

## **We're More Alike Than We Are Different: Using Multicultural Children's Literature to Develop Understanding and Acceptance of Diversity**

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*Stories help us to construct ourselves, who used to be one way and are now another.*

Genishi and Dyson, 1994 (Mathis)

### **INTRODUCTION**

I tried to focus on my original topic of developing comprehension and phonics in students: I really tried. However, these tumultuous and uncertain times would not allow my mind to stay the course. My concern about the troops and the Iraqi people as well as my concern and worry over my eighteen-year-old nephew—whose welfare has, at times, been the only reason for my existence—has put the subject matter of comprehension on hold. Instead, I would like to focus my attention on the significance of multicultural children's literature and its use as a powerful tool for helping children to develop an understanding and acceptance of diversity.

Multicultural literature is vital because it can introduce children to unfamiliar customs and beliefs that are important to people from different cultures. Children need to begin to understand at an early age that every culture has a heritage and they need to know and respect their own heritage and that of other people. Using multicultural literature as an avenue for exploring and celebrating diversity will help put children on the path to developing and understanding the concept of the interdependence of all people in the global culture.

Learning about people from different backgrounds is something that is of great importance. Recent wars in Europe, Africa, Central America and the Balkans help to underscore the difficulty that people from diverse backgrounds have in achieving and keeping peace. Children need to discover what is unique to each group of people and what are the common threads that bind us together no matter our race, creed or nationality. It is for this reason that exploring humanity through multicultural children's literature is so important.

There maybe some teachers out there who, after reading the introduction to this unit, may still be asking the questions, "Why should I teach using multicultural children's books? Is it really that important?" I ask these teachers to consider this: America is truly a "tossed salad" which is made up of individuals from a myriad of cultural backgrounds. Each day many children come into contact with people whose background and beliefs are different from their own. The manner in which the children handle these encounters will be based, in large part, on the knowledge and attitudes they've collected from the past

experiences they've had. The addition of quality multicultural literature to the curriculum is an excellent way of providing children with positive encounters involving people from different backgrounds. These initial encounters will go a long way in fostering and cultivating within a child an acceptance of and appreciation for cultural differences. In order to better prepare our students for the diversity found in the world, we must begin to develop a curriculum that focuses on the inclusion and acceptance of diversity in all its forms.

## **MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE DEFINED**

One question educators may have is, what is multicultural literature? The best definition I've discovered comes from an educator named Elizebeth Martinez who views multicultural literature as being "that which emphasizes respect for the different historical perspectives and cultures in human society" (Mathis). This is a wonderful definition because it leaves room to contemplate the various aspects of cultural diversity, particularly when a teacher is selecting multicultural literature for the classroom.

This is not to say that children's literature is the "be all and end all" for developing students' understanding and awareness of diversity. I do realize that although books can help raise the consciousness level of children and deepen their understanding of cultures different from their own, books can never become substitutes for personal contact with others. However, the importance of multicultural literature cannot be discounted because according to a study done by Bruno Bettelheim (1977), "second only to parents, books provide the majority of information children learn about others and their own ethnicity" (McGowan).

To further support my rationale for using multicultural literature in the classroom, I offer the results from a study done in 1996 by Wham, Barnhart and Cook. Their findings demonstrate that children who are exposed to multicultural literature, both at home and at school, develop the most positive attitudes toward cultural differences. The largest increases (and decreases) occurred in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. The researchers believed that this is likely the time when multicultural attitudes are most modifiable. Other studies done on this same topic have yielded results that link the effects of students' reading about their culture and the cultures of others to: higher self-esteem, greater academic achievement and positive influences across subject areas. It has also been suggested that these effects have both long- and short-term outcomes such as fostering positive self-perception, positive views of school, greater success at and willingness to stay in school, better education and better employment opportunities (McGowan).

## **HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE**

At this juncture it is important to explore a little of the history of multicultural children's literature and education. According to a study done by Cai and Sims Bishop, demands for multicultural literature and for multicultural education were a direct result of the civil

rights and women's rights movements of the 60s and 70s (Harris). It was during this time that educators really started focusing on the representations of diverse peoples in children's literature. Early multicultural educators believed the educational problems that needed to be addressed were problems that arose from prejudice, misunderstanding and ignorance. However, more recent trends in multicultural education seem to suggest that its purpose is to develop cultural awareness (Taxel).

