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Towards a Relational Understanding of Food, Identity, and Diversity in Children's Literature

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TOWARDS A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD, IDENTITY, AND DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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My dissertation extends existing work on food in children's literature to examine the different narratives strategies that texts for young audiences use to connect cuisine, identity, and diversity. Three areas of scholarship—foodways scholarship, children's literature scholarship, and feminist care ethics work—inform my project. Overall, I am interested in how a variety of genres for young readers use food to represent ethnically diverse identities in complex ways as well as the ethics surrounding those representations, so it is worth delineating here the different concepts and how they are used to make sense of various representations. I theorize three categories of texts, which constitute a spectrum of narrative strategies that range from overly simplistic portrayals of food and culture to nuanced, contextual understandings of cuisine and its role in identity formation. I argue that narrative approaches which portray food in a complex web of identity tend to portray identity and representation in more thoughtful, nuanced, and productive ways.

KEYWORDS: foodways, cultural diversity, children's literature, young adult literature, feminist care ethics

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PREFACE

Food is a part of every human's life, and it is often woven throughout our stories. I'd known this long before I began obsessively consuming cooking shows on PBS and food documentaries on Netflix. There was just something about seeing chefs and eaters talk about their foods, their choices, their cuisines, their ideas—anything to do with food really—that had me glued to my television, my stomach constantly growling. Around the time when my obsession with food documentaries was at its peak, I was also discovering my love for Korean food as I learned about Korean culture and watched Korean dramas. I approached my professor about writing my final paper on Korean picture books, and she asked me to consider whether I should write about these books. I was, quite frankly, taken aback: I felt like she was implying that I was not the right person to write about these books or, that as a white person, I might do harm by writing about Korean texts. I consider myself to be someone who lives by a strong sense of ethics, someone who tries to think about my privilege and how it impacts how I interact with the world around me, so I was a little angry to think that my professor might be making that assumption about me. Little did I know that this interaction, this very question of "Am I approaching this wrong?" would help me begin articulating so many of the ways I have had to work through how my privilege impacts my interactions with food.

Instead of writing about Korean picture books, I turned to my undergrad notes to think about something else I could talk about for the course's final paper, and I found some thoughts I jotted down from a class conversation about how food and diversity were often paired together, which piqued my interest since I had been spending so much time on food shows. As I began my research, with simple search terms like "food" and "multicultural picture books," I realized that some of the ways people were talking about these books were…not great. While I was sitting

with these books and thinking about what I was noticing, I began to think about how I approach food in the world, and I was struck by this sudden thought—*am I consuming Korean food (and culture) in a problematic way*? *Am I ethically eating Korean food*? No one had ever said this to me; no one was standing over my shoulder when I ate kimchi/김치 or slurped spicy instant Korean ramen/라면 for the first time. I didn't *feel* like I was doing anything wrong. Eating is something that makes us human. To my dismay, I began to realize that how we view others through their food is not always humanizing. This realization stemmed from my whiteness—I had (and have) never experienced anyone making fun of me for the ingredients my family used. Even when someone raised an eyebrow at us for eating corn pudding, there was no underlying question about my humanity. I was never in danger because of what I ate.

That does not mean to say I cannot speak to the experience of people—including my mother, sweet woman that she is—turning up their nose at us as my father, uncle, grandfather, cousins, and I would devour chitterlings, or pork intestines, which we coated in batter, fried so they were extra crispy, and covered in hot sauce. I can definitely acknowledge that, when I think about wasting food, I can hear my grandmother's voice in the back of my head saying "it's probably alright" or "you can just cut that spot off" because saving food and scrimping by is just something we did. But because of my race and ethnic identity, I never had to question what I ate or how others might think about what I ate.

I sat and asked myself this question that I knew I couldn't solve by watching food documentaries but also couldn't keep from fixating on—*what do I do about how I eat food*? Since I studied children's and young adult literature, I continued to turn to the books and scholarship I knew best and found that no one was drawing together all of these threads—food, children's literature, diversity, questions of ethics. And so my dissertation topic was born.

As a white woman, I have had to ask myself a lot of questions about why I am doing this project and why I am the person to ask these questions. At an important conference in my field, a senior scholar even asked me those kinds of questions, which has helped me to think about why I care about this work and why I find it essential. Around the time I began exploring foodways scholarship, I also began reading theories about feminist care ethics, and I found that both fields often talked about relationships, relationality, and responsibility, though only care ethics uses those specific terms. Those ideas struck me as a way to impact my world, to ask questions about how my life and my choices are entangled with those around me. Much of what I have researched has helped me think about how and why I food adventure; how food has been racialized and marginalized, although we so often like to pretend that it hasn't; and how privileged people (especially white people) continue to appropriate cuisine without considering its origins, its nuances, its contexts, and its ties to historical oppression and colonialism. Many food books for young audiences are marketed to white readers to assuage their worries about those "other" cuisines, and I often recognize a version of myself as I analyze the implied readers of these texts, which helps me situate myself as I examine these narratives. I am not saying that culinary fusion is wrong or trying new recipes inherently perpetuates harm; what I am saying is that we need to ask more questions about how we interact with, eat, and read foodways because, sometimes, those actions do hurt individuals and communities. I certainly do not have all of the answers about how we attend to food or what children's literature needs to do. Rather, my project is a first step in emphasizing how I can use my privilege to better the world around me by modeling critical reading, analysis, and tough-question asking (if such a phrase may be used in academic spaces).

