



## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION THRIVE

By Annette McMahon

Close your eyes and think about a place where you feel comfortable, where you can be yourself. Where you can see and hear the things that are important to you. You can eat how and what you really like, dress in a way that is important to you, and where you are not labeled “too loud,” “too quiet,” or just seen as “different.” This place you have just imagined is where you can function without fear and anxiety. Where you are not made to feel shame about what you eat or wear. Where you can speak to peers in your dialect without being told it is wrong. This environment is a place where cultural responsiveness can thrive.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as “a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning” ([Ladson-Billings, 1994](#)). But how do you get there, to that sweet spot of inclusion and acceptance of all who are a part of your school community? The road to becoming culturally responsive is built with purposeful actions which prove that your students and their culture are important to you. There are specific steps that can be taken which help create visibility for our students and help them see themselves in a positive light. **See** your students, your community, and plan for their comfort and success.

To build a culturally responsive environment, decorate with purpose. Fill your space with the sights and sounds of the varying cultures that represent your stakeholders. Display flags, traditional artwork, and artifacts that demonstrate the beauty of the culture. Speak and display the language around the classroom and school. Showing parents and students visually that the language and traditions that are a part of their culture are important to you as a school leader is vital. Plan celebrations around cultural events/holidays that are important. Create spirit weeks that encourage students to dress in a way that will show the pride they feel for their culture. These purposeful steps will begin to transform the culture of your building or classroom into a place where inclusion is normal and world cultures are celebrated. This foundation will allow for the important work of culturally responsive teaching to flow.

Small changes will lead to increased parent involvement, increased attendance, and an environment where culturally responsive teaching will flourish. I am speaking from experience – you will find success!

References

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## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

By Nelofar Khamisani

Spring 2020 brought a profound change in the life of students. It was the beginning of COVID-19 when students went for Spring break, and the break did not end for a long time because suddenly, school closure was announced (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). Where COVID-19 brought family members close to each other (Cahapay, 2020), it built a giant wall between students and teachers. It put students in the trauma of no socialization, especially when they belong to an immigrant family with a cultural difference and limited social contacts.

As a mother, I witnessed my first grader raise her hand to share some connections with the teacher during the remote learning while having a read-aloud time. It usually took a long time to have her turn to share something with the teacher.

Mom said, "Teacher is busy, dear. You can share with her later."  
First-grader said with a sad mood, "She never listens to me!"

I realized why she (first grader) was silent in the class, avoided showing her work to the teacher, always put her head down on the desk, and her activeness and excitement for the class dropped off slowly and gradually. She constantly wanted mom beside her to listen to her.

It shows me that no socialization factor for a long time made students' expectations high for teachers, and they wanted teachers to listen to them all the time. There is a challenge for teachers now when students are on face-to-face learning. How to assist and bring students back who faced the trauma of no socialization and have a negative impression of appearing to be ignored?

There are positive impacts on students' learning and development with interaction with their teacher (Easa, Bazzi., 2021). There is a need to develop a good relationship between teacher and student, and it is possible through interaction and making a connection with family to know about them. Every student has faced a different situation, so knowledge about students' lives informs teachers about their strengths and needs, especially for culturally different students (Delpit, 1995).

Conversation with students and families to know about the time they spent at home and about social-emotional challenges they faced will help teachers to bring students back with all strengths and with no negative impression from the trauma they faced. Making a rubric to check in with students is also helpful for teachers to understand students' learning needs and strengths.

### References

Cahapay, M. B. (2020). How Filipino parents' home educate their children with autism during COVID-19 period. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 1-4.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. The New Press.

Easa, N. F., & Bazzi, A. M. (2021). COVID-19 and lack of socialization: does service innovation become an imperative for universities? *International Journal of Disruptive Innovation in Government*.

Garbe, A., Ogurlu, U., Logan, N., & Cook, P. (2020). COVID-19 and remote learning: Experiences of parents with children during the pandemic. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 4(3), 45-65.

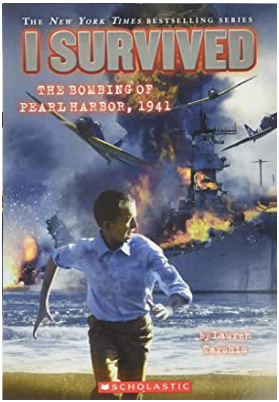
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## FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

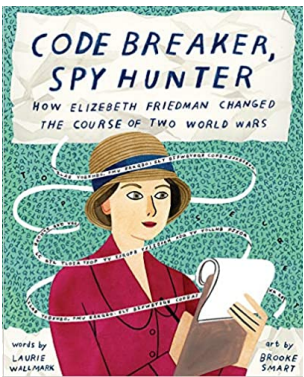
December has arrived. Thoughts turn to Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanza. December is **Human Rights Month**. It commemorates the passage of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights Document by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 guaranteeing everyone has basic rights and

freedom regardless of who you are. December is also **Read a New Book Month** which encourages everyone to take time out from this hectic season to spend some time reading. Books also make nice gifts to give or receive.



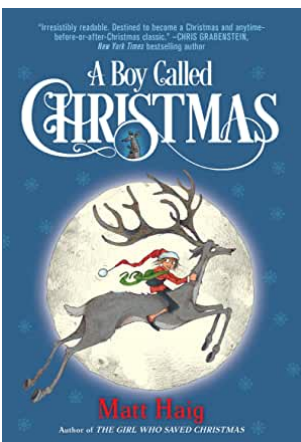
December 7, 1941, the "Day that will live in Infamy" is the day that America became involved in World War II. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese airplanes. ***I Survived the Bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1941*** by Lauren Tarshis is a short historical fiction story that gives the feeling of what it was like to experience the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Danny and his mom have just moved from New York to Hawaii. His mom is a nurse at the hospital located on Hickam Field. Danny meets and soon becomes friends with a Japanese family (the Sudos and their 3 year old son Aki) living within his apartment complex. Aki has a sketch book filled with drawings of all the planes that his father drew, and Aki tells Danny about the various planes. It is now December 7th, and being jolted out of bed by Aki's screams of swarms of planes that aren't American along with seeing the fire, smoke, and the bombs, Danny realizes America is being attacked. Danny heads to Hickam Field to find his mom. Along the way there's another round of bombing and shooting. He meets a pilot who's wounded but able to

walk. Will Danny and the lieutenant make it to Hickam Field? Will Danny be able to find his mom and she be OK? You'll have to read *I Survived the Bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1941* to find out if they all survived. The back of the book has further information about Pearl Harbor, and an extensive timeline of events along with books for further reading. This book makes a nice introduction to World War II.



If you like solving puzzles, codes, and mysteries, then read the book ***Code Breaker, Spy Hunter: How Elizabeth Friedman Changed the Course of Two World Wars*** by Laurie Wallmark. This picture book biography tells the story of Elizabeth Friedman who, as a young girl, enjoyed English literature, especially poetry and the works of Shakespeare. She also liked puzzles, mysteries, and creating and deciphering codes. The patterns and structures used in these works would eventually lead her to work as a cryptanalyst. Along the way she met her husband William, a scientist, and together they developed a code breaking unit that was able to decode enemy communications as well as develop new code breaking techniques during World War I. After the war Elizabeth helped the Coast Guard capture smugglers and bootleggers by cracking the codes they used to communicate about their illegal businesses. When America entered World War II Elizabeth joined the new office OSS (Office of Strategic Services), using her code breaking unit to help capture Nazi spies.

However, the FBI Director took all the credit for accomplishing this feat. Elizabeth continued to work at the office and helped in the capture of several others who were working as spies for the Japanese. *Code Breaker, Spy Hunter* contains Elizabeth's own words which are strategically placed within the watercolor illustrations. The ribbons on several of the pages also contain coded messages for the reader to solve. The back of the book contains information about codes and ciphers, and includes a challenge to crack the code. There is also a timeline, bibliography, and information on cryptography today. To download a great guide for teachers, go to [www.abrambooks.com](http://www.abrambooks.com). Go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) to hear the story being read.



Have you ever wondered how the tradition of Santa Claus or Father Christmas started? For an interesting answer read the novel ***A Boy Called Christmas*** by Matt Haig. This is the story of a poor boy called Nicholas. He lives with his widowed father who works very hard to make ends meet. Then one day Nicholas's father is offered a job which pays more money even though he has to go to a far away land. As a result Nicholas has to live with his aunt who neglects, harasses, and mistreats him. He becomes friends with a cheese eating mouse, Mika, and a reindeer. As a result of Nicholas's living conditions, he runs away to search for his father and thus the adventure begins. He recalls his mother telling him "never let fear be your guide but be brave and do the right thing." Nicholas is eventually rescued by some elves and the magical part of the story ensues. This is a story about love, friendship, and kindness but also reindeers, elves, trolls, and pixies, along with whimsical illustrations and a touch of humor. *A Boy Called Christmas* is now a Netflix film and would make a nice addition to your Christmas books.



A wish for a certain gift is always part of everyone's Christmas Wish List. **The Christmas Wish** by Lori Evert is the story of Anja who lives way up north (presumably Norway), whose greatest wish is to be one of Santa's elves. On one snowy day in December Anja sets out on her skis to find Santa Claus. Anja doesn't want her parents to worry so she leaves them a message where she went. Guided by a cardinal she travels through the woods. As she travels on her journey Anja makes friends with many animals who help her along the way, including a strong horse, a shy musk ox, a kind polar bear, and a tired reindeer. It is the reindeer who takes Anja to the North Pole. Does Anja get her wish or is it just a dream? The beautiful illustrations also enhance the story. *The Christmas Wish* is a beautiful book to share with your families. Head to You Tube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) to hear the book read aloud and another short video on how the story was written and illustrated.

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## LITERACY LINKS

By the IRC Educational Media Committee

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

### Interactive Resources

[Sketchboard.io](http://Sketchboard.io)

Sketchboard is an interactive tool that allows online collaboration in realtime. Collaborators are able to combine diagrams, shapes, images and freehand drawings on one endless board. The projects are automatically saved to the cloud for future collaboration.

### Comprehensive Resources

[Zane Education](http://Zane Education)

The comprehensive resource provides videos, quizzes, study tools and lesson plans. These resources are available for grades K-12. The resources are aligned to state standards and are differentiated to meet the varied needs of all learners.

### Web 2.0 Resources

[Choosito](http://Choosito)

Choosito is an Internet search tool that allows teachers to find resources on the web that are differentiated according to reading level. They are organized according to subject area as well. This is a great resource to make finding Internet resources easy and at the appropriate reading level for all students.

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## UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **December 1, 2021: IRC Webinar** on *The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Using Literature as a Lens and Tool for Transformation* with Chad Everett from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **December 2, 2021: Prairie Area Reading Council** will host an Illinois Reads Sneak Peek at 6:30 pm via Zoom.
- **December 3, 2021: East Central-EIU Reading Council** will host a Holiday Book Exchange from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at Jackson Avenue Coffee, 708 Jackson Avenue, Charleston, Illinois.
- **December 4, 2021: Northwestern Illinois Reading Council** will host Read with Mrs. Claus at 10:30 am at the Mt. Carroll Public Library, 208 N Main Street, Mt. Carroll, Illinois.

- **December 6, 2021: Western Illinois Reading Council** will host the Science of Reading Make and Take from 4:30 to 5:30 pm at the Galesburg 205 Board Office, 932 Harrison Street, Galesburg, Illinois.
- **December 7, 2021: Will County Reading Council** will host Santa Reads from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Joliet Public Library, 3395 Black Road, Joliet, Illinois.
- **December 8, 2021: Will County Reading Council** will host Santa Reads from 9:00 to 11:00 am at the Joliet Public Library, 3395 Black Road, Joliet, Illinois.
- **December 11, 2021: National Road Reading Council** will host Stories with Santa at 10:00 am at the Effingham Public Library, 200 N. 3rd Street, Effingham, Illinois.
- **December 14, 2021: MID-State Reading Council** will host the next session of The Well-Balanced Teacher Book Study at 4:30 pm at Gill Street Bar & Grill, 3002 Gill Street, Bloomington, Illinois.
- **December 15, 2021: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRC Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).

## QUICK LINKS

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Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at [irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org) or by phone at 309-454-1341.

See what's also happening on our social media sites:

