram, illustrated by Meera Sethi (2019), the plot revolves around a yellow suitcase Asha always carried from California to India to visit her beloved grandma whose funeral her family is attending.

Comings and Goings was selected for the [2022 Outstanding International Books List](#). The book was originally published in 2017 by Kaleidoscope Publications. Star Bright Books translated the original Greek text and republished the book in English in 2021.

This book is the first collaboration by authors Anna Kontoleon and Manos Kontoleon, a daughter-father team. Anna, a children’s book writer and translator, won the 2012 Greek IBBY award for *The Seven Lives of Kombos*. Manos, a popular Greek children’s author, has earned many awards. They live in Athens and report that the characters in *Comings and Goings*’ characters “resemble us a little.” Illustrator Fotini Tikkou is a freelance illustrator of children’s books, patterns, and handmade ceramics. She studied at the Athens School of Fine Arts and lives in Copenhagen.

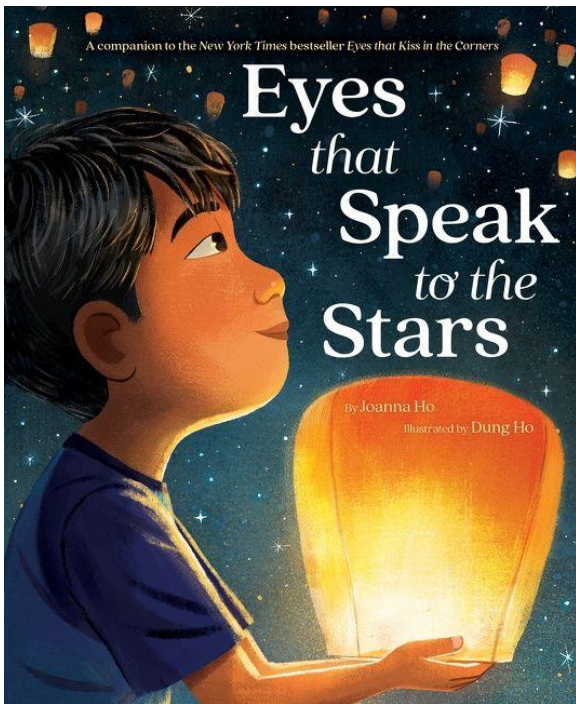
Judi Moreillon, Tucson, AZ

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/4>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



Eyes that Speak to the Stars

Written by Joanna Ho

Illustrated by Dung Ho

HarperCollins, 2022, 40 pp

ISBN: 9780063057753

Eyes that Speak to the Stars is a beautiful picturebook about a young Chinese American boy who sadly greets his father after school because a friend drew a picture of their group of friends with his eyes as two slanted lines. The boy tells his father that he didn't recognize himself in that picture. His father takes him on a journey of appreciation for his features as part of his identity. The remainder of the book takes the boy on a circular path of self-identity, sharing sweet memories with his father, grandfather, and brother, all of whom have eyes like his.

His Baba (father) gives him vision and encouragement for what he can accomplish. The boy's Agong (grandfather) shares his wisdom through cultural stories that represent their shared family heritage such as rice paddies on mountains, miracles from the sea goddess Mazu (Hamilton, 2021), and mango milk. The boy realizes that his baby brother DiDi's eyes also look like his when they squeeze shut with delighted laughter. Each experience reminds him that he is more than one physical feature and has a meaningful history and destiny.

The cover contrasts the boy holding a bright lantern against the dark night sky, which represents the deep emotions he feels. The dark blue represents his sadness and confusion with the realization that his friends' ideas about his features differ from his own. Throughout the book, yellows, oranges, and reds convey emotional warmth and security as the boy comes to realize his identity and potential, supported by his family. The lines are often diagonal and slanted upward to suggest the deep emotions which the boy is feeling (Short et al., 2018). The pictures are realistic and heartwarming and complement the prose beautifully. They emphasize authentic aspects of Chinese culture such as dragon kites, stories from family history, a beautiful Chinese city, and paper lanterns.

