BUILDING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS THROUGH GLOBAL LITERATURE

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Learn how to use global literature to help students understand their personal cultural identities, their responsibility to take action in their worlds, and how to express these understandings in art.

Jenna gathered her first graders on the carpet. Over the previous three weeks, they’d read and discussed the stories and art in 12 picturebooks about people who took action to address a problem. Now Jenna invited the children to look across the books for common themes in writing and art. With the books lined up along the dry erase board tray, the children took turns making connections. Vivian said, “Unspoken (Cole, 2012) and Four Feet, Two Sandals (Williams & Mohammed, 2007) are both about friendship. They take action by giving something special to their friend.” Lillian shared, “In The Curious Garden (Brown, 2009) and A Child’s Garden (Foreman, 2009), the artists both use contrast to show what’s important in the illustrations.” When Jenna asked, “What are the big ideas that grow out of all of the books?” Landon suggested, “All the characters saw something that wasn’t right and they fixed it.”

This example from Jenna’s classroom (Loomis, 2013) demonstrates one way we are using global literature to help students understand their personal cultural identities, their responsibility to take action in their worlds, and how to express these understandings in art.

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literature in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms to develop children’s intercultural understandings and their knowledge of how artists communicate. Landon’s comment reveals that he understood the “big idea” that the characters in the stories saw a problem that touched their hearts and chose to act.

Global literature, like multicultural literature, encourages learners to respect and accept people who are different than themselves and break attitudes that are oppressive and prejudicial. Global literature, however, focuses on cultural groups in a range of social, political, family, and economic situations outside of America, while multicultural literature shows cultural groups within America (Lehman, Freeman, & Scharer, 2010).

Definitions of global literature vary from “books that are international either by topic or origin of publication or author” (Lehman et al., 2010, p. 17) to more comprehensive definitions that include multicultural literature. Our work is guided by Hadaway’s (2007) perspective that global literature “honors and celebrates diversity, both within and outside the United States, in terms of culture, race, ethnicity, language, religion, social and economic status, sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual ability...[it] includes both multicultural and international literature...and all types of diversity” (p. 5).

Because we work with young children, the global literature we read is primarily picturebooks. Since, by definition, the art in picturebooks is just as essential to the story as the written text, we also discuss how artists represent meaning (Kiefer, 1995; Sipe, 2008). For example, we talk about why the artist may have selected particular colors or drawn lines in certain ways. We have found that examining communication through art challenges children to think critically, attend to details, and make strong inferences (e.g., Maderazo et al., 2010; Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, & Aghalarov, 2012, 2013).

Global literature is central to our work because it supports children’s intercultural understandings. Interculturalism is an attitude that permeates thinking and the curriculum with a focus on creating understandings of cultural perspectives (i.e., ways of living, acting, believing, and valuing in the world) and global issues (Short, 2009).

Research demonstrates that story builds understandings and community (e.g., Galda & Cullinan, 2003; Martinez & Roser, 2003). Global literature (fiction and nonfiction) is story that develops intercultural understandings and helps readers make sense of the world (Short, 2012). As advances in technology make communication around the world instantaneous and demographic changes increase diversity (“Stirring the Pot,” 2009), a respect for and valuing of people who live, believe, and think differently than we do is essential.

Locating global literature to use it in the classroom, however, takes conscious effort. Statistics show that 40–80% of the children’s literature published in Europe and major Asian countries was originally published elsewhere and translated; in the United States, the figure is less than 2% (Bond, 2006).

While economic and production issues influence translations, opportunities to read translated books create understandings of global cultures (Bond, 2006). The lack of translated books in the U.S. makes this more difficult for American children. Banks (2004) argues, “Literate citizens in a diverse democratic society should be reflective, moral, and active citizens in an interconnected global world... The world’s greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write [but] from...different cultures, races, religions, and nations being unable to get along and to work together to solve the world’s intractable problems” (p. 298).

In this article, we share our observations of children’s engagement and learning through global literature related to their intercultural understandings. We particularly focus on developing children’s personal cultural identities and how those identities result in ways they take action to address issues they identify. Woven throughout are ways that we highlight communicating meanings through art.

Pause and Ponder

Think about the literature in your classroom. What books do you use with settings in other cultures around the world? How can you build in more global literature to help broaden your students’ perspectives?

In what ways do you incorporate aspects of your students’ cultural identities into the curriculum?

How can you encourage your students to look for ways to take action in your classroom, community, home, and world to make the world a better place?

“Global literature...develops intercultural understandings and helps readers make sense of the world.”
Setting the Context
We are six public school teachers in two schools and two teacher educators. Christie teaches prekindergarten, Liz (Elizabeth) and Robbie kindergarten, and Laura and Michelle first grade at a metropolitan school (38% European American, 27% African American, 16% Hispanic/Latino, 14% Asian, 5% two or more races; 41% free/reduced meals) on the East Coast. Jenna teaches first grade at a school in a rural area (88% European American, 2% African American, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Asian, + 4% two or more races; 11% free/reduced meals). Prisca and Ray teach at Towson University. The eight of us have been a literacy community for several years, exploring how global literature develops children’s intercultural understandings (Martens & Martens, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

A Curriculum That Is International
We organize our work around A Curriculum That Is International, developed by Kathy Short (2009; Short & Thomas, 2011). Short based this curricular framework on her studies of global literature and the work of others in the fields of global education and intercultural education.

The framework outlines four areas of exploration, around which teachers create engagements with global literature at any grade level: (1) personal cultural identities, (2) ways people live in specific global cultures, (3) different cultural perspectives present in any unit of study, and (4) global issues that provide opportunities for taking action. These areas are interrelated and build on each other to develop children’s intercultural understandings from a critical perspective.

To enact this curriculum, teachers locate global literature related to their focus area and create text sets. Text sets are collections of books (fiction and nonfiction) that provide a range of alternate perspectives to help children see the complexities in our world (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996).

“We want learners to understand culture as shared beliefs and ways of living (i.e., religion, gender, geographical regions, language, class, family structure), not merely ethnicity.”

Young Children as Cultural Beings
To help our 4- to 6-year-olds think about themselves as cultural beings, we incorporate experiences that highlight culture. When school begins, we survey parents to learn aspects of their cultural backgrounds, including the country or countries from which the family originated, languages spoken at home, holidays the family celebrates, how and why the child received his or her name, and what the name means.

The home countries are plotted on a world map that remains in the classroom all year. Each child’s photograph around the outer border of the map is connected with yarn to the country or countries from which their family originated. Teachers and children refer to it throughout the year when they read global literature, talk about holidays (e.g., Diwali, Cinco de Mayo), and so on. While some children have initial difficulty grasping that their ancestors lived in another country, they begin to appreciate who they are in their families’ cultural histories.

Personal Cultural Identities: Learning About Self
Understanding self as a cultural being is at the core of A Curriculum That Is International. We want learners to understand culture as shared beliefs and ways of living (i.e., religion, gender, geographical regions, language, class, family structure), not merely ethnicity (Geertz, 1973).

When learners realize their background and cultural experiences influence their personal perspectives, interculturalism begins (Short, 2009). As they appreciate the significance of culture in their lives, they appreciate and respect its significance in others’ lives (Pattnaik, 2003). Banks (2004) states, “Self-acceptance is a prerequisite to the acceptance and valuing of others” (p. 302).

Cultural Identity Text Set
The Cultural Identity Text Set invites children to think about who they are as cultural beings. Through discussions, the children connect with aspects of culture and respond to the books orally or through writing or art. Figure 1 lists examples from this text set and art concepts we highlight. We discuss a few additional books in this section.
My Name is Sangoel (Williams & Mohammed, 2009) is the story of Sangoel and his mother and sister, who move from Sudan to the U.S. after their father/husband dies in a war that leaves them refugees. Sangoel treasures his Dinka name that his father and grandfather held before him and is bothered when no one in his new community can pronounce it. Then, he thinks of a way to help his classmates know his name, and he begins to feel at home in the U.S. Because it is my grandmother’s middle name too.” Like Sangoel, the children appreciate their unique characteristics and their cultural heritage.

In The Invisible Boy (Ludwig, 2013), Brian feels invisible at school. No one talks to him or invites him to play, so he keeps to himself and draws. When children laugh at Justin for eating his Korean lunch with chopsticks, Brian and Justin become friends. Artist Patrice Barton draws everything on the beginning pages in color, except for Brian, who is in pencil. By the end of the story, though, Brian is also in color. Through the contrast of pencil and color Barton powerfully conveys feelings of loneliness and acceptance.

Laura reads The Invisible Boy to help her first graders think about their actions and how those actions (intentional or not) can make others feel. After discussing the story, Laura invites the children to think of a time they felt invisible and draw or write about it, contrasting color and pencil as Barton did. The children have no problem with this! Carrie, for example, drew herself small and in pencil in the background and three friends in color with their arms around each other in the front center of the page. She wrote, “When Michaela and Brittany and Emily said, ‘You are not my BFF [best friend forever],’ it made me feel like I was invisible.” Laura states, “By reflecting on times someone’s actions made them feel invisible, the children become aware of how their actions affect others. The Invisible Boy helps children consider their identity as a friend.”

Robbie chooses You Be You (Kranz, 2011) to read with her kindergartners because “it’s a story that celebrates diversity and individuality. The book offers opportunities to talk about similarities and differences and accepting others.” In the book, Adri explores the illustrations of watercolor and photographs woven into a meaningful whole, just as Sangoel’s life of mixed cultural experiences becomes a meaningful whole. Michelle invites her students to create a collage in the same style that shows something about them.

Michelle glues a photograph of each child’s head in the upper part of a paper and information about their name toward the bottom. The children then draw their bodies, create a background, and cut objects from newspapers and magazines to show something about who they are.

Leah, for example, is an avid soccer player and drew herself standing by a player and drew herself standing by a ball she cut out of newspaper. The information on her name read, “My name is Leah. It is a Biblical name that means ‘weary.’ My parents made a list of names that they liked and tried to pick one that was not too popular. My middle name is Diane and I was given that name because it is my grandmother’s middle name too.” Like Sangoel, the children appreciate their unique characteristics and their cultural heritage.

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**Figure 1. Select Books From the Identity Text Set**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title, Author, and Cultural Setting</th>
<th>Connection to Identity</th>
<th>Art Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Featherless Chicken (Chen, 2006) Taiwan</td>
<td>Be proud of who you are; don’t judge yourself or others by outer appearances</td>
<td>• Primary and secondary hues distinguish different characters  • Movement shown with brush strokes, repeated lines and shapes, diagonal lines  • Confidence shown through body language, facial expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Monique (Rousaki, 2003) Greece</td>
<td>Be proud of who you are and let your individuality shine</td>
<td>• Red is Monique’s unique color; symbolizes stop, love  • Facial features exaggerated to emphasize uniqueness  • Confidence shown through body language, facial expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suki’s Kimono (Uegaki, 2005) Japan and Canada</td>
<td>Be yourself despite what others think and stand up for what you believe</td>
<td>• Primary colors, emphasis on red (cultural)  • Movement shown with repeated lines, shapes  • Confidence shown through body language, facial expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Be Me, I’ll Be You (Mandelbaum, 1990) France</td>
<td>Accept and be proud of who you are; don’t judge yourself or others by outer appearances</td>
<td>• Contrasts (value, color, shape, texture) parallel contrasts in family members  • Emotions shown through body positioning, facial expressions</td>
</tr>
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*After discussing the story, Michelle and the children examine artist Catherine Stock’s mixed-media and the children examine artist Catherine Stock’s mixed-media and backgrounds builds acceptance and nurtures the celebration of diversity in our classroom family.*
“Creating [cultural x-rays] helps children understand the complexities in people and cultures.”

ocean and is amazed at how colorful his underwater world is with countless varieties of fish, illustrated as painted rocks. Robbie invites her students to paint their own rockfish using the colors and designs they want. Together, they then talk about their rockfish, how they are similar and different, and what makes each one special. Nate commented, “We are like the fish. We are all different,” and Caroline added, “We’re special. We make new friends.”

Liz (Soper, 2013) likes to read You and Me Together: Moms, Dad, and Kids Around the World (Kerley, 2005) with her kindergartners toward the end of the school year. This nonfiction book is color photographs of parents and children involved in everyday activities, such as play, prayer, conversation, and work. Liz states, “During the year, we read and discuss stories about different cultures, like Korean, Chinese, and Indian. You and Me Together helps us reflect back on those earlier conversations because it includes families from a range of cultures.” As Liz read the book recently, Charlotte suggested, “Why don’t we make a book like that about us?” Great idea! Liz invited parents to send in photos of their child and a family member to be part of a class book. The children provided text to go with their photos. The book was a rich display of the uniqueness of each child and his or her family. For his picture, Sean wrote, “I like swimming in the ocean with my dad.” Jayden wrote for his picture, “[My mom and I] are making silly faces because we wanted to look like clowns. It is sooo fun!”

The Cultural Identity Text Set challenges the children to think about themselves in relation to their families, friends, and world; fears, hopes, and dreams; and unique qualities that make them special. The children reflect on these to create cultural x-rays.

Cultural X-Rays
Cultural x-rays are gingerbread-type outlines on which physical or visible characteristics are written around the outside (i.e., hair and eye color, gender, skin color, hobbies and interests) and important things the person values (i.e., family, things they care about) are written inside the heart (Short, 2009). Creating them helps children understand the complexities in people and cultures.

In their first-grade classrooms, Michelle, Laura, and Jenna begin creating cultural x-rays early in the school year to think more deeply about story characters before having children create their own. After reading Suki’s Kimono (Uegaki, 2005), for example, Laura’s first graders helped her create a cultural x-ray for Suki.

Various children suggested drawing the kimono, dark hair, and shoes on the Suki figure and writing “girl,” “in first grade,” and “has two sisters” around the outside. For the heart, Karla said, “Write that Suki loves her obachan and her family and that she doesn’t care what others say about her kimono.”

Other story characters Laura uses for cultural x-rays include Sebastian (de Deu Prats, 2005), Wemberly (Henkes, 2000), Guji Guji (Chen, 2004), and Marisol (Brown, 2011). As the line-up of characters’ x-rays grows, children make connections between them.

After creating Marisol’s x-ray, for example, Carlos realized, “Hey, Marisol and Suki are both proud of who they are!” That led to a conversation about being confident in yourself. Laura has found that “by making cultural x-rays, my students begin to understand that what’s in someone’s heart motivates their actions.”

Distinguishing inner and outer characteristics is challenging, but gradually, the children sort that out. Jenna’s student Jared explained it this way: “The Ravens [Baltimore’s professional football team] are my favorite team. If I’m thinking about how important they are to me, I put them in my heart, but if I’m wearing my Ravens jersey, it’s on the outside.”

Figure 2 shows the cultural x-ray Abby (first grade) created for herself. Around the outside, she wrote, “girl, brown hair, I like pink, gymnastics, dance, I am me, I help, I like to read, person,” because she believes others know that by observing her. In her heart, outlined with other hearts,
she wrote, “family, friends, my fish, my frogs, school, nice, caring” because those things are important to her. Some children include their cultural heritage on their x-rays. Connor, for example, drew an Irish flag, and Akeelah wrote that she was from India. In his heart, Richard included his hanbok [Korean traditional clothing] because “It is very special to me.”

In prekindergarten, Christie (Furnari, 2013) adapted cultural x-rays to help her children celebrate diversity and understand how and why they are unique. “Cultural x-rays reinforce the ideas of same yet different, provide a large piece of work that represents the uniqueness of each child, and are a way for the children to see they are readers, writers, and artists.”

Prekindergarten cultural x-rays are about two feet tall (see Figure 3). Throughout the year, Christie reads books like Edward the Emu (Knowles, 1998) and Shades of People (Rotner & Kelly, 2009) to emphasize how special each child is. For the x-rays, she focuses on different body parts each week that the children create and write about, sometimes completing a sentence frame.

Christie starts with feet and shoes and reads Shoes, Shoes, Shoes (Morris, 1998), which shows the types of shoes people wear around the world. The children create their favorite shoes and write about them. Sandra, for example, completed the frame “I like to wear _____ shoes on my feet so I can ___” with “ballerina” shoes so she can “dance.”

After reading and discussing Come Out and Play (Ajmera & Ivanko, 2001), about children playing around the world, the prekindergartners created shorts, skirts, and legs and wrote about what they like to play. For the hearts, Christie cuts out heart shapes and the children write and draw words and pictures of things they love. In her heart, for example, Jessica included loving her sisters, her parents, and the color purple. Christie attaches the hearts to the back of the shirts and folds the outer ends of the shirts over the hearts. Children use fasteners to keep the shirts closed and the hearts (attached to an accordion fold) pop out when the shirts are opened.

When the cultural x-rays are complete, Christie interviews each child about it. The interviews reveal the children have positive perceptions of themselves and appreciate their unique complexities. Allison’s responses included, “I want to be an animal doctor for animals…. I like to help my mom with my hands and I clean my room and watch my brother…. I am amazing.”

Taking Action to Make the World a Better Place
A critical aspect of children’s cultural identities is how they relate to others and the world. We want children to see themselves as integral members of their communities (home, school, neighborhood, and beyond) who assume responsibilities and question “what is,” imagine “what if,” and take action for social change (Freire, 1970; Short, 2011). As Banks (2004) states, we want our students to “develop global identifications [and] a deep understanding of the need to take action as citizens of the global community to help solve the world’s difficult global problems” (p. 301).

Global literature offers possibilities for discussions that develop children’s understandings of how to identify issues and take action to address them. Figure 4 contains a selection of other books from our Taking Action Text Set.

We read and discuss the stories, considering the problem characters identify, what makes this a problem, the action characters take, and the result. Discussions also include how the artists represent meaning in the illustrations.

Michelle has found that One Child (Cheng, 2000) makes the importance of taking action very clear. “My first graders pick up on the need to take action immediately with this book. The illustrations are a powerful part of telling the story. In the beginning, as the girl, the ‘one child,’ surveys the environment, with pollution, trash, people fighting, etc., the images are dark and gray. As she works to make the world a better place, Woolman, the artist, gradually incorporates more color.”

The art helps readers realize the effects of taking action. Khyree
Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature

Figure 4: Select Books From the Taking Action Text Set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title, Author, and Cultural Setting</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
<th>Art Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Curious Garden (Brown, 2009) urban area</td>
<td>planting, nurturing, inspiring others to do the same</td>
<td>Contrast of grays vs. greens and bright colors (destruction/pollution vs. life) Unusual location of garden illustrates how the garden is curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Child (Cheng, 2000) different places in the environment</td>
<td>walking/marching for a cause, making a speech, building, singing, making signs</td>
<td>Contrast of grays vs. bright colors (destruction/pollution vs. life) Effects of child’s actions illustrated by changes in color Contrast in child’s facial features, from sadness to happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Come the Zebra (Barasch, 2009) Kenya</td>
<td>making friends, saving/protectiong a young child, bringing different communities together</td>
<td>Contrasts between the two boys (clothing, etc.) emphasize differences in communities Simple life lived by the characters highlighted by artistic technique of pen, ink, and watercolor and use of little detail in the art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Feet, Two Sandals (Williams &amp; Mohammed, 2007) Pakistan</td>
<td>sharing sandals, making friends</td>
<td>Mute earth tones for camp parallels the dullness of the girls’ lives Lack of detail reflects simple life in a refugee camp Brightly colored clothing highlights the girls’ humanness and their hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

summarized the story this way: “One girl’s world was gray and she realized that if you stop littering and start planting you can make a difference in the world. If you can imagine, anything can happen.” Children think of ways they can take action, too. Clair suggested, “Turn off the light if you don’t need it, walk if you can [and don’t drive], plant a seed, and throw away trash.”

Children Taking Action

While we have a Taking Action Text Set, discussions of the concept of taking action begin early in the school year. The text set, when we read it, offers opportunities to “label” the actions children have been taking, enrich their identities as responsible citizens, and consider global issues that need action. Four primary ways of taking action have emerged in our work with young children.

Taking Action With Ourselves. We begin with the children taking action by being accountable for themselves. With her prekindergartners, for example, Christie uses I Like Me (Carlson, 1988). “When the pig in the book falls down, she picks herself up. When she is sad, she cheers herself up. We return to this throughout the year. I want the children to be responsible for themselves, to check their skin if they fall and if they’re okay, then get up and keep going.”

Through books and discussions, the children become more independent and responsible. When Christie interviewed Ezra at the end of the year, he said, “My brain…helps me think. If I make a mistake, I try and try again.”

Taking Action for Others. Being a good friend is also a way to take action. One book Liz and Robbie like to read with their kindergartners is Listen to the Wind: The Story of Dr. Greg and Three Cups of Tea (Mortenson & Roth, 2009). They talk about how Dr. Greg was a friend who took action by building a school for children in Pakistan. Following artist Susan Roth’s art, the kindergartners make collage pictures and write stories about friendship. Jacob wrote about finding a lost ball and Caroline about picking flowers for her family.

In first grade, after reading Each Kindness (Woodson, 2012), Han decided to write a story about being a friend. It read, in part, “First you have to be nice…. If someone is hurt, don’t leave them…. If someone needs something you can give it to them.” Saleah wrote, “If I cannot fit in clothes, I will give them to kids who have no clothes.”


We also emphasize taking action in the classroom, school, and home and community environments. The metropolitan school is a “Green School” with a meadow, a rain garden, a trail of native trees, a Bayscape garden filled with plants native to the area, and a bluebird trail on the school grounds.

Maintaining the Bayscape is one of the projects Michelle’s first graders take on (Doyle, 2013). She says, “By talking about erosion, studying the native plants, mulching, and pulling weeds, the children realize that their actions matter. They develop a respect and sense of protectiveness for this area.”

The Bayscape is not fenced and is near the playground. The first graders quickly discover the importance of keeping it safe. They make posters (e.g., “Please do not run in the Bayscape,” “Do not litter in the Bayscape!”) that they deliver to other classrooms, and they occasionally share reminders during the school’s morning announcements. In addition, after learning in science that the checkerspot, the state butterfly, is endangered due to deer eating the turtlehead plant, which the butterflies need to live, the children decided they should add turtlehead plants to the Bayscape to help the checkerspots survive.
Taking Action in Small Ways (That Add Up!). While many global books address major ways of taking action, such as cleaning an oil spill (Grindley, 1995), bringing electricity to an African village (Kamkwamba & Mealer, 2012), or planting trees (Codell, 2012), we don’t want to overlook the countless little ways children take action each day, often without being aware. Those are important, too!

*Ordinary Mary’s Extraordinary Deed* (Pearson, 2002) makes this point. When Jenna read this book with her first graders, the children commented that it wasn’t like other books. Marty said, “This is like *Because Amelia Smiled* (Stein, 2012). They take action in little ways, not big ways like in other books.” Jenna wanted to make sure the children clearly understood that those little ways matter.

The next day, she printed 3-inch by 8-inch slips of paper that read, “Ordinary students are taking action! How extraordinary! _____ took action by _____ when ______.” Over the following days, the children filled in slips with ways they took action. Emma took action by “letting my brother Carl sleep with me when he was lonely at night,” Sarah by “finding Mrs. Loomis’s timer when she could not find it,” Jack by “helping my sister Maddie find her earring when she lost it,” and Vivian by “protecting a turtle when it was in the middle of the road.”

At the end of the week, the children worked together to make a chain by looping a strip through the ring made by another strip and gluing it into another ring. When they finished, the children measured their chain at 18 feet! Jenna reflected, “The children were amazed! They quickly realized that their little actions do make a difference!”

Committing to Taking Action

To connect to their cultural identities, the first graders create and illustrate stories or posters on ways they take action. Topics include, for example, turning off the lights, using both sides of paper, donating toys, and protecting trees for birds and animals and to clean the air.

Bryan wrote about how he and Devin defended their friend Donald from a bully. Bryan made the background on the first page gray because “everything was doom and not nice and bad.” On the second page, Bryan’s art included speech bubbles for himself, Devin, and the bully. Bryan explained, “I put red around [Devin’s and my] speech bubbles and not [the bully’s] because I’m showing you pay attention to these speech bubbles instead of that one…. It’s contrast.” Donald is dressed in yellow, a warm color, on this page because “he’s feeling kind of good.”

Claire is passionate about monk seals and created a poster about how they are becoming endangered from getting tangled in nets. Her art showed a monk seal choking in a net: “[The yellow paper shows this] is almost done healing, [the orange paper] still has a little time… [and the red paper] hasn’t been healing but it’s coming up” Claire’s poster read, “Stop throwing nets into the sea.” Claire’s concern for monk seals sparked a concern for other endangered animals, too, and she made postcards to raise that awareness.

While we discuss global issues and needs, the issues our young learners identify for taking action are grounded in their lives. The Taking Action Text Set, though, begins developing their awareness of broader issues and the importance of them being active responsible citizens in our world. As they mature, the children’s awareness of “what is,” imaginings of “what if,” and actions for change will also grow.

Closing Thoughts

As 4- to 6-year-olds, our young learners are only on the threshold of deeper understandings of cultural identity and taking action related to global issues, the foci of this article. The children are developing richer understandings of themselves as complex cultural beings, a deeper appreciation of others and diverse perspectives in the world, and a perception of themselves as capable problem-solvers who take action. In Landon’s words, our hope is that, as confident cultural beings, if they “[see] something that [isn’t] right…they [fix] it.”