

Poets of Color/ Poems Celebrating Diversity

Prepared by Rachyl Kirk, UNC, January 28, 2021

Alarcón, Francisco X., Rodríguez, Odilia Galván. *Poetry of Resistance: Voices for Social Justice*. The University of Arizona Press, 2016.

This multicultural anthology highlights a multitude of calls for justice, feelings of hurt and betrayal, and more, all through poetry. Started on a Facebook page by poet Francisco X Alarcón and Odilia Galván Rodríguez in 2010 in response to the nine Latinx students being arrested for protesting the Arizona SB 1070 law, *Poetry of Resistance* combines the works of over eighty writers from the United States and elsewhere who challenge the detrimental ideologies embedded in a historically racist system. What began as an open forum for poets, writers, and activists to share their related works, became the inspiration and sole source for this compilation. These are poems written in English and Spanish, dedicated to the many people who have been unrighteously killed, imprisoned, and abused including immigrants and citizens alike. Bringing to light the inequality and deliberate oppression of many by an imperfect system is a forward step toward confronting the “beast of hate” that is all too present in the world.

Alexander, Kwame. *The Undefeated*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

This powerful poem by Kwame Alexander comments on many events and factors in American history often overlooked because of its color. *The Undefeated* is a message of endurance, perseverance, and unity to African Americans in a consistently adverse world in which they live. Drawing focus to relevant social issues like Black Lives Matter and the overt narrative of white prevalence in media, Alexander mentions a few of the many important curators of the American culture and history. Some of these individuals are Martin Luther King Jr., Serena Williams, LeBron James, and other history-makers and record-breakers. It does not only focus on these highlights, however. Alexander points out the history of struggle and violence toward his people and unspeakable events throughout history; he remembers those who have been lost... but he also imparts upon the readers the strength contained within this community that is undefeated yet.

Caraveo, Vanessa. *Voices of Diversity*. Los Fresnos, USA, 2020.

Aiming to call forward the beauty and love that is within the diversity of our world, *Voices of Diversity* assembles rich poems from the perspectives of many. Various

instances of navigating multicultural social interactions between children and young adults highlights the desire to be accepted, included, and loved. Whether discovering the importance of making a new friend or being proud of one's heritage and homeland, this collection intends to inspire and create opportunities for maintaining open and kind hearts towards others who are different from us and yet are similar in unlimited ways.

Freedman, Russell. *Angel Island: Gateway to Gold Mountain*. Clarion Books, 2013.

In this retelling of the turbulent history of immigration in the United States are the testaments of mostly Chinese immigrants written in the form of poems. The American immigration station in San Francisco, Angel Island, which was operational from 1910 to 1940, sports square inch by square inch of Chinese poetry and writing on each of the walls of the detention facilities that unfairly held mainly young Chinese laborers trying to secure entry into the U.S. Including these poems with the many personal testaments from immigrants and their descendants, Freedman paints a vivid picture of the experiences and discriminatory processes of immigration that many Asian and East Asian people faced at this port. Bringing to light a dark history of racism within, complete with pictures, *Angel Island* provides the other side of a story seldom heard from the point of view of mistreated people.

Hecht, Merna Ann. *Our table of Memories: Food and Poetry of Spirit, Homeland and Tradition*. Chatwin Books, 2015.

Within the pages of this savory collection of foods and traditional favorites from around the world is an overarching theme of connecting the world through the expression of cooking. The contents range from happy memories of the dishes made by family members, to celebratory foods, to the significance of food in times of struggle or war. This book was conceived by Merna Hecht and put together with the assistance from Project Feast. Broken up into three sections, *Our Table of Memories* not only contains creative descriptions of experiences with these dishes, but also the recipes and conversations with students and Project Feast.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Imagine*. Candlewick Press, 2018.

