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Open Theme

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Introduction and Editor's Note

The seven picturebooks reviewed for this open theme issue invite us as readers to reflect upon the concept of togetherness. What kind of experiences encourage us to feel united, safe, supported, and respected? What experiences make us feel that we belong? What experiences urge us to love and care for someone else?

Sometimes traditions bring individuals, families, and communities together. In *'Ohana Means Family*, by Ilima Loomis and Kenard Pak (2020) two young Hawaiian children take readers through the nuances of growing the kalo (taro) to make the poi for their family's lū'au celebration. The preparation for lū'au honors the people, the land, and their history of connectedness. Also grounded in family traditions, *No Kimchi for Me*, by Aram Kim (2017) describes Yoomi's experiences with Kimchi, a Korean dish. Yoomi is not fond of Grandmother's spicy kimchi, but she and her brothers learn that there are different ways to enjoy this special family recipe. For some families, camping is a once in a lifetime experience, while it is a summer tradition for others. In *The Camping Trip*, author Jennifer K. Mann (2020) draws on her family annual camping trip; however, for Ernestine, camping in the forest is a new experience that she shares with her aunt, cousin, and father. Under a starry night, Ernestine learns that she can feel safe and at ease even in unfamiliar places.

Stories can also bring people together. *Our Favorite Day of the Year* by A.E. Ali and Rahle Jomepour Bell (2020) tells the story of a diverse group of young students who are about to experience stories and storying as a means of making new friends and developing a sense of belonging and togetherness. Also set in the classroom, in *The 1619 Project Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Renée Watson, and Nikkolas Smith (2021), a young Black American child learns about the rich histories and stories of her African ancestors before being stolen, kidnapped, and brought to America—stories of survival, resistance, remembering, and pride.

Other times, a call for action can bring people together. Set in Alabama, *The Youngest Marcher*, by Cynthia Levison and Vanessa Brantley Newton (2017) narrates the story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a young Black girl who marched to protest against segregation laws. Audrey was one of the more than three thousand children who were arrested in 1963; she was sentenced to “one week in juvenile hall.” Audrey's mother called the detention center every day of that week to ensure her daughter's safety. Also focused on fighting for justice, *The Library Bus*, by Bahram Rahman and Gabrielle Grimard (2020) tells the story of a bus that has been transformed into a library with the goal of teaching English to young girls living in rural communities in Kabul, Afghanistan. Together, Pari and Mama continue grandfather's legacy by bringing school to the villages and refugee camps.

Please consider submitting a review for our future issues. The editors welcome reviews of any children's or YA book that highlights intercultural understanding and global perspectives around these themes:

Volume 15, Issue 2 – Themed issue on intergenerational relationships (Winter 2022) – submission deadline December 31, 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).

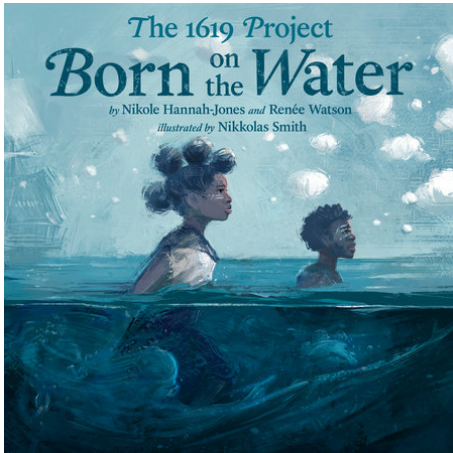
Volume 15, Issue 3 – Open theme (Spring 2023) – submission deadline February 15, 2023. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

María V. Acevedo-Aquino and Susan Corapi, Co-editors

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The 1619 Project: Born on the Water

Written by Nikole Hannah-Jones & Renée Watson

Illustrated by Nikkolos Smith

Kokila, 2021, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-0593307359

When a young girl is asked to draw the flag of her ancestral land, she is puzzled. A decedent of enslaved people, she can recall the history back three generations but can't retell her history past her great-grandparents. In response to her feelings of sadness and shame, her grandmother gathers the family and tells the origin story of her ancestors who lived in

Ndongo, spoke Kimbundu, and lived rich lives that involved learning, inventions, commerce, vibrant music, medicine, and homes filled with joy and love. In 1619 that rich life was violently interrupted when slave traders captured her people and carried them across the Atlantic on *The White Lion*, a slave ship that landed in Virginia four years before the arrival of the *Mayflower*. Those who survived the voyage were said to be “born on the water.” Her ancestors learned new words for home because “We have determination, imagination, faith. We will survive because we have each other.” The grandmother recounts how it was illegal to teach enslaved people to read, yet they became great educators; they were beaten, yet they became healers; they expressed their joy by creating jazz, hip-hop, and the blues. Following the family meeting, the young girl returns to school and proudly draws the American flag, a symbol of the country her ancestors helped build into a democracy that honors the freedom of all humans.

