

COLLABORATIVE CRITICAL PRACTICE:
DESIGNING A CHILDREN'S PICTUREBOOK
WITH RESETTLED REFUGEES

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this endeavor to my family, especially to my husband for his steadfast support and companionship. To my two children for first opening my eyes to whose stories are being told in today's picturebooks and for your enthusiasm as I pursued this project. And finally, to the resettled refugee children and their families whom we have been privileged to know as our neighbors in Houston.

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ABSTRACT

People of color and other marginalized communities have long been underrepresented or misrepresented in children’s literature in the United States. Only 13% of children’s books published between 1994 and 2017 included multicultural content. Even fewer picturebooks for young readers are told from the perspectives of refugees. This disparity exists despite an increase in global migration and despite evidence that multicultural storytelling has a profoundly positive impact on young children of all races and cultural backgrounds.

Born out of the conviction that designers must be “more conscious of the roles they play in culture, politics, and society, both serving and creating,” (Heller and Vienne) this project seeks to present a research model for how designers might confront complex social issues through collaborative critical practice. Situated within the context of Houston, Texas—a major hub for refugee resettlement—the designer and a local immigrant artist facilitated an art and writing workshop with five resettled refugee children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to create an original picturebook. The collaborative team determined the ideation for the picturebook and verified direction along the way. Through a multi-phase process rooted in participatory and equity-centered design, the design outcome emerged to supplement the slim inventory of contemporary stories told by refugees.

I. INTRODUCTION

Refugee resettlement has become an increasingly contentious issue amidst a rise in anti-migrant discourse and restrictive immigration policies in the United States. After four decades of bipartisan consensus on welcoming refugees who have fled persecution and violence in their home countries (Salehyan), the annual admission of refugees to the U.S. has been repeatedly reduced since 2016 and is forecasted to be capped at 18,000 in 2020: the lowest quota on record (Krogstad). Yet the United Nations reports “witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record” with 25.9 million refugees worldwide waiting for resettlement (UNHCR). In this fraught sociopolitical context, refugee children already resettled in the U.S.—the majority of whom are also persons of color—“may be more vulnerable to bullying, bias, and harassment” (BRYCS). Not unlike other marginalized communities, refugee children struggle to find affirming and authentic representation in mainstream American culture. The positive, multidimensional portrayal of refugees in literature and mass media carries the potential to support these newcomers’ perspectives and experiences, as well as provide an avenue for empathy and social inclusion among their American-born peers.

Statement of the Problem

Specifically in the genre of children’s picturebooks, the perspectives of refugee protagonists are in remarkably short supply. Instead, Eurocentric, monocultural narratives continue to dominate children’s book publishing in the United States. A fraction of children’s picturebooks published each year are created by, or about, people of color (Cooperative Children’s Book Center). Even fewer picturebooks offer “windows” into the experiences of children who are refugees or “mirrors” for refugee children themselves

(Sims Bishop, “Mirrors”). This disparity exists despite evidence that multicultural storytelling has a profoundly positive impact on young children of all racial identities and cultural backgrounds. Social psychologists and early childhood education experts agree that multicultural books foster empathy and empowerment in young children and can counteract negative stereotypes (Aronson and O’Brien; Brooks and McNair; Gopalakrishnan; and Sims Bishop, “Reframing”). Considering the developmental period of children between the ages of five and nine is particularly conducive for bias reduction efforts (Baron and Banaji; Beatty; Douglass et al.; and Harris), the medium of the picturebook targets this age group and offers a distinct opportunity to cultivate social inclusion. Furthermore, among children of color, picturebooks featuring “mirror” protagonists promote healthy racial identity development and a heightened sense of worth and agency in the larger society (Sims Bishop, “Mirrors”).

This thesis explores ways in which design practitioners are uniquely suited to approach the complexity of a collaborative, cross-cultural publishing project because of their skills in synthesizing information and designing iteratively (Medley; Barness and Papaelias; Barringer; Cross; and Menegazzi and Debus). Indeed, the broadening design discipline empowers designers to become whole-process innovators who originate and implement innovative strategies to address contemporary social issues (Cassim). At the core of this design research is the supposition that *counter-narratives* are necessary to resist systems of oppression and erasure (Brooks and McNair; Koss; and Nieto and Bode). Counter-narratives confront gaps in representation and offer divergent perspectives to challenge society’s default, dominant narratives. In the same vein, *critical practice* “functions as a catalyst to change the mainstream or the status quo” (Ericson and

Mazé 395). Thus, operating within the counter-narrative and critical practice traditions, this project aims to address the acute shortage of children's literature written by or about refugees. With methodology based on the principles of Equity-Centered Community Design, which intentionally seeks the participation of diverse co-creators and decentralizes power dynamics among the collaborators, the design process focuses on a mutuality of exchange in the production of an equitable design solution (Creative Reaction Lab). The outcome of this research and design process is a picturebook for young readers based on the stories of refugee children who have resettled in Houston, a racially and ethnically diverse city in Texas which historically has led the nation in its number of refugee resettlements (Kragie).

Thesis Organization

Having introduced the problem in Chapter 1, the next chapter frames the vision for this project by describing a brief history of multicultural children's literature, examining the current context of children's book publishing in the United States, and demonstrating the impact of multicultural stories—or the lack thereof—on young children. Chapter 2 also includes an overview of how the field of design is expanding as more designers initiate, facilitate, and collaborate on projects derived from their own sense of social responsibility.

Chapters 3 and 4 include a discussion of the project's research and methodology. These chapters present a detailed record of how the iterative design process involves several phases—including story gathering, prototyping, and testing and analysis—before arriving at the design outcome. Finally, Chapter 5 provides discussion and ideas for future research and project expansion.

II. RESEARCH

Framework and Parameters for Success

Complexity is familiar for graphic designers who often “must be all things—thinker and technician, problem solver and practitioner” (Kim 17). Equipped with design thinking and craftsmanship, designers might be tempted to produce design outcomes solely from their own expertise. However, Participatory Design holds the potential to augment design outcomes because the “viewpoints of other participants can have a radically innovative impact on the project” (Huybrechts 41). As this thesis demonstrates, Participatory Design is even more indispensable in a cross-cultural endeavor. In traversing complex terrain, the project demanded an integrative approach, combining well-researched evidence with new, first-hand information from “living experts” (Creative Reaction Lab).

In order to construct a framework for the project, as well as parameters for success, the next section describes the (1) design opportunity; (2) context and collaboration; and (3) desired outcome.

Design Opportunity. Designers are notorious for taking a problem and calling it a “design opportunity.” Although this may be interpreted as naïve optimism, approaching a problem as a design opportunity reveals the designer’s genuine expectation of possibility. The act of framing problems as design opportunities reveals designers’ eagerness and belief in their capacity to take on complicated projects. As design researcher Nigel Cross explains, “In order to cope with ill-defined problems, designers have to learn to have the

self-confidence to define, redefine and change the problem (“Designerly Ways of Knowing” 7).

For this thesis, the design opportunity stemmed from the scarcity of multicultural children’s picturebooks, especially those depicting the stories of refugees. One may wonder, *why design a picturebook?* What is distinct about this mode of communication? There are many ways to define a picturebook, but the one-word spelling of picturebook is an important starting place. As defended by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, the one-word spelling of “picturebook” accurately conveys a more integral picture-text relationship as compared with a “picture book” (a book that happens to have pictures). In a picturebook, there is a dynamic, indispensable interplay between the book’s images and words—a multimodality combining both visual and verbal communication.

In what children’s literature expert Megan Dowd Lambert calls “shared reading,” picturebooks have long been known to provide natural opportunities for child-adult interaction and reading for mutual enjoyment and learning. The format of the picturebook offers an interwoven visual and verbal narrative for young audiences and their caregivers. Even in the emerging digital landscape of e-books and other media, Lambert insists that the picturebook “will robustly outlast any other codex form due to its reliance on its physical bookness and how it creates a meeting space, that ‘playground for the mind,’ for children and adults to interact with one another on a common ground of words, pictures, and design” (96). Often, children first engage picturebooks with a trusted adult—whether a family member, teacher, or librarian. During the pre-literate stage, children flip through the pages of picturebooks on their own, observing the illustrations, studying the words and phrases, and making untold connections about the world around them. Both in shared

and solo reading experiences, children are being formed socially, emotionally, and culturally through picturebooks.

Not only do picturebooks introduce children to art and the written word from an early age, picturebooks can enhance or inhibit children's multicultural literacy (i.e., a "growing repertoire of knowledge" founded upon diverse cultural perspectives) (Taylor and Hoechsmann 221). Through the themes and narratives depicted in its pages, the picturebook holds the potential for exposure to complex subject matter and diverse experiences, which can stimulate child-adult dialogue and edify the child's developing mind and social consciousness. Children often ask questions about the story or caregivers initiate conversation to unpack tough topics. As will be explored in depth later, picturebooks can be "mirrors" in which young children can see and relate to characters like themselves or "windows" through which they can engage the stories of characters who are different from them (Sims Bishop, "Mirrors"). Both types of stories are essential to children's understanding of themselves and the broader human family. Depending on whether a given picturebook serves as a mirror or window to a child, that picturebook presents distinct possibilities. Mirror picturebooks told from the perspective of people of color have the power to promote empowerment and dignity within marginalized communities (Nieto and Bode). Window picturebooks can evoke empathy for and deeper understanding of the book's characters who may represent different cultural perspectives than those of the reader (Clay and Iocaboni; Martinez et al.).

All of these factors further solidify the design opportunity to create a children's picturebook centered around the mirror-window story of a family's refugee experience. Picturebook researchers Salisbury and Styles assert that "there is no topic so taboo or

taxing that it has not been tackled in a picturebook” (86). Because picturebooks provide a “safe space” wherein “children can explore emotional relationships, including some of the big issues of life—love, divorce, death, violence, bullying, environmental issues, and so on” (86), the picturebook is the ideal format to share complex, yet vital, stories with young children as well as elicit conversations between children and their caregivers.

Context and Collaboration. From the outset, it is important to contextualize this project and recognize its dependence on collaboration. First, the regional context of Houston, Texas, provides the narrative origin for this project. Houston is ranked as the most racially and ethnically diverse major city in the nation (Emerson) and is known as a hub for refugee resettlement (Kragie). According to 2014 data, the greater Houston area welcomes about 25 of every 1,000 refugees that the United Nations resettles globally—more than any other American city. School-aged children in the Houston area are likely to encounter children from many places around the world due to refugee resettlement among other migration factors. Yet very few (if any) picturebooks have been created to tell the stories of children living in this region of intersecting cultures.

The second unique factor of this thesis is its collaborative format. While many picturebooks take the approach of recounting a single story, this project aspires to achieve shared authorship facilitated through an art and writing workshop. During the workshop, five children (ages 11–15), whose families are originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, were invited to reflect on their early childhood experiences of displacement and eventual resettlement in Houston. Through an intentional design process engaging stakeholder feedback, which will be described in detail later, these stories were developed into a composite story with vibrant text and illustrations. This strategy is an example of

design research that operates from a participatory mindset. Participatory Design means that, rather than taking a posture of individual expertise, the designer values collaboration with other people as integral to the design process (Sanders).

Desired Outcome. The desired outcome of this thesis is to create a collaborative, shared-authorship children's picturebook, which will supplement the slim inventory of contemporary stories told by refugees and hopefully stimulate the creation of more of these stories to be shared with the world. This research and documentation process will illuminate details of the designer's creative process and offer best practices when approaching a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary project of this nature.

The Movement for Multicultural Children's Literature

Gaps in Representation. In order to provide historical context for this project, one must understand that people of color have long been underrepresented or misrepresented in children's literature in the United States. After the Civil War and throughout the early 20th century, Black characters were largely absent from children's books or were portrayed through dehumanizing stereotypes (Pescosolido 445). In an effort to address this inequity, in 1920 W. E. B. Du Bois published the first magazine dedicated to positive representation for African American children (Brooks and McNair 141–2). Although *The Brownies' Book* only ran for 23 months, it provided a sharp contrast to many of the demoralizing caricatures found in mainstream children's books (see fig. 1). Within the pages of *The Brownies' Book*, uplifting storytelling and imagery “celebrated African American identity, urged racial pride, and encouraged its young readers to aspire to positions of leadership within their communities” (Center for Digital Research in the Humanities).

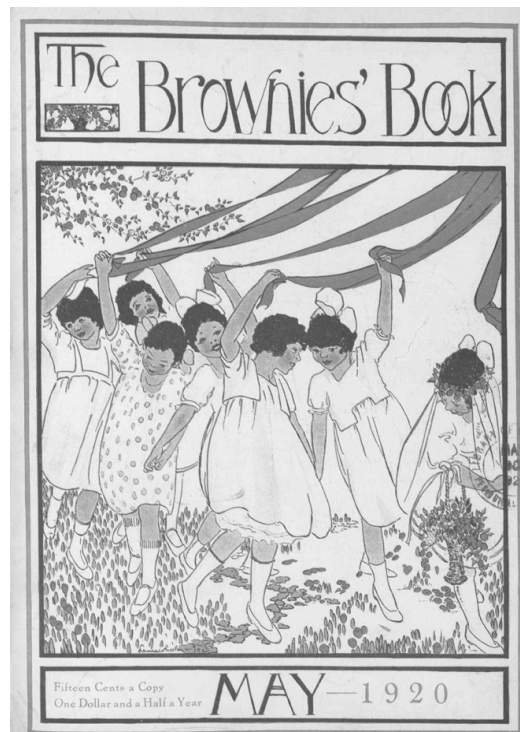


Fig. 1. Examples of early 20th-century picturebook caricatures of African Americans, including *Little Black Sambo* by Helen Bannerman (Source: Alephbet.com), *Epaminondas and His Auntie* by Sara Cone Bryant (Source: Archemdis.wordpress.com), and *Frawg* by Annie Vaughan Weaver (Source: Abebooks.com) in contrast with W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Brownies' Book* (Source: Center for Digital Research in the Humanities).

Sharing Du Bois' vision, there were additional efforts among African Americans to produce literature for children of color during the Harlem Renaissance (Smith). These

early endeavors, championed by creators of color, led to a growing inventory of multicultural books in the United States. Still, invisibility and cultural distortions of racial and religious minorities persisted as the norm in the White-dominated children's publishing industry well into the mid- to late-20th century. Many children's books published in this era—including those now considered “classics,” such as picturebooks by Dr. Seuss and “the most popular and readily available set of children's books, the *Little Golden Books*” (Pescosolido 446)—perpetuated racist and xenophobic attitudes. These stories for young readers often conveyed suspicion and mockery of people of color, foreigners, and other marginalized groups, including misrepresentations of First Nations/Indigenous, Jewish people, Asians, and Arabs (Ishizuka and Stephens; Pescosolido).

Still, proponents of equity in children's literature continued to advance the cause. In the same decade as the Civil Rights Movement, Nancy Larrick's 1965 article, “The All-White World of Children's Books,” was circulated in *The Saturday Review of Books*, bringing widespread awareness to disparities in book publishing and new energy to make multicultural books available to children. Soon after, the Council on Interracial Books for Children and the Coretta Scott King Award were both established (Gopalakrishnan 26). Perhaps most notable in the movement for multicultural children's books was the landmark research of Rudine Sims Bishop in 1990, which left an indelible mark on discourse among scholars and educators. Using the metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, Sims Bishop describes how, through books, children need to see themselves reflected back (like mirrors), to gaze into unfamiliar landscapes (windows), and to enter worlds different from their own (sliding glass doors). She notes how

underrepresented communities experience a scarcity of mirrors: “When children cannot find themselves in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part” (“Mirrors” ix). Sims Bishop asserts how this literary void not only harms children of color, but White children too:

Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others...

In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism (“Mirrors” x).

Sims Bishop’s influential research has energized the movement for multicultural books for nearly 30 years. Numerous book awards and contests have been established to support and stimulate the literary endeavors of diverse authors and illustrators. One such book award finds its origins at Texas State University. Named in honor of alumnus Dr. Tomás Rivera, the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award was created in 1995 (Texas State University College of Education). The award honors authors and illustrators who have published fiction and non-fiction children’s books that depict the Mexican American experience. Other awards encourage manuscript submissions by aspiring authors and illustrators of color and Native nations, such as the New Voices Award for children’s picturebooks (Lee and Low Books).

Notably, public awareness around the diversity gap in children's literature spiked in March 2014 with two opinion pieces in the *New York Times' Sunday Review* on "Where are the people of color in children's books?" written by father-son authors, Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers. Then, in April and May 2014, novelists Ellen Oh, Aisha Saeed, and Malinda Lo generated thought-provoking conversations on social media with the hashtag campaign #weneeddiversebooks. These efforts evolved into We Need Diverse Books, a non-profit organization, which "offers awards, grants, and mentorships for authors, internships aimed at making the industry more inclusive, and tools for promoting diverse books" (Slater).

Responding to the slow progress in mainstream publishing, some creators of color have pursued publication through self-publishing avenues or through independent publishers committed to multicultural children's literature. One such independent publisher, Lee and Low, was established in 1991. Now considered the largest multicultural children's book publisher in the United States, Lee and Low has contributed to public awareness and demonstrated its commitment to increasing the number of books created by people of color for all children to enjoy. For a number of years, Lee and Low has tracked data provided by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. Their annual infographic, "The Diversity Gap in Children's Books" (see fig. 2), documents how few children's books published in the U.S. contain multicultural content. Although they have observed an up-tick in the annual average of new multicultural children's books in recent years, content has been largely produced by White authors and illustrators. Only seven percent of new children's books published in 2017 were written or illustrated by #ownvoices from the Black, Latinx, or First Nations/Indigenous communities (Lee

and Low Books). This low percentage is far from representative of the nation’s youthful readership. More than half of children under the age of five are children of color, and nearly one in four children in the U.S. are children of immigrants or immigrants themselves (Children’s Defense Fund). Even in an increasingly diverse U.S. context, the lack of diversity in children’s books goes deeper than needing to provide a numerical quantity of children’s books proportional to the nation’s demographics. It is also the authenticity and quality of multicultural children’s books that matters in equitable representation. Cultural authenticity requires not “only the absence of stereotypes but also the presence of values consistent with a particular cultural group and accuracy of cultural details in text and illustrations” (Yoo-Lee, EunYoung, et al. 326).

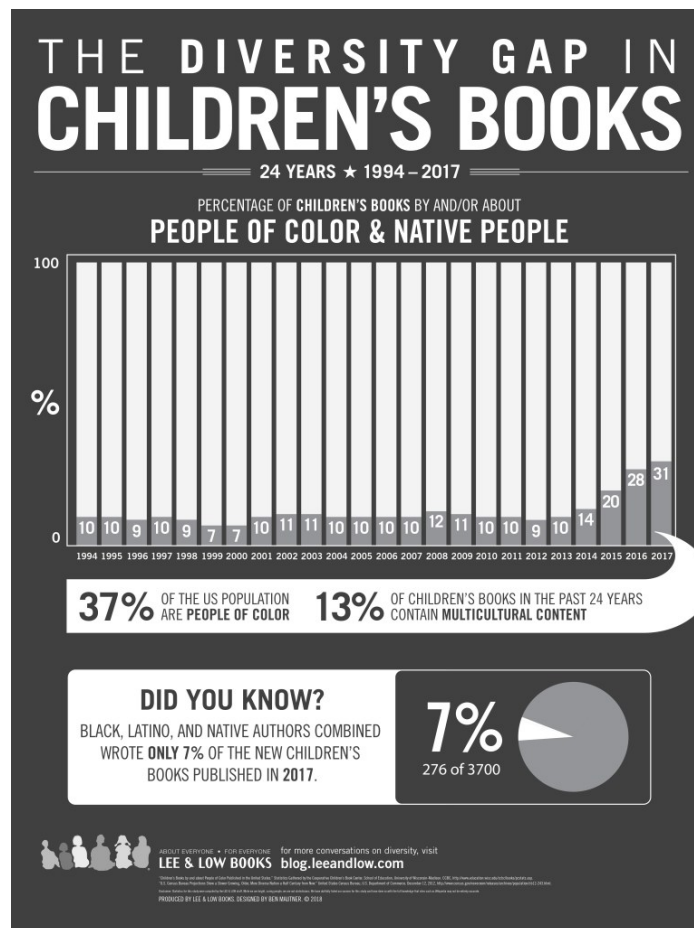


Fig. 2. *The Diversity Gap in Children’s Books* (Source: Lee and Low Books).

