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VOLUME XVIII, ISSUE 2

Winter 2025
Curiosity, Imagination, and Creativity

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WOW Review: Volume XVIII, Issue 2
Winter 2025
Curiosity, Imagination, and Creativity

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Introduction and Editors' Note

Childhood has been described as an ideal time to foster curiosity about the world with imaginative and creative play. In a culture that replaces freedom to explore with movies, video games and structured play, these titles serve as encouragement to be curious, imagine with abandon, and create games, ideas, inventions, and music. The ability to imagine is an important tool for solving problems, and these titles exemplify that ability as the protagonists seek creative solutions to problems they face.

In *The History of We*, Nikolas Smith gives readers a peek into the amazing creativity of our earliest ancestors as they explored, developed survival tools, recorded history, and celebrated life. Fast forward many millennia and that wonderful creativity is profiled in a boy's curiosity about words in *Marcelo, Martello, Marshmallow*, a girl's efforts to make her dreams take place in *Hopscotch*, and in the variety of words in Arabic for different expressions of love in E*leven Words for Love: A Journey Through Arabic Expressions of Love*.

Problem solving is the impetus for creative thinking in *Freedom Braids*, a story of the way enslaved people in Colombia wove directions for freedom trails into braids. *Go Forth and Tell: The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller* profiles the creative work of Augusta Baker, a librarian in Harlem, who saw the lack of positive African American portrayals and set about addressing the problem. A contemporary example of creative problem-solving is portrayed in *The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale* as fourth graders rally to fight censorship in their school library.

Several titles profile the tradition of passing down creative knowledge from one generation to another in Indigenous communities. In *Heart Berry Bling*, a young girl learns how to use beads to decorate objects but also to tell the stories of her culture. In *Berry Song,* a grandmother takes her granddaughter to harvest food from the rivers, sea, and forest.

We invite you to read and learn from these examples of creative thinking in the face of challenges. We also invite you to submit book reviews for future issues. Please consult the guidelines (https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewcall/) and the calls:

Volume 18, Issue 3 (Spring 2026 – submission deadline: March 1, 2026) – Open theme. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children's or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

Volume 18, Issue 4 (Summer 2026 – submission deadline: May 1, 2026) – Themed issue profiling titles in which resistance is part of the plot. Examples of resistance could be stories in which child protagonists challenge injustice and/or authority, question norms, or critique power structures. It could include resisting a single story (e.g., Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, The Danger of a Single Story) or resisting an inner prompting.

Susan Corapi, Co-Editor
Melissa Wilson, Co-Editor

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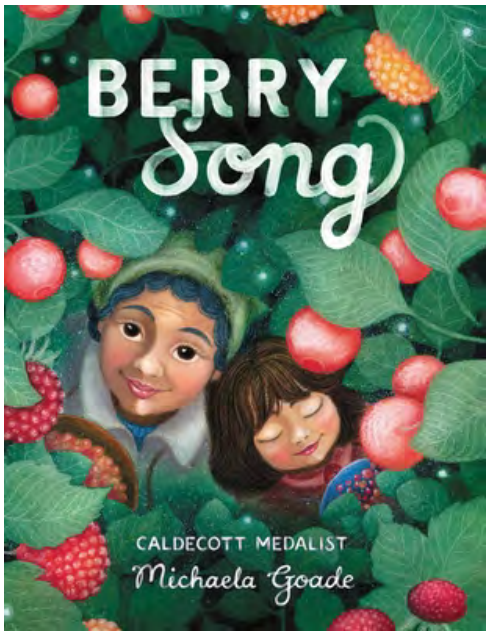

Berry Song
Written and illustrated by Michaela Goade
Little Brown & Company, 2022, 36pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-0316494175

This culturally rich and evocative picturebook invites readers to cultivate an awareness and respect for nature. Through the cultural tradition of berry picking, a cross-generational community practice cherished by the Indigenous peoples of the Tlingit and Haida tribes of Southeast Alaska, we experience the deep and profound reverence these communities have for their land and its natural resources.

Mirroring the author's childhood memories, we accompany the child narrator on a journey that begins with her grandmother showing how nature provides for their needs as they gather herring eggs and salmon from the sea. The text and illustrations interact with one another to create movement as if on the open sea. The next page brings us to the edge of the forest. The circular illustration creates the illusion that we are entering the edge of the forest with the narrator carrying her berry-picking basket, almost as if we are joining her with our own basket to gather the bounty found within (p.5). The forest is filled with berries, and the young girl and her grandmother pick all kinds of berries, singing and naming them as they joyfully fill their baskets. With each turn of the page, the girl and her grandmother reflect on the bountiful land and the reciprocal relationship between the land and its people—the land takes care of them and they, in turn, take care of it. The land and sea are personified through song. They are alive and give life, and the girl and her grandmother, like their ancestors, continually give thanks, or Gunalchéesh.

Goade's illustrations are beautiful renditions of nature and portals to the past and future. She uses white to form the foamy crests of the waves on the sea and the sparkling drops of dew in the forest to create a dreamy and magical sense of awe when surrounded by nature. The berries are bright and colorful against the serene green background of the forest. In one double-page spread, we see the narrator walking forward into a bright future holding a bowl of berries (pp. 19-20). The locks of her long hair are made of beautiful green vines, flowers, and tree branches. As she looks behind her, she acknowledges the greatness of her ancestors who came before her and how they were one with the land and sea. Goade wondrously clothes the narrator in a flowing dress whose train is like the waves of the sea, filled with marine life and the spirits of her ancestors rowing boats on the open waters.

Berry Song emphasizes the strong bond between a grandmother and granddaughter and the passing down of ancestral traditions. At the end of the story, we see the connection between generations once more when the narrator takes her little sister by the hand and begins singing to her about the berries as they enter the forest. The story mostly focuses on the feminine voice and relationships, leaving the male voice unheard. With the absence of male voices, we are left to consider how men influence the cultural heritage of Tlingit and Haida tribes of Southeast Alaska.

According to Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), literature can serve as both a window and a mirror, allowing us to explore and experience other worlds beyond our own, while reflecting our own lived experiences. As a window, *Berry Song* invites us to share in the stewardship of the earth for generations to come. Indigenous readers and others may experience *Berry Song* as a mirror, reflecting the shared cultural value of reverence for nature and the passing down of traditions from generation to generation.

Texts that complement *Berry Song* include *We are Water Protectors* (Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade, 2020) and *The First Blade of Sweetgrass* (Suzanne Greenlaw, Gabriel Frey, and Nancy Baker, 2021). Both texts celebrate the importance of cultural heritage, community, ancestral knowledge, and protecting our natural resources.

Michaela Goade is an award-winning Indigenous author and illustrator from Southeast Alaska. As a member of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, her children's picturebooks predominantly center Indigenous voices and honor her rich cultural heritage. She has received multiple awards and honors for her work, including the 2021 Caldecott Medal for *We Are Water Protectors*, and the 2023 Caldecott Honor for *Berry Song*. For additional biographical information, awards, and book titles, visit her website (https://www.michaelagoade.com/).