This nonfiction picturebook is structured as lyrical free-verse poems, richly illustrated with oil paintings that mirror the tone of the poems. The beginning poem introduces readers to life in Ndongo. The vibrant colors depict the multi-storied buildings built by these ancestors. Subsequent pages describe their language, including vocabulary describing love, friends, family relationships, and home. The poems and images remind readers that even that long ago, the ancestors lived rich cultural lives full of music, and commerce. “Their hands had a knowing” that let them care for their children, use herbs for healing and flavoring foods, and shape iron into tools. “Their hearts had a knowing” so they created music to make work joyful. “Their minds had a knowing” so they were curious about the world and learned other languages like Portuguese.

The tone changes in several dark double-page spreads; the contrast portrays the day they were stolen and carried away at the bottom of the ship to a New World “they had no desire to see.” The color palette changes again once they land. While the dark silhouettes portray the anger and agony of being forcibly sold away from loved ones, the rest of the palette is bright, illustrating the indomitable hope enslaved peoples carried in their hearts in spite of forced labor. For example, an enslaved person in the foreground looks to the sky and dreams of freedom, while hints of future descendants are portrayed in the clouds, speaking out or gaining an education. In one of the final spreads a parade of historical figures is depicted: Black people who fought for freedom and equal rights (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Benjamin O. Davis), who contributed to the sciences (e.g., George Washington Carver), who were elected to government (e.g., Shirley Chisholm), who were entrepreneurs (e.g., Madame C. J. Walker) or who used a platform to resist Black oppression (e.g., John Carlos).

Suggestions for text sets are found in the educator guide (http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780593307359.pdf). The titles are organized into four themes and profile a wide range of perspectives and contributions to Black history. One sample title from each themed text set is listed below:

1. Incredible Africa: *Africa, Amazing Africa: Country by Country*, by Atinuke and Mouni Feddag (2019)
2. The history of Black Americans in the United States: *Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life*, by Ashley Bryan (2016)
3. Black excellence in the U. S.: *Above the Rim: How Elgin Baylor Changed Basketball*, by Jen Bryant and Frank Morrison (2020)
4. Becoming an anti-racist: *The Talk: Conversations about Race, Love, & Truth*, by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson (2021)

Included in the educator guide is a list of critical questions readers can ask when selecting books. Those questions highlight what makes this particular book stand out. *Born on the Water* promotes healing from a past that includes unjust suffering; the text conveys hope and the illustrations support imagination; the narrative is a counternarrative to stereotypes, profiling rich African culture and the indomitable spirit of enslaved humans; and above all, the poems portray love in a way that builds community.

Nikole Hannah-Jones is an investigative reporter who spearheaded the 1619 Project with the *New York Times* to help readers understand the hold of institutional racism on U.S. communities. Pulitzer is the official education partner of the project and resources can be found at the 1619 Project (<https://1619education.org/>) and the Pulitzer Center (<https://pulitzercenter.org/lesson-plan-grouping/1619-project-curriculum>). More information about Nikole Hannah-Jones can be found on her website (<https://nikolehannahjones.com/>).

Renée Watson is the best-selling author of *Piecing Me Together* (2017). Her poetry and fiction center around identity construction, the intersection of race, class, and gender, and the lived experiences of Black women and girls. More information can be found on her website (<https://www.reneewatson.net/>).

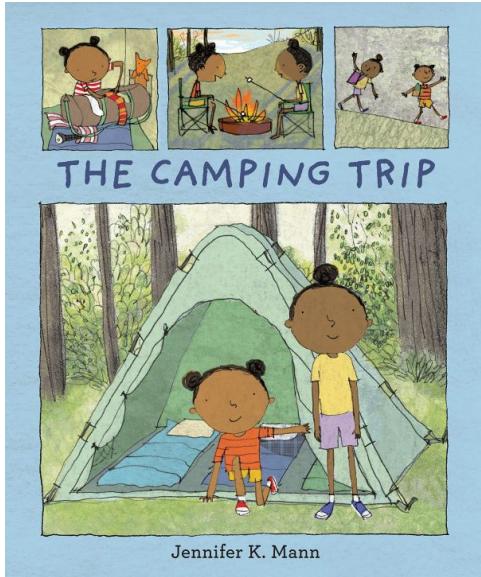
Los Angeles-based Nikkolas Smith describes himself as an ARTivist, concept artist, children's book author, film illustrator, and movie poster designer. He works to create art that sparks meaningful conversations that lead to change. More information can be found on his website (<https://www.nikkolas.com/>).

Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

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The Camping Trip

Written and illustrated by Jennifer K. Mann
Candlewick, 2020, 48 pp
ISBN: 978-1536207361

To prepare for her first camping trip in the forest, a young Black girl and her father practice making a tent with a blanket in her bedroom the night before the big adventure. Ernestine is going camping with Aunt Jackie and her cousin Samantha. Aunt Jackie sends her a list of things to pack: towel, camera, bandages, swimsuit, and flashlight. Ernestine is hesitant but also excited, and determined to love the experience. The first thing they do after arriving at Cedar Tree Campground is set up the tent. Then, they go swimming in the lake and Ernestine reminds herself that she enjoys swimming in the Y pool; however, seeing the fish in the lake makes her rethink the idea

of swimming. When they decide to go hiking, Ernestine remembers that she walks to school every day, so hiking must be like walking—only in nature—but hiking the hills wears her out. Throughout the day, Ernestine, Aunt Jackie, and Samantha explore the forest. They make s’mores and read comic books before going to bed. But Ernestine can’t sleep and when she tries calling her father, the call does not go through because there is no reception in the forest. Aunt Jackie invites the children to look at the stars and make wishes upon a shooting star. The next morning the children eat pancakes, swim in the lake, then say goodbye to their camping site. At home, Dad is waiting for Ernestine with his arms wide open.

This story captures the hesitation and fear that most individuals experience when facing a new situation. Ernestine aims to make connections to familiar experiences but quickly notices that while there are similarities, there are also important differences across experiences. Ernestine is not alone in this process. Aunt Jackie, Samantha, and Dad support Ernestine before, during, and after the camping trip, sending the message that new experiences may require both personal willingness and external support.

Something that sets this story apart from others is the significance of the father-daughter relationship and the importance of family like aunts and cousins in the lives of young children. The text and the illustrations suggest that these relationships are based on a deep sense of caring and trust that allows Ernestine to feel love and safe enough to explore new places and activities. This book challenges existing dominant narratives in the field of children’s literature that still fail to capture diversity within family structures and dynamics. This hybrid picturebook/comic also contributes a positive depiction of families of color enjoying life to balance the numerous stories about social issues experienced by these cultural communities. While absolutely important, stories addressing struggles must be balanced with stories of happy everyday experiences to create a more authentic representation of life.

Mann created the illustrations using pencil on tracing paper, followed by a digital process of collage and painting. The illustrations combine double-page spreads and the use of graphic-style panels to highlight interesting sequences, like Ernestine gradually walking up the hill or the struggles she faces when trying to fall asleep. The story also relies on speech bubbles to convey both the conversations between the characters, and labels of exciting objects, such as the graham

crackers and the marshmallow-roasting fork. The endpapers showcase drawing or camping items, with their labels, over a bright orange background. Readers can have fun finding the items throughout the story and/or brainstorming other objects they might take camping. Overall, the illustrations offer extensive details that work alongside the written text to create Ernestine's world.

The Camping Trip could be paired with other picturebooks around camping in the forest like *Fatima's Great Outdoors*, by Ambreen Tariq and Stevie Lewis (2021) or the wonderful visual narrative *Flashlight*, by Lizi Boyd (2014). Other pairing opportunities could highlight the father-daughter relationship like *My Papi Has a Motorcycle*, by Isabel Quintero and Zeke Peña (2019) or *Hair Twins*, by Raakhee Mirchandani and Holly Hatam (2021). Moreover, *The Camping Trip* could be read alongside stories that focus on aunt-niece relationships. For example, *Tía Isa Wants a Car*, by Meg Medina and Claudio Muñoz (2016) or *Auntie Luce's Talking Paintings*, by Francie Latour and Ken Daley (2018).

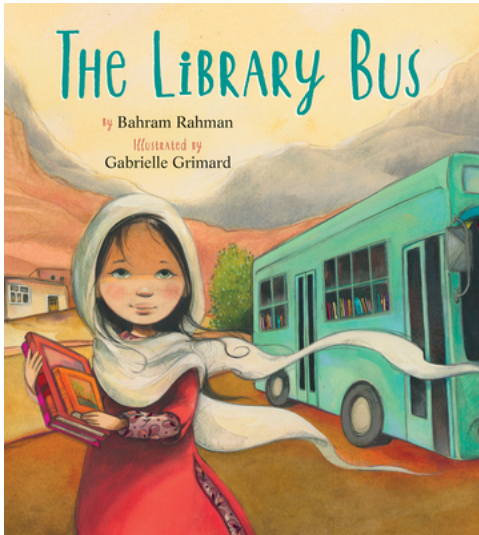
Author and illustrator Jennifer K. Mann lives near Seattle and wrote this story inspired by her own camping experiences. As explained on the book jacket, Mann camps with her family and friends every summer "on the same campsite, at the same campground, in the same beautiful state park." Her work can be explored at <http://www.jenniferkmann.com/>

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

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The Library Bus

Written by Bahram Rahman

Illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard

Pajama Press, 2020, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1772781014

