

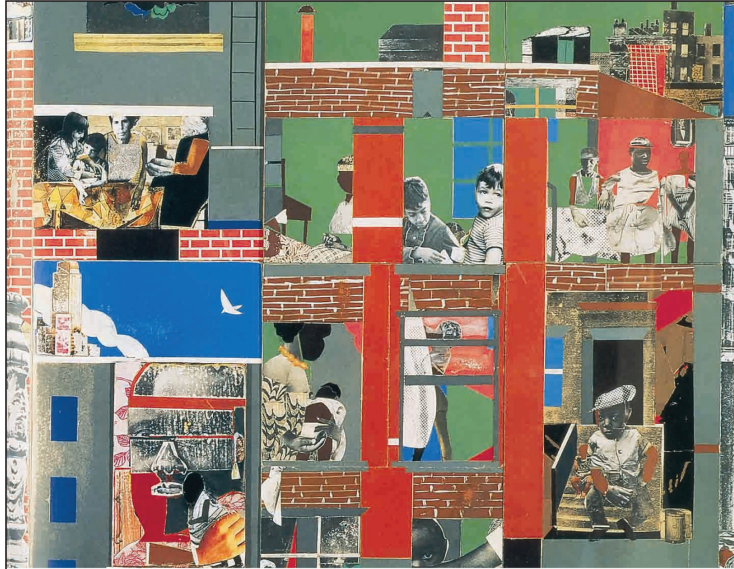
A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO
America Street

REVISED EDITION

Edited by Anne Mazer & Brice Particelli

(AGES 12+)

Guide by Brice Particelli



**AMERICA
STREET**
A MULTICULTURAL
ANTHOLOGY OF STORIES
REVISED EDITION

**EDITED BY ANNE MAZER
AND BRICE PARTICELLI**



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

DEAR READER,

This guide has been developed to accompany *America Street: A Multicultural Anthology of Stories* (Revised Edition, 2019)—an anthology of twenty stories about young people from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds growing up in the United States. It is divided into two parts, Story Pairings and Story Guides. In Story Pairings, you will find connections between stories by Theme or by Craft. In Story Guides, each story is covered individually in the order in which it appears in the book. Included within each are a Summary of the story, information on Context, and approximately ten questions and writing prompts that address theme and idea, intertextual relationships, writer’s craft/technique, and narrative writing. We hope that what is presented here will spark possibility, providing a quick guide to frame a class or seed a curriculum.

While the stories in *America Street* were selected to be content-appropriate for middle school students, they are certainly also appropriate for high school and beyond. There is no age limit on these stories. They transcend boundaries. The protagonists are all young people exploring a time in life we all go through, when we are unsure of our place in the world. This is the power of literature: that by reading stories in a variety of voices—voices that might not otherwise be heard in our too-often homogeneous schools and communities—we expand our students’ experience.

Since its first publication in 1993, *America Street* has been used in thousands of classrooms, with curricula developed for middle schools, high schools, and teacher education programs by teachers and nonprofits. We hope that this guide to the Revised Edition, with its twelve new stories, will kick-start curriculum development once again.

Every classroom is unique. We urge you to take this guide and expand it to fit your own specific grade levels, standards, and purposes. We are proud of the stories in this anthology, and we are sure students will find them engaging, eye-opening, insightful, and fun.

Enjoy.

Brice Particelli, Ph.D.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Brice Particelli earned his Ph.D. in English Education from Columbia University. He has worked with middle- and high-school students as an instructor, curriculum coach, and curriculum writer in Chicago and New York, and through his work as the Director of the Student Press Initiative at Teachers College Columbia University and as the Director of Pace University’s Summer Scholars Initiative. He currently teaches at Pace University, where his research is in education and writing pedagogy.

STORY PAIRINGS

There are numerous combinations of these stories that could be used as units or to complement units. Below are some of the possibilities. For your convenience, the page number on which each story begins is cited.

THEMES

Art and Expression: “Heritage” by Justin Torres (31), “Drum Kiss” by Susan Power (82), “Halloween” by Norma Elia Cantú (145), “La Ciramella” by Mary K. Mazotti (147)

Bigotry and Bullying: “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros (40), “Sixth Grade” by Michele Wallace (44), “Passing the Bread” by Veera Hiranandani (62), “Drum Kiss” by Susan Power (82), “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (155), “Alone and All Together” by Joseph Geha (172)

Fighting Power: “The First Day” by Edward P. Jones (34), “Sixth Grade” by Michele Wallace (44), “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (155)

History: “Business at Eleven” by Toshio Mori (Great Depression) (139), “La Ciramella” by Mary K. Mazotti (Great Depression) (147), “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (Vietnam War, Civil Rights) (155), “Alone and All Together” by Joseph Geha (9/11/2001) (172)

Passing Down Culture: “The Journey” by Duane Big Eagle (3), “Water Names” by Lan Samantha Chang (26), “Heritage” by Justin Torres (31), “Passing the Bread” by Veera Hiranandani (62), “Hamadi” by Naomi Shihab Nye (72), “Yiddische Baby” by Rivka Galchen (92), “Halloween” by Norma Elia Cantú (145), “La Ciramella,” by Mary K. Mazotti (147)

Parenting: “The White Umbrella” by Gish Jen (16), “The First Day” by Edward P. Jones (34), “Sixth Grade” by Michele Wallace (44), “You Decide” by Gary Soto (54), “Yiddische Baby” by Rivka Galchen (92), “The Summer of Ice Cream” by Tope Folarin (110), “La Ciramella” by Mary K. Mazotti (147)

Grandparents and Elders: “The White Umbrella” by Gish Jen (16), “Water Names” by Lan Samantha Chang (26), “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros (40), “Hamadi” by Naomi Shihab Nye (72), “Drum Kiss” by Susan Power (82), “Yiddische Baby” by Rivka Galchen (92), “Thank You M’am” by Langston Hughes (134)

Work: “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (9), “The White Umbrella,” by Gish Jen (16), “The Summer of Ice Cream” by Tope Folarin (110), “Business at Eleven” by Toshio Mori (139)

School: “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (9), “The First Day” by Edward P. Jones (34), “Sixth Grade” by Michele Wallace (44), “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (155)

