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Bachelor's project in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education for Years 1-7

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Abstract

Many before me have claimed that it is essential for teachers to be aware of the way race is portrayed in the children's literature they choose to use in the classroom. This is because the ideologies and key messages conveyed can deeply affect how students view human similarities and differences, and their sense of self in relation to others. In this paper, I argue that the picturebook *Whoever You Are* (2015) by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub constructs a racial hierarchy, which again affects the construction of normality in a problematic way. The representation of races and the relationships between them, combined with the intended audience of this book, supports established racial hierarchies and constructs norms and normality in regards to the white, middle-class child. In this way, some children are defined within the norm, while others are defined as 'other' and deviating from the norms presented within this universe.

Alle er like, men noen er likere enn andre

Sammendrag

Mange før meg har fremhevet at det er viktig for lærere å være oppmerksom på måten rase blir fremstilt i barnelitteraturen de velger å benytte seg av i klasserommet. Dette er fordi ideologiene og budskapene som blir fremmet kan påvirke elevenes syn på mennesker generelt og hvordan de oppfatter seg selv i relasjon med andre. I denne oppgaven argumenterer jeg for at billedboka *Whoever You Are* (2015) av Mem Fox og Leslie Staub konstruerer et rasehierarki, som igjen påvirker konstruksjonen av normalitetsbegrepet på en problematisk måte. Både representasjonen av og forholdet mellom rasene, samt de intenderte leserne av boka, støtter et etablert rasehierarki, og konstruerer dermed normer og normalitetsbegrepet i forhold til det hvite, middel-klasse barnet. På denne måten, blir noen barn definert innenfor normen, mens andre blir definert som utenfor, og dermed 'annerledes' og avvikende fra normene presentert innad i universet beskrevet i den aktuelle billedboka.

“Narratives which incorporate characters of various ethnicities do not necessarily engage with the cultural difference, and it is important to consider not merely how many characters come from diverse ethnic backgrounds but how such characters and cultures are represented”

(Bradford, 2010, p. 49)

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1.0 Introduction

One day during my teaching practice in Australia, my practice teacher pulled out the picturebook *Whoever You Are* written by Australia's most famous picturebook author: Mem Fox. I had only heard warm words about how this book was racially inclusive – which was important at their school, as the school was located in a multicultural neighbourhood. As many different races were represented, the teachers exclaimed their love for it. Due to this, the teachers actively used this picturebook in their classrooms, in order to increase multicultural awareness and inclusion. However, as Bradford (2010) has made me aware, “it is important to consider not merely how many characters come from diverse ethnic backgrounds but how such characters are represented” (p. 49). Within this picturebook I have found that the portrayal of races and their relationship, combined with the intended readership, helps construct an unfortunate racial hierarchy, which includes some children while it excludes others.

The teachers flipped through the picturebook and told me about their personal connections to this fantastic book about race and equality: how they had read it to their children as bedtime stories, or how their parents had read it to them when they were younger. The sense of nostalgia was palpable. However, this sense of nostalgia amongst teachers can be a dangerous affair, especially when it comes to selecting picturebooks (Moebius, 1993, p. 133). Moreover, Nel (2018) claims that “Wrapping yourself in an unreflective nostalgia for the art you grew up with may comfort you, but if that art [...] caricatures people of color, or otherwise harms minoritized communities, *then you bear responsibility for the pain that this art inflicts*” (original emphasis; para. 14). In this way, it is especially important for teachers to be critical of the literature they use in the classroom, as these choices can deeply affect the students.

In this paper, I argue that the picturebook *Whoever You Are* (2015) by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub constructs a racial hierarchy, which affects the construction of normality in a problematic way. In order to shed a light on this matter, I will examine four sub-questions:

1. How is race constructed in *Whoever You Are*?
2. How is the relationship between the races portrayed?
3. Who are ‘you’?
4. How does this affect the construction of normality?

After having explored these elements, I want to outline what implications this might have for teachers, as I believe that critical awareness of children's literature is a vital part of the job

description. Inside the classroom, critical approaches to children's literature is significant because, regardless of whether the teacher has been consciously aware of the literature selected or not, the students learn valuable lessons about themselves in relation to others. There has also been a recent resurgence of the term accountability, where teachers are held accountable for various aspects of their teaching, such as methods, literature and results, by instances such as parents, the principal and The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Mausethagen, 2015, p. 57). In this way, there are multiple reasons why teachers need to be critically aware of the literature they use in the classroom and the choices they make.

A central term in this paper is construction, both in regards to race and normality. Throughout my paper, I will use the definition provided by Smedley and Smedley (2005), who claim that *construction* in this sense is "a culturally invented conception about human differences" (p. 22). In this way, construction can refer to culturally and socially invented norms and regulations, which individuals are supposed to follow. When people follow this set of established standards and norms, they are considered to be 'normal' ("Normality," 2019). However, some may deviate from these established norms, and consequently be considered 'other'. Nonetheless, the idea of normality and 'other' is only a product of the culturally and socially constructed norms and regulations.

1.1 Australian picturebook politics

Bradford (2010) claims that "while children's books circulate within a global market, their treatment of ethnicity and multiculturalism engages with national and local politics" (p. 47). Therefore, in order to understand the political environment in which this book was written, it is essential to return to the 1970s in Australia. This was a time with a strong political shift from assimilation towards multiculturalism, and in 1972, Australia officially declared its status as multicultural (Stephens & McCallum, 2009, pp. 129-130). From the 1970s and until the mid-1990s, the multicultural ideology was welcomed and encouraged within the world of literature; however, little influence on this literary development was made by cultures of origins other than British (Stephens & McCallum, 2009, p. 132). Yet, in the 1990s, a new political shift happened: the conservative Howard Government was elected in 1996, and in 1997, One Nation was formed. This was a political movement that opposed the concept of multiculturalism, claiming it a threat to the values, identity and culture of Australia (Stephens & McCallum, 2009, p. 130).

Reschke explains the 1990s in Australia as "a backlash against notions of political correctness" (as cited in Stephens & McCallum, 2009, p. 130). Within this context, *Whoever You Are* was written and published in 1997. The book aims to convey the message that though

external signifiers such as race may make us different, there are internal signifiers that unite us, such as love and joy. Even though the political environment reflected different values, this book is intended to be racially inclusive and positive towards multiculturalism. This is explained by Stephens and McCallum (2009) as “a dialogic relationship between, on the one hand, what the writer conceives of as a current and dominant situation or attitude and, on the other hand, a desirable direction of change for society” (p. 142). In this way, *Whoever You Are* (2015) can be read as Fox & Staub’s personal envision of social change, and an idea of what could be, in an otherwise hostile situation.

2.0 Picturebooks and race

2.1 What is a picturebook?

There are many definitions and criteria of what a picturebook is, and can be. Sanders (2013) claims, that “picture books are books that combine words and images” (p. 63). Still, Birkeland and Mjør (2012) are more specific in their statement that a picturebook can be defined as such when there is at least one picture for every doublespread (p. 70). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) use the terms *doublespread* when referring to two pages, and *spread* when addressing one page. As *Whoever You Are* uses both spreads and doublespreads to convey meaning, I will also use these terms. Moreover, other definitions further emphasise the relationship between the two components of image and text, claiming that they are “equally important” in picturebooks (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 6). Nevertheless, the definition I have chosen to use, is one by McCallum (1997), who claims that a picturebook is “a text in which the visual and verbal texts are given equal emphasis and interact to produce meaning” (p. 103). The reason I have chosen this definition is that it takes into account not only the relationship between the verbal and visual text, but also how they interact with each other and thus, creates an entirety. A concept that supports this definition and interaction is *iconotext*, which I will come back to.

There are multiple types of picturebooks that are defined based on the relationship between picture and text. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (2006), there are five main types of picturebooks, and one of these is the complementary picturebook (p. 12). In this type of picturebook, the text and image do not necessarily portray the same, however, they fill each other’s gaps and gives the readers additional information that they would not have received if one medium stood alone (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 12). Furthermore, a picturebook will often have what Birkeland and Mjør (2012) term *anchorage*. This means that the picture and text are co-operating in order to show the reader what is important, to make central connections and read the other medium most effectively (p. 79).

According to Andersen (2012) many attempts has been made in order to distinguish between the *narrator* and the *focalization* (p. 49), which are important aspects of the text. This has proven difficult as the two components are interdependent and co-operate to create an overall impression. However, focalization is the way we, as the readers, are able to view the world which is presented, and narration is the voice that presents it to us (Andersen, 2012, p. 49). Within this context, there are multiple variations and combinations of these terms that can be used to describe different narrative styles. However, I will only present the one relevant to this paper. Omniscient narrator is a narrative style where the narrator is external, which means that the narrator is not an active participant of the text's action. Additionally, this narrative style has a zero focalization, which means that the reader gains access to the world through an undetermined point outside the aforementioned world (Andersen, 2012, p. 50). In other words, this focalization allows the narrator to be omniscient and thus, have access to all knowledge in the world. This type of narrator is able to change the time and location of the story at any time without considering the practical implications of this, and usually addresses the reader specifically (Andersen, 2012, p. 50).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) claim that because we read from left to right, the principle of old and new information often follows this pattern too (p. 181). This means that the information the reader typically is expected to know and be familiar with is placed to the left, as it is encountered first, and from there, the page slowly advances into the unknown and unfamiliar on the right. However, this also means that the key information and main point in a text or picture is often on the far right-hand side of the doublespread. The importance of the right can have many different functions, such as “the invitation to identify with a role model highly valued in the culture” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 180). Furthermore, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) state that this sequence of information is the same in text as in images with a horizontal structure, as both have left to right movements (p. 181).