Research has revealed that multicultural literature consists of three distinct kinds of literature. The broadest of the three is world literature, which includes the literature of "underrepresented peoples." Cross-cultural literature refers to works written about one group of people from someone who is not part of that culture. An example of this type of work is Ezra Jack Keats who often wrote about African-Americans although he himself was Caucasian. Finally, there is parallel culture literature, which refers to books written by individuals from "parallel" cultural groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics.

When developing a curriculum that incorporates multicultural children's literature, teachers have a number of things to consider. First, and most important, is that the chosen literature should be carefully read to make certain that the portrayal of the characters accurately reflects a group's culture, language history and values. Second, educators should be aware that many false perceptions are concerned with race. One way that these false perceptions continue to be perpetuated is through children's literature, which tends to reflect the values and beliefs of society at a particular time. As a result, it is important for teachers to educate themselves on how to uncover the various forms of racial bias. According to research done by Finazzo (1997), the following questions aid educators in locating good multicultural books:

- Does the story include real and authentic characters?
- Are the characters depicted in active rather than passive roles?
- Are the actions of characters true to life and not stereotypical?
- Are different cultures portrayed in a positive fashion?
- Within the story, do the characters develop and grow in acceptable ways?
- Does the story increase understanding and acceptance?
- Does the story help members of the portrayed minority feel greater pride in their own background?
- Does the book appropriately reflect the speech of the people featured?
- Does the style of the illustrator complement the text and enhance the story?
- Do the illustrations reflect an authentic portrayal of physical features and other detail?
- What experiences have the author and illustrator had to prepare for the book?
- What is the copyright date of the book and does that affect the accuracy and authenticity of the story?
- Does the book encourage the children to become more socially conscience?

(McGowan)

In addition to the guidelines for material selection, it is also important for teachers to have access to good resources, which can help them select good multicultural literature for use in the classroom. A useful resource often contains critical reviews, bibliographical information and a short abstract of each work. Guidelines for using a particular book or suggested lessons may also be included. When used appropriately, these resources can assist teachers in locating materials in a timely manner. Here are just a couple of resources which can aid teachers in selecting materials to help build their multicultural classroom library:

1. Barrera, R.B., Thompson, V.D., & Dressman, M. (Eds.). "Kaleidoscope: A multicultural booklist for grade K-8"(2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
2. Muse, D. (97). "The New Press Guide to Multicultural Resources for Young Readers. "New York: New Press"

It is also important to not use just one book to generalize about members of a particular ethnic group. Students must be reminded that one book does not give a complete picture of a country or a particular group of people (Bambridge).

The one thing I really want my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students to get out of this unit is the realization that humans are more alike than they are different. People everywhere share the same basic social, and biological and emotional needs. The values, customs and cultural beliefs of the various groups of people are determining factors in how these needs are met. I feel confident that good multicultural children's literature can be used to help children understand, appreciate and respect people from diverse cultures. After all, this particular genre of literature tells more than just stories; multicultural literature chronicles the history of humanity. I think researchers Rasinki and Padax (1990) summed it up best when they said, "Literature does more than change minds: it changes people's hearts. And people with changed hearts are people who can move the world" (McGowan Tom). With this thought in mind, I would now like to focus my attention on how I intend to teach this curriculum to my students.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

According to research, there are four models for integrating multicultural literature into the curriculum. I list them all because I intend to use a combination of all four with more emphasis to be placed on the latter two stratagems. The first model is the Contribution approach. This particular style focuses on the highlights, heroes, and holidays of a particular culture. Next is the Additive approach which focuses on content, concepts and themes of other cultures. The Transformation model places emphasis on examining the problems, themes, concerns and ideas from the viewpoint of different cultural groups. Finally, there is the Decision making and social action approaches which focus on

identifying social problems and concerns, making decisions and taking action to help resolve any identified problems.

The first two models mentioned--the Contribution and Additive approaches--are good because they are generally easy and enjoyable to implement into a curriculum. However, according to researchers, they are not the best strategies to implement because they only look at a particular culture on a very superficial, surface level. In order to get to the real “meat and potatoes” of what multicultural children’s literature can do, the latter two approaches are the ones that come highly recommended. I, however, plan to use a mixture of them all.

