

Multicultural Literature for my Classroom

Title: *The Sandwich Swap*

Author: Queen Rania Al Abdullah and Kelly DiPucchio

Illustrator: Tricia Tusa

Publication Date: 2010



Plot Summary:

Lily and Salma are best friends who go to school tomorrow. They are inseparable and do everything together. Some of the activities they do together include art projects, playing on the playground, swinging on the swings, jump roping and eating lunch together every day. One day, just like any other, Lily and Salma are enjoying lunch together at school when Salma pulls out a hummus and pita sandwich, while Lily has a peanut butter sandwich. The girls look at each other's sandwiches and say they look "yucky". This creates a lot of despair and the girls stop being friends due to their difference. It does not take long for the rest of the students to find out what is going on and they begin to take sides. The school is split in half and this ends up resulting in a food fight with Lily and Salma at the core. The girls are called to the principal's office to explain themselves and this is the realization that something needs to change. The girls try each other's sandwiches and actually think they are good, rekindling their friendship. At the end the school has a pot-luck type picnic where all of the students can bring food for their classmates to try and learn about each other's culture.

Multicultural Focus:

The multicultural Focus in this story is very obvious. The girls are from different cultural backgrounds and their first time noticing that they are different from each other is when they see the other's food at lunch which appears much different from what they are used to. "The Sandwich Swap" focuses on tolerance of others who are different from you and how conflicts can be resolved. I like this book in particular because it can be used to teach a plethora of different lessons, cultural and not. Not only are there themes of multiculturalism but about bullying and peer pressure as well (as with the food fight and the other students picking sides). These themes give teachers a great opportunity to speak to their students about bullying due to differences of all kinds and how to not get caught up and "take sides". The end of the story gives the positive message about coming together and not being afraid to try things that are new to you and teaches that your best friends can be completely different from you and may like different things and come from a different place, but that does not make them any less of an honorable person or friend.

Teaching Ideas:

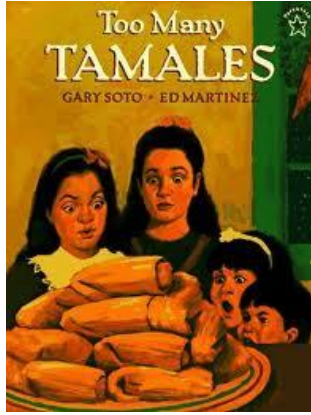
This activity could really work for any grade level, but the book is geared towards younger grades, probably K-2. Having a pot luck like the students at the end of the story would be a great way for the children to bring a part of their own culture to class to share with their friends, and what better and more fun way than through food?

Title: “Too Many Tamales”

Author: Gary Soto

Illustrator: Ed Martinez

Publication Date: 1993



Plot Summary:

Maria is helping her parents make tamales for Christmas dinner when she sees her mom put her beautiful diamond ring down while she tends to the cooking. Maria can't help but to notice how gorgeous the ring is and it catches her eye. She decides to try the ring on, just for a moment, and before she notices the ring is gone. In a panic Maria looks everywhere and thinks that it must have fallen into the tamale dough. Instead of going straight to her mother, who she assumes will be upset, she enlists the help of her cousins. They decide that they will eat every single tamale until they find the ring. The cousins eat all of the tamales and do not find the ring, although Maria's cousin Danny thinks he might have swallowed it. Maria knows she has to fess up to her mother about what happened, and when she goes to do so she realizes that the ring is on her mother's hand! The family gets together to make a new batch for dinner.

Multicultural Focus:

The most notable multicultural focus in *Too Many Tamales* is family and tradition. Holidays are a huge time of tradition in families from all different kinds of backgrounds especially when it comes to food and activities. It is important for students to be aware that their classmates and friends might not celebrate the same holidays as their families do, and if they do, the way they celebrate may be very different. The story also has the theme of telling the truth when you do something wrong instead of trying to cover it up which is a great reminder for students of all ages!

Teaching ideas:

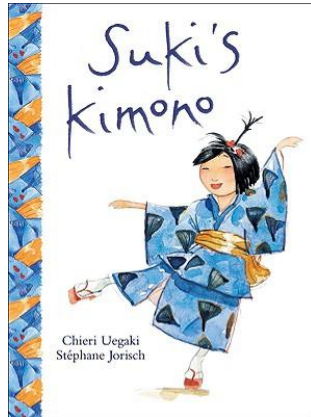
Around the Fall and Winter time I think it would be a great idea to have the students write about their favorite holiday that their family celebrates and talk about some of the activities they do during that time, the foods they eat, how they help out, etc. and have the students share with the class. For something more in depth, after the journal entries the class could always have a “multicultural holiday” celebration in which you take some of the activities and recipes from the students and have a big “melting pot” celebration.

Title: *Suki's Kimono*

Author: Chieri Uegaki

Illustrator: Stephane Jorisch

Publication Date: 2003



Plot Summary:

Suki has a blue Kimono which was a gift from her obachan (aunt) and it is her absolute favorite thing she owns. She wants to wear it to her first day of school even though her sisters tell her that she should wear something newer and more “cool”. Suki does not care what they say, and she wears it anyways. When Suki gets to school she is teased and laughed at by the other students. The students are talking about what they did over the summer break and when it is Suki’s turn she tells the class an elaborate story of how she went to a festival with her obachan and they participated in a circle dance. While telling the story she gets so passionate about it that she actually starts humming the music and reenacting the dance that they did at the festival. This time the reaction from the other students is much different. They applaud her and are entertained.

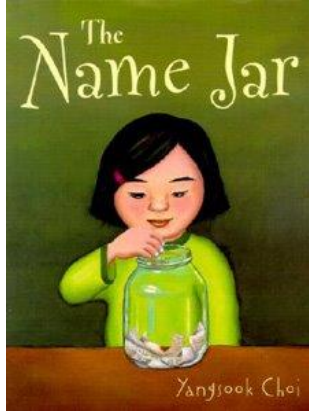
Multicultural Focus:

Suki teaches students that having pride in your culture is important no matter what others might think about it. An underlying theme is to “walk to the beat of your own drum”, as Suki did quite literally in this story. She shows that it is okay to be yourself even when people might not understand you. The story gives a look at Japanese culture and students learn about the traditional “Kimono” worn by Japanese women as well as the word “obachan” which means “aunt” in Japanese.

Teaching Ideas:

I was given these books by an old mentor teacher who teaches 2nd grade so most of them are geared towards younger grades. The activity I came up with for this one is geared for K-1, maybe 2nd. To get the students moving, it would be enjoyable to find a couple of songs from different cultures (you could ask parents for ideas as well) and have the children move and dance themselves to music they aren’t familiar with. This activity is not only fun and helps the little ones release some energy but it teaches them to appreciate different cultures at a young age!

Title: *The Name Jar*
Author: Yangsook Choi
Illustrator: N/A
Publication Date: 2001



Plot Summary:

Unhei leaves her home in Korea to move to the United States and before she leaves her grandmother gives her a special stamp with her name in Korean on it. When she first gets to America she feels left out and different. The other students can't pronounce her name and they make fun of her. She decides that she wants to change her name to something American but she has a hard time coming up with one. The students in her class make a "name jar" in which they put their suggestions for what Unhei's American name should be. She meets a boy and at a Korean supermarket he hears her Korean name and loves it. He tells her he does not want her to change it and he takes the name jar. Unhei soon finds out that he too, has a special stamp with his name on it.

Multicultural Focus:

This book reminds me of another book I read in class for a similar assignment called "Tea with Milk". Both are about the transition from one culture to another and how you might want to change yourself to "fit in" better. In this story Unhei finds someone who has a similar background as her so she feels more welcome and is able to keep her old culture while also adapting a new one, which also happens in "Tea with Milk." The main theme being to not let go of your old culture completely and not forget where you came from just because you are submerged in a new culture.

Teaching Ideas:

For younger students I would use "The Name Jar" and for older students "Tea with Milk" for the same activity which gives students pride in their own cultures or many different cultures they may be a part of. Have the students make their own name stamps and add pictures, words, and phrases that tell something about them or their culture. Hang these on the wall as a constant reminder that everyone is different and that is awesome!