# CHALLENGING SINGLE STORIES:
## Critical Engagements and Careful Considerations When Pairing Picturebooks About Immigration

Paul H. Ricks, Terrell A. Young, and Sara Koford

IN JULY 2009, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED Talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story" in which she described how exposure to and acceptance of single stories (i.e., narratives reductively representing a one-size-fits-all version of people and their experiences) can create damaging misunderstandings and prejudice. Many of these single stories result from tellers' deficient knowledge, though some are promulgated with malicious intent.

Adichie (2009) recalled that at an early age she read only American and British books, and her tales as a young writer included blue-eyed boys and girls who ate apples, talked about the weather, and drank ginger beer. She had never been exposed to characters with "skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails" (2:26), so she accepted the single story that all books were about white children. She didn't imagine that books could be about people who looked and lived like she did. However, she experienced "a mental shift" (2:20) in what stories could and should be like when she was finally introduced to books by African writers.

As an elementary teacher and two children's literature professors, the authors of this article are interested in how the words and insights of Adichie (2009)

> **We wish to examine how pairing two texts can challenge stereotypes and help young readers to dismantle othering narratives about immigrants who come to the United States by way of the southern border.**

can guide educators as they prepare to engage young readers in critical conversations. More specifically, we wish to examine how pairing two texts can challenge stereotypes (Short, 2017) and help young readers to dismantle othering narratives about immigrants who come to the United States by way of the southern border. Adichie (2009) asserted that limitation to a single story "robs people of dignity" and "makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult" (13:57). A single story also "emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" (14:04). In this article, we provide educators with a critical multicultural analysis of two paired picturebooks in an effort to demonstrate how said texts can both disrupt and—if we are not careful—re-create single stories that deserve to be interrogated.

### Review of Related Literature

As stated above, in this study we examine possible disruptions and reifications of stereotypes that can surface by pairing two illustrated texts for young readers. Such text pairings can offer "different perspectives on a topic" (Leland et al., 2013, p. 88) that in turn help students unpack the "variety of understandings and misunderstandings" (p. 84) they may have about the many worlds they inhabit. In the tradition of critical scholarship that focuses on the

ideological underpinnings and implications of children's texts (McCallum & Stephens, 2011) featuring characters often kept at the margins (e.g., immigrants who cross the U.S.–Mexico border), our analysis is guided by Adichie's (2009) words, which have found widespread influence across a variety of academic disciplines.

For instance, Makama et al. (2019) examined stereotypical single stories about African men and proposed "advancing a feminism that is committed to the promoting of positive masculinities rather than simply the surfacing of toxic masculinities" (p. 61). In an earlier study, Brooks (2018) analyzed and compared two novels by African authors that deconstructed a prevalent single story of poverty in African daily life. In a study that applied a single story that has gone beyond literature, A. Rosenblatt (2019) found that forensic scientists' response to violence—humanitarian forensic action—must be viewed more broadly through "divergent mandates, working methods, and definitions of humanitarianism" (p. 75) in response to mass violence in the world.

In other research, Linda Christensen (2012), director of the Oregon Writing Project, described an assignment in which she paired the essay "Just Walk On By: Black Men and Public Spaces" by Pulitzer Prize winner Brent Staples with Adichie's TED Talk. Christensen's aim was to get Black male high school students to write about and deconstruct the single stories told about them. Applying the single-story issue to teacher candidates, Roselle et al. (2013) designed a method to take these individuals beyond single stories by uncovering the cultural layers that define them. Additionally, Braunstein et al. (2020) developed an online discussion board for their preservice teachers of color in response to Adichie's TED Talk. They found three themes in the teacher candidates' responses—(a) resisting essentializing and racializing discourses, (b) recognizing hybrid identities, and (c) participating in solidarity and community building—that allowed them to make recommendations for creating more equitable teacher preparation programs.

## Methods

In the following sections, we outline our methods of analysis for critically examining *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* (Tonatiuh, 2013) and *Two White Rabbits* (Buitrago, 2015). We first discuss our identities and positionalities, which undoubtedly influenced our readings of these two texts. We then briefly present our rationale in pairing these picture-books. We conclude by describing the theoretical framework of our study and the ways it informed our analysis of these texts, which portray immigrants traveling across the U.S.–Mexico border.

### Participants

The three of us chose to engage with *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*, considering that our unique backgrounds, histories, and ways of seeing and being would likely affect how we examined the two picturebooks (Milner, 2007). As white, middle-class educators who live in the American West, we are cultural outsiders of immigration stories, particularly those stories that occur at the U.S.–Mexico border. Much of our understanding of these settings has been acquired secondhand rather than through lived experience, and we by no means consider ourselves authorities on this topic. Though we speak other languages (Portuguese, Korean, and Spanish) and have taught outside of the United States in non-English-speaking countries, English is our primary language and the language in which we read both texts.

We also understand that our respective teaching experiences affected our examinations of the two texts. At the time of this study, Sara had recently completed her university studies and was beginning her first year as an elementary school classroom teacher. Her students were a diverse group of young learners: Some were first- and second-generation immigrants from South and Central America as well as other regions of the world, and some had been born and raised in the United States in the majority culture.

Paul and Terrell had also taught in elementary schools serving diverse populations, though more recently they worked primarily with white, middle-class, female teacher candidates in university courses. Paul and Terrell noted that many of the teacher candidates they worked with expressed both a desire and a reticence to share texts in order to engage in critical conversations with young learners. The teacher candidates seemed to recognize the importance of using texts to engage in critical conversations, but at times they felt uncomfortable, overwhelmed, and anxious that they wouldn't be able to use texts "correctly" or with the sensitivity that such conversations deserve. The three of us admit to having had similar misgivings about our abilities to examine texts portraying immigrant stories, but our goal for this study was to contribute worthwhile insights to the field despite our limitations as researchers and critical readers.

## Text Selection

We sought a text pair "with overtly political messages" about immigration that would potentially help "stimulate conversations with readers about their implications" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 266). Recalling former students' responses to *Two White Rabbits* (Buitrago, 2015), we searched for another picturebook that would push young learners to engage with "the explicit exercise of coercive power" and would "invite critiquing of the microinteractions among characters, reconstructing them toward collaborative power" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 266). As Short (2016) affirmed, researchers often begin by "researching many different text possibilities before deciding on a specific text or set of texts for analysis" (p. 8). This was our procedure as we considered a number of texts with related topics and themes before ultimately deciding to use Duncan Tonatiuh's (2013) *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*.

We chose to pair *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits* for three main reasons. First, we noted that their various similarities— anthropomorphized animals (specifically rabbits and coyotes), ambiguous endings, written text with both Spanish and English words, and back matter with information providing readers with additional context—could enhance readers' understanding of the topics and themes and thus open discussions about how these books complemented and supported each other. Second, these picturebooks have various differences, including genre, illustrative style, and narrator voice, and we felt that educators could guide discussions considering the unique affordances of the two texts. Finally, as both texts were created by Latinx authors and illustrators, we felt that these texts were more likely to present important insider perspectives (i.e., #OwnVoices) that have historically been pushed to the margins or silenced completely.

## Analysis

We examined *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits* using the critical framework developed by Botelho and Rudman (2009), which they termed "critical multicultural analysis" (CMA). CMA is at once "a theoretical stance in literary study" and "a method of analysis that allows readers to engage deeply with a text by looking closely at language and at character relationships to power and each other" (Johnson & Gasiewicz, 2016, p. 41). Drawing from a wide range of theoretical lenses, CMA is at its core "an interruption of the status quo" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 3), as it encourages readers to "read all texts critically" (p. 7) in order to bring about social action. By examining the interconnectedness of culture, ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, CMA provides a lens through which readers can critique texts by asking questions such as "Who is represented, underrepresented, misrepresented, and/or invisible?" and "How is power exercised?" (p. xiv).

Although CMA requires that readers engage in a number of efferent readings (L. Rosenblatt, 1978) to interrogate representations of power in texts, we emphasized first reading through the picturebooks for aesthetic stances in order to emotionally connect with and make sense of their narratives. After these initial readings, undertaken individually, we reread the texts while considering the following research questions:

- Which single stories can potentially be dismantled or deconstructed by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*?

- Which single stories can potentially be reified or reconstructed by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*?

This reading also was independent, and we paused throughout to jot down preliminary notes about possible deconstructions and reconstructions.

After examining the texts individually, we met via video chat to discuss potential ways the texts might dismantle or reify certain single stories. We shared various deconstructions and reconstructions we had identified through our initial readings, and we created short lists with informal descriptions. We also shared specific textual (visual and print) examples of these deconstructions and reconstructions to enable us to list and think through our preliminary categories.

Next we revisited the texts independently to assess our disagreements and agreements about ways that the texts might dismantle or reify certain single stories. We also revisited the texts to identify additional dismantlings or reifications that we might have missed in our initial readings. As we engaged in subsequent close readings of the texts in this manner, we again made notes and looked for specific examples from the picturebooks that we planned to discuss during our video chats. We repeated this process and met weekly over the month.

We were eventually able to identify and agree upon three single stories that the texts could collectively deconstruct and three single stories that the texts could potentially reify. In the

following sections of our article, we present these dismantlings and reconstructions and discuss their implications for educators.

## Findings

### Deconstructing Single Stories

Our first research question asked which single stories could potentially be deconstructed by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*. As noted previously, our readings of the two texts led us to deeply consider how they were graying certain binaries (e.g., good and bad, right and wrong) that are often used to divisively categorize and separate individuals' worlds. We highlight these important deconstructions of certain single stories in the sections that follow.

### Picturebooks as Benign Stories for Young Readers

A prevalent single story that can be deconstructed by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* (Tonatiuh, 2013) and *Two White Rabbits* (Buitrago, 2015) is that children's books, especially picturebooks, should present an ideal world free of conflict, harshness, pain, and suffering. This idea of protecting young children from a world that is often dark and frightening can be particularly appealing for teachers and parents (Young et al., 2020). Thus, an abundance of cute, gentle, happy, safe, and even sentimental books are published each year.

However, other observers, including a number of prominent authors, question the notion that texts for young readers should avoid material that some might consider too harsh or frightening for children. Newbery-winning author Matt de la Peña (2018) has asked, "How honest should we be with our readers? Is the job of the writer for the very young to tell the truth or preserve innocence?" (para. 8). In response, de la Peña suggested that instead of hiding difficulty, pain, or loss, books should reveal their presence and provide children with support for encountering them. Kate DiCamillo (2018), another Newbery medalist, similarly asserted that authors need to "tell the truth and make that truth bearable" (para. 7). DiCamillo added that including a little sadness in stories can help children realize that they are not alone because of difficulties in their lives and that problems should not make them feel shame.

*Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits* both responsibly portray the dangerous, harsh, and frightening realities involved in traveling north to enter the United States. In *Pancho Rabbit*, the author explicitly tells readers that Papá Rabbit and other animals left because of crop failure and to earn money to send home to their families. In *Two White Rab-*

*bits*, readers must speculate about the reasons the father and his young daughter leave the home they love and know to travel north, but potential reasons include crop failure as well as dangers associated with gangs and drug cartels.

The illustrations in both books portray the perils protagonists encounter, which include riding on top of fast-moving trains, walking through barren deserts, and crossing treacherous rivers. Also, the characters are portrayed entrusting their lives and safety to enigmatic coyotes who navigate the places and spaces controlled by armed militias. The dangers are accompanied by the sadness associated with leaving homes and loved ones behind. These harsh realities for immigrants who travel to the United States are not the stories commonly shared in children's books, but their treatments serve as necessary voices in contrast to the norms currently depicted in picturebooks.

### Undocumented Immigrants as Violent Criminals

Another single story that can be dismantled by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits* is that those who cross the U.S.–Mexico border illegally are unquestionably "bad" people. Many Americans believe that entering the country without documentation justifies applying derogatory labels, and excessively emotional, factually deficient rallying cries voice and influence the opinions of the masses. When Donald J. Trump first ran for president of the United States, he asserted, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best.… They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with [them]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Lee, 2015, para. 1). Despite studies showing that "undocumented immigrants commit violent crimes at lower rates than US citizens" (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, 2019, para. 4), this vitriolic rhetoric garnered sufficient support to elect Trump to public office. As such, on some levels, this highly questionable story was, and undoubtedly still is, accepted by many as "the only story" (Adichie, 2009, 13:23).

However, in *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*, readers are given positive portrayals of those who migrate north, and these representations can lead readers to interrogate and reconsider the above insidious single story. Both texts depict characters with whom readers can empathize (e.g., parents who are concerned, children who long for stability); therefore together they serve as counternarratives to the "dangerous immigrant" stereotype. Potentially, both those who see their stories and those who see the stories of others in

these texts (Bishop, 1990) will be encouraged to question the notion that all undocumented immigrants are violent criminals to be feared.

For example, in one of the first spreads of *Two White Rabbits*, Rafael Yockteng's illustrations depict a young daughter perched on her father's shoulders. Both are looking lovingly into each other's eyes, and they playfully extend their arms as if pretending to fly while running down a sidewalk. In the next spread, the same father–daughter duo are kneeling next to a group of chickens. They are happily engaged in a counting game, and their facial expressions and affectionate physical proximity show that they present no danger to themselves or others. Similarly, the title page of *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* depicts a loving family seated together as the father reads a story aloud to them. The next spread depicts a heart-wrenching moment as the family waves goodbye to the father and his compatriots who "set out north to find work in the great carrot and lettuce fields" where they can "earn money for their families." These and other, similar scenes show readers that a single story about immigrants being violent criminals badly misrepresents a much wider and more nuanced story that deserves to be considered. Additionally, as the two picturebooks focus on very young protagonists who innocently approach many difficult life circumstances, these protagonists hardly come across as the future hardened "drug lords" and "rapists" described elsewhere.

## Ease of Crossing the U.S.–Mexico Border

The U.S.–Mexico border is 1,954 miles long, spanning from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. The Rio Grande River accounts for 1,254 miles of the border, and in some places the river spans to 500 feet wide and 60 feet deep (Trumble et al., 2018). Many Americans believe crossing this southern border is easy—perhaps too easy, which is a narrative often promulgated by conservative politicians (Jenkins, 2015). In reality, many inherent natural dangers make this crossing perilous, including dangerous currents and alligators in the Rio Grande River (Kanno-Youngs, 2019), extreme temperatures (111 degrees in summer months), desert terrain (Jenkins, 2015), and even hurricane-driven giant rats and venomous snakes in tent encampments (Sanchez, 2020). Also, there are human hazards such as coyotes (paid to smuggle immigrants across the border) who might abuse or abandon their charges, as well as militias made up of "anti-immigration activists who see migrants as a threat to American society and regularly patrol the border looking to intercept crossers" (Jenkins, 2015, para. 21).

The United Nations reported 514 migrant deaths between January 1 and August 16, 2019 (Wright, 2019), a 33% increase from the deaths reported in 2018. Over half of these deaths were due to drownings in river crossings or shipwrecks in coastal areas. Other causes of death included highway and railroad accidents, dehydration and exposure, violence, sickness, and lack of medical care. Of note, the reported 514 migrant deaths did not include those who died in detention centers in the United States or Mexico or those who died after crossing into the United States.

Adding to the dangers of crossing the border, patrol personnel and technology were increased to prevent unauthorized immigrants from entering the United States during the Bush and Obama presidencies. This technology included towers fixed with cameras, radios, and microwave transmitters; Tethered Aerostat Radar Systems; and more than 12,000 motion sensors and remote video or mobile surveillance systems (Trumble et al., 2018). Such increases in technology and personnel undoubtedly decreased the "ease" and "safety" that might have once been associated with crossing the U.S.–Mexico border.

Both books we examined disrupt the single story of an easy border crossing by illustrating the many dangers and difficulties of attempting to reach the United States with the aid of a coyote. In *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, Pancho heads north to find his father. On his journey with a sneaky coyote, Pancho travels on top of trains, crosses both a river and a desert, and encounters rattlesnakes collecting tolls to enter a tunnel. The coyote tries to make Pancho Rabbit his meal when the young rabbit's food supply is depleted. Similarly, in *Two White Rabbits*, a father and daughter face a number of dangerous and otherwise difficult situations. They travel on top of a speeding train called "La Bestia" (The Beast) after camping near the railroad and interacting with people who place their heads on the tracks to determine when the train will arrive. Additionally, they hitchhike along improvised routes and outmaneuver armed officers who are shown taking others into custody.

In an article about the perils migrants face, Villegas (2014) noted that those who travel through Mexico on La Bestia are the poorest of the poor and risk many dangers, including "injury or death from unsafe travelling conditions, gang violence, sexual assault, extortion, kidnapping, and recruitment by organized crime" (para. 9). The Mexican government has attempted to prevent Central American migrants from traveling through Mexico on these trains by adding more border patrols

and road checkpoints and by increasing the trains' speed. Thus, the existing dangers, along with the increased personnel and technology, make crossing the border more difficult than ever before, and these two picturebooks depict this reality.

## Reifying or Reconstructing Single-Story Concerns

With our second research question, we asked if there are single stories that can potentially be reified or reconstructed by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*. After careful examination, we identified three single stories, which we discuss in the following sections.

## All Immigrants as Undocumented and From Mexico

A single story that all immigrants who come to the United States are from Mexico and enter the country illegally can potentially be reified by pairing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and *Two White Rabbits*. Both books depict characters who "come to the United States looking for work and a better life for themselves and their families" (Tonatiuh, 2013), leaving "the world they know and love to go to a different country" (Aldana, as cited in Buitrago, 2015). Because the two books show characters without documentation crossing the U.S.–Mexico border and also provide statistics in the back matter attesting to the large number of immigrants who enter the United States through Mexico, some readers may interpret these texts to portray the "typical" immigrant experience.

The notion that all immigrants are from Mexico and that they all come to the United States illegally is one of various highly politicized stereotypes of our day. Adichie (2009) rightfully cautioned that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (13:14). It is not inaccurate to state that a great number of immigrants come to the United States through the U.S.–Mexico border illegally. But tens of thousands enter legally each year, and some have argued that "the vast majority of immigrants coming to the U.S.–Mexico border clearly want the opportunity to enter a legal process" and are "accessing the only legal process available to them: asylum" (Bier, 2019, p. 2). Furthermore, we must note that in the last decade, "India and China overtook Mexico as the top countries of origin for new arrivals, displacing its longstanding position" (Batalova et al., 2021, "Immigrants Now & Historically" section, para. 14). Thoughtful critical conversations would likely include this type of information in order to disrupt the single story of all immigrants as undocumented and from Mexico

that could potentially be reified if readers understood that the texts do not represent all immigrant and refugee stories.

## Inhumanity of All "Coyotes"

Another single story that can potentially be reified is considering certain anthropomorphized characters as less than human because of the ways they are represented in the picturebooks. Both books feature coyote characters, which undoubtedly are meant to stand in for human "coyotes": "slang for a person who smuggles people across the US–Mexico border" (Tonatiuh, 2013). Though the texts are by no means identical in their depictions of these characters, together they can create a particular message: that all smugglers are dangerous, evil, coldhearted beasts—a message that needs to be questioned.

For example, in Tonatiuh's fable, Señor Coyote is drawn in a way unlike the other characters in the story. He walks on all fours, though many "civilized" animal characters (e.g., rabbits, sheep, pigs) stand on two feet, and his only article of clothing is a handkerchief tied around his neck, although the other characters wear pants, shirts, skirts, hats, scarves, and so on. Additionally, his physical features (e.g., sharp fangs, jagged claws, and blood-red eyes) all lead readers to believe that he is a threat (Bang, 2016). Those who pair Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* with Buitrago's *Two White Rabbits* could frame Buitrago's coyote called "chucho" according to what they see in the other text. "Chucho" also arranges perilous passage across unnamed rivers, warily avoids law enforcement, and affords himself comforts he does not share with others. If readers identify the character in one story as the obvious bad guy, and if they notice that the coyotes in both stories seem have a lot in common, readers could assume that everyone who smuggles immigrants across the border is more feral than civilized, more creature than person.

Some have argued that "ubiquitous anthropomorphism in children's literature does have ethical consequences, and unfortunately they are rarely questioned" (Fraustino, 2014, p. 159). Thus, we maintain that well-meaning educators should be warned against unwittingly re-creating some single stories as they seek to dismantle others. We do not wish to imply that the creators of these two picturebooks have done anything wrong by portraying human characters as animals, since children's literature carries a long tradition of allowing animal stand-ins "when the story message is very powerful, personal, and painful" (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 213). Nor do we wish to deny the fact that abhorrent and monstrous acts have occurred

and continue to occur at the hands of smugglers. But we must also remember that the "coyotes" of the world—just like the immigrants portrayed in these stories—are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and friends, some of whom undoubtedly deconstruct the predatory stereotype, and we do ourselves a major disservice if we allow texts to dissuade us from seeing the humanity that can at times be found in unlikely circumstances.

### Cruelty of All Border Patrol Officers

A third single story to avoid reifying is that border patrol officers are, without exception, thoughtless bullies who inflict pain on defenseless immigrants. Though only included across one spread in *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and two spreads in *Two White Rabbits*, these brief depictions can be interpreted as suggesting that all who are paid to enforce current laws and regulations are brutish as they carry out their jobs. We by no means wish to imply that this is either the correct or the intended message of these picturebooks; we simply explore it as a possibility to remind readers of the active stances (Botelho, 2015; Botelho & Rudman, 2009) they must maintain to avoid the re-creating of single stories, especially as they read texts specifically designed to dismantle those stories.

These two texts may re-create a particular story about border patrol officers because of the officers' minor roles and brief presentations. They are inherently flat characters, "depicted as having one typical trait or none at all," and can "be ascribed features such as 'good' or 'evil'" (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 129). It's important to remember that just because "the author chooses to emphasize one single trait in the character does not mean that the character reflects a real person with only one trait, which by experience we know is impossible" (Nikolajeva, 2002, pp. 129–130). But as the officers are depicted as venomous rattlesnakes who accept bribes in *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and as gun-toting simpletons who verbally and physically abuse those who seem helpless in *Two White Rabbits*, some readers may come away feeling a certain disdain for the officers of the border patrol.

Although these depictions may, if read in isolation, create a single story about border patrol officers, they can also help to dismantle a different single story some readers may have already accepted. On television programs such as the documentary series *Border Wars*, viewers have been repeatedly exposed to propagandistic portrayals of border patrol officers "as brave, patriotic, and compassionate individuals who simultaneously fight the war on drugs, battle with terrorism, and save lives

of immigrants stranded in the desert" (Jones, 2014, p. 186). Thus, depending on one's positionality and familiarity with certain types of media, these two picturebooks may portray not so much a single story that negatively frames those who work at the U.S.–Mexico border but a counterstory that layers or questions the idealistic treatment of border patrol officers in other contexts.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Because of our roles and positions as children's literature scholars and critical pedagogists, we are constantly seeking opportunities to enhance the literary experiences of educators and their young students by encouraging them to take children's literature seriously and to read for social change as well as pleasure (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997). Using Adichie's (2009) ideas that engagement with different stories can enhance one's understanding of the world and break down barriers of closed-mindedness that may result from lack of exposure and experience, we critically examined two picturebooks in order to think through how they might perpetuate or dismantle single stories that deserve to be interrogated. As shown in these examples, pairing texts with some like characteristics can potentially create spaces for critical conversations that generate extensive consideration, commitment, and care, particularly as our biases and limitations, along with those of others, are unveiled.

Following Botelho's (2021) argument that paired readings "around a similar cultural theme can provide multiple perspectives and nuanced cultural portrayals," particularly when they are examined "side by side" for their "intertextual ties, connections, disconnections, and questions" (p. 122), we attempted to unpack certain ways that children's texts can both dismantle and perpetuate negative stereotypes. We examined critically paired picturebooks according to two research questions that we consider simple enough to apply to most texts teachers choose to share with young learners. However, engaging with these relatively simple prompts required significant effort, and we anticipate some educators may consider it a challenging process to analyze books in terms of dismantling or perpetuating stereotypes. Additionally, we imagine such engagements will likely yield more hard questions than easy answers. That said, analyzing books like we have explained will also likely yield opportunities for growth and compassion in which teachers and students can create spaces for the myriad stories that need to be told, celebrated, and examined.

As educators, we must do our best to ensure that our

engagements with texts actively dismantle closed-mindedness and harmful stereotypes. We can begin by considering the single stories (Adichie, 2009) that might be (un) told through the texts we share. This requires the willingness and capacity to discuss difficult topics and thoughtful preparation for and openness to the unexpected and unknown. We cannot assume "because a book is deemed multicultural" that "its words and images will resonate with readers, or that it is immune to stereotypes and dominant worldviews" (Botelho, 2021, p. 122). Moreover, we cannot assume our transactions (L. Rosenblatt, 1978) will be exactly like, or even remotely close to, those of others. However, we can take up the call to help students engage with the messier, multifaceted, politicized ideas of our day and co-create with them more equitable worlds in which expansive narratives that disrupt single stories are shared, valued, and understood. •

**Paul H. Ricks** is an assistant professor of children's literature in the Department of Teacher Education at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

**Terrell A. Young** is a professor of children's literature and the assistant chair in the Department of Teacher Education at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

**Sara Koford** is a fifth-grade teacher at Westridge Elementary School in Provo, Utah.

## REFERENCES

Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TEDGlobal. http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Bang, M. (2016). *Picture this: How pictures work*. Chronicle Books.

Batalova, J., Hanna, M., & Levesque, C. (2021, February 11). *Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article /frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united -states?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIjYSY1Lr07AIVBh6tBh1SEgHZEAAY ASAAEgI_UfD_BwE

Bier, D. J. (2019, August 20). *Legal immigration will resolve America's real border problems* (Policy Analysis No. 879). CATO Institute. https://www.cato .org/publications/policy-analysis/legal-immigration-will-resolve-americas -real-border-problems

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, *6*(3), 1–2.

Botelho, M. J. (2015). Learning from/with multicultural children's literature. In M. F. He, B. Schultz, & W. H. Schubert (Eds.), *The Sage guide to curriculum in education* (pp. 268–275). Sage Publishers.

Botelho, M. J. (2021). Reframing mirrors, windows, and doors: A critical analysis of the metaphors for multicultural literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, *47*(1), 119–126. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203885208

Botelho, M. J., & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature: Mirrors, windows, and doors*. Routledge.

Braunstein, L. B., Ozdemir, O., & Garcia, C. (2020). "Danger of a single story": Pre-service teachers' of color use of an online discussion board to discuss the essentialization of culture. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, *16*(1), 5–27. https://doi.org/10.1515/mlt-2019-0008

Brooks, R. (2018). A dangerous single story: Dispelling stereotypes through African literature. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *12*(1), 21–36. https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=byuprovo&id=GALE %7CA559893742&v=2.1&it=r&sid=LitRC&asid=73c3a6e9

Burke, C. L., & Copenhaver, J. G. (2004). Animals as people in children's literature. *Language Arts*, *81*(3), 205–213.

Christensen, L. (2012). The danger of a single story: Writing essays about our lives. *Rethinking Education*, 26. https://www.rethinkingschools.org /articles/the-danger-of-a-single-story-writing-essays-about-our-lives

de la Peña, M. (2018, January 9). Why we shouldn't shield children from darkness. *Time*. https://time.com/5093669/why-we-shouldnt-shield- children-from-darkness/

DiCamillo, K. (2018, January 12). Why children's books should be a little sad. *Time*. https://time.com/5099463/kate-dicamillo-kids-books-sad/

Fraustino, L. R. (2014). The rights and wrongs of anthropomorphism in picturebooks. In C. Mills (Ed.), *Ethics and children's literature* (pp. 145–162). Ashgate.

Jenkins, J. (2015, February 10). What it is really like to cross the U.S.–Mexico border. *ThinkProgress*. https://archive.thinkprogress.org/what-its-really -like-to-cross-the-u-s-mexico-border-a375d80f3cc/

Johnson, H., & Gasiewicz, B. (2016). Examining displaced youth and immigrant status through critical multicultural analysis. In H. Johnson, J. Mathis, & K. G. Short (Eds.), *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective* (pp. 28–43). Routledge.

Jones, R. (2014). Border wars: Narratives and images of the US–Mexico border on TV. In R. Jones & C. Johnson (Eds.), *Placing the border in everyday life* (pp. 185–203). Routledge.

Kanno-Youngs, Z. (2019, June 8). Death on the Rio Grande: A look at the perilous migrant route. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes .com/2019/06/08/us/politics/migrants-drown-rio-grande.html

Lee, M. Y. H. (2015, July 8). Donald Trump's false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime. *The Washington Post*. https://www .washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald -trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/

Leland, C. H., Lewison, M., & Harste, J. C. (2013). *Teaching children's literature: It's critical!* Routledge.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. (2019, May 17). *Myths & facts about immigration in the U.S.* https://www.lirs.org/immigration-fact-che ck?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIvuGGz7P07AIVFRvnCh0cJgqpEAAYASAAE gJGSvD_BwE

Makama, R., Helman, R., Titi, N., & Day, S. (2019). The danger of a single feminist narrative: African-centered decolonial feminism for Black men. *Agenda*, *33*(3), 61–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2019.1667736

McCallum, R., & Stephens, J. (2011). Ideology and children's books. In S. A. Wolf, K. Coats, P. Enciso, & C. A. Jenkins (Eds.), *Handbook of research on children's and young adult literature* (pp. 359–371). Routledge.

Milner, H. R., IV. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(7), 388–400.

https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471

Nikolajeva, M. (2002). *The rhetoric of character in children's literature*. Scarecrow Press.

Roselle, R., Hands, R., & Payne, S. (2013). The danger of a single story: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach for social justice. In K. Zenkov, D. Corrigan, R. S. Beebe, & C. R. Sell (Eds.), *Professional development schools and social justice: Schools and universities partnering to make a difference* (pp. 91–104). Lexington Books.

Rosenblatt, A. (2019). The danger of a single story about forensic humanitarianism. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, *61*, 75–77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2018.11.007

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Sanchez, S. (2020, September 1). Recent drownings offer stark warning to migrants considering crossing Rio Grande into South Texas. *BorderReport*. https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/immigration/spate-of-recent -drowning-deaths-on-rio-grande-by-migrants-trying-to-cross-into-south -texas/

Short, K. G. (2016). Critical content analysis as research methodology. In H. Johnson, J. Mathis, & K. G. Short (Eds.), *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective* (pp. 1–15). Routledge.

Short, K. (2017). *Paired book picturebook sets*. Worlds of Words. https://wowlit .org/links/booklists/paired-book-picture-book-sets/

Trumble, S., Kasai, N., & Amaning, A. (2018, December 3). *The state of the southern border*. Third Way. https://www.thirdway.org/memo/the-state-of -the-southern-border

Villegas, R. D. (2014, September 10). *Central American migrants and "La Bestia": The route, dangers, and government responses*. Migration Information Source. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central -american-migrants-and-%E2%80%9Cla-bestia%E2%80%9D-route -dangers-and-government-responses

Wright, L. (2019, August 16). UN: Migrant deaths in Americas pass 500 in 2019. *Deutsche Welle*. https://www.dw.com/en/un-migrant-deaths-in- americas-pass-500-in-2019/a-50053650

Yenika-Agbaw, V. (1997). Taking children's literature seriously: Reading for pleasure and social change. *Language Arts*, *74*(6), 446–453.

Young, T. A, Bryan, G., Jacobs, J. S., & Tunnell, M. O. (2020). *Children's literature, briefly* (7th ed.). Pearson.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CITED

Buitrago, J. (2015). *Two white rabbits* (R. Yockteng, Illus.). Groundwood Books.

Tonatiuh, D. (2013). *Pancho Rabbit and the coyote: A migrant's tale*. Abrams Books for Young Readers.