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Jill Moss, Texas Woman's University

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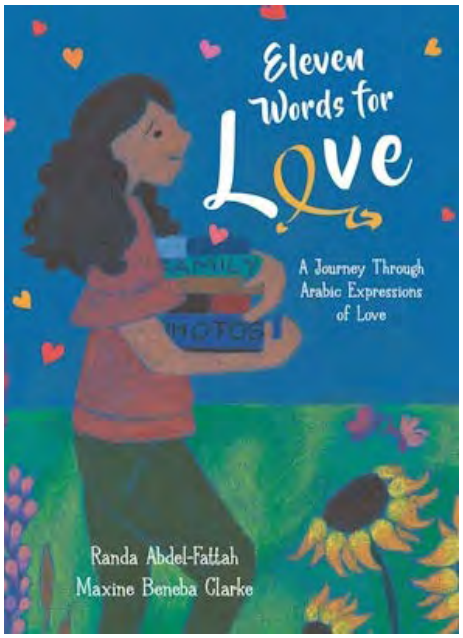

Eleven Words for Love: A Journey Through Arabic Expressions of Love
Written by Randa Abdel-Fattah
Illustrated by Maxine Beneba Clarke
Candlewick Press, 2022, 36pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-1536230215

Palestinian-Egyptian author Randa Abdel-Fattah, published her hilarious young adult debut novel *Does My Head Look Big In This?* in 2005 and followed it with a girl's quest during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict *in Where the Streets had a Name* (2008). Her latest book is E*leven Words for Love: A Journey Through Arabic Expressions of Love.* This book tenderly and beautifully shares the memories of one Palestinian family and the warmth of their love. It celebrates the universality of family love while centering the Arabic language through the author's careful selection of 11 expressions of love.

Maxine Beneba Clarke, an Australian poet, writer and illustrator of Afro-Caribbean descent, further emphasizes the joy and love through her bright and playful illustrations rendered in watercolor pencil and collage on textured cardstock. The book is told through photos and scenes of a Palestinian family's experiences, bonds, and memories of home. Each double-page spread introduces readers to a specific Arabic expression of love and the way it is manifested through one family's experience of migration—from yearning for homeland, to the bond between friends, sisters, neighbors, and finally to love for those who have passed.

What makes *Eleven Words for Love* unique is that while it is a story of immigration and exile, it strays far from the stereotypical images in children's books about the Middle East of wars, refugees, or desert landscapes. Instead, it is first and foremost a story of a family celebrating their love for their home country and love for the new place in which they live. As noted in the endpapers, the family members "both show and receive kindness and love in their new home" thereby humanizing immigrants and refugees and presenting counter representations to stereotypical depictions of refugees. On almost every page, the illustrations show characters extending their hands to each other in acts of generosity, love, and giving.

The Arabic language is central to this book despite it being primarily written in English. On the cover, the Arabic word for love (hubb حب) forms the letter 'o' at the center of the English word 'love.' In the book, the Arabic words are placed on the left pages with the English transliteration below the Arabic, allowing English speakers to follow along and try out the Arabic expressions; on the right pages, lyrical verses bring to life the ways in which these expressions of love are experienced in family memories and experiences.

In an interview on ABC Radio National (Nobel, 2022), Abdel-Fattah speaks about this intentionality in the placement of the text and the choice not to translate the Arabic expressions, linking this decision to a history in Australia, as well as other Western countries, of immigrants being denied the

opportunity to speak a second language. Instead, she points to the need to protect indigenous languages and the desire to reclaim immigrants' home languages and to remind both immigrant and non-immigrant readers that diverse languages are enriching rather than threatening.

Eleven Words for Love was an Honorable Mention for the 2024 Middle East Book Award. It is a heartwarming read that readers of all ages interested in the Arabic language and Arab cultures will enjoy, as well as those looking for books on themes of family, home, and immigration. This book could be paired with *How We Say I Love You* by Nicole Chen and illustrated by Lenny Wen (2022) to explore the theme of family love and *The Rock in My Throat* by Kao Kalia Yang and illustrated by Jiemei Lin (2024), which is another authentic portrayal of a refugee experience centering language and including translanguaging in its pages.

Readers interested in picturebooks with Arabic words and translanguaging between speakers of both English and Arabic might also enjoy *Insha'Allah, No, Maybe So* written by Rhonda Roumani and Nadia Roumani and illustrated by Olivia Aserr (2024) and readers with a stronger command of Arabic can also read *Bil'Arabi Ya Habibi (In Arabic, My Love)* written by Dalia al-Manhal Mirza and illustrated by Maya Majdalani (2023), which tells the story of a boy growing up in a bilingual home, who is lovingly reminded to speak in Arabic when visiting his grandfather.

Randa Abdel-Fattah is an award-winning author. She worked as a lawyer and human rights advocate. She holds a PhD in Sociology and is a researcher on Islamophobia, racism, and everyday multiculturalism in Australia. She lives in Sydney, Australia with her family. More information can be found on her website (https://randaabdelfattah.com/index.htm).

Maxine Beneba Clarke is an Australian award-winning author and illustrator of over 15 books. She writes nonfiction, poetry, memoirs, and picture books. She is also a former lawyer (O'Halloran, 2025). Maxine is the inaugural Peter Steele Poet in Residence at the University of Melbourne.

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Freedom Braids
Written by Monique Duncan
Illustrated by Oboh Moses
Lantana, 2024, 28pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-1915244802

This picturebook narrates the life of Nemy, an Afro-Colombian girl. It is a fictional story inspired by a historical event in San Basilio de Palenque in Colombia, set during a period of enslavement. The main character, Nemy, grows up enslaved within her community. The story depicts her daily activities, such as sowing and collecting seeds, and her encounters with Big Mother, an elder who spends nights sharing stories. Nemy observes a group of women gathering at midnight to braid each other's hair as part of a ritual and ancestral practice. When she joins them, the experience reminds her of her Nana, and her scent of natural herbs. The practice of braiding became a form of communication through codes, patterns, and shapes that created maps guiding enslaved people to freedom; braids also served to carry seeds for settlement in their new location. Eventually, a group of women decide to escape from their captors, crossing the harsh tropical forest in search of liberty in Palenque.

San Basilio de Palenque is in the Caribbean Region in Bolivar State, close to Cartagena de Indias, a place known for the arrival of conquerors and the African Slave Trade. This town is the first place in the Americas considered free; it was liberated by people who escaped slavery, and it became a symbol of resistance. In 1540, the Spanish king was informed that enslaved people had fled through the hills of the Montes de María, risking everything for their lives and freedom. There, they built rudimentary homes hidden in the dense vegetation. They met their basic needs, such as food and shelter, using items that were easy to carry or destroy if they needed to leave the place. By 1570, the Spanish Crown officially recognized the existence of Palenqueros communities formed by runaway enslaved peoples.

