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WOW REVIEW

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Winter 2022

Intergenerational Relationships

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**WOW Review: Volume XV Issue 2
Winter 2022
Intergenerational Relationships**

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Introduction and Editor's Note

This culturally and linguistically rich collection of seven picturebooks depicts family and community stories marked by deep caring across generations.

Five titles describe children visiting their grandparents and extended families. In *Amah Faraway* (2022), young Taiwanese-American Kylie travels from San Francisco, U.S. to visit her Amah in Taiwan. While Kylie is used to seeing her grandmother on the computer, flying to Taipei is a different and slightly scary experience. Through linguistic changes in the speech-bubbles (involving Taiwanese, Chinese Mandarin, and English), the book cleverly shows how Kylie and Amah reconnect as they visit some of Taipei's most famous sights. Similarly, in *Mariana and Her Familia* (2022), Mariana drives across the U.S.-Mexico border to visit her mother's family. Uneasy in the beginning, Mariana learns that she has always been part of the familia, despite speaking another language and living in a different country; familia is familia. With a twist, *I'll Go and Come Back* (2022) depicts Jyoti visiting her grandmother Sita Pati in India. When it is time to return home, Jyoti says in Tamil: "Poitu varen," which means I'll go and come back. This phrase transitions readers to the second half of the book describing Sita Pati visiting Jyoti in the U.S. This story shows different generations learning from each other. During Sita Pati's visit Jyoti reciprocates her grandmother's actions, making sure her Amah feels as much at home in the U.S. as she does in India.

Slightly different, *Holding On* (2022), narrates the story of a young girl's summer vacation at grandma Lola's house in the Philippines. The story revolves around the importance of sharing Tagalog songs and family "remember when" stories to help Lola remember; to help her hold on to her memories particularly during those recurrent days of silence and stillness. In another twist, *Telling Stories Wrong* (2022) focuses on a grandfather who keeps changing the story of the Little Red Riding Hood as he interacts with his granddaughter. "Not even close, Grandpa!" she says, reminding Grandpa that Little Red Riding Hood finds a wolf in the forest, not a giraffe. Together, they enjoy the power of sharing and re-imagining stories.

Moving away from the focus on visiting grandparents, the sixth story within this issue is set in Ohio by the side of the road. *Watercress* (2022) tells the story of a Chinese immigrant family who collects as much watercress as they can to navigate economical hardships. However, the young girl struggles with the fear of being seen by others or associated with eating free food: "Free is hand-me-down clothes and roadside trash-heap furniture and now, dinner from a ditch." Her mother's childhood stories around life in China during difficult times support the young girl in better understanding her family history and creating new family memories around watercress.

The seventh title, *The Can Caravan* (2022) depicts a Romani community in the UK coming together to help Mrs. Tolen rebuild her home. After Mrs. Tolen, beloved member of the community, breaks her hip, her old caravan is not safe to live in anymore, but Janie, referred to as komli chavvie [kind child] knows what to do. Inspired by her field trip to an aluminum recycling plant and family and community funds of knowledge, Janie and her community gather knowledge, skills, and resources to turn Mrs. Tolen's old vardo into the very first can caravan.

As we gathered the reviews for this issue, we noticed that all seven picturebooks have female protagonists. This pattern, which can create an unbalanced representation of intergenerational relationships, encouraged us to share a list of titles that involve young male characters:

- *A Different Pond*. Phi, Bao. Bui, Thi, Ill. Capstone Young Readers, 2018. ISBN: 978-1623708030
- *Drawn Together*. Le, Minh. Santat, Dan, Ill. Little Brown, 2018. ISBN: 978-1484767603
- *A Drop of the Sea*. Chabbert, Ingrid. Nieto Guridi, Raul, Ill. Kids Can Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1525301247
- *Eyes That Speak to the Stars*. Ho, Joanna. Ho, Dung, Ill. HarperCollins, 2022. ISBN: 978-0063057753
- *The House of Lost and Found*. Widmark, Martin. Dziubak, Emilia, Ill. Floris Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1782505426
- *I Talk Like a River*. Scott, Jordan. Smith, Sydney, Ill. Neal Porter Books, 2020. ISBN: 978-0823445592
- *Julian is a Mermaid*. Love, Jessica. Candlewick, 2018. ISBN: 978-0763690458
- *Last Stop on Market Street*. De la Pena, Matt. Robinson, Christian, Ill. G.T. Putnam's Sons Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0399257742
- *Monsoon Afternoon*. Sheth, Kashmira. Jaeggi, Yoshiko, Ill. Peachtree, 2008. ISBN: 978-1561454556
- *Mr. Frank*. Luxbacher, Irene. Groundwood, 2014. ISBN: 978-1554984350
- *My Baba's Garden*. Scott, Jordan. Smith, Sydney, Ill. Neal Porter Books, 2023. ISBN: 978-0823450831
- *A Plan for Pops*. Smith, Heather. Kerrigan, Brooke. Orca Book, 2019. ISBN: 978-1459816145
- *When Grandpa Gives You a Toolbox*. Deeniham, Jamie L.B. Rocha, Lorraine, Ill. Union Square Kids, 2020. ISBN: 978-1454932321

For additional thematically related titles, please visit WOW Dozen: Intergenerational Global Families in Picturebooks (<https://wowlit.org/blog/2022/08/11/wow-dozen-intergenerational-global-families-in-picturebooks/>).