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION—APPARENTLY, EVERYBODY EATS RICE

So far, no connection in the study of children's literature has been made among food studies, diversity studies, and children's literature studies, even as these three fields overlap in examining diversity and identity. My dissertation extends the existing work on food in children's literature, which combines food and literary studies, to examine the different narrative strategies used by texts for young audiences to connect cuisine, identity, and diversity. I argue that narrative approaches which portray food within a complex web of identity result in more thoughtful, nuanced, and productive depictions of identity and cultural diversity.

Thinking About How We Eat: The Importance of Foodways

Food studies itself is characterized by its focus on foodways, which Lucy Long defines as "the *network* of behaviors, traditions, and beliefs concerning food, including the procurement, preservation, preparation, presentation, and performance of that food" ("Introduction" 8, emphasis added). In this way, food studies scholarship tries to account for all of the ways that humans eat, interact with, cultivate, manage, and think about food, and the field often emphasizes the tensions that exist within the ways we eat and frame food. One of the major goals of foodways scholarship is to reclaim and/or reaffirm a thoughtful and intentional study of food. Scholars like Raymond Boisvert and Lisa Heldke approach foodways through philosophical understandings of food's role in our social interactions. In *Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human*, Boisvert and Heldke start with the question, "how are we to eat?" and they highlight how humans are hungry creatures, an idea through which they orient the rest of their philosophical inquiry (8). As they explore this question, Boisvert and Heldke interrogate a traditional mind-body duality where food and hunger are associated with the body and are, thus,

less serious. They argue that basing philosophical inquiry on this question reveals how "[t]he stomach, beneficiary of good recipes ingested, cannot be thought of as isolated, self-sufficient" because "[it] must be part of a context, of a setting in which possibilities of satiation are present" (170). Their argument works to undermine philosophy's prioritizing of rationality above all else as they underscore that seeing hunger (and, by extension, eating) as an innate part of human nature provides a concrete way to conceptualize how "humans are integrated creatures whose emotional, affective, intelligent, social dimensions must somehow work together" and how this can be theorized throughout other human activities (164). This commentary on food's role in social structures is also highlighted by Peter Scholliers in "Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present," in which he examines how food has been tied with identity and identification. The thread of how, what, and why humans eat exists as a key question across these varied approaches, which underscores food's significant role in how we come to understand ourselves and each other.

Food studies, as a field, also works against the idea that anything to do with the body is less objective, not rational, and, hence, not worthy of study. For instance, foodways scholars seek to understand how the different aesthetic, sensual qualities of food have impacted how humans define themselves through food. In *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu*, Dan Jurafsky traces food histories through language, emphasizing how language provides a way to think about the material conditions and nature of food, while Emily Brady connects the sensory qualities of food with aesthetics in "Smells, Tastes, and Everyday Aesthetics," arguing that this new aesthetic awareness can be helpful "in orienting us in our environment and contributing to its meaning and value" (77). This sensory aspect of food studies is also a thread in Yi-Fu Tuan's "Pleasure of the Proximate Senses: Eating, Taste, and Culture," Pierre Bourdieu's "Taste of

Luxury, Taste of Necessity," and Carolyn Korsmeyer's "Perspectives on Taste," which is her introduction to the edited collection, *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, of which Tuan's and Bourdieu's essays are a part. Korsmeyer establishes that taste has been historically perceived as an inferior sense, indicating that "one of the reasons that the sense of taste has traditionally been relegated to the status of the lower sense is the presumption that taste is relatively inarticulate, that foods and flavors do not convey meaning as the objects of sight and hearing do" (5). Throughout the rest of the collection, scholars undermine the idea that taste is an inferior sense, and they provide new insights into why taste is a sense that should be taken seriously, especially as it relates to culture, identity, and human interactions. Tuan's essay, for instance, compares eating practices from Europe and China to explore how "eating/tasting is a cultural activity in its own right" (227). In his work, Bourdieu points out how taste cannot be separate from other contexts, that is, "tastes in food cannot be considered in complete independence from the relationship to the world, to others and to one's own body, through which the practical philosophy of each class is enacted" (76). In this quotation, Bourdieu also connects taste to class, again emphasizing how taste represents and is connected to far more than just an individual eating. Overall, these scholars emphasize taste as an important sensory element of eating and culture, pushing back on how taste has been undervalued in philosophy and other scholarship more broadly.[1]