The framing within picturebooks can represent different meanings. According to Moebius (1993), frames can be the difference between looking into a world, or living within that world. The frames create a divide between our reality and the reality presented, and thus, limit the text and image to the world in which they are created (p. 141). Moreover, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) claim, “The absence of framing stresses group identity, its presence signifies individuality and differentiation” (p. 203). In this way, the strength of the frame helps represent how separate the units presented are. This means that the stronger the framing is, the more unconnected the elements are.

Many different artistic choices can be made in order to convey a deeper meaning within a picture. *Overlapping* is a perspective used in order to emphasize relationships between characters (Nodelman, 1996, p. 235). Overlapping of people is often used to convey positive relationships between the characters involved. Furthermore, when text is used within illustrations, this is called *intraiconic text* (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 22). Typical examples of this could be signs and labels.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) state that because a text's means for communication is through telling, it is *diegetic*. Furthermore, the pictures are *mimetic*, as their way of communication is through showing (p. 26). These two means of communication within a picturebook are interdependent (op de Beeck, 2018, p. 20); and this "inseparable entity of word and image, which cooperate to convey a message" is called *iconotext* (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 6). In other words, iconotext is a term used to describe the interdependent relationship and interaction between the visual and verbal text. This can be further illuminated by Nodelman (1996), who claims that, "a picture book contains at least three stories: the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two" (p. 240).

2.2 Method

When analysing picturebooks critically, it is essential to consider how language is used and what key messages are expressed. One way to do this is through hermeneutics, which is the general theory about meaning conveyed through language (Krogh, 2014, p. 9). Within this theory, Gadamer (1990) claimed that in order to understand new concepts, we need to have the correct assumptions or 'pre-understandings', as these help us in our understanding. To further explain this concept, the term *prejudice* is used to explain any perceptions developed in advance (Gadamer, 1990, p. 307). These prejudices are not viewed as a hindrance, but as positive conditions in which humans are allowed to fathom the world. These prejudices make up the foundation in which we make sense of our understanding, which in its entirety is called our *horizon of prejudices*. In other words, this is a world of prejudices and assumptions that all individuals take for granted (Krogh, 2014, p. 54), and everything we process goes through this horizon. According to Gadamer (1990), it is essential to become aware of one's own prejudices before interpreting a text, in order to read the text as it is, and thus, widen our horizon of prejudices (p. 306). Contrastingly, Krogh (2014) claims that, because we are constantly living within our horizon, it is impossible to be aware and critical of all our prejudices (p. 54).

In light of this, I can only try to become aware of any prejudices I might have as an ethnically white, middle-class woman, during my work with this book. However, I am

constantly living within a horizon of my assumptions that I take for granted and of which I can never become fully conscious. Furthermore, Iser (1972) has stated that a text is only realised when a reader and an author co-operate to construct the text and give it meaning (p. 279). As the reader plays an essential part in constructing the text along with the author, and because of my horizon of prejudices, it is important to acknowledge that the way I have chosen to interpret the picturebook *Whoever You Are*, may not be the same way as the authors' intended it to be read. It may also not be the same way as other readers interpret the message within the book.

Gadamer (1990) claimed that our horizons are always influenced by our time period and experiences. Thus, when analysing a text, there are two horizons operating parallel to each other: the text's horizon and the reader's horizon. This further affects the reading of the text, as the reader's and text's horizons influence each other. In other words, understanding is always a process in which these horizons merge (p. 345). When these two horizons merge, new understanding is obtained, which again helps construct further understanding. This is a circle motion of understanding termed *the hermeneutic circle*.

The process of reading and interpreting *Whoever You Are* can be further illustrated by the hermeneutic circle (Appendix 6.1). My horizon of prejudices influenced my initial reading of the book. However, my reading and understanding of this book has then influenced and altered my horizon. These prejudices were then brought into the analysis and interpretation of the individual spreads, which again were changed by my reading. As my horizon and prejudices change constantly while reading and working with the literature, this allows me to understand new concepts within the book. These new understandings are then incorporated into my horizons and prejudices, and so the circle rotates. This means that my overall analysis has been heavily influenced by how my horizon has developed and been reconstructed along the way.

Gadamer's theory about interpreting texts is based on the strong relationship between questions and answers (Krogh, 2014, p. 68). Further, he claims that within this relationship, the text is asking the questions, and the readers need to answer them through their interpretations. There are two main components to this thought: Firstly, the text itself is a question posed by the author in the time it was written, as an attempt to understand. Secondly, in order to understand the text, the reader needs to know what questions the text is attempting to answer (Krogh, 2014, p. 69). Illuminatingly, as picturebooks are "peculiarly responsive to shifts and tensions in social and political life" (Bradford & Huang, 2007, p. 10), I have researched the historical and political context in which *Whoever You Are* was written, and this has affected my interpretation of the text.

2.3 How is race constructed in picturebooks?

2.3.1 What is race?

Race is a difficult term to define, as the term creates individual connotations and criteria according to the context in which it is used. Bradford (2010) defines race as “the classification of humans into distinct types ordered by physical appearance and genetics” (p. 40). However, Smedley and Smedley (2005) argue that race is neither a biological nor an anthropological construct, but rather a social construction created by the early European colonists in order to create a racial hierarchy that benefitted them. Furthermore, they claim that, “At its core, the concept of race depends fundamentally on the existence of social hegemony” (p. 22). In this way, Smedley and Smedley (2005) state that the only power the term “race” has is the power humans give it within different contexts, as the term itself was constructed. Omi (2001) supports this notion and expresses it as such, “the idea of race and its persistence as a social category is only given meaning in a social order structured by forms of inequality” (p. 254). In this way, the concept of race only exists as long as the context in which it is used, allows it to exist.

I have examined the terminology used by two different dictionaries as they define the word “race”, and identified two major ideologies behind the definitions. Merriam-Webster offered four different definitions of the term “race”, and used terminology such as “belonging”, “unified”, and “shared” (“Race,” 2019a). These words imply that a race is something people share and that unifies them into a community or fellowship of some kind. On the other hand, the eight definitions given by Oxford Dictionary used another terminology to describe race. A term that is present in three of these definitions is “division” (“Race,” 2019b). Instead of uniting a group of people, these definitions weight how the term race splits groups of people into categories that are mutually inclusive and exclusive. Due to this, I have found that there are two main ways to define race within the dictionary, and which I will use within this paper: race as a divider and race as a unifier.

Bhopal (2004) claims that “There is no consensus on appropriate terms” to use in such situations (p. 441). However, throughout this paper, I need a racial terminology in order to discuss how race is portrayed in the picturebook *Whoever You Are*. When categorizing the characters in this book into different races, this classification will be based on their physical appearance. Nonetheless, with the exception of these terms, I will primarily view race as a social construct. Furthermore, Bhopal (2004) proposes a list of terms relating to race which I will use throughout my paper (pp. 442-444). In order to discuss a character of European origin with white skin, I will use the term *Caucasian*, this includes but is not limited to Europeans and Australians. The term *African* will apply to a character with ancestral origins in Africa. Lastly,

the characters with ethnic origins from the Arabian Peninsula will be referred to as *Arab*, and *Asian* will be utilized whenever an Asian descended is depicted.

2.3.2 How does the portrayal of race affect the construction of normality?

Within picturebooks, race is also constructed through the depiction and representation of different races and cultures. Within this context, Bradford (2010) claims that “it is important to consider not merely how many characters come from diverse ethnic backgrounds but how such characters and cultures are represented” (p. 49). It is important to consider what values, perspectives and assumptions are made in a picturebook, as picturebooks have a powerful “potential to reinforce (or subvert) norms” (Sanders, as cited in op de Beeck, 2018, p. 23).

Bishop (1990) claims that books can have two main functions in a multicultural sense (n.p.). Firstly, books can be a window, which allows the reader to access information, cultures and perspectives that they would not normally see. She highlights the importance of this, as a lack in diversity can result in an increase of ethnocentrism¹ and solipsism², as one culture would always be more portrayed than others. This contributes to the construction of a hierarchy between races and thus, helps maintain the notion of the ‘white middle-class child’ as the norm. On the other hand, she claims that books can be used as mirrors. In this case, reading becomes a self-affirmation, in which the reader is made aware of the value they and their background have. When children do not find books in which they can mirror themselves, or if they find books in which they are portrayed in an inaccurate or negative way, “they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part” (Bishop, 1990, n.p.). This means that a one-sided view on race within children’s literature is neither beneficial for the children who are always mirrored, nor the children who are never mirrored.

In some ways, race is created through the construction norms and normality within picturebooks. Nel (2017) poses essential questions about how race is constructed in picturebooks and how this maintains or challenges how the term “normality” is perceived. This is because the views of the world, perspectives and values it highlights, will be dependent on what assumptions the authors make of their readership. If there is little variation between the perspectives, values, and assumptions made within children’s literature, children might view some perspectives to be constructed as less significant. This use of focalization and perspective is important to examine, especially within children’s literature that aims to be racially aware,

¹ When an individual judges another culture based purely on the prepossessions obtained through the individual’s own culture, this can be referred to as ethnocentrism (Bishop, 1990, n.p.).

² Solipsism can be read as «a reference to Australian culture’s failure to engage with the heterogeneity associated with multicultural ideology» (Flanagan, 2013, pp. 14-15). In other words, solipsism refers to being self-centred and accepting the self as a norm.

because it affects the construction of a hierarchy between the races, and thus, helps maintain the inequality. Stephens and McCallum (2009) explain this as “if actions, events and attitudes are focalized through the perspective of the majority culture, ethnic otherness is implicitly depicted as deviating from a norm and therefore becomes other and lesser” (p. 132).