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

Volume 15, Issue 3 – Open theme (Spring 2023) – submission deadline April 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.

Volume 15, Issue 4 – Themed issue on global perspectives around food (Summer 2023) – submission deadline is June 1, 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, especially perspectives influenced by individual and community practices that involve food.

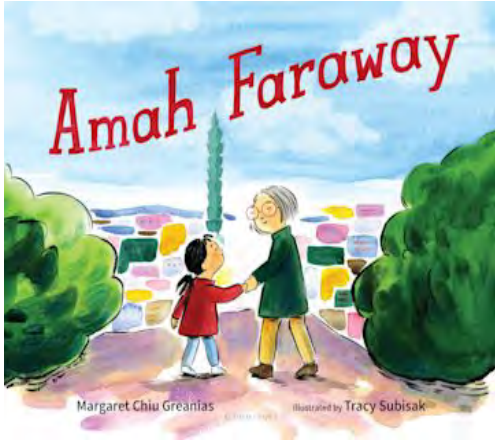
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Hsiao-Ping Wu, Texas A&M-San Antonio, Invited Reviewer

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Amah Faraway

Written by Margaret Chiu Greanias
Illustrated by Tracy Subisak
Bloomsbury, 2022, 36 pp (unpaged)
ISBN: 978-1547607211

Amah Faraway tells how a young girl named Kylie and her Taiwanese Amah/grandmother grow in their relationship during the child’s visit to Taipei. When the story opens, Kylie’s mother announces it’s time for a visit with Amah. “One hundred butterflies took flight in Kylie’s belly.”

Although they meet online every Saturday to tell stories, sing

songs, and talk about snacks, Kylie and her Amah rarely see each other in “real life.”

When Kylie and her mother arrive in Taiwan, Amah greets her visitors with a sign that reads “KYLIE” in English and Mandarin Chinese. At the beginning, Kylie understands little that Amah says and finds her customs strange. She is overwhelmed by the large extended family who attend a banquet in her and her mother’s honor; she eats only rice rather than tasting all the delicious offerings laid before her.

Kylie trails behind her mother and grandmother when Amah shows them the city she loves. Amah treats them to Chinese donuts and takes them to parks and shops at the night market. When Amah speaks, her speech bubbles display Taiwanese language pronunciation along with traditional Mandarin Chinese characters, followed by the English translation.

The relationships change when Amah takes them to the hot springs. Kylie takes a chance and finds she loves splashing in the warm water. Now, Kylie’s speech bubbles dominate the story and are displayed in English, followed by Chinese Mandarin characters, and then the pronunciation in Taiwanese. After that, Amah and Mama trail behind Kylie everywhere they go.

The story then follows a confident child leading her Amah and mother through each experience in reverse. The clever layout of languages in the speech bubbles allows readers to read top-to-bottom, or bottom-to-top. With each read, readers get a glimpse into the linguistic experiences of each character. Author Margaret Chiu Greanias shows how Kylie has grown to embrace her Taiwanese family, city, culture, and language as she shops at the night market, plays in parks, eats Chinese donuts, tours Taipei, and dines at a banquet of delicious food with her now familiar relatives. When she returns to San Francisco, Kylie and Amah continue to meet online, building on the strong familial bond that developed during their visit. At the end of the story, Kylie is the one who speaks the sentence that opened the book: “It was time...for a visit.”

While the speech bubbles in *Amah Faraway* provide cultural information and add innovation to the book, the author, illustrator, or editor missed an opportunity to support readers in taking full advantage of these innovations. Adding an informational note regarding Taiwanese pronunciation and Mandarin Chinese characters could help non-Mandarin and non-Taiwanese language readers successfully read aloud the print in this book.

This book invites readers to connect with the characters' feelings and to notice how Kylie's feelings, in particular, change over the course of the story. Greanias plotted the book to show how children's feelings can change as they experience new things, especially with their families and in the context of their heritage cultures. Learning language is one aspect of culture that supports Kylie's growth.

The dedication by the author reads: "to all families with a loved one faraway."

Amah Faraway can be paired with picturebooks that center on children learning more about their heritage from their elders. In *Drawn Together* by Minh Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat (2018), a young boy and his Thai-speaking grandfather cross linguistic, cultural, and generational borders through drawing action figures and sharing their imaginations. In *Nana Akua Goes to School* by Tricia Elam Walker, illustrated by April Harrison (2020), Zura's Nana visits her class on Grandparents Day and shares a quilt with Ghanaian symbols and crosses cultural borders by explaining and sharing family traditions. *When 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 Pati/grandmother travel from Bangalore to the southern tip of India sharing languages and cultural connections along the way.

Greanias, a U.S.-born grandchild, also kept close ties with her Taiwanese Amah – before video chat. She is the daughter of Taiwanese immigrants; her Amah lived in Taipei. This story is personally meaningful for her as well as for illustrator Tracy Subisak, whose mother is Taiwanese. As an adult, Subisak lived in Taipei for a time. Read more about her work on her website (<https://margaretgreanias.com/>).

