

## Children’s Literature

# Around the World in 80 Pages: Notable Trade Books through the Lens of “Cosmopolitan Education”

Benjamin M. Jacobs

In the age of globalization — marked by growing interrelationships and interdependence between nations, economies, people, and cultures the world over — U.S. educators are increasingly interested in how to induct young children effectively and appropriately into the responsibilities of global citizenship. Research studies, conceptual explorations, curriculum guides, and teaching materials produced over the past few decades address this question from a variety of vantage points. Some writers suggest that teachers emphasize democratic and free market values as a means of exporting a homogenized version of American culture worldwide (referred to as the *assimilationist* approach). Other writers advocate for developing awareness of the diverse people, cultures, and societies around the globe with whom they may have increased contact now or in the future (referred to as the *multicultural* approach).<sup>1</sup>

A third approach that has gained traction in recent years is cosmopolitan education, which calls for embracing a broader horizon of outlook and concern for global humanity (i.e., relationships between people and understanding the needs of others) and global ecology (i.e., relationships between people and the environment), while simultaneously remaining rooted in one’s



Martha Nussbaum



Kwame Anthony Appiah

Book Council as “Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People 2012.”<sup>3</sup> It begins with a brief synopsis of the idea of cosmopolitan education and its application to social studies, then summarizes and critiques the children’s books in light of this framework, and suggests some potential teaching applications for the books with the goals of cosmopolitan education in mind.

### Cosmopolitan Educators

Cosmopolitanism, which has its roots in the Greek term for “citizen of the world,” has meant different things to different people in different places throughout history, as the question of what comprises “citizenship” or even “the world” has been politically and morally contested. That said, “the nebulous core shared by all cosmopolitan views is the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should [and can] be cultivated.”<sup>4</sup>

The question that most cosmopolitan thinkers contend with is precisely along what lines the community should be developed: Political? Social? Economic? Cultural? Moral? All or

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**Cosmopolitan:** (*adjective*) Having worldwide rather than limited or provincial scope or bearing; worldly.  
(Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary)

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local culture, heritage, and mores, and valuing what they may contribute to global understanding.<sup>2</sup>

This review looks through the lens of cosmopolitan education at three children’s books selected by NCSS and the Children’s

some of these? In contemporary cosmopolitan discourse, there are those who claim that cosmopolitanism involves shedding individual and parochial attachments in favor of a global society based on common, universal, and mutual concerns (e.g., Martha Nussbaum), and there are others who maintain that cosmopolitanism entails respecting individual differences and global diversity while seeking points of commonality, mutual consideration, and cooperation toward shared goals (e.g., Kwame Anthony Appiah).<sup>5</sup>

As applied to education, the universalist cosmopolitan vision implies implementing a mutually agreed-upon common core curriculum, while the differentiated cosmopolitan vision is more geared toward developing cross-cultural understanding. The universalist vision suggests imposing global harmony from the outside and socializing children into it, while the differentiated vision recognizes that cross-cultural relationships must evolve organically, albeit with encouragement.

Finally, the universalist vision aims at cultivating world citizens who are prepared to participate in a worldwide political, economic, social, and cultural superstructure and tackle the world's problems from that base, while the differentiated vision aims at developing good citizens of the world who care for the ways in which humans relate to each other individually and collectively, as well as how they relate to the actual world in which they live (i.e., the environment).<sup>6</sup>

### Close to Home

The educational philosopher David Hansen, of Teachers College, Columbia University, provides a vision of cosmopolitan education that recognizes elements of differentiation and universalism at once. He suggests that teaching toward a cosmopolitan sensibility ought to begin with the students' familiar experience, or "where they are" in their local milieu, but then cultivate in students an appreciation for a much broader, more global, and indeed more universal context in which they come to recognize local cultures as mere constituents of a much grander "world inheritance bequeathed to persons everywhere."<sup>7</sup> Specifically, students must first be initiated into their local (native) culture so that they can have a frame of reference for understanding people of differing backgrounds.

Next, the curriculum ought to encourage an analytic stance toward the local culture so as to develop in the students the capacity to reflect critically on their own cultural foundations and be receptive to understanding the cultural practices of others. The critical detachment is not meant to destroy the students' affinity for the local community, but rather to enable students to see themselves as others might see them. In addition, seeing how their local culture evolved can help students recognize the complex ways in which human experiences interrelate across space and time, and beyond ethnic, national, religious, and other boundaries. In the process, students are encouraged to learn from other cultures as a means of clarifying their own ways of seeing the world in addition to appreciating what other

people's inheritances have to offer.

