

Five Steps Toward Successful Culturally Relevant Text Selection and Integration

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For today's diverse populations, we present teachers with a five-step guide as a pathway to successfully selecting culturally relevant texts.

Recently, student demographics in U.S. classrooms have shifted from majority white to majority nonwhite. National enrollment trends across the past decade indicate a decrease in white students from 59% to 50% and an increase in Hispanic students from 19% to 25%; a continuation of these trends is predicted (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

We see this trend in Ms. Misoni's (all teacher and student names are pseudonyms) third-grade classroom. Although her students were predominantly white until recently, they are now predominantly Middle Eastern and African immigrants. Ms. Misoni is getting ready to teach her typical Thanksgiving literacy theme, and she wonders how the unit might change to be more culturally relevant to her students.

This uncertainty about how to change one's pedagogy to meet the needs of increasingly nonwhite students is a critical issue to ensure equity in literacy education (Lazar, Edwards, & McMillon, 2012). Gadsden (1993) argued that "learners do not develop knowledge and literacy exclusive of their social histories, cultures, and immediate contexts for using knowledge" (p. 358). Culturally responsive teaching, which uses students' cultural knowledge and ways of being in the world to support learning, offers a way to address this issue. Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that it "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 18).

Despite the potential power of culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers are often underprepared to engage in it (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To address this issue, we present five steps that teachers can take toward integrating culturally responsive teaching:

1. Recognize the need for culturally responsive instruction.
2. Get to know more about your students' lives.
3. Search for culturally relevant texts.
4. Select culturally relevant texts for instruction.
5. Identify critical and personal response opportunities for instruction.

Throughout this article, Ms. Misoni's story illustrates these steps with the accompanying research that supports them as well as her use of technology as a modality for eliciting student stories of crossing borders. As teacher educators and former classroom teachers, we have used these steps ourselves and have taught others to use them. Thus, they are research-based and teacher-tested in real classrooms.

Step 1: Recognize the Need for Culturally Responsive Instruction

Ms. Misoni selects the book *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen (1998) as a read-aloud for her Thanksgiving-themed unit, which focuses on white European pilgrims coming to America to seek religious freedom. Molly, the main character, and her family have come to the United States from Russia to escape religious persecution, as had the pilgrims who arrived in the 17th century. Ms. Misoni determines that this text,

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set in a more modern time, might better help her students connect with the pilgrims of the past.

This year, during her reading of *Molly's Pilgrim*, Ms. Misoni's student Amani raises her hand and says, "I, too, am a pilgrim." Curious, Ms. Misoni prompts, "Tell us more about that." Amani explains, "Well, my family left Iraq because we were persecuted for our religion."

Amani's response gives Ms. Misoni and her class another perspective on what it means to be a pilgrim: Pilgrims are not just European and white, as Amani's classmates might have expected. In this case, literature provides an excellent vehicle for insights into the myriad of cultural perspectives valued by Amani's peers and can provide reflective insights into the lived experiences occurring within most classrooms. Just as the Dalai Lama expressed his appreciation for Demi's telling of his story in *The Dalai Lama* and how the book brought to life not only the Dalai Lama's experiences but also those of his people in Tibet, Ms. Misoni imagines that her students will appreciate texts that tell their cultural stories—the personal ones, the ones celebrated by their families, and the ones about their people.

Ms. Misoni sees the potential for Amani and other Middle Eastern immigrant students who fled persecution to connect to texts if she finds texts that reflect their experiences. She also recognizes that such texts would help broaden other students' perspectives on what it means to be a pilgrim. Further, she wonders if she can find texts that reflect her African immigrant students' pilgrimages as well. She begins to envision her Thanksgiving theme more broadly as a crossing-borders theme that represents pilgrimages from around the world and particularly those that reflect her students' experiences.

Research supports Ms. Misoni's vision for improving her pedagogy by broadening this theme. The use of culturally relevant texts anchors students' culturally relevant knowledge, such as their identities, experiences, and norms, in ways that improve their literacy outcomes (Gray, 2009). This occurs because the dynamic transactions between reader and text, through which meaning is made (Rosenblatt,

2005), are facilitated when the reader has more relevant cultural knowledge that aligns with the text (Christ et al., 2017).

