

A Focus on Transnational Experiences in Children's Literature

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This special issue of the Journal of Children's Literature (JCL) focuses on research, scholarship, and current conversations about the diversity of transnational experiences in the world.

IN THE WAKE OF continued anti-immigrant politics and a global pandemic, we have experienced an abrupt hiatus in travel. The sociological outcome of this pause on border crossing will truly only be known over time. However, many, including young children, are already experiencing the psychological impact of closed borders, threats of building a wall, and endless xenophobia that sustain barriers (both real and metaphorical) and perpetuate trauma (Osorio, 2018). After such a long stretch of paralyzed mobility, many of us seek healing and reconnection to our roots as we look toward a season of recovery from stillness and severed ties to our communities. Like Alma who shines on our *JCL* cover, our origin stories are waiting to be reclaimed and remembered.

This issue is an opportunity to contribute to that healing as it features needed counternarratives in children's literature and classrooms (Martínez-Roldán, 2021). These narratives highlight the unique experiences and resilience of transmigrant communities and families, and how their lives are often shaped by complex social networks and negotiations that transcend national borders, cultures, languages, genders, and social groups. As Brochin and Medina (2017) have noted, over the past decade, we have seen an emergence of transnational texts in contemporary children's literature that depict the complex social networks and lived realities of communities who live in between and across nations, states, and borders—including physical, cultural, linguistic, and gendered spaces.

Transnational literature for children makes visible the complex dynamics and consequences of transnationalism in diverse communities in the United States and across the U.S. borders, and challenges conceptions of a linear path of migration while centering global politics of power (Sánchez & Landa, 2016). Per Brochin and Medina (2017), a transnational perspective on the study of children's literature does not simply map how people and texts move but aims to understand the new forms of marginalization, unfair redistribution of wealth, and resegregation that emerge specifically for transmigrant communities.

JCL recently published a critical content analysis of children's literature focused on representations of Latinx immigrants and immigration (Rodríguez & Braden, 2018). This issue extends this work further as it features four manuscripts and a Teachers' Voices column that explore more nuanced portrayals of transnationalism in children's literature, and how teachers and students are responding to the social, political, and linguistic border-crossing narratives in the texts shared. The manuscripts are an invitation to enter into the unique border-crossing experiences of distinct communities portrayed in children's literature, including migrant workers, transracial adoptees, the African diaspora, and those of Muslim faith.

Overview of Contents

This issue includes four peer-reviewed articles. In "It's Almost as if I Wrote This': Transnational Migrant Farmworkers Read 'Their' Lives," Alma D. Stevenson and Scott Beck provide a telling analysis of transnational migrant workers' responses to picturebooks featuring their experiences. Their responses provide needed criticisms of the literature and note misrepresentations while offering perspectives missing from

scholarly critiques. In “Memoirs or Myths? Storying Asian American Adoption in Picturebooks,” Joanne Yi, using tenets of Asian critical race theory, or AsianCrit, frames a critical content analysis of transnational, transracial adoption stories for young children to examine representations of how Asian American adoptees are represented and reveals the harmful tropes and limited portrayals that permeate the sample. “Not American Enough: African Diaspora, Unfinished Migrations, and Transnational Children’s Literature” by Latoya Teague examines African diasporic transnational children’s books and defines essential guiding principles for text selection, including references to ancestral and spiritual practices, items delivering memory, the guidance of elders, and memory as a mode of border crossing. In “Navigating the Land of Opportunities as Muslim Immigrants: A Geocriticism Perspective to Transnationalism in Multicultural Children’s Literature,” Suriati Abas, Ebrahim Bamanger, Amani K. Gashan, and Aslihan Guler analyze how depictions of Muslim migrant characters in children’s narratives reflect current realities and contemporary life in the United States to advocate for the inclusion of this literature in curricula to broaden students’ understanding of minoritized Muslims and address the injustice of privilege. These manuscripts are followed by a Teachers’ Voices column carefully edited by Suzanne Knezek and Paul Ricks. In “They ‘Come to School With Their Backpacks Heavy’: Bilingual Teacher Candidates Learning to Use Transnational Latinx Children’s Literature,” Anissa Wicktor Lynch and Elizabeth A. Morphis describe how students’ transnational experiences helped them form strong connections with each other and to literature while reading and creating texts that were meaningful to them.

What you will note across each of the four research manuscripts as well as the Teachers’ Voices column is that representation of transnational experiences remains limited in children’s picturebooks, and what few are available are not without issue. You’ll see, for example, how some of the literature samples featured included texts that are not free of critique, including *Islandborn* (2018) by Junot Díaz and *One Green Apple* (2006) by Eve Bunting. As the authors provide transparency about their text selection, what emerges as salient is the need for careful review and further guidance for selecting children’s picturebooks featuring a diverse array of transnational experiences. When faced with a small pool of potential transnational literature for children, what must we keep in mind to help ensure that representations are fair, authentic, and nuanced?

As always, *JCL* features its regular CLA series, including a thoughtful Critical Conversations column by Edith Campbell and a note from the CLA president, Dr. Ruth McKoy Lowery. In this issue, you will also find the 2021 Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts review and an interview by Rachel Skrlac Lo and Donna Sabis-Burns, co-chairs of the 2021 CLA Breakfast. Both columns reflect the service, work, and design of their corresponding CLA committee members.

To conclude, we would be remiss to not acknowledge our incredible reviewers who nudged our authors forward to revising these impactful pieces. We would like to also thank our entire editorial staff, particularly lead student editorial assistant Sarah Reid, as well as the CLA Executive Board for their continued support. ■

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