

# C Is for Culture: A Look at Multicultural Alphabet Books

Angela Leeper

## Introduction

With their recognizable arrangement and chances for predictions, alphabet books are an appealing format for children. Recent publications have covered myriad topics from dinosaurs, cowboys, and space to weather, national parks, and princesses. But can an alphabet book sum up an entire culture? Of course not! They can, however, be an inviting introduction to different areas of the world and ethnic and religious traditions that may be new or less familiar.

Alphabet books first engage children with their picture book format of strong visuals and shorter text passages than typical nonfiction and reference books. They focus on areas that are relevant in children's lives, such as food, clothing, homes, education, religion, the arts, wildlife, and holidays and other customs. These books also comprise such areas as government, economy, and transportation, which touch readers as part of a global community.

Below is an annotated list of both recommended and not recommended multicultural alphabet books. Recommended titles employ text that is clear and makes new terms and concepts easy to understand. Images and text are representative of the culture, but do not stereotype it. Sarah Heiman's *Japan ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Japan*, for example, features woodblock art reminiscent of that created in Japan, but it also distinguishes between modern-day and traditional dress. Images and text must also depict distinctions within the culture. For instance, Debbie and Michael Shoulters' *D is for Drum: A Native American Alphabet* is not recommended because it fails to show facial distinctions among various tribes.

An excellent multicultural alphabet book goes beyond what is expected and offers new insights into the culture. In *Amelia to Zora: Twenty-Six Women Who Changed the World*, Cynthia Chin-Lee includes women one might expect, such as Jane Goodall and Mother Teresa, as well as Quah Ah, a Pueblo artist, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader of Burma. With these recommended titles, children will have 26 opportunities in each book to discover or learn more about their own or others' cultures.

## RECOMMENDED

### General and Multiple Ethnicities

Ajmera, Maya, and Versola, Anna Rhesa. *Children from Australia to Zimbabwe: A Photographic Journey around the World*. Durham, N.C.: SHAKTI for Children/Charlesbridge, 1996. 64 pp. ISBN-13 978-0-88106-999-0, \$18.95. Gr. 3–6.

An opening map displays the 26 countries represented, one for each letter of the alphabet. Each double-page spread features the

word "Hello" in the country's primary indigenous language; a map; a flag; and quick facts, including the country's capital, languages, total population, number of children, favorite sports, and an interesting tidbit (for instance, protected beaches in Oman are home to green sea turtles, and Brazil makes most of the world's orange juice). Color photos depict children in everyday and traditional dress, at work and at play, and in different locales throughout the country. Respectful and lengthier text than in most alphabet books describes the culture of each country. The authors introduce Xanadu, an imaginary country of peace and love for the letter X, and conclude the book with numerous ideas for learning about different countries and cultures.

Cave, Kathryn. *W Is for World: A Round-the-World ABC*. London: Frances Lincoln (distributed by Shen's Books), 2004. 36 pp. ISBN-13 978-1-84507-314-5, \$7.95 (pb). Gr. K–3.

Produced in conjunction with Oxfam International, an organization dedicated to worldwide economic and social justice, this alphabet book highlights the needs (such as clothes, food, and home) and human and natural gifts (such as books, icebergs, music, and trees) that unite people around the world. Attractive color photos and supplemental text bring awareness to the various ways of life, from rivers used for travel in Brazil to oxen used for plowing land in Kenya. Originally published in England, the book does contain a few criticisms, the most notable being "Q is for Queue where we wait our turn and chat to our neighbours."

Gillis, Jennifer Blizin. *Candle Time ABC*. Chicago: Heinemann, 2002. 24 pp. ISBN-13 978-1-58810-532-5, \$18.50. Gr. PreK–1.

The titles *Christmas*, *Diwali*, *Hanukkah*, *Kwanzaa*, and *Las Posadas* from the Candle Time series emphasize the importance of light when celebrating these religious and ethnic holidays. *Candle Time ABC*, another stand-alone book in the series, uses letters of the alphabet and concepts introduced in the previous titles to tie them together. For example, diyas, the oil lamps used during Diwali; faroles, the lights carried during Las Posadas; and kinaras, candle holders filled during Kwanzaa are all described through text and accompanying color photos. Back matter includes a picture glossary with pronunciations for more challenging words.