Korsmeyer interrogates a viewpoint of taste that has classist, racist, aetonormative, and

[1] The study of children's literature also has been undervalued for similar reasons, so the field has pushed back on the idea that literature for young audiences is less serious and less intellectual in that children are less knowledgeable than adults.

oppressive connotations, too, which connects to how people have continually been marginalized for their sense of taste. In the introduction to *Reimagining Marginalized: Global Processes, Local Places*, Elizabeth Finnis begins the discussion of marginalized foods with this comment: "When we use the term *marginal*, we specifically refer to distinct foods and culinary practices that have tended to be associated with peripheral or non-elite populations and cultural groups; these may include indigenous cultures, migrants, or local groups that have been, at least officially, subsumed by notions of one coherent, national, and dominant whole" (1, emphasis in original). Finnis addresses how these foods existing on the periphery reveal the ways people are perceived, as foods are equated with different value judgments. Finnis acknowledges how "A food that one group considers inedible, inappropriate, or low status may play important roles in dietary diversity or the creation and maintenance of social bonds, identity, and livelihoods for another" while "what is understood as exotic and rare in one context may be associated with scarcity and poverty in another" (1). In these ways, foods can be used to assign negative stereotypes to marginalized communities, further oppressing them. Similarly, John Germov points out how "Class has long been associated with food consumption, exemplified by the alleged 'good taste' and 'good manners' of the upper classes compared to the working class. Such pejorative views with moralistic overtones are still evident today" (265). How we view people through their foods, then, becomes significant in how those people are treated because of how they eat, which is something at stake in literature for young audiences that seeks to represent diverse cuisines and cultures.

These differing value judgments of food reaffirm how food *should* be taken seriously in scholarly circles since it plays such a significant role in our lives and because it can have lasting repercussions and consequences when it is not taken seriously. This mutual understanding of

cuisine and culture is not always easy nor is it ever apolitical or innocent, so food studies scholars also interrogate issues of authenticity, tourism, and food experiences with "other" cultures to redefine how eaters experience, think about, and, of course, eat ethnic cuisines. As Lucy Long points out, "Culinary tourism is more than trying new and exotic foods," indicating that "[t]he basis of tourism is a perception of otherness, of something being different from usual" ("Introduction" 1). Eaters approaching food in this way often partake in an "us versus them" mentality. Long further defines how "Otherness in relation to food tends to be thought of as cuisines representing ethnicity or exotic cultures vastly different from one's own. Food, however, can represent many types of other: time-related, religious/ethical, regional, gendered, age-related, and socioeconomic as well as the more common cultural or ethnic" ("Introduction" 11). These definitions of otherness, while broadly categorized, are central to food studies' emphasis that food is not an innocent medium and is an integral aspect of human identity.

Lois Stanford also addresses these issues of culinary tourism in "When the Marginal Becomes the Exotic: The Politics of Culinary Tourism in Indigenous Communities in Rural Mexico," in which Stanford describes the effects of culinary tourism on "indigenous cuisine and women chefs in the highlands of Michoacán, Mexico" (67). Through her research, Stanford identifies how "the indigenous foods traditionally produced in small fields and gardens for consumption within the Purhépecha community are physically and metaphorically transformed as they are extracted out of their home environments for presentation to outsiders," stating that "the transformation process is characterized by fundamental changes in the cultural meaning of the food, the role of the chef, and the control over the cultural knowledge related to food" (83). Stanford emphasizes how these interactions, while they benefit a group of tourists, have long-lasting, negative effects on the indigenous communities whose heritage and knowledge are being

stolen. “The farther the food is carried from the indigenous community,” Stanford says, “the more superficial the foodways become” (83). Through this process, these indigenous communities are repeatedly marginalized and consequently othered.

Lisa Heldke, in *Exotic Appetites*, theorizes othering relationships related to food as well, critiquing her own food adventuring as a form of *cultural food colonialism*. Heldke defines this phenomenon with two eater qualities: “their often obsessive interest in and appetite for the new, the obscure and the exotic; and their treatment of dominated cultures not as genuine cultures, but as resources for raw materials that serve their own interests” (*Exotic Appetites* 7). Heldke concludes that the solution to avoiding cultural food colonialism (what she calls becoming an anticolonial food adventurer) means respecting cultures and their cuisines by undermining one’s own problematic ways of consuming foods (and cultures).[2] Relatedly, Long acknowledges that “the motivations for eating particular foods are complex and varied,” and they are not simply or easily defined as “[t]he political intertwines with the personal, the individual with the communal, and the aesthetic with the functional” (“Introduction” 2). Paying attention to eaters’ motivations in foodways scholarship reveals the tensions underlying eaters’ experiences of cuisines and cultures, particularly those of which they are not a part.

