

Beyond the Single Story: Utilizing Cluster Texts to Celebrate Diversity

Lisa Parker

Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Erie, PA

Jenny Malec

Wattsburg Area School District, Erie, PA

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the advantages of incorporating cluster texts in educational settings to present a variety of viewpoints. The discussion begins by examining the reasons behind choosing picturebooks, followed by introducing the concepts of intertextuality and cluster texts. The significance of students' ability to connect with the texts is highlighted. The article then introduces three carefully curated cluster text sets, developed with consideration for classroom observations and students' requirements: 1) laying the groundwork and the school experience; 2) highlighting unsung heroes and overcoming obstacles; 3) showcasing diverse family structures and experiences. Each set features an in-depth analysis of a primary text, accompanied by a table outlining supplementary books within the cluster. The article wraps up with a summary of key insights on the subject matter.

KEYWORDS

cluster texts;
intertextuality;
viewpoints;
diverse literature

Each student enters my classroom with preconceived notions about the year. For many, their emotions are derived from stories passed on from older siblings or friends. Some worry that their differences will not be accepted. Others worry the uniqueness of their home life will not be understood. Every year as I welcome students to our room, I see them evaluating the experience from the first step in the door. The first thing they do is look around the room. There is always a brief moment of pause . . . a pause with conversation . . . a pause with movement . . . they simply look for visual cues that are comforting (Jenny, the second author).

Children want to see a classroom in which they feel represented. Creating a classroom environment that visually reflects a variety of people and experiences allows for students to know they are accepted. When designing a classroom, we feel that diversity and inclusiveness in terms of the representation of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, abilities and disabilities and so on are important. When entering this classroom, students may encounter diverse bulletin boards, classroom libraries, and visual cues increasing the potential for them to feel comfortable in their environment. This mindset transcends throughout all members of the classroom. Feeling welcomed and comfortable can allow children to lower their inhibitions, place their concentration on their learning, and feel safe while approaching new ideas (Eggebrecht-Weinschreider, 2020). It is a gateway to social, emotional, and academic success. We believe that much of this success occurs through stories.

Life is about stories. Storytelling can serve to develop community and honor diverse communities. There are stories in every subject we teach: language arts, social studies, and even math and science. In our classrooms, we value picturebooks that are diverse culturally and linguistically as one way to share stories. Through a picturebook, readers can feel the emotions of

the individuals represented, can travel during the time period to visualize, and can experience the event rather than just reading to learn a bunch of facts or to identify story elements. We believe and advocate for utilizing text sets in the classrooms. Text sets are one powerful tool that can be used to share stories with multiple perspectives (Cappiello & Dawes, 2021). With slight modifications, text sets can be transitioned into another powerful learning tool, cluster texts.

Cluster texts are like text sets in many ways (Ciecierski, 2017). They consist of multiple books just like a text set. However, in a cluster text one text is identified as the way-in text. A way-in text is a text that stimulates motivation where motivation did not exist before (Bintz, 2011). This is the text a teacher and his/her students would utilize first. Like text sets, cluster texts do not tell just a single story. They have sophisticated text potential in terms of the way the texts are connected as well as the vast array of stories they share. Because the diversities in our classroom grow each year, cluster texts provide a tool where students may think, “I see myself in these books, so I know I am not alone.”

The purpose of this article is to share the potentials of utilizing cluster texts in the classroom to share more than a single story. We begin by sharing our reasoning for choosing picturebooks. Additionally, we present an introduction for intertextuality and cluster texts. We continue by sharing the value of students seeing themselves in the texts around them. Next, we share three cluster texts formulated after reflecting on our classrooms and the needs of our students. We conclude with final thoughts.

The first author taught for fifteen years in an urban district with many of her years spent teaching middle school in urban schools. The second author also spent fifteen years in the classroom. Her experience is situated primarily in an elementary school located in a rural district. Even *our* stories and backgrounds are diverse in a variety of ways. Our experiences and backgrounds have helped us create cluster texts to represent multiple perspectives. Therefore, we share three cluster texts: 1) developing an understanding of inclusion and empathy; 2) celebrating the uncelebrated through overcoming challenges; 3) diverse family dynamics and experiences. We describe one text in detail for each cluster text set. This is the way-in text and is followed by a table showcasing the other books in the cluster. We conclude with final thoughts.