Scillian, Devin. *P Is for Passport: A World Alphabet*. Chelsea, Mich.: Sleeping Bear Press, 2003. 56 pp. Illus. by various. ISBN-13 978-1-58536-157-1, \$19.95. Gr. 2–5.

Using a travel theme and rhyming text, this alphabet book

explains many shared experiences around the world (for example, A is for animals, C is for currency, M is for music, and S is for sports). The travel theme carries through in such letters as K is for knapsack, R is for railway, and Z is for (time) zones. Sidebars provide more detailed explanations and differences among countries; for example, the B is for bread sidebar describes the differences among Brooklyn bagels, French baguettes, Argentine tortillas, and Indian naan. Each double-page spread is illustrated by a different artist, but the layout remains consistent throughout the book.

Williams, Laura Ellen. *ABC Kids*. New York: Philomel, 2000. 32 pp. Illus. with photos by the author. ISBN-13 978-0-399-23370-8, \$15.99. Gr. PreK-K.

Close-up, energetic color photos of young children of various races and ethnicities illustrate this alphabet word book. While some words (apple, elephant, and x-ray) are standard selections, most words (bubble bath, jellybeans, nap, and underwear) carry special importance or appeal to preschoolers.

Yorinks, Arthur. *The Alphabet Atlas*. New York: Winslow, 1999. 64 pp. Illus. by Adrienne Yorinks. ISBN-13 978-1-890817-14-5, \$19.95. Gr. K-3.

Each letter represents a different country and one interesting fact about it. What makes this alphabet book stand out are the fabric-art collages that feature a political map, representative flora and fauna, and patterned cloth associated with the country. For instance, the collage about Kenya features mud cloth originally from that country. The letters themselves also echo some of the patterns used in the collages.

### African and African American

Bryan, Ashley, comp. *Ashley Bryan's ABC of African American Poetry*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. 32 pp. Illus. by the compiler. ISBN-13 978-0-689-81209-5, \$17.95. Gr. K-4.

Ashley Bryan uses the alphabet and vibrant art to introduce children to African-American poetry. His signature tempera and gouache paintings illustrate contemplative, lighthearted, and imagery-rich short poems and poem fragments by both early (such as Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Countee Cullen) and contemporary (such as Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and Rita Dove) African-American poets.

Clary, Margie Willis. *A Gullah Alphabet*. Orangeburg, S.C.: Sandlapper Publishing Co., 2007. 56 pp. Illus. by Dennis L. Brown. ISBN-13 978-0-87844-184-6, \$16.95. Gr. 2-5.

*A Gullah Alphabet* begins with a brief history of the language that evolved when slaves from various African countries arrived in South Carolina and began communicating with one another. It continues with entries in both Gullah and English (“A iz fa Affiky, de Gullah foke netib soil/A is for Africa, the Gullah folks’ native soil”) with

topics related to the culture, region, and past, such as harvest, “Mistress who entertains in the big house,” quilt, and wagon. Accompanying the entries are attractive sepia-toned illustrations rendered in pastels. A bibliography of Gullah-related books is also included.

Ford, Juwanda G. *K Is for Kwanzaa: A Kwanzaa Alphabet Book*. New York: Scholastic, 1997. 32 pp. Illus. by Ken Wilson-Max. ISBN-13 978-0-590-92200-5, \$10.95. Gr. PreK-2.

Following a brief introduction to the non-religious holiday and its seven principles, letters of the alphabet present the food, clothing, symbols, and customs of Kwanzaa. While a few of the words, such as candle, feast, and neighborhood, will be recognizable to young readers, many of the African terms, such as bendera (the African-American flag) and shakere (a rhythm instrument made from a hollow gourd) will be new to those less familiar with the holiday. Pronunciation guides are placed within the text. The Kwanzaa festivities are made livelier with accompanying vibrant, child-friendly paintings.

Heiman, Sarah. *Kenya ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Kenya*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2003. 32 pp. Illus. by Arturo Avila. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-0022-9, \$17.95. Gr. 2-5.