This book is written for younger children. However, the themes in this book include stereotyping, family, and self-esteem rooted in cultural identity, which have far-reaching meaning for everyone. These themes invite readers to contemplate questions such as: Have I unknowingly or knowingly made comments or insinuations that stereotype others? Have others made stereotypes about

me? What aspects of my family heritage influence my identity? Does my self-esteem build on my cultural identity? These questions can invite classroom discussions to enable students to gain awareness of their identity and interactions with others. Teachers could use this book as a starting point for a discussion about family heritage and the influence of our immediate family and ancestors on who we are.

Other books that could pair with *Eyes that Speak to the Stars* are *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2003) and *The Proudest Blue* by Ibtihaj Muhammed and Hatem Aly (2019). *The Name Jar* is about a girl who comes to a new school where the students can't pronounce her name and she must decide if she will choose a new American name or keep her Korean name. *The Proudest Blue* is told from the perspective of a young girl whose older sister wears a Hijab to school for the first time. Though some students laugh, her big sister ignores them and lends courageous strength to her. Another pairing is on the first book on the stereotypes of Asian eyes by Joanna Ho and Dung Ho, *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners* (2021), about a Chinese American girl.

The author of this story, Joanna Ho, has been an English teacher, high school vice principal, and professional development educator. She decided to create children's books when she couldn't find holiday books with diverse characters for her children. She enjoys spending time with her children, writing equitable stories, eating ice cream and chocolate cookies, and hiking, especially where there are waterfalls. More information can be found on her website, joannahowrites.com.

Dung Ho, the illustrator, lives in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam where she enjoys drawing books for children. She was born in Hue, Vietnam and lived there through her college years. At Hue University, she studied graphic design. She worked in advertising and design before deciding to become a children's book illustrator. Her interests include watching movies and cooking (Dung Ho, n.d.-a; Dung Ho, n.d.-b).

References

Dung Ho. (n.d.-a) Dung Ho. Simon and Schuster.

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Dung-Ho/164076650>

Dung Ho. (n.d.-b) Dung Ho. Harper Collins. <https://www.harpercollins.com/blogs/authors/dung-ho-52275>

Hamilton, M. (2021, November 22). Chinese Goddess: Mazu. *Mythopedia*.

<https://mythopedia.com/topics/mazu>

Short, K.G., Lynch-Brown, C.L., & Tomlinson, C. M. (2018). *Essentials of children's literature* (9th ed.). Pearson.

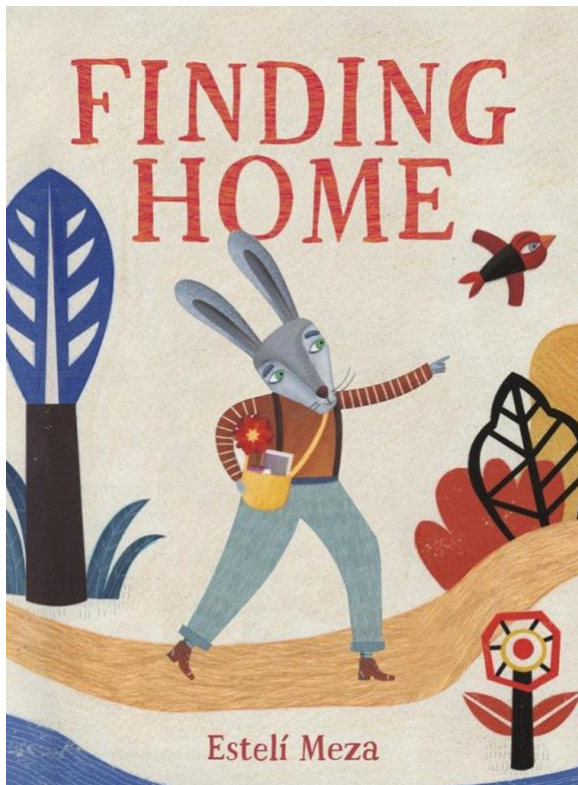
Rebecca Rader, University of Nevada-Reno

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/5>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



Finding Home

Written and illustrated by Estelí Meza

[Orchard Books](#), 2021, 36 pp

ISBN: 9781338648218

Conejo’s house was blown away by a gust of wind during a stormy fall, so Conejo embarks on a journey to find his house. Lobo Lobito gives Conejo a ride over hills and across valleys, but they cannot find the house. Perezoso helps Conejo look for his house over trees and leaves with no luck. Buhíta also helps, but cannot find the house, either. After these attempts, Conejo, although grateful for his friends, “sat with sadness for some time.” When the rain stops, Conejo feels the breeze coming from a different direction and in that new direction, he finds his way home—a home that looks different, yet is filled with the stories, memories, love, and friendship of those who accompanied him through his journey.