In the darkness, the library bus rumbles out of the city of Kabul, Afghanistan. The library bus is no ordinary bus; it's the only bus on wheels in all of Kabul. Pari is nervous and excited about her first day as Mama's library helper. Mama drives the bus to a small village where girls eagerly await to return the books they borrowed and browse for new ones. Mama gathers the girls in a circle to practice English by singing the alphabet song and counting from one to ten. Bwob-b-b... Vroom! and they are off to a refugee camp. On the way, Mama tells Pari that girls

were not allowed to go to school when she was young. Pari learns that her grandfather taught her mother to read and write while hiding in the basement. Pari will be starting school next year, and Mama encourages her to study hard and never stop learning, believing that education is freedom. Pari passes out pencils and notebooks at the refugee camp while Mama exchanges books for the girls. Later at home, Pari asks Mama to teach her to read, and Mama tells her she will go to school in the city to learn to read. Mama explains to Pari that there are no schools for the girls in the village or camp and that they only have the library bus, but she will help them as her father helped her. The book ends with Pari in her bed, smiling and hugging her mother while thinking about the girls in the village and camp, the library bus, and the new girls they will meet tomorrow.

Grimard's illustrations pair well with Rahman's words to tell an inspiring and realistic story about an Afghan girl and her mother's effort to expand literacy to young girls in areas where no schools exist. Their commitment to and engagement with helping educate girls is demonstrated throughout the book. *The Library Bus* shows hope in the love of learning and how people share this hope, even in challenging circumstances. The endnote by the author explains that he wrote this book to show the strength of children in Afghanistan, particularly girls, in the pursuit of education. Rahman wrote, "when you are born in war, you are unaware of the alternative, peace. War is your normal. Life carries on... You get hurt and heal. And you dream. Big dreams like those of every other child." The author includes more information on refugee camps in the back of the book. This section references the initials printed on the tents in the refugee camps: UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), one of the organizations supporting displaced people in Afghanistan.

The Library Bus can be paired with *Malala's Magic Pencil*, by Malala Yousufzai and Kerascoet (2017), highlighting the power of education and the people in war-torn countries fighting for their children's education, particularly girls. *The Sky-Blue Bench* (2021) is Bahram Rahman's second picturebook about the resolve and resilience of children facing barriers in education. *Nasreen's Secret School, a True Story from Afghanistan*, by Jeanette Winter (2009), can be read alongside *The Library Bus*; young Nasreen is enrolled in a secret school for girls in Afghanistan after her parents disappear and she stops talking. The issues of inequality, the importance of education, and the perseverance of a young girl are highlighted in *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, by Robert Coles and George Ford (2010).

The author Bahram Rahman was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, and grew up during the Taliban regime and civil war. Rahman obtained a medical degree from Kabul Medical University and a master's degree in public policy from the University of Erfurt, Germany, while working as an activist in Afghanistan for gender equality. In 2012, Rahman came to Canada as a refugee and is currently a senior policy advisor at the Ministry of Health in Ontario. *The Library Bus* was his first picturebook. *The Library Bus* was the winner of the Middle East Book Award, a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award, a finalist for the Florida Literary Association Children's Book Award, a finalist for the OLA Forest of Reading Blue Spruce Award, and Winner of the Northern Lights Book Award: Multicultural Category. In 2021 Rahman wrote *The Sky-Blue Bench*, 2022 ALA Schneider Family Book Award Honor Book Winner.

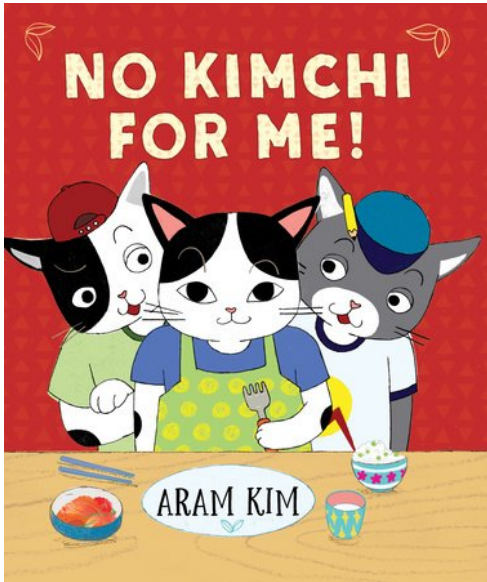
Award-winning Canadian illustrator Gabrielle Grimard's realistic and captivating art transports the reader to Afghanistan. Grimard began her career as a muralist in Ontario, Canada and began illustrating books after the birth of her son. Her compelling characters celebrate the strength of women and girls demanding their right to education. *When I Was Eight* (2013) and *Not My Girl* (2014) are two of over 30 books Grimard has illustrated. *Lila and the Crow* (2018) is her first book where she is author and illustrator.

Michelle Roddy, Texas Women's University

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No Kimchi for Me!