Picturebooks in the Classroom

Picturebooks are not just for children. As a matter of fact, picturebooks are even appropriate for adults (Paul, 2021), making them a strong resource to have in classrooms in elementary, middle, and high schools. Picturebooks are around 32 pages in length (Murphy, 2009). While they are not lengthy in the number of pages, they are often hefty in terms of benefits. With compact language and rich aesthetic displays, picturebooks have great potential to be highly sophisticated (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2015) and therefore, encourage complex thinking to deconstruct their meaning.

In many picturebooks, both the text and the pictures work together symbiotically to tell the story (Youngs & Serafini, 2011). The story would not exist without both the pictures and the text. Thus, we utilize the word picturebook as one word, because of the importance of the two to each other. Analyzing the techniques of the author and illustrator has potential to help readers learn skills that may be difficult and challenging (Leland et al., 2017). For example, recognizing the author’s purpose, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and identifying the main idea are often difficult for students to understand but with picturebooks, it might be easier for several reasons. First, the text is shorter, so the reader can really focus in on the skill or practice. Second, the reader can utilize both the text and the illustrations to support their thinking and learning.

Picturebooks are a helpful resource to build background knowledge and interest (Bintz, 2011; Ciecierski & Bintz, 2015; Murphy, 2009). Many times, a picturebook can be read as an anticipatory set or “hook” to lay a foundation for a topic being studied and to stimulate interest. Once the picturebook is read and deconstructed, then longer and more traditional texts can follow. Implementing this type of instruction is an example of teaching in an intertextual manner.

Intertextuality and Cluster Texts

Intertextuality is a reading stance that acknowledges that no reader reads in a vacuum. According to Bakhtin (1987), “All texts are tinted with echoes and reverberations of other texts” (p. 91). As a matter of fact, whether you know it or not, when you read any text, you are making connections to other texts as well as other experiences. According to Kristeva (1987), text can be viewed as a mosaic of quotations. They are absorbed and transformed from one another to amplify meaning. According to Ciecierski and Bintz (2018), “reading intertextually affords the potential to interpret texts from multiple perspectives. It gives teachers a tool to challenge students to stretch their thinking beyond the fallacy that there is always a right or wrong answer, a black or white solution, or a good or bad decision” (p. 479).

Reading is about making connections (Bintz, 2015). Connecting texts in meaningful ways with clear intentions, benefits your students at a greater level rather than using single texts or even randomly connecting texts. Also, when you vary your types of textual connections, students show increased learning of content material, greater comprehension, and more authenticity to their learning (Ciecierski, 2017).

We recommend varying the types of connections that you and your students make. Altering between the use of companion texts (texts connected by topic) and corresponding texts (texts connected by theme) has proven results. You could also utilize contradictory texts. These treasures are more difficult to find but are connected by discrepancy related to either the topic or the theme (Ciecierski, 2017). Recognizing that companion, corresponding, and contradictory are different ways of connecting texts is the first step. The second step is determining which type of intertextually connected text will you use for your instruction. Will you utilize paired text, tri-texts, cluster texts, or text sets?

One of the most common types of connections are made with paired or twin texts, that is two connected texts (Camp, 2000). Paired texts might connect a picturebook with a textbook, a poem with an article, or even a picturebook and the author’s note to build on information learned by reading the picturebook. Tri-texts are also an option with added benefits (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2018). Simply stated, a tri-text consists of three intertextually connected texts. Tri-texts are a valuable tool to use to extend beyond paired text and so are cluster texts.

Cluster texts are connected by theme and/or topic and are like a text set but have one distinguishable feature: the first book read matters and is identified as the way-in text (Ciecierski, 2017). We use way-in texts to create cluster texts. However, way-in texts can stand by themselves. In terms of cluster texts, the way-in text is the text that is recommended as the first text read with the purpose of forming a foundation or inspiring interest. The other texts are connected in a way that either extends or substantiates meaning. We chose to showcase cluster texts in this article because we believe that cluster texts have the most potential for our students to see themselves in the texts around them.

The Value of Students Seeing Themselves in the Text Around Them

We have learned from experience that students naturally evaluate their surroundings by making observations and drawing conclusions. When a student sees a classroom poster promoting success, they may feel motivated and inspired. When the learning target is posted, students' progress and achievement is regulated (Moss & Brookhart, 2012). However, when students observe their peers, the thought processes can be much different. Students evaluate and internalize similarities such as skin color, accents, clothing, abilities and so much more. This continues through conversations about their homelives and social activities. Students can recognize what is deemed *normal* or *acceptable* and whether they feel as though they meet this ideal.