Some food scholars think about these cultural implications of food by examining the politics of culinary authenticity, calling into question what culinary authenticity means and how it reifies othering ideologies about ethnicity and culture. For instance, Robert Ji-Song Ku, in

[2] Nick Dreher has taken up Heldke’s framework in “Food from Nowhere: Complicating Cultural Food Colonialism to Understand Matcha as Superfood” to expand how the concept of cultural food colonialism can be used to understand ethnic foods in the health food space.

Dubious Gastronomy: The Cultural Politics of Eating Asian in the USA, discusses authenticity and eaters' responses to Asian cuisines, highlighting the fraught relationships between Americans and the foods they consume. Ku questions "the absolutism of [culinary] authenticity by considering the cultural politics of the dubious, with the hopes of demonstrating that authenticity is both an illusion and a trap" (4). Authenticity serves as an illusion because it is easier to package a cuisine as a homogenous entity than recognize the far more diverse reality. The very idea of culinary authenticity, then, works as a trap to impact negatively those whose cuisines are being eaten and consequently exploited. Through Ku's reframing of authenticity, eaters can learn to see an entire cuisine as, itself, inherently diverse, which allows us to avoid further homogenizing a culture based on an (often) assumed and unquestioned authenticity.

Similarly, through autoethnographic methods, Sonia Ryang considers how the diasporic contexts of Korean communities, especially across the United States, shape and define Korean cuisine in her book *Eating Korean in America: Gastronomic Ethnography of Authenticity*. Ryang focuses on "[s]tudying the ways in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed," while also acknowledging that "the experience of eating remains such a personal thing, mostly embedded in the context of family life" (xi). Ryang emphasizes the need to think about food contextually on a global scale, while also accounting for the personal, individual food experiences that happen in everyday life. In this way, she highlights the public and private spaces where food exists, suggesting a more balanced understanding of food. In particular, I find that Ryang's discussion of interaction between outward-facing spaces (others) and inward-facing spaces (self) is a conceptual framework similar to one found in feminist care ethics, which I employ to understand the ethical implications of how food is portrayed in texts for young audiences.

Literary Foodways

The field of food studies thus emphasizes the contextual web surrounding how we eat, experience, and appreciate food, and scholars theorize what is at stake when food, cuisines, and cultures are not perceived in multifaceted ways. In literary food studies, the focus on food works slightly differently as the medium being studied is no longer an actual, physical (material) food but a linguistic representation of a material food. However, literary scholars still attend to food's multidimensional qualities because how individuals *read* food is as significant as how those same individuals eat food. Foodways are complex precisely because of the ways our bodies and senses respond to foods' various qualities; because of how food is tied to our personal identities; because of the relationships we form with and through food; and because of the ways we receive, cultivate, and prepare food. All these aspects of food appear in literary representations of food: even if a reader is not *eating* that food, they are likely still thinking about these qualities of food when they read.

Scholars studying literary representations of food outside of children's literature interrogate cultural and ethnic representations of identity as it is tied to food, as Wenying Xu does in *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*. In this book, Xu attends to the role food plays in Asian-American literature, asserting that "the rich culinary materials in Asian American literature have also come about because Asian Americans have been racialized, gendered, and classed through their involvement with food by restrictive U.S. immigration laws, limited occupational options, and media representations" (13). Analyzing various literary representations, Xu discusses the cultural and political implications of ethnic foodways. In her book *Tasting Difference: Food, Race, and Cultural Encounters in Early Modern Literature*, Gitanjali Shahani "traces the colonial histories and racial formations by which people become

food, by which subjects become edible objects" (11). Shahani does not concentrate on one culture or cuisine in particular but instead "analyzes nascent discourses of racial, cultural, and religious alterity that emerged in the wake of English contact with foreign peoples and foreign foods from across the globe" (15). Focusing on sixteenth and seventeenth century texts, Shahani looks to how literature helps us understand historical contact between cultures and cuisines that created and reproduced people as subjects through their food.

Literary scholars also focus on how people work through their sense of cultural identity alongside the foods they eat. For instance, Lan Dong discusses literature about childhood experiences in particular in her work "Eating Different, Looking Different: Food in Asian American Childhood." Dong considers "how American-born children of Asian descent understand their identity and bicultural heritage through the culinary habits that they adopt in childhood from their families" (138). Through her analysis, Dong points out how food exists as an essential part of the way two different narrators conceptualize their girlhoods. Dong's work does not focus on children's texts specifically, but her analysis emphasizes the role food plays in how we form our identities. The scholars I have discussed above, like Dong, explore foodways from a multitude of perspectives, and they are all connected by an emphasis on how important food is to the way people live and understand themselves. Similar ideas are often explored in children's literature scholarship with additional attention paid to the age of intended readers and characters.