Illustrator Tracy Subisak uses India ink, Japanese watercolor, pastel, and colored pencil on watercolor paper. Beginning with the endpapers that portray various aspects of Taiwanese culture, readers are drawn into Kylie's learning about her heritage. With multiple scenes on single pages, feelings depicted in characters' faces and body language, and techniques that convey movement, readers experience the connection, adventure, and love in this story. The large close-up portraits of Kylie's and Amah's faces are particularly effective. See more of Subisak's work on her website (<http://tracysubisak.com/>).

The book's backmatter includes a note from the author followed by a section in which Greanias points out Kylie's transformation and how the structure of events in the story circle back to the beginning in reverse order. In Subisak's illustrator's note, she shares her Taiwanese connections. The final page of the book describes the sites of Taipei visited by the characters in the book and provides information about Taiwanese food.

Judi Moreillon, Tucson, AZ

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The Can Caravan

Written by Richard O'Neill

Illustrated by Cindy Kong

Child's Play, 2022, pp. 32 (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1786286154

Janie, a young, inventive girl, undertakes a huge recycling project to help a member of her Romani community in the UK. As the story begins, we are introduced to Janie, who appears to share close relationships with people in her community. Janie's class will be going on a field trip to a recycling plant soon, and Janie enthusiastically shares her Romani perspective on recycling. When her neighbor, Mrs. Tolen, breaks her hip and ends up in the hospital, Janie learns

that Mrs. Tolen can't return to her caravan until it passes an inspection by social services. She takes it upon herself to find a way to restore Mrs. Tolen's caravan. Janie enlists the help of her class and family to initiate a recycling project to collect aluminum cans which they can trade for sheets of aluminum to restore the caravan. She even seeks out the social worker assigned to Mrs. Tolen's case and asks him to secretly inspect the aluminum caravan to help surprise Mrs. Tolen. The whole community and Janie's class show up to surprise Mrs. Tolen with her new home, the world's first Can Caravan! The book ends with additional material about the step-by-step process of aluminum recycling and some interesting facts about aluminum.

The Can Caravan is full of inclusivity and positive representations. The characters include Janie's male teacher and his husband, a classmate who is a wheelchair user, classmates and family members wearing turbans and hijabs, and senior characters with mobility aids. Power relationships are also well balanced, as Janie is the one taking on a managerial role in the restoration project. There are also positive relationships between younger and senior characters portrayed through Janie and Mrs. Tolen's friendship, as well as Janie's relationship with her granddad.

Some significant details can also be observed through the illustrations, which reveal aspects about Romani culture. These include hidden items like Mrs. Tolen's horse locket on the bedside table when she is in the hospital, Janie's mother's arm tattoo, and the golden horseshoe rings Janie's mother and grandfather wear. Not-so-hidden is the representation of the caravan life style and the use of Romani terms, for which the author provides a glossary at the front of the book.

While visually the story is inclusive and vibrant, it neglects to invite the reader into the character's cultural experiences. This is because the primary purpose of this story is not to invite readers into Romani culture, but to educate on recycling and community action. There seems to be a significant connection between Romani culture and recycling, referred to by the grandfather as "rag-and-bone" trade; however, because the focus is split between taking global climate action and the Romani life experiences, the latter gets overshadowed. This is apparent through the explicit focus on community action, showing Janie as she advocates for Mrs. Tolan by holding lectures, going door-to-door, and posting online videos as a call to action. In contrast, details

about Romani culture are hidden in the illustrations, rather than explicitly addressed. The few times Romani experiences become significant in the story is the use of occasional Romani terms, or when Janie shares the historical connection between Romani people and recycling. In addition, we are distanced from the character's cultural experience by the third-person voice and the simplistic art style for characters who never make eye-contact with the reader. This is a well-told story about a young person who leads a community project and happens to be Romani, rather than the story of a Romani community activist.

This book would fit well in a text set with O'Neill's other books of Romani characters and could also be paired with a non-fiction text like *A History of The Romani People* (2005) by Hristo Kyuchukov and Ian Hancock to gain deeper understanding of the Romani people, their history, and their culture.

The author, Richard O'Neill, is a sixth-generation storyteller who was raised in a fully nomadic Romani family, traveling between Northern England and Scotland. O'Neill describes himself as an activist of Romani and Gypsy culture and advocates for positive education, interaction, and inclusion of Romani people. He has published multiple children's picturebooks, all featuring Romani characters or telling stories of Romani people. His works include *The Lost Homework* (2019), illustrated by Kristi Beautyman, and *Polonius the Pit Pony* (2018) illustrated by Feronia Parker Thomas. He has also published folktales, co-authored with Katherine Quarmby, such as *Yokki and the Parno Gry* (2016), illustrated by Marieke Nelissen, and *Ossiri and the Bala Mengro* (2016), illustrated by Hannah Tolson. O'Neill's children's books are published by Child's Play Ltd., both in the UK and the US. Online resources for information about O'Neill include: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/storytellers-and-authors/find-uk-storytellers-authors/richard-oneill/> and <http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/richard-oneill-storyteller-author-playwright/>

Cindy Kang is a New York-based Korean illustrator. Her other notable contributions to children's literature include the art for *King Sejong Invents an Alphabet* (2021). Kang paints an entire world in this picturebook where every single detail, from the background characters to the jewelry, are thoughtfully designed and placed to create a vibrant community and add depth to the story. Her work can be explored on her website (<https://cindysykang.com/>).