The illustrations consist of double-page spreads. The front cover features a Black girl with braided hair and a landscape in the background, while the back cover shows three women and Nemy pointing toward a destination, symbolizing female empowerment and the vital role of women in their communities. Throughout the book, eighteen illustrated heads with different braid styles are portrayed, each labeled with a representative name, most of them in the Spanish language. This text conveys a powerful message of resistance and resilience.

The illustrations vividly portray Black women gathered outdoors around the fire as the only light source in the warm Caribbean nights. Although the exact setting is not specified, the imagery suggests a location near the Caribbean or Pacific coasts, where many Afro-Colombian communities historically lived. The book also depicts straw houses surrounded by sugarcane fields and yucca roots, reflecting the environment shaped by colonial exploitation. Spanish colonizers introduced both

sugarcane and enslaved Africans to the Americas, forcing them to cultivate and harvest vast plantations to produce sugar for trading and exportation.

In the last section of the book, Duncan dedicates two pages to historical notes, emphasizing the experiences of Afro-descendant communities and the role of Palenque as a place of resistance and liberation. She highlights the importance of women while acknowledging the contributions of men who sought freedom. Braiding is presented as a way of communication that colonizers could not decrypt. Each braid style is described with accuracy, guiding readers' curiosity to learn more about the topic.

Suggested children's books to read with this theme include *Bintou's Braids* (Sylviane Diouf and Shane Evans, 2001), *I Love My Hair!* (Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and E. B. Lewis, 2001), and *My Hair Is a Book* (Maisha Oso and London Ladd, 2024). These texts highlight the meaningful practice of styling hair with intention in Black communities, emphasizing connections to ancestors and fostering an understanding of historical and cultural background.

As a Colombian researcher, I suggest creating a Spanish version of this book with the Palenqueros community to honor and commemorate their traditions. An accurate translation could contribute to connecting Afro-Colombian children to their cultural roots, enriching classroom discussions, and strengthening cultural identity.

Monique James-Duncan conducted fieldwork research in San Basilio de Palenque, Bolívar, Colombia. She explored the oral traditions of the region and interviewed residents to ensure the authenticity of her narrative. In an interview with Lantana Publishing (2024), Duncan explained that her inspiration began from childhood memories of her mother braiding her hair with styling patterns to resemble her Jamaican heritage. This practice deeply rooted in the African diaspora reflects the transmission of cultural identity and resilience across generations.

Monique James-Duncan lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her family. Her first picturebook, *Mommy Time* (illustrated by Ebony Glenn, 2023), received a starred review from School Library Journal, and her earlier work *When Mama Braids My Hair* (2020) was nominated for the Ezra Jack Keats Award. Her effort to explore African and Caribbean heritage through children's literature demonstrates her commitment to cultural preservation, female empowerment as resistance, and permanent exploration of Black heritage. More information can be found on her website (https://www.moniquejamesduncan.com/).

The illustrator, Oboh Moses, is originally from Lagos, Nigeria. His work enriches the African diaspora narrative through artwork that celebrates representation, identity, hope, and the strength of African stories and perspectives. The book features digital illustrations that use multiple colors, gradients, and strong light contrasts to highlight moments of hope. Throughout the story, the faces of the characters convey connection and intimacy, especially in the braiding scenes, where closed eyes and gentle body positions evoke a sense of calm. Additionally, the illustrations portray women escaping

and hiding among the crops, allowing the audience to feel the tension of the situation. In particular, the final pages depict freedom through bright colors.

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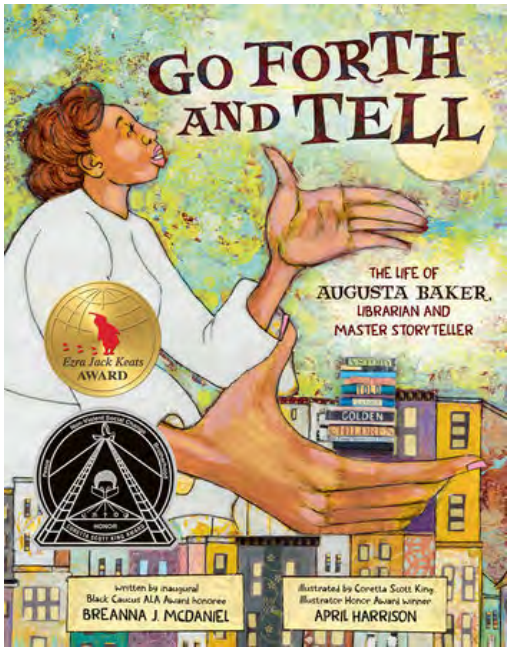

Go Forth and Tell: The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller
Written by Breanna J. McDaniel
Illustrated by April Harrison
Dial Books, 2024, 40pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-0593324202

This picturebook biography features the life of Augusta Braxton Baker, the first Black Coordinator of Children's Services at the New York Public Library. Augusta grew up loving hearing stories shared by her grandmother. Her passion led her to become a librarian in Harlem. As a librarian she noticed a lack of representation of Black people in children's books. She decided to build a collection that featured Black authors, illustrators, and characters. April Harrison's vibrant mixed-media illustrations evoke Augusta Baker's personal journey and her impact on librarianship. The illustrations bring her life work into focus, showing the emotional experience of story time, activism, and cultural pride. The creativeness between word and illustration fosters empathy, making Augusta's journey memorable and meaningful for young readers.

As a picturebook biography, this text is accessible to young readers while remaining historically accurate. The text balances storytelling with informative content and includes backmatter that adds details about Augusta Baker's life (Author's Note, photographs, and timeline). It centers around a lesser known but pivotal person in library and literacy history. The text goes beyond a simple biography by capturing Baker's impact on others, honoring her activism and professionalism as a librarian and showcasing her emphasis on storytelling. McDaniel's writing is lyrical and builds on rhythm that reads aloud beautifully. The phrasing and tone align with Baker's voice as a storyteller, as she "painted worlds with her words."

Augusta Baker learned the craft of storytelling from her grandmother, and the stories she heard taught her that where there is a will there is a way. While the text profiles her incredible impact on children's literature and the art of storytelling, the backmatter mentions only briefly the determination that kept Baker pressing toward a goal when segregation and prejudice blocked her path. She was refused admission to the Albany Teacher's College in upstate New York until Eleanor Roosevelt intervened (Graham, 2024). She became the first Black woman to earn a degree in librarianship from that college. She was hired in 1937 as a children's librarian at the New York Public Library in Harlem. In 1953 she became the Assistant Coordinator and in 1961 the head Coordinator of Children's Services for the entire New York Public Library system, overseeing and setting policy for children's programs. She was the first Black person to hold an administrative position at NYPL.

Harrison's illustrations elevate the text, celebrating Black beauty, community, and storytelling. Clothing, hairstyles, settings, and expressions resemble the historical and cultural context of the 1940s in Harlem. Her color palette is rich with warm, deep blues, and bright earth tones. She portrays

Baker surrounded by children, books, and light. The illustrations mirror the storytelling by Baker, layered and textured, and incorporate lines from favorite stories and quotations from Black historical figures (Baker, 2025).

The book's themes of representation in literature of marginalized people, librarianship as activism, and empowerment through literacy are timely and enduring, holding true today. Even though the book is rooted in the African American experience, readers from many backgrounds can connect with using books to lift others and preserve cultural identity. In the Author's Note McDaniel reflects on her own childhood librarian, Michelle Carnes, which shows her attention to historical detail and personal authenticity (Njoku, 2024). Just as Augusta Baker nurtured young James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, she credits Carnes with nurturing her love of books and affirming her identity. McDaniel understands the impact librarians have on young readers, especially those who are underrepresented.

This story not only celebrates a trailblazer in children's literature but also models the power of representation. When McDaniel began her research, she found many ways that Baker advocated for readers from all types of communities (Jones, 2024). She included specific references to places and people, rooted in verifiable historical facts. Harrison reached out to family members and obtained actual photographs of Augusta Baker from her granddaughter (Horn Book, 2024).

To compare books about underrepresented Black voices that are collected and celebrated, teachers can pair this book with *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library* (Carole Boston Weatherford and Eric Velasquez, 2017), a story that highlights Arturo Schomburg, a Black Puerto Rican librarian who devoted his life to preserving and celebrating the achievements of people of African descent. Another good book pair is *Just Like Me* (Vanessa Brantley-Newton, 2020), a collection of short poems and mixed media portraits of Black girls from many different backgrounds. Finally, *Lift as You Climb: The Story of Ella Baker* (Patricia Hruby Powell & R. Gregory Christie, 2020), is another text that focuses on amplifying minoritized voices through community action.

The author, Breanna J. McDaniel, completed her PhD in education in September 2022. She has published in academic journals and an academic anthology. Her research was longlisted for the Cassava Republic Press Global Black Woman's Non-Fiction Prize. She is the co-founder of Researchers Exploring Inclusive Youth Literature. McDaniel has four published picturebooks with three more forthcoming. You can learn more about this author at her website (https://www.breannajmcdaniel.com/).

April Harrison is a two-time Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Award Winner for *Go Forth and Tell* and *Me and the Boss* (Michelle Edwards, 2022). She also won the 2020 Coretta Scott King-John Steptoe award for her illustrations in *What is Given from the Heart* (Patricia McKissack, 2019). Her work appears in several universities as well as many private collections. Harrison creates her illustrations with rich mixed media, using color and collage with paper and magazine prints as well as repurposed objects. Her work is firmly rooted in African American artistic traditions. See more of her work at her website (https://www.april-harrison.com/about-the-illustrator).

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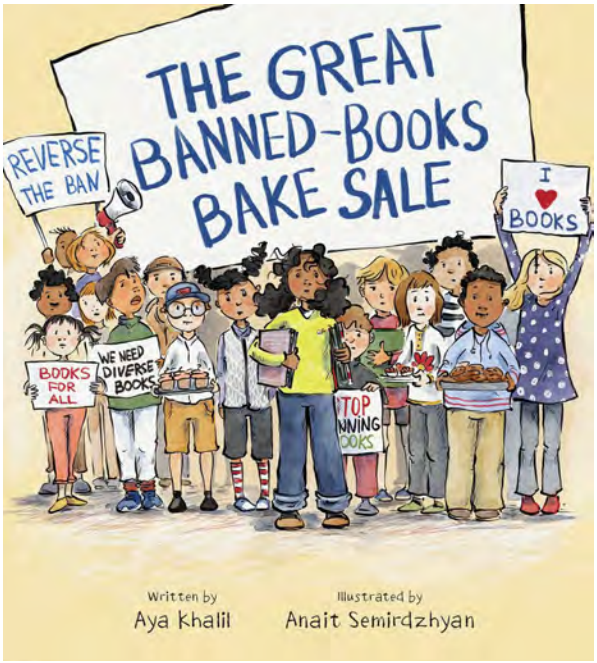

The Great Banned-Books Bake Sale
Written by Aya Khalil
Illustrated by Anait Semirdzhyan
Tilbury House Publishers, 2023, 32pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-0884489672

This picturebook portrays the importance of student voice and activism, and the power of diverse books. In this follow-up to *The Arabic Quilt* (2020), readers again meet Kanzi, an Egyptian American girl who takes pride in her heritage, who leads her classmates on a visit to the library. Today's library visit is different though; students find out that many of their favorite diverse books that show their cultures, languages, and lives have been banned by the school board and removed from the shelves. When asked why, the librarian explains "Some words are so powerful that they intimidate people." Later, in a classroom discussion, the students wonder if books that represent their voices and lived experiences are important. They decide to have a banned books bake sale and a protest. The proceeds from the sale will be used to purchase books that will be added to Little Free Libraries (https://littlefreelibrary.org/), a nonprofit that places book-sharing boxes in communities. Later, while baking baklava for the bake sale, Kenzi is inspired by her grandmother's story about protesting injustice in Egypt. On Friday the bake sale is a success and the protest that started with children expands to include many others from their community, coming together in support of students' right to read books where they are represented. Following the protest, the school board reverses their decision and children, once again, can read library books that represent their voices and lived experiences.

Khalil's writing is clear, compassionate, and deeply relevant. She doesn't shy away from tough topics but presents them in a way that young readers can understand and connect. Khalil effectively conveys the characters' emotions, especially the confusion and hurt that comes from being erased and the confidence they display when they are protesting. This story shows that children don't have to wait until they're older to make a difference. Their unified voices can spark change now.

Anait Semirdzhyan's illustrations bring beauty and emotional depth to the story. Her soft pencil and watercolor style gently show everything from the heartbreak of the empty library shelves to the joy and energy of the protest and bake sale. The students are from different backgrounds, and are drawn with distinct features like skin tones, clothing, and cultural details that feel authentic and respectful.

This book is useful for encouraging conversations around student voice, banned books, activism, and what it means to see yourself (or not see yourself) represented in books. *The Great Banned Books Bake Sale* feels timely, hopeful and relatable in today's climate. However, while it addresses the problem of censorship, it simplifies the actions of children and adults. Based on real instances of censorship, the probability of a single protest reversing a school board's decision on censorship of diverse books is unlikely.

Educators might pair this book with *Ban This Book* (Alan Gratz, 2017), a novel about a fourth-grade girl and her classmates who resist the banning of *Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (E. L. Konigsburg, 1967). They take action by using a locker to create a secret library of banned titles and also make up reasons to ban every book in the library in order to make a point. Young activism around identity is supported in *That's Not My Name!* (Anoosha Syed, 2022), a story in which Minha teaches her fellow students how to pronounce her name rather than change it to something more Western. Finally, *We Are Water Protectors* (Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade, 2020) profiles a community banding together to protect the water and land rights of Indigenous peoples threatened by a pipeline traversing their land.

Aya Khalil is an Egyptian American author and former ESL teacher who brings lived experiences to her storytelling. In her author's note, she explains how real-world book bans inspired the story and why children like Kanzi need books that reflect their worlds. Her earlier book, *The Arabic Quilt* (also illustrated by Anait Semirdzhyan, 2020), also explores identity, language, and cultural pride. The title won the Arab American Book Award and was included in the 2021 list of Notable Books for a Global Society. Khalil has served as a mentor for We Need Diverse Books. Read more about Khalil at her website (https://www.anaitsart.com/).

Anait Semirdzhyan was born in Russia, grew up in Armenia, and now lives in the U.S. She loves creating whimsical worlds and often illustrates stories that focus on identity and belonging. Readers can find out more about Semirdzhyan at her website (https://www.anaitsart.com/new-page).

Alicia Leslie, Texas Woman's University

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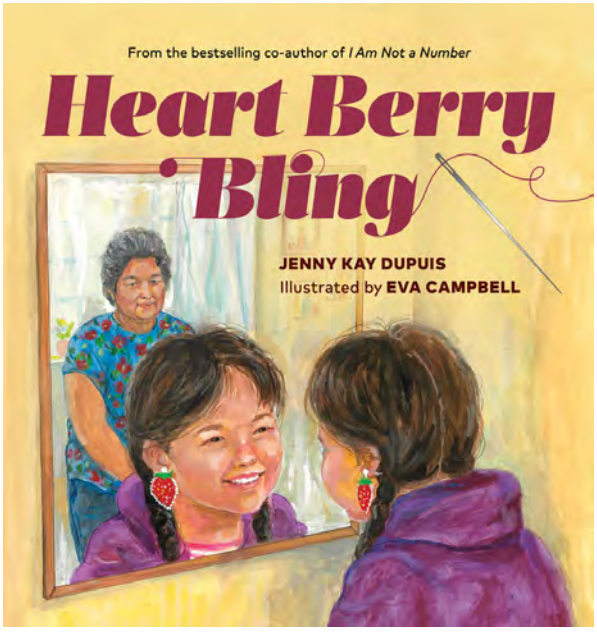

Heart Berry Bling
Written by Jenny Kay Dupuis
Illustrated by Eva Campbell
Highwater Press, 2023, 44pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-1774920558

"The heart-shaped fruit shows us that caring is more than feeling. We can look to the plant-its fruits, flowers, leaves, stems, runners, and roots-to understand how in nature everything is connected...The strawberry is an amazing gift." (pp.20)

In this Canadian picturebook, Maggie, a young Anishinaabe girl, spends the day visiting her grandmother in the city. After enjoying a lunch of fry bread and chili, Maggie is especially excited to open her grandmother's bead jar and begin creating a design. While looking through patterns, she finds an old photograph and asks her grandmother about it. Her grandmother explains that the picture shows her as a young girl living on the reservation. She goes on to share that she lost her First Nations status after marrying a non-Indigenous man, a consequence of the Indian Act. This forced her to leave behind her home and everything familiar.

Despite this loss, preserving her cultural heritage remained important to her and teaching Maggie how to bead is one meaningful way she continues to pass on those traditions. When Maggie chooses to bead a heart berry, or strawberry, an image full of cultural meaning in Anishinaabe traditions, her grandmother explains its symbolism and the significance of strawberry teachings. As they bead together, Maggie not only learns the art of beading but also deepens her understanding of her family's history and her Anishinaabe identity.

The story incorporates several meaningful social themes as Maggie spends the day with her grandmother. One central idea is cultural preservation. Maggie learns that beading isn't just a craft, but a way to carry on the knowledge, stories, and values of her Anishinaabe heritage. The book presents Indigenous heritage with honesty and care, avoiding the stereotypes too often found in stories about Native communities. The bond between Maggie and her grandmother demonstrates the importance of intergenerational relationships and the role older people play in shaping identity and passing on traditional knowledge.

The book also addresses historical injustice when Maggie's grandmother explains how she lost her First Nations status after marrying a non-Indigenous man because of the Indian Act. This law unfairly hurt Indigenous women because it meant that if they married outside their community, they would lose their status. Indigenous men did not face the same repercussions. This policy wasn't just unfair to Indigenous communities, it also showed clear gender bias. Even more damaging, it denied future generations their rightful status and connection to their cultural identity.

Jenny Kay Dupuis brings Maggie's story to life through heartfelt dialogue and vivid details that make you feel like you're right there with her. The heart berry symbolizes love, connection, and cultural tradition, helping the story feel even more personal and powerful. The tone throughout is soft and reflective, perfectly capturing the quiet, special moments shared between a granddaughter and grandmother. The slow, steady pacing feels intentional and allows the memories and emotions to unfold naturally. Maggie grows more connected to her identity as the story progresses. At first, she's excited about creating something beautiful, but as she listens to her grandmother's story, she gains a deeper understanding of her family's history and cultural roots.

The illustrations by Eva Campbell are soft and expressive, using gentle colors and warm tones that reflect the relationship between Maggie and her grandmother. The pictures complement the text by showing cultural items like the beading jar, the lunch of fry bread and chili, and the shared workspace. These images help ground the story in specific cultural details while also conveying love, learning, and legacy.

Readers of *Heart Berry Bling* will come away with an appreciation for tradition, respect for elders, and pride of connecting with your identity. The story encourages children to ask about their own culture and heritage, think about fairness and injustice, and learn about traditions passed down from one generation to the next.

Books like *Jingle Dancer* (Cynthia Leitich Smith, Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu, 2000) and *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* (Kevin Noble Maillard & Juana Martinez-Neal, 2019) would pair beautifully with *Heart Berry Bling*. All three books highlight intergenerational bonds and the important role elders play in passing down traditional knowledge.

Jenny Kay Dupuis, a member of the Nipissing First Nation, is an educator, author, artist, and speaker who focuses on raising awareness about Indigenous communities. With her expertise, she has supported organizations, businesses, and schools in addressing Indigenous policies and promoting equity. Dupuis holds a Bachelor of Arts in History and Visual Arts, a Master of Education in Special Education, and a PhD in Educational Leadership. She lives in Toronto, Canada. You can find out more about this author at her website (https://jennykaydupuis.com/).

Eva Campbell, the illustrator, holds a Master's degree in African Art History, and a Master's of Fine Arts. She currently teaches art at Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific in Victoria, British Columbia. Her artwork has been exhibited across Canada and the United States. You can see more of Campbell's work on her website (http://www.evacampbell.ca/).

Laurianne Frayser, Texas Woman's University

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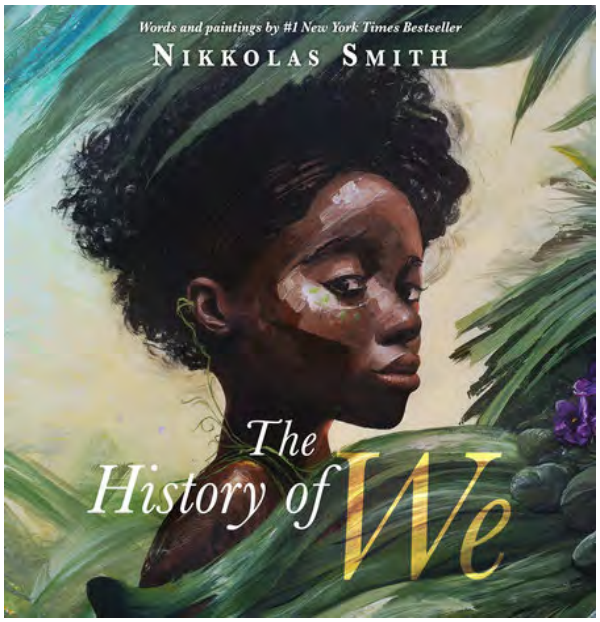

The History of We
Written and illustrated by Nikkolas Smith
Kokila, 2025, 40pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-0593619681

In this informational picturebook, the reader is immediately drawn into a collective history by making eye contact with a young ancestor on the book cover. The narrative begins on the end pages with a visual reference to the creation account of darkness changing to light. That is followed by a representation of Michelangelo's masterpiece, The Creation of Man, as dry and fertile land flows out of the creator's hand. Readers are then treated to a poetic and visual feast, introducing them to the African cradle and the beginnings of human activity on earth. Each subsequent page profiles early ancestors learning about healing plants, exploring seas and lands beyond the horizon, engaging in engineering tasks that involve designing and building shelters, refining agricultural practices to feed families, and creating clothing and tools that protect and aid in sustaining life. The poem is a love song to human ingenuity, curiosity, and creativity.

The word pictures in the poem are masterful and lyrical. They demonstrate Smith's ability as a poet to help us understand that our ancestors were vibrant, smart, and creative people. He sets the premise of the book in the first pages, using line breaks and formatting to lead readers into the story of our shared roots:

> *In this fertile African cradle,*
> *the birthplace of civilization is found.*
> *Here, we dreamed and we spoke. We shared and we healed.*
> *We sang, and danced, and built, and explored.*
> *We lived.*
> *Let us travel back to the start, so far back*
> *that all of our roots begin to tell the same story.*
> *The origin story of humankind.*
> *The history of WE. (p. 6)*

Smith then takes each active verb and expands the action on subsequent spreads, using artistic vocabulary that helps readers marvel at what our ancestors accomplished. They "sculpted words that made stories." Early artists "with boundless vision, . . . painted wonder." Musicians, with "drums and heartbeats in sync, . . . played alongside the chorus of nature's radiant choir."

The hand-painted acrylic images are stunning, shifting the perspective of the reader to highlight the vastness of landscapes at the mouth of a cave, the exuberance of dance, and the wide-eyed wonder of an explorer swimming in ocean waters. In the final spreads, Smith leads readers to the notion that curiosity about the world led ancestors to build boats and explore beyond their known horizons. He visually maps the spread of humans from the African cradle to other continents. The words and image in the final spread emphasize the common roots humans share coupled with the diversity that evolved as humans dispersed across the globe.

Nikkolas Smith calls himself an artivist, an artist who uses the visual medium to give a voice to the voiceless. While that often implies the voices of marginalized people, this book involves a marginalized story. In the Author's Note and a YouTube introduction to the book (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69XohI7l_Rg) Nikkolas describes how he learned the human origin story that began in Africa from his parents. Thousands of years of ingenuity were skipped over and ignored in his school history books. Through the work of paleoanthropologist Mary Leakey, human activity has been verified as early as 233,000 years ago in Ethiopia (book content was verified by the Leakey family). Smith explains these humans "spoke sentences, laughed, danced, and cried as we do. They were as intelligent as us. They were us." So Smith wondered what it was like for that first artist to paint on cave walls, the first medical inventor to use plants to heal, the first astronomers to map the stars, or the first explorers to wonder what was over the next stretch of water. The images and words allow the reader to see the ancestors' wide-eyed wonder, surprise, and joy in discovery.

The book title implies commonality, a common history, a community of humans, alike in many ways, stemming from a single root. As people migrated they changed, but at the core they are the same. The message of universality works as a counternarrative to the messages internalized with immigration raids, book banning, removal of historical artifacts, and other forms of censorship. It draws readers back to the idea that we are all human beings and all deserve to be treated with dignity, humanity and kindness. But it also communicates a respect and admiration for the ingenuity and curiosity of early ancestors who are frequently portrayed in history books as only hunters and gatherers. We are one family.

There are several ways that books could pair with *The History of We*. Peter Spier's classic *People* (1980) addresses Smith's theme of the commonality and creativity of people across the globe by highlighting how diverse we have become. Smith's masterful poetic language and storytelling can be paired with other lyrical texts like Gill Lewis and Jo Weaver's (2018) *A Story Like the Wind*, a tale of a group of immigrants floating in a boat and encouraged through a musical story. Finally, Smith's theme of ingenuity and marginalized history can be paired with other marginalized histories of Indigenous people in Wab Kinew and Joe Morse's (2018) title *Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes.*

Nikkolas Smith lives with his family in Los Angeles. He is diverse in his artistic reach. He earned a degree in architecture that he used in designing theme parks for Disney. He has also created concept art for films, designed movie posters, and an apparel line featuring Black superheroes. He is the author/illustrator of several books including *The Artivist* (2023) which describes the journey of a young artist in developing a visual voice with murals and paintings to address social inequities. He

also illustrated the award-winning title *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water* (Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson, 2021). More information can be found on his website (https://www.nikkolas.com/).

Reference

Smith, N. (2025, May 20). *"The History of We" by Nikkolas Smith: From idea to creative process.* YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69XohI7l_Rg

Susan Corapi, Trinity International University

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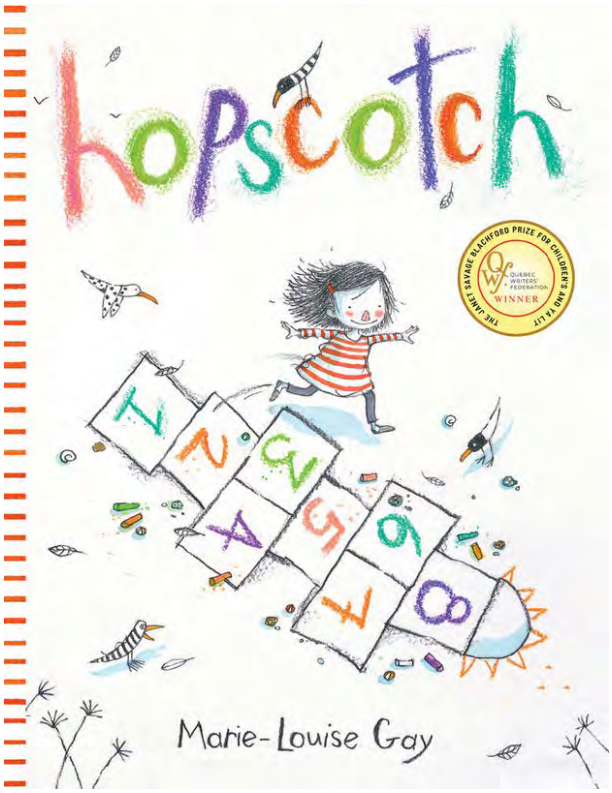

Hopscotch
Written and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay
Groundwood Books, 2023, 40pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-1773068435

Hopscotch is a picturebook told from the perspective of Ophelia, a young girl with an enormous imagination. We first meet her in her backyard where she is watching a neighbor dog, Jackson, who is tethered to a long rope that allows him to walk back and forth, but nowhere else. Ophelia is bothered by Jackson's confinement and dreams of helping him escape. But before she can, Jackson disappears. Ophelia misses him so she crosses her fingers, wishes on shooting stars, and rubs a magic stone, hoping for his return. She finally draws a magic hopscotch where she wishes even harder for Jackson to come back, live with her and be her best friend. He never returns. Instead, Ophelia's father has a new job, and the family moves yet again to a new house and town. Even though her mother tells her not to be sad, Ophelia wants to stay and wait for Jackson. When the family arrives in the new town, they stay at an old motel where Ophelia describes the giant rabbits in the fields and crow-witches she sees in the sky.

Ophelia must now go to a new school. Her mother reassures her that she will learn her numbers and letters there, but Ophelia wants to learn how to fly. When she gets to her classroom, she is greeted by her teacher, a fairy princess who speaks to her in French. Her mother assures her she will learn the language quickly. Ophelia is stunned as she is left in the classroom surrounded by staring children who make her feel like a fish in a bowl. At first, she hides in the corner, but the fairy princess gives her paper and some colored pencils, and she draws a picture of Jackson. Later at recess, Ophelia draws a magic hopscotch where she makes a wish, and then her classmates start to play in it too. At the end of the story Ophelia's family finds a house close to the school. She starts to learn new French words and gets ready to learn to fly.

Hopscotch is a book that highlights the power of a child's imagination. While Ophelia has no agency about some things—like moving to a new town, going to a new school, and learning a new language—her imagination allows her to have agency about how she makes sense of her life. Ophelia has her own deep feelings; even when her parents tell her everything is okay, she knows it isn't. She tries wishing on stars, crossing her fingers, and rubbing a stone. She is certain their new home is surrounded by giant rabbits and witches cawing like crows. Her mother tries to encourage her on her first day of school by telling her she will learn to read, write and count. But Ophelia wants to learn how to fly, become invisible, and cast spells to find Jackson. But her new classroom becomes a safe space through the power of a white piece of paper, a rainbow of pencils, and the magic of a

hopscotch that Ophelia draws on the playground. Through the game, she connects to her classmates and imagines a more hopeful future.

Marie-Louise Gay, the author and illustrator, based this story on part of her own childhood, one where she moved often and had to learn a new language along the way (in her case, English). Gay's lived experiences make this book come alive. She creates Ophelia's world, in words and pictures, as a place that is frightening and wondrous and beautiful. Ophelia's magical thinking is treated with respect, and she is given the opportunity to solve her own problems, which were not of her making. This is a book that allows readers to see themselves and others when they are powerless and powerful. She wrote about the process of writing *Hopscotch* in her August 2023 blog post (http://marielouisegay.com/blog).

The illustrations in watercolor, acrylic, pencil, and crayon are true to Gay's signature style of illustration. Her white backgrounds allow the characters' emotions to take center stage. The characters play across the entire page, exuding joy in play or reeling from oversized fear of imagined threats like a giant ogre crossing guard. Her illustrations are full of movement and color, exploring the line between reality and the imaginary world that Ophelia enters.

Hopscotch could be paired with many titles because of the themes in the narrative. Marie-Louise Gay's *Stella* series introduces readers to another imaginative and enthusiastic protagonist who experiences a new world like Ophelia. Another book that shows imagination as power in an uncertain world is *Lubna and Pebble* (Wendy Meddour and Daniel Egnéus, 2019), a thoughtful picturebook depicting a young refugee finding a pebble and turning it into a friend. *Hopscotch* could be paired with *The Year We Learned to Fly* (Jacqueline Woodson & Rafael Lopez, 2022), a story of children using their imagination to escape boredom and impatience with each other. Finally, titles like *Mustafa* (Marie Louise Gay, 2018) and *Gibberish* (Young Vo, 2022) highlight language learning and can support discussion about strategies language learners can use to communicate with new friends across language barriers.

Marie-Louise Gay is a Canadian illustrator and author who lives with her family in Montreal. She has written and illustrated over sixty books, in both French and English, winning many awards along the way. Her work has been shortlisted for the Governor General's Award several times (*Stella, Fairy of the Forest*, 2002; *Stella, Princess of the Sky*, 2004; *Any Questions*?, 2014) and she won the 2015 TD Canadian Children's Literature Award for *Any Questions?* She has been nominated for both the Hans Christian Andersen and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Awards. Her books have been translated into fifteen languages and even made into TV shows. Please read more about this extraordinary woman on her website (http://marielouisegay.com/english).

Melissa Wilson, Cardiff, Wales

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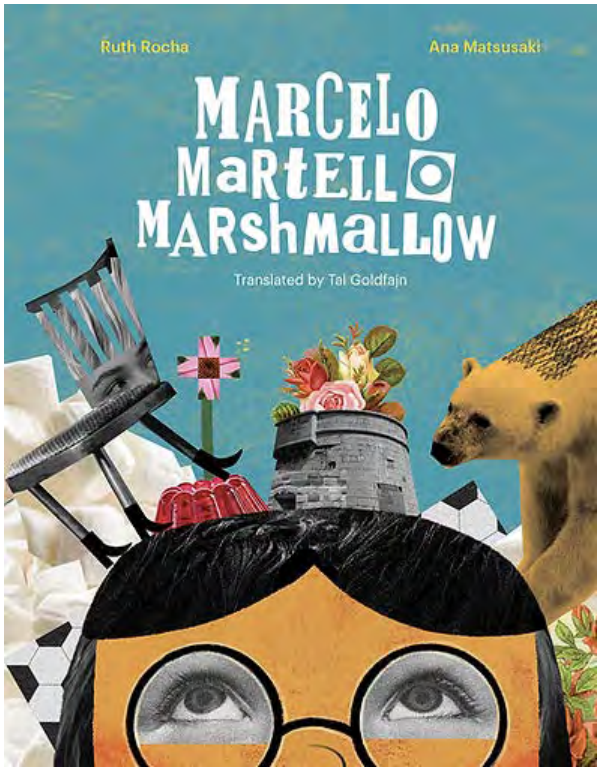
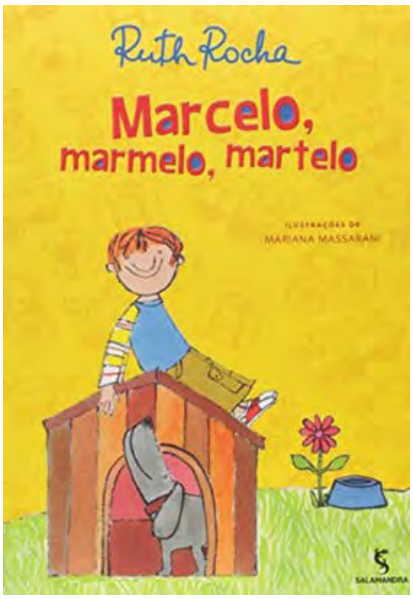


Marcelo Martello Marshmallow
Written by Ruth Rocha
Illustrated by Ana Matsusaki
Translated by Tal Goldfajn
Tapioca Stories, 2024, 36pp [unpaged]
ISBN: 978-1734783995

This translated book from Brazil features a child who asks questions and creatively acts on aspects of his world that do not make sense to him. What he finds most puzzling is the randomness of words. He starts by questioning his name and then goes on to question the words assigned to objects and animals, such as table, chair, and hair. His parents grow tired of his questions, but their answers do not satisfy Marcelo. He decides to create his own words that he feels are a better fit, like calling a chair by the term 'seater' and a spoon as 'scrambler.' His parents are embarrassed when guests visit and worry about school, but Marcelo continues developing his own language. When Marcelo's invented language is not understood by his parents, the doghouse burns (the dog is safe). Marcelo complains with frustration that grown-ups do not understand him, and so the parents decide to communicate with him in his language rather than forcing him to conform to adult terminology. The book ends years later with Marcelo's daughter asking, "Why is a table named table?"

This picturebook is creative both in Marcelo's invented language and in the translation process. The original book title in Portuguese is *Marcelo, Marmelo, Martelo*, names that Martelo plays with as possibilities for himself. In Portuguese, marmelo means 'quince,' a golden, fragrant fruit used to make jams, so the translation decisions were difficult since using quince would ruin the language play. The translator made the decision to use marshmallow to preserve the language play, since that is central to the book. Martelo in Portuguese means 'hammer' but that is changed to Martello in the English translation which is the name of a tower. These shifts in translation to preserve the language play meant that the book needed to be re-illustrated to bring in marshmallows instead of the fruit and a tower instead of a hammer.

The book, originally released in 1976, is considered a classic read in schools all over Brazil and was made into a television series (see the cover and the TV promotion). That book contains three short stories of children, one of which is Marcelo's story. The original illustrator, Adalberto Cornavaca, used cartoon-style illustrations for the short story, highlighting the main actions in small spot illustrations. The translated book features new full-page illustrations by Ana Matsusaki, who uses a surrealistic style in which fragments of photos are incorporated into each scene, especially the eyes and hands of characters.



Themes of creativity and imagination are highlighted along with word play and child agency. The ending is notable in that the expected ending of Marcelo realizing that he needs to use socially conventional words to communicate is upended by the parents honoring their child's frustration with grown-ups who do not "understand anything about anything at all." His father replies, "Please don't be sad, my dearest boy. We'll build a new dogstayer for Barky." Although the parents do not learn to speak exactly like Marcelo, they do "try very hard to understand what he says" and they no longer care what their guests think, honoring their child's curiosity and creativity.

Another possible interpretation relates to the time period in which this book was originally published in Brazil. Since Brazil was under a military dictatorship at the time, free speech was limited and many writers expressed dissent in subtle ways. Although this book is not explicitly political, Marcelo's act of redefining reality and creating his own vocabulary can be read as a metaphor for resisting imposed norms and censorship. To highlight the theme of subtle resistance, this book could be read alongside *The Composition* by Antonio Skármeta and Alfonso Ruano (2000), about a government contest for children to write about what their family does at night, based on a dictatorship in Chile.

Other possible pairings are books that celebrate word play and vocabulary, such as *A Chest Full of Words* by Rebecca Gugger and Simon Sothlisberger, translated from German by Lawrence Schmiel (2025). The translator faced a similar problem in that words that flow from the chest had to be translated to words that are expressive in English in similar ways to the original German. Since these words are integrated into the illustrations, the illustrations had to be revised. *What Makes Us Human* by Victor D.O. Santos and Anna Forlati (2024) was originally published in Brazil and uses a riddle format to explore language as the cornerstone of human identity and connection.

This picturebook could also be connected to books that depict child agency especially with adults, such as *Fred Stays with Me* by Nancy Coffelt and Tricia Tusa (2007) in which a child, who splits her time between her father's and mother's houses, tells her parents that her dog is the constant in her life and they do not decide if she can keep the dog. *The Rock in My Throat* by Kao Kalia Yang and Jiemei Lin

(2024) is the story of a Hmong child who asserts her agency by refusing to speak English, the language of impatience and rudeness, in school to reply to teachers, while fluently speaking Hmong, a language of beauty, at home with her family. *Head in the Clouds* by Rocio Araya (2024) is translated from Spanish and features a child whose teacher complains is always daydreaming with her "head in the clouds" instead of paying attention. In response to the teacher's criticism, Sofía shares the many questions that fill her mind. Color-filled images from Sofía's vibrant mind are depicted in contrast to the teacher's monochromatic dull-gray mind.

This picturebook was named to the 2025 Outstanding International Books, an award that Ruth Rocha received in 2017 for her translated book, *Lines, Squiggles, Letters, Words* (2016). Ruth Rocha (https://brazilianpublishers.com.br/en/noticias-en/5-books-to-discover-ruth-rochas-childrens-literature/) is a beloved and acclaimed Brazilian author who is viewed as leading a new wave of Brazilian children's literature with her articles and books. She is particularly known for her playful storytelling and her focus on children's curiosity. *Marcelo, Marmelo, Martelo* (1976) was her second children's book. She received the Charge to Cultural Merit from Brazil's president along with other prestigious literary prizes. She has published 130 books, translated into 500 editions and more than 25 languages.

The illustrator, Ana Matsusaki (https://anamatsusaki.com/), is from São Paulo with a degree in graphic design. She worked as an art director before deciding to commit herself full-time to illustration and book design in her own studio. Her work has been selected for inclusion at the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava and the Bologna Children's Book Fair. *The Collector of Heads* (2023) was her debut book, originally published in Brazil and translated into English and Spanish, about a girl who collects heads, histories, and memories of those who have died.

Tal Goldfajn (https://www.umass.edu/spanish-portuguese/about/directory/tal-goldfajn) is a linguist, translator, and translation scholar who is an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the Spanish and Portuguese Studies department. Along with her students at UMass Amherst, she founded the Pipa Project initiative for the promotion of translated children's literature and multilingual storytelling. She is working on a book titled *Translation and Inheritance,* for the Routledge series New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies. She translates books and articles in Spanish, English, Portuguese, French, and Hebrew.

Kathy G. Short and Christiane Pontes Pimental de Andrade, University of Arizona

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