Relevant Themes in the Study of Children's Literature

When authors depict food, readers learn a lot about the characters and their motivations, and, in literature for young audiences, this is no different. Indeed, food is a recurring element in

children's literature, as Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard acknowledge in the introduction to their edited collection *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature*. "Food experiences," Keeling and Pollard write, "form part of the daily texture of every child's life from birth onwards, as any adult who cares for children is highly aware; thus it is hardly surprising that food is a constantly recurring motif in literature written for children" (10). But what sort of questions might we have about how readers consume (or are encouraged to consume) the foods they find in these books? My project considers several major themes in children's literature scholarship, including didacticism and diversity along with food, identity, and relationships, to begin unpacking this question.

Didacticism and Diversity

As a genre, children's literature has often been defined by a dynamic between instructing children (educating children about moral, religious, and social values) and delighting them (providing texts that please and entertain). Clémentine Beauvais writes that "Didactic literature for children—namely, for religious and moral instruction—was the origin of children's literature itself" and, as such, "didacticism is in the DNA of children's literature" (57). Literature for young audiences focuses on education and teaching children about the world in which they live, which makes the genre frequently didactic and inherently ideological. Along these lines, Carrie Hintz and Eric Tribunella note how "Children's literature is a key site for transmitting values and educating children," which "has a profound impact on socialization and society" (34). As such, children's literature represents one way that adults, in both explicit and implicit ways, seek to educate children about societal values. Describing how food, in particular, works in children's literature, Carolyn Daniel points out that, "When adults write about and for children…they also

disclose cultural concepts of adulthood and attitudes toward the child" (1-2). Keeling and Pollard, in *Table Lands*, emphasize something similar when they write about how historical "cookbooks [for example] show a changing set of adults' expectations of skills based on shifting ideologies of child capability" (7). By focusing on the ideological messages found in children's texts, "we gain a stronger understanding of the broader culture we live in" (Hintz and Tribunella 34). Beyond these didactic characteristics are literature's aesthetic qualities: rich imagery in picture books certainly comes to mind along with exquisite prose found in novels and chapter books written for middle grade and young adult audiences. "The history of children's literature is marked not only by didacticism and the impulse to instruct but also by literary innovation and artistry," Hintz and Tribunella emphasize (37). Even so, "With the advent of a distinct market for children's literature during the mid eighteenth century," they add, "a struggle ensued within the enterprise of children's literature between the adult belief that children's books should be educational and the creative and commercial impulse to entertain children and to craft literary works for them" (Hintz and Tribunella 99-101). Simply put, "didacticism occurs in tension with pleasure and artistry" (Hintz and Tribunella 101).

Beyond this tension between didacticism and aesthetics, scholars often attend to how texts for young audiences uphold or challenge normative ideologies, in particular issues of diversity, representation, and inequity. Likewise, various academic and public conversations recognize the importance of discussing representation and diversity. As Michelle H. Martin points out, "Many of us advocate for this change not only in the public spheres where the books are produced but also in the educational pipelines where we prepare the next generation of teachers, librarians, education and youth professionals, and thinkers" (94). Without this advocacy, educational leaders simply reproduce what they know about literature for young

people, which Martin states "is too often the white canon" (94). Additionally, scholars who discuss how children are represented in texts highlight issues with diverse representation more generally, emphasizing how representation is about quality, not just quantity. When scholars studying children's literature focus on the intersections of youth identity with cultural, racial, and ethnic identity, they often highlight how all youth should see themselves represented positively within a range of texts written for young readers. Rudine Sims Bishop famously describes the importance of mirrors in children's text, arguing that, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" ("Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors"). Windows, Bishop adds, are also important: "Children from dominant social groups," she writes, "have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others" and that these readers "need windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds. They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans" ("Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors"). Thus, the *qualities* of representation matter just as much as the quantity of books representing various identities.

These conversations about the need for both more *and* better representation happen in online movements and spaces as well as through academic and disciplinary-specific criticism. Movements like We Need Diverse Books and #OwnVoices also emphasize the work that authors and the publishing industry need to do to celebrate marginalized stories and experiences, especially since children's literature publishing predominantly portrays white characters more often than characters of color (Huyck and Dahlen). When looking at the books that do represent characters of color, we must acknowledge how "[t]he shelves of libraries and bookstores remain

full of children's books that present themselves as culturally authentic and yet distort, misrepresent, or caricature their subjects," Sarah Park Dahlen points out ("Authenticity" 25). Edited collections like *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors through Reading*, edited by Jamie Campbell Naidoo and Sarah Park Dahlen, cover a range of topics, from critical analysis of cultural and ethnic representation to specific recommendations about how to read diverse youth texts or choose texts for a library collection or syllabus. Similarly, journals like *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* approach scholarship about diversity by "uplift[ing] academic work with the goal of considering the ways young people's texts reflect or depart from accurately portraying the heterogeneity of human experiences," as Katherine Slater explains (1).

