

# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Multicultural Children's Literature

*A Critical Issues Approach*

Many of our fondest memories of grade school are of those moments when we had fun while learning, the moments where we uncovered a certain concept or understood something suddenly or discovered that we could do something well. Especially selections from works written for children, called *children's literature*, afford us those moments, and they are quickly becoming an invaluable part of the curriculum of not only grade schools but also university classrooms that prepare teachers to teach. But what distinguishes children's literature for this unique job? While it is written for children and usually reflects children's experiences, in recent years this body of literature spans a range of topics that includes almost everything, even those previously considered unsuitable for children. This body of literature also aims to reach out to a developmental span that is gigantic and has grown into a category of multiple proportions that provides avenues of learning that are attention grabbing and motivating. But what is children's literature and what is its role in today's schools? What distinguishes this body of literature from literature in general? How can this body of literature be inclusive of many diverse perspectives and reflect the stories, experiences, and voices of all children? In this introductory chapter, these questions are unpacked with a brief historical overview of children's literature.

A definition of **multicultural children's literature** is given and its role in schools today is explored. In this text, the importance of critical literacy is emphasized along with an issues approach to multicultural children's literature. A critical approach is imperative in these times when schools and classrooms in the United States have a population that is more and more diverse.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE DEFINED

Ask the average person what children's literature is and you may get answers like "They are books with bright pictures," "They encourage children to read," "They are fairy tales and folk tales or animal tales," and so on. But few realize that there are over 10,000 trade books published each year in the United States alone in a variety of genres, topics, and formats, and that many of these books are so sophisticated in their plots, stories, and designs that they are enjoyed by adults and children alike. While experts would define children's literature in many ways, ultimately it is literature that is written with children as its main audience. A look at some experts' definitions of children's literature gives us an idea of not only how complicated it is to define this body of literature, but also how difficult it is to pinpoint what makes a children's book, except to say that it is for and about children.

Temple, Martinez, Yokota, and Naylor (2002) said, "Children's literature is the collection of books that are read to and by children . . . from birth to about age fifteen" (p. 6). They also acknowledged that "it is surprisingly hard to define a children's book" (p. 5).

Norton, Norton, and McClure (2003), rather than directly defining children's literature, simply talked about the qualities of good literature for children and the development of literature for children in recent times: "When students of children's literature look at the beautiful books published to meet children's needs, interests and reading levels, many are amazed to learn that not long ago books were not written specifically for children" (p. 42). They continued: "When childhood began to be viewed as a special part of the human life cycle, literature written specifically for children became very important" (p. 42).

Charlotte Huck, long considered one of the original theorists of children's literature, said, "Children's books are books that have the child's eye at the center" (Huck, Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2004, p. 5). These educators also discussed how "children have become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about certain life experiences than children of any previous generation" (p. 4), acknowledging that the topics of this body of literature are therefore very hard to distinguish from adult literature in many cases. Death, war, starvation, terror, violence—everything is part of children's literature now, as it is, unfortunately, a part of some children's lives. As Huck et al. mentioned, children no longer are spared any emotions; the evening news brings them everything vicariously, and in fact, "today's children are exposed to violence purely in the name of entertainment" (p. 4).

One could argue that distinguishing children's literature from other types of literature is unnecessary, because what was once thought of as material written for adults may now be termed children's literature. For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, was not originally written with children in mind, although the main

character is 8-year-old Scout and the whole story, which spans a period of 2 years, is told through her voice and eyes. Publishing houses have further muddied the definitions by the demands that certain books have commanded in the market. For example, with the *Harry Potter* series, by J. K. Rowling, although it started off as writing aimed at children, it is clearly debatable as to who more enjoys these books, especially when taking into account the sheer vastness of its reading audience. In all of these definitions, however, the most important point that distinguishes children's literature from other types of literature is that it *validates* all children's experiences.

## MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Validation for all children's experiences needs to include the diversity present in our society today, therefore, throughout this text, the emphasis is on multicultural children's literature, rather than simply naming this body of literature as children's literature. Simply put, multicultural children's literature is literature that is not of the mainstream in the United States. Rather, it is about groups who have been previously underrepresented and often marginalized by society as a whole, especially in depictions in children's literature in the United States. Although it is difficult to exactly define this body of literature in rigid terms, the following definition may serve to clarify the ideas represented in this text: "Multicultural children's literature is about the sociocultural experiences of previously underrepresented groups. It validates these groups' experiences, including those occurring because of differences in language, race, gender, class, ethnicity, identity, and sexual orientation." Although the term *multicultural children's literature* is explored in detail in Chapter 2, one of the main purposes of children's literature is to be inclusive of and provide validation for all children's experiences, hence books that are from many different sociocultural backgrounds are included in this text. This text takes a broad view of the term *multicultural* to include all sociocultural aspects and not just those aspects that are apparent because of ethnicity and race culture. Please see Chapter 2 for more on this.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Just as defining children's literature is murky, historically, it is hard to pinpoint when books began to be written for a primarily child audience. However, most educators agree that children's books reflect the historical times in which they were published, particularly the perspectives of what makes up a child. Largely didactic tales with mainly moralistic and religious overtones were popular during

the 16th and 17th centuries. Books such as *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan; Horn books with moral verses; and stories of Gods and apostles, mythological tales and legends, flourished. Even in many Asian cultures, the precursors to children's literature today were moralistic tales with animal characters that were specifically created to teach short didactic lessons. One such example from India is the short animal tales from the collection called the *Panchatantra* or "Five Principles" of life. These kinds of stories reflected the perspective of a child who was thought of as a young adult, someone who needed to be instructed on the ways of society, on the rights and wrongs and "dos" and "don'ts." As people's attitudes on children changed, so did books for children.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw travel and adventure stories as people began to discover new lands, foray into new fields, and communicate with new cultures and peoples. Hence this era saw books for children such as *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, collected and written by the brothers Grimm, two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose collection is largely about central Europe and life during that time. Anyone reading the original tales as written down by the Grimm brothers will agree that these stories were more cautionary and violent, meant to scare children and adults alike into correct behavior. Other didactic books include those published by John Newbery's publishing house, including titles that he wrote himself. Newbery's publishing house was the first known to cater to a child audience. He published such titles as *Little Goody Two Shoes* and wrote one of the first books for children, called *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, an alphabet book. Today, the Newbery Medal for children's books, which started in 1922, is given annually to an author of children's books in his remembrance.

The 19th century also saw the advent of magazines for children, the most famous of which is the *St. Nicholas Magazine*, which started in 1872 and was in publication well into the 20th century. This magazine is reputed to have given many authors and illustrators of those times an avenue to showcase their talents. Stories of faraway lands, folk tales, historical fiction, and adventure and discovery, interpreted by a mainly White authorship, were the staple content of these magazines. In fact, it is believed that many of the folk and fairy tales as we know them today, including their illustrations, were the result of authors' and illustrators' interpretations in the *St. Nicholas Magazine*. For example, Reginald Birch, a well-known illustrator of that time, gave us the character of the potbellied jolly Santa Claus, with the white beard and red suit, carrying a huge sack of presents, that most children identify as the icon of Christmas today.

In the early 20th century, as a result of the gross stereotypes and misrepresentations of people from other ethnicities and races like Black, Asian, and Latino/a, the *Brownies' Book* magazine was also started. Although the focus of this magazine was a Black or African American audience, its stories and representations tried to reach

out to all children. Please see Chapter 2 for an in-depth description of the *Brownies' Book* magazine.

Although these books and magazines began to be produced with a child audience in mind, it was not until the late 20th century that children's books really began coming into their own. While the previous decades saw mainly traditional literature, including folk and fairy tales, as the mainstay of children's books, the later part of the 20th century saw distinctions of genres of children's literature as we know them today, including **realistic fiction**, **historical fiction**, **poetry**, **picture books**, **modern fantasy**, **science fiction**, and so on. In fact, books began to be written specifically as teaching aids for children, to motivate them to read and learn about the world. In other words, from just entertainment, children's literature began to play a leading role in schools and classrooms.