Written and illustrated by Aram Kim

Holiday House, 2017, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-0823437627

The story of *No Kimchi for Me!* begins on a rainy day as Yoomi looks through the window while her two brothers work on their summer homework in the attic. Their grandmother calls them for lunch. Yoomi likes her grandmother's food but she does not like kimchi because she finds this dish stinky and spicy. Her brother Jun teases Yoomi, saying that she is a baby for not being able to eat kimchi. Yoomi's other brother Yoon adds that only big kids have the ability to eat kimchi. Yoomi uses a fork and puts kimchi in her mouth to prove that she can eat it, but she spits it out. Their grandmother gives Yoomi a glass of water

while Jun and Yoon continue to call their sister a baby. After lunch, Jun and Yoon refuse to let Yoomi play with them, saying that what they are doing is not for babies. Angered from being ostracized, Yoomi tries to eat kimchi by hiding it inside a chocolate chip cookie, a slice of pizza, and ice cream. When all her attempts fail, Yoomi screams out loud in frustration. Yoomi's grandmother comes up with a plan to help her, and they cook a large kimchi pancake together. The delicious scent from the kimchi pancake attracts Yoomi's brothers to the kitchen, and their grandmother puts it on a large plate. Yoomi carefully tries some of the kimchi pancake, and although it is still spicy, the food tastes yummy to her, so she has successfully eaten kimchi. Together, they all share the big kimchi pancake as the rain slowly begins to stop. The story ends with the illustration of an empty plate on the table and Yoomi playing with her brothers outside where there is a vibrant rainbow in the sky.

The characters are depicted as cats dressed in modern human outfits. This personification can create countless possibilities around Yoomi's cultural identity. For example, Yoomi could be a Korean child living outside of her home country, a Korean American, an adopted child who may or may not be Korean, a biracial, or a multiethnic girl. Thus, this element enables the story to be more inclusive. The illustrations in pastel and colored pencil are incredibly detailed with vivid drawings of foods, toys, and facial expressions. Moreover, some of the text uses capital or bold letters to emphasize certain words and sentences. An example is when Yoomi's grandmother states that the kimchi pancake is especially **"FOR OUR BIG GIRL!"**

The plot enables readers to understand that not all people with a Korean cultural background may necessarily like spicy kimchi. Thus, the story is able to challenge the stereotype that Koreans mostly enjoy spicy kimchi. However, there is not enough information about kimchi in this book for readers who may not know this Korean dish. The written text describes kimchi as something "stinky" and "spicy." The front endpaper shows several vegetables that are used to create kimchi in Korea. The back endpaper presents illustrations of twelve different types of kimchi. For example, cucumbers are used for Oisobagi (cucumber kimchi), perilla leaves for Kkaennip kimchi, and Korean radishes for Dongchimi and Kkakdugi. The napa cabbage is the main ingredient for making Baechu Kimchi, which is the kimchi that the protagonist Yoomi initially experienced difficulties

eating due to its spiciness. The napa cabbage is also used to create Baek Kimchi, also known as White Kimchi. The copyright page explains that the endpapers were reviewed by The Korea Society and a representative of the Korean-American Grocers Association of New York.

Despite the informative illustrations of kimchi, some readers may not be able to connect the vegetables with the type of kimchi. Therefore, there is a concern that another stereotype might be created that every kind of kimchi tastes hot. The kimchi presented in the plot of the story is Baechu Kimchi. While Baechu Kimchi is the most common kimchi in Korea, the book does not provide explanations about the other eleven types of kimchi. Although the non-spicy Baek Kimchi (White Kimchi) and mild Dongchimi are illustrated on the back endpapers, descriptions of these kinds of kimchi are missing. Since kimchi is not always spicy, this book can encourage further explorations around different types of kimchi and their level of spiciness.

No Kimchi for Me! shares a cooking recipe for Kimchi pancakes from Eunsook Lee, the author's mother. The recipe is easy to follow and tastes delightful. This book could make a great pair with other Korean books that share cooking recipes like *Bee-Bim Bop!* by Linda Sue Park (2008) and *Sunday Funday in Koreatown* also by Aram Kim (2021). *Bee-Bim Bop!* includes a recipe for Bee-bim-bop, a traditional Korean dish that mixes rice with vegetables, meat, Gochujang (red pepper paste), and sesame oil. *Sunday Funday in Koreatown* provides a recipe for *Kimbap* (Korean Seaweed Rice Rolls). By pairing these books, families and educators could read interesting stories while also making delicious Korean food together.

