

Multicultural Children's Literature Tools and Techniques in *Sitti's Secret* by Naomi Nye

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Abstract

Multiculturalism has become a familiar topic in picture books around the world. The genre of multicultural children's literature approaches children by reflecting on their realities in a multicultural society and guides them to embrace the multicultural identity. Multicultural children's literature plays an important part in children's lives, purposefully it develops in the child reader values including morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture's past and aspirations about the present and the future. Giving children access to all varieties of literature is extremely important as it teaches them to be open and curious about different cultures. It also helps them appreciate diverse ways of life. Children's literature transmits important literature and themes from one generation to the next. It is important because it provides children with opportunities to respond to literature; it gives them an appreciation for their cultural heritage as well as those of others. Children's picture books combine verbal narratives and visual figures, both the text and the illustrations are very important to the development of the story. The study of the multicultural picture book *Sitti's Secret* (1994) will tackle the different tools and techniques that were used by the author Naomi Nye and the illustrator Nancy Carpenter based on the book analysis.

Keywords

Multicultural Literature, Children's Literature, Picture Books, Diversity, Identity.

Centuries ago, people used to entertain their children by storytelling. This orally transmitted tradition provided a way to instruct and educate children. The early stories among the ancients such as myths and legends were first meant for adults. Later, these were adapted to be enjoyed by children. Every story holds a message, a moral instruction, or a religious aspect to deliver an ancestor's experience from generation to generation. The early children's literature consists of fairy tales, lullabies, folktales, fables, epics, legends, myths, and songs that were recited to children before printing was invented. These early stories developed into what we now call children's literature.

Children's literature is well-established as a literary genre, specifically written to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. It is a very powerful resource that helps children to understand themselves and the world around them. *The Library of Congress* defines "children's literature" as, "materials written and produced for the information or entertainment of the children and young adults. it includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres, and physical format"(1). In essence, children's literature can be defined as books for children from birth to adolescence that cover relevant and interesting topics to children of those ages. It is composed of all things that are read, or used by children, or made for children.

Children's literature as we know it today did not exist before the end of the Renaissance age, with the development of the concept of childhood. As Clifton Fadiman claims, "Children's literature first clearly emerged as a distinct and independent form of literature in the second half of the 18th century"(Fadiman,1). The 18th century marked the beginning of children's literature as a respected branch of literature. Children's literature flourished with a substantial rise in the

number of works produced. Fadiman adds, “During the 20th century, however, its growth has been so luxuriant” (Fadiman,1). The 20th century became widely regarded as the golden age of children's literature for the sheer number of published pieces that are now considered classics. Moreover, Children’s literature started to thrive and receive recognition as a branch of literature that offers the reader enjoyment as well as insights into the human condition.

Today, children’s literature is divided into several types, alongside the simplified classics version of world literature. According to Cullinan and Galda’s book *Literature and the child* the types that make children’s literature as a genre are:

- A. Picture books
- B. Poetry and Verse
- C. Folklore
- D. Fantasy
- E. Fiction
- F. Nonfiction
- G. Biography and Autobiography (Cullinan and Galda, 1994)

Picture books are mass-circulated children’s stories that provide a visual experience to entertain children. They remain the most popular type of children’s literature, as they easily capture the children’s attention. They appear in numerous forms such as alphabet books, counting books, concept books, pattern books, wordless books, and picture storybooks. However, picture storybooks are the main attraction for the unique influence they have on children in promoting cultural and traditional values and beliefs. They are seen as the base

building block or the gateway which most young children learn about life itself while they learn how to read.

Children's picture books combine verbal narratives and visual figures to attract children. Both the text and the illustrations are equally very important to the development of the story. Ideally, picture books should contain a harmonious blend of text and illustrations, with the one enhancing the other, to create the complete story. Illustrations within picture books mirror the reality of the words and help children engage with the story. As it is mentioned by Cullinan and Galda, "Picture books tell a story or demonstrate a concept through a unique combination of text and illustration. The illustrations extend and reflect the meaning conveyed by the words" (Cullinan and Galda, 1994, P.30). In other words, the body of a picture book is composed of written text and illustrations that go with it, to entertain and instruct children. The interrelationship of text and illustrations produces the meaning of the picture book. Illustrations help children understand the story by drawing their attention and linking the words with the visual images. It also serves to explain and elaborate the written text; children sometimes can get an idea of the story by looking at the images without even reading or listening to the story. Illustrations should be distinguished in a way that works with the text to enrich the story.

In picture books, the visual and the verbal text form an interconnected whole. John Warren Stewig in *Children and Literature* defines picture books as, "A picture storybook is simply a book in which the story and the picture are of equal importance. The two elements work together to produce an artistic unit stronger than either of the words or pictures would be alone"(Stewig, 1980, P.97). Picture books focus on the integration of the words and the illustrations, as they are the main elements that define an ideal text. This means that neither the

words nor the illustrations would be effective on their own. Stewig believes that, “picture books must combine strong visual features with memorable language. In a truly fine picture book, both illustrations and words must be equally strong”(Stewig, 1980, P.124). The words and illustrations in picture books allow children to learn more about the environment around them.