Flanagan (2013) claims, that when analysing a picturebook and the way it depicts race, one must be aware of the relationships between the different cultural groups (p. 21). This can be linked back to the ideologies behind the definition of race, and whether it is used as a divider or a unifier. Bradford (2010) further exemplifies a relationship between different cultural groups with an Aboriginal population, “When Maori seek to become like white people, they disclose their inferiority” (p. 41). Within this context, op de Beeck (2018) has offered some criteria in order to categorize and structure such a complex genre of children’s literature as picturebooks. Amongst these she claims that, “a picturebook constructs an implied reader – [...] and excludes an implied Other” (p. 20). This can typically be found in the way a book presupposes a readership, and constructs race. In addition, the terminology used in picturebooks can construct race and maintain the racial inequality between different ethnic groups. If the terminology allows for division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘them’ is often constructed as “‘other’, as marginal and less civilised” (Stephens & McCallum, 2009, p. 133).

As previously mentioned, the term race is only given meaning in contexts where the social hegemony allows it to have meaning. However, the term race also serves the purpose of creating and maintaining racial stereotypes of people’s behaviours and rankings (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 22). According to Spencer (2014), a stereotype is a shared perception based on generalised features of a sort of person (p. 13 & 211); and in this case, linked to race. Furthermore, this perception is commonly based on an oversimplified and uncritical idea that has been repeated and thus, solidified (“Stereotype,” 2019). An example of a known stereotype could be that all Asians are good at math and do well in school (Alt, Chaney, & Shih, 2018, p. 2).

3.0 Race in *Whoever You Are*

3.1 *Whoever You Are*

The picturebook *Whoever You Are* is about one man with four children of different ethnicities, who fly around the world and view different cultures from the outside. The key message of the journey around the world is to show the reader that even though we may be different on the outside, everyone is the same on the inside (where it counts). The story is told through 14 doublespreads. As the picture, text and iconotext convey similar but different

messages and fill each other's gaps, this picturebook can be categorized as complimentary. Furthermore, the book has an omniscient narrator with zero focalization. This means that the narrator has access to all the information within the world for which we are presented. In this way, we are able to move between cultures, countries and scenarios without the practical implications of time and transport, as a man and four children fly around the world. Additionally, this type of narrator often addresses the reader through the narration, such as, "Little one, whoever *you* are, wherever *you* are" (Fox & Staub, 2015, doublespreads 1-2, my emphasis; Appendix 6.02 & 6.03).

3.2 How is race constructed?

There are many different races and cultures depicted within this picturebook; however, it is important to consider not only how many races are included, but how they are represented (Bradford, 2010, p. 49). In this section, I will examine how races are depicted and constructed in the picturebook *Whoever You Are*. As there are many different races and cultures portrayed in this book, I have limited my selection and chosen the four races Asian, African, Arab and Caucasian to study.

The African race and culture is presented on the eighth spread (Appendix 6.08). Here, the reader can see three men without clothes, posing in front of their clay houses with thatched roofs. There could be multiple explanations for why they are not wearing clothes. Firstly, they might be depicted without clothes as an attempt to be racially inclusive. When minorities want to become like the majority, they "disclose their inferiority" (Bradford, 2010, p. 41). In this way, by not dressing them in 'western' clothes, they are thus not represented as someone who wants to be or has become westernized. Contrastingly, this depiction might not be correct, as most people in Africa do wear clothes of some kind on their upper bodies. In this case, the stereotyping of Africans is visible and preferred over westernization. Additionally, one of the men has a monkey on his head. This association to wild animals, and considering its placement, the race is constructed as wild in some ways. Combined with the depiction of the houses, this creates a portrayal of the African race as underprivileged.

On the fourth spread, an Arab school is depicted (Appendix 6.05). Here, we can see children sitting on the floor in a room with no walls. Presumably, there is a roof, as there is a scaffold of some kind lining the edge of the room. As the school has no walls, chairs or tables, the Arab race is constructed as one with little resources and a poor economy. Furthermore, the picture depicts a major gender divide. There are women on the outside of the scaffolding, looking in on the school. All these women have hijabs on, including a girl who is supposedly quite young as she is still holding a doll. As there are no children wearing headscarves in school,

no children with long hair and as they are all wearing pants and button-up, collared shirts, my conclusion is that all the students depicted are boys. In this way, the Arab race is not only depicted as unfortunate and poor, but also oppressive to women.

As the Caucasian race does not have its own doublespread like many of the races do, I will look at the way this race is constructed on the third doublespread (Appendix 6.04). On this spread, a blonde-haired and blue-eyed boy stands in front of apartment buildings and skyscrapers. As buildings like these require resources, a good economy and people to house, the Caucasian race is constructed as economically developed and wealthy.

The sixth doublespread depicts an Asian scenario, where (presumably) a mother, father and child sell the produce from a farm of some kind (Appendix 6.06). The surroundings are quite rural, and consists primarily of fields and hills. Furthermore, within this context it is insinuated that Asians primarily purchase their food at an outside market, rather than at a store. Moreover, on the right-hand side of the spread, a dog is depicted standing on the pears that the family is about to sell. In this way, the Asian race is portrayed as unhygienic and disadvantaged. Contrastingly, the little girl is petting the dog on both sides of the spread, and the dog looks up at her lovingly. This also gives this race a kind-hearted quality as they (within this book) care for animals.

3.3 How is the relationship between the races portrayed?

Flanagan (2013) has stated that when analysing picturebooks in terms of race, it is essential to view not only how the races are represented, but furthermore, the relationship between them (p. 21). In this section, I will examine how the relationship between the races are portrayed in terms of racial hierarchies, the definition of race and the construction of normality.

The third doublespread (Appendix 6.04) shows four children of different ethnicities, standing in a row with their respective homes behind them. They have their arms wrapped around each other's shoulders, representing unity between the races and cultures of the world. Furthermore, the depiction of their homes constructs certain relationships between the races. The three first children have quite similar looking houses, of approximately the same size and shape. However, the Caucasian child on the far right-hand side has a city behind him, with skyscrapers and apartment buildings. As cities often bring connotations of wealth, success and economic growth, this implies that the Caucasian race is the most developed of the four. Still, this could be an attempt to represent different ways of living in order to include all races and customs. However, as most of the largest cities in the world are located in Asia, it is peculiar that the child of European descent is portrayed in this way. Furthermore, there are fences between the houses of the different cultures, but also within the different cultures. In this way,

the fences do not necessarily mean a divide between cultures, but can be interpreted as an intention to display different ways of living and different types of fences.

Doublespread eleven looks a lot like the third doublespread, with some major differences (Appendix 6.10 & 6.05). Firstly, the children have grown up, and are now adults. We are aware that time had passed because the left-hand side of the doublespread before reads “Little one, when you are older and when you are grown” (Fox & Staub, 2015, doublespread 10; Appendix 6.09). Additionally, the towns have grown into cities, and the children are depicted as adults. A major difference between the two spreads is that the characters no longer have their arms wrapped around each other in unity. Another alteration is that, while doublespread three had ten fences between the houses and towns, doublespread eleven only has three – one between each culture. In this way, the racial divide between the cultures has become clearer in the eleventh spread, than in the third. Considering the social and political context of the time, this can be read as a social criticism, implying that children are more open than adults, and that adults should learn from the way children treat each other. Additionally, these differences signal that attitudes, such as racism, are aspects of communication that children learn with time.

As text and horizontal images have the same movement, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) claim that they have many of the same traits when it comes to reader movement. The principle that old or given information is placed on the left, as the reader will encounter this first, and that new information and key points are on the right, is one of the traits mentioned. On the seventh spread, the phrasing changes from “Their [...] may be different from yours” to “Their [...] are just like yours” (with minor alterations). On the eighth spread, the text reads “and they laugh just like you” (Fox & Staub, 2015; Appendix 6.08). In this sentence, “they laugh” is old information, in the sense that everybody laughs. However, in order to portray race as a unifier, the sentence adds new information and a key point: “just like you”. In this way, the similarities between humans and the signifiers that unite us are emphasized, and the ideology of race as a unifier is incorporated. Nevertheless, the text also incorporates an unfortunate ‘us’ and ‘them’ categorization. By saying that ‘they’ laugh the same as ‘you’, a divide is immediately made between humans, and within the context of this book, that divide is based on race. In this way, the book similarly uses race as a divider.

As previously mentioned, a picturebook has at least three stories: one told by the pictures, another by the text, and finally, the last one told by the combination of these two (Nodelman, 1996, p. 240). To study this, it is essential to isolate the picture and text in order to examine the two components individually, and I will exemplify this by using the fourth

doublespread (Appendix 6.05). An Arab school is depicted and the text reads, “Their schools may be different from yours” (Fox & Staub, 2015, doublespread 4). Within this context, the picture in itself becomes only one of many possible representations of how an Arab school could be organized. It is still possible to identify this school as Arab because of the way the characters are dressed and the intraiconic text depicted, yet, this representation is neither absolute nor static. Contrastingly, the previously mentioned ‘us’ and ‘them’ terminology is still used, which creates a divide between the races. However, it is also necessary to mention that without the context of the book, this distinction and division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ could have been based on any criteria, not necessarily race.

Nonetheless, this notion is solidified in the iconotext when the picture and text interact with each other, and another significant message is conveyed. Now, the phrase “their schools” refers to the portrayal of the Arab school. This becomes the only encounter the reader has with this culture, and thus, the only representation of how Arab schools *are* within the universe presented. Furthermore, “different from yours” now creates a divide between ‘them’, which we have established is the Arab population, and ‘you’. Firstly, through this, the iconotext defines the relationships between the races, as ‘you’ is defined away from ‘them’. Secondly, this means that the intended reader of this book is not a part of the Arab population, as this race is ‘different’ from the presupposed readers of this book and the norms presented.

A closer look at this doublespread further solidifies this portrayal of the relationship between races. In the centre of the spread, a girl wearing a hijab is holding her doll, which is fair skinned and has blonde hair – a Caucasian doll. This detail was probably intended as a means to portray interculturality and a positive co-operation between the races. However, it also helps construct the racial hierarchy portrayed within the doublespread and book in general. Multiple times, Bishop (1990) has claimed the importance of being mirrored in relevant literature in order to obtain self-affirmation and know that all cultures are valued within the society of which one is a part (n.p.). As this is true with literature, it is reasonable to apply this concept further to other means of everyday life for children, such as toys. As her doll is of a different race than she is, and as children often admire their dolls, this can send powerful signals about how her race is devalued in a larger world sense. In this way, the doll and its owner further constructs the hierarchies between races presented in the book.

As previously mentioned, frames can give the reader essential information about group identity and individuality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 203). This depends on how strong the frames are, and in what context they are used. In this picturebook, there are strong frames surrounding every doublespread. However, when the races are presented individually, they are

separated by not only one frame, but by two. Through the individual presentation of races and the use of frames to divide them, it is clear that not much contact is made between the races. Overall, five doublespreads out of fourteen depict interaction between the races (on a deeper level than the man with four children flying). In this way, some of the race ideology in this book can be defined as a divider rather than a unifier.

Contrastingly, on the last full doublespread, there are no frames between the races (Appendix 6.11). Four of the races depicted are standing together on the left hand side of the spread, insinuating that multiculturalism is considered familiar; and the text reads “[...] are just the same – wherever they are, wherever you are, wherever we are” (Fox & Staub, 2015, doublespread 13). This gives the impression that the boundaries created by the frames have been broken through the journey depicted in the book. Furthermore, there is clear overlapping between the children and parents of different races, which can symbolize positive relations between the cultures and races. In this last double spread, the boundaries of the frames are broken in order to convey one last time, that internal signifiers are more important than external ones. In this way, parts of the race ideology can also be defined as a unifier rather than a divider.

Furthermore, the man and children’s flying pattern are used to show the division of the races. On doublespread seven, this flying group is looking through a window (Appendix 6.07). This creates direct associations to someone who is on the outside, looking in on a culture that they are not a part of. It also gives connotations to windows as described by Bishop (1990), and how window texts allows the reader to glimpse into a world that is unknown to them (n.p.). On the next spread, we can spot the flying crowd standing behind a fence, looking over at the three African men and a monkey (Appendix 6.08). Their positioning related to the African men seem quite strange and unnatural. In some ways, it gives connotations of being at the zoo and looking in on something wild and exotic. As previously mentioned, the monkey and its placement further contributes to this construction of the race. However, as the flying group can be spotted on every doublespread, this could also be the illustrator’s way of trying to hide the group, to give the reader a challenge when trying to spot them.

Stereotypes are also present within this picturebook. On the eleventh doublespread, the children are now depicted as grown with elements of their present lives (Appendix 6.10). The Asian woman on the far left is portrayed with a pencil in her hand and a notepad. This can be classified as stereotyping, as a known stereotype is that Asians do well in school (Alt et al., 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, another example of stereotyping can be found on the right-hand side of doublespread eight, where the African men are depicted without clothes on their upper bodies

(Appendix 6.08). This helps construct the stereotype of Africans as underprivileged. In this way, the stereotypes solidify an unfortunate racial hierarchy linked to race.

3.4 Who are ‘you’?

As previously mentioned, this picturebook has an omniscient narrator with zero focalization, who directly addresses the reader as “Little one, whoever *you* are” (Fox & Staub, 2015, doublespread 1, my emphasis; Appendix 6.02). As a reader, this makes me question who the “you” refers to or represents.

If we again consider the iconotext on the left-hand side of the second doublespread (Appendix 6.03), we see a girl with open body language, covered in a dress that matches the background. The text reads, “Wherever you are”. Firstly, as the girl’s dress is the same as the landscape around her, this creates connotations to the world. In this way, the girl can be seen as a representation of the world. Furthermore, to use the term by Birkeland and Mjør (2012), this doublespread has anchorage. As the picture shows one person, and the text refers directly to the reader as “you”, it is clear that this person is supposed to represent the intended audience. Even though this has not been mentioned explicitly, this connection is made through the way the picture and text interact with each other. This is problematic in itself, having one person, gender and race functioning as a representation of the world. Moreover, this is also problematic as she is a white, middle-class child who is most likely from Australia.

The girl is the first single person the reader encounters, and she is on the left-hand side. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the left-hand side represents what is familiar to the reader, as this has a comforting effect, before the doublespread moves to unfamiliar concepts. Within this context, the unfamiliar appears on the right-hand spread, which depicts children of different origins placed around the world. This can be experienced as new and strange; however, the girl from the left-hand side of the doublespread is the only character who has full frontal body positioning, and her placement in relation to the others and the world is central. The girl’s positioning gives the impression that even though there are many different children and cultures in the world, the Australian child is still in the centre of this story, and the presupposed reader of this book.

On the other hand, an Asian child is placed on the far left-hand side of the next doublespread (Appendix 6.04). If we again follow the principles by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) about left to right movements, this picture can be read as if the Asian culture is familiar to the reader. There are multiple interpretations of this child’s placement. Firstly, Australia’s closest continent is Asia, and in this way, this might be the most familiar culture for Australian children with the exception of their own. Contrastingly, as Asian culture is considered one of

the oldest in the world, this can also be a possible interpretation. However, it would be difficult to interpret the doublespread in a way that places an Asian child in the position of ‘you’. This is mainly because an Asian scenario is presented on the sixth doublespread, and the text reads “their lives may be different from yours, and their words may be *very* different from yours” (Fox & Staub, 2015, spread 6, original emphasis; Appendix 6.06). In this way, the intraiconic text serves as a differentiator between the races, and the Asian race is categorized as ‘different’ from the ‘you’ presented.

Moreover, many scenarios are depicted and categorized as either “different from yours” or “just like yours” (Fox & Staub, 2015). Illuminatingly, all races involved in scenarios depicted this way are implicitly ruled out as the “you” character and implied readers of this book, as they are “different” or “like” the ‘you’-character, but never the same. In this way, the “you”-character (and thus, the presupposed reader) must be one that is not portrayed as ‘different’. Even though a Caucasian and Australian child is depicted within the book, there is no depiction of someone with an Anglo-ethnic origin that is described as ‘different’, and they are both in favourable positions in relation to the others. This implies that the white, middle-class child is not different from ‘you’, and thus, qualifies for the position of presupposed reader.

3.5 How does this affect the construction of normality?

Sanders has acknowledged the picturebooks’ great “potential to reinforce (or subvert) norms” (as cited in op de Beeck, 2018, p. 23). This construction of norms and normality can be made through the representation of race, the depiction of the relationship between races and focalization. In the picturebook *Whoever You Are*, different races are constructed in multiple ways, for instance by using stereotypes and associations. In this way, the representation of the races and the relationships between them help maintain the racial hierarchy and stereotypes established, and thus, the construction of normality.

Bishop (1990) has claimed that it is equally important to provide children with literature that mirrors them, and which opens windows to further understanding of other cultures and lives (n.p.). If one culture is frequently presented, this perspective will start to be constructed as the ‘norm’ in which children should be familiar. This can be seen through, amongst other means, focalization. If the point of view is always located within the majority race, class or gender, this will solidify the notion of these criteria as ‘norms’.

The terminology used in this picturebook, further creates divides between the races. Throughout the book, terminology such as ‘their’ and ‘yours’ are used. ‘Them’ becomes a group that is outside the norms established, and consequently, ‘you’ is a group very much on the inside of this normality presented. Thus, race is used as a divider, which categorizes different people

into separate groups. Furthermore, through the phrasing “just like you” and “different from yours”, ‘you’ and ‘yours’ becomes a benchmark in which the ‘other’ cultures are now measured. It is important to mention that, as ‘you’ is now the benchmark, the other cultures are defined as deviating from the norm provided and are therefore “different from yours”. In this way, a relationship between cultures and races are constructed, which also affects the construction of norms and normality.

As previously mentioned, one criteria made for the picturebook is that in its construction of an implied reader, by default, there is an excluded Other (op de Beeck, 2018, p. 20). Within this picturebook, the way the female character is presented on the second doublespread, the distinction made by the terminology ‘different from you’ and the use of the majority culture as focalization point, presupposes an audience of Anglo-ethnic origin, more specifically Australian. By including Caucasian children in this way, an ‘other’ is excluded, which includes all the other races. Moreover, Stephens and McCallum (2009) have claimed that those who are excluded are considered to be ‘other’ and differing from a norm. In this way, the ‘others’ are constructed as deviating from what is presented as ‘normal’ within the universe of this picturebook, and thus, presented as ‘lesser’ than the majority culture. Consequently, this maintains the construction of racial hierarchies and normality, as the concept of race in itself does not exist without social hegemony (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

4.0 So what?

4.1 Pedagogical implications

As we have seen throughout this paper, picturebooks have an enormous influence on the constructions of norms and normality. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Bishop (1990) has claimed that the literature students are exposed to can teach them important lessons about racial hierarchies and which cultures are valued within the society of which they are a part (n.p.). In this way, it is central for teachers to be aware of the ideological assumptions behind the picturebooks selected, as they can implicitly affect the students’ understanding of the world and the construction of their horizon of prejudices. This means that teachers need to be aware of the elements of critical picturebook analysis when reading and choosing books for their own classrooms, in order to reflect upon how this might affect their students.

My findings are not limited to this specific picturebook or picturebooks about race but can be generalized to other picturebooks within various fields. As previously mentioned, op de Beeck (2018) has claimed that one of the genre characteristics of a picturebook is that in its inclusion of some, an Other is implicitly excluded. In this way, it could be argued that all

picturebooks are excluding in some manner. Therefore, it is central to note that my point is not to discourage the use of picturebooks and literature in the classroom, but to encourage the teacher to consider how this exclusion is constructed and who is affected by it. Furthermore, through this reflection, the teacher can tailor the selection of picturebooks to the students and in this way, promote different ideologies and create a more balanced view of the world.

By considering these ideologies and exclusions, the teacher can also function as a scaffold for students in classroom discussions about the literature. Problematic depictions in literature could be the foundation of interesting discussions and help students become critical thinkers. However, this needs to be prepared and executed with utmost caution as not to exclude any of the students. The teacher's role when discussing problematic literature is vital and can again affect the way students view themselves in relation to others and the world. In this way, teachers should be aware of not only the literature they use in the classroom, but also the way they chose to utilize it.

External factors are also essential when considering why critical analysis of literature is important for teachers. In regards to the resurgence of the term accountability, it would also be relevant for teachers to think critically about the literature and ideas it promotes to account for the choices made. A significant aspect to consider is how the teacher's nostalgia and horizon of prejudices can affect what literature is chosen. Teachers should be held accountable for their actions in the classroom, and as Nel (2018) reminds us, they "*bear responsibility for the pain that this art inflicts*" (para. 14). Therefore, they need to consider the practical implications of the literature and teaching materials they choose to use in order to fulfil their social mandate.

4.2 Summary and conclusion

To summarize, the picturebook *Whoever You Are* (2015) by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub constructs a racial hierarchy, which affects the construction of normality in a problematic way. Throughout the book, race is constructed in multiple ways. Amongst other means, stereotypes are used to give different races certain defining qualities. These stereotypes and the way they portray the races, support an established racial hierarchy constructed within the universe of the book, and thus, affects the construction of normality. This is a central aspect for teachers to consider when teaching multiculturalism. No one is able to claim objectively that one race or culture is superior to another. In this way, it is vital for the teachers to consider how their horizons of prejudices might affect the choice of literature or how various races are represented in the classroom.

The distinction in terminology between 'you' and 'them' supports the construction of relationships by distinguishing between the races. This terminology can further be read as a

unifier, as the main message is that internal signifiers are more important than external ones, such as race. However, through the use of ‘you’ and ‘them’, race is also a divider where races are categorized and separated from one another. In this way, ‘you’ is defined away from ‘them’, which is essential in defining who the presupposed readers are. Furthermore, as the continuous criteria in this book is “different from/just like you”, ‘you’ becomes a benchmark in which the other races are measured. Due to this, it is essential for teachers to consider how terminology is constructed within the classroom and how this can affect the way students view themselves in relation to others and the world.

Another problematic aspect of the book is that the intended reader is most likely mirrored in the Caucasian girl portrayed on the second spread, through the connections made by the book’s anchorage (Appendix 6.03). As the book is focalized through this perspective, problematic signals are sent about which races are valued more than others, which further affects the construction of normality and what is perceived as normal. Within this context, it is important for teachers to consider which points of view are represented and presented in the literature and which are not. When one point of view is represented disproportionately more than others, this can affect the students’ construction of their horizon of prejudices and again result in ethnocentrism and solipsism. In this way, it is significant for teachers to consider the ideologies portrayed through literature in order to assess the consequences of these.

Considering the time period in which this book was written, it is essential to note that social criticism can be found within the book. A significant criticism made is that children are more accepting than adults, which poses a central question about attitudes expressed by adults in society. I claimed that the key point made was that racism and other prejudices are taught. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to consider what influence the literature used in the classroom might have on the students. As students who enjoy picturebooks the most typically are quite young and thus impressionable, the teacher should reflect upon the impact he or she has as a role model. The attitudes conveyed, consciously or subconsciously, will affect the students and their understanding of the world. This big responsibility should be handled with caution.

Gadamer firmly believed that to understand a text, one needs to understand what question(s) the text is trying to answer. Considering the context in which this text was written, I would assume that a possible question posed would be ‘how should we treat and perceive each other and our differences?’. Due to the points made earlier in my text, however, I would say that the author and illustrator only partially manage to answer the question posed. Even though the main message is that we are all different but still the same, and that these differences and

similarities unite us, the picturebook still promotes ideologies linked to both race as a unifier and race as a divider. In this way, the picturebook *Whoever you are* (2015) by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub portrays race in a problematic way, and this affects the construction of normality.

There are multiple reasons why teachers should consider the picturebooks critically before introducing the literature to students. For teachers, it is key to be aware and critical of not only the classroom materials, but also how these are constructed and used in a classroom setting. This is because the literature utilized in the classroom affect how students construct their horizon of prejudices and how they view themselves in relation to others. As teachers are held accountable for their choices in the classroom and the ideologies they promote, it is essential that the teachers also reflect upon their own horizon of prejudices and how this might affect the classroom situation. Lastly, fulfilment of the social mandate for teachers requires teachers to think and reflect critically about the choices made in a classroom, which includes picturebooks and other teaching materials.

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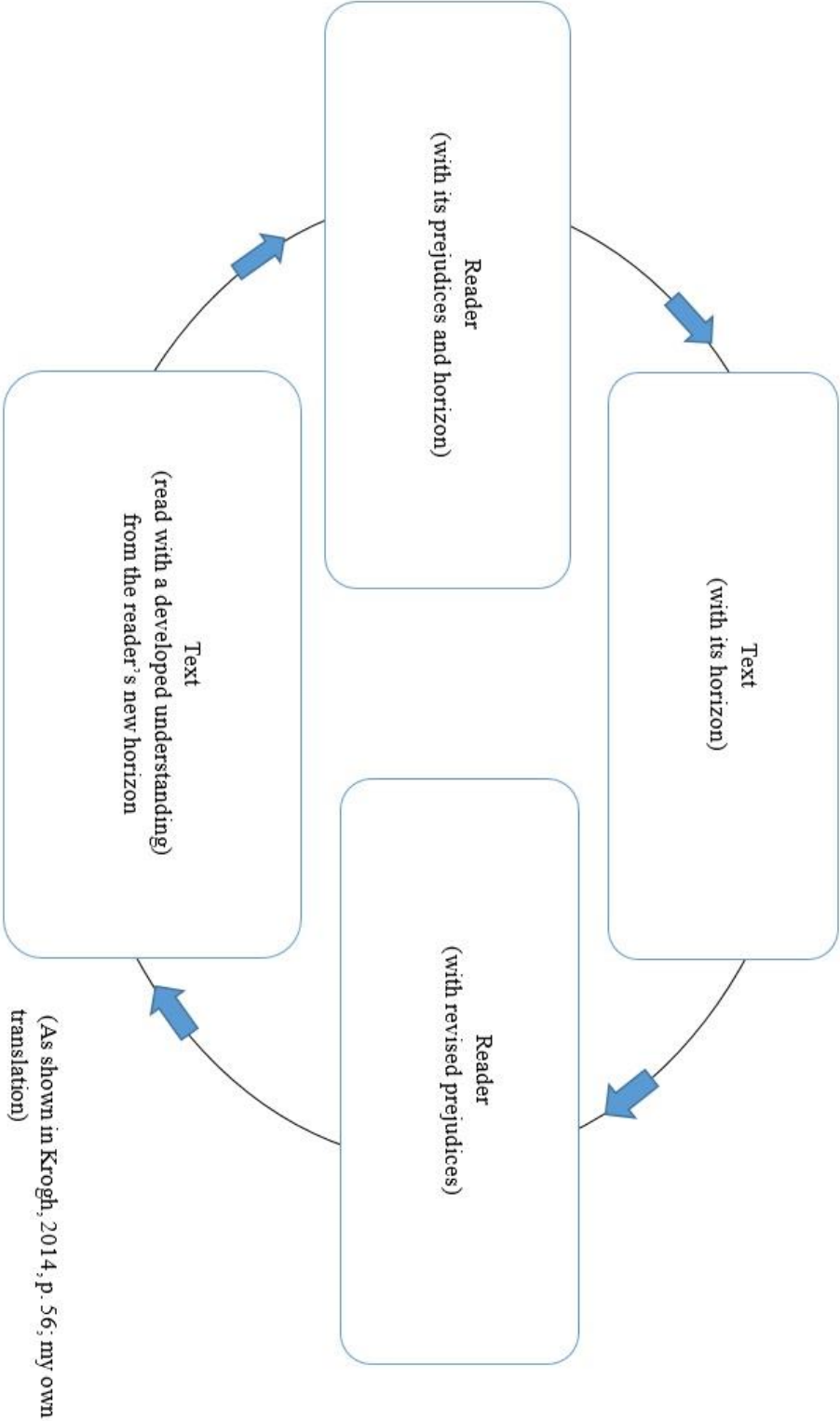
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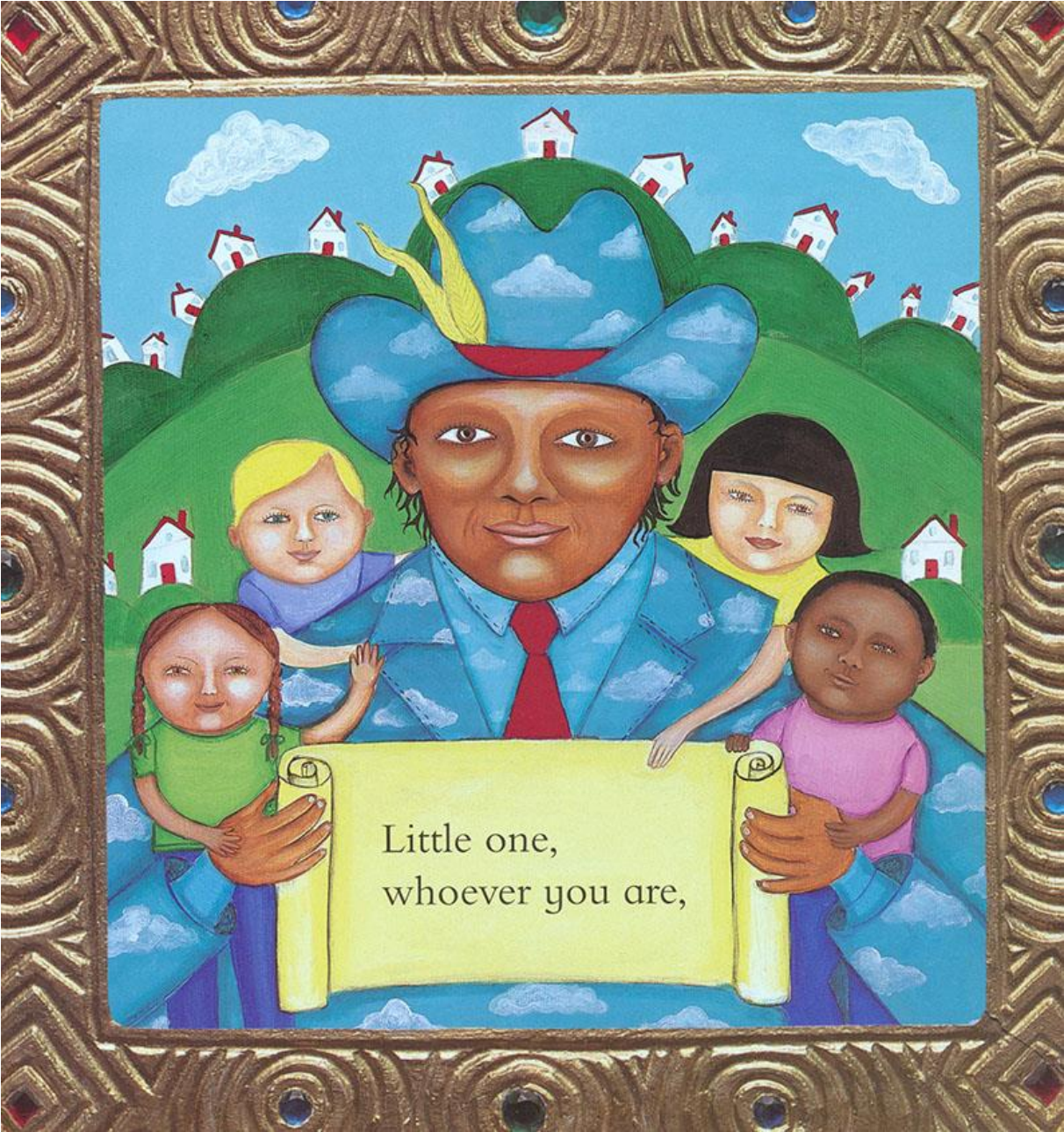
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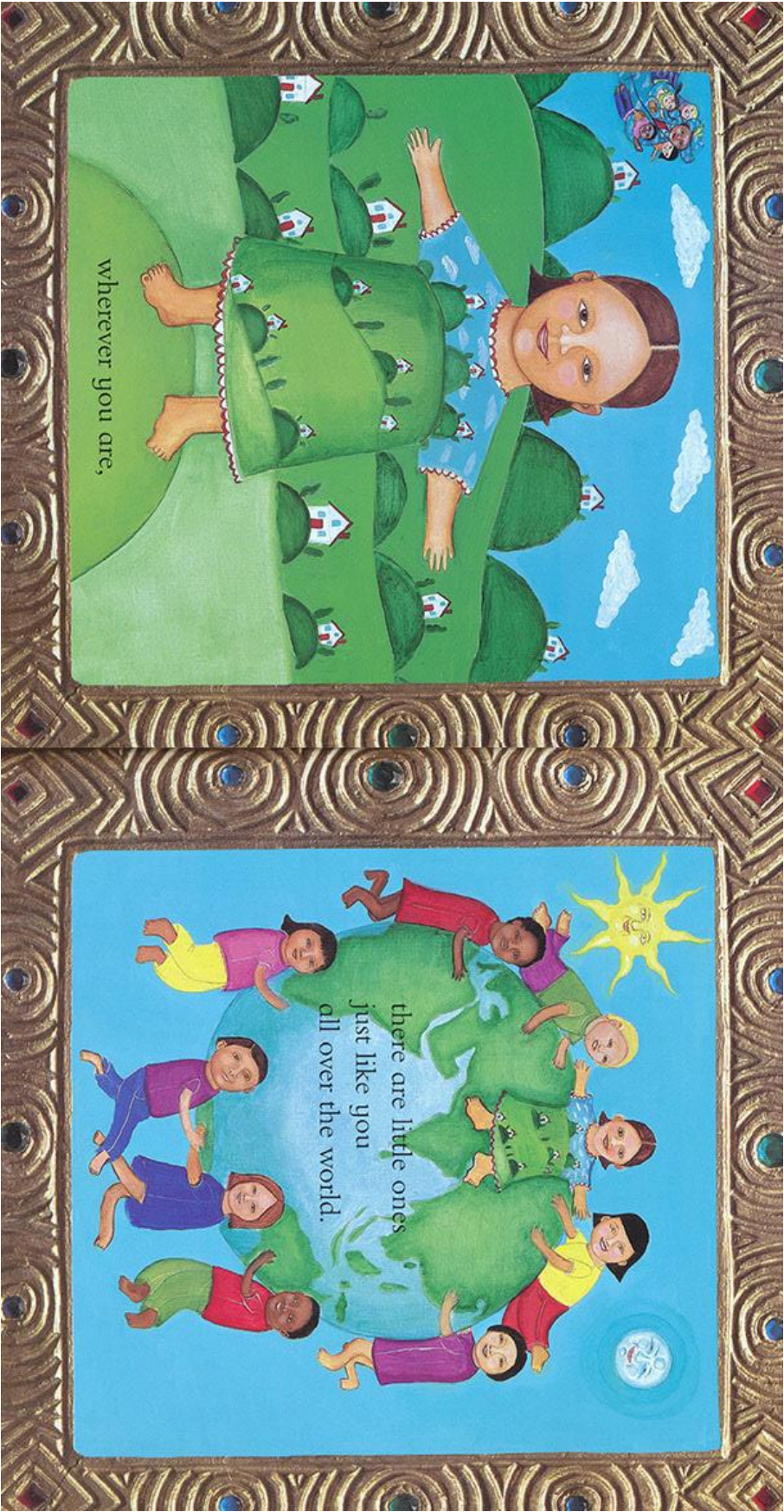
6.0 Appendices

6.01 The hermeneutic circle

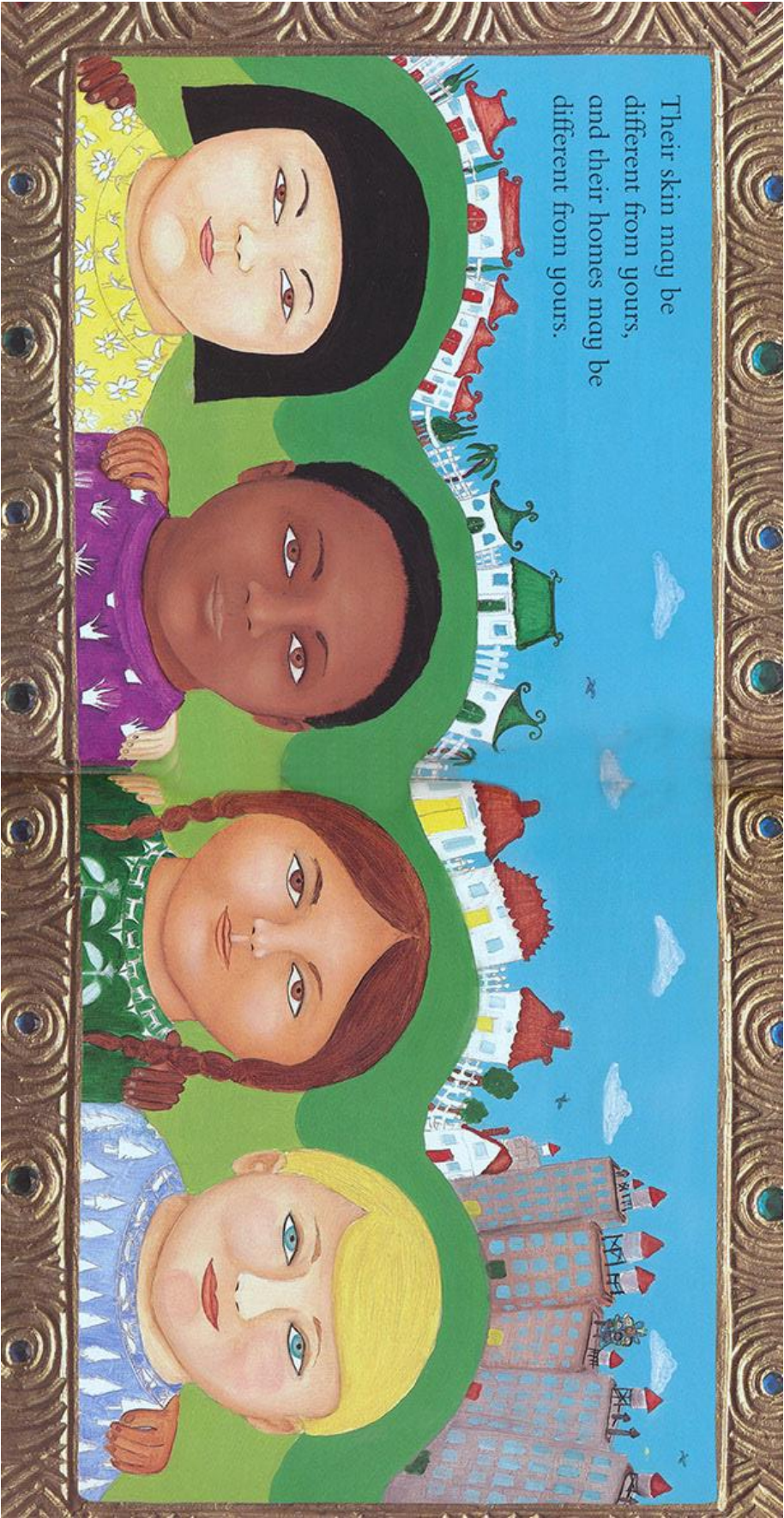




6.03 Doublespread 2

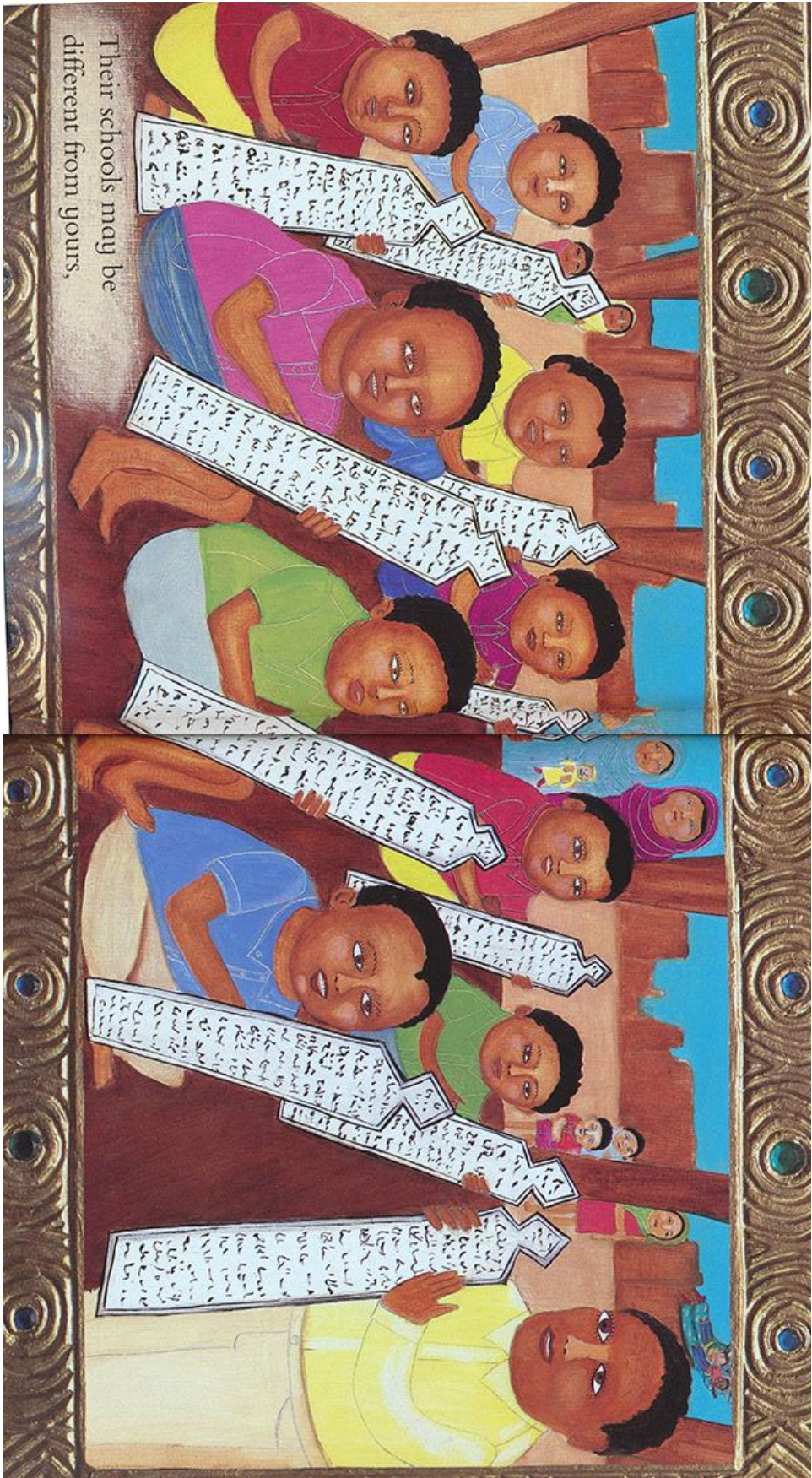


6.04 Doublespread 3

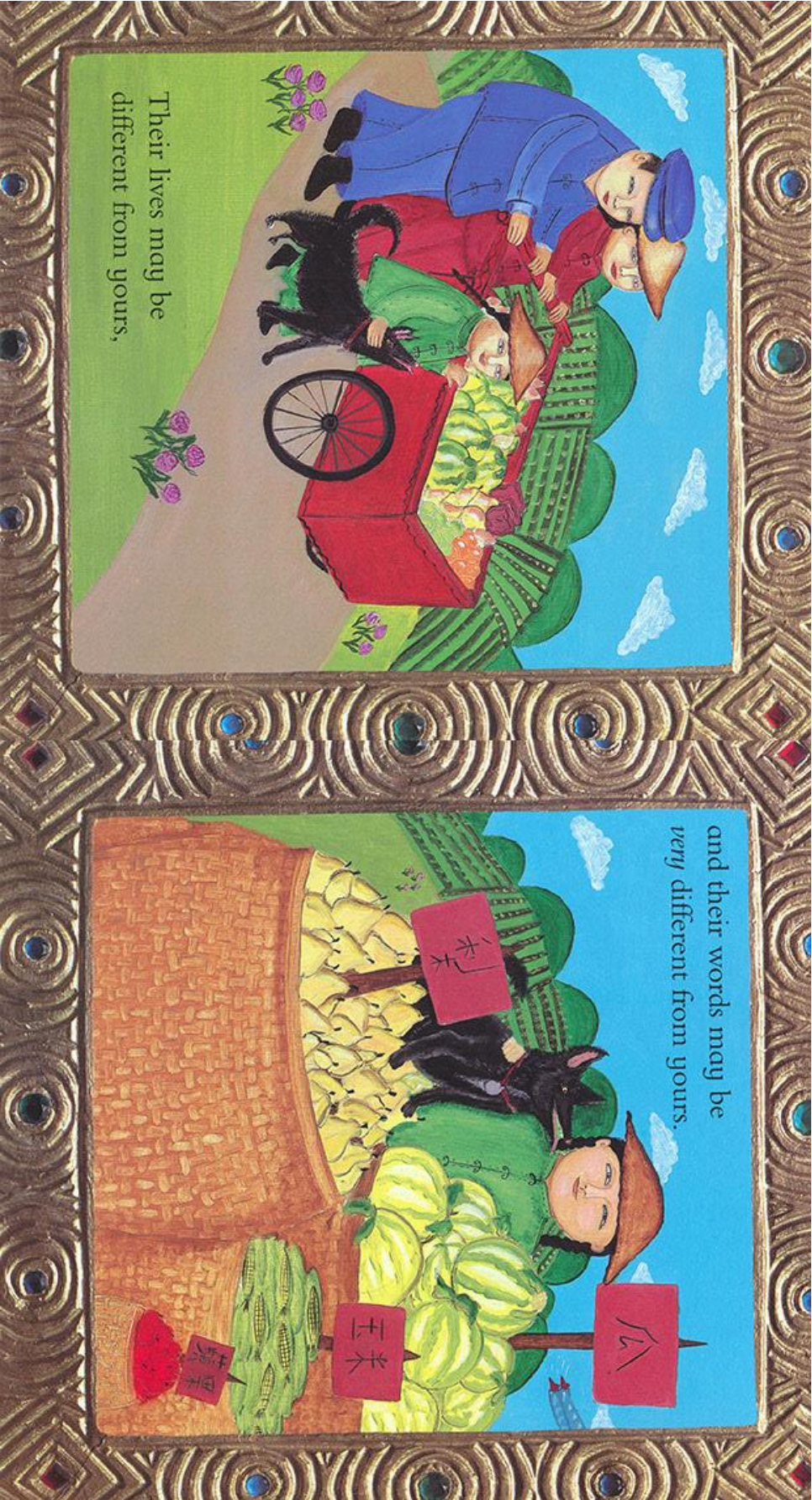


Their skin may be
different from yours,
and their homes may be
different from yours.