In the end, the goal is to foster cross-cultural understanding and cosmopolitan-mindedness, an appreciation of our shared fate as humans on Earth, and the capacity to see the value of building common ground for the sake of humanity and ecology the world over.<sup>8</sup>

### Recurring Themes

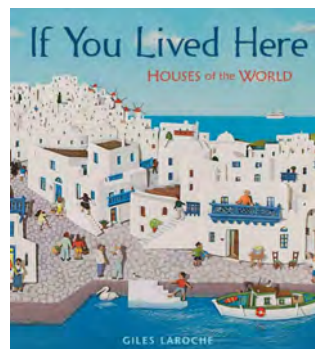
While cosmopolitan education is meant to influence educational structures and curriculum planning more broadly, it clearly has special import for social studies education in particular. After all, social studies has perhaps the most explicit mandate for developing cross-cultural understanding of all the school subjects. All of the NCSS National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, and these specific thematic strands<sup>9</sup>

- ① CULTURE,
- ② TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE,
- ③ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS,
- ④ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY,
- ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS, AND
- ⑥ GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

have strong correlates with components of cosmopolitan education. The type of social studies curriculum that would be best suited to realizing the goals of cosmopolitan education would necessarily emphasize:

- Local culture, but with outwardly views and connections (i.e., it would need to provide sufficient time for cross-cultural studies at every stage of the expanding horizons)
- Anthropology (culture), sociology (community), and geography (ecology), in addition to history, civics, and economics
- Arts and humanities as well as contemporary affairs
- Critical thinking, open-mindedness, and a proclivity for active participation in community life
- Cooperation and collaboration, as well as individual growth
- Moral development and social betterment.

This type of social studies ought to be restored to the elementary curriculum, alongside literature, math, science, and character education.



### ***If You Lived Here: Houses of the World***

Three of Notable Social Studies Trade Books for 2012 might be of special use in such a social studies program. The most edifying and artistically impressive of the books, *If You Lived Here: Houses of the World* (grades K-5), consists of a series of 15 bas-relief cut-

paper collages of various types of historical and contemporary

dwellings from around the world, along with descriptions of the architecture, location, materials, historical timeframe, and other noteworthy information about each.

The book begins with a dogtrot log house from the mid-Atlantic and southern regions of colonial America, and meanders through a Swiss chalet, New Mexican adobe, Spanish cave dwelling, Chilean *palafito* (house on stilts), Venetian *palazzo*, Fujian *tolou* (rammed-earth dwelling), South African decorated house, Mongolian yurt, and Airstream trailer, among other places, before landing at last on an image of a tree house being constructed by three young Boy Scout-types in a generic American backyard.

The strengths of this book include its magnificent artisanal renditions of these homes, its rather detailed descriptions of the materials used to construct the houses, and the sometimes surprising facts kids might learn from it (e.g., there are approximately 45 million cave dwellers in the world today; it was not until 2010 that the first woman qualified to be a gondolier in the 900-year history of gondolas; and so on). Furthermore, the book is written in the second person, which automatically places the reader in both an empathetic and comparative frame-of-mind (e.g., “If you lived here, you would always have friends at home to play with because your huge round house would be home to dozens of families”).

Finally, the book begins and ends with the local context — moving from log cabin to tree house — giving readers a sense of coming full circle within Americana while learning along the way how the diverse structures they visited around the world relate to their own familiar cultural inheritances (e.g., most of them are wood frame, however simple or elaborate).

There are a few areas that social studies teachers mindful of cosmopolitan education may want to improve on, however. For starters, a map on the last page of the book reminds us that, of the fifteen dwellings on our world tour, seven are located in Europe, four in North America, two in Asia, one in South America, and one in Africa. Correct for this Western and Northern hemispheric bias by having students do research and create paper collage renditions of dwellings from various other places of the world (e.g., Vietnamese stilt houses, Bedouin tents, Saharan mud huts, Amazonian long houses, etc.). Similarly, about half the houses depicted in the book are high-end or bourgeois residences (e.g., chalet, chateau, palazzo). Here is an opportunity to do research, for example, on where Venetian gondoliers live (hint, not likely to be in palazzos) — a lesson that can also introduce to students the concept of neighborhood stratification and even “ghettoization” more generally (in fact, the term “ghetto” derives from the area where Jews historically were confined in Venice).

Last, the book sometimes mentions the environmental impact of these residences, but more often neglects it. Yet, log cabins mostly were created by felled trees, not fallen trees; houseboats can wreak havoc on the ecology of lakes; Airstream trailers may have a reputation for being hippie headquarters, but they normally are dragged along by gas-guzzling trucks on their way

to vacation destinations. For the sake of raising global ecological awareness, students might conduct a geographic study of the environmental impact of various types of living spaces. They could learn how to determine a households’ ecological footprint.<sup>9</sup>



### **The Great Global Puzzle Challenge**

More technologically sophisticated virtual globetrotters may enjoy the book *The Great Global Puzzle Challenge with Google Earth* (grades 3-8), which relies on numerous intricate navigational and digital mapping features. Each destination is reached by plugging in coordinates

found on the corresponding page of this companion book. The book reads like a GenNext travel guide, providing historical tidbits, geographic trivia, tourist attractions, and a bright, busy, colorful Pop Art illustration of the sites from which readers are supposed to pick out certain people, animals, objects, and such, from a crowd, à la the popular *Where’s Waldo* series.

To the credit of the Google tour guides, this trip around the world, while it skews urban (six of the eleven sites), manages to reach the Amazon Rainforest, Great Barrier Reef, Himalayas, and Tanzanian safari as well (on the last page, students are even encouraged to visit various spots in outer space). Cosmopolitan educators might appreciate the nod to historical centers of cosmopolitan culture, such as Ancient Egypt, Ancient Rome, London, New York, and Paris (depicted as a multiethnic mecca).

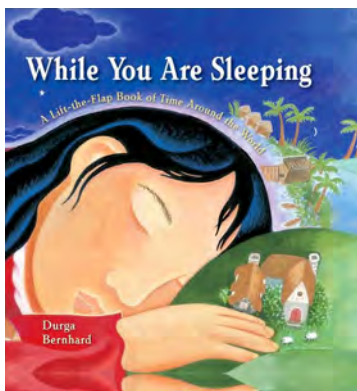
Also included are two hotbeds of contemporary globalization, Tokyo and New Delhi. The description of each place, while quite thin on content and rather lacking in sophistication, nonetheless draws young readers into the focal learning activity, which is essentially a high-tech scavenger hunt, and inspires them to investigate the selected sites — and hopefully more — on Google Earth. While the book can stand alone as at-home “edutainment,” its primary value in the classroom lies in its scaffolded connections to Google Earth, unquestionably one of the most significant technological resources social studies educators have access to today.<sup>10</sup>

Cosmopolitan educators working with the *Great Global Puzzle Challenge* might also benefit from using the book as a foil of sorts, for it provides ample opportunities to understand and critique the impact of globalization on human society and the environment. A glance at the book jacket and copyright page reveals that the book was designed specifically for a billion-dollar high tech company with global reach, Google; produced by a multinational publishing conglomerate with headquarters in London and New York, Macmillan; and printed in one of the world’s fastest growing global business hubs, Dubai.

Using the book interactively with Google Earth of course requires students to have access to a computer with adequate Internet service, either or both of which may not be available in some U.S. school districts let alone outside of wealthy, developed nations. Pointing this out to students will help sensitize them to issues of who is and who is not included in the so-called globalized world, based in part on who has access to resources, information, markets, and the like.

In a similar vein, notice that the humans depicted in Tanzania (alongside various animals from the African plains) fall into two categories: black hunters and gatherers holding spears and water jugs, and white tourists fishing off a pleasure boat and taking pictures from open-topped SUVs. The native Africans aim their spears while the white visitors aim their cameras. Because none of this is explained in the accompanying text, it is hard to know the author's intention here, but it would be worthwhile for teachers to point up these contrasts and discuss them, perhaps speculating whether the author was attempting to be "authentic" or "tongue-in-cheek," why, and to what effect. If most people in the countries of Africa live in cities and agricultural villages, why not depict them that way?<sup>11</sup>

Last, the planet Earth in Google Earth appears to exist mostly for the sake of human exploitation and consumption. Animals shown at almost every site are accompanied by people, and in most cases they are being dominated by them as well (British Royal Guards on horseback, Roman gladiators wrestling with tigers, fishermen and divers at the Great Barrier Reef). Cities consist of massive gleaming buildings, lots of neon signs (and electricity use in general), and streets teeming with people and vehicles, while natural wonders are trod upon by climbers camped in tent cities (Himalayas), slaves building pyramids (Ancient Egypt), and boats taking over waterways (even the pristine Amazon rainforest has a canoe docked on a bank of the river). Indeed, the Great Global Puzzle Challenge offers teachers and students several fruitful launching points for critically investigating the ecology of global development.



### **While You Are Sleeping**

From the standpoint of working toward cosmopolitan education in elementary social studies, *While You Are Sleeping: A Lift-the-Flap Book of Time around the World* (grades preK-2) deserves our greatest approbation. The book opens with an Eskimo mother reading a

bedtime story to her daughter at 10:00 p.m. (also identified as 22:00) Alaskan time, noting that, "While you are reading, on the other side of the world, someone is getting dressed." That someone is a young Nigerian girl who lives in a thatched hut

and is preparing to carry some fruit and bread from one part of her village to another at 9:00 a.m. Nigerian time.

The story continues marking the same moment in time in places around the world, including Japan (5:00 p.m., two friends walking home from school), Mexico (2:00 a.m., a girl awakened from sleep by a sound in the night), Thailand (3:00 p.m., a boy climbing a tree), Haiti (3:00 a.m., three children sleeping), the United Kingdom (8:00 a.m., a girl milking a goat), Brazil (5:00 a.m., a boy pushing a boat from shore), and India (where it is noted that the time zone is 5:30 hours ahead of the prime meridian).