When texts are culturally relevant, students are better able to monitor comprehension, make connections, and interpret what they read (Al-Mahrooqi, 2013; Christ et al., 2017; Ebe, 2010; Garth-McCullough, 2008; Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; McCullough, 2013; Porat, 2004; Pritchard, 1990; Ramirez, 2012). As a result of these literacy outcomes, students' motivation is also improved (Garth-McCullough, 2008; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). In our own use of culturally relevant texts and that of the teachers with whom we work, we have found these same improved literacy outcomes and motivation (Christ & Sharma, 2017).

PAUSE AND PONDER

- Reflect on the students in your classroom. What types of texts might be relevant to their cultures and experiences?
- What are some texts you already have that are culturally relevant for your students?
- How could Web 2.0 resources be used to expand your culturally relevant text collection?
- What are some critical questions that you have asked, or would ask, when reading texts that reflect the cultural stories or identities of your students?


Step 2: Get to Know More About Your Students' Lives

Ms. Misoni knows some of her students' personal histories of immigration but wants to know more about these stories, as well as her students' families and communities, to better guide the development of her crossing-borders theme. She knows that family and culture shape her students' views of the world (Edwards, 1999; Kidd, Sánchez, & Thorp, 2008) and that understanding her students will help her value and connect with the strengths, knowledge, and histories they bring to school (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1994).

To learn more about her students' lives, Ms. Misoni uses three methods. First, she conducts one-on-one reader interviews with each of her students during independent reading time. She includes several dimensions that would help her understand her students' identities, experiences, norms, and family systems (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012; Ebe, 2010; Edwards, 2010). She asks questions related to each of these dimensions and records her students' responses. Figure 1 presents the Reader Interview Guide that she uses when she interviews Amani.

Second, Ms. Misoni has her students create their own personal story projects using digital technology

Figure 1
Amani's Reader Interview

Demographic info	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your name? Amani 2. How old are you? I am 9 years old. 3. How long have you attended this school? I have been at this school for 1 year. 4. Where did you attend school before this? I went to school in Saudi Arabia for the past 2 years. Before that I went to school in Iraq where my family is from.
Family members and living arrangements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your family. Do you live in an apartment, house, etc.? I live in house with my mom, dad, two sisters, and one brother now that we moved to America. Before that we lived in an apartment when we moved from Iraq to Saudi Arabia. 2. Do you have any pets? No
Favorite family activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some activities that you do weekly with your family? Every Sunday we go our Eastern Orthodox church. 2. What kinds of celebrations or holidays do you and your family enjoy? Easter is the most important holiday for our family. We celebrate Easter on different date than western Christian each year. The date of Easter is used to set the date for other holidays such as Christmas.
Perceptions about reading	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you like to read? Why or why not? Yes, I love reading. I enjoy pretending that I am my favorite character. 2. Do you read at home? How often? Yes, I read at home. I am always reading, once I finish a book it usually takes me about a week to start a new one. 3. Do you prefer to read with someone else or by yourself? I hate to read with others or out loud in general, I feel any pronunciation issues I have show up more if reading out loud. I do however love to talk about what I have read. 4. Do you think it's important to know how to read? Why or why not? Of course, we learn about people, places and issues that we could never reach sitting at home.
Perceptions about reading, continued	 <p>(Photos retrieved from: Amazon.com)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Take a look at these texts... Do you see anything here that you would like to read? Why or why not? I think I would like to read <i>Making It Home</i>, the cover shows kids that seem to be from different countries and I feel like I can relate to them. 6. What book do you think would be: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Just-right for you to read. What makes it just-right? <i>Making It Home</i> since I was born in Iraq and I still have family that lives there. I always struggled with what "home" meant. b) Too easy for you to read. What makes it too easy? <i>Nabeel's New Pants</i>. It seems like it's for young children. c) Too hard for you to read. What makes it too hard? <i>Nabeel's Song</i>. The cover makes it seem a little more mature than the rest of the books; also in the description it seems to be covering more serious topics.
Perceptions about cultural relevance of selected texts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which of these books do you think has characters that are like you? How are they like you? I can relate to Ramona Quimby. I always had a hard time with friends and fitting in, but I feel like I always stayed positive. 2. Which of these books takes place in places that you've been before? How are they like places you've been? I've never been to the foreign place mentioned in the book <i>Ziba Came on a Boat</i>, even though Afghanistan is near Iraq and is in the Middle East, it's very different than Iraq. 3. Which of these books has characters that talk like you? Again, I can relate to Ramona because she sounds optimistic like me. 4. Which of these books has an event that is like an experience that you've had? I think <i>Molly's Pilgrim</i>, my family moved to America when I was very little, we were not escaping anything, but I can relate to leaving your home. 5. What was your experience and how does it relate to the book? I had to leave the only life I knew in Iraq, including my friends and family. In the description it mentions she had to escape, which gives me the impression that she had to leave her friends and family.

