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Teachers encounter greater numbers of children each year with little book reading experience. Here are some ideas for engaging these children.

Children enter preschool or kindergarten in the United States, particularly in urban settings, with a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Almost 40% of the total U.S. public school population is made up of students of color, a percentage that exceeds 80% in many metropolitan school districts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). According to the U.S. Department of Education, by the year 2020 students of color will represent the majority of students in 18 states including California, Texas, Florida, and New Mexico. In the period between 1981 and 1990, immigration to the United States increased by 63% over the previous decade (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994, p. 11), and approximately 14% of the U.S. population at that time spoke a first language other than English, also an increase from the decade before (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993).

Despite their diverse backgrounds, all children bring to school rich linguistic abilities acquired through social interaction in their homes and communities. Three decades of research on language development in a variety of social and cultural contexts have documented the complexity of young children's language use in their interactions with family, peers, and other community members (e.g., Crago & Crago, 1983; Durán, 1981; Fantini, 1985; Galda & Pellegrini, 1985; García, 1983; Garvey, 1976, 1990; Heath, 1983; Nelson, 1989; Ninio & Bruner, 1976; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Snow, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Vernon-Feagans, 1996; Zentella, 1997).

This research also suggested that children learn to use language in culturally specific ways. In her research in three communities in North Carolina, for example, Heath (1983) found that children in these communities learned to tell very different kinds of stories based on their community's cultural beliefs about what constituted an effective story. Comparing a group of low-income African American children and a group of middle-class European American children the summer before they entered kindergarten, Vernon-Feagans (1996) examined their use of language in peer and sibling interactions. She found very few differences between the two groups on quantitative measures of linguistic complexity or in the abstract level of their talk. She did, though, discover significant differences between the groups in the kinds of verbal interactions that accompanied their play. The African American children engaged in four times as many interactions that involved extended storytelling and also talked more than the European American children did.

Despite such culturally influenced differences, however, the findings of this body of research clearly underscore the fact that children from every linguistic community learn to use language in ways that are highly complex and that provide a strong linguistic foundation for teachers to build on in literacy instruction (for examples, see Au, 1980; Bloome, Champion, Katz, Morton, & Muldrow, 2001; Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Crawford, 1989;

Cummins, 1989; Foster, 2001; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993; Phillips, 1972, 1983; Piestrup, 1973; Secret, 1998; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Linguistic research reveals that, by the age of 3, the vast majority of children all over the world have mastered all of the sounds and most of the complex grammatical systems of their native language or languages (e.g., Jackendoff, 1994; Pinker, 1994). In addition, as the research cited here documented, they have figured out how to use language to get things done in the world, often in highly sophisticated ways. This is illustrated in the examples that follow.

Marisa (described in Eisenberg, 1986, pp. 194–195) is a monolingual Spanish-speaking preschooler living in a Mexican immigrant community in northern California. Eisenberg recounted what happened one day when Marisa's father teased her by offering her a taco with chile, even though he knew that Marisa didn't like chile. Marisa (age 34 months) protested angrily: "Chile no, Papi/Te pego, Papi (No chile, Daddy/I'll hit you, Daddy)." But when her father's stern response "¿A quién le vas a pegar? (Whom? Whom are you going to hit?)" signaled Marisa that she has gone too far and faced possible punishment for being disrespectful, this almost-3-year-old quickly defused the situation by changing her verbal behavior. Instantly adopting the sing-song intonation associated with teasing in her community, Marisa transformed her original threat into a game by playfully naming all of the family members she supposedly would hit. She ended with her Grandpa Valente who wasn't even present at the time, thus underscoring the obviously playful, nonserious nature of her threats. That Marisa's quick-thinking switch to teasing behavior had been successful in getting her out of trouble was confirmed when everyone at the table, including her father, laughed.

Lindsey (described by Wolf & Heath, 1992, p. 21) is a white, standard–English-speaking preschooler living in a middle-class community in California. One day, Lindsey (age 3 years, 11 months) was riding in the car with her mother when she dropped the rice cake she had been eating. When Lindsey asked her mother to pick it up for her ("Can you reach my rice cake?"), her mother told her to wait until they got to a stop light. Unsuccessful in getting what she wanted, Lindsey, like Marisa, quickly changed her verbal tactics. Inspired by a children's book that her mother recently read to her about an old woman who loses a rice dumpling, Lindsey tried again to enlist her mother's assistance, this time by adopting the language and intonation patterns of the book: "Mama? Mama? Jizo Sama! Have you seen my dumpling?" Clearly charmed by her daughter's clever use of book language, Lindsey's mother pulled to the side of the road and retrieved the rice cake.

Lem (described in Heath, 1983, p. 110) is an African American preschooler whose speech patterns include many of the systematic features of African American English and who lives in a small economically struggling community in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. One day Lem got into trouble for taking off his shoes when he wasn't supposed to. Exasperated with his behavior, Lem's mother asked what he had done with his shoes and said to him in a challenging tone, "You want me ta tie you up, put you on de railroad track?" Drawing on the verbal abilities he acquired through socialization in a language community that greatly values verbal improvisation and quick thinking, Lem hesitated only a moment before responding with what is essentially a poem created on the spot:

Railroad track
Train all big 'n' black
On dat track, on dat track, on dat track
Ain't no way I can't get back
Back from dat track
Back from dat track
Big 'n' black, I be back. (Heath, 1983, p. 110)

Needless to say, Lem escaped punishment and all further scolding from his admiring audience.

Each of these preschoolers, socialized in very different linguistic and cultural communities, demonstrates the ability to use language in powerful ways to negotiate relationships with other people and to accomplish his or her social purposes. All three are alert to nuances of other people's verbal and nonverbal behaviors and are able to adjust

their own language in response, skillfully employing subtle intonation and prosodic features (e.g., alliteration, repetition) to convey their intended meanings. Their verbal sophistication provides an important cognitive and linguistic foundation for understanding storybooks and other kinds of written texts and for composing stories and other written accounts of their own. Yet despite the similarities among these three in terms of their ability to use language effectively within the context of their families and communities, anyone familiar with the day-to-day workings of schools would have little difficulty predicting that these children's impressive linguistic abilities are unlikely to serve them equally well in early literacy instruction.

In the examples I cited, Lindsey's use of language differs from that of Marisa and Lem in that Lindsey draws on the language of a book to help make her persuasive case. In doing so, this preschooler demonstrates not only her already considerable knowledge about books but also her awareness of how important book knowledge is to the adults in her life. Where do her knowledge and awareness come from? As Wolf and Heath (1992) documented, Lindsey, like many other mainstream preschoolers, has spent countless hours being read to by adults. From these book reading experiences, many children acquire an extensive book-based vocabulary and absorb important cultural lessons about things like gender roles, family relationships, and the nature of friendship. They also come to view book reading as a pleasurable and rewarding activity and to see books as an authoritative source of knowledge about the world. Some young children, as Lindsey's example illustrates, begin to use their knowledge of characters, plots, and story language in their interactions with other people and to make sense of their own experiences.

It is more prosaic perhaps, but of immense value in earning the teacher's approval and encouragement in preschool and kindergarten, that these early book reading experiences also give children practice in expected book reading behaviors, such as listening quietly and attentively while the story is being read, raising one's hand to answer questions posed by the teacher, and holding on to (and remembering) one's own questions until the teacher signals the appropriate time to ask. Through countless question-and-answer interactions with adults in which they are rewarded for answering correctly, young children come to feel an enormous sense of satisfaction and pride in knowing the right answer to the teacher's questions about the text. Book knowledge becomes, in essence, part of these children's sense of identity in the world.

Not so for Marisa and Lem, who do not hear stories read to them by adults. In this respect, they are like many children in urban multilingual, multicultural classrooms. Intelligent, inquisitive, verbally sophisticated, and eager to learn, they come to school with little or no experience of books. Some are children of immigrants who come from countries where reading storybooks to children is not part of the cultural tradition, whatever the social class or educational level of the family. Children from these families may hear many oral stories, but not stories read from books written for children. Other children, like Lem, may be heirs to a cultural tradition that does place great value on reading books to children and yet still have little exposure to books, because their families cannot afford to buy them or because the difficult circumstances of their lives have led their families to lose touch with this cultural value.

Children who don't have many early book reading experiences learn their cultural lessons through interactions with family and other community members, from oral stories, and from observations of other people's behavior. These interactions provide important linguistic models for how to use language in creative and powerful ways. The novelist Paule Marshall (1983), for example, described how her earliest lessons about the power of language came from childhood experiences listening to her Barbadian mother and her friends talking animatedly in the kitchen about every topic under the sun. Similarly, writer Cherrie Moraga (1983) remembered her mother's vivid, detailed stories; the tantalizing sounds of her mother and aunts "gossiping—half in English, half in Spanish—while drinking cerveza in the kitchen"

(p. 31); and the importance of those oral stories and sounds to her eventual evolution as a writer.

In a study of public and private meanings of literacy, Qualls (2001) recorded the childhood reminiscences of one African American male, which speak to the powerful influence of the spoken word on the development of children's facility with language: "The constant dialogue in our household constituted a form of the 'emergent' method of language learning.... Our childhood household was a virtual 'sound-stage,' with family members constantly convincing, debating, expressing, and imploring each other" (p. 12). Surely Lem, who at age 3 was able to turn his mother's scolding words into the makings of a poem, drew at least part of his inspiration from the oral poetry he heard around him every day.

The rich linguistic abilities of children like Lem do not necessarily help them to be successful at, or even interested in, the kind of book reading activities that constitute the heart of the literacy curriculum in preschool, kindergarten, and the early primary grades. Many children who are unused to books and being read to find it difficult to sit still for the time it takes the teacher to read even a fairly short picture book. Unfamiliar with the book reading routines many teachers assume as common knowledge, children who have not been read to at home may find these routines aversive, puzzling, or simply boring. Recently, for example, I was an observer in a prekindergarten class of 4-year-olds where the teacher was reading aloud the same book she had read to the children on two previous occasions. Periodically, she would interrupt her reading to ask questions about the illustrations or the text, the same questions she had asked during the two previous readings. At one point when the teacher asked, "How many mittens are there?" Gabriela (a pseudonym), the bilingual Puerto Rican child sitting next to me, turned and asked me, in an exasperated tone, "Why can't she remember that?"

Clearly Gabriela knew the answer her teacher was looking for, yet she chose not to raise her hand to volunteer it. Instead, she expressed to another adult her amazement that her teacher would have so much difficulty remembering the answer to a question that had not only been answered twice before, but to which the answer, to Gabriela at least, was self-evident in the first place (i.e., the mittens are clearly visible in the illustration). Many children in multicultural, multilingual classrooms are not used to an adult asking them questions for which it is obvious that the adult already knows the answer. Yet these kinds of "known answer" questions are ubiquitous in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, particularly during book reading sessions. It is probable that a good number of children are puzzled by the purpose of these questions, some doubtless concluding, as Gabriela evidently did, that there must be something amiss with the questioner. The teacher's likely assumption in this case was that Gabriela did not know the answer to the question, possibly leading to the conclusion that she needed more simplified instruction, or perhaps more English-language vocabulary, rather than more interesting questions. It is not difficult to imagine that from the perspective of Gabriela, who came to school with little experience of books, book reading was not shaping up to be a very pleasurable or intellectually stimulating activity.

While Gabriela (at least in my observations) seldom responded to her teacher's storybook questions and typically sat quietly when books were being read, other children who have not had the experience of being read to at home may participate vociferously in story reading sessions, though not always in ways their teachers approve. They call out. They talk to the children sitting next to them. They raise their hands to answer questions and then make comments, which may be only tangentially related to the question that was asked or to the book. In *Teaching Other People's Children: Literacy and Learning in a Bilingual Classroom* (Ballenger, 1999), the author described storybook reading near the beginning of the year in her Haitian bilingual preschool classroom, a description likely to strike a familiar chord in the experience of many teachers:

> Three months into the year and it still seemed to me that books had not taken hold. The children were too noisy, they were always calling out, always commenting,

> always jumping up to punch the monsters in the book or to act it out. They were not listening. What they were doing was not, in my opinion, a part of book reading. I dreaded it. And yet they seemed to enjoy it. (p. 58)

Particularly frustrating to Ballenger (1999) was her sense that for the children what was central during these sessions was not the book, but the conversations they created around the book, conversations that were sometimes related to the story and often times not. After one long, off-topic interchange among the children, for example, Ballenger tried to move the discussion back to the book by asking "'You wanna see what the book says happens? Let's see what the book says,' to which one of the children, Jeremie, responds 'No'" (p. 64).

In my experience, teachers sometimes respond to children's off-task behaviors and short attention spans by minimizing the time spent reading aloud to the class and placing greater emphasis on literacy activities that seem to be more engaging to children, like drawing and labeling pictures or working with pencils, papers, and stickers at the writing center. Or a teacher may spend 10 minutes or so reading aloud and then spend the balance of the literacy period on follow-up activities (e.g., an art or cooking project related in some way to the story).

Although these follow-up activities may be fun and engaging and may well involve important learning, they nonetheless lead away from the book, focusing children's attention on something other than the text. By the time these activities are finished, children may have practiced their fine motor skills, acquired new vocabulary, or learned something more about letters and sounds, but they have not had the opportunity to connect in a deep and meaningful way with literature. They have not been imaginatively drawn into a book to see their own lives—their wishes, fears, joys—reflected in the characters, themes, and situations depicted there. This is no small concern because ultimately it is children's connections to books that give purpose to all the other literacy activities in class.

If books are not compelling to children, then no amount of time spent on rhyming games, phonemic awareness exercises, or any other kind of literacy activity will result in their becoming proficient and empowered readers. Even children as verbally sophisticated as Lem are in danger of eventual school failure if their teachers are unable to help them extend their love of the spoken word to an equally passionate engagement with the written word. It is true, of course, that preschool or kindergarten hardly constitutes children's last opportunity to fall in love with books. I'm thankful that it is possible for this experience to occur at any point in one's life. Yet no one could argue with the fact that the earlier this experience occurs—the sooner children forge a deep and authentic connection to books—the likelier it is that they will be successful in school. There is no more essential task for teachers in preschool and kindergarten classrooms than to help make books meaningful in children's lives.

How do teachers accomplish this task with the many bright, articulate, talented children who come to school with little experience of books and, perhaps as a consequence, little interest in listening to their teachers read aloud? What follows are three suggestions; they are offered with great humility and deep respect for the challenging and important work that preschool and kindergarten teachers do every day.

1. Choose books that relate to children's lives

As a teacher educator who spends considerable time observing and reading to children in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, I have been witness, again and again, to the powerful effect on children's responses to text when they see and listen to books that connect in a meaningful way to their lives.

One of many examples I could offer comes from a prekindergarten of 4-year-olds in which the teacher read *So Much* (Cooke, 1994) to her class of 18 children, all of whom were English-language learners from a variety of language backgrounds. In this vividly illustrated book, the members of an extended family—Auntie Bibba, Uncle Didi, Nannie, Gran-Gran, Cousin Kay-Kay, and Big Cousin Ross—gather for a surprise birthday party at the baby's house. Each guest's arrival is signaled by the phrase "Ding Dong!" which the teacher brings to life each time it appears in the text by

pressing a bell on her lap. As she does this, every pair of eyes is focused on the book; every child in the room waits expectantly to hear "what the book says." As the family members arrive, they all greet the baby by exclaiming how they are going to squeeze, kiss, eat, or fight him, all because they love the baby "SO MUCH." Like all good literature for young children, the book is lyrical and repetitive, with just a hint of West Indian grammatical features and intonation patterns. By the end of the first reading, some of the children have already picked up on the repeated refrain, "SO MUCH." It is a book that children request to have read repeatedly, and after a couple of weeks many children have parts of it memorized.

In another kindergarten class, I brought in a new book to read one day. *Leola and the Honeybears* (Rosales, 1999) is an African American retelling of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The children all loved it—no one more so than Colette (pseudonym), a 5-year-old Haitian child who lived with her mother in a homeless shelter. During the next few weeks, she frequently pointed to one of the illustrations of Leola in the book and said with a smile on her face, "That's me." Colette not only liked to look at the book, she also wanted to hear it read again and again. Laughing delightedly, she would repeat Leola's refrain: "But I don't think she'd mind *this time*." It was not surprising that Colette started to develop other favorites among the books her teacher and I read. All of her favorites had "brown people" in them.

Many people of color have written movingly about the difference it made in their intellectual lives to discover literature by other people of color (e.g., Gates, 1990; Marshall, 1983, Scott, 1998; Shange, 1975; X, 1964). On the other hand, the children's author Candy Dawson Boyd (1997) probably spoke to the experiences of many more people of color in the United States when she wrote of her childhood:

> As an African American female child, I never saw my face or the lives of my family, friends, and neighbors in the books I read.... The characters were always white, nice, safe, and perfect, in their own distant way. I realized that I was invisible, excluded, disaffirmed, spurned, discarded, scorned, and rejected in the white world of children's literature. (p. 107)

One Asian American educator (Aoki, 1993) wrote, "I turn the pages, book after book, and ask where are we?" (p. 112). As if echoing Aoki's words, a Puerto Rican teacher and scholar (Nieto, 1993) said that "many youngsters develop the impression that books are not about them, their families, or communities, but rather always about 'the other'" (p. 195).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of choosing books that connect to children's lives. This is important to remember for all students at every level, of course, but for none more so than young children who enter school with no prior attachment to books. At this point in time, there is not a single topic or theme appropriate for exploration in early childhood classrooms that authors of color have not written about. Numerous books of extraordinary quality that represent diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic experiences are available: alphabet books; counting books; books about colors and shapes; folk tales; nursery rhymes; bedtime stories; and books about family, community, friendship, and identity.

One concern that teachers sometimes have about using books that incorporate words and phrases from languages other than English is that they will not be able to pronounce the words correctly. *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991), for example, has Spanish words and sentences that are skillfully defined in context as well as included (with a pronunciation key) in a glossary at the end of the book. The Spanish adds immeasurably to the cultural authenticity of this book about the relationship between a little girl and her grandmother, and it also echoes the bilingual world in which many native Spanish-speaking children in the United States grow up. The Spanish in the text sends a powerful message to bilingual children that both of their languages are important and "worthy" of being written as well as spoken. It is a great idea for teachers to practice unfamiliar words with a native speaker of the language in question, and children's family members, or even children themselves, are likely sources of expertise.

Not every book used in a multilingual, multicultural classroom needs to represent people of color or to incorporate linguistic diversity, but if bilingual children and children of color make up the majority of the class, then the majority of books used in the class should reflect that fact. Books are not meaningful to children who do not see themselves

represented in them. Especially for very young children, learning occurs most productively and profoundly in a context of familiarity.

2. Teach book reading behaviors explicitly

When one thinks about Gabriela, the little girl who expressed frustration over her teacher's seeming inability to remember the answer to a simple question, it is difficult not to empathize with her point of view. After all, known-answer questions are not exactly stimulating intellectually. Many children would probably participate more in talk about books if their teachers asked more creative, open-ended questions. Yet research shows that known-answer questions are the most frequently asked type of question in many school settings (Cazden, 1988; Stubbs, 1983). Thus, in addition to incorporating more open-ended questions into storybook reading sessions, early childhood teachers would probably serve their students best with explicit instruction in the kind of book reading behaviors, including responding to known-answer questions, that their future teachers are very likely to expect.

I isolate known-answer questions for specific attention here because asking and answering them is not only an unfamiliar language behavior for some children, it's also one that may violate cultural views of effective language use. In many African American communities, for example, the expression of obvious information—stating what "everyone already knows"—is not considered appropriate or skilled verbal behavior. Consider the perspective offered by one African American teacher and father quoted in Gundaker (1998):

> Black people get the point quickly. It's essential to their survival. Once they see something or once it's been said they assume everybody gets it. They don't like to repeat it. They don't see any reason to spell things out.... But in school they want you to spell it out. That's what they grade you for. That's how you show you are smart. Black kids show they're smart by showing how far they can go playing all around the point but they consider it stupid to spell out what everybody gets. (p. 164)

For better or worse, children (and adolescents) are rewarded in school and viewed as intelligent for knowing the right answer, for being "information givers" in response to factual questions posed by teachers and, frequently, on standardized tests as well. Even though the content of questions obviously becomes more sophisticated as children progress up the educational ladder, their underlying form and function remain the same: to test the respondent's ability to produce a single, specific, predetermined answer. Because being able and willing to respond appropriately to these questions is essential to success in many school settings, I advocate talking explicitly with children about known-answer questions.

Using a big book as a prop, for instance, a teacher might introduce the topic by telling children something like the following:

> In school, we play a question game when we talk about books. I ask a question, and, if you know the answer, you raise your hand. I may not be able to call on you to say the answer out loud, because you know that I can only call on one person at a time, but I'll notice that your hand is up. Sometimes the questions will be silly. Look at this page [show illustration]. When we play the question game, I might ask you, "How many owls are sitting on the branch?" It's a silly question, isn't it? Because we can all see that there are three owls. But even if the question is silly, when you know the answer, raise your hand, because that's how we play the game.

I have found it helpful to use a puppet to talk with children about known-answer questions and other kinds of book reading behaviors. For example, many preschoolers and kindergartners love *Owl Babies* (Waddell, 1992). I typically read this book with an owl puppet; the one I use has a head that swivels and wings that flap. Because *Owl Babies* lends itself to lots of interaction with listeners, there are many opportunities during the reading for the owl puppet to behave inappropriately (e.g., calling out answers and other comments, turning his head away and not paying attention, distracting other children). In turn, these behaviors give many chances for the teacher initially, and eventually for the children themselves, to explain to the owl puppet how it is supposed to behave when a book is read aloud.

Inspired by Gabriela, I sometimes have the owl puppet voice ideas I suspect the children might have. For example, when the puppet covers its eyes in frustration and says (in a very scornful voice) "That's a really silly question!" I am able—in my response to the puppet—to validate what some children may be thinking and communicate my

own awareness that, yes, the questions we ask in the "question game" *are* often kind of silly. This is critical because it is especially important in multilingual, multicultural classrooms for children to feel (a) that their teachers' comments and responses "make sense" and (b) that these either fit with, or differ from in understandable ways, the assumptions about language that they bring from home. In this particular example, then, children who come from a cultural community in which stating the obvious is not valued learn that *in school* stating the obvious *is* valued. This understanding allows children to participate in "talk about books" in ways that will help them be successful in school without having to reject their own community's standards of skilled verbal performance.

3. Make books come alive

A couple of years ago, I received a package from one of my sisters for my birthday. In it were three stuffed bears and a brown-skinned doll, all dressed up to look like the characters from *Leola and the Honeybears*. With minimal sewing skills, a wonderful imagination, and very little money (the bears and the doll were purchased from a resale shop), my sister created the means for characters in a story to step out of the pages of a book and into the life of the classroom. Leola and the honeybears joined the owl and a host of other puppets and dolls that I use to help stories come alive for children who are just beginning to form a connection with books.

In addition to the teacher using dolls and puppets to help read books in lively and engaging ways, children can use them to dramatize the story in the book or to create new dialogues and stories of their own. These storybook characters can also be used in more structured ways to help children develop deeper understandings of story elements like character and plot. For example, children might interview Leola about her feelings and motivations at critical points in the story. As children begin to identify with a book's characters, they enter fully and imaginatively the world of story. Characters who reappear in a series present particularly rich possibilities for children to form a strong attachment to text (see Sidebar for useful series books). One example of these possibilities is described next.

USEFUL CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Clifton, L. (1970). *Everett Anderson's year.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1970). *Some of the days of Everett Anderson.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1971). *Everett Anderson's Christmas coming.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1976). *Everett Anderson's friend.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1976). *Everett Anderson's 1-2-3.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1983). *Everett Anderson's goodbye.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (1991). *Everett Anderson's nine month long.* New York: Henry Holt.
Clifton, L. (2001). *One of the problems of Everett Anderson.* New York: Henry Holt.
Havill, J. (1986). *Jamaica's find.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Havill, J. (1989). *Jamaica tag-along.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Havill, J. (1993). *Jamaica and Brianna.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Havill, J. (1995). *Jamaica's blue marker.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Havill, J. (1999). *Jamaica and the substitute teacher.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Havill, J. (2002). *Brianna, Jamaica, and the dance of spring.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
Keats, E.J. (1962, 1976). *The snowy day.* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1964, 1977). *Whistle for Willie.* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1967, 1998). *Peter's chair.* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1968, 1998). *A letter to Amy.* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1969, 1998). *Goggles!* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1970, 1999). *Hi, cat!* New York: Puffin Books.
Keats, E.J. (1972, 1999). *Pet show.* New York: Puffin Books.
Lachtman, O.D. (1995). *Pepita talks twice/Pepita habla dos veces.* Houston: TX: Piñata Press.
Lachtman, O.D. (1998). *Pepita thinks pink/Pepita y el color rosado.* Houston, TX: Piñata Press.

In a multilingual kindergarten class, I made audiotapes of myself reading aloud the first three books in the Jamaica series by Juanita Havill. On the tapes, I not only read the books but also talked to the children, commenting on illustrations, defining words, and drawing connections among different parts of the book. On one page of *Jamaica's Find* (1986), for example, there is an illustration of Jamaica on a swing. On the audiotape, I made up

a song I asked children to imagine that Jamaica might sing as she was swinging: "Brown skin, brown skin. I just love the skin I'm in." Over a series of weeks, the teacher and I placed each of the tapes in the listening center along with multiple copies of the book that matched the tape. Soon after we did so, we began to notice Jamaica and her friends entering the classroom in all sorts of interesting ways.

One day, for instance, I came upon a group of children in the block corner. As they were building their structures, two of the boys were softly singing, "Brown skin, brown skin...." Another day, a girl in the class described the drawing she was working on: "Here's me and here's Jamaica...." On another occasion, several children noted that a classmate's boots were "just like Brianna's" in *Jamaica and Brianna* (1993). Despite the fact that the majority of them listened to each of the tapes several times (and some children many more times than this), children frequently requested one or another of the Jamaica books to be read during story time or times when an adult in the room read with one child or a small group of children. These requests for rereadings are significant, because each time children return to a text they listen to it with deepened awareness, perhaps noticing new elements in the story, putting together pieces of a pattern that eluded them the first or second time they listened, or coming up with different questions about some aspect of the book. When they listen to familiar stories, children experience book reading as a pleasurable and intellectually engaging activity.

One of my most memorable experiences in this particular class was witnessing children's excitement the day I brought in a copy of the then-brand-new *Jamaica and the Substitute Teacher* (1999). Many children in this class were second-language learners, and most came from families and communities in which reading books to young children was not a common or familiar practice. Yet no writer's new book could have been more eagerly anticipated; this group of multilingual kindergartners could not wait to find out what was going to happen to Jamaica next.

Part of the process of making books come alive for children is to engage in authentic conversations. One morning, for example, I was reading *Jamaica's Find* (1986) with a small group of children when Brittany (pseudonym) pointed to a little girl in one of the illustrations and said, "She's white." What ensued was an intense discussion among the group about skin color, friendships, and (eventually) an incident involving these issues that had occurred on the playground. In this discussion, the book became a lens through which to examine the world, a tool for thinking about and solving problems in children's everyday lives. When teachers have large numbers of students, as they often do in urban multicultural, multilingual settings, it is not always easy to find time in the day for extended dialogues. Indeed, one main reason the discussion described could occur was that there was more than one adult in the classroom. By no means do I underestimate the very real constraints under which many teachers have to operate. Nonetheless, I strongly believe, having witnessed it so often, that whatever efforts teachers can make to create spaces for extended discussion about literature will be richly rewarded as children begin to forge deep connections to books.

In *Inside Picture Books* (Spitz, 1999), the author recounted an incident that reminds us of how powerful and long-lasting children's early attachments to books can be. In a cafe one day, Spitz was discussing *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* with a fellow lover of children's literature when an elderly woman at a nearby table broke into their conversation to share the story of her lifelong reluctance to try chamomile tea. She attributed this reluctance to her childhood assumption that it must be awful-tasting stuff, because Peter Rabbit's mother made him drink it as part of his punishment for venturing into Mr. McGregor's garden. Recently, however, the woman had been persuaded to try it and, much to her surprise, had discovered that chamomile tea was delicious. This event, she confided, had caused her to reevaluate her earlier impressions of Mother Rabbit's character and, indeed, to call into question her interpretation of the story as a whole. Spitz wrote,

> My companion and I were charmed with this interruption.... A bond was instantly established. There we sat in the cafe, puzzling over the latent ambiguity of one of our childhood books more than ninety years after Beatrix Potter had first published *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1902. (pp. 4-5)

As I read Spitz's description of this incident, I found myself reflecting upon how powerful and magical this elderly woman's first encounters with the book must have been.

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