## **TIME FRAME**

This will be a month-long unit. During the course of it, the students will encounter stories whose characters are from diverse backgrounds. Along their path, the students will meet a little Ukrainian girl; a little Guatemalan girl; a Japanese immigrant and his grandson; and a Mexican-American family. It is my intention that the stories I select will help children see themselves and others in an entirely different, yet identifiable, light. The students and I will begin our journey by focusing on what we can take with us. I will incorporate a number of ways in which to spark my students’ interest in the countries we will visit.

First, I will post visual aids in the classroom such as maps of the world and/or maps that show the country in which the particular story we will be reading takes place. I also plan to give some background information about each place we will visit. I would like for this to take place in the form of students viewing a videotape, by conducting virtual tours on the Internet and/or by looking through travel brochures of the country. I also plan to grab hold of my second graders’ attention by engaging them in certain aspects of that culture such as the food, music, or an art project. I realize that it is important to set the stage for the students so that at least they have something to grab onto while we are reading the story.

It is at this time that an educator can see the importance of the Contributions Approach and the Additive Approach. They offer the enticement the students will need in order for them to be interested in coming along for the ride, and they allow the teacher to get as creative as they wish. These activities should be planned for the first day, before you even read the story, but now that the stage has been set, let’s look at how we can examine the deeper meanings of the story.

## **UTILIZING THE STRATEGIES**

By using the Transformation Approach, a teacher can choose a theme such as courage and utilize a variety of books that include different perspectives. The main themes I chose for this unit are that of family and friendship. I chose these because there are so

many different avenues the students and I can take in exploring such themes. These are the best themes, I believe, for exploring situations the children can identify with.

An example of utilizing this strategy would be to use the book, *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto. In this story, the children are reluctant to admit a mistake they made as the family gathers to celebrate the holidays. The main character, Maria, believes she lost her mother's ring in one of the tamales she helped prepare. In order to try to correct the mistake, the kids wind up eating all the tamales. One of the topics of conversation the students and I could have would be to share with each other what type of family traditions we carry out in our own families to help celebrate the holidays. This would enable the students to compare/contrast how their family is like this Mexican-American family, and how they are different. We could even discuss a time when we did something we were not supposed to do and what consequences we had to suffer because of it. Another discussion we could have would be to ask the student, "If you were Maria, how would you have handled the situation? Would you have done something different, or would you have handled it the same way she did?" This line of questioning is a good lead into the Decision Making and Social Action model which both call upon the students to use their higher order thinking skills. This is because both models allow students to explore and discuss their values, make decisions and seek out solutions to problems.

Another story I intend to use is, *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco. In this story, students will watch a friendship develop between a Ukranian-American girl and the African-American boys who were her neighbors. During the story, the boys' grandmother, Miss Eula, becomes a surrogate grandmother for the little girl. In helping the children understand the beauty of this friendship, we will explore the Ukranian culture. Of course, we will do this before reading the story, but I think it is important because I want the students to see that, despite coming from incredibly diverse backgrounds, something unique and wonderful developed between children who on the surface shouldn't really have much in common. We will locate Ukraine on the map and see how far people have to travel to get from the Ukraine to the United States. We will then look at pictures and perhaps a movie about the country. After reading the story, the students will be asked to explore their feelings about friendship. How would they feel if a child who was from a different culture moved in next to them? How would they make him/her feel welcome? Once they have explored their feelings about this topic, the students will then bring their thoughts and ideas together and collaboratively make a "friendship mural" which would display the beliefs they have on how to extend the "olive branch" of friendship to children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

One other book I plan to utilize but have not yet mentioned is *Grandfather's Journey*. In this poignant story a man reminisces about his grandfather's journey from the Far East to the United States. Through this beautifully illustrated tale, students will learn the meaning of immigration and sacrifice as they follow first the grandfather, then the grandson on their long voyage from Japan to the United States.

I aim to use a total of four books that feature children and families from very diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Ideally, I would like to spend one week on each book exploring and learning about different aspects of the ethnic group we are reading about. However, I realize that curriculum time restraints that need to be followed make this line of thinking impossible. Instead, I propose that teachers use this unit as part of the social studies curriculum, which, at my school, will allow the class to spend Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on this program. The primary focus of the unit will be on the TEKS Strands of Geography and Culture. The TEKS this unit will primarily focus on will be:

SS TEKS 113.3b Geography  
SS TEKS 113b Culture.  
SS TEKS 113.b Culture (Project Clear)

We know that children bring all their experiences to any reading event. Sometimes those experiences will include feelings of fear, hostility and curiosity. At the same time, children are wonderfully accepting of others. This incredible openness and capacity to trust that children demonstrate is very evident in the primary grades. These are the qualities that children possess that I want to harness in order to help the students develop an understanding of universal emotions and themes that the books in the unit contain.