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

tools (Hull & Katz, 2006; Lundby, 2008). Students use iMovie to make a movie trailer or use storytelling apps (e.g., Little Bird Tales, Explain Everything, Doodlecast Pro) or digital All About Me boards to present their personal stories and preferences. Figure 2 shows Alima's personal story using the app Explain Everything. Students may choose to construct an All About Me board using photos, drawing, writing, or a combination. Figure 3 is one example of an All About Me board.

Third, Ms. Misoni invites her students to search for and find texts they feel are culturally relevant for them. She asks her school's media specialist to help the students with search techniques and websites to facilitate this. As students find books they feel are relevant to their lives, they take screenshots and pin the images onto a digital collage board using Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>) or the app CollageFactory. Figure 4 gives an example of a third grader's culturally relevant text digital collage.

These three activities provide ways for Ms. Misoni to get to know her students better. She plans to use this information to guide her selection of culturally relevant texts for her crossing-borders unit. She provides time for students to browse one another's personal story projects and digital collage boards to help them get to know one another better. Further, after masking her students' names, Ms. Misoni shares the digital collages publicly online so others can see the types of texts that are relevant to children in their community. She believes this may help other teachers, parents, or students find texts that are relevant as well. Finally, she prints the digital boards and arranges them into a classroom collage to promote a visual image of the cultures reflected in her classroom.

Step 3: Search for Culturally Relevant Texts

Based on the information that Ms. Misoni collects about her students, she embarks on searching for texts that would extend her Thanksgiving theme. She wants to move beyond the typical white-culture-coming-to-America theme into a crossing-borders theme that will create a space for her nonwhite immigrant students to see themselves and their stories represented in the unit's texts (Dudley-Marling, 2003).

This process is difficult because Ms. Misoni has few, if any, texts in her classroom or school that depict the lives of her nonwhite immigrant

students. Unfortunately, this scarcity of texts for nonwhite students is the norm (Currie, 2013; Gangi & Ferguson, 2006). This lack of accessibility to culturally diverse children's literature in today's classrooms is an alarming injustice as it privileges white students and marginalizes nonwhite students.

How does this happen? Booklists used by many teachers and schools to select books predominantly suggest titles that depict white or animal characters written by white authors (Gangi, 2008). This is even true of the Common Core State Standards list of recommended texts, in which only 18 of 171 texts are by nonwhite authors (Gangi, 2008). Worse yet is the Scholastic Teachers' Picks list (<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/teachers-picks-top-25-picture-books/>); no nonwhite characters at all are represented in the top 10 recommended texts.

Fortunately, there are many, although less publicized, booklists that can potentially help teachers select culturally relevant texts. Many of these lists focus on books that have won awards for their presentation of a particular culture's experience:

- The Coretta Scott King Book Awards, for books created by African American authors and illustrators that depict the African American experience
- The Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, for books that depict the Mexican American experience
- The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award, for manuscripts by unpublished authors that portray the Jewish experience
- The Skipping Stones Honor Award, for books that promote multicultural awareness
- The Jane Addams Children's Book Award, the International Literacy Association's (ILA) Notable Books for a Global Society list, and the Carter G. Woodson Book Award, for texts that engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity

Table 1 gives a list of links to these and other booklists that might assist you in finding culturally relevant texts for your students. Additionally, Google searches often yield booklists put together by educators and educational organizations that can be helpful in identifying culturally relevant texts.