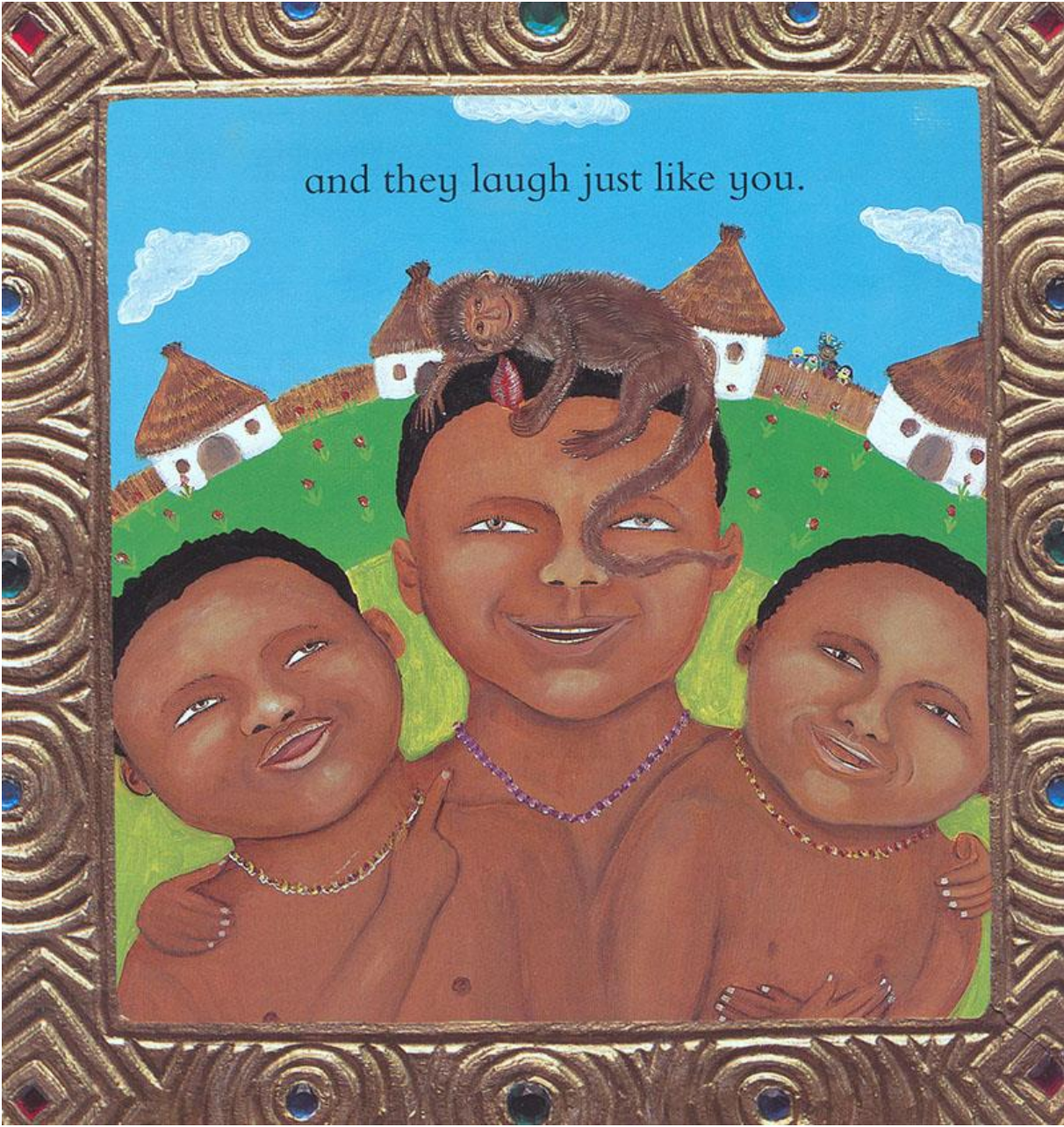
6.05 Doublespread 4



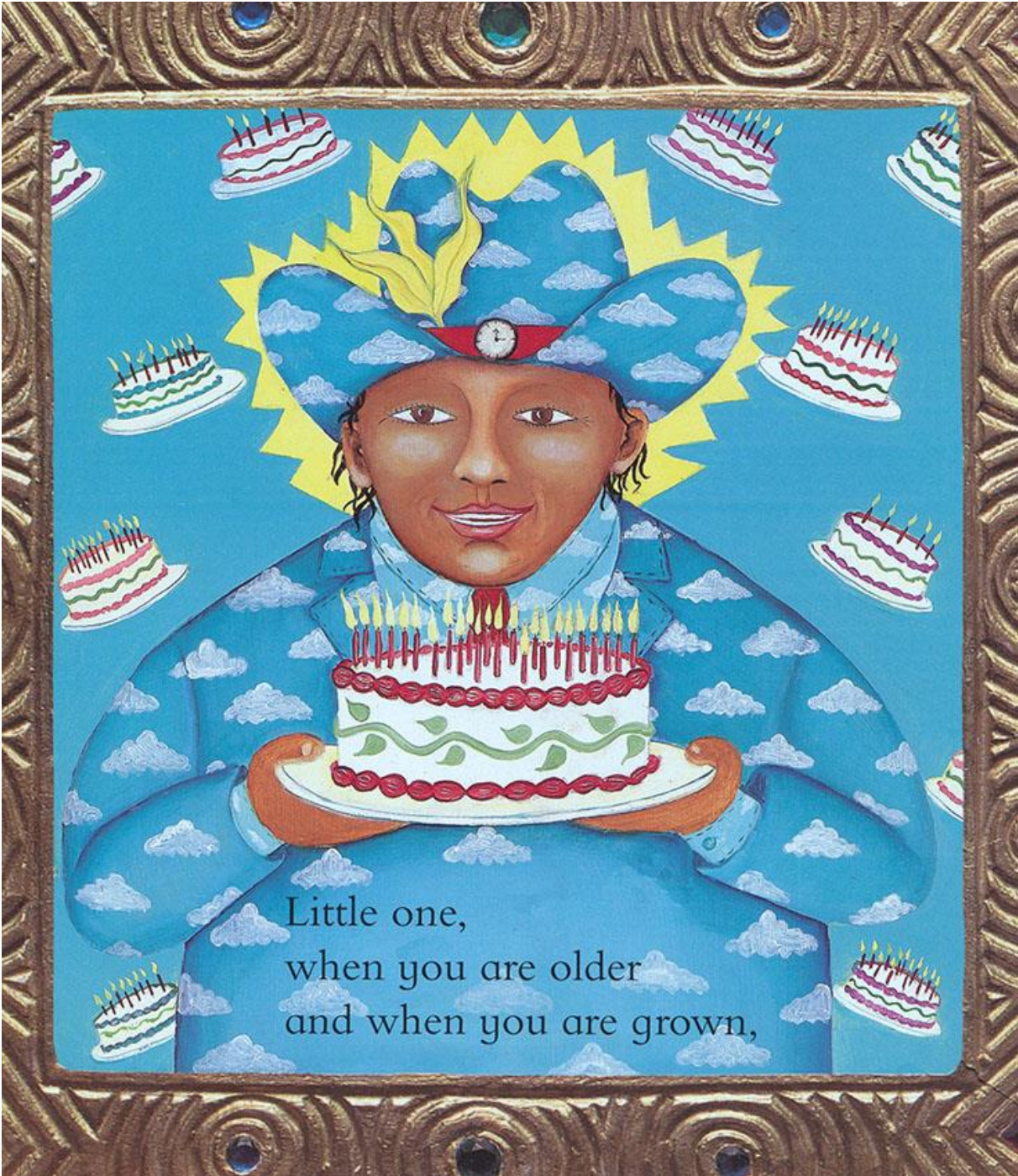
6.06 Doublespread 6



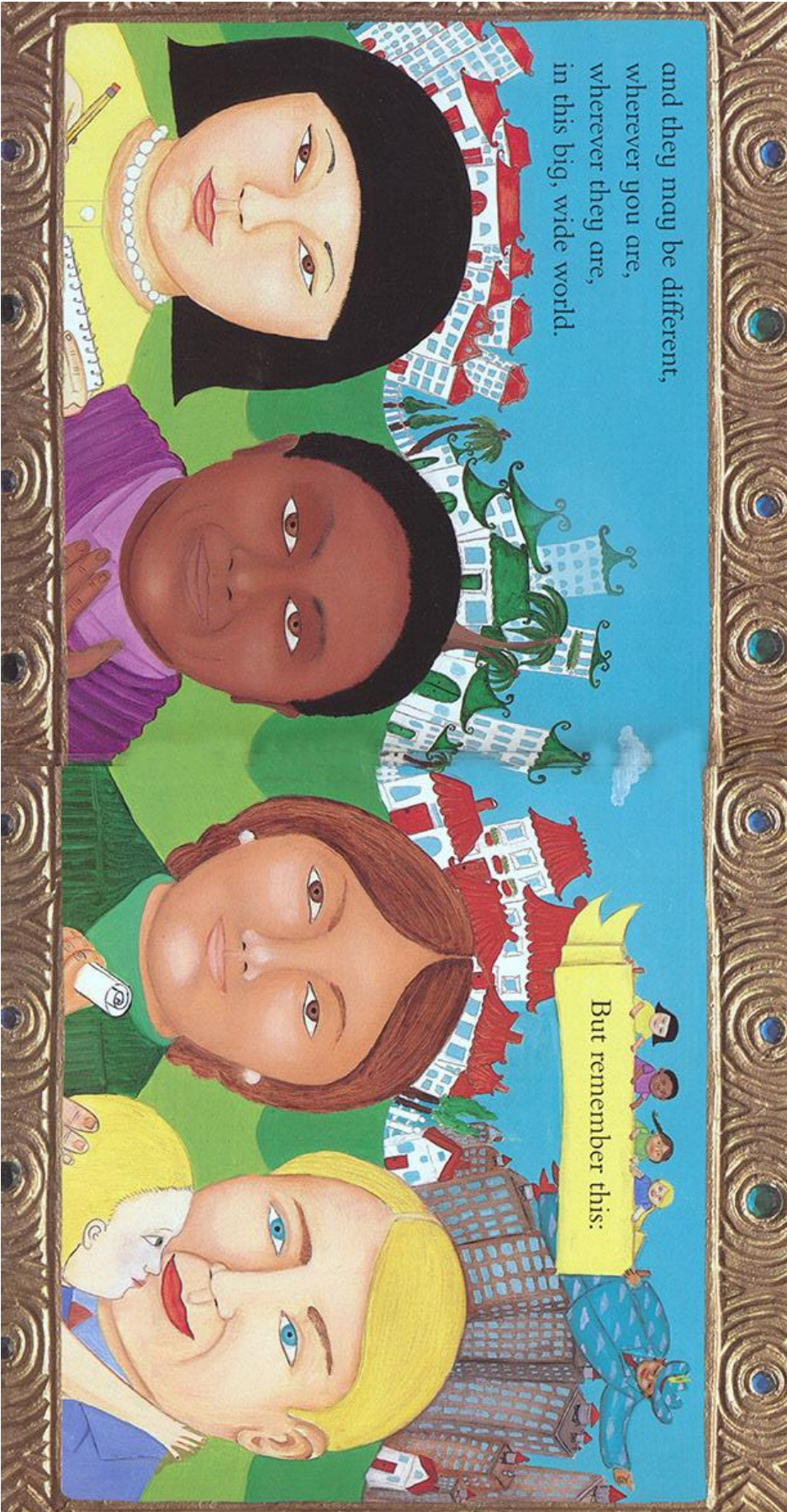




and they laugh just like you.



Little one,
when you are older
and when you are grown,



and they may be different,
wherever you are,
wherever they are,
in this big, wide world.

But remember this:



Smiles are the same,
and hearts are just the same—
wherever they are,
wherever you are,
wherever we are,

