

Evaluation of Multicultural Teaching Resources

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The book I chose for my teaching resource is *Ganesh* by Malcolm J. Bosse. My research indicates that this book was written for young adults from 5th through 8th grade. For a young adult book, *Ganesh* addresses a lot of adult issues, from coping with death to dealing with prejudice and unjust government acts.

The book is about Jeffrey Moore, a 14-year-old boy and his struggle to overcome tragedies caused by death and find an identity in two very different cultures. Jeffrey Moore was born in Madras on the Southeast coast of India. His parents were white American couple that worked for organizations that helped the poor.

At the age of 9, his mother contracted encephalitis while administering anti-cholera shots to thousands of pilgrims. She died in a week. His father turned to Hindu to deal with his grief. He went to Hindu temples, practiced Hindu rituals, and after meeting the Swami became a devotee of the holy man. In their village, his dad was well respected. When he went on his spiritual travels for weeks, the villagers would all care for Jeffrey whom they called Ganesh.

When Jeffrey was 14 his father died from a heart disease. At his funeral, he was given the rites of a Brahman caste. However, after his father's death, the villagers suddenly started treating him as a foreigner even though he spoke their language and had the same religion as them. The good treatment Jeffrey received in the past was out of respect for his dad and after his death; they wanted Jeffrey to leave their village and go home to his relatives. An Indian gets his or her identity from having family and relatives. If you don't have one you are considered a foreigner.

Jeffrey flew to the United States to stay with his aunt in the Midwest due to his promise to his dying father. In America Jeffrey had a new set of problems to deal with

like adjusting to the weather and learning the American culture that is very different from his Indian upbringing. Jeffrey was slow to mingle with his American classmates but the friendship he developed with the school's star basketball player, Tom Carrington, helped him blossom by the book's end.

Toward the end of the school semester, Jeffrey's aunt Betty tells him that the government bought their land to make way for a major highway. Aunt Betty's house has been in their family for many generations so Jeffrey decided to disobey the government. He gathered a handful of his classmates to practice Satyagraha. Satyagraha means "a grip on the truth." It was what Gandhi used to liberate India from the British rule. Jeffrey, his aunt and his classmates fasted for 11 days until the government decided to leave their house and move the highway path due to mounting public pressure.

The book ends with Jeffrey bonding with his classmates during their Satyagraha. At the end of the book, Malcolm Bosse had managed to masterfully discuss many of society's multicultural issues.

Ganesh uses many techniques to address current issues and trends associated with cultural and social and multicultural education.

In *Multicultural Education: issues and perspective*, the authors discussion of race as a social category "indicates that the criteria for determining the characteristics of a particular race vary across culture, that an individual considered black in one society may be considered white in another, and that racial categories reflect the social, economic, and political characteristics of a society" (Banks, p. 19). In *Ganesh*, Jeffrey's father was considered Indian; he had "lived a good life and had done good work and most importantly had traveled on many pilgrimage with the Swami" (Bosse, p.27). Since he

was accepted as a member of the Brahman caste his son was considered Indian as well. However, after his death, his son became a foreigner because he had no relatives in India. If Jeffrey was taken in by any villager then he would become Indian again, even though he looks like an American white. In America, Jeffrey was considered Indian because of his accent and mannerisms even though he looked white. Being Indian is not determined by birth or skin color alone. Jeffrey's dad showed that one can gain acceptance in the Indian culture by your religious practice and work ethics and generosity. Likewise in America you can look and be classified as something else and be accepted by another race based on your attitude and actions in their society.

Another current issue addressed in *Ganesh* is religious accommodations. Most students in Jeffrey's school were Christians so they did not have rules to accommodate other religions. Jeffrey is a Hindu and by his religion he did not eat meat. During lunch at his school he had to ask about the ingredients of the food and if they didn't have anything he could eat he went hungry.

In my opinion the most important issues discussed in *Ganesh* are the small cultural adjustments. This book showed the view point of a minority which will make a great learning tool for most Americans. It will give them a chance to see life from a different perspective which will give them a richer view of life and may help them avoid the common stereotypes associated with foreigners. *In Multicultural Education: issues and perspectives*, this point is called the transformation approach, a curriculum that enables students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspective and point of view (Banks, p.233).

Ganesh also addressed cultural issues from a relations approach. This approach “believes that greater social equality will result if students learn to respect one another regardless of race, class, gender, or disability...its goal is to promote a feeling of unity, tolerance, and acceptance among people.” The curriculum in this approach focuses on individual differences and similarities. It also provides accurate information for common stereotypes students hold about different ethnic, racial, disability, gender or social-class groups. An example of this approach in the book is towards the end when Jeffrey and his classmates were holding their Satyagraha. Jeffrey held yoga classes for his classmates and explained the goals of Satyagraha and for their willingness to help him, he tried eating hotdog because he had never eaten meat before due to his religious practice (Bosse, p.147). Another example is the bike ride that Jeffrey and Tom took after school. On these rides Jeffrey will tell Tom about India and Tom talked about America and they learned from each other about the other’s culture.