Ms. Misoni uses both of these methods to incorporate books that will be culturally relevant for her

Figure 2
Alima's Story

Alima's Story

My family is Turkish. When I was small my family moved from England to Turkey. Now we live in America.

I like to draw. My best friend likes to draw also. She brought me a paper with pictures and numbers. There are paints in the top of the page. There are numbers too, like one. You find the number one in like the blue color and the sky in the picture has the number one and you paint it.

Last summer I went to London with my mom, dad, and four-year old brother. We stayed at a hotel that my dad's sister owns.

We went to the M & M World in London with our friends. There was so much M & M's. Like you push a button and M & M's come out in every color.

We also went to Lego Land. There are like people made of Legos called Lego Land people. They make like they talk. It was really fun.

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Figure 3
Destiny's All About Me Board

All About Me		
<p>My Family</p> <p><i>I live with my mom, six sisters and two brothers.</i></p>	<p>Where I Live</p> <p><i>I live in a two-bedroom condo near the school.</i></p>	<p>Favorite Place</p> <p><i>My favorite place is my Daddy's house and Cedar Point.</i></p>
<p>Most Important Thing I Do Each Week</p> <p><i>The most important things that I do are going to school, helping my mom, and cleaning up my house.</i></p>	<p>My Hobbies</p> <p><i>I love to sing and dance.</i></p>	<p>My Favorite Kinds of Books</p> <p><i>Historical fiction is my favorite kind of book.</i></p>
<p>My Dreams</p> <p><i>I want to be become a singer and dancer.</i></p>	<p>Best Vacation</p> <p><i>My best vacation was to Disney World.</i></p>	<p>My Favorite Music, Movies, & Games</p> <p><i>My favorite music is hip-hop, Young M.A.</i> <i>My favorite movie is Scary Movie 2.</i> <i>My favorite game is Just Dance and Monopoly.</i></p>

students as part of the crossing-borders unit. She hopes to find books that will elucidate the realities of many of the refugees in her class.

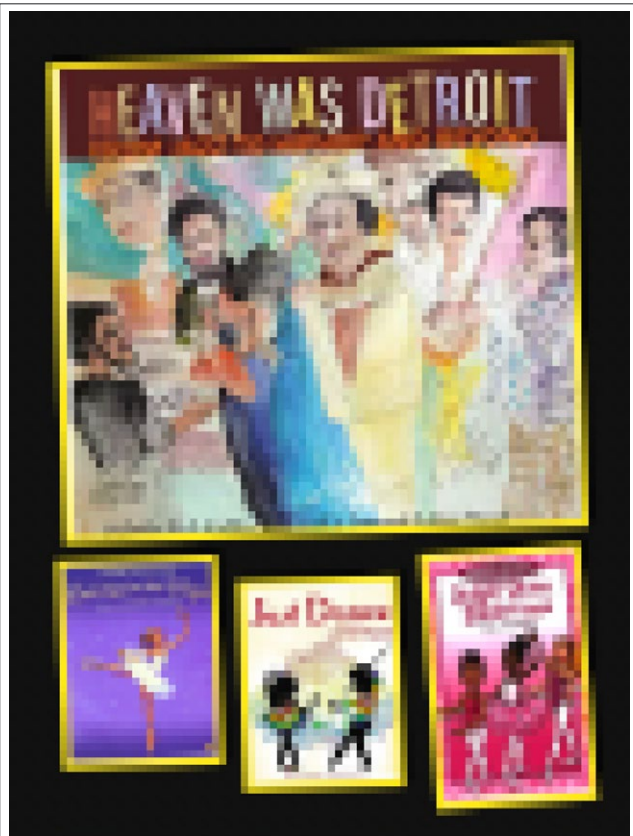
First, Ms. Misoni generates a list of potential books by searching Google for the term “crossing borders book list.” She scans the headings and links that appear across her computer screen and spots an online booklist titled “Classroom Connections: Crossing Borders with Books.” She selects several titles from this to add to her list. Then, she uses the same search terms to look for books pinned on Pinterest boards. Voilà! A visual board of books appears on her computer screen; this makes it convenient to scan the covers to find potentially relevant texts. Lastly, she uses the lists of award-winning books, including past winners of the Arab American Book Award, the Children’s Africana Book Awards, and the ILA Notable Books for a Global Society list. Although she has to do more wading through these lists as they are not specifically focused on