Dovetailing with the gaps in literary representation is the standard curriculum or “canon” of knowledge in the context of American public schools. Standard curriculum is largely monocultural—not multicultural. Through textbooks and classroom lessons, “what students learn represents only a fraction of available knowledge. Those who decide what is most important make choices that are influenced by their own limited background, education, and experiences” (Nieto and Bode 35). One of the dangers in excluding diverse people and perspectives is that this exclusion thwarts young people’s capacity for self-actualization and inhibits their contributions in creating a more just world. Indeed, as migration and globalization continue to influence communication, politics, and economies, “it behooves us to educate our students to participate more fully in multicultural and global social exchanges” (Nieto and Bode 23).

Racial Ideology. Recognizing a confluence of factors in the scarcity of multicultural children’s literature, it is important to emphasize that the racial ideology of White supremacy in the U.S. contributes to whose stories are valued and visible (Nieto and Bode). The statistics on children’s books published in the U.S. uncover how preference continues to be given to storytelling that normalizes and thereby elevates Whiteness. People of color are severely underrepresented as protagonists, even in the most recently published books for children (Cooperative Children’s Book Center). In 2018, more children’s books were about animals or non-human characters like trucks than First Nations/Indigenous, Latinx, and Black characters combined (Huyck and Dahlen). By omitting or distorting the stories of people of color, Eurocentric narratives remain default. In turn, these omissions and misrepresentations of people of color affect the socialization and racial attitudes of all children regardless of race:

When children's books center Whiteness, erase people of color and other oppressed groups, or present people of color in stereotypical, dehumanizing, or subordinate ways, they both ingrain and reinforce internalized racism and White supremacy (Ishizuka and Stephens 6).

As in other sectors in American society, the diversity gap in children's books goes largely unchallenged because the dominant racial ideology of White supremacy does not recognize this inequity as problematic. To recognize and dispute entrenched inequities, it is critical to understand that racism depends on two central tenets: "First, a belief in the inherent superiority of some people and the inherent inferiority of others; and second, the acceptance of distributing goods and services—let alone respect—in accordance with such judgments of unequal worth" (Nieto and Bode 53). Despite the common assumption that race has always been an intrinsic part of human identity, it is a relatively recent phenomenon. According to the American Anthropological Association, 18th-century European colonizers invented racial classifications to justify their treatment of conquered and enslaved peoples in North America and throughout the globe (4). Whiteness—a category assigned to people of European descent—became the preferred and privileged identifier associated with cognitive and behavioral superiority. Before this intentional shift, a person's wealth and religion were the determinants of social standing (*Race: The Power of an Illusion*). In fact, race has no biological basis and has been debunked as a scientific classification system (Mukhopadhyay and Henze 670). While predicated on an arbitrary and always shifting set of categories, race still functions as a social ranking mechanism. It divides people into groups based on visible and invisible traits. Although race is not real, the myth of race has very real purpose: to create a social hierarchy where

Whiteness is privileged. As Tatum stresses, “the original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression” (97).

The insufficient inventory of multicultural children’s books in America reveals which narratives are considered consequential. Out of the current inventory of children’s books for elementary-age students, those featuring immigrant and refugee protagonists are in meager supply. Only a few picturebooks on the theme of global migration could be identified in recent years (see fig. 3), including: *Lubna and Pebble* by Wendy Meddour (2019), *Dreamers* by Yujin Morales (2018), *Imagine* by Juan Felipe Herrera (2018), *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies (2018), *Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush’s Incredible Journey* by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes (2017), and *My Name Is Not Refugee* by Kate Milner (2017). Considering that more than 3,000 children’s books published each year in the U.S. are counted and categorized by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC), it is clear that the publishing industry has not kept up with the need for robust storytelling across race and culture.

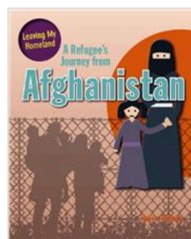
[E]very year we see amazing books by and about people of color and First Nations people published. There just aren’t enough of them. The more books there are, especially books created by authors and illustrators of color, the more opportunities librarians, teachers, and parents and other adults have of finding outstanding books for young readers and listeners that reflect dimensions of their lives, and give a broader understanding of who we are as a nation (CCBC).



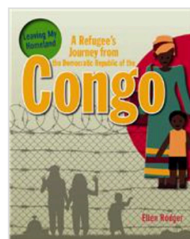
Fig. 3. Recently published picturebooks on the theme of global migration.
(Source: www.goodreads.com)

No recent examples in the picturebook category could be found with protagonists representing the African diaspora with the exception of the *Leaving My Homeland* series published in 2017 by Crabtree Publishing. Operating in a non-fiction format, the series features refugee accounts from 16 different countries. The books are less narrative-driven and more didactic in nature with statistics, maps, charts, and photographs meant to be used in mid- to upper-elementary classrooms. While the books provide factual information about the global refugee crisis, it is concerning how the book covers portray refugees as disempowered victims (see fig. 4). Silhouetted figures stand behind chain-link and barbed wire fences resembling prisons or detention camps with the names of the characters' home countries prominently displayed across the front covers. The unintended effect of this juxtaposition may create a negative association between the refugees (many of whom are also people of color) and their representative nationalities. As the National Council for the Social Studies advises, books should “avoid portraying

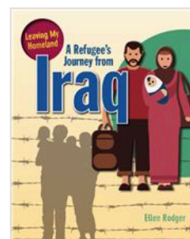
racial/ethnic group[s] as ‘problem-oriented.’” It is possible that contemporary children’s books featuring the stories of refugees in an oversimplified manner could exacerbate biases by equating people from other countries with negative circumstances and catastrophes. Although a forthcoming series scheduled for publication in 2020, *Leaving My Homeland: After the Journey*, claims to offer a look at “how refugee children and their families face and overcome challenges after fleeing their homelands” (Crabtree), when so few books are available, children still only have collapsed and incomplete stories.



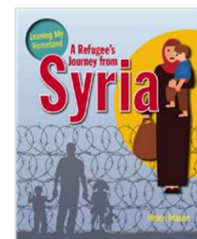
A Refugee's Journey from Afghanistan



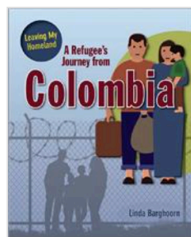
A Refugee's Journey from The Democratic Republic of the Congo



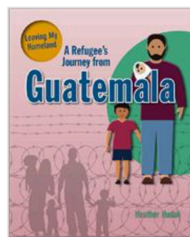
A Refugee's Journey from Iraq



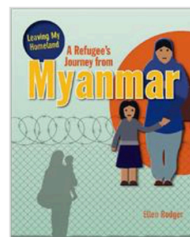
A Refugee's Journey from Syria



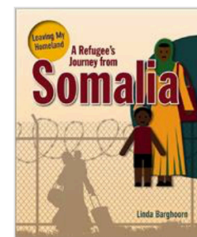
A Refugee's Journey From Colombia



A Refugee's Journey From Guatemala



A Refugee's Journey From Myanmar



A Refugee's Journey From Somalia

Fig. 4. Examples of books in the *Leaving My Homeland* series.
(Source: www.crabtreebooks.com)

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addresses the need for a multiplicity of stories about people and places in her TED talk called “The Danger of a Single Story.” She contends that a single story flattens human experiences and produces stereotypes based on incomplete information:

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story... The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (Adichie).

It cannot be overstated how important it is for children to have access to a wealth of mirror and window stories written from a variety of cultural perspectives. The persistent racial ideology of White supremacy in the U.S. contributes to the deficit of multicultural children's books, and this problem has a profound impact on children.

Impact on Children

Scholarship in the fields of psychology and early childhood education unequivocally affirms the power of multicultural narratives. When multicultural books are available to young children, these narratives help cultivate healthy racial identity development and decrease racial bias at a critical window in social development.

Empowerment and Racial Identity Development. From an early age, children begin to realize their own racial identities and make sense of the world. They benefit from a variety of narratives taking the shape of “mirrors” and “windows” (Sims Bishop, “Mirrors”). In this critical developmental stage, particularly between the ages of five and nine, the positive effects of “mirror” books for children of color are well-documented. Benefits include heightened self-esteem and racial pride (“Reframing the debate” 25), as well as a greater enthusiasm and love for reading (Brooks and McNair 144).

Without exposure to characters of color, children of all races falsely understand White as the default, normal existence and conclude that everyone else must be different.

For White children in particular, this gives them “a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspective, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups” (Banks 190). Likewise, in their seminal textbook for educators, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*, Nieto and Bode debunk the notion that multicultural content is useful *only* for children of color. They contend:

There is a widespread misperception that multicultural education is only for students of color, for urban students, or for so-called disadvantaged or at-risk students... All students are miseducated to the extent that they receive only a partial and biased education... It can even be convincingly argued that students from the dominant group need multicultural education more than others because they are generally the most miseducated or uneducated about diversity (37–38).

Indeed, books have served as cultural artifacts throughout history, imbued with the power to transmit values and messages through words and images. Yet even 21st-century children’s books do not accurately portray a multicultural society, thereby impeding American children’s potential for healthy racial identity development. As recently as 2015, a study showed that “children who interact with current picturebooks predominantly see White faces and receive the message that... to be White is to be better. Finding books depicting non-White characters, particularly books depicting culturally specific elements, is rare” (Koss 37). Additionally, in her work as an early childhood specialist, Janice Beaty highlights the importance of visual representation in multicultural children’s books. She describes how realistic scenes in picturebooks—preferably

depicted by illustrators who are cultural insiders—can transport young readers directly into the lives of book characters. Cultural insiders share the same cultural background or context as the characters portrayed in the book. According to Beaty, “such portrayals are of great importance in picturebooks, where illustrations carry more of the story line. We sometimes overlook the importance of visual representation in the lives of today’s young children” (11). Similarly, language also transmits powerful cultural values by “construct[ing] who we are as people, as cultures, and as a society. Language circulates the dominant ideologies of gender, race, and class” (Botelho and Rudman 2). Because children’s picturebooks employ a multimodal interweaving of both words and images, the powerful influence of these books on early childhood cannot be underestimated.

Furthermore, the majority of today’s children’s books fail to provide a forum for healthy dialogue about race or account for the plurality of racial expression. In her research on racial identity development, Barbara Daniel Tatum notes “[t]here is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them” (94). Racial identity continues to impact all children. Ignoring race and/or remaining silent about it does not exempt anyone from the real experience of living in a racialized society. In fact, when children’s books are not culturally diverse, children miss the opportunity to embrace an egalitarian, pluralistic worldview and are not equipped with multicultural literacy, which is necessary to converse and collaborate with one another across race and culture. As Nieto and Bode point out, “multicultural literacy is just as indispensable for living in today’s world as reading, writing, arithmetic, and computer

literacy... A monocultural education deprives all students of the diversity that is part of our world” (35).

Empathy and Bias Reduction. Stories shape beliefs and notions of oneself and others. On a neurological level, people respond and relate to fictional characters as if they were real people. Due to “mirror neurons,” readers can experience the same feelings as book characters through neural-activated imitation. In other words, human brains are wired for empathy (Clay and Iocaboni). Children make personal connections as they respond to characters’ thoughts, feelings, and intentions (Martinez et al.), which is why the medium of picturebooks holds particular potential for reducing bias in young children.

Diverse narratives also dispute harmful stereotypes through “counter-storytelling,” thus breaking down barriers between people groups and correcting misunderstandings (Koss 33). In this way, multicultural children’s literature can do more than simply celebrate or represent a culture; these books can actually challenge the status quo. Brooks and McNair explain that when children’s books call into question “culturally unauthentic depictions,” they have the power to “counter hegemony by provoking discussion about systemic forms of injustice and oppression” (130). Sims Bishop concurs on the power of counter-storytelling in her essay “Reframing the debate about cultural authenticity in children’s literature”:

Across ethnic, racial, cultural, and national boundaries, and across time, children's literature has long been considered a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values... When a group has been marginalized and oppressed, the cultural functions of story can take on even greater significance because storytelling can

be seen as a means to counter the effects of that marginalization and oppression on children (25).

Children keenly detect when situations are unfair or unequal, so when they are exposed to multicultural narratives, children and adults have the opportunity to discuss the realities of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination in an age-appropriate manner. Glossing over racial conflict or remaining silent about these issues is not a productive strategy for parents and caregivers who want to raise children with minimal bias. Openly discussing race and culture with children can correct faulty assumptions about racial and cultural differences (Bigler and Liben). Children's books provide an entry point for engaging these complex conversations (Salisbury and Styles).

Still, there are limitations in introducing multicultural stories to children. As mentioned earlier, a single story can do little to dislodge embedded notions attributed to racial or cultural identities. Only a cumulative effect of impressions and empathic responses can significantly reduce bias and transform a person's worldview over time through repeated exposure. Acknowledging this reality, critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic explain what they call the *empathic fallacy*:

Most people in their daily lives do not come into contact with many persons of radically difference race or social station. We converse with, and read materials written by, persons in our own cultures. In some sense, we are all our stock of narratives—the terms, preconceptions, scripts, and understandings that we use to make sense of the world. They constitute who we are, the basis on which we judge new narratives (34).

Clearly, the occasional multicultural narrative cannot be expected to remove bias among individuals and cultural groups. Still, because stereotypical representations abound and have dehumanizing effects, exposure to these misrepresentations can be counteracted by intentionally seeking more culturally authentic representations to *rehumanize* individuals and cultural groups. With a more inclusive inventory of multicultural children's literature, "[t]he hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers to bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others. Engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world" (Delgado and Stefancic 49).

Books can promote a fully integrated, pluralistic society in other ways as well. A study by psychologist Krista Aronson and her colleagues finds that children respond positively when picturebooks include visual examples of cross-racial friendships. Whether through illustrations or photographs, "[w]hen we see someone like us doing something with someone different from us, we become more open to doing it ourselves. Psychologists call this *vicarious contact*. It can ease children's anxiety about interacting across difference because they have seen that it's really fun" (Aronson and O'Brien). Literature allows children to see that cross-cultural friendships are possible. Books have a humanizing effect where children can find their places as members of a richly diverse and connected family (Harris). As children grow more comfortable and curious about making friends outside their racial groups—in part because they've seen these friendships modeled by book characters—they are likely to gravitate toward forming these cross-racial friendships in real life. In turn, "having more cross-race friends can promote more

positive racial attitudes and also lowers feelings of discomfort when interacting with people of a different race” (Douglass et al.).

In conclusion, when children do not have access to multicultural narratives, they are deprived of equity in literacy and experience profound impacts on their social-emotional development. Beyond simply representing minority cultures, children’s literature featuring a variety of culturally authentic characters can dispute negative stereotypes and combat marginalization and systems of oppression. In order to achieve these vital purposes, children’s books must provide young readers with a healthy supply of “mirrors” and “windows” (Sims Bishop, “Mirrors”).

The Expanding Role of the Designer

Although the lack of multicultural children’s books is a dynamic and multi-layered problem, the nature of the design process lends itself well to complex, process-driven endeavors. Indeed, designers utilize a synthesis of skills and “ways of knowing,” including observation, critical thinking, collaboration, and innovation (“Designerly Ways of Knowing”). The following characteristics of design thinking are useful in navigating complex social problems:

1. Designers tackle and resolve ill-defined problems.
2. Designers are solution focused rather than problem focused.
3. Designers frame their problems in a way that is unique to the problem at hand.
4. Designers focus on synthesis.
5. Designers use non-verbal, visual language as a tool.
6. Designers employ abductive or forward thinking.
7. Designers engage in continuous evaluation and reflection.

8. Designers take a broad systems approach to the problem.
9. Designers take a human-centered approach.
10. Designers adopt an integrative and collaborative team-based approach
(Cassim 197).

Even as the role of the designer continues to expand dramatically, over the past 100 years the design discipline itself has been defined and redefined. American book designer William Addison Dwiggins first coined the term “graphic design” (Meggs and Purvis 371), although this term would not be used broadly until the 1940s. For much of this era, graphic design maintained ties to the advertising industry, and output was expected to stimulate consumerism. However, in the late 20th century, with societal shifts from modernism to postmodernism, graphic designers began to eschew practicing their craft solely to benefit corporate interests. A vision for graphic design and a “reversal of priorities” was set forth by the co-signers of the First Things First manifestos (1964 and 1999; see fig. 5) by asserting:

There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention. Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programs, films, charitable causes and other information design projects urgently require our expertise and help.

Inspired by this manifesto and a gradually more inclusive design education, contemporary design professionals are more likely to apply their expertise into self-directed and “issue-oriented” projects that convey their commitment to greater social responsibility (Soar 582). Lucinda Hitchcock, department head of the Rhode Island

School of Design, considers the enlarging boundaries of the design field to require designers' increased agility and adaptiveness. Designers are "responsible for so much more territory" which comes with an "added awareness of, and accountability for, the power of visual media itself" (Hitchcock). Today's designers have also begun experimenting with more collaborative approaches by engaging non-designers in the design process (Sanders; Martin and Hanington).



Fig. 5. *First Things First*. ADBUSTERS (1999)

Socially Conscious Design / Critical Practice. In contrast to purely commercial-driven endeavors, many graphic design professionals channel their concern for meaning-making through creative, socially conscious design. Contemporary designers are coming to realize their capacity and responsibility as cultural influencers. As such, these designers' regard for the common good often motivates their creative output.

In the second edition of *Citizen Designer: Perspectives on Design Responsibility*, Steven Heller dialogues with fellow designer Véronique Vienne. Heller states in the introduction: "Designers, I can safely argue, have become more engaged as citizens and more conscious of the roles they play in culture, politics, and society, both serving and creating" (11). Expounding on this definition of "citizen designer," Vienne later goes on to say that graphic designers "know how to organize information and make it understandable... We could simply say that citizen designers are people who put their talent and *savoir faire* at the service of worthy pursuits and worthy causes" (14).

As designers embrace this new paradigm of socially conscious design, critical practice becomes especially relevant. In his 2008 seminar lecture, Ramia Mazé builds a case for how graphic designers might engage critical practice. He asserts that critical practice "functions as a catalyst to change the mainstream or the status quo" (395). According to Mazé, a designer's engagement in critical practice can occur in three arenas: (1) criticality within an individual's own design practice (being self-reflective about personal methodology and design activity); (2) criticality within a community of design practice (challenging traditions or paradigms); and (3) criticality targeted towards other issues outside the field of design (confronting environmental or social problems).

What is common to all is that critical practice is about using what we know, what we have, our skills, our work, to raise, explore and make public a critique. It is about acknowledging that designers have power—and that the powerful visual and material means of design can be used to build a unique form of critique (Ericson and Mazé 397).

This thesis project engages the third kind of critical practice, which Mazé describes as criticality toward an issue outside the field of design (i.e., a larger social problem). In executing a collaborative picturebook wherein refugee protagonists co-create the narrative, this thesis demonstrates how design as critical practice might merge with correlative areas of Critical Media Literacy and Critical Race Theory. Critical Media Literacy (CML) proponents encourage the critical reading and decoding of media “texts,” whether those texts are films, advertisements, books, or any number of other mainstream narratives produced in American society. By asking a series of questions and applying them to any given text, a CML inquiry exposes the purpose behind a story and reveals potential issues of representation. For example, the question “Whom does this text advantage or disadvantage?” reveals the ways in which media texts are never neutral “conveyors of information;” instead, all texts either perpetuate or contest ideologies about people, groups, and issues (Yildiz and Keengwe 8). Using this critical framework, students of CML are equipped to reflect on problematic narratives and respond with their own counter-narratives to rewrite dominant notions of normalcy. As counter-narratives, these original texts can be constructed by students to “affirm their own unique perspectives” (12).

Similarly, Critical Race Theory (CRT) supports the use of counter-narratives as a means of challenging social conventions by elevating the voices of chronically marginalized racial groups. Critical race theorists assert the strength and legitimacy in the storytellers' "experiential knowledge" as people of color, "draw[ing] explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies... and narratives" (Solórzano 26). To put it another way, CRT recognizes that "people of color have a unique voice and experience that can communicate the reality of people of color in a way that White people cannot" (Nieto and Bode 50). Counter-storytelling from the perspectives of marginalized people thus becomes a method of resisting systems of oppression and erasure.

Collaborative Design. With CML and CRT undergirding this project as an endeavor of critical practice, nothing could be achieved without collaboration. Collaboration serves as the fundamental methodology of this project in the construction of a counter-narrative originating from the oral histories of resettled refugee children. Categorized under Participatory Design, this kind of collaboration is a human-centered strategy that invites and "respects the creative insight of participants" (Martin and Hanington 128). Rather than the designer holding the reins for the entirety of the project, Participatory Design advocates for active user and stakeholder engagement throughout all phases of research and design process, often including co-design activities.

Although this collaborative approach often culminates in better outcomes than solo design, Participatory Design can be "risky" (Huybrechts). Operating in a participatory context means that designers must "relinquish authorship...[and] open up their projects to uncertain adaptations by the participants" (Huybrechts 111).

Risk is thus defined by the fact that makers deliberately deal with the uncertainty to give up control over their project to other participants and to invest in a temporary or long-term engagement with them, without being certain of the outcomes (111).

As an example, the Creative Reaction Lab in St. Louis, Missouri, founded by social entrepreneur and designer Antionette D. Carroll, engages a hybrid form of Participatory Design. True to the tenets of Participatory Design, Carroll orients her design practice around regularly engaging community members in iterating, making, and testing. However, she takes it a step further. She has developed a methodology called Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD), which intentionally seeks the initiation and participation of co-creators and stakeholders from underrepresented groups, particularly people from Black and Latinx communities. Carroll operates in the “de-authored” tradition and relies on the wisdom and creativity of equity-focused teams to develop innovative solutions. As Carroll contends, “Designers are more than our craft. We are makers and navigators of complexity.” Furthermore, in a field where 71% of U.S. designers are White according to AIGA’s 2019 census, the designer’s positionality based on racial/ethnic identity must be accounted for in cross-cultural, counter-narrative work of this nature and mitigated by intentional collaboration and decentering strategies.

In summary, this project investigates how design practitioners are prepared to confront some of the most complex social issues of our time. By utilizing participatory methods and operating with an awareness of their own positionality, designers can apply their aptitude for meaning-making and problem-processing in a collaborative context. The next chapter explains the methodology and details of the design process.

III. METHODOLOGY

While it is not unusual for contemporary design discourse to champion the social responsibility of the designer, few resources in the discipline provide designers with guidance in navigating cross-cultural endeavors. With popular emphasis on human-centered and Participatory Design (e.g., IDEO and Design for America), designers are encouraged to strategically confront society's "wicked problems" (Buchanan) yet they often lack the multicultural fluency to achieve equitable outcomes especially when traversing global boundaries. Consequently, in this project, the designer attempts to harmonize interdisciplinary research with the principles of Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD). ECCD intentionally seeks the participation of co-creators and stakeholders from underrepresented groups and aims to develop humility and empathy among members of the design team. Utilizing the ECCD framework throughout this project, the goal was to decentralize power dynamics among the collaborators in the course of producing an equity-based design solution.

As the design process unfolded, it became clear there would be various levels of collaboration and duration. Although distinct phases were not pre-determined by the designer, they could be identified and observed in retrospect. Figure 6 shows a visualization of the process and its expanding and contracting phases with differing numbers of participants. Phase 1: Interdisciplinary Research was sustained over a period of 18 months and included the designer, illustrator, and community stakeholders. Phase 2: Story Gathering lasted two months and brought more co-creators into the process, including five resettled refugee children. Phase 3: Prototyping was executed over two months and narrowed the creative work to a dedicated partnership between the designer

and illustrator. Phase 4: Testing and Analysis was conducted in one month, broadening the input and participation to more community members before concluding with consultation about necessary revisions to the book between the designer and illustrator. The remainder of this chapter provides details for Phases 1 and 2 of the design process. Phases 3 and 4 are described in Chapter 4.

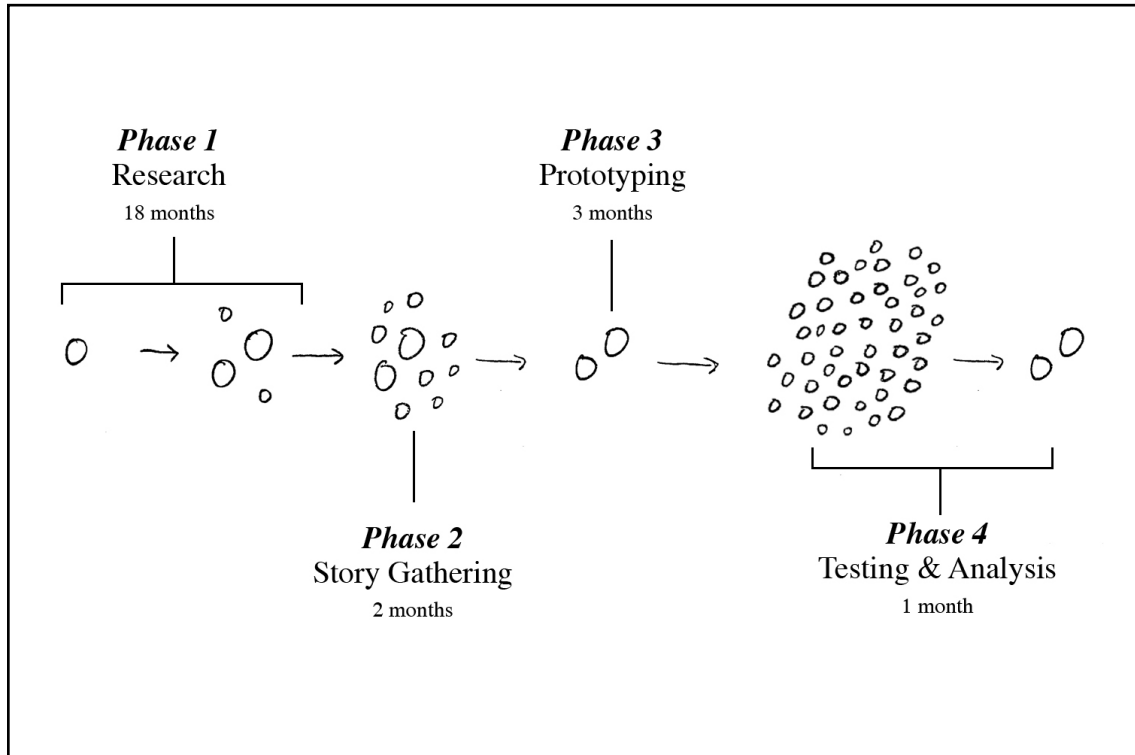


Fig. 6. Four phases of the collaborative design process (number of participants represented by circles).

Design Process: Phases 1 and 2

Phase 1: Interdisciplinary Research. In Phase 1, preliminary research investigated multicultural children’s literature as it intersects with early childhood education and psychology, as documented in Chapter 2. The interdisciplinary research phase also included interviews with representatives from two local non-profit agencies: (1) FAM Houston, an organization that cultivates friendships and social resources among refugees, immigrants, and Houstonians; and (2) Iconoclast Artists, a poetry-writing and social-

emotional learning initiative for underserved students in Houston and Galveston.

Applicable take-aways from those interviews are recorded in this section.

Local Non-Profit Interviews. Established in 2012, FAM Houston has made its mission to “work for justice by building empowered community among refugees, immigrants, and local Houstonians through practices of hospitality, mutuality, storytelling, and inclusivity” (Terry). Executive director, Rev. Hannah Terry, expressed that this collaborative picturebook project complements FAM Houston’s value of storytelling. She described how the cultivation of friendship among refugees, immigrants, and others living in Houston depends on relational bridge-building. Storytelling functions as this relational bridge from one human being to another and from one set of experiences to another. “Currently we’re not capturing these stories on paper, but it’s happening orally, person to person, and in group settings,” Terry said. “There’s a real gap here in Houston. We’re the number one city in the U.S. for refugee resettlement, but I don’t know of any project like this one. To have a children’s book told by refugees—this should be happening here.”

Creating a picturebook is a unique endeavor, both in format and content. Terry expressed excitement about this project featuring the stories of refugee children who have been a part of FAM Houston’s community since its inception. When Terry first met the five youth participants and their families, the children were between five and seven years old and new to the U.S. They represent two sets of siblings who resettled in Houston with their Congolese families as refugees. Now in middle school and high school, the children have grown up together in the same apartment building and school district. Terry has observed that over the years, as the children have acclimated to their new home in

Houston, they have experienced cultural dissonance and questions of identity. She expressed hope that the co-creative process of writing and illustrating a picturebook would be an outlet for the children to share their voices and perspectives with other children. “I appreciate the mutuality and the creative exchange of this project. This will be something to be proud of,” Terry said.

The second interview was conducted with Iconoclast Artists, an organization working with underserved students within high schools, middle schools, and juvenile detention centers in Houston and Galveston. The program infuses core curriculum classes with instruction in creative writing and expression. Since its founding in 2014, Iconoclast Artists has published an annual anthology of student poetry, and one of Iconoclast Artists’ newest endeavors has been to expand into elementary classrooms. Piloted by artist-in-residence Brooke Summers-Perry, Iconoclast Artists’ Community Arts program has enabled Summers-Perry to work with 2nd through 5th grade students at Field Elementary in the Houston Heights neighborhood. During the 2018–19 school year, she and her students used art and writing exercises to explore creative approaches to real-world problems. Based on her experiences, Summers-Perry offered advice for crafting a series of prompts for the art and writing workshop with refugee children. She suggested engaging multisensory details in the prompts to encompass sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. “These are the pathways to memory,” she explained. “You should ask questions such as, ‘What did it taste like or smell like?’” Summers-Perry also emphasized the importance of sequence and pacing in the art and writing exercises. She suggested utilizing an instructional approach called, “I Do / We Do / You Do” or “gradual release of responsibility” (Fisher and Frey). Essentially, this intentional sequence encourages

maximum participation by guiding the students in the creative or learning process. The initial step— “I Do”—serves to model what is possible to the students. The facilitator introduces the prompt and presents his or her own response with the group as an example. “It breaks the ice in the room and demonstrates that the facilitator is willing to enter the same vulnerable space [he or] she is asking of those in the group,” Summers-Perry said. Then, in the “We Do” step, the facilitator invites the group to share with one another, peer-to-peer, stimulating responses and brainstorming as a collective. Lastly, the facilitator invites the students into the “You Do” step in which they take some quiet time for private reflection through journaling and/or art. Then the group moves on to the next prompt, and the “I Do / We Do / You Do” sequence can be repeated. Summers-Perry’s suggestions were incorporated into the format of the art and writing workshop.

Phase 2: Story Gathering. Phase 2 involved listening and story gathering through an art and writing workshop conducted with the five Congolese children who came to Houston as refugees and are connected with the FAM Houston network. This interactive workshop was co-facilitated by the book’s illustrator, Ibraim Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilian artist who moved to Houston in 2007. He brought particular insight into the experience of leaving one’s homeland and straddling cultures. The workshop’s format was documented should it prove useful in future story-gathering projects (see Appendix B).

Preparation and Participatory Models. A significant part of the vision of this project was that the content for the book and the inspiration for the illustrations originate from the storytellers themselves. The five refugee storytellers were invited to construct biographical narratives at the art and writing workshop. Additionally, while the children’s difficult experiences as refugees are integral to their composite story, the goal of the

picturebook is to capture their stories as multi-dimensional, relaying the rhythms of daily life, adversity, friendship, and everything in between. The direction for the book's content and design elements—such as title, plotline, character development, and typefaces—were determined by the children's stories and the outflow of the collaborative design process.

Early on, the designer sat down with Nascimento to gauge his interest in illustrating the picturebook. He agreed to participate in the project and met with the designer on several occasions to discuss the project. It was decided that Nascimento would be a co-facilitator at the workshop in order to meet and interact with the children and hear their stories first-hand. This strategy elevated Nascimento's role to co-designer rather than being brought in at a later stage to layer his illustrations into an already solidified picturebook manuscript. In contrast, most children's picturebook editors insist that the written manuscript and illustrations be completed in two separate stages. "It is very rare for an author and an illustrator to ever communicate or confer on a children's book" (Fredericks 16). This project's collaborative approach sought to build a design team that would contribute to every step of the ideation process and verify direction. Based on the tenets of Participatory Design (Martin and Hanington 62), it was essential to have Nascimento participate in generative research with the designer and the refugee storytellers to engage in co-design exercises. No part of the process would be siloed into different tasks or be confined to a linear, step-by-step progression. A shared vision and direction would only develop through the team's flexibility in working with parallel lines of thought and remaining open to how each other's perspectives and ideas would shape the final outcome. The methodology is consonant with the parallel reasoning Lawson and

Dorst describe in *Design Expertise*: “[E]xpert designers are able to view the design situation through multiple frames and consider several disparate ideas simultaneously. This way of thinking allows them to consider the design situation from a diverse range of perspectives and more completely understand potential challenges and solutions” (60). Moreover, a “diverse range of perspectives” would not be merely hypothetical, but realized and verified through intentional interaction and co-creation with people who are “living experts,” i.e., the youth participants and the illustrator who have experienced firsthand what it is like to be a newcomer to the U.S.

During the planning meetings, Nascimento expressed his own experiences as an immigrant from Brazil and how it feels to be displaced from one’s culture and homeland. Many of his metaphors and ways of describing the path of an immigrant or refugee were integrated into the workshop format. It must be stressed how invaluable these planning meetings and early conversations were to the overall design process. As a native-born American who is White, the designer recognized the challenge and limitations of attempting a cross-cultural endeavor. Conducting secondary research alone could not substitute for the personal insights and participation of cultural insiders. The designer intentionally sought out people, like Nascimento, who held insider knowledge and who could draw from lived experiences to advise on best practices in formulating the workshop and engaging the full design process in a culturally responsive manner. In fact, the act of inviting diverse co-creators into the design process is one strategy of Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD). The ECCD field guide states:

People with different identities, perspectives, and backgrounds (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) will bring holistic insights into any setting,

particularly through knowledge building, problem solving, and implementation...

We especially need to include the individuals and communities affected, also known as living experts, who are often excluded from design and decision-making processes (Creative Reaction Lab 15).

Another ECCD strategy that goes hand in hand with inviting diverse co-creators to the table is the act of intentionally building humility and empathy among the gathered design team. By encouraging individuals to be self-aware and recognize gaps in their own knowledge and cultural experiences, the ECCD approach makes it possible to remain open and observant as the collaborative design team explores different solutions. In other words, the approach “requires the humility to acknowledge where our assumptions and biases lie and the empathy to observe and listen with suspended judgment” (19). In the end, exercising these ECCD priorities strengthened the project’s output but also required an elongation of the design process to ensure maximum representation and participation.

Concurrent to conversations with the illustrator, the designer researched therapeutic storytelling workbooks for children, including *My Hurricane Story* (Dell’Oliver and Greenman) and *Family Forever: An Activity Book to Help Latino Children Understand Deportation* (Utter). These workbooks are available online to be downloaded and used in counseling or school environments to help children process traumatic experiences in a healthy and validating manner. The designer wanted to approach the trauma experienced by the refugee youth as tenderly as possible, and these resources were a helpful starting point. The designer and illustrator reviewed these workbook examples in order to create an art and writing journal that would guide participants. Both *My Hurricane Story* and *Family Forever* begin with an “About Me”

section (see fig. 7). Children are asked to write or draw pictures about how they see themselves and basic facts about their families (e.g., age, siblings, and hobbies). Then the workbooks guide young people through a series of art and writing prompts to create a narrative of their traumatic experiences, whether they are processing loss due to a natural disaster or the deportation of a family member. The workbooks also utilize an integrated model of writing and art exercises as a tool for empowerment. “Coloring, drawing, and writing down or telling stories all help increase the sense of control that children have over the things that happen in their lives” (Utter 6). These resources aim to help children regain their agency in the wake of tragic circumstances and help them manage in a world that often feels unpredictable and full of risk and threat.

Facts about Me

I am _____ years old.

Circle one:
I am a boy. I am a girl.

My hair is this color _____ and my eyes are this color _____.

My favorite color is: _____.

My favorite food is: _____.

At home I speak this language: _____
Write language(s)

(If you go to school) At school I speak: _____
Write language(s)

I have _____ brothers and sisters.
number




Three things that I am good at doing are:



1) _____


2) _____

3) _____

These are some activities that you might know how to do or want to learn how to do:



My name is _____ I am _____ years old.

The date I started this book is _____.

I have _____ sisters and _____ brothers in my family.

The people who usually live with me are:

Fig. 7. Excerpted sections from *Family Forever* (left) and *My Hurricane Story* (right).

Loosely modeled after the *Family Forever* and *My Hurricane Story* resources, the participant journal for the refugee youth’s art and writing workshop was arranged into five thematic sections: (1) Self, (2) There, (3) Here, (4) Between, and (5) Next. See Figures 8 through 12 for details. The participants were invited to fill out or skip any part of the journal—as they felt comfortable—and they were encouraged to take their journals home as a keepsake upon the completion of the workshop.

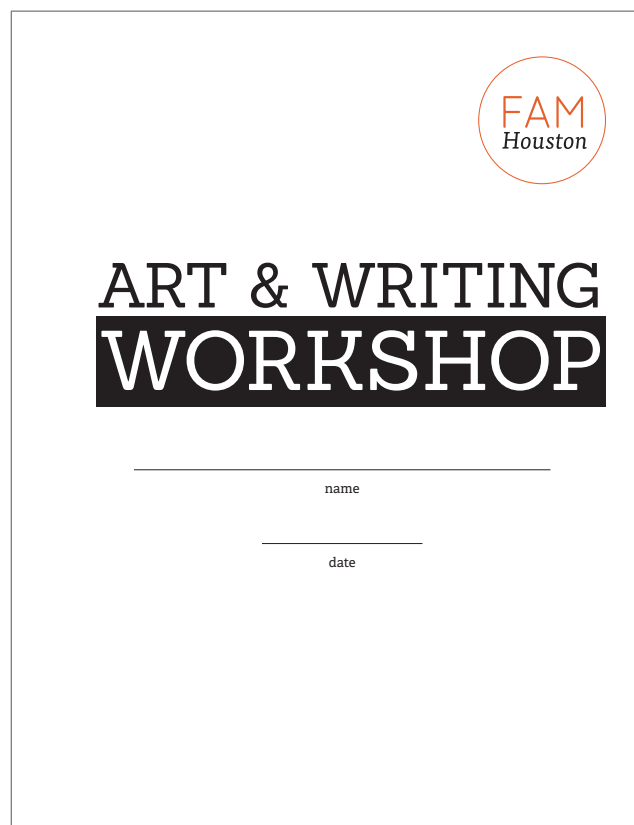


Fig. 8. Participant journal: front cover.

SELF

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old.

I have _____ sisters and _____ brothers.

Some of my favorite things to do:

Playing sports	Reading
Being with friends	Playing a musical instrument
Riding bike / scooter	Watching TV / movies
Playing video games	Playing outside

I am...

Honest	Joyful	Calm
Helpful	Lonely	Brave
Curious	Generous	Kind
Patient	Understanding	Determined
Worried	Loyal	Cautious
Funny	Angry	Serious

THERE

Life in my home country

Games I played _____

My favorite foods _____

My community _____

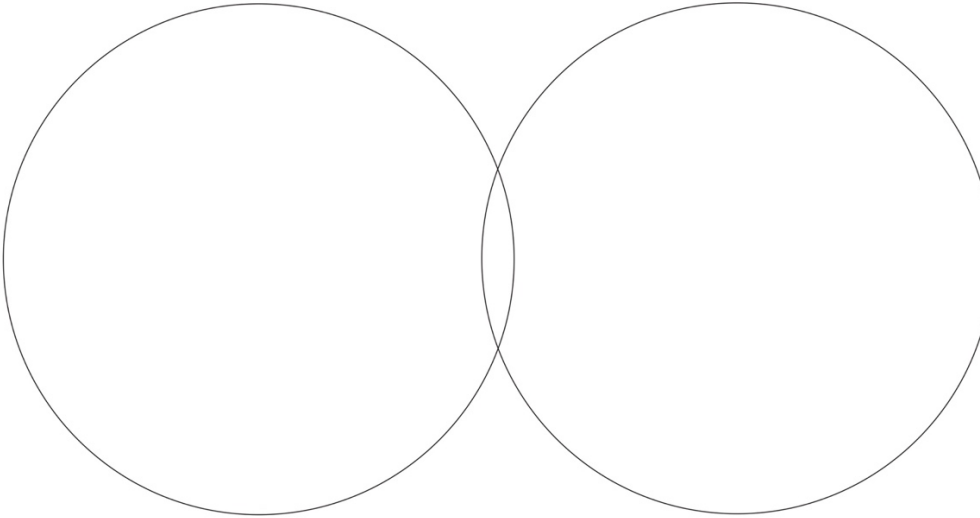
Something I miss _____

Why did you leave your home country?

How old were you?

Would you like to return someday to visit or to live there? Why or why not?

Fig. 9. Participant journal: sections “Self” and “There.”



WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR **HOME COUNTRY**, WHAT DO YOU...

SEE... ?

SMELL... ?

TASTE... ?

HEAR... ?

FEEL... ?

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT **HOUSTON**, WHAT DO YOU...

SEE... ?

SMELL... ?

TASTE... ?

HEAR... ?

FEEL... ?

Fig. 10. Participant journal: free response on two worlds.

HERE		BETWEEN
How long have you been living in Houston? _____		What are some traditions your family continues to practice? _____
What were your first impressions? <i>(write or draw below)</i>		
		My favorite word in English _____ My favorite word in _____ <i>(your first language)</i>
What surprised you?	What disappointed you?	What do your favorite words mean to you?
		What is something people get wrong about you or don't understand?
3 things I like about living here:	3 things I don't like about living here:	What makes someone a good friend?
1)	1)	
2)	2)	
3)	3)	

Fig. 11. Participant journal: sections “Here” and “Between.”

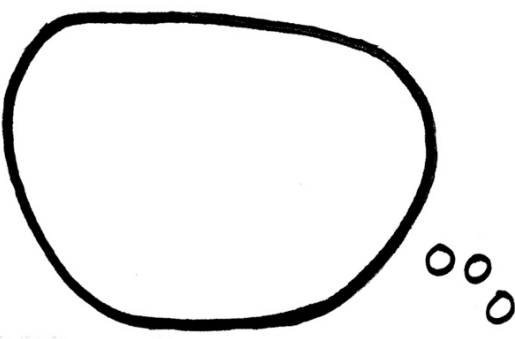
NEXT
What advice would you give to a child who is coming to Houston as a refugee?
What do you dream about? What do you see in your future? <i>(write or draw)</i>


Fig. 12. Participant journal: final section “Next.”

Workshop Format and Process. Similar to a “design workshop” (one example of Participatory Design as described in *Universal Methods of Design*), this project’s art and writing workshop provided participants with opportunities to engage “efficient, compelling, [and] fun... activity-based research” (62). In terms of format, the workshop also borrowed from the structure of what is called “directed storytelling” (68) in which a session is started with a prompt by the researcher, and the researcher continues to give prompts as the narrative unfolds, guiding and keeping the storyteller(s) comfortable. Directed storytelling as a research method captures the essence of experience and relies on thorough documentation to ensure the story is interpreted accurately. Complementary to directed storytelling, the methodology of “generative research” further encourages collective participation yet expands beyond the verbal and written components of directed storytelling. Generative research employs “expressive exercises” whereby participants can “articulate thoughts, feelings and desires that are difficult to communicate through more conventional verbal means” (94). Whether through collage, drawing, or diagramming, generative research can draw out participant engagement through multisensory and multimodal means. It need not be reliant upon verbal or written activities, which can frustrate participants who experience language or other social barriers. Furthermore, these expressive exercises in which the group collaborates to create an artifact often function “as a trigger for engaged and comfortable conversation” (94).

An adaptation of all of these approaches was developed for the format of the interactive art and writing workshop (see Appendix B). The designer and illustrator co-facilitated the two-hour workshop in June 2019. Other adults present to observe were

FAM Houston's executive director Rev. Hannah Terry, summer intern Bria Rochelle, and youth director of Westbury United Methodist Church (WUMC), Katy Sabyrac. All five children who were invited to participate in the workshop were able to attend. As noted before, these participants had been connected to WUMC and FAM Houston for approximately seven years (the same length of time they have lived in Houston as resettled refugees). Having familiar and trusted adults present in the space likely enhanced the youth's willingness to participate and overall comfort level. To preserve the participants' privacy, their full names are not used in this documentation, only their initials: F.T., F.I., O.N., S.M., and S.N.

After a brief introduction, the youth participants were invited to go around the circle and say their names and what grades they would be entering in the fall. They filled out the first page of their journals, "Self" (see fig. 9), which presented them with some fill-in-the-blank sections to describe themselves and their families. Without prompting, when some of the participants were finished with that page, they moved on and began filling out the next section, "There." It seemed they were eager to continue to write, so the workshop facilitators took their lead and encouraged them to continue. The section "There" (see fig. 9) asked the participants to reflect on their experiences in their home country, including what life was like there, why they left, how old they were when they left, and if they would like to return to visit or live there someday. This opening writing portion was concluded by having the participants voluntarily share some of their answers with the group.

In the next exercise, the facilitators sought to activate memories through art. Nascimento followed the "I Do / We Do / You Do" model discussed previously. He

demonstrated “I Do” by sharing with the youth some of his first experiences of dissonance as he adjusted to American culture and how he deeply missed his home in Brazil. He expressed a homesickness for the colors and sounds of the streets, the smell of familiar food cooking, and the friendliness of the people. He related well to the youth, affirming how different life feels in America and how learning a new language is very difficult. By offering some of his own examples, he encouraged them to recall their home country in tangible, sensory ways. Then the group moved on to the “We Do” phase of the exercise. Nascimento passed out sheets of watercolor paper, pencils, and watercolor paints and brushes. He invited the youth to make their own sketches and paint those with watercolor, saying, “Create something that represents you or a memory you have of home. Don’t worry about your drawing skills, because it’s really a memory exercise.”



Fig. 13. Youth participants create watercolor paintings representing memories of their home country.



Fig. 14. Examples of participants’ artwork.

Once the youth created their own paintings, Nascimento asked them to describe their paintings to the group in the final “You Do” phase. They explained why they chose that object or person or place. Paraphrased by the designer, their responses were:

F.T. – A community house with an adjacent outdoor soccer field and children playing on the field; the house was a central place for meeting, decision-making, and holding church services.

S.N. – A brown house with a table inside where people could eat; nearby is an attached structure, which he described as the kitchen; ears of corn are growing outside and a chicken is near the door to the house (see fig. 14, top left).

F.I. – A round-topped barn with a diamond-patterned fence running alongside; “It is raining so all the animals are inside the barn” (see fig. 14, top right).

O.N. – Green grass near a river full of yellow fish; dark rain clouds are overhead and raindrops falling from the sky; “It was my favorite place to go after school” (see fig. 14, bottom left).

S.M. – A small house with a colorful wooden door and a thatched roof; there is a goat standing nearby; “We used to eat goat in a soup” (see fig. 14, bottom right).

As the youth presented their paintings, Nascimento was attentive and supportive of their artistic expression. The facilitators noticed that all of the youth’s paintings depicted a more rural, farm-like setting, starkly different than the urban landscape of Houston, where their families now live. As the art exercise came to a close, Nascimento summed up why he had asked the youth to do the watercolors: “When you start to paint, it activates memories. You start to re-live the memory. The whole memory... comes through the painting. It’s like you are there again.”

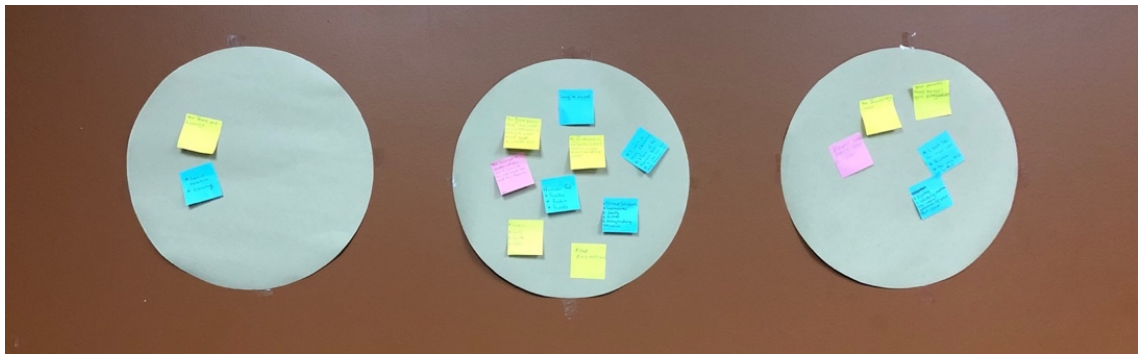


Fig. 15. “Three Worlds” exercise.

Then, the facilitators introduced the next group activity as “Three Worlds” (see journal pages in fig. 10) and pointed to three circles taped to the wall (see fig. 15). The three circles represented one’s homeland (circle on left), one’s new home (circle on right), and a world in-between (circle in the middle). After passing out sticky notes and pens to each of the participants, Nascimento explained: “What you’re doing is taking the

best from each culture, from each place, to imagine and create a new world... This new world has all the good things from both places.” This exercise helped the youth visualize and collaborate in reconstructing the interstitial experiences of displaced peoples.

Again, the youth were actively engaged throughout this exercise. They readily understood the purpose of the exercise, and, after some moments of reflection, everyone wrote their responses on sticky notes, conferred with one another, and placed the notes on the appropriate circles on the wall. One facilitator stood near the circles on the wall and read aloud the things they would prefer to leave in their home country: “the wars and fighting,” “lack of education,” and “the economy.” From their experiences in America and what they would prefer to do without, they wrote: “people who do bad things,” “unnecessary laws,” “parents having to take us everywhere,” “fighting,” “not doing everything we want because of our skin color,” “racism,” “crime rates,” and “the way people are labeled.” Finally, in the middle circle representing the new world they want to create, the youth wrote about things they want to retain from both cultures and experiences in each place: “going to school,” “great foods,” “family,” “freedom,” “friendliness,” “Kinyarwanda (first language),” and “how rich America is.” Nascimento shared some of his observations with the youth and validated their responses. “Do you see things that you put there [pointing to the middle circle]? This is extremely similar to other immigrants’ experiences. They all want a new world where they can bring their family and friends and share in the amazing things that America has... you want to combine what is good from both places to make a new one.” The group then transitioned to further explore details of the youth’s experiences of life in America, living in the “in-between” world of grappling with different cultures and customs, and what they hope for

themselves and their families in the future. For the remainder of the workshop time, the youth returned to their journals to complete the last few pages of writing prompts: “Here,” “Between,” and “Next (see figs. 11 and 12). Space was allowed for the youth to write privately and a few more minutes of group sharing before the workshop officially ended with a shared lunch.

In conclusion, the art and writing workshop with the refugee youth borrowed from research methodology related to Participatory Design, including “design workshop,” “directed storytelling,” and “generative research” (Martin and Hanington). It also implemented the instructional model of “I Do (direct modeling) / We Do (guided instruction) / You Do (independent practice)” suggested by Summers-Perry of Iconoclast Artists. Eschewing a process that relies solely on the designer’s expertise, this form of design research and methodology intentionally engaged co-creative exercises among five youth participants facilitated by both the designer and the illustrator.

With the Phase 2 story gathering exercises complete, the subsequent phases continued the collaborative design process by developing a picturebook prototype to test and analyze. To that end, the next chapter provides a discussion of Phases 3 and 4 of the design process, as well as documentation of the outcomes.

IV. OUTCOMES

Design Process: Phases 3 and 4

In Phases 3 and 4, the design process progressed in a non-linear, yet structured, manner as the designer and illustrator actualized the picturebook. This interpretative process was heavily informed by the participatory research methods documented in Chapter 3. As in any large design project, the design process demands “reconciling the variety of interests—technical, financial, social, aesthetic, etc.—that inevitably have to coalesce... [D]esigning becomes not just a personal, cognitive process, but a shared, social process” (Cross 19–20). This “shared, social process,” was punctuated by the collaborators’ contributions utilizing distinct skillsets, as well as continuous negotiation and reconciliation of interests.

Phase 3: Prototyping. Prototypes are often accomplished through rough sketching and assembling tangible materials to develop an approximation of the outcome. This multi-faceted making process helps the designer experiment with and test possibilities before introducing the prototype to a broader audience for user testing, followed by evaluation, refinement, and production. For this project, a prototype of a picturebook intended for children ages 5–9 was developed by the designer and illustrator in consultation with community stakeholders.

Manuscript and Storyboarding. Soon after the art and writing workshop was concluded and documented, the designer and illustrator began working on concepts for the picturebook. Due to the nature of the workshop, which combined art and writing exercises, the youth participants had already generated an ample inventory of visual and verbal narrative concepts from which to springboard. Preliminary discussion between the

designer and illustrator centered around possible themes and character development as inspired by the stories shared by the refugee youth. Equal consideration was given to the book's imagery and textual representations, especially in choosing a possible motif to ground the themes of the book.

One of the workshop participants shared a memory from when she lived in Rwanda as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She described lying on her back near a river, looking up at the clouds, and how she enjoyed the smell of dirt after it would rain. These sensory interactions with the natural world, while specific to her homeland, were also embodied vividly in her new home in Houston and are universal to the human experience. Thus, inspired by the refugee youth's sensory-rich memory, the designer and illustrator arrived at the motif of clouds and rain. This motif would be featured in the beginning and the end of the story with repetitive elements throughout the length of the book. Selecting the motif of clouds and rain enabled the designer and illustrator to have a conceptual framework for the picturebook. The next concrete step in creating the picturebook prototype was the development of the written manuscript. (See Appendix C for the initial manuscript draft). The working title of the book was decided upon—*When Clouds Bring Rain*—and it was proposed that the medium for the book's artwork would be watercolor to further advance the cloud and rain motif.

Next, the designer and illustrator worked to visualize the narrative through sketching a storyboard. Integrating the text from the manuscript, the storyboard displayed the overall sequence and anticipated placement of text and illustrations. (See Figure 16 for sample pages from the storyboard and Appendix D for the full storyboard.)

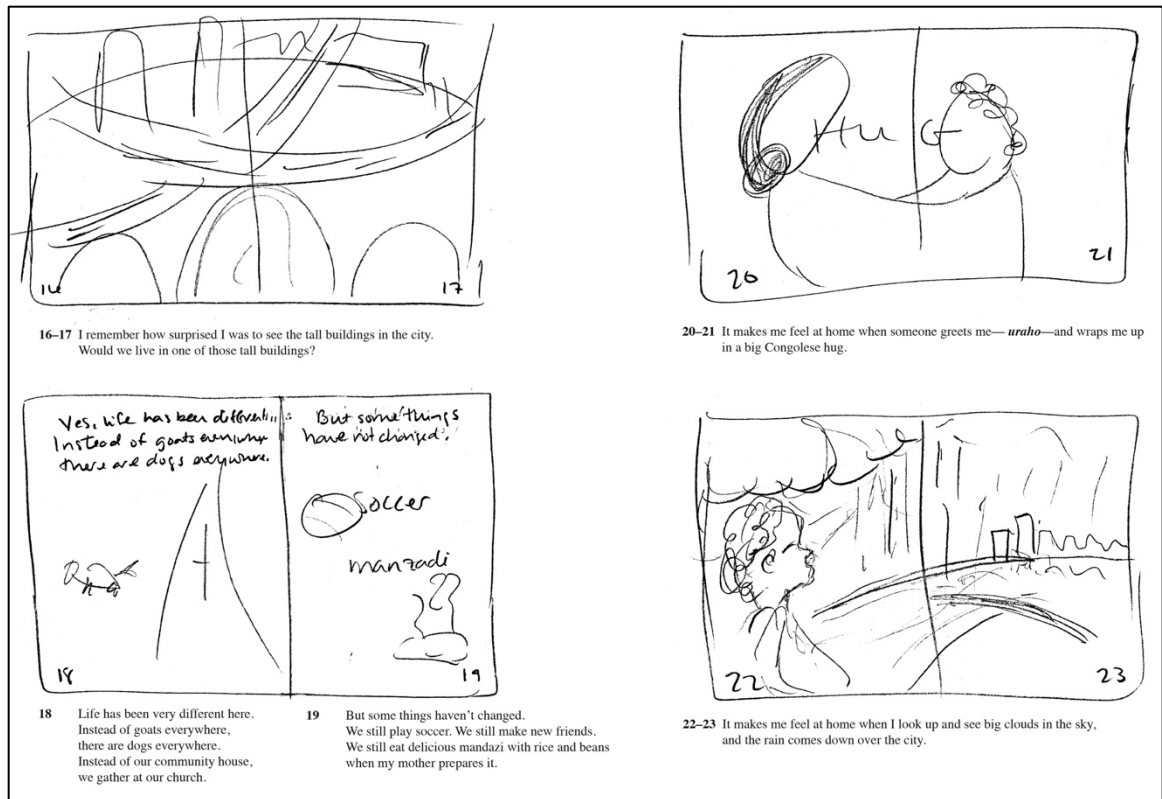


Fig. 16. Sample pages from storyboard.

Throughout the prototyping process, the designer and illustrator consulted award-winning picturebooks, perusing the shelves at local libraries, bookstores, and online book lists for inspiration. Salisbury and Styles' anthology *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling* was a particularly helpful resource. One notable takeaway from this observation and research process was the strategy of a picturebook using minimal text and allowing the illustrations to be primarily responsible for the narrative impact. Operating in a format appropriate for pre-literate or early readers, Salisbury and Styles contend that "[t]oday's picturebook is defined by its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words to convey meaning" (7). If indeed the picturebook's images would be imparting much of the meaning of the book, more immersion in the visual representations of Congolese culture was essential. Thus, the

designer and illustrator referred to a community-assembled collage of Congolese-Houstonian refugee families, textiles, and rural landscapes from central Africa as described in the youth's biographical narratives (see Appendix E). Intentional feedback from stakeholders and "living experts" was sought in Phase 4 to make certain of the illustrations' cultural authenticity and accuracy.

Picturebook Design Considerations. In a continual process of interpretation and negotiation, the designer and illustrator collaborated over the course of ten weeks to develop the prototype. The text-picture relationship remained a central and dynamic component in the prototyping stage to ensure a balance between words and illustrations. This section provides greater detail about the overall format of the picturebook and its distinctive design elements.

Narrative Structure. Although the manuscript was conceived before the illustrations, the visual motif of clouds and rain had a strong influence on how the storyline developed at the outset. Some of the narrative structure adapted to accommodate for a stronger direction coming from the images or vice versa, from revisions to the written word. This process was rather intuitive for the designer and illustrator, but confirmed through the observations of Denise Matulka in *A Picturebook Primer: Understanding and Using Picturebooks*: "Often the words exist before the images, but the way an illustration develops can also have an effect on the story, requiring an adjustment to verbal narrative... the relationship between verbal and visual is constantly shifting and changing to reach that perfect balance" (105–106). In this way, the words and images were in "dialogue" with one another to complement the narrative and impart its meaning.

For example, although the designer and illustrator had agreed on a particular layout and sequence during the storyboard process, as the illustrator executed the paintings for pages 14 and 15 (see fig. 17), it became clear that the text and layout should be adapted for a slower reveal. This change occurred in the section of the book where the mother explains to her children why they must leave their home, and the children experience confusion by all that is new and different. In deference to the powerful illustrations, the designer adjusted the text and created more white space to visually convey a more gradual pace. The original text read on the verso (left) page: “My mother told my brothers and me that she wanted us to be safe, to learn in school, to have a good future,” quickly followed by “We tried to understand but everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in America” on the recto (right) page (see fig. 17).

1. ORIGINAL STORYBOARD



14-15 My mother told my brothers and me that she wanted us to be safe, to learn in school, to have a good future. We tried to understand but everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in America.

2. FIRST DRAFT



Fig. 17. Comparison of original storyboard and first draft.

3. ADJUSTMENTS TO NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

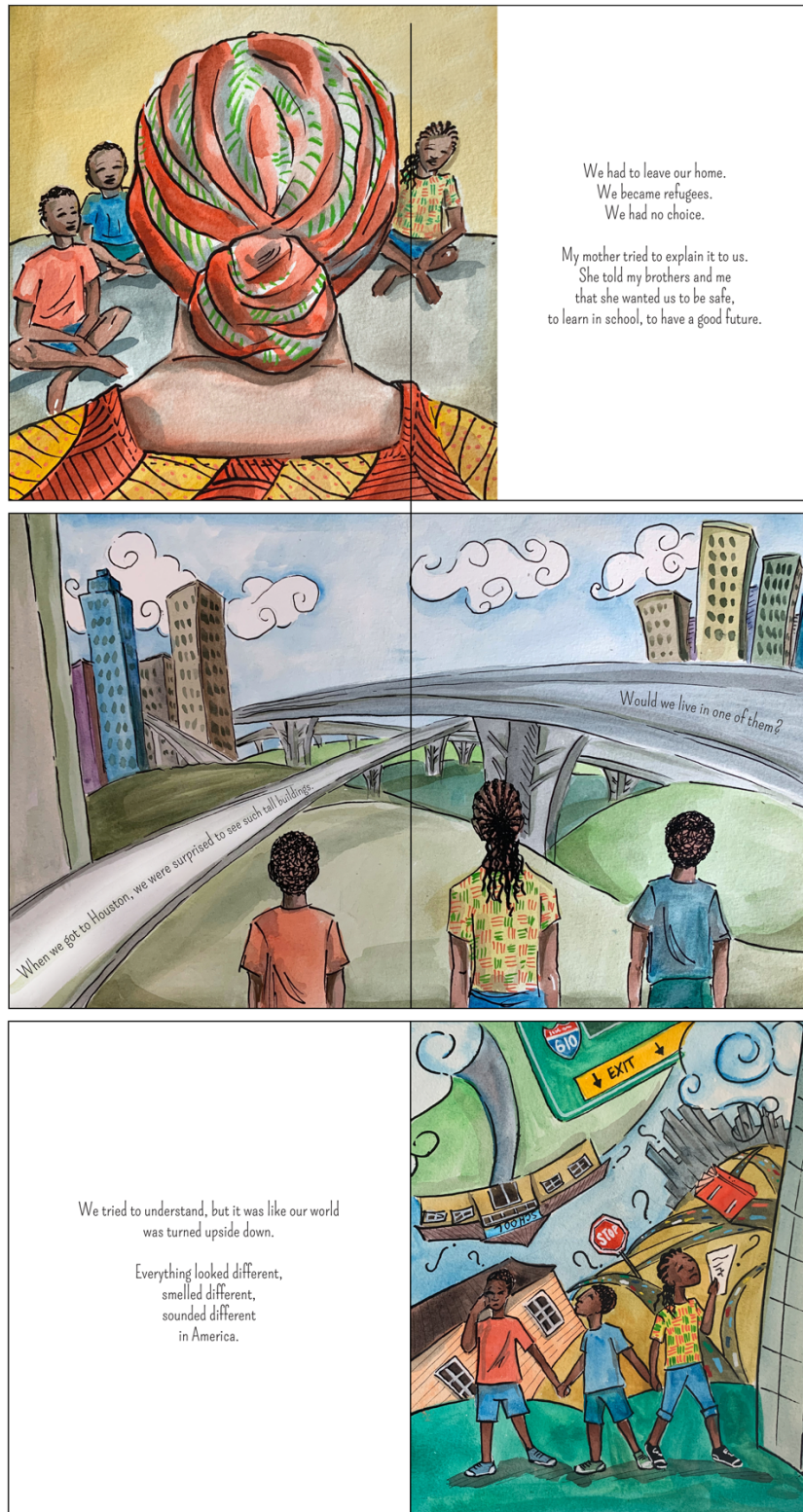


Fig. 18. Adjustments to narrative structure.

As shown in Figure 18, in adapting the narrative structure, text was captured from a previous spread to begin the new sequence: “We had to leave our home. We became refugees. We had no choice. My mother tried to explain it to us. She told my brothers and me that she wanted us to be safe, to learn in school, to have a good future.” Then the designer inserted an imposing, double-page spread of the children’s entry into Houston: “When we got to Houston, we were surprised to see such tall buildings. Would we live in one of them?” Finally, the sequence concludes with an illustration on the recto (right) page and text on the verso page: “We tried to understand but it was like our world was turned upside down. Everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in America.” Spacing out the illustrations and adapting the accompanying text created a more impactful and balanced visual experience. Using a similar process across many draft versions, the designer and illustrator discussed their ideas and amended earlier iterations to hone the book’s narrative structure.

Trim Size and Orientation. The initial storyboarding process aided the designer and illustrator in determining page size and orientation. After cutting sample sheets of paper to various trim sizes, the designer and illustrator held the differently sized pieces of paper as one would hold a book and compared how horizontal or vertical orientation would change the reader’s experience. This simple, tactile exercise helped to solidify the direction for the project. For the book’s dimensions, the single page size was decided to be 8 inches wide and 10 inches tall. When the book is opened, the full spread is 16 inches wide and 10 inches tall. The portrait orientation was intentional in anticipation of illustrations that would make use of the vertical space between sky and earth as well

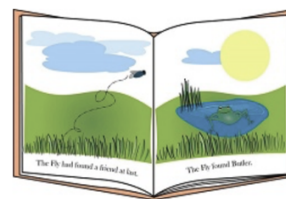
accommodate portraiture of the characters. It was estimated that the length of the book would be 28 or 32 pages, depending on the front and back matter.

Composition and Typography. With the understanding that “a combination of layouts stimulates interest” (Matulka 107), the illustrator and designer deliberately varied single- and double-page layouts. Alternating the layouts served to establish an appropriate narrative pace, either quickening or elongating the story, thus heightening drama in strategic places. As readers anticipate the turning of the page, drama can be experienced as “the action or tension that carries a story forward” (112). The designer and illustrator were careful to avoid repetitive compositions. For a more dynamic quality, an informal text placement was employed (see fig. 19). While many books take on a more formal arrangement where the text appears predictably above or below the illustrations, an informal arrangement of the text permits the text to follow more unpredictable and curvilinear paths as inspired by the illustrations.



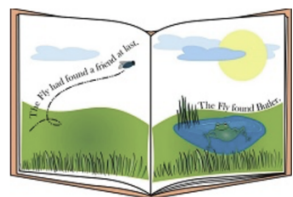
FORMAL

Formal arrangements feature text both above and below illustrations.



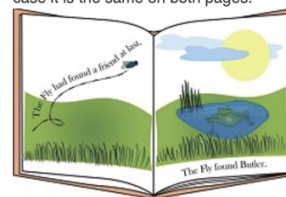
VERY FORMAL

Very formal arrangements feature text either above or below, but in either case it is the same on both pages.



INFORMAL

Informal arrangements feature irregular arrangements as well as text placed either above or below illustrations.



VERY INFORMAL

Very Informal arrangements feature irregular arrangements that fit inside, outside, or between illustrations on one or both pages.

Fig. 19. Four types of text layout. (Source: www.picturingbooks.com)

In terms of typography, the designer chose a casual and subtly handwritten typeface for the body text. The typeface Pompiere (see fig. 20) evokes an approachable quality, reminiscent of the youth participants' own journal writings as they shared their memories and experiences. For the display text, Montana was selected. It is a slightly bolder typeface and rendered in all-caps (see fig. 21). Montana's tall, condensed presence mimics the long vertical direction of rain falling from the sky, which reinforces the book's cloud and rain motif.



ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
,. - - :; ' " | \$ & (! ? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Fig. 20. Pompiere typeface specimen.



WHEN CLOUDS
BRING RAIN

Fig. 21. Montana typeface rendered as book title.

Jacket Art. In the storyboard stage, the designer and illustrator left the front cover design fairly undeveloped. Originally, the artistic concept was to have clouds above and raindrops falling alongside the vertically-oriented title of the book. After developing the

book's interior illustrations, it became evident to the designer and illustrator that a stronger concept for the cover would prominently feature the main character. Thus, the jacket art for the book (see fig. 22), which serves as the first impression to potential readers, actually came last in the design ideation and development phase. The intentional placement of the face of the main character on the cover is a design choice that aligns with one of the project's goals: to resist a racialized system of erasure (Nieto and Bode). In other words, the presence of the refugee's face on the cover figuratively conveys, "I am here. I am a real person. I will not be forgotten. My story matters."



Fig. 22. Prototype: front cover.

Paratext. As another design consideration, special attention was paid to the front and back matter, otherwise known as paratext. While paratext is not part of the main narrative, because of its proximity to the story, paratext holds potential for designing a reader experience at the book's beginning and ending.

Utilization of this paratext space is often an editorial decision made by the publisher. Sometimes this space is left blank or displays a dominant color or texture to anchor the book. At other times, front end papers are used “to begin the story before the opening words” (Lambert 28), or to “introduce an important motif or object in a story” (29). For this project, the designer and illustrator chose to use the opening double-page spread to set the scene with the main character in her home country looking up at the clouds (see fig. 23). Practically speaking, this spread functions as the title and forthcoming copyright page. Yet, rather than simply having text on a blank background, this design choice for an illustrated background makes efficient use of the available space by introducing the cloud motif as well as the main character.

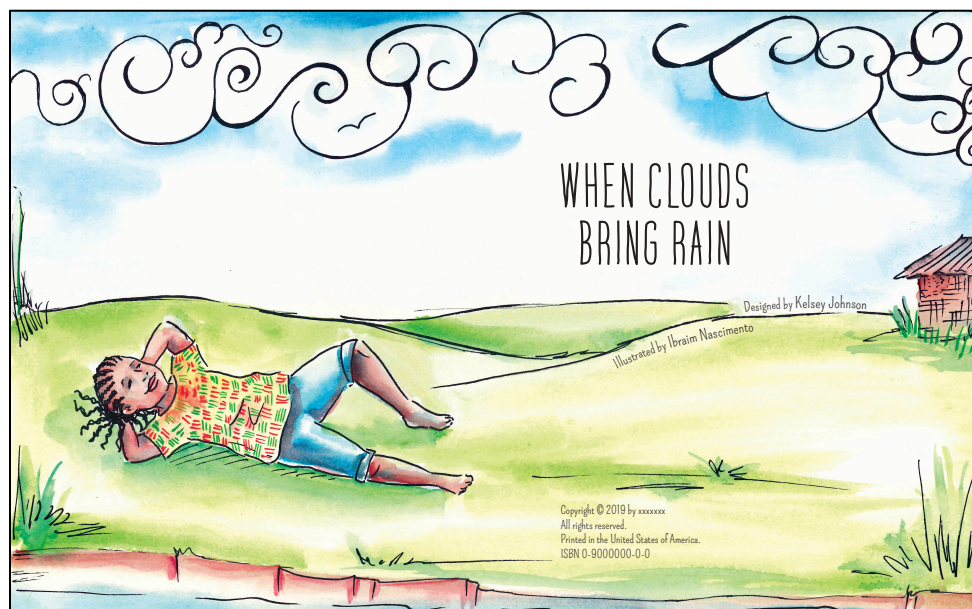


Fig. 23. Prototype: front end papers.

Likewise, the picturebook concludes with a final nod to the cloud motif. Functionally, the end papers at the back of the book needed to summarize the book project, include a section expressing gratitude to the youth storytellers for their contributions, and provide short biographical details of the designer and illustrator. By

being integrated into an illustrated cloudscape, this essential content retains visual interest and narrative cohesion. In this way, the end papers are not merely an afterthought but intentionally incorporated into the book's design.

When taken as a whole, the design considerations involving narrative structure, trim size and orientation, composition and typography, jacket art, and paratext achieved a working prototype (see all pages of the prototype in Appendix F). This prototype was the culmination of the generative design process as “the creative translation of research and ideation into tangible form” (Martin and Hanington 138).

Phase 4: Testing and Analysis. With the prototype complete, the designer initiated a plan for testing and analysis. This plan constituted the evaluative phase of the design process and was carried out over the course of one month.

Reader Survey. To gather anonymous feedback on the picturebook prototype, a reader survey (see figs. 24–28) was administered to adults who occupy various roles in the lives of children and who come from a variety of cultural perspectives based on nationality and race/ethnicity. This survey was conducted in lieu of a focus group wherein people might be influenced by the opinions of others in the group and not always be willing to share their own opinion if it differs from group consensus or if the researcher/designer is present to receive critique. Additionally, one may wonder about the rationale of seeking input from adults rather than children in the target audience (5–9 years old). This decision revolved around the need to query adults who have the agency to purchase the proposed picturebook. If the surveys revealed that adults were not enthusiastic about the book or did not resonate with its content, the likelihood of children encountering the book would

be slim. In other words, children's access to the book would be granted through an adult caregiver, teacher, or librarian's consumer choices.

Respondents were invited via targeted email (135 individuals in total) to view a digital mock-up of the picturebook and then complete an online survey. The survey was translated from English into Swahili for Congolese respondents who might be more comfortable engaging the survey in their first language. To gauge the effectiveness of the book's content and design, the survey was divided into four parts: (1) About You, (2) Content and Design of the Picture Book, (3) Cultural Representation, and (4) Conclusion. Part 1 (figs. 24–26) asked demographic questions about the reader and requested that the reader identify his or her primary role in the life of a child and how often he or she typically reads to a child. Part 2 (fig. 27) presented questions particular to the design choices, themes, and characters, and which age range of children the book might appeal to most. Part 3 (fig. 28) asked the reader to identify any misrepresentations of refugees in general or Congolese culture more specifically and invited the reader to offer suggestions on how to remedy any errors. Part 4 (fig. 29) concluded the survey by asking the reader to rate the book's level of success in achieving a series of stated purposes, including evoking empathy and encouraging a "mirror" experience for refugees and immigrants. Part 4 also offered a free-response opportunity for any additional feedback. Survey responses were collected over the course of three weeks. All in all, 52 out of 135 people took the survey (a 38.5% response rate).

Picture Book Survey

About You

1. Which best describes you? (choose one)

- ☐ Immigrant
- ☐ Resettled refugee
- ☐ U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- ☐ Other: _____

2. What is your country of origin (home country)?

3. Which role(s) do you play in the life of a child? (choose one or more)

- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Aunt/Uncle
- ☐ Grandparent
- ☐ Foster Parent
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Librarian
- ☐ Other: _____

4. How often do you read a book to a child?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ 2-4 times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times a year
- ☐ Never

Page 1 of 6

Fig. 24. Picture Book Survey: About You

5. What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 or older

6. Would you describe yourself as...?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other: _____

7. What is your annual household income?

- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Less than \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000–\$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000—\$99,000
- ☐ \$100,000–\$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 or more

Page 2 of 6

Fig. 25. Picture Book Survey: About You (age, sex, income)

8. Choose one or more racial/ethnic categories you identify with:

- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latinx
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ White
- ☐ First Nation/Indigenous
- ☐ Other: _____

9. Which best describes where you grew up?

- ☐ Rural (country)
- ☐ Urban (city)
- ☐ Suburban (outskirts of city)
- ☐ Other: _____

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Fig. 26. Picture Book Survey: About You (race/ethnicity and childhood home)

Content & Design of the Picture Book

10. How well would this picture book appeal to children in these age ranges?

	Unsure	Not well at all	Somewhat well	Very well
Ages 3-5				
Ages 5-7				
Ages 7-9				

11. How effective is the design and content of the picture book?

	Unsure	Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective
Illustrations				
Storyline				
Characters				
Page Layout and Font				
Pace and Overall Length				

12. If you are a refugee or an immigrant, to what extent have you experienced the following?
Circle a number (5 being the highest).

Disorientation / acclimation period with new setting and culture	0	1	2	3	4	5
Resilience through trauma and grief	0	1	2	3	4	5
Loneliness and homesickness for your homeland	0	1	2	3	4	5
Wanting to preserve customs from your homeland	0	1	2	3	4	5
Comfort and solidarity when memories can be shared	0	1	2	3	4	5
Feeling a connection between homeland and identity	0	1	2	3	4	5
Language and food as vital components of your culture	0	1	2	3	4	5

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Fig. 27. Picture Book Survey: Content and Design of the Picture Book

Cultural Representation

13. In this picture book, are there any misrepresentations of the experiences of refugees?
If so, please describe and/or suggest a correction.

14. More specifically, are there any misrepresentations of Congolese culture?
If so, please describe and/or suggest a correction.

Fig. 28. Picture Book Survey: Cultural Representation

Conclusion

15. To what extent do you think this picture book achieves these purposes?
Circle a number (5 being the highest).

Evokes empathy toward refugees / immigrants	0	1	2	3	4	5
Humanizes the experiences of newcomers to the U.S.	0	1	2	3	4	5
Invites refugee or immigrant children to see themselves as the characters in the story	0	1	2	3	4	5
Helps children of any background to see themselves as part of a global family	0	1	2	3	4	5
Encourages curiosity and respect for another culture	0	1	2	3	4	5
Opens the door for adults and children to talk about refugee resettlement and immigration	0	1	2	3	4	5
Offers an authentic narrative about a refugee family	0	1	2	3	4	5

16. Additional insights / feedback:

Thank you for completing this survey!

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Fig. 29. Picture Book Survey: Conclusion

Out of the 52 adults who completed the survey, 41 identified themselves as U.S. citizens, six as immigrants, and five as resettled refugees. Countries of origin (other than U.S.) included the Democratic Republic of the Congo–6, Taiwan–2, El Salvador–1, Hong Kong–1, France–1, Mexico–1, and Sierra Leone–1. Racial/ethnic demographics were 63% White, 19% Black, 11% Asian, 7% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0% First Nations/Indigenous. In describing the setting where they grew up, respondents indicated Rural (country)–10%, Urban (city)–48%, Suburban–38%, and Other–4%.

Most of the respondents (69%) reported reading to a child on a daily or weekly basis. Their roles in the lives of children included Parent–38%, Aunt/Uncle–24%, Grandparent–12%, Foster Parent–2%, Teacher–13%, Librarian–1%, and Other–10%. The majority were female, with only three males taking the survey. In terms of age, 65% were between the ages of 25 and 54, and the remaining 35% of respondents were 55 or older. Thirty-six of the 52 respondents (71%) thought that the book would appeal very well to children ages 5–7 and 32 (62%) for ages 7–9, while only 10 (20%) for ages 3–5.

To analyze how respondents evaluated specific elements of the book, the designer filtered the responses into two demographic segments for comparison: (1) refugees/immigrants and (2) U.S. citizens. The refugee and immigrant segment submitted slightly higher scores on the effectiveness of each element compared to U.S. citizens (see fig. 30). However, both groups were in agreement on the overall effectiveness in each category. Illustrations were rated the most favorably according to 91% of refugees/immigrants and 88% of U.S. citizens. Respondents also rated the characters as very effective: 82% among refugees/immigrants and 71% among U.S. citizens. The storyline, page layout and font,

pace and overall length received identical scores for effectiveness at 73% among refugees/immigrants and 68% among U.S. citizens.

Elements Rated as “Very Effective”	Refugees/Immigrants	U.S. Citizens
Illustrations	91%	88%
Storyline	73%	68%
Characters	82%	71%
Page Layout and Font	73%	68%
Pace and Overall Length	73%	68%

Fig. 30. Comparison of book elements rated as “very effective” by refugee/immigrant respondents versus U.S. citizens.

The survey also asked the readers to rate the book’s level of success in achieving a list of intended purposes. On scale of 0 to 5 (5 being the strongest identification), respondents ranked the top three purposes of the book as follows: (1) Invites refugee or immigrant children to see themselves as characters in the story—4.69; (2) Opens the door for adults and children to talk about refugee resettlement and immigration—4.67; and (3) Humanizes the experiences of newcomers to the U.S—4.64.

Refugees and immigrants were asked an additional question to gauge their resonance with the book’s thematic content. They were asked, “To what extent did you experience the following as a refugee or immigrant?” Based on their responses, the most common experiences on scale of 0 to 5 (5 being the strongest identification) were: (1) Feeling a connection between homeland and identity—4.73; (2) Language and food as

vital parts of culture—4.45; (3) Disorientation / acclimation period with new setting and culture—4.18; (4) Wanting to preserve customs from homeland—4.00; and (5) Comfort and solidarity when memories can be shared—3.45.

While the survey data confirmed much of the project’s direction and execution, possibly the most helpful part of the survey were the free-response sections that asked about feedback on cultural representation, refugee experience, and overall impressions of the book. Respondents’ comments have been coded and organized into four categories (see figs. 31–34):

1. General Feedback
2. Narrative (Storyline, Characters, Pace, and Length)
3. Representation (Congolese Culture and Refugee Experiences)
4. Design Considerations (Illustrations, Font, and Page Layout)

Overall, the book was well-received, judging from the free-response comments balanced with the survey’s multiple choice and matrix data. Under “General Feedback” and “Narrative,” respondents validated the book’s usefulness in sparking adult-child conversation around the multi-faceted experiences of refugees and immigrants. Several comments were made about the length of the book being too short and needing more details about the journey of the refugee family and daily life before and after resettlement. One respondent suggested adding a cross-racial or cross-cultural component: “I think it could be made richer if in a page or two there was some interaction between the Congolese children and other children, perhaps those they meet in school or in their neighborhood whose life experiences and race may be different.”

The book was praised by most respondents: “The story is very accessible and I think children of many ages can approach it,” “I think it is very well done. It shows the hardship but also carries hope,” and “As a retired teacher, I would have used this book as a springboard for a class writing project. It is just THAT inspiring.” However, a few respondents did not approve of the storyline: “The story is very clearly sincere and earnest, but a bit flat and uninteresting,” and “Lacks details, it feels very surface level.”

1. General Feedback
<p>I think it is very well done. It shows the hardship but also carries hope.</p> <p>Such a wonderful book and story, thank you.</p> <p>Excellent book. I think the book is a very good starting point for further discussion with the readers.</p> <p>I feel that the book will help families explain the multi-faceted story of immigration.</p> <p>The story is relatable and compelling. Thank you for creating this work. I buy children’s books regularly for my young nieces and nephews, and now great-nieces, and have never seen a story like this! You are filling an important void. I hope this is the first of many. I hope you will consider a book about children dealing with flooding that emphasizes resiliency and encourages hope. Thank you for this very important gift to the world!</p> <p>I am so excited by this book and look forward to reading to both my children and my students! Awesome!!!!</p> <p>I think these kinds of books, while well-meaning, are often difficult to pull off as works of art/literature. The story is very clearly sincere and earnest, but a bit flat and uninteresting. My children are grown, so I don’t read books to little ones as often as used to, but I remember having a few books like this on our shelf, because I wanted to expose my kids to other cultures, other experiences. But they were not the stories my children ever wanted to read. I think, to really understand Congolese culture, it might be more compelling to just tell Congolese stories. What folk tales or fairy tales do the children or adults you work with remember? What kinds of stories were they told as children? Perhaps a story within a story might be more interesting—the story of a refugee child listening to a story told by his mother as they are fleeing or once they have been resettled and are longing for home.</p> <p>As a retired teacher, I would have used this book as a springboard for a class writing project. It is just THAT inspiring.</p> <p>I love that it gives adults a way to introduce/discuss the experience of being a refugee.</p> <p>Beautiful book, excited to see it in publication.</p>

Fig. 31. Free-response comments: General Feedback.

2. Narrative (Storyline, Characters, Pace, and Length)

The story is very accessible and I think children of many age ranges can approach it.

I'd like to hear more detail about daily life in the country of origin and here.

It was simple but perfect for children to grasp. I would have loved for the story to be a little bit longer.

There is so much to tell, I want the story to be longer.

Lacks details, it feels very surface level. The kids ask the question "Would we live in a tall building?" but it doesn't answer the question.

I think it's AWESOME!!! For a very young literal reader/listener, there might be some questions about why the main character remembers lying on the grass after school back home and had to move in part to learn in school ("Wasn't she in school already?").

My son is 3, I think this book is probably a little too abstract for his full understanding, though I think he would like the story and illustrations (we could definitely talk through the parts he doesn't understand). That said, assuming it is the right level of complexity for a 5-7 age group, I think it could be a little longer and/or deeper for that older age group [7-9 years old]. There could be more to explore about why the characters feel those things. Alternatively, if the expectation is to primarily provide access to relevant literature for a group that speaks English as a second language, it might be most appropriate to leave as is?

The only change I'd recommend is adding a little more substance to why the newcomers came to the US. The second paragraph on p. 13 "My mother tried to explain it to us..." needs a little bit more information. There's a lot of room to build empathy here, either through additional text or visuals. Another option, if you don't want to change the text, would be to add an information or fact page in the back. Maybe stats on the number of refugees or some educational component.

I love the book. I think it could be made richer if in a page or two there was some interaction between the Congolese children and the children, perhaps those they meet in school or in their neighborhood whose life experiences and race may be different.

I wonder if there is a way to distinguish refugee vs immigrant for other reasons (or if that it too advanced for the target age range).

I thought the book was a little short, maybe because I was enjoying it. Could use a few more pages to develop the characters or give more examples of the challenges the refugee kids face. Perhaps the book will become the first in a series.

Fig. 32. Free-response comments: Narrative.

<p>3. Representation (Congolese Culture and Refugee Experiences)</p>
<p>The book is representative of the stories of refugees that I know.</p> <p>Consider using first person terminology. The word “mother” on page 12-13.... would Congolese say Mama?... it might help make it more authentic.</p> <p>There are many different customs from different regions in the Congo, but in general this story is accurate to the Congolese experience.</p> <p>I don’t know much about Congolese culture, but my question would be if it’s all rural? The kids’ memories seem to suggest as much.</p> <p>I suspect Congolese culture is pretty varied and shouldn’t be generalized. But because this book does, of necessity perhaps, do this, that might be the misrepresentation.</p> <p>I can’t suggest any corrections. I am glad the children have these memories of home.</p> <p>What the children remember is true [according to a Congolese mother.]</p> <p>I would be interested in their journey to the US. What is a refugee vs immigrant, etc.</p> <p>To be a refugee requires that you have fled your own country. Only after becoming registered as a refugee can you hope to be permanently resettled in a third country. There is no sense here that the family has fled to another country, really.</p> <p>There is an absence of travel experience getting here...it jumps from their mom saying they have to leave to them being in America. Did they fly, boat, walk? Were they allowed straight in or have to wait? Where?</p> <p>Discussion questions would help. Talking about how they don’t have a choice takes away some of their agency – leaving a bad/impossible situation is a powerful choice.</p>

Fig. 33. Free-response comments: Representation.

4. Design Considerations

(Illustrations, Font, and Page Layout)

It is well balanced and the choice of words and illustration content is very good.

I would prefer if the person giving a big hug had darker skin, to represent other Congolese refugees they've recreated family with. Or via the illustration she could get multiple hugs representing the rainbow of people in her life.

Illustration of girl with two faces (happy/sad) is not pretty.

Font is too light and stylized for age of readers. Use bold block print.

In reference to the font for the book-I like it; however, it appears to be light. In other words, it needs to be darker. It may just be my monitor. I loved the upside-down pictures to match the words.

The book is beautiful. I love the illustrations. The storyline and characters are very good. The writing itself I feel is basic and does not tell the story as well as it could.

I like the page with the highway overpasses best.

Love the cornrows [girl's braids] and the picture where things are upside down.

I would like to see a larger font. This would enable more young readers and older folks with eyesight that is diminishing to read it more easily.

I felt the words and illustrations worked together beautifully.

The illustrations and your book's message are so beautiful.

It does not show why people would need to be refugees, that said, I think that accurate illustration would be scary for children. I think maybe in the text to mention sometimes there are dangers or things that interfere with being safe or going to school.

Fig. 34. Free-response comments: Design Considerations.

When asked about the book's representation of the refugee experience, eight respondents suggested revising the storyline to include more information about what circumstances would make someone a refugee, what distinguishes a refugee from an immigrant, and the journey toward resettlement. Several of the Congolese respondents felt that the book portrayed Congolese culture with accuracy and authenticity while

acknowledging it is difficult to capture the plurality of regional customs and languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Under “Design Considerations,” three respondents critiqued the weight, size, and/or style of the typeface. Comments included “I would like to see a larger font” and “Font is too light and stylized for age of readers. Use bold block print.” These comments could be attributed to trouble the readers had viewing the book digitally, especially if the readers were using a mobile device on which the screen size is considerably smaller than a printed book. Had the prototype been presented at the full 8x10 inch print size, user experience may have differed. However, the readers’ critique of the font is duly noted and will be addressed in the revision process.

Revisions. Based on feedback from the reader survey, the designer and illustrator (in consultation with FAM Houston) developed a discussion and resource guide for teachers and parents (see Appendix H). The discussion guide offers a series of questions for use in one-on-one conversation, small or large group discussion, or as writing prompts for independent class work. Sample questions are divided into two age groups: ages 5–7 (K–2nd grade) and ages 8–10 (3rd–5th grade). The discussion guide is intended for adults interested in starting a conversation with children about the book and helping children process the material on a social-emotional level beyond basic reading comprehension. On the reverse side of the discussion guide, there are further resources for readers at home or in the classroom. It also includes options for civic and personal engagement around the issues of global migration and forced displacement. Options include volunteering with local organizations in tangible ways, seeking assistance with bullying and discrimination,

getting involved in public policy, and writing and/or illustrating one’s own storybook.

The discussion guide will be available as a free download from FAM Houston’s website.

In response to survey comments about legibility and the prototype’s font being too small or too light, the designer experimented with other typefaces and replaced the original typeface Pompeiere (see fig. 20) with the typeface Bree (see fig. 35). Bree was selected because of its heavier weight and one-story “a” and “g” characters, which are easier for young readers who are just learning to read and write.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
,.- – :;”|\$&(!? 0123456789

Fig. 35. Bree typeface specimen.

Reader input also informed the decision to revisit the prototype to incorporate more details to the storyline and improve the pacing. The revised manuscript in Appendix G demonstrates how these changes affect the story, including giving each of the main characters names and creating dialogue among them to make the story feel more personal and relational. Two spreads were added to narrate the family’s experience of displacement (i.e., why they had to leave their home) and the “in-between time” waiting to be resettled (see fig. 36). These changes required additional illustrations and some adjustments to pagination. Thus, the overall length of the book increased from 28 pages to 36 pages (see fig. 37).

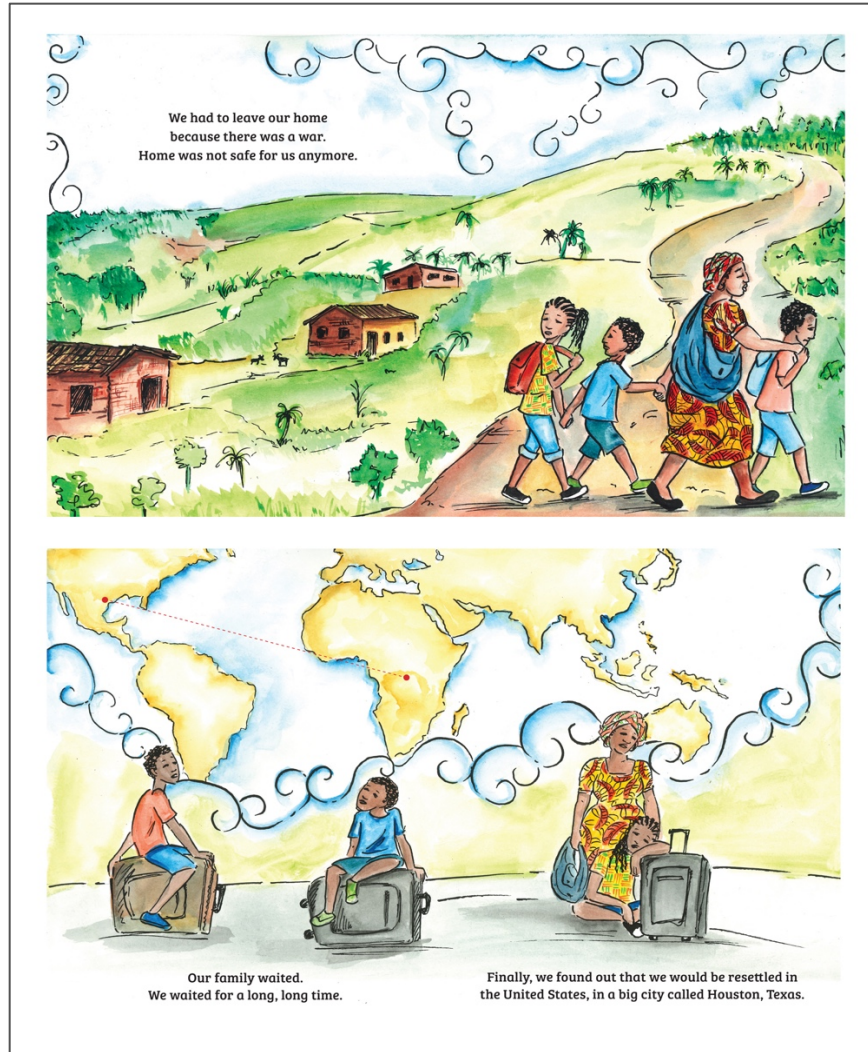


Fig. 36. New illustrations.



Fig. 37. Increase in page count.

With the revisions complete, the narrative of *When Clouds Bring Rain* weaves together the resettled refugee children's memories to tell the story of a girl and her two brothers. Alternating between scenes of rural, central Africa and the big city of Houston, Texas, the children discover that familiar things—like language, food, play, and even the rainy weather—can deepen their family's bond and connect them to their new neighbors.

Reflections. In addition to creating a discussion guide and making revisions related to typeface and overall narrative, the collaborators on the design team spent time reflecting on debriefing their experiences. Their observations are summarized here as they may relate to future storytelling endeavors:

1) *Elongation of time commitment.* Perhaps a solo, designer-led project would have been more expeditious, yet the time spent in negotiations among the collaborators (i.e., workshop participants, illustrator, designer, community stakeholders, and survey respondents) proved indispensable to the final product. As was hypothesized, the making of the book in a collaborative manner strengthened the process and achieved a meaningful outcome. Furthermore, the mutuality of exchange, inclusion of diverse co-creators, and decentering of power dynamics constituted this project's alignment with the core values of equity-centered design.

2) *Increase of collective ownership and enthusiasm.* The design team noticed that involving multiple co-creators and stakeholders through this collaborative effort had a positive effect in the community by garnering more support and awareness of the project in the generative and evaluative stages. This positive effect may bode well for the viability of publishing and disseminating the picturebook. However, even if the book does not obtain broad circulation with the public, there was value in its making,

especially among the resettled refugee children who shared their stories. In their “Teaching About Refugees” activity guide, the United Nations refugee agency recommends teachers encourage their students to undertake collaborative creative activities as a means of empowerment, agency, and community-building. Creating something in a participatory manner helps young people “understand that everyone’s contribution is important” (UNHCR). Examples suggested by the UNHCR include creating and holding an art exhibition or poetry recital, putting on a dance recital or play, or writing a storybook. For the book project at hand, the art and writing workshop conducted with the resettled refugee children functioned in this empowering way. The format provided creative exercises as the children made their voices heard through storytelling and affirmed the children’s contributions throughout the process. Regardless of the commercial viability of the published picture book, the project proved inherently worthwhile as an activity of empowerment and collective ownership among its co-creators.

3) *Acknowledgment of limitations due to positionality.* How did this project succeed or fail in navigating collaborations between cultural insiders and outsiders? Positionality refers to how identity (e.g., race, gender, and class) influences one’s worldview (Özkazanç-Pan). Cross-cultural researchers must be aware of positionality, which can influence researcher-participant interactions and research outcomes. The project’s primary researcher/designer was White and a U.S. citizen, thereby a cultural outsider in engaging the stories of Congolese refugees. Likewise, although an immigrant himself, the illustrator also had a limited set of reference points in this cross-cultural enterprise. The designer and illustrator attempted to mitigate these factors by

intentionally collaborating with diverse co-creators who were integral to the creative work and final evaluation. However, undetected flaws might remain in the picturebook's design due to the cultural biases of the designer and illustrator.

In conclusion, discoveries made in Phase 3: Prototyping and Phase 4: Testing and Analysis reveal the incremental and repetitive cycle that is inherent in the design process: learning, creating, testing, improving, and resolving. In fact, in many ways, the act of creating the book—the “critical making” —and documenting the process proved to be as significant and illuminating as the final outcome (Barness and Papaelias 6).

V. CONCLUSION

Who and what can be seen? What images will children see when they open the books in their classrooms, libraries, and homes? Will they see themselves? Will they see an unrealistic all-white or predominantly white world? Will they see untrue images of their own culture? —Kathleen Horning and Ginny Moore Kruse

America's children are in pressing need of books that will give them back their souls.
—Langston Hughes

Discussion

Even as unprecedented numbers of displaced people resettle across the globe, young children of all backgrounds experience a deficit of picturebooks featuring the stories of refugees. All too often these stories are excluded from the pages of children's picture books because the pervasive racial ideology of White supremacy dictates whose stories—and synonymously whose lives—are valued in American society. By omitting or distorting culturally divergent stories, dominant narratives remain uncontested and default. However, as the research documented in earlier chapters of this thesis explains, children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds benefit from a more balanced exposure to “mirror” and “window” books (Sims Bishop, “Mirrors”). Multicultural storytelling has a profoundly positive impact on young children by cultivating healthy racial identity development, empowerment, empathy, and bias reduction.

The role of designers continues to expand and “[t]he notion of design as a credible and valuable way of thinking to deal with contemporary problems is being pursued within a widening domain” (Cassim 191). As this project demonstrates, motivated

designers can channel their creative skills and collaborative problem-solving to address complex social issues. In this case, the designer formed a collaborative design team to create a counter-narrative as a means to not only critique the scarcity of books written by or about refugees, but to offer an experimental design methodology to ameliorate the problem (to whatever extent possible). This project addresses the dearth of children's literature featuring refugee protagonists by proactively generating a picturebook told from the perspective of refugees. With the principles of Equity-Centered Community Design as the backbone of the iterative process, the design outcome was accomplished through intentional cross-cultural collaboration.

Future Research and Development

In March 2020, the non-profit organization FAM Houston allocated grant money to print a first run of 1,000 full-color, paperback copies of the picturebook. Parental permission was sought and granted to print the first names and last initials of the youth storytellers as co-authors of the book to recognize their vital contributions. All proceeds from the sale of the book will be funneled back to the non-profit for future storytelling initiatives. Ideally, enough copies of the published book will be sold in order to underwrite the distribution of the books to Houston ISD elementary classrooms for free or at low-cost. The picturebook will likely benefit from enhanced marketability due to regional appeal; its broader reach is yet to be tested. The design team is scheduling a series of visits throughout the greater Houston area to share about the collaborative project. Additionally, they plan to release an e-book version in the coming months to expand the book's availability and affordability.

Going forward, the framework of collaborative storytelling—anchored by design methodology—could be applied to construct narratives with other marginalized or displaced populations. For instance, an investigation might determine whether a similar art and writing workshop and co-creative process could engage children who have survived floods or other natural disasters. Alternatively, the original picturebook could be expanded into a series of books featuring characters with a wide range of migration experiences (e.g., children and their families seeking asylum in the U.S.), thus multiplying impact in the already identified gap for children’s books.

Some of the best practices and potential pitfalls for designers to be aware of when engaging cross-cultural endeavors have been documented through this research. As a result, this research certainly has implications for a plethora of future design projects. Other questions to explore include: How might the design outcome differ if the intended audience were older children or teenagers? How might the design outcome differ beyond the Houston, Texas region (i.e., how pivotal is context and location to the process)? How can the design outcome be evaluated in its mirror-window effectiveness at evoking empathy and promoting agency? And finally, to what extent might the positionality of the designer as convener of the collaborative team influence the design outcomes?

In conclusion, as more of today’s designers strive toward social responsibility, design practice must continue to adapt in order to embrace more culturally responsive and equitable priorities in our 21st-century global context. Integrating interdisciplinary research and collaborative strategies derived from equity-centered design, this thesis chronicles how design as critical practice can be implemented at the intersection of global migration and multicultural children’s literature. The design outcome as a children’s

picturebook will serve to supplement the sparse inventory of contemporary stories told by refugees and potentially inspire more of those stories to be shared with the world.

APPENDIX SECTION

A. RESPONSES FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT JOURNALS

B. WORKSHOP FORMAT

C. MANUSCRIPT DRAFT

D. STORYBOARD

E. EXCERPTS FROM CULTURAL COLLAGE

F. PICTUREBOOK PROTOTYPE

G. MANUSCRIPT REVISION

H. DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPENDIX A: RESPONSES FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT JOURNALS

“Why did you leave your home country?”

“So we can have a better and more joyful life to live.” – F. T.

“To have a better life and a better education.” – O. N.

“Three things I like about living in Houston”

“Education. Restaurants. Activities you can play.” – S. M.

“Sports. Streets and playing all around. Activities here.” – F. T.

“Three things I don’t like about living in Houston”

“Racism. Bullying. The bills my parents have to pay.” – S. M.

“The bullying. How people treat other people just because of how they look. That I had to struggle to get used to the country.” – F. T.

“What makes someone a good friend?”

“Being honest and reliable.” – S. M.

“Having trust in each other.” – S. N.

“When they got your back and you guys trust each other.” – O. N.

“What advice would you give to another child who is a refugee?”

“Don’t forget where you came from because there will be moments when you feel like you don’t belong. Always stay true to yourself.” – S. M.

“Take school seriously and always have a dream or a goal.” – S. N.

“Try your best to learn English and never give up because God is with you.” – O. N.

APPENDIX B. WORKSHOP FORMAT

10 min – **Greeting and Introductions**

Facilitator greets participants and gives quick overview of what to expect with the workshop activities (there will be a variety of writing and art exercises to engage solo and as a group). Shares expectation that participants can choose to participate as much or as little as they feel comfortable—everything is voluntary. States that the end result of the workshop will be to generate narratives in order to create a children’s picturebook. Participants are invited to share their names with the group. Facilitator passes out workbooks and pencils.

20 min – **Journaling I**

Participants are invited to fill out sections (1) Self and (2) There. After completing those pages, the participants are asked to share any of their written responses with the group and have a conversation together.

40 min – **Art Exercise I: Watercolor**

Facilitator passes out watercolor supplies. Facilitator gives an example of something that reminds him of his home country and invites participants to express a memory from their home country through the art exercise on their own papers, offering brief instructions on sketching lightly with pencil first and then using watercolors to paint the picture.

10 min – Participants give short presentations on what they painted, describing how the art connects them to their memories of home.

20 min – **Art Exercise II: Collage**

Facilitator describes how coming to a new country and adjusting to a new culture can present challenges and opportunities. Three large circles of paper on the wall represent “three worlds”: the circle on the left is one’s home country (old home), the one on the right is the U.S. (new home), and the one in the middle is an ideal world that captures the best from both places and experiences. Participants are invited to dialogue with one another or work independently to write examples of the experiences and realities in their old home and in their new home (both positive and negative) on sticky notes. Next, they collaborate to decide which of those sticky notes they want to move from the outer circles to the middle circle. In this way, the participants are bringing together cultural elements and experiences to imagine a new world of their own making.

15 min – **Journaling II**

Participants are invited to return to their workbooks to fill out sections (3) Here, (4) Between, and (5) Next; participants may share any of their responses.

5 min – **Conclusion**

Facilitator thanks the participants for their willingness to participate in the workshop and outlines next steps/plans for follow-up in the creative process.

APPENDIX C. MANUSCRIPT DRAFT

When Clouds Bring Rain

06/25/19

I remember my favorite place.

After school I would lie on my back in the soft grass and gaze up at the clouds.

Sometimes those clouds would bring rain. I liked the smell of the dirt after it rained.
It was rich and heavy and good.

My brothers remember too. They remember what it was like back home.
Goats everywhere... our community house... playing soccer...

I smile when I remember, but I feel sad at the same time.

We had to leave our home.
We became refugees.
We didn't have a choice.

My mother told my brothers and me that she wanted us to be safe, to learn in school, to have a future.

We tried to understand but everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in America.

I remember how surprised I was to see the tall buildings in the city. Would we live in one of those tall buildings?

Life has been very different here.
Instead of goats everywhere, there are dogs everywhere.
Instead of our community house, we gather at our church.
But some things haven't changed. We still play soccer. We still make new friends.
We still eat delicious *mandazi* with rice and beans.

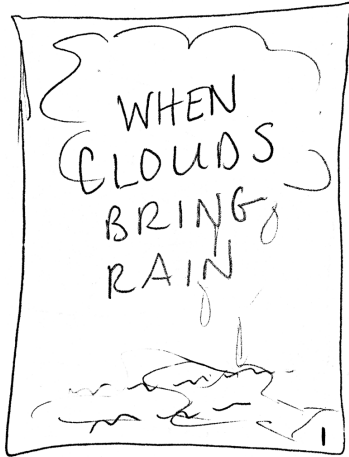
It makes me feel at home when someone greets me— *uraho*—and wraps me up in a big Congolese hug.

It makes me feel at home when I look up and see big clouds in the sky, and the rain comes down over the city.

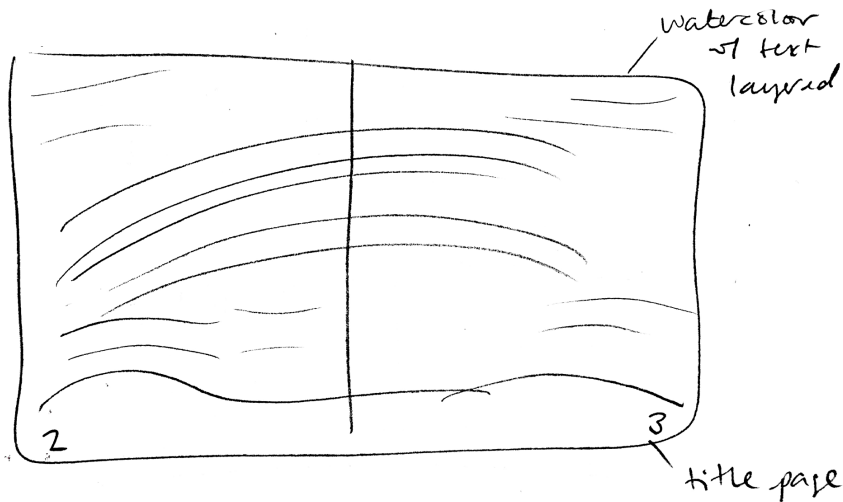
I close my eyes. Just for a moment, I can smell the dirt after the rain. That same good, rich smell of dirt that reminds me of home.

APPENDIX D. STORYBOARD

Storyboarding Sketches 07/12/19
“When Clouds Bring Rain”



Front Cover “When Clouds Bring Rain” A Memory Story



2-3 Rainbow arc across spread // journal text in youth handwriting textured in sky background, varying opacity // dedication integrated into rainbow // title page at right: “When Clouds Bring Rain”



4-5 I remember my favorite place under the African sky.



6-7 After school I would lie on my back in the soft grass and gaze up at the clouds.



8-9 Sometimes those clouds would bring rain. I liked the smell of the dirt after it rained. It was rich and heavy and good.



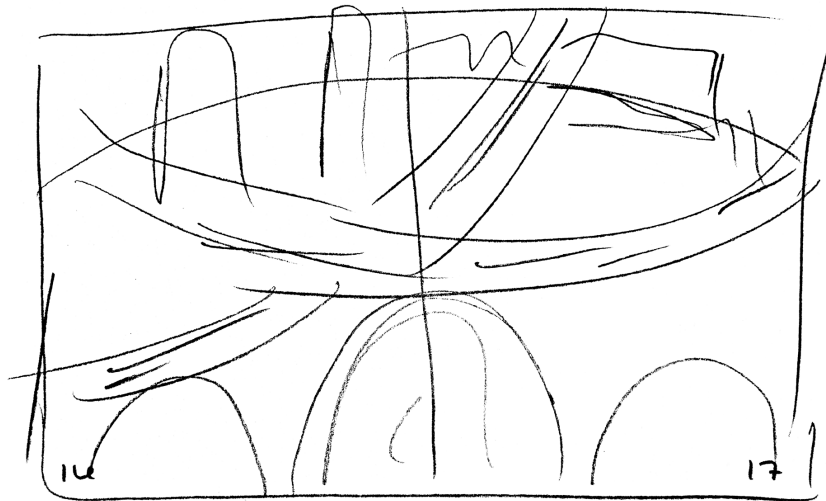
10-11 My brothers remember too. They remember what it was like back home. Goats everywhere... our community house... playing soccer...



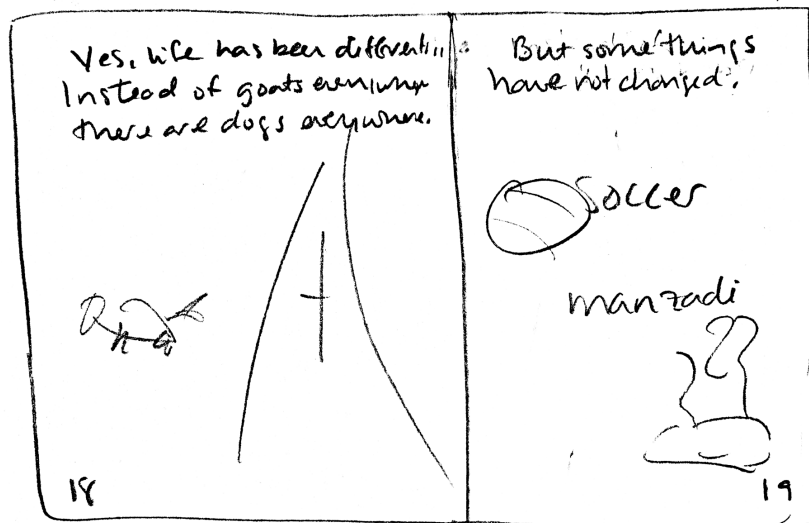
12-13 I smile when I remember, but I feel sad at the same time.
We had to leave our home. We became refugees. We didn't have a choice.



14-15 My mother told my brothers and me that she wanted us to be safe, to learn in school, to have a good future. We tried to understand but everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in America.

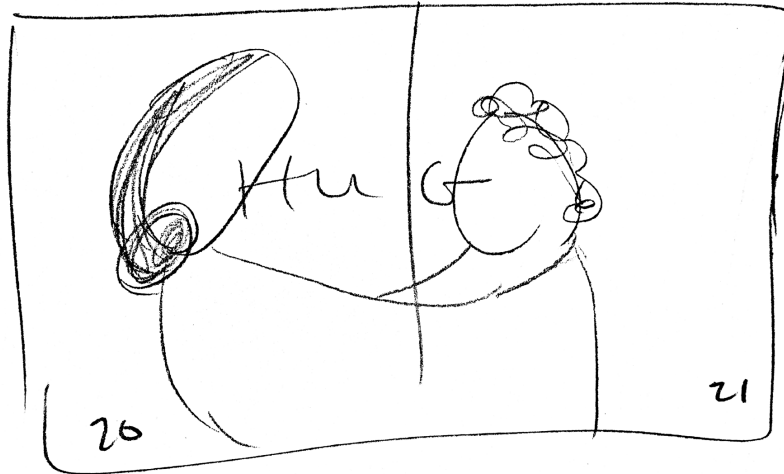


16-17 I remember how surprised I was to see the tall buildings in the city.
Would we live in one of those tall buildings?

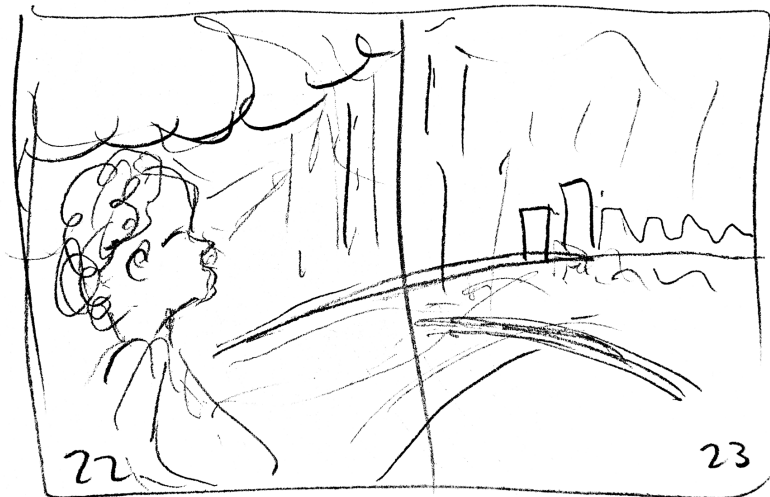


18 Life has been very different here.
Instead of goats everywhere,
there are dogs everywhere.
Instead of our community house,
we gather at our church.

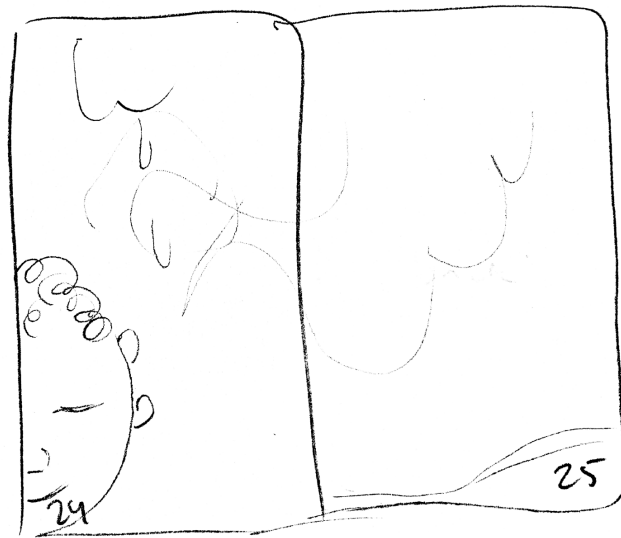
19 But some things haven't changed.
We still play soccer. We still make new friends.
We still eat delicious mandazi with rice and beans
when my mother prepares it.



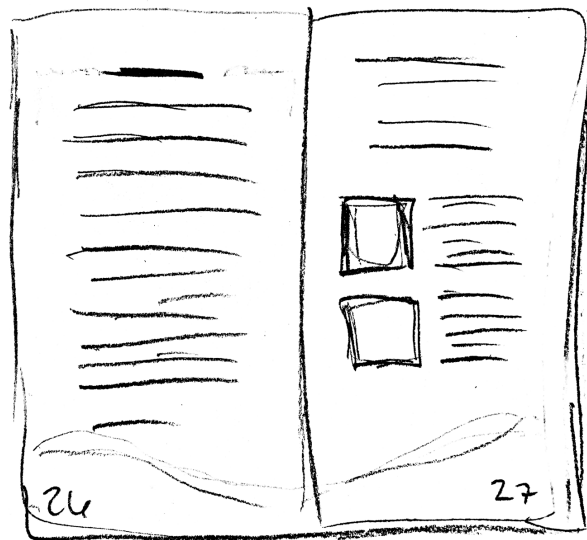
20-21 It makes me feel at home when someone greets me— *uraho*—and wraps me up in a big Congolese hug.



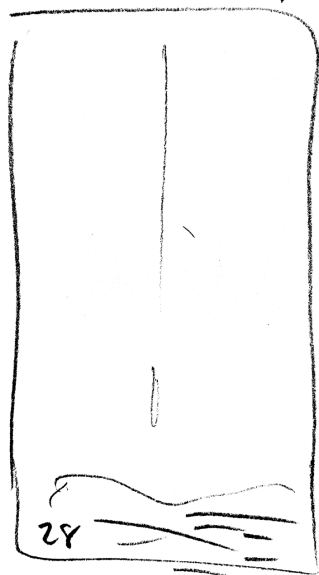
22-23 It makes me feel at home when I look up and see big clouds in the sky, and the rain comes down over the city.



24–25 I close my eyes. Just for a moment, I can smell the dirt after the rain.
That same good, rich smell of dirt that reminds me of where I came from.

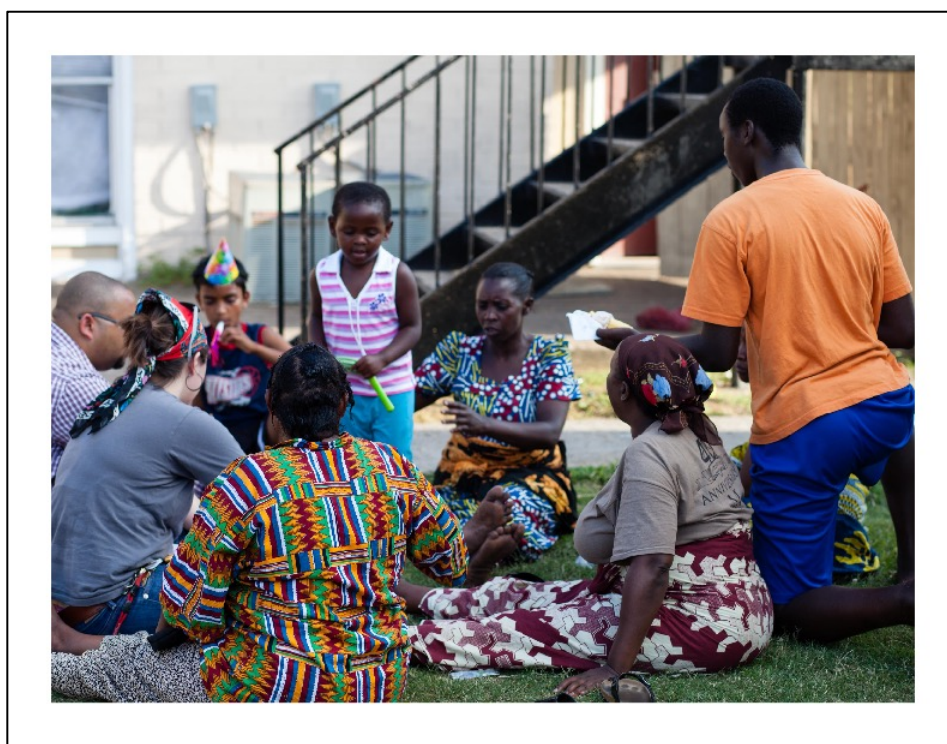
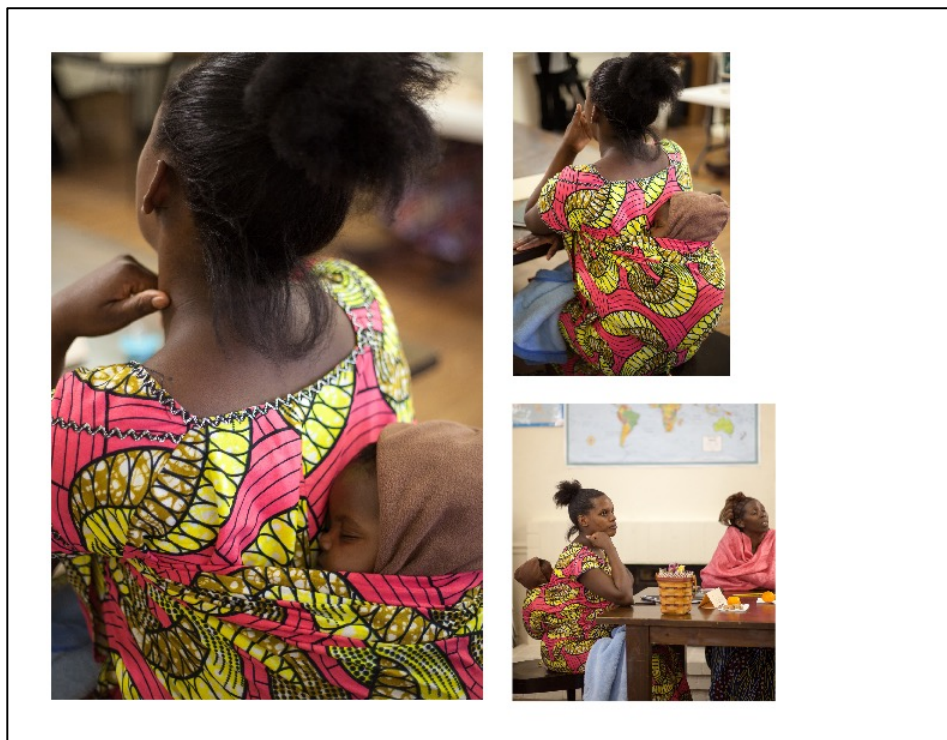


26–27 About the authors (youth-inspired stories) // illustrator and designer



Back Cover Final drop of rain with words reflected in puddle

APPENDIX E. EXCERPTS FROM CULTURAL COLLAGE



Photos by Kelsey A. Johnson; courtesy of Westbury United Methodist Church

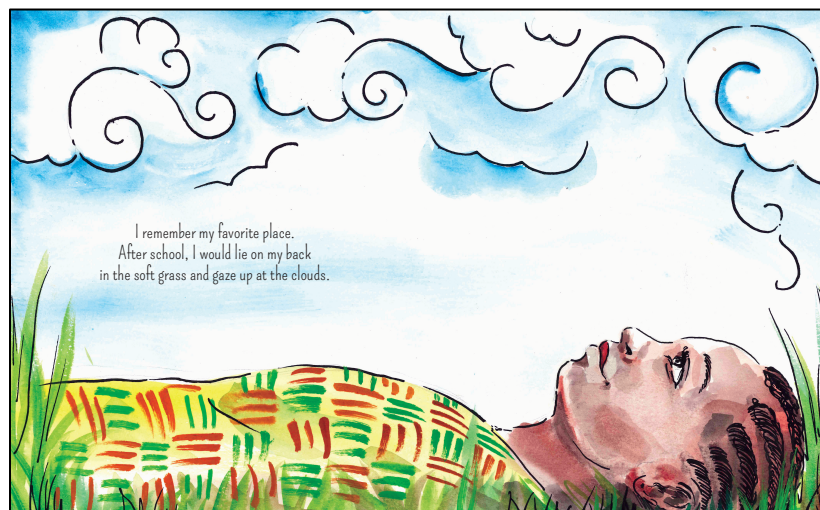
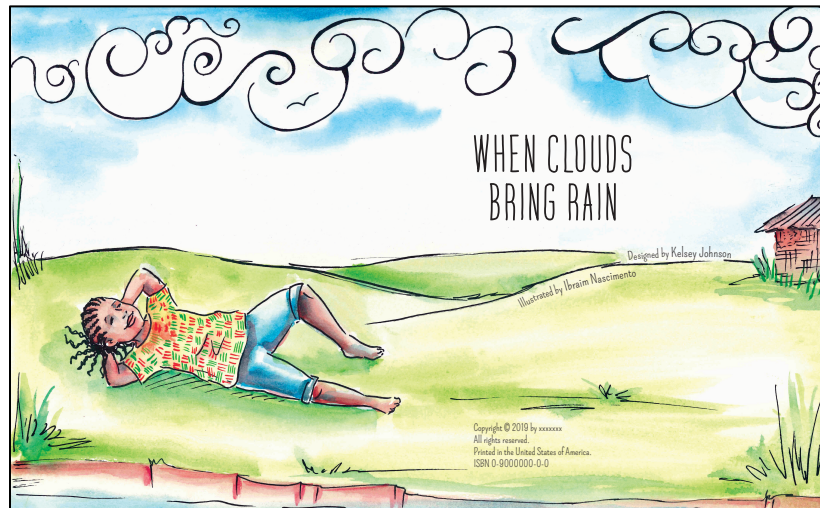


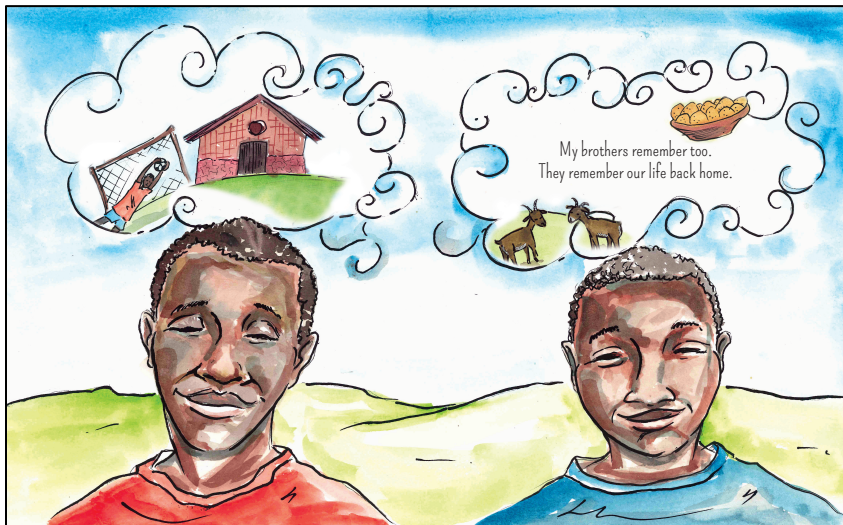
Image Source: Susan Beccio. IFAD, 2014.
<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/publication/asset/39379174>

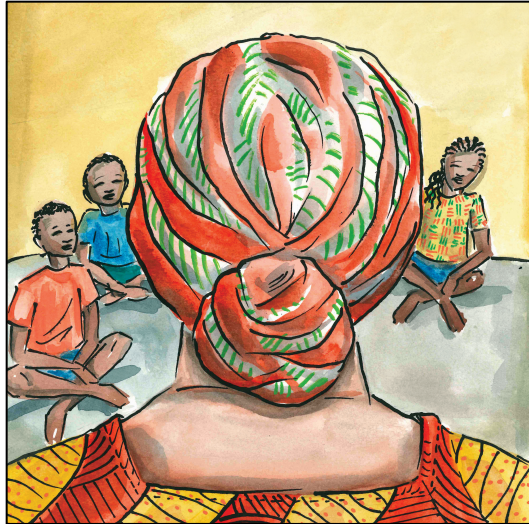


Image source: Robin Hammond. National Geographic Magazine, 2013.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/land-grab/>

APPENDIX F. PICTUREBOOK PROTOTYPE

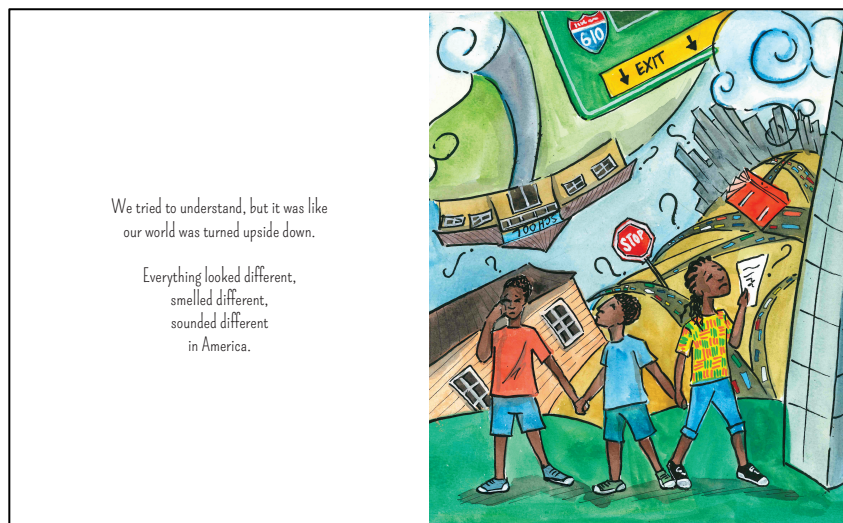






We had to leave our home.
We became refugees.
We had no choice.

My mother tried to explain it to us.
She told my brothers and me
that she wanted us to be safe,
to learn in school, to have a good future.







About the Project

In June 2019, the non-profit organization FAM Houston began a new storytelling initiative with a group of refugee youth whose families had been resettled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa. The youth participated in an interactive art and writing workshop facilitated by designer Kelsey Johnson and illustrator Ibraim Nascimento. Inspired by the youth's memories and experiences, this book was created using a collaborative design process.

✱

FAM Houston works for justice by building empowered community among refugees, immigrants, and local Houstonians.
www.famhoustontx.org

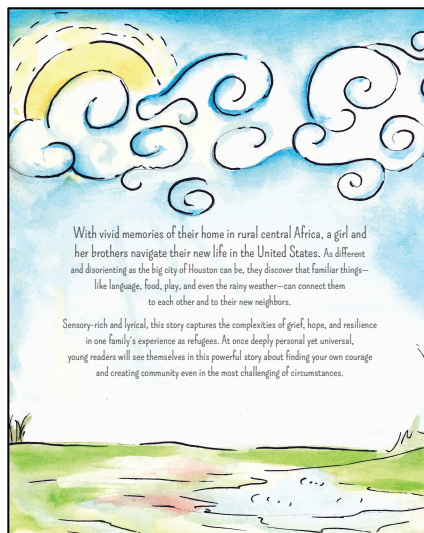
About the Collaborators

IBRAIM NASCIMENTO studied fine arts at the Federal University of Bahia in Brazil and is primarily trained in acrylic painting and mixed media art. He has taught art to young children in Brazil and the United States. He lives with his family in Houston, Texas.
www.ibraimnascimento.com

KELSEY A. JOHNSON is a designer, photographer, and writer based in Houston, Texas. She began this collaborative picturebook project as an MFA Communication Design student at Texas State University. Her creative work focuses on advocacy for diverse children's books.
www.kjportfolio.com

Special Thanks

To Olivia, Samuel M., Frank, Freddy, and Samuel N.
and to all resettled refugee children who call Houston home.



APPENDIX G. MANUSCRIPT REVISION

When Clouds Bring Rain

01/22/20

I remember my favorite place. I would lie down by the river and gaze up at the clouds.

Sometimes the clouds would bring rain. Mama would call to me, “Fehhhhh-zaaaah! Feza! Come in from the rain.”

After the rain, I would go back outside. The smell of the dirt was rich and heavy and good.

My brothers, Mosi and Bakari, remember too. They remember our life back home.

I smile when I remember, but I feel homesick at the same time.

We had to leave our home because there was a war. Home was not safe for us anymore.

“What is going to happen to us?” my brother Mosi asked Mama.

Mama tried to explain it to us, “We are refugees now.”

She told us we could not go back home, and we did not know where our new home would be. We would have to wait.

“No matter what,” she said. “I want you to be safe, to learn in school, to have a good future.”

Our family waited for a long time. We waited for a long, long time.

Finally, we found out that we would be resettled in the United States, in a big city called Houston, Texas.

When we got to Houston, we were surprised to see such tall buildings.

“Will we live in one of those tall buildings?” Bakari wondered.

We tried to understand, but it was like our world was turned upside down. Everything looked different, smelled different, sounded different in Houston.

Many things are different from the home we remember.

Instead of goats outside, we see dogs everywhere.

Instead of our community house, we gather at our church.

Yet some things are not so different. We still play soccer almost every day.
And we still eat delicious *mandazi* on really special days.

Remembering home is a good thing. When I feel homesick, I can share my memories
with my brothers and with our new friends.

When I write in my journal and draw pictures... I remember home.

When my neighbor greets me by saying “*Uraho!*” and wraps me up in a big hug...
I remember home.

And when I look up at big clouds as rain comes down over the city...

Just for a moment, I can smell the dirt after the rain.
The same good smell of dirt that reminds me of home.

APPENDIX H. DISCUSSION GUIDE



When Clouds Bring Rain

A Discussion Guide about the Picture Book for Teachers and Families

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK: Remembering their home in rural central Africa, a girl and her brothers navigate their new life in the United States as resettled refugees. At first, their experiences in the big city of Houston are disorienting and confusing. They discover that familiar things—like language, food, play, and even the rainy weather—can connect them to each other and to their new neighbors.

The following questions about the book can be used in one-on-one conversation, small or large group discussion, or as writing prompts for independent class work.

QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN AGES 5–7 (K–2ND)

1. Why does the main character, Feza, like it when it rains? Do you enjoy the rain? Why or why not?
2. When Feza's brothers, Mosi and Bakari, remember their home, memories float above their heads. Can you find the pages later in the book with those same memories/scenes?
3. When Mama explains that their family won't be returning home, what three things does she want for her children? Are these things similar to what your parents or other adults in your life want for you?
4. Have you ever felt like your world was "upside down"? Maybe it was a new school or a new place to live or another situation that felt overwhelming and confusing. Notice in the "upside down" picture how the girl and her brothers are all holding hands. Who "holds your hand" (is there for you) when things are really hard?
5. Feza feels better when she can write in her journal and draw pictures. Have you tried this before? What makes you feel better when you are sad or struggling with something?
6. Why do you think it is special for Feza's neighbor to greet her by saying "uraho" ("hi") in Feza's first language? How can a friendly smile and a hug remind someone of home?

QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN AGES 8–10 (3RD–5TH)

1. On the page when the girl's mother calls to her to come inside, the raindrops look like tears. How does this foreshadow what comes next in the story?
2. Turn to the page where Feza appears to have two faces. How can she be happy and homesick at the same time? Describe a time when you have experienced two or more emotions at once.
3. The book only mentions "Mama." What do you think happened to the children's father? Do you think it has something to do with the war that forced the family to leave home?
4. At the center of the book, the three children look out at the highways and tall buildings of the big city. Bakari wonders if they will live in one of the tall buildings. Do you think that ended up happening? If you have ever moved to a new place, what have been some things that have surprised you?
5. Feza, Mosi, and Bakari notice all the things that are different in their new home, and they also notice the things that feel familiar. Think about ways you connect with your friends and make new ones. Do your friendships involve favorite games, sports, or other fun activities? What about your favorite foods?
6. Did you notice the swirls and clouds in the illustrations? The clouds are a symbol for the children's memories—they are being carried from page to page, from place to place. What about clouds makes them a good symbol for memories? What other symbols can you find? (bridges, rain, etc.)

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

Wondering how you can broaden the conversation with your students or children about global migration and forced displacement? To understand the context of the issue and complexities facing refugees, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) keeps detailed, up-to-date information. They offer resources for home and classroom, including age-appropriate activity guides, multimedia content, and other helpful tools.

Find accurate terminology, data, and resources geared toward children at “Teaching About Refugees”: www.UNHCR.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html

NEXT STEPS

1 Is there an organization that works with resettled refugees in your community? Consider volunteering! Whether you are originally from the U.S. or another country, all of us can welcome and support newcomers.

Plant It Forward offers economically disadvantaged refugees an opportunity to become self-sufficient through growing, harvesting, and selling produce from a sustainable urban farm.

VOLUNTEER: Participate in a community farm workday or buy fresh, locally-grown produce or subscribe to a weekly “farm share.”
www.plant-it-forward.org

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston's Refugee Services relies on individuals and groups to assist with welcoming tasks.

VOLUNTEER: Sponsor a refugee family, conduct a donation drive, or serve as a translator.
www.imgh.org/refugee-services

FAM Houston works for justice by building empowered community among refugees, immigrants, and local Houstonians.

VOLUNTEER: Collect clothing and household items, provide homemade or store-bought snacks for our Women's Empowerment Group, and many more opportunities!
www.famhouston.org

2 Bullying and discrimination (like being treated unfairly because of your racial identity or nationality) are not okay anywhere—at school, in your neighborhood, and in places of worship. If you or someone you know is being mistreated, talk to a trusted adult to get help right away.

www.stopbullying.gov
www.tolerance.org

3 Some laws and policies in the United States make it harder for refugees to come to this country. If you believe that refugees should be welcomed and supported in the U.S., get an adult's help to contact your government representatives. You can write them a letter or an email to express how you feel about this issue and how it affects your life and your community.

www.commoncause.org/find-your-representative

4 Have you ever thought about making your own picture book? You could work with other students in your class or collaborate with family members or neighbors. Write and illustrate the story you want to share with others: you can easily create a book from folded paper, use a scrapbook with plastic sleeves from a craft store, or upload a digital version to an online photobook service to have it printed and shipped to you.

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