

Chapter 8

Using Diverse Youth Literature to Expand Knowledge and Consider Multiple Perspectives Through Tri-Texts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter shares lessons learned in relation to intertextually connected texts with a focus on tri-texts. It presents both the theoretical framework and underpinnings that support utilizing tri-texts in the classroom as well as practical and engaging ways for preservice and in-service teachers to implement these practices in their own classroom. The organization of this chapter will lead readers through valuable steps and will support teachers in this implementation. This chapter is organized in six sections: 1) Diverse Youth Literature, 2) Intertextuality, 3) Tri-Texts, 4) An Instructional Framework for Tri-Texts Utilizing Diverse Literature, 5) Putting Intertextuality Into Action Using Tri-Texts and Diverse Literature, 6) Final Thoughts and Next Steps.

INTRODUCTION

Note: In this chapter we intentionally use the spelling of the word *picturebook* as one word to highlight the inextricable unity of words and pictures of this type of book.

Recently, as a part of a graduate literacy course focusing on the use of diverse youth literature in the classroom, William (Author 2) read aloud a picturebook titled *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse, 2007).

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It is an emotional story about a young Afghan girl named Ziba and her family who are fleeing their home country due to war. Throughout the story, the author and illustrator, with descriptive words and evocative illustrations, describe Ziba's home, father, and friends, and the trials and tribulations of being forced to move from their homeland.

After reading, students were invited to share their reactions and understandings of the book and discuss them with the whole class. In general, students' reactions focused on the difficulties immigrants experience moving from one land to another, and how this experience must be particularly difficult and harmful for children. However, one student, an international graduate student from Iran, reacted much differently to the story. She stated:

I did not like this story. It reminded me of so many other books that I have read that are more distortions of immigration. This book, though heart-warming, did the same thing. It seemed to present and perpetuate an inaccurate, if not stereotypical, depiction of people immigrating to another country. I was born in Iran and am now attending graduate school in the United States. As an immigrant who came here looking for a better education, and not because of war, discrimination, or poverty, I had to leave my family, home, friends, and most importantly my comfort zone; namely, my culture, language, traditions, customs, and so on. To me, Ziba Came on a Boat was a tragic story but that was definitely not the way I, indeed, most people in that region, and other countries around the world, used to live back home. There is no war in my country. I have never lived in a shelter, hunted for food, made my own clothes, or baked bread. All immigrants are not poor or uneducated. Instead, they can come from highly educated families and beautiful countries. Thus, it was hard for me to relate to the story, and, I suspect, difficult for many people who immigrate to the United States, for a better life.

At first, all three of us were taken back by this student's response to the story. We certainly did not intend to communicate stereotypical and/or offensive messages. However, as we reflected, we were able to learn from this experience as well as remember previously learned lessons.

This student's words made a strong impression on us. We learned and remembered several lessons connected to literacy from hearing this student's voice and her own experiences as an immigrant. While not all new, these lessons remain important.

We were reminded that making personal connections to texts is important for comprehension. Readers can do this when they *see* or *hear* themselves in texts. Ironically, this student made a personal connection from the picturebook not by seeing or hearing herself, but by seeing and hearing the opposite, or at least a different or falsely-perceived version, of herself. Either way, she clearly comprehended the text and experienced significant intellectual and emotional reactions to it.

We were also reminded that making intertextual connections to texts is important for comprehension. One way for readers to strengthen their intertextual thinking is to make connections between the texts they are currently reading and the texts they have already read. This student made connections between *Ziba Came on a Boat* and other books she has read on immigration. In this particular case, the books she referred to reaffirmed the stereotypes that she felt were communicated through *Ziba Came on a Boat*. Her connection was that these texts presented "more distortions than accurate portrayals of immigration." After hearing her response, we wondered: What if we would have presented multiple picturebooks representing multiple perspectives? Would this student have felt both valued and respected? Would presenting multiple picturebooks from other perspectives inspire other students to share their thoughts and stories? Would it help students see multiple points of view?

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