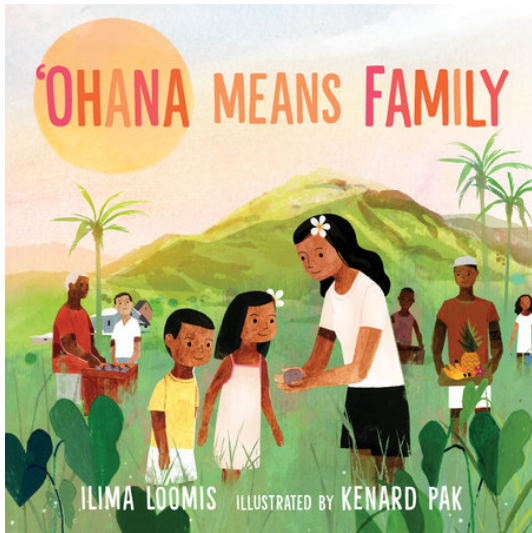
Author and illustrator Aram Kim was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her family moved back to South Korea when she was two years old. She has received a bachelor's in English Literature from Yonsei University in Seoul, and a master's in Illustration as Visual Essay from the School of Visual Arts in New York. She is an art director of the picturebook team at Macmillan Children's Publishing Group and currently lives in Queens, New York. Additional information about the author can be found online at: <https://www.aramkim.com/>

Hyunjung Lee, University of Arizona

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'Ohana Means Family

Written by Ilima Loomis

Illustrated by Kenard Pak

Holiday House, 2020, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-0823451180

Written in the cumulative style of *The House that Jack Built*, award-winning author Ilima Loomis and illustrator Kenard Pak skillfully demonstrate Hawaiian cultural practices that connect humans to the environment through preparations for a lū'au (Hawaiian feast). The book opens with a picture of poi (a staple food of the Hawaiian people, pounded into a smooth paste from the taro plant) in an 'umeke (wooden calabash) and states, "This is the poi for our 'ohana's lū'au." This illustration and statement,

although seemingly understated, says much. Poi is made from kalo (also known as taro), 'ohana means family or relative and suggests the importance of this food for the family, and at lū'au people commonly come together to eat in Hawai'i. According to Hawaiian cultural practitioner, Roxane Stewart, "the poi (in how the author later traces the pathway from land to bowl) feeds the 'ohana nutritionally but also feeds the 'ohana spiritually, emotionally, physically, etc. in the practices that lend to that poi-filled 'umeke (wooden calabash)" (personal communication, March 15, 2022). This illustration and text introduces the significance of this particular food in the Hawaiian culture and how it connects 'ohana with the natural world, and each other. It is an honor to feast and celebrate these relationships and connections. At the end of the book, a note on kalo and poi from Noho'ana Farm on Maui by Hōkūao Pellegrino supports the cultural authenticity of the cultural and farming practices. In the author's note, she explains her purpose and intention focused on the idea that "food connects us."

The story starts with poi, but as the narrative builds, it shows how everything in nature is interconnected and plays an important role in the outcome of the harvest—from the mud where the taro grows to the clear and cold water, which needs to cover the mud so the kalo can flourish. In the text, the sun "warms the wind" that "lifts the rain," that "feeds the stream," that "floods the land." Each action builds on the next, carefully emphasizing the interdependence that each element has with one another and the cyclical patterns in nature. It underscores the scientific knowledge needed to sustain growth and weaves in cultural beliefs and practices related to growth, preparation and consumption of kalo. Hawaiian cultural practitioner, Stewart further comments, "this interconnectivity is at the core of how Hawaiians see & understand their environment & their role in it – holistically (vs linearly)."

'Ohana Means Family is the title of the story and is also part of a popular quote from the 2002 Disney movie, *Lilo and Stitch*; however, a number of other implicit cultural nuances can be found in the text and illustrations. For example, the cultural significance of passing on generational knowledge is depicted through the text, "work the hands so wise and old" along with the illustration which shows an elderly person harvesting kalo in the field, giving it to a child, while another watches. There is reference to "lands that's never been sold," which presumably refers to Hawaiian

perspectives on being caretakers rather than owners of the land. Stewart points out the meaning of ‘āina (often translated as land) is more than land, “being that which feeds,” drawing the nutritional cycle between land, poi an, ‘umeke.

The deep relationship and reciprocal exchange between human and nature is beautifully depicted through the poetic text and illustrations. For example, the cover and most of the pictures in the story show people either interacting with each other (giving and receiving something) or working the land. Methods for learning and teaching are emphasized in some pictures where youth are shown learning by closely observing the young adults and the older generation working. On other pages, the children are “learning by doing” and participate in the work alongside the adults. The aerial view of the kalo fields shows that many hands work together to feed the family, which highlights the collective aspect of the Hawaiian worldview. Finally, an emphasis on gratitude for nature is suggested with the line, “This is the ‘ohana, the loved ones we hold, who give thanks” for the sun, wind, rain, stream, land, and water.

This text can be paired with picturebooks *Naupaka* by Nona Beamer and Caren Ke’ala Lobel-Fried (2008) or *The Fish and Their Gifts* by Joshua Kaipohohea Stender (2004), which show the Hawaiian worldview perspective on the reciprocal relationship between human and nature.

The author Ilima Loomis was born and raised in Hawai’i and specializes in writing about healthcare, science and Hawai’i. She has published several other children’s books: *Eclipse Chaser: Science in the Moon’s Shadow* (2019), and *Ka’imi’s First Round Up* (2008). More about her and her work can be found on her website (<https://ilimaloomis.com/>).

