

1-1-2011

# Multicultural Literature, Literally!

Stan Steiner

*Boise State University*

Maggie Chase

*Boise State University*

Eun Hye Son

*Boise State University*

## Multicultural Literature, Literally!

Stan Steiner, Maggie Chase and Eun Hye Son  
Boise State University

Our communities have been changing right before our eyes. Children in our schools, patrons in our libraries, and families in our towns and cities have become increasingly diverse, yet the number of children's books written and illustrated that reflect the ethnically diverse make up our communities tends to fall short of reality. Children's author Anne Sibley O'Brien calls this "white mind." Fortunately, a few artists and authors have opened their eyes to the rich panorama of people who live, work, and recreate side by side in today's world.

This article is titled multicultural literature literally because we wanted to focus on literature that reflects diversity in the pictures and story lines. We felt it was important to call librarians' and teachers' attention to some of these books because they reflect the natural interactions across race that occur with our children and adults. The books we refer to may have the ability to break down racial discrimination in their own subtle ways if we have them available in our libraries or classrooms and share them with our patrons.

As we began looking for these changes in recently published books, we found they tended to fall into three categories. We decided to feature two of the three categories, leaving out books where the illustrator consciously represented characters in a setting rich in diversity. The first group includes books with ethnically diverse characters interacting in positive, meaningful ways. The second group lists books that use diversity as an underlying theme. Of course, you will find these books fit other broader topics and genres such as poetry, graphic novel, historical, seasons, and others, but we leave those connections to the readers. We hope you can see the significance of using these books in your classrooms and libraries as a tool to promote the awareness of diversity and the occurrence of positive interactions across race in our communities.

### Ethnically Diverse Characters Interacting

*How Tía Lola Learned to Teach.* By Julia Alvarez. 2010. 144p. Knopf, \$15.99 (9780375864605). When Tía (Aunt) Lola arrives in a small Vermont community to help care for Juanita and Miguel she makes everyone feel happy in the home, school and community. A conflict arises with her immigration status and an unexpected number of town people and extended family want to help.

*Me and Rolly Maloo.* By Janet S. Wong. Illus. by Elizabeth Buttler. 2010. 122p. Charlesbridge, \$15.95 (9781580891585). Janet Wong raises the question, "would you cheat to be popular?" A recent study showed 60% of students surveyed have cheated on a test in the past 12 months. In this captivating story Jenna and Rolly Maloo learn about the consequences of putting popularity over true friendship.

*Sahwira: An African Friendship.* By Carolyn Marsden and Philip Matzigkeit. 2009. 198p. Candlewick, \$15.99 (9780763635756). The story of two boys, one black and one white, whose friendship is severely tested during the racial and political turmoil in Rhodesia in the mid -1960's. Each boy struggles with the consequences of their actions and decisions.

*Seeds of Change.* By Jen Cullerton Johnson. Illus. by Sonia Lynn Sadler. 2010. 40p. Lee & Low, \$18.95 (9781600603679). The determination of one person can change an entire nation. Striking scratchboard and oil illustrations bring this biography of Kenyan born 2004 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Wangari Maathai to a deserved place of distinction for saving one corner of our environment and the trees of Kenya.

*Sharing Our Homeland.* By Trish Marx. Photos by Cindy Karp. 2010. 48p. Lee & Low, \$19.95 (9781584302605). Through large, colorful photographs, the author tells of a summer camp in Israel that brings Palestinian and Jewish children together. Fun, friendship, and understanding win out, despite their own countries' often hostile relationship. Marx focuses on the lives of two children's families in telling the story.

*Smile*. By Raina Telgemeier. 2010. 214p. Scholastic, \$10.99 (9780545132060). Anyone who has had orthodontic work, especially braces, can relate to this graphic novel. A fictionalized account of the author's own experiences, including the hurt and injustices that some adolescents intentionally heap upon their peers.

