Opinion
Guest Voices



(Unsplash/Becca Tapert)



by Sarah Hoyoung Ku

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 28, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

For a long time, I carried with me a memory of a picture book from my childhood. With a vague recollection of the title, I recently tracked down a used copy of *Welcome is a Wonderful Word* by Gyo Fujikawa. As a child with bookshelves filled with characters that didn't look like me, a biracial Korean and white girl, this book about a child named Meisu had been etched in my mind.

Educator Emily Style wrote that "windows and mirrors" are an integral part of learning. We need windows into experiences unlike our own to widen our understanding of the world, but we also need mirrors that reflect and validate our own story.

Growing up surrounded by windows, I struggled to find a sense of place and belonging. No one gave me the language of needing mirrors too. When I found Fujikawa's simple picture book, it illuminated my own self journey and changed the way I engaged with the world. I felt seen. For those who experience the opposite — a life with mostly mirrors and few windows — the result is also a disequilibrium; this time, the danger of an overinflated ego. When only your own story is given attention, it is difficult to empathize with and serve a diverse world.

As Catholics, we are part of a universal church. We are composed of people from ethnicities across the entire globe, all coming together as family around our faith in Jesus. Paul uses the image of the physical body to describe how the body of Christ should operate. Paul exhorts that, "there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). A healthy functioning body is one where each part is operating fully in its unique design and role.

> When only your own story is given attention, it is difficult to empathize with and serve a diverse world.
>
> Tweet this

In the United States, we are coming to the end of Asian American Pacific Islander, or AAPI, heritage month, a time where we honor and celebrate how AAPI communities have enriched American history. The following list of books by Asian and Asian American authors span childhood through adulthood. For some, these books will be mirrors to your experiences. For others, these may be windows to stories unlike your

own. For all, these books can bring balance and perspective to further your own self journey, and ultimately, your Catholic faith.

The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison, by Venerable Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. Imprisoned for his faith in Vietnam for 13 years, this book of reflections is a compilation of messages that he smuggled out from prison on small scraps of paper to Vietnamese Catholics. (Vietnamese)

More Than Serving Tea: Asian American Women on Expectations, Relationships, Leadership and Faith, edited by Nikki A. Toyama-Szeto and Tracey Gee. This collection of reflections by Protestant Asian American women explores the intersection of Asian identity and faith. (Various Asian American)

Eyes That Kiss in the Corners by Joanna Ho. This is the book that I needed as a young girl. In the absence of Asian beauty reflected in American media, Ho's empowering words exuberantly celebrate Asian features. The phrase "eyes that kiss in the corners" is a taking back of a beautiful feature that sadly, has been a source of bullying for many. (Chinese American)

Silence by Shūsaku Endō. This theological and historical fiction novel tells the story of a Jesuit priest who travels to Japan to support the local church in the early 17th century. Similar to China, Japanese Catholic Church history involved a tremendous amount of persecution. (Japanese)

It Began with a Page by Kyo Maclear. Picture book biographies are a fantastic way to learn the history of Asian Americans. This one tells the story of Gyo Fujikawa, the trailblazing woman who was one of the first to include characters of color in her work. Fujikawa is the author of *Welcome is a Wonderful Word*, the book that deeply impacted me as a child. (Japanese American)

Advertisement

Pachinko by Min Jin Lee. An epic story that follows the trajectories of four generations of a Korean family of immigrants to Japan, this is the first novel I read as an adult that felt like a mirror of my family and home. (Korean American)

A Wish in the Dark by Christina Soontornvat. A fantasy novel set in Thailand, this story is a retelling of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. One of the most meaningful parts

of the story is the friendship between Pong and Somkit, two young boys who grew up in a prison and long for freedom and connection. (Thai American)

Diaries of the Chinese Martyrs, edited by Gerolamo Fazzini. These autobiographical testimonies of Chinese Catholics imprisoned for their faith in the mid-1900s are an inspiration. (Chinese)

Boxers and Saints by Gene Luen Yang. Yang's companion graphic novels tell the story of China's Boxer Rebellion from two different perspectives. The Boxer Rebellion was a violent uprising in China against foreigners from 1899 to 1901, and many of our Chinese saints were killed during this time. (Chinese American)

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin. Lin is an absolute trailblazer in bringing forward a wide assortment of Asian American literature for children. Fantasy and adventure are found in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, a recipient of the John Newbery Medal. Lin's poetic words drip with beauty as she draws from Chinese folklore. (Chinese American)