immigrants, she does identify some very high-quality culturally relevant texts.

Across these search methods, Ms. Misoni identifies several books that might work for her crossing-borders unit:

- *Four Feet, Two Sandals* by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed makes Ms. Misoni think about her student Alima, her family, and their life in a refugee camp while awaiting approval to immigrate to the United States from the Middle East.
- *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting makes Ms. Misoni think of Nisa, a Muslim girl from Turkey who, like the main character, did not speak English and is homesick.
- Ms. Misoni chose *My Name Is Sangoel* by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed for Elfatih because, like the main character in the book, he and his family bear the scars of

Figure 4
Destiny's Culturally Relevant Text Digital Collage



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

the atrocious war acts in Sudan. Also, Elfatih has to repeatedly correct the pronunciation of his name, just like Sangoel, the main character.

- Ms. Misoni selected *The Great Migration: Journey to the North* by Eloise Greenfield for Destiny, a new African American student in her class. Destiny's family moved from Georgia for a job opportunity for her father, just like the families in the story who courageously left their homes in the South after World War I.

Step 4: Select Culturally Relevant Texts for Instruction

So, which of the books that Ms. Misoni found should she use? Selecting texts that students will find culturally relevant can be a challenge for teachers (Tatum, 2006, 2008, 2009). Thus, we suggest a rubric

to guide this process, such as the one presented in Table 2. It contains seven dimensions that should be considered when assessing the extent to which a text may be culturally relevant for a student:

1. How the book portrays culture, in terms of presenting culture accurately, ignoring cultural differences, or perpetuating stereotypes (Sims, 1983; Sims Bishop, 1991)
2. How the book portrays culture, in terms of being written and illustrated by someone who shares the culture represented in the book (Ebe, 2010; Walters, 1998)
3. Whether the student shares cultural markers with the main character, such as race, ethnicity, or religion (Ebe, 2010)
4. Whether the student is of the same age and gender identity as the main character (Ebe, 2010)
5. Whether the student talks in a similar way as the main character (Ebe, 2010)
6. Whether the student has lived in or visited places similar to the setting of the book (Ebe, 2010)
7. Whether the student has had experiences similar to those in the book (Ebe, 2010)

These seven dimensions of cultural relevance are dynamic and complex and address the multiplicities of readers' identities (Tatum, 2000). Thus, the cultural relevance of a text is not a dichotomous proposition (i.e., relevant or not relevant) but, rather, a fluid construct across a spectrum from very relevant to irrelevant (Christ et al., 2017; Ebe, 2010; Gray, 2009; Tatum, 2000). To accomplish this, teachers need to be very knowledgeable about the lives of their students. Thus, the activities for getting to know more about students' lives are critical.

Ms. Misoni uses our rubric to evaluate the culturally relevant texts that she found through her searches. First, when she is evaluating the text *The Color of Home* by Mary Hoffman (2002), which tells the story of a Somali boy who fled Mogadishu and immigrated to England, Ms. Misoni wants to know if Hoffman and the illustrator, Karen Littlewood, are Somali refugees. She does a Google search to find biographical information about them and discovers that Hoffman and Littlewood are both white English women. Neither is Somali nor a refugee. However, despite this, Ms. Misoni finds that the book has several accurate portrayals of Muslim and Somali culture, such as prayer mats and brightly colored clothes and furnishings. She concludes

