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Use children's books to link the cultures of the world

Mary J. Lickteig

Kathy Everts Danielson

Global education is a timely and important emphasis in schools today. In this article, we consider the goals of global education, present a rationale for providing global education experiences at the age children are most responsive to instruction, explore the ways that children's trade books can provide links among cultures, and consider goals of geography and ways trade books can be used to meet these goals.

Goals

Learning about people from all over the world is the most obvious goal of global education. Becker (1982) extended this idea by suggesting that, through study, the learner develops a competence in perceiving his or her involvement in a global society. This includes recognizing that (a) all individuals are members of a single species sharing a common biological status; (b) people have differing perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about a global society and its components; and (c) all human beings are a part of the earth's biosphere.

Cushner (1988) referred to this as "international socialization" and suggested that it requires a certain stage of development. Being able to understand and interact with people from another culture requires not only "the ability to project oneself into the other's mind" (empathy), but also "the ability to think, perceive, communicate, and behave in . . . new and different ways" (160).

Age-Appropriate Instruction

According to Cushner, a critical period exists for this international socialization in children. Referring to Piaget's four stages of cognitive development (i.e., sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational), he suggested that children of ages seven and eight begin to see other people's viewpoints. Children of this age have an increased ability to communicate with others by comprehending another's perspective.

The middle childhood years (ages seven to twelve) may thus represent the critical period in the development of an international, intercultural, or global perspective in children, especially considering the existence of attitude flexibility that is later followed by attitude rigidity. This age seems to be characterized by rapid cognitive development, related especially to the area of perspective and role-taking ability, low rejection of groups, and high attitude flexibility. It is a time when children begin to perceive another person's point of view. Educational efforts to develop international and intercultural perspective should, therefore, begin during these years (Cushner 1988).

Teachers need to present information to children of this age at the emotional or active level, rather than merely the cognitive level. As Cushner suggests,

A cognitive-only approach, as it is generally thought of, is not sufficient to bring about marked long-lasting change. There is a little evidence that education about prejudice or intergroup interaction without emotional involvement brings about the desired change. A tremendous effort must be made to provide affective experiences for students whenever possible, or to search for cognitive materials that engage the emotions.

Certain geographic goals have recently been set by the Council of Chief State School Officers in conjunction with the National Council for Geographic Education. These are the goals set for fourth-grade basic proficiencies in this area:

Students should be able to use words and/or diagrams to define basic geographic vocabulary; identify personal behaviors, responsibilities and perspectives related to the environment and describe some environmental and cultural issues in their community; use visual tools to access information; identify major geographic features on maps and globes; be able to read and draw simple maps, map keys and legends; demonstrate how people depend upon, use, and adapt to the environment; give examples of the movement of people, goods, services, and ideas from one place to another. In addition to demonstrating an understanding of how people are alike and different, they should demonstrate knowledge of the ways people depend on each other. (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Council for Geographic Education 1993, 15)

The Role of Books

Children's trade books offer an appropriate vehicle for engaging the emotions of children, meeting geographical goals, and aiding in development of global awareness. Norton (1990) described the many values of reading children's literature about different cultures in this way:

[Students] gain understandings about different beliefs and value systems. They develop social sensitivity to the needs of others and realize that people have similarities as well as differences. Students gain aesthetic appreciation as they learn to understand and respect the artistic contributions of people from many cultural backgrounds. (28-29)

The search for books, then, must focus on looking for those with global perspectives that deal with specific geographic concepts that elicit emotional responses from children ages seven to twelve. Two ways for eliciting emotional involvement are considered here. One way is through the story because becoming involved with narrative helps the reader experience another's perspective. A second way to provide involvement is through some commonly known link; that is, something well known by the child is shown in the other cultures. These links serve as a bridge from the known to the unknown, a sort of steppingstone that introduces something familiar in a new setting.

The several books suggested here provide a link between the child's own culture and another culture, giving the child progressing from the preoperational period to the concrete operational period assistance in crossing cultural gaps and viewing the perspective of others.

These books also demonstrate how cultural regions differ from one another through links that are made between the cultures described. The books deal with these specific geographical goals: (a) human adaptation to the environment, (b) comparative cultures (spoken language and written scripts), (c) map work, (d) making cultural connections from the familiar to the less familiar, and (e) interaction with geography between natural and human systems.

Designed for third-grade students and beyond, these literature experiences give students opportunities to compare and contrast cultures, identify similarities and differences among cultures, and learn about the interaction between the cultures and their environments.