CRAFT

First person present tense: “The First Day” by Edward P. Jones (34), “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros (40), “Drum Kiss” by Susan Power (82), “Halloween” by Norma Elia Cantú (145), “Alone and All Together” by Joseph Geha (172)

First person past tense: “The Journey” by Duane Big Eagle (3), “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (9), “The White Umbrella” by Gish Jen (16), “Water Names” by Lan Samantha Chang (26), “Heritage” by Justin Torres (31), “Sixth Grade” by Michele Wallace (44), “Yiddische Baby” by Rivka Galchen (92), “The Summer of Ice Cream” by Tope Folarin (110), “Business at Eleven” by Toshio Mori (139), “La Ciramella” by Mary K. Mazotti (174), “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (155)

Third person: “You Decide” by Gary Soto (54), “Passing the Bread” by Veera Hiranandani (62), “Hamadi” by Naomi Shihab Nye (72), “Thank You, M’am” by Langston Hughes (134)

Flash fiction (1–4 pages): “Heritage” by Justin Torres (31), “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros (40), “Thank You, M’am” by Langston Hughes (134), “Halloween” by Norma Elia Cantú (145)

Long form (16–25 pages): “Yiddische Baby” by Rivka Galchen (92); “The Summer of Ice Cream” by Tope Folarin (110); “American Dad, 1969” by Marina Budhos (155)

STORY GUIDES

“THE JOURNEY” BY DUANE BIG EAGLE, page 3

Summary

“The Journey” follows Raoul, a young boy suffering from tuberculosis (and perhaps more), on a train ride from Mexico to Oklahoma to visit a Yaqui medicine woman to find a cure.

Context

Duane Big Eagle is a member of the Northern California Osage Association and was born in Claremore, Oklahoma. He teaches and writes poetry and fiction, and is a traditional Southern Straight dancer—a style of powwow dancing attributed to Native American nations like the Osage, whose nation once covered the Great Plains and into the Ozarks, but who were relocated to Oklahoma when the Osage Nation’s land was bought by the United States from the French in the Louisiana Purchase. The Yaqui, mentioned in “The Journey,” refers to Native American people from what is now northwestern Mexico.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does Raoul hope for on this journey? Does he find what he’s looking for?
2. Who is the girl in the dark red dress? What does she represent to Raoul throughout the story?
3. Read “Halloween” (also in *America Street*, page 145.) Compare and contrast the way each family thinks about medicine and healing.
4. Is there a movie or book that this story reminds you of? Perhaps a story about a journey to a new place, or a story about someone struggling with illness?
5. How does belief and religion play a role in this story? What do you know about Native American religions? About the Yaqui?
6. The story focuses on the journey. What do we learn about Raoul’s life before the journey? Why does the author limit what we get to learn about his life?
7. Do you trust what Raoul says he sees? How does the author make you question or trust what Raoul experiences?
8. Is there a moment that you are waiting for? How does the author create suspense?
9. At the end, Raoul says, “I’ve come on a journey out of childhood.” What could “childhood” and “adulthood” mean to Raoul?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about a journey you’ve taken to a new place. Maybe you visited family far away or simply saw a new friend in a new neighborhood. Focus on a new experience. How different was the place from your own home—the buildings and trees and sounds and smells and people?
2. Create a character who wonders if what they are seeing is true. Write a story from that character’s point of view.

“THE CIRCUIT” BY FRANCISCO JIMÉNEZ, page 9

Summary

“The Circuit” follows Panchito as his family moves from town to town to work on farms across California, where he often works alongside his parents in the fields.

Context

When Francisco Jiménez was four years old, his parents crossed from Mexico into the United States without documentation so that they could find work. Jiménez began working in the fields alongside them while he was still in elementary school. He earned citizenship while in high school. Jiménez is a professor at Santa Clara University in California.

“The Circuit” is from Jiménez’s autobiographical short story collection, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*. Its twelve stories are independent but intertwined, following Pancho and his family as they cross the border, move from job to job, and slowly grow from a family of four to a family of eleven. (He is called Panchito in this story.)

Jiménez’s style is often compared to Steinbeck’s in *The Grapes of Wrath* because of his portrayal of personal struggle within a setting of stark social realism. Jiménez has written two sequels to *The Circuit*, the short story collections *Breaking Through* and *Reaching Out*.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does Panchito think about the fact that his family moves so often? How does he cope with it?
2. What are Panchito’s parents’ hopes for themselves and for their children?
3. In his first draft, Jiménez titled this story “Cajas de Cartón” (“Cardboard Boxes”), but he changed it to “The Circuit” before publication. Which title works better?
4. Jiménez wrote this story in Spanish first, but then decided that it needed to be published in English instead. Why do you think he wanted it in English?
5. This story is set more than fifty years ago. How has life changed for migrant farm workers? Find stories or news reports from today to compare or contrast.
6. What is the history of children working in the United States? What have the laws been? What are they now?
7. Read “Business at Eleven” by Toshio Mori (also in *America Street*, page 139). How does Panchito’s work compare to the work in that story?
8. We do not see Panchito in school until the end of the story. Why did the author structure the story this way? How would the story change if it had begun during the scene when Panchito is struggling to read aloud?
9. How often does the author allow us to know Panchito’s thoughts and feelings? This is often called “narrative distance”—when it is “close” we see a lot of the protagonist’s emotions, when it is “far,” we see only action.

Narrative Writing

1. Describe what you would do if you had to walk into a school in a new town. (Perhaps you’ve already had to do this.) How would you handle the first day? How would you choose someone to talk to?

"THE WHITE UMBRELLA" BY GISH JEN, page 16

Summary

"The White Umbrella" follows a twelve-year-old girl whose mother begins working, making the family unsure of how to handle this new situation. The girl and her sister spend time with their neighbor, Miss Crosman, who gives piano lessons.

Context

Gish Jen was born on Long Island, in the state of New York, and grew up in towns throughout the New York City area. She graduated from Harvard University with a B.A. in English and went to Stanford Business School for a year before dropping out to focus on writing, earning her M.F.A. in fiction at the University of Iowa instead.