Table 1
Multicultural Notables

Award or list	URL	Selection criteria
American Indian Youth Literature Award	http://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors the very best writing and illustrations by and about American Indians
Américas Award	http://claspprograms.org/americasaward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors distinctive literary quality of children's and young adult literature with regards to cultural contextualization; exceptional integration of text, illustration, and design; and potential for classroom use
Arab American Book Award	http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/bookaward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors books written by and about Arab Americans
Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature	http://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors literary and artistic merit Recognizes individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage
Batchelder Award	http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes outstanding books originally published in a language other than English in a country other than the United States, and subsequently translated into English and published in the United States
Belpré Medal	http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator of books for children and youth whose works best portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latino cultural experience
Caldecott Medal	http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children
Carter G. Woodson Book Award	https://www.socialstudies.org/awards/woodson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages the writing, publishing, and dissemination of outstanding social science books for young readers that treat topics related to ethnic minorities and relations sensitively and accurately
Children's Africana Book Awards	http://africaaccessreview.org/childrens-africana-book-awards/caba-winners/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes authors and illustrators for the best children's and young adult books on Africa published or republished in the United States
Coretta Scott King Book Award	http://www.ala.org/emiert/ckskbookawards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values
ILA Notable Books for a Global Society	http://clrsig.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes books with appealing and enduring quality with regard to (a) physical characteristics, (b) intellectual abilities and problem-solving capabilities, (c) leadership and cooperative dimensions, and (d) social and economic status Recognizes books that represent cultures in rich detail Recognizes books that honor and celebrate diversity as well as common bonds in humanity Recognizes books that provide in-depth treatment of cultural issues Recognizes books that include characters within a cultural group or between two or more cultural groups who interact substantively and authentically Recognizes books that include members of a minority group for a purpose other than filling a quota

(continued)

Table 1
Multicultural Notables (continued)

Award or list	URL	Selection criteria
Jane Addams Children’s Book Award	http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes children’s books of literary and aesthetic excellence Recognizes books that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people
Newbery Medal	http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberymedal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children
Skipping Stones Honor Awards	http://www.skippingstones.org/honors_98.htm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes creative and artistic works by young people that promote multicultural, international, and nature awareness
Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award	http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=Sydney_Taylor_Manuscript_Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors outstanding manuscripts by unpublished authors for children and teens that authentically portray the Jewish experience
Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award	http://www.education.txstate.edu/ci/riverabookaward/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honors authors and illustrators who create literature that depicts the Mexican American experience

Table 2
Cultural Relevance Text Evaluation Rubric

Book title and author:	1	0
How the book portrays culture, part 1 (Sims, 1983; Sims Bishop, 1991)	<i>Culturally conscious</i> books validate a culture through accurately portraying language and experiences in their illustrations and words.	<i>Socially conscious</i> books perpetuate stereotypes. <i>Melting pot</i> books ignore cultural differences (e.g., <i>The Snowy Day</i> by Ezra Jack Keats).
How the book portrays culture, part 2 (Ebe, 2010; Walters, 1998)	The author or illustrator are of the background being portrayed in the book.	The author or illustrator are not of the background being portrayed in the book.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 1 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters are the same race/ethnicity/religion as the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are <i>not</i> the same race/ethnicity/religion (or other cultural marker) as the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 2 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters are the same age/gender as the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are <i>not</i> the same age/gender as the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 3 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters talk like the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters <i>do not</i> talk like the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 4 (Ebe, 2010)	The reader has probably lived in or visited places like those in the story (relevant place), and the story could take place this year (relevant time period). (Settings are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably <i>not</i> lived or visited places like those in the story, or the story could <i>not</i> take place this year.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 5 (Ebe, 2010)	The reader has probably had an experience similar to one in the story. (Events are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably <i>not</i> had an experience similar to one in the story.

that it is a culturally conscious book rather than a melting pot book or a socially conscious book that perpetuates negative stereotypes (Sims, 1983; Sims Bishop, 1991).

Ms. Misoni chose this book for her collection because it reminds her of her student Gnette. Hassan, the main character in the book, is also a young boy about the same age as Gnette who has experienced similar appalling conditions while fleeing his homeland of Somalia. Like Hassan, Gnette is experiencing the challenge of adjusting to a new culture, home, and language.