In our experiences, we have observed that using carefully chosen inclusive texts can bring a new dimension of diversity to the classroom. Inclusive readings are designed to make texts relevant to more readers and simultaneously expand how texts are interpreted (Skrlac Lo, 2019). These texts allow students to see a variety of lifestyles, challenges, and ethnicities. They provide a new atmosphere in which students can see themselves in the characters and explore their ideologies.

In today's classroom, teachers more than ever can share the responsibility to approach conversations which promote equity. We define equity as students seeing themselves as equally valued members of a classroom community of learners. Using picture books in our classrooms has shown to create opportunities for students to collectively explore their curiosities, while in turn helping us, the teachers, to guide these conversations. Children need a place to begin the critical introduction to culturally sensitive ideas and concepts of social justice (Norris, 2020). When students begin to see themselves in the texts and conversation, they feel safe and included.

Cluster Texts to Show Multiple Perspectives

When we think about cluster texts, we are reminded of the value in showing students multiple perspectives. We want our students to accept and value differences, potentially building self-worth, community, and acceptance. Here, we share three cluster texts to represent three points of consideration that we believe are prevalent in many classes. We highlight the way-in text first in detail and then share multiple texts that the way-in text might be surrounded by.

When using cluster texts in the classroom, the teacher would utilize the way-in text first. This could be as an interactive read aloud where the teacher would stop periodically and engage students in conversation, or it could be part of a shared reading lesson with all students reading a copy of the text. Following the reading of the way-in text, students would read other books in the cluster. This might take a variety of formats, depending on the purpose. Perhaps all students read all the texts. Maybe small groups of students focus on individual books and then come together to share what they learned. There is not a prescriptive way to implement cluster texts in the classroom. Decisions can be made based on purpose as well as the needs of the students.

As previously stated, picturebooks can be utilized with children of all ages, adolescents, and adults. We chose picturebooks that could primarily be used in elementary school classrooms. We begin by sharing a cluster text that lays a foundation for learning and centers around going to school. The second cluster text was created to celebrate the uncelebrated through overcoming challenges. The third cluster text represents diverse family dynamics and experiences.

Developing an Understanding of Inclusion and Empathy

All students experience school in some way. However, culture, religious belief, and race diversify this educational experience. Here is a cluster text that contains characters that are diverse in cultural representation. This cluster text may begin the exploration of multiple stories. In exploring this cluster text, students might gain appreciation for school. They might also build empathy for those who have much different school experiences than they do.

The Day You Begin (Woodson, 2018) captivates the reader through its use of color and relatable childhood experiences. This picturebook highlights moments when students may come to school feeling as though they are different. In addition, the author's voice gives the reader a sense of being spoken to. Each situation provides a moment where students can instantly see themselves in the story, whether they are the student feeling left out, or a part of the class. Raphael Lopez, the illustrator, utilizes color tones that change as if to show the characters being in two different worlds. The student who appears to be left out is illustrated with a background of soft, but duller tone colors of a lonely world, while the remaining students are illustrated with bright, vibrant colors and pictures that include the other children together in a happy, inclusive world.

At first glimpse, we see a little girl peeking into the classroom, accompanied by the narration "There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you." The phrase "there will be times when" is presented as though the author is speaking to the little girl, reassuring her that some moments are difficult to cope with.

Next, we see this same little girl sitting alone during share time. There is a buzz of excitement of children sharing their stories and souvenirs from their summer vacation. We see her reflection to her own summer experience where she cared for her younger sister. Her escape to new adventures was done by reading on her fire escape. In this moment, we can understand the feeling of uncertainty as she looks over the building tops at the pigeons flying in the sky. Here, the reader is presented with a moment of inquiry, "What good is this when other students were flying and sailing and going somewhere." This moment of inquiry draws the reader to make a personal connection with the character and the self-doubt she is experiencing, as well as the beginning yearning for a connection with her siblings. The author continues this inquiry through a variety of examples from sitting alone at lunch time to watching others play at recess. Each time using the phrase "there will be times when." All the while, the color pattern continues, and we find the child who is left out venturing farther and farther from the group.