As the aforementioned scholars demonstrate, there are many ways to consider how books seek to represent diversity—and food is one of the many ways authors do this as they help readers understand different cultures, customs, and ideologies through the foods the characters eat and explore. Certainly, food is an inescapable aspect of our lives, histories, and cultures. As Carolyn Daniel writes in *Voracious Children: Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature*: "Food events are always significant, in reality as well as in fiction" because "They reveal the fundamental preoccupations, ideas, and beliefs of society" (1). Food is ideological material, and it communicates to us about who we are and how we interact with one another. As Daniel and Keeling and Pollard establish, the didactic qualities of these texts cannot be ignored, even when the sensual, aesthetic qualities of food are invoked.

Food, Identity, and Relationships

The tie between food, childhood, and children is a central theme in children's literature scholarship like Keeling and Pollard's *Table Lands: Food in Children's Literature*. In their

second book on food in children's literature, Keeling and Pollard observe that food and identity have long been connected throughout children's and young adult literature, emphasizing the important ways that food comes to represent as well as complicate identity. Carolyn Daniel in her book *Voracious Children* also considers the literary qualities of food and eating, focusing on the metaphorical nature of food in texts. As previously mentioned, Keeling and Pollard in their earlier edited collection, *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature,* help establish a literary focus and analysis of food in children's texts, which serves as an early example of children's literature scholars attending to food. Overall, children's scholars discussing these ties between food, childhood, and identity seek to better understand how and why these themes are connected.

Scholars like Genny Ballard and Lan Dong also analyze connections between food and identity in texts for young audiences, focusing on cultural identity in particular. In "The Keys to the Kitchen: Cooking and Latina Power in Latin(o) American Children's Stories," Genny Ballard focuses on how young girls learn to cook through the relationships they share with their older female mentors. In particular, she "examine[s] the acquisition of knowledge regarding food and cooking as a right [sic] of passage for young women in contemporary children's stories from three different cultural groups: rural Cuba, the United States/Mexican border, and Chicanos in the Unites States" (167). Ballard argues that, together, the food and mentoring relationships are responsible for the girls' coming of age. Similarly, Lan Dong's essay on food in texts representing Vietnamese protagonists considers the role that food plays in characters understanding their cultural identities in "Consuming Vietnamese America One Bite at a Time: *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* and *Inside Out & Back Again*." Dong analyzes how "the young narrators' interstitiality is closely tied to their dislocation and in-betweenness and is particularly

manifested in food and food practices" (147-148). Through her analysis, Dong considers the main characters' "negotiation among multiple cultural elements between Americans and American culture and newly arrived Vietnamese immigrants in their respective struggles to form their own identities" (147). Dong's analysis links together food, negotiation, and relationships as part of cultural identity, considering them alongside what it means for Vietnamese culture and cuisine to be represented in texts for young audiences.

What Dong and Ballard highlight here are story elements that a relational framework of food also prioritizes. Dong and Ballard themselves do not use feminist care ethics to describe the literature in this way, and, certainly, this is not necessary for their analyses. However, by connecting relationships to individual identity formation, they underscore a key theme across the other scholarly work I have mentioned from food studies, diversity studies, and children's literature criticism that has yet to be fully developed: accounting for the relationships that we all exist in and how these relationships characterize food interactions. One way to better understand this theme is through a care ethics framework of relationality, which is the idea that we all exist in relationship with one another and that we should prioritize these relationships as we make ethical decisions.

Feminist Care Ethics: Responsibility, Relationships, and Care

Relationality is a key framework in care ethics because it names the often invisible ways that our relationships make us who we are and affect how we act. As a field of study, care ethics stems from Carol Gilligan's work in *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* where she contends with studies done by scholars like Lawrence Kohlberg, arguing that Kohlberg's study does not account for women's voices and experiences. In this influential

work, Gilligan focuses on the different voice she hears across women's stories about moral decision making, which she describes as an ethic of care. Gilligan posits this ethic as different from an ethic of justice, which considers ethics in terms of rules and universal principles: according to an ethic of justice, an ethical dilemma can be resolved through a particular solution that is universally recognized by everyone and recognizing these universal principles is a sign of moral development. An ethic of care instead emphasizes that ethical dilemmas are individual and unique and solving such dilemmas always requires paying attention to context; a contextual understanding of ethical situations includes the ways individuals relate to each other, the characteristics of these relationships, and the responsibilities individuals feel in those relationships. As such, Gilligan points out, "[t]his ethic [of care], which reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships, evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent" (74). Scholars working in feminist care ethics expand on these ideas about relationships to argue that relationality is what makes people who they are. Nel Noddings, for instance, asserts that care ethics is based in the idea that "[w]e become individuals only within relations. We are recognizable individuals as separate physical entities, but the attributes that we exhibit as individuals are products of the relations into which we are cast" (*The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality* 58). Through our relationships with others, we come to learn about ourselves. From a care ethics perspective, "Our identity is generated substantially through how others see and respond to us, rather than emerging solely from within ourselves," Marian Barnes, Tula Brannelly, Lizzie Ward, and Nicki Ward note in the introduction to *Ethics of Care: Critical Advances in International Perspective* (3). Moreover, Catherine Manners Bucolo points out "[c]are ethics takes into account the interconnected nature of our world, and the vulnerabilities and dependencies of those who live in it," (1). Seeing the world as interconnected means