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Jen says that writing depends on what Philip Roth called an "amiable irritant." She says that being an "Asian American, having been a child of immigrant parents—all of that difficulty did serve as a kind of amiable irritant, the grain of sand that hopefully produces the pearl." Jen is now a professional writer and speaker.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Why does the narrator's family struggle with the fact that the mother began working? What does each family member think about it?
2. Keep an eye out for mentions of "American," or implications of what it means to be American. What is "American" in the context of this story and the characters within it?
3. What is Miss Crosman's backstory? List the details we know. What can we tell about her history and why she is so kind to the sisters?
4. Read "Passing the Bread" by Veera Hiranandani (also in *America Street*, page 62). Describe the differences in the relationship between children and their parents.
5. Consider some popular movies or television shows you've seen. How are work-focused women portrayed? How are work-focused men portrayed? How does this story fit within that framework?
6. The narrator is fixated on the umbrella. What does it represent?
7. How does the story's back-and-forth structure affect the way we see the mother and Miss Crossman?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about an object someone gave you. Describe the object in detail and then tell the story of what it means to you.
2. The narrator describes a proud moment as an entire constellation of stars rising in her heart (p. 19, middle). Write a few of your own metaphors or similes. Focus on emotions you've felt—perhaps joy, grief, anger, love, or something else.

“WATER NAMES” BY LAN SAMANTHA CHANG, page 26

Summary

“Water Names” is told from the perspective of a young girl who fights with her sister. Her grandmother tells them stories from China.

Context

Lan Samantha Chang was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, to parents who emigrated from China to the United States after the Second World War. After earning a master’s degree in business at Harvard—in part to please her parents, she says—she earned an M.F.A. in writing from the University of Iowa to pursue her passion. In 1998, the collection *Hunger: A Novella and Stories*, which focuses largely on the Chinese immigrant experience in the U. S. won her high acclaim. “Water Names” comes from that collection.

In an interview published in *Nashville Review*, Chang says that when she was writing *Hunger*, “I wrote about what mattered to me then. At the time, I was in the process of trying to understand the forces that weighed on my own childhood and the life of my family and other families like mine in the United States.”

Discussion and Analysis

1. Why does the grandmother tell the story of Wen Zhiqing’s daughter? What does she hope her grandchildren will learn from it?
2. The narrator says they’d gotten used to Waipuo “creating a question and leaving without answering it, as if she were disappointed in the question itself.” What does this mean? What is the question and what is the answer in this story?
3. What ghost stories do you know? What lessons do they offer? Why do people tell them? How does this one compare or contrast?
4. Find a review of Chang’s book *Hunger*, which includes this story. How does the review describe the work? How does “Water Names” fit that description?
5. Find an interview with Lan Samantha Chang. How does Chang describe her writing? Looking at this story, do you agree with the way she describes it?
6. Read “Drum Kiss” by Susan Power (also in *America Street*, page 82). How does the grandparent and the grandchild interact in each of them? Compare and contrast.
7. Why is this story told from the point of view of the granddaughter? Why not third person? Or from the grandmother’s point of view? How would the story change? (Try rewriting it.)
8. How does the author use the protagonist’s opinions throughout the story? Where in the text can we see what she thinks about the story of Wen Zhiqing?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about a time you learned something from an elderly family member or neighbor. Include setting and try to include some quotes from the person, too.
2. Write a story in which ghosts interact or once interacted with people.

“HERITAGE” BY JUSTIN TORRES, page 31

Summary

“Heritage” focuses on three brothers dancing in the kitchen. Their father challenges the way they dance.

Context

Justin Torres was raised in upstate New York to Brooklyn-born parents. He describes his mother’s family as coming from Ireland and Italy and his father’s family from Puerto Rico, an unincorporated territory of the United States. In an interview with *Electric Lit*, Torres says that he wrote “Heritage” because “there is a certain lose-lose attitude toward being mixed race. You ain’t this, you ain’t that. And I wanted to express that, but also, that’s a pretty joyous scene as well. I think that there is a bounty to being able to dip into this or that, the other category. I’m no longer the class I was growing up, I no longer claim the sexuality I was expected and raised to have, but I feel like I have access to all of it, to so many worlds, at the same time I feel like I don’t belong.”

“Heritage” comes from a series of nineteen short, interconnected stories in Torres’s first book, *We the Animals*, which was made into a movie in 2018.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does dance represent in this story? Why is it important?
2. Define “heritage.” How is it reflected in the story? Is the narrator proud of his heritage? Are his parents?
3. Find the trailer for the movie *We the Animals*, which is based on the book that includes this story. Do the characters in the trailer fit your expectations? Compare them.
4. Read “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros (also in *America Street*, page 26). Describe the differences in gender expectations between these two stories.
5. Research the history of Puerto Rico and its place within the United States. When the father calls them “Mutts,” and says, “You ain’t white and you ain’t Puerto Rican,” what does he mean? What is “Puerto Rican”?
6. This is a very short story. Is there a plot or a conflict? How would you define “story”? Is this a story?
7. Find some of Torres’s other work. (Some of his other shorts are free, online, at *Granta* and other places.) How would you describe his style of storytelling?
8. How do sensory details—like the smell of food or descriptions of the home—add to the story?

Narrative Writing

1. Create a fictional story about learning how to dance. One person is teaching another. Use dialogue and description.
2. If dance is part of this family’s heritage, what is part of your heritage? What does your family like to do and tried to pass on to you?

“THE FIRST DAY” BY EDWARD P. JONES, page 34

Summary

“The First Day” focuses on a kindergartener’s first day of school. Her mother refuses to accept the school her daughter is told to attend and tries to enroll her in a different one.

Context

Born in 1950, Edward P. Jones grew up in racially segregated Washington, D.C. His mother, like the mother in this story, did not know how to read or write. Jones mostly read comic books until he was thirteen, when he discovered two books by African American authors that caught his attention: Ethel Waters’ *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* and Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. He said, “I felt as if they were talking to me, since both books had people in them that I knew in my own life. I was shocked to learn black people could write such things.”

Jones attended college and graduate school to write, but returned home to take care of his terminally ill mother. In 1992, he completed his first short story collection, *Lost in the City*, which includes “The First Day.” The book earned critical attention but Jones continued working as a proofreader until he was laid off in 2002. This pushed him to focus on writing full-time, resulting in his first novel, *The Known World*, which won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize. Jones is now a professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What is the mother trying to accomplish in this story? Why is it important?
2. What is the relationship between the family and their neighbors? And their city? Why are they met with opposition? What are they struggling against?
3. What stories have you read or what films or plays have you seen that represent the treatment of African Americans in the 1950s? How does this story compare to those?
4. What is the history of school segregation in the 1950s and 1960s? How does this history affect this story?
5. How does access to education work right now? Who has access to the best schools?
6. Read “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (also in *America Street*, page 9). Compare and contrast the role of education and opportunity in these two stories.
7. Jones chooses to write this story about a kindergartener. How does his choice affect the kind of story he is able to tell? What can we see through the eyes of a young protagonist that would look different to an adult?
8. The story is told in present tense. Why? How would this story change if it were told through the reflections of an adult, looking back?

Narrative Writing

1. Rewrite this story from the perspective of the mother.
2. Write a story about a parent or student fighting to change a school.

“MERICANS” BY SANDRA CISNEROS, page 40

Summary

In “Mericans,” Micaela and her brothers wait outside of the church for their “awful grandmother” to come out.

Context

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago, one of seven children and the only daughter. She describes this situation as being lonely, pushing her to begin writing. In an interview with *Latino Book Review*, Cisneros was asked to speak about difficulties she had growing up. She said, “Looking back at it, I would say the most difficult part was how the world made you feel about being poor, about being a girl. And, later, how painful it was navigating the world as a young woman. A lot of times I found myself in disastrous situations because I was such an innocent/idiot. It left me damaged as a human being for decades. I think having been beautiful was a cross, and I’m grateful I’m no longer young and no longer beautiful in that same way.”

“Mericans” was published in Sandra Cisneros’s collection of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Its interconnected stories focus on a family that is not only surrounded by American influences but also connected to its Mexican heritage. Many of the stories focus on the relationship girls have within their families.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Why is the story called “Mericans”? Consider two or three possible answers.
2. What does the grandmother think of the grandchildren? What do the grandchildren think of their grandmother’s interests? (Make a list of quotes that support each.)
3. The grandmother says that the kids are born in “that barbaric country with its barbarian ways.” What country, and what are the “barbarian ways”?
4. Consider how other books or shows (or your own communities) define what it means to be “American”? How would Micaela describe it?
5. How is setting used differently to describe the church versus the plaza? Make a list of descriptions of each.
6. The protagonist is called both Michele and Micaela. When is each one used, and why?
7. Consider the length of this story. Why is it so short? What would you add if it were expanded?
8. List all of the ways Micaela might identify herself—through gender, culture, ethnicity, age, race, social group, her place in the family, and any other way that adds to a person’s outward identity in the world. Now do the same for yourself. Write about how you fit or don’t fit within your community because of an aspect of your identity.

Narrative Writing

1. Describe a time when you felt as if you were trapped between two cultures (or selves)—when you had to act one way in one place and another way in another place.
2. Describe some of the beliefs that older members of your family or community have. Where do you fit within them?

“SIXTH GRADE” BY MICHELE WALLACE, page 44

Summary

In “Sixth Grade,” Sandra is an African American girl in a “lily white” school. She struggles to understand why she is treated so disrespectfully by her teacher, Mrs. Wernerhann.

Context

Michele Wallace was born in Harlem, the daughter of Faith Ringgold, an important and popular artist, and Robert Earl Wallace, a classical and jazz pianist. While earning her B.A. at City College of New York, Wallace was an organizer within the anti-war and anti-imperialist art movements, helping found the National Black Feminist Organization and the Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation with her mother. After college, Wallace wrote for *Ms.* magazine and *The Village Voice* on black feminism, and worked for *Newsweek* and *Essence* magazines. She went on to earn her Ph.D. in Cinema Studies from New York University.

Wallace is perhaps best known for her book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, a classic feminist text that focuses a critical eye on sexism in the black community during the Civil Rights Movement. In it, she describes destructive stereotypes of black men as hypermasculine and hypersexualized and black women as “superwomen,” strong and unfazed by racism. Wallace currently teaches at City College and at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Describe the community and school. Where does Sandra fit within this community?
2. Define “racism,” “bigotry,” and “bullying.” Pick some scenes and describe whether or not they fit your definitions.
3. How did Sandra’s mother handle the situation? How did Sandra want her to handle it?
4. Read “Alone and All Together” by Joseph Geha (also in *America Street*, page 177). Compare and contrast some instances of bullying. How do people respond to the bullies?
5. When do you think this story takes place? Find some clues and make a case for it.
6. Which scenes tell the story of Sandra’s relationship to the other students?
7. This story is told in the past tense. What does the narrator think about this story now? Where is a retrospective voice used?

Narrative Writing

1. Describe the role that race and ethnicity play within your own school’s culture and classrooms.
2. Imagine you were in the class when Mrs. Wernerhann said, “Why Sandra, I’m amazed. I thought certainly you would be one of my F students.” Describe what you would think or say or do.
3. Tell a story about a bully. You can choose to tell it from the perspective of the bully, the bullied person, or a bystander.

“YOU DECIDE” BY GARY SOTO, page 54

Summary

In “You Decide,” thirteen-year-old Hector’s parents are getting divorced and he is left with a difficult decision. He sneaks out the window that night to consider his options.

Context

Gary Soto was born in Fresno, California. His father died when he was five years old, and his family struggled financially. In high school and college, he picked grapes and cotton and chopped beets. He studied at Fresno City College and California State University at Fresno for his B.A., and then earned his M.F.A at the University of California at Irvine. His acknowledged major literary influences include Gabriel García Márquez; Edward Field; W. S. Merwin; Christopher Durang; E. V. Lucas; and Pablo Neruda, whom he calls “the master of them all.”

In an interview published in *Scholastic*, Soto said, “A lot of my work seems autobiographical, because I write a lot about growing up as a Mexican American. It’s important to me to create and share new stories about my heritage. It’s a huge part of my life. If you read my poems and stories, you might wonder which things really happened to me. As a writer, I like to make things up, as long as the actions of the characters are believable. There are many different types of writers. Some people like to write things that are factual and historical. For me, the joy of being a writer is to take things I see and hear and then rearrange them. I like to tamper with reality and create new possibilities. In short, not all my work is autobiographical, but it could be.”

Soto lives in Northern California. He has published more than forty books.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What decision does Hector have to make? How does he weigh his decision?
2. What role does class (or wealth) have within this story? What does Hector think of his neighborhood in relation to Uncle Rudy’s?
3. Throughout this story, Hector sees a few versions of what a family or a home can be. What kind of life does he want?
4. Read “Passing the Bread” by Veera Hiranandani (also in *America Street*, page 62). Like “You Decide,” it focuses on a loss that is out of the protagonist’s control. What are differences in the ways the two main characters deal with these difficulties?
5. How is divorce treated in other stories you’ve read, or shows you’ve watched? Pick one and describe how it compares to or contrasts with this story.
6. Consider your own region, state, city, or town. How does wealth affect the various communities? How do people treat each other differently in each neighborhood?
7. Is the dog meant to be a metaphor within the story? What might it represent? Why is it important to Hector?

Narrative Writing

1. Retell the story in first person.
2. Write a story about a person on a journey to escape from a difficult decision.
3. Describe what “home” means to you. Tell a story through a specific detail or scene.

“PASSING THE BREAD” BY VEERA HIRANANDANI, page 62

Summary

“Passing the Bread” portrays Rasika’s visit to her grandparent’s home for Shabbat dinner, soon after her cousin, Sunil, died.

Context

Veera Hiranandani grew up in a small town in Connecticut and loved playing video games at the arcade. (Her favorite was Pacman.) In the biography on her website, she writes, “Growing up wasn’t always easy. My mother is Jewish-American, my father is from a Hindu family in India, and I didn’t know any kids like me where I lived. But coming from two cultures and not always fitting in has probably made me a stronger person. I was also pretty shy, so I spent a lot of time quietly watching other people. Maybe I wouldn’t have become a writer if I wasn’t forced to look at the world a little differently.”

Hiranandani attended George Washington University and then worked in marketing for a corporate law firm before returning to school to get her M.F.A. in fiction from Sarah Lawrence College. She worked as a children’s book editor, a college admissions counselor, and a Montessori teacher, but now focuses entirely on writing and teaching writing.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Describe the differences and similarities between Rasika’s home with her parents and her grandparents’ home.
2. What is considered a “lie” to Rasika? How does she define it?
3. Describe the scene between Sunil, Rasika, and Brandon at the lockers. Why did Sunil respond the way he does? Why is Rasika upset by it?
4. Read “Alone and All Together” by Joseph Geha (also in *America Street*, page 177). Both stories involve friends bullying other friends in racially charged ways. Compare and contrast a scene from each story.
5. Why is the story about Sunil and Rasika’s shoes important? Describe what the scene shows.
6. What does not eating the challah represent to Rasika? Why is this important to her?
7. The “present action” in this story is at the grandparents’ house, but we get to see the past as well. How do flashbacks help us understand the present?

Narrative Writing

1. Shabbat, the Jewish sabbath, or day of rest, begins on Friday night with a dinner like the one Rasika’s family is having in this story. Write about a tradition or ceremony that you are required to participate in.
2. Write about a friend or family member who has taken a stand and made you proud.
3. Tell a story about a person who is making an effort to stay quiet in an uncomfortable situation. Focus on building that tension.

"HAMADI" BY NAOMI SHIHAB NYE, page 72

Summary

"Hamadi" tells the story of a family's relationship with Saleh Hamadi, an older person who is not related, and how he fits into their family during the Christmas holiday.

Context

Naomi Shihab Nye grew up in Ferguson, Missouri, close to where her mother had grown up. Her father was a journalist and refugee from Palestine. Her parents met in Kansas.

In an interview with Krista Tippett on National Public Radio, talking about her focus on refugees in some of her writing, Nye said, "I think many times the way people look at immigrants with such a sense of diminishment, as if this person is less than I am because they've left their country. Well, I actually think they're more than we are because they're braver. They've gone some other place. They have to operate in another language. How easy would that be? If I had to go to China today and start living in China and doing everything in Chinese, it would be very, very hard. So, you think about the bravery of these people and the desperation with which they're trying to find a realm of safety for their families and just the basic safeties that we take for granted every day we get up."

Nye lives in Texas.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Who is Hamadi to the family? Why is he important to Susan?
2. Define what these words mean in this story: home, family, refugee.
3. Hamadi says, "We go on. On and on. We don't stop where it hurts. We turn a corner. It is the reason why we are living. To turn a corner." Why does he offer this advice? What other advice does he offer?
4. Find a quote where Susan talks about immigrants or refugees. Compare and contrast the way she describes immigrants or refugees to the way they are talked about in the United States right now.
5. Read a summary of Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*. Why is this text meaningful to the story?
6. Read "The White Umbrella" by Gish Jen (also in *America Street*, page 16). Compare and contrast the protagonist's relationship with Miss Crosman with Susan's relationship with Hamadi.
7. Describe Tracy. What does she represent to the central themes of the story?
8. Write a list of the similarities and differences among these three characters: Hamadi, Susan, and Susan's grandmother. Pick two and compare and contrast their approach to life.

Narrative Writing

1. Tell the story about a non-family adult who is important to your family, or to you.
2. Describe a moment when a parent or guardian did not want you to spend time with a particular person. Describe that person and the argument or advice given to you.
3. Create your own story about an older person helping a younger person through a difficult time.

“DRUM KISS” BY SUSAN POWER, page 82

Summary

“Drum Kiss” follows Fawn, whose parents died in a car crash. She lives with her Grandma Lizzie, who who makes beaded jewelry to be sold at powwows.

Context

Susan Power is a member of the Standing Rock Tribe of the Dakotas and a descendant of Sioux Chief *Mato Nupa* (Two Bears) on her mother’s side and an early Euro-American governor of New Hampshire on her father’s side. Power grew up in Chicago and attended Harvard for both undergraduate and law degrees. While working as a lawyer, she began reading Louise Erdrich’s novels and was excited to see Native American characters who resembled people in her family and community. Power soon left law to focus on writing.

In an interview published in *Ploughshares*, Power says, “because writing was such a basic element in my life, like breathing, brushing my teeth, I didn’t really consider pursuing it professionally until I’d graduated from Law School and realized I wasn’t meant to be an attorney after all—I was an Arts person and had to honor that calling. So I focused on learning more about craft, in the small bits of free time I had during a lunch break at work or on weekends. I should also say that I’d strenuously avoided studying writing all through high school and college because I’d had such power struggles with teachers in elementary school. Several of them noted my talent, but questioned my subject matter. I would write about the Native experience in Chicago, some of it quite harrowing, only to have teachers ask why I couldn’t write about ‘pretty things,’ didn’t my people ‘love the natural world?’ So, I instinctively protected my voice and vision from their interference.”

Discussion and Analysis

1. What roles do magic and imagination play in this story? Why are they important to Fawn?
2. Describe the town and the school. Why do students treat Fawn as an outsider?
3. What do you know about the book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*? Why is it important to “Drum Kiss”?
4. Read “Water Names” by Lan Samantha Chang (also in *America Street*, page 26). Compare and contrast the grandmother / granddaughter relationships.
5. What is the history of Native Americans in the United States? How does that history affect the present? How can the history be seen in this story?
6. What is the story of the “drum kiss”? Why does Fawn tell it? What does it mean?
7. The story is written in present tense. How does that affect it? How would the story be different in past tense, told in a more retrospective and knowing voice?

Narrative Writing

1. Tell a story about someone holding back a secret from their friends.
2. Write a story that includes magic or miracles.
3. Write a story in which the history of your town or community plays a role in your character’s life.

“YIDDISCHE BABY” BY RIVKA GALCHEN, page 92

Summary

In “Yiddische Baby,” Maya doesn’t know any Jewish people other than her family in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her Uncle Shai and cousin Eli, who are Israeli like Maya’s grandfather was, step in and out of her life. The characters consider what it means to date or marry outside of Judaism.

Context

Rivka Galchen was born in Toronto, Ontario, in Canada, but her parents moved the family to Norman, Oklahoma, when she was very young. Her father had served in the Israeli Army. In the U.S., he became a meteorology professor at the University of Oklahoma. Her mother was a computer programmer at the National Severe Storms Laboratory.

Galchen received her M.D. with a focus in psychiatry, but never practiced. Instead, she chose to pursue her M.F.A. in fiction from Columbia University.

In an interview published in *Washington Square Review*, when asked what it was like growing up in Oklahoma, she said, ironically, “I’m still trying to recover from my happy childhood. Going to the drive-through of the bank was so exciting, the tension of wondering whether the teller would include a lollipop when sending back the capsule through the vacuum tube.”

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does Maya’s family worry about, being Jewish in Tulsa, Oklahoma?
2. What are Uncle Shai’s biggest concerns about Eli? What is Eli’s central concern or conflict?
3. Define *shikse* and *yiddische* baby. What do they signify in the story?
4. Consider the story of *Romeo & Juliet*, or any other story you know in which two people’s parents do not want them to date because of their backgrounds. Compare it to this story.
5. Read “Heritage” by Justin Torres (also in *America Street*, page 31). Compare and contrast the relationship each family has to the idea of cultural tradition.
6. Write a list of the main characters. What does each character think about marrying or dating outside of their religion? Find a quote to back it up.
7. Yiddish words are often used without translation or explanation. Maya doesn’t know some of the words, and, similarly, some readers won’t know them. Why does the author choose to do this?
8. The story jumps around in time. Outline the story and consider which scenes take place in the past and which take place the present. Why does the author order the scenes this way?

Narrative Writing

1. Describe the characteristics of people you are expected to be friends with, or to date. How do those expectations affect your choices?
2. Write a story about a friendship or relationship that adults look down on, but that your central character thinks is entirely normal.

“THE SUMMER OF ICE CREAM” BY TOPE FOLARIN, page 110

Summary

In “The Summer of Ice Cream,” Tunde’s father leaves his job because of overt racism and bullying. Tunde and his brothers help their father start and run an ice cream business.

Context

Tope Folarin was born in Ogden, Utah. His parents emigrated from Nigeria, and Folarin was the oldest of five children. When he was fourteen, his family moved to Texas. Folarin graduated from Morehouse College and was a Rhodes Scholar.

In an interview published in *Nigerians Talk*, Folarin describes his connection to Nigeria, where much of his family still lives. “Because of this, I’ve maintained a deep emotional and intellectual connection to Nigeria. For example, my first experience with art—before I even knew what art was—was with Nigerian art: the stories my mother whispered into my ear after she had tucked me in, the cassette tapes featuring Nigerian musicians that my father played over and over again. In school, I studied Nigerian politics, Nigerian history, and Nigerian culture—all this culminated in my second master’s degree at Oxford (in African Studies). Nigeria is an intrinsic part of who I am.”

Folarin lives in Washington, D C. and works at the Institute for Policy Studies, focusing on African politics and the racial-wealth divide in the United States. He is the author of the novel, *A Particular Kind of Black Man*.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does the father want? For himself? For his kids?
2. Why does the father involve the kids in the business? What do the kids gain from the experience?
3. How do accent and skin color affect these characters’ lives? Describe a scene or two in which one or both of these realities change their choices or options.
4. Read “Business at Eleven” by Toshio Mori (also in *America Street*, page 139). Compare and contrast the financial situation of the family in each story. How do their differing financial circumstances affect their choices?
5. Read “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (also in *America Street*, page 9). How are the parents in each of these stories portrayed? Compare and contrast.
6. How does Tunde describe Nigerian culture in relation to Utah’s culture? How are they different or similar? Write a list of specifics for each.
7. Why spend so much time explaining the process of building the truck, keeping ice cream cold, and finding the right spot to park the truck? How does that focus and shape the story?
8. Pick a scene that best captures the father’s character. Describe the scene and what it represents.

Narrative Writing

1. Describe a time when you learned how to do something new, outside of school. Explain the way that you learned it, using specific detail.
2. What is a business or service you think your neighborhood needs? Is it centered on food? Or helping a group of people in need? Or offering a product or store or service that isn’t there but should be? Have a fictional character start it.

“THANK YOU, M’AM” BY LANGSTON HUGHES, page 134

Summary

“Thank You, M’am” follows Roger, a boy who tries to steal a woman’s purse so that he can buy shoes. The woman, Mrs. Jones, grabs him and takes him home with her to feed him and to have a talk.

Context

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. By the time he finished high school, he’d already had a poem published (in *Crisis*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois). His paternal great-grandmothers were African Americans, enslaved by his paternal great-grandfathers, who were white slave-owners in Kentucky. Hughes’s maternal grandfather helped lead the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society.

Hughes is one of the most recognized leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, an intellectual and artistic movement centered in the New York City neighborhood of Harlem, in the 1920s. It focused on the art, music, and literature being created by African Americans who, since the end of the Civil War, had fled violent racism in the South and settled in northeastern and midwestern cities. However, African Americans associated with this movement lived throughout the U.S., as well as in Paris, France.

Discussion and Analysis

1. List all of the things you know about Roger. What clues do you have about his backstory?
2. What clues does the author give us about the racial or ethnic identity of Roger and Mrs. Jones? Are they the same? Does it matter?
3. What do you think Roger wanted to say to Mrs. Jones besides “Thank you, m’am”? Why couldn’t he say it?
4. Hughes has been accused of reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes in some of his stories. Is that a concern here?
5. How do stories, movies, and shows tend to portray kids who steal? Pick an instance from something recent and compare it to this story.
6. How would you write this story in the first person? Whose story is it?
7. If this story included flashbacks of Mrs. Jones’ life, what do you think they would reveal?
8. Why didn’t Hughes use flashbacks?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about a time when you were forgiven for doing something wrong, or when you were mentored by an adult to make better choices.
2. Describe your neighborhood. Do people look out for each other? Describe a moment that shows us how you interact with (or don’t interact with) your neighbors.
3. Tell the story of a character who does something wrong and gets caught.

“BUSINESS AT ELEVEN” BY TOSHIO MORI, page 139

Summary

In “Business at Eleven,” Johnny sells used magazines to people in his neighborhood, during the Great Depression. His mother has died and his father is out of work.

Context

Toshio Mori is known as the first Japanese American writer to publish a book of short stories in the United States. Mori was born in Oakland, California. During the Second World War, he and his family were held in a Japanese internment camp in Utah called Topaz. His first book, *Yokohama, California*, was published in 1949 and includes the story “Business at Eleven.” Mori worked in a small, family, plant nursery his whole life, but eventually published three more books—in 1979, 1980, and a posthumous collection in 2000.

During the Second World War, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered that all Japanese Americans in the United States were to be moved into concentration camps. More than 100,000 people were held. Approximately 62% of those interned were American citizens, like Mori.

Discussion and Analysis

1. What pushes Johnny, who is only eleven years old, to sell magazines each day? What is his central conflict or concern?
2. Describe the narrator. Why is he telling this story? What does he think of Johnny?
3. What do you know about the Great Depression? What was different about that time compared to now?
4. Read “The Circuit” by Francisco Jiménez (also in *America Street*, page 9), which focuses on a young person working to help his family. How might the work each one does affect the rest of his life? What options or opportunities will each have? What are their hopes or aspirations?
5. Define “American Dream.” Is it reflected in this story? How does Johnny’s age affect this aspect of the story?
6. What do we know about Johnny’s life outside of magazine sales? What does the author include? What is kept from us, and what effect does this have on the story?
7. How would this story be rewritten if it were told from Johnny’s perspective?

Narrative Writing

1. Describe the youngest person you know who works. Describe the work that is done.
2. Write about a young person who makes a personal sacrifice, like Johnny does, to help the larger family.

"HALLOWEEN" BY NORMA ELIA CANTÚ, page 145

Summary

"Halloween" follows a young girl who burns her foot while cooking for her family.

Context

Norma Elia Cantú was born in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and raised in Laredo, Texas. Cantú attended Laredo Community College and Texas A&M as an undergraduate, and went on to earn a Ph.D. in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Cantú teaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

When asked how she chooses what language to write in, she told *Latino Book Review*, "I write in English and Spanish. Spanish is my first language and I write poetry in Spanish; poetry flows more easily in Spanish for me. The short fiction and narrative often erupts in English and then switches to Spanglish. In fiction, I first write in whatever language the character speaks; often I have to translate later into English to get published. I have a very intimate relationship to Spanish that has not substantially changed in the last fifty years or so (I'm seventy-one), but my first language was Spanish and I was punished for speaking it in school. I was lucky to have parents who spoke only Spanish, so I kept my Spanish fluency."

Discussion and Analysis

1. Why is this story called "Halloween" when the narrator states that the family "didn't yet believe in that strange U.S. custom"?
2. Describe the traditions in this family that surround Halloween.
3. What is the "Day of the Dead" in Mexico? Compare and contrast its traditions to Halloween traditions in the United States.
4. Read "Heritage" by Justin Torres and "Mericans" by Sandra Cisneros (both in *America Street*, pages 31 and 40, respectively). How do the authors of each story portray people who navigate their lives between more than one culture? Compare and contrast.
5. In an interview, Cantú says she was punished for speaking Spanish in school. What languages are spoken in your school? What are the benefits of speaking multiple languages?
6. Cantú says that she sometimes writes her fiction in Spanish first, but then "often I have to translate later into English to get published." Why do you think she does this?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about a meal that your family or community prepares. Perhaps it's one that you've helped prepare, or one you always eat during a specific holiday. Describe it in detail.
2. Describe a holiday that you celebrate differently from other people.
3. Write a story about a family during a holiday when something goes wrong.

"LA CIRAMELLA" BY MARY K. MAZOTTI, page 147

Summary

"*La Ciramella*" is set during the Great Depression, when a father remembers how much he valued a musical instrument from his youth called a *ciramella*, similar to a bagpipe. He makes one, and the family dances to the music.

Context

Mary K. Mazotti was born in California in 1924. Her parents were immigrants from a Calabrian village in southern Italy, and she spent her childhood among other Italian immigrants from the same area. Mazotti is the mother of seven children, and worked for many years as a school secretary. In 1981, she began to write, and has been published in various journals.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Why is the *ciramella* important to the father? What does it represent to the family?
2. Describe the role of nostalgia in this story. (Define "nostalgia" and offer some examples from your own community.)
3. Read "Heritage" by Justin Torres (also in *America Street*, page 31). Focus on the way that dance and music is described. Compare and contrast.
4. Read "Business at Eleven" by Toshio Mori (also in *America Street*, page 139). Compare and contrast the portrayal of the Great Depression in each.
5. Research the Great Depression. Bring in a few details or statistics to share about that time in American history.
6. Describe the role of history in this story. Why does the author set it during a specific time, including details and timelines? What does it add to the story?
7. Describe the way the story ends. Is it hopeful or not? Is the family better off or not?

Narrative Writing

1. Write about a part of your life that typically involves music. Is it with family? By yourself? With friends? Focus on a single scene that exemplifies it.
2. Interview an older member of your family or community about something they used to do when they were your age. Did they play a musical instrument or a sport? Paint or dance? Write about it and include quotations of what they tell you.

"AMERICAN DAD, 1969" BY MARINA BUDHOS, page 155

Summary

In "American Dad, 1969," Jamila struggles with her West Indies father, whom she sees as too "foreign." She joins a protest against the Vietnam War by not participating in singing "The Star-Spangled Banner," the U. S. national anthem, at school.

Context

Marina Budhos was born in Queens, New York. She was the daughter of an Indo-Guyanese father and a Jewish-American mother who met when her father worked at the Indian Consulate in New York City. Her father was from India, from a converted Christian family, and her mother was Jewish. Because of this background, she says in a *Brooklyn Magazine* interview, "I could never assume my own story was 'representative.' I was an outsider and observer in many contexts, and yet I needed to find a way to make the particulars of my own experience reach others through storytelling. At the same time, I was raised in an international community, with many interracial and intercultural families, so I grew used to an ease of moving in and out of so many different cultural households."

In an interview at The Center for Fiction's KidsRead event, Budhos was asked about politics and fiction. She responded, "I think what interests me is the mix, the political pressures that have bearing on a young person's story. Some of my instincts as a journalist (and someone who is a voracious news reader) find their way into my YA books. As a young person, I experienced all the pangs of coming of age, but there was also a swirl of events and politics around me. I've never seen these realms as separate, really."

Discussion and Analysis

1. What is the conflict between Jamila and her father? What bothers her about her family?
2. Describe Jamila's family and Elizabeth's family. How does Jamila view the differences?
3. Why does Jamila join the protest against the Vietnam War? Why does she continue even after she gets into trouble?
4. Describe the differences in opinion between Jamila's father and Elizabeth's father about refusing to sing the national anthem. How have their individual experiences shaped their understanding of what is right?
5. Research the year 1969. What was going on that year? What were the protests focused on? Compare those events to the central themes and conflicts of this story.
6. Read "The Summer of Ice Cream" by Tope Folarin (also in *America Street*, page 110). How does each child feel about the "foreignness" of their father?
7. The students here chose not to stand for or sing the national anthem, in protest of the Vietnam War. How else has that type of protest been used?
8. Why does Budhos pair a story about Jamila's family life with a story about protesting the Vietnam War? How does that structure shape the story?

Narrative Writing

1. What would you protest if you were able to? What concerns do you have about our world?
2. Write a story about a person who chooses to join a protest.

"ALONE AND ALL TOGETHER" BY JOSEPH GEHA, page 172

Summary

"Alone and All Together" follows Libby, an Arab American teen in Chicago, who is watching the September 11, 2001, attacks on TV while she's on the phone with her sister Sally, in New York, where the attacks are taking place.

Context

Joseph Geha was born in Zahle, Lebanon. When he was two, his family moved to the United States. He grew up in Toledo, Ohio, and earned his B.A. and M.A. at the University of Toledo. He is currently professor-emeritus at Iowa State University.

In an article in the Wayne State University Press, Geha was quoted, saying that while he believes writing is a political act, he "doesn't want to press home any particular political point." Instead, he just "wants to get it right, get the subject-matter right, because writing is an expression of love."

Discussion and Analysis

1. What does the title mean? How can we be both alone and all together? Answer this both before you read, and after.
2. Why does the mother allow Libby to stay home from school? Do you think this is a good idea?
3. When Libby hears her father's voice, she says, "Hearing it, I want to be home. But I *am* home. Does that make sense?" What does she mean by "home"?
4. What events happened on 9/11/2001 that this story revolves around? How do people in this story, set in Chicago, talk about how it affected them?
5. When Libby talks about the names people call her sometimes, she distinguishes between people "being mean" and "just teasing." Do you agree? Is it okay to "tease" based on race or heritage?
6. Define bullying. Pick two relevant scenes from this story and compare them to your definition of bullying.
7. Describe the incident with "the little guy" and why Libby takes action.

Narrative Writing

1. Libby's friend, Erin, uses the word *dib*, an Arabic word meaning "a huge, clumsy guy," which she picked up from Libby. What words do you and your friends or family use that others don't use? Where did they come from?
2. What is the earliest memory you have of a major event? Perhaps it was something you saw or read about on the news, or heard people talking about at home. Describe it.
3. Interview an older relative about a memory of a significant event that occurred when they were young (an historical event that many experienced or a specific event that was personal).

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FICTION

Imagining America: Stories from the Promised Land

Edited by Wesley Brown and Amy Ling

Sudden Flash Youth: 65 Short-Short Stories

Edited by C. Perkins-Hazuka, T. Hazuka, and M. Budman

Big City Cool: Short Stories About Urban Youth

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Fishing for Chickens: Short Stories About Rural Youth

Edited by Jim Heynen

A Walk in My World: International Short Stories About Youth

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Working Days: Stories About Teenagers at Work

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NONFICTION

Going Where I'm Coming From: Memoirs of American Youth

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