*The Sandwich Swap*. By Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and Kelly DiPucchio. Illus. by Tricia Tusa. 2010. 32p. Hyperion, \$16.99 (9781423124849). It has been said that food is the first assimilation into learning about another culture. This beautiful story, based on one of Queen Rania's real life experiences, has an even greater message about acceptance and friendship across ethnic groups.

*Whaling Season: A Year in the Life of an Arctic Whale Scientist*. By Peter Lourie. 2009. 80p. Houghton Mifflin, \$18.00 (9780618777099). Peter Lourie's amazing photos and detailed account of whaling takes readers on a lifetime adventure to Barrow, Alaska that few non-natives have ever experienced. Spend time with Arctic whale scientist Craig George and the people of the North Slope for an insider perspective on whaling.

### **Diversity Driven Theme**

*A Friend*. by Anette Bley. 2009. 28p. Kane Miller, \$14.95 (9781935279006). As this timeless book shows so well, friends come in all shapes and sizes and they all have a lot in common when it comes to fulfilling the emotional needs of another friend.

*Amazing Faces*. By Lee Bennett Hopkins. Illus. by Chris Soentpiet. 2010. 32p. Lee & Low, \$18.95 (9781600603341). Each face in Chris Soentpiet's amazing watercolor illustrations tells a story in itself. Reading each carefully selected poem from a line-up of incredible writers will inspire an emotional connection for those you love and those you meet for the first time in this truly beautiful book.

*Big Red Lollipop*. By Rukhsana Khan. Illus. by Sophie Blackall. 2010. 32p. Viking, \$16.99 (9780670062874). Rubina is so excited when she is invited to a birthday party, but that bubble bursts when her mother makes her take her little sister, Sana. In many ways, this ruins the fun for Rubina, but she later sees a golden opportunity to get back at Sana. What will she do?

*Duck for Turkey Day*. By Jacqueline Jules. Illus. by Kathryn Mitter. 2009. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807517345). Turkey Day has become synonymous with Thanksgiving. Tuyet interprets this to mean that everyone in America eats turkey. Troubled by the fact that her Vietnamese family and relatives eat duck, Tuyet worries about what her teacher will think. A pleasant surprise ensues from the classroom discussion following "Turkey Day".

*Henry Aaron's Dream*. By Matt Tavares. 2010. 40p. Candlewick Press, \$16.99 (9780763632243). Most would agree Hank Aaron was one of the greatest baseball players of all times. He held the record for homeruns, runs batted in, total bases, and extra base hits. Perhaps his greatest legacy is his role in breaking discrimination against blacks, athletes and citizens alike.

*Heroes of the Environment: True Stories of People Who Are Helping Protect the Planet*. By Harriet Rohmer. Illus. by Julie McLaughlin. 2009. 109p. Children's Book Press, 16.99 (9780811867795). This book highlights people of all ages who are making a difference in our world by creating alternative energy sources and combating pollution and the destruction of habitats. Persistence and determination are common threads throughout each heroic story.

*Kindergarten Day USA and China: A Flip-Me-Over Book*. By Trish Marx & Ellen B. Senisi. 2010. 40p. Charlesbridge. \$16.95 (978-1-58089-219-3). Two kindergarten classrooms filled with young children, seemingly worlds apart, yet full of similarities is the underlying theme in this book. Expressive photographs capture the children's range of emotions as they go through a school day.

*Marching for Freedom: Walk Together, Children, and Don't You Grow Weary*. By Elizabeth Partridge. 2009. 72p. Viking, \$19.99 (9780670011896). Partridge tells a gripping, unforgettable account of the horrific and heroic efforts of Blacks to gain the right to vote in Selma, Alabama in 1965. This book is full of photos and descriptive text of children and adults as they fought the injustices and violence inflicted upon them.