Estelí Meza explains in the Author’s Note that this book was inspired by two natural disasters taking place in September of 2017: Hurricane María, which struck Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands and a strong earthquake that hit Mexico City. Meza’s note reflects on “the feeling of longing for home” as a universal experience that may or may not involve a physical relocation, but certainly implies an emotional journey. For example, Conejo walks readers through his emotions as he copes with sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, and the feeling of loss. Conejo is not alone, though, and his friends are helpful in unique ways. Meza’s story is about an outer journey as much as it is about an inner journey, where Conejo must also explore and redefine the meaning of home for and by himself.

Finding Home can encourage conversations about journeys in general (forced vs voluntary, internal vs external), and journeys to find home after a natural disaster, during a divorce, after losing a loved one, or while arriving to a new place. This story can also encourage dialogue around the importance of having a support system—a community of diverse individuals who care about its members’ mental health. Most importantly, *Finding Home* can provide spaces to explore the meaning of connecting with self, listening to one’s inner voice, and finding oneself in order to find home. As part of this inner or spiritual journey, Meza and Conejo invite readers to view quiet time with oneself as essential toward finding the way home.

When asked about her creative process, Meza explains that *Finding Home* started with a pencil, as she drew Conejo with a sad face, “My process is very particular because first I develop the whole visual part” (Schuit, 2021, para. 6). She explored with a range of materials, including India ink, acrylic, and colored pencils. After each character went through various transformations, Meza played with the backgrounds and the creation of the sketches. She scanned each sketch and used Photoshop to add color. Then, she printed the scans on cotton paper, applied additional layers of colored pencils, and inserted collages to highlight certain elements like the little red bird accompanying Conejo throughout the story.

Finding Home can be paired with other books stressing the emotional and physical journey of finding home after a storm. One example is *A Flood of Kindness* by Texas author Ellen Leventhal and illustrator Blythe Russo (2021). This story follows Charlotte and her family as they are forced to evacuate their home due to an overbank flooding of the river. A second pairing could be *A Place to Stay: A Shelter Story* (2019), also illustrated by Estelí Meza and written by Erin Gunti. This story describes a mother and daughter moving into a shelter. The reason behind their move is not addressed, which can give readers the opportunity to consider literal and/or metaphorical storms.

Estelí Meza is a Mexican author and illustrator who was awarded A la Orilla del Viento in 2018, the prestigious picturebook award in Mexico. Meza has authored and illustrated over ten books. *Finding Home*, also available in Spanish as *Buscando un hogar*, is her U.S. author-illustrator picturebook debut. Visit Meza’s official website at estelimeza.com for further information on her work.

References

Schuit, M. (2021). Let’s talk illustrators #167: Estelí Meza. *Let’s Talk Picture Books*.
<http://www.letstalkpicturebooks.com/search?q=Meza>

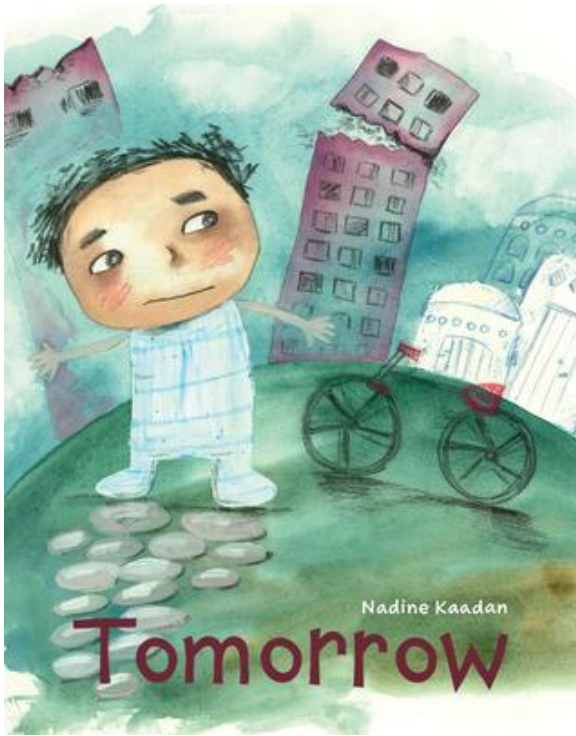
María V. Acevedo-Aquino, Texas A&M-San Antonio