accounting for both the positive elements of relationships as well as the downsides and complications that human interactions manifest. As such, Barnes, Brannelly, Ward, and Ward note, "care is difficult, situated, [and] complex and requires in-depth understanding of care needs that cannot be achieved without interpersonal activities" (16-7). By extension, caring, interpersonal activities require a nuanced understanding of ideological structures and systems that continue to marginalize various groups of people. Scholars such as Nicki Ward and Olivia Hankivsky assert that care ethics must account for more intersectional understandings of identity and relationships. Just as identity and relationships are contextual, so too must be the care that is provided as a response to individual intersecting identities. Practicing this kind of care means paying attention to how and when marginalized individuals ask for care, which also involves recognizing how power dynamics are involved in providing care as well as valuing the work that marginalized communities and scholars are already doing so as not to provide care that is unwanted or, even worse, further harms those communities. Overall, care ethics scholarship argues that someone cannot care for someone else without listening to their stories and their needs—all of them, even when they intersect, diverge, contradict, and confound.

One way to accomplish this kind of care work is to understand that, as Nicki Ward points out, "identity is formed and experienced through relationships of power and knowledge" ("Care ethics" 58). Feminist care ethics emphasizes how carers, scholars, readers, and theorists should acknowledge power differentials in any relationship in order to enact care in a way that repairs damage done from social inequities, rather than perpetuate those social inequities in the name of "care." Thus, care "involves the relationship between people, assessments of sameness and difference and diversity, but also the relationship between individuals and the sociopolitical structures experienced relationally" ("Care ethics" 67). Care ethics, as a field of study, is

working to attend to these power dynamics and systemic inequities. Hankivsky asserts that the field needs to acknowledge that "complex versions of care theory fall short because they center and prioritize gender and gendered manifestations of power" (262). Critiquing care ethics, Hankivsky further points out that "when care scholars consider factors beyond gender, they are inclined to add race and class rather than consider the ways in which these are co-constructed in multiple ways and with various effects" (252). This "additive" way of understanding identity can be better informed by intersectional theory, Hankivsky asserts, stating that "theorizing around social locations, differences, experiences of inequality, and power need to be further developed" (262). As care ethics grows as a field, intersectional contexts must be accounted for, a mindset I will highlight throughout the work of my dissertation.

Catherine Manners Bucolo applies care ethics theory to the typical American diet, providing a distinct way to understand the fact that how and what we eat has consequences far beyond our own immediate contexts. She argues that "Accepting that we are intrinsically linked to one another can give us a better understanding of how our actions impact others, and how we possess the capabilities to better the lives of others" (Bucolo 1). Accounting for the myriad ways that humans are connected and drawn together, care ethics emphasizes that no universal solution exists for the moral dilemmas that humans face throughout their lives: instead, ethical decisions must focus on the contextual realities of every dilemma for a solution to be found, while prioritizing and maintaining relationships through these decisions. Care ethics, along with food studies and children's literature scholarship, provide the groundwork for defining what is at stake in children's texts seeking to teach about or represent cultural diversity through food.

Brief Notes on Multiculturalism, Diversity, and Intersectionality

The three areas I have described above—foodways scholarship, children's literature scholarship, and feminist care ethics work—inform my project. Overall, I am interested in how a variety of genres for young readers use food to represent ethnically diverse identities in complex ways as well as the ethics surrounding those representations, so it is worth delineating different concepts scholars discuss and how they can be used to make sense of various representations. Some of these texts proudly bear the label *diverse*, while others claim to be *multicultural*. But the terms *multicultural* and *diverse* have slightly different meanings, as Ebony Elizabeth Thomas explains: "[*m*]*ulticultural* was initially intended as a term inclusive of cultures beyond race and ethnicity, but it did not sufficiently address recent attention to growing awareness of differences in gender, sexual orientation, religion, and immigration status; cultural and linguistic differences; disabilities, and Native peoples as sovereign nations" (65). In this way, *multiculturalism* initially referenced an idea of "culture" connected not just to ethnic and racial histories but also the shared experiences of different groups of people within different identity categories. Yet *multicultural* as a term did not entirely suffice, continues Thomas; instead, "the term *diverse* emerged as a way to include a broader range of identity in literature," although she acknowledges that, "[s]ince it often functions as a synonym for *nonwhite*, the term *diversity* can occlude the difference it strives to make visible by not naming the many varieties of human experience that its users want literature to include" (65-66). Through these discussions, Thomas outlines how these terms have been taken up in different ways. In pop culture and education contexts, in particular, readers and teachers use *multicultural* to describe texts that discuss various cultures; even so, some academics reject the term *multiculturalism* as a term because they associate it with an all-too-easy box-checking approach to inclusivity.