We find a shift in the story as the author delivers an empowering message of resiliency. The reader is shown a child who has become so left out that he is completely alone standing in dry, brown grass at the edge of the water holding a book, peering at his reflection. In his reflection, we can see the bright, vibrant colors shooting out from his book, his face full of joy, as though he can see the happiness that has come from being brave. The illustrations give additional insight into the character's internal struggle supporting the reader to see how the character is wanting the happiness of being included.

The focus returns to the little girl as the author's phrase has become empowering "There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you until the day you share your stories." We see the girl share her summer vacation. The color tones of the illustrations stay bright. All the children are talking, laughing, and playing together. It's here in the story we see the phrase "This is the day you begin." The reader can connect to the internal struggle of the character and the bravery she made the choice to share her story.

Using *The Day You Begin* as a way-in text for a cluster text centering on going to school (see Table 1) is an excellent foundation for developing an understanding of inclusion and empathy within the school setting.

Table 1: Developing an Understanding of Inclusion and Empathy

Title	Author(s) & Year	Synopsis
<i>*The Day You Begin</i>	Woodson, 2018	Way-in text described above.
<i>The Arabic Quilt</i>	Khalil, 2020	Kanzi and her family moved to America from Egypt. When Kanzi is feeling homesick she wraps herself up in the quilt her Teita (grandmother) made her. Kanzi enjoys her school, but feels hurt when the other children laugh at her when she speaks in Arabic. Kanzi's teacher invites her mother to school to make a class quilt, with each student having a square with their name written in Arabic. This brings excitement and togetherness to the classroom.
<i>Dreamers</i>	Morales, 2018	Every mother has a dream for her child. <i>Dreamers</i> is a story of a mother's dream of building a better life for her newborn child. She dreams of their journey together as immigrants to America, the challenges they will face, and the opportunities they find.
<i>The Girl Who Buried Her Dreams in a Can</i>	Trent & Gilchrist, 2015	In this true story of Dr. Tererai Trent, we follow Dr. Trent's journey of perseverance as a young girl in a village in Zimbabwe, desperate to learn to read. She secretly learns to read and write with the help of her brother. After the war, she dreamt of an education in America. With the help of her fellow villagers, she is able to travel to America and attend college. She studies and earns degrees until she reaches the highest level. Upon achieving her goals, she returns to her village to fulfill her dream of bringing education to the boys and girls of Zimbabwe.
<i>Nasreen's Secret School</i>	Winter, 2009	In this true story set in Afghanistan, Nasreen's town is overcome by soldiers during the war. The soldiers were harsh with rules and how they treated the villagers. Girls are no longer allowed to attend school. Villagers like Nasreen's mother came up missing. Nasreen becomes withdrawn, not speaking to others. Her grandmother sneaks her to a secret school. Going to school brings her friendships and hope. She discovers the world outside of Afghanistan and the dreams that are to come.
<i>Steamboat School</i>	Hopkinson & Husband, 2016	Based on true events from 1847 Missouri, Hopkins retells the struggles brought to African Americans when a law is made that no African Americans may learn in the state of Missouri. Devastated, the reverend with the help of a boy named James, use their ingenuity to continue learning on a steamboat on the Mississippi River.

Celebrating the Uncelebrated Through Overcoming Challenges

Life is full of challenges. While we should acknowledge and learn from the challenges that we do not overcome, we believe that it is also beneficial to celebrate overcoming challenges. In addition, when students recognize each other's obstacles, challenges, successes, and failures, there is an opportunity to build a strong community of learners.

All Because You Matter (Charles, 2020) is unique in that it speaks right to the reader. Written in second person point of view, the message that YOU matter is prevalent and woven throughout. You mattered "long before you took your place in this world." With a closer look, the

reader sees the magnificent artistry of Caldecott Honor Winner and illustrator, Bryan Collier. Through collage, we see multiple faces woven in the quilting cloth being designed by many hands. This “quilt” is worn as a stunning headdress on the next page. Amongst the colorful design shown like peacock feathers, we see that the faces are different. Some are looking at the reader while others show side images. Still others show faces with eyes closed. In another feather, we only see an eye. The arrangement and presentation suggest the diversity of those who matter.

