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CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

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Roselmina Indrisano

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Boston University School of Education

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The Guidelines for Authors are on page 59.

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BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

INTRODUCTION

LAURA M. JIMÉNEZ, *JOURNAL OF EDUCATION*

I have the pleasure of introducing this review of texts for young readers that share a common thread reflective of the theme of this issue. They all offer readers opportunities to become acquainted with cultural groups that are chronically misrepresented or underrepresented in children's literature, part of an historic trend across all American literature.

The need for texts for young readers that are diverse, authentic, and complex is not new to the classrooms of our day. We have long understood that, as a nation, we need to do more than simply acknowledge diversity of culture, language, race, and experience. We need to embrace the diversity that is our country's strength. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) described the potential of books to realize this vision when she wrote about the possibility of literature providing "Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (p. ix). A text can be a mirror, reflecting what is familiar to the reader's own experience. The same text can also be a window that allows other readers to look beyond their own experiences and see something new. And, there are other texts that have the potential, with a teacher's careful guidance, to be a sliding glass door that invites the reader to experience a new vista.

The texts that are reviewed here have the potential to open a new world to students whose own lives are not reflected in them. And, each text offers the rare opportunity to become better acquainted with underrepresented people, including those in the classroom, who deserve the chance to see themselves, their language, and their history in the pages (or screens) of great stories.

One of the goals of our Books for Young Readers reviews is to introduce teachers to resources that broaden the opportunities for students to learn about those whose culture and language are different from their own or whose courageous deeds helped to create our shared history. We hope that the texts reviewed here will provide young readers "Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" to appreciate the richness of our diversity as a nation.

REVIEWS

ELIZABETH NOLAN AND ROSELMINA INDRISANO,
JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

The Baobab, A Storybook App

STORY BY MELISSA MALZKUHN, KRISTEN HARMON, BENJAMIN BAHAN, AND WANDA RIDDLE
ILLUSTRATED BY YIQIAO WANG
STORYTELLER: APRIL JACKSON-WOODARD

The Baobab and the VL2 storybook app series are designed and managed by Melissa Malzkuhn, VL2's Digital Innovation & Media Strategies Manager.

Produced by Gallaudet University Science of Learning Center on Visual Language and Visual Learning, 2013

Award: DEVICE Design Award, 2014
(Ages 5 to 8)

In an interactive, bilingual American Sign Language (ASL) and English Storybook app for children, the NSF Science of Learning Center on Visual Language and Visual Learning (VL2) at Gallaudet University presents a tale of a "curious and adventurous little girl." What makes this story unique is that the content is provided in two languages—ASL and English. As the reader opens the app, the words Watch, Read, Learn appear on the screen. Selecting Watch brings into view April Jackson-Woodard, an ASL Storyteller who signs the story. Choosing Read opens the book with highlighted words that, when tapped, show the Storyteller signing the corresponding ASL sign. Selecting Learn opens the most unique feature of this app, a 170-word glossary of alphabetically-arranged words in English along with the invitation to "select a word," whereupon the Storyteller appears and signs the corresponding ASL sign. On each subsequent page a red bookmark allows access to the glossary, a feature that is likely to engage the interest of children who are beyond the stage of beginning reading.

The bilingual features of this app enhance an engaging story created by a team of Deaf authors: Melissa Malzkuhn, Kristen Harmon, Benjamin Bahan, and Wanda Riddle, and captivating watercolor illustrations by Yiqiao Wang. The story begins, "Once upon a time, in a land far past the hills, a small village lay tucked between mountains and rivers." The illustration on this page forecasts the delights to follow as the stylized rendering of trees that are drawn as curlicues gives way to a series of pictures that exhibit familiar qualities of children's art. Important characters and objects, the animals and the tree, are drawn larger than the surrounding scenes.

Reminiscent of preschool drawings, the little girl's head with pink sunglasses on her face is bigger than the rest of her body. The colors chosen by Wang are as bright as the favorites in a child's box of crayons that are worn down from frequent use.

