

Diversity and Inclusion – Book Reviews

Book reviews by Debbie Bradbery, Lecturer in Primary Education, University of Newcastle, Australia

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Migrant by Jose Manuel Mateo, illustrated by Javier Martinez Pedro, rightly won the New Horizons Award at the 2012 Bologna Children’s Book Fair because of its powerful message and outstanding images, as well as its unique codex style presented in one long accordion fold.

Although a story about the dangerous journey one family makes from Mexico into the United States it is very relevant as an allegory of the difficult and dangerous journeys families from across Syria are making to western European countries today. As the folds of this exquisite art piece unfold each panel reveals an elongated picture with sparse text on the one side written in English and on the other the same story in Spanish.

The codex story begins on a Mexican farm and follows one family’s arduous journey, which unfolds to a crowded Los Angeles dwelling. Written in the first person it is the story of a young boy who migrates with his mother and sister to escape poverty, live safely and find news of their missing father on the other side of the border. Illustrations and text partner beautifully on the accordion style pages. Unlike most books or novels, readers are invited to decode astonishing images of pastoral and urbanised settings and in the process develop deep empathy for the critical and life threatening risks surrounding refugees and forced immigrants everywhere. As the author and illustrator note at the close of the book : “They launch themselves on a journey full of danger because they have the hope of finding a job and of living in peace, or because they want to reunite with their family. They leave because of poverty, mistreatment, or violence.” They go onto to say that when many children migrate they cannot legally prove their names upon arrival in their new homeland...

“ nor can they request documents to do so; many times they cannot even manage to find out what their real age is. For this reason we have created this book: to demand these children’s right to exist.” This is a powerful and very relevant story that tells its tale in the most beautiful way.

Another epic tale capturing a turning point in American history is the must-read book **Because They Marched: The People’s Campaign for Voting Rights That Changed America**. To mark the 50th anniversary of the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, Newberry Medalist Russell Freedman, produced this poignant and moving story of the struggle for voting rights in the American South. Readers of this text are pulled into the long and sometimes violent struggle through clear, concise storytelling and the many quotes from participants at the time. Freedman’s chronicle showcases the various 1965 protests and marches that eventually led to there being over 25,000 supporters from all faiths and skin colours gather outside the capitol building in Montgomery on March 25, which then in turn prompted President Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Act on August 6 that same year, 1965. The inspirational narrative and often graphic black and white photographs build momentum and richly

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illustrate this story, that although has been told many times, is fresh and new in this version. The use of “eyewitness press reports, interpretive articles, essays by observers who travelled to Selma and interviews conducted over years with marchers and demonstrators whose testimonies, even decades later, speak eloquently of the passions of the time.” The wonderful array of photos, many of which are full page, add authenticity and insights into the depth of feeling at the time. This well researched story is fittingly finalised with a timeline, select bibliography, source notes and an index.

This is a powerful and important book, not only because it elucidates a key moment in American history, but also because it brings its readers to the realities of current issues. Freedman’s epilogue details threats made to the Voting Act by the Supreme Court in 2013, releasing nine southern states from requirements to seek federal approval before changing their election laws. He notes that this has resulted in some states immediately setting stricter voter ID laws making it harder “for minority voters, older people, students, legal immigrants and the poor of all races to register and vote.” This is especially relevant at this time with Donald Trump as President.

Both of these inspiring, moving and unforgettable books should be used in classrooms and lecture theatres around the world to help highlight the plight of all those fighting for social justice and human rights.

References

Freedman, Russell (2014). *Because They Marched: The People’s Campaign For Voting Rights That Changed America* New York, NY: Holiday House Pub.

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