Alisa Kaiser, University of Arizona, Tucson

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Holding On

Written by Sophia N. Lee

Illustrated by Isabel Roxas

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2022, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1534494459

Holding On is a moving yet feel-good picturebook about a young girl who spends song-filled summers with her music-loving grandmother in the Philippines. When her Lola starts slipping into “silence and stillness,” living with early signs of Alzheimer’s, the girl helps her grandmother hold on through music and the joyful memories the songs bring.

The book is the first-person perspective of a young Filipino-American girl who tells the story of her summer visits to the

Philippines. The mixed-media illustrations powerfully exhibit the perspectives from the Filipino culture portrayed in the book. Lola, the grandmother, has Alzheimer’s disease—a poignant, universal point that may speak to people from all cultures. Furthermore, the characters challenge stereotypes of Filipino people in that they do specific things that are not true for the majority of people in this community.

One of the most notable aspects of the book is the vivid imagery that captures the essence of Filipino life. From the lively home to the serene beaches, the illustrations expertly depict the diverse landscapes and close family ties that represent the Philippines. The use of bright colors and intricate patterns reflects the rich visual arts tradition of the country.

In addition to its captivating illustrations, the book contains numerous references to iconic elements of Filipino culture, such as the bahay-kubo, a traditional stilt house that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. The book also features popular Filipino dishes such as adobo and sinigang, which are home-cooked staples in many Filipino households and a significant part of the country’s culinary heritage. Additionally, the walis tingting, a type of broom made from the rib of a palm frond, is a commonly used cleaning tool in the Philippines, and its inclusion in the book serves as an excellent example of the country’s practical and resourceful approach to everyday life. These references not only add to the authenticity of the book’s portrayal of Filipino culture but also provide valuable teaching tools for educators. Through these references, educators can introduce students to important aspects of Filipino culture, such as the country’s unique architectural styles, rich culinary traditions, and practical yet sustainable way of life.

The book reflects specific Filipino cultural experiences and values through the love of music and the deep relationship between the grandmother and the granddaughter. The book is written for both children from the culture and other cultural backgrounds. Though some of the details are distinctive cultural preferences (i.e songs and singers named), the illustrations depict compelling images to draw young audiences from different cultures (i.e musical notes playfully inserted across the illustrations). To supplement this reading, it is recommended that teachers offer relevant activities so students can connect their experiences with the themes of the book. Having

children tell their favorite summer memories, listen to the music mentioned in the book, and share what and how they will hold onto their favorite memories are strategies to activate children's funds of knowledge.

During a recent interview with Simon Kids (2022) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9uwHUPxFMO>), Lee and Roxas expressed their desire to inspire young readers in multiple ways. First, the book aims to encourage children to cherish their precious memories with loved ones, even after they have passed. By highlighting the power of music and art as means of preserving memories, the book teaches children that there are numerous ways to keep the memories of those they love alive. In addition, the book seeks to help children remember everything they love about their summer. Through its evocative imagery and immersive storytelling, the book transports readers to the idyllic summer days of the Philippines, showcasing the country's unique landscapes, customs, and traditions. By immersing children in this world, the book helps them relive the sights, sounds, and experiences of their summer memories, encouraging them to appreciate the joys of life's simpler pleasures.

In today's increasingly globalized world, it is essential for students to develop a deep understanding and appreciation of different cultures and traditions. By introducing children to diverse perspectives and experiences, educators can help promote empathy, inclusivity, and cross-cultural understanding. A picturebook set in the Philippines can play a crucial role in achieving these goals, particularly in a classroom where students may have limited exposure to cultures outside of their own. The book can help broaden students' horizons, providing them with a glimpse into the unique customs and traditions of the Philippines, while also helping to dispel stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of this complex and fascinating country. Overall, *Holding On* presents universal themes in a culturally accurate manner. It celebrates the unique culture and heritage of the Philippines, while also promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Exploring picturebooks of similar themes in a text set such as summer experiences, visiting grandparents, even touching on the delicate yet important conversations around dementia and old age, and finally learning about music are great tools to deepen understanding of this book. Without proper contextualization, readers might fail to appreciate the true value and message of the global story. The picturebook *When Lola Visits*, by author Michelle Sterling and illustrator Aaron Asis (2021), is a comparable book exploring similar cultural and intergenerational themes. Another great pairing exploring cultures in the same region would be *Amah Faraway*, by author Margaret Chiu Greanis and illustrator Tracy Subisak (2022), and *Drawn Together*, by author Minh Lê and illustrator Dan Santat (2018).

The author Sophia N. Lee remembers her summers being filled with music when Lolo (grandfather) would play the ukulele as she danced to 'Pearly Shells.' She adds that her Lola knew how to make everyone's favorite food. Growing up in the Philippines, Lee understood the importance of showing close ties with loved ones, an undoubted mark of being Filipino. Lee is the author of the picturebook *Soaring Saturdays*, illustrated by Aaron M. Asis (2019), and the

novel *What Things Mean* (2014), the grand prize winner of the 2014 Scholastic Asian Book Award. Readers can learn more about Sophia N. Lee at her website (<https://www.sophialeewrites.com/>).