The last part of *Ganesh* focused on Jeffrey recruiting his classmates to help him “persuade the government they have been making a mistake” by practicing Satyagraha. Their action against the government is in the context of education a social reconstructionist approach. Their approach questions ethics and power relation in the new global economy (Banks, p.69). Jeffrey and his friends used critical consciousness to analyze the government highway proposal before taking action.

I think that *Ganesh* took on too many issues and as a result, the novel seems too thin in the information it gave the readers about India. Another part of that problem is the culture being covered. India is such a large complex culture with different subcultures that it can’t be properly covered in 300 pages much less 185.

Ganesh's portrayal of the people of Southeast India is accurate but not thorough. The author describes their religion as Hindu and their language as Tamil. My outside source, *Cultural Atlas of India* says that 90 percent of the Southeast region, the state of Tamil Nadu, are Hindus (Johnson, p214). The author talks about Hindu as a religion but only in fragments, not enough to give people an accurate understanding of the religion. For example, in the first chapter the author says:

“After his wife’s death, Mr. Moore turned to religion. He read Hindu philosophy, went to Hindu temples, practiced Hindu rituals and after meeting the Swami became a devotee of the holy man.”

For an outsider without prior knowledge of this religion, that statement doesn’t mean much. Who is Swami? I gained a better understanding of Hinduism by reading my outside source. According to *Cultural Atlas of India*, “Hinduism is a religion of some 330 million gods, some of whom are greater than others. They reach from the great gods like Brahma, the original creator, or Shiva and Vishna who came to prominence within Hinduism 2,000 years ago to minor gods and lesser spirits who may inhabit a single place.” It further stated “...in Hinduism the gods are but different aspects of a single supreme being. They have many forms and numerous names...”

Another aspect of *Ganesh* I don’t know how accurate it is dealt with Jeffrey’s dad being given the rites of a Brahman (Bosse, p27). *Cultural Atlas of India* indicates that Brahma is the original creator. The caste of priests and those with religious knowledge is Brahmins. I am not sure if this is a regional difference, or if the caste names vary or perhaps it could be just a mistake.

Ganesh in a limited way does help students to better understand the history and characteristics of Southeast India. Jeffrey gave students a narrow perspective on Hinduism. At the beginning of the book he is learning yoga and towards the end he teaches us that yoga is a way to calm the mind in preparation for meditation. His conversation with his dad before his death reveals some of Hinduism's philosophy. His father said, "And in you, Jeffrey, and in the bats flying around, and the farmers of this village, and in whoever is laughing out there. We are all the same consciousness." At another time he said, "Remember this, Jeffrey. The soul is a bird. The nest it makes is the body. A bird makes its nest, raises its fledglings, then flies away. The nest rots, but the bird has made another nest" (Bosse, p 23).

During the early stages of Jeffrey's friendship with Tom Carrington, he described Southeast India to him. He told him of the variety of snakes in that region and he explained the monsoon season. Jeffrey said, "they had rain only one month a year, and if they didn't receive enough water to last the other eleven months, there was drought, famine, and death" (Bosser, p. 111). Jeffrey talked about the foods they ate, how him and his best friend Rama, played cricket and dreamed of one day playing in the All India team against Pakistan. He also talked about the different diseases that were common in his region and their style of building.

Ganesh didn't deal with Indian-Americans or their contribution to America. The book was written about the life of a 14-year-old boy and how he adjusted to a new culture and it just focused on Jeffrey and how he interacted with his environment. The students in Jeffrey's school didn't really have any stereotypes because they knew so little about the

Indian Culture. This book through its accurate presentation of information prevents future stereotypes and other forms of misrepresentation.

I enjoyed reading *Ganesh* and feel that it is a quality book that should be used in a middle school curriculum. To get the most out of this book, a teacher need other supplementary materials. One of the weaknesses of the book is lack of definition for a lot of words and concepts it used. For a middle school audience, the book will be more meaningful as a way of finishing up an Indian Cultural study. If used at the end when students already know what Hinduism is and have been introduced to some aspects of Indian culture, the book will flow better.

Ganesh is a great book to do class activities with. It is suitable for a human relations approach of teaching, a social reconstructionist approach or a social action approach of teaching. The book is more focused on drawing attention to cultural differences and how to teach appreciation for other cultures than providing in-depth details on India. It also covered only one region, the southeast part of India, so I recommend using it with other resources depending on how you want to teach India.

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