*My Father is Taller Than a Tree.* By Joseph Bruchac. Illus. by Wendy Anderson Halperin. 2010. 32p. Dial \$16.99 (9780803731738). This book is a wonderful tribute to fathers and sons. Fathers do many things for us, but best is the time spent with you, whether it be playing in the park or reading a book. The time together becomes a legacy for the next generation of fathers and sons.

*One of Us.* By Peggy Moss. Illus. by Penny Weber. 2010. 32p. Tilbury House, \$16.95 (9780884483229). When Roberta transfers to a new school, she struggles to find a group of students whose interests and tolerance for others' differences are as diverse and eclectic as her own.

*One World, One Day.* By Barbara Kerley. 2009. 48p. National Geographic. \$17.95 (9781426304606). This book shows universal similarities children experience. Children start their day bathing, eating a variety of breakfasts, traveling to school on foot or by other means. They study, have recess time to play different games, and some have chores before dinner. Children across the globe settle in for the night.

*Our Grandparents: A Global Album.* By Maya Ajmera, Sheila Kinkade and Cynthia Pon. 2010. 32p. Charlesbridge, \$16.95 (9781570914584). No matter how you say grandma and grandpa in your native language they all have something in common and that is you. They love to be with you, take you places, explore, learn, and laugh with you. This book also suggests five wonderful things to do with your grandparents.

*Say Hello!* By Rachel Isadora. 2010. 32p. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399252303). Saying hello in any language most often comes with a smile and is the beginning of a friendship. Rachel Isadora takes readers on a wonderful journey of greetings around the world in natural settings.

*Shades of People.* By Shelley Rotner. Photos by Sheila M. Kelly. 2009. 32p. Holiday House, \$16.95 (9780823421916). This is a feel good book for everyone. Photographs and carefully selected vocabulary present a beautiful look at skin color in terms of shades with color words that radiate a warm feeling.

*Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down.* By Andrea Davis Pinkney. Illus. by Brian Pinkney. 2010. 40p. Little, Brown & Company, \$16.99 (9780316070164). The year 2010 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Woolworth's lunch counter protest against segregation in restaurants that took place in Greensboro, North Carolina. This book is a fine tribute chronicling one event in a string of peaceful protests during the Civil Rights Movement.

*The Beatitudes: From Slavery to Civil Rights.* By Carole Boston Weatherford. Illus. by Tim Ladwig. 2010. 32p. Eerdmans, \$16.99 (9780802853523). Using Biblical scripture from Matthew 5:3-12 as the foundation, Carole Boston Weatherford weaves stirring words highlighting African American heroes and events through U.S. history. Tim Ladwig's moving illustrations capture each moment.

*The Best Family in the World.* By Susana López. Illus. by Ulises Wensell. 2010. 28p. Kane Miller, \$15.99 (9781935279471). Carlota has been waiting for this day to arrive. She is being adopted. This lovely book puts readers see into Carlota's mind as she anticipates who and how her adoptive parents will treat her.

*The Hallelujah Flight.* By Phil Bildner. Illus. by John Holyfield. 2010. 32p. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399247897). Have you heard of James Banning and Thomas Allen? In 1932 they became the first African-Americans to traverse the U.S. from coast to coast in an airplane. At each stop, they depended on kindness and generosity from strangers for food and spare parts to fix their dilapidated plane.

*The Longest Day: Celebrating the Summer Solstice.* Wendy Pfeffer. Illus. by Linda Black. 2010. 40p. Dutton, \$17.99 (9780525422372). Around the world and through time, as anthropological evidence shows, people have celebrated the beginning of summer. This book is a good resource to discuss possible reasons why people celebrated this day each year.

*When It's Six O'Clock in San Francisco: A Trip Through Time Zones.* By Cynthia Jaynes Omololu. Illus. by Randy DeBurke. 2009. 32p. Clarion Books, \$16.00 (9780618768271). This book takes readers across the time zones through the lives of kids. In San Francisco, Jared is starting his day as kids in other parts of the world are doing a host of activities from playing soccer, eating and ending their day.