Any picture book has visual features that strengthen the text. These visual features consist of tools like style, shape, size, colors, and the layout of the book. The visual features not only serve as a tool to understand the text but also help children develop their skills. Thus, picture books serve three specific purposes as Stewig points out, “These books provide language input, visual input, and stimulation for oral discussion”(Stewig, 1980, P.124). The first purpose that picture books serve is language input. Authors usually include a variety of vocabulary that influences the child’s learning skills. At a young age, children’s listening skills are better than their reading and speaking skills. They tend to figure out the meaning of the new word from the main idea or from the illustrations. The second purpose of picture books is visual input. Pictures and illustrations develop children’s visual sensitivity and imagination. Children who are exposed to illustrations in picture books have a fruitful imagination. They can get the meaning of the texts by reading the illustrations. The third purpose that picture books serve is the simulation of oral discussion. Picture books serve as a form of language development, it stimulates the verbal and visual fluency of children. The reaction of children towards the books they read or listen to, helps them express what they notice and what catches their attention in the picture books. Children notice information while looking at the illustrations; they sense the mood of the picture book from the colors that the illustrator uses. Thus, picture books are very useful and valuable, they should be a part of every child’s daily environment.

Moreover, words and illustrations are an essential form of storytelling. The juxtaposition of the verbal and visual integration, highly contributes to the value of the picture book. In *How Picture Book Works*, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott identify five ways the visual and verbal depictions contribute to the narrative of the text. The first depiction is when the words and images are “Symmetrical”, the words are matching with the illustrations and tell the same story. Nikolajeva and Scott explain the symmetrical as, “If the gaps are identical in words and images(or if there are no gaps at all)”(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P.17).

The second depiction is the “Complementary” relation between the words and the images. It is the bond between the words and the illustration, when one will enlarge the other and will affect the overall meaning. Nikolajeva and Scott describe the complementary as, “Words and images fill each other’s gaps wholly, there is nothing left for the reader’s imagination”(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P. 17).

The third depiction is when the words and illustrations are considered “Enhancement” when the words are parallel to the illustrations, and there is a little difference between what the words say and what the illustrations show. Nikolajeva and Scott depict the enhancement as, "words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way" (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P.17)

The fourth depiction is the “Counterpoint” it shows when the words and the illustrations provide the reader with extra information. Nikolajeva and Scott define the counterpoint as, “the pictures do not really provide a counterpoint to the words, but rather “expand” or “enhance” and “elaborate” the words”(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P.17).

The fifth depiction is the “Contradiction”, it happens when the words and the illustrations contradict each other and tell different stories. Nikolajeva and Scott claim that the contradiction is, “ the nature of interaction is radically different... words and pictures contradict each other”(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P.17).

Nikolajeva and Scott believe that some picture books tend to present the illustrations and word interaction as counterpointing because it provides multiple readings and interpretations which involve the reader using their imagination. Nikolajeva and Scott state, “The picturebooks that employ counterpointing are especially stimulating because they elicit many possible interpretations and involve the reader’s imagination”(Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006, P.24). Nikolajeva and Scott believe that the most successful examples of the counterpoint depiction in narratives, are the one made by the same author/illustrator as the artist will be free to choose which depiction will carry the main idea of the narrative.

There are different kinds of good-quality picture books. Jean Colby discusses the qualities to consider while analyzing a picture book in her book *Writing, Illustrating, And Editing Children’s Books*. She divides the categories of picture books by age range. As for picture books which are made for children within the age range of one year up to three years should be simple and clear. Colby states, “Simplicity of concept, line, and color is necessary for this age. There should be no exaggeration or emotional conflicts”(Colby,1967, P. 97). Illustrations in picture books should be easy to recognize from the first glance. Picture books that cover the age range from three years up to six years should be simple and direct. Colby adds, “More varied fare is possible here, but again clarity, simplicity, and directness are desirable. Freshness and individuality are nice extras”(Colby, 1967, P.98). Colby stresses the importance of

simplicity in picture books for almost all age ranges, in order for children to be able to understand it clearly without even reading the text. The colors and style of the illustration should be realistic and match the text. Colby claims that the key of a great picture book is the rhythm between the text and the illustrations, “The rhythm of the text is cleverly matched by the rhythm of the drawing”(Colby, 1967, P.99). A good picture book should have a simple illustration that reflects the text.