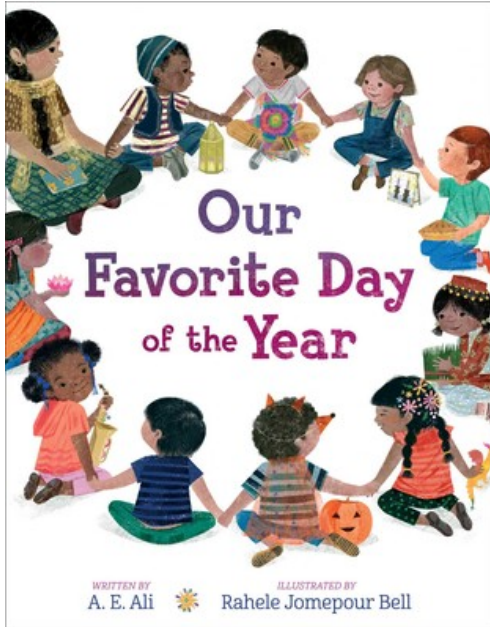
Illustrator Kenard Pak has illustrated picturebooks such as *Have You Heard the Nesting Bird* (2014) and authored and illustrated a series of books on seasons: *Goodbye Summer, Hello Autumn* (2016), *Goodbye Autumn, Hello Winter* (2017), and *Goodbye Winter, Hello Spring* (2020). His official website is: <https://www.pandagun.com/>.

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Our Favorite Day of the Year

Written by A.E. Ali

Illustrated by Rahele Jomepour Bell

Salaam Reads, 2020, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-1481485630

Our Favorite Day of the Year was written by A.E. Ali, a writer based in California. It is a beautiful picturebook about a little boy named Musa, who is nervous about his first day of school. He meets three other boys that he is not sure are his friends. To Musa, they look like strangers. Musa's teacher has each student teach classmates about their personal favorite day of the year. As the year goes on, Musa and the other students learn that through the presentation and celebration of their differences they can learn about one another and become friends. This book is a beautiful celebration of diversity in the classroom.

The story of four different children from different backgrounds are presented in this text. The main character, Musa, presents his favorite holiday, Eid Al -Fitr, which is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. Mo's favorite holiday is the beginning of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. Moises's favorite holiday is a Christian holiday called Las Posadas. Lastly, Kevin shares about his favorite day to celebrate called Pi Day. Kevin's favorite day is the only day that is not a religious holiday, but a day that honors the importance of the number 3.14. At the end of the book, the readers can find additional information about each of the favorite days highlighted in the story. Muslim, Jewish, and Christians are represented in this story but the purpose does not appear to omit a particular story or only value certain holidays. The story of every possible favorite day cannot be told in a single picturebook. The clear intent of this text is to represent and value diversity.

The social issue presented in this beautifully illustrated book is the significance of the celebration of diversity. The format of the book is vertical. The front cover art shows a group of diverse students and a teacher holding hands in a circle suggesting that the story takes place in a classroom setting. The back cover depicts Musa and his new friends sharing items that represent their favorite day of the year. A consistent simple font is used throughout the text with the exception of when the individual students' favorite day of the year is introduced. Each time a new holiday is presented, the font changes to all caps and is bolded. This change in font is significant and can create a sense of excitement around the holiday. The end papers look like a quilt with square patches representing many important days and symbols across cultures, for example the four-leaf clover or the Hamsa, also known as the Hand of Fatima.

In terms of layout, each illustration is spread across both pages, so readers feel like they are within the setting along with the characters and that you are not merely observing from a distance, but are part of the classroom. The exception to this pattern is when the teacher hands out a calendar with all the holidays students presented throughout the year. The text is positioned at the top of most of the pages with the illustrations making up the largest portion suggesting that the illustrations hold just as much importance as the text itself. The illustrator's style could be

described as traditional, using deep, rich colors throughout the illustrations as well as different weights and directions in lines that create varied textures. The point of view creates a sense of connectedness with the characters and reader.

Our Favorite Day of the Year can appeal to both young children and adults as parents and educators. The illustrations provide opportunities for children of a variety of backgrounds and cultures to see themselves in text. It also allows the reader to see and learn about the perspectives of others.

Our Favorite Day of the Year can be paired with additional titles that celebrate diversity in the classroom like *All Are Welcome*, by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman (2018). Building upon the concept of a child's favorite day of the year, *My Heart Fills with Happiness* by Monique Gray Smith and Julie Flett (2016) invites readers to think about what makes their heart fill with happiness.

