

Children between Worlds

Talk at Ralph Brown Draughon Library

Auburn University

January 13, 2009

Slide 2 Introduction

Exhibit

Source: International Youth Library

Purpose: To begin the dialogue about racism and xenophobia, an issue we have long dealt with, in the United States. While this issue is relatively new to Europeans, where most of the books come from, it continues to have relevance everywhere, including in the United States. As the director of the International Youth Library, Barbara Scharioth said in her introduction when the exhibit opened at the IJB: “books can serve as mediators, because they are themselves part of this dialogue, which is often a dialogue between cultures.” From the start, this exhibit was meant to be first seen at the IJB but then to go on tour to many cities and countries. The exhibit has been traveling around the United States since 2005, and the reason we have it is that Suzy Westenkirchner, the Education Librarian’s, and Joyce Hicks’s, organizer of the exhibit here at Auburn University Library, have worked hard to bring it here and to present it.

Organization: The exhibit divided is into 5 sections, and that is how they are exhibited in the exhibit cases near the door:

- 1.) Corner Country: Stories in Pictures – these are picture books for younger children;
- 2.) A Butterfly in the City short fiction for children to age 12, which give children a glimpse into the experiences of young children as they move to a new culture, whether from the Caribbean to Paris or from Hamburg to India;
- 3.) The Other Side of Truth for young adults over 13, in which children begin to see immigrant and other intercultural experiences in a more psychologically nuanced way;
- 4.) “Childhood Cravings for 15 and older readers (some of these books are meant for adults), in which through autobiography and fiction authors ask questions about life, fixed cultural models, the role of women, religion, language, and love“;
- 5.) If the World Were a Village – non-fiction that introduces the varied world to children and young adults.

The write-up about each book from the exhibit catalogue is next to the book itself.

IBBY/USBBY – The exhibit is traveling thanks to the sponsorship of USBBY – Purpose of USBBY

Slide 3: International Youth Library

Brief history – Jella Lepman – in 1946 had an exhibit of books and books to give to children –in the wake of the devastation in Germany right after World War II – the book that was given away was *The Story of Ferdinand* by Leaf Munro. In 1949 Jella Lepman established a permanent collection, the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany, with the intention of promoting intercultural understanding among children through children’s literature. Scholars today come from all over the world to study today at one of the largest international collections of children’s books in the world, housed in the beautiful 15th century castle, Schloss Blutenburg in Munich. (see web page <http://www.ijb.de/>)

Slide 4: Definition of Children between Worlds

President Elect Obama is a perfect example:

“He is growing up in Hawaii and when he comes to the mainland he has to work at it [his Black identity]... He is not socialized like other people” Randall Kennedy, a professor at Harvard Law School

“...he is open to the world in a way that most Americans have not had the opportunity to be. That is something that outsiders have to do.” David Levering Lewis, Historian

“ The Joshua Generation” by David Remnick, *New Yorker Magazine*, Nov. 17, 2008, p. 72

Slide 5 Immigrants, strangers, people who are different

Themes and points of view:

- Perspective of the mainstream
 - Tolerance or acceptance
 - Opportunity to learn from newcomer
- Perspective of the newcomer/stranger
 - Learning about the new country/surviving/ exploring
 - Assimilation v. Maintaining one’s cultural identity – balance
- Children truly between two worlds
 - Children acting as liaisons between cultures in conflict

- Refugees : You may not be welcome in the new place, but you can't go home

Slide 6: Dreaming about the larger world

Main Theme – the world is wondrous and varied

Ways theme is developed :

- photographic celebrations of the world's wonders
- We are different but we share the same basic human needs
- Art and artifacts from different cultures
- World tours celebrating our differences and similarities

Slide 7 Perspective of the mainstream

Themes: acceptance, valuing, learning from is a common theme in the picture books – typical example include:

Gaetan Doremus, *Belisaire* SUZY WESTENKIRCHNER WILL DISCUSS

Petra Mönter and Sabine Wiemer's *Vimala Gehört zu Uns*, [Vimnala is one of us] in which a class accepts and enjoys their new, and 'different' classmate whose parents had come from India, though she herself was born in Germany. COMMENT ON NOTIONS OF NATIONHOOD AS ETHNICITY.

Slide 8 When three children on the play ground and on the street tease Vimala, the Vimala's classmates unite to stand with Vimala demonstrating that when people oppose bullying by the few, the bullies lose their power. Dynamic layouts and caricature-like drawings strengthen and support the text. In the scene where Vimala is being harassed she looks as if she were lost in a forest of tire swings,

Slide 9 while the diagonal line the children create as they face the bullies, adds both strength and interest to the scene, as does the bird's eye view scene of Vimala and ten of her friend walking home together from school.

Slide 10 What the newcomer has to offer

In *Raschid* by Jean Maubille the children are suspicious of Rachid, the new kid, because he speaks differently –

- Slide 11 he is so shy he starts speaking in Arabic instead of French when he first arrives, even though it's clear that he does know French; he does not eat the same kind of food as they; and he wears a "scarf" – a kifaya.
- Slide 12 The kids are a little concerned, though, when Rachid does not come to class after lunch. Just as he does show up someone knocks his desk over and out roll his bag of marbles. This turns the situation around as the Rachid offers to play with the children and they gladly join him. The animal characters with their soft colors and amusing shapes keep the story slightly distanced and allow the author to talk about difference without dealing with ethnicity, although the implication is clear.
- CHALLENGE OF READING PICTURE BOOKS – TEXT'S VOCABULARY! E.g. "Raseurs"
- Slide 13 *Afrika: Ahter Het Het* [Africa Behind the Fence] by Bart Moeyaert and Anna Höglund goes a step further: the protagonist learns from the newcomers.
- Slide 14 While initially, like his neighbors, he is puzzled by the newcomers' unusual backyard activities amid their identically neat garden plots,
- Slide 15 the boy decides to explore and is introduced to the joys of hot tea in an African style village house on a rainy afternoon Belgium.
- Slide 17 In *Land der Ecken* [Land of Corners] by Irene Ulitzka and Gerhard Gepp no one has ever seen a round object.
- Slide 18 Even the people's heads have corners.
- Slide 19 One day a strange object lands in the grass.
- Slide 20 What is not known, however, cannot be, at least that is the conclusion the professors come to when a student brings the strange new object to school. Rather than examine it, the professors try to cast a spell over it as if to make it disappear. When it shatters, they are horrified,
- Slide 21 but the boy decides to explore what else is beyond the horizon and discovers a world.
- Slide 22 *Die Insel* by Armin Gerder [*The Island*, published in English in 2007 by Allen & Unwin] takes a sinister tone and is clearly appropriate for upper elementary, or even secondary school – one high school English teacher in Australia wrote about how she uses the book with her 10th graders.
- Slide 23 When a stranger is blown ashore by the ocean currents and fate, the islanders see him as too different and treat him as a subhuman.

- Slide 24 They give him no name and lock him in a goat pen. When their conscience pricks them as they realize he is starving and cold, they try to 'do something' for him, by giving him the dirtiest and most arduous jobs, but their fear and suspicion continues, and, as the artist suggests, the children have learned an unplanned lesson well.
- Slide 25 As unease mounts the parents use the man to frighten the children into behaving; the teacher complains that the children are scared of him; the watchman is convinced that the man will murder the people if he's allowed his freedom; and the headlines blare that the stranger is keeping the island in fear. They finally conclude they cannot let the man stay among them and he is to be thrown back in the ocean.
- Slide 26 One fisherman speaks up against this decision, but when his boat is burned by the islanders, others are afraid to speak up. After this experience, the islanders built a wall and shot down any bird that tries to fly in from the outside world. The art alludes to 20th century art of the Dadaist movement, i.e. post WWI anti-war protest art, or as one Australian high school teacher suggested, Holocaust victims' art, and in one scene there's an allusion to Eduard Munch's "The Scream."
- Slide 27 **Perspective of the newcomer/stranger**

The chapter books tend to be written from the point of view of the newcomer and his or her struggles to learn the customs, to fit in, and frequently to resist losing their ethnic identity.

Learning about the new country/surviving/ exploring

Two American books describe being new as an American in another culture.

In *Beyond the Mango Tree* Amy Bronwen Zemser draws on her memories of living in Monrovia, Liberia to tell the story of a lonesome and inquisitive girl, Sarina, from Boston, whose fearful, diabetic mother prevents her from making friends or from exploring beyond the garden wall, by tying her to the mango tree in the yard whenever her diabetes induced fear becomes irrational. Sarina does learn about life in Monrovia through the servants, one of whom she blackmails into taking her to the market, and more importantly through a clandestine friendship with Boima, a boy who come into the yard to play with her. They hide from her mother's and Te Te the housekeeper's prying eyes Te Te and her friend to conspire to steal a few jars of fish from the kitchen to help the boy's family. Hurt by this 'betrayal' Sarina remains blind to her friend's dire circumstances until his sister comes to her for help as Boima lies dying from Yellow Fever in their tiny house. Inequities are clear – economic opportunities, the bare necessities for survival, from food to adequate health services are inadequate for most of the local people. While this story, told from an American perspective, provides a limited picture of life in Liberia, it highlights important social realities.

Joan Abelow uses her own experience as a cultural anthropology student working on her dissertation in a village on the Amazon in Peru in the early 1970s to create a vision of American culture as seen through the eyes of a young teen-ager from the village. Two women anthropologists ask to be allowed to stay in the village for a year of observing daily life, a request the villagers reluctantly grant. Humorous misunderstandings based on differing values regarding family relations such as a woman being unmarried and traveling with a stranger, and especially regarding daily living from planning and saving versus sharing whatever you have immediately with everyone, e.g. having a party immediately with the cane liquor the women had bought in town on one of their rare trips up the river away from the village, rather than saving it for an occasion as the women planned. By the end of the year the American women learn a few things, especially about sharing, something the protagonist the women should have learned from a record they play for her. The singers, whose names are a bug, say you only have as much love as you give. Although this is easy reading, frank references to sexual activity may make this more appropriate for high school.

Slide 28

Assimilation v. Maintaining one's cultural identity – balance- It seems that for immigrants there are distinct stages of leaving the old and adopting the new culture, but factors such as the level of acceptance by the new culture and the degree of difference between the old and the new likely affect the immigrant child's feelings of being between worlds.

Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing* is the humorous description of the journey of Remi, a young Nigerian woman from a 6 year old surrounded by a doting, well-to-do family in Lagos in the early 1950s to a frightened new boarding school student isolated by both different cultural practices, e.g sleeping alone in a cold room and bed during the week before the rest of the children arrive, and by prejudice based on ignorance about Africa, an ignorance which pervades society from children taking their images of Africans from Tarzan films to adults' assumptions about Africans' culture and capabilities. Humorous scenes include Remi shivering at Brighton Beach with her white family – she is wearing a bathing suit knitted by her 'Auntie Betty' from green army remnant wool. By the end of the book Remi is completely integrated into English life and considers herself English, though it's clear that others do not see her that way when she goes with her class on a week-long visit to Germany, where she is once again treated as the representative of Africa, even though by this time she had been away from Nigeria for almost 10 years and knew very little about Africa. As a young adult she now has to integrate her own identity, which she succeeds in doing when her family comes to visit and help her revive her African roots through dance and shared values.

In An Na's *A Step from Heaven* Young Ju tells her story from the time she is four in Korea and thinks going to America means going to heaven, where she hopes to be reunited with her dead grandfather. Discovering that America is not heaven, but maybe a step from heaven is her first disappointment. Her parents' perpetual struggle to make a living

in the new country where their lack of education and difficulties with the language are distinct barriers to achieving the life style her classmates take for granted, continues to be a source of stress for Young Ju. But while Young Ju adjusts and fulfills her mother's dream to become an outstanding student, her mother has to make endless sacrifices by holding down two, then three jobs, and the same economic hardships destroy their father. He becomes an alcoholic and is more and more abusive as he sees his dreams vanish in the endless round of low-paying jobs, the only kind of jobs open to him. The story resolves with the children's success as Americans, but at the price of the family breaking up and the father returning to Korea. The story highlights the discrepancy between the American dream and the reality for many. This was not an autobiography, but it does help dispel stereotypes about 'model' Asian-Americans, and does show how hard it is to negotiate two cultures. It is also a paean to the many immigrant parents who have sacrificed even at the expense of their physical and psychological health to provide a better life for their children.

Slide 29

In a world replete with strife, some refuse to accept predefined sides – Both *Samir and Yonathan* by Daniella Carmi and *Habibi* by Naomi Shehab Nye have a hopeful tone in the face of intolerance and violence.

Carmi, an Israeli author, develops her theme through the eyes of a Palestinian boy who because of an accident is taken to a Jewish hospital in Jerusalem. The four Israeli boys, who are in his room represent a microcosm of Israel. Three of the four brag about their older brothers in the military, exacerbating Sami's anxiety. One boy, Yonathan, however, is more thoughtful, and the two begin to develop a tentative friendship based on common interests.

In *Habibi*, an American Palestinian girl's father takes the family, in the optimistic wake of the 1993 peace accord, to live in the West Bank, where Lyana, who is after all American, struggles with language, the new ways, the strictness of her Armenian Christian school where she studies, and the political tensions surrounding them. She discovers what it is like for people to live in temporary facilities with no infrastructure and with constant fear of violence, actual or implied, from the Israeli military. When Lyana falls in love with a Jewish boy whom she meets on the Israeli side, she is afraid to bring him home, but his openness and desire to get to know her Palestinian family help form a shaky bridge.

Both books offer hope that the covers well capture – a glimpse into what could be. *Samir and Yonathan* was a Batchelder Award book and *Habibi* is the work of Naomi Shehab Nye, an outstanding American poet of Palestinian ancestry, who has made Palestinian and Middle Eastern culture and everyday life accessible to children through fiction, picture books, and translated poetry. RBDL has many of her books.

The exhibit includes several more books by and about people from the Middle East – Europeans have far more books for young people from immigrants from Turkey, Iran, Jordan and North Africa than we do in the U. S.

Slide 30

Refugees have an added problem of not being able to return to their countries of origin yet often feeling unwelcome or like strangers in their new countries. These are the children who perhaps feel most caught 'between worlds.' PERSONAL COMMENT

One such book, South African writer Beverly Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth*, is about an outspoken Nigerian journalist's two children, Sade and Femi, who are spirited to England because the family's lives are in danger, when their father criticizes the corrupt government. When their uncle fails to meet them upon their arrival in London, the children are left to their own devices to survive in a new country until eventually they are picked up by Child Services and placed with a foster family. The children's courage, bewilderment, and fear for their father are realistically portrayed. When their father also escapes the discrepancies between his story and the name on his name passport and the fact that even the children he claims are in England cannot be found because Sade had deliberately given a false name to protect her father who she thought was still in Nigeria, the British immigration authorities detain him and are ready to send him back into the arms of the Nigerian government.

Liaison between two cultures *Maniac Magee*

Slide 31 Theme – the world is wondrous and varied ; Vehicles :

photographic celebrations:

La Terre Racontée aux Enfants [The Earth Told to Children] by Hubert Comte and Yann Arthus-Bertrand gives – through the birds eye-view images of Arthus-Bertrand and Hubert Comte's interpretation one sees the beauty of our world and its people and the patterns of life in different places around the world. One can also see how small and precious our world is.

Slide 32

We are different but we share the same basic human needs:

If the World were a Village by David Small compares a wide range of statistics with an emphasis on the inequitable distribution of resources from income to water to availability of clean water, but also other interesting facts from religious practices to languages spoken globally.

- Slide 33 One of the surprising statistics included in *If the World Were a Village* is the number of chickens that the 100 person village would own – almost twice as many as it has people. On the other hand, the unequal distribution of resources become most apparent in statistics about the percent of people who are severely malnourished (20%) and the proportion of people who have no access to safe drinking water. Armstrong’s lively illustrations, however, emphasize the wonderful diversity of our world.
- Slide 34 *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations* by Anabel Kindersley shows children celebrate their ethnic group’s holiday’s, e.g. Chinese New Year, Jewish holiday of Purim, Swedish celebration of Christmas, Day of the Dead in Mexico, etc.
- Slide 35 Art and artifacts books;
Pourquoi si Fâchée? Le Petit Catalogue d’art Traditionnel by Pascal Bourgeault– invites readers to guess what they are seeing by showing a tantalizing portion of an artifact that represents a category of objects,
e.g. spoons from around the world, African head-rests, etc.
- Slide 36
- Slide 37 Finally, Egyptian artist Mohieddin Ellabbad from Egypt shows that dreaming and art can bring the world home in *The Illustrator’s Notebook*. He begins with describing his souvenirs which for him are literally remembrances and reminders of past times. He shows us his collection of childhood dreams, such as of becoming a streetcar driver, his photographs of places whose memories evoke different smells for him, and his drawings of cats by artists from all over the world as he tried to develop his own cat image and decided he has to draw his own. Throughout the book we see his world peopled by images that have influenced him from around the world, including Tenniel’s *Alice in Wonderland*.
- Slide 38 World tour celebrating our differences and similarities:
In your own neighborhood: *Madlenka and Madlenka’s Dog* by Peter Sís – Madlenka lives in Manhattan, but when she is about to lose her first tooth the whole world admires it as she goes around her multiethnic neighborhood and listens to the neighbors’ stories about their countries of origin. In *Madlenka’s dog* she introduces her imaginary dog to all her neighbors, who in turn tell her about their favorite dogs, which are as varied as their owners. The radially laid out opening scene reflects both the whole-round world and the fact that Madlenka’s surrounded by loving neighbors wherever she goes.
- Slide 39 *Le Tour de Monde d’Adele et Zorba en 500 Mots: La Planète de A à Zèbre* [Adele and Zorba’s world tour in 500 words] by Gilles Eduard. As Adele the giraffe and Zorba the Zebra travel alphabetically around the world, each place has many things that are unique or special about it and for each country a brief list of words allows children to play ‘eye’ spy

Slide 40 *Un et Sept* [One and Seven] by Gianni Rodari and Beatrice Alemagna is a more philosophical, though not an exceptionally subtle book which emphasizes our essential unity as humans as a seven boys with from seven different countries are shown to be the same child.

Slide 41 Each boy had a unique life-style. Jimmy in New York, for instance helped his dad pump gas. When each of these boys grew up, they refused to go to war against each other. **The last scene is somewhat reminiscent of *The Story of Ferdinand*, the bull who preferred the flowers in the field to bullfighting.**

Slide 42 All children between worlds
Traditional v. modern life; print v. digital communication/reading; familiar v. the unknown

Slide 43-Slide 476 Imagination and a spirit of adventure are needed: Rafik Schami 's *Der Wunderkasten* [The Magic Box] presents a world already in the throes of change – a modern homes and cars mingle with a traditional storyteller/vendor's cart. As he regales the children with fairy tales, they can view a scroll of pictures of the story. Once there was a young shepherd named Sami. He was as handsome as the moon and as brave as a panther...

He tells a traditional story of a hero who wins the heart of a beautiful girl but who must prove that he is worthy of her by doing the bidding of her father.

Over the years the storyteller 's scroll becomes tattered and he replaces some of the missing parts with pictures from magazines. As he tells the story he matches it to the new pictures. The heroine is no longer a strong young girl named Leila who can readily lift the jugs at the well, but a delicate movie star with perfect teeth named Kolgata (Colgate). Her father is a rich car dealer and she goes to the store to buy champagne, not the well with a jug. Still, one day she goes to the well where she sees the handsome Sami. She really needs his help now to lift the jug to her shoulder. The story becomes more and more mixed up as the illustrations become more and more patched with contemporary images.

Finally, the story is such a mess the children lose interest and the storyteller stops coming. But one day, he returns once again. He has no picture box. But he begins to tell a new story, better than ever. The children sit entranced as they see, in their minds' eye the wonderful pictures the storyteller paints.

Slide 48 Where to get books:

Ralph Brown Draughon Library; Hans Christian Andersen Awards list (<http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=273>); Mildred L. Batchelder Award list from ALSC (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward/index.cfm>), United States Board on Books for Young People's "Outstanding International Books"

<http://www.usbby.org> ; International Children's Digital Library (<http://www.icdlbooks.org/index.shtml>);
Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards from the United Kingdom
<http://www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/home/index.php>

Slide 49 *For Every Child: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Words and Pictures*
adapted by Caroline Castle, the word state and the pictures illustrate 15 the 42 articles
in the 1989 Convention, focusing on such essential needs as the right to love and
security, safety from wars, a right to learn, and the right to play. The artists are well-
known illustrators of children's picture books.

Slide 50 Image from *For Every Child*

Other books with images but not used in slide show:

Immigrants, strangers, people who are different

Frog and the Stranger by Max Velthuijs, a Hans Christian Andersen Award winner for illustration, traces the evolution of relating to a stranger from the arrival of Rat, with the four friends, Frog, Rabbit, Pig, and Duck suspicious, with Pig in particular using negative stereotypes about rats to keep his friends from including him in their group. When Frog takes the time to get to know Rat, he discovers all of Rat's skills, and when Rat saves Rabbit from drowning and fixes Pig's roof, even Pig realizes that there is much to learn from the stranger.

Le Premier Livre de Tout nos Couleurs [The first book of all our colors] by Allain Serres and Zau – starting with a young child and expanding to the family, the community, and the world, the book describes through words, photographs, drawings, and expressionistic paintings, the variety of ways that diversity enriches our lives, from foods to the alphabet, and other inventions. The book, however, focuses on the need for acceptance of this diversity and the dangers of intolerance, with examples from history.

Gott hat viele Namen: Kinder aus aller Welt erzählen von ihrem Glauben, by Georg Schwikart has children from around the world tell about their religious beliefs.

Children Just Like Me by Anabel Kindersley in which 31 children from countries around the world tell of their daily lives, from going to school to being a monk (a Thai boy)

L'Afrique, Petit Chaka by Marie Sellier and Marion Lesage introduces African art held in the Paris Museum of African and Oceanic Art through the eyes of one little boy from Senegal, whose grandfather tells him about his own childhood as he describes the uses of the museum pieces in everyday life. Only a few of the pieces are, however, from the country where the story takes place.