Moreover, picture books are commonly considered as a simple form of literature that is far beyond critical analysis. However, picture books embody many codes, styles, textual devices, and intertextual references. Perry Nodelman in *Understanding Children's Literature* tackles the process of reading visuals in picture books. Nodelman points out, “‘Picture books’, a combination of variable text and visual images. We provide children with books like this on the assumption that the picture communicates more naturally and more directly than words, and thus help young readers make sense of the text they accompany”(Nodelman, 1988, P.128). Visual images serve as a mirror of the verbal text in picture books. Illustrations in picture books are as important as the text, as children directly understand the idea of the illustration faster than understanding the words. Nodelman assumes that illustrations are not straightforward tools; sometimes they carry lots of information behind what is represented. To emphasize, illustrations represent a specific perspective as Nodelman states, “It makes a culture-bound prejudice to look at visual images expecting to find perspective and therefore, knowing how to interpret it”(Nodelman, 1988, P.129). Visual images evoke different styles of representations, which convey different meanings to each person according to their cultural background. In order to gain a better understanding of the illustrations, people must have the knowledge of how to interpret the complex operation of understanding a virtual picture. Nodelman claims, “it takes effort to

become aware of the arbitrary conventions and distinctions we unconsciously take for granted, to see the degree to which that which seems simply natural is complex and artificial”

(Nodelman, 1988, P.131). He is against the idea that a picture book is a very simple genre of literature. In other words, illustrations in picture books are surprisingly complex. Visual and verbal representations are variable tools that make you understand the text.

Furthermore, Nodelman affirms,

The pictures ‘illustrate’ the texts - that is, they purport to show us what is meant by the words, so that we come to understand the objects and actions the words refer to in terms of the qualities of the image that accompany them - the world outside the book in terms of the image within it. And the world as they know it is not necessarily the world all viewers would agree to seeing (Nodelman, 1988, P.131).

Illustrations reflect on the text in a way, which simplifies and clarifies the meaning of the words. Picture books significantly give assistance to children to understand their culture, themselves, and others. Nevertheless, picture books encourage the appreciation of visual and verbal tools, which can be enjoyed once the reader understands the codes to get a better view of the text.

To reiterate, picture books are written to motivate children to read and learn. Picture books help children to interact with the book and encourage them to develop their reading skills, especially children who still have not developed in language. Picture books enrich children’s minds with enjoyment, imagination, and inspiration. They also give a simple perspective on culture and heritage. Some picture books lend a helping hand to children to bring out their inner selves to light.

In picture books, words and illustrations can work together to create a strong image of people, places, events, and histories. Illustrations are considered as one of the essentials in any picture book, in order to enjoy and understand the idea of the written word. As Zhihui Fang in his article “Illustrations, Text, and the Child Reader: What are Pictures in Children's Storybooks for?” notes, “Picture books hold a prominent place in children's literature because of the juxtaposition of pictures and words” (Fang, 1966, P.130). The interaction between the words and the illustrations in picture books creates a supportive meaning to the topic of the text. Illustration serves as an explanation to decode the text. Picture books are a combination of well-written words and expressive illustrations. Subsequently, they create a successful text. Fang claims, “illustrations and picture books are meant to delight, to capture attention, to amplify or tell a story, to teach a concept, and to develop appreciation and awareness in children” (Fang, 1966, P.140). Illustration helps children to capture the idea and understand the text while enjoying it at the same time. It also provokes children's imagination and exploration of the world around them.

As picture books demonstrate a topic throughout the combination of words and illustrations, illustrations serve as a tool to reflect the meaning of the words. Cullinan and Galda claim: “A picture book is a text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a child.” (Cullinan and Galda, 1994, P.16). A picture book is a special book for young children that has more illustrations and fewer words. It is divided into two parts, which are texts and illustrations. Illustrations are meant to be a method that demonstrates the deep meaning within the text. Correspondingly, illustrations tend to enrich and enhance the meaning of the text in picture books. Words alone could not reveal the whole meaning of a text. Illustrations clearly express the feelings and the meanings of the words. It extends the text to help children

understand the whole idea of the picture book. The main focus of the illustrations is to create an image that is related and connected to the text.

Children build assumptions about the world by reading and looking at illustrations. They learn to read a book at a young age by looking at the characters, events, and actions in the illustrations. Resultantly, children's literature needs to be analyzed through theoretical lenses of visual representations. As it was mentioned in *Theorizing Visual Representation in Children's Literature* by Peggy Albers,

Children often see their world and begin to recognize patterns before they learn oral and/or written language. They begin their understanding of the world through looking and seeing. How they look and see, however, are often situated in the way children's literature artists look at and see their world through the images they render. (Albers, 2008, P.165)

Albers presented the primary reasons that led her to the development of the theory of "looking and seeing" in literature. She stresses the importance of visual images as a source of shaping people's beliefs, as it helps them develop learning to read images. Visuals make life meaningful, by noticing the visual text and beginning to understand what they mean. Visual images and illustrations help children and adults to get a better meaning of the text. Before children learn how to read, they depend on understanding the text through the illustrations, especially in picture books. Visuals build a strong relationship with the reader's life experiences in mind. Therefore, the theory of "looking and seeing" connects images to the mind of the reader.