## **ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TODAY'S SCHOOLS**

A quick look at the curriculum of any school district in reading and literacy or language arts shows us that it includes literature selections in some form or other. Usually, this is where children's stories or literature specifically written for children is used to enhance vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, speaking, language, and the like. Further, college classrooms that prepare teachers have recognized the importance of this category of literature and many have specific courses and seminars specialized in children's literature. For example, the California Department of Education has an extended recommended literature list that has annotations of over 1,000 books in it. This list spans an age range of K–12 (see <http://www.cde.ca.gov>) and is used by many college preparatory programs in California. The Language and Literacy Standards of the California Department of Education also include children's literature in some form or other, especially in terms of language and reading abilities that include phonemic awareness and phonics. However, many classrooms use only children's books that are written specifically to teach certain lessons, such as identify the plot of stories, predict from pictures what may happen, be able to answer questions about the story, learn new words used in context in the story, recognize parts of a story, and so on. Some of these books are written solely to engage in these simple classroom activities and are widely used in classrooms, like the "Dick and Jane" books of the early 20th century or the more recent themed readers published specifically to address simple language arts lessons. Multicultural children's literature in such classrooms is mainly used for children's free choice of reading, for entertainment

purposes, or for specific preassigned times like Black History Month or Asian Appreciation Month.

This book, however, advocates for an approach that integrates multicultural children's literature throughout the day, throughout the school year, and at all times, for all types of lessons. By using the wonderful, creative, complex, and rich literature that encompasses multicultural children's literature to its fullest extent in all lessons, across the curriculum, it is hoped that a child's ability to fully participate and function in the world will be enhanced. In fact, in order to truly appreciate and understand the richness and depth of the available multicultural literature written especially for children, to engage with multicultural authors and their endeavor to contribute to the expanse of children's experiences, and to acknowledge the social and cultural relevance of multicultural children's literature today, a critical issues approach to reading multicultural children's literature is more useful. In other words, the use of multicultural children's literature in schools and classrooms may be intricately linked to **critical literacy**.

## **CRITICAL LITERACY AND MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

Changing demographics in the United States and abroad, in conjunction with an increased focus on technology today more than ever before, brings the spotlight on literacy, which continues to make a greater demand on children and adults. In many places, literacy divides the population in terms of who gets to go to the best schools, who gets the best jobs, and who is the most successful, in general. In fact, the ways in which we speak and act within the literate world often helps to determine who we are and the world in which we interact (Shor, 1999).

Students and teachers today are called on to be literate in more complex ways than ever before. In such a world, *literacy* is not just knowing how to read and write; it is much broader. It is making apparent and revealing the inner workings of a particular group or society and the ways in which the group or society defines itself in different contexts. In order to "be literate," therefore, one needs to know enough information to be able to participate and function fully within various contexts in that society or group. So a simplistic example would be when one is "computer literate," one knows the ins and outs of using a computer, one knows and understands the language that computer professionals use, and so on. In other words, a computer literate person knows enough about the inner workings of computers and people associated with computers in order to fully participate in that society. Another example would be texting. The children and youth of today are more "literate" in their text messaging world, which includes various short forms for commonly used

phrases, to the point where literature in Japan is being redefined. Novels are written and published and distributed only on text messages on cell phones. Books are no longer published in the regular sense (Day, 2008). In order to read and comprehend one of these “cell novels,” one would need to be “text literate,” as the language used in these would be amusingly abbreviated words that have meaning only to those that are *literate* in that context.