Figure 5 presents Ms. Misoni’s complete analysis of *The Color of Home* in terms of how relevant she thought it might be for Gnette. Because the book was more relevant than not, she decided to select it for use in her crossing-borders unit.

Step 5: Identify Critical and Personal Response Opportunities for Instruction

Ms. Misoni creates critical questions to discuss across texts in her crossing-borders unit, such as the following:

- Why do people immigrate?
- What are the journeys like from one country to another?
- What are people’s experiences like when they arrive in their new country?
- Do you think people wish they could go back to their country of origin? Why or why not?

She plans to have her students map the answers to these questions for each book on a large bulletin

Figure 5
Evaluation of the Cultural Relevance of *The Color of Home* by Mary Hoffman

Book title and author: <i>The Color of Home</i> by Mary Hoffman	1	0
How the book portrays culture, part 1 (Sims, 1983; Sims Bishop, 1991)	<i>Culturally conscious</i> books alidate a culture through accurately portraying language and experiences in their illustrations and words.	<i>Socially conscious</i> books perpetuate stereotypes. <i>Melting pot</i> books ignore cultural differences (e.g., <i>The Snowy Day</i> by Ezra Jack Keats).
How the book portrays culture, part 2 (Ebe, 2010; Walters, 1998)	The author or illustrator are of the background being portrayed in the book.	The author or illustrator are not of the background being portrayed in the book.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 1 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters are the same race/ethnicity/religion as the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are <i>not</i> the same race/ethnicity/religion (or other cultural marker) as the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 2 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters are the same age/gender as the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters are <i>not</i> the same age/gender as the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 3 (Ebe, 2010)	The main characters talk like the reader. (Characters’ cultural markers are relevant.)	The main characters <i>do not</i> talk like the reader.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 4 (Ebe, 2010)	The reader has probably lived in or visited places like those in the story (relevant place), and the story could take place this year (relevant time period). (Settings are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably <i>not</i> lived in or visited places like those in the story, or the story could <i>not</i> take place this year.
Analyzing cultural relevance, part 5 (Ebe, 2010)	The reader has probably had an experience similar to one in the story. (Events are culturally relevant.)	The reader has probably <i>not</i> had an experience similar to one in the story.

board and, at the end of the unit, develop themes across the answers at the bottom of the bulletin board. She hopes this will help students see both the commonalities and the uniqueness of the journeys across borders.

Ms. Misoni also plans for critical questions within each text that focus on deeply understanding the main character’s crossing-borders experience. For example, when students read *The Color of Home*, she asks questions such as the following:

- How do you think Hassan feels as he is traveling from Mogadishu to Mombasa to England?
- In what ways is Hassan able to connect his old and new homes and ways of seeing himself? In what ways is he not able to do so?

These questions are intended to help students who had similar crossing-borders experiences connect to the text and to build others’ understanding about these experiences.

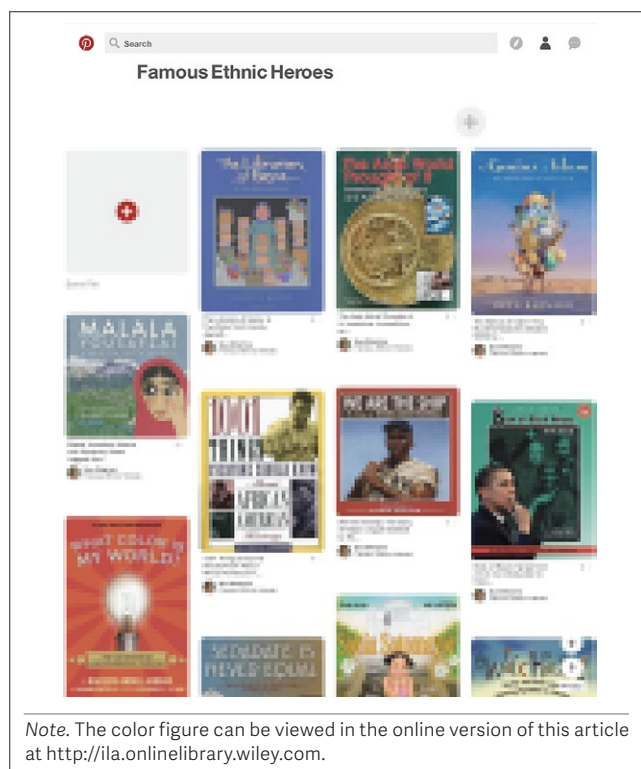
Finally, Ms. Misoni plans to have all the students create a multimodal presentation of their own personal crossing-borders story using Doodlecast Pro. This app produces a shareable video that integrates photos, video, text, and a voiceover. She plans to engage parents in this project by inviting them to collaborate on the presentations with their children at home or at school during digital writing time. These presentations will be shared on parent night to strengthen understanding of different families’ stories across the community (Edwards, 2016).