This alphabet book opens with a map of Kenya and information about its population and official languages. Vibrant illustrations and clear text depict the agriculture, animals, geography, flag, food, industry, education, pastimes, and various peoples of Kenya. A few items typically associated with Kenya (baobab tree, drums, gourd, and yams) are also introduced. Swahili words are italicized, and pronunciation guides are offered for more difficult words. In some cases, smaller text provides more information or other examples of clothing and foods. The text and illustrations do make distinctions between traditional dress and ceremonies and everyday life today. Back matter includes a hands-on activity, Swahili phrases, “Fast” and “Fun” facts, a glossary, and a bibliography.

Musgrove, Margaret. *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*. New York: Dial, 1976. 32 pp. Illus. by Leo and Diane Dillon. ISBN-13 978-0-8037-0357-5, \$19.99. Gr. 4-7.

Meticulous details and research are evident in the text and illustrations of this Caldecott Medal winner. Each letter of the alphabet reveals a different ethnic group in Africa and a particular aspect of their culture, such as the “talking” drums of the Ewe, the wedding rituals of the Ndaka, and the moveable homes of the nomadic Rendille. An introductory note about the preparation of this book explains that in most of the Dillons’ elaborate illustrations, prepared in pastels, watercolors, and acrylics, “they have included a man, a woman, a child, their living quarters, an artifact, and a local animal, though in some cases these different elements would not ordinarily be seen together.” A final map identifies the locations of the various ethnic and language groups.

Sanders, Nancy I. *D Is for Drinking Gourd: An African American Alphabet*. Chelsea, Mich.: Sleeping Bear Press, 2007. 40 pp. Illus. by E. B. Lewis. ISBN-13 978-1-58536-293-6, \$17.95. Gr. 2–5.

This inspirational alphabet book highlights the struggles (slavery, Great Migration, and civil rights), achievements (inventors, politicians, and Olympians), history (Buffalo Soldiers, black cowboys, and Tuskegee Airmen), and culture (Harlem Renaissance, Kwanzaa, and quilts) of African Americans. Each alphabet word is introduced in rhyming couplets and expanded on in a lengthier historical note. Lewis's emotional watercolors aptly convey the people, time periods, and concepts. A selected reference list with print and Internet resources concludes the text.

### Asian and Asian American

Alberti, Theresa. *Vietnam ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Vietnam*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2007. 32 pp. Illus. by Natascha Alex Blanks. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-2251-1, \$18.95. Gr. 2–5.

Vietnam's geography, languages, flag, art, music, literature, traditional dress, and religion are some of the many topics covered in this alphabet book. Several entries, such as "j is for jungle" and "r is for rice," are expected, while other less familiar entries, such as "x is for xich lo" (a pedicab) and "y is for yin-yang" add interest. A few entries, particularly "w is for war," relate information about the Vietnam (American) War. Each entry consists of a short paragraph of text and a watercolor and gouache illustration on a textured background, as well as periodic "Fast Facts" with more detail. A map, additional country facts, phrases in Vietnamese, a glossary, and a bibliography round out the text.

Chin-Lee, Cynthia. *A Is for Asia*. New York: Orchard, 1997. 32 pp. Illus. by Yumi Heo. ISBN-13 978-0-531-33011-1, \$16.99. Gr. 2–5.

Author Chin-Lee introduces the vastness and diversity of Asia, from batik in Indonesia and camels in Saudi Arabia to the New Year in China and sled races in Siberia. Each entry contains a one-paragraph description of Asian culture and customs, the alphabet word written in an Asian language (Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, or Urdu, for instance), and energetic, stylized, sometimes even folkloric, illustrations. While some entries, such as kites, origami, and rice, are expected, other entries, such as gamelan (an orchestra in Malaysia and Indonesia), xiang qu (Chinese chess), and yurts (tent-like homes in Mongolia), will surprise young readers. Also included in the book is a brief note on various Asian languages.

Compestine, Ying Chang. *D Is for Dragon Dance*. New York: Holiday House, 2006. 32 pp. Illus. by Yongsheng Xuan. ISBN-13 978-0-8234-1887-9, \$17.95. Gr. PreK–2.

Despite the difficult "V is for Veneration" and unexplained "Q is for Quiz," this alphabet book is an appealing introduction to Chinese New Year traditions. The author links many concepts, such as

dragon dancers, evil spirits, and firecrackers, with an accompanying simple sentence, "Dragon dancers and firecrackers scare away evil spirits." Exuberant, brightly colored artwork, rendered in watercolor, acrylic, and latex, is placed over Chinese characters, creating a multi-layered effect. A playful cat on each double-page spread further encourages children to examine the textured illustrations. Back matter includes an author's note about Chinese New Year, "Tips to Ensure Good Fortune in the New Year," an artist's note about the varying calligraphic styles, and a recipe for dumplings.

Heiman, Sarah. *Japan ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Japan*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2003. 32 pp. Illus. by Todd Ouren. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-0021-2, \$17.95. Gr. 2–5.

Complemented by illustrations that resemble Japanese woodblock art, this alphabet book begins with a map of Japan and facts about its population. For each letter, it introduces information about the country's food, geography, government, education, religion, transportation, economy, and culture. Smaller text provides more details (such as other common Japanese foods besides "R is for rice"), and pronunciation guides are provided within the text for more difficult words. The author is careful to avoid stereotypes, explaining, for instance, that traditional kimonos are usually worn for special occasions and festivals. She concludes with instructions for making a streamer for Children's Day, "Fast" and "Fun" facts, a glossary, and list of further resources.

### Caribbean

McLean, Dirk. *Play Mas! A Carnival ABC*. Toronto: Tundra Books, 2000. 32 pp. Illus. by Ras Stone. ISBN-13 978-0-88776-486-8, \$16.95. Gr. 2–5.

Each letter of the alphabet features an alliterative sentence ("See the steel drums scorched and shaped to satisfaction") and a vibrant, energetic watercolor painting about the Carnival season of the Caribbean. For children and educators less familiar with this festival "rooted in the French tradition of the Masquerade (Mas) and flavored predominantly by African and Spanish culture," an introduction and notes for each alphabet page offer further explanation. For added fun, readers can search the illustrations for more items beginning with the alphabet letter and check their answers in the concluding key.

### Central American

Cooper, Sharon Katz. *Costa Rica ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Costa Rica*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2007. 32 pp. Illus. by Allan Eitzen. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-2249-8, \$18.95. Gr. 2–5.

Colorful acrylic paintings illustrate succinct descriptions of Costa Rica's government, geography, flag, food, art, music, natural resources, ecotourism, and exports. Children will also learn about the country's hydroelectric dams and its University of Peace. Many of the entries are accompanied by "Fast Facts" in smaller print, which give

more details. Other features include an opening map and information on Costa Rica's official language and its population, as well as concluding facts, such as the country's capital, climate, and agricultural products; phrases in Spanish; a glossary; and a bibliography.

## Hawaiian

Goldsberry, U'ilani. *A Is for Aloha: A Hawaii Alphabet*. Chelsea, Mich.: Sleeping Bear Press, 2005. 40 pp. Illus. by Tammy Yee. ISBN-13 978-1-58536-146-5, \$17.95. Gr. 2-5.

For each letter of the alphabet, rhyming quatrains describe Hawaii's geography, animal life, and natural resources. An emphasis is also placed on the Polynesian history of the state, the former monarchy, and their cultural influences that continue today. Also accompanying each letter are bright watercolor illustrations and longer text passages, which offer more detailed descriptions of Hawaiian words and culture. The book concludes with a question-and-answer page and a pronunciation key of Hawaiian words and their meanings.

## Jewish

Drucker, Malka. *A Jewish Holiday ABC*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1992. 32 pp. Illus. by Rita Pocock. ISBN-13 978-0-15-200482-8, \$13.95. Gr. PreK-2.

Young readers will find a Jewish family celebrating their religious

holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, Passover, and Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israeli Independence Day). For each letter of the alphabet, a different religious custom (for example, C is for "As the sun goes down, Minnie and her mother sing the prayer that blesses the Shabbat candles") or symbol (L is for "For the eight days of Chanukah, Maxie loves to eat latkes dripping with applesauce") is explained through text and illustrated with attractive artwork, a combination of textured collages and colored pencils. Those who need more information can read the appended descriptions of each holiday and a glossary with pronunciation guides.

See also: Schroeder, Holly. *Israel ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Israel*.

## Latino

Ada, Alma Flor. *Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1997. 40 pp. English translation by Rosa Zubizarreta. Illus. by Simon Silva. ISBN-13 978-0-688-13903-2, \$16.99. Gr. K-5.

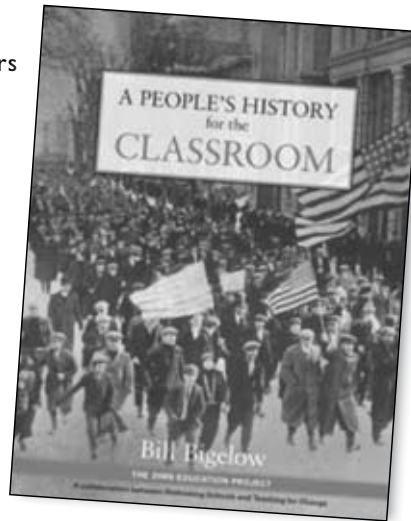
Using the Spanish alphabet as a basis (including *Ch* and *Ll*), Ada incorporates Spanish words into 27 short poems (with English translations) that reflect the life of migrant farmworkers. The poems pay tribute to their work, Mexican heritage, family pride and honor, and hope. Another poem is dedicated to Cesar Chavez. The boldly colored gouache illustrations, painted in the hues of the region, are reminiscent of Diego Rivera and other Mexican artists.

# NEW FROM RETHINKING SCHOOLS!

## A People's History for the Classroom

By Bill Bigelow

**A** *People's History for the Classroom* helps teachers introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of U.S. history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula. This collection of exemplary teaching articles and lesson plans emphasizes the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history, and raises important questions about patterns of wealth and power throughout U.S. history. Through improvisations, role plays, imaginative writing, and critical reading activities, students learn about key turning points in U.S. history.



"A people's history and pedagogy ought to allow students to recognize that 'we' were not necessarily the ones stealing land, dropping bombs or breaking strikes. 'We' were ending slavery, fighting for women's rights, organizing unions, marching against wars, and trying to create a society premised on the Golden Rule."

— from the Introduction to *A People's History for the Classroom*

**Only 12.95!**

Plus shipping and handling.\*

May, 2008 • Paperback • 120 pages • ISBN: 978-0-942961-39

\* U.S. shipping and handling is 15% of the subtotal (minimum charge of \$4). Canadian shipping and handling is 25% of the subtotal (minimum charge of \$5).

Order online: [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org) Call toll-free: 800-669-4192 Fax: 802-864-7626  
RETHINKING SCHOOLS, PO Box 2222, Williston, VT 05495 Mastercard, Visa and Purchase Orders accepted.

Alpers, Jody. *T Is for Tortilla: A Southwestern Alphabet Book*. Santa Fe, N.M.: Azro Press, 2005. 32 pp. Illus. by Celeste Johnson. ISBN-13 978-1-929115-14-3, \$15.95. Gr. PreK-2.

This small-sized alphabet book reflects the unique landscape, plants, and animals of the Southwest through entries for desert, mesa, yucca, jackrabbit, and roadrunner. The book includes general customs in the area, such as hot air balloon festivals, as well as both Latino culture with such entries as Christmas luminaries and tortillas and Native American culture with entries for adobe homes and Indian water pots called ollas. A concluding pronunciation guide provides help with unfamiliar words. Simple sketches rendered in hues from the region and guided questions with many entries will keep children's interest.

Elya, Susan Middleton, and Banks, Merry. *N Is for Navidad*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. 40 pp. Illus. by Joe Cepeda. ISBN-13 978-0-8118-5205-0, \$14.95. Gr. PreK-2.

As a Mexican family celebrates Christmastime, from preparations for Las Posadas to Three Kings Day on January 6, snappy rhyming text and a word in Spanish introduce a part of this holiday season. For instance, "D is for *dulces*, a sweet preparation. E is for *estrella*, a bright decoration." Readers unfamiliar with these Latino traditions are given clues through the text as well as through the lively and vibrant oil-and-acrylic paintings. An author's note and a glossary with pronunciation guides add further information.

Heiman, Sarah. *Mexico ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Mexico*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2003. 32 pp. Illus. by Todd Ouren. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-0023-6, \$17.95. Gr. 2-5.

Brightly colored images reminiscent of Mexican folk art illustrate entries about the art, music, wildlife, food, flag, money, religion, geography, clothing, and customs of Mexico. Pronunciation guides are provided for words in Spanish, while smaller text gives additional information, such as the Legend of the Mexican Coat of Arms for "F is for flag." This alphabet book also opens with a map and population facts, and concludes with a craft, Spanish phrases, "Fast" and "Fun" facts, a glossary, a bibliography, and a list of web resources.

Winter, Jeanette. *Calavera Abecedario: A Day of the Dead Alphabet Book*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2004. 48 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN-13 978-0-15-205110-5, \$16.00. Gr. K-3.

Don Pedro, his sons, and grandsons make calaveras, or papier-mâché skeletons, for the Day of the Dead fiesta in Mexico City. As the family takes them to market, the calaveras come to life, acting out a Spanish word for each letter of the alphabet. The vibrant, jaunty acrylic paintings, highlighted against a black background, are inspired by Mexican folk art. Although Winter does not include a pronunciation guide, a concluding alphabet glossary provides English translations and explains various interpretations of the Spanish alphabet. An author's note honors the real Don Pedro and his famous calaveras.

## Middle Eastern

Schroeder, Holly. *Israel ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Israel*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2004. 32 pp. Illus. by Claudia Wolf. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-0179-0, \$17.95. Gr. 2-5.

Digitally rendered illustrations in bold colors accompany this text, which begins with a map of Israel and information about its population and official languages. While many of the entries discuss Jewish customs ("H is for Hebrew" and "L is for lunar calendar"), others represent Islam ("G is for gold dome") and Christianity ("R is for the River Jordan"). The entry "P is for Palestinians" briefly describes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's flora and fauna, geography, government, flag, money, tourism, and economy are all covered as well. Throughout the text, "Fast Facts" in smaller print provide more information. Additional country facts, phrases in Hebrew and Arabic, a glossary, and a bibliography complete the book.

## Native American

Tapahonso, Luci, and Schick, Eleanor. *Navajo ABC*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. 32 pp. Illus. by Eleanor Schick. ISBN-13 978-0-689-80316-1, o.p. Gr. PreK-3.

Illustrated with detailed, realistic colored-pencil drawings, this picture book depicts a loom, arroyo, grandmother, and other objects, places, and people that are important to the Navajo. While most of the entries are represented with words in English, a few are written in the Navajo language, such as the words for home, sunset, moon, and snow. A concluding pronunciation guide and glossary give both the English and Navajo terms for each entry, as well as a definition or further information.

See also: Alpers, Jody. *T Is for Tortilla: A Southwestern Alphabet Book*.

## Persons with Disabilities

Girnis, Meg. *ABC for You and Me*. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman, 2000. 32 pp. Illus. with photos by Shirley Leamon Green. ISBN-13 978-0-8075-0101-6, \$15.95. Gr. PreK-1.

Multiethnic children with Down Syndrome pose with common objects (apple, nest, and umbrella) for each letter of the alphabet in this simple yet eye-catching book. A clear layout with a white background allows young readers to focus on the color photograph of the child, the alphabet letter, and the corresponding word.

## South American

Cooper, Sharon Katz. *Venezuela ABCs: A Book About the People and Places of Venezuela*. Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2007. 32 pp. Illus. by Stacey Previn. ISBN-13 978-1-4048-2250-4, \$18.95. Gr. 2-5.

## NOT RECOMMENDED

### Jewish

Clement, Janet. *Jewish Alphabet*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 2006. 32 pp. Illus. by Albert G. Rodriguez. ISBN-13 978-1-58980-414-2, \$15.95. Gr. PreK–2.

Latkes, Shabbat, Noah's Ark, and other Jewish symbols, traditions, and Bible stories are introduced through each letter of the alphabet. Forced rhyming descriptions ("Ff is for family, gathered for a Seder./ The afikomen is a special matzoh, used a bit/ later"), stretches with alphabet letters ("Uu for unmistakable candles every Friday night"), word lists with no explanations, and distorted, uninspiring, amateurish illustrations will instill little interest in young readers.

Stone, Tanya Lee. *D Is for Dreidel: A Hanukkah Alphabet Book*. New York: Price Stern Sloan/Penguin, 2002. 24 pp. Illus. by Dawn Apperley. ISBN-13 978-0-8431-4576-2, \$4.99 (pb). Gr. K–2.

Stone, Tanya Lee. *P Is for Passover: A Holiday Alphabet Book*. New York: Price Stern Sloan/Penguin, 2003. 24 pp. Illus. by Margeaux Lucas. ISBN-13 978-0-8431-0238-3, \$4.99 (pb). Gr. K–2.

Both of these titles use forced rhyming couplets with no punctuation to describe the people, food, customs, and history of Passover and Hanukkah. For instance, in *D Is for Dreidel*, Stone writes, "T is for tzedakah/ Perform a good deed/ It's charity and giving/ We help those in need!" Although the books sport child-friendly illustrations, they do not provide pronunciation guides or more information for children unfamiliar with the holidays.

### Latino

Chin-Lee, Cynthia, and de la Peña, Terri. *A Is for the Americas*. New York: Orchard, 1999. 32 pp. Illus. by Enrique O. Sánchez. ISBN-13 978-0-531-33194-1, \$16.99. Gr. 2–4.

This alphabet book covers the cultures of North, Central, and South America, with an emphasis on its diversity. While it gives considerable attention to Latino and Native American influences, the text and accompanying acrylic and gouache illustrations do not always distinguish between modern-day life and attire and that of special ceremonies.

Vargo, Sharon Hawkins. *Señor Felipe's Alphabet Adventure: ELAlfabeto Español*. Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook, 2001. 32 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN-13 978-0-7613-1860-6, \$22.90. Gr. PreK–2.

Señor Felipe, an alligator photographer, and his trusty parrot, Paco, receive an assignment: photograph objects that begin with each letter of the Spanish alphabet. Scampering across their remote island, they find common objects (such as book, cloud, and shoes) to meet their requirements. While this book may have some use in

After a map of Venezuela and information about its official language and population, bright acrylic paintings illustrate alphabetical entries on the country's government, geography, history, flag, food, religion, art, music, sports, natural resources, and indigenous peoples. While children may be especially interested in the entries about dolphins, baseball, and piñatas, they will also learn about kinetic art, which plays with color and light to create the effect of movement, and queso blanco, a white cheese that does not melt when heated. Entries also include pronunciation guides for words in Spanish and "fast facts" with additional information. The text ends with more country facts in "Venezuela in Brief," phrases in Spanish, a glossary, and a bibliography.

### Women

Bunting, Eve. *Girls A to Z*. Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills, 2002. 32 pp. Illus. by Suzanne Bloom. ISBN-13 978-1-56397-147-1, \$15.95. Gr. PreK–2.

From Alike to Zoe, pleasing alliterative and rhyming text highlights the possible future vocations of 26 young girls. The roles range from the traditional stay-at-home mother, teacher, and nanny to the less traditional astronaut, firefighter, race car driver, and even president. Equally affirming are the exuberant, mixed-media illustrations, which depict girls of varying ethnicities, physical attributes, and abilities.

Chin-Lee, Cynthia. *Amelia to Zora: Twenty-Six Women Who Changed the World*. Watertown, Mass.: Charlesbridge, 2005. 32 pp. Illus. by Megan Halsey and Sean Addy. ISBN-13 978-1-57091-522-2, \$15.95. Gr. 4–7.

Twenty-six of the twentieth century's greatest women are recognized in this stylish alphabet book. They range from Frida Kahlo, Jane Goodall, Mother Teresa, and Zora Neale Hurston to the possibly less recognizable yet equally compelling physician and women's rights activist Nawal El Sadaawi, Pueblo artist Quah Ah, and democratic leader of Burma Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Each woman is portrayed through two to three paragraphs of text, a stirring quote, and a textured, multimedia illustration with details from her life. Back matter offers a bibliography and an author's note. A companion title is Chin-Lee's *Akira to Zoltan: Twenty-Six Men Who Changed the World*.

Shaw, Eve. *Grandmother's Alphabet*. New York: Scholastic, 2001. 32 pp. Illus. by the author. ISBN-13 978-0-439-19995-7, \$14.95. Gr. PreK–2.

Accompanied by realistic colored-pencil artwork, rhyming text describes some of the myriad careers that grandmothers of various races, ethnicities, ages, shapes, and physical abilities can perform. The jobs range from the traditional homemaker, nurse, and teacher to the nontraditional carpenter, oceanographer, and rancher. Additional career ideas are given on each alphabet page, as well as in a concluding list.

introducing the Spanish language, it does not make any references to Latino culture.

### Native American

Bruchac, Joseph. *Many Nations: An Alphabet of Native America*. New York: Scholastic, 2004. 32 pp. Illus. by Robert F. Goetzl. ISBN-13 978-0-439-63590-5, \$5.99 (pb). Gr. 1–3.

Despite its attempt to represent a wide cross-section of Native American tribes, from Hopi, Iroquois, and Zuni to Goshute, Lummi, and Yavapai; its eloquent text; and its beautiful paintings with features unique to each tribe, *Many Nations* depicts Native Americans in both historical and modern dress without noting a distinction. A concluding author's note references the location of several of the tribes, but a map would have been more helpful to children and adults alike.

Shoulders, Debbie, and Michael. *D Is for Drum: A Native American Alphabet*. Chelsea, Mich.: Sleeping Bear Press, 2006. 36 pp. Illus. by Irving Toddy. ISBN-13 978-1-58536-274-5, \$16.95. Gr. 2–5.

The rhyming couplets used to introduce Native American culture are often awkwardly phrased and confusing (“Millions of majestic Bison roamed freely/ through fields of grass on the plains./A much-needed resource, they sustained the tribes/ through their useful life-giving remains”). The rhyming couplets, expanded informational text, and muted illustrations fail to identify or make distinctions among specific tribes. There is also little distinction between traditional customs and the life of modern-day American Indians.

See also: Chin-Lee, Cynthia, and de la Peña, Terri. *A Is for the Americas*.

**Angela Leeper** is an educational consultant, freelance writer, book reviewer, and author of children's books, including *Juneteenth: A Day to Celebrate Freedom from Slavery*. 📖

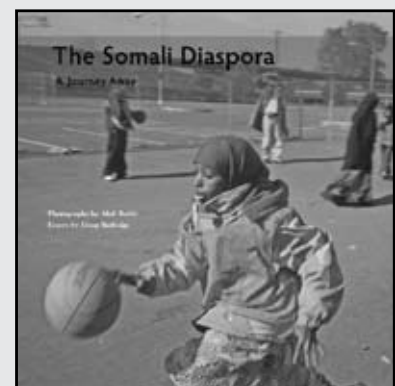
## Race, Place, and Legacy



Grace M. Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* is an engrossing encounter with lingering ghosts of the Korean War. \$22.50 paper • \$67.50 cloth • 264 pages



Born in a Jamaica still under British rule, the acclaimed writer Michelle Cliff embraces her many identities: a light-skinned Creole, a lesbian, an immigrant in both England and the United States. \$21.95 cloth/jacket • 104 pages



*The Somali Diaspora: A Journey Away* is the heartbreaking and hopeful story of Somali immigrants in America told through Abdi Roble's intimate photographs and insightful essays by Doug Rutledge. \$34.95 paper • 208 pages



University of Minnesota Press • [www.upress.umn.edu](http://www.upress.umn.edu) • 800-621-2736