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by Worlds of Words is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/6>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



Tomorrow

Written and illustrated by Nadine Kaadan

Lantana Publishing, 2018, 32 pp

ISBN: 9781913747152

Admittedly, I know little about Syria beyond the news coverage of war and refugee camps, and less about the book highlighted in this review, *Tomorrow*, and its author and illustrator, Nadine Kaadan. *Tomorrow*, set in the city of Damascus, Syria, is an example of how global literature encourages readers like me to expand their perspectives of how people live in different parts of the world.

Tomorrow tells the story of young Yazan who misses the days he went to the park and played with his friends. He doesn't understand the changes in his mother and

father, why he has to stay indoors, and why his mother doesn't paint anymore. He observes, "Now, the minute she [wakes] up she [watches] the news with the volume turned up loud... SO LOUD." Yazan's parents try to protect Yazan from the war raging throughout the city, explaining, for example, that the reason they make many phone calls before leaving the house is to check on traffic conditions. Eventually, when Yazan cannot take the boredom of being stuck inside, he heads to the park on his bicycle, only to discover the world outside is vastly different from what he remembered: empty streets, the sounds of explosions in the distance, none of his playmates to be seen. His father finds him, and instead of being angry at Yazan for leaving the house without permission, he is silent. Yazan's mother, on the other hand, explains that he cannot leave the house by himself, ever, and begins to paint again with Yazan, this time on the walls of the house, replicating the park he misses so much.

The real stand out for this book are Kaadan's hauntingly provocative illustrations. She describes her pallet as "gloomy and dark," and it is through those colors that the reader feels the tension between an endearing child and the harsh reality of war. For instance, on the first two-page spread when we first meet Yazan, he is sitting in a dark corner of a seemingly barren, colorless room, with a sideways gaze toward a yellow window, inviting the reader to consider how disconnected Yazan feels from the outside world that the window represents. The window appears on every page until Yazan leaves the house, as a symbolic reminder of what Yazan remembers about the city before the war. It disappears with Yazan's innocence when he learns the truth of his situation and reappears as a symbol of hope when he and his mother begin to

paint a playground on the walls inside his home. The subtlety and complexity of Kaadan's artistic devices, such as the use of color, placement of characters within the settings, and movement of objects, make this book appropriate for a range of ages, from primary to intermediate aged readers. The illustrations serve as powerful opportunities for discussion as the story evolves.

The potential uses for *Tomorrow* in a classroom setting are substantial. It would work in a text set or paired with other books about war like the *Librarian of Basra* by Jeanette Winter (2019), *The War Outside* by Monica Hesse (2018), or *The Cat Man of Aleppo* by Karim Shamsi-Bashra and Irene Latham (2020). I also think that readers today will connect with Yazan's emotional state, brought on from being forced to stay home, much in the same way children were shut in during the height of the COVID pandemic. Texts about COVID and the impact of being locked down to pair with *Tomorrow* could include *When the World Went Quiet* by Tia Martina (2020) or *And the People Stayed Home* by Kitty O'Meara (2020).

Nadine Kaadan is an award-winning author from Damascus, Syria, who now lives in the United Kingdom. Her books are inspired by her rich Syrian heritage, and her commitment to helping child refugees in Europe and the Middle East. In the afterward, written as a letter to the reader, Kaadan explains, "I wrote this story because I saw children like Yazan in my hometown of Damascus. Their lives were changing, and they couldn't understand why. All of a sudden, the Fridays that were supposed to mark our weekends became frightening instead of fun. Families were afraid to go outside and instead stayed home."

Tracy Smiles, Prescott, AZ

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/7>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



When Lola Visits

Written by Michelle Sterling

Illustrated by Aaron Asis

Katherine Tegen Books, 2021, 32 pp

ISBN: 9780062972859

This picturebook is a window into Filipino culture from the perspective of a young Filipina girl growing up in the United States. The book also serves as a mirror for Filipino children in the U.S. who experience visits from family flying in from the Philippines and their shared activities during their stay. In this story, the activities are described through the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the various things the main character remembers doing with her lola, which is Tagalog for grandmother.

The story begins with wonder when a little girl tries to recall the beginning of summer. Her mind is instantly filled with a recollection of her lola visiting her from the Philippines and the many memories they share together. Presented as snapshots, some of the sweet moments between the granddaughter and grandmother include cooking sisig (a meat dish served on a sizzling plate), enjoying a fireworks display, preparing lumpia rolls, and eating on banana leaves with their bare hands. The little girl makes numerous comparisons between summer and the different foods, objects, and activities they enjoy together. But when the summer rains come, the little girl must face the bitterness of saying goodbye to her lola. Finding that her life is not the same, the girl learns to find joy again in small moments through the comforting scents of the familiar.

The plot is told through similes and flows easily by featuring common experiences of the young, old, and everyone in between. The story makes numerous references to Filipino food including those not commonly featured in other picturebooks for Filipino American readers. There are also many words from the native language, Tagalog, that add a linguistic dimension to the text. The illustrations are characterized mainly by curved lines and unique brushed strokes suggesting movement and the passing of time. The muted colors also go along with that dreamy effect that the little girl feels as she remembers the memories of summer and her lola. The illustrations are effective in emphasizing the changing moods in the story, such as anticipation, excitement, dreariness, and encouragement.

As a reader with Filipino heritage, this piece is authentic in foregrounding the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren as situated in a Filipino household. It validates the role of grandparents in looking after grandchildren especially when both parents are working. This idea of “extended family” is a core quality of many Filipino households, and the book highlights this in a double page spread of kamayan.

This book would be a great multicultural piece to include in a text set focusing on family coming to visit. The text set could include titles like: *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant and Stephen Gammell (1993) about a big family reunion in West Virginia; *Bigmama’s* by Donald Crews (1998), a story that describes four siblings visiting their grandmother in Cottondale, Florida; and *Amah Faraway* by Margaret Chiu Greanias and Tracy Subisak (2022), which follows Kylie as she visits Taipei, Taiwan to be reunited with her grandmother.

This book is written by Michelle Sterling, a Filipina children’s picturebook author who is also a photographer, speech-language pathologist, and food connoisseur. Her mother is from the Ilocos region in the Philippines while her father is from Manila, the country’s capital. *When Lola Visits* is her debut picturebook. This book is illustrated by Aaron Asis, a Filipino illustrator and graphic designer based in Manila, Philippines. Visit behance.net/aaronasis to follow his expressive artwork.

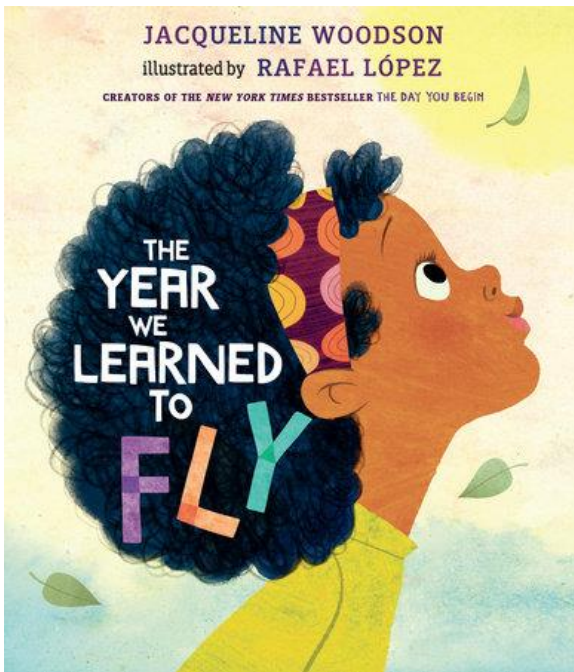
Elizabeth Isidro, Western Michigan University

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/8>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527

WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



The Year We Learned to Fly
Written by Jacqueline Woodson
Illustrated by Rafael López
Nancy Paulson Books, 2022, 32 pp
ISBN: 9780399545535

The book opens with a chrysalis hanging on a single branch against clouds in a blue sky. A single phrase, “That was the year we learned to fly,” introduces readers to the way imagination allows us to fly outside of challenging circumstances. With rhythmic text and bright acrylics, Woodson and López take readers through a year of a young brother and sister heeding their grandmother’s advice to “lift your arms, close your eyes, take a deep breath” and imagine in an urban apartment building. Woven into her advice is a reminder that their