Furthermore, the concept of "looking and seeing" cannot be successful without the concept of transformation, which means the ability of the reader to reshape their perspective while viewing pictures and images. In order to understand the theory, Albers distinguished

between “looking and seeing”. She states that, “we look at surface aspects of the image, physical details, or criterial aspects that are visible to the eye” (Albers, 2008, P.168). Looking is how you look at something visible and collect information by searching for details that help you build a general idea about it. Albers claims that by looking at the elements within the illustrations, readers might get some detailed information about it. Color, shape, line, and placement of objects are the elements that help the reader catch the idea behind the picture. On the other hand, she claims, “To see is to transact with the text, to make meaning from the elements that comprise this text.” (Albers, 2008, P.168). Seeing is only getting the meaning of the text; it is how the reader understands the meaning while viewing the illustration. Artists’ knowledge is built on experience; they build their images based on the information they already have. After “looking and seeing”, they compare what they want to represent with what they have seen in the past, this process forms a representational code that helps the reader understand the idea at once. Albers states, “artists develop representational codes, or schematic codes—details that nearly always appear in artworks that have a similar theme or composition. These recurring details in artworks allow readers to recognize the composition more immediately and then to make their meaning from these visual texts” (Albers, 2008, P.172). Representational codes develop the memory of both the artist and the reader; these codes can be recognizable through time and place. “Looking and seeing” build a wider view of the world. Albers claims, “By directing attention in this way, the artist reduces the number of places on the visual text to which a reader initially may look to make sense of the image. Therefore, readers’ interest and attention, and thus how they build knowledge about the world” (Albers, 2008, P.177). The artist can direct the reader’s attention to the focus point that he creates to understand a specific idea. Albers sums up the importance of “looking and seeing” theory in three points, she concludes, “(a) image types cut across time,

culture, and artist's rendering; (b) images embody stable representations of culture; and (c) images tend to render visual binaries and invite oppositional readings.” (Albers, 2008, P.163). The theory of “looking and seeing” helps artists to develop a memory of images and produce representational codes. The theory also expands the reader’s mind to be able to understand the world by “looking and seeing”.

Picture books are influenced by the cultural and ethical values of their authors. These values are frequently revealed as the literary work unfolds. Also, children can discover the world around them as well as exploring new cultures and identities, and these are known as multicultural picture books. These books are a well-known kind of children’s literature; they are also an important field of cultural and intercultural studies. They offer children from different cultures the opportunity to understand and explore many cultures, in order to celebrate cultural diversity. Multicultural picture books depict a variety of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups. It allows young children opportunities to develop their understanding of others while affirming children of diverse backgrounds.

Multiculturalism is the new global reality that is a direct result of the human migration movement that mixed all nations and cultures together. Migration-related issues and multiculturalism are essential to this study, which is concerned with the empathic potential of children’s literature, specifically picture books that deal with complex issues of cultural difference. During the course of the 20th century, people were either compelled or aspired to leave their homeland behind and find new lands. Some left to escape the horrors of war, or poverty, or simply in the pursuit of better life and opportunities. As a result, many societies have become more culturally diverse. In general, the term multiculturalism refers to societies that are

culturally diverse in nature, and is found in a wide range of different areas of art including -and especially- literature. But to have a better understanding of the nature of multicultural literature, one has to explore multiculturalism in general, and as a status-quo.

Multiculturalism as a term can be broken into two parts, the prefix (multi) which means multiple and (Culturalism) which refers to cultures. According to Mingshui Cai, in *Multiple Definitions of Multicultural Literature: Is the Debate Really just "Ivory Tower" Bickering?: "Multiple + Culture = Multiculturalism."* (Cai, 1998, P.313). Multicultural literature is the literature of multiple cultures. Cai explains that multiculturalism is about diversity and cultural differences, which lead to social equality and justice among all cultures. Cai is against the concept of more cultures meaning more diverse literature, as it conflicts with the fundamental assumptions of multiculturalism.

Multicultural literature might be defined in many terms to different people. Cai describes three possible interpretations of multicultural literature, which are world literature, cross-cultural literature, and parallel literature. The first interpretation of multicultural literature is world literature, which includes literature from all cultures, with no distinction between the dominant and other cultures. Cai argues that the definition of multicultural literature is focused on how many cultures should be covered. He claims, "multicultural literature should include as many cultures as possible with no distinction between the dominant and dominated" (Cai, 1998, P.313). The goal of multicultural literature is to understand, accept, and appreciate all the cultures.

The second interpretation is cross-cultural literature which focuses on racial and ethnical issues in multicultural literature. It includes only literature from cultures that are marginalized out of inequality, discrimination, and oppression. Without these issues, the term multicultural loses its meaning, Cai argues,

Multiculturalism is about diversity and inclusion, but what is more important, it is also about power structures and struggles. Its goal is not just to understand, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, but also to ultimately transform the existing social order to ensure greater voice and authority to the marginalized cultures, and to achieve social equality and justice among all cultures so that people of different cultural backgrounds can live happily together in a truly democratic world. (Cai, 1998, P.313)

Cai's concept of multiculturalism shows how important it is to understand that equality among all cultures and diversities is a necessity to live in harmony.