### **Day 1**

I will stand before a KWL chart and tell the students that we will be reading a story called *Abuela's Weave*. A KWL chart is a way for students to organize information into three categories. The categories are: what do they *know*? (K), what do they *want* to know? (W) and what have they *learned*? (L). I will inform them that the story takes place in Guatemala and is about a little girl and her grandmother. I will ask the students if they have ever heard of Guatemala. Once I receive answers, I will locate Guatemala on the map and place a sticker on its location. I will then pass out post-it notes to the students and ask them to write one thing they know about Guatemala. Once the students have finished, I will give them a little background information about Guatemala. We will look at pictures I have obtained from the travel agency as well as eat “pan,” which is a sweet bread that is not only popular in Guatemala (and other parts of Central and South America), but can also be found in most grocery stores.

Once the initial introduction to Guatemala has been completed, I will once again pass out post-its to the students. This time I will ask them to write one thing they would like to learn about Guatemala. The students will write down and then read their questions aloud. They will then place their post-its on the KWL chart under W.

## Day 2

I will ask the students to please come sit in the reading circle. Together we will review any information we have learned about Guatemala. I will then tell them that I am going to read a story called *Abuela's Weave*. I will explain that the story takes place in Guatemala and is about a little girl and the relationship she has with her grandmother. I will ask the students to think about what they have in common with the little girl and how they are different from her. I will then read the story to the class, asking questions along the way. These questions will help the students think about what I previously asked them to consider. For example, I might ask them, "Describe the relationship between the little girl and her grandmother. What chores did the little girl have to do?"

Once I have finished reading the story, the students will then do an art project. I will explain that the grandmother in the story was a weaver and that a weaver can create beautiful works of art by weaving together strands of material. The students will then receive strips of paper 1 inch wide and 8 inches long. They will also receive another piece of paper in which seven slits have been cut. Each slit is spaced at least 2 inches apart from each other and they will be cut lengthwise on the paper. I will have the students weave the strips of paper in and out of each other. Each strip will be held in its place by a small amount of glue. Once the students have completed this simple weaving project, I will laminate the place mats for durability. By doing this simple project, I feel that students can get a feel for what it might be like for the grandmother to weave together strands of material into something she's proud of.

## Day 3

The students and I will once again take a look at the map. By this time, I know the students will be able to tell me the location of Guatemala without any help. We will also take a look at our KWL chart. As a group, we will look at what we knew about Guatemala and its people before we started. We will then examine the questions we had about Guatemala and write the answers to them on the post-its. The answers will be placed under the W on the chart which stands for, "What we have learned?" In this manner, both the students and I can gauge where they started and how far they have come.

Another story I intend for the students to read is the story *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto. In this story a Mexican-American family gathers for the Christmas Holidays. The little girl in the story tries on her mother's wedding ring and accidentally loses it while she's making tamales. Since she is too frightened to tell her mother what happened, she enlists the aid of her cousins who attempt to help her find the ring by eating all of the tamales. The three-day schedule used for the previous story will be modified to accommodate this story. As I stated earlier, this is a great story to do because you can

make it relevant to your students' lives in either one of two ways. You can either focus on family traditions and celebrations (as I have done), or you can focus on the problem the little girl in the story had and how she tried to solve it. Either way, the students can relate their family to the family in the story, or they can identify and sympathize with the little girl getting into trouble and being too scared to tell her mother about it.

### **Day 1**

I will stand before the KWL chart and tell the students that this time we will be reading a story called *Too Many Tamales*. The students will be informed that although it takes place in the United States, it is about a Mexican-American family. Together we will locate Mexico on the map so the students will see that its location is not far from Texas. I will also tell the students a little bit of history about Mexico. I will attempt to tap into the students' prior knowledge by asking them if they have ever been to Mexico or met anyone who is from Mexico. After their responses I will once again pass out the post-its to students and on it they will write one thing they know about Mexico. Each student will take turns reading what he/she wrote and putting it on the KWL chart under K. The students will then get to sample some store bought tamales. While they are eating I will explain that making tamales requires hard work and that we will learn how tamales are made when we read the story. Once the students have finished their snack they will write something they would like to learn about Mexico on the post-its that I will once again pass out to them. The students will take turns reading the questions they wrote and putting them on the KWL chart under W.

### **Day 2**

The students and I will review any information they may have picked up about Mexico. Before we begin reading *Too Many Tamales*, I will ask the students to think about how they and their families celebrate the holidays. I will ask them to compare the family in the story to their family. I will then read the story to the class. Once I have finished the story, I will ask the students if the family in the story had anything in common their family. We will construct a Venn Diagram on chart paper to compare and contrast the family in the story to the students' own families. We will then have a class discussion on traditions and celebrating holidays. Once the discussion is over, the students will be given an assignment to do in which they will be asked to describe their favorite holiday and how their family celebrates it.

In order to do the assignment, the students will be given: a pencil, some crayons, a sheet of construction paper and a sheet of writing paper. They will be asked to draw a picture of their favorite holiday. They will then be instructed to write about why it is their favorite holiday and how their family celebrates it. The students will share their work with the other students once it is completed.

### Day 3

As a class we will gather around the KWL chart. The students will talk about what they have learned about Mexican-Americans. I am expecting many children to be able to see how many similarities there are between their families and the family in the story. The students will receive post-its and write down something they learned about Mexico over the course of the lesson. They will read what they wrote to the class before posting it on the KWL chart under "Learned." Once all the post-its have been put up, it is a wonderful time to review the chart to see if any of the questions under the W had been answered. Students like to see how much knowledge they have acquired as a result of a lesson and a KWL chart is an effective and non-threatening way for students to do just that.

The other two books will follow the same general format that I just went through for *Too Many Tamales* and *Abuela's Weave*. On the first day of instruction, the students' interest will be piqued. On the second day of the lesson, the story will be read to the students followed by an activity. Finally, the third day of instruction will be a wrap-up and review of what the students learned. Overall I feel this to be a very simple, but effective format.

**LESSON PLANS** (The objectives will be the same for all the lessons in this unit: Students will locate places of significant places on maps and globes. Student should understand the similarities and differences that exist between families. Students should understand the relative location of places.)

**Lesson Plan 1:** *Abuela's Weave* by Omar Castaneda

**Materials needed:**

- Book, *Abuela's Weave*
- Maps
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Chart paper
- Pencils and crayons
- KWL Chart

The lesson begins with a discussion about Guatemala. I will ask the students if they think they can tell me where it is on the map. We will then locate it together and I will place a sticker on its location. I will give them a little history about the country while they look at pictures I obtained. We will then sample some bread called "mollejas," which is a sweet bread from Central America. The students will then receive post-it notes I will pass out and on that they will write one thing they know or think they know about Guatemala. We will then place these post-its under the K of the previously made KWL

chart. I will then pass out another post-it. On this one, the students will write what they would like to learn about Guatemala.

The next day, I will read *Abuela's Weave* to the students. Both before and during the reading, I will ask the students questions that will ask them to examine the similarities and the differences between their relationship with their grandmother and the relationship that is portrayed in the story. After reading the story I will ask them to consider the question as to why it was important that the grandmother told the little girl how to weave. I will ask the students to think about some of the things they learned from their grandmother and how wonderful it was to acquire that knowledge. I will then have the students create a place mat by weaving strips of paper together. It is in this manner that the students will experience a little bit of what the young lady in the story experienced.

On the third day of the lesson, I will revisit the KWL chart with the students. we will review some of the things we have learned about Guatemala over the past couple of days. We will review the location of Guatemala on the map, talk about the culture of the Guatemalan people. I will then past out post-its once again. This time I will ask the students to write down one thing they learned about Guatemala. Each student will read what they wrote aloud and place it under the "L" on the KWL chart. We will then take a look at the questions under the W and see if we were able to answer any of them.

## **Lesson Plan 2:** *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco

### ***Materials needed:***

- Book, *Chicken Sunday*
- Maps
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Chart paper
- Styrofoam eggs
- Black paint
- Beads of various shapes and sizes
- KWL Chart

The lesson begins with a discussion about the Ukraine. I will ask the students if they think they can tell me where it is on the map. We will then locate it together and I will place a sticker on its location. I will give them a little history about the country while they look at pictures I obtained. We will then listen to music from the Ukraine.

The students will then receive post-it notes I will pass out and on that they will write one thing they know or think they know about the Ukraine. We will then place these post-its under the K of the previously made KWL chart. I will then pass out another post-it. On this one, the students will write what they would like to learn about the Ukraine.

The next day, I will read *Chicken Sunday* to the students. Both before and during the reading, I will ask the students questions encouraging them to examine the similarities and the differences between the friendships in the story and the friends they have. In other words, I would like for the students to consider the question, “What makes a friend?” The students will then create Ukrainian eggs to give to their friends. They will take a Styrofoam egg and paint it black. After it dries, they will begin gluing beads to the eggs to create a beautiful work. They will then let the glue dry on it before they take it home.

On the third day of the lesson, I will revisit the KWL chart with the students. We will review some of the things we have learned about the Ukraine over the past couple of days. We will review the location of the Ukraine on the map and talk about aspects of the culture. I will then pass out post-its once again. This time I will ask the students to write down one thing they learned about the Ukraine. Each student will read what they wrote aloud and place it under the “L” on the KWL chart. We will then take a look at the questions under the W and see if we were able to answer any of them.

### **Lesson Plan 3:** *Grandfather’s Journey* by Allen Say

#### ***Materials needed:***

- Book, *Grandfather’s Journey*
- Maps
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Chart paper
- KWL Chart
- Face paint
- Chopsticks and Sticky rice or steamed dumplings (which you can purchase from any Asian restaurant)

The lesson begins with a discussion about Japan. I will ask the students if they think they can tell me where it is on the map. We will then locate it together and I will place a sticker on its location. I will give them a little history about the country while they look at pictures I obtained. We will then sample some steam dumplings using chopsticks. The students will then receive post-it notes I will pass out and on that they will write one thing they know or think they know about Japan. We will then place these post-its under the K of the previously made KWL chart. I will then pass out another post-it. On this one, the students will write what they would like to learn about Japan.

The next day, I will read the story to the students. Both before and during the story, I will ask the students to remember a time when they had to leave something that was familiar to them and how they felt. I want to see if they can relate their feelings to the grandfather’s feelings about leaving home. I will then explain to students that Japanese

theater is important to the people of Japan. I will show them pictures of how the actors paint their faces in order to show drama and feelings. They will then be asked to think about a time when they had to do something new and how they felt about it. Were they scared or excited? They will be broken up into groups of two and asked to come up with a skit in which to show how they felt or might feel about moving somewhere or doing totally different and far from home. The students will be given about 20 minutes to come up with a skit. They will then perform it in front of the class.

On the third day of the lesson, I will revisit the KWL chart with the students. We will review some of the things we have learned about Japan over the past couple of days. We will review the location of Japan on the map and talk about aspects of the culture. I will then pass out post-its once again. This time I will ask the students to write down one thing they learned about Japan. Each student will read what he/she wrote aloud and place it under the “L” on the KWL chart. We will then take a look at the questions under the W and see if we were able to answer any of them.

#### **Lesson Plan 4:** *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto

##### ***Materials needed:***

- Book, *Too Many Tamales*
- Maps
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Chart paper
- KWL Chart

The lesson begins with a discussion about Mexico. I will ask the students if they think they can tell me where it is on the map. We will then locate it together and I will place a sticker on its location. I will give them a little history about the country while they look at pictures I obtained. I will probably spend quite a bit of time on the history of Mexico because its history is so intricately tied in with that of Texas. As a result, I will have a lot of material on colorful characters such as Davey Crockett, Santa Anna and Sam Houston. I will also have pictures of the many historic places in Texas such as San Antonio and The Alamo. This is a great time to hit most of the TEKS, which cover Texas history and geography. I don't intend to lecture to the students, I just want to touch upon some of the really important highlights of our state's history. Once we have completed our discussion on state history, we will then eat quesadillas and store bought tamales. We will also listen to some of my favorite Spanish singers. The students will then receive post-it notes I will pass out and on that they will write one thing they know or think they know about Mexico. We will then place these post-its under the K of the previously made KWL chart. I will then pass out another post-it. On this one, the students will write what they would like to learn about Mexico.

The next day, I will read the story to the student. Both before and during the story I will ask the students to remember celebrating their favorite holidays with their family. I want them to think about the things they did and how they felt during the celebration. I want the students to make comparisons between how their family celebrates and how the family in the story celebrates the holidays. I will then give the students a piece of construction paper and crayons and ask them to draw a memory they have from a family celebration. Once the picture is completed they will write an explanation about the picture. They will write what the celebration is about and what they were doing in the picture. They will share their work with the class.

On the third day of the lesson, I will revisit the KWL chart with the students. We will review some of the things we have learned about Mexico over the past couple of days. We will review the location of Mexico on the map and talk about aspects of the culture. I will then pass out post-its once again. This time I will ask the students to write down one thing they learned about Mexico. Each student will read what they wrote aloud and place it under the “L” on the KWL chart. We will then take a look at the questions under the W and see if we were able to answer any of the questions there.

I think one positive aspect of this unit is that a teacher can vary the length of it. Granted, this unit is only 1 month long, but a teacher can adapt the curriculum to incorporate as many books as he/she desires. It is simply a matter of reading the story and finding the angle from which you want to relate the story to the lives of the students.

There are many wonderful multicultural stories to be told and numerous talented writers who tell them. The books I mentioned in this curriculum are a good beginning, but there is much more good-quality multicultural literature available for teachers. Some authors to look for are: John Steptoe, Donald Crews, Amy Tan, Leo and Diane Dillon, and Tomie de Paola. These are just a few authors who teachers may want to seek out when looking for multicultural children’s books. It is a good idea to keep the classroom library well stock with multicultural children’s literature so that the students will be able to continue their encounter with multiculturalism during independent reading time.

### **Gathering Materials**

Room arrangement will be an important aspect for this unit. In order to keep my students’ interest high, I plan to furnish my room with instruments, quilts, pottery and pictures of famous artists (Frida Khalo, for example) that I have collected which showcase different cultures. Since I am a big fan of music, I will also bring in CDs featuring my favorite singers from around the world. My class will listen to everything from the Gypsy Kings to Gregorian Chants. I really intend to have the students totally immersed in this particular learning experience.

Please don’t worry about spending too much money on trying to furnish the room. There are a couple of ways in which to obtain pictures and other materials to set up in the

room. As I stated earlier, you can get pictures from travel agents, who are often quite willing to get rid of old brochures. You can also get pictures from travel magazines available at the bookstore. There are a few magazines on the market that are dedicated to travel and leisure. Second-hand bookstores can also yield some great treasures. I know that Half Price Books carries a series of books comprised entirely of postcards that highlight a particular artist's works. A teacher can easily take the book apart and place the pictures around the room.

As for finding instruments or other little tidbits that you can use to decorate your room, a good place to start would be to ask friends, family members or other teachers if they have ethnic artifacts they wouldn't mind lending to you for the school year. I have found that people are often quite willing to contribute items. Another good source for locating multicultural pieces is a second hand store such as The Salvation Army. I have found many things there. It really is a gold mine just waiting to be plundered. You just have to be willing to spend a little time perusing the aisles and using your imagination.

If you are still finding it difficult to find pieces to furnish your room, please don't forget to try the embassies. Many of the embassies have an educational outreach component and are quite willing to send posters or any information you might be interested in concerning that country. Some embassies even have curriculum guides that they will send for free. Therefore, it is possible to get your classroom looking multicultural without breaking the bank; all you need is a little ingenuity.

Please don't limit the multicultural aspect of the unit to just social studies. In my classroom, I have done a couple of math lessons with Jacob Lawrence and have taught my students to do a diamante poem with the help of a self-portrait done by Frida Khalo. This is a unit that begs teachers to go off the beaten path and to be as creative and as artsy as they want to be. Have fun with it!

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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A young Guatemalan girl and her grandmother grow closer as they weave glorious creations in order to sell them at the market.

Polacco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday*. New York: Philomel Books, 1992.

This story is about an unlikely friendship between a young Ukrainian girl and two African-American boys. To thank Miss Eula for her wonderful Sunday dinners, the three children sell eggs to buy her a hat.

Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

A Japanese American man remembers his grandfather's journey to America which he later also undertakes. He talks about his feelings being torn by his love for his two countries.

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