Goal 1: Human Adaptations to Environment

Landscape Features

Human adaptations to, or modifications of, the environment are influenced by the characteristics of specific environments, such as weather and climate, landscape features, and natural resources. (Council of State School Officers 1993, 60)

Some children's books show how people of different cultures have adapted to their environments in terms of common links such as houses, clothes, and forms of transportation.

Human adaptation to the environment is especially evident in *Houses and Homes* (Morris 1992). Photographs of homes all over the world show how people have created houses that can survive, depending upon climates, landscape features, and natural resources. Houses in this book are made from stone, mud, straw, and a variety of other materials. Students will enjoy viewing the variety of houses in the world. Similar books, also by Ann Morris, are *Hats, Hats, Hats* (Morris 1989), *On the Go* (Morris 1990), *Loving* (Morris 1990), and *Bread, Bread, Bread* (Morris 1989).

Activity: Houses and Homes

Have the students list the types of homes they live in (examples: apartments, two-story houses, farm houses). Graph the information. Then have the students look carefully at the book and complete a three-column chart on which they list the countries mentioned in the book, the term for home used in each country, and the material used for the construction of these homes.

Goal 2: Comparative Cultures

Spoken Language and Written Scripts

Identify and describe values, attitudes, and perceptions of people as revealed in various modes of expression such as poems, songs, dances, stories, paintings, and photographs. Compare and contrast cultures, identifying similarities and differences. (Geography Assessment and Exercises Specifications 1993, 64)

Some books for children share the written language of another culture. Letting students examine that written language may help to elicit an emotional and empathetic response to the book and culture, progressing from a known language and script (English) to an unknown language and script.

The presentation of writing crosses cultural gaps in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* (Heide and Gilliland 1990). The reader follows Ahmed on his errands all day long through modern-day Cairo, Egypt. From the beginning, it is noted that Ahmed has a secret that he will reveal to his family that night. At the end of the day, he proudly displays his secret: He can write his name. "Ahmed" is shown written in Arabic in large, bold script. It is important to point out to children that Arabic is read right to left (not left to right,

as is English). For cultural comparisons, children could contrast a typical day of an American student with Ahmed's day and share how much they have learned about life in Cairo.

Readers will guess along with the characters what the mysterious item is in *Is It Dark? Is It Light?* (Lankford 1991). The book reveals that the bright, shimmering mystery is the moon. Words for "moon" around the world are printed on the last page of this captivating picture book that celebrates the diversity of language with the universality of a mystery.

Activity: Is It Dark? It It Light?

Using the last page of *Is It Dark? Is It Light?* (Lankford 1991), write the names of the languages and the words for moon in each different language on index cards or other durable paper that can be used in a pocket chart. Then put the language cards in the pocket chart and pass out the words for moon in the different languages to students. Have students match their word to the language that it represents. Students could also be invited to find out the country in which each of these languages is spoken (Arabic, qamar; Dutch, maan; French, lune; German, mond; Greek, selene; Hebrew, yarak; Hindi, chand; Italian, luna; Norwegian, moanne; Swahili, nyota; Ummarmiut, tatqiq).

The numbers used in the United States are Arabic numerals, of course. Both English script and Arabic script are presented in the counting book, *Count Your Way Through the Arab World* (Haskins 1991). For each numeral, a bit of Arabic culture is presented along with the numeral in Arabic script and a pronunciation guide to counting in the Arabic language. Children can learn to write and count from one to ten in Arabic as over 185 million of our Arab neighbors do. There is much to learn about Arabic culture throughout this counting book. Jim Haskins has written similar books about other cultures, namely, *Count Your Way Through Mexico* (Haskins 1989), *Count Your Way Through Germany* (Haskins 1990), and *Count Your Way Through Italy* (Haskins 1990).

Many scenes of Inuit life are shown in the picture book *Arctic Memories* (Ekoomiak 1988). For each scene, a painting is presented accompanied by a short explanatory text. Included are scenes from daily life and stories from the culture. Each text is written in English and Inuktitut script, a language of the Inuit people. A map shows the specific location of the author's Inuit home, Fort George in Quebec on James Bay. Information about the artist/author, the Inuit people, the language, and the art provides a good background so that repeated viewings of the artwork deepens the appreciation and understanding of the culture. Related books about this culture are *Eskimo Boy* (Kendall 1992) and *Mama, Do You Love Me?* (Joose 1991).

Maria recounts her memories of spending summers at her grandparents' estancia (cattle ranch) in the pampas of Argentina in the book *On the Pampas* (Brusca 1991). The end papers are filled with vocabulary (and a pronunciation key) unique to this part of the country and lifestyle. Children can compare American cattle ranching to the information provided in this book to examine similarities and differences in experiences and language.

Activity: On the Pampas

Using the end papers of *On the Pampas* (Brusca 1991), write the Spanish words and their English counterparts on index cards or other durable paper that can be used in a pocket chart. Then put the Spanish words in the pocket chart and pass out the English words to students. Have students match the English word to the Spanish word. Have students share other Spanish words that they know.

Goal 3: Maps/Map Work

Goals include the ability to identify major geographic features on maps and globes, read and draw simple maps, interpret information from maps and globes, and apply information learned through . . . working . . . with maps, globes, atlases. (Council of Chief State School Officers 1993, 15-16)

Bread, perhaps the most common food in the world, is a unifying theme showing a variety of cultural variations in *Bread, Bread, Bread* (Morris 1989). At first viewing, note the many shapes bread takes and the many different ways bread is transported and eaten. As pictures and text are presented, the students can see how many breads can be named and guess the location of the photo. Answers can be checked at the back of the book. All the different words for bread and the sixteen different places named should be written down for all to see. A point to consider: Cultures of one country are present in others. Note the breads from other cultures that are enjoyed in America and how other cultures have adopted "American" bread--evidence of our global village.

Activity: Bread, Bread, Bread

After sharing the book and noting the different words for bread, prepare individual cards for the sixteen place names in the book: Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Sicily, United States. Distribute place name cards to students and have students hold up card for the picture representing that card. Include text from index pages that tells about the bread in the photograph. Locate the place name on the map and/or globe. Display all place names again and organize them according to continent. Challenge students to find one other country from each continent.

All of the children's books in the bibliography can be used for map work by locating the places on a map or in an atlas. Places could be identified by continent, reinforcing the following terms: northern hemisphere, southern hemisphere, eastern hemisphere, and western hemisphere. For instance, *A World of Toys* (Rowland 1990) and *Hopscotch Around the World* (Lank-ford 1992) can be used for locating all the place names on a map and organizing them by continents.

Time zones are evident in *Is Anybody Up?* (Kandoian 1989), *Nine O'Clock Lullaby* (Singer 1991), and *All in a Day* (Anno and Briggs 1986). Students can compare the time zones and note their effect on daily life.

Northern and southern hemispheres are illustrated in *Molly's Seasons* (Kandoian 1992). Climatic differences and terms (polar regions, equator, tropics,temperate) are shown within the context of this book.

Goal 4: Making Cultural Connections from Familiar to Less Familiar

The goals for this area include compare and contrast cultures, identify similarities and differences, explain how people are connected to the rest of the world by . . . language. (Council of Chief State School Officers 1993, 64-65)

A fanciful story, *Here Comes the Cat* (Asch and Vagin 1989), told from a mouse's perspective, provides an opportunity to make cultural connections from familiar to less familiar. A balloon-borne mouse

warns, "Here come the cat!" He spreads his message to birds and fish and especially to other mice engaged in a variety of activities. Finally, all mice are gathered, and the reader is presented with an ominous shadow of a very large cat. Turning the page, what appeared to be imminent danger is really a smiling cat pulling a wagon laden with a large wedge of cheese. The mice enjoy the cheese, and they prepare a saucer-of-milk treat for the cat.

Read the story first in English. Then, after studying the Russian pronunciation for "Here comes the cat" ("syu-DAH ee-DYOT KOT!"), the book can be reread in Russian. This will internalize the message that readers of diverse cultures can experience and enjoy the same story. In the afterword the authors/illustrators discuss their collaboration and relate how acquaintances from two different parts of the world became friends.

A Country Far Away (Gray 1988) contrasts the daily events of two boys from two cultures, one from suburban United States and one from rural Africa. The events pictured, accompanied by brief text, include an ordinary stay-at-home day, helping parents, the last day of school, bike riding, the birth of a sister, swimming, shopping, playing soccer, a visit from a cousin, and looking at a book about a country far away. Implicit is the message that, though details differ, essential elements are similar. This presentation is limited in that a specific country in Africa is not named, and it would be erroneous to generalize that this is the African experience. It would be wise, too, to remind children that although this comparison shows rural Africa, there are large, modern cities in Africa, too. The book, nonetheless, shows that the human experience is similar despite cultural differences. The tone of genuine interest in other cultures and the note of friendship across cultures is also apparent. This book could serve as an introduction to a study of the great diversity that is Africa.