The illustrator, Isabel Roxas, explained her connections as well—her images of summer capture the lush greenery of the provinces in the Philippines, and family hometowns that are the school break destinations for many Filipino children. Roxas’ experience of summer is salient in the illustrations of *Holding On*. Being born, raised, and based in the Philippines, Roxas has deep connections with the country and its culture that emanate from the images she chose to illustrate in the book, such as the image of taho, a famous Filipino sweet tofu breakfast. Roxas explains how she used her grandmother Lola Ven as the inspiration for the Lola depicted in her illustrations. Visit her website (<https://studioroxas.com/>) to learn more about her work.

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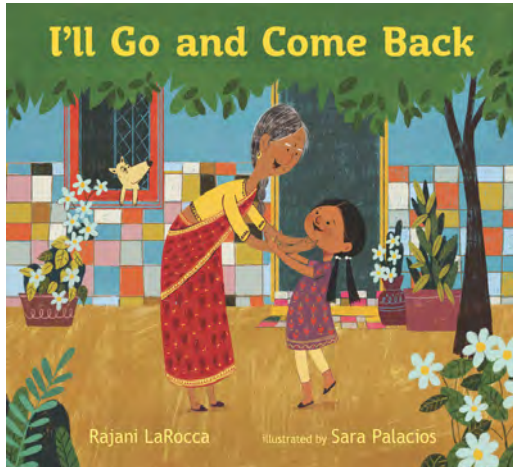
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I'll Go and Come Back

Written by Rajani LaRocca

Illustrated by Sara Palacios

Candlewick Press, 2022, 36 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-1536207170

I'll Go and Come Back portrays a love between a grandmother and child as they overcome language, cultural and distance barriers.

This story is told through the eyes of Jyoti, a young girl with Indian heritage, as she leaves the United States for India for the first time since she was a baby. Confident and

with a sense of belonging, she leaves the U.S. to see her Sita Pati, grandmother, only to arrive in India uncertain and homesick. Readers can notice how Sita Pati and Jyoti use play, food and shopping to overcome language and cultural barriers, deepening their relationship. By the time the visit is over, Jyoti is sad to leave. She remembers that in Tamil, the native language of her Sita Pati, no one just says “goodbye.” The Tamil phrase, “Poitu varen,” is used instead. Jyoti’s heart is reassured by this vow of “I’ll go and come back.”

As promised, the next summer Sita Pati flies from India to the U.S. “She seemed smaller than I remembered,” observes Jyoti. Sita Pati is likely experiencing the same feelings of uncertainty as Jyoti did. This is a gentle reminder that it is often frightening to travel to an unfamiliar place, even when family is waiting to welcome the arrival, especially when the language and cultural norms are different. Just as Sita Pati did for Jyoti, it’s now Jyoti’s turn to make her grandmother feel comfortable with games, food, and shopping. It is significant that we see the comforting actions of Sita Pati being reciprocated by her young granddaughter. This story of intergenerational relationships shows how important it is that youth are taught the language and customs of their heritage to keep them alive. The book also highlights the significance of both generations learning from each other.

In a September 2021 interview by Candlewick Press, Rajani shared that the book came to her as a “visual metaphor.” She thought of how the patterns and colors in the border of a sari can be reflected in the body of the sari and how the patterns in the body of the sari can be reflected in the border. Like the beautiful saris in the endpapers, the quality of the illustrations is evident straightaway with the cover depicting the unconditional love between a granddaughter and her grandmother. The character’s facial expressions reveal emotion and set the tone for the story, complimenting the text being read. Several whole page spreads indicate key moments that keep readers present in that particular part of the book until the page is turned. The illustrations were done in gouache and acrylic and assembled digitally by Sara Palacios.

I'll Go and Come Back portrays strong grandparent-grandchild connections in a Tamil family so this story might pair well with a picturebook by LaRocca titled *Where Three Oceans Meet* (2021). Illustrated by Archana Srenivasan, this story shows three generations of Tamil women, Sejal, Mommy and Pati, who travel through South India from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. During their trip, they share food, clothes, and ideas that reflect their personalities, but also generational and

cultural differences. A second pair is *Ammachi's Amazing Machines*, written and illustrated by Rajiv Eipe (2021). This story is about young Sooraj and his grandma who love inventing. Readers follow the two in their adventure using simple machines to make coconut barfi. Young Sooraj wants to learn from his Ammachi how to make coconut barfi and Ammachi is pleased that the knowledge is being passed down. Just like *I'll Go and Come Back* (2022), *Ammachi's Amazing Machines* (2021) depicts an intergenerational relationship and the bond that is strengthened from time being spent together.

Rajani LaRocca is an award-winning author of children's novels and picturebooks. She was born in Bangalore, India, but her family moved to the U.S. when she was a baby so she grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. LaRocca graduated from Harvard College and Harvard Medical School and lives in eastern Massachusetts where she works as a primary care physician. Her middle grade novel, *Red, White, and Whole*, won a 2022 Newbery Honor, the 2022 Walter Dean Myers Award, the 2022 Golden Kite Award, and the 2021 New England Book Award. Rajani's other novels and picturebooks include *Much Ado About Baseball* (2021), *Seven Golden Rings* (2020), *Where Three Oceans Meet* (2021), and *Bracelets for Bina's Brothers* (2021). She also co-hosts the STEM Women in KidLit Podcast. Her work can be explored on her website (<https://www.rajanilarocca.com/>).