The book ends having come full circle: "While you are watching the sun rise [in Brazil], far away across oceans and continents, someone is going to sleep [in Alaska]." It's a simple story with relatable characters (all children) and themes (doing what children do), accompanied by soft, colorful, Impressionistic watercolors of people and places. The circular lift-the-flaps depict the living quarters of the children readers visit; when the flaps are open they include analog and digital clock displays, photos of children engaged in activities, and maps for each site.

What makes *While You Are Sleeping* such a superlative pedagogical resource for early childhood social studies educators is not just its beauty, simplicity, and resonance, but its thoughtful and sensitive approach to understanding time, culture, people, places, environments, global connections, and more (i.e., most of the Ten Thematic Strands of the Social Studies Standards). We meet everyday children in their native habitats doing the various things expected of them in each place and time, be it sleeping, playing, going to school, or contributing to the household economy. We get a sense of the way kids dress (Nigerian *adire* cloth wraps, Indian *saris*, British wools and plaids) and wear their hair (Eskimo braids, Haitian dreadlocks, Japanese boys in baseball caps) in different places, and we get multiple clues about their day-to-day lifestyles. There are no overt messages regarding socio-economic status; rather, everyone comes across as a commoner.

Outside the normal concerns that might be raised about stereotyping people, places, and cultures in the limited snapshots provided, it is hard to imagine anyone taking offense to the content of this book vis-à-vis displaying caricatures or inaccuracies. Critics of cultural relativism might be quick to decry the book's innocuous comparisons between various people and places, but one strength of this book is its ability to capture global diversity in the most uncomplicated, down-to-earth sort of way, that is, by capturing one simultaneous moment in time around the world. No judgments are made about what the kids are doing anywhere because they are engaged in commonplace activities found nearly everywhere.

For cosmopolitan educators, this book helps students appreciate how human experiences compare across space and time and beyond cultural boundaries. At the same time, it begins and ends with the local culture — in the United States — albeit in

an mind-opening way, by using Alaska and Eskimo people as the central frame of reference (i.e., as opposed to somewhere in the Lower 48, as one might expect). Perhaps most important, it can help children understand their own special place in the world, in addition to appreciating the place of others. 🌐

**Notes**

1. Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti and Lynn Mario T. M. de Souza, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
2. See, for example, David T. Hansen, "Curriculum and the Idea of a Cosmopolitan Inheritance," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 40, no. 3 (2008).
3. National Council for the Social Studies and Children's Book Council, "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People 2012," (New York: Children's Book Council, 2012). The selected books are Giles Laroche, *If You Lived Here: Houses of the World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); Clive Gifford, *The Great Global Puzzle Challenge with Google Earth* (New York: Kingfisher, 2011); Durga Bernhard, *While You Are Sleeping: A Lift-the-Flap Book of Time around the World* (Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2011).
4. Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, "Cosmopolitanism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/cosmopolitanism.
5. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); "Cosmopolitan Patriots," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3

(1997); Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country?*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

6. A summary of these positions can be found in Leonard J. Waks, "Reason and Culture in Cosmopolitan Education," *Educational Theory* 59, no. 5 (2009); James A. Banks, "Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age," *Educational Researcher* 37, no. 3 (2008).
7. Hansen, "Curriculum and Cosmopolitan Inheritance," 304; David T. Hansen, "Cosmopolitanism and Education: A View from the Ground," *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 1 (2010).
8. *National Council for the Social Studies, National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010).
9. There are a number of good, free ecological footprint calculators for teachers and kids available online. For a listing see [www.mnn.com/earth-matters/climate-weather/stories/the-15-best-carbon-calculators](http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/climate-weather/stories/the-15-best-carbon-calculators).
10. See, for example, the Geothentic project at [lt.umn.edu/geothentic](http://lt.umn.edu/geothentic).
11. Barbara Brown and Alicia Carroll, "Beyond Wildlife: Teaching about Africa and Stereotypes," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 20, no. 4 (March/April 2008): 12-16.

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## Passport to Learning: Teaching Social Studies to ESL Students

Bárbara C. Cruz, Joyce W. Nutta, Jason O'Brien,  
Carine M. Feyten and Jane M. Govoni  
*NCSS, Bulletin No. 101, 123 pp., 2003*

More and more teachers face the challenge of teaching social studies to students whose native language is not English. The authors of this book have designed it specially to help social studies teachers do so successfully. The first part of the book enables teachers to understand the process of acquiring a second language and how to deal with students engaged in that process. The second identifies good topics for social studies classes that include ESL students, and offers detailed, ready-to-use lesson plans. This book is a must for social studies teachers whose classes include ESL students.

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