Just because multiple cultures are represented does not mean that representation is done well or ethically, which is something especially applicable to multiculturalism but also relevant to how we conceptualize diversity. Sometimes readers, parents, and teachers miss the mark as they look for texts that celebrate and discuss diversity because they choose books without critical awareness about how the terms *multicultural* and *diversity* are more nuanced. If the term *multicultural* is supposed to be a way to point out identities that have been historically marginalized, underrepresented, and misrepresented, then the term should not just mean representing more than one culture nor should the term focus our attention too narrowly on ethnicity and race so that we miss other important cultural elements that make up an individual's identity. As scholars studying intersectionality point out, someone's identity exists at the axes of all sorts of different components of who they are. In "Rethinking Care Ethics: On the Promise and Potential of an Intersectional Analysis," Olena Hankivsky writes:

> gender, race, sexual orientation, geographic location, immigrant status, ability, and class, among other factors, converge to produce a social location that is different than just the sum of its parts. A central tenet of intersectionality theory is that social identities are not mutually exclusive and do not operate in isolation of each other, nor is it sufficient to simply 'add' them to each other to create a lens for examining social locations, experiences, and concomitant needs. (255)

Thus, identity is multi-layered and complex, and, as different identity categories intersect, these intersections form different, unique experiences. These intersections are completely different experiences than being Asian and being queer, for instance. Representation cannot happen equitably, then, if identity categories are seen as checkboxes and books are considered "multicultural" or "diverse" because a box is checked, for example, with a simple representation

of nonwhite race or ethnicity.

Such ways of thinking about *multicultural* and *diverse* characterize one-dimensional understandings of identity that do not account for the myriad contexts and experiences that form who we see ourselves to be. This one-dimensional thinking becomes apparent, for instance, when we examine how some readers describe books they see as *multicultural* or *diverse*. For example, when I began to research this topic, I found an abundance of blogs and websites aimed at parents that compiled lists of picture books which are supposed to help children learn about other cultures through their foods. These bloggers and writers focused on food as a singular identity point, which raised questions for me about what teaching children to appreciate food and culture actually means. In general, these authors seem to imply that food is something easy for readers (especially *young* readers) to consume and understand. In their respective posts, each writer spends time explaining what a book teaches about another culture; they repeatedly diminish the process of understanding complex ethnic identities and cultures into reading about a snippet of food that young readers can easily digest. For instance, on her blog Pragmatic Mom, blogger Mia Wenjin in her post "17 Wonderful Multicultural Picture Books About Food" states, "My favorite way to learn about *other cultures is through food*. It can be intimidating to cook a new ethnic cuisine for the first time, so consider this list a menu of sorts to decide if there is anything you want to make at home" (emphasis added). On another website, InCultureParent, in an article called "A Multicultural Feast: 7 Fun Children's Books on Food," Meera Sriram writes: "Foods embody cultures. And food-themed books are a great way to *sample and savor cultures*" (emphasis added). Heather, author of the blog *Happy Kids Kitchen*, uses the word diversity in her blog post "Culture and Cooking: Children's Books about Diversity and Food" to describe how "Cooking and eating is something *we all, as humans, have in common*, and it's *something kids*

easily relate to," stating that "[r]eading about recipes and food traditions from other cultures is a *great way to teach children to embrace* and celebrate differences across race, ethnicity, gender, and appearance" (emphasis added). These few quotations emphasize how some readers may use *multiculturalism* and *diversity* interchangeably, even though, as Thomas points out, many academics do not see the terms as synonymous. They also reiterate how different audiences and writers are using these terms in different genres for different reasons. For instance, the intended audience for the aforementioned bloggers is usually parents or adults desiring to find books that represent different identities; this group of readers is certainly different than the intended audience of the scholars I have discussed or, even, of this project, who are likely other academics. Academic conversations about diversity and issues surrounding representation, then, can provide insight for bloggers or readers who may have good intentions but may not be aware of the nuances surrounding identity that have populated academic spaces, especially as of late.

Throughout this dissertation, I will discuss paratext, academic scholarship, and pop culture conversations that use these terms in various ways (sometimes interchangeably), which may become confusing. To clarify, I thus use the term *multicultural* when I discuss authors, readers, