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**USING MULTICULTURAL READ ALOUD BOOKS TO SUPPORT STUDENT  
UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER EDUCATION THEMES**

by

Elizabeth A. Somers

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

February 17, 2020

Thesis Chair: Susan Browne, Ph.D.



## Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, who have encouraged me throughout this process. To my husband, your support has been amazing. I could not have done this without you! To my children, thank you for your patience. I promise, no more schoolwork! To my parents, thank you for always cheering me on.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Browne. I am truly grateful for your guidance and encouragement.

I also want to recognize my fellow classmates. It has been a pleasure to complete this journey with you! Best of luck to each of you as we move forward in our professions.

## Abstract

Elizabeth A. Somers  
USING MULTICULTURAL READ ALOUD BOOKS TO SUPPORT STUDENT  
UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER EDUCATION THEMES  
2019-2020  
Susan Browne, Ph.D.  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using multicultural read aloud books during character education lessons in a second grade classroom. Six character education themes were paired with six multicultural picture books. Prior to reading these texts, students were asked to explain what they already knew about the targeted character traits in a writing activity. After reading, students discussed with a partner and then shared their thoughts with the whole group. Students completed a post-reading activity, by writing to explain what they learned about that character trait from the story. It was found that utilizing multicultural literature during character education lessons yielded positive results. Students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the themes after reading. Additionally, students made meaningful text-to-text and text-to-self connections with the selected mentor texts. Finally, students applied the learning of these traits into other classroom situations. Implications for today's classroom and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

There was an audible buzz in the classroom as I handed out new books. Students excitedly flipped through the text, pointed at photographs, and shared their thoughts with neighboring classmates. Today, our second grade class would begin a new book as part of our reading curriculum titled *Friends Around the World* by Ana Galan.

I introduced the book by explaining, “Today in reading, we will be meeting some students from different places around the world! We are going to be learning about students that go to school in New York City, Canada, Vietnam, and Australia!”

I pointed these places out on a world map displayed on the SMART board. Students were instructed to turn and talk to their partners and share what they might already know about these places. It was obvious students knew a lot about New York, some students had even visited the city before. Many students mentioned the Statue of Liberty, tall skyscrapers, and the subway. Some shared background knowledge about Australia, claiming that kangaroos and koalas live there. There was not much information shared about Canada other than its close proximity to the United States. Students did not have any background knowledge to share about Vietnam. After a minute of discussion, we dove into the text and began reading.

After reading the first few pages, the author introduced us to Akiak, a boy that lives near the Arctic Circle in Canada. One of my students piped up, “Akiak? That name sounds weird. It sounds like A-Kayak, like the boat!” A few other students giggled.

Caught off guard, I responded by pointing out the next line of text that explains that his name is a traditional Inuit name. “The Inuit people are a native group to Canada. They have their own history, culture and language. Akiak’s name means

‘brave’ in his native language. So, his name may sound different to you, because you have a different language and culture”.

The students acknowledged my response by nodding their heads. I mentally gave myself a pat on the back. I felt that my explanation was clear and meaningful. Ready to continue, I pointed to another student whose hand shot in the air to ask a question. “Are those the same people that live in igloos and rub their noses together?” she asked.

I deflated. This question left me feeling disheartened. It was obvious up to this point that some of my students had limited knowledge of other cultures, and what they did “know” were actually negative stereotypes. I realized in this moment that I had some work to do. I had a responsibility to instill an attitude of respect and understanding of other cultures in my students.

### **Story of the Question**

The classroom anecdote as described above was just one incident that inspired my classroom research. Over the last decade of teaching, my district population has changed from typically white, middle-class families to a much more diverse population. Today, more than 50% of the students in my school are considered economically disadvantaged. There is a diverse mix of students, representing various cultures. In my classroom of eighteen students, I have five families that are non-English speaking. Two students are homeless. One student’s father has been deported. Family dynamics in my classroom vary between two-parent households, single parents, same-sex couples, and multigenerational families. Now, more than ever, I feel the responsibility of making sure my students see themselves represented in our curriculum. Additionally, I feel the need to expose my students to various cultures outside of their own. It was obvious in the

story with Akiak, that my students had misconceptions when it came to the Inuit culture. I want my students to be exposed to authentic multicultural literature that represents cultures realistically and free of stereotypes.

Also, I feel a responsibility to emphasize values and morals in the classroom. Throughout my career, teaching character education has been a commitment of mine. Several years ago, I began a character education committee in my school. Our committee developed a school-wide plan for teaching character education values. After reading the story *Friends Around the World* with my students, I saw the opportunity to bridge character education and multicultural literature. I know my students would benefit from using multicultural books to launch conversations about character education values. Although my students are only seven and eight years old, I want them to embrace cultural differences rather than giggle at them. It is my hope that teaching traits such as respect and compassion could change students' perspectives about diverse cultures.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to examine how multicultural read aloud books can support student understanding of character education themes, such as respect and compassion. Specifically, this study will determine if students gain a deeper understanding of character education themes after listening to a multicultural book and discussing their thoughts and observations with peers. My inquiry will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How can multicultural literature support students in identifying character education themes?

- In what ways can multicultural read alouds and discussions with peers help students gain a greater understanding of the character education themes?
- In what ways are students able to recognize similarities in values and character themes between other diverse groups of people and cultures?
- How can students make connections and apply the targeted character themes to their own experiences?

### **Research Problem**

As classrooms become more and more diverse, teachers have a responsibility to meet the learning needs of all students. Teachers are charged with providing a learning environment that is relevant to students' home cultures, as well as teach students to respect and celebrate other cultures. These topics can be addressed through utilizing authentic multicultural literature, implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, and making connections to character education values.

Using multicultural literature in today's classroom is essential for many reasons. Rudine Sims-Bishop (1990) compares multicultural books to mirrors and windows. These books act as mirrors, allowing students to see themselves reflected and represented in literature. Also, multicultural literature can be a window, providing students with a glimpse into a new culture or experience. By incorporating multicultural literature into this research study, students will have opportunities to make connections by seeing themselves reflected in the texts, as well as learn about diverse people and cultures.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a practice constructed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992). Her primary purpose for developing this theory was to improve teacher education and develop an appreciation for the assets students bring with them into the classroom. Three major tenets support culturally relevant pedagogy, which include academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Carefully selecting multicultural literature to intentionally use in the classroom is one way to establish culturally relevant practices. By utilizing culturally authentic literature, students can demonstrate intellectual growth, cultural competence, and become aware of sociopolitical issues.

Many developmental theorists agree that a student's moral reasoning develops over time and through social interactions (Kohlberg & Hersch, 1977). Kohlberg's research on moral development outlines six stages that children transition through over time. Kohlberg encourages discussions of moral dilemmas to help children move from one stage to the next. Moral development can be fostered by helping students engage in conflict resolution discussions (Kohlberg & Hersch, 1977). In schools, teachers can address character education topics through the curriculum and cooperative learning (Lickona, 1993). The research design presented in this thesis, uses carefully chosen multicultural books that complement the grade level curriculum, as well as use social interactions and discussions to promote understanding of the targeted character trait.

### **Organization of Thesis**

In chapter two, a comprehensive literature review will discuss the previous research done on the focal topics of multicultural literature and character education. Chapter three describes the context of the study, providing details about the

community, school, and participants. It will also outline the research methodology and plan for collecting data. Results of the research and data analysis will be explained in chapter four. Chapter five will draw final conclusions about the research, as well as limitations and implications for classroom practice, and recommendations for further research.



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

Infusing multicultural literature in the early childhood curriculum encourages children's empathy and bonding with others. The result is children's deepening understanding of and respect for their own and others' beliefs, values, and cultural traditions. (Harper and Brand, 2010, p. 233)

A comprehensive review of literature indicates that using multicultural literature is essential and beneficial for student learning. Multicultural books allow students to make connections and identify with stories, as well as learn about diverse people and places. Teachers should also adapt their teaching practices to apply culturally informed pedagogies when utilizing multicultural literature (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002). Embracing student identities and home cultures within the classroom leads to student academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bennett et al., 2018). Additionally, character education plays an important role in today's classrooms. Researchers indicate that using quality literature is an effective way to teach character education values (Koc and Buzzelli, 2004; Britt et al, 2016). In an attempt to meld multicultural literature and character education, this chapter will explore previous and current research in those areas. The review of literature will present information that not only supports the use of multicultural literature to address character education topics, but the research also outlines how these practices are greatly beneficial for students academically, socially, and emotionally.

## **Theoretical Stance**

The premise of this research is founded in Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory. The lessons for this thesis research focuses on activating student background knowledge prior to reading, listening to a read aloud book, and discussion with peers after reading. Rosenblatt's research asserts that reading is a two-way process between a reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1982). Readers bring their own experiences and background knowledge to a reading of a text, which gives the reader a unique perspective and understanding. "Transactions with texts that offer some linkage with the child's own experiences and concerns can give rise aesthetically to new experiences. These in turn open new linguistic windows into the world" (p. 275). Rosenblatt encourages educators to foster an aesthetic reading stance in students. Reading with an aesthetic stance allows students to make an emotional or experiential connection to the text. Thus, based on Rosenblatt's research, we can presume that by adopting an aesthetic stance when reading multicultural literature, students are more likely to make connections and experience an emotional response to the text.

## **The Role of Multicultural Literature**

Research shows that multicultural texts are a valuable tool to teach students about diverse people and cultures. Additionally, multicultural texts allow students of color to see themselves represented in literature. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) discusses the essential role of multicultural literature through the metaphor of books acting as windows, sliding glass doors, and mirrors. Books that serve as windows give the reader a new view or perspective. When a text acts as a sliding glass door, readers can step through and experience the author's story. Mirror books serve as a reflection, allowing

the reader to see themselves represented in the story. Sims Bishop (1990) discusses the lack of representation of diversity in children's literature. When children see themselves depicted in stories, they have a sense of affirmation and value within society.

Incorporating a balance of multicultural books that act as windows, sliding glass doors, and mirrors is imperative in supporting all students.

Using multicultural literature can also be used to create classroom communities and help students build connections between their home and school identities. Lopez-Robertson (2017) sought to achieve this through utilizing multicultural literature as a way to build a classroom community at the beginning of the school year. This research study used a book titled *The Best Part of Me*, which was a compilation of photographs and descriptions of students' favorite features. In the study, Lopez-Robertson worked with a class of third grade students and asked them to respond to the text by identifying their best parts. Students were able to share and learn about each other on a personal level. Ultimately, she found that by conducting this project with a carefully selected text, students were engaged on a personal level and developed a strong sense of classroom community fostered on mutual respect.

Educators should be selective in their materials and instructional practices when planning lessons with multicultural texts. Louie (2006) created a recommendation of guiding principles for teaching with multicultural literature. In summary, teachers should select authentic texts that accurately represent the cultural group the story is depicting. Teachers should also teach students how to critique the portrayal of characters and identify characters' unique perspectives. Building student schema is also necessary and can be addressed through reading different story versions or media. Last, students

should respond to multicultural literature through discussion and writing responses. Louie (2006) explains that by utilizing these guiding principles when teaching with multicultural literature, students can enhance their understanding. These practices give students the opportunity to develop a critical understanding, empathize with characters and increase their perspective, as well as develop conceptual awareness in terms of cultural norms.

### **Culturally Informed Pedagogies**

According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) adopting instructional practices that are culturally relevant, are meaningful and appropriate. Gloria Ladson-Billings originally developed the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to link students' home and school cultures. Three tenets are necessary for establishing a culturally relevant pedagogy. They include academic success of students, developing and maintaining a cultural competence, and developing a critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (1992) asserts that culturally relevant teaching requires a teacher's recognition that a student's culture is a strength in their educational experience. Teachers can use the student's culture to help them understand themselves, others, and social experiences. Through careful selection and utilization of multicultural children's literature, teachers can implement a practice of culturally relevant pedagogy. Reading and discussing multicultural literature provides students with opportunities for academic success and growth, engaging in cultural competence, and gaining perspectives in sociopolitical issues.

Culturally responsive teaching is another approach to improving the academic success of diverse students (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as

“using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Gay asserts that designing culturally relevant curricula is imperative to student success. Teachers have a responsibility to have thorough knowledge of different cultures and how these cultural values impact student learning. Specifically, teachers can adopt culturally responsive practices by directly addressing social issues within cultural groups and conduct deep cultural analyses of instructional materials and texts to ensure cultural representation. Culturally responsive teaching can be achieved by adapting classroom interactions and instruction to embrace student cultural identities (Gay, 2002).

Culturally responsive teaching methods can be directly applied to early literacy practices. Researchers identified five components that lay the framework for culturally responsive teaching in early childhood settings. These factors include developing a culturally responsive classroom, family engagement, critical literacy within a social justice context, utilizing multicultural literature, and providing a culturally responsive print rich environment (Bennett et al. 2018). Although, the authors recognize that culturally responsive teaching is complex and unique to each classroom culture and needs to be specific to the needs and identities of the students. Researchers urge early childhood teachers to use a critical lens and “create an environment that promotes conversation, encourages multiple perspectives, builds relationships, and fosters authentic experiences” (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 242).

A recent study examined how culturally relevant texts could be utilized with Kindergarten students and their families. Schrod, Fain, and Hasty (2015) employed a Family Backpack Project with a class of kindergarten students. Students were given a

bag of books that were relevant to students' cultures and identities within class. Books were sent home to read with parents, along with a journal to record responses. The responses from students and parents were overwhelmingly positive. This project demonstrates one example of how teachers can bridge the gap between home and school. "When teachers can weave culture and literacy together, families experience power, acceptance, and academic achievement" (Schrodt et al. 2015, p. 597).

Another meaningful study focused on using culturally relevant read alouds with students who had emotional and behavioral disorders posed interesting results. Verden (2012) investigated the impact of culturally relevant texts on students in a middle school self-contained emotional support room. Texts were carefully selected by the teacher, reflecting the students' interests, cultural backgrounds, identified needs, and common social issues. Books were read aloud over the duration of the study and students were given the opportunity to share, discuss, and reflect. The results indicated that these lessons left a positive impact on the students. "Through the medium of reading aloud, students were able to focus not only on their problems but also gained empathy for the problems of others" (p. 627). One of the commonalities that were identified was the students' ability to connect and empathize with the characters. This allowed the students to reflect on their own experiences and behavior, bringing an awareness that they had not had before. Another theme that arose in the results was accepting responsibility for your actions and being able to forgive. By making connections to the situations and characters in the story, students reflected on similar situations in their own lives. These discussions led to some students' self-realizations and acknowledgements of their behavior and how they could manage similar situations in the future.

## **Moral Development and Character Education**

Many developmental theorists have claimed that children develop their moral reasoning over time and through social situations and interactions. The theory of moral development was initially defined by Jean Piaget in 1932, then refined by Lawrence Kohlberg in 1966. Both theorists claim that a child's moral learning is social and developmental. Kohlberg's research determined that moral reasoning in a child moves through six stages. Kohlberg believes the "aim of moral education should be to stimulate people's thinking ability over time in ways which will enable them to use more adequate and complex reasoning patterns to solve moral problems" (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 56). The theory of moral development lays the foundation for today's character education approach in schools.

Kohlberg makes specific suggestions for teachers and how they can stimulate moral development in their students. Classroom moral discussions are one strategy that teachers can employ. Teachers should challenge students with moral issues within the school community and discuss these topics as problems to solve (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Moral development occurs as a result of dialogue between others. Kohlberg also discusses the importance of moral content in curriculum materials. He stresses that curriculum being used should be free of instances of stereotypes, racism, and sexism. Using materials that are fair and just is essential in establishing a curriculum that supports moral education in the curriculum.

Character education is a derivative of moral education and development. Pritchard (1988) clarifies character education as having two specific qualities. First, character education focuses on content, such as a set of qualities and

moral virtues. Second, character education concentrates on behavior that reflects those values. Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist, extends this definition of character education by claiming that effective character education programs must include several criteria: moral knowing, moral feeling or attitudes, and moral behavior (Lickona, 2001). Character education must encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. The emotional side of character education serves as a bridge between judgement and action. Another important component is that character education encourages taking moral action (Lickona, 1993). “Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good - habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action” (Lickona, 2001, p. 240).

Additionally, Lickona (1993) offers specific suggestions for teachers. These include modeling moral behavior, creating a moral classroom community, teach values through the curriculum, use cooperative learning, encourage moral reflection, and foster caring beyond the classroom. Lickona (2001) also believes that moral development is just as important as academic achievement. Teachers have the power to change students’ values in school, which ultimately can affect their character.

### **Using Literature to Address Character Education**

Many researchers encourage using children’s literature as a resource for teaching character education. Children’s stories offer students the opportunity to examine characters’ actions, motives, and traits from an outside perspective. Researchers Koc and Buzzelli (2004) argue that using children’s literature is a valuable tool in teaching moral education. Aligned closely with Kohlberg’s theory on moral development, Koc and Buzzelli strongly believe that leading discussions around moral dilemmas presented in



children’s literature will help support students’ moral understanding and development. Using literature, children can observe and experience moral conflicts and learn to take on other perspectives. Discussions around these books “challenge young children, encouraging them to think more deeply about moral issues, and that promote moral reasoning abilities” (p. 97).

One of the most seamless ways to incorporate character education into the curriculum is by using good quality children’s literature (O’Sullivan, 2004). O’Sullivan (2004) recommends that books selected for use in teaching character education should contain moral dilemmas, offer enough depth to go beyond literal comprehension, have admirable and believable characters, and include a wide range of cultures. Also, instead of examining characters at the literal level, characters should be discussed in relation to character traits and virtues.

Character education is also closely aligned with social emotional learning. Social emotional learning identifies five core competencies that are necessary for children’s social and emotional well-being. These include self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Heath et al, 2017). Interactive read alouds in conjunction with questioning and enrichment activities is an ideal way to incorporate social emotional learning into the classroom (Britt et al, 2016). Additionally, using stories to build a foundation of social emotional learning can positively influence student behavior (Heath et al, 2017).

A significant study examined character education lessons with preschool students that used children’s books to teach bullying prevention (Freeman, 2014). Researchers selected an assortment of books that were developmentally appropriate and included

themes of bullying and/or character and moral development. The purpose of this study was to determine if children's literature would support character education and bullying education in a preschool setting. After reading an assortment of selected books with the participants, students were asked to identify bullying behaviors. All the participants were able to adequately provide examples. Additionally, all the students were able to give at least two positive responses, such as appropriate strategies to take when dealing with a bully, or how to help someone who was bullied. The results of this research suggest that using children's literature is an effective approach to teaching anti-bullying and character education. "Integrating literacy and character education is a win-win situation" (Freeman, 2014, p. 311). Freeman (2014) also warns that teaching bullying prevention and character education should not be a one-time lesson. Rather, teaching these topics should continue throughout the duration of the school year.

## **Conclusion**

The reviewed literature suggests that using multicultural literature in classrooms gives students opportunities to learn about other cultures and see themselves reflected in stories. Additionally, using read aloud stories to teach character education has the potential to yield positive effects on student learning, as well as support students socially and emotionally. However, the research presented confirms the need for further inquiry in specifically using multicultural literature to support character education curriculum. Although there are findings that confirm the importance of using culturally relevant multicultural literature, little research confirms the impact these texts have on teaching character education themes. Research does confirm the fact that using children's literature in general is one of the best approaches to teach character education and address

social emotional learning. The research in this thesis will attempt to merge these topics and target specific character education themes by exclusively using carefully selected and culturally relevant multicultural picture books. It is my hope that this inquiry provides valuable results when examining how relevant multicultural read alouds support student understanding of character education themes.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design/Methodology

This study is naturalistic qualitative teacher research. The research design relies on practitioner inquiry and takes place in the natural setting of the classroom. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain teacher research as a valuable framework for inquiry. “Every teacher has wonderings worth pursuing. Teacher research is one way to pursue these wonderings in a thoughtful, systematic, and collaborative way” (p. 9). Two principles that define teacher research include close observation of students at work and the reliance upon a research community within a school or district (Shagoury & Power, 2012). A primary goal of the teacher researcher is to “understand her students and improve her practice” (p. 4).

Shagoury and Power (2012) explain that teacher research is dominated by qualitative inquiry. They suggest various tools for harvesting and analyzing data. Teacher journals and note taking are an essential tool in teacher research. Reviewing and reflecting on written notes can “provide a bridge between what you are experiencing in the classroom and how you translate the experience into larger meaning” (p.92). Additionally, audio and video recordings can provide valuable information to the teacher. These recordings allow teachers the opportunity to listen and review classroom discussions and transcribe direct quotes from students and teachers. Student artifacts can also provide teachers with meaningful data. Examples of student work “is tangible evidence of what kids are able to do and of the range of ways in which kids respond to different learning tasks” (p. 115).

This study qualitatively analyzes the impact of using multicultural read aloud books to teach character education themes in a second grade classroom. The following sections will provide an outline for the context of the research, as well as explain the research procedures and collected data sources used for analysis.

### **Community**

This study took place in a second grade classroom in a small town in southern New Jersey. According to the United States Census Bureau data (2017), there are approximately 10,230 people living within the 3.87 square miles of the town. Based on reported racial demographics, the town is comprised of 64.8% White, 25.6% Black/African American, 1.6% Asian, 4.2% two or more races, and 9.7% Hispanic or Latino. In 2017, the median household income was \$51,286 and 13.6% of residents living in poverty. The public school district includes four schools, including two elementary schools (grades PreK - 5), one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). According to the New Jersey School Summary Report (2018), this district served 1,870 students in the 2017-2018 school year.

### **School**

The research took place at Small Town Elementary School (pseudonym). This school served 489 students during the 2017-2018 school year. Data retrieved from the New Jersey School Summary Report (2018) indicated that approximately 56% of students attending this school are economically disadvantaged, 21% have disabilities, and 2.5% are English Language Learners. At this school, the student population is comprised of 39.9% White, 18.6% Hispanic, 32.7% Black/African American, 2.5% Asian, and 6.1% of two or more races.

At Small Town Elementary, the staff created their own character education program guidelines. Several years ago, a character education committee created a framework for teaching character traits so that there was more consistency school wide. Each month the school focuses on a character trait, such as respect, responsibility, etc. Throughout the month, classroom teachers are expected to hold at least two class meetings with a focus on that character trait. The character education committee generates a monthly newsletter for teachers that includes teaching ideas, websites, and book recommendations. At the end of the month, each classroom teacher recognizes one student from that class that exemplifies the character trait that was the focus for that month.

### **Classroom**

The study was conducted in a second grade classroom at Small Town Elementary School. This is one of three second grade classrooms at the school and within the classroom there is one classroom teacher. In addition, the students receive varying levels of support from a math paraprofessional, a Response to Intervention (RTI) teacher or literacy specialist, and an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher. The class consists of 18 students. Of those 18 students, parental consent for participation in this research study was granted for 14 of them. Participating students include seven girls and seven boys, between ages seven and eight. Racial demographics of the students participating include four White students, three Hispanic students, five Black/African American students, and two Asian students.

In this classroom, students spend about two and a half hours a day engaged in literacy activities. About thirty minutes a day are devoted to whole group reading

activities from ReadyGen, a program published by Pearson Education. Students read a balance of fiction and nonfiction trade books and focus on comprehension strategies; another thirty minutes is devoted to writing. Writing lessons are directly related to the mentor texts from the reading program. An hour of guided reading and literacy centers is scheduled each day. During this time, students struggling with literacy skills receive RTI interventions. Another half an hour is dedicated to direct phonics instruction through Wilson's Foundations program.

Character Education is addressed during class meetings scheduled for thirty minutes on Friday afternoons. The teacher typically addresses character education traits by holding discussions, reading picture books, and showing videos. The teacher also recognizes students who demonstrate the monthly trait by rewarding points. On the Class Dojo app, students have their own avatar and can earn or lose points based on targeted behaviors. Each month the teacher creates a category based on the monthly character trait. This encourages students to model the positive behavior throughout the month.

### **Procedure of the Study**

To prepare for this research, I examined many multicultural picture books that I thought would be age appropriate for my second grade classroom. I also considered which character education themes were portrayed in each story, specifically looking for the same character traits that are recognized by our school's character education framework. After careful selection, I chose six books that represented various cultures and demonstrated six different character education themes and created a schedule for teaching:

- Week 1 - Responsibility – *The Water Princess* by Susan Verde  
This book is about a young girl named Gie-Gie that lives in an African village. Her responsibility each day is to walk miles to collect clean water for her family.
- Week 2 - Perseverance - *Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words* by Karen Leggett Abouraya  
This book describes the events leading up to the attempted assassination of Malala. The reader learns how she perseveres and goes on to win the Nobel Peace Prize.
- Week 3 – Compassion – *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts  
*Those Shoes* is a story about a boy who wants a cool pair of sneakers, but his family cannot afford them. He learns a lesson about needs vs. wants and ultimately shows compassion for a friend in need.
- Week 4 – Fairness – *Let the Children March* by Monica Clark-Robinson  
This picture book tells the true story of children who participated in the civil rights marches in Birmingham, Alabama. The reader learns about the discriminatory laws that were in place and how children helped protest segregation.
- Week 5 – Respect – *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi  
*The Name Jar* tells the story of Unhei, a girl from South Korea who moves to the United States. She is teased by other students, and feels like she doesn't fit in. This story teaches a lesson about respect and being proud of your cultural identity.



- Week 6 – Kindness – *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson

This book tells the story of Chloe, who is not nice to a new student in her class. She excludes her at recess and laughs at her with her friends. After the teacher does a lesson on kindness, Chloe regrets the way she treated the new student and wants a chance to change her behavior.

The classroom research took place over a six-week period. Each week a new book was presented, and its theme was discussed. I conducted each lesson following the same lesson protocol (Appendix A). First, I introduced the weekly character trait by creating an anchor chart and providing students with a definition of the character trait. The student-friendly definitions for each trait included:

- Responsibility – doing what you are expected to do, making good choices, doing your part
- Perseverance – to keep trying and working hard, even when it is difficult, reaching for your goals
- Compassion – showing concern and understanding for others, helping someone in need
- Fairness – treating people equally, taking turns and sharing, being open-minded
- Respect – showing care about someone’s feelings and well-being, accepting others for who they are
- Kindness – doing something nice for others without wanting anything in return, showing people that you care about their feelings

After providing the class with a definition, I gave the students an open-ended response that prompted them to write and/or draw to show what they already know about the targeted character trait. When students finished writing their responses, we gathered to read the selected book. I set a purpose for reading by encouraging students to look for examples of the defined character trait in the story. During each read aloud, I clarified and provided background information as needed to support student understanding of the text. For example, when we read *The Water Princess* by Susan Verde, I showed students on a map where the story took place in Africa and explained how there was a shortage of clean drinking water in that area.

After reading, students met with a partner to think-pair-share and discuss examples of the selected character trait from the story. While students discussed with a partner, I jotted down anecdotal notes of some of the conversations I heard. Then, I asked students to share examples of what they had discussed with the whole group. As students shared their thoughts, I added examples to the anchor chart. Next, students returned to their seats to answer a final open-ended response. I asked students to explain what they learned about the character trait from the story we read. Students completed the response by writing and/or drawing. Student work was collected to analyze.

### **Data Sources**

I used multiple qualitative measures to collect data for this research project and data was triangulated using three primary sources. First, I kept a teacher research journal where I noted my observations and thoughts. This tool allowed me to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of my lessons. I also used video/audio recordings of each lesson. These recordings were valuable in allowing me to go back and review student

comments and discussions of the text. I was able to use recorded verbal responses to determine if students were able to make meaningful connections to the story and if they could find examples of the targeted character trait. Last, I collected student work samples of their pre and post reading open ended responses. These responses helped me determine what their understanding of the character trait was before reading and evaluate if the read aloud book helped strengthen their understanding of the character trait.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to draw conclusions regarding the impact the multicultural stories left on students' understanding of the character education traits, the aforementioned data sources were analyzed qualitatively. The pre and post reading responses provided me with valuable information and demonstrated how their understanding of the character trait changed from the beginning to the end of the lesson. Each week students completed one pre and post reading response based on the targeted character education traits. I read over their work and noted the responses that had demonstrated a clear understanding and made meaningful connections to the story that was read.

At the end of each week, I reviewed the video/audio recordings from the lesson. The video/audio recordings provided me with direct quotes of student discussion that I transcribed into my notes. I was able to examine which students were able to find specific examples of the character trait from the story, themes that emerged in response to the texts, and identify meaningful connections made to the character in the text. I was also able to analyze the support I provided students by clarifying portions of the story and providing essential background knowledge.

The teacher research journal allowed me to see trends and themes in my notes and reflections. I was able to note commonalities between the lessons and student reactions to the stories. After reviewing my notes each week, I highlighted instances and added reflections that I thought were important to the classroom research. These notes and reflections were essential in providing a qualitative analysis of the classroom research. An inductive process of analysis was used to establish three major themes that emerged across all data sources.

In the next chapter, I will discuss and analyze the results from the various data sources. I will compare student written work from before and after each lesson, critique student discussions and verbal responses, and convey my own thoughts from my research journal and notes.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Findings

#### Introduction

Chapter four discusses the results of classroom research, examining the effect of using multicultural literature during character education lessons. This chapter is organized into three major themes that emerged through an analysis of the data to answer the research question that asked how multicultural read aloud books can support student understanding of character education themes. The themes that emerged from the study include the following:

- Deeper Understandings of Character Traits - Students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the targeted character trait after listening to a book read by the teacher. Students evolved from a narrow understanding to a broader perspective by giving examples from what they learned from the mentor texts
- Connections with Mentor Texts - students made personal connections and text-to-text connections with the characters and events in selected mentor texts
- Application of Learning - students applied their learning of the character education traits to other classroom subjects and situations

#### Deeper Understanding of Character Traits

Some of the most significant data that I collected and analyzed was the written responses of my students. Comparing their pre and post reading responses demonstrated clearly how students went from having a basic and personal understanding of the character education theme, to a much deeper understanding and broader perspective. Before reading, the targeted character trait was defined, and students were

asked to explain what they already know about that trait. Many of these responses were personal and gave examples from the students' lives and prior experiences. This pre-reading activity was essential in activating their background knowledge before engaging with the text. After listening to the reading of the book and discussing with peers, students were asked to respond by explaining what they learned about that trait from the selected story. Many students showed a deeper understanding by using examples from the text and referring to the character's actions. Below are examples of student pre and post reading responses that were collected over the duration of the study.

Table 1

*Week One: Responsibility*

<b>Student #</b>	<b>Before Reading - What do you already know about RESPONSIBILITY?</b>	<b>After Reading - Explain what you learned about RESPONSIBILITY.</b>
13	Not losing my pencil and not losing my TV remote and not losing my bookbag.	She couldn't go to school because she had a job to get water for her whole family.
11	To be responsible is to take care of stuff. To always do your chores at home. To bring in homework to your class. To throw garbage in the trash.	What I learned more about responsibility is that Gie Gie walked long for water. When Gie Gie went back home with water she boiled the water and waited for it to cool off. She drank the water to live.
10	Don't leave your bed messy. Make your bed nice.	Gie Gie helps her mom get some water for her mom and village. She did responsibility by helping her mom get water.
6	What I do responsible is clean up after myself. And I clean my room. And I clean up the living room. But I clean up after my sister too. I even clean up after my dogs.	I learned that helping your family is responsible. It helped me understand that you have to help moms, dads, and friends.
15	Taking out the trash. Clean my room. Help my mom.	African people work very hard for water. Their responsibility is to help their family.

Responsibility was discussed during the first week of research. I introduced the character trait by defining responsibility as “doing what you are expected to do, making good choices, doing your part”. I asked students to describe what they know about responsibility in an open-ended response. Most students recognized responsibility in terms of chores. In Table 1, each student identified responsibilities they have at home. To teach the character trait of responsibility, I chose to read the picture book *The Water Princess* by Susan Verde. This book is about a young girl in an African village who had the responsibility of walking miles each day to collect water and bring it home for her family. Prior to reading, I showed students on a map where Africa is in relation to the United States. I also explained that they would be learning about a family that lives in a village where there is no clean drinking water. We discussed why it is so important to have clean water each day. After I felt that students had sufficient background knowledge, I read the story aloud.

After reading the story, students spoke with a partner, discussing what they thought about the story and what examples of responsibility they could find. Students had interesting discussions after listening to this story. One young man shared with his partner, “Gie-Gie has a hard responsibility. She has to walk miles and miles. I don’t think I’ll ever complain about making my bed again!”. The students also showed empathy in their discussions with one another. One student said to her partner, “Her job is so important, but she can’t even go to school. I’m glad we have clean water”. These discussions demonstrated student understanding of how there are greater responsibilities than their own. This book also shed light on a world issue that they were unaware of.

After discussing, students were asked to do another open-ended response, describing what they learned about responsibility from the text. Students referred specifically to the text and the main character Gie-Gie, citing her responsibility of collecting water. Some even acknowledged the fact that her responsibility affected others and that her family counted on her to deliver the water each day. I believe this story offered students a new perspective and that they certainly gained a deeper understanding of what responsibility means.

Table 2

*Week Two: Perseverance*

<b>Student #</b>	<b>Before Reading - What do you already know about PERSEVERANCE?</b>	<b>After Reading - Explain what you learned about PERSEVERANCE.</b>
2	Working hard and being a role model and being nice.	Malala is very brave for standing in front of 1,000,000 people and from the bad guys.
4	Perseverance means doing what you are supposed to do. Perseverance also means help your mom and dad. Perseverance means to keep trying.	I learned that Malala did not give up when she got shot. Also, she was brave to talk in front of a lot of people.
6	Perseverance means to work hard and never give up. When I was doing homework it was hard but I did not give up.	I learned that Malala never gave up. She was shot in the face but she never gave up. She keep on trying. She said that girls should go to school.
5	Perseverance means trying your best on anything and to show respect to someone you know.	I think Malala is very brave and intelligent. She showed perseverance by speaking out loud to people that she does not know and being responsible. She also cares about her country.
14	Perseverance means to keep trying if something is hard like riding as bike.	I learned perseverance from Malala to be brave and to never give up. It is hard for her because there is bad guys.



Next, we focused on the character trait perseverance. I introduced the definition for perseverance as “to keep trying and working hard, even when it is difficult, reaching for your goals”. I asked students to share some thoughts of what perseverance means to them. Again, students reflected on perseverance within their own lives. Some discussed struggles with homework, learning to ride a bike, and not giving up when something is hard. To address this trait, I used the book *Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words* by Karen Leggett Abouraya. In order to build student background knowledge prior to reading, I played a short video on the Brain Pop website. The video gave a short biographical synopsis about Malala’s life. Then, I read the picture book, which described Malala’s life in more depth.

Students were shocked that girls were forbidden from attending school, and saddened that Malala was shot for speaking out against the Taliban. In the student responses seen in Table 2, students thought she was brave, especially to not give up after surviving a shooting. Student discussions with their peers yielded some meaningful comments. One girl said “She showed perseverance by standing up for what was wrong. When they said girls couldn’t go to school, she said that was wrong and didn’t give up”. Another student said, “When she got shot, she thought about stopping, but she didn’t. That’s like perseverance.” Overall, it seemed that the students had a solid understanding of what perseverance means to them but reading Malala’s story gave them a new perspective of what perseverance looks like to people in other parts of the world who are fighting for human rights.

Table 3

*Week Three: Compassion*

Student #	Before Reading - What do you already know about COMPASSION?	After Reading - Explain what you learned about COMPASSION.
7	When I saw no people playing with a girl I played with her.	He bought the shoes and they were too little. His friend wanted it and he gave it to him. I know everyone should be friends.
3	At home my brother got hurt and I help him. At the playground a girl fell and I help take her to the nurse.	It tells me about compassion how Jeremy gives shoes to Antonio and Antonio was happy that he has the shoes.
5	Compassion is to care, love, help someone. Compassion also means to help someone who is injured or help someone that is poor.	This book taught me how Antonio felt about Jeremy and how Jeremy gave new shoes to Antonio.
12	What I know about compassion is to help people that is poor and someone that needs help.	The story helped me learn about compassion because it was a kid that help another kid that did not have good shoes.
2	Helping someone that is homeless by giving them money.	I learned that compassion is you can give someone that needs something.

During the third week of research, our lesson focused on compassion. Compassion was defined for the students as “showing concern and understanding for others, helping someone in need”. Many of the students’ pre-reading responses discussed showing care for someone that was hurt and helping others. I read the book *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts. In this story, a boy wants a pair of “cool” sneakers, even though his family could not afford them. He finds a pair of “those shoes” at a thrift shop and buys them even though they are too small. In the end, he gives the shoes to his friend who needs a pair of shoes. After reading, students discussed how they could closely identify with the character in this story. In their post-reading responses,

they focused on the act of giving as showing compassion. Some also commented on how making his friend happy was a way of showing compassion.

During the student discussions, a few students found other examples of compassion in the story. One girl mentioned that the guidance counselor showed compassion. When I prompted her to explain her thinking she said “When the guidance counselor saw that Jeremy’s shoes were falling apart, he gave him a pair of new shoes. Even though they weren’t the cool shoes he wanted, he got what he needed”. Another student explained that Jeremy’s friend Antonio shows compassion in the story first. “Remember when everyone laughed at the baby shoes he had. The only one that didn’t laugh was Antonio. He showed compassion first, maybe that’s why Jeremy decided to give him the shoes.” Although, I don’t think this book provided a deeper meaning of compassion for the students, I do think they were able to relate to the situation in this story and identify with the main character more so than the other stories we have used in this research study. For many of the students in my class, their families struggle financially. I think this book was easy for them to identify with the character’s situation and feelings, which is demonstrated through their meaningful responses and peer discussions.

Table 4

*Week Four: Fairness*

Student #	Before Reading - What do you already know about FAIRNESS?	After Reading - Explain what you learned about FAIRNESS.
4	Fairness means take turns and share. Play by the rules. Avoid blaming others. Listen to ideas.	I learned that black people couldn't go to the same school. Also they could not go to the same restaurant. They could not drink out of the same water fountain.
6	Fairness means when me and my sister both had an equal amount of play-doh. Fairness means to share and treating people equally. Fairness means be good to others.	In the olden days white and brown people weren't treating people the way they are supposed to be treated.
5	Fairness means to have something for the same amount of money or to treat someone you would like them to you.	Black people could not go to the same stores, restaurants, parks or schools. Since black people marched they got along.
9	When me and my brother play on the I-pad we take turns.	Black and white people should not be separate.
10	It is fair when someone has a toy and the other person has a toy.	The book taught me that white and brown people should go to the same school.

Fairness was discussed during week four. I defined fairness as “treating people equally, taking turns and sharing, being open-minded”. I asked students to think about what fairness means to them. Many of the students’ pre-reading responses, as seen in Table 4, focused on playing fairly by following rules and sharing. Students saw fairness as having the same as someone else.

To teach the fairness trait, I used the book *Let the Children March* by Monica Clark-Robinson. This book tells the true story of the civil rights marches that took place in Birmingham, Alabama and what happened to the children that participated in the protests. Prior to reading, I held a class discussion to build background knowledge. I told them that the book was about the protests organized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

and the discriminatory laws that were in place during that time. Many students knew about Dr. King and his fight for equality. Although, some students were shocked to find out that there were discriminatory laws in place. For example, laws that wouldn't let black people drink from the same water fountains as white people, or parks for only white children to play. After our discussion, I felt that they had sufficient background knowledge to proceed with the reading of the text.

This lesson initiated some very thoughtful and deep discussion by the students. Many were surprised by how the children were treated in the story. "I can't believe they locked up kids in jail!" one boy cried. Another girl replied, "I bet they wouldn't have done that if white kids were marching". It was obvious that this book sparked some emotions in the students. Another student explained, "I feel bad for them, they just wanted to be treated like everyone else". Another student thoughtfully said "It's kind of silly what we think isn't fair. The kids in the story had serious things that were not fair". I found it interesting that some of the students were able to reflect and see how other issues of fairness compared to their own experiences.

When comparing the pre-reading and post-reading responses, as seen in the examples in Table 4, none of the pre-reading responses mentioned skin color or race. However, almost all the students mentioned it in their post-reading responses. Several students explained that they learned that people were not treated fairly because of their skin color, citing examples from the book. I believe this book was eye-opening for many of them and gave them a much deeper understanding of fairness. They gained a new perspective that fairness means more than just having the same amount as their siblings

or playing a game by the rules. I think they truly understood that being treated fairly has a greater significance, especially for people of color.

Table 5

*Week Five: Respect*

<b>Student #</b>	<b>Before Reading - What do you already know about RESPECT?</b>	<b>After Reading - Explain what you learned about RESPECT.</b>
19	Respect means if you show respect to everyone. You show your parent you show respect. Use good manners and language. Never bully, hit, or hurt people.	You should not make fun of her name. Should not be disrespectful just because people are different.
13	When my cousin fell on my chair and I said are you OK?	They were making fun of her name and she made herself a new name. Then they figure out her name means Grace and they understand.
17	Never judge people because they are different	Should not be rude and mean because of their name.
5	Respect means to be kind. Paying attention to who is speaking and try their very best.	I learned we should not make fun of someone's name if it is from another country and learn about them.
11	To me respect means that people should be nice to other people because you won't hurt their feelings.	What I learned more about respect is if someone is from a different country and their name is different you should not make fun of their name.

During the fifth week of research, our class focused on respect. I provided the definition of respect as "showing care about someone's feelings and well-being, accepting others for who they are." Students were asked to share what they know about respect in a pre-reading response. Some student responses included examples such as respecting your parents and teachers, not bullying others, and not judging others. Students seemed to have a basic understanding of the meaning of respect.

The multicultural book that was selected for this lesson was *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. This book is about a girl who moves to America from South Korea. She struggles with her identity when students laugh at her ethnic name. She considers changing her name, but in the end decides to keep it. Before reading, we talked about how different names have different meanings, and how names from other cultures might sound different to us. I also showed them images on the Smartboard of Korean characters, explaining that some countries use a different alphabet and speak a different language. After ensuring that students had thorough background knowledge, we read the text.

After reading, students discussed with their partners the examples of respect and disrespect that they saw in the book. They quickly identified the fact that it was disrespectful when students laughed at her name and encouraged her to change her name. "It was so rude of the students to laugh at her name," said one student to her partner. Another student said, "If they couldn't say her name the right way, they could have asked her to teach them instead of making fun of it". Another student claimed that the one character, Joey, was respectful when he took the time to learn about the meaning of Korean names. "Joey chose a Korean name because he wanted to show her that she should keep her name. He was showing respect." he explained. Students' written responses were also reflective. Many students cited the example of students laughing at her name as disrespectful, which is evident in the student sample responses on Table 5. Several students wrote similar responses, explaining that you shouldn't laugh at someone who is different than you, rather you should learn more about them. Overall, it seemed that students understood that respect is more than just being nice to each other. The

students demonstrated through their discussion and written responses that you can show respect by accepting and learning about what makes people different. This book gave students a unique perspective in what students from different cultures may experience and feel when coming to America.

Table 6

*Week Six: Kindness*

<b>Student #</b>	<b>Before Reading - What do you already know about KINDNESS?</b>	<b>After Reading - Explain what you learned about KINDNESS.</b>
4	Kindness means to hear what others got to say.	Kindness means helping someone if they fall. It also means to include others to play with you. It also means if someone smiles at you, you have a chance to smile back at them.
5	Kindness means if someone is alone and you could play with them and care for their feelings, so they won't ever feel hurt.	What I learned is that if someone is being nice to you then you should never miss your chance to be nice to them back and not laugh at them if they are looking silly.
11	What I know about kindness is to be nice to people because you won't hurt their feelings.	What I learned more about kindness is to never bully someone because you will hurt their feelings.
9	Making sure you don't hurt people's feelings.	When you have the chance to smile, do it. It can make you and your friend happy.
10	You could be kind by helping.	I learned that kindness is all about if someone is not dressed right you should not laugh at them. And if they smile at you, you should smile back.

During the final week of research, our class focused on kindness. The definition I provided students was “doing something nice for others without wanting anything in return, showing people that you care about their feelings”. Before our lesson, students wrote about what kindness meant to them, some examples can be seen in Table 6.



Several students wrote about how they could show kindness to someone who is hurt or lonely. Several other students mentioned considering someone else's feelings, such as "be nice to people because you won't hurt their feelings". Students demonstrated a basic understanding of kindness during the pre-reading activity.

The story that I read for this lesson was *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson. I did not do anything in particular to build background knowledge with this story, as I felt that the students would be able to identify with the characters and storyline. This story is about a new girl, Maya, that enters school. Some of the students are not nice and do not include her at recess. They laugh at her clothing and think that she is strange. After the teacher shares a lesson about kindness, the main character, Chloe, feels bad about her behavior and wants to make it up to Maya, but learns that she moved away and that she missed her chance to show her kindness.

After reading, students discussed the book with partners. Many students shared feelings of empathy. "I feel bad for her, that she missed her chance to be kind to the new student", said one girl. Another student said "I bet the new student felt sad. She tried being kind by asking the girls to play with her on the playground, but they weren't kind to her." Another student was dissatisfied by the ending of the story, "That's it? Why didn't the story have a happy ending? I think it should have ended with Chloe finding Maya and saying sorry for not being kind."

This story seemed to have resonated with the students, reflecting on the message of regret over not being kind when you had the chance. Students were reflective during their post-reading responses, citing examples from the story, such as "never miss your chance to be nice" and "if someone smiles at you, you have a chance to smile back at

them”. This story gave students a unique perspective on what happens when you lose an opportunity to be kind. It was clear through student responses that they gained a deeper understanding about how showing kindness can have a meaningful impact on others.

### **Connections with Mentor Texts**

Throughout the weeks of research, another pattern emerged in my data collection. Every lesson that I conducted, I witnessed students making relevant text-to-self and text-to-text connections with the selected multicultural books. According to Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory (1982), reading is a reciprocal event. A text provides information, while readers draw on past experiences and past encounters with other texts to make meaning of what they are reading. During the weeks of research, the personal connections that students shared were meaningful and gave me more insight into their home lives and experiences. The multicultural books that we used became a catalyst for discussion and sharing. Students also identified connections they made between other stories we have read in class. It was obvious that the selected books were thought provoking and kept students engaged and thinking.

**The Name Jar.** One personal connection that was significant was shared by a student when we read *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. This book was about a South Korean girl who moved to America. Students laughed at her traditional Korean name. One of my students made a close personal connection to this story. In 2019, his family immigrated to the United States from Nigeria. This boy’s name is a traditional African name, and for many of us it was difficult to pronounce at first. During the class discussion after reading he shared,

I felt like that when I moved from Nigeria. In my first class, kids laughed at my name. They kept saying it wrong. They didn't listen to me when I tried to tell them. But in this class, everyone learned my name. It makes me feel good that no one is laughing at my name. I like my name.

It was obvious that this story held a very personal connection for him. He also shared that it made him feel good when our class learned more about Nigeria. Early in the school year, I used the SMART board to show students images of the city that he lived in, and he told us about what it was like to live in Nigeria. He said, "It made me happy to teach you about my home". He connected that to the characters in the story by saying, "The kids should have learned about her, not laughed at her".

Students also made text-to-text connections after reading *The Name Jar*. Earlier in the school year, as mentioned in my introduction, our class read a story called *Friends Around the World*. This nonfiction text gave us a glimpse into the life of other children around the globe. One student piped up during our post-reading discussion, "*The Name Jar* reminds me of *Friends Around the World*. We learned Akiak's name meant brave, and in this story, we learned that her name meant grace." Another student chimed in with an additional text-to-text connection, "Both kids have names that sound different, but we learned that we shouldn't laugh. Their names are important to them." I was encouraged to see the correlations students were making with other books regarding respect and accepting cultural differences. It was also assuring to see what an impact this story had on my student from Africa. He was able to relate to this story on a personal level and express his feelings to his classmates. It was heartwarming to see how he initially felt frustrated in his first class but felt welcomed in our class because we took the time to

learn about him. This discussion confirmed the message of showing respect by accepting others and embracing and learning about what makes them unique.

**Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words.** Teaching the students about Malala was one of the more difficult lessons during this research study. Students were horrified to learn that she was shot for speaking her opinion about the Taliban. They were shocked that there are countries that do not treat girls and women fairly. This book was definitely eye-opening for them. Students were unable to identify with Malala on a personal level because her experiences were so different from their own, however, they were able to make connections to other people and historical figures. During our post-reading discussion, one student commented “Malala reminds me of Martin Luther King. He was shot for saying what he believed.” I thought this was a great connection, and we further discussed how both Malala and Dr. King were speaking out about fairness. Another student raised her hand and added,

I read a book about Ruby Bridges. She was a black girl that went to a white school. She kept going every day even though people didn't want her there. Isn't that perseverance like Malala?

The students demonstrated that they were actively thinking about the meaning of the text and Malala's message of perseverance. I was impressed that although the students were unable to identify with her story on a personal level, they were able to make other connections from prior learning. I believe that although this book covered some difficult topics, it broadened students' perspectives and made them aware of socio-political issues in other cultures.

**Those Shoes.** The story *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts inspired many personal connections for my students. In this story, a boy struggles with the concept of getting what you need rather than what you want. More than half of our school's population is considered economically disadvantaged, so the themes present in this book were something that many of them could relate to. During the reading of the book, the character, Grandma, says, "There's no room for want around here, just need." One of my students interjected, "That sounds like what my mom always says! She tells me that I get what I need before I get what I want." Another student replied, "My mom says the same thing!" Most students nodded their heads in agreement, confirming that they had heard a similar message in their home. After the reading, students discussed the text with their partners. I heard one boy share with his partner,

I remember I really wanted a pair of Jordan's, but they were too expensive. I got new shoes that were on sale instead. And who cares? They're just sneakers! I can still play basketball just as good!

Another girl spoke to her partner about the story,

Sometimes my family shops at the thrift shop. Even though some of the stuff is used, it's still good. I got a coat that looks brand new. It doesn't matter where it's from. I like it and it keeps me warm.

I was humbled by hearing some of the comments my students made. From the sound of it, many of them have already learned a lesson in needs versus wants. They were able to relate to the main character's struggles and make connections to their own experiences. It was evident that his book served as a mirror, allowing the students to see similar situations they've experienced reflected in the text. Additionally, sharing their

connections with each other allowed some of them to see that they are alike in more ways than they may have realized.

There were a few connections students made in relation to other books we had read. One student made an interesting text-to-text connection. She spoke up,

This story reminds me of the family in *A Chair for My Mother*. Both families have Grandma living with them. And both families have to save their money for things that they need.

Another student replied, “Yeah, I think both books teach us about money and not wasting it. Only get what you need.” This made another student shoot her hand into the air, “Remember in the story *Alexander Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday*? He learned a lesson about not wasting his money on silly things.” It was apparent that this book gave students the opportunity to make connections and see themselves and their families reflected in a story, allowing for a great discussion.

### **Application of Learning**

Over the duration of my research, I observed and noted students referring to the taught character traits in situations outside of the character education lessons. These were unprompted incidents where students applied what they learned about the character education traits into current and real-life situations.

**Perseverance.** Soon after teaching the lesson about Malala and perseverance, students demonstrated their understanding by showing perseverance in other situations. One morning during our math period, I introduced a new concept, two-digit addition with regrouping. I began by explaining that this would probably be one of the more difficult math skills they would learn in second grade. I told them I would need

their focus and excellent effort as we began the lesson. A student raised his hand, “Mrs. Somers, we know all about perseverance. Even if it’s hard, we’ll keep trying until we get it!” Another student chimed in, “Yeah even if we make mistakes, we don’t give up.” I was pleasantly surprised to see that students applied their learning about perseverance to a current situation.

**Compassion.** Each year our school holds a holiday food drive. Donated food goes to a local food pantry and gets distributed to families in our community before the holidays. I read the book *Those Shoes* and taught the trait compassion during the two-week food drive time frame. Part of our discussion focused on how giving to people in need was a way to show compassion. In the story, the boy gave up the shoes that didn’t fit, to his friend who needed shoes. During our discussion after reading the book, one of the students asked, “When we bring in cans for the food drive, is that compassion?” This question launched a great discussion about how we can give to people in need, such as the food drive, and how that was similar to the character’s actions in the book. A student shared, “I’m going to tell my mom that we learned about compassion. I’m going to ask if I can bring in extra cans of food tomorrow.” Several other students called out, “Me too!” Incredibly, the amount of food that students in my class donated that week, nearly doubled the amount that was donated the week before. This act of giving by my students showed that they truly understood the meaning of compassion.

**Responsibility.** One of my teaching partners organizes a Veteran’s Day activity each year for students in second grade. In the week leading up to Veteran’s Day, students are assigned a local military veteran to write a letter to, thanking them for their service to

our country. While discussing ideas for what to include in their letters, a student made an interesting connection,

The soldiers have important responsibilities. Just like *The Water Princess*. They have to spend time away from home to do their job. That's like the story. People counted on her to get the water, and people count on soldiers to protect our country.

I was glad that the story *The Water Princess* left an impact on students, and that message of responsibility still resonated with some of them. As students began drafting their letters, several students included messages about responsibility. One student wrote, "You have a lot of responsibility. I think you are brave." Another student wrote, "Thank you for protecting our country. That is a big responsibility." It was clear to me that students understood that there are greater responsibilities and sacrifices that people make, and they were able to extend that appreciation to the responsibilities of our service members.

**Respect.** When we read *The Name Jar*, a large portion of our discussion was about how taking the time to learn about someone's differences is a way to show respect. At the beginning of December, I teach a unit about different winter holidays around the world. We spend time learning about Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Chinese New Year. During one of our lessons, a student commented, "Learning about different holidays is respectful right? We're learning about how other people believe in different things." Another student added, "Yeah, just like how we learned about the symbols on the dreidel, and the Chinese writing. It reminds me of *The Name Jar*." These comments confirmed that students understood the message of respect presented in *The Name Jar*.



Students demonstrated that they understood that taking the time to learn and appreciate differences is a way to show respect.

### **Summary**

Several themes arose when I looked closely at student written responses, student oral responses during discussions, and my anecdotal records. Data analysis uncovered that utilizing multicultural literature to teach character education traits was beneficial and effective for students. Students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the character traits after listening to a multicultural text. Additionally, students demonstrated the ability to make personal connections to the characters and storyline, as well as relate the story to previously read texts. These books allowed students a glimpse into other cultures, and students also saw themselves reflected in some of the characters. Students were also able to apply their learning about the taught character education traits into current classroom situations.

Based on the results of data analysis, we can determine that utilizing multicultural literature is a powerful resource when teaching character education lessons. Exposing students to diverse characters allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of character education themes. Overall, the multicultural texts broadened students' perspectives about diverse people and cultures. Reading and discussing these books with peers provided students with meaningful learning. This data suggests that bridging multicultural literature and character education lessons can provide students with valuable learning experiences. The final chapter will present a summary of the findings, as well as the overall conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

This chapter details a summary of the results and findings of my research. In this section, I will also address the final conclusions and implications of the study and the impact it has on today's classrooms. Last, I will identify the limitations of my research study and make suggestions for future research.

### **Summary**

This study examined the effectiveness of using multicultural literature to teach character education themes in a diverse second grade suburban classroom. The research took place over the course of six weeks. Each week a new character education theme was presented, and a multicultural picture book was read to the class. Data was collected in the forms of students' pre and post reading responses, visual/audio recordings of the lessons and discussions, and teacher anecdotal records kept in a research journal. The research yielded positive results showing that students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the character education traits after reading a multicultural text. Additionally, students applied their learning of the character education traits into other school subjects and activities. Students also made significant and meaningful text-to-self and text-to-text connections with the selected mentor texts.

### **Conclusions**

There were several significant findings from the results of this study. The first was that using multicultural read alouds positively impacted student understanding of character education traits. When analyzing students' pre and post reading responses, it was evident that the picture books were essential in supporting student

understanding. Many students cited specific examples from the text and identified the character's actions and feelings when explaining the meaning of the character traits. This evidence supports the research of previous studies, emphasizing the role of children's literature in providing students with unique and diverse perspectives (O'Sullivan, 2004; Koc & Buzzelli, 2004; Freeman, 2013).

I also found that carefully selecting texts that represent diverse characters and situations is engaging for students. Evidence indicated that students made meaningful text-to-self and text-to-text connections during the character education lessons. With several of the texts, students were able to identify closely with the characters and their situations, while other stories offered new learning about diverse people and places. Using diverse texts, as proposed by Rudine Sims-Bishop (1990) can serve as windows and mirrors, offering new learning experiences, as well as stories students could relate to. These connections demonstrated that students were actively making meaning of the stories and linking the text to their prior knowledge. This evidence also suggests that students were taking an aesthetic stance, allowing them to make an emotional or experiential connection to the text (Rosenblatt, 1982). I can conclude that by carefully selecting multicultural texts in which students can see themselves represented, the more likely students are to make meaningful connections and applications to learning.

The final conclusion that I drew from the study, is that by teaching character education traits through read alouds and collaborative discussions, students are more likely to apply this learning into real life situations. The evidence gathered indicated that the learning students gained from the stories resonated with them on a personal level. The transaction that occurred between the reader and text fostered a response that gave

rise to new learning (Rosenblatt, 1982). Students then applied this learning to new concepts and situations within the classroom. The application of knowledge that students demonstrated implies that using diverse texts to teach character education traits has the ability to leave a lasting and influential impact on students.

### **Implications**

Using multicultural literature in today's classrooms is essential. As schools become more and more diverse, educators must be willing to embrace students' home cultures and see their background as a strength in their educational experience (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Selecting culturally relevant and authentic literature can allow students to see themselves and their experiences reflected in texts (Bishop, 1990; Louie, 2006). Using children's literature as a resource for teaching character education lessons allows students to gain broader perspectives by understanding the characters' viewpoints. This supports students' moral development and judgment (Koc and Buzzelli, 2004; Britt, et al, 2016). These findings offer several implications for today's classrooms.

As the results of this study suggests, bridging character education lessons with multicultural literature yields positive results. This implication could impact the instruction within my own classroom. Moving forward, I will be more selective in the texts that I am using in my lessons. Adapting my character education instruction and making conscious text selections, can improve student engagement and learning. Finding opportunities to incorporate multicultural texts and highlighting the character education themes will help benefit students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Within my school, I can share these results and recommendations with my co-workers and character education committee members. The implications this study has on

our character education framework could be influential. By incorporating a wide range of multicultural literature, teachers can broaden students' perspectives of other cultures and diverse people, yet still highlight how character education traits such as kindness and compassion are a similar thread that can bind us all together.

### **Limitations**

In this research study, qualitative data was analyzed to reach conclusions. Therefore, statistical data was not collected or analyzed. This study included 14 students from one second grade class. Participating students included seven girls and seven boys, between ages seven and eight. Racial demographics of the students participating included four White students, three Hispanic students, five Black/African American students, and two Asian students. Also, the study was six weeks in length and only focused on six multicultural books and six character traits. For these reasons, we should recognize that due to the limited scope of the study and small sample size, the results of this research cannot be generalized to students of other backgrounds and grade levels.

### **Future Research**

Further research in this area would help provide more conclusive evidence on the advantages of using multicultural literature to teach character education concepts. It is recommended that future research on these topics be conducted on a larger scale. The six week time frame of this study provided limited data with only one grade level. I would suggest conducting a year-long investigation, including a span of grade levels, and select participants of various cultural backgrounds. Additionally, other researchers may want to consider including more lessons focused on specific character education traits and include a wider array of multicultural texts.

## **Final Thoughts**

In closing, this research provided evidence that using multicultural literature to teach character education themes is beneficial for student learning. Incorporating culturally relevant texts kept students engaged and provided meaningful discussions. This study demonstrated how utilizing multicultural texts can broaden students' perspectives and allow them to consider other points of view. It is my hope that this research will inspire other teachers to consider these findings when choosing literature in the classroom. Additionally, I hope that teachers understand that reading diverse texts allows students to see how different people and cultures can have distinct similarities and values when discussing character traits. Weaving together multicultural literature and character education is a practice that offers extensive benefits.

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## Appendix A

### Lesson Protocol

1. The teacher will introduce the weekly character education theme. The teacher will define the trait (compassion, respect, etc.) and display it on an anchor chart.
2. Students will complete an open-ended response prior to reading, “Draw and/or write to explain what you already know about this week’s theme” (responsibility, perseverance, etc.)
3. The teacher will introduce the selected book and ask students to look for examples of the character trait identified on the anchor chart. The teacher will read aloud the selected book, providing clarifications as needed.
4. Students will think-pair-share and discuss how the character trait was presented in the story.
5. The teacher will ask students to share their thinking in a whole group discussion and the teacher will record discussion notes on the anchor chart.
6. Students will complete an open-ended response after reading, “draw and/or write to explain what you learned about this week’s theme.”

## Appendix B

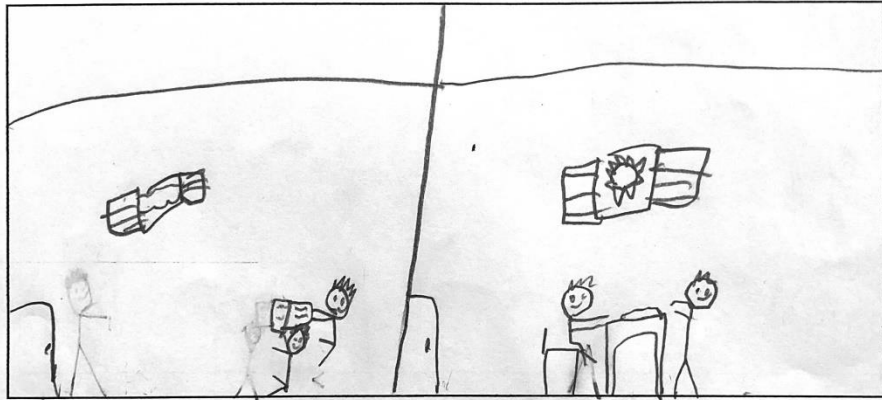
### Student Work Samples

Student ID# 12

### Responsibility

*The Water Princess* by Susan Verde

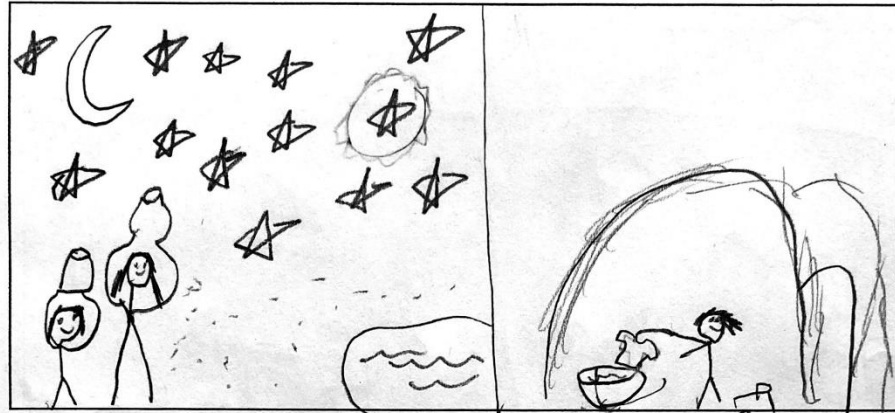
Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about RESPONSIBILITY



it's Responsibility to help  
others with some things like  
if they need help with reading,  
and it is Responsibility if some-  
one came back with a  
teacher and they do not know  
what to do.

Student ID# 12

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about RESPONSIBILITY



Gie Gie is responsible for helping her family get some water. and she helps her mom do things. and she help if it is night time.

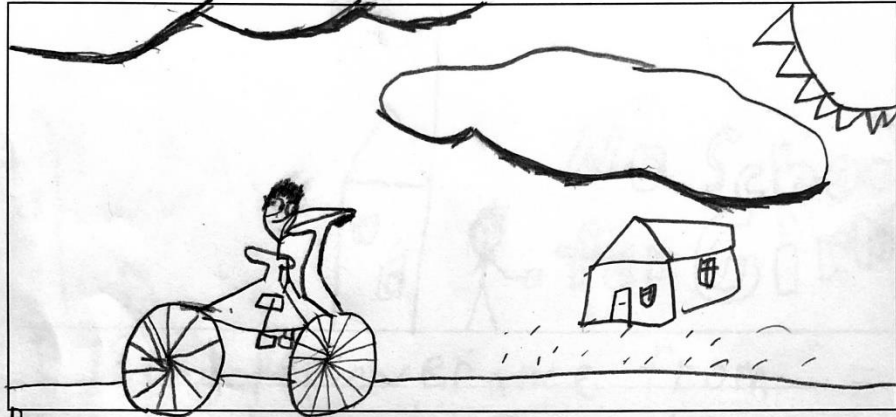
Student ID#

14

## Perseverance

*Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words* by Karen Leggett Abouraya

Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about PERSEVERANCE



Perseverance means to keep  
trying if something is hard.  
like riding a bike.

Student ID# 14

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about PERSEVERANCE



I lerned perseverance from  
Malala to be brave and to  
never give up. its hard for her  
because ther is bad guys.

Student ID#

2

## Compassion

*Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts

Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about COMPASSION

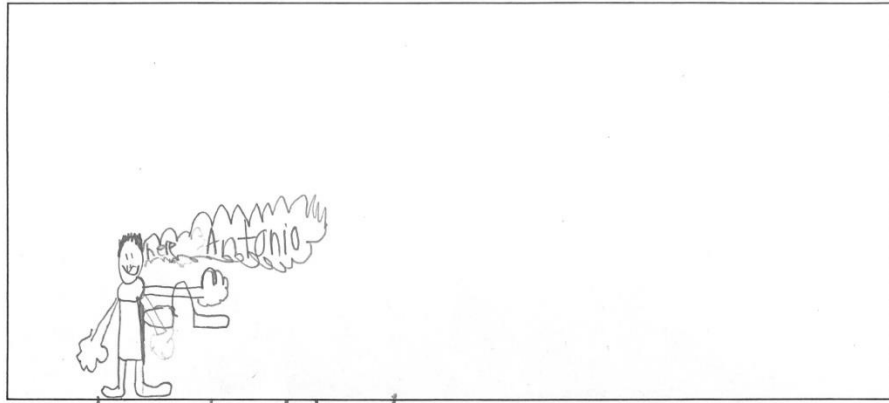


Helping some one that is  
homeless by giveing them  
money.

Student ID#

2

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about  
COMPASSION



I learned that compassion is you  
can give someone that needs  
some thing.

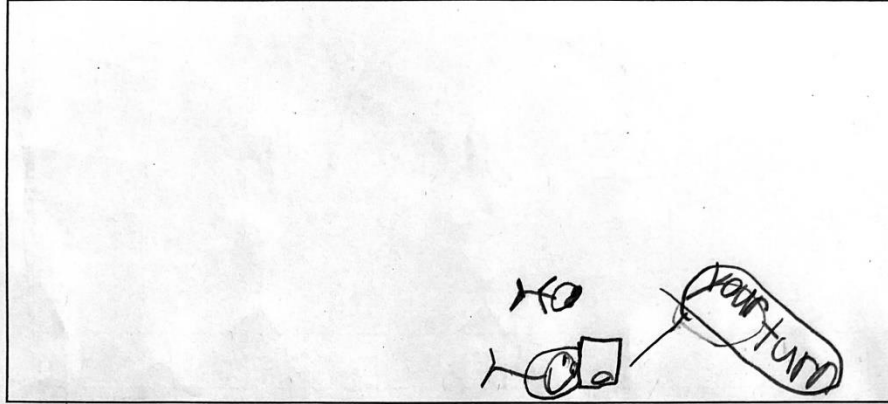
Student ID#

9

## Fairness

*Let the Children March* by Monica Clark-Robinson

Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about FAIRNESS

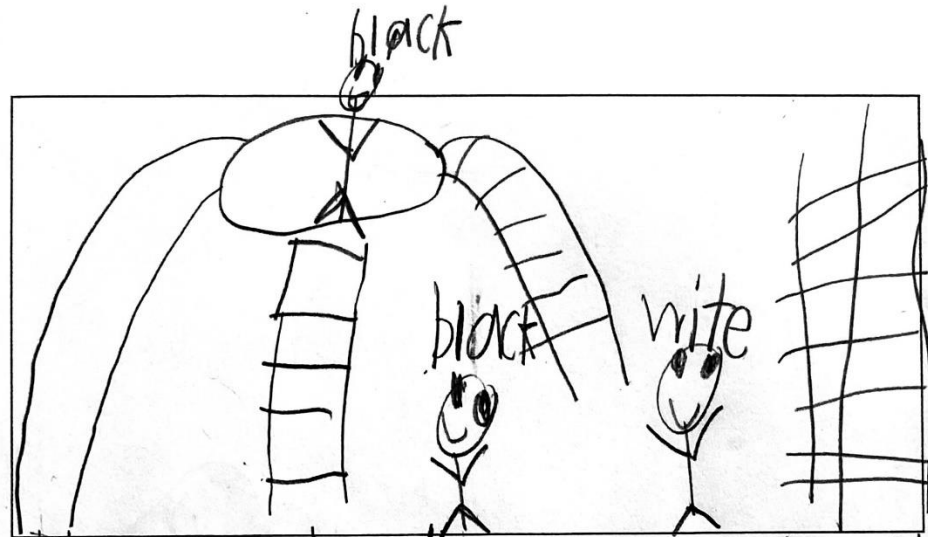


when me and my brother play on  
the iPad we take turns.



Student ID# 9

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about FAIRNESS



Black and white people should not be sheper

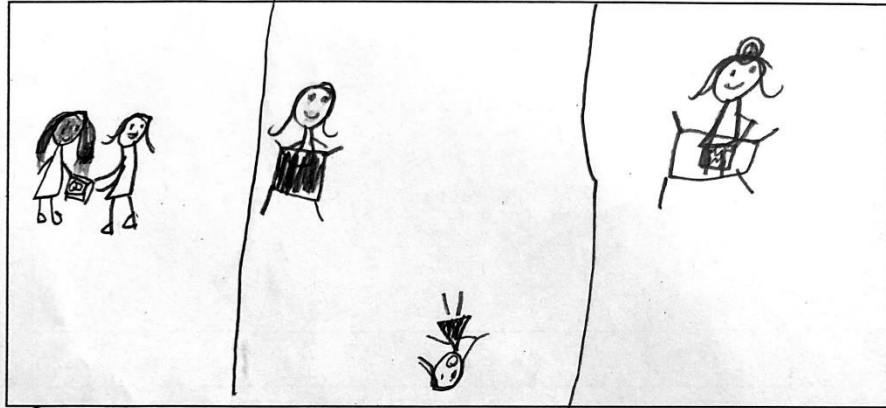
Student ID#

5

## Respect

*The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

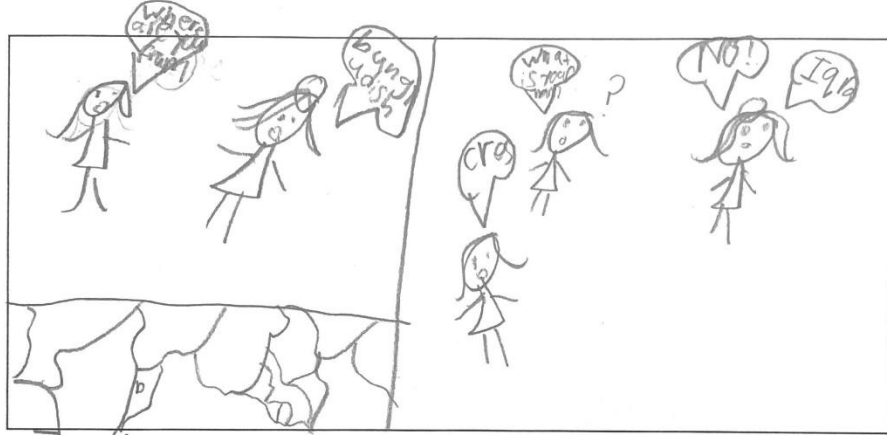
Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about RESPECT



Respect means to be kind  
paying attention to how I  
speak and try their  
very best.

Student ID# 5

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about RESPECT



I learned we should not  
make fun of someones  
name if it is from a  
nothr cruntrye and learn  
about them.

Student ID#



## Kindness

Each Kindness by Jaqueline Woodson

Before Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you already know about KINDNESS



What I know about kindness  
is to be nice to people because  
you won't hurt their feelings.

Student ID#

11

After Reading - draw and/or write to explain what you learned about KINDNESS



What I learned more about  
Kindness is to never bully  
someone because you will  
hurt their feelings.