Specific depictions of childhood experiences in the life of poet Juan Felipe Herrera compile to ask the readers an important question: who could you be? In *Imagine*, illustrated by Lauren Castillo, Herrera outlines many of the new situations among some familiar ones he had encountered growing up in a migrant family who only spoke Spanish. Encouraging youth to think on that question, this book inspires them not to put limits on what can be obtained if they imagine what they can do. After all, Herrera

overcame his own obstacles to be the influential person he is, so too can the inspired readers become giants in their own ways.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *Laughing Out Loud I Fly: Poems in English and Spanish*. Joanna Colter books, 1998.

The free-spirited form of writing in this collection of poems spans across many topics that all in one fashion or another pertain to the experience of Latin American culture. Through talking about happy experiences with food and family as well as appreciating the many interactions in the community, this collection illustrated by Karen Barbour brings to life a joyful mood of discovery that comes with childhood.

Lai, Thanhha. *Inside Out and Back Again*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2011.

Inside Out and Back Again follows the story of a young Vietnamese girl named Kim Hà from Saigon during the Vietnam War. The chronological progression of flowing poetry reveals how her once simple life of living with her family, watching her papaya tree grow, and spending time picking flower seeds with her dear friend, turned into her family's journey to seek refuge in America. Making some stops along the way, Kim Hà and her family learn English and change as they continue the search for a new home. The ever-sweet sounding rhythm of the words do not fail to bring out a childlike innocence in the face of tragedy and uncertainty.

Mora, Pat. *Confetti: Poems for Children*. Lee and Low Books, 1996.

In *Confetti: Poems for Children*, poet Pat Mora writes colorfully innocent poems that awaken the inner child-like wonder of the simple things in nature. Beautifully illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez, this collection communicates the everyday joys that can be experienced through the eyes of children appreciating the world, from finding pictures in the clouds to recounting the days with loved ones.

Mora, Pat. *Yum! ¡MmMm! ¡Qué Rico!* Lee & Low Books Inc., 2007.

In this artistically illustrated book of haiku, poet Pat Mora conveys the many unique experiences with foods native to the Americas. With Rafael López's brilliant illustrations bringing life and color to the words, readers also get a new sense for each item from the informational blurbs present on the sides of the pages. Mora includes many fruits, vegetables, and more. This includes anywhere from Wisconsin cranberries to the South

American potatoes of Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador while sprinkling in some enriching native and Spanish words.

Soto, Gary. *A Fire in My Hands*. Scholastic Inc, 1990.

This story told through poetry by Gary Soto, outlines many of his own experiences as a Mexican American growing up in the San Joaquin Valley, California. Illustrated by James M. Cardillo, the poems address many varying topics that are common in childhood. Ranging from his every-day experiences of summer activities with friends to commenting on the social disparity between the cultures he is living in, Soto uses smoothly written poetry to unfold precious memories while prefacing each one by providing contextual commentary.

Urrea, Luis Alberto. *Vatos*. Cinco Puntos Press, 2000.

In this book, Luis Alberto Urrea's poem, *Vatos*, is accompanied by photographs by José Galvez. The two work together to provide meaningful connections to each other and to the lives of Chicano men to which the poem is addressed. The use of both English and Spanish enrich the vocabulary and cultural experience in many sentences throughout.

UNICEF. *I Dream of Peace: Images of War by Children of Former Yugoslavia*. Harper Collins Publishers, 1994.

Vivid but tragically accurate images of war from the eyes of children fill the pages of *I Dream of Peace*. Through both the mediums of writing and drawing, the young refugee children who are traumatized by the effects of war in their homes, describe their hopes of one day finding peace as well as reuniting with lost family members and friends. These real accounts, varying in length and depth, call attention the destruction and inhumane efforts of war to those who are able to listen. As prefaced by Maurice Sendak and as many of the children's messages say, although the ability to play and be happy is forcefully taken from them, they are always awaiting peace; hoping that the world would hear them and not continue to let the children around the world suffer in such unimaginable ways.