As the little girl begins her adventure, she meets a man who introduces himself as a traveler and his purpose as "I find stories." The man holds fruit from "an important enormous tree called the baobab!" After tasting the fruit, the girl ignores his warning that the tree is "forbidden" and sets off to find more fruit. Her journey is interrupted by warnings and mishaps in the form of hummingbirds and a monkey with a "large red nose and blue cheeks." When she finally locates the baobab that looks "upside down," the girl who "loves to climb trees" begins her attempts to secure the fruit until her final ascent results in a fall into a dark hole. Her rescue by a large elephant that cradles the little girl in his trunk to bring her back to her village closes an enduring story of an heroic child that begins with the traditional "Once upon a time," and concludes with the equally familiar words, "THE END."

Children, whether Deaf or hearing, will enjoy this appealing tale of an adventurous little girl who pursues her purpose despite every obstacle. For readers who know ASL, the bilingual interactive mode of the text affords options for accessing the content in either ASL or printed English. For those who do not know ASL, this app provides an introduction to another language as they read and enjoy an enhanced version of an engaging story and creative illustrations. For all readers, the bilingual glossary will be both intriguing and informative.

Opportunities for instruction abound as this well-crafted tale invites discussions of the characters, setting, plot structure, and descriptive language. The characters might become the inspiration for children's own tales as they imagine the stories the traveler may have found after he left the little girl, or who the herd of elephants might have rescued after they left her safe at home. The illustrations can serve as models for a gallery of art that illustrates other favorite stories or the further adventures of the curious little girl. Finally, as other bilingual stories, this app affords opportunities to experience and discuss another language, this one a visual language. While American Sign Language may be different from their own language, even young readers can appreciate the universal purpose of language, to communicate with others. With this app, readers will enjoy a good story and perfect pictures, this time, in two languages.

The Other Side

WRITTEN BY JACQUELINE WOODSON

ILLUSTRATED BY E.B. LEWIS

Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001

Award: ALA Notable Book

(Ages 5–8)

The Other Side is the creation of two award winners: author Jacqueline Woodson and illustrator E. B. Lewis. Woodson's words and Lewis' watercolors tell a simple story about a complex topic. Set in an unspecified rural town, this picturebook reveals the complicated history of racism and segregation to young readers without

distilling the significance of the injustice. The narrative is a story of childhood innocence as Clover, who is African American, and Annie, who is White challenge a rule that doesn't make sense to either of them. Despite warnings from their mothers the girls find a way to overcome the barrier that is intended to restrict them, and they become friends.

In the beginning of the narrative Clover and Annie interact only by glancing or staring at one another over the fence that divides the African American and the White neighborhood. Then came the day when Annie sits on the fence and asks to play with Clover and her friends, but Clover reluctantly says, "No." On the rainy summer days that follow, Clover watches from her window as Annie dances in spite of the rain. In the middle of the summer when the rain finally ends, a friendship evolves.

The fence serves as a metaphor for the great divide between the races. Clover notes that during that summer the fence "seemed bigger," and "everyone and everything on the other side of that fence seemed far away" (n. p.). Through the use of simple, realistic language, Woodson allows the reader to feel what Clover feels about the distance between her and the girl in the pink sweater. The description of the fence as bigger and the distance larger between the two sides provokes a reader to question if Clover would pay so much attention to the fence if Annie were not on the other side.

Lewis' lifelike watercolor illustrations, many crossing the spine of the book to the facing page, beautifully complement the narrative and engage the reader. The double page illustration that opens the book prepares the reader to understand the setting and to visualize the large divide between one side of the fence and the other. On the pages that follow Lewis' detailed and striking paintings depict on Clover and Annie's faces, their curiosity, longing, happiness, and sadness. A reader could spend considerable time studying the watercolors and gaining a deeper understanding of the characters and their actions. The day Clover approached the fence, and the two girls spoke to one another for the first time is illustrated by an especially moving image, Clover with arms wide reaching for the sky, her head tilted back, and a wide smile on her face. The words on the facing page read "I felt brave that day. I felt free" (n. p.).

Depending on the grade level, this book can elicit a variety of discussions. Younger readers may be able to make connections to their own friendships, questions of right and wrong, and what they know about segregation. For students in grades 2 and 3, the metaphor of the fence can be used both in reading and writing. For all students, the compelling story and pictures invite inferences and conclusions regarding the characters' thoughts and feelings at each turn in the events. Aside from being beautifully told and illustrated, the story offers a message about the importance of breaking down fences. Inspired by the author, educators and caregivers alike can use this opportunity to discuss the ways children can be leaders for change. In her Author's Note, Woodson recalls that when she wrote this story she did not know the impact it would have over time. She writes,