Sara Palacios is a native of Mexico and the recipient of a Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor for *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (2011). Sara is also the illustrator of other picturebooks, including *A Song of Frutas* (2021), *Hello, Friend* (2020), *A Way With Wild Things* (2020), and *The Flying Girl* (2018). Sara earned a degree in graphic design along with BFA and MFA degrees in illustration from the Academy of Art in San Francisco, where she lives. Visit her website (<https://www.sarapalaciosillustrations.com/>) to see more of her work.

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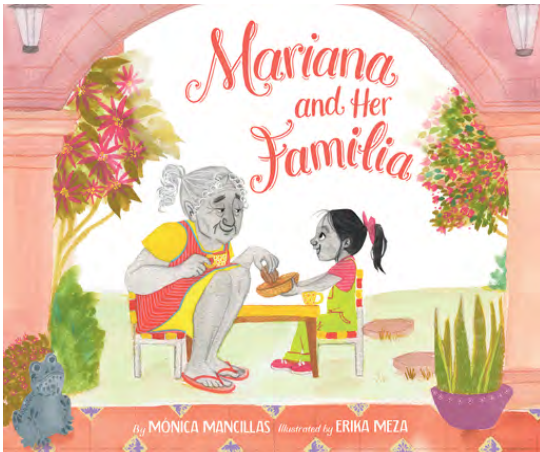
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Mariana and Her Familia

Written by Mónica Mancillas

Illustrated by Erika Meza

HarperCollins 2022, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0062962461

Mariana and her mother are crossing the United States-México border to visit Abuela and their extended family. Mariana is hesitant because she has not been to Abuela's house in many years. At home, there is only Mariana and Mami. But here, there are lots of family members. Mariana knows little Spanish and she feels embarrassed when she

utters *agualita* rather than *abuelita*. But Abuela knows exactly what to do. She invites Mariana to read *Los tres cochinitos*, which Mariana recognizes as the story about the three little pigs and the big bad wolf. Then, they make quesadillas and share them with the rest of the family. Now that Mariana feels better, she is ready to give Abuela the gift she brought from the U.S.: a picture of Mariana when she was little. As Abuela walks Mariana to a special wall of family pictures, Mariana understands that she has always belonged to her familia.

This story is particularly relevant to readers who are reconnecting with family after being apart by time and distance. Abuela and Mami represent love and patience. It is very possible that Mami experienced similar fears when she moved to the U.S. Although her experiences and emotions are not the focus of the story, her sense of place, reassurance, and certainty could indicate that she learned how to reconnect and what it means to have a home away from home some time ago. Similarly, Abuela must have gone through a similar journey when Mami moved away. Now Mariana learns from her own experience and from the experiences of prior generations. Since Mariana's extended family lives, presumably, in a *pueblo fronterizo*, it is possible that the familia interacts within a monolingual-multilingual continuum; however, that is not addressed in the story. Therefore, Mariana's bilingual identity could contribute to the creation or expansion of linguistic spaces and practices in the family history; a journey of bringing families, homes, and worlds together.

Erika Meza used watercolor pencil, gouache, and drew from childhood memories of characters, objects, and cantera stone to create the illustrations. Picturebooks that depict skin tone with a gray palette are not common, with the exception of books about sadness or depression, in which the gray tones gradually change to a range of colors like *The Color Thief: A Family's Story of Depression* (2015), by Andrew Fusek Peters, Polly Peters, and Karin Littlewood. Countless shades of gray are infused throughout the illustrations creating colorful and warm representations of Mariana's familia. Interestingly, there are visual instances when the little cousins' faces look too similar to one another. This observation could elicit important conversations about representation and diversity within families and communities.

Along with her use of gray tones, Meza offers several cues to signal readers that the book might be set in Tijuana, México. For example, the sign on a street vendor's cart that reads CROC Manuel

Zavala, presumably referencing Juan Manuel Zavala, a representative of the Taxis Amarillos in Tijuana, and CROC, a Mexican union federation. Both organizations have advocated for Taxis Amarillos to be able to operate in the San Ysidro border crossing. This reference speaks to the illustrator's ability to provide a window into the larger socio-political and economic climate of the story.

Mariana and Her Familia can be paired with other picturebooks about grandparents and grandchildren seeking connections while learning languages together like *Mango, Abuela, and Me*, by Meg Medina and Angela Dominguez (2017), *Drawn Together*, by Minh Lê and Dan Santat (2018), or *Grandpa Across the Ocean*, by Hyewon Yum (2021). In these stories, characters' profound love and desire to keep family together encourage them to build connections through stories, artifacts, and places, despite linguistic and cultural differences.

Mónica Mancillas is an author, musician, and educator, who writes picturebooks and middle grade fiction and non-fiction. She wrote *Mariana and Her Familia* based on her childhood experiences as a first-generation immigrant, born in Ensenada in Baja California, México. Some of her upcoming projects include the picturebooks *The Worry Balloon*, illustrated by Betty C. Tang (Roaring Brook Press, 2023) and *How to Speak in Spanglish*, illustrated by Olivia De Castro (Penguin Workshop, 2023). Her work can be explored at her website (<https://www.monicamancillas.com/>).

Erika Meza is a Mexican author and illustrator. She studied graphic design in Tijuana, Mexico and attended the Illustration programme at L'École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, France. She is the illustrator of the award-winning book *My Two Border Towns* by David Bowles (2021). Her upcoming projects include the Spanish translation for *Nigel y la luna*, written by Antwan Eady and illustrated by Gracey Zhang (HarperCollins, 2023), her first author/illustrator picturebook titled *To the Other Side* (HarperCollins, 2023), the illustrations for *The Memory Book*, by Louise Gooding (Wren & Rook, 2023), and *Stop! That's Not My Story*, by Smriti Prasad (Simon & Schuster Children's UK, 2023). Visit her website (<https://www.erikameza.com/>) to learn more about Meza's work.

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Telling Stories Wrong

Written by Gianni Rodari
Illustrated by Beatrice Alemagna
Translated by Antony Shugaar
Enchanted Lion Books, 2022, 32 pp
ISBN: 978-15927036091481485630

A grandfather tells the story of Little Red Riding Hood to his granddaughter, but much to the joy and exasperation of the little girl, the grandfather keeps changing the details of the story. Little Red becomes Little Yellow, then Little Green and finally Little Black. She takes potato peels to her Aunt Hildegard instead of a warm loaf of bread to her grandmother. On the way she meets a giraffe. When corrected, the grandfather explains that the wolf asks Little

Red “How much is six times eight?” After Little Red goes to the store for a jar of tomato sauce, the wolf reappears and suggests that everyone take bus #75 which stops in front of the cathedral where they will find a quarter on the ground that can be used to buy some bubble gum. This story gone wrong concludes with a big hug, a real quarter for the little girl, and some quiet newspaper reading for Grandfather.

While *Telling Stories Wrong* at first glance seems like a simple narrative portraying the warm relationship between the grandfather and granddaughter, it is a significant book that illustrates the storytelling pedagogy of Gianni Rodari. Born in 1920 in Italy, he lived through the turbulent fascist years. Following WWII, he became a journalist and eventually an author for children. He is considered the father of modern Italian children’s literature. The years between the World Wars shaped his desire to encourage children to ask questions that would give them tools for solving social issues they would later face as adults. *Telling Stories Wrong* is a demonstration of what Rodari believed: that fairy tales are rich food for developing imaginations which can lead to critical thought and imaginative problem-solving. He wrote, “I think that fairy tales—both old and new—can help in the development of the mind. Fairy tales are the place of all hypotheses — they can give us the keys and help find new ways to reality. They can help the child learn about the world and give them the ability to evaluate it” (Rodari, 1970). *Telling Stories Wrong* is full of imaginative detours in the tale of Red Riding Hood.

The illustrations add to the nonsensical version by adding details that show the grandfather and granddaughter interacting about the changes and even entering into the story action. Their words and thoughts are captured in speech and thought bubbles but their body language contributes as well. Grandpa’s eyes get oversized behind his glasses and the granddaughter’s braid is as expressive as her face and words. The images are rendered on sepia-toned paper with markers and wash, resembling illustrations by a child. The book was named one of the New York Times/ New York Public Library Best Illustrated Children’s Books for 2022 and an Outstanding International Book by USBBY.

This book pairs well with stories of child/wolf interactions. In *The Girl and the Wolf*, written by

Katherena Vermette and illustrated by Julie Flett (2019), a young girl is lost in the forest, but a wise wolf helps her understand that she has all the tools she needs to find her way back home. In *Wolf in the Snow* (Matthew Cordell, 2017) a young girl in a red coat helps a wolf pup return to his wolf pack. The adult wolves in turn help her parents find her when she becomes lost in the snowy forest. Another type of book pairing is a variant on the Red Riding Hood classic tale. In *Interrupting Chicken* (David Ezra Stein, 2010), Little Red Chicken changes the end of the bedtime story to rescue Red Riding Hood from the wolf. There are many cultural variants, but a favorite is *Petite Rouge: A Cajun Red Riding Hood*, written by Mike Artell and illustrated by Jim Harris (1999), in which a hungry swamp gator meets his match in Little Red, a smart duck.

Gianni Rodari (1920-1980) was a well-known children's author in Italy, and winner of the 1970 Hans Christian Andersen medal. He wrote the Batchelder winner *Telephone Tales* (2020), a set of stories inside a story that is full of fantasy and fun, from which *Telling Stories Wrong* is taken. A teacher, journalist and author, he wrote *The Grammar of Fantasy* (1996) as a way of encouraging imaginative and critical thought. He collaborated closely with children, reading and revising his manuscripts following his discussions with them.

Beatrice Alemagna (<http://www.beatricealemagna.com/>) is an illustrator from Italy who now lives in France. She grew up reading the stories of Rodari and considers him a mentor. Alemagna has exhibited her work at solo and collective exhibitions in Paris, Bologna, Bordeaux, Charleville, Munich, Reims, Lisbon, Tokyo, Sapporo, Kyoto, Stockholm, Dublin, Beijing, Abu Dhabi, Sofia, Cairo, Madrid, Berlin. She has been nominated to the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award four times (in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017).

Antony Shugaar (<https://www.antonyshugaar.com/>) translates books, articles, scripts and screenplays for TV, and movies for HBO, Netflix, and Amazon from Italian and French. He translated Gianni Rodari's *Telephone Tales* from which comes this book *Telling Stories Wrong*.

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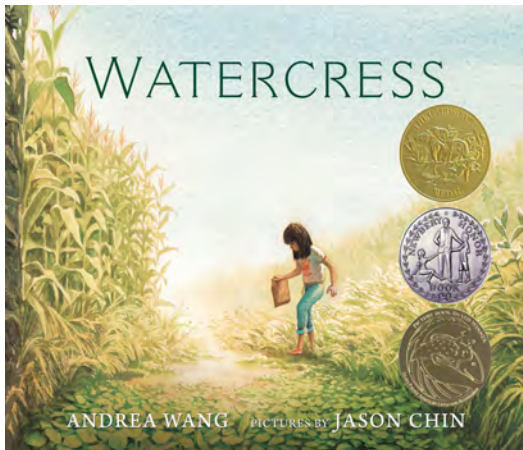
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Watercress

Written by Andrea Wang

Illustrated by Jason Chin

Holiday House, 2021, 32 pp (unpaged)

ISBN: 978-0823446247

This story is based on the childhood memory of the author, Andrea Wang. Writing from a first-person perspective, Andrea Wang tells the story of a Chinese American family picking watercress in a ditch beside the road. Through this experience the younger daughter in the family, also the narrator, comes to understand the

family history, develops empathy towards her family heritage, and explores her Chinese cultural identity.

A distinct clue that guides the development of the plot is the protagonist's attitude toward watercress. At first, the narrator feels ashamed of her parents' behavior of picking free food from a ditch. The resistance of the narrator is portrayed by her description of the ditch, "The water in the ditch is cold. / It stings my ankles / and the mud squelches / up between my toes."; her reaction to passing cars, "A car passed by / and I duck my head / hoping it's / no one I know."; and her mixed feeling towards her gleaned watercress, "The paper is soaked and I'm / half afraid / half hopeful / that the bottom will split, / sending all the plants back down / into the muck."

The narrator further expresses her resistance by refusing to eat any watercress at the dinner table and when her parents persuade her to try some watercress saying "it's free" and "it's fresh," her hatred toward "free" climbs to the climax because it hurts her self-esteem as a teenage girl. This reaction pushes her mother to reveal their family history connected to watercress—in 1960s China, the family suffered from hunger and lost the younger child. During that great famine, people ate anything they could find and watercress was one of the resources that people relied on for living. Having learned the family history, the narrator develops a different perspective toward watercress, which serves as the bond for her to understand her parents and value her family history and cultural identity.

The illustration of *Watercress* complement the layers of memories in the text. The illustrator, Jason Chin, chose watercolor as his way of painting since it is common to both Chinese and American cultures. In his note at the end of the book, Jason Chin explains his choice of color: "The color palette is heavy in yellow ochre, which reminds me of the old photographs and 1970s decor, and the cerulean blue, which is similar to the blue often used in Chinese paintings." Jason Chin indicates that the technique of soft washes echoes the painting features in traditional Chinese landscapes and that the dreamlike quality created by soft marks is appropriate to imply memory. He also applied softness to the story content. For example, in the images portraying the great famine, rather than directly displaying the heartrending scenes, he embedded hardship through the empty bowls on the table, the frowning faces of characters, and the disappearance of the younger sibling.

Watercress delicately presents the struggle of the second generation of immigrants in the U.S.—their difficulties in finding their own cultural identities and building connections with their cultural roots. The story employs the conflict between the parents and children on the issue of picking watercress from a ditch to depict the cultural gap between first and second-generation immigrants—while the parents regard picking watercress as their family heritage, the child who was born and grew up in the U.S. views it as a shame of taking free food. Though the child’s perspective fits cultural values in the U.S., it stands in contrast with her parents’ complex family heritage in which watercress symbolizes life and hope during the great famine. Though the author tied up the story with a happy ending, her depiction of the parents’ hesitance to share their family history with children reveals a social issue in immigrant families—the difficulty of sharing family history with the following generations who have little connection with their cultural origins. Moreover, it is worth considering that there are still numerous families and children struggling to find, and even losing, their family histories and cultural identities.

Considering Bishop’s (1990) metaphor of mirrors and windows and the target audiences of this picturebook, *Watercress* falls into a special category: at the first glance, it seems to be a book that helps readers to see themselves; however, the “self” in this book is second generation immigrants. Therefore, it can be both a mirror and a window through which the readers can see and explore their identities. This picturebook can help children from immigrant families who experience difficulties in identifying their cultural identities and who struggle with being in between—neither able to fully understand their parents nor fit into the new environment. Meanwhile, *Watercress* is also a reminder for the parents in immigrant families to see the importance of sharing their family heritage with the younger generations.

Watercress can be paired with other thematically related picturebooks, like *Drawn Together* (2018), written by Minh Lê and illustrated by Dan Santat. A second pair could be *A Different Pond* (2018), written by Bao Phi and illustrated by Thi Bui.

Andrea Wang is a celebrated author of children’s literature and the second generation of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Her book *Watercress* has received awards including the Caldecott Medal, a Newbery Honor, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, a New England Book Award, and a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor. Andrea focuses her work on the exploration of culture, creative thinking, and identity. Wang’s work can be explored at her website (<https://andreyawang.com/>).

Jason Chin is an acclaimed author and illustrator of children’s literature and the third generation of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. His distinguished works include *Grand Canyon* (2017) which received a Caldecott Honor, a Sibert Honor, and the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award. His illustrations in *Watercress* (2022) were awarded a Caldecott Medal, and the picturebook also won the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, a New England Book Award, and a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor.

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