

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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## **Bringing Global Cultures and World Languages into K-8 Classrooms: Manual for Language and Culture Book Kits**

Most U.S. students do not encounter less commonly taught languages until they enter high school or the university. Our goal is to introduce K-8 students to less commonly taught cultures and languages so that students will be more open to later choosing that language for study and are more comfortable with exploring a range of world languages and global cultures. Literature is a powerful way to engage K-8 students in a study of the world to explore global perspectives and languages. Engagements with international literature can increase international understanding, support language development, lead to a recognition of similarities across cultures as well as an appreciation of differences, and foster critical thinking on global issues and concerns.

There are many ways of opening the world for children and adolescents, including technology, world language study, student exchange programs, and global studies. All of these are significant but literature offers unique possibilities, in particular the opportunity for students to go beyond a tourist perspective of surface-level information about another culture. Literature invites readers to immerse themselves into story worlds to gain insights about how people live, feel, and think around the world—to develop emotional connections and empathy as well as knowledge. These connections go beyond the surface knowledge of food, dance, clothing, folklore, and facts about a country to the values and beliefs that lie at the core of each culture.

Language and Culture Book Kits each contain 12-15 picture books written in English, 3-5 read-aloud novels in English, 3-4 picture books in the world language, and beginning language learning materials. The purpose of each kit is to provide a set of books to share with students that authentically reflect historical and contemporary experiences and views of the diverse peoples within that culture. The kits meet the concerns and obstacles that teachers and librarians face in locating and using literature about global cultures. One is that many of these books are not well known and are recent publications and so are difficult to identify and locate. Another major issue is that they are not familiar with the culture and so are unsure about which books authentically reflect the culture and the range of lifestyles within that culture. An additional challenge involves uncertainties about how to effectively use international books with students, given that many contain unfamiliar stylistic devices and terminology and the experiences and settings in the books, at first glance, seem far removed from students' lives. Educators struggle with how to support students in making significant connections to these books in order to move their responses beyond viewing other cultures as exotic or strange. They are also unlikely to introduce students to the language because of their lack of familiarity with that language. The kits provide resources and materials for teachers and students to explore that respond to these concerns and needs. The focus of the kit is exploration, not an in-depth study of the culture or the language.

The process for developing each Language and Culture Book Kit involves first identifying a specific language and culture. These include world languages based in a specific country, such as Hangeul in South Korea, and languages that cut across countries, such as Arabic in the Middle East and South Asia. Once a culture and language are identified, we invite an insider from that culture to work with our team to explore possible materials for the kit, including picture books, novels, and beginning language teaching materials. The process includes:

- Data base searches to identify as many children's books as possible that are available in the U.S. about that particular culture.

- Web-based searches for books in the language of that country and beginning language teaching materials (both in the U.S. and in the country)
- Identifying and locating books selected from these searches that reflect diverse perspectives on that language and culture.
- Reading through the books and materials to make final selections based on the guidelines. Readers include both an international consultant who is an insider to that culture as well as an expert in children's literature, who each read through the materials and then meet to discuss the selections.
- Creating an annotated book list for the materials in the kit.
- Creating audio recordings by a native speaker and English translations for books in the world language.
- Identifying key web sites that provide access to further information on the culture and language.
- Compiling teaching strategies and suggestions for uses of the materials.

## Guidelines for Language and Culture Book Kits

- Select 12-15 picture books with 3-4 novels, focusing on books that are good read-alouds.
- Include a range of genres – traditional literature, historical fiction, information books, poetry, and contemporary fiction.
- Balance historical fiction and folklore with contemporary fiction and information books.
- Select books that show the diversity of the culture, such as rural/urban, different social classes, range of ethnic groups within the culture, etc.
- Include some books which highlight common universal values and other books that highlight cultural differences and specific values within that culture.
- Include a book that raises issues for readers and can be used to discuss common stereotypes of that culture.
- Select books originally written and published within the culture and then translated to English or books published by an immigrant from that culture so that insider perspectives are included in the literature.
- Check the cultural authenticity of all books through reviews and critiques by cultural insiders.
- Include books in the language of that culture, particularly bilingual books and companion books (separate editions of the same book in English and in the language of the culture). Books in the language of the culture should be simple with strong illustrations and a small amount of print so as not overwhelm readers. Include a audio recording of a native speaker reading the book and a written translation into English.
- Include one common book in the language of the culture that is already well known to readers (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*).
- Include music specific to that culture
- Select simple language learning workbooks and charts
- Include a list of web sites that provide cultural information and ideas for language study.

# Evaluating Authenticity

Evaluating authenticity involves considering complex issues, not making a simple yes or no decision about a book. These issues and questions can be useful in thinking about the complexity of cultural authenticity.

- **Literary Qualities**  
How well does the author tell the story? Is it quality literature?
- **Origin of book**  
What is the origin of the book? Who was the original publisher and in what country? Who is the author? illustrator? translator? What are their backgrounds?
- **Authorship**  
How do the author's experiences connect to the setting and characters in this book? What are the experiences and/or research on which the book is based? Why might the author have chosen this story to tell?
- **Believability**  
Is this story believable? Could it happen? In what ways does it feel real? Are the characters larger than stereotypes but less than "perfect" heroes?
- **Accuracy of details and authenticity of values**  
What are the inaccuracies within the details of the book? What values are at the heart of the book? How do these values connect to the actual lives of people within the culture? Does this book reflect a specific cultural experience or could it happen anywhere?
- **Perspectives**  
Whose perspectives and experiences are portrayed? Who tells the story? What is the range of insider perspectives?
- **Power Relationships**  
Which characters are in roles of power or significance within the book? Who takes action? How is the story resolved? Where does the story go and how does it get there? Who takes it there? Why?
- **Audience**  
Who is the intended audience? Is the book written for children from that culture or to inform children from other cultural backgrounds about that culture?
- **Relationship to other books**  
How does this book connect with other books about this cultural experience? Do the books reflect a range of perspectives and experiences within the culture?
- **Response by insiders**  
How have insiders responded to this book?
- **Connections for your readers**  
What are the possible connections for students? Is the book accessible?

# Global and Intercultural Understandings

The concept of global competence has emerged as a way of articulating the knowledge and capacities students need in the 21st century. Global competence requires knowledge and understandings of world cultures as well as the ability to use that knowledge creatively and productively. Global studies are grounded in critical inquiry so that students develop the ability to critically and creatively confront the issues of a global society and are willing to work for social change, rather than to just accept the world as it is. Our students, the leaders to be of the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century, will have to understand and collaborate with people from around the world.

Global competence includes the ability to understand prevailing world conditions, issues and trends through interdisciplinary learning. Students in San Francisco or São Paulo who know what's going on in the world and how the world works, from climate change to migration trends to human rights, will be able to function more successfully and effectively in our global society. Educating students for global competence requires substantive engagement over time with the world's complexities. Gaining this knowledge and understanding depends on acquiring and applying four key cognitive capacities – essential dimensions of global competence. Today's globally competent youngsters are able to create a safe, accepting and successful learning environment for all to:

## Investigate the world

- Increase their awareness of global issues
- Strengthen their cultural consciousness
- Strengthen their intercultural awareness

## Recognize perspectives

- View issues as if they were actually living someone else's perspective
- Increase their awareness of alternate historical perspectives
- Demonstrate how ideas change or are appropriate/inappropriate for different cultures

## Communicate ideas

- Use multiple ways of communicating their ideas with others
- Develop flexibility as language users across multiple languages

## Take action

- Work to prevent prejudice and discrimination
- Generate solutions for global issues and implement them as appropriate
- Critique society in the interest of social justice

You will find many useful resources in this kit that builds bridges between cultures as you and your students begin or continue on an exploration of other parts of the world.

# Global Inquiry and Global Literature

Reading literature to gain understandings of global cultures involves reading to inquire into issues in children's lives and in the broader society. These experiences support children in becoming critical and knowledgeable readers and thinkers. Readers are encouraged to engage deeply with the story world of a text and then to step back to share their personal connections and to reflect critically with others about the text. They engage in shared thinking about ideas based on critical inquiries that matter in their lives and world.

Critical inquiry focuses on issues of power and on questioning oppression. Readers are challenged to critique and question "what is" and "who benefits" as well as to hope and consider possibility by asking "what if" and taking action for social change. Through critical literacy, children learn to problematize, question, and develop a critical consciousness that involves them in

- questioning the everyday world
- examining relationships between language and power
- analyzing popular culture and media
- understanding how power relationships are socially constructed
- considering actions to promote social justice

This critical consciousness allows children to become problem-posers who critically analyze the way we exist in the world and view the world as in the process of transformation and becoming.

Cultural authenticity is a critical issue for readers, both in identifying with and challenging the social worlds portrayed within literature. Cultural authenticity goes beyond accuracy or the avoidance of stereotyping to include the cultural values and practices within a social group in order to examine whether a book is authentically reflecting the values and practices of particular cultures. The issue of authenticity is complex, given the range of experiences within any cultural group and the unique interpretations that each reader creates from a book. Reading literature from a critical perspective engages readers in questioning the meanings embedded within texts. They "read against the grain" of texts to question dominant messages and uncover the different layers of meanings, beliefs and perspectives embedded in a book.

Providing brief information about the background of authors and illustrators before reading aloud can raise children's awareness about the significance of this frame in interpreting literature. Students realize that they need to know if an author is a cultural insider, has visited the country, or has engaged in research or some kind of experience related to the content of the book. This context is important in considering an author's perspective and how and why authors write about a particular topic as well as for readers to position themselves in critically discussing a book.

Cultural authenticity is an analysis of the extent to which a book reflects the world view of beliefs and values and depicts the accurate details of everyday life and language for a specific cultural group. Given the diversity within any cultural group, there is never one image of life within any group, and so the themes and underlying ideologies are often more significant for analysis. Readers from the culture of a book need to be able to identify and feel affirmed that what they are reading rings true in their lives, while readers from another culture need to be able to identify and learn something of value about cultural similarities and differences.

See *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, edited by Dana Fox and Kathy G. Short (NCTE, 2003).

## Global Cultures: The First Steps toward Understanding

Elsie Begler

Too often when we turn to the classroom study of particular cultures, there is a fixation on what I call the “Five Fs”: food, fashion, fiestas, folklore, and famous people. Without a proper understanding of what “culture” is, misconceptions about “cultures” will continue to abound.

Most of us are aware of the distinction between Culture and culture (“big C, little c”). Culture thought of with a big “C” refers to “high culture,” as in the fine arts, literature, philosophy, classical music, and other forms of endeavor that represent the highest aesthetic achievements of a society. Culture with a “little c” adds to this the social, economic, and political systems of a society—with people’s values and beliefs providing a framework for all other aspects of the culture.

We tend to think very differently about foreign cultures from the way we regard our own. Foreign cultures are often seen as discrete entities—rather like hard-shelled billiard balls that go through history banging into and bouncing off each other without ever much changing their shape, size, or color (although some do manage to get knocked out of the game entirely).<sup>1</sup> For instance, Chinese culture is often seen as having reached its essential form by the end of the Han Dynasty (200 A.D.), continuing on basically unchanged right up to the establishment of the modern People’s Republic.

In contrast, we are more likely to think of our own culture as dynamic, versatile, and contemporary. One misconception is that, here in the United States, the level of diversity is so great that each of us has an individual culture. Chinese culture, so the misconception goes, is monolithic; United States culture is made up of not one but 265 million rainbows.

Because of the misconceptions about our own and other cultures, and because the amount that can be said about cultures is so vast, it can be a difficult subject to teach in the classroom. Although ambitious and challenging, teaching about culture can also be both effective and rewarding. The key is to have a teaching framework that allows students a good grasp of the fundamentals of culture, and that can be used to study all cultures, including our own.

The first step is to make sure that students have an understanding of the word “culture” that is conceptually correct yet also manageable. While there are many definitions in the anthropological literature, virtually all contain the idea of culture as an integrated system of beliefs and behaviors that are learned and shared. Key understandings include the following concepts:

- Culture is learned rather than genetically inherited. This means that each of us is capable of learning more than one culture, although—as with language—we are usually most fluent and comfortable with the culture in which we grow up.
- Culture is shared by members of a group. It is true that each of us is unique and capable of individual thoughts, behaviors, and utterances. It is also true that societal knowledge is not shared equally among all members; individuals have varying levels of familiarity and expertise with different aspects of their own culture. Even so, what we say and do must conform to some set of underlying linguistic and cultural rules that makes us comprehensible



to other members of our society. Otherwise, these behaviors are idiosyncratic, not cultural. We do not each have our own individual culture.

- Culture is dynamic rather than static. Even during Paleolithic times, when human societies were small and travel over long distances was hardly possible, there were changes in culture. These resulted from adaptations to changing environmental conditions, as well as ideas and inventions that became incorporated into the common knowledge and behavior of groups. During most of history, conquests and trade contacts have caused the mixing of new ideas and artifacts among human cultures. Today, few groups remain sufficiently isolated from the global networks of information and artifact exchange to possess a culture that has remained essentially unchanged over the last fifty years.
- Culture is a systemic whole and not to be broken into high and low culture. It is neither Confucius nor chopsticks, Orozco nor serapes, Yeats nor Yorkshire pudding. It is all of these, as well as the color of the flag, the music heard on the street, the value of the currency, and the rate of divorce.

### **World Culture: A Visual Organizer**

How can we present such a complex whole to students in a way that helps them to understand different cultures, including the one to which they belong? “Culture” is such a large concept—embracing both beliefs and behavior—that it is often easier to grasp when broken down into distinct components. Figure 1 provides an easy visual organizer for analyzing cultures using a Venn diagram format. To the various facets of culture described above, it adds both the historical and geographical context. It is based on several assumptions:

- All cultures serve basic functions that can be classified into a set (or sets) for easier understanding. Five basic sets of functions of any culture are: economic, social, political, aesthetic, and values/beliefs.
- All cultural behavior is framed by underlying systems of values and beliefs that shape behavioral norms and provide meaning to human activity.
- All cultures exist within a historic context that has shaped the development of the cultural forms and functional systems in operation today. To adequately understand why a culture takes the form it does, historical study is imperative.
- All cultures operate within a geographic context that involves them in a constant state of interaction and adaptation. In the broadest sense, the geographic context for human culture writ large is spaceship Earth.

The World Culture visual organizer can be used as a quick check on whether all the main aspects of a culture are included in a unit of study, or whether the study is heavily skewed towards a few areas only—say, politics and beliefs (religion).

The visual organizer also serves as a powerful reminder that culture is an integrated whole. A simple but powerful way to impress this concept on students is to distribute well-chosen pictures that clearly illustrate two or more aspects of a culture simultaneously (e.g., a picture of an Amish house-raising can, arguably, illustrate all five basic functions within a specific historical and geographic context).

Finally, the visual organizer is useful for the comparative study of cultures, illuminating as it does what is universal, what is similar, and what is unique about the cultures under study. For instance, using the organizer as a guide, students can discover both surprising congruencies and

significant differences between the cultures of ancient Rome and the antebellum U.S. South. The organizer can also be used effectively to study how the same cultural tradition has changed over time.

As pointed out in the “Guidelines for Global and International Studies Education” (pages 311-317 in this issue of *Social Education*), “despite almost 40 years of culture studies and programs, curriculums featuring holidays and food festivals ... still seem to be the extent of the offerings in many schools.” Does this mean we should abandon the ever-popular “Five Fs”? Must we forgo our International or Multicultural Fairs, our Cinco de Mayo and Chinese New Year festivals? Of course not. But let’s use them as starting rather than culminating points in our cultural studies. Again, the World Culture visual organizer provides a guide.

Take food. Food is more than something to fill the belly or titillate the taste buds. It’s a topic that can be used to delve deeply into virtually every aspect of culture. Next time your class or school serves food as part of a cultural fair, use the occasion to have your students research the following questions for the culture they are studying:

- *Geographic Context:* How do the foods traditionally eaten in this culture reflect the geographic context within which the culture developed?
- *Historical Context:* If a traditional food item is not indigenous to this culture, how did it get here? For example, the chili peppers so important to East Indian and Thai curries today did not exist in the Eastern Hemisphere prior to 1492. Nor, for that matter, did the “Irish potato.” What does the contemporary (as opposed to traditional) menu of this culture look like?
- *Economic Context:* How is food produced and distributed in this culture? Who has access to certain kinds of food and who does not? To what degree does access reflect economic factors?
- *Social Context:* Who eats with whom, when, and where? Are there special foods for special occasions? Do certain foods carry symbolic messages or indicate special roles or status?
- *Political Context:* Who prepares food? Who serves it? Who cleans up? In what other ways might positions of power and authority be reflected in food customs?
- *Aesthetic Context:* How much attention does this culture pay to the aesthetic aspects of preparing and eating food? How does this vary with the social, economic, or political context?
- *Values and Beliefs Context:* Which foods are highly valued in this culture? Do certain foods have special religious or ritual values? What are they? Are any foods taboo? Why? What meaning (beyond basic sustenance) does food have in this culture in general?

Think how much your class would learn about a culture (another or their own) by answering these questions. Food is no trivial matter if the right questions are asked. Nor, for that matter, is any human behavior. The World Culture visual organizer can provide an easy and useful reference point for framing questions about topics throughout the school year, whether the subject is history, current events, a piece of literature—or the senior prom.

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*The following lesson illustrates how cultural perspectives may affect the definition and use of resources. The International Studies Education Project of San Diego (ISTEP) adapted this lesson from a unit titled What Is a Resource? developed by the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). This lesson works well both at upper elementary and secondary levels. It can be used to reinforce lessons about differences between cultures and/or differences within the same culture over time. It is also an excellent way to integrate science and social studies.*

## An ISTEP Multiple Perspectives Adaptation of Resources and Culture

**Objectives** - Students will understand that:

1. The identification of certain things in the natural environment as “resources” is dependent upon culture, and will vary over time as technology advances; and,
2. The particular use to which people put a given “natural resource” will vary with culture and technology.

### **Materials Needed**

Two or three sets each (depending on whether a two- or three-way comparison of cultures is being made) of:

Ocean or lake water (i.e., jars containing water and either sand/seaweed/shells or silt/pebbles/and perhaps a mollusk or two)

A stick and some leaves

A bone and some feathers

Dirt and rocks

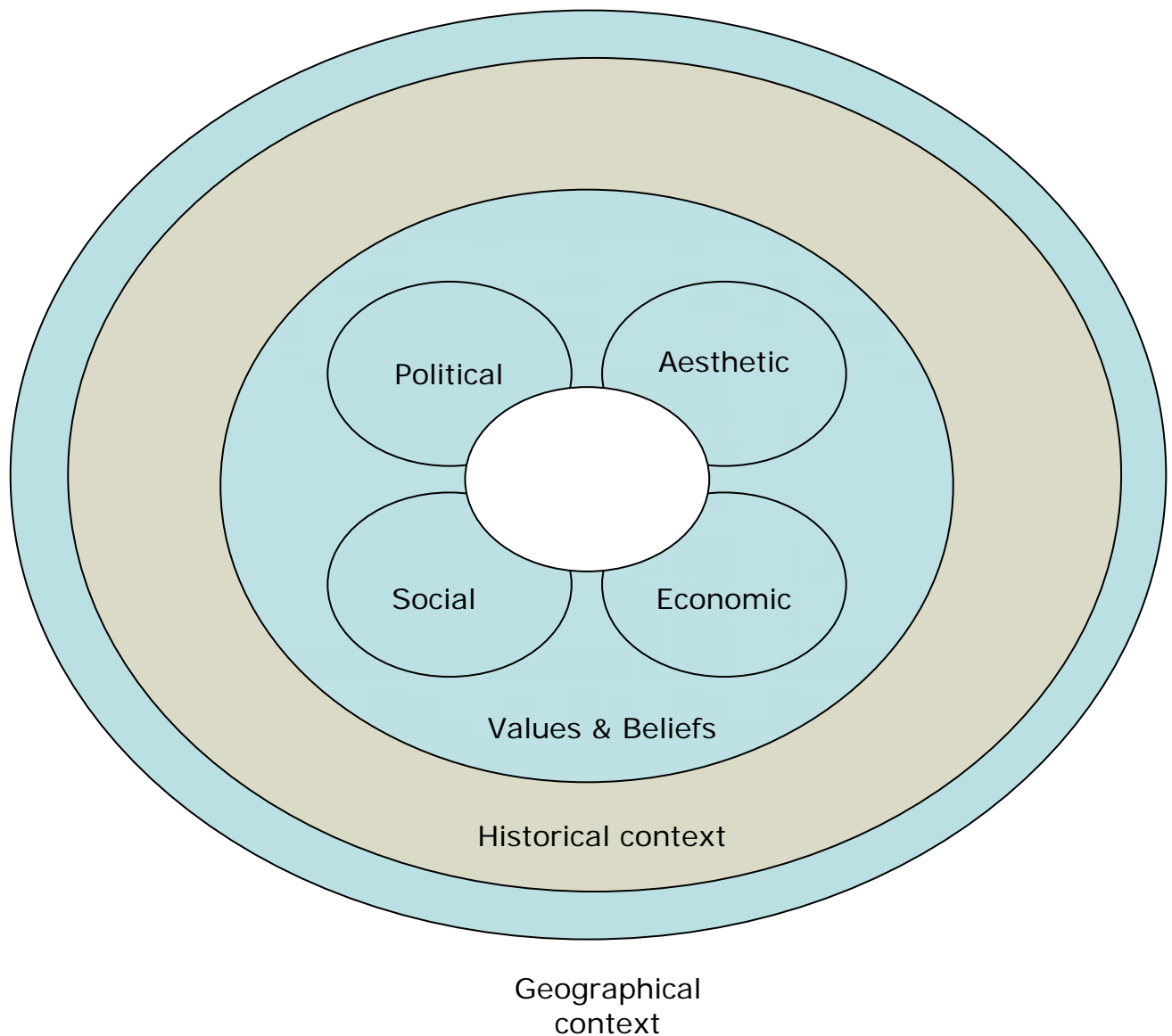
The last three sets of items should be sealed in clear plastic bags to avoid loss and mess.

### **Procedure**

1. Divide the class into small working groups of three to five students each. Assign one-half (or one-third, if doing a three-way comparison) of the groups to role-play the identity of one cultural or historic group they have been studying (e.g., Pilgrims, etc.). Assign the other half of the groups the identity of the contemporary inhabitants of the region (e.g., contemporary New Englanders). A three-way comparison might involve the role-play identity of, e.g., Northeast Woodlands Native Americans prior to the arrival of Europeans.
2. Distribute the prepared items to each group, making sure that the same item is given to groups with different identities—e.g., both Pilgrims and modern New Englanders get ocean water. Depending on how you wish to set things up, each group may be given one or more items.
3. Instruct the groups that they are to identify their item(s), figure out what kind of resource it represents, and pretending they are the identity assigned, list all the possible ways in which that

group of people might have made use of that item. If the item needed to be processed in order to use it in a particular way, they should describe the process used. Impress upon them that they must try to think the way the people whose identity they were given probably would think (e.g., the Pilgrims probably would not have thought of using chicken bones for nose ornaments!)

4. Have each group share the uses they thought of for their resource. Which of the various cultural functions illustrated on the World Culture Model do the different uses fulfill? What differences do they see between the uses different groups made of the same item? What are some of the reasons these differences exist.



## Rubric of Global Competencies

<b>Investigate the World</b>	<b>Recognize Perspectives</b>	<b>Communicate Ideas</b>	<b>Take Action</b>
Students investigate the world beyond their immediate environment.	Students recognize their own and others' perspective.	Students communicate their ideas effectively with diverse audiences.	Students translate their ideas and findings into appropriate actions to improve conditions.
<p>Students can: <b>Generate and</b> explain the significance of locally, regionally or globally focused researchable questions. <b>Identify,</b> collect and analyze the knowledge and evidence required to answer questions using a variety of international sources, media and languages.</p> <p>Weigh, integrate and synthesize evidence collected to construct coherent responses that is appropriate to the context of issues or problems.</p> <p>Develop an argument based on compelling evidence that considers multiple perspectives and draws defensible conclusions.</p>	<p>Students can:</p> <p>Recognize and articulate one's own perspective on situations, events, issues or phenomena and identify the influences on that perspective.</p> <p>Articulate and explain perspectives of other people, groups or schools of thought and identify the influences on those perspectives.</p> <p>Explain how the interaction of ideas across cultures influences the development of knowledge and situations, events, issues or phenomena.</p> <p>Articulate how the consequences of differential access to knowledge, technology and resources affect the quality of life and influences perspectives.</p>	<p>Students can: <b>Recognize that</b> diverse audiences may perceive different meanings from the same information.</p> <p>Use appropriate language, behavior and strategies to effectively communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, with diverse audiences.</p> <p>Explain how effective communication impacts understanding and collaboration in an interdependent world.</p> <p>Select and effectively use appropriate technology and media to communicate with diverse audiences.</p>	<p>Students can:</p> <p>Recognize one's capacity to advocate for and contribute to improvement locally, regionally, or globally.</p> <p>Identify opportunities for personal and collaborative action to address situations, events, issues or phenomena in ways which can make a difference.</p> <p>Assess options for action based on evidence and the potential for impact, taking into account varied perspectives and potential consequences for others.</p> <p>Act creatively and innovatively to contribute to improvement locally, regionally or globally both personally and collaboratively.</p>

The Global Competence Matrix was created as part of the Council of Chief State School Officers' EdSteps Project, in partnership with the Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning. Similar matrixes describing criteria for global competence within academic disciplines are in development.

## Student Friendly Rubric

<b>Investigate the World</b>	<b>Recognize Viewpoints</b>	<b>Communicate Ideas</b>	<b>Take Action</b>
<b>Look beyond your own community</b>	<b>Understand your viewpoints and others' viewpoints</b>	<b>Explain your ideas in way that best helps others understand (not what is easy for you, but what is easy for them)</b>	<b>Use ideas to improve the world around you</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Find good information to answer questions about a region or country from different kinds of sources.</li> <li>•Check for truthfulness and importance. Answer questions while looking at all of the major issues to help solve a problem.</li> <li>•People with different backgrounds could answer the same question in different ways. Show how that can happen. Explain your thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Explain your thinking about situations, events, or issues. Show how what you know and believe shaped your explanation.</li> <li>•Explain how other people might think about situations, events, or issues. Show how what they know and believe shapes their viewpoint.</li> <li>•People from different cultures often work together. Explain how each person's views and knowledge might change when they listen to other's views and knowledge.</li> <li>•Not everyone has the same information. They have different ways to get information. Computers, newspapers and TV may not give all of the facts. Books might be scarce. Explain how viewpoints and beliefs would change when information changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Explain how people from different places or backgrounds could understand the same information in a different way.</li> <li>•Explain how you would need to change your language and body language to share your ideas with different people.</li> <li>•Show how learning to communicate well with people from different places and backgrounds improves understanding. Explain how it helps everyone work together more successfully.</li> <li>•People communicate in different ways. Show how to use different media and technology to communicate with people from other places and backgrounds in the best way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Show that you can explain an issue to others that helps to improve a local, regional, or global problem.</li> <li>•Find ways for you and others you work with can "make a difference."</li> <li>•Use facts and evidence to find different ways to solve a problem. Show how each solution might be different if people are from other backgrounds and beliefs. Explain how you knew what was the best choice.</li> <li>•Act by yourself or with others to create ways to improve local, regional, or global problems.</li> </ul>

## “I can . . .” Rubric

<b>Investigate the World</b>	<b>Recognize Viewpoints</b>	<b>Communicate Ideas</b>	<b>Take Action</b>
<b>Look beyond your own community</b>	<b>Understand your viewpoints and others’ viewpoints</b>	<b>Explain your ideas in way that best helps others understand (not what is easy for you, but what is easy for them)</b>	<b>Use ideas to improve the world around you</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I can find good information to answer questions about a region or country from different kinds of sources.</li>   <li>•I can check for truthfulness and importance. Answer questions while looking at all of the major issues to help solve a problem.</li>   <li>•I can show that people with different backgrounds could answer the same question in different ways. I can explain my thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I can explain my thinking about situations, events, or issues. I can show how what I know and believe shaped my explanation.</li>   <li>•I can explain how other people might think about situations, events, or issues. I can show how what they know and believe shapes their viewpoint.</li>   <li>•People from different cultures often work together. I can explain how each person’s views and knowledge might change when they listen to another person’s views and knowledge.</li>   <li>•I can show that different people get different information. I can show how computers, newspapers and TV may not give all of the facts. Explain how viewpoints and beliefs would change when information changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I can explain how people from different places or backgrounds could understand the same information in a different way.</li>   <li>•I can explain how I would need to change my spoken language and body language to share my ideas with different people.</li>   <li>•I can show how learning to communicate well with people from different places and backgrounds improves understanding. I can explain how it helps everyone work together more successfully.</li>   <li>•People communicate in different ways. I can show how to use different media and technology to communicate with people from other places and backgrounds in the best way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•I can explain an issue to others to help improve a local, regional, or global problem.</li>   <li>•I can find ways for myself and for others I work to can “make a difference.”</li>   <li>•I can show how to use facts and evidence to find different ways to solve a problem. I can show how each solution might be different for people from other backgrounds and beliefs. I can explain how to make the best choice.</li>   <li>•I can act by myself or with others to create ways to improve local, regional, or global problems.</li> </ul>







*This collaborative project involves teachers in a small public elementary school in Tucson, Arizona in the USA. They examine the pedagogical issues and strategies involved in integrating international literature into the curriculum beyond a “tourist” approach, encouraging close critical reading in developing children’s understandings of culture and the world.*

Building international understanding through children’s and adolescent literature has always been at the heart of IBBY. Jella Lepman fled Nazi persecution in Germany during WW II, returning as a cultural and educational advisor at the end of the war. Her belief that books can build bridges of understanding to unite children of all countries led her to establish IBBY and the International Youth Library. Through literature, children have the opportunity to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture. They are invited to immerse themselves in story worlds, gaining insights into how people feel, live, and think around the world. They also come to recognize their common humanity as well as to value cultural differences.

*Through literature, children have the opportunity to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture.*

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# Critically Reading the Word and the World

Building Intercultural Understanding through Literature

by KATHY G. SHORT



Kathy G. Short is a professor in the Department of Language, Reading and Culture at the University of Arizona, and Director of Worlds of Words ([www.wowlit.org](http://www.wowlit.org)).

Lepman's vision of opening the world for children through literature still remains an elusive goal in many schools and libraries. The availability of authentic literature from a range of global cultures varies dramatically from country to country. Even when the books are increasingly available, many educators are not familiar with the books and are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. They are often unsure about how to use the books since many contain unfamiliar stylistic devices and terminology and are about experiences and settings that, at first glance, seem removed from their students' lives. They struggle with how to help students make the significant connections that move their responses beyond viewing other cultures as exotic or strange. Many unwittingly adopt strategies that are tangential, or even in opposition, to the goals of global education, through, for example, focusing on "we-they" dualisms or superficial features of cultural lifestyles that actually reinforce stereotypical perceptions. Simply reading more about the world can actually negatively influence the development of intercultural understanding.

*Interculturalism is an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum.*

My research focuses on the challenge of effectively engaging children with international literature to build intercultural understanding. One collaborative project involves working with teachers and administrators in a small public elementary school in Tucson, Arizona. Our research examines the pedagogical issues and strategies involved in integrating international literature into the curriculum and the influence of literature on children's understandings of culture and the world. Teachers at Van Horne Elementary

School have written vignettes about their work in an electronic journal, *WOW Stories* ([www.wowlit.org](http://www.wowlit.org)).

### **Teaching for intercultural understanding**

Teaching for intercultural understanding involves far more than lessons on human relations and sensitivity training or adding a book or unit about a country into the existing curriculum. These approaches typically lead to superficial appreciations of cultural differences that reinforce stereotypes, instead of creating new understanding about cultural perspectives and global issues. Interculturalism is an attitude of mind, an orientation that pervades thinking and permeates the curriculum. It is based on a broad understanding of culture as ways of living and being in the world that are designs for acting, believing, and valuing. Geertz (1973) defines culture as "the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). These patterns include language, religion, gender, relationships, class, ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, family structures, nationality, and rural/suburban/urban communities, as well as the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people.

*This framework highlights multiple ways of engaging with international literature to support children's critical explorations of their own cultural identities...*

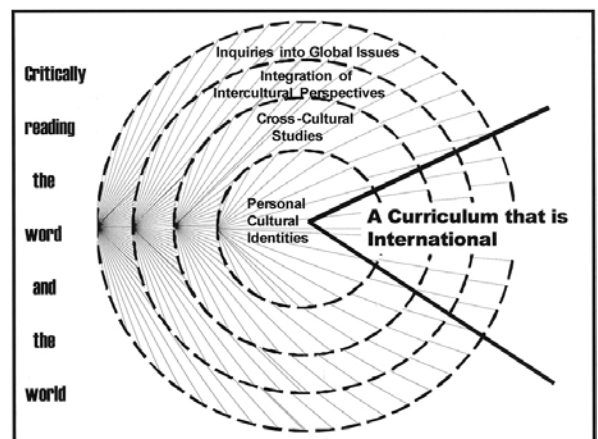
Fleck (1935), a Polish scientist and philosopher, argued that cultures consist of thought collectives that form whenever groups of people learn to think in similar ways because they share a common interest, exchange ideas, maintain interaction over time, and create a history that affects how they think and live. Since most individuals think and act within several thought collectives at a time,

this view captures the dynamic, evolving nature of culture as each person interacts with, and is changed through, transactions with other cultures. These understandings highlight the diverse ways in which culture is reflected in children's lives.

Key scholars in intercultural education (Allan, 2003; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Hofstede, 1991) as well as global education (Begler, 1996; Case, 1991) inform my definition of intercultural understanding as an orientation in which learners:

- Explore their cultural identities and develop conceptual understandings of culture.
- Develop an awareness and respect for different cultural perspectives as well as the commonality of human experience.
- Examine issues that have personal, local and global relevance and significance.
- Value the diversity of cultures and perspectives within the world.
- Demonstrate a responsibility and commitment to making a difference to, and in, the world.
- Develop an inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring perspective on taking action to create a better and more just world.

We use a curriculum framework to enact these theoretical beliefs and to organize our curricular work. This framework highlights multiple ways of engaging with international literature to support children's critical explorations of their own cultural identities, ways of living within specific global cultures, the range of cultural perspectives within any unit of study, and complex global issues. The curricular components in the framework interrelate and build from each other to highlight different intercultural understandings. Surrounding these components is an environment in which readers are encouraged to read from a critical stance. We are using this framework to explore the potential that each component offers for children's understandings and the different ways that international literature can be integrated into the life of a school.



### Personal cultural identities

All learners, adults and children, must explore their own cultures before they can understand why culture matters in the lives of others around them. Interculturalism does not begin with the ability to consider other points of view, but with the realization that you have a point of view. Children bring their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of

specific cultural groups and social contexts to school. They need to examine their own histories to understand how those experiences and interactions determine their view of the world and they need to find their lives reflected in books in order to value school as relevant. When students recognize the cultures that influence their thinking, they become more aware of how and why culture is important to others. They no longer see culture as about the “other” and as exotic, but recognize that it is at the heart of defining who they are as human beings.

Literature can encourage students to focus on themselves as cultural beings in order to go beyond the typical “Who am I?” activities. In our research, we read aloud and discussed many picture books in which the characters struggled with their identities, such as *You Be Me and I’ll Be You* (Mandelbaum, 1990) and *Cooper’s Lesson* (Shin, 2004). Students responded to these books by exploring their cultural identities in different ways, such as bringing in artifacts reflecting their cultural identities to create museum displays, drawing memory maps of their neighborhoods to identify stories from when they were “little,” and mapping significant events in their lives

on “Life Journey Maps.” They also created “Cultural X-Rays” in which they labeled the outside of their bodies with aspects of their culture that are evident to others, such as language, age, ethnicity, gender, and religion, and the inside with the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts.

These engagements helped students realize that their experiences within families and communities shape how they think and act. Multicultural books that reflected their own life experiences in the American Southwest were essential to building these understandings. We continued to weave multicultural literature along with international books throughout our inquiries so that they recognized the commonalities in life experiences across diverse cultures as well as the unique aspects of these cultures.



Cultural X-Rays (Alejandro & Natali, age 11).

*Although intercultural understanding is grounded in awareness of one’s own cultural perspective, students need to consider points of view beyond their own...*

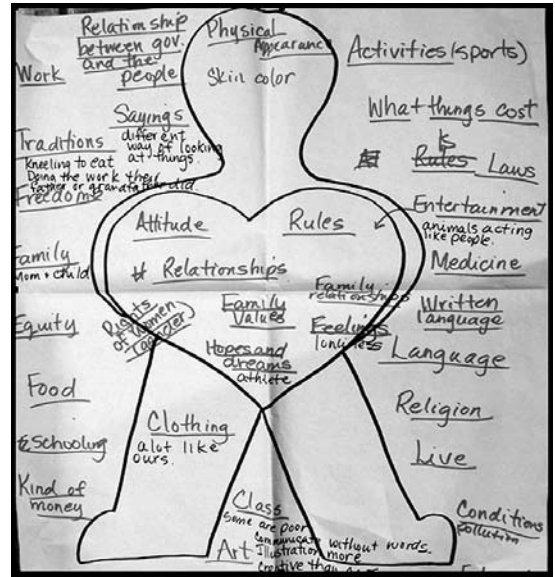
#### Cross-cultural studies

Although intercultural understanding is grounded in awareness of one’s own cultural perspective, students need to consider points of view beyond their own, so they come to recognize that their perspective is one of many ways to view the world; not the only one or the norm against which to measure other viewpoints.

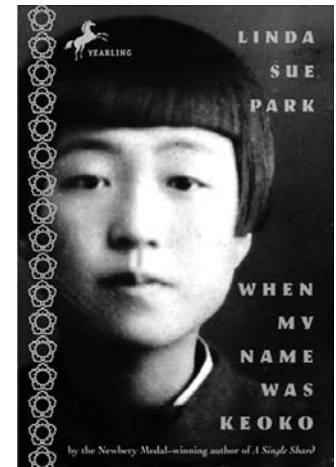
In-depth studies of specific global cultures can broaden students' perspectives and provide a window on the world. Unfortunately cross-cultural studies often take the form of theme units that focus on superficial aspects of a culture through a limited study of the 5Fs – food, fashion, folklore, festivals, and famous people. A cross-cultural study should provide an opportunity for children to examine the complexity and diversity within a particular cultural group. Focusing on food or folklore is a beginning, but can lead to stereotypes and superficial understandings unless students also examine the deeper values and beliefs that are significant within that culture. A cross-cultural study should include literature that reflects complexity in terms of the economic, social, political, aesthetic, moral, historical, and geographical contexts of a cultural group (Begler, 1996).

We found that because our students already recognized the complexity of culture within their own lives, we could use their experience of creating Cultural X-Rays to brainstorm what they might explore about another culture. When fifth-grade students began a study of Korean culture, for example, they used a large blank Cultural X-ray to brainstorm the aspects of identity that they needed to explore to understand this culture.

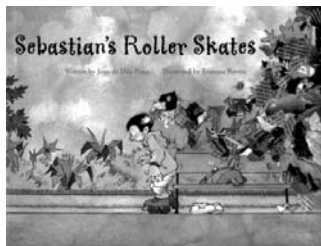
This large chart of brainstormed cultural characteristics served as a place for students to record observations throughout our study as they read from a range of fiction and nonfiction literature. *When My Name Was Keoko* (Park, 2002) was read aloud and discussed and students browsed a collection of many picture books and informational books. We found that the books about Korean culture available in the United States were primarily historical fiction and folklore with few contemporary images, leaving the impression that Korean culture was mired in the past with traditional clothing and small villages. We purchased picture books from South Korea written in Hangul to provide contemporary images and to encourage explorations of the Korean language. We also located books that had been recently translated into English, such as *My Cat Copies Me* (Kwon, 2007), and discussed picture books, such as *Waiting for Mama* (Lee, 2007), that students could connect to their lives but which also provided an anomaly because of actions or values that were unexpected from their cultural viewpoint.



Brainstorm of aspects of identity within a culture (11-year-olds).



*Cross-cultural studies thus provide both a mirror and a window for children as they look out on ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light*



The value of an in-depth cross-cultural study is that students look deeply to understand the complexity within a culture and so go beyond the surface-level explorations that characterize this type of study. Not only can these studies provide a window on a culture, but they can also encourage insights into students' cultural identities. Students come to deeper understandings about their own cultures and perspectives when they encounter alternative possibilities for thinking about the world. Cross-cultural studies thus provide both a mirror and a window for children as they look out on ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light.

### Integration of international perspectives

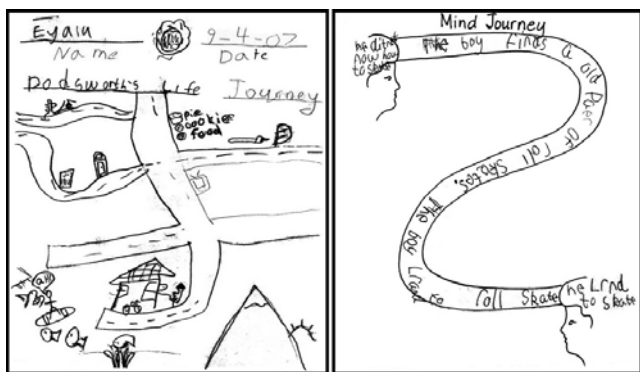
While an occasional cross-cultural study is appropriate, literature reflecting a wide range of cultural perspectives needs to be woven into every classroom study, no matter what the topic or curriculum area. We worked to integrate the stories, languages, lifestyles, and ways of learning from many cultures into units of study across the curriculum, not just for one or two special

units each year. Whether the focus was folklore, family, living at peace with others, the moon, or fractions, we tried to incorporate literature reflecting a range of global perspectives. Otherwise, interculturalism can be viewed as a special unit instead of an orientation that pervades everything.

We took on a school-wide focus on "Journeys," beginning with a conceptual understanding of journeys through connections to children's lives. We discussed literature, such as *Once There Were Giants* (Waddell, 1997) and *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007) and asked students to map their own life journeys. Their discussions of different types of journeys led to a range of inquiries. The younger students focused on mapping learning and emotional journeys through responding to books such as *No, I Want Daddy* (Brune-Cosme, 2004) and *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Du Prats, 2005).

The older students met in small groups to discuss text sets organized around themes that emerged from their brainstorming. Each of these text sets included 10-15 picture books from a range of cultural perspectives around the themes of Beginnings and Endings, Movement and Competition, Dreams and Wishes, Growing and Learning, Pain and Healing, Spiritual and Emotional Pathways, and People

*We have been able to locate global literature on various social and historical themes and topics, but have struggled with finding books from a range of global cultures on science and mathematical content.*



Maps of *The Pink Refrigerator* & *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. (Eyalu & Tanner, Age 7).

and Relationships. Their inquiries eventually led students to a study of the forced migration of people who have become refugees throughout the world.

We found that integrating literature from diverse cultures into student inquiries provided for a much wider range of perspectives on a particular theme or topic and so encouraged more complexity in the issues that students considered. They cannot settle comfortably into the issues that are part of their own cultural perspectives only, but are challenged to go beyond that worldview. We have been able to locate global literature on various social and historical themes and topics, but have struggled with finding books from a range of global cultures on science and mathematical content. Those books rarely appear to be selected for translation and publication in North America.

### Inquiries on global issues

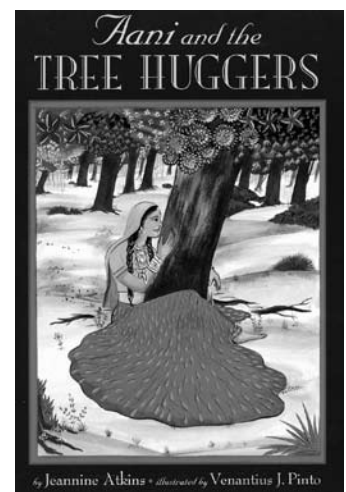
Another curricular component that is significant for building intercultural understanding is developing inquiries that focus on specific global issues, many of which highlight difficult social, political and environmental topics, such as violence, human rights and social justice, environmental degradation, overpopulation, poverty, language loss, race and ethnicity, and economic imperialism (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1998). Students occasionally need to study a global issue in-depth and over time to understand the local and global complexity of an issue and to consider ways of taking action in their lives. These studies are essential in encouraging students to go beyond talk and inquiry to determine how to take action to create a better and more just world.

We engaged in a school-wide inquiry on human rights that each classroom took in different directions. We began with developing a conceptual understanding of rights through connections to children's lives. We knew that children often complained about events they saw as "unfair" at

school. We read aloud and discussed books such as *A Fine, Fine School* (Creech, 2003) and *The Recess Queen* (O'Neill, 2002) and invited students to create maps of the school on which they located unfair events. These maps supported students in searching for the rights that were involved when they felt something was unfair. Students created lists of what they believed their rights were at school and noted which rights they felt needed to be addressed in their own context.

*Reading critically is the stance that race, class, and gender matter in how we interpret and analyze our experiences in the world as well as in the texts we encounter.*

We moved students beyond a discussion at the local level to the broader global issues through browsing books from many different parts of the world that reflected a range of human rights issues, including *Aani and the Tree Huggers* (Atkins, 1995), *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005), *Selavi* (Landowne, 2005), and *Friends from the Other Side* (Anzaldúa, 1993). We also read aloud and discussed books such as *The Carpet Boy's Gift* (Shea, 2006) to examine the strategies that children use to take



## Children's Books Discussed

Anzaldúa, G. (1993) *Friends from the other side* San Francisco: Children's Book Press

Atkins, J. (1995) *Aani and the tree huggers* New York: Lee & Low

Brune-Cosme, N. (2004) *No, I want daddy* New York: Clarion

Creech, S. (2001) *A fine, fine school* New York: HarperCollins

D'Adamo, F. (2001) *Iqbal* New York: Aladdin

de Deu Prats, J. (2005) *Sebastian's roller skates* Ill. F. Rovira La Jolla: Kane/Miller

Egan, P. (2007) *The pink refrigerator* New York: Houghton Mifflin

Kwon, Y. D. (2007) *My cat copies me* LaJolla: Kane/Miller

Landowne, Y. (2005) *Selavi, that is life: A Haitian story of hope* El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos

Lee, T. J. (2007) *Waiting for mama* Ill. K. Dong-Sung New York: North-South

Mandelbaum, P. (1990) *You be me, I'll be you* LaJolla: Kane/Miller

O'Neill, A. (2002) *The recess queen* Ill. L. Huliska-Beith New York: Scholastic

Park, L.S. (2002) *When my name was Keoko* New York: Yearling

Perez, L. (2002) *First day in grapes* Ill. R. Casilla New York: Lee & Low

Shea, P. D. (2003) *The carpet boy's gift* Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House

Shin, S. Y. (2004) *Cooper's lesson* Ill. K. Cogan San Francisco: Children's Book Press

Waddell, M. (1997) *Once there were giants* New York: Candlewick

Williams, M. (2005) *Brothers in hope* Ill. G. Christie New York: Lee & Low

action in their own contexts. In their classrooms, students engaged in a range of inquiries that included discussions, based on their interests, about literature relating to particular human rights issues such as child labor, gender inequity, undocumented immigrants, and homelessness. Throughout these inquiries, students particularly noted the strategies characters used to take action and used these strategies to take action on some of the issues they identified in their own school context.

### Critically reading the word and the world

All components of a curriculum that is international should be permeated with “critically reading the word and the world.” Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) used this phrase to indicate the importance of raising issues of power, oppression, and social justice. Without a focus on critically reading the word and the world, the four components could easily become a superficial tour of culture where

students learn about internationalism as tourists who pick up isolated pieces of information. A tourist curriculum is based on the assumption that “if we all just learned more about each other, we would like each other and the world’s problems would be solved.” This approach does not consider difficult issues of social justice and so students are unable to make real changes in how they think about and relate to others.