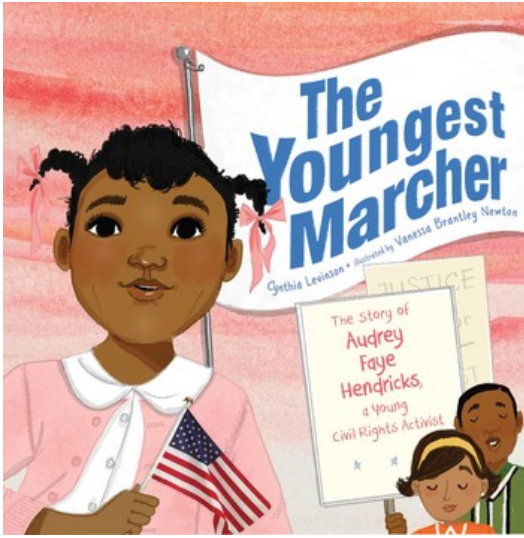
The author, A. E. Ali, is a writer based in California and her favorite day of the year is Eid al-Fitr. *Our Favorite Day of the Year* is her first book. The illustrator, Rahele Jomepour Bell, is originally from Iran and moved to the United States in 2011. Some of the recognitions her work has received include the Portfolio Award Grand Prize and the Social Media Mentorship for Illustrators, both at the 2018 Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) National Conference. Her work can be further explored in <http://www.rahelestudio.com/bio>

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The Youngest Marcher

Written by Cynthia Levinson

Illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Atheneum Books, 2017, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-1481400701

The historical narrative of *The Youngest Marcher* chronicles the influential mark made by some of the least expected and budding participants in the fight for desegregation. The story takes place in Birmingham, Alabama during the 1960s at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement. Audrey Faye Hendricks and her family often host dinners for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other prominent leaders who create plans of civil disobedience. Audrey, alert and ambitious, attempts to voice her

consensus but is hushed often because of her age.

Audrey reflects on her wishes to have equal rights to available seats, front doors, clean water, and ice cream at open countertops as do white residents. She anxiously watches reluctant church members too afraid to join Dr. King's call to action to fill jails to capacity. When Reverend Jim Bevel proposes children participate in the civil disobedience, Audrey volunteers to march alongside other students. To her surprise, she is one of the youngest protesters and the only one from her elementary school. Audrey is arrested on the first day and sentenced to a week in a juvenile facility. As the days go by, more young protesters are arrested, confined behind bars, and separated from their parents. The cells overflow. Although her time is unsettling, Audrey witnesses the impact the protesters have when the overcrowded jail leads to desegregated stores and restaurants.

Levinson's *The Youngest Marcher* expands upon several themes related to collaboration, resilience, grit, acceptance, and equality. The message is clear: some of the smallest humans can have a great impact for positive change. In May of 1963, Hendricks, along with over 3,000 adolescents, were arrested during the Children's March. This biographical narration also highlights the influence of civil rights leaders who inspired the actions of Audrey Faye Hendricks and young nonviolent demonstrators. Classroom curriculum often focuses on the prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, and readers can browse through the pages of *The Youngest Marcher* and make connections to the familiar face of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This rarely told story points out that numerous people were instrumental in policy changes that had long threatened and prohibited people of color from the simple joys of life. Audrey Mae Hendricks later became known as the Civil Rights Queen.

Each page is filled with vibrant freehand digital illustrations that utilize a retro style. The characters are dressed in pastels, pleats, and floral prints that create texture and imagery. Although the topic is serious and historic, the cartoon-like illustrations add a tender tone to the protagonist.

Whether *The Young Marcher* is a leisure read or a mentor text, it opens the door to necessary conversations on race relations in America. In order to avoid history repeating itself, children

should be exposed to biographical accounts such as *The Young Marcher*. Readers can understand the historical context as it relates to validating all members of society. This text can be paired with *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* (2013), written by Paul Young Shelton and Raul Colón to analyze multiple perspectives of children living through the segregation era.

Children’s author Cynthia Levinson is known as an advocate for nonfiction literature. She writes narrative nonfiction because she wants to understand her subjects’ motivations and what propels their actions (Levinson, 2021). Her books have received numerous recognitions, including the Carter G. Woodson Award, the Jane Addams Book Award, the Crystal Kite, a Golden Kite and Orbis Pictus Honors, and *The Youngest Marcher* was a nominee for the NAACP Award. Her work can be explored on her website (<https://cynthialevinson.com/>).

The Youngest Marcher's illustrator, Vanessa Brantley-Newton, wants all children to see their unique experiences reflected in the books they read, so they can feel a sense of empowerment and recognition (Painted Words, 2022) She has illustrated over 25 picturebooks, including *One Love* (2014), a board book co-authored with Cedella Marley. Her authored collection includes *Grandma’s Purse* (2018) and *Let Freedom Sing* (2022), among others. Her work can be explored on her website (<https://www.vanessabrantleynewton.com/>).

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Painted Words, Inc. (2022). Vanessa Brantley-Newton. <https://www.painted-words.com/portfolio/vanessa-brantley-newton/>

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