Is Anybody Up? (Kandoian 1989) presents a variety of cultures by comparing early morning activities. Starting the day with Molly, who gets up and makes her own breakfast, other cultures in the same time zones are shown as morning comes. Included are an Inuit woman on Baffin Bay, a boy in Quebec, a cat in New York City, Molly's grandfather in Miami, a girl in Haiti, a parrot in Colombia, a boy in the Andes of Peru, a sailor off the coast of Chile, and a seal near Antarctica. Summary pages show a morning greeting in all those locations, revealing a variety of cultures and languages. The final page gives a brief explanation of time zones. A look at a map or globe will reveal Molly's Eastern Time Zone from north to south. This shows the comparison of early morning activities, noting likenesses (basic human needs; example, eating) and differences (dependent on weather and climate, landscape, features, natural resources).

A World of Toys (Rowland 1990) shows teddy bears, boomerangs, ka-china dolls, daruma dolls, kites, and other toys representing nine different cultures. The universality of toys and play is illustrated in this informational book.

A familiar childhood game is seen from a variety of cultures in *Hopscotch Around the World* (Lankford 1992). For instance, in France, the game is played within a spiral shape and is called "escargot." Complete rules and diagrams for playing the game in such places as India, Nigeria, Poland, and Aruba are described in this book to unite children of the world by means of a commonly played game.

Bread, Bread, Bread (Morris 1989) depicts the commonality and adaptation of food, as does *Everybody Cooks Rice* (Dooley 1991). Both books show similarities and differences among cultures about food.

Goal 5: Interactions between Natural and Human Systems

This Is the Way We Go to School (Baer 1990) is a rhyming text telling how students all over the world go to school. Some travel by bus, others by boat, by train or on foot. At the end of the book, there is a map of the world that shows where all of the children in the book live.

Activity: This Is the Way We Go to School

After looking through the book, list all the methods of transportation discussed in text: walking (and its various forms--jogging, roller skates), bus, car, ferry, cable car, "el", horse and buggy, trackless trolley, vaporetto, skis, train. Then, associate the characters and modes of transportation with the locations listed in the back of book. Find each location on a world map and discuss the reasons for the type of transportation in each location.

Prepare a chart on which the means of transportation used by the characters is listed under one of the following three categories:

1. Geographic reasons: Niels and Solveig use skis because of snow and mountain (land forms and climate).
2. Cultural reasons: Jake and Jane ride in a horse and buggy because they are Amish.
3. Available man-made means of transportation: Jack and Jill, who live in San Francisco, ride on cable cars.

Have students list the ways they travel to school each morning and make a graph of this information.

Interactions between natural and human systems are shown in other books. *Is Anybody Up?* (Kandoian 1989) shows the effect of climate in one time zone from northern to southern hemispheres as does *Nine O'Clock Lullaby* (Singer 1991). *Hats, Hats, Hats* (Morris 1989) demonstrates that type of hat is dependent on climate and geography.

These books are a good way to introduce students to the similarities and differences among various cultures and provide learning experiences meeting specific geographic goals. The use of story and the linking of a known to an unknown culture provide both emotional involvement with culture and an aid in developing children's global awareness.

Resources for Teachers

Children's Books That Link Cultures

- Anno, M., and R. Briggs. 1986. All in a day. New York: Philomel.
- Asch, F., and Vagin, V. 1989. Here comes the cat. New York: Scholastic.
- Baer, E. 1990. This is the way we go to school. New York: Scholastic.
- Brusca, M. C. 1991. On the pampas. New York: Henry Holt.
- Dooley, N. 1991. Everybody cooks rice. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda.
- Ekoomiak, N. 1988. Arctic memories, New York: Henry Holt.
- Gray, N. 1988. A country far away. New York: Orchard.
- Haskins, J. 1991. Count your way through the Arab world. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda.
- Haskins, J. 1990. Count your way through Germany. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda.
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- Morris, A. 1989. Bread, bread, bread. New York: Lothrop.
- Morris, A. 1989. Hats, hats, hats, New York: Lothrop.
- Morris, A. 1992. Houses and homes. New York: Lothrop.
- Morris, A. 1990. Loving. New York: Lothrop.
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- O'Brien, K., and Stoner, D. K. 1987. Increasing environmental awareness through children's literature. *The Reading Teacher* 41: 14-19.