Black ancestors came across the ocean to the United States cuffed with iron but learned to imagine and fly away from tough circumstances. So the children imagine themselves out of a spring rain storm into bright flowers; out of arguments over summer chores into enjoyment of being together; out of an autumn too-dark too-quiet room into the sparkling magical world of a book; and out of a winter in a new friendless neighborhood into friendships with children who also learn to lift their arms, close their eyes, breathe deeply, and fly. Across the year the siblings learn that they can take positive action and that their imaginations can change perceptions and feelings to provide ways to solve challenging problems.

Though this title could be classified as one that supports social-emotional health—which it certainly does—it goes beyond platitudes and inspires readers to use their minds and imaginations to change their attitudes, actions, and eventually perceptions. As the brother and sister follow their grandmother’s advice, their actions impact their own sense of freedom from challenging circumstances, but also inspire neighbors and potential friends to do the same. The words and images reference Black ancestors using their imaginations to escape enslavement. The author’s note in the back gives additional background on the story. As a child Jacqueline Woodson was inspired by Virginia Hamilton’s retelling of Black folklore. Through stories and the power of words, Woodson learned to close her eyes, take a deep breath, and fly into her imagination, one that eventually created award-winning stories that encourage readers to also fly.

What Woodson does through words, Rafael López does through acrylic and watercolor illustrations that use contrasts to convey the power of the grandmother’s advice. He paints scenes

of drab cracked apartment walls on one page and contrasts the facing page with an outside full of springtime sun and colorful flowers. He paints the loneliness of being ignored with the surprise and exuberant joy of imaginative play with new friends. He hides silhouettes of ancestors in the garden plants where the grandmother is tossing her granddaughter into freedom of flight.

The title can be paired with Virginia Hamilton's titles that portray dealing with tough situations through "flying" with imagination, literacy, becoming wise about how something works, or actually escaping. In many of her titles, historical, contemporary and imaginary characters use ingenuity and trickery to escape hard situations. In *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (1985) Hamilton and illustrators Leo and Diane Dillon, retell twenty-four stories of animals, enslaved peoples, and magical creatures learning to fly. An additional book pair that is also based on the Black folklore of learning to fly is the Caldecott Honor book *Tar Beach* (Faith Ringgold, 1991) in which Cassie learns to fly from her Harlem apartment rooftop. An additional book pair is the earlier title Woodson and López collaborated on, *The Day You Begin* (2018), which discusses taking the first steps to connect with others. That book is included in *The Year We Learned to Fly* in the autumn when the children escape their dark room as they read the book under the covers with a flashlight.

Jacqueline Woodson grew up in Greenville, S.C. and Brooklyn, N.Y. She is an award-winning author of picturebooks, middle grade and young adult novels, and has recently published two novels for adults. Long appreciated in the U.S., she served as the 2015-17 Young People's Poet Laureate and the Library of Congress' 2018-19 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. She is the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Lifetime Achievement Award for her body of work. Her books have been translated into many languages, so her work is appreciated around the world, and she has won the international Hans Christian Andersen and Astrid Lindgren Awards for her body of work. More information can be found on her website, jacquelinewoodson.com.

Rafael López grew up in Mexico, and lives and works both in San Diego, California and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. His work in community murals was the subject of the picturebook *Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood* (Campoy, Howell & López, 2016) and is based on the Urban Art Trails in San Diego, the organization he founded that brings people together to paint murals in their neighborhoods and improve the community. His illustrations in picturebooks reflect his concern for communities and many of the awards he has won focus on multicultural communities including the Schneider Family award (*Just Ask!*, Sotomayer & López, 2019), The Jane Addams award (*The Day You Began*, Woodson & López, 2018), the Pura Belpré award (*Dancing Hands*, Engle & Lopez, 2019), and the Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award (*Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood*, Campoy, Howell & López, 2016). More information can be found on his website (<https://rafaellopez.com/>)

Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

Authors retain copyright over the vignettes published in this journal and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under the following Creative Commons License:

WOW Review, Volume XIV, Issue 3 by [Worlds of Words](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Based on work at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-3/9>

WOW review: reading across cultures
ISSN 2577-0527