Conclusion

To address the increasingly diverse students in her classroom, Ms. Misoni uses the five steps described in this article to transform her Thanksgiving theme into a crossing-borders theme that includes multicultural literature and texts that are culturally relevant for specific students. She feels this is successful in helping her students personally identify with the texts read in class and in promoting deeper understandings about families in the community. She decides that she will also transform her next literacy unit from a focus on Eurocentric fairy tales to an ethnic hero unit that spans the cultures of the students in her classroom. Figure 6 represents a Pinterest collage of the texts she plans to use.

We urge you to engage in these steps to transform your literacy instruction. You can transform any Eurocentric or middle class-centric unit into

Figure 6
A Pinterest Board With Texts About Famous Ethnic Heroes



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

TAKE ACTION!

1. Get to know more about your students and their families, cultures, and lives. To do so, you might use a reader interview, digital storytelling, or student-created collages of culturally relevant books.
2. Look for potential culturally relevant texts by using multicultural booklists and Google searches for author backgrounds, or garner recommendations from clearinghouses such as Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services (<http://www.brycs.org/clearinghouse/Highlighted-Resources-Children-Books-about-the-Refugee-Immigrant-Experience.cfm>) to create a list.
3. Use the criteria in Table 2 to evaluate the cultural relevance of a particular text for a particular student.
4. As part of instructional planning, determine what critical questions you will ask across the books in the unit and for each text.
5. Determine how each student and his or her family can articulate their personal stories and how these can be shared among the classroom or broader community.

one that represents a greater diversity of perspectives by incorporating texts that reflect the perspectives of your students' lives—that is, culturally relevant texts.

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MORE TO EXPLORE

- ReadWriteThink.org: Search for and use lesson plans created by other teachers, such as “Assessing Cultural Relevance: Exploring Personal Connections to a Text” by Traci Gardner (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/assessing-cultural-relevance-exploring-1003.html>), or a lesson for a specific text such as *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña that might be culturally relevant for some students and provide a starting point for writing their own biography (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/author-matt-pena-born-31137.html>).
- Youth Voices (<http://www.youthvoices.live>): This is a school-based social network and blogging platform for students to have conversations about issues that are relevant to them. These conversations may provide opportunities for both windows and mirrors.
- Pinterest boards: These can provide premade collections of potentially culturally relevant texts, such as refugee and immigrant tales (<https://www.pinterest.com/ssharma/refugeeimigrant-tales/>) and mirrors and windows for young African American boys (<https://www.pinterest.com/ssharma/mirrors-window-books/>).
- Teaching Tolerance (<http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>): This resource provides free lessons plans to address social justice related to topics that may be also be culturally relevant for your students.
- Edutopia’s “Culturally Responsive Teaching” tag (<https://www.edutopia.org/blogs/tag/culturally-responsive-teaching>): Find information, discussion boards, and teaching tips with this tag.
- TED and TEDx Talks: Search for talks about culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, such as “Bringing Cultural Context and Self-Identity Into Education” by Brian Lozenski (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bX9vgD7iTqw>) and “A Tale of Two Teachers” by Melissa Crum (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgtinODaW78>).

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