The third interpretation is about parallel literature, multicultural literature should focus on racial issues and people of different colors, whose voices have been omitted from literature, as they are not easily given a voice in society. Cai believes the issues of race are so critical that they should be the focus of multicultural literature. He adds, "the term of multicultural literature is also treated as though it were the equivalent of multiethnic literature" (Cai, 1998, P.314). Essentially, all literature examines cultural issues, but multicultural literature should only focus on the examination of marginalized cultures. Multicultural literature marks the equal treatment of different cultures that help people overcome ignorance and be more respectful of others' cultural diversities.

Moving to multicultural children's literature, Ambika Gopalakrishnan defined it in *Multicultural Children's Literature: A Critical Issue Approach* as, "Multicultural children's literature is literature that is not of the mainstream...Rather, it is about groups who have been previously underrepresented and often marginalized by society as a whole, especially in depictions of children's literature"(Gopalakrishnan, 2011, P.5). Thus, according to Gopalakrishnan, multicultural children's literature should provide better validation of all children's experiences, which include a difference in language, race, gender, class, ethnicity, identity, and heritage. These groups are referred to as the parallel culture. Therefore, when children read about their personal experiences in books, they become more knowledgeable about certain life events. Children nowadays are exposed to violence and terrible events, Gopalakrishnan claims, "Death, war, starvation, terror, violence- everything is part of children's literature now, as it is, unfortunately, a part of some children's lives" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, P.4). Multicultural children's literature is specially written for children to view the life cycle realistically. The most important point that Gopalakrishnan raised is to differentiate between children's literature and other kinds of literature is that, "the most important point that distinguishes children's literature from other types of literature is that it validates all children's experiences" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, P.5). Multicultural children's literature is written to encourage children to read and learn more about the world around them, and also connect the stories to their lives. Additionally, multicultural children's literature enables marginalized children to see characters resembling them mirrored in the literature they read and listen to. This process facilitates building their self-esteem and pride in themselves as a part of their culture.

Multicultural children's literature appreciates, approaches, and treats the idea of accepting one's own identity and embraces the idea of being different. Klára Kašparcová defines the aims and purposes of multiculturalism based on literature. She states in *Multicultural Literature for children from different bilingual environment*,

Portraying multiculturalism in literature is actually a very natural way of expressing oneself and coping with the fact. The art of writing is then often used as a tool to express oneself and let others experience it through the storybook, identify with it or overcome prejudices and fear of otherness. (Kašparcová, 2015, P.23)

Children have to be exposed to different cultures and ethnicities by reading multicultural literature, to build compassion and respect towards others and themselves. It also presents the children with the opportunity to gain greater knowledge about the world geographically and culturally. Kašparcová states in her article,

It is believed that exposing children of all family backgrounds to this kind of literature has a positive impact on their development. Regarding children from mainstream society, it develops their understanding of cultural diversity and raises their sense of respect to those differences. (Kašparcová, 2015, P.24)

She believes that children who are exposed to multicultural literature, develop their understanding of the meaning of diversity .

Multicultural literature is a necessary field that children need to be exposed to during their childhood and adolescence. It plays a very important role in developing children's understanding across cultures. Children need to learn how to respect others and accept all the different diversities. As it is mentioned in *Multicultural Children's Literature: Through the eyes*

of many children by Donna Norton, “Positive multicultural literature has been used effectively to help readers identify cultural heritages, understand sociological change, respect the values of minority groups, raise aspirations, and expand imagination and creativity” (Norton, 2013, P. 2). Multicultural literature is a powerful tool that enables children to change their attitude towards other children from various cultures. It also supports children to get a better understanding of both their own culture and others' cultures. Through this deeper knowledge, relationships can be strengthened; it can also break down the gap between students from different cultural backgrounds. In addition to this, multicultural literature provides a more balanced and diverse society.

Multicultural children's literature promotes diverse experiences across cultures. By reading multicultural literature, children develop a better understanding of the world. As it was mentioned in *Across Cultures: A Guide to Multicultural Literature for Children*, by Kathy East and Rebecca Thomas, “Literacy provides opportunities to grow and improve” (East and Thomas, 2007, P.26). Multicultural literature gives children the chance to connect with people from different diversities in a better way. In other words, it provides children with everyday experiences to help them grow. East and Thomas claim, “children need opportunities to use literature and language and to connect these to what they know. Personal experiences such as losing a tooth or flying kites or getting ready for bed help children “see themselves” in books” (East and Thomas, 2007, P.44). By reading more about everyday experiences, children get to know more about themselves and their experiences. They can relate their own daily life and incidents, with some ideas and experiences in multicultural books. It helps children overcome any experience they go through and improve the reaction towards any circumstances.