The reader is taken through birth, first steps, first words, and opening a book. The book shows a person who looks just like you, a young Brown boy. The author shares how the boy sees himself in the characters with the “same hair, same skin, same dreams.” The author also shares how the words and pictures come together because “you matter.” Not everything is always sugar coated and as the story continues, we see that “light does not always reach lonely planets, covered moons, stars unseen, and if matter no longer exists.” We see children laughing in the back as the question “what kind of a name is that?” is posed.

The author shares how life is full of obstacles: seeing big red X’s on a math page might make you question if you, your work, and your effort matter; looking at the news to see people taking a breath, taking a stand, taking a knee; hearing whispered prayers as another name is called Trayvon, Tamir, Philando and wondering *if they, or you, will ever matter*.

With the turn of a page, we shift to the main character looking right at us. We read, “Did you know that you were born from queens, chiefs, legends?” Through all of creation and from the beginning of time “you mattered, they mattered. We matter. . . and always will.” This way-in text sets the stage and sends a message of resiliency. Despite the obstacles our students encounter, they matter. Each student is an important member of our classrooms just like the many colorful and unique feathers in the headdress shown in the book. This book is perfect to introduce stories about individuals who faced obstacles and succeed, despite the challenges (see Table 2).

Table 2: Celebrating the Uncelebrated Through Overcoming Challenges

Title	Author(s) & Year	Synopsis
<i>*All Because You Matter</i>	Charles, 2020	Way-in text described above.
<i>All the Way to the Top: How One Girl's Fight for Americans With Disabilities Changed Everything</i>	Pimentel, 2020	This is the true story of Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins who never let her wheelchair slow her down even if the world around her made it hard for disabled individuals to do simple things like go to school or eat in the cafeteria. She joined activists in Washington D.C. for what became known as the Capitol Crawl as she climbed all the way to the top without her wheelchair when the Americans with Disabilities Act was proposed to Congress.
<i>Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah</i>	Thompson, 2015	Emmanuel was born in Ghana, West Africa with one deformed leg. He was dismissed by many people but never by his mother, who always taught him to reach for his dreams. When he was young, he hopped more than two miles to school. He learned to play soccer. At the age of thirteen, he left home to provide for his family and became a cyclist. He rode four hundred miles across Ghana, showing many how determination pays off and a disability does not have to be an inability.
<i>I Talk Like a River</i>	Scott, 2020	The Schneider Family Award is awarded each year to an author or illustrator for a book with artistic expression of the disability experience. In 2020, <i>I Talk Like a River</i> won this prestigious award. We are taken through a young boy's day. He wakes up silent. Words stuck in his mouth, he eats his breakfast without

		saying a word. After school, his dad picks him up and consoling him, tells him that he talks like a river. The story is based on the author's experience.
Michael Rosen's Sad Book	Rosen, 2004	Michael is sad. At times, his sadness takes over his mind, leaving him helpless. At other times, Michael is angry. Sometimes he wants to just disappear. Michael suffers from mental illness, attributed partially to the loss of his son Eddie. Readers are brought into Michael's life and his struggles.
Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship	Kensky & Downes, 2018	This heart-warming story personifies Rescue, a dog meant to be a Seeing Eye Dog, just as his family members were. Rescue is surprised that he is going to be a service dog. Jessica's life is different than she expected, too. A runner in the Boston Marathon, Jessica became a double amputee after surviving the bombing. Rescue and Jessica's friendship is a valuable one as each helps the other survive.

Diverse Family Dynamics and Experiences

Today, the students in our classrooms differ in their family dynamics and experiences. In 1960, eighty-eight percent of children lived with both parents (United States Census Bureau, 2016). That number is much lower now. In our classrooms, there are children from single parent homes and homes with divorced parents. Additionally, we have students from interracial families as well as families with same sex parents. Children without homes, and children with incarcerated parents are also amongst our students today. For those who are not privy to these backgrounds, they may feel in a position where they do not know what to do or what to say. Realizing that each one of us is "good" and can do amazing things is an important first step.

I Am Every Good Thing (Barnes & James, 2020) makes the perfect way-in text for a cluster text centered around diverse family dynamics and experiences. Written in first person, the main character shares how he is every good thing as we read "I am a nonstop ball of energy. Powerful and full of light. I am a go-getter. A difference maker. A leader. I am every good thing that makes the world go round." One of the beauties of this book is that the portrayal of the boy is not just positive. While we read that he is "good to the core, like the center of a cinnamon roll" and see him playing with his friends, we also see him fall while doing skateboard tricks but getting back on his feet, despite his scraped knees and elbows.