*Critical literacy* is an extension of the aforementioned definition of literacy and grew out of a critical approach to education. A critical approach teaches students to question, inquire into, and reveal the power relations that exist in the workings of a society or a group. It encourages students and teachers to take an active role in their learning, to take action and be doers rather than merely passive listeners. It is a methodology that teaches students that they can be independent agents of a change for the better; rather, they *should* be agents of change, creating opportunities and choices for themselves. The scope of critical literacy goes beyond a two-dimensional transaction of knowing how to function in a group to creating possibilities for multidimensional understandings between the individual and the group or society. *Critical literacy* may be defined as the process of becoming literate about a society or group through questioning, through seeing things from various viewpoints, through uncovering biases and reading “between the lines,” and through critically analyzing the workings of a society historically and culturally, in order to thrive in it.

Educators and theorists such as Anderson and Irvine (1993) described critical literacy as follows: “Learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (p. 82). In their interpretation then, reading and writing are a means to becoming conscious of our experiences as historically constructed and not just as situated within a particular time and space. In such a definition, reading and writing are not isolated literacy events; rather they are situated within the contexts of history, of all that has happened before this point in time and what that means and how that weighs on how we interact now. Not only is literacy not viewed as merely basic skills in reading and writing, but critical literacy requires students to “question the assumptions of institutionalized knowledge and to use knowledge to take action” (Banks, 2003, p. 18).

In this text, critical literacy is related to multicultural children’s literature through an issues approach. By teaching children the relationships between the texts they are reading and their lives, we help them “read the world through the word” (Shor, 1999, p. 1). For example, take a well-loved picture book such as *The Rainbow Fish*, by Marcus Pfister. In it, there is a beautiful rainbow fish that has rainbow colored scales but has no friends. However, the wise octopus advises the fish to share his rainbow scales by giving one to each of the other fish. The rainbow fish does so and gains friends. A simple read of this text tells us a sweet story of sharing. A more critical read of this story, however, tells us something different.

In this world of fishes, when one “reads the world through the words” of this text, one learns that sometimes one has to compromise in order to be part of a larger group. One learns that sometimes conformity is better than uniqueness or standing out of the group and that sometimes in order to be assimilated, one has to make some tough choices. One could combine this book along with *Swimmy*, by Leo Lionni (a book about a fish that teaches its friends to swim in formation so they can escape the big tuna fish that will eat them), to teach a lesson that there is strength in numbers, that when a group works together, conforming to the larger good of the group, everyone gains.

Exemplary literature has that power to help children see themselves in the curriculum. Reading about children like themselves has the power to motivate them to participate more in the curriculum. Reading about children around the world in a variety of different situations has the power to expand their worldviews, creating opportunities for understanding. Further, helping children read through a lens of critical literacy gives them the power to see the value of their readings and to help them believe that they can succeed and change the world to be a better place for themselves, in other words, to own the curriculum.

## **FORMING ISSUES INTO AND THROUGH CRITICAL LITERACY LESSONS**

In an issues approach to multicultural children’s literature, one can have multiple transactions with a text, allowing for a multitude of understandings. Rather than merely reading children’s books, we can begin to situate these books and what they are saying historically. We can interpret these from multiple perspectives, gaining a critical vantage point from which to understand them. For example, take the topic of immigration. There are numerous books that describe the various nuances of immigration: the journey, the separation from one’s homeland, the feelings of loneliness, the feelings of joy as one starts a new life, and so on. When we read these books, we gain an insight into the lives of immigrants. When we read them from a critical literacy point of view, we are able to gain multiple understandings into the complex situations that make up immigrants. We are able to place them historically, and we are able to make attempts to relate to them and step into their shoes for a minute. Such readings help foster tolerance and cooperation amongst students because they lay bare the processes of curriculum. Further, an issues approach with a critical literacy goal helps students see themselves in the curriculum. It helps them shape and ask questions of the curriculum, and it helps them read themselves into the curriculum.

As mentioned before, there are children's books that have been written about a vast range of topics and stories. Integrating exemplary children's books throughout the curriculum is not only possible but necessary in today's classrooms, given the sociocultural and socioeconomic range of students in schools today. Topics may be chosen by a two-pronged process: seeing what interests students and what needs to be covered in the classroom in terms of content. A commonly used technique is a simple and well-known webbing technique to connect the two processes of students' wanting to know and needing to learn. Webbing also helps bring out ideas for the range of the topic or issue in terms of connections, subject matter, curriculum areas, and other related topics. Although webbing is a good place to begin, a technique that lays bare the curriculum for the students is much more effective in motivating students to participate and form the curriculum. For example, take students into confidence by letting them know why they need to learn and know certain topics. Show students, through creating a *web of significance*, what they need to learn for school to succeed in school. Show them the state standards, and connect these standards to real-life issues or real-life processes that they will use. This process allows students to see that what they learn in school is not just for school but actually useful for life skills, giving them the opportunity to participate in their curriculum and understand that they will use these skills in their real lives in the future. In fact, teachers of gifted students are taught many such techniques to keep students engaged fully. Fun learning activities such as drama are commonly used with gifted students. However, in an approach that has critical literacy and issues, *all* students can be motivated to engage fully.

### **Creating a "Web of Significance"**

A web of significance may look like the concentric circles of a ripple effect in water, beginning in the middle and radiating out into larger and more inclusive circles. Put down the main topic that they will be learning for school, making sure that this topic is broad enough for them to approach through multiple perspectives. Next, put down how this topic connects with their real lives in the future or in the current times or in the past, laying bare the significance of this topic. Showing this connection or significance will show students why they need to learn about this topic now, creating a motive. Ask students what they would like to learn and know for themselves as related to this topic and as related to their individual interests and needs, showing them that they have choices in what they learn. Have plenty of resources about the topic ready for students to use, for research and inquiry. Books on all genres on this topic are usually a very good place to start for resources. Once the class has gone through an exercise of building a web of significance, put this up

in a prominent place in the classroom for all to see and consult with, throughout the time that this topic will be focused on. Here is a snapshot of the process:

- Choose a very broad main topic to learn for school.
- Show the significance of this topic. How does it connect to students' real lives?
- Create a motive. Show them why they need to learn about this topic.
- Give them choices. What do they want to learn about this topic? What interests them?
- Have a variety of multimedia resources available. Students can choose what interests them.
- Display the web of significance so the class can consult with it.

Once this web of significance has been created with the students as participants, the teacher could begin with a regular curricular activity such as a read-aloud with carefully chosen multicultural children's books that may be read to the whole group or read by themselves in small groups. Allow enough time for students to inquire into this topic, including any personal interests about the topic that they may want to explore. Lead students with carefully chosen open-ended questions around the topic that furthers their inquiry into it. Next, help them connect the topic to their lives by bringing in an actual past, current, or imminent future event. Help students connect with the lives of characters in the multicultural children's books chosen for the topic through a creative medium such as writing in role or writing to a character or as a character. In making these connections, students get a chance to interact with the curriculum, putting themselves into it.

As can be seen, any topic may be turned into a critical literacy lesson by following these simple steps, given here using the topic of immigration as an example:

- Create a web of significance to see in which direction the lessons could go.
- Begin the lesson with a familiar curricular activity, such as a read-aloud.
- Let students browse through carefully chosen books, in small groups.
- Guide students' thinking with carefully chosen questions and provide information to their queries about immigrants and their experiences.
- Ask them to connect their lives and experiences through various creative avenues to the lives of immigrants in the books.
- Transform these connections into something they can actually put into action, such as writing letters, forming a group to help, and so on.
- Help students critically associate with immigrant experiences in the real world through writing, depicting a scene, discussing, and so on.
- Mediate a whole-class discussion to transform their knowledge to the real world and for reflection and closure of the lesson.

Following these same principles, the chapters in this book are also divided into an issues approach, highlighting various topics in multicultural children's literature that are imperative to explore today.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHER

Any topic may be turned into a critical literacy angle by asking ourselves a few simple questions:

1. What real-life issue does this school or curriculum topic relate to?
2. What real-life event has happened, will happen, or is happening that can be connected to this school or curriculum topic?
3. If I were a professional working or living within this real-life context, event, or issue, how would I deal with it? What historical references can I draw and learn from that has happened before?
4. What can I do to change and learn from the event, problem, or issue?
5. How can I connect this curriculum topic or school topic to my current situation to make it better?
6. What steps (however small or large) can I take to make a change?
7. How will my actions affect others now, later, and in the future?

### **SAMPLE RESPONSE LESSON 1.1**

#### **Forming a Critical Literacy Lesson Using Educational Drama**

##### **Elementary Grades (2nd to 5th): In the Classroom, by Teachers, Parents, or Tutors**

Duration: 1 Day or 1 Week

##### *Overview*

The teacher chooses a broad critical topic that may be from the curriculum standards or a current topic that is relevant to the class such as immigration that can be viewed from many

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different angles. The teacher brainstorms along with students on what possibilities and avenues of learning this topic offers. This may be done using well-known techniques such as a K-W-L chart (what I *know*, what I *want* to know, and what I *learned*) or a webbing technique.

The teacher picks several carefully chosen picture books on immigration that show various aspects of the topic and has students read them in small groups of four or five. Students may read books such as the following: *The Tangerine Tree*, by Regina Hanson; *The Keeping Quilt*, by Patricia Polacco; *Lights for Gita*, by Rachna Gilmore; *American Too*, by Elisa Bartone; and *Grandfather's Journey*, by Allen Say.

After the students have read the stories, the teacher uses a simple drama technique such as still image or tableau to help students connect with the characters in the story. Through carefully worded questions, the teacher guides students into some of the possible points of view of the characters in the story. Finally, the teacher has students rewrite the stories creatively as a screenplay for a possible movie.

### **Materials**

Various books on immigration such as the ones mentioned earlier, poster paper, markers, journals for screenplays, butcher paper for a whole-group activity

### **Key Vocabulary and Terms**

Immigrants, Perspective, Screenplay, Tableau, Journey, Leaving

### **Anticipatory Set**

1. *Focus:* Students will learn to view a topic from within a perspective. They learn about immigrants and what they may have felt when they were about to leave their homes. Students inquire critically into immigrants' possible lives and depict creatively what it might have been like to be in the immigrant characters' shoes.
2. *Objective:* By the end of the lesson, students learn about different immigrants' possible motives to move homes and what it may feel like to be an immigrant. Students creatively interpret immigrants' lives by writing a short scene in a screenplay or a play.
3. *Transfer:* As students depict still images with their bodies and discuss each others' still image pictures, they begin to gain insights into some of the complexities of immigrant lives. Students will also gain practice in writing and interpreting stories from books. As they will do this in a group, stronger writers can help the others, and students learn structures of plot, story, and so on.

***Instructions***

1. The teacher divides the class into groups of four or five students and distributes one book to each group. Each group is asked to read the book and understand the story.
2. The teacher explains what a still image or a tableau is: "It is a moment in time like a still picture that you will depict with your bodies. There is no movement and no dialogue." The teacher then instructs the groups to pick the moment when the characters in their respective books first arrived in the new country. Students will be given about 10 minutes to discuss amongst themselves how they will depict the pictures with their bodies as a still image or tableau.
3. The teacher calls on each group one after another to depict their still image. As the group freezes into position, the teacher will ask the rest of the class to interpret what is going on in the image depicted. Carefully chosen questions will be asked, such as the following: "What do you think might be happening in this picture?" "Where do you think these people are?" "What are they doing?" "What is going on in this person's mind?" "What can we tell about this family from looking at this picture?" (This technique is very similar to asking students to "predict" from a picture walk by showing a picture book, except that it is far more interactive and allows for students' active participation.)
4. The teacher will also instruct the groups responding that there are no right or wrong answers, that these are our own interpretations or "readings" of what we feel is depicted. After all the groups have had a turn, discuss with the whole class what they understood from this exercise on immigrants' experiences.

***Independent Practice***

After the whole-group discussions, tell the students that they are "expert filmmakers" (usually students know what filmmakers do; if not, explain that filmmakers work from a script). Ask the group to pick a scene in their respective books and rewrite it as a scene with dialogue. Model for students how you can take one short scene and rewrite it with possible dialogue. (At the end of this lesson, you will find some actual examples of this, done in a fourth-grade classroom.)

***Closure***

Have students share their scripts and enact them in class.

***Extension***

The teacher or school may have a guest speaker or a fellow classmate share an experience of being an immigrant and give students a chance to connect their classroom experience with that of a real person in real life.

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### Modifications: Secondary Grades

The same lesson may be followed with books that also concentrate on other aspects of immigration, such as being a refugee or an illegal immigrant. You can use books such as *The Circuit* and *Breaking Through*, by Francisco Jimenez, two sequel books that follow the autobiographical life of Dr. Jimenez, whose early life in this country was that of an illegal migrant farmworker. High school students may also read *Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck, that talks about the Joad family's journey west. Although this is not about immigration, the aspects of leaving home and looking for a better life are wonderfully depicted in this book.

## EXAMPLES OF RESPONSES TO LESSON 1.1

Here are some examples of first scenes from screenplays created by a fourth-grade class.

Students' response to *Lights for Gita*, by Rachna Gilmore:

**Gita:** Did you get the matches?

**Father:** Yes! I did.

**Gita:** Let's go then, Dad.

**Mother:** Ok, Put on your coats. Let's get them out.

Students' response to *The Tangerine Tree*, by Regina Hanson:

**Rosa:** Is that snow in your hands?

**Miguel:** Yeah, can you believe it?

**Mom:** Before you go outside put on your coats.

**Miguel:** I can't believe that there's snow outside, can you? I mean in Jamaica we never get any snow and when we came all of a sudden there is snow!

Students' response to *The Keeping Quilt*, by Patricia Polacco:

**Wilma:** Grampa, who are these people? (*Looking at a photograph*)

**Grampa:** You don't know them, but that's me and my brother before I came to America.

- Wilma:** Why isn't he in America now?
- Grampa:** Because he did not want to leave his country
- Wilma:** Why, Grampa?
- Grampa:** Well, I tell him, Hershel, I am going to America, do you want to come? And he says, No, I am scared. So I came alone to America. (*Phone rings*)
- Wilma:** I'll get it. . . . Hello?
- Grampa:** Who is it?
- Wilma:** Grampa, it's Uncle Hershel. . . .

## SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bartone, E. (1996). *American too* (T. Lewin, Ill.). New York: HarperCollins.

Rosina thinks she must shed her Italian ways to be really American. She insists that her parents call her Rosie, and she changes her doll's name from Allesandra to the good "American" name of Meghan O'Hara. Although her family speaks Italian, waving their hands around, Rosie sits on her hands and answers in English. And when Papa tells her that she'll be the queen of the feast of San Gennaro, she storms, "Why do we always have to do Italian things? This is America, not Italy!" While gazing at the Statue of Liberty, she has a wonderful idea, a way to be American and Italian, too, a way to have the best of both worlds. Recommended age 3 years and up.

Bunting, E. (1998). *Going home* (D. Diaz, Ill.). New York: HarperCollins.

A family goes back to their village in Mexico on a car trip. Told through the eyes of second-generation American children, it brings out the nostalgia felt by the parents and gives the children a unique peek into the lives of their parents. Beautifully illustrated by Diaz, the colors and flow of the pictures will grab even the youngest of babies. Recommended age 0 to 10 years.

Bunting, E. (1997). *A day's work* (R. Himler, Ill.). Boston: Sandpiper Books.

A grandfather and his 7-year-old grandson wait for work as day laborers. Everyone around them gets picked up but the grandfather as he seems too old to do any work. Finally a man comes asking for a gardener. The grandson, who is there to help translate for the grandfather, tired of waiting, hastily says his grandfather can do the job. Not knowing the difference between weeds and new samplings, they pull out the wrong plants in the man's yard. Upon confrontation, the grandfather apologizes and says he will return the next day to fix the problem without pay. The grandson learns a lesson in commitment and honesty from his grandfather. Recommended age 4 years and up.

Fleischman, P. (2004). *Seedfolks*. New York: Harper Teen.

Originally published in 1997, this inspiring story is told in the first person through a series of short vignettes, introducing us to the trials and tribulations of each person who lives in this community. A vacant, deserted, and littered lot in the middle of a cosmopolitan street in Cleveland becomes the grounds for a community garden when Kim, a young Vietnamese girl, plants some lima beans. People from various cultures and ethnicities come together, working to make this garden successful. The garden, in turn, reflects the hope and inspiration that these immigrants gain from this community effort. Recommended age 6 years and up.

Gilmore, R. (2000). *Lights for Gita* (A. Priestley, Ill.). Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.

In a picture book first published in Canada, an immigrant child from India celebrates the Hindu holiday of *Diwali* for the first time in her new home. *Diwali* is a holiday celebrated at the end of October and the beginning of November with lights, fireworks, street theater, sweets, and parties. Many consider it the beginning of a new year. In the November gloom of her new apartment, Gita longs for her extended family in New Delhi and the warmth she's left behind. She cries when an ice storm knocks out the power in all the buildings on her street; but with her parents and her best friend, she lights the *diyas* (lamps) for the festival, and she comes to see that the lights of *Diwali* can beat the darkness outside and the sadness within. Recommended age 3 years and up.

Hanson, R. (1995). *The tangerine tree*. Boston: Clarion Books.

This picture book about a small child in Jamaica dramatizes the anguish of families separated by migrant labor. Ida's papa must leave to go and work in New York City. We feel the family's heartbreak as the time for Papa's leaving gets closer and the bus finally takes him away from them. Before he goes, he gives Ida a gift, a book of Greek myths, and he tells her that by the time she can read it by herself, he'll be back. The expressive acrylic paintings in bright tropical colors express the family's love and loneliness. Recommended age 4 years and up.

Polacco, P. (2001). *The keeping quilt*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

"We will make a quilt to help us always remember home," Anna's mother said. "It will be like having the family in backhome Russia dance around us at night." And so it was. From a basket of old clothes, Anna's babushka, Uncle Vladimir's shirt, Aunt Havalah's nightdress, and an apron of Aunt Natasha's become *The Keeping Quilt*, passed along from mother to daughter for almost a century. For four generations the quilt is a Sabbath tablecloth, a wedding canopy, and a blanket that welcomes babies warmly into the world. In strongly moving pictures that are as heartwarming as they are real, Patricia Polacco tells the story of her own family and the quilt that remains a symbol of their enduring love and faith. Recommended age 4 years and up.

Say, A. (1993). *Grandfather's journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Home becomes elusive in this story about immigration and acculturation, pieced together through old pictures and salvaged family tales. Both the narrator and his grandfather long

to return to Japan, but when they do, they feel anonymous and confused: "The funny thing is, the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other." Allen Say's prose is succinct and controlled, to the effect of surprise when monumental events are scaled down to a few words: "The young woman fell in love, married, and sometime later I was born." The book also has large, formal paintings in delicate, faded colors that portray a cherished and well-preserved family album. Recommended age 2 years and up.

Winter, J. (1992). *Klara's new world*. New York: Random House.

When a drought brings tough times to her Swedish family, Klara, not yet 8, fears she'll be hired out to work on the manor. Then a letter arrives from a friend in America, urging them to sell out and join him. Hesitantly, they decide to do so, leaving home, friends, and grandfather forever. Crossing the Atlantic in a sailing ship, they continue by train and steamboat to their Minnesota destination, where Papa's friend Bertil helps them establish a new home. Recommended age 4 years and up.

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