Multicultural literature focuses on multicultural themes or diverse experiences, which leads children to respect others and their differences. It also helps them shape their own identity and promote their self-esteem. East and Thomas point out, “As children have new experiences, they may feel uncertain and insecure. They want to be reassured and feel comfortable with the changes in their lives” (East and Thomas, 2007, P.1). Children need to feel secure and more comfortable especially with the continuous changes that occur in their lives. Therefore, they should read literature that provides them with information, experience, and guidance that they can relate to. Multicultural literature grants children a clear idea about their self-image, identity, and individuality.

Additionally, multicultural literature is a mirror of all different cultures around the world. It enables children to develop understanding beyond themselves. Besides, it celebrates diversity among children across cultures. Children from all around the world must be able to see themselves and their lives in multicultural children's literature, to understand their own identity. If children understand the cultural difference in multicultural children's literature, they will be able to accept and engage with all different diversities. Multicultural children's literature highlights the fact that diverse people contribute to world information and knowledge development by sharing their different cultures. Diversity is a very important aspect of multicultural literature; it is good for children to see themselves through literature. Reading multicultural children's literature helps children to know more about their culture, history, identity, and ethnicity.

Furthermore, multicultural children's literature offers windows into society, which is closely associated with social identity. As Maria Jose Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman explain in their book *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*,

Children need to see themselves reflected so as to affirm who they and their communities are. They also require windows through which they may view a variety of differences. Books are one way they learn about the world. Once these foundations of story and society are internalized, literature can be a conduct -a door- to engage children in social practice that functions for Social Justice” (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.1).

Multicultural children's literature is the mirror of society; it opens the window for children to understand their identity and the communities around them. When children see a variety of cultures and traditions represented in the literature, they shape their identity and accept others' diverse social identities. Multicultural children's literature is a door to engage children to learn more about the world. All multicultural children's literature materials can be considered as a cultural product that has the power to identify relations of class, race, and gender. Children position their own identity and understand more about different diverse identities by reading multicultural children's literature. Multicultural children's literature offers a chance to all children to link their experiences with people across lines of social differences. Botelho and Rudman mention, “children's exposure to diversity and the opening up to new ideas or to varying and even conflicting perspectives raises awareness of different rules, conduct, and thought, then this type of socialization is advantageous” (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.17). The process of reading multicultural children's literature exposes children to diverse social events that shape

their identity. It maintains children's ability to open up to different societies, cultures, and traditions.

Multicultural literature develops children's appreciation toward their family's heritage and their own identity. As East and Thomas argue, "By examining cultural practice and family traditions, children develop an appreciation for diversity" (East and Thomas, 2007, P.59). By reading multicultural books, children learn more about their culture and heritage. They also get the chance to be exposed to different cultures and identities. Multicultural books describe families' traditions and cultures by representing their food, costumes, and celebrations. Children can observe the contribution of different cultures and heritage in multicultural texts, by learning about the diverse social practices of different cultural groups. The first traditional tool in multicultural books is the representation of traditional food. East and Thomas confirm, "food offers an ideal way to promote comparisons among people" (East and Thomas, 2007, P.88). Children learn about their cultural heritage by reading about each country's traditional food. Traditional recipes and dishes in each country help children know more about their culture. The second traditional tool in multicultural books is the representation of clothes and traditional costumes. Children gain a better understanding of culture by reading about the different kinds of clothes and costumes that each inherits from their country. The selection of colors and designs used for the dresses of each culture sufficiently represents its traditions. East and Thomas imply, "children can explore garments from their own heritage" (East and Thomas, 2007, P.7). Children feel more comfortable with their traditional clothes when they see their traditional costumes introduced in multicultural books as it helps them celebrate the differences between diversity. The third representation of traditional tools in multicultural books is traditional celebrations.

Different celebrations across the world offer many opportunities for children to explore their culture and traditions. Each country has different ways of celebrating; children learn more about the world by comparing and contrasting their way of celebrating with other nations. These traditional elements allow young children opportunities to develop their understanding of different cultures and widen their diverse backgrounds.

Multicultural topics are often raised in children's picture books, to contribute to the development of the intercultural awareness of children. These topics must reflect the realities of a multicultural society. Another definition for the term multicultural children's literature was given by Sofia Gavriilidis in her article "Multicultural Children's Literature". She defined the multicultural children's literature as, "A brief and general definition of the term, though, describes books for children that treat issues of cultural diversity, either racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious or even biological and social and aim at contributing to the development of the intercultural awareness of young readers." (Gavriilidis, 2001, P.1). Multicultural picture books reflect the realities of multicultural society and help children to accept different identities and cultures. These types of books are used extensively in schools and classrooms that have children from diverse backgrounds.

Multicultural picture books are powerful tools that provide awareness for children, to develop an understanding and respect towards people of different cultures, while appreciating their own identity and cultural heritage. Botelho and Rudman claim, "Critical multicultural investigations of children's literature focused on the analysis of power relations as factors in the trends of what gets written, illustrated and published" (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.2). The

meaning that is driven from a picture book, for example, is not only exclusive to language but also depends on the illustrations. For children to understand their culture, they must be exposed to the linguistic and visual elements in picture books. By understanding the language children increase their knowledge about their culture, while illustrations help children connect with other cultures. Botelho and Rudman argue that, "How to use language constructs who we are as people, as cultures, and as a society... as a way to illustrate how to conduct cultural studies" (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.2). The process of combining and merging language and illustrations helps to show how multicultural literature represents different cultures. Cultural representations that are established through representations of written text and illustrations are associated with the position of self and social identity. Botelho and Rudman wrote, "critical multicultural analysis of children's literature focuses on the examination of power as a factor in what gets written, illustrated, and published. In other words, meaning found in children's books is not for language alone but from institutional practice, power relations and social position"(Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.101). The relation between the written text and illustrations mirrors the society and implies social justice. Children can only make sense of reality by reading multicultural children's literature. Written and visual language is not fixed and it does not have a stable meaning as it varies from one child to another and can depend on their background and their knowledge. Multicultural children's literature goes beyond sketching children's life. It reshapes children's cultural imagination and ideology within a diverse society.

Multicultural children's literature represents cultural groups including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans (Hispanics), Arab Americans, and Native Americans. It reveals their diverse identity and social relations. Botelho and Rudman assume that when the

authors and illustrators write multicultural children's books, they employ an essential view of culture and social practice. Artists bring a stable cultural reality into the text. Botelho and Rudman point out,

Our findings demonstrate that we cannot discount the cultural membership of the author. The insider authors and illustrators are more versed in or have more access to culturally specific discourses and histories than outsiders to the cultures. These writers and artists tend to have a greater understanding of how language is used and how power is exercised within and outside the culture... Many of these writers bring the reader up close to the complexities of culture and its power relations” (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, P.104).

Authors and illustrators represent their cultural experiences among their texts; you can follow their identities in the main idea in the books. They might have similar experiences to their book characters.

Authors and illustrators write and draw about their cultural experiences and in doing so, empower that text with a stable cultural reality. They can represent their identity by portraying their traditions, culture, and social practice. In the picture book *Sitti's Secret* Naomi Nye represents her Arab American identity throughout the text. Though Nye chooses to write her picture book in English, the Arabic language is not absent from the picture book. This is because Nye is aiming at foregrounding her own identity. Nye tells the passionate story of a young girl who goes to visit her grandmother in Palestine. Throughout the book, she puts many details that urge cultural acceptance and understanding of diversity among people. The main character in *Sitti's Secret* is a little Palestinian-American girl called Mona. Her father is originally from Palestine, and they live in America. Mona takes comfort in thinking that as the sun sets in

America, it is simply starting to ascend over her grandma on "the other side of the earth". She travels from America to Palestine to visit her "Sitti", which is used to denote "grandmother" in many Arab cultures. Mona cannot understand her grandmother's language, she does not speak Arabic and her grandmother, on the other hand, is not familiar with the English language. At first, Mona's father translates for them, but then Mona and her grandmother create a language on their own, they learn ways to communicate with each other without using words. They create a bond between each other regarding language and distant barriers. When Mona returns back home to America, she writes a letter to the president telling him that Palestine deserves peace. She mentions in the letter her growing concerns about the situation in the Middle East. She wants to convince him that people in Palestine are kind and good people and if he gets to see her grandmother, he will like her. This picture book expresses the love and connection between Mona and her 'Sitti', even when they are miles apart. It also highlights some of the traditional and cultural practices in Palestine.

Cultures and traditions are very precious and remarkable in the Arab world. Nye portrayed the Palestinian traditions by introducing their traditional ways to get water in the old days. She claims:

"My grandmother likes to unpin the laundry in the evening so she can watch the women of the village walking back from the spring with jugs of water on their heads. She used to do that, too. My father says that women don't really need to get water from the spring anymore but they like to. It is something from the old days they don't want to forget"

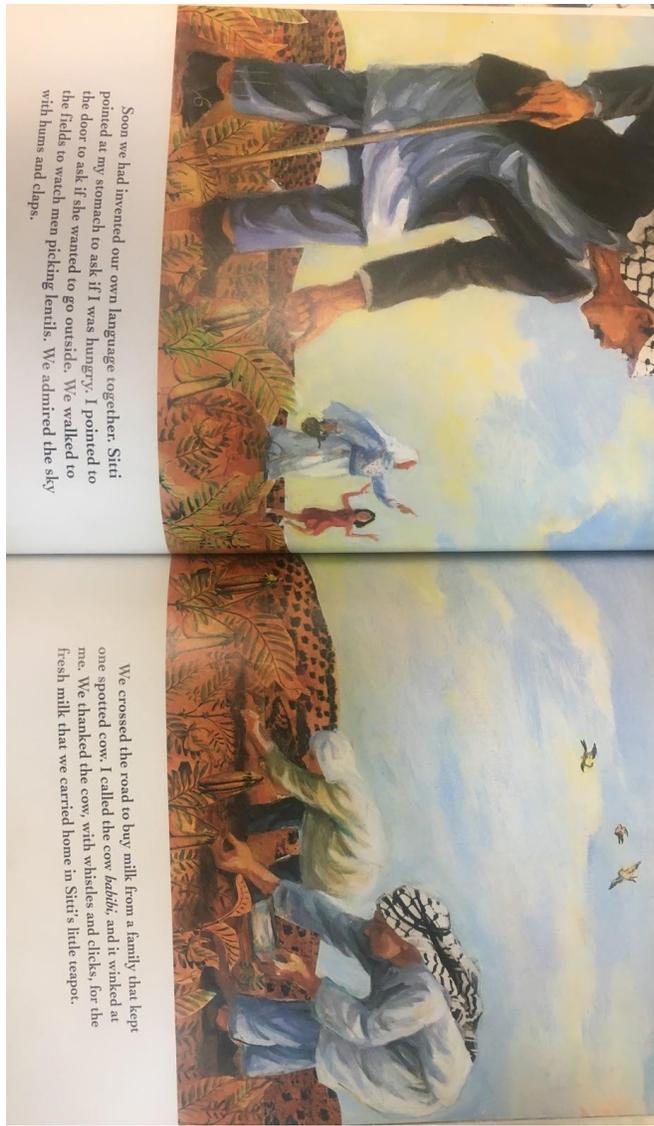
(Nye ,1994)

Palestinian women like to revive their own culture and identity so they never lose their roots. Nye wanted to praise her homeland traditions and glorify the past.

Nye also implanted a statement that reveals the traditional costume of the Palestinian woman. As Mona first saw her grandmother, Nye points out: "A few curls of dark hair peeked out of her scarf on one side, and a white curl peeked out on the other side. I wanted her to take off the scarf so I could see if her hair was stripped." (Nye, 1994). Mona wanted her grandmother to take off her veil to see her hair, this scene highlights the point of difference between the two cultures. Nye positively introduces the Islamic concept of veil, as Palestinian women normally cover their hair with a scarf or a veil, as a part of their Arab identity.

Nancy Carpenter made the illustrations of *Sitti's Secret*, she used a lot of visual elements to create this text. When Mona was in America thinking of her Palestinian homeland and her grandmother, the colors of the illustration were mainly cold and dark, which expresses her sadness and longing for her homeland. When Mona arrived in Palestine, the colors of the book changed into warm and bright color shades, which indicates Mona's happiness. Carpenter also portrays the Arab cultures and traditions by displaying the traditional cloth and the veil of the Palestinian women in her drawings.

Carpenter represented the Palestinian traditions and cultures in many ways. First, she installed an Arabic word inside her illustration, which was "حبيبي" "Habibi", which means my love. This is a great gesture of expressing Mona's grandmother's Arabic language. Using a word from Nye's mother tongue language glorify her love to her homeland.



Both Nye and Carpenter successfully introduced many cultural and traditional practices through the written text and the visual illustrations. The words and the illustrations are symmetrical and tell the same story.

To conclude, children's literature and especially multicultural children's picture books are a very powerful tool for helping children understand their homes, cultures, traditions, beliefs, identity, communities, and the world. Multicultural literature describes how people live in

different areas of the world. It represents an accurate representation of the culture it portrays. Through these real representations, children can build a clear understanding of cultural heritage. Parents, teachers, and community members should help children develop an affinity and a passion for reading multicultural literature, as it helps them shape their character. Multicultural children's literature provides children with a sense of affirmation about their cultural identity, which is essential for the respect, and understanding of other people from different cultural backgrounds. It also promotes children's discovery of identity and personal language. It has the power to influence children positively, to enlighten them with a love of learning, and provide a looking glass into the world. Words and illustrations in multicultural picture storybooks work together to create a strong image of the new multicultural world around children. The proper utilization of those literary tools to accomplish the goals of presenting reality and provoking amendment is crucial to making a high-quality piece of multicultural children's literature. Within multicultural children's literature, there should be coherence between the text and the illustrations. In evaluating the quality of the illustrations, it is very important to decode the usage of the visual elements to add something unique to the piece of literature. As language and words must be rich and powerful to provide the text with a perfect story, so must the use of these elements in the literature. The analysis of *Setti's Secret* focuses on the presentation of the cultural and traditional details presented in text and illustrations.

Finally, multicultural children's literature serves as a powerful tool that enables children to gain a better understanding of both their own culture and the cultures of others. It also assists children to understand their identities and gives them a sense of belonging and acceptance of their heritage. Multicultural children's literature is the key that opens windows and doors to understand our identity.

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