The authors take us through the boy's life in a relatable way that illustrates his experiences. For example, when they write that the main character is a gentleman and a scholar, it is followed by saying he is "kind and polite, like, 'yes, ma'am,' and 'yes, sir,' helping my grandmother cross the street, and saying 'bless you' when a stranger has to sneeze." We learn about the boy in terms of learning, having fun, being musically and athletically talented. We also learn that he is an important member in the world around him as a "brother, son, nephew, favorite cousin, grandson, and friend." This boy is "real" and recognizes that even though he is something of a superhero, there are times when he is afraid. Despite this, he shares that he is brave, hope, worthy of success, and worthy to be loved. Being worthy to be loved and worthy to be valued is a valuable message to send and be heard in our diverse classrooms making this the perfect way-in text for a cluster text on diverse family dynamics and experiences (see Table 3).

Table 3: Diverse Family Dynamics and Experiences

Title	Author(s) & Year	Synopsis
<i>*I Am Every Good Thing</i>	Barnes & James, 2020	Way-in text described above.
<i>Knock, Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me</i>	Beaty, 2013	Every day the young boy in the story plays a game with his father. His father comes to his room and says "knock, knock," and the boy pretends to be asleep. One day, his father does not come. He does not come the next day or the day after that, either. While the reader does not truly know what happened to the father, the author's note leads the reader to the conclusion that he may have been incarcerated. As the reader, we travel through the boy's life as he becomes a man and a father.
<i>Heather Has Two Mommies</i>	Newman, 2016	Heather loves the number two. She has two arms, two legs, two pets, and two mommies. She does not have a daddy. When she goes to school, and the children all draw pictures of their families, Heather learns that there are not any families that are the same. Everyone is different in their own way.
<i>A Shelter in our Car</i>	Gunning, 2004	Zettie and her mother had a warm and comfortable home in Jamaica. When they come to America, they are forced to live in their car. Mama cannot find a steady job, and Papa is gone. Despite the situation, Mama's love is unwavering and shows Zettie that they can meet all challenges.
<i>The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage</i>	Alko, 2015	Richard Loving was White, and his wife Mildred was American and Cherokee. They were married in Washington D.C. Their marriage was forbidden in Virginia, where they lived, so when they returned home, they were arrested. Their fight went all the way to the Supreme Court, where they finally won. They changed the world for interracial couples and showed the unfairness of any law that restricts who you are allowed to love.
<i>Love</i>	de la Pena, 2018	This book reminds readers that there is love all around us. Even when parents fight, there is still love and something bright to look to. Everything can be called love, from shared joy to comfort in the darkness.

Final Thoughts

I (Lisa, the first author) still remember when I read *Knock, Knock* to my seventh-grade classroom. I had taken over a seventh-grade classroom in December, so I was a new teacher to them, even though I had many years of experience. We were reading and analyzing the picturebook, projected on a large screen. In those first days in the classroom, it was one of the few times during the day where all students were focused and engaged. The students had struggled with focus and appropriate behavior all school year. One student interrupted the reading at the point that the boy's father disappears. He laughed and said, "I bet you he went to jail." He looked around at his classmates trying to get them to join in his laughter. This student was trying to get the attention of his peers but was taken aback when I read the end of the book that shared that yes, indeed, the boy's father was in jail. In that moment, my students began to look at me differently. Instead of seeing a white, middle-class female in front of them, they saw someone who "got it." They saw someone who understood that we all have stories and experiences who shape who we are and that our differences deserve to be celebrated as do our similarities. This showed in the way they interacted with me; it also showed in the focus and effort they showed towards their studies.

For this article, we chose three cluster texts to share. We reflected on the students we have taught during our years in education to choose these three clusters. These are just ideas, but we hope through our creations, we have demonstrated how to create cluster texts that are culturally and linguistically diverse. There are many books to choose from when building libraries that represent the students in your classrooms. Additionally, there are many ways that teachers can utilize cluster texts in the classroom. We have suggested a few. There are many more. We wholeheartedly believe in the value of sharing multiple stories and in having our students feel represented in our classrooms. We know that this sense of value and belonging has great potential to stimulate interest, community, and deep learning.