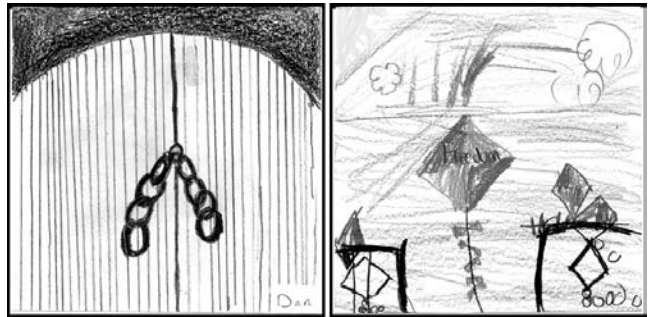
Reading critically is the stance that race, class, and gender matter in how we interpret and analyze our experiences in the world as well as in the texts we encounter. Freire argues that students need to wrestle with ideas and words, not just walk on top of them. Reading the word and the world from a critical stance provides the opportunity to question “what is” and “who benefits” as well as to consider the “what if” of new possibilities. We noticed, for example, that students initially avoided talking about issues of racism by taking a position of colorblindness and stating “It doesn’t



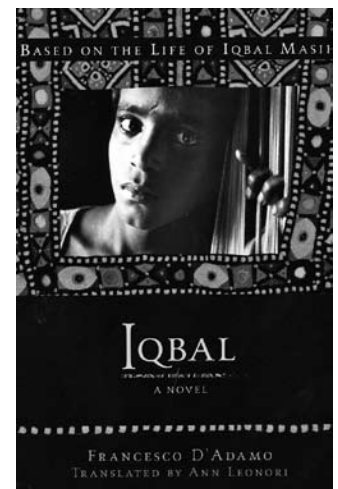
matter what you look like on the outside, it's the inside that counts.” These statements deny that skin color matters in how people are treated and is one essential aspect of cultural identity. Colorblindness allowed students to walk on top of words, but they needed to be challenged to wrestle with the difficult issues of racism in their lives as well as in the broader world. As always, we began with books close to their lives – such as *First Day in Grapes* (Perez, 2002) about a Latino child who is treated with prejudice – before moving into literature on these issues from a range of cultural perspectives.

Critically reading the word and the world involves students in thinking critically and questioning the way things are and the power relationships they observe in order to consider multiple cultures, perspectives, and ways of taking action. We encouraged students to take this critical stance whether they were looking at their own personal cultural identities, engaging in a cross-cultural study, considering multiple perspectives across the curriculum, or examining a difficult global issue.

In critically examining issues of child labor, for example, a group of nine-year-old children created “Sketch-to-Stretch” responses where they symbolically explored meaning through visual images (Short & Harste, 1996). Dan responded to *Iqbal* (D’Adamo, 2001) about a boy who led an influential movement to protest child labor in Pakistani carpet factories with a sketch of a broken chain to show the boy’s escape from the looms and as a symbol of his freedom, inner strength, and intelligence. The dark colors at the top of the sketch reflected Iqbal’s anger. Gaby responded to the same book with a sketch of the sky and a kite as symbols of freedom breaking through the fence as a symbol of oppression.



Sketch-to-Stretch responses to *Iqbal* (Dan & Gaby, age 9).



### Final reflections

This curriculum framework provides a means of evaluating what is currently happening within a classroom or library context to support the development of intercultural understanding through literature. What is working well can be identified along with what is missing or needs to be strengthened. Although all aspects of this framework will not be in place at one particular moment in time, they should all be available to students across the school year. We found that interactions across the framework can build complex understandings of interculturalism. The components of personal cultural identity and cross-cultural studies focus students on developing conceptual understandings of culture; the integration of international books across the

curriculum develops their conceptual understandings of perspective; and inquiries on global issues highlight conceptual understandings of taking action. All of these understandings are essential for interculturalism as an orientation for approaching life, both inside and outside of school.

Children's engagements with literature have the potential to transform their worldviews through understanding their current lives and imagining beyond themselves. Students do need to find their lives reflected in books, but if what they read in school only mirrors their own views of the world, they cannot envision alternative ways of thinking and being. These experiences need to be embedded within a curriculum that is international, or their potential to challenge students to critically confront issues of culture is diminished or lost. A curriculum and literature that are international offer all of us – educators and students – the potential for enriching and transforming our lives and our views of the world.

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## Literature Circles

*Kathy G. Short*

Readers need time to read intensively for reflection and critique as well as to read extensively for enjoyment and information. When they have the opportunity to converse and dialogue about what they are reading, readers are able to explore their “in-process” understandings, consider alternative interpretations, and become critical inquirers. *Literature Circles* provides this time and opportunity by inviting readers to:

- Engage in small groups to provide more opportunities for dialogue;
- Share individual connections and in-process thinking;
- Consider multiple interpretations through talk with other readers;
- Dialogue about specific tensions and issues that emerge from the group discussion;
- Critique “what is” and ask “what if” about life through dialogue around literature.

In these ways, *Literature Circles* support reading as a transactional process in which readers actively construct understandings of a text by bringing meaning to, as well as from, that text. By participating in *Literature Circles*, readers come to understand that there is no one meaning to be determined, but many possible interpretations to explore and critique. The primary intent of this engagement is providing a space for readers to learn about life through multiple perspectives, not to learn about literary elements or comprehension strategies.

### Materials?

1. Shared Book Sets (multiple copies of a particular book) that support conversation and dialogue or Text Sets of 10-15 conceptually-related picture books
2. Literature logs, chart paper, art materials, etc. for response.

### How?

1. Organize literature related to a particular theme as either Shared Book Sets or Text Sets. A Shared Book Set contains multiple copies of the same text. Each small group reads a different shared book set related to the same broad theme. Text Sets are sets of 10-15 conceptually-related picture books that are connected to a broad theme.
2. Introduce students to the selections through short book talks and give them time to browse the books. Create ballots on which students list their first and second choices and use their choices to organize the students into heterogeneous groups of 4-6 students.
3. Have the students read the books and prepare for literature discussion.
  - a. Students reading chapter books should determine how many pages to read a day in order to finish the book in one or two weeks. Reading goals that are not completed at school are considered homework. Students meet in a mini-circle for 10-15 minutes daily to check in with each other on their reading goals and share connections and confusions.
  - b. Students who are unable to read the book can partner read with another student from the group or listen to an audio-recording of the book.
  - c. Young children who may not be able independently read the more complex picture books that support literature discussion can have the books read aloud to them by a teacher, an older buddy reader, a family member, or an audio recording. Young children benefit from hearing the book read aloud several times. One option is to

- have the books read aloud at home for several days before the school discussion.
4. As students read, they can respond by writing or sketching their connections and wonderings/tensions to be ready to share with group members. The responses may be in a literature log, on post-its placed in the book, or on a Graffiti Board.
  5. Encourage students who finish reading ahead of the rest of the group to read from a set of books thematically related to their Literature Circle books.
  6. Once students have completed the book, they meet in literature circles for extended discussions. These discussions typically occur after students have read the entire book. Students may need to meet in literature circles along the way if a chapter book is particularly difficult or if students need to process the book as they read because of their struggles as readers or as language learners. Literature circles typically last anywhere from two days to two weeks, depending on the length of the book and the depth of the discussion about the book. The discussions are open-ended and provide time for readers to share their initial responses with each other and then dialogue about several issues in more depth. As part of these discussions, students often:
    - a. Begin by sharing their thinking about the story, including initial interpretations, personal connections, stories, and retellings of favorite or confusing parts. They may want to use a particular response engagement such as Sketch to Stretch (see 2.11, this text), Save the Last Word for Me (see 3.13, this text), or a drama strategy (see 5.10, this text) to facilitate this sharing.
    - b. Create a Web or Consensus Board to brainstorm the issues that they could explore further from this book or set of books, based on their initial sharing. They identify a focused issue that is an anomaly or tension and that they want to inquire about together as a group.
    - c. Engage in Text Set discussions by initially having each student read one or two books from the set and then meet to share and retell their books. Students often move between reading and sharing/retelling for a week or two and then web the connections and differences across the books in their set. They choose one of these issues to discuss in greater depth through inquiry and critique.
    - d. Prepare for the discussion of the identified tension/issue by rereading sections of book, writing or sketching in their logs, placing post-its to mark relevant quotations, engaging in further research, or using a particular response engagement such as Save the Last Word for Me (see 3.13, this text), Sketch to Stretch (see 2.11, this text), or Tableau (see pg. 240, this text).
    - e. Students share their ideas and connections related to the identified tension/issue and engage in dialogue around differing interpretations and perspectives.
    - f. Students can continue their literature circles by returning to their web multiple times to identify another issue or tension for discussion.
    - g. You do not need to be in a group, but if you join a group, participate as a reader and group member, sharing connections and tensions
  7. When students complete their Literature Circles, presenting the key ideas from their discussions will support them in pulling together their thinking about the book or text set. They may share informally by talking about their book and showing their web of connections and issues. If preparing a formal presentation, have them list the most important ideas they want to share with others about their book and discussion and then

brainstorm different ways to present these ideas, choosing the one that best fits the ideas they want to share.

### **Variations**

1. The texts discussed in a Literature Circle can be in different sign systems, including music, visual art, dance, mathematical problems, or drama, or in a range of language genres, including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, newspaper articles, oral stories, etc. Students engage in the same process of sharing their initial connections, exploring multiple interpretations, choosing an issue for in-depth inquiry, and using dialogue to think collaboratively.
2. The discussions in Literature Circles are more complex and generative if teachers embed these circles within a broad class theme, such as identity or journeys, around which are planned a range of engagements, including class read-alouds of novels and picture books and browsing of other books on that theme. This theme may be connected to a unit of inquiry within the class curriculum or to issues students are exploring in their lives.
3. Literature Circles may initially be whole class read-aloud discussions to provide demonstrations of the talk. A whole class book may also occasionally be the focus. Whole class books provide a shared history within a classroom but eliminate choice and so should be used only occasionally and discussed in both whole group and small groups to provide for more participation.
4. Literature Circles can be organized as Book Clubs where the same groups of students stay together over time, selecting the books they want to read and dialogue about together. These books may not relate to a broad class theme but to the group's own history of reading and discussing with each other.

### **For More Information**

Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. Chicago: Modern Language Association.  
Peterson, R. & Eeds, M. (1990). *Grand conversations*. New York: Scholastic.  
Short, K. & Pierce, K. (1990). *Talking about books*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

### **Shared Book Sets of Picture Books on the Theme of Journeys**

Altman, L.J. (1995) *Amelia's Road*. Ill. E. Sanchez. New York: Lee & Low.  
Brown, A. (2001). *Voices in the Park*. New York: DK.  
Bunting, E. (1998). *Going Home*. Ill. D. Diaz. New York: HarperCollins.  
Burningham, J. (1987). John Patrick Norma McHennessy: *The Boy Who Was Always Late*. New York: Knopf.  
De Deu Prats, J. (2005). *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. Ill. F. Rovira. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.  
Egan, I. (2007). *The Pink Refrigerator*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.  
McKissak, P. (2001). *Goin' Someplace Special*. Ill. J. Pinkney. New York: Atheneum.  
Miller, W. (1999). *Richard Wright and the Library Card*. Ill. G. Christie. New York: Lee & Low.  
Santiago, C. (2002). *Home to Medicine Mountain*. Ill. J. Lowry. San Francisco: Children's Press  
Steptoe, J. (1986). *Stevie*. New York: HarperCollins  
Wheatley, N. (1994). *My Place*. Ill. D. Rawlins. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.  
Wild, M. (2006). *Fox*. Ill. R. Brooks. LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.  
Wyeth, S. (2002). *Something Beautiful*. Ill. C. Soentpiet. New York: Dragonfly

### **Shared Book Sets of Chapter Books on the Theme of Journeys**

- Almond, D. (1999). *Skellig*. New York: Delacorte.
- Cameron, A. (2005). *Colibri*. New York: Laurel Leaf.
- Creech, S. (1996). *Walk Two Moons*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Curtis, C. P. (2007). *Elijah of Buxton*. New York: Scholastic.
- de Mari, S. (2006). *The Last Dragon*. New York: Miramax.
- Maclachlan, P. (1993). *Journey*. New York: Yearling.
- Park, L. S. (2002). *When My Name Was Keoko*. New York: Clarion.
- Pullman, P. (1996). *The Golden Compass*. New York: Knopf.
- Ryan, P. M. (2005). *Becoming Naomi Leon*. New York: Scholastic.
- Schmidt, G. (2004). *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. New York: Clarion.
- Spinelli, J. (2004). *Wringer*. New York: Harper.
- Stolz, J. (2006). *The Shadows of Ghadames*. New York: Yearling.
- Yumoto, K. (2005). *The Friends*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

### **Text Sets on Exploring Issues of War and Conflict**

#### **Conditions that Lead to War**

- Bogacki, T. (1997) *I Hate You! I Like You!* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Bunting, E. (1989) *Terrible Things*, Ill. S. Gammell. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society.
- Dr. Seuss (1984) *The Butter Battle Book*. New York: Random.
- Kasza, K. (2001) *The Mightiest*. New York: Putnam.
- Kellogg, S. (1973) *The Island of the Skog*. New York: Dial.
- McKee, D. (1990) *Tusk Tusk*, LaJolla, CA: Kane/Miller.
- Mochizuki, K. (1993) *Baseball Saved Us*. Ill. D. Lee, New York: Lee & Low.
- Olaleye, I.O. (2000) *In the Rainfield*. Ill. A. Grifalconi. New York: Blue Sky.
- Pin, I. (2005) *When I Grow up, I will Win the Nobel Peace Prize*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Weigelt, U. (2001) *The Wild Wombat*, Ill. A.K. Piepenbrink. New York: North-South.

#### **War as an Institution**

- Foreman, M. (2002) *War and Peas*. Atlanta, GA: Andersen Press.
- Greenfield, E. (2006) *When the Horses Ride by Children in the Times of War*. Ill. J.S. Gilchrist. New York: Lee & Low.
- Heide, F. P. & Gilliland, J.H. (1992) *Sami and the Time of the Troubles*, Ill. T. Lewin. New York: Clarion.
- Khan, R. (1998) *The Roses in my Carpets*, Ill. R. Himler. New York: Holiday House.
- Martin, R. (1997) *The Monkey Bridge*, Ill. F. Amiri. New York: Knopf.
- McKee, D. (2004) *The Conquerors*, New York: Handprint Books
- Sisulu, E.B. (1996) *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, Ill. S. Wilson. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Swope, S. (1989) *The Araboolies of Liberty Street*, Ill. B. Root. New York: Sunburst.
- Vaugelade, A. (2001) *The War*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda.
- Wendt, I. (1991) *The End of War*, Ill. A. Boratynski. New York: Pitspopany Press.

### **Consequences of War**

- Amis, N. (2003) *The Orphans of Normandy*. New York: Atheneum.
- Bunting, E. (1998) *So Far From the Sea*, Ill. C.K. Soentpiet. New York: Clarion.
- Bunting, E. (2001) *Glow*, Ill. P. Sylvada. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Coerr, S. (1993) *Sadako*, Ill. E. Young. New York: Putnam.
- Hoestlandt, J. (1993) *Star of Fear, Star of Hope*, Ill. J. Kang. New York: Walker.
- Innocenti, R. (1985) *Rose Blanche*. Minneapolis: Creative Education.
- Kodama, T. (1992) *Shin's Tricycle*, Ill. N. Ando. New York: Walker.
- Smith, F.D. (2000) *My Secret Camera*, Photo. M. Grossman. San Diego: Gulliver.
- Tsuchiya, Y. (1988) *Faithful Elephants*, Ill. T. Lewin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Uchida, Y. (1993) *The Bracelet*, Ill. J. Yardley. New York: Philomel.

### **Overcoming War**

- Baillie, A. (1994) *Rebel*, Ill. D. Wu. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cutler, J. (1999) *The Cello of Mr. O*, Ill. G. Couch. New York: Puffin
- Deedy, C.A. (2000) *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark*, Ill. H. Sørensen. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree
- Demi, (2001) *Gandhi*. New York: McElderry Books
- Dolphin, L. (1993) *Oasis of Peace*. Ill. B. Dolphin. New York: Scholastic.
- Lee-Tai, A. (2006) *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow*. Ill. F. Hoshino. Children's Book Press.
- Maruki, T. (1980) *Hiroshima No Pika*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Martin, R. (1998) *The Brave Little Parrot*. Ill. S. Gaber. New York: Putnam.
- Stamaty, M.A.(2004) *Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq*. New York: Knopf.
- Wild, M. (1991) *Let the Celebrations Begin!*, Ill. J. Vivas. New York: Orchard.

Short, 2009

### **LITERATURE DISCUSSION STRATEGIES**

See *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*, Kathy G. Short & Jerome Harste, Heinemann, 1996.

#### **FREE WRITES**

After reading the book, set a timer for 5-10 minutes. During that time, write continuously about your thoughts related to the book. If you run out of things to write, write "I don't know what to write" until you think of something else. In the group, one person begins by reading aloud all or part of their free write. The group discusses the ideas in that free write and then moves on to the next person. Instead of free writes, group members can create a sketch of their thoughts about the book.

#### **LITERATURE LOGS or POST-FULL THINKING**

Stop periodically as you read and write about what you are thinking in response to a book. In the group, begin by having a person read an entry. The ideas are discussed by the group until the conversation dies down and then someone shares another entry. You could instead use post-its to jot a quick response or connection to place on a page in the book to share in the group.

**ANOMALIES** - Write down questions or things that surprise you. Once you finish reading, look back over your questions to identify the ones that you are still wondering about or that you wonder how others would respond. Discuss the questions to create new anomalies.

**MAKING A CONNECTION** - Write or sketch stories or experiences that come to your mind as you read. In the group, share your connections and talk about how they relate to the book. If the group is reading in a text set of different books, look for connections across all the books.

#### **COLLAGE READING/TEXT RENDERING**

Mark quotes that are significant to you as you read. In collage reading, group members read aloud quotes to each other. One person reads a quote and then someone else comes in with another quote and the reading continues in no particular order. Readers choose when they will read a particular quote in order to build off of what someone else has read. There are no comments about the quotes. Text Rendering is similar except that someone reads a quote and states why they chose it and then someone else reads a quote. There is no discussion about the quotes or the comments until after the text rendering is finished.

#### **GRAFFITI BOARD**

Put a big sheet of paper on the table. Each group member takes a corner of the paper and writes and sketches their thoughts about the book or text set in a graffiti fashion. The responses, comments, sketches, quotes, and connections are not organized. The major focus is on recording initial responses during or immediately after reading a book. When the group is ready to discuss, group members share their responses. The graffiti can then lead to webbing or charting to organize the connections.

#### **SAY SOMETHING**

Two people share the reading of a short story. The first person reads aloud a chunk of text (several paragraphs or a page) to the other person. When the reader stops, both "say something" by making predictions, sharing personal connections, asking questions, or commenting on the story. The second reader then reads aloud a chunk of text and again stops and both "say something." The two readers continue alternating the reading of the story, commenting after each reading, until the story is completed.

#### **SAVE THE LAST WORD FOR ME**

Note 3-5 passages or quotes that catch your attention as you read because they are interesting, powerful, confusing, or contradictory and put each quote on a 3 x 5 card. On the back of the card, write your response or why you found that particular passage noteworthy. In the group, one person shares a quote and the group briefly discusses their thinking about that quote. When the discussion dies down, the person who chose the quote tells why he/she chose it. That person has the last word and the group then



moves on to another person who shares a quote. Young children show a page from a picture book and others in the group share their responses, letting the child who chose that page have the last word.

### SKETCH TO STRETCH

After reading a book, make a sketch (a quick graphic/symbolic drawing) of what the story meant to you (not an illustration of the story) - your connections to the book. In the group, show your sketch, letting others comment on the meanings they see in the sketch before you share your meaning. Talk about your sketches with each other and discuss the different ideas raised by the sketches.

### WRITTEN CONVERSATION

Have a silent conversation by talking on paper. Two people share a piece of paper and a pencil and talk about a book by writing back and forth to each other. No talking is allowed except with young children who often need to read what they have written to each other.

### STORY RAY

Each person receives a 3 foot long narrow strip of paper and is responsible for one chapter in a novel. On the ray, a visual essence of the selected chapter is created using colors, images, and a few words with various art media and little or no white space. The rays are assembled on a large mural to reflect the unfolding of the novel. A variation is for each person to reflect on the major themes and visual images of the book on their strip.

### WEBBING WHAT'S ON MY MIND

After sharing initial responses to a book, the group brainstorms a web of issues, themes, and questions that they could discuss from the book or text set. Using the web, the group decides on the one issue that is most interesting or causes the most tension to begin discussion. They continue their discussions by choosing from other ideas on their web. New ideas are added as they come up in the discussion.

### CONSENSUS BOARD

A board is created with a circle in the middle and 4 sections. The circle contains the title of the book or a key theme from the book. In the individual sections, each person writes down personal connections to that theme or book. The group shares these individual and then comes to consensus on the tensions, issues, or big ideas they want to explore further. These tensions are written in the middle of the board.

### CHART A CONVERSATION

Discuss a book in a group and fill in a chart with the categories: I Like, I Dislike, Patterns, Problems/Puzzles. Each group shares what is on their chart and the other groups write anything new in a different color on their charts. The groups then talk about something on the chart that they didn't previously discuss. Each group shares what they discussed in a whole class discussion of the book.

### COMPARISON CHARTS or VENN DIAGRAMS

Talk about similarities and differences across a set of books. From these discussions, develop broad categories to use on a comparison chart as a way to compare the books. The books are written on the side and the categories across the top of the chart. Both pictures and words are used in the boxes. A Venn Diagram (two circles that overlap in the center) focuses the comparison on one major issue at a time.

### HEART MAPS

After an initial discussion of the book, the group chooses a character or a group of characters that they would like to think about further. On a big piece of paper the group maps that character's heart. The group discusses values and beliefs held by the character and the people or events are important to the character's life. These are mapped into a heart shape, using spatial relationships, color, and size to show the relative importance of each idea and the relationships between ideas.

## Cultural X-Rays

*Kathy G. Short*

Geertz (1973) defines culture as the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives. These shared patterns go beyond external characteristics to include the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people. Culture is therefore a way of living and being in the world; it involves ways of acting, believing, and valuing. These ways of living develop through participation in thought collectives that form whenever groups of people learn to think in similar ways because they share a common interest, exchange ideas, maintain interaction over time, and create a history that affects how they think (Fleck, 1935). Because students are part of multiple thought collectives at the same time, culture has a dynamic, evolving nature as students interact with, and are changed through, transactions with other cultures. Indeed, culture plays out in complex and diverse ways within students' lives and identities. Through creating *Cultural X-rays*, students come to:

- Recognize their multiple cultural identities
- Develop conceptual understandings of culture
- Raise awareness of how and why culture matters to each person

### Materials

1. Cultural X-Ray (outline of a body with a large heart inside)
2. Crayons or colored pencils
3. Literature in which characters explore their cultural identities, particularly books in which characters are exploring multiple identities. (See **For More Information** for a list of suggested books.)

### How?

1. Read and discuss picture books in which the characters explore their cultural identities.
2. Discuss the aspects of culture that influence each character's life and thought. Chart these patterns of culture.
3. Have each student create a personal cultural x-ray using an outline of a body shape with a large heart inside. The metaphor of an x-ray highlights the need to understand what is on the outside as well as the inside of each of person's cultural being. On the outside of this shape, students create labels to describe the behaviors, appearance, and other aspects of their identities that others can observe or easily determine (e.g. age, family, gender, language, religion, family composition, places they have lived). On the heart shape inside the x-ray, have students place the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts and that may not be immediately evident to others around them. Using a mirror, they also fill in the body shape to reflect their actual physical appearance. The three questions students ask themselves in this process are:
  - What am I?
  - What is important to me?
  - What do I look like?
4. Students often struggle with placing values and beliefs in their hearts, instead they list people and things that they value, such as their families, rather than why they

value these. If this happens, read aloud books, such as *A Day's Work* (Bunting, 1997) and talk about the values and beliefs that are reflected in the interactions between the boy, his grandfather and the employer. Ask students to return to their hearts and think about the values and beliefs that they have gained from each person or thing in their heart (e.g. "What values do you gain from your family?" "What do they add to your life?" "Why are they significant to you?").

### **Idea Sheet**

1. Use *Cultural X-rays* as a literary response engagement. Students can create cultural x-rays for characters from novels that they are reading either as a class read-aloud or in literature discussion groups. They can work as partners, choosing a character from the novel whom they see as significant and for whom they gradually build an x-ray to show that character's multiple cultural identities.
2. Begin a study of a cultural group by asking students to brainstorm the aspects of culture that would be significant to explore if they want to understand a person from that culture. They can record these on a large-sized x-ray on chart paper. They can also use the x-ray as a way to record insights they are gaining into the culture through their reading and explorations.

### **For More Information**

Fleck, L. (1935). *The genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. NY: Basic Books.

Giff, P. R. (1997). *Lily's crossing*. NY: Delacorte.

This engagement is grounded in anthropological theories of culture, especially the work of Clifford Geertz and Ludwik Fleck.

### **Children's Books that Explore Cultural Identity.**

Ada, A.F. (2002) *I Love Saturdays y domingos*. NY: Atheneum/Simon and Schuster

Bridges, S. Y. (2006). *Ruby's Wish*. CA: Chronicle.

Browne, A.(2001). *Voices in the Park*. City: NY: DK Children

Bunting, E. (1996) *Going Home*. NY: HarperCollins

Bunting, E. (1997). *A day's work*. NY: Clarion.

de Paola, T. (1979). *Oliver Button is a sissy*. FL: Voyager Books/Harcourt Brace.

Elya, S.M. (2002) *Home at Last*. NY: Lee & Low Books

Herrera, J.F. (2000) *The Upside Down Boy/El niño de cabeza*. CA: Children's Book Pr.

Igus, T. (1996) *Two Mrs. Gibsons*. CA: Children's Books Press

Lacapa, K. & Lacapa, M. (1994) *Less Than Half, More Than Whole*. AZ: Northland

Levine, E. (1989) *I Hate English*. NY: Scholastic

Mandelbaum, P. (1990) *You Be Me, I'll Be You*. NY: Kane/Miller Books

McKay, L., Jr. (1998) *Journey Home*. NY: Lee & Low Books

Recorvits, H. (2003) *My Name is Yoon*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

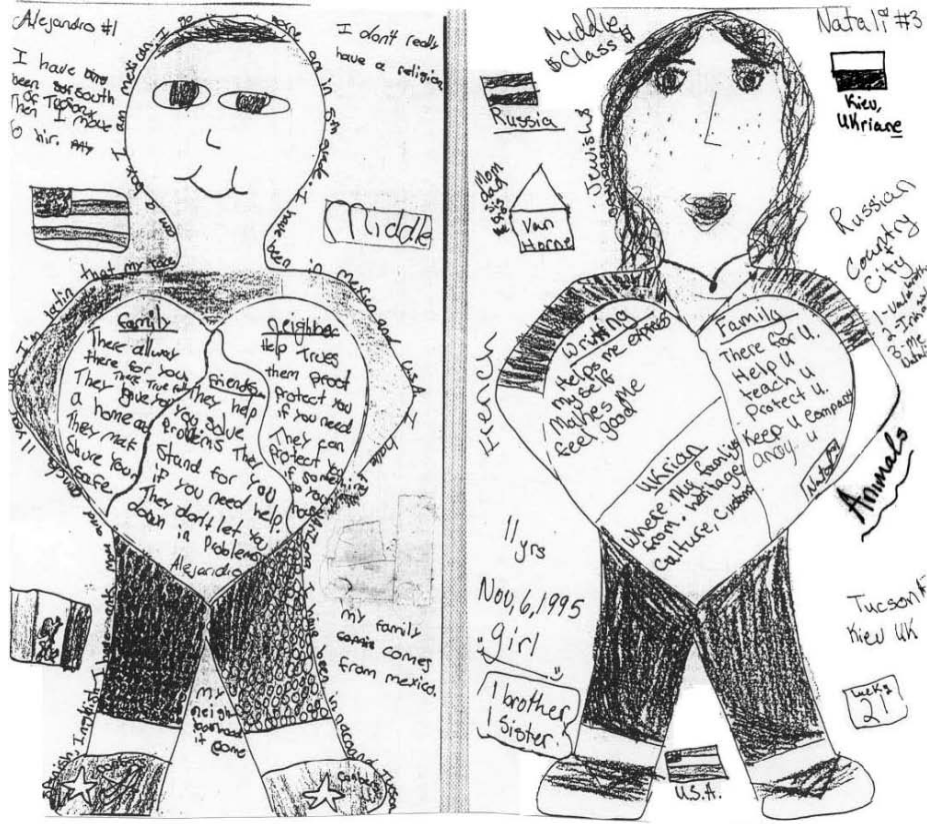
Rodríguez, L.J. (1997) *América is Her Name*. CN: Curbstone Press

Rosenberg, L. (1999) *The Silence in the Mountains*. NY: Orchard Books

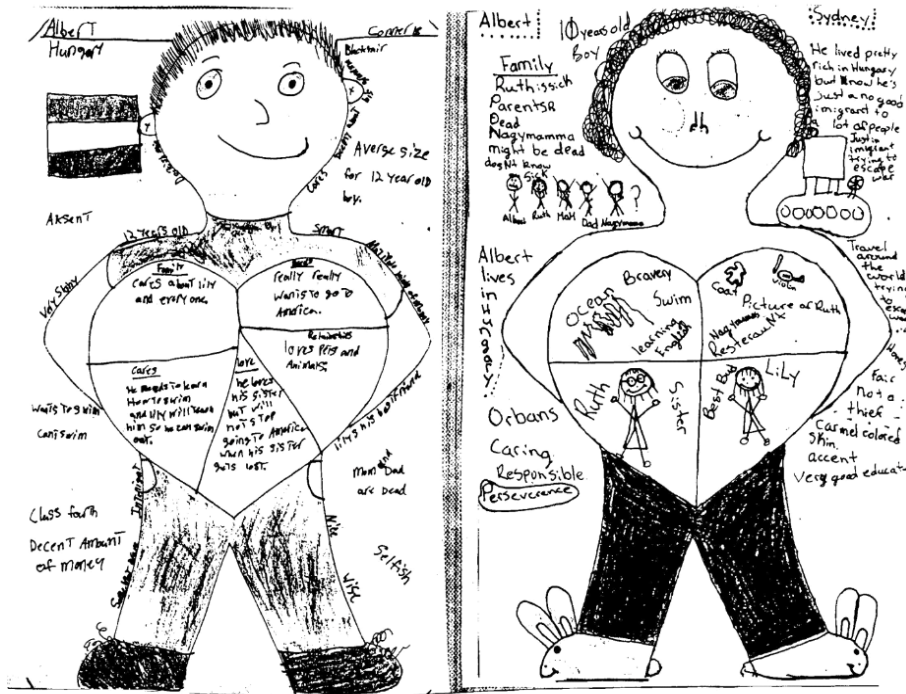
Say, A. (1993) *Grandfather's Journey*. NY: Houghton Mifflin

Shin, S.Y. (2004) *Cooper's Lesson*. NY: Children's Book Press

Williams, K.L. (1991) *When Africa Was Home*. NY: Orchard Books



Cultural X-rays of Personal Cultural Identity, Alejandro and Natali, 5<sup>th</sup> grade.



Cultural X-rays of Character from Lily's Crossing (Giff, 1999), Fifth graders.

## Save the Last Word for Me

*Kathy G. Short*

Reading is an active process in which readers construct meaning from a text. Each reader brings differing experiences and knowledge to a reading event and so will always construct a unique interpretation of a text. When readers interact with other readers and discuss their differing tensions and understandings, they come to recognize that there is no one “right” interpretation to a text and that:

- reading is an active process of constructing meaning
- every text has a range of possible interpretations
- multiple interpretations are created as readers relate their life experiences to a text
- discussions with other readers changes each person’s interpretation of a text
- interpretation of a text is ongoing as readers respond and talk with others

### **Materials**

Texts that are challenging and invite multiple interpretations

3-5 small index cards or slips of paper per student

### **How?**

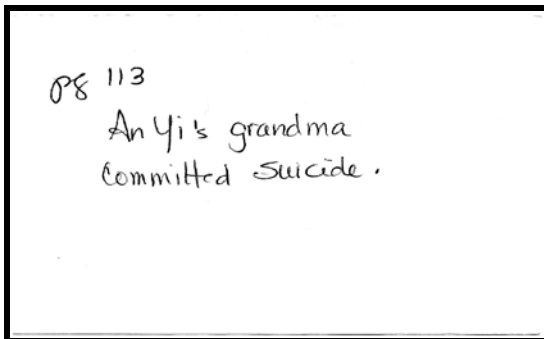
1. Each student individually reads the text.
2. As the students read, they each select 3-5 segments of the text (words, phrases or sentences) that particularly catch their attention and write these on the front side of each card. Each quotation relates to ideas that they believe are significant, interesting, or confusing from the text.
3. On the other side of the cards, students individually reflect on why they chose a particular quotation and what they want to say about it in their small group discussion.
4. Students gather in small groups to share their cards.
5. Students first individually go through their cards to select the one quotation they each want to share and discuss with the group. During the sharing, if someone uses the same quotation, the person who has not shared chooses a different quote from their cards.
6. Each student gives the page number and reads aloud a quotation to the group. The other students respond by talking about what they see as interesting or significant about that particular quotation. The student who read the quotation must remain silent during this discussion but has the last word. Once the others have shared, the student turns over the card and shares why he or she selected the quotation.
7. After each person in the group has shared one quotation, the group continues in their discussion, often informally sharing their other quotations with the group.
8. Younger children often mark the illustration they consider significant with a sticky note and then share with each other using the same process of saving the last word for the reader who selected a particular illustration.

### **Variations**

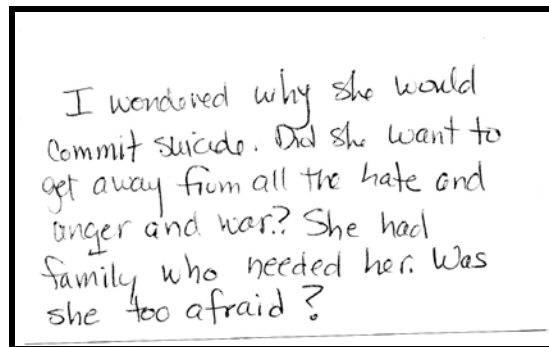
1. *Save the Last Word for Me* can be used with many kinds of texts, not just literature. For example, readers can use this strategy as a way of sharing their *Sketch to Stretch*

(see 2.10, this text) visual images with each other. Each reader displays his or her visual image but does not explain the image, instead waiting until others in the group have shared their interpretations.

2. Another variation is for students to pass their cards around with a sheet of paper so that each person reads the card and then writes their comments about the chosen quotation on the piece of paper. The next person responds both to the card and to the comments.
3. Students can read aloud their quotations in a large or small group to create a collage reading of the text. One person begins by reading aloud a quotation and then others join in by each reading their selections, choosing when to read a particular quotation so that it builds off what someone else has read.
4. Text rendering is a variation of collage reading in that each person reads aloud a quotation and also states why that quotation was chosen or makes a comment on their interpretation of that quotation. The next person then reads aloud a quotation and makes a comment, without discussion of these comments or the quotations.



pg 113  
An Yi's grandma  
committed suicide.



I wondered why she would  
commit suicide. Did she want to  
get away from all the hate and  
anger and war? She had  
family who needed her. Was  
she too afraid?

Fifth-grade response on Save the Last Word for Me, *The Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997).

### **Possible Texts for Save the Last Word for Me**

- Budhos, M. (2007). *Ask Me No Questions*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Choldenko, G. (2006). *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. New York: Puffin.
- Chotjewitz, D. (2006). *Daniel Half-Human*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Curtis, C.P. (2000). *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. New York: Laurel.
- Farmer, N. (2004). *The House of the Scorpion*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fleischman, P. (2004). *Seedfolks*. New York: Harper.
- Hesse, K. (1997). *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic.
- Jiang, J.L. (1997). *The Red Scarf Girl*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Joseph, L. (2001). *The Color of My Words*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Paterson, K. (1996). *Jip: His Story*. New York: Puffin.
- Rylant, C. (1993). *Missing May*. New York: Yearling.
- Schmidt, G. (2007). *The Wednesday Wars*. New York: Clarion.
- Sheth, K. (2007). *Keeping Corner*. New York: Hyperion.
- Woodson, J. (2007). *Feathers*. New York: Putnam.
- Woodson, J. (2004). *Locomotion*. New York: Puffin.

## Sketch to Stretch

### Why?

Students can create meaning in many sign systems or forms of representation. By taking what we know in one sign system and recasting it in another system—language, art, music, movement, mathematics, and so forth—new understandings are created through a process called “transmediation.” Students are encouraged to go beyond a literal understanding of what they have experienced and to recognize that more than one interpretation exists for an experience.

Often, as students sketch, they generate new insights. They are faced with a problem because the meanings they had constructed for the selection through language or music cannot be transferred into a sketch. As they deal with this problem, they often come to understand the selection at a different level than when they first read the book or listened to a musical piece. Sometimes students discuss and explore aspects of meaning they have captured in art that they were not aware of having understood verbally or musically. Note that this engagement is one that students often initially struggle to understand and that many initially draw illustrations rather than sketches of meaning. Don’t give up. Students often need several opportunities with this engagement to understand it.

### Materials

1. A reading selection or a piece of music
2. Pencil, paper, crayons, colored pencils, etc.

### How?

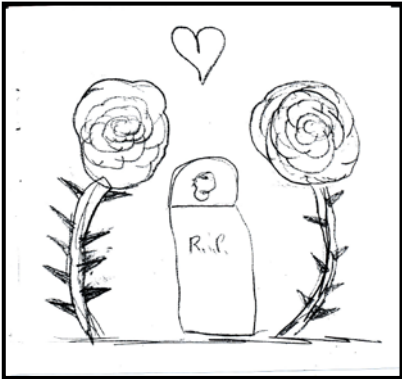
1. Students read a selection or are read a particular selection
2. Students think about what they read and draw a sketch of the meaning of the story -- “what this story means to you.” Encourage students not to draw an illustration of events from the story but to think about the meaning of the story and find a way to visually sketch that meaning. If they struggle with sketching the meaning, it may be helpful to ask them to draw their connections to the story.
3. Explain to students that there are many ways of representing the meaning of an experience and they are free to experiment with their interpretation. They can use color and shape to reflect the emotion of an experience; the sketch does not need to be representational.
4. When the sketches are complete, each person in the group shows his or her sketch to the others in the group. The participants study the sketch and say what they think the artist is attempting to say. The artist has the “last word,” to share his/her own intentions and thinking about the sketch.

### Variations

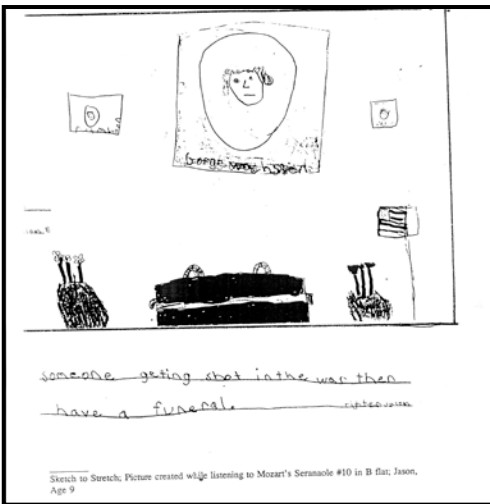
1. Students can sketch the meaning of a piece of music, a drama, etc.
2. Students can sketch the meaning of a particular concept they have been exploring, such as “taking action” or “courage.”



Sketch to stretch by second grader of his understanding of the concept of taking action – stopping to consider the consequence of doing something.



Third grader response to *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan focusing on the love of the mother and girl for the father who has died and the thorns that they need to protect themselves from others.



Student response to a piece of music – Mozart Serenade #10 in B flat



## Consensus Board

Kathy G. Short

Students need time to explore their initial responses to a text in order to attend to their feelings and connections as they engage with the world of that text. Although this initial response is necessary, students need to push their thinking beyond their immediate experiences in order to become critical thinkers who consider alternative perspectives. Reflecting on their responses provides students with an opportunity to analyze and take intellectual responsibility for their views. Students co-produce meaning through critique and inquiry by engaging in dialogue around tensions that arise from considering their multiple interpretations of a text. They move from sharing a wide range of connections to intensively considering a particular tension through dialogue. *Consensus Boards* encourage readers to:

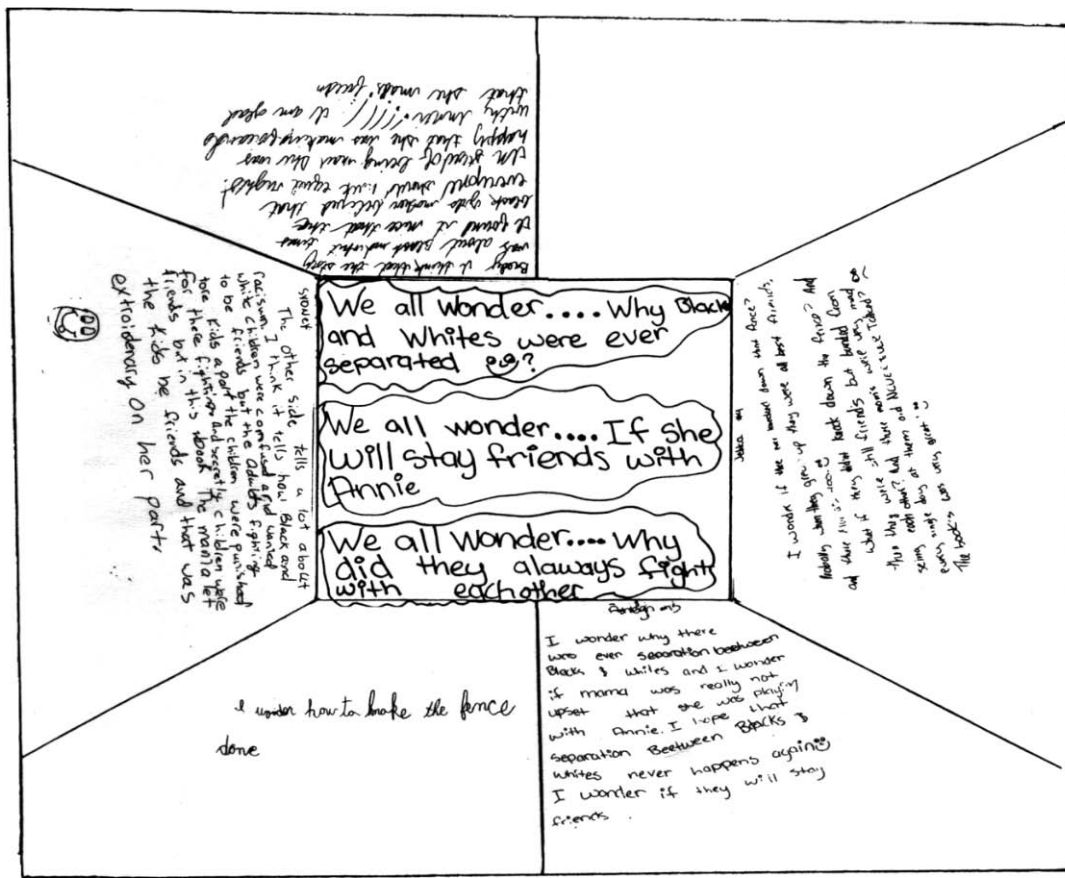
- Capture initial responses and experience of a text
- Share their initial responses and interpretations with others
- Identify significant tensions that emerge from the group discussion
- Move to dialogue around a specific tension as a group

### Materials

1. Texts that are challenging and invite inquiry and multiple interpretations
2. Markers
3. A large consensus board created from chart paper that covers the table and has a center circle or square with 4-5 sections marked from that center to each corner of the paper

### How?

1. Provide the opportunity for students to read/listen to a piece of literature or experience another type of text (video, art, music, etc.)
2. During or after the experience, have each student take his or her own section of the consensus board and jot, sketch, and/or web responses to that text. Depending on the text and the age level of the students, they may need to first experience the text and then subsequently respond on the *Consensus Board* during a second viewing or reading of the text. Some students prefer to respond during, and others after, their experience of a text.
3. Once students have had a chance to respond personally, ask them to share their responses with each other at their tables and talk and think together about the text.
4. Next, ask them to consider the tensions or issues that are still bothering them and that they might want to explore further. Have them come to consensus on one or two tensions they will spend time thinking about as a group. These tensions are recorded in the center of the board.
5. Once a group has selected a particular tension to explore further, they need to decide on strategies for thinking more about this tension before their next group meeting. They might decide, for example, to revisit the text to locate quotations related to the tension, write or sketch their thinking about the issue, or create a web of their connections and ideas. These tensions become the focus of further group discussion.



Consensus Board for *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), Fifth graders

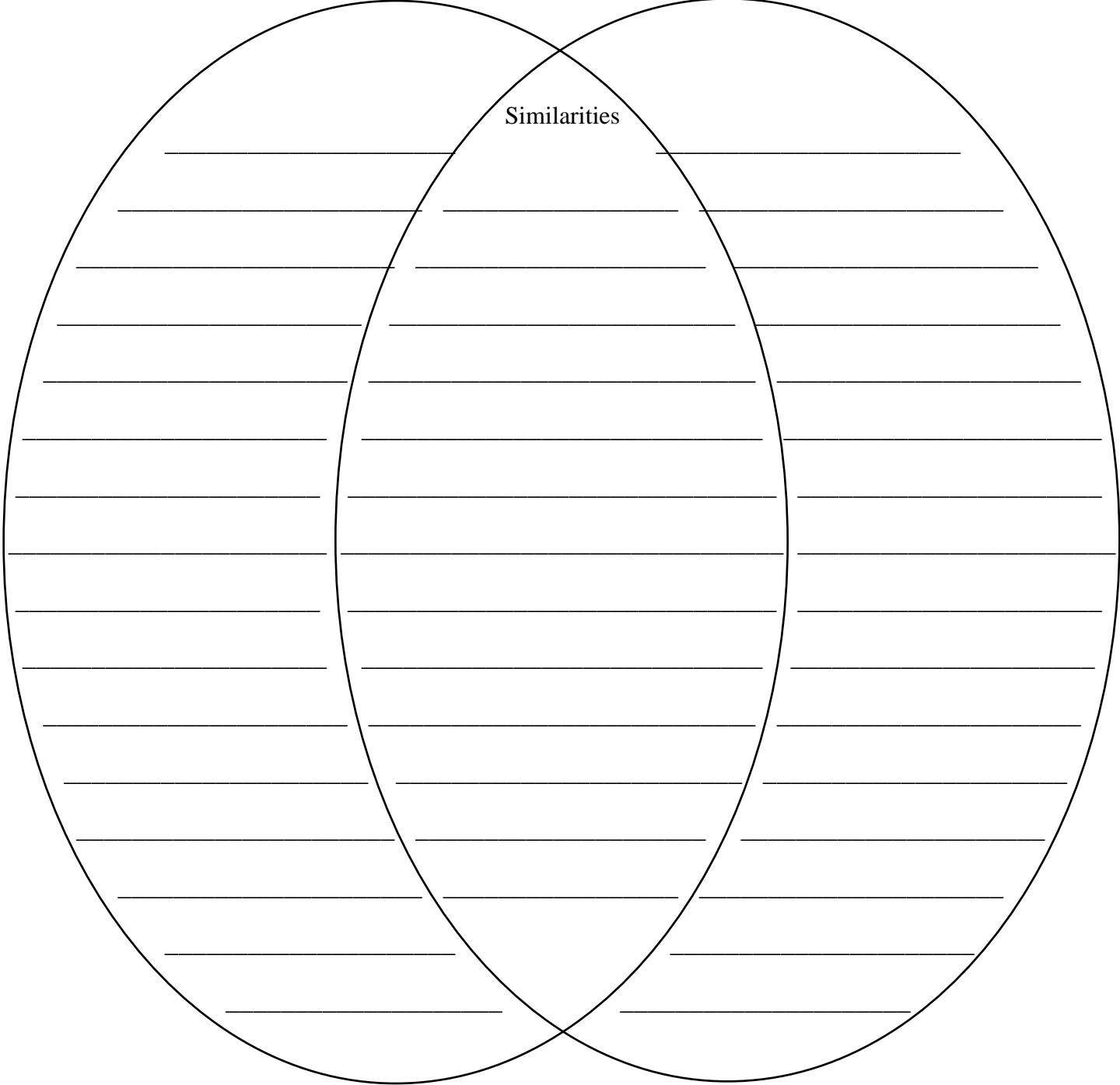
**Another Variation**

Develop definitions of key concepts at the heart of student work, such as inquiry, journeys, or culture. Students use their individual spaces to brainstorm their connections and understandings of the concept, share these with the group, and then work together to develop a consensus definition for the center of their board.

**For More Information**

Woodson, J. (2001). *The other side*. New York: Putnam.  
This engagement is grounded in the work of Louise Rosenblatt and reader response theories, particularly *Literature as Exploration* (1938, Modern Language Association).

Venn Diagram: A comparison that focuses on differences and similarities with the similarities noted in the overlap of the two circles. The comparison can be between two books from the same culture, between the perspectives and/or experiences of two characters, between books with similar themes from two different cultures, between two books on the same event but with different perspectives, etc.



## Encouraging Reflection through the Graffiti Boards and Literature Circles

by

Jennifer Griffith, Second Grade, Van Horne Elementary

Reading aloud to children has always been a significant part of the day in my classroom. I regularly read aloud a book and spend a few minutes talking about children's thinking in response to the book. After discussing literature circles and response strategies in our school-based teacher study group, however, I began wondering about the difference between literature circles and read aloud, particularly in relation to encouraging greater depth of thinking and talk around the books. I wondered how the opportunity to reflect before talking about a book would influence young children's thinking. Douillard (2002) notes that many educators assume that reflection is for older students, but her teacher research with primary children indicates that, "Reflection helps students remember and actively participate in the learning experience" (p. 93). I wanted to see what would happen if I engaged my kids in reflection and so another primary teacher and I developed a plan for bringing literature circles into our classrooms.

We began our school year with the plan to devote three weeks to our readers workshop and then one week to literature circles. We continued to read aloud to our students on a daily basis and invite short discussions but during our week of literature circles we wanted to encourage more reflection and sustained talk around a book.

Our first literature circle took place in September. We chose to read *You Be Me, I'll Be You* (Mandelbaum, 1990), a picture book from Belgium about a young biracial girl, Anna, who isn't happy with the way she looks. Anna explores questions about her identity by "switching" skin colors with her white father. We chose this book because of the special relationship between a father and daughter, something we felt our kids could connect to and because of the deeper issue of feeling different and uncomfortable with your physical appearance. We were interested in seeing whether our kids would pick up on these issues and explore them in discussion. In addition to having a variety of issues that might be explored, this book was also part of the international collection at our school and so seemed like a great choice for our first discussion.

We decided to introduce the reflection by using graffiti boards (Short & Harste, 1996). This strategy is easy to use with primary students because they can respond through art and/or writing. This strategy involves placing a large sheet of

paper at each table. Each group member takes a corner of the paper and writes and sketches their thoughts about the book in a graffiti fashion. Their responses, comments, sketches, quotes, and connections are not organized in any manner. The goal is to record initial responses during or right after listening to a book. Group members can then share their thinking using their graffiti as a reference. These boards can also lead to organizing and webbing their connections to find a focus for further discussion.

We spent the week reading the book everyday to our students and introducing the graffiti boards. Day one was an introduction to the book, day two was responding to the book on graffiti boards, day three was sharing our boards with the class, and the final day was a literature circle using our graffiti boards as a springboard for our discussion.

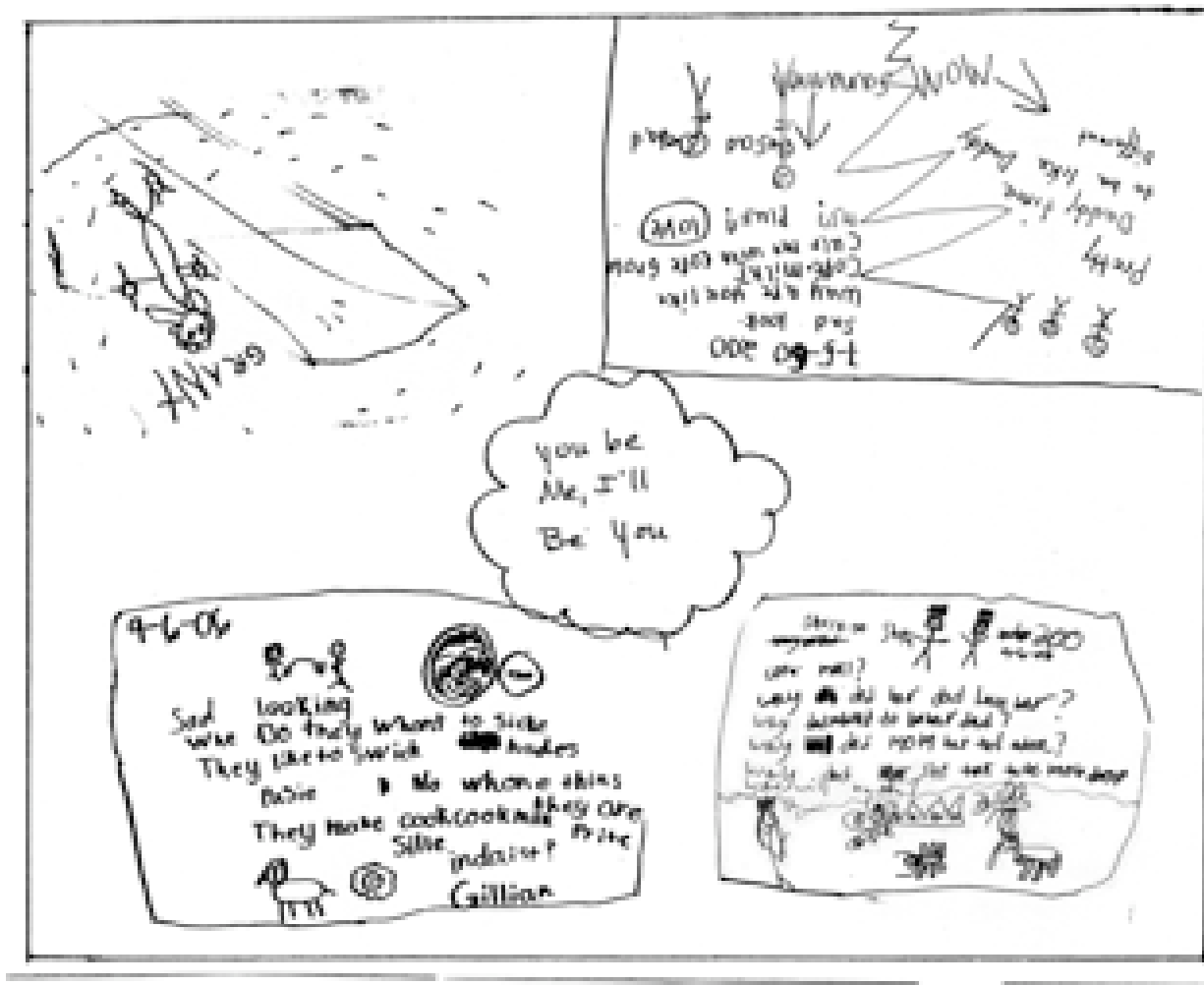
The first day the kids and I talked about our focus on learning how to talk about books. We discussed the importance of thinking about our reading and having the opportunity to reflect on our thoughts and connections and then talk about them with others. I chose not to give a lot of direction to what this process of reading, reflecting, and discussing would look like; I wanted the kids to develop their own approaches to the process that fit their personalities. So often, we give kids step-by-step directions for how to do something; I wanted this experience to be a self-exploration of how to reflect on a story and have a deep conversation about literature. The endeavor was new to me as well so I would be exploring what worked for them.

I introduced *You Be Me, I'll Be You* by showing the cover and explaining that we would read the book everyday that week. Each time I wanted them to look and listen for something new from the story and to hang on to those thoughts. We read the book as a whole group that day and I showed the illustrations. I taught them the response strategy of Say Something (Short & Harste, 1996), pausing at several different points in reading the story aloud and asking them to turn to a neighbor and share their thinking about the story in the form of a connection, question or prediction. The kids did turn and talk as pairs but had a hard time knowing what to say to each other, almost as if they were afraid of not having the 'right' answer. My goal was to encourage them to begin reflecting on their thinking by providing time to pause and think during the story. I knew it would take some time for them to feel comfortable with this kind of reflection and talk.

The second day of reading *You Be Me, I'll Be You*, I introduced graffiti boards. I demonstrated the process of responding through a graffiti board by having a colleague, Anna, read *King of the Playground* (Naylor, 1994), while I stood at the

front of the room with my own graffiti board. I represented my thinking aloud by sketching pictures of my connections to the story and characters, writing connections to my own life, noting my wonderings or questions about the story, and jotting quotes that resonated with me. This process allowed the kids to see what a graffiti board looked like and to view my reflection process.

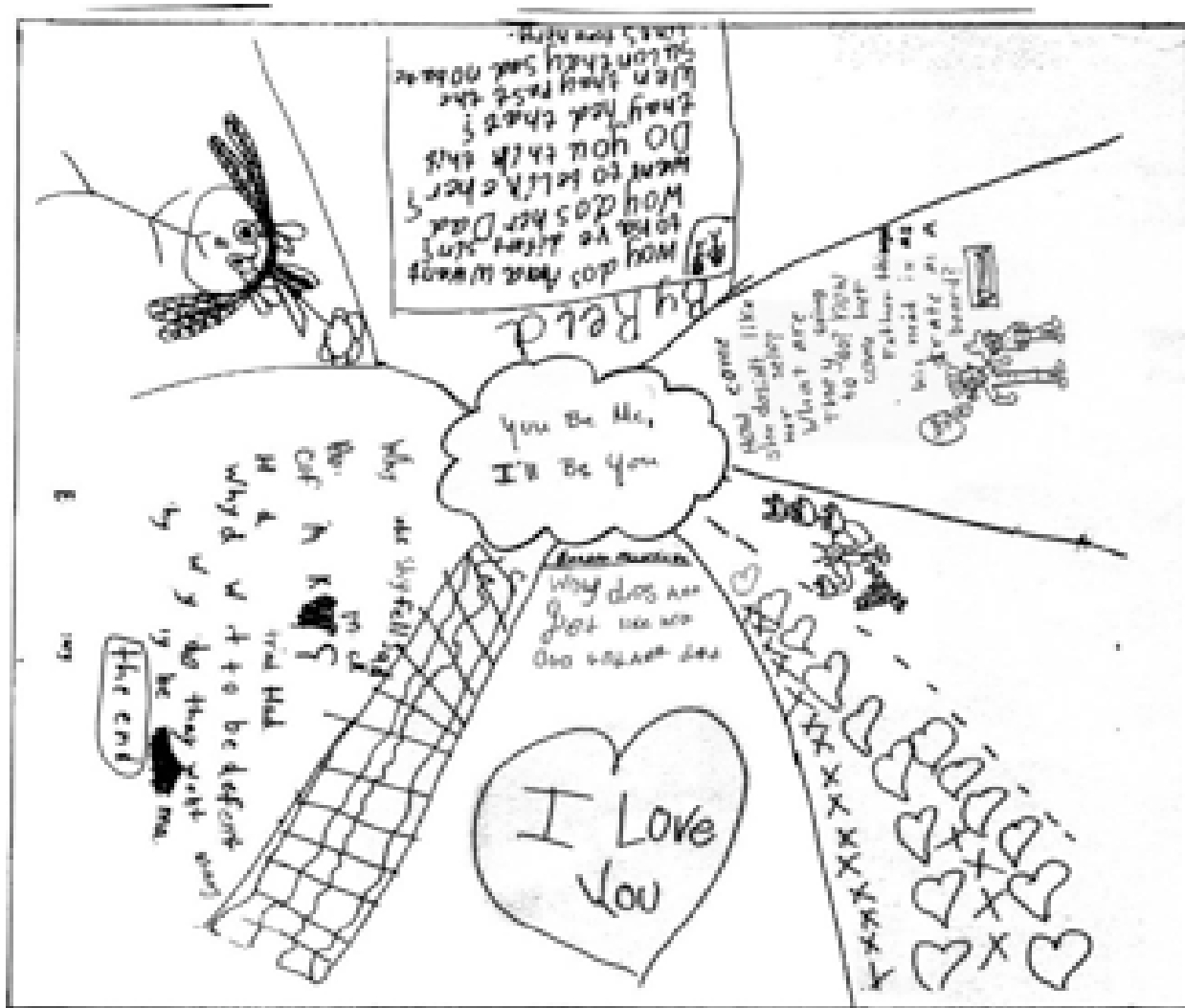
The kids returned to their tables with a large piece of paper and markers. I explained that I would read the story but not show the illustrations this time and that while I was reading they could reflect on their boards using whatever response technique they wanted. I encouraged them to try out the different ways of responding that they had seen me use on my board but let them make their own decisions about what they wanted to do. I walked around the room reading the book and observing their first experience with this type of response. I was really excited with what I was seeing – the kids were asking thoughtful questions and expressing their thinking both visually and in writing. I especially enjoyed seeing the active engagement of all of the students.



After studying the graffiti boards of each group, I noticed many common threads and found that their responses could be grouped into three categories. A large majority of the kids asked the question, in some form or another, of “Why does

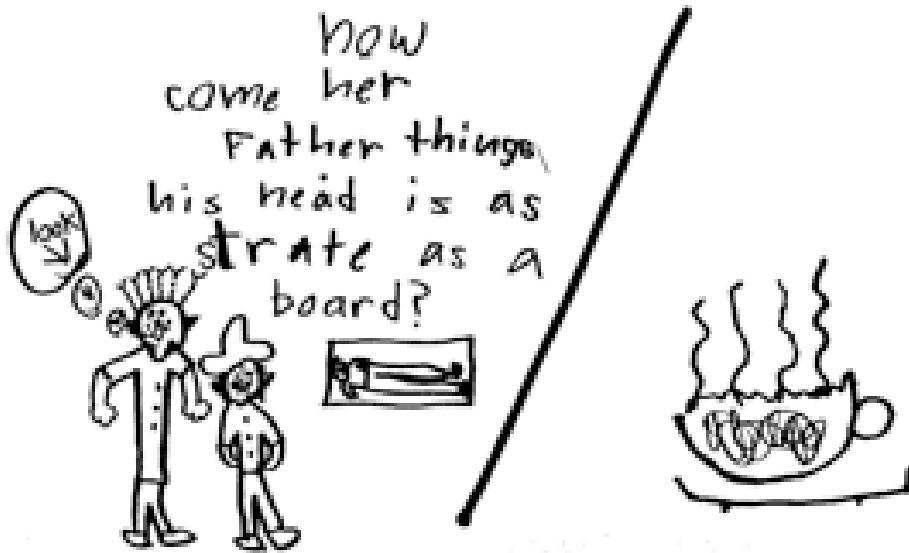
Anna not like herself or her skin?" The kids had a hard time grasping the idea of not liking something about oneself. Their focus wasn't on Anna's concern that she was a different race than her father but on why she wasn't happy with herself. They truly seemed puzzled as to why she didn't like herself and why she would want to be like her father. It was refreshing to see these kids question why a young girl would have a problem with her appearance.

Reid was the only one who brought up the issue of people not liking their appearance. She referenced the part in the book where Anna and her father walk by the salon and they see that no one likes their hair; that everyone is altering it in some fashion. Many kids did not seem to see skin color as an issue; no one brought up the fact that she had a different skin color than her dad even though several of my students come from biracial families. Only one boy, who is white, commented on skin color, saying, "The girl wants to be her dad, the girl wants some white skin."



Another category of their reflections was questions and wonderings about the

language used in the story. Children wondered "How come her father thinks his head is as straight as a board?", "What is coffee-milk?", "What is pluff?" Many kids attempted to illustrate what these might look like in a creative manner. "Head straight as a board" was a favorite to draw. When the kids later shared their graffiti boards with the class, many of them discussed possible definitions



such as "pluff" being a cloud or "coffee-milk" as a color name. Their definitions were as creative as their illustrations of these new words.

A third category on their graffiti boards was wondering, "Why was the mom mad at them? Why

did she think they were clowns?" None of the children could figure out why the mom was upset with Anna and her father when they met her after both had 'switched' skin colors. One student did suggest that the mom was embarrassed by them but didn't develop his thinking. Several wondered why the young girl who passes by Anna and her father on their way to meet the mother points at them and asks if there is a circus in town, but nobody brought up this pivotal moment for discussion.

The issues that I had identified as my reason for choosing this book weren't explored fully by the children, perhaps because those issues did not connect to their life experiences at this age. I noticed after looking at these categories and the children's responses that there were no personal connections on the boards, which surprised me because young children usually make many personal connections. In our second literature discussion and graffiti boards on *Grandpa & Bo* by Kevin Henkes (2002), there were many personal connections, so the lack of personal connections with *You Be Me, I'll Be You* seemed to be due to their lack of experience with the content of the story. It could also have been that talking about skin color and race was new for them and so they avoided the topic.

On the third day of our work with *You Be Me, I'll Be You*, the kids shared their graffiti boards with the whole class; each student focusing on their section and sharing their reflections. This part of the process took the longest and by the last graffiti board the kids had grown impatient. Many noticed that their responses



were similar and we discussed how these would be great ideas to bring up in our literature circle the following day.

The fourth and last day with this book was our discussion day. We went to the library, which was more conducive for 28 second graders to have a literature circle. We sat in a large circle and I placed the graffiti boards in the center to use as a springboard for ideas/topics to spark conversation. I explained to the students that there was no need to raise their hands – they would know it was their turn to speak when no one else was talking. This was the only guideline I provided.

The discussion began but unfortunately didn't go as I had envisioned. Kids talked over each other and too many side conversations took place. They did use the graffiti boards as a springboard, but not in the way I had hoped; many read off of their boards rather than using their questions to spark a discussion.

I believe the reason for the lack of depth in their conversation was because this was our first discussion and so this type of talk was not yet familiar or comfortable for the kids. If I had chosen to prompt the conversation it may have been more successful but my goal was to sit back and see what did and did not work so I would know how to change the process for the next time.

Four weeks later my kids and I were ready for another literature circle by reflecting before discussing. This time we chose the book *Grandpa & Bo* (Henkes, 2002) because it connected with the theme of family relationships that we had been exploring. I used the same schedule as with the previous book so by the third day the kids were ready to share their graffiti boards. This time around the story supported more personal connections and less questions and wonderings. The sketches were more related to the setting of the story as opposed to the characters, which made for beautiful boards. Instead of sharing our graffiti boards as a whole class we shared at the tables, which shortened the experience.

We decided to create a web to narrow our thinking and help us focus our discussion. Our web was a combination of our reflections from our boards. I decided to do this literature circle in our classroom because the kids felt more at home there. This setting seemed to support them in a more informal approach to their discussion. The kids began by sharing lots of personal connections, ones that they had represented on their boards. By the end of this literature circle, I felt they were close to having those meaningful conversations that I had envisioned for our classroom.

Although the students struggled in our first literature circle, I reminded myself that both the discussion process and the reflection on graffiti boards were new for all of us. This first experience was a stepping-stone in what would be a year filled with learning how to talk meaningfully about literature and utilizing reflection to elicit this type of talk. When I examine the talk during read alouds where students are asked to immediately make a few comments and literature circles where they have time to first reflect, I can see how providing them with time to reflect on their questions, wonderings and connections allows for more insightful conversations. I agree with Douillard (2002) that, "Reflective activities in the classroom help make thinking more visible, enabling students to learn from one another and to gain greater insights into their own thinking and learning processes" (p. 93).

Dewey (1938) argues that reflection provides learners with the opportunity to organize ideas so that they are more available for pushing the learner's own thinking and for sharing that thinking with others. Reflection supports learners in connecting with what they already know, considering alternative perspectives, posing and solving problems, and organizing their experiences. Encouraging young children to regularly engage in reflection helps them develop purpose and control over their own thinking and learning. I believe that literature circles provide one way to encourage young children to take on reflection as a means of thoughtfully considering and questioning their lives and learning.

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## **Engaging Students with the Unfamiliar: *Nory Ryan's Song***

by

Kathryn Tompkins, Fourth Grade, Van Horne Elementary

Choosing the right book to initiate talk with students is a decision that I make carefully, particularly looking for read alouds that will connect to issues that matter in their lives. When I decided to read aloud an international book, I knew that students might struggle with this book because the connections to their own lives would not be as evident, but I had fallen in love with the main character. *Nory Ryan's Song* (Giff, 2000) is the story of a young Irish girl who refuses to give into hunger, exhaustion, and hopeless circumstances during the potato famine of the mid-1800s. I knew that students would struggle initially to relate to Nory because of the unfamiliar historical and cultural context, but I felt that they would also fall in love with her once they got to know her and came to care about her. Nory was an appealing character to me because of her strength at a young age and I thought that students would connect to her as a person and imagine what they would do in her situation where there was no one who was going to come and save her and her family. I didn't realize how difficult it would be for them to understand the reality of a famine, especially one taking place so long ago. Their initial responses made it clear that I had to find ways to make this book real and connected for my students.

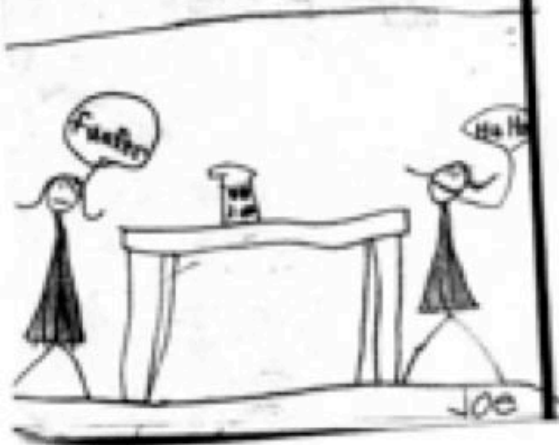
Our routine for the literature sessions with *Nory Ryan's Song* was important to me because I felt that it was the best way to immerse students into the book so that they could have meaningful discussions. Each day during the literature response time, I read one or two chapters aloud. I did not stop and talk about the language or the issues in the book until the class had listened to the chapters and responded in their literature logs. I did stop briefly occasionally to refer to the glossary of terms but we talked about the language more during our class discussion than during the read aloud. I focused on reading aloud without interruption because I was afraid students would lose the story if I continuously stopped reading to clarify cultural and historical details. The students quickly became familiar with the process and knew they would listen to the story, have time to respond, and then discuss and ask questions of each other or of me. I tried never to cut off a discussion of the chapters because I felt that we learned through talking to understand the book.

Rosenblatt (1991) points out that readers move between two types of stances or purposes for reading that influence their understandings and experiences of literature. I wanted to invite students to take an aesthetic stance and immerse themselves in the story world we were experiencing and feeling. I believed that if I continuously interrupted the story to explain historical or cultural details, I would instead focus students' attention on the information they were taking away from their reading, an efferent stance. In any kind of literature experience, it is vital for readers to experience and enjoy the story world. I don't want them to feel that they have to search for correct answers or facts. I do not want to do anything that will take away from the emotional experience of reading a powerful book that touches their hearts as well as their minds.



#12 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Why did Anna put  
 the milk in Nory's  
 mouth. Why didn't  
 Anna take the limps



10 -

I thought this chapter was  
 serious and sad because  
 they are starting and  
 Nory's really missing her  
 sister and father. Patch  
 Nory's little brother  
 wanted milk and  
 Ann gave him some.  
 Faster: dieusting  
 symzyuky  
 anta del'koo

Students had small literature logs to respond in after each read aloud. They responded through writing their thoughts and questions or sketching for five minutes and then we discussed the book as a class. At the beginning of the book their responses were narrow and surface-level. In their logs, I saw entries saying that “Nory has a friend named Shawn,” or “Nory’s dad went fishing.” Students were just skimming the surface of the book to note information but not trying to understand the characters and their situations. They were bored by the idea of this young girl starving in Ireland because they didn’t believe that it could happen or thought it was a problem that could be easily solved. One student asked, “Why didn’t the U.S. go help them?” Students saw the U.S. as having a mission to go into other countries and save them from their problems. They wanted to know why no one went to the aid of the Irish and why England would continue to charge rent to starving people and throw them out of their homes. It seemed strange to them and these tensions led them to become a little more engaged in the book.

I didn’t have to work at interesting students in the language of the characters. They began using *fuafar* in reference to anything they felt was disgusting. They loved calling dogs *madrás*. The most intriguing part of the language for them was the reference to *sidhe*, creatures from another world who cause trouble. They talked about how people carried salt to protect themselves and how the horrible *sidhe* liked to steal boys. They were particularly fascinated that Nory’s little brother, Patch, wore a gown rather than pants to fool the *sidhe* into thinking he was a girl because he would be stolen if they saw he was a boy. They were fascinated by these spirits and the idea that the night belonged to them so that children had to be careful when they left the house after dark. They used vocabulary from the book in their writing and class discussions. The author does a great job of including Irish words that are easy for students to remember and process in their talk. She doesn’t overwhelm readers with lots of terms that would cloud their understanding but has carefully selected key terms that give a flavor of the language and culture.

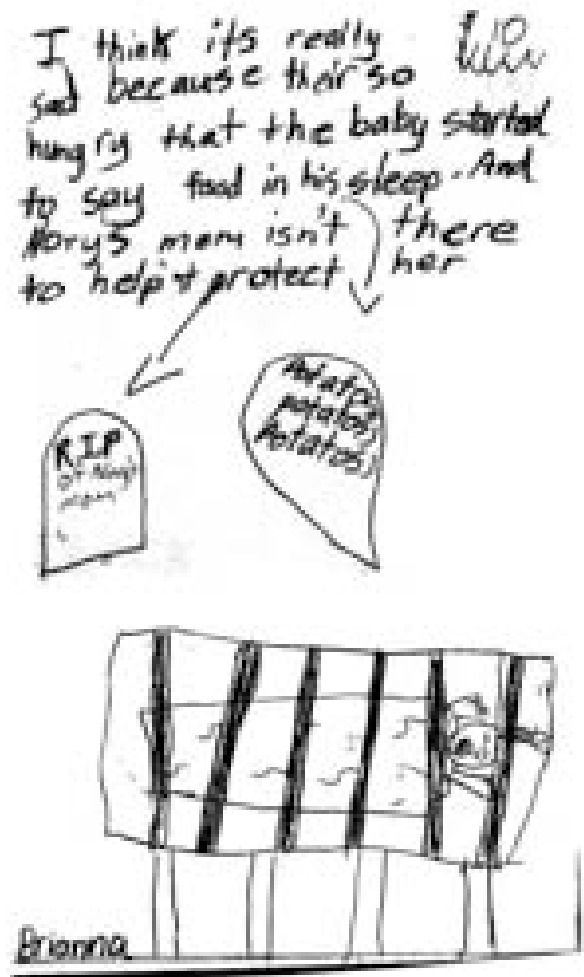
One strategy that helped students understand the context of the book was to show them maps of Ireland. Most of the students had heard of Ireland but they didn’t know anything about it. They had no idea where it was located or what surrounded it. The book said that Nory’s family and other Irish people were trying to get to the port of Galway to board ships to other countries. We found Galway on a map and that helped them realize that the book was set in a real place with real issues and real people. If Galway was a real place, then people like Nory must have existed.

I found it was important to look at maps and other reference books at a separate time from our read aloud and discussion of *Nory Ryan’s Song*. The time we spent reading and discussing Nory was used only for reading and discussing the book, not for lessons about Ireland. I scheduled other times throughout the day to look at maps and discuss books on Ireland to learn more about the place where Nory lived so that they would have more background knowledge on the place and time. I didn’t want students to get caught up in the details of Ireland when we were discussing Nory’s life.

Another strategy that helped students better understand the time period was to find books dealing with the potato famine. It seemed difficult for my class to understand the severity of the potato famine from 1845-1850. I checked out books on Ireland and the potato famine that they could browse and they read about and saw the

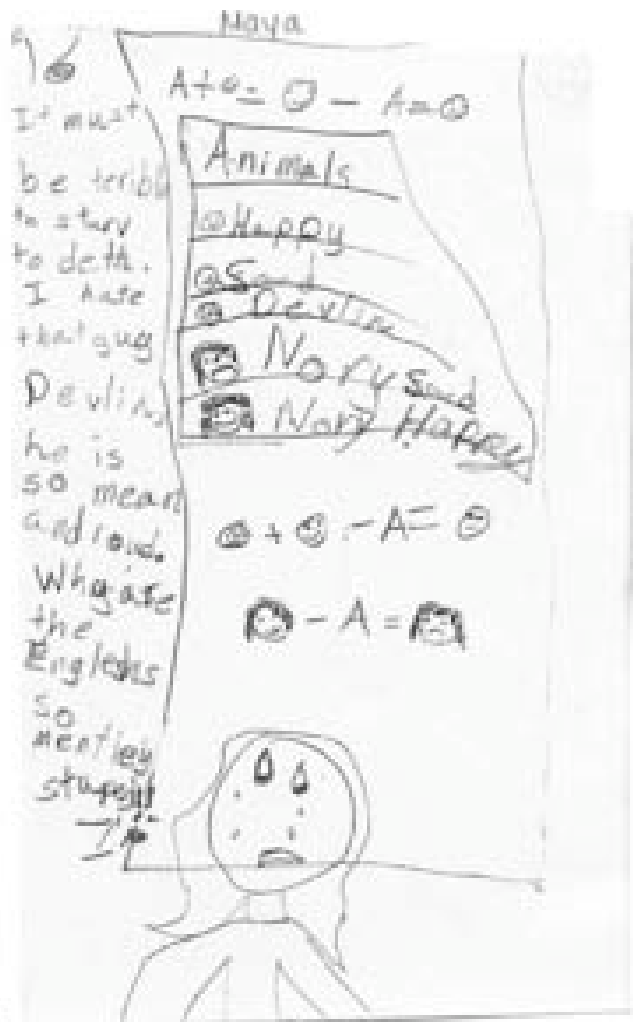
destruction caused by the rotting potatoes. They wanted to learn more about this time and they were eager to find more information, so much so that they started doing their own internet research. Whereas they initially saw potatoes as an occasional food to eat, they came to realize that the potato was a staple for the Irish, not only as food but as future income. Potatoes were the livelihood for the Irish farmers. In *Black Potatoes* (Bartoletti, 2001), the students learned the details of this famine and it became real to them. The fact that one million people died due to starvation and disease over a five-year famine came to mean something. The book had illustrations that helped students picture the time when Nory lived. This made her more relatable to the students, despite her “living” over 150 years ago. The history came alive as a real time with real consequences due to the loss of potatoes. Their initial thoughts were, “Okay, the potatoes are rotten so go to the store.” After doing research on the 1840s in Ireland, they understood there were no stores or trees full of fruits, just potatoes. No potatoes meant no food.

I noticed the point when they understood the difference in the way that Nory lived by the entries in their literature logs. At first they saw famine as meaning a person was hungry with a growling stomach. As Brianna’s log shows, she thought they “hardly had food” and so their stomachs started growling. As she grew to understand what a famine really was, she drew tombstones for those who died and a young boy who is so hungry he moans for potatoes in his dreams. The research into the time period in Ireland and the illustrations in the books helped students understand the difference between having a stomach growl from hunger and really starving due to famine.



Looking back I realize that another strategy was taking time each day to discuss with students and talk through their understandings of the chapters we were reading. I could tell from their literature logs when they started connecting to the story. Each day during discussion they talked through the issues and questions they had about the book. They challenged each other and tried to answer their questions. They also expressed their frustrations with what they didn't understand. This time to engage in talk became an important strategy for them to work out new understandings about the book. Their talk also helped me to know what resources to seek out. The fact that they were stunned by the idea of a famine told me that I needed background materials on the potato famine. Listening to their talk helped me plan ways to help them better understand the book.

One student, Maya, who loves to read and usually connects to stories read aloud in class, struggled at the beginning of the book. She felt sad for Nory but didn't see the characters as real people dealing with the unimaginable issue of famine. Once we learned more about the famine through books and internet research, she came to see the characters in Nory Ryan's Song as real people. She felt hate for the English landlords who took away the animals and the homes of the Irish people. She was so angered by this situation that she fixated on the landlord during class discussions. We had to talk about that, just because the mean landlord was English, it didn't mean that all of the English were the same. There are people in America who make bad choices but that doesn't make all Americans bad. The book evoked powerful feelings in the children.



By the end of *Nory Ryan's Song*, the students were hooked! They felt as if she was a friend and cared about what was going to happen to her. I had become a fan of all three Nory books—*Nory Ryan's Song*, *Maggie's Door*, and *Water Street*—and made the decision to continue my literature time using *Maggie's Door* because I knew how invested the students had become in Nory. I felt that we had moved over the hurdle of finding something in the book to connect to because the students understood the famine and how life was for the Irish during this time period. The day that we finished *Nory* I watched and listened as they discussed her future and stressed about what would happen to her. When I told them that they would continue to learn about Nory they begged me to start reading *Maggie's Door* immediately. I had never seen students so excited about a book! Who would have guessed how strongly they would identify with a young girl who lived so long ago! We sailed through *Maggie's Door*, reading at least one or two chapters a day, and they continued to fret about Nory making her way to the U.S. They fell in love with Nory and with Shawn and wanted the “American Dream” for them.

*Maggie's Door* ends with Nory and Shawn seeing the Statue of Liberty from their ship and reuniting with members of their families. The students knew that this couldn't be the end! I started *Water Street* the same day we finished discussing *Maggie's Door*. When I read the first chapter, the students were crushed that Nory was all grown up and that this book focused on her daughter. They were frustrated because they had grown to love Nory as a young girl whom they could identify with. They gave Bird, Nory's daughter, a chance simply because she was Nory's daughter, and did learn to love her as well.

The author of these books, Patricia Reilly Giff, did an amazing job of creating characters who students could come to know and love and want to identify with, despite the differences in their lives and situations. *Nory Ryan's Song* became the standard for my students in judging other books. They constantly compared other characters and books to *Nory Ryan's Song* and worked at understanding historical events in other countries by connecting those events to Nory. This book was definitely our “touchstone” book for the year.

I also learned more about how to get my students to invest in a book that is set in a different time period and cultural and geographical context.

Pick a book with a strong character to whom students can relate.

Provide background information using maps, books, or internet research.

Don't interrupt the reading of the book to give informational lessons.

Let them discuss! They can learn so much from each other through talk.

Reading through all three books was a tremendous investment of time, but the depth of what students came to understand about Irish culture and their strong sense of commitment and connection to Nory made that time well worthwhile. They continued reading and rereading these three books, checking them out of the library for their personal enjoyment. Nory had become a significant person in their lives with whom they had a relationship across time and place and Ireland was no longer a name on a map but the home of a friend.



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## Exploring Culture through Literature Written in Unfamiliar Languages

by

Lisa Thomas, Instructional Coach, Van Horne Elementary and Kathy Short, Professor, University of Arizona, A  
Vignette

“Oh, that looks like Chinese or Japanese writing,” was the first comment we heard as children browsed the picture books about Korea at their tables. We had integrated a few picture books written in Korean into our study of Korean culture because we felt it was important for children to see the language even though none of them could read it. We believed that language is an essential aspect of cultural identity and so wanted children to be able to see the language as part of exploring culture. We also felt that books written in Hangul, the native alphabet of the Korean language, would help the kids see the culture as “real.” We expected confusion about this unfamiliar language; what we did not expect was that the children would respond with such excitement and interest to these books.

Our study of Korea was part of a school-wide inquiry to explore how to engage in thoughtful cross-cultural studies with kids. So often, studies of other cultures remain surface level with a focus on food, fashion, folklore, festivals, and famous people while ignoring the central values and ways of living and thinking within a culture. Children gain facts about a cultural group or country, but little in-depth understanding of that culture. The result is often a tourist-level curriculum and the development of stereotypes, not intercultural understanding.

We were particularly interested in the ways children’s literature about and from other cultures support students in developing understandings of those cultures. We gathered all kinds of books about Korea, many of which came from Kathy Short’s extensive international collection at the University of Arizona. Some books were family memories of Korea written by Korean Americans, others were books written by Korean authors. The majority of the books were in English and were published in the U.S.

We knew that language needed to be part of our exploration of cultural identity because the way people view and interpret their world is reflected in their language (Banks, 2001). We purchased only a few books in Korean, because we did not expect these books to play a major role in our inquiries, given that none of us, teachers or children, could read or speak the language. We thought that children would find the books intriguing, but did not expect the level of interest that children evidenced, nor that they would return to study these books over and over. The children’s responses challenged our assumptions and led us to inquire into the ways in which literature written in an unfamiliar language can be integrated into a cross-cultural study. Our explorations of the possibilities for engaging children meaningfully in books written in languages they do not understand led us to new insights about the role that these books can play in any study of a cultural group.

**Integrating Hangul Literature into Browsing**  
**The first** way we used literature in Hangul was to integrate a few picture books into the Korean text set that we used as an initial experience to interest the kids in Korean culture. We introduced students to the text set by asking them to browse the books. We wanted to see what they noticed. We hoped they would browse to gain initial insights and impressions about the culture and later use these books for more in-depth explorations of the culture. As we expected, they commented on the similarities and

distinctions that they noticed between their own culture and the cultures represented in the books. What we didn't expect was how significant the few books written in Hangul would be for the children. The value of this literature as a part of the collection went beyond awareness of the language as an aspect of Korean culture. They continuously referred to these books as we webbed their impressions and questions about Korean culture.

Over several weeks of using these books for browsing and initial discussions about Korean culture, the books written in Hangul were clearly the most popular with children. They spent a great deal of time looking carefully at the details of the illustrations. For the children, these books were "real" and they saw them as more authentic representations of Korean culture. Also, we realized that the majority of books about Korea written in English were traditional literature or historical fiction, while the Hangul picture books portrayed contemporary culture, which was of greater interest to the children. We immediately purchased a larger set of Hangul picture books and borrowed others from a Korean graduate student who graciously shared her collection.

The children's interest in the written language in these books was immediately evident and continued over time. As the students browsed the first time, Demetri took out a small slip of paper from a fortune cookie that she had in her pocket and compared the Chinese on the slip to the writing in the books. Kelvin, a kindergarten student who moved to Tucson from China, thought that the writing might be Chinese. One student commented that even though she couldn't read the words, she could tell what was happening from the pictures. We had the sense that, while the children could make some sense of the books through the illustrations, their interest lay in the text itself and that they were intrigued with Hangul and so we decided to spend some time exploring the language.

Investigating Written Language Even though we told the children that these books were from and about Korea, many commented that the books were written in Chinese. We thought that this might be because their experience with written Korean was limited and that they associated the Hangul symbols with the Chinese characters with which they were more familiar. Several children who had investigated Japanese culture in their classroom wondered if the language was Japanese. We knew that it was important to develop an awareness of the distinctions between Korea, Japan, and China and thought we could begin to build this understanding by determining the differences between the three written languages. Kathy gathered collections of Japanese and Chinese literature to add to our Korean books. We labeled the books according to the language and asked the children to study the text carefully and see what they noticed about the similarities and differences between the languages.

We suggested that the children choose books from two of the languages and place them side by side so that they could compare them more easily. At one table, Michael told Kathy that the Japanese books were backwards. Kathy pointed out that it depends on whose perspective we are looking from—the Japanese would say that our books open backwards. The realization that what is the "norm" depends on whose perspective is used to view an action or object was a new insight for the kids and one that was often referenced throughout our cross-cultural study. We did not want to fall into the trap of viewing our own culture as the norm against which other cultures are judged as deficient or "weird" in some way.

When the students gathered at the Story Floor, we created a chart of what they had noticed:

- Chinese has symbols and there are some small symbols between the big ones.
- Japanese symbols have more lines in them.
- More detail and strokes in Japanese and Chinese.
- Japanese moves top to bottom instead of left to right.
- Korean and Chinese are the same as English—left to right.
- Some Chinese characters have house shapes.
- Korean symbols seem more complicated.
- Japanese has more variability.
- There are some similarities between Korean and Japanese symbols.
- Japanese is all mashed together.
- There are more words in Chinese than Korean.
- Japanese has small symbols next to large ones.

- Let's Learn Korean -

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		ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ
ㅏ	가	가	거	고	교	구	규	그	기		
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ㅕ	려		려								
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We simplified this engagement for our kindergarteners by having them compare only two languages. Because Kelvin was familiar with Chinese, we asked them to compare Chinese with Korean. Their comments included talk about Korean having more words on a page than Chinese and Chinese having more lines in the symbols.

The kids were often not sure how to verbalize their observations and did not have the terminology to label the differences but they were looking closely and clearly recognized that the three languages were distinct, but shared some characteristics. To further our investigation of Korean

written language we explored its structure and organization and practiced writing in Hangul.

Hangul is a relatively new written language with an interesting and well-documented history. Not surprisingly, Kathy had a book, *The King's Secret* (Farley, 2001), about the history of Hangul and King Sejong, the man responsible for its creation. She told the story of how this enlightened ruler developed a phonetic system of writing to replace the complicated Chinese characters that the Koreans had been using. He felt Koreans should have a written language that matched their spoken language in order to make reading and writing accessible for all Korean people. The kids were fascinated with this story and with the idea that someone would create an alphabet.

We invited Yoo-kyung Sung, a Korean graduate student from the University of Arizona, to introduce Hangul to the children. She showed them, using magnetic symbols, how each shape represents a sound and how to position the symbols to form a word. Then Yoo-kyung gave each student a chart of Korean symbols and their sounds to use as they explored writing Hangul. Because of the way Hangul was created, the sound/symbol relationships are systematic and easy to learn.

Many of the children were most interested in writing their names using the Korean symbols. Some attempted to translate by trading one Korean symbol for one English letter. They struggled with the idea that the Korean symbols represented sounds found in Korean spoken language and that our English spelling patterns wouldn't apply to Korean writing. For instance, Ashleigh struggled until she realized that she only needed one Korean symbol to show the sound of "eigh" in her name.

Some students tried to apply what they knew about the sounds that the symbols represented in decoding the words from the books. They were confused because they could sound out the Korean words but didn't know what they meant. They were expecting English to emerge from the Korean text. It was interesting to see how this engagement allowed the kids to explore Korean but also to develop deeper understandings about English and the connections between written symbols and sounds within a language.

Kids continued to explore Hangul through comparing several sets of books that we found in both their original Korean text and in English. Kane/Miller is a publishing company that obtains the rights to books that originate in other languages and cultures and translates them, retaining the original illustrations, for U.S. distribution. We purchased the English translations (Bae, 2007; Kwon, 2007; [Lee, 2003](#); Lee, 2007) and Yoo-kyung helped us find the original Korean version. Kids spent hours comparing the books, reading the English and then closely examining the Hangul text to see if they could recognize words.

Understanding Contemporary LifeThe Korean text set was intended as a vehicle to a deeper and more complex understanding of Korean culture. As we began to pull individual books to read and discuss at the Story Floor, it became clear that the Korean books that were available in English depicted historical Korea and traditional stories, both of which showed Koreans in traditional dress and in village settings from long ago. The only books we found that depicted contemporary life in Korea were written in Hangul. We had to find ways to support students in deriving meaning from the Korean language books or their understanding of Korean culture would be outdated and inaccurate.

Furthermore, we wanted children to realize that cultures have a past and a present. We wanted them to understand that the way people live changes over time. We knew that children often assume that other cultures are the same today as in the past, unlike the U.S. We wanted to challenge this ethnocentric perspective. It made sense to introduce this concept close to home. We used two books set in Arizona, one in the early 1900's and the other more recently, to ask the children to think about whether the stories took place in their past or present and how they knew this. We then asked them to sort the Korean texts according to historical and contemporary settings. We hoped that this experience would frame their thinking as they continued to explore the texts in search of information about life in Korea.

Many of our students were surprised to learn that children in Korea not only had televisions, video games, and cell phones, but that many of the sophisticated electronics that we have in the United States were developed and manufactured in Korea—and available there long before here. Upon reflection, this misconception makes sense given the resources that teachers have available to them. If children's experience with Korean culture comes exclusively through historical and traditional literature, they would assume that Korea today looks like Korea in the past. We found it interesting that the U.S. publishers sense a market for historical and traditional books about other cultures, but fail to translate books about contemporary society. We found this trend also true with chapter books, finding only historical fiction about Korea available in English. We used the books on contemporary life in Korea in several ways. They were integrated into our text sets so that kids continuously interacted with them, often primarily focusing on the illustrations, as sources of information about contemporary life for their own inquiries. We also chose several of the books and asked Yoo-kyung to provide an English translation for those books so that we could use them for read-aloud and response engagements with the younger children. For example, one Hangul book told the story of an older sister who has to take her bratty younger brother on the subway to visit her grandmother. We knew that the children would have many



connections to this book from their own lives, but that there would also be some interesting cultural differences. One that the kids noted right away was that the two children were allowed to go by themselves on the subway. We read the book aloud in English and then read it a second time and invited children to respond through a graffiti board where they could sketch their connections and thoughts about the book through visual images and words. The kindergarten children sat on the floor around a large sheet of paper and sketched and then later dictated comments to add to their visual responses.

Exploring Cultural Differences and Anomalies The books in Hangul raised interesting cultural differences and anomalies for children. One book in particular became an exploration of cultural and age differences for children and teachers. Kathy shared a book that she found particularly puzzling with the teachers and children. The book, written in Korean, was about a boy who is looking for his mother. He waits at a train stop. The illustrations indicate the passing of time. Each time a train stops, the boy talks to the conductor and the train

moves on. The boy waits, and waits, and waits, but no mother appears. In the end, it looks like the boy is still waiting, as a snowstorm swirls around him. No one has arrived to pick him up. Teachers were outraged. How could this small boy be left alone at the end of the story?

We needed to comprehend the print so that we could better understand the story. We thought about having Yookyung translate for us, but Kathy found the book in English at a bookstore in Australia, titled *Waiting for Mummy* (Lee, 2004). In this version, an illustration had been added to the final page showing the boy walking hand in hand with his mother through the snow—the happy ending that we craved. This book led us into an interesting discussion as we explored differences in cultural values and why this book would be seen as a seminal piece of literature within Korean culture while we found it troubling as American adults.

We wondered how the children would respond to the story, so I read and showed the English version while Kathy showed the Korean version. Then we asked them what they thought about the story. There were clear differences in the responses based on age level. The fourth and fifth graders responded similarly to the adults with an immediate concern about the child being left without his mother. In fact, as I finished reading the book aloud, one fourth grader audibly gasped, saying “He never found his mother?” and the rest of the class looked visibly concerned. The kindergarteners were not as concerned about the ending; they seemed to have a young child’s faith in mothers and knew she would come eventually. They were more concerned about the ways that the conductors treated the boy and how he was separated from his mother:

- How come they won’t let him inside?
- Why do the conductors talk so mean to him?
- Why is his nose red?
- He still didn’t find his mom.
- There are some houses that have Korean writing.
- I wonder if his mommy is on one of the trains.
- The guy told him to stay and wait – he didn’t want him to get hurt.
- When he went outside to play, he went to a different city and got lost.



When reading the book aloud to the fourth graders, Sheshna noticed something that all of us as adults had missed—the mother and child are in the Korean version on the final page but their image is very small in the middle of a double-paged spread of a snowstorm. What was interesting is that the editors of the Australian version lifted that small image of the mother and child and put it by itself on the final page of the English version to

make it obvious to readers that the mother had come. Clearly, they shared our cultural values and needed to be sure that children would realize that there was a happy ending.



The difference in the emphasis that each book made on the mother returning made us wonder what this said about Korean culture. The children had some ideas about why the mother's return was less conspicuous in the Korean version:

- Korean books like to leave people guessing.
- It breaks people's hearts—they don't need happy endings.
- Yoo-kyung told us that Koreans don't often say I love you, they aren't as expressive.
- Australians need happy endings.
- The book made us think and focus on problem solving.
- Koreans like puzzles and the book left us puzzled.
- They want you to look at the visual images more closely to figure it out.

This experience was significant for teachers and children in beginning to probe the deeper differences in cultural values between American and Korean cultures. The discussions were thoughtful and tentative, but did not focus on one culture as "right." Instead the focus was on understanding the differences in values and we found that these explorations continued after this experience with much more thoughtful consideration of understanding Korean cultural values and not assuming they were the same as ours.

Assessing Children's Understandings of the CultureAnother use of these books occurred at the end of our study as a way to assess children's understandings of culture. Our kindergarteners had been given multiple opportunities throughout the course of our cross-cultural study to explore the Korean text set. They made many connections between things that they find in their own culture, and things that they saw in the books. We wanted them to move beyond "things" that are the same and different to experiences and stories that connect and distinguish cultures. They had primarily focused on responding to read-alouds with personal connections to the daily lives of children, pets, and families—the things that are important in their lives. While the older children engaged in inquiries to learn more about particular aspects of Korean culture, our focus with the younger children was on reading aloud books about everyday life in Korea and encouraging them to respond with their comments and connections.



One day, very late in the school year, we spread the text set on tables throughout the room. Lisa asked the Kindergarteners to gather with her on the Story Floor and told them there were books in English and Hangul on the tables. She explained that they had seen some of them, but that we had added others. Lisa invited them to move to a table, choose a book that they found interesting and “tell themselves a story” using the illustrations.

Lisa discovered that there is simply no way to predict how five and six year olds will respond to anything. She wasn't sure if they would engage with the books for any length of time at all. She had markers and crayons ready if needed, but instead we all enjoyed a magical time telling stories together. The children spent a few minutes negotiating which book they wanted to enjoy. Most chose one for themselves, some decided to share with a buddy. Many moved from table to table searching for just the right book. But soon they settled in, opened their books and began telling stories.

Lisa worked with a pair of boys at one table. They had chosen a historical book. The boys carefully explored each page looking for details within the illustration to guide their words. “Long ago in Korea...” began Jesse. Together they identified each character. They had a villain, the boss (you could tell he was mean by his face), and a hero, the farm worker. The boss wasn't nice because he didn't pay the farm worker enough money so he couldn't buy food for his family. At one point, they noticed a celebration. They decided it was a wedding and that the evil boss turned nice and allowed the farm worker to go to the wedding and get married. “And they lived happily every after. The End.”

As Lisa glanced around the room, every kindergartener was engaged with their book in the same way, using what they knew about story in conjunction with the illustrations to “read” their book. Their stories showed us many things. We learned very quickly they knew a great deal about how stories are structured but we also learned what they had come to understand about Korean culture by what aspects of that culture were or were not incorporated into their stories. By recording quick notes about their stories, we were able to assess their understandings in the same way that the presentations of the projects by the older students reflected their understandings.

**Final Thoughts**We were struck by the significance that the Korean language books played in our understanding of Korean culture and culture in general. The tension that existed as students attempted to make sense of books written in a language they didn't read or speak led them to look more carefully and to think more critically about the texts and the culture. We came to believe that books written in native languages are critical in text sets that support cross-cultural studies. These books are significant not only because of the importance of language to culture but also because of the role they can play in inviting children to explore deeper aspects of cultural ways of living and thinking. Without these books, children could easily have formed many misperceptions about culture, particularly about contemporary life.

In reflecting on this experience and thinking about the implications for future cross-cultural studies, we developed the following recommendations:

- Locate as many books in the native language of the culture as possible. One source of these books are

international students at the university, particularly education majors. Even if they don't have the books, they can access websites in that language to purchase materials and can help send interlibrary loan requests. Many libraries participate in worldwide interlibrary loan agreements and so can make requests for books in that language. You do need to know the book information in that language and so need help from a native speaker to make the request.

- Books in the native language can often be purchased on web sites that are available to speakers of that language in the U.S. You don't necessarily have to get the books shipped from the country because often a group has already imported the books, thus avoiding large shipping fees. The major issue is that the sites are usually in that language, not English.
- Invite speakers of the language to come to the classroom to read books in the language to children and to teach a few basic principles of the language. They can also be tremendous resources later in the study as children have specific questions that cannot be answered in available materials.
- Ask native speakers to tape record themselves reading several books.
- If possible, locate some books that are available in both English and the native language so that children can compare the books.
- Ask a native speaker to translate several key books so that they can be used as read-alouds for response engagements.
- Integrate the books into all aspects of a cross-cultural study, not as a separate experience, but as part of the text sets of books that support a range of experiences from browsing to literature discussions to small group inquiry projects.

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## Mapping Our Understandings of Literature

By

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Reading picture books aloud to my students has always been one of my favorite times of the day. Typically, these read-aloud times include talk about children's personal connections and interpretations of a book. I have explored other ways of thinking and responding to books, such as sketches, drama, webbing, charting, and graffiti boards. These ways of responding provide time for students to reflect on their thinking about a story in ways that are often more supportive of young children's thinking instead of only relying on talk to explore interpretations (Short, Kahn, & Kauffman, 2000). Recently I have been intrigued by the ways in which mapping has helped my students organize their thinking and explore relationships between ideas, people, and events in the stories we are reading.

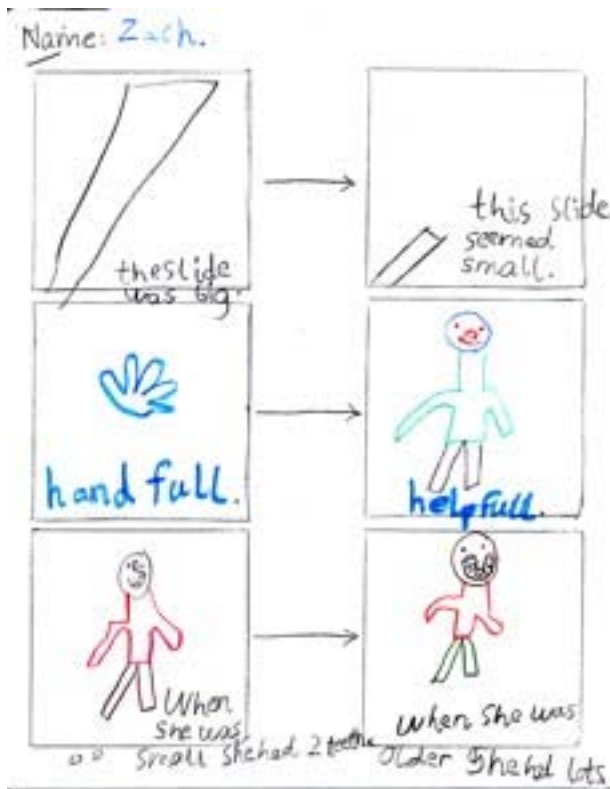
I associate maps with geography and did not consider their potential as a response strategy until we began a conceptual exploration of journeys in the Learning Lab that carried over into my classroom. We used literature to challenge students to go beyond a literal understanding of journeys as trips to a more conceptual or metaphoric understandings. Each time we read a new book, students engaged in a literature discussion and some type of mapping response strategy. Given the connection of maps to journeys, mapping was a natural choice for response and for encouraging the development of conceptual thinking. This strategy gave the students a visual way to think about and organize their responses. By the end of the fall semester, students recognized that a journey could be much more than the physical movement from one place to another.

Moline (1995) argues that maps are used to place information in its spatial context. Maps can enable a learner to highlight spatial relationships, summarize a process, show changes over time, and record the movement of people or ideas. When children create maps, they are forced to organize their ideas and information on paper while paying attention to spatial relationships. They have to prioritize the ideas and information because they can't include everything on the map. The spatial organization emphasizes the relative importance of particular ideas or events and provides a visual representation of the relationships between these ideas or events. For young children, the maps we created highlighted relationships and helped to make abstract concepts more concrete.

Our focus on journeys began with reading aloud *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Egan (2007). This became a touchstone text for our classroom because the students had a very strong connection to the book and continued to refer to it throughout the entire school year. Dodsworth owns a thrift shop, and each day visits the junkyard to bring back items to sell in his shop. One day he notices a pink refrigerator with a note attached, stating "make pictures," and inside the refrigerator are paints, brushes, and a sketchbook. Dodsworth intends to sell the art supplies, but instead he uses them. Each day thereafter a new note appears and Dodsworth continues to carry out each exploration. Most students initially recognized this story as a physical journey of moving from one place to another in their maps of his life. Alexis drew a map reflecting her thinking that Dodsworth's journey was basically linear, while Eyalu depicts Dodsworth's life journey as having pathways separate from his main route.



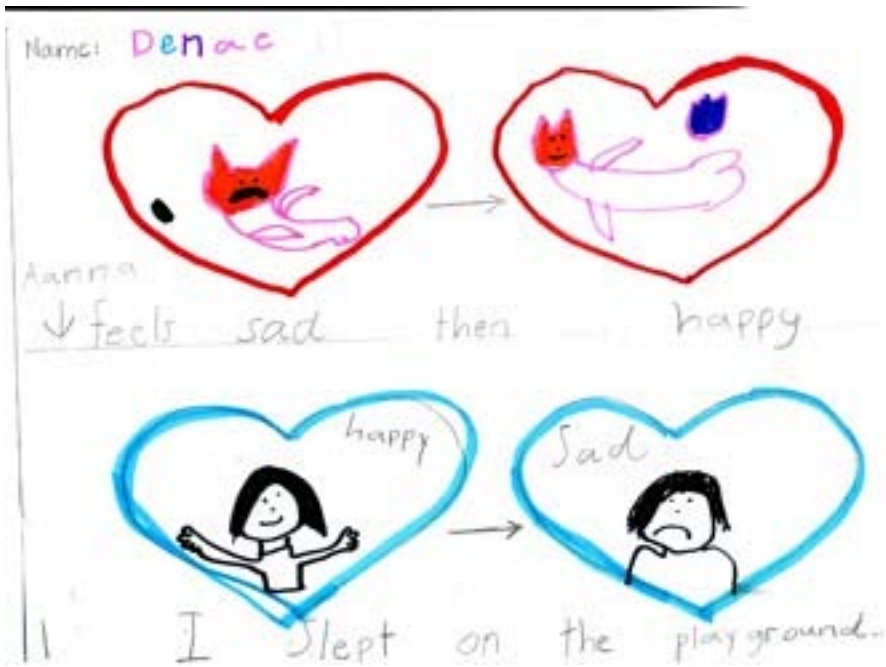
In our teacher study group, we reflected on the students' understandings about journeys from this experience. It was apparent that they did not have a conceptual understanding and saw a journey as a physical movement from place to place. We decided to teach what they were on the edge of knowing about journeys—what they were starting to explore but didn't quite grasp yet. That decision led us to focus on growing up journeys, emotional journeys, and learning journeys in our next experiences with the younger children.



Our next two books, *Once There Were Giants* by Martin Waddell and Penny Dale (1989) and *When I Was Little* by Jamie Lee Curtis (1993) presented stories about the changes young children go through as they mature. The students easily labeled this type of journey as a growing up journey. We asked students to create a simple map in which they identified and mapped some of the changes for the main character. We wanted them to explore journeys as changes that are not necessarily a physical change in location. Zach's map of the little girl's metamorphosis from *When I Was Little* is evidence of his understanding of the changes that occur on such a journey.

To challenge students to continue developing their conceptual understandings about journeys, we explored emotional journeys. *No, I Want Daddy!* By Nadine Brun-Cosme (2003) illustrates the many changes in emotion that a young girl experiences. Anna comes home happy, but her mother's grumpy mood results in her anger and she decides she

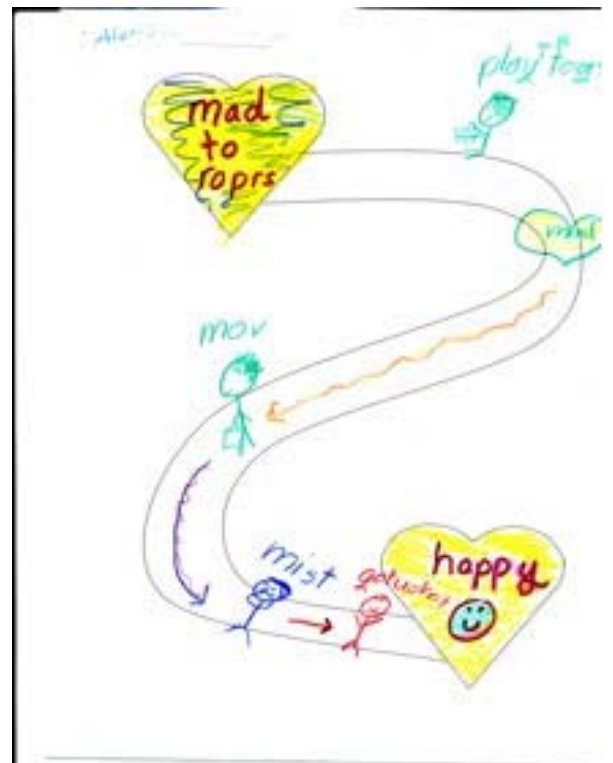
wants Daddy to do everything with her that evening. After her daddy tucks her in bed she feels as though something is missing until her mother quietly visits her. They are able to mend hurt feelings and Anna is finally able to sleep. We used the visual of a heart to help students map the emotional journeys that Anna goes through in the book. Students had to decide which of her emotional journeys they wanted to depict. Denae's map reflects Anna's change in feelings from sad to happy. On this map we also asked students to make a personal connection of a time when they experienced an emotional journey. Denae's understanding is apparent in her illustration and her writing about her journey as well as Anna's.

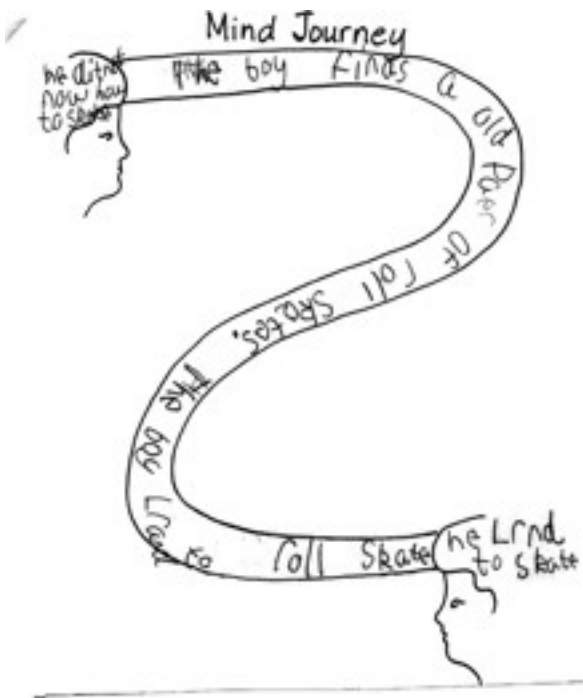


John Steptoe's (1969) book, *Stevie*, deepened the students' understandings of emotional journeys. Robert is angry that his mother is babysitting for another little boy. He is angry because Stevie plays with his toys when he's at school and leaves dirty footprints on his bed. But when Stevie's parents decide to move away, Robert is sad and misses him. At this point we recognized that students could see a change occurring in the different types of

journeys so we decided to use the maps in a different way to highlight pathways. We wanted students to understand that there is a process that leads to change. Hearts were still used to illustrate the emotional aspect of the journey, but this time students selected an emotional change and illustrated the process of that change over time. Alexis chose to show Robert's multiple changes in emotions across the book.

Another journey that students explored was a mind journey, which they also called a learning journey. *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2003) was read aloud to further their conceptual understandings. The book tells a story of a shy young boy who gains confidence by learning to roller skate. As shown in Tanner's map, Sebastian didn't know how to skate at the beginning of the story, but learns to do so by the end of the story. This book was significant because not only did the students identify the learning journey, but they also understood that by learning to skate Sebastian gained confidence that helped him to overcome his shyness.



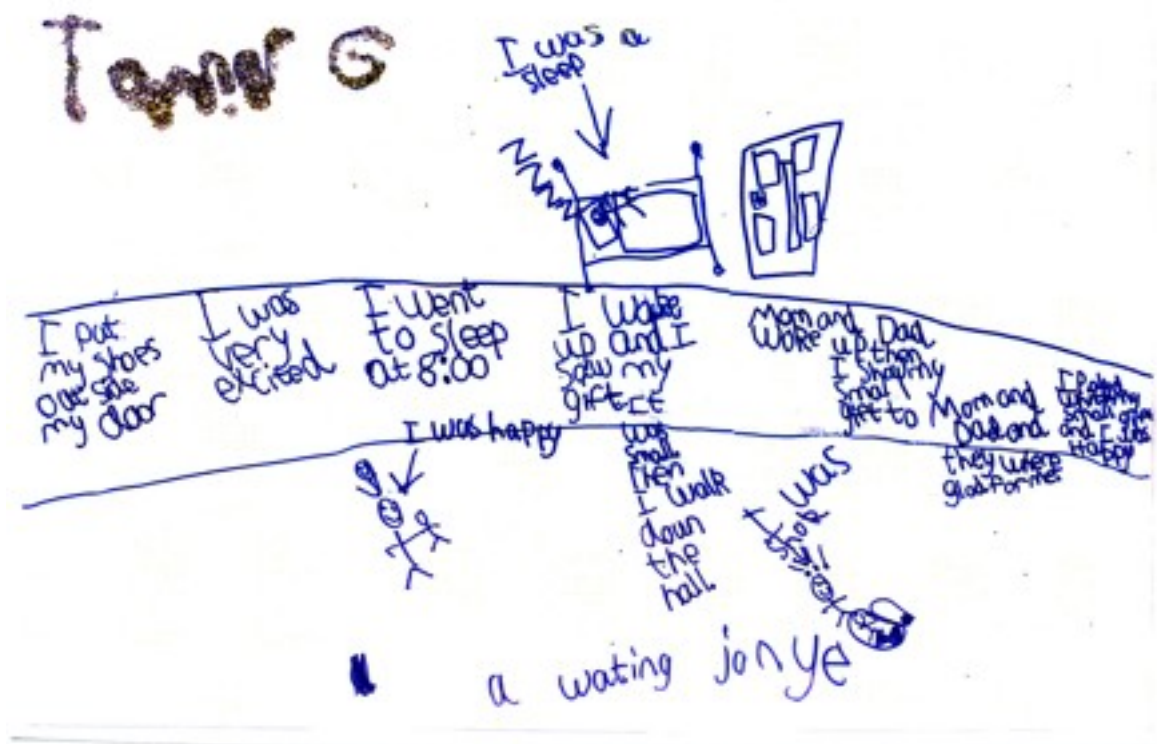


Initially I considered these mapping strategies as examples of students' understandings about the books and about journeys. It wasn't until several months after we began our exploration of journeys, that I realized the effect of thinking conceptually on my students as thinkers. We asked the students to look at all of their different maps and reflect with a partner. I realized this opportunity to analyze, make connections between maps, and explain each map to a partner was vital because when my students were asked, "What are some of the big ideas that are true about our world?" they showed a deep understanding of the concept of journeys. This question was posed to see if students could identify big ideas based on our explorations of journeys. I anticipated a retelling of events from the stories, but their responses were evidence that the students had a broad understanding of the concept:

- When you grow up you get to do different things.
- Growing up is like a journey because you start as a baby, then a kid, then a teenager, then an adult, then you're old.
- When you grow up you have different things.
- You can learn from other people.
- You learn harder things as you get older.
- As you get older you get different kinds of emotions. When you're younger you're silly, when you're older you're serious.
- Sometimes your emotions change because of other people.

These responses show that the students were better able to see and understand the themes within each book and to form conceptual understandings of journeys at a metaphorical level. Erickson (2002) suggests that using a conceptual lens for a topic of study, as we did with journeys, facilitates and requires deep understanding and allows for the transfer of knowledge to new settings.

Additional evidence of their conceptual thinking occurred when the students voluntarily offered their own labels for journeys in books we were reading in the classroom. For example, one day while reading *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson (2001), Manny commented that it included a "friendship journey." In the spring when our concept study had shifted to human rights, my students were learning about how our choices affect our environment when Deana shouted out, "Wow, that's a thoughtful journey because we have to always be thoughtful about our choices." The students continued to recognize different types of journeys throughout the entire school year.



Our Holiday Memory Maps evolved from our involvement with the study of journeys. We asked the first and second-grade students to discuss their holiday traditions with their parents. Students were then asked to identify one of their favorite holiday memories and to map it

using a pathway of their choice. After the map was created, the students labeled the kind of journey they experienced during that particular memory. Many students used familiar labels, such as emotional and learning journeys, and some created new labels. David's learning journey, Megan's happy journey, and Tanner's waiting journey reflect some of the thinking that students engaged in around their memories.



A broad concept serves as an umbrella that students and teachers can use to encompass a wide range of topics, themes, and ideas. It does not limit the possibilities for class and student

inquiries, but provides a point of connection across those inquiries (Short, et al., 1996). My students' thinking grew from simple and concrete understandings that a journey represented physical movement from one place to another to the conceptual idea that a journey is a pathway of changes that involve growing up, emotions, and

learning. Even more significant to me was the students' ability to apply this conceptual knowledge in other areas, as they did with the Holiday Memory Map.



The mapping response strategies played a key role in supporting students in making this shift from literal to conceptual understandings and in applying their understandings in new contexts. Mapping provided a concrete way for them to visually show change over time through pathways and to understand the process of change. They could see the connections and relationships in ways that

would have not been apparent if we had only used talk or writing to respond to the books. Mapping is a strategy that both extends and transforms students' thinking and supports them in making the abstract concrete.

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## Encouraging Symbolic Thinking through Literature

By

Kathryn Bolasky, Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Engaging my students in meaningful responses to literature was a tension for me throughout the school year. My students were proficient in making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections to literature, but I struggled with pushing them to dig more deeply into their interpretations. I wanted them to struggle with ideas and issues as they considered their understandings of literature, not just make a comment about a connection. Our teacher study group provided opportunities for me to explore new response strategies. Looking back over the year, I realize that one response strategy, Sketch to Stretch, became particularly significant. When I compared our initial sketches with ones completed during the last week of school, I was impressed and surprised by the change in the complexity of student thinking. By the end of the year, my students went from simply illustrating the events of a story to symbolically representing their understandings of literature through visual images.

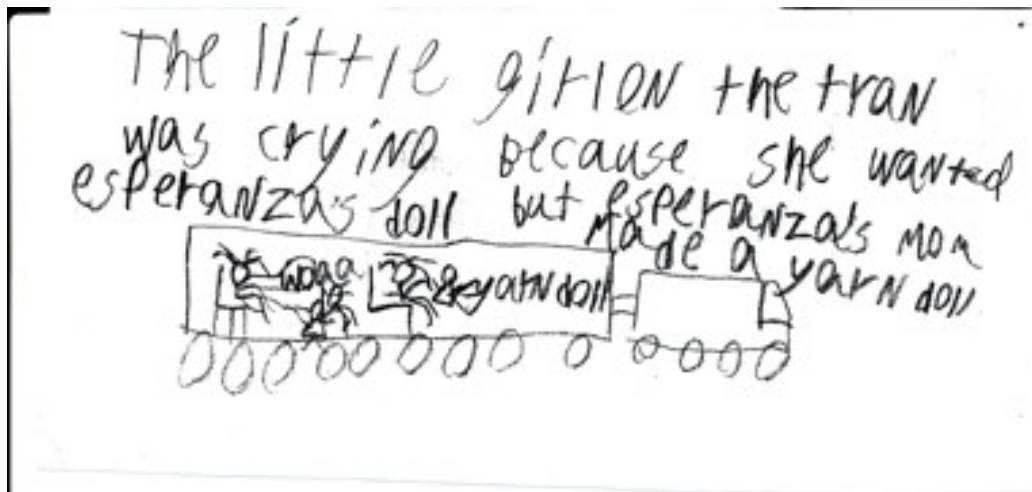
Whitin (1994) defines Sketch to Stretch as “a visual representation of colors, lines, symbols, and shapes to convey one’s understanding of conflict, character, theme, or feelings” (p. 101). Readers do not illustrate the events of the story, but explore their meanings or connections to a story through visual images. Typically, we ask students to respond to literature through conversation or a writing. Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) argue that language is not the only way to create meaning and that there are many sign systems that we use as human beings to “share and make meaning,” including music, art, mathematics, drama, and language. Sketch to Stretch involves moving from the sign system of language to the sign system of art, a process called transmediation. Short, Harste, and Burke point out that transmediation is not just a translation or transfer of meaning from one system to another. Each sign system has a different meaning potential and so readers have to transform the meaning they have created in language as they move into art. This transformation encourages readers to go beyond a literal understanding of their reading and supports complexity in student thinking as well as the ability to think symbolically about significant concepts within the book.

I was introduced to Sketch to Stretch as a response strategy in study group and was anxious to try it out with my class. I was reading aloud *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000) and decided to have students respond in literature logs. I had been struggling to engage students in meaningful discussions with each other and hoped that responding in lit logs

and using Sketch to Stretch would provide them with ideas to talk about in the discussion. This novel captures the compelling story of a young Mexican girl who immigrates to a new country and into a different social class. The death of her wealthy, loving father results in her uncle's pressuring her mother to remarry one of them, and so Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their ranch and belongings behind and flee to a new life as migrant workers in California.

I explained that I wanted students to explore the big ideas of the chapter using pictures or words. My past experience as a primary teacher led me to believe that using pictures as a response would ease their anxiety about putting their thoughts into writing. Their responses incorporated both writing and pictures, but only showed basic comprehension of the events in the story. Even though their responses were retellings, not sketches of meanings, the sketches were a significant step in developing their thinking about literature because they were using more than one sign system to visually represent events from the story.

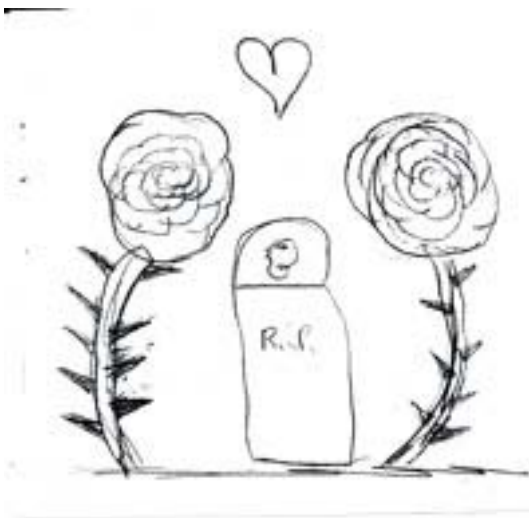
Their sketches indicated that students were able to identify the important events in each chapter, but they could not explain why those events were important. Mason's response depicts a pivotal scene from the Chapter 7 where Esperanza and her mother are on the train and a young passenger wants to play with Esperanza's treasured doll. This part of the story is a turning point for Esperanza and her mother, because Esperanza interacts with someone who is poor for the first time. She has grown up in Mexico with wealth and privilege and her mother explains that they are now also struggling with poverty. Choosing to respond to this part of the chapter indicated that Mason understood the importance of the event, but he could not explain why this event is significant to the story.



Even though a majority of the responses were retellings of events, a few students did use visual symbols related to the events. Dan drew a wedding ring and a wedding band, with the caption “ring- will you marry me,” to show that Esperanza’s uncle wanted to marry her mother. During the discussion of this chapter, Dan indicated that he saw this as an important event, but he could not explain why. Elana used facial expressions to represent the change in Esperanza’s uncle’s personality. Esperanza’s perceptions of her uncle change in the story and Elana noted the shift, but was not able to verbally explain how that affected the story.



Bailey’s response gave me hope about using Sketch to Stretch to push student thinking. Bailey was able to effectively use symbols to signify Esperanza’s father’s death. She drew a grave marker that was framed by two roses and she explained that the roses symbolized Esperanza and her mother. On each stem there were large thorns. She drew a heart above the gravestone and the two roses to show the love they had for each other. Bailey’s response showed me that my students could move past retellings into deeper understandings of a text.



I decided to use the conceptual frame we were focusing on in Learning Lab to guide and push our thinking. Our teacher study group had decided to look at human rights and the power of choice. With the help of Lisa Thomas, I selected a few picture books from a text set on our central theme and read aloud *When I Grow Up I Will Win the Nobel Prize* (Pin, 2006), *First Day in Grapes* (Perez, 2002), and *The Big Box* (Morrison, 2002). I started our discussions

by asking, “Who had the power to make choices for a better world?” This question provided a starting point for student responses and jump started many discussions. I also made an effort to demonstrate my thinking about the important decisions that were occurring within each story. The students were able to look deeper into the stories that we read. They talked about decisions that characters were making and explored why these choices were significant in that character’s life and world. As our discussions developed, I noticed that the students were creating more detailed sketches as well because of the support of this talk in exploring and developing their thinking about different interpretations for a book.

These experiences demonstrated that students needed to explore their initial interpretations of literature before moving into the sketching. I originally thought that Sketch to Stretch responses would develop student discussions, but I came to understand that students needed to engage in exploratory talk about a book before moving to symbolic thinking. Symbolic thinking was new to them and they needed the initial sharing to help them consider possible issues and interpretations to explore symbolically through visual images and then could move back into more in-depth dialogue about the book. *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001) was a key picture book that helped shift our thinking from using art to summarize a plot to using art to symbolically represent the deeper meanings of the story. Set in Mississippi in the summer of 1964, the book portrays the close friendship of two boys, one black and the other white, who celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights Act by going to the town pool, expecting to be able to swim together for the first time. Instead, they find a work crew filling the pool with asphalt, a reflection of the town’s resistance to desegregation.

Lisa read aloud the book and gave students time to talk about their questions before asking them to sketch. By discussing first, the students talked through their confusions and helped each other go beyond recounting the plot into interpretations. Through the discussions students learned to think interpretively and this supported them in moving into symbolic thinking. The students could take their new understandings and create sketches of the concepts and ideas that they each wanted to think more about.

Elena took ideas from the story that were discussed and effectively used visual images to explain her understanding. She used symbols to show the many tensions in the story. Her sketch is divided into two parts to represent the perspectives of the two boys. On the left side of the paper she has a chain link fence with barbed-wire across the top, storm clouds that are raining, and a butterfly with black wings. These images are juxtaposed against

the visual images on the right side of the sketch which depict a blue sky, sun, brightly colored butterfly, and flower. Most of Elana's understandings of the tensions in the story are illustrated in the middle of the sketch. She drew a blue line to clearly delineate the two sides, but it was not a straight line. Instead she drew a curvy line with a heart and an area that bulges into the blue sky of the right side.



When I interviewed Elana about her sketch she was very confident as she explained each aspect. She said that the left side is supposed to be dark and sad because that is how John Henry felt about not being able to do things that Joe could do. She created the right side to represent Joe's feelings about being happy, except when John Henry was discriminated against because of the color of his skin. She explained

that she showed Joe's frustration with the inequality by putting a dark cloud and rain in the middle of his blue sky to indicate that not all of him is happy. This piece of cloudy, rainy sky is like the piece of Joe's heart that is sad and frustrated. I was impressed with Elana's ability to clearly capture the main character's frustrations in her sketch. Her sketch was more than an illustration of an event from the story—it was a look into her thinking about the text. When I saw all of the students' sketches displayed on a bulletin board in the Learning Lab, I realized that my class was able to use visual images as symbols to express and deepen their thinking.

After our success with *Freedom Summer*, I wanted to continue to use Sketch to Stretch as a response to our next read aloud. Due to our focus on human rights and the power to make decisions for a better world, I was reading aloud *Iqbal* (D'Adamo, 2001) to my class. *Iqbal* is a fictional story based on the life of a young boy who led an influential movement to protest child labor in Pakistani carpet factories. I knew that I would have to

create an atmosphere where students could ask questions and thoughtfully discuss the tough issues in the book. I gave out literature logs and encouraged children to respond in any way they felt made sense. I set aside the last thirty minutes of each day to read a chapter from the book. After finishing a chapter, students responded in their literature logs and then we had a discussion. The students were involved in the story and always looked forward to the last half an hour of the day. I was surprised by the deeper understandings of the concepts, ideas and issues that students brought up during discussion, such as illiteracy, poverty, and justice. Based on their conversations and emotional connections to the story, I realized that the students were engaging with this story in ways I had never seen before. When we finished the book I explained to the class that they were going to do a Sketch to Stretch about the overall meaning of the book for each of them. The students immediately read through their literature logs and got to work on their sketches.

As students shared their sketches with each other, I was astounded at their ability to use visual images as symbols to represent their understandings. Many of the students used symbols that we had talked about in our discussions like birds symbolizing freedom and rainbows symbolizing hope. When Dan shared his sketch, he explained that he drew the



chain that was used to imprison Iqbal to his loom and it was “empty” showing that Iqbal was free. He said that he drew the top part of his sketch as dark and red because Iqbal was angry because he knew it was wrong to be chained to the loom and forced to make carpets. He shared that he left the image white behind the loom because Iqbal knew he could be free and that he was going to make it happen. Dan recognized that Iqbal was intelligent and knew child labor was wrong and was brave enough to stand up for himself and other children. Dan used the chain as a symbol of strength not despair.

Gaby shared that she drew a kite to show freedom because Iqbal and Fatima dreamed of the day that they could fly a kite and were free from the looms and their master. She also explained that she drew the kite “breaking through a fence” that held in the kids. The clouds in the sky were another symbol of freedom because the kids could not see the sky when they were working in the shop. The small details in their drawings indicate that students had listened carefully to this intense story, made their own meanings, and created visual images to show their new understandings.

Sketch to Stretch was more than just a response strategy to literature in my classroom. These sketches are an illustrated record of our learning. Through examining how the students’ sketches unfolded over time, I was able to see the ways in which my students developed more symbolic and conceptual thinking, as well as how my own learning as a teacher developed. I originally planned to use Sketch to Stretch as a way to encourage thoughtful talk about literature, but quickly learned that we needed to first engage in exploratory talk to share our initial responses. This exploratory talk provided students with the support they needed to consider their own interpretations and engage in transmediation to move their talk into symbolic representations of our thinking. We needed to think together and I needed to demonstrate and encourage symbolic thinking to support them in creating a sketch.

As an educator it is sometimes hard to abandon carefully developed lesson plans, but in this case it was essential to do so to support my students as critical thinkers. I could have easily judged their first attempts at sketching as an indication that third graders could only illustrate events from a text. Through taking a closer look at their sketches, I saw glimpses of symbolic thinking starting to emerge. By taking instructional time to build strategies and ways of thinking about books, my students moved past their surface understandings of a text. Sketch to Stretch gave students a way to create visual images of their thinking and this move from language to visual thinking transformed their understandings and, in turn, led to richer dialogue. Action research provided a way for me to examine these small shifts in student thinking over time and, in turn, transformed my understandings about children’s potential to engage in symbolic thinking.

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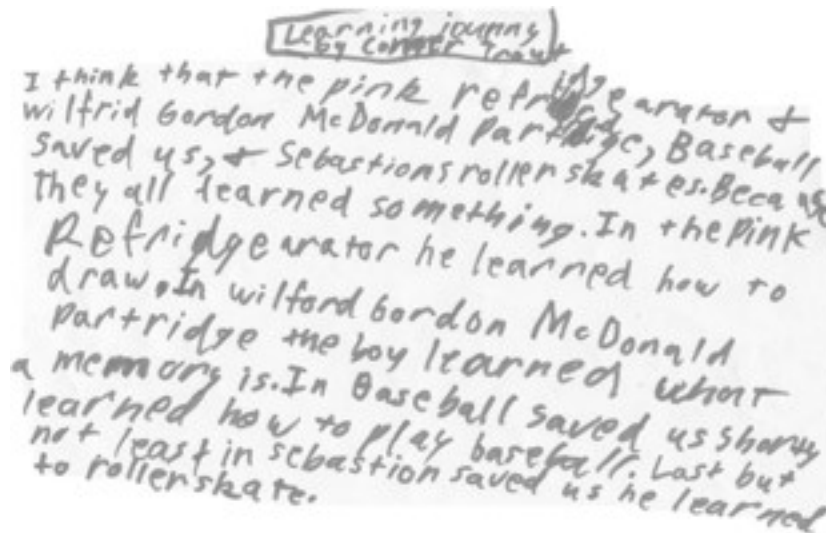


## Encouraging Intertextual Thinking in the Classroom

By

Kathryn Bolasky, Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Sitting on the floor of my classroom, I sorted through the piles of student work that had collected across our semester-long inquiry on journeys. It was the last week of school and I was trying to bring order to the classroom and decide what to send home with students and to keep for my own reflection. One particular student reflection caught my attention because I didn't remember seeing it. I started to skim and then went back to read carefully. Conner had decided to thoughtfully reflect on the connections between three picture books based on the learning journeys in each story. It was at that moment that I realized that my students' thinking had shifted from making surface-level connections between books about characters and plots to understanding that books can be connected conceptually by big ideas and themes. This shift in thinking had occurred gradually over the semester without my being aware of it and so I decided to revisit my students' work to see how this shift unfolded. I wanted to look for key teaching strategies and engagements that helped pushed students to think intertextually about conceptual



Learning journeys  
by Conner

I think that the pink refrigerator & Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, Baseball saved us, & Sebastian's roller skates. Because they all learned something. In the Pink Refrigerator he learned how to draw. In Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge the boy learned what a memory is. In Baseball saved us Sharpy learned how to play baseball. Last but not least in Sebastian saved us he learned to roller skate.

connections across texts. Since this was my second year of teaching, I hoped that identifying these teaching strategies would help me more consciously integrate them into my instruction for the following year.

Intertextuality is a key thinking strategy

in which learners make connections between texts and involves the process of making meaning through connections across present and past texts and life experiences (Beaugrande, 1980). This complex process requires readers to look past superficial similarities between books to the larger conceptual issues within and across texts. Thinking intertextually is the basis for critical and creative thought, but was not a process

that I taught directly. Instead my students were encouraged to make connections across texts by being immersed in a collection of texts and responding to those texts in a variety of ways. Students can be guided towards intertextual thinking, but the students themselves have to inquire and make their own connections. I examined engagements that occurred within my classroom and in our school's Learning Lab with our instructional coach, Lisa Thomas, to identify the key instructional strategies that seemed to support students in moving toward intertextual thinking. These strategies included the development of a conceptual frame to support our inquiries, the use of mapping as tool for exploring our thinking, connecting through a touchstone book, exploring text sets, and connecting across books through comparison charts.

### **Establishing a Conceptual Frame**

One key instructional strategy was the use of a broad conceptual framework to connect the various topics and subject areas we explored across our day. Our teacher study group came to consensus about focusing our research on exploring the concept of journeys because this concept wove across the individual units we were doing at the various grade levels. Since journey was a school wide framework, students were given opportunities to conceptualize journeys in more than just my classroom. They were challenged to think metaphorically about journeys during our time in Learning Lab and during our Opening Minds through the Arts (OMA) program with our fine arts specialist. This consistency was a vital aspect in the students' success with finding connections across the curriculum.

I started the year with the goal of using the concept of journeys to guide my planning and instruction in reading. Having a framework in mind helped me make decisions about what materials to use with my third graders. I soon noticed that I was finding numerous ways to connect journeys to almost everything I was teaching, not just in reading. For example, I would present a new math procedure by saying, "Today we are going to start the journey of learning how to add two three digit numbers." Students became excited when they were able to identify journeys in other contexts besides in reading and this search seemed to help them look for more meaning across the various activities in our school day.

Another key aspect in creating a conceptual framework was the language that I used with my class. I made a concerted effort to push their thinking by asking two key questions in everything we did. The questions were:

What types of journeys are occurring?  
What makes it a journey?

I wrote each question on a sentence strip and placed them on my chalkboard so I would remember to ask the questions as we finished various lessons throughout the day. These two questions served as an effective closure for many of my lessons. The students were able to identify different journeys in their own learning and were encouraged to back up their observations by explaining their thinking. The question “What makes it a journey?” was more crucial in developing their understanding of the different journeys because they had to explain their thinking. Students had to take the time to identify and define different types of journeys and I used a range of response strategies to encourage them to think further about these journeys. In the teacher study group, we realized that maps were a logical way to help represent our understandings, given our focus on journeys.

### **Using Mapping as a Tool for Learning**

We started our focus on journeys in the Learning Lab by relating the concept to the student’s lives through having them create life journey maps. Initially only four of my students completed their maps. Needless to say I was frustrated with this response, but Lisa talked with my class about why the life journey maps were important, asking them, “How is your life like a journey?” Their responses included:

**Nick:** You go through challenges that are hard.

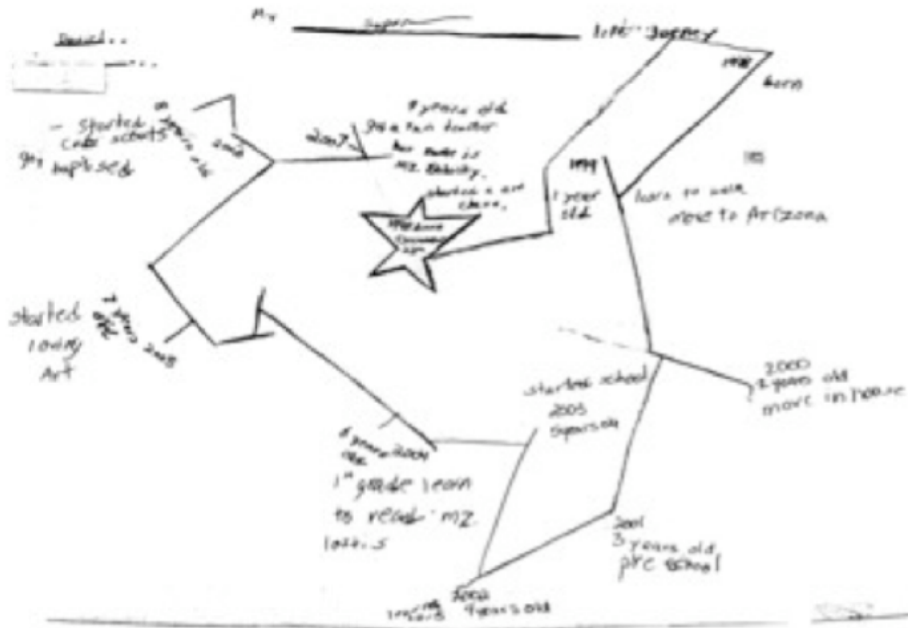
**James:** In life things are sometimes hard and sometimes not.

**Brittney:** You are getting through easy, fun, and hard stuff.

**Kaitlynn:** Obstacles are bumps in your journey. Challenges are like a bump.  
Challenges are like when you turn too fast.

**Elana:** There are lots of events in both.

The students needed this discussion to think about how journey could be a metaphor to think about ourselves and our world. They had a better sense of the “why” of this assignment and worked with their families to create a visual representation of their lives so far. Some students chose to do a time line, while others created a game board with each square representing a major event in their life. It was a first step in visually mapping their personal connections to the concept of journey.

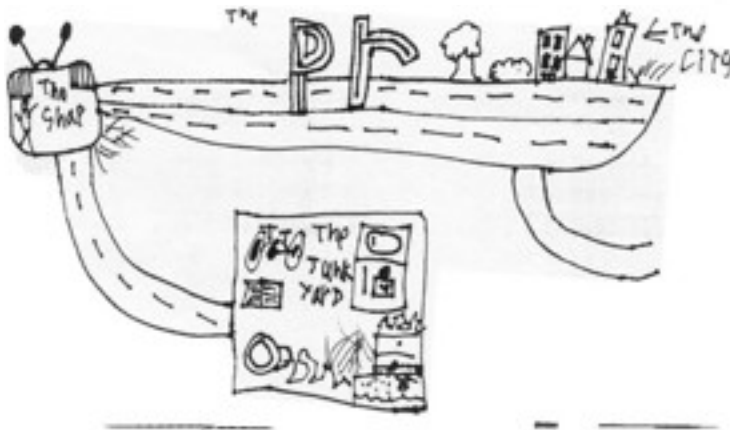
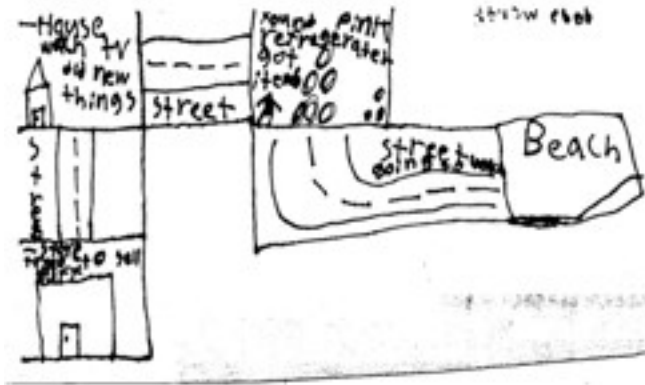


Grant's Life Journey



Students then went on to map the important events from a picture book, *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan 2007), that Lisa read aloud in Learning Lab. Each student was free to choose the format in which they mapped the

events. When the students were working independently I noticed they mostly focused on the physical journeys that the character Dodsworth was making—the actual movement from one place to another. They were able to identify a few other types of “changes” that were occurring with Dodsworth, but could not explain why they thought they were journeys. To help develop the metaphoric understanding of different types of journeys we needed to spend more time discussing and mapping a wider range of types of journeys in the literature we were reading.



During our next session in Learning Lab, Lisa helped us take another step towards shifting our thinking by working with students to create a semantic web of "Kinds of Journeys." The students were able to generate the following ideas:

- wanting to do new things
- doing new things
- physical journeys (Dodsworth going to the ocean and going to the junk yard everyday)
- life journeys
- maturity journeys
- following interests

We asked students to take another look at their own life journey maps to see if they could identify any other types of journeys. After talking about their maps in small groups, they returned to the whole group area and were able to add other kinds of journeys to the web:

- time journeys
- history journeys
- friendship journeys
- pet journeys (getting used to a new pet)
- sports journeys

- medical journeys (surgeries)
- growing up (birthdays)
- first-time journeys (first day of school)
- adventurous journeys
- school journeys (field trips)
- moving journeys

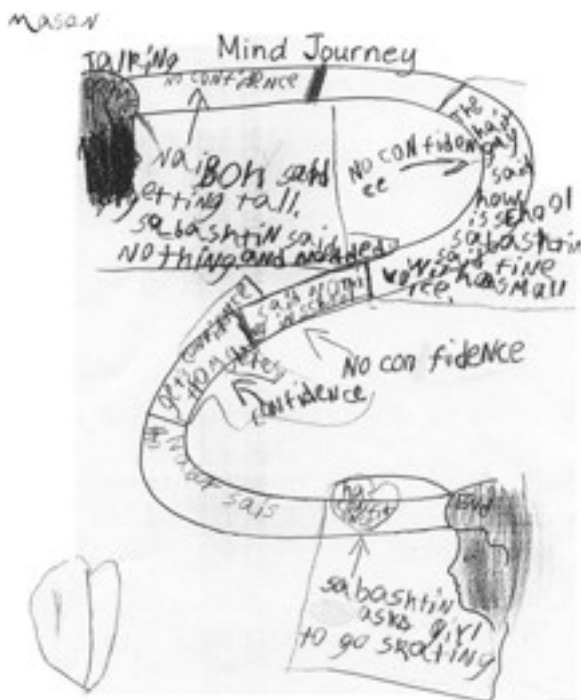
Giving students an opportunity to look at their lives as a journey helped them begin to conceptualize journeys. During this session of just an hour the students moved beyond their surface level thinking to take a big step towards deeper understanding. Short (1993) argues that “we learn something new when we are able to make connections between what we are currently experiencing and something we already know” (p. 284). The students understood their own lives and their personal journeys and could use that expertise to explore other variations of journeys. Creating this web resulted in the students identifying three major types of journeys—physical, emotional, and learning—that they saw as the broader categories for other types of journeys.

To promote a deeper understanding of these types of journeys, we created various mapping responses to encourage students to go beyond just identifying the beginning and ending points of change to exploring the pathways of change. This shift in focus of the responses allowed the students to explore, “When does a change become a journey?”

In Learning Lab, students mapped a character’s change in emotion during a story on a Heart Map. Lisa read aloud *Stevie* (Steptoe, 1969) and the students mapped the emotional changes of the main character, Robert, during the story. Michelle used the heart at the top of the page to show Robert’s emotion at the beginning of the story “Bobby did not like Stevie.” Along the pathway, Michelle represented Robert’s changes in emotions by drawing new hearts along the pathway. At the end of the pathway there is a final heart that contains Robert’s final emotion of deciding that “Stevie was a good friend like he was his brother.”



Students also mapped the changes that occurred with character's thinking during a story on a Mind Journey Map. Instead of having two hearts at the beginning and end of a pathway the Mind Map depicts a face to represent thinking. We used the Mind Map as a response to *Sebastian's Roller Skates* (de Deu Prats, 2003). Mason mapped Sebastian's change from lacking confidence to having confidence using important events from the story as evidence along the pathway. The students gained confidence in identifying a change in the story as a journey after having a way to provide evidence on the pathways.



## **Connecting and Reconnecting through a Touchstone Book**

Another important strategy was having a touchstone book. A touchstone book is a piece of literature that exemplifies the concept or topic being explored and that is read and reread and referred to continuously throughout a unit of study (Calkins, 1994). The amazing thing about a touchstone book is that you can't necessarily predict ahead of time what book will gain that significance for students. Touchstone books materialize based on students' understandings and inquiries within the study. The touchstone book for my class happened to be from the first engagement about journeys that I facilitated in my classroom. I read aloud *Fox* by Margaret Wild (2000) with the goal of having students discuss the book and identify journeys. After I read the story aloud, I recorded their thoughts on a semantic web. The students were able to identify many different types of journeys.

This simple engagement laid a solid foundation for my students because they found the book compelling and wanted to think more about it. As the study progressed, numerous students referred back to *Fox* and the types of journeys that they had identified in the story. Having this book as a reference gave the students a sense of security—they were confident in their thinking about *Fox* due to the responses they received from me and each other during the discussion. This allowed them to take risks when approaching a new story. In fact every time they referred back to *Fox* after hearing or reading another story, their understanding of it was deepened. For example, in Learning Lab, the class completed wide reading of various text sets in order to explore different types of journeys. I sat near one student and asked him what journeys he was seeing in the book *Sebastian's Roller Skates*. Conner responded, "Physical journeys and feeling journeys, just like in *Fox*. Magpie travels to the desert and when she is left there, she goes from happy to scared. [Both characters] go from one emotion to another." Conner created meaning for the story that he was reading by using *Fox* as a reference. Touchstone books promote this type of intertextual thinking because students use their shared experience within their community of readers to make sense of new literature.

## **Exploring Text Sets**

Text sets, collections of conceptually related books, were used in different ways throughout our study of journeys (Short, 1993). We used text sets in small group and whole group settings to explore types of journeys. Based on the student webs about journeys, we gathered books in the Learning Lab to create the following sets: Beginning



and Endings, Dreams and Wishes, Pain and Healing, Spiritual and Emotional, People and Relationships, Growing and Learning, and Movement and Competition. Students chose a theme that interested them and spent several weeks reading books in that set. They were then asked to search for themes, issues, patterns, and ideas that ran across their text set. This exploration enabled them to come to consensus on a definition of journeys. They also used another group of text sets to glean knowledge about different countries during our forced journey exploration.



The most influential text set was a collection of picture books on journeys that were read aloud to the students in the Learning Lab and my classroom. The text set grew as the study progressed, and remained available throughout our study. Each time another book was read aloud and discussed, it was placed in our text set basket next to the read-aloud chair. There were many occasions when students would refer back to a particular book in the set as a point of reference within our discussions of a new read-aloud. The read-alouds were carefully chosen so that they would reflect a broad range of types of journeys and issues about journeys. The significance of this text set came to light towards the end of the study when the students were asked to find connections across many books through comparison charts.

### **Connecting Books through Comparison Charts**

It was not until the students created comparison charts that I fully understood the effectiveness of the text sets and the ways in which they had deepened students' thinking. The comparison chart engagement started with spreading out all of our read-aloud text set on the floor of the Learning Lab. The students were asked to sort the books according to meaning, not by size or color. In the first sort, students created the following groups:

- Animals working together: *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Koala Lou*, *Anansi*, *Fox*
- People working together: *Baseball Saved Us*, *Stevie*
- Things that make the characters try new things: *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*
- Changes because of getting older: *Once There Were Giants*, *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*

The books were combined into one large set again and students were asked to sort the books using different categories in order to push them to consider other connections across the books:

- Problems with mothers: *Koala Lu*, *No, I Want Daddy!*
- Being trapped: *Anansi*, *Fox*
- Going to School: *Once There Were Giants*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*
- Pushing someone away: *Fox*, *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Baseball Saved Us*
- Sitting around: *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*, *The Pink Refrigerator*

We repeated the process a third time, this time focusing on the types of journeys in each story:

- Physical Journey: *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*, *Anansi* (The students then realized that all the books could fit in this category)
- Growing Journey: *Once There Were Giants*
- Mental Growth Journey: *Wilford Gordon MacDonald Partridge*
- Learning Journey: *Baseball Saved Us*, *The Pink Refrigerator*, *Sebastian's Roller Skates*, *Koala Lou*
- Emotional Journey: *Koala Lou*, *Stevie*, *No, I Want Daddy!*, *Fox*

To bring closure to this sorting and categorizing activity, students were asked to create list of concepts that were present throughout the text set:

- working together
- things that make you try new things
- change because of getting older
- being trapped
- pushing someone away
- problem with mothers
- sad about being alone
- going to school
- sitting around

- life experiences
- growing journeys
- mental growth journey
- emotional journey
- going journey (physical journey)
- learning journey

The following week in Learning Lab, students were asked to engage in an activity to showcase their connections across our text set. The students worked in small groups to create a comparison chart. Comparison charts are a response strategy where students take three books and three concepts and relate the books to each other. The template for the chart was:

Title of the Chart	Title of a Book	Title of a Book	Title of a Book
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept
Concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept	Evidence of concept

Like finding a point on a map using a coordinate grid, the conceptual connections across three separate texts can be located on a comparison chart. It was during this activity that I found evidence of my students' intertextual thinking.

Many of the small groups approached their comparison chart by looking for different types of journeys. Mason, Aden, Shesh, and Conner, for example, chose *Baseball Saved Us*, *Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald Partridge*, and *The Pink Refrigerator* and connected them with Learning Journeys, Physical Journeys, and Working Together Journeys. I was pleased with the deeper understanding the students showed on their charts. They were able to examine the event of building a baseball field in *Baseball Saved Us* and recognize that there was a process in creating a field. They also understood that many people worked together with a common goal to complete the field.

My "Ah ha! Moment" came while I was working with a group that chose to take a different approach. Instead of using types of journeys they focused on one journey. They chose emotional journeys and found three concepts of this type of journey to connect their books. I sat with Reanna, Scott, Michelle, and Nick, while they worked through connecting the three stories. My initial reaction was that the three books they chose,

Anansi, Baseball Saved Us, and Stevie, were going to be difficult to connect. They seemed like vastly different stories to me. The group methodically started discussing the similarities across the books and their discussion resulted in the three concepts of Working Together, Loneliness, and Being Trapped. The next step was to find evidence in each story for each concept and to represent the connections on the chart. I was impressed to see the way that the group was able to identify the concept of being trapped, which I saw as a difficult connection for them. Not only did the group identify loneliness, but they found evidence from each story for this connection.



As I begin preparations for the next school year, I am anxious to continue to explore ways of encouraging intertextuality. By analyzing the work of my third-grade students, I saw the significance of this thinking for their own understandings and identified the teaching strategies that supported them. Witnessing and identifying the shift in thinking of my students helped me grow as an educator. I now know the value of developing critical thinking through encouraging deeper meanings about the ideas we are exploring. I no longer think of my instructional time in segments that are devoted to separate curriculum. I understand that, with thoughtful planning and implementing effective instructional strategies, a common theme can unite our entire school day. These connections across subjects, texts, and situations encourage students to develop more complex conceptual understandings and to be more effective as learners. They expect and search for connection as essential to learning.

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## Exploring Flow Charts as a Tool for Thinking

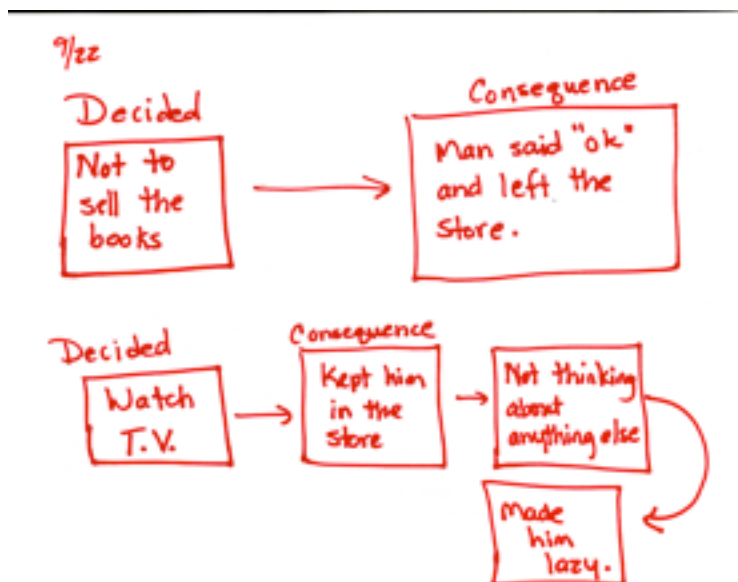
By

Jaquetta Alexander & Jennifer Griffith, First/Second Grade Teachers, Van Horne Elementary School

We consider ourselves fortunate to teach at a small urban elementary school because our staff of eight teachers allows for a high degree of collaboration. Our school year begins with a retreat in which we work together to establish a school-wide concept that every grade level uses as a framework for the school year. We decided on “power” as our concept because of the relevancy to our curriculum and student interest in issues of power the previous year. Within that framework we strive to challenge student thinking and find meaningful ways for them to respond to literature to deepen their understandings.

In our teacher study group, we discussed our observation that first and second graders could identify the beginnings and end points of story plots and character actions, but sometimes missed the events in between that influenced those plots and actions. We identified the need to enable students to see sequences and the relationships between cause and effect. Moline (1995) argues that flow diagrams are useful to show change, growth/development, and cause and effect. Once we made the connection between our desired outcome and Moline’s work, we began using flowcharts with students.

Our Learning Lab teacher, Lisa Thomas, introduced the students to flowcharts after reading *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Egan (2007). During this lab session we focused on the power of consequences. Bailey portrays her understandings by stating, “I noticed

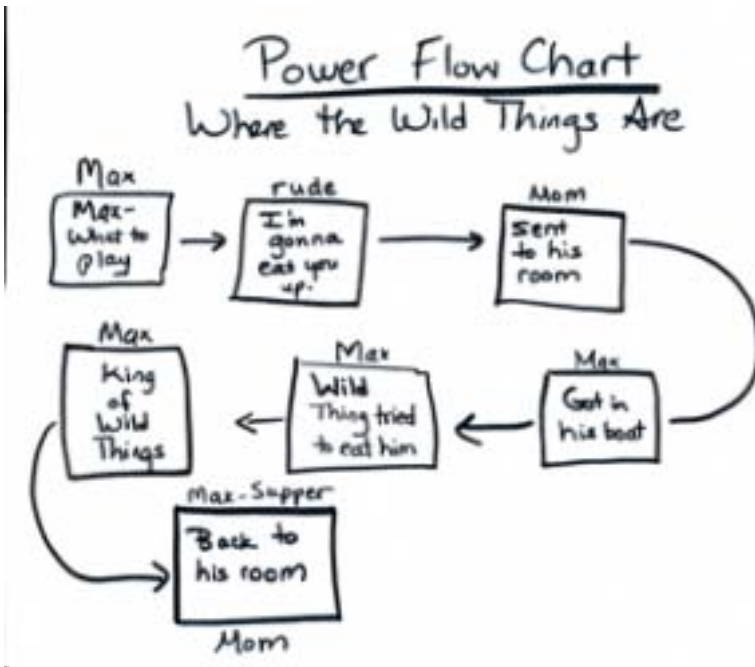


that he made the choice to do what was on the refrigerator, but then he didn’t know what to do when the last note was there so he learned to do things by himself.” When the students were asked to think about everything that happened in the book, Lisa depicted their thinking in a simple flowchart that reflected Dodsworth’s decisions and the

consequences that resulted. The simple diagram shows how one idea connects to another and creates a chain reaction. This diagram allowed the students to explore cause and effect by stating the decision and the consequence.

In our next lab session Lisa read *The Wild Things* by Maurice Sendak (1963) and we focused on the power we have over other people and the power they have over us. The impact of our previous discussion about decisions and consequences was apparent in the literature discussion. Morgan stated, “They are mad and for a consequence they showed their teeth.” Carah said,

“Max had power over the monsters — he told the wild things what to do.” The class created a flowchart together depicting the elements of power in the story. The students easily identified the shifts in who had power at this point, which are represented in the writing above the cells in the flowchart.



The Learning Lab is often a catalyst for our teaching in the classroom. With their knowledge of flowcharts and seeing where the kids were at with their understandings of power, we knew it was time to move our thinking into our classroom. Knowing that kids like to look for beginnings and endpoints, we chose to use a simple version of a flowchart that allowed kids to chronicle the important events from a book. This type of visual organizer allows kids to think about the sequencing of a story and focus on the causes and effects of decisions made by the characters. We used stories from our reading series, both fiction and non-fiction. With second grade we read the story *Helping Out* by George Ancona (1985), a photo essay about young children helping out adults at home, at school, and in the community, and the rewards of helpfulness. We created a class flowchart on ‘what do we do at school to help out.’ The kids were able to take their thinking about

flowcharts from the learning lab and our discussions to create a flowchart about how they help out at school. Moline (1995) states that the use of flow diagrams allows kids to organize information in meaningful sequences. Because we were focused on cause and effect relationships, their simple idea of “We help out by listening” grew to be as complex as, “We could help out by making the world better if other schools were like ours.”



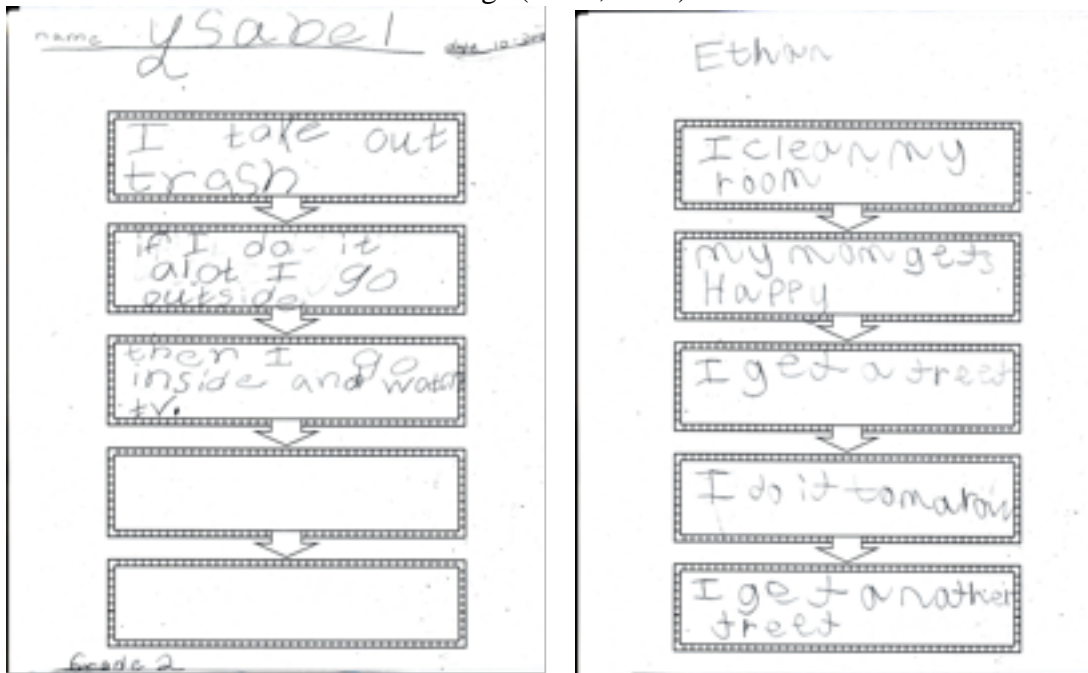
It was obvious that using the response strategy of flowcharts was starting to make sense and deepen their understanding. We felt that we were providing them with a tool for their thinking. With each new discussion, we were constantly connecting to our concept of power. When asked who had the power to help out our school their response was, “We do!” It was exciting for us to see their thinking begin to evolve, however, the flowcharts that we asked the students to create independently were not as successful. After we completed the class flowchart of helping out we

asked the students to complete a flowchart showing cause and effect by selecting a chore that is completed at home. They were asked to show the consequences of their helpfulness. These flowcharts were evidence that they were on the edge of grasping the strategy, but still needed guidance and practice.

After using simple forms of visual organizers with various stories from our reading series, we knew we needed to challenge their thinking in regards to responding using this tool. As the winter holidays approached we struggled with an inquiry to undertake that would support our work in the Learning Lab with our concept of power and use of flowcharts. We value inquiry as a stance on the significance of how we learn, not only



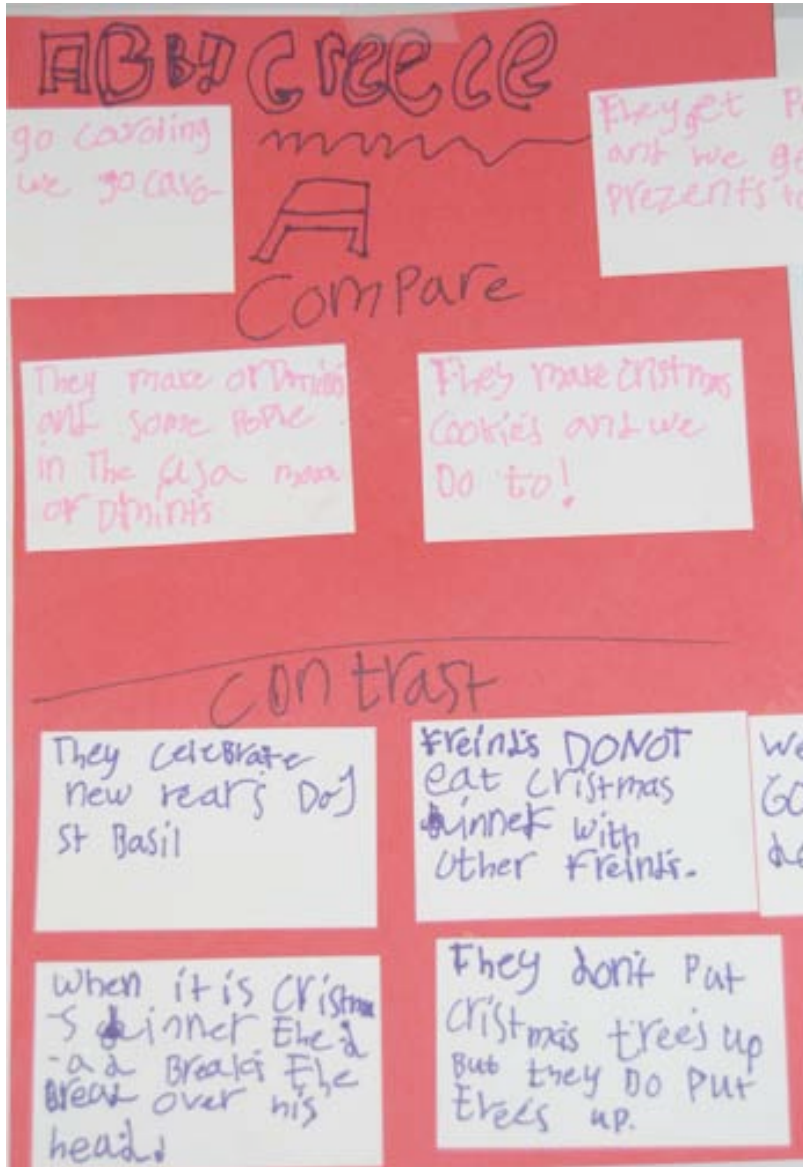
because this stance influences student learning of content, but also because it influences who learners become as human beings (Short, 2009). Our collaborative efforts with our



students led them to decide on a country inquiry about Greece and India. We delved into understanding the holiday traditions of each of these countries through guest speakers, read alouds, songs and non-fiction texts.

We referred back to Moline (1995) to review the types of visual organizers for an idea of where we wanted to head with flowcharts and organizers. We knew the kids were learning about the similarities and differences between the Greek and Indian cultures so finding an organizer that supported that thinking was challenging. We wanted kids to develop the recognition that other cultures are similar and different to their own and have a respect for others' stories. We also wanted children to have choice in their learning and offered them two varieties of organizers. One was an organizer to compare and contrast a country's holiday traditions to their own traditions. Flowcharts tend to illustrate a flow or sequence of a story and in this case, kids needed to think about comparing and contrasting and so using a comparison organizer seemed the perfect tool to support their thinking. After searching for the right one we decided to create our own version of a comparison chart, one that helped organize their thoughts in a way they were familiar with after working with flowcharts. The result was for them to split their paper in two with the labels of compare and contrast and on note cards write their comparisons and contrasts of the country they chose. The note cards limited their space and forced them to write concise statements similar to the boxes they had grown used to in the flowcharts we had worked with over the last months. We were impressed that kids took their time and

wrote insightful similarities and differences. Introducing the comparison chart was a great tool for supporting their understanding of comparisons and contrasts. Abby chose to create a visual organizer of comparisons for Greece.



The second type of organizer we offered as a choice was a familiar type of flowchart — a linear chart that sequenced the significant events in a story. To support our inquiry study of Greece and India we read international literature that gave the kids a glimpse of life in those countries as well as non-fiction texts. Kids who were drawn to a particular story had the option of chronicling the events from the story into a linear flowchart. Linear charts help kids organize their thinking in a sequential manner, allowing them to go from the beginning to

the end of a story. Often, young children need a tool that supports this thinking, allowing them to visually see the whole story. Riley chose to create a linear flowchart on a story from Greece, *I Have an Olive Tree* by Eve Bunting (1999). She carefully chose the important events to chronicle on her flowchart. Once again, the use of note cards limited the kids' space so they had to select their words carefully, a skill that can be challenging for young kids.

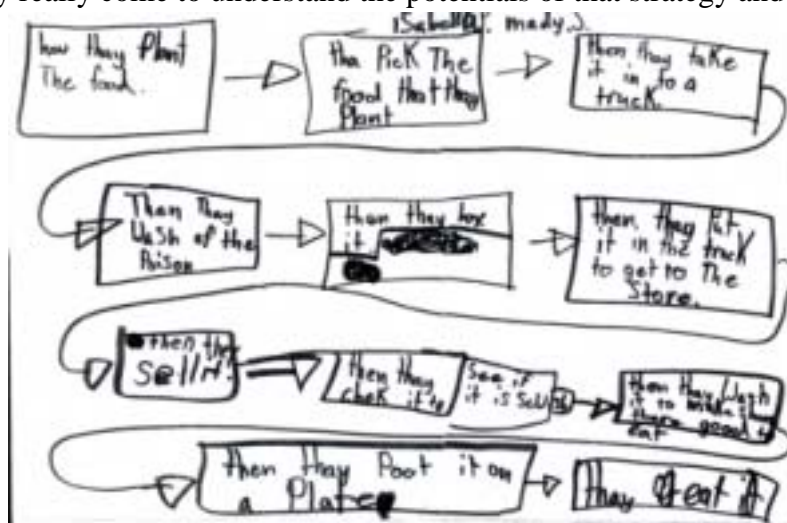
Kids need to have freedom when choosing their tools for responding so that they have ownership and take pride in their work. All the students took their time and really thought



about what they were writing. When kids chose to create a flowchart in response to a read aloud, they thought about the significant events and chronicled them in their own words. It was at this moment that we saw how powerful flowcharts were in providing kids

with an organizational tool for their thinking about a book. Instead of merely summarizing what happened, they were supported in focusing on the relationships of cause and effect and sequencing. In their early experiences with flowcharts, a lot of our time was focused on the procedure of how to create the chart and kids' questions of what to do. Their work with these charts indicated that our students had officially moved from focusing on the procedure of flowcharts to becoming fluent with their understanding of them. They could now use them as a tool for understanding.

After winter break we decided to continue with flowcharts. We knew from experience and research that kids learn best when they are able to focus on the same response strategy over time so they really come to understand the potentials of that strategy and can use it flexibly as a tool. Our work with flowcharts was having an impact on their thinking and their ability to organize ideas, events, and processes in the literature and inquiries we were exploring. The more we offer them the opportunity

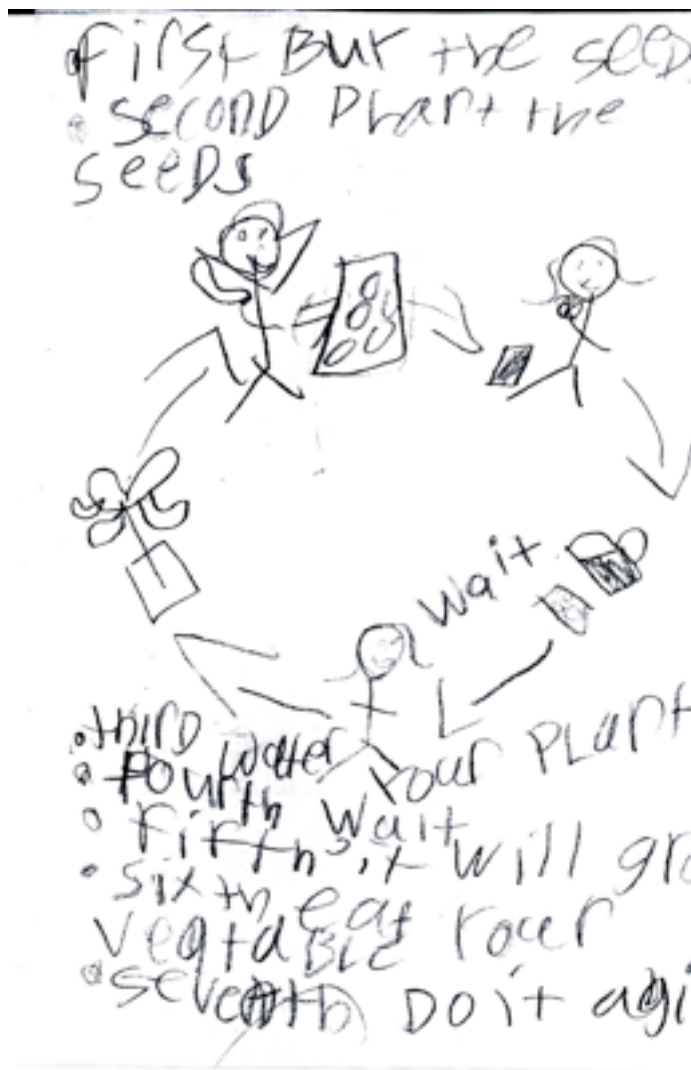


to work with a particular type of response strategy, the more fluent and flexible they become in using this strategy. Our goal was for kids to acquire enough experiences with visual organizers to use them independently by the end of the school year.

After the fall our school-wide concept shifted to thinking about the power of food for the spring semester and our kids became excited about gardening and the life cycle of plants. The classroom became inundated with texts and posters illustrating the life cycle of plants and the importance of gardening. We had a guest speaker teach us about the proper way to garden in the desert; the kids were engaged and eager to plant their vegetables. Upon doing this we decided that we needed to bring in flowcharts that would help them illustrate their learning. In the Learning Lab the kids had been studying the process food goes through to get from the farm to the table, using charts that were similar to the ones we had been exploring in class —

simple flow diagrams that illustrated the process of how food gets to your table. Although these flowcharts were effective in supporting sequencing, we knew it was time to introduce more complex organizers to build their repertoire of different types of flowcharts.

It seemed natural then that we push out kids to expand their use of flowcharts within our study of the cycle of plants. We referred back to Steve Moline (1995) where he talks about cyclical flow diagrams and how they are best used in describing continuous processes such as cycles. This was a flowchart we hadn't experimented with yet and it seemed to fit perfectly into our inquiry of gardening. We challenged our students to think about what we had been

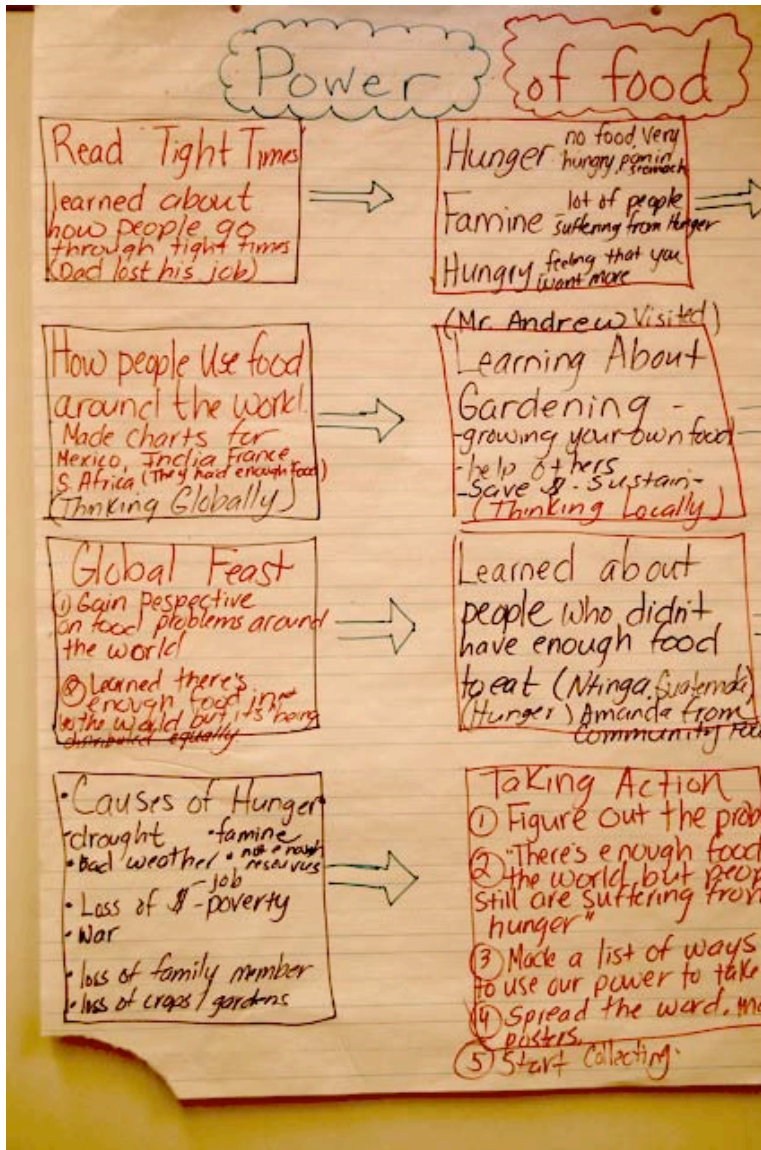


learning about the planting process and how they could represent that in a flowchart. After engaging in a conversation, we decided to create a flowchart of our learning as a class. The process helped the kids see the cycle visually and they seemed to grasp the concept quickly.

Our understandings about gardening enhanced our conceptual understanding of the power of food. It was that time in the school year to take action based on our learning. Our Learning Lab experiences were filled with stretching our thinking about the concept of taking action. We had finally moved into more complex flowcharts according to Moline (1995). We decided to use concept webs, a tool used to make connections between concepts, when discussing the meaning of taking action. In the Learning Lab Lisa had the kids stretch their thinking out of their comfort zone of cyclical and linear flowcharts to creating a concept web on taking action. This type of web encourage them to think about what taking action is, what it looks like and what it means to them. Their ideas are surrounded by the center concept of taking action. Webs were not something new to our students, but using them in the context of flowcharts as a concept web was new. The kids were able to come up with several ideas that fit into the web.



Our exploration of power had taken us on quite a journey; a journey we knew needed to be recapped in order for our taking action piece to be meaningful. It was important to us as teachers for our kids to revisit our process of taking action related to the power of food. We were hoping to integrate a visual organizer into our discussion but knew that the kids needed to lead and that we should not set it up for them. We came together as a class, asking them to think about what they learned about the



power of food. It was natural for them to start with the story *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1983), that had been read in lab to begin our thinking about the power of food. Once they decided to start with this story, the class decided to create a flowchart of our learning for the semester. We were excited to see our kids naturally drawn to creating a linear flowchart, a sequencing of our significant moments in learning about the power of food.

After reflecting on the different flowcharts that we had created across the year, it was exciting to see the evolution of the kids'

thinking and understanding related to this response strategy. Flowcharts is a strategy that allowed our kids to see the whole picture when reflecting on a piece of literature, concept, or process. Their evolution began with a simple format where they summarized a story or event in chronological order, moved to writing their thinking in concise statements and comparing and contrasting, and finally creating cyclical diagrams and concept webs. The one area where we wished we had spent more time was in having kids independently create flowcharts so that this strategy became a natural part of what they did on their own as inquirers to make sense of ideas.

We saw two main areas of learning for our students. One was the use of flow charts and other visual organizers as a tool for thinking about relationships, such as sequencing and cause and effect. These visual organizers provided them with a way to sort out and show

how ideas or events relate to each other in some kind of order or chronology. The second was that they identified conceptual patterns to look for in other engagements and texts. They were beginning to understand, for example, that cause and effect and the way that decisions lead to consequences is a pattern they can look for as they read or engage in activities in order to make sense of those experiences.

Often, students are introduced to a response strategy and then quickly moved to another one without having the opportunity to really explore that strategy in meaningful ways and in enough depth that they develop flexible understandings of its potentials. We have learned as educators that children need time to explore and become fluent with a response strategy. Otherwise, their focus remains on the procedures of how to do the strategy, rather than on using the strategy as a tool for thinking. Our goal is for students to view our classroom as a place for thinking and for life work, not just for completing tasks and school work.

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# Creating a Context for Understanding in Literature Circles

By

Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

My mother always told me that knowledge is power. As a fifth-grade teacher I want my students to gain as much knowledge as possible before they move on to middle school and forget everything as the hormones take over, however, I don't want them to be dependent on me for that knowledge. As a teacher I prefer the role of "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage." In recent years I have made great efforts to move from a teacher-centered classroom to student-centered strategies. Probably the thing I most want kids to take from my year with them is a love of literature and to value the experience of reading. Rosenblatt (1938) states that students acquire experience as well as knowledge through reading. Literature provides the experience of "living through," not just knowledge about, the story world and lives they enter in a book. Reading thus allows students to gain both literary and social perspective. This is what I envision for my students while participating in literature circles. They are immersed in a range of text experiences to build knowledge and understanding that they then hopefully will use to connect to their own problems and needs.

My intention was to start the year by teaching about global issues, since Van Horne's focus is to effectively engage children with international literature to build intercultural understandings. Through the world of books, students are invited to gain insights into how people around the world think, feel, and live (Short, 2008). I decided to start with literature circles of books that were set in China because the Beijing Olympics had just ended as our school year began. I assumed that with the television coverage, at least some of the students had been exposed to Chinese culture. My expectations didn't match their experience and this mismatch led to tension throughout our inquiry.

I started the literature circles by reviewing the guidelines for literature discussion since students had participated in them during the previous years. Since this would be their first time discussing literature together with a new group of kids, I knew this step would make the discussion groups go a bit smoother. We had a whole group discussion of a picture book, *Ruby's Wish* (Yim, 2002), a book about a little girl in historical China who wanted to go to school. Afterward we debriefed as to how the discussion went and came up with a list of guidelines for literature circle discussions. This list was similar to the guidelines my class used last year, however, I felt it was important for this group to create their own guidelines for discussion so that they had ownership in the process.



The books we read were *The Diary of Ma Yan* (Yan, 2002), *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997), *Chu Ju's House* (Whelan, 2004), and *Dragonwings* (Yep, 1975). In introducing a new set of books, I always tell students about the authors for each novel so they get a feel for their perspectives. It is important to know the backgrounds of authors and whether they are an insider or an outsider to the culture. I had cut out a few news articles about Beijing; few were about the culture and most focused on the games and how the Americans were performing. I also had a range of books about China, both fiction and non fiction, available for independent reading. Other than that, there was little background building before reading to teach students about the culture.

Each week the students participated in literature circles using several discussion strategies. Some of the strategies for facilitating discussion were Graffiti Boards, Save the Last Word for Me, and Consensus Boards (Short & Harste, 1996). Graffiti Board are where students in a small group respond to literature using pictures or words written randomly on a large piece of brainstorming paper much like graffiti on a wall. Graffiti boards let students respond to a story before and during their discussion. As the discussion unfolds, the events of the story take a back seat to the issues, tensions, and problems that students connect to within a book. I like this strategy because it allows even the most reluctant students to share their thoughts on the paper for all to see.



Figure 1: Graffiti Board of Red Scarf Girl

While listening to the discussions of *Red Scarf Girl*, I noticed that there was a great deal of confusion about the Cultural Revolution in China. The time period

was a bit of a mystery to my students. In the forward, the author explains that the Cultural Revolution started in China in 1966 but that 17 years earlier, in 1949, the revolutionary leader Mao Ze-dong led the communist party to power as the new leaders in China. This important information was missed by some students because they skipped the forward, thinking it was not important to the story. I quickly realized that I needed to sit down with

this group and talk about the difference between democracy, which we were learning about in social studies, and China's government, communism, which they were unfamiliar with. What I didn't realize at that time was the extent of their confusion about historical China as compared to contemporary China. I also noticed that students were spending so much time puzzling through what was happening in the book that they were not as engaged with the issues and ideas as I had expected.

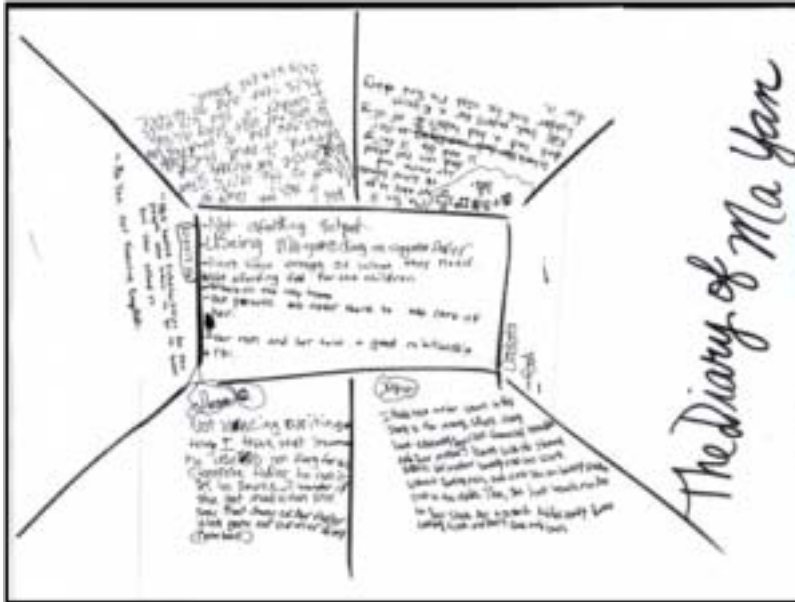
After responding to the story by adding to their graffiti boards several times as they continued reading chapters, they looked for issues they saw as significant in the books. They identified these on a consensus board. On a large piece of paper with sections for each, they individually listed the issues that they felt were important in the text. They then had to come to consensus about what they all thought were the main issues in the book and list those in the center of the consensus board.

After the groups completed this discussion, we charted the issues found by each group as a class. The issues that students identified across the novels about China were:

- gender preference
- population-one child limit
- adult/child relationships
- lack of resources for families: \$ and time
- sick parents
- child abuse
- lack of political freedom
- drug abuse/violence
- equal education opportunities for girls and boys
- care of elderly
  - racism
- hunger

As I read through their list of issues from the books about China I became worried that the students thought China was a terrible place. I didn't want to demonize Chinese culture because of misperceptions brought about by reading these historical novels. I wanted the students to realize that at least some of these problems existed in our country historically as well and so asked them to look at the same issues in the United States. In small discussion groups, students chose one issue and created T-charts listing the Figure

2. Fifth Grade Consensus Board of The Diary of Ma Yan



problems related to this issue and whether or not these issues were exclusive to China or also appeared in the U.S., either now or historically. We then shared in a whole group setting. Through this experience, students realized that these problems were found in the U.S. as well as China. The issues the

four groups chose to compare with the U.S. were:

- hunger
- homelessness
- violence
- freedom and power

Hunger	
USA	China
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A lot of people can't afford food.</li> <li>- Homeless people.</li> <li>- Shelters</li> <li>- Bethel</li> <li>- Goodwill</li> <li>- Food Bank</li> <li>- Church's help families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A lot of people can't afford food.</li> <li>- Don't have stuff to help homeless people</li> <li>↳ Not sure</li> </ul>

Freedom & Power	
China	USA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman Mao gave class status</li> <li>• Lack power</li> <li>• Class behavior</li> <li>• Separation</li> <li>• government control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Govt officials Have power over people but don't give class status</li> <li>• we lack power Kids - adult</li> <li>• Class behavior</li> <li>• slavery</li> <li>• parent control</li> </ul>

July  
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AJ

Figure 3: T-Charts Comparing Problems in China and the U.S.

A common problem with international studies is that students assume that the target country still exists in the past. It is difficult to find current, up-to-date, contemporary texts on many cultures and countries. This was true throughout this study. There were a lot of misconceptions about contemporary culture in China. Students were discussing events as if nothing had changed in China since the 1960s and the Cultural Revolution. Students needed to realize that much had changed in both the U.S. and China since 1966. For instance, one of the issues that came up in several of the novels was that children were disciplined using corporal punishment. Students couldn't believe that kids were hit by adults as a means to teach them how to behave. We discussed how children at our school are currently disciplined and that sometimes they are asked to take a time out or "Think Time" in a special location in the room, an adjoining room, or the office. I explained to the students that in my school years, small slaps were administered by adults to children who misbehaved. Robert confirmed this practice because his dad had shared that if you were swatted at school, usually the parents followed up with the same discipline at home just to make sure you got the point. We talked about the fact that what is considered appropriate changes over time in all societies throughout the world and that we no longer consider it appropriate to slap or swat a child in school. Since most of our books were historical, this practice could have changed in China as well. Robert pointed out that maybe someday in the future sending kids to other rooms for "time out" won't be considered a good thing to do to kids.

The issue of hitting children also came up in the *Diary of Ma Yan*, a contemporary story about China. This story takes place in rural China as does *Chu Ju's House* where children who are living in an orphanage are hit as a form of discipline. In thinking things through, students realized that changes in attitudes sometimes take place slower in rural areas than in cities.

To challenge some of their misperceptions about contemporary China, I invited a Chinese doctoral student from the University of Arizona, Ke Huang, to visit our classroom to discuss the present day culture. I wanted the students to be able to interview an insider to Chinese culture to counter some of the stereotypes I was afraid they were developing. The students asked many questions especially about her experiences with school and childhood in China. They asked about some of the issues they were seeing in the literature and she was forthright in answering tough questions about population control, corporal punishment, and governmental philosophies. She knew about the time period of the Cultural Revolution, but was too young to remember it. This was a valuable addition to the unit and Ke was an amazing resource.

Near the end of the literature study I searched for articles on contemporary China through the Scholastic web site. I found some interesting pieces appropriate for fifth graders on issues such as population control, China's need for hydro-electric power and the resulting damage to the environment, governmental shifts from communism to free trade, and gender issues. Students read and discussed these short pieces in small groups and shared the big ideas and information with the whole class. This experience gave students a much better understanding of Chinese culture, both in the historical setting of the novels and in contemporary times. In fact, students were fascinated with understanding communism and it became a topic of interest throughout the school year. Some of the students even went snooping to the end of the Social Studies textbook in chapters on the Cold War and Vietnam. They did this again and again and found other texts that mentioned communism on my nonfiction shelves. They had created a context for the ideas behind communism and wanted to know more.

In reflecting on this experience, I felt positively about the ways in which these engagements challenged the misconceptions and stereotypes my students were developing through their discussions in the literature circles. I felt tension, however, about the need to counter their misconceptions and wondered what I could have done differently in setting up this inquiry.

Many times I pull sets of related texts, maps, newspaper articles and other artifacts related to the critical issues or the geographic area of study to enhance the experience for the students. I hope these artifacts will spark an interest in some aspect of the culture. I don't want to pre-teach the concepts, but build experiences and knowledge so the students can puzzle through the text while building their own meanings and understandings. Rosenblatt (1938) states that background materials often receive too much attention and can become an end to a means. She feels that background knowledge has value only when students feel the need for it and when it is assimilated into a student's experience with a certain piece of literature.

It had not crossed my mind that I needed to immerse this new group of students into texts about China and the Cultural Revolution before reading these novels. All but one student had been at Van Horne and had worked with concepts of internationalism and culture for two years. I made the mistake of thinking these new kids had the background, experience, and connections that my previous class had left with in May. I felt they didn't need the additional information and that their experience with the novels could be damaged by giving away too much before reading. I wanted them to glean the information about

China and the Cultural Revolution from reading, not be spoon fed the ideas from the teacher. Looking back I realize I could have helped them understand better if I myself had known more about the topic before getting started. In other words, I could have done my homework a bit more thoroughly.

Sylvia Edgerton is a teacher who believes that the more she knows about a topic the more her students will learn (Smith, Diaz, & Edgerton, 2008). Before she starts an inquiry unit she reads newspaper articles, views video clips from the internet, watches the nightly news to increase her awareness of state and federal legislation that might be related to the topic, and interviews anyone who might be knowledgeable about the topic that are getting ready to study. During the study she deliberately plans reflective activities so students can have opportunities to revisit texts and make connections between and among them.

The problems encountered during our literature circles on China taught me firsthand to consider the experiences with a range of texts that students might need both ahead of time and during the study. In this case, they needed ways to more effectively build a context within which they could construct meaning and explore issues from novels. Smith, Diaz, and Edgerton (2008) believe exposure to multiple texts helps build connections and deeper intertextual understandings. They describe intertextuality as the ways that texts — whether written, visual, or spoken — are interpreted, one in light of the other. Intertextuality is more than trying to find a personal link while reading or connecting one text to another. It is a cognitive strategy that, linked with intentional thinking, can progressively transform readers and their understandings. They believe this collection of texts should be explored both at the beginning and throughout an inquiry-based study. As students explore multiple texts in multiple settings they spin a web of understanding. Connections are then made from student to student and text to text, creating layers of meaning and new understandings.

After working through the struggles that students had with the concepts and issues in the books relating to China, I am now considering when to prepare kids ahead of time for reading a particular set of novels and when to just immerse them in the novels and let them figure them out the confusions on their own. I now know that I need to continuously struggle with the balance between supplying experiences and texts before literature circles and letting students make their own meaning during the study with intertextual materials that facilitate connections gained through dialogue with other students and between texts. Clearly, there is no one right way to approach this balance and I need to know the literature and my students to make these decisions with each new set of

literature discussions.

Our first literature experience of the year wasn't a failure from a teaching and learning standpoint because I learned a few things about my students and my teaching. It was a learning experience I didn't expect but nonetheless was still very valid. Students learned that they can't judge another place by its history and realized they needed to challenge their assumptions and recognize that other countries are not still operating in the past. One of the most valuable things they learned was how to sustain themselves as readers even when they don't understand the content. They may not have engaged in the in-depth discussions of issues that I had hoped would emerge from these novels, but they learned to puzzle through and develop valuable understandings and knowledge from confusing texts. I know that the knowledge they gained was powerful for them because of this struggle. Tension provided a generative point of learning, both for me and for my students, even though that learning was not what any of us had originally intended.

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## Language and Culture Kit for Arabic-Speaking Countries and Cultures

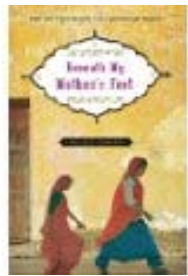
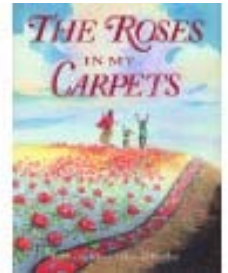


**The Bread winner.** Ellis, Deborah. Toronto: Groundwood Books/Douglas & McIntyre, 2000. ISBN 0-88899-419-2. 170 p.

Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, 11-year-old Parvana has rarely been outdoors. Bared from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, the heroine of Deborah Ellis's engrossing children's novel *The Breadwinner* is trapped inside her family's one-room home. That is, until the Taliban haul away her father and Parvana realizes that it's up to her to become the "breadwinner" and disguise herself as a boy to support her mother, two sisters, and baby brother.

**Roses in My Carpet.** Khan, Rukhsana. Illustrated by Ronald Himler. Fitzhenry & Whiteside (2004). ISBN-13: 978-1550050691.

This story follows a day in the life of a young Afghani refugee who takes solace in the beautiful carpets he weaves. In a recurring nightmare, the boy narrator flees with his mother and younger sister, Maha, from the bomber planes that killed his father, then awakes to find himself in a safe but impoverished camp. At dawn, a muezzin calls him to prayer; he then attends school, followed by another call to prayer and finally goes off to his long-awaited practice of carpet weaving. For him, weaving is a skill that ensures "my family will never go hungry" and an outlet that allows him to create a world of color and beauty. When Maha is injured by a truck, the boy must set aside his weaving to come to his family's aid.



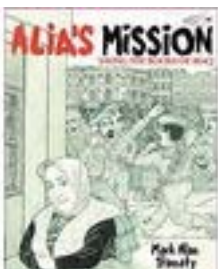
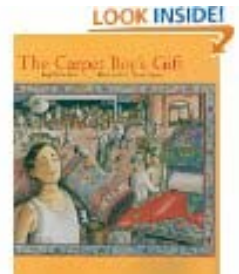
**Beneath My Mother's Feet** by Amjed Qamar: 208 pages. Atheneum (2008) ISBN-13: 978-1416947288. "Our lives will always be in the hands of our mothers, whether we like it or not."

Nazia doesn't mind when her friends tease and call her a good beti, a dutiful daughter. Growing up in a working-class family in Karachi, Pakistan, Nazia knows that obedience is the least she can give to her mother, who has spent years saving and preparing for her dowry. But every daughter must grow up, and for fourteen-year-old Nazia that day arrives suddenly when her father gets into an accident at work, and her family finds themselves without money for rent or food. Being the beti that she is, Nazia drops out of school to help her mother clean houses, all the while wondering when she managed to lose control of her life that had been full of friends and school. As Nazia

finds herself growing up much too quickly, the lessons of hardship that seem unbearable turn out to be a lot more liberating than she ever imagined.

**The Carpet Boy's Gift.** Shea, Pegi Deitz. Illustrated by Leane Morin. Gardner, ME: Tilbury House, 2003. ISBN 0-88448-248-0. 40 p. Picture book.

Nadeem, a young boy sold to a carpet maker for a loan of 1,000 rupees works close to paying back the peshgi, master fines him for some indiscretion. He works hard for the honor of his family until one day he meets Iqbal Masih, a boy who escaped from a factory, was educated, and is teaching other child laborers about the laws that are supposed to protect them. This fictional account honors the legacy of Iqbal Masih and includes resources at the end of the book to inform children about child labor issues and encourage them to support companies that honor the United Nations "Rights of the Child."



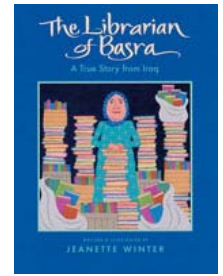
**Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq: Inspired by a True Story** Stamaty, Mark Alan. New York: Knopf, 2004. ISBN 0-3758-3217-3. Unpaged, (8 up). Biography.

In 2003, as bombs exploded over Basra, Alia attempted to preserve the collective history of Iraq. Alia was the chief librarian of the Central Library and as she watched her city prepare for war, she recalled her childhood history lessons and the stories of the destruction of the great library of Baghdad in 1258. Alia begged local officials to help but instead government officials commandeered her building. Secretly, Alia and her friends transported 30,000 volumes to safety before the library burned to the ground.



**The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq** by Winter, Jeanette. Orlando: Harcourt, 2004. ISBN 0-15-205445-6. 32 p. (8-10). Picture book.

Books are “more precious than mountains of gold” to Alia Muhammad Baker, the librarian of Basra. She and her friends remove more than 30,000 volumes from the library and store them in their homes to prevent their destruction when a bomb hits the building. This moving true story about a real librarian’s brave struggle to save her war-stricken community’s priceless collection of books is a powerful reminder that the love of literature and the passion for knowledge know no boundaries.



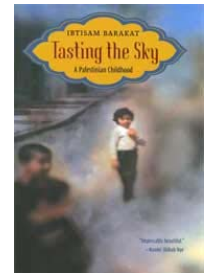
**Silent Music** James Rumford (2008) : Roaring Brook Press. ISBN-10: 1596432764.

A boy’s ingenuous voice introduces readers to the beauty and discipline of Arabic calligraphy in this mood piece set in Baghdad. Ali directly addresses readers, explaining how much he loves playing soccer and listening to loud music, and how he loves calligraphy even more. His hero is Yakut, a 13th-century calligrapher who took solace in his art amidst the Mongol invasion. Like Yakut, Ali finds comfort in practicing his letters

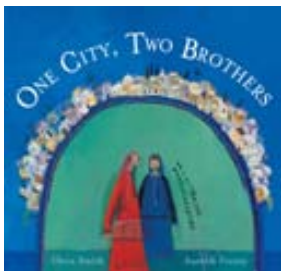
during the turmoil that has reigned in Baghdad since 2003.

**Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood** by Ibtisam Barakat. 192 pages: Farrar, Straus and Giroux ISBN-13: 978-0374357337.

In this groundbreaking memoir set in Ramallah after the 1967 Six-Day War, Ibtisam captures what it is like to be a child whose world is shattered by war. With candor and courage, she stitches together memories of her childhood: fear and confusion as bombs explode near her home and she is separated from her family; the harshness of life as a Palestinian refugee; her unexpected joy when she discovers Alef, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet.



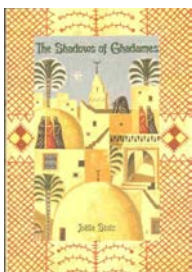
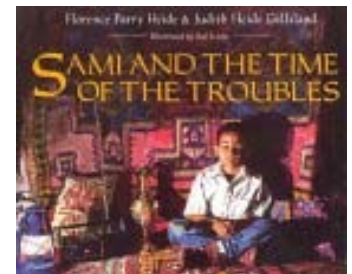
**One City Two Brothers** by Chris Smith and Aurelia Fronty.: Barefoot Books (2007) ISBN-10: 1846860423.



Framed by a story of King Solomon that deals with two squabbling brothers, this tale tells of two quite different brothers. They live in two villages, sharing the land between them and dividing their harvest. One abundant year, the elder brother, who has a wife and children, worries that his unmarried brother needs to save for his old age. Secretly he brings extra grain to his brother’s storehouse. Yet the next morning, the elder brother seems to have the same amount of grain as before. Meanwhile, the younger brother has been worrying, too; his elder brother has a family to be fed. He is secretly bringing grain to his sibling, then finding his own storehouse still full. The mystery is solved when the brothers meet on the hilltop, each with a donkey laden with grain. The blessed spot where they meet becomes Jerusalem. Based on a folktale told by both Jews and Arabs, this picture book gives readers hope for what could be if people thought more about one another than about themselves.

**Sami and the Time of the Troubles** by Florence Parry Heide, Judith Heide Gilliland. Clarion (1995) ISBN-13: 978-0395720851.

In this poignant and appealing story, a boy longs for peace in his war-torn Beirut, Lebanon. This book touches upon the manner in which childhood prevails for all. Given the circumstances the protagonist is living in, he still finds time to play with other children as soon as there is a small respite in the usual flow of violence. His family connections seem to make him clearly secure within his shaky existence.

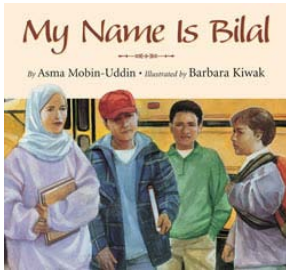
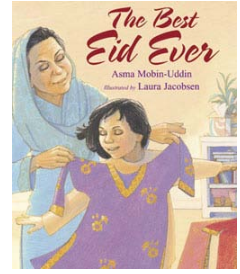


**The Shadows of Ghadames**. Stolz, Joelle. Translated from the French by Catherine Temerson. New York: Delacorte Press, 2004. Originally published in France as Les Ombres de Ghadames in 1999 by Bayard Editions Jeunesse. ISBN 0-385-73104-3. 119 p

In the Libyan city of Ghadames at the end of the nineteenth century, Malika is dreading her twelfth birthday. That is the time when, according to her family’s Berber customs, she will be close to marriageable age and confined to the world of women. In Ghadames that means restriction to the rooftops. Malika longs to live beyond the segregated city and travel, like her father, a trader. But the wider world comes to Malika after her father’s two wives agree to harbor, in secret, a wounded stranger. This is a story of an outsider who unsettles a household and helps a young person to grow.

**The Best Eid Ever** by Asma Mobin-uddin illustrated by Laura Jacobson (2007) ISBN:978-1590784310

It's Eid, and Aneesa should be happy. But her parents are thousands of miles away in Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage. To cheer her up, her grandmother gives her a gift of beautiful clothes from Pakistan, one outfit for each of the three days of Eid. At the prayer hall, Aneesa meets two sisters who are not dressed in new clothes for the holiday. Aneesa discovers that the girls are refugees. Aneesa can't stop thinking about the girls and what Eid must be like for them. That's when Aneesa comes up with a plan to help the girls celebrate Eid and make it the best Eid holiday ever.

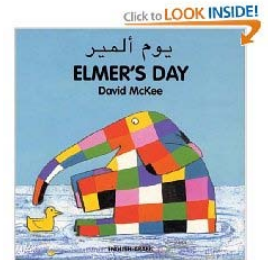


**My Name is Bilal**- Asma Mobin-Uddin, Boyds Mills Press (2005) ISBN-10: 1590781759

This book is a well-done treatment of a subject not often seen in children's picture books. Bilal transfers to a school where he and his sister are the only Muslim children. After an incident in which a boy pulls off Ayesha's headscarf, Bilal decides to hide the fact that he is Muslim until an understanding teacher, who is also Muslim, gives him a biography of Bilal ibn Rabah, a black slave who became the very first muezzin because of his steadfastness in the face of religious persecution. Attractive watercolor illustrations emphasize the parallels between the persecution faced by Bilal ibn Rabah and that faced by the American boy. It can enhance discussions of cultural diversity and understanding.

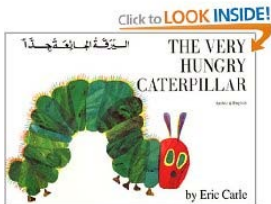
**Youm-e-Elmer or Elmer's Day:** by David Mckee ISBN:1-84059-398-9, 13: 978-1840593983

This book features a colorful patchwork elephant as its subject. Elmer's winsome personality shines through as he romps with a variety of wild animals from all over the world, Polar bears and leopards, elephants and kangaroos in this jungle fantasyland. Elmer's Friends, the most sophisticated of the four, leaves readers with the message that we can be different and still get along.



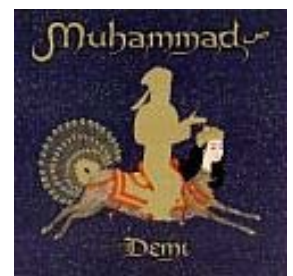
**Al Dudatu Al Shadidat Al Gou: by Mohammad Anani** ISBN: 977-6171-03-6, Translated from "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle.

One sunny Sunday, the caterpillar was hatched out of a tiny egg. He was very hungry. On Monday, he ate through one apple; on Tuesday, he ate through two pears; on Wednesday he ate through three plums – and still he was hungry. Strikingly bold, colorful pictures and a simple text in large clear type tell the story of the hungry little caterpillar's progress through an amazing variety and quantity of foods. Full at last, he made a cocoon around himself and went to sleep, to wake up a few weeks later wonderfully transformed into a butterfly.



**Muhammad-** Demi 48 pp. McElderry 7/03 ISBN 0-689-85264-9

Demi tells the story of the prophet Muhammad from birth to death, explaining the creation of Islam and the Koran. While her text presents his life point by point with little embellishment, the illustrations are lively--surprisingly so, given the restrictions placed on them. For one thing, Islamic law states that Muhammad may not be depicted and so she shows him as a gold silhouette. This means that the pathos and much of the action rely on her portrayal of secondary characters and the setting. These are shown in the artist's familiar two-dimensional style, with thin black outlines and bright, solid colors.

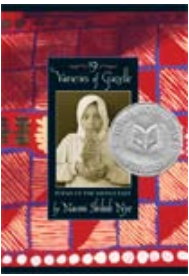


**Traveling Man: The Journey of Ibn Battuta** 1325-1354 by James Rumford. 40 pages Houghton Mifflin (2004) ISBN-10: 0618432337. "In the days when the earth was flat and Jerusalem was the center of the world, there was a boy named Ibn Battuta." So begins this introduction to the journeys of this historically important but little-known, 14th-century Muslim figure. Born in Morocco and raised as a scholar, he began his 29 years of travel in 1325 when, "At twenty-one, he decided to go to Mecca as a pilgrim." He went on through Africa, across the steppes of Asia, into India and China, and back to Morocco where "he told his story to the Moroccan court secretary Ibn Juzayy, who wrote it down in Arabic."

**Apricots Tomorrow:** Primrose Arnander and Ashkhain Skipwith, illustrated by Kathryn Lamb. ISBN 13: 978-0905743578. Stacey International

This is a book about Arabic proverbs; it is very interesting due to the bilingual text and western correlations.

**APRICOTS TOMORROW**



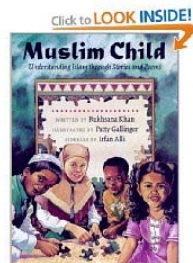
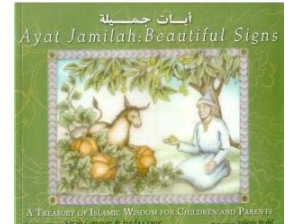
**19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East.** Nye, Naomi Shihab York: Greenwillow, 2002. ISBN 0-06-00-9765-5.

“September 11 cast a huge shadow across the lives of so many innocent people and an ancient culture’s pride,” Nye tells the reader in the introduction of these sixty poems that tell about being Arab-American, about Jerusalem, the West bank, and her family. The poet encourages us to think and understand what it is to be Arabic, and to leap like the gazelle toward the horizon with the hope of peace spinning inside us.

**Ayat Jamilah: Beautiful Signs: A Treasury of Islamic Wisdom for Children and Parents**

by Sarah Conover, Freda Crane, and Valerie Wahl. ISBN:978-0910055949

A collection of folktales and wisdom culled from the Muslim World. One of the most popular folk characters is Mulla Nasruddin, a wise and witty spiritual guide. The book isn't only folktales; it also includes retellings of Qur'anic passages

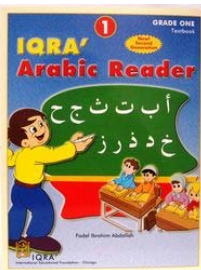
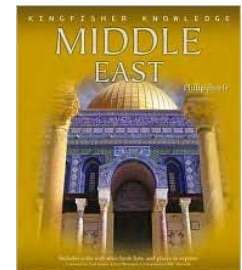


**Muslim Child-** Rukhsana Khan. 72 pages. Napoleon Publishing (1999) ISBN-13: 978-0807553077

Muslim Child presents aspects of the daily lives of Muslim youngsters in various locales, including Canada, the U.S., Nigeria, and Pakistan. The child's-eye view substantially increases the likelihood that non-Muslim readers will be able to internalize and understand what the protagonists are feeling and thinking, even if the religious basis of those thoughts and emotions is unfamiliar. It is a collection of stories and poems about Islam from a child’s perspective.

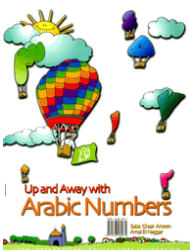
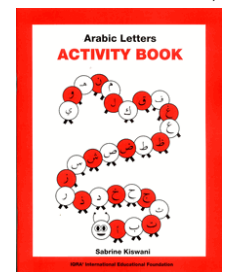
**Middle East** (Kingfisher Knowledge) by Philip Steele, 64 pages. Kingfisher (2006). ISBN-13: 9780753459843KFK.

Middle East takes an in-depth look at the peoples and places of this diverse and fascinating region- from the cradle of civilization to the powerful countries that play a central role in today’s global economy and politics. Find out where different religions began and how they have shaped countries and cultures. Discover ancient trading routes, incredible monuments, and modern capitals. Learn about cooperation and conflicts, oil and resources, and religion and art-as well as recent disputes and hopes for the future.



**IQRA', Arabic Reader, Grade One Textbook:** By Fadel Ibrahim Abdallah. ISBN: 1-56316-027-7, (2006) International Educational Foundation, Chicago. This book has an introduction to the Arabic language at an elementary level. This book focuses on teaching the essentials of the language. Due to it being bilingual, it is easier to understand and use.

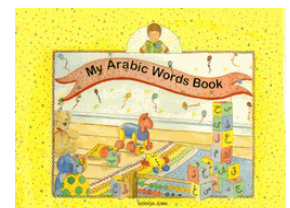
**Arabic Letters, Activity Book:** Sabrina Kiswani. ISBN: 1-56316-015-3. IQRA' International Educational Foundation, (1996-2007). This book emphasizes the Arabic alphabet through worksheets and activity sheets.



**Up, Up, and Away with Arabic Numbers:** Saba Ghazi Ameen and Amal El Naggar. ISBN: 1-56316-027-7. IQRA' International Educational Foundation, (1988). This book emphasizes the numbers in English and Arabic with activities on each page.

**My Arabic Words Book:** by Sid diqa Juma, ISBN: 978-1879402331. Iman Publishing Ltd. (1999).

In this wonderfully illustrated book, a child can learn how easy and fun it is to learn new Arabic words. Each page provides the Arabic writing, the transliteration and the translation.



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**Arabic-Speaking Countries and Cultures**  
***(Useful WebSites)***

**[www.al-balsam.com](http://www.al-balsam.com)**

**[www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com)**

**[http://www.milet.com/milet\\_languages\\_us.asp?lang=Arabic-English](http://www.milet.com/milet_languages_us.asp?lang=Arabic-English)**

**[www.iqra.com](http://www.iqra.com) & **[www.iqrabooks.com](http://www.iqrabooks.com)****

**[www.OnlineIslamicStore.com](http://www.OnlineIslamicStore.com)**

**[www.fadakbooks.com](http://www.fadakbooks.com)**

**[www.BizRate.com](http://www.BizRate.com)**

**[www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)**

**[www.nmelrc.org](http://www.nmelrc.org)**

**[www.worldlanguage.com](http://www.worldlanguage.com)**

**[www.eapgroup.com/islamic1.htm](http://www.eapgroup.com/islamic1.htm)**

**<http://Bloom.mit.edu/agakhan/imgdb/index.html>**

**[www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/IslArt.html](http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/IslArt.html)**

## Worlds of Words

### Korean Culture & Language Book Kit

**Bae, H. (2007). *New clothes for New Year's Day*. La Jolla, CA: Kane Miller Book Publishers. ISBN: 978-1-933605-29-6**



This informational book explains the steps to wearing special new clothes for New Year's Day (Sol-bim). The illustrations are detailed, so that the process of putting on a Korean Han Bok for New Year's Day is well described.

Korean edition is available.

**Farley, C., & illustrated Cooper, F. (1995). *King's secret: The Legend of King Sejong*. New York: Lee & Shepard Books.**



ISBN: 978-0688127763

Chosun Dynasty had a wise King Sejong who ruled the great land of Korea. When a humble servant boy tells of his longing to read and write, King Sejong sets out to create a simple yet beautiful way to write the Korean language. The people reject the new way of writing--until the servant boy gives the king another grand idea.

**Heo, Y. (1996). *The green frogs: A Korean folktale retold*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. ISBN: 978-0618432288**



A folktale about two green frogs who always disobey their mother explains why green frogs cry out whenever it rains.

This folktale is one of the most popular stories told by parents in Korea. The life-long disobedient green frogs concern their mother. She is afraid that her children will do the opposite from what she asks for her grave, so she asks them to bury her near the river hoping they will bury her in the hill. The frogs

choose to follow their mother's last wish. The mother's grave is near the river, so the frogs cry whenever it rains, worrying that the rain will demolish the grave.

That's why a frog's cry gets louder when it rains.

**Ko, T. Y. & Kim, Y. J. (2006). *No way subway*. Kyung Gi Doh, Pajoo city: Gil Buht.**

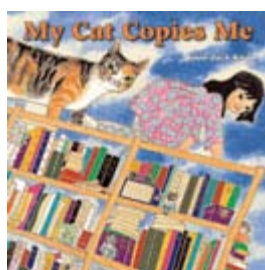


**ISBN: 9788955820461**

A little boy and his older sister ride a subway to go to their grandparents' house. It's their first time to ride a train without a grown-up. The big sister feels so much responsibility, yet the baby brother doesn't listen to her. His impulsive behavior worries his big sister. After they

arrive in their granny's house, the sister bursts with her tension. The dramatic illustrations appeal to young children.

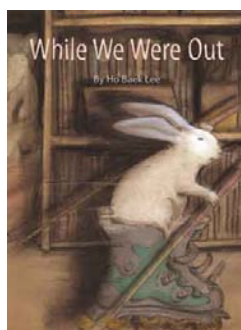
**Kwon, Y. (2007). *My cat copies me (English edition)*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.**



**ISBN: 978-1-933605-26-5**

This book explores the special bond between children and their pets as a little girl and her cat play, hide, and comfort one another. The illustrator, Kwon, studied advertisement art and now lives in China studying Eastern Art with her husband who studies Eastern philosophy. Korean Edition is available.

**Lee, H. B. (2003). *While we were out*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.**



**ISBN: 978-1-929132-44-7**

The patio door is left unlocked. The rabbit explores room after room, picking up this and looking at that. The adorable rabbit exhausts herself and her curiosity before the family returns. Lee studied Industrial Design and Journalism in Korea and Communication & Images in Paris. Korean edition is available

**Lee, S. (2007). *The zoo (1st ed.)*. La Jolla: Kane/Miller. ISBN: 978-1-933605-28-9**



A little girl's trip to the zoo becomes an extraordinary, imaginative, fun-filled animal adventure. Meanwhile, her parents experience an alarming adventure of their own. Suzy Lee is an artist and illustrator, born in Seoul, Korea. She received her BFA in painting from Seoul National University and her MA in Book

Arts from Camberwell College of Arts, London. Her books and paintings have won numerous international awards and have been featured in exhibitions worldwide including Bologna Children's Book Exhibition.

***Waiting for Mama***

**Written by Tae-Joon Lee**

**Illustrated by Dong-Sung Kim**

**North-South; bilingual edition, 2007, ISBN: 978-0735821439**

**Lee, T. J. (2007). *Waiting for moma*. North-South. ISBN: 9780735821439 (bilingual Korean/English edition)**



This is the simple story of a young boy waiting at a tram-stop for his mother. Trams come and go, people get on and get off, yet the boy waits patiently, even as a snowstorm gathers. Winner of Korea's prestigious Baeksang Publishing Award for children's literature, and selected as Book of the Year by three of Korea's national newspapers.

Author Tae-Jun Lee was born in Korea in 1904 and was orphaned as a child. He wrote his most famous short stories during the 1930s, including 'Waiting for Mama' in 1938. His works are well-loved in Korea for their poetic prose and emotional sensitivity. Lee was later a war correspondent during the Korean War. This edition with new illustrations was published almost half a century after his death.

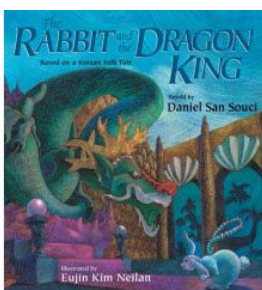
**Liu, J., & Sheen, D. I. (2002). *Yellow umbrella* ( English edition) Kane/Miller Book Publisher. ISBN 978-1-929132-36-2**



This wordless book presents a birds-eye view of colorful umbrellas carried by children on a rainy walk to school. Originally published in South Korea with a 15 track of music CD attached to the book. Liu studied Oil Painting in college & graduate school and now teaches picture books in Seoul City University. Sheen majored in Composition in Korea and New York University.

**Neilan, E. K. (2002). *The rabbit and the dragon king: Based on Korean Folklore*.**

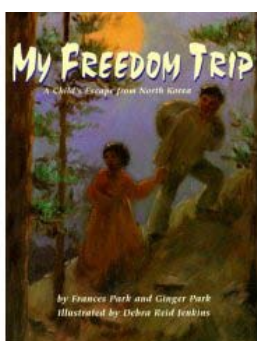
**Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, Inc.**



**ISBN: 978-1590784181**

Thanks to a quick-witted rabbit and a seaworthy turtle, an ill dragon king regains his desire to live. This is one of the most popular folktales in Korea. Dragons are not as big in Korea as in Chinese culture, yet the dragon figure is often associated with the King of the ocean.

**Park, F., & Park, G. (1998). *My freedom trip*. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, Inc. ISBN: 978-1563974687**



Based on the life of the authors' mother, this is the story of her escape from North Korea after the communist take-over. Stories of escapes from North Korean are not a common topic in children's literature in South Korea, thus, the availability of the book is more valuable.

**Park, L. S. (2001). *A single shard*. New York: Clarion Publisher.**

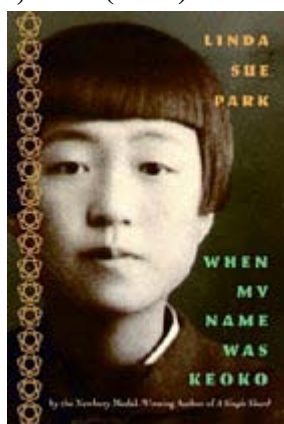


**ISBN: 978-0395978276**

Linda Sue Park's 2002 Newbery Award-winning story. Tree-ear, an orphan, lives under a bridge in Ch'ulp'o, a potters' village famed for delicate celadon ware. Tree-ear is fascinated with the potter's craft; he wants nothing more than to watch master potter Min at work, and he dreams of making a pot of his own someday.

When Min takes Tree-ear on as his helper, Tree-ear is elated -- until he finds obstacles in his path: the backbreaking labor of digging and hauling clay, Min's irascible temper, and his own ignorance. But Tree-ear is determined to prove himself -- even if it means taking a long, solitary journey on foot to present Min's work in the hope of a royal commission . . . even if it means arriving at the royal court with nothing to show but a single celadon shard.

**Park, L. S. (2002). *When my name was Keoko*. New York: Clarion Books.**



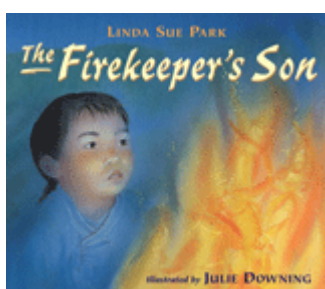
**ISBN: 978-0440419440**

With national pride and occasional fear, a brother and sister face the increasingly oppressive occupation of Korea by



Japan during World War II, which threatens to suppress Korean culture entirely. The fact that Korea was colonized by Japan during World War II is not well known in the United States. This book broadens the historical context around World War II and also helps to develop cultural awareness through two Korean protagonists who resist taking on Japanese identity. Korean culture is well illustrated through the strong gender and family relationship hierarchy, social oppression, acceptance, sibling dynamics, and cultural identity.

**Park, L. S. (2004). *The firekeeper's son*. New York: Clarion Books.**



**ISBN: 9780618133376**

In early-19th-century Korea, after Sang-hee's father injures his ankle, Sang-hee attempts to take over the task of lighting the evening fire, which signals to the palace that all is well. Includes historical notes.

**Park, L. S. (2006). *Archer's quest*. New York: Clarion Books.**

**ISBN: 9780618596317**



Twelve-year-old Kevin Kim helps Chu-Mong, a legendary king of ancient Korea, return to his own time. Kevin Kim is a typical contemporary American boy who struggles to view himself as Korean. His character is presented differently from the majority of Korean-American characters in children's book who typically are presented as newly immigrated families to the States.

**Park, S. C. (2006). *Cookie, 과자* (korean alphabet**

**book). Seoul: Yeo Woo Goh Gae publisher. ISBN: 9780618596317**



The process of making cookies teaches how to make the Korean alphabet, Hangul. The cookie dough makes different shapes that look like the Korean alphabet.

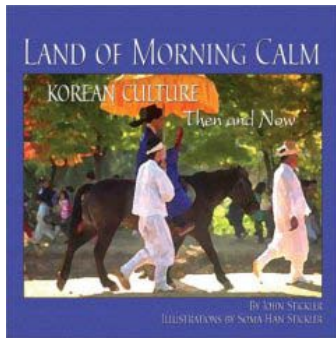
**Song, J., & Lee, J. (2004). *Sun and moon*. Pah Joo, Kyung Gi Doh, Korea: Goohk**



**Min Suh Gwan. ISBN: 9788911023639**

This Korean version of the Red Riding Hood story is a pourquoi for the sun and moon creation. The boy and girl become the sun and the moon after the life-threatening tiger is killed. The tiger is as greedy as the wolf in the western version of Red Riding Hood. The mother becomes the first victim as Red Riding Hood's grandma is swallowed by the wolf. There are many versions of Sun & Moon folklores in Korea, yet this version is often praised as the best picture book presentation of the story.

**Stickler, J. (2003). *Land of morning calm: Korean culture then and now*. Fremont,**



**CA: Shen's Books. ISBN: 978-1885008220**

Introduces the cultures and traditions of Korea, from ancient times to the present. The illustrations and photos provide a brief introduction to Korean culture.

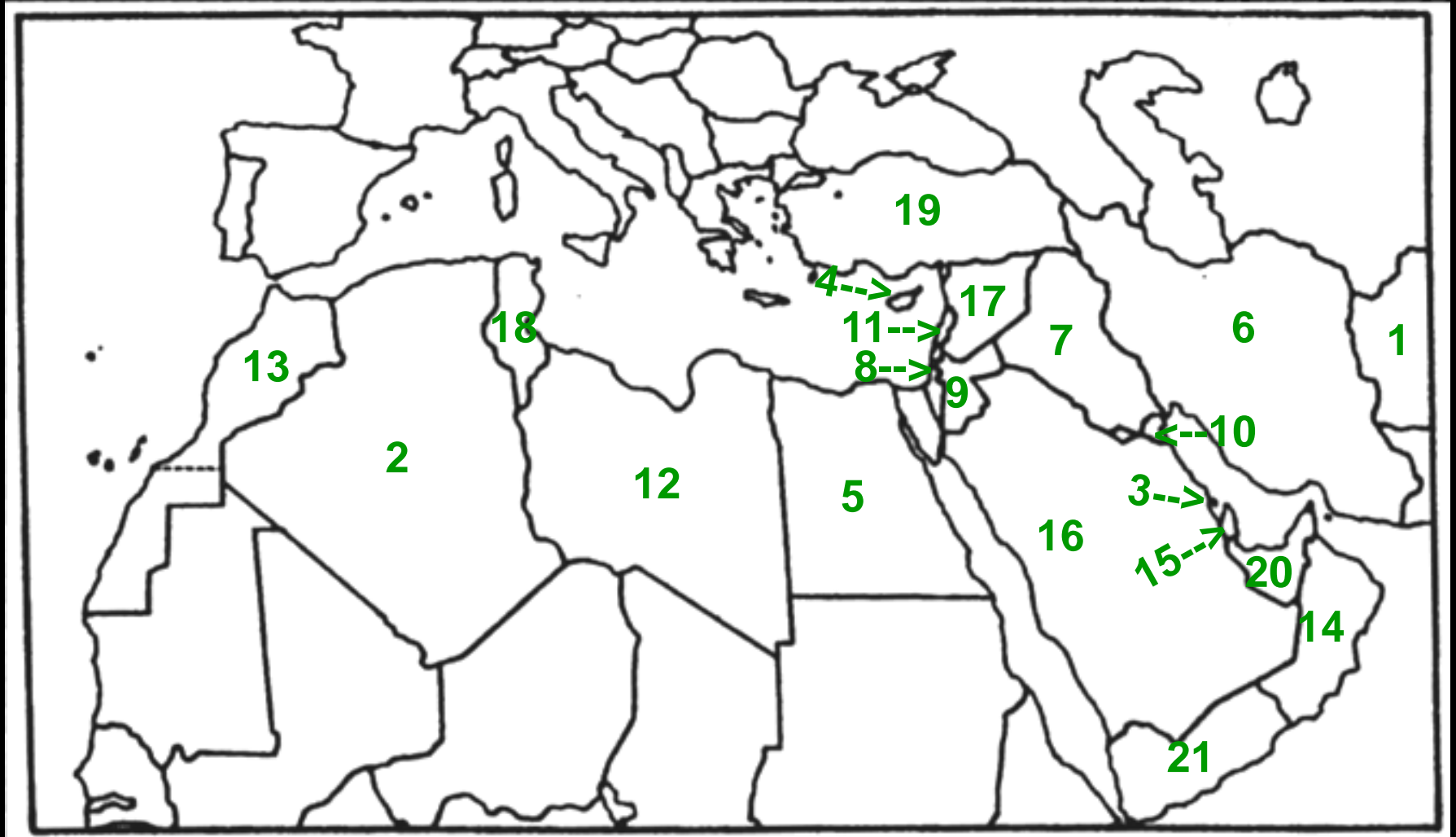


# The Geography of the Middle East

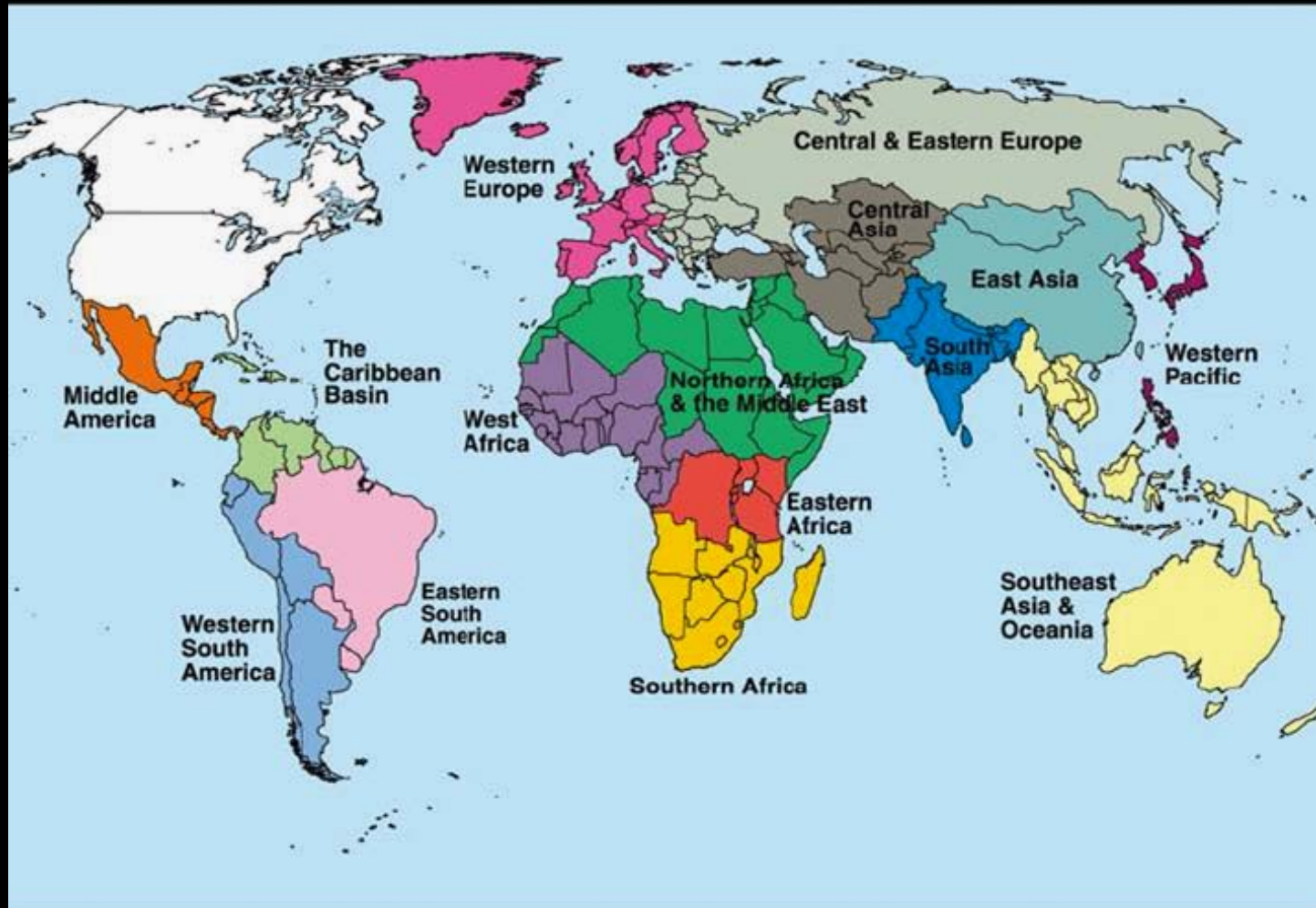


Susan M. Pojer  
Horace Greeley HS Chappaqua, NY

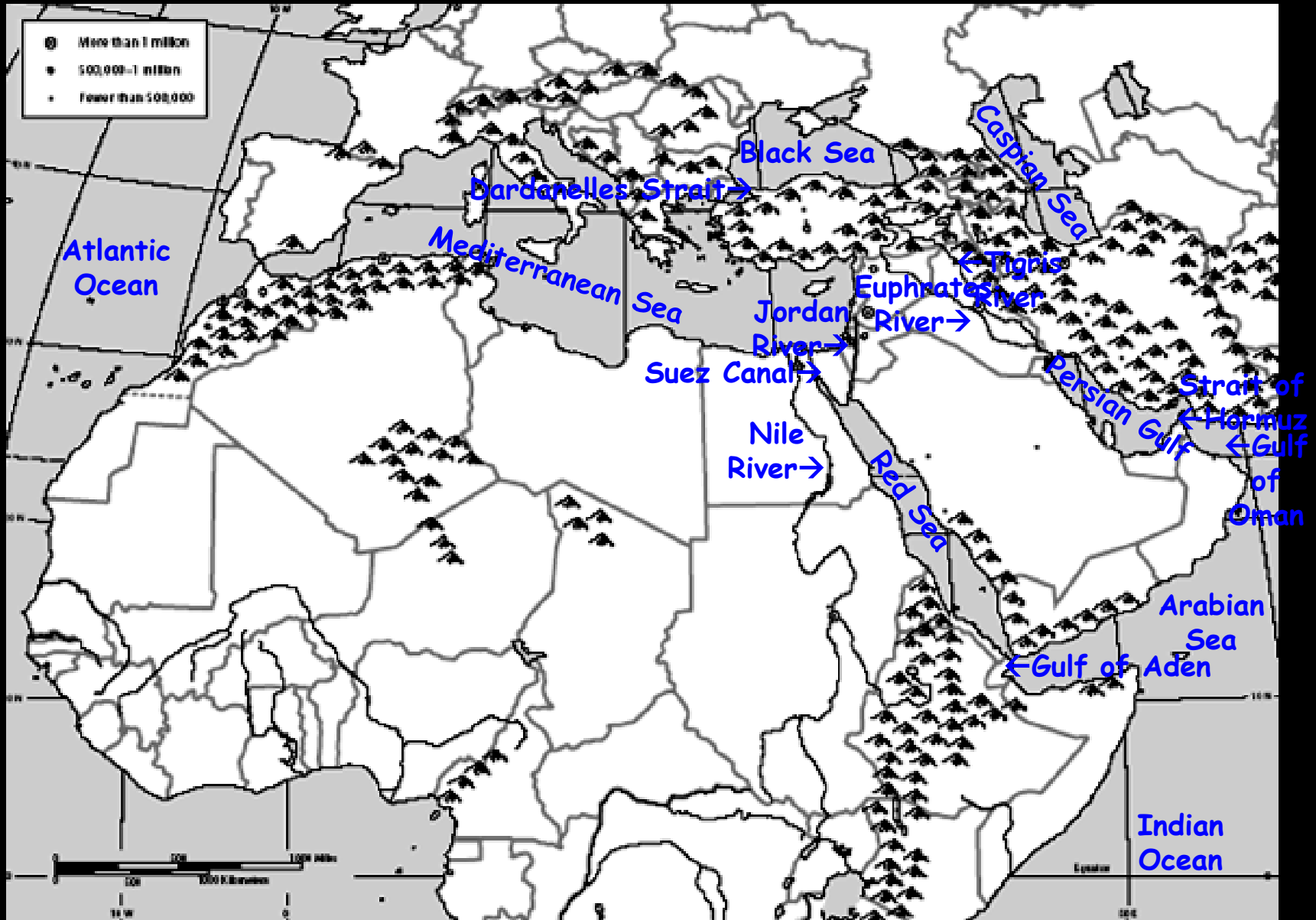
# The Middle East Today: Political Map



# Middle East? OR Near East? OR Southwest Asia? OR...?



# Bodies of Water



# The Mighty Nile River: “Longest River in the World”



The Landsat image (left) shows the Nile flowing into its delta. An outline of the continental United States (right) shows the length of the Nile's course. The actual length of the Nile with all its twists and turns is more than **4,100 miles.**



# Egypt: The “Gift of the Nile”



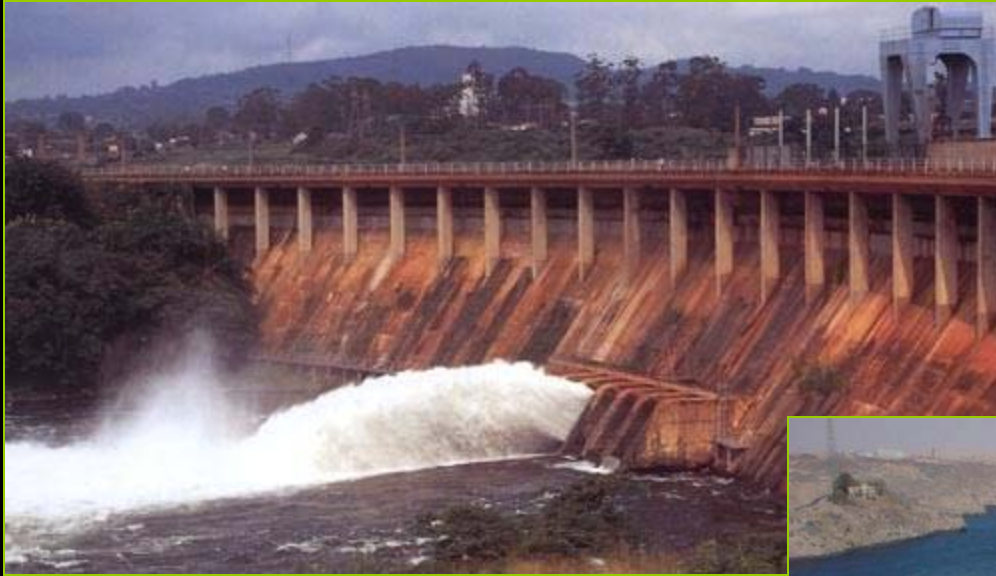
Annual Nile Flooding



95% of the Egyptian people live on 5% of the land!



# Aswan High Dam, Egypt



**Hydroelectric  
Power Plant**

# Suez Canal

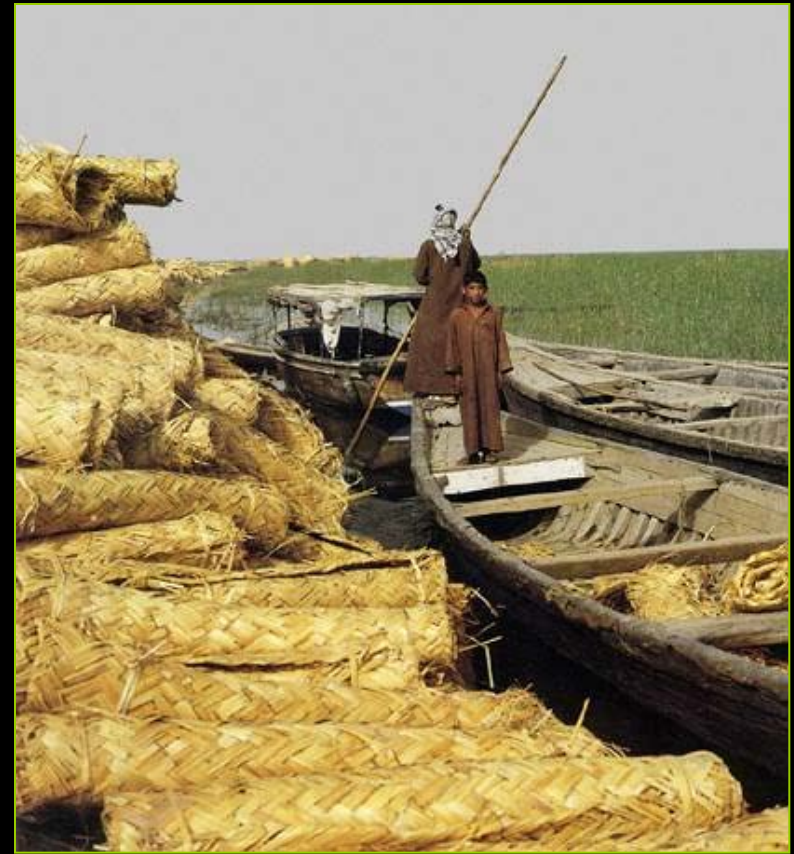


**Completed by the British in 1869**

# The Tigris & Euphrates River System



**Mesopotamia:  
"Land Between the Two Rivers"**



**Marsh Arabs, So. Iraq**

# Dust Storms Along the Tigris-Euphrates Flood Plains



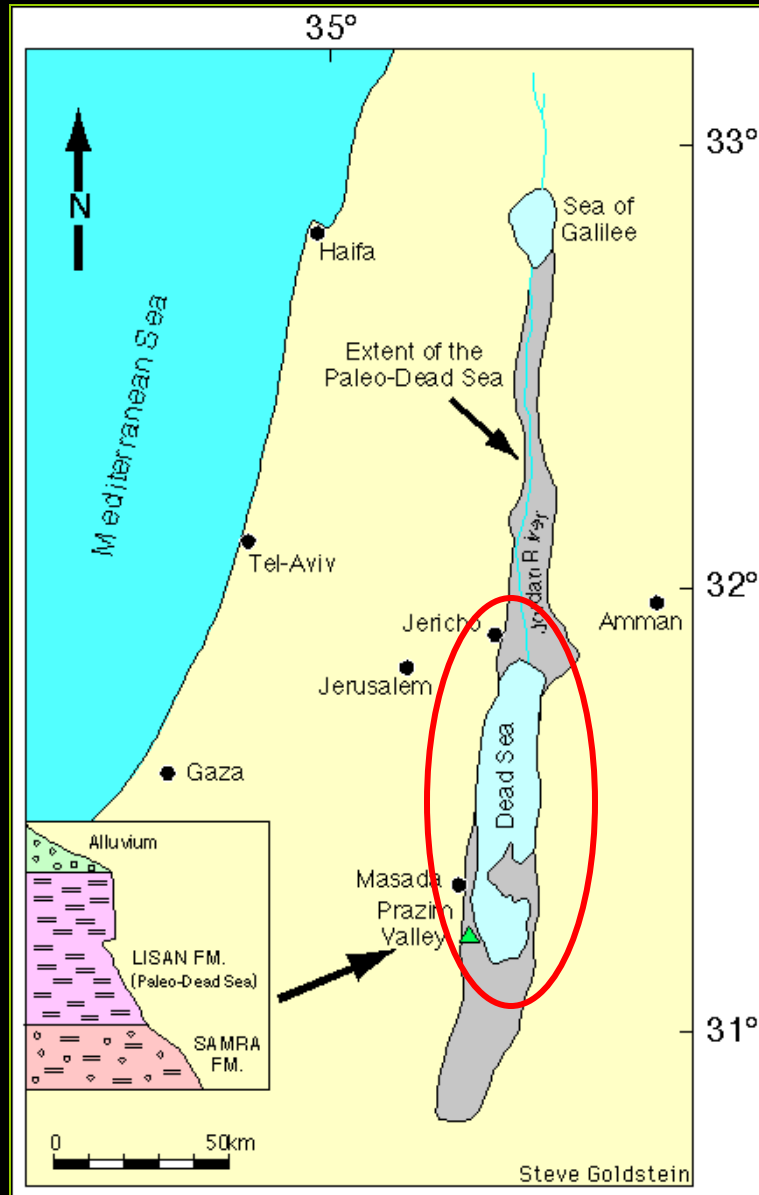
# The Jordan River System:



Israel & Jordan--A Fight Over Water Rights?

# Dead Sea: Lowest Point on Earth

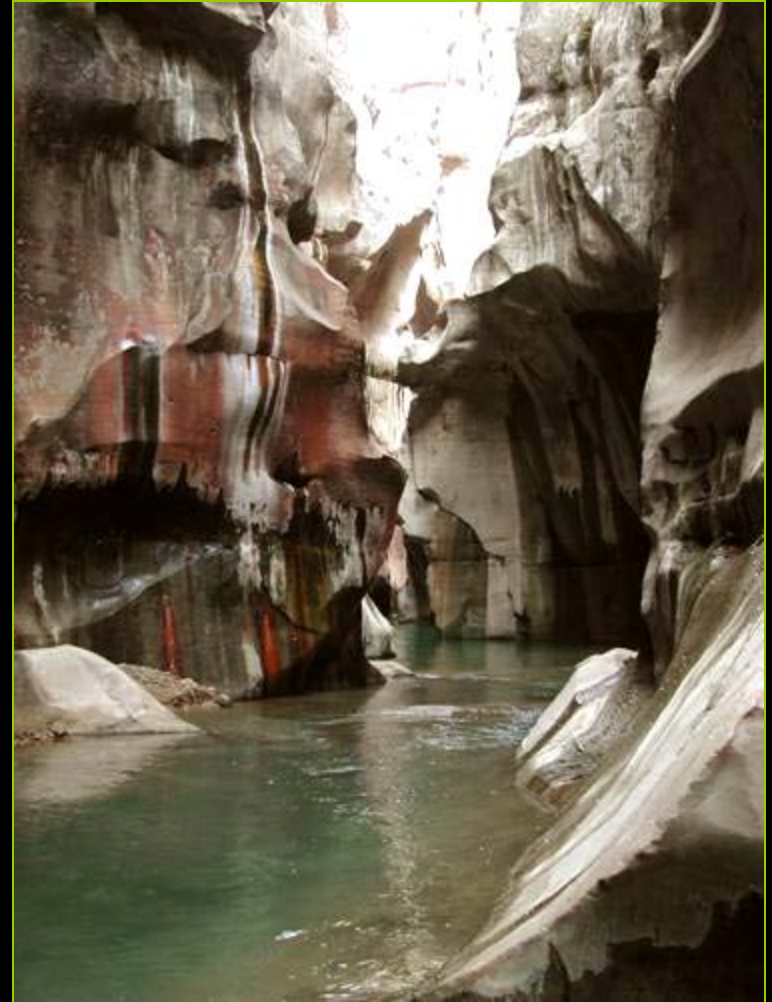
2,300' below sea level



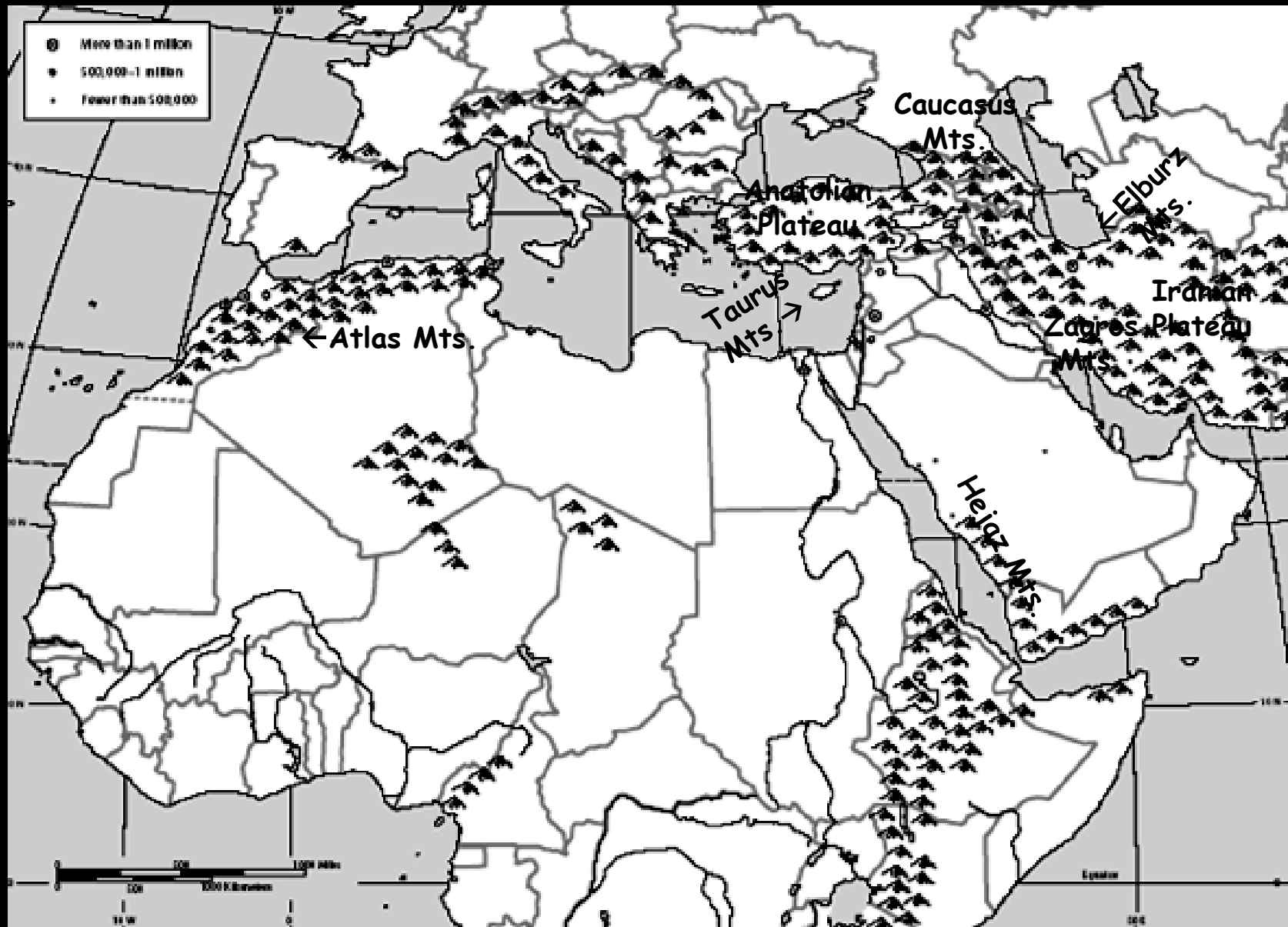
Highest  
Salt  
Content  
(33%)



# *Wadis*—Instant Springs



# Mountains & Plateaus





# Mountain Ranges in Mid-East



**Elburz Mts., Iran**



**Zagros Mts., Iran**

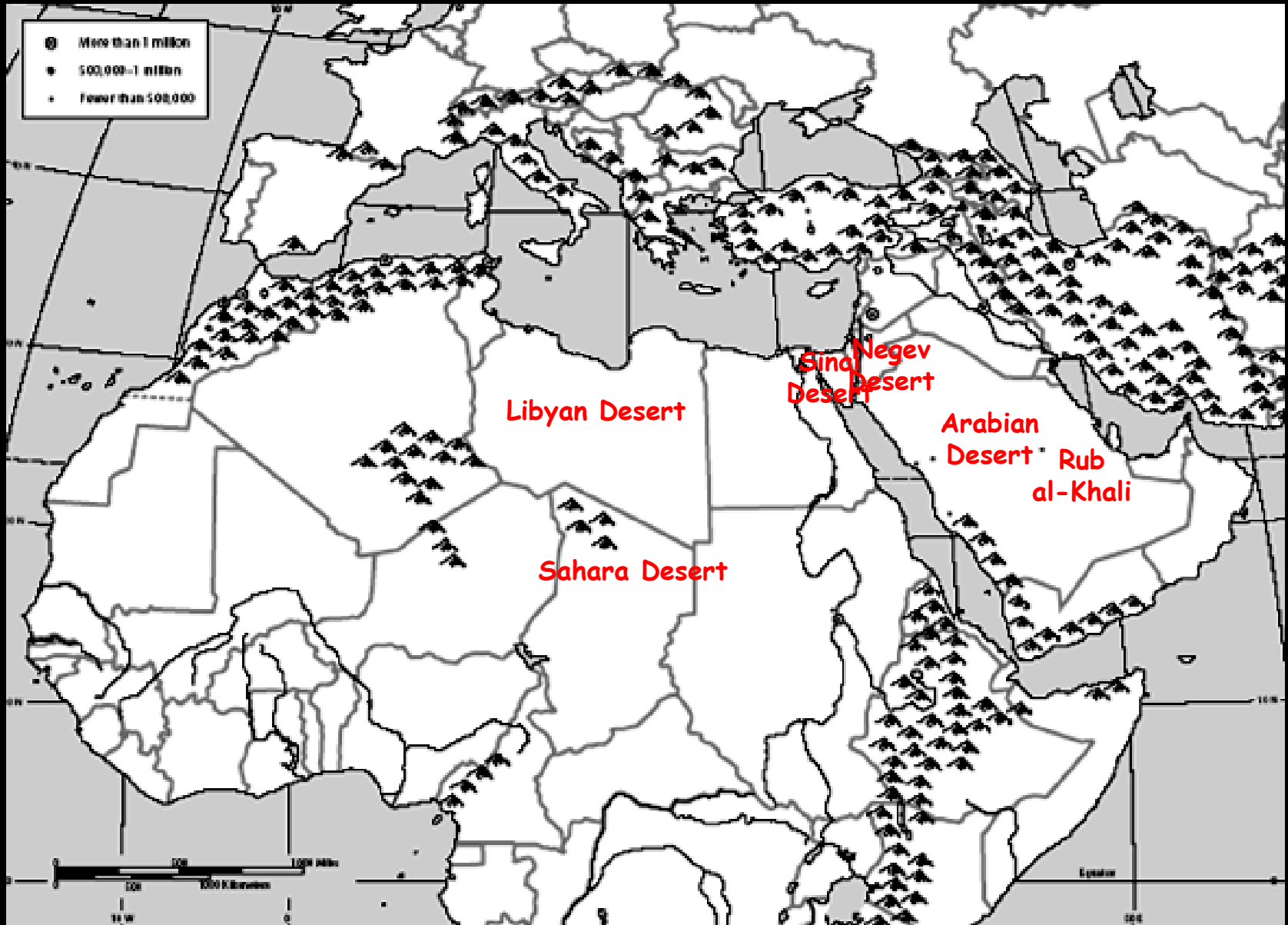


**Lebanese Mts.**

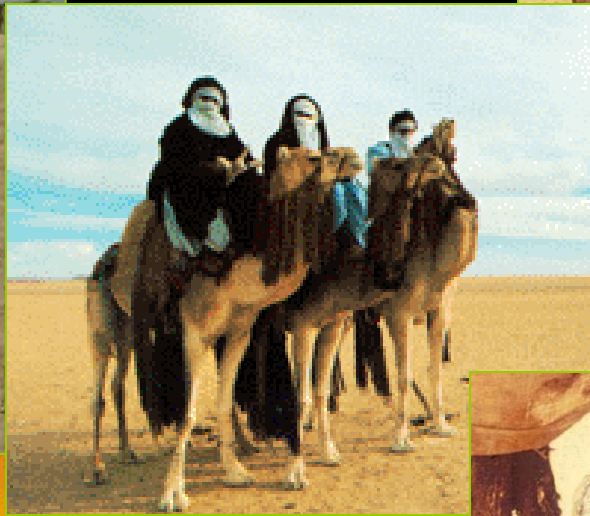


**Taurus Mts., Turkey**

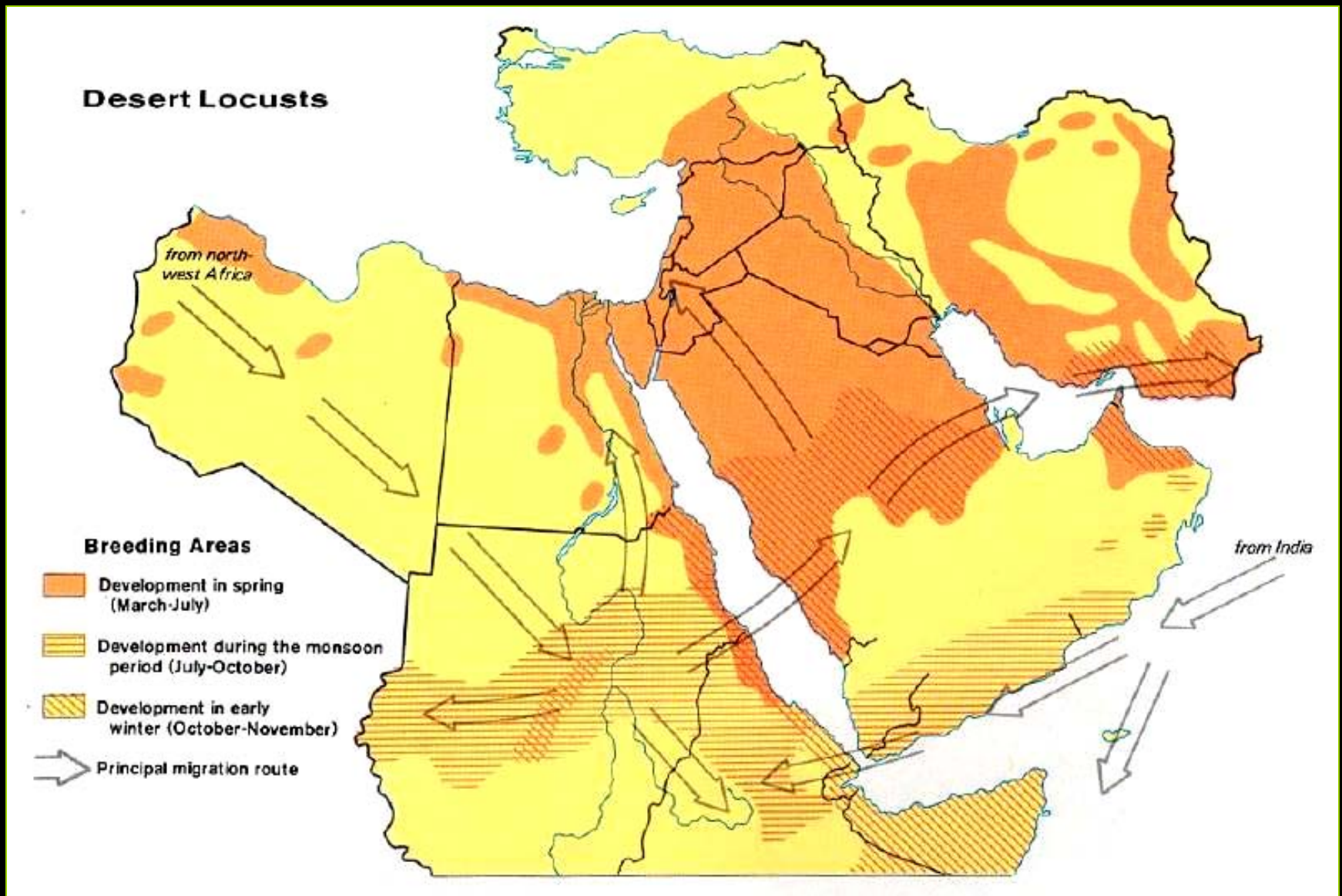
# Deserts



# Desert Bedouins



# Breeding Areas of Desert Locusts



# Swarms of Desert Locusts!

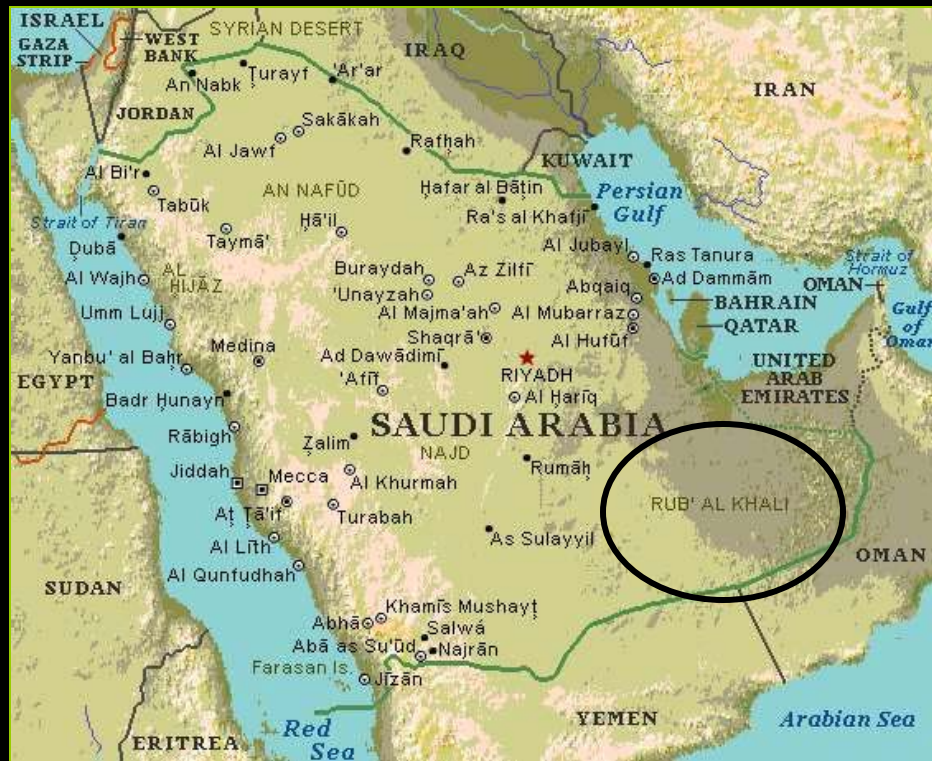


Locusts Swarm the  
Pyramids Complex at  
Giza!

Israel Hit By Worst Locust  
Plague Since the 1950s!



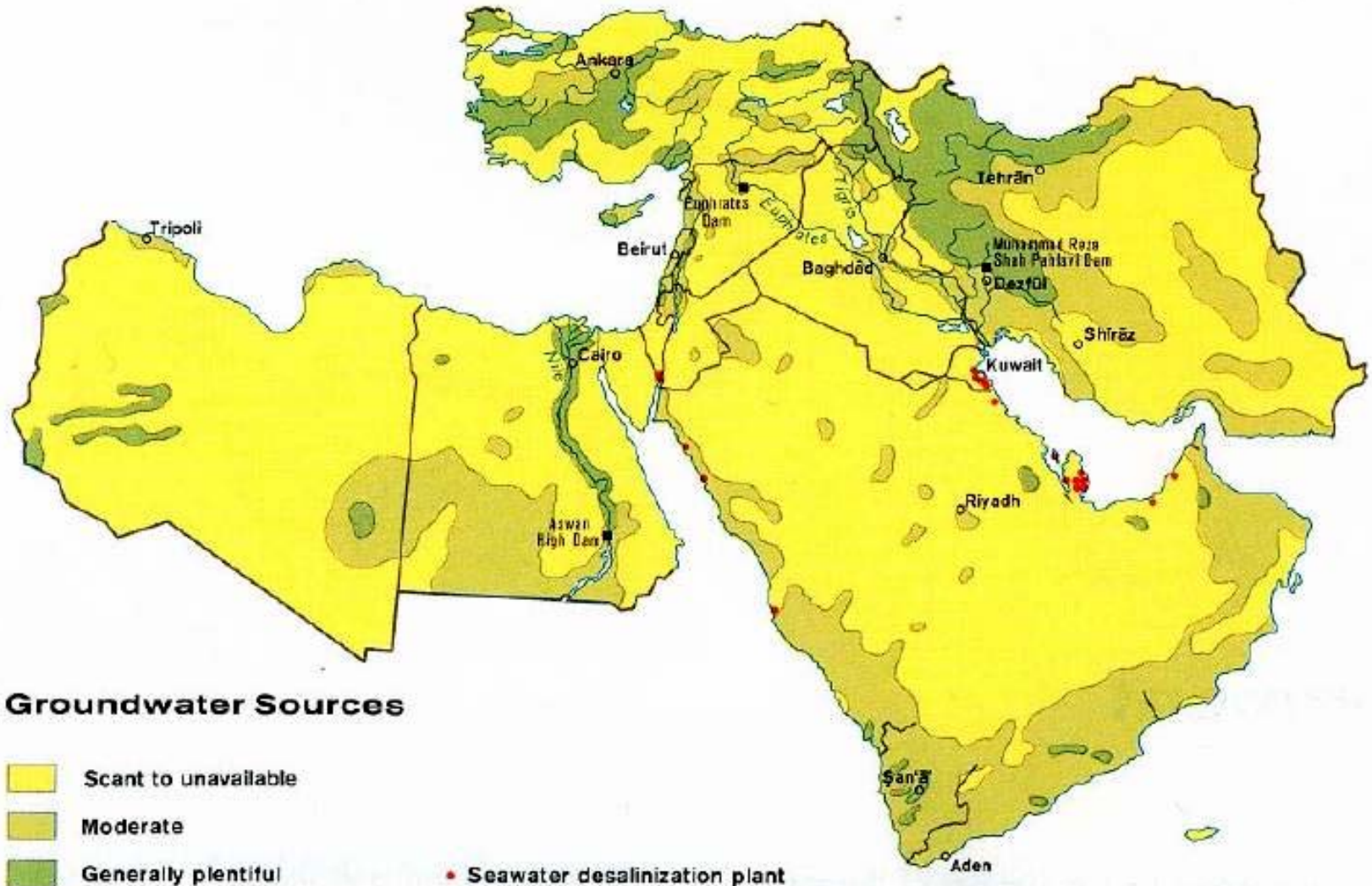
# Rub al-Khali: “The Empty Quarter”



# Desert Oases: Water at a Premium!



# Fresh Groundwater Sources

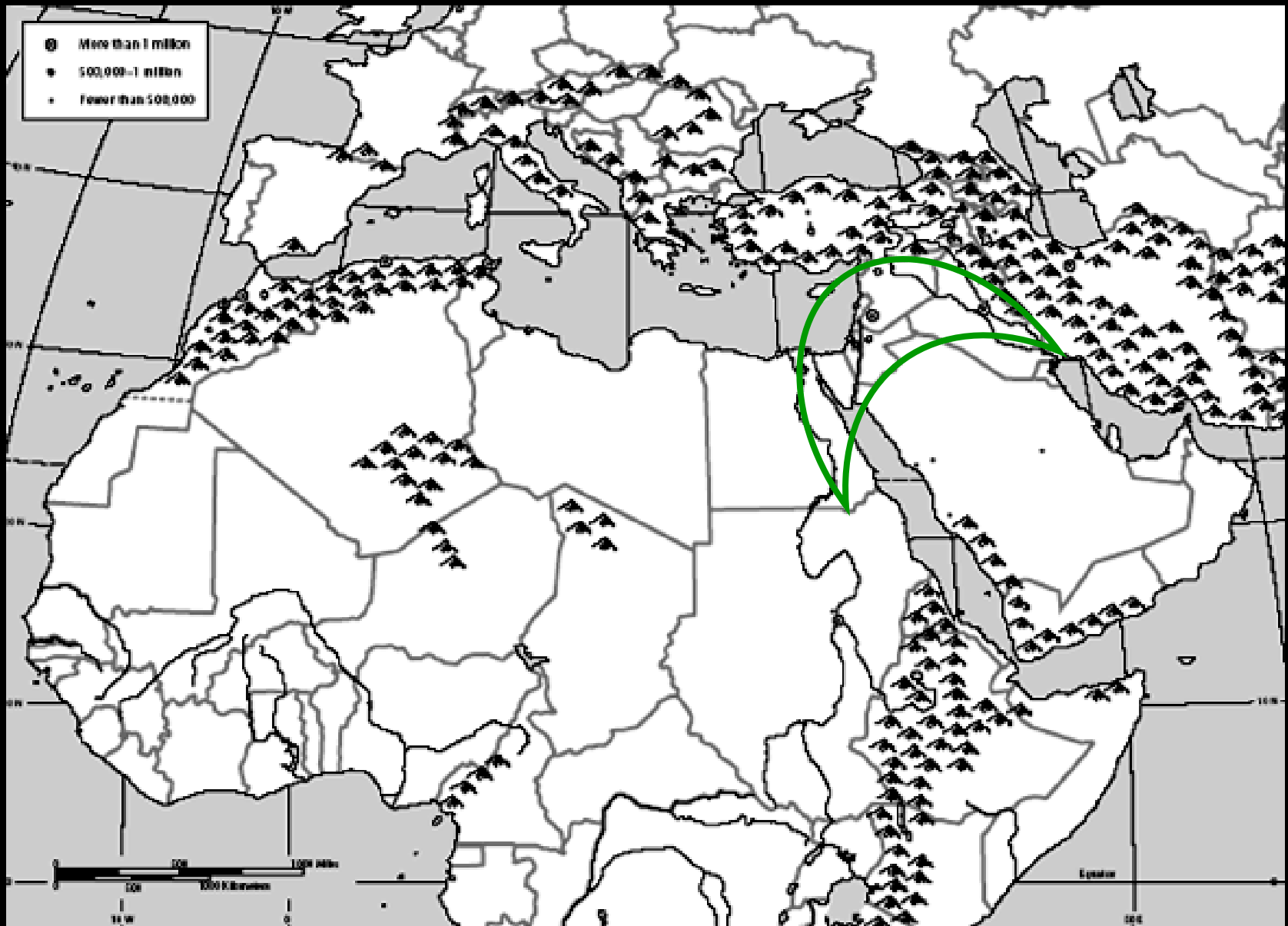




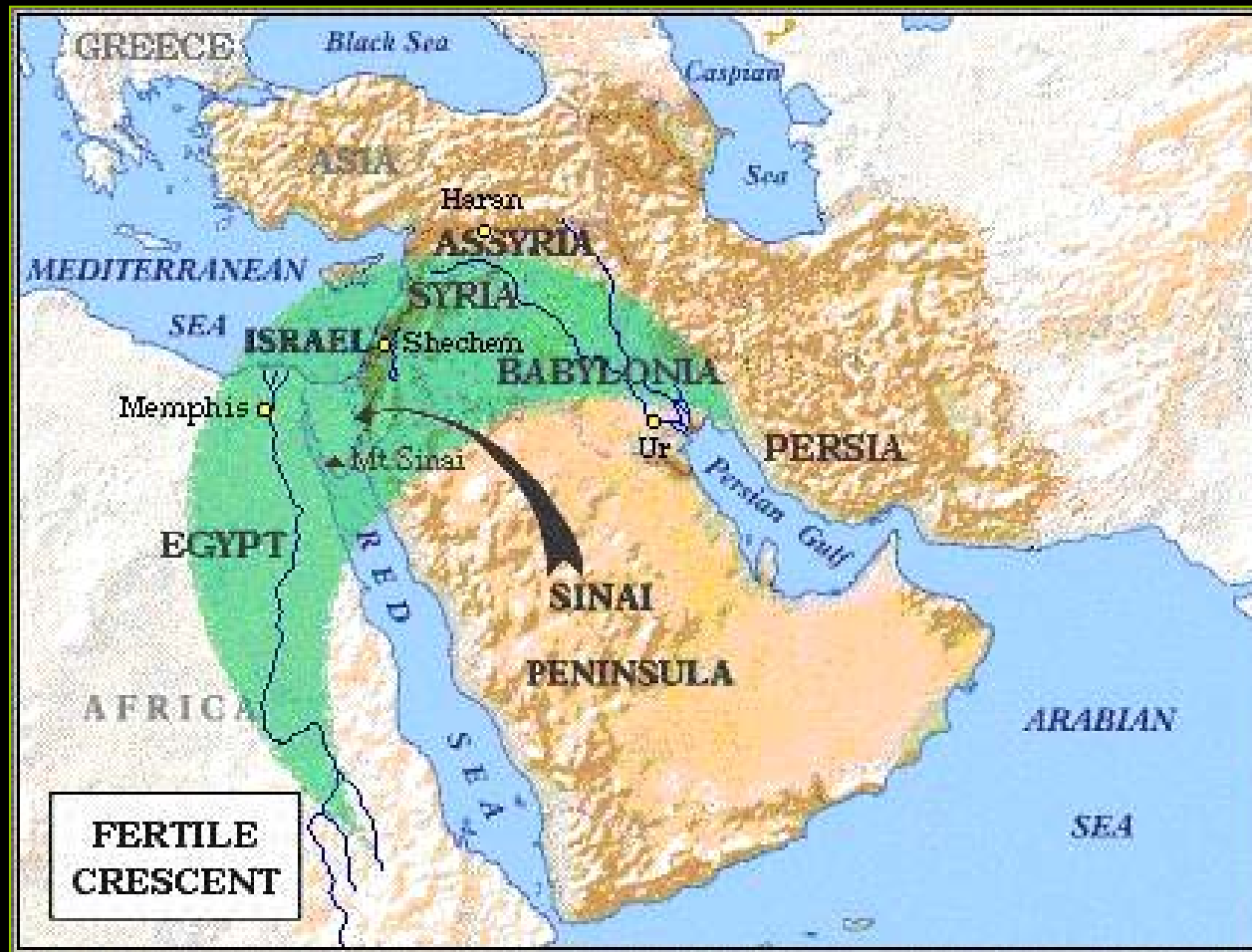
# Desalination Plants



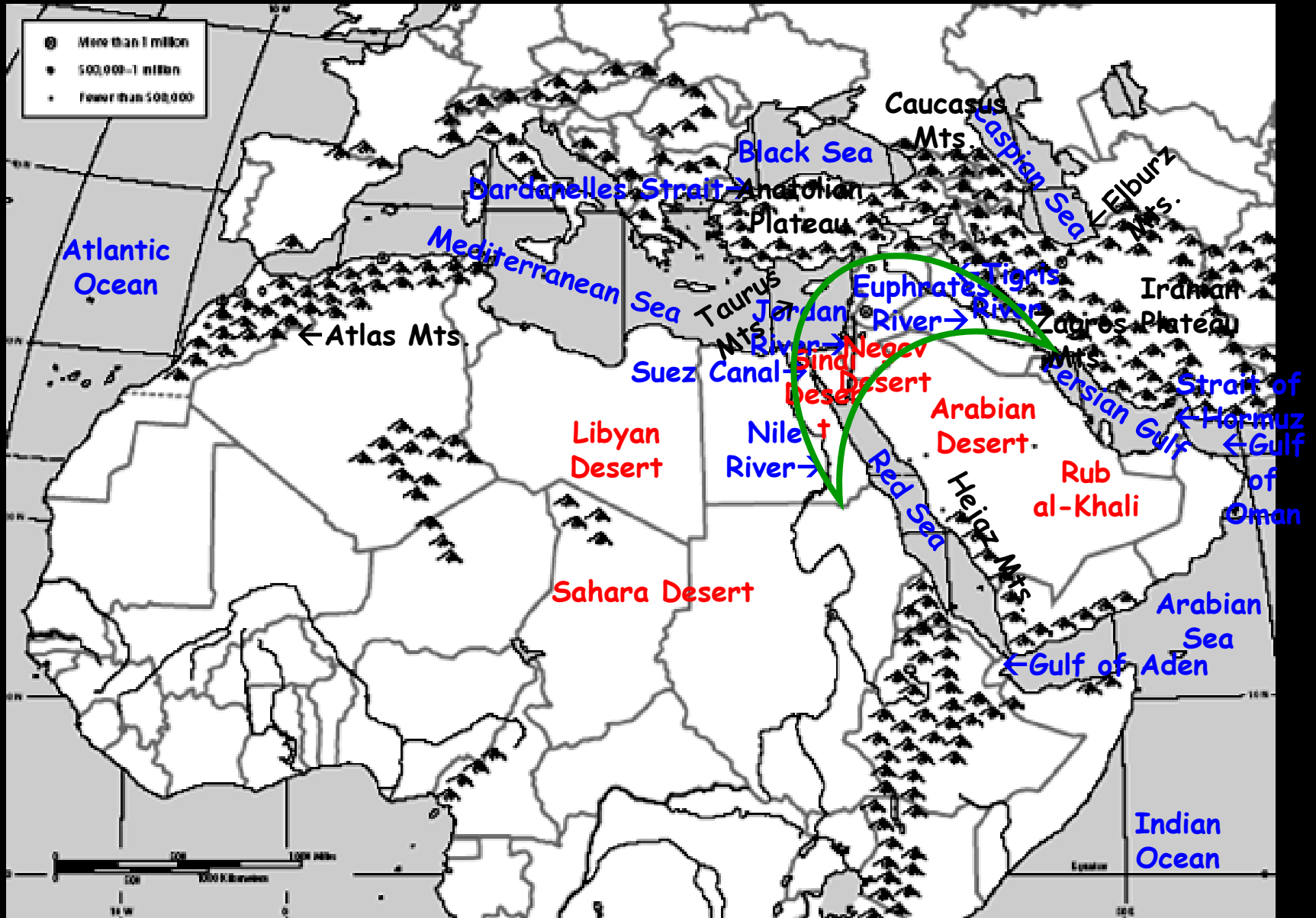
# Fertile Crescent



# The Fertile Crescent



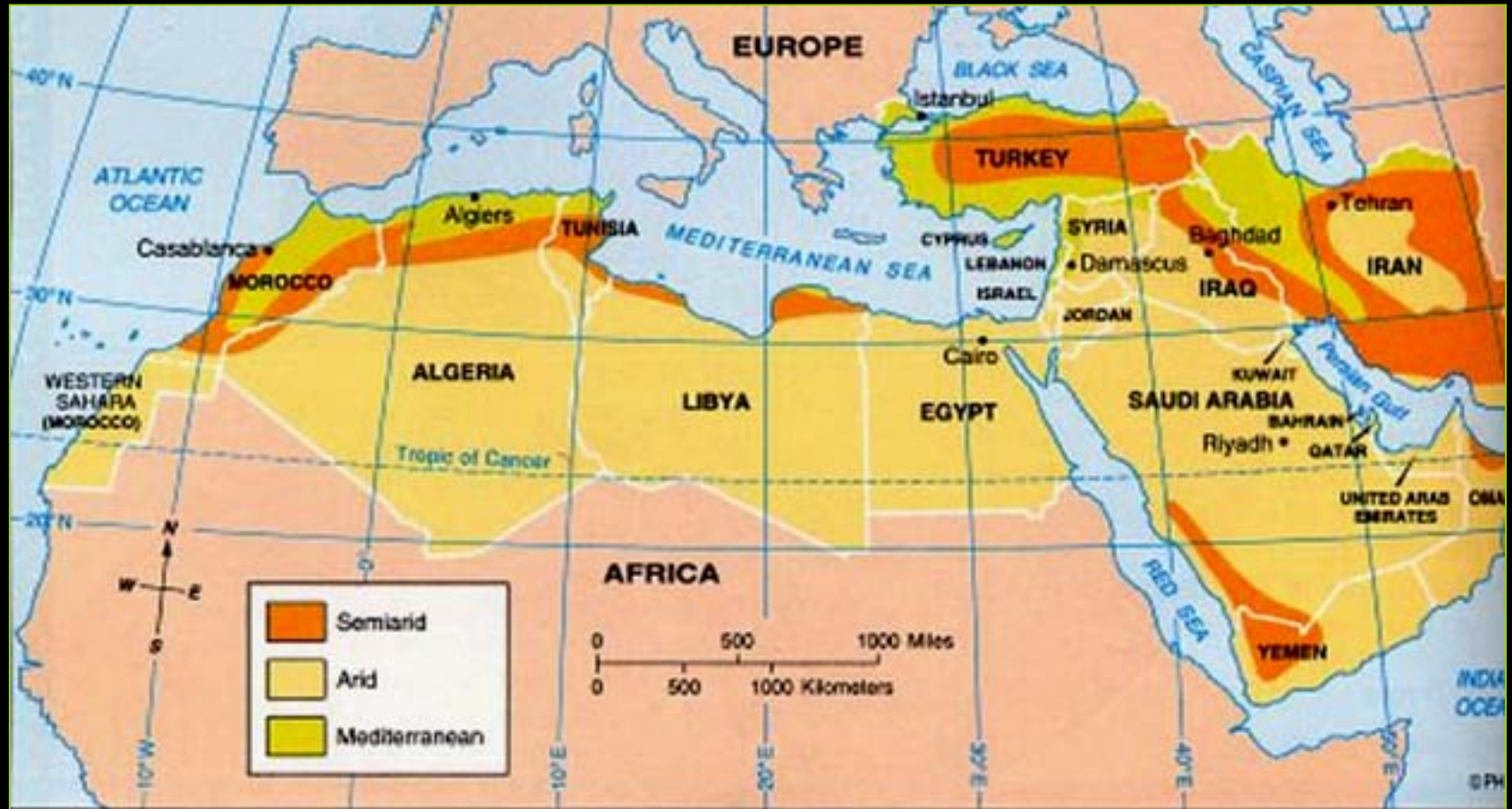
# Completed Map



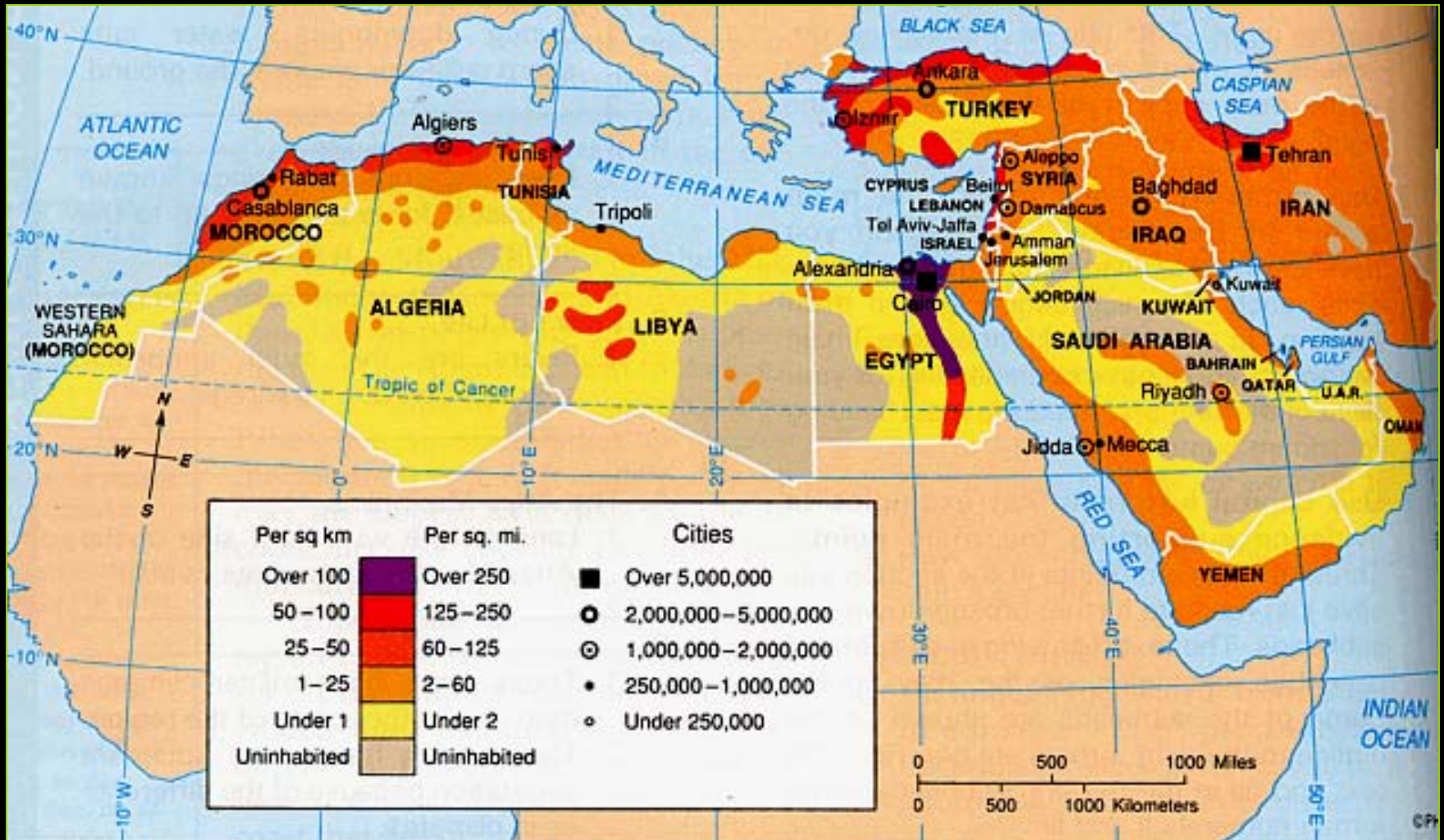
# The Middle East vs. the U. S. Latitude Lines



# Middle East: Climate Regions



# Middle East: Population Density



# Cairo, Egypt:

## Most Populated City in the Middle East

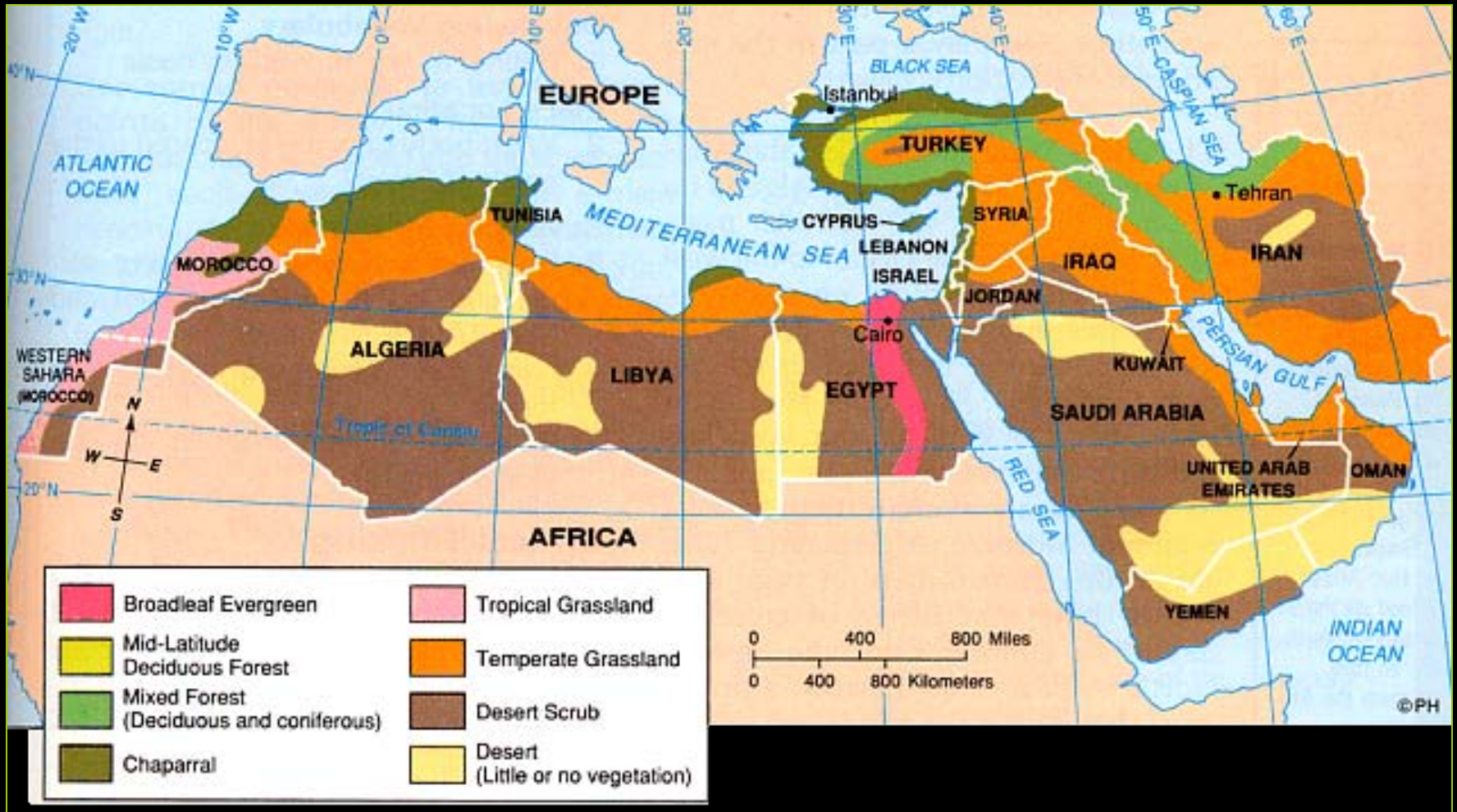


**17,000,000+**  
**People!**

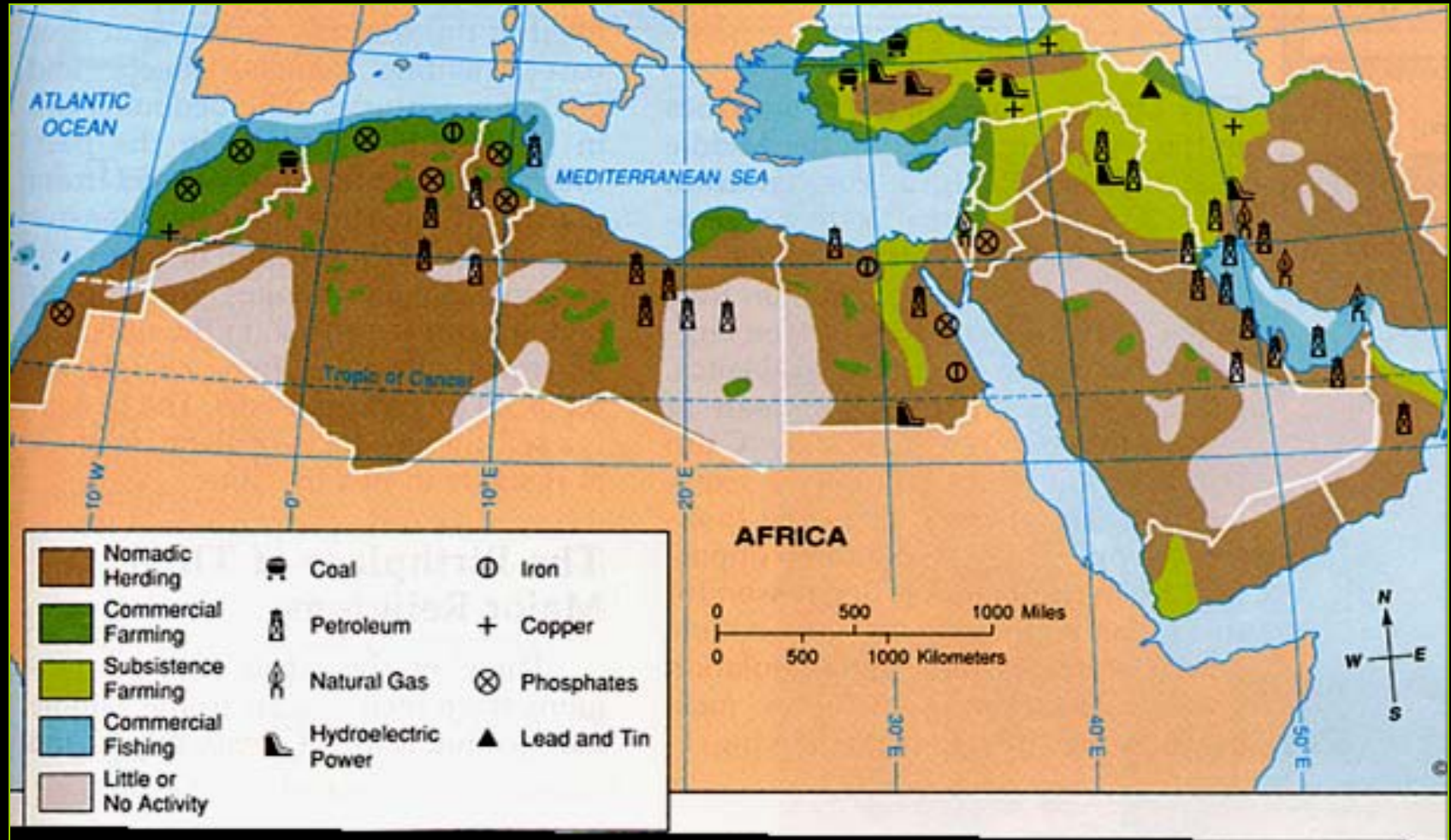




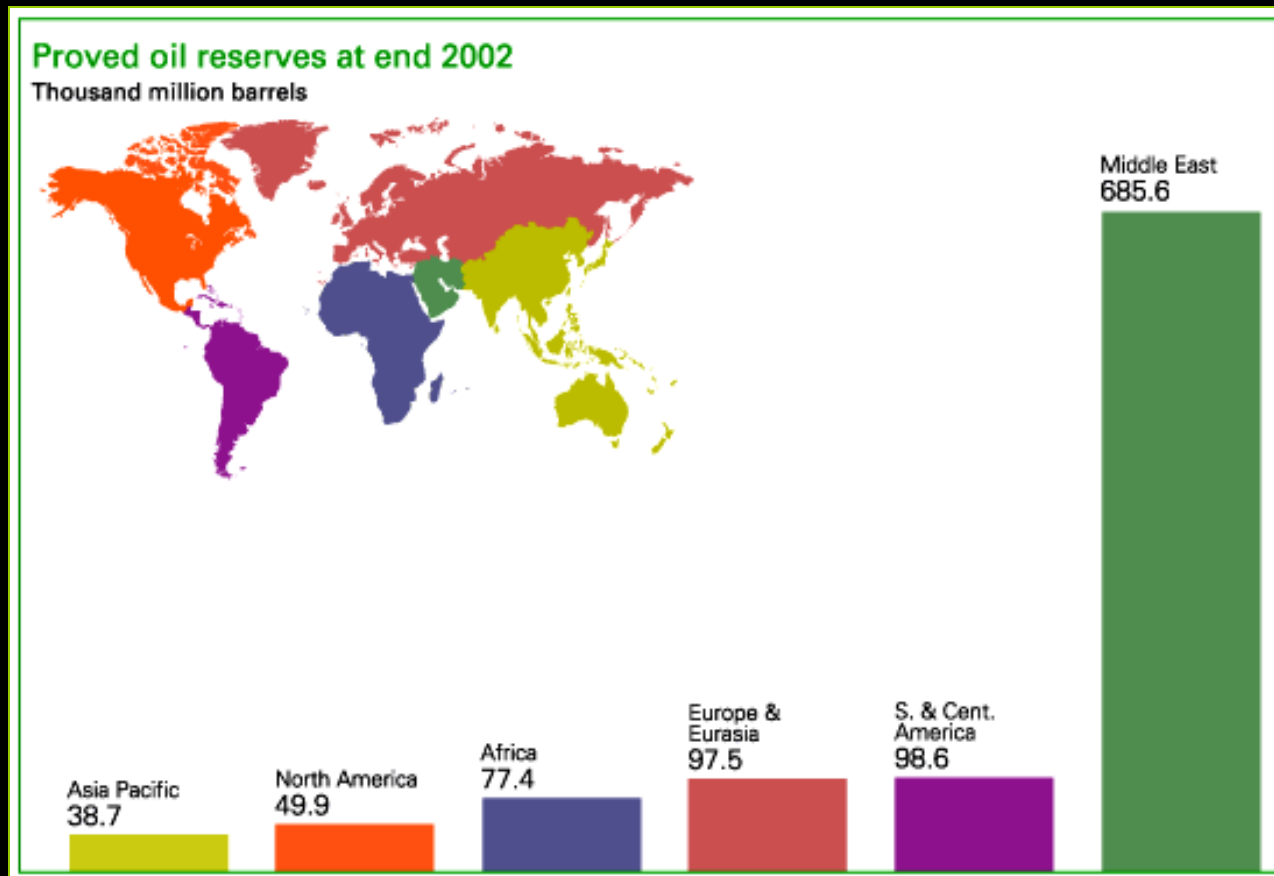
# The Middle East: Natural Vegetation



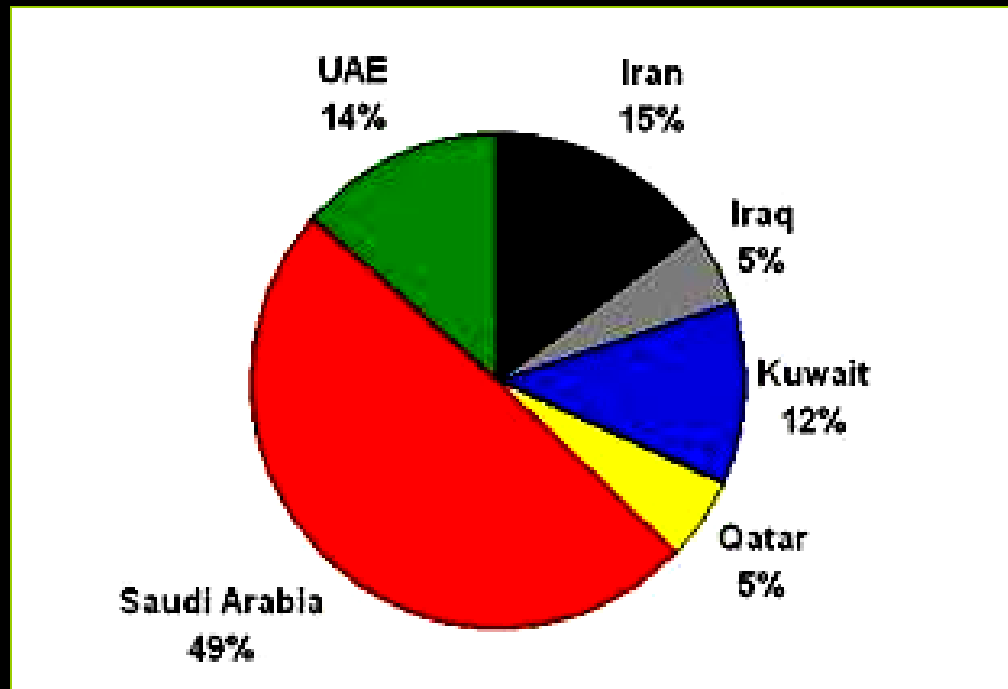
# The Natural Resources of the Middle East



# World Oil Reserves



# Persian Gulf Oil Exports (2003)



# Saudi Oil Fields & Refineries



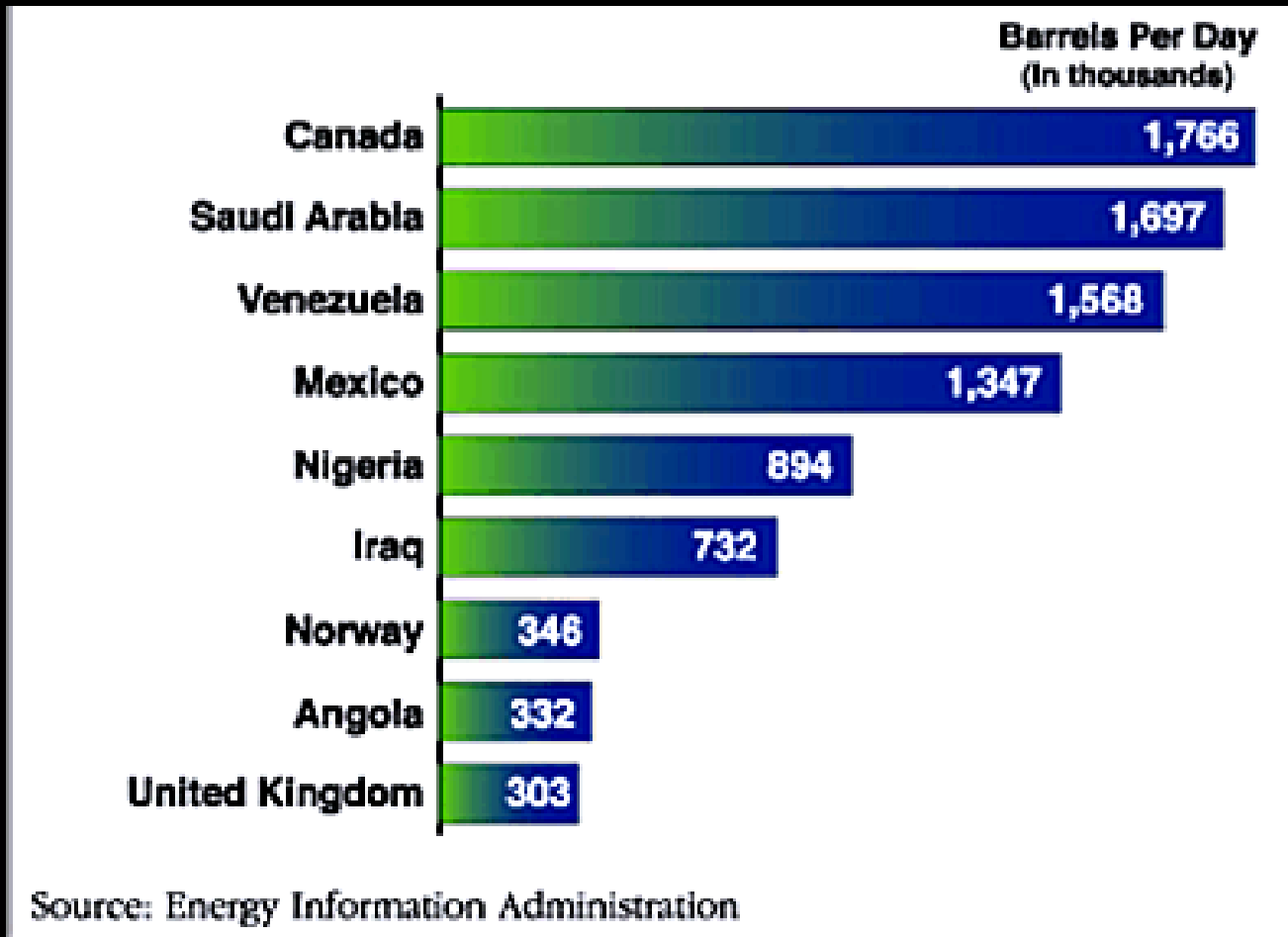
# Kuwait: *An Island Floating on a Sea of Oil*



**Kuwait  
City**



# Leading U. S. Oil Suppliers



**The U. S. imports 30% of its oil needs from the Middle East.**

## Arabic-Speaking Countries and Cultures

*(Useful WebSites)*

[www.al-balsam.com](http://www.al-balsam.com)

[www.saudiaramcoworld.com](http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com)

[http://www.milet.com/milet\\_languages\\_us.asp?lang=Arabic-English](http://www.milet.com/milet_languages_us.asp?lang=Arabic-English)

[www.igra.com](http://www.igra.com) & [www.igrabooks.com](http://www.igrabooks.com)

[www.OnlineIslamicStore.com](http://www.OnlineIslamicStore.com)

[www.fadakbooks.com](http://www.fadakbooks.com)

[www.BizRate.com](http://www.BizRate.com)

**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

[www.nmelrc.org](http://www.nmelrc.org)

[www.worldlanguage.com](http://www.worldlanguage.com)

[www.eapgroup.com/islamic1.htm](http://www.eapgroup.com/islamic1.htm)

<http://Bloom.mit.edu/agakhan/imgdb/index.html>

[www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/IslArt.html](http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/IslArt.html)





## Useful Websites about Korea

<http://www.korea.net>

This website has a nice overview about Korea. Make it sure that you click each section on the top. This website covers not only cultural piece but also the try-out features of Korean language.

<http://english.tour2korea.com>

This website introduces Korea in the point of tourism. This website can be a great tool to explore exotic features and it is the part of a culture.

<http://www.seoulselection.com/index.html>

This is a internet shop for Korean Cultural and Intellectual products. This website gives you the access to purchase Korean products you need. Children's book selection is focused on traditional stories.

<http://www.koreaaward.com/>

The general information about Korea is listed. The information is differently organized from other sites. This site focuses not only tourism but also other information about Korea such as history, art, nature, and religion.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~koreanrs/hangul.html>

Indiana University offers Hangul tutorial program. The Korean alphabet is well introduced through sounds. You can hear clear pronunciation of vowels and consonants associating with visual references.

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/korean.htm>

This site contains details of most alphabets and other writing systems currently in use, as well as a few ancient and invented ones. It also includes information about some of the languages written with those writing systems, multilingual texts, tips on learning languages, a book store, some useful phrases in many different languages, and a ever-growing collection of links to language-related resources. The background of Korean writing system is well explained. In the end of the page, the numerous links relating to Korean language are listed.



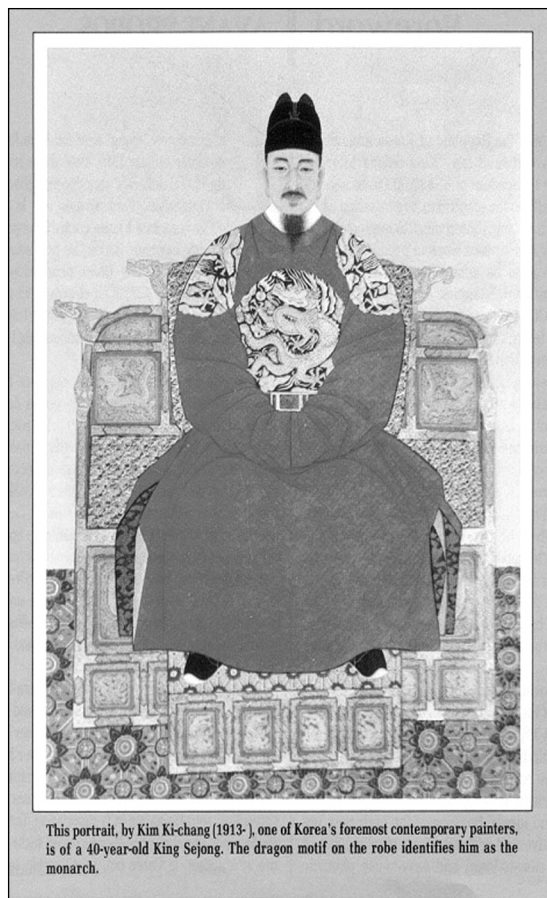
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# The Cultural Work of Sejong the Great

Gari Ledyard

Many kings have ruled in the world since organized political life began, but the list of truly great ones is comparatively short. Any such list would surely have to include a Korean Monarch, Sejong (r. 1418-1450), the fourth king of the Chosŏn Kingdom (sometimes called the Yi dynasty, 1392-1910), who is universally regarded by Koreans as the wisest and most gifted ruler of their long history. The basis for this proud regard lies primarily in Sejong's having invented the Korean alphabet, an absolutely unique system of writing which Koreans consider to be the very soul of their national culture.

Koreans have always known that King Sejong first announced the new alphabet during the winter of 1443-1444, and that he formally proclaimed it as "The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People" (Hunmin Chŏng'um) in October, 1446. But the full modern understanding of this event did not become possible until 1940, when an exhaustive commentary which had been joined to the original proclamation came to light in the small town of Andong, in the southeastern part of Korea. The commentary went into detail on the technical rationale for the shapes of the original twenty-eight letters (only twenty-four are used today) and revealed the alphabet to be the conscious and closely reasoned invention of a highly original mind. Western historians of writing, guided by the evolutionary and diffusionist development of writing in their own tradition, had explained the alphabet – which first came to their attention in 1799 – as a derivative of various known Indian or Tibetan scripts, and even today such uninformed speculation can still be found in western reference literature. But for the most part the world now recognizes this script as the unique and amazing invention that it is. The life and career of its inventor, less well known, deserves attention not only in



connection with the alphabet, but more broadly for its own intrinsic interest.

## Sejong's Accession and Early Reign

Of all Korean kings, Sejong is the most remembered. He is the king who appears on the postage stamps and money, whose name identifies boulevards, cultural centers, foundations and prizes. But the blaze of his halo has turned him into a saintly, mythic figure, and ironically obscured many of his

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achievements and human qualities. To genuinely understand him, it is necessary to turn away from all the statues and hagiography and see this great man securely in his time and place.

The political culture which produced King Sejong, eschewing charisma and personality as the chief criteria of royal greatness, rather emphasized Confucian morality and conformance to the image of the "sage" (sǒng) established in the Confucian classics. Even in his lifetime, the king's persona was sacralized. The most powerful political figures could only approach him with utter deference, while the common people, on the relatively rare occasions when he left his palace for some necessary royal function, actually had to cover their windows and turn away from him lest their gaze sully his sagely presence. Inevitably, however, even this solemn aura had to be broken by the exigencies of practical government and politics. Officials could argue vigorously with him over policy and administrative matters; indeed, the Confucian concept of loyal remonstrance obligated them to do so. Sejong was denounced, for example, for spending so much of his workday on the alphabet, and there were plenty of other matters over which he and the bureaucracy were from time to time at loggerheads. In such circumstances, the king's personality and character could hardly remain hidden. Even the common people, though deprived of direct impressions or "news" in the formal sense, could hardly have been unaware of what manner of man sat on the nation's throne.

Very little is known of Sejong's early life. He was born on May 7, 1397, the third son of Yi Pangwǒn, himself the son of Yi Sǒnggye (King T'aejo), the founder of the Chosǒn dynasty. Yi Pangwǒn had played a major role as aide to his father in the establishment of the new dynasty, and after he himself came to throne as King T'aejong (r. 1400-1418) he laid strong administrative and political foundations for the new state. In 1404, T'aejong

selected his eldest son, Prince Yangnyǒng, as crown prince, and the younger Sejong (then known as Prince Ch'ungnyǒng) would seem to have been destined for obscurity along with his ten other brothers. But in the end it was Prince Yangnyǒng who faded into obscurity. He remained crown prince almost to the end of his father's reign, but was suddenly deposed in 1418 and replaced by his younger brother Sejong. Less than two months later, T'aejong abdicated and Sejong came to the throne (September 7, 1418). He was at that time twenty-one years old.

The reasons for this sudden turnabout are unclear. Given that Prince Yangnyǒng had been criticized for his weakness of will and indecisive character, the conventional thinking is that Sejong's superior intelligence simply made him the more appropriate choice to succeed his father. But if personal character had been the sole criterion, that would have been apparent much earlier; why wait for years to effect the change? It is the very suddenness of the change, and the quickly following abdication, that compel attention. They suggest that T'aejong intended to surprise his bureaucracy. With more than one qualified heir, some senior officials, anxious for more power for the bureaucracy, might have wanted the weaker Yangnyǒng to succeed. Doubtless many of them, anticipating his succession during his fifteen years as designated successor, had cultivated his friendship. For T'aejong to now replace him with Ch'ungnyǒng (Sejong), and then abdicate while he himself still had a few healthy years left, would enable him to decisively set the course of the kingdom for decades to come. If such was indeed T'aejong's plan, he succeeded admirably.

When Sejong came to the throne in 1418, the administrative and political structure of the Chosǒn dynasty had already been laid out by T'aejong. Sejong kept that structure running smoothly, and refined it from time to time, but thanks to

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T'aejong's foundations he did not find it necessary to be constantly preoccupied with administrative or political matters. But neither did he waste this stability by resting on his oars and giving himself over to a life of ease and comfort, as he might easily have done. Although he did not leave an explicit personal declaration of the policies he would follow, numerous casual remarks and the overall results of his reign allow us to see that he wanted to build a state in which Confucian institutions in both public and private life would be carefully cultivated, in which defense and security would be prudently attended to, in which agriculture, the "foundation of the state," would be brought to new levels of strength, and in which culture and education would be developed in a manner to compare favorably with the standards of the leading Chinese dynasties. National pride was an important element in these plans. Korean culture was not merely to imitate Chinese culture, but was consciously seen to require a distinctive Korean dimension. And this would serve the highest political purposes: in an international system in which Korea was in suzerain relationship to the Ming dynasty in China, Korea would create a self-defined standard of Confucian culture that would support a separate Korean legitimacy independent of China.

From Sejong's youth his intelligence and studiousness had been remarked by all, and in his encouragement of learning after he became king he was as much a participant as the presiding spirit. To serve as the guiding institution for his cultural policies, Sejong looked to an existing institution called the "Hall of the Wise" (Chiphyŏn chŏn). Established in 1399, it had languished on organizational charts until 1420, when Sejong reorganized it as an active organ of applied research, a kind of fifteenth-century Korean think tank. He staffed it with the best and the brightest young men that he could find. In 1426, a program of research grants was established, in which young men of unusual gifts could devote

themselves to advanced study away from the daily pressures of an official career. The library for the Hall of the Wise was completed in 1428. Education and scholarship were fostered throughout the kingdom, and books were collected and purchased, often in China, occasionally in Japan. In every way, Sejong worked to set a scholarly yet also pragmatic tone for his government.

The attention given by Sejong to study and research did not detract from his primary duties as king; in no sense was he a scholarly escapist. He opened his court each day at dawn (as was the custom in East Asian kingship), and after the ceremonial visits of his senior officials went directly to work on state affairs. He rarely accepted the opinions or arguments of petitioning officials without asking questions and contributing his own remarks, and not infrequently these were more to the point. In thousands of recorded discussions of this kind, he showed an evenness of judgment and a lack of prejudice. On one occasion, during a regular review of the national statutes, the question arose whether polo should be designated as an official support for the military. The relevant officials were against it on Confucian grounds (it supposedly diverted officers from full attention to their duties), and also because leaders of the preceding Koryŏ dynasty had reportedly pranced at polo while the Mongols were burning the country. Sejong admitted that the Koryŏ rulers had played it excessively, even to the detriment of the state, but he could see no harm in it as a military sport and indeed confessed his admiration for the skill and agility required of good players. (It probably helped that T'aejo, Chosŏn's founder and Sejong's grandfather, had excelled at the game.) He insisted that polo be reflected in the national statutes, "and, if later, people would denounce it, let them not play it." Such examples of flexibility and common sense gleam like scattered gems throughout the *Sejong sillok*, the official chronicle of his reign.

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## Sejong's Cultural and Scientific Projects

In his own time and later, Sejong was famous for the number and quality of his cultural projects. It would be quite impossible to describe these at length, but a short summary will at least suggest the range of activity and the close involvement of the king himself in the work.

To begin with the humane sciences, Sejong ordered the compilation or revision of the official annals of the reigns of his three predecessors on Chosŏn's throne, and followed closely the activities of the "Spring and Autumn Hall," which held the official archives of the state. He established the procedures by which, after the death of each king, that king's official chronicle, or *sillok*, was to be compiled, and he began the practice of making extra copies for storage in four branch archives in different regions of the country. Because of this foresight we still have these records today, the main Spring and Autumn Hall copies having been destroyed in 1592 during the disorders caused by the Hideyoshi invasions. Beginning in the reign of Sejong's son Sejo (1455-1468), the annals were printed. Today, the collected annals of all of Chosŏn's kings over 518 years take up over 115,000 pages printed in the traditional format, and are collected in a modern edition (the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*) of 31,000 pages in 51 large volumes. Another of Sejong's historical projects was the compilation of the official history of the preceding dynasty, Koryŏ. Although much valuable source material had already been lost or dispersed by his time, and in spite of lingering political problems involving the treatment of some key events and personalities of late Koryŏ, the *Koryŏ sa* is remarkable for its coverage, coherence and organization. Both in this dynastic history and in the royal annals, the historiographical methodology was influenced by long-established Chinese and Korean precedents,

but the historiographical quality of the work inspired by Sejong is outstanding by any criterion and shows a special dimension that can be credited to him.

The geographical projects of Sejong were of equal scope. In 1434, detailed maps of the kingdom were prepared, although they have unfortunately not survived. They were based on previous cartography and records, but principally on a thorough survey of the nation completed two years earlier. A final, comprehensive gazeteer based on this work can be found in the appendices to Sejong's annals, and is now a rich source of information on early Chosŏn administration and local lore. A draft of the original survey for a single province still survives, showing the thoroughness of Sejong's overall plan. The survey recorded the formal details of administrative geography: population, irrigation facilities, key economic crops, local manufactures, regional defense, education, important mountains and waterways, communications, boundaries, regional distances accurate to the foot, and useful information on the social and family system. All this provided a solid foundation for later maps and gazeteers.

Agriculture and agronomy attracted Sejong's interest at an early date. He ordered surveys of agricultural conditions throughout the kingdom, the collection and improvement of cropping techniques, irrigation methods, and tools, and the comparative study of Chinese agriculture. Several Chinese farm handbooks were edited in versions incorporating local Korean practice and distributed throughout the nation. In order to more accurately measure Korean agricultural productivity and to more fairly assess crop value for taxation purposes, rain gauges were devised and installed, careful rainfall records were maintained in each district town, and soil types were studied and classified according to specifications of six grades of fertility. This work not only rationalized

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and enhanced the national taxation system, but improved the quality of life for the peasantry.

Medicine and pharmacology were other fields in which Sejong's busy academicians labored with much energy. As in agriculture, this research involved extensive local surveys of regional medical practice and medically efficacious herbs and substances. Between 1443 and 1445, a giant medical encyclopedia in 365 volumes was organized and completed. Although it does not survive today, its rich research provided a solid foundation for the later *Tong'ŭi pogam* (1610), which even today is frequently seen on the reference shelves of practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine throughout East Asia.

Sejong had a deep interest in music, and assigned a brilliant musicologist named Pak Yŏn to conduct research in classical Chinese and Korean musical theory, court music and musical instruments. Much new music was composed for official court functions; the scores for some of these compositions have been preserved in Sejong's annals. This research resulted in the recovery or reconstruction of older music and musical instruments, and is today highly regarded by all who specialize in the classical music of East Asia.

Nor were mathematics and the observational sciences ignored. Beginning in 1433, Sejong's astronomers, led by Chŏng Ch'ŏl, conducted studies of the various calendrical systems that had been used in China or Korea. The results – laid out in all their mathematical detail in the appendices to Sejong's annals – were embodied in the design of a battery of observational and demonstrational instruments developed during the 1430s, and in a spectacular clepsydra (water clock) built in the palace to indicate the nation's standard time. This work too served as a foundation for later research, contributing particularly to the weight-driven clock and demonstrational armillary sphere built in the 1660s, and a privately-made weight-driven

clock which also incorporated some later western features derived from Jesuit astronomical works compiled in China.

Military science was advanced by studies of earlier works on strategy and tactics, and by developmental research in artillery and pyrotechnical weapons. In the Sejong annals we find an interesting series of technical reports sent to the king directly from the proving grounds.

Printing technology had a long developmental tradition in Korea, going back to the world's earliest known xylographically (i.e., by wood block) printed text, dated 751, and the world's first cast metal movable typography, achieved in 1252. The Chosŏn kingdom produced its first font of metal movable type in 1403. Three fonts appeared during Sejong's reign – in 1420, 1434, 1436, and one just after his death, in 1450; of these, the "*kabin*" font of 1434 has received the greatest acclaim from printing connoisseurs and historians. Printing, however, is more than just fonts. Many problems involving inks, papers, matrix materials and design, and other areas, had to be identified and solved in order to make type-casting technology actually practicable on a wide scale. The bulk of this experimentation was carried out during Sejong's reign.

This background sketch of Sejong's various scientific and cultural projects demonstrates a remarkable procedural consistency. The king would identify an area for special research, designate the researchers from among people of appropriate talent or the staff of the Hall of the Wise, and follow the progress of the project through reports and his own personal reviews. In some cases the projects ended with a formal report or publication (as in the case of the provincial gazetteers or the scores of the court music), or with the design and production of certain items (as shown by the rain gauges, musical instruments, cannons). Sejong is the only king of the Chosŏn dynasty to have special appendices in his official annals devoted

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ed to such projects. In the modern edition these take up several hundred closely printed pages.

### **A Political Problem in Mid-Reign**

Although Sejong was a very strong monarch, the Korean monarchy itself had serious institutional and political limitations. In theory, the king was not only the head of government, whose person was sacred and whose word was law, but the very father of the state, the apex of the hierarchical pyramid that formed the structure of both government and society. In practice, however, he was closely checked by the higher bureaucracy, especially by formal organs of remonstrance which had the responsibility of scrutinizing the actions of the king and the government as a whole. In addition, the official royal tutors, nominally in charge of the king's Confucian formation, had traditionally exercised remonstrance functions as well. The king who wished to execute policy had to steer it between all these censorial forces and also among various administrative organs. In China, which also had a Confucian system of government, there was a despotic tradition that allowed the ruler to override and even to dismiss, humiliate, or even execute such critics. But in Korea the bureaucracy had genuine countervailing power that usually ruled out such monarchical caprice; the king had to fight and persuade. There were times, indeed, when the king seemed to be all alone in his government.

One such case was the controversy over the crown prince's administrative powers, which consumed so much of the court's time and energy in the last thirteen years of Sejong's reign. From around the mid-1430s, Sejong did not enjoy good health, and in 1437 he was sufficiently ill to announce that he wished to turn the lesser matters of state over to the crown prince, reserving for his own decision only high political matters and

appointments and national security issues. His official tutors, who were concurrently high appointees in the various ministries and departments, argued that this was too sensitive and radical an innovation, one strongly opposed by all the traditions and precedents of Confucian rule. The filibuster was so vigorous that Sejong had to drop the matter. But three months later he raised it again, this time with his chief state councillor, the venerable Hwang H'ui, complaining specifically of rheumatic difficulties. Hwang, who was then seventy-four and would live to be ninety, seems to have been too healthy to understand the king's problem. He assured Sejong that he was only forty, in the prime of life, and that in such prosperous and stable times as Chosŏn then enjoyed there was no precedent for turning responsibilities over to the crown prince. Hwang's reservations were not without some merit; such an administrative arrangement, which came close to dual monarchy, was perhaps easier to propose than to carry out. It was not always easy to decide what was "major" and what was "minor," and bureaucrats could understandably have cause to worry about the consequences of misjudging such a question. The old Confucian adage was: "There are neither two suns in the sky, nor two rulers in the kingdom." So on this occasion too, Sejong dropped the matter. Twice in the next two years he pressed further for administrative help from the crown prince, but still in vain. "In two or three years, you will have to follow my wishes," he warned his officials.

But nothing happened in two or three years, and Sejong's health did not improve. In 1442 he again raised the issue, revealing that his eyes were troubling him so much that he could not keep up with paperwork. Treatments at the hot springs of Ich'ŏn had given relief but no cure. But again the senior bureaucracy turned a deaf ear. Finally, in 1443, tired of any further discussion and having exhausted every possibility for harmonious com-

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promise, Sejong issued an edict, composed by himself and citing precedents from Korean and Chinese history, in which he decreed that henceforth the crown prince would handle all but major decisions for the last half of every month, and that his ministers would all assemble and swear their loyalty to the crown prince. This edict hit the court like a shock, unleashing all the pressures that had been building since 1437. Protests flowed in from all agencies of the government. The personnel of the six administrative departments closed their offices and marched in a body to the palace. Memorials and protests arrived in a flood. What was new, and intolerable to the officials, was that the crown prince would actually preside at court. This involved extremely complicated issues of precedent and ceremonial. The very relationship between lord (*kun*) and liege (*sin*), at the inner core of Confucian concern, was at stake. But now it was Sejong's turn to be implacable. Each memorial was no sooner presented than it was denied, in spite of the fact that many of the protests were reasonable enough in raising the fundamental problems that would flow from the division of royal power.

The king's determination now set the stage for a compromise along the lines originally proposed, even though the actual effecting of the plan involved two more years of haggling. Finally, in June of 1445, the crown prince began officially to handle routine administrative affairs. The drain all of this had caused on Sejong's already poor health can be imagined, as can the tensions that had been created in the relationship between king and court.

The last years of this controversy overlapped the period – roughly 1442 to 1446 – when Sejong was working intensively on his alphabet. Inevitably, that too would become a matter of bitter debate, not least because the king had assigned certain administrative details concerning alphabetic research and publication to the Office of

Deliberation (*ũisa ch'õng*), the very same organ that, under the crown prince, would decide the so-called "minor affairs."

### The Invention of the Alphabet

The alphabet project developed in the same way that the other cultural projects had: a need was identified, researchers were appointed, a final report was published, and actual publication projects using the alphabet were launched. There were only two factors that were new: Sejong himself was the chief expert and principal researcher, and the project was marked by controversy from the day it was announced.

The need for an effective Korean script must have become evident to Sejong from some of his earlier projects. For example, in 1431, in connection with the pharmacological survey, numerous Korean plants with no standard Chinese name had to be written in phonetic transcriptions using Chinese characters. An alphabet would have obviated that problem. In 1433, a survey of popular songs and ballads was conducted "in all towns and districts" by the Board of Rites, which counted music among its many responsibilities. The results of this project are not known, but surely there would have been many problems in transcribing the Korean words of the songs. Korea had a long tradition of writing Korean vernacular poetry in the phonetic medium of Chinese characters, but no consistent notation method had ever evolved even for the standard language, let alone for the dialectal needs of the "towns and districts." (Such a development had occurred in Japan, as shown by the Chinese-character-based script known as *manyõgana*. But such a development could not occur in Korea because the phonology of its language was vastly more complex than that of Japanese.)



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Then there was the matter of standardizing the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters. This question seems to have aroused considerable concern in the early Chosŏn dynasty. In 1416, in King T'aejong's time, a Korean riming dictionary, or possibly a Korean edition of a Chinese riming dictionary, had been compiled, but it evidently did not meet Korean needs, because Sejong made a renewed attack on the problem. Before he died in 1450, his chief phonological scholar, Sin Sukchu (1417-1475), had carried out at his direction studies of the phonological systems of both the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and had edited a Korean dictionary, entitled "The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country" (*Tongguk chŏngŭn*), which was intended to define correct Sino-Korean pronunciation. All of this demonstrates on the part of Sejong not only a clear concern with Sino-Korean phonology, but also an unusual level of expertise in this very rarefied area of Chinese studies.

The Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters was an area of concern for scholars and the highly educated members of the bureaucracy. Yet they were but a small minority of the total population of Korea. What of the common people? Sejong also had their particular needs very much in mind. In 1444, in justifying his alphabet to his critics, he urged the necessity of reforming legal procedure in connection with the recording of testimony: those who could not read the complicated Chinese character transcriptions of witnesses' statements were put at a serious disadvantage, one that he proposed to rectify by using the alphabet to record the testimony in the original vernacular. And his proclamation of the alphabet in 1446 emphasized his special distress that ordinary people were unable to read or write.

This royal concern for the literacy of the common people seems to have been first manifested in 1434, on the occasion of the publication of a collection of morality tales that Sejong had

ordered compiled in order to promote consciousness of Confucian ethics. This work, entitled "The Three Bonds and True Examples of their Practice, with Illustrations" (*Samgang haengsil to*), was concerned with the three basic Confucian relationships: those between parents and children, seniors and juniors, and husband and wife. Three hundred and thirty inspiring stories exemplifying these "three bonds" were culled from Chinese and Korean history and rewritten in Chinese versions, each filling a single printed page. But Sejong clearly saw the essential problem: if the people could not read Chinese, how could they be uplifted by the stories? Adding an illustration for each story was helpful but hardly met the difficulty, as the king acknowledged. "Since the common people generally do not know Chinese characters," he lamented, "even when this book is distributed how will they be able to act upon it unless someone shows them how to read it? ... Let everyone, in the capital and out, exert themselves in the arts of teaching and instruction; let everyone seek out people of learning and sophistication, without regard to class status, strongly urging them to teach people to read, not excluding women of all ages ... May the hearts of the people profit by morning and advance by evening, let there be none who do not feel an opening of their natural goodness."

What Sejong evidently had in mind at that time was a kind of nationwide tutorial in the text of "The Three Bonds." His prescription followed the traditional Korean reading pedagogy for Chinese: using Sino-Korean pronunciation, one teaches the student to pronounce a Chinese text out loud; the student then memorizes it and absorbs instruction on its meaning; and as the same procedure is repeated with more and more texts, he or she gradually learns to read. While Sejong's wishes were noble enough, he himself surely realized that they were unrealistic. The

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idea for a new and different approach – the direct promotion of national literacy through the creation of a national phonetic script – may indeed have been conceived at this time. In any case, we know for certain that a decade later, within a few weeks of his announcement of the alphabet, Sejong was talking of a Korean translation of "The Three Bonds."

However that may be, no sign of any work on the alphabet is evident during those nine or ten years. But in late 1443 or early 1444, Sejong suddenly announced to his court that he had completed a phonetic script of twenty-eight letters which could be functionally classified as "initial, medial, or terminal sounds" and arranged in syllabic groups. Soon after this we hear of a demonstration class of clerks being assembled to learn the script, printing technicians preparing alphabetic textual material (unfortunately not described), the launching of a major research inquiry into the phonology of a Chinese riming dictionary, *Yun hui* (compiled 1292), and of course the plans for "The Three Bonds" in Korean. These announcements had a powerful effect on the capital; indeed, they precipitated a political crisis.

It seems that Sejong's alphabet plans had found major opposition among the senior officials, including some even in the Hall of the Wise. In fact, Sejong had found it necessary to go around the Hall and locate the phonological research project in the Office of Deliberation. The academic attack was led by Ch'oe Malli, who had also been a prominent opponent of the proposed administrative role for the crown prince. Ch'oe at that time occupied the highest research position in the Hall. From his long protest memorial, sent to the king early on March 5, 1444, we can see that he was basically an elitist who believed that literacy meant Chinese literacy and should be the privilege of the ruling class. To him, a phonetic script was a "bar-

barian matter" and not something a cultured country should have. He protested against using the "unattested" alphabet to "lightly revise the rime books already perfected by the ancients." He thought that mass literacy would destabilize Korea's social order, and he was skeptical that accurate transcription of trial testimony could bring any improvement in the quality of justice. He complained that Sejong had acted precipitously, without consulting his high officials, and lamented that the king was spending so much time on such things when he should be attending to the real business of government, and that even the crown prince was being diverted from his absorption in "the learning of the sages. "

Sejong was clearly angered by these arguments. He summoned Ch'oe Malli and the six academicians who had joined in his protest and point by point demonstrated the errors in their thinking. "How," he wondered as he looked over Ch'oe's memorial, "can these words be the informed and reasoned words of Confucian men? What utterly useless, commonplace Confucian men!" Although the king had his way, the views voiced by Ch'oe were widely held in officialdom and in the upper class, and would have a significant effect on the early history of the alphabet.

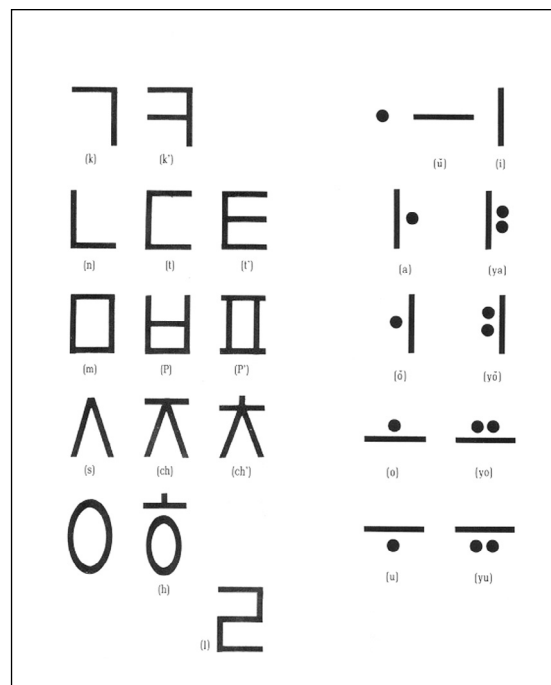
During the following two years, the phonological research went forward, the alphabet was refined, and various orthographical problems were confronted. But the most valuable product of this period was a thorough theoretical defense of the script, carefully conceived on Confucian principles and based on a highly sophisticated understanding of phonetic articulation. It was entitled "The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People, with Explanations and Examples" (*Hunmin chōngūm haerye*). This was the commentary mentioned earlier, the long-lost text of which was found in the old house in Andong in 1940.

Among the many fascinating details in this doc-

ument is an explanation of the shapes of the letters. The seventeen consonants are classified according to the five basic categories established by Chinese phonologists during the eleventh century. These were velars, dentals, labials, alveolars, and laryngals. The letters for the velar sounds *k* and *k'* were based on an upper-right angular shape which was said to represent the outline of a tongue pressed against the soft palate, where these consonants were articulated. The dental letters *n*, *t*, and *t'* were based on a lower-left angle, representing the outline of the tip of the tongue touching the gum in back of the teeth. The labial letters for *m*, *p*, and *p'* were built on a square, representing the mouth and lips. The graphs for alveolar sounds *s*, *z*, *ch*, and *ch'* were based on the shape of an inverted "v", said to represent the incisor teeth which are clearly visible during articulation of these sounds (the Chinese name for this category was "incisor sounds"). Finally, the laryngeal letters for *h*, and the glottal stop, etc., were based on a circle, representing the larynx.

Vocalization was analyzed in a three-part scheme, front vowels symbolized by vertical line, mid-vowels by a horizontal line, and back vowels by a thick dot. The eleven individual vowel signs and fifteen diphthong combinations were then constructed using various combinations of these three strokes.

Thus Sejong's system was not only based on the best linguistic science of his day, it literally engendered that science. And his recognition of an independent phonetic category for vowels went completely beyond the Chinese theory from which he had started. On the other hand, his provision that the letters, though they constituted a genuine alphabet, be written in syllabic blocks rather than sequentially in a line, shows an accommodation to the basic East Asian habit of writing a single syllable as a single graphic unit. No other alphabet in the world has such a feature.



The commentary went on to rationalize the phonological structure of the alphabet in terms of what might be called a Confucian physics, which in turn was correlated, in the Confucian manner, with ethics, music, and the sequence of the seasons. This section, not easy to summarize, was designed to convince men trained in Confucianism of the fundamental appropriateness of a phonetic script.

The commentary continued with orthographical explanations concerning initial consonants, vowels, and final consonants, and laid out a system of diacritics to indicate pitch levels, or accents. It concluded with a long list of sample Korean words demonstrating possible combinations of the letters.

The Korean alphabet is thus revealed to be a script like no other. It was conceived and invented by a true genius, and explained in theoretical terms that, for their time and place, can be called scientific without hesitation or scruple. Phonetic evolution and various orthographic reforms since Sejong's time have rendered three of the original consonants and one of the vowels obsolete, and the letter shapes, originally rather geometric, have gradually

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become streamlined. But in its fundamental design and structure, the alphabet has not changed since it was invented.

But it proved to be easier to create a theoretically ingenious alphabet than it was to change social and cultural attitudes toward writing and literacy. It is true that the Buddhists, under the patronage of Sejong and especially of his son Sejo (r. 1455-1468), quickly realized the benefits of an alphabet for the production of popular translations of religious texts, and that women took up the alphabet almost immediately for purposes of informal writing and correspondence. But neither the Buddhists nor women had much influence in public education. Sejong tried to encourage Confucian scholars to use the alphabet for translation and educational work, but it was nearly a century before there was any significant response to his initiative. By the early seventeenth century the alphabet began to have an impact on the growth of vernacular literature, but in the main classical Chinese still held sway. Predictably, opposition to the alphabet was the greatest in the bureaucracy, which not only retained Chinese in its traditional exclusive role until the latter part of the nineteenth century, but even continued to favor the old character-based systems over the alphabet in many vernacular applications. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, however, trends in Korean society and the gradual breakdown of the traditional class structure brought major changes in political and cultural attitudes. The vigorous growth of Korean nationalism created many champions of native Korean culture, and of all the treasures that they claimed from the national past, the alphabet was the first and the greatest. Sejong's wisdom was recognized and his vision vindicated, and in the end his "Correct Sounds" enjoyed the respect and gratitude of all Korean people.

For approximately the last hundred years, Koreans have called their alphabet by the name "Han'gŭl, " or "Han script." The syllable *han* is sig-

nificantly ambiguous, yielding three different but legitimate translations for the name: "the Korean script," "the great script" and "the one script." This last reflects the desire of most modern Koreans to use Han'gŭl unmixed with Chinese characters, which because of the Chinese origin of a part of the Korean vocabulary was once a popular option but which in more recent times has encountered steady resistance throughout the culture.

### Sejong's Last Years

Throughout his reign, Sejong had worked to perfect Confucian institutions in government and administration, and to strengthen Confucian values in Korean education and life. Although in this he followed the long established policies of T'aejo and T'aejong, he also was in accord with his own deeply felt convictions, nurtured by a lifetime of study and research in the Confucian classics and in Korean and Chinese literature, music and history. But he was not because of this hostile to Buddhism, in the manner of most Korean scholars and government officials throughout the long history of the Chosŏn dynasty. Indeed, in the last years of his life, Sejong turned more and more to the comforts of Buddhism, and this increased the distance that had been growing between him and many of his senior officials. Sejong had actually shown Buddhist sympathies early in his reign, and the agencies of remonstrance had fought him on this ever since 1426, when they petitioned him to have removed from his throne hall a Buddhist prayer engraved in the exotic Siddharn script on one of the ceiling beams. On that occasion Sejong had gone along with their wishes, and he also followed earlier dynastic precedents in applying strict standards for the licensing of monks, severely restricting the number of Buddhist temples that could be maintained throughout the country, and

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limiting the amount of land that they could hold. But insofar as he personally was concerned, he was not only open-minded but positively cordial to Buddhism. In 1428, he admitted monks to the palace on his birthday. "The monks' robes mixed with the officials' caps and insignia, and the Indian music clashed with the sounds of the gongs and reed organs." This aroused a protest which he dismissed without discussion. Such complaints continued throughout his reign, some of them coming, not surprisingly, from the ever combative Ch'oe Malli. Things came to a head in 1448 and 1449, when Sejong had a shrine built on the palace grounds. The bombast that followed was particularly bitter; the students of the Confucian university even went on strike, and conducted a demonstration outside the palace.

During this same period, Sejong composed – in Korean, using his alphabet – hundreds of devotional Buddhist poems, all dedicated to the memory of his wife, Queen Sōhōn, who had passed away in 1446. Sejong himself passed these last years on a reduced schedule, attending to important business but spending much time in study and thought, finding what peace he could.

In the early months of 1450, his accumulating pains became too serious for his physicians to alleviate. He died on March 30, 1450, in the thirty-second year of his reign, at the age of fifty-three. The name Sejong, by which he is known to history and which means something like "epochal ancestor," was chosen for him at that time.

#### NOTE

"The Cultural Work of Sejong the Great" was written in 1990 as a proprietary paper for the Overseas Information Service (Haeoe Kongbogwan) of the Republic of Korea, which used it in a brochure prepared for ceremonies to inaugurate the King Sejong Literacy Prize, held in Paris under the joint auspices of the Korean government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The prize was established by the Korean government; the selection of winners is decided annually by UNESCO.

The paper was translated into French and appeared in both French and English in the bilingual brochure prepared for the occasion. In a mutual understanding with the Overseas Information Service, there was no indication of my authorship in the brochure, which was distributed by both the Korean government and UNESCO. In the intervening years, copies of the brochure have become completely unavailable. Since neither my text nor the brochure itself was ever copyrighted, I have decided to prepare copies in a new format for free distribution, with my authorship now indicated.

—GARI LEDYARD November, 2002

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