

Increasing Global Literature in the Library

Elizabeth Farris and the Startown Global Literacy Community

The community of Startown is a suburb of Newton, North Carolina. Startown Elementary serves a student population of approximately 550 students preschool through sixth grade. Seventy percent of students are white, 10% are Asian American, 8% are Latinx, 7% are African American, and 5% are two or more races (Great Schools.org). Based on the number of eligible families for free or reduced lunch, 49% of Startown families are low-income (Startown Elementary, 2018). Despite this level of low-income households, the school has a 1:1 ratio of Chromebooks for students.

For this grant, the group's initial goals were to purchase and promote global books for the library and to create a schoolwide celebration of cultures. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we changed the latter goal to instead commission a global mural in our school. Our goal to commission this mural has also been put on hold due to COVID restrictions with outside visitors in the building, as well as difficulty in getting a muralist to complete the work. Because of these setbacks, our goal of promoting global literature became the primary focus of the group.

Our study group was already a committee, the Global Committee, designed to lead our school through global modules in conjunction with Participate Learning. Participate Learning partners with K-12 schools to implement global education, as well as to help hire ambassador teachers from other countries to teach through dual language immersion. The additional focus of global literacy worked seamlessly into our meetings, which were scheduled for each month. We did not always meet monthly due to the unique circumstances of our hybrid school year, but our group worked together through emails and quick chats in the halls as time allowed when physical meetings were not possible.

When we met, we brainstormed suggestions for books to purchase for the library. Members collected suggestions from colleagues and book lists. We created a shared document to curate a list of books to be purchased. Once the books were purchased and processed by the media coordinator and Global Committee Chair, Mrs. Farris, we worked on ways to encourage our colleagues to incorporate global competencies and global literature within their lessons.

One of the best study group meetings was our last one of the year, when we reflected on what we had gone through as a staff, whether we had reached our goals, and what we wanted to do moving forward.

Global Literature

Mrs. Farris created "Global Book Unboxing" videos to generate excitement for the grant purchases. Books were discussed in three segments—books written in Spanish, paperback books intended for teacher use, and global books for everyone. We shared these videos with teachers and students through our Learning Management System. This allowed students to preview the new books and place the books on hold for checkout since they were unable to physically visit the library at the time. [Link to Global Unboxing Samples.](#)

Once students were able to visit the library again, the books were highlighted once more through book displays.



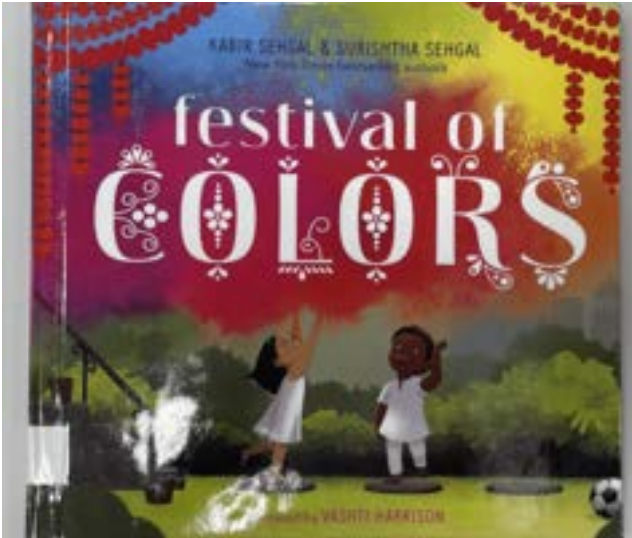
Figure 1. New Global Picture Books.

Paperback books were purchased for teacher use and shared through the Unboxing videos as well.



Figure 2. Paperbacks for teacher use.

Mrs. Setliff, a kindergarten teacher and Global Committee member, as well as Ms. Whitehouse, a sixth-grade teacher and Global Committee member, read the picturebook *Festival of Colors* by Surishtha and Kabir Seghal (2018) about Holi, the Indian Festival of Colors, with their students. Mrs. Butterfield, the school's music teacher and Global Committee member, incorporated a discussion of Holi into her lessons for kindergarten through sixth grade when teaching about musical instruments of the world. She stated that she realized her lessons were mostly centered around Europe and through our study group discussions became mindful to include the whole globe when teaching students about music.



Mrs. Butterfield also noted that through teaching about Holi, the kindergarteners enjoyed the vibrant colors, and a first-grade student whose family is from India was very excited to learn about Holi in music class. Seeing himself represented in this way was noticeably affirming. Students made connections between the original story of Holi and the Christian story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Sharing a short picturebook with older students helped bring their class discussions of ancient civilizations to modern day.

Figure 3. Festival of Colors.

Mrs. Setliff shared with the committee the importance of “teaching the teachers first” in order for global understanding to truly take root with students. She did not know about the Holi festival prior to selecting *Festival of Colors* to read with students, and she found the author notes in the book to be informative for her prior to sharing the story. Setliff also noted how she continues to read books to students about Chinese/Lunar New Year because she had a student from China the previous year. Getting to know a child from another country strengthened her appreciation for other cultures and the importance of teaching her students to do the same.

Several teachers met virtually after school one afternoon with author Nancy Johnson James and illustrator Constance Moore to discuss their picturebook, *Brown: The Many Shades of Love* (2020). This opportunity led to great discussions about the portrayal of the color brown in children’s literature and all human skin as a shade of brown. Teachers brainstormed different ways in which to use the book with students, noting the versatility of the book for all ages. Constance Moore led the group through a sample lesson that involved tracing and coloring our hands and writing a poem using the sentence starters “My brown is” and “My beautiful shade of love is.” The participating teachers discussed how they had never truly taken the time to notice their own skin prior to the activity.



Figure 4. *Brown: The Many Shades of Love*.

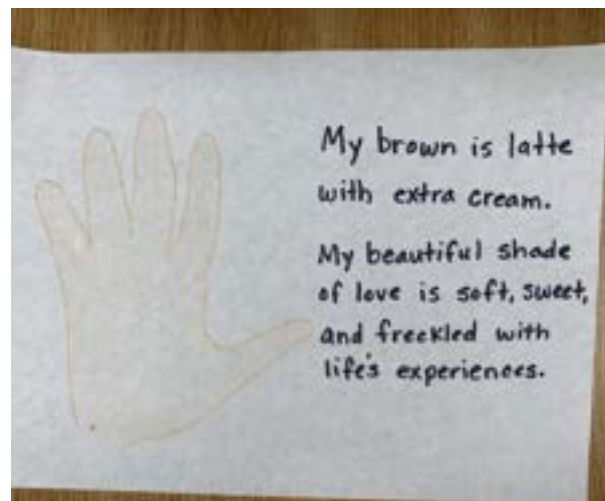


Figure 5. Poem written by teacher during author/illustrator virtual meet for *Brown: The Many Shades of Love*.

Global Experiences

Mrs. Finney, a Global Committee member who was teaching a virtual first grade class, had three students from other countries. This has helped shape her lessons to be more mindful of approaching lessons with a global lens. The school had a “Dress from Your Culture” day, and her three students dressed up for their online meet. One student even made a video of herself wearing traditional Hmong clothing and spoke in Hmong to her classmates.

Even though our original goals had to change, the group still wanted to plan a schoolwide celebration of different cultures. We planned and implemented a schoolwide “Christmas Around the World” contest in which grade levels studied Christmas traditions from other countries. The rules were kept to a minimum to allow teachers the flexibility to cater the contest to their students’ needs. Teachers could also choose to work independently or as a grade level, and they were given the freedom to choose the area of focus for their students. Everyone chose to work together as a grade level, with second and third grade working together to focus on Central and South America. Second grade painted a permanent “mini mural” of Central America, which has inspired our study group to encourage each grade level to create mini murals of geographical areas in the future.



Figure 6. Mural of Central America.

Fourth grade took the opportunity to learn more about a new student whose family is from Egypt. His family used video to present their Christmas traditions, shared family artifacts, and taught the whole grade level how to sing a song in Arabic.

The winning grade level's reward was to get to watch *Landfill Harmonic: A Symphony of the Human Spirit*, a documentary about a Paraguayan children's musical group. This was the first time the majority of the third-grade students had watched a documentary, let alone the first time they had watched something primarily in another language.

Classes were able to "visit" other countries around the school by viewing the artwork from the contest that decorated the hallways.

Señorita Quiñones, our kindergarten dual immersion teacher, shared information about her home country of Colombia with students. Already immersed in the Spanish language, students were eager to learn about her country and share what they learned with the rest of the school. They created and shared a video with the school completely in Spanish. Mrs. Farris, the media coordinator, was with sixth graders when the video was shown to the school. They were amazed that the kindergarteners could speak so fluently, and one student who speaks Spanish at home was especially impressed with their ability to correctly pronounce words. This student had heard about the program but hadn't yet seen it in action, and it made her proud to see a whole class of students speaking her family's native tongue. Link to Colombia Project Student Samples (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cpFEXS38U8RebuycBNZn4cHqnkhXUw6v/view?usp=sharing>).

In addition to this project, Señorita Quiñones' students were open to checking out books from our library's World Language section, as well as nonfiction books about various countries. Their interest was not limited to just Spanish-speaking countries. The grant allowed us to really beef up the World Language section by 55%, which proved to be crucial for the dual immersion program.



Figure 7. World Language section of library (as indicated by yellow arrows).

Final Reflections

Not having intervention time put a damper on being able to incorporate global studies for some classes. Some teachers felt pressured to fit a year's worth of curriculum into the days students were physically present because many students and their families struggled to attend during their virtual days. Some teachers relied on their traditional ways and were hesitant to explore newer stories in a similar context. The committee feels confident that without a pandemic-laden year, all of these pieces will be better put together in the future.

Having the time to reflect at the end of the school year on what the school did accomplish towards a global understanding helped the committee to realize that we actually did more than we thought. We are growing in our own understanding and intentional planning.

Media coordinator and Global Committee chair Elizabeth Farris reflects, “One thing I have noticed this year is that in addition to using the books we purchased through this grant, teachers are also eager to share global literature they have come across with me. They want these books in our library, and they want to share them with students. They recognize the importance of students seeing themselves and others reflected in literature, and they are excited to share their newfound knowledge with me. Prior to this grant, I don’t recall this same enthusiasm.”

The group is looking forward to continuing this work next year. We still very much want to create the mural and are now leaning towards having Startown alumni create it. We also want to continue school-wide celebrations of cultures similar to our Christmas Around the World.

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