References

- Bakhtin, N. (1987). *Speech genres and other late essays* (2nd ed.). University of Texas Press.
- Bintz, W. P. (2011). "Way-in" books encourage exploration in middle grades classrooms. *Middle School Journal*, 42(3), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2011.11461763>
- Bintz, W. P. (2015). Using paired texts to teach CCSS anchor standards in reading. *Voices from the Middle*, 22(4), 39–43.
- Camp, D. (2000). It takes two: Teaching with twin texts of fact and fiction. *The Reading Teacher*, 53(5), 400–408.
- Cappiello, M. A., & Dawes, E. T. (2021). *Text sets in action: Pathways through content area literacy*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Ciecierski, L., & Bintz, W. P. (2015). Using authentic literature to develop challenging and Integrated curriculum. *Middle School Journal*, 46(5), 19–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2015.11461921>
- Ciecierski, L., & Bintz, W. P. (2018). Tri-texts: A potential next step to paired texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(4), 479–483. <https://doi.org/10.1002/6565.1649>
- Ciecierski, L. (2017). What the Common Core State Standards do not tell you about connecting texts. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(3), 285–294. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1616>
- Eggebrecht-Weinschneider, C. (2020). Comfort is critical for student success: Here are three simple factors to consider. *Classroom Components*. <https://spaces4learning.com/articles/2020/05/25/comfort-is-critical-for-student-success-here-are-3-simple-factors-to-consider.aspx>
- Kristeva, J. (1987). *The Kristeva reader*. Columbia University Press.
- Leland, C. H., Lewison, M., & Harste, J. (2017). *Teaching children's literature: It's critical!* (2nd ed). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315269627>
- Moss, C., & Brookhart, S. M. (2012). *Learning targets: Helping students aim for understanding in today's lesson*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Murphy, (2009). Using picture books to engage middle school students. *Middle School Journal*, 40(4), 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2009.11461677>
- Norris, K. E. L. (2020). Using the read-aloud and picture books for social justice. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 56(4), 183–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2020.1813521>
- Paul, P. (2021, February 20). Our kids aren't too old for picture books, and neither are you. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/20/opinion/sunday/picture-books-reading.html>
- Skrlac Lo, R. (2019). Resisting gentle bias: A critical content analysis of family diversity in picturebooks. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 45(2), 16–30.

- United States Census Bureau. (2016, November 17). The majority of children live with two parents, Census Bureau reports. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-192.html>
- Youngs, S., & Serafini, F. (2011). Comprehension strategies for reading historical fiction books. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(2), 115–124. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.01014>

Literature Cited

- Alko, S. (2015). *The case for loving: The fight for interracial marriage*. Arthur & Levine Books.
- Barnes, D., & James, G. C. (2020). *I am every good thing*. Nancy Paulsen Books.
- Beaty, D. (2013). *Knock, knock: My dad's dream for me*. Little Brown Books for Young Readers.
- Charles, T. (2020). *All because you matter*. Orchard Books.
- de la Pena, M. (2018). *Love*. G. P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers.
- Gunning, M. (2004). *A shelter in our car*. Lee & Low Books.
- Hopkinson, D., & Husband, R. (2016). *Steamboat school: Inspired by a true story*. Disney Hyperion.
- Kensky, J., & Downes, P. (2018). *Rescue & Jessica: A life-changing friendship*. Candlewick Press.
- Khalil, A. (2020). *The Arabic quilt*. Tilbury House Publishers.
- Morales, Y. (2019). *Dreamers*. Findaway World.
- Newman, L. (2016). *Heather has two mommies*. Candlewick Press.
- Pimentel, A. B. (2020). *All the way to the top: How one girl's fight for Americans with disabilities changed everything*. Source Book Explore.
- Rosen, M. (2004). *Michael Rosen's sad book*. Candlewick Press.
- Scott, J. (2020). *I talk like a river*. Neal Porter Books.
- Thompson, L. A. (2015). *Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah*. Anne Schwartz Books.
- Trent, T., & Gilchrist, J. S. (2015). *The girl who buried her dreams in a can: A true story*. Viking Books for Young Readers.
- Winter, J. (2013). *Nasreen's secret school: A true story from Afghanistan*. Zaner-Bloser.
- Woodson, J. (2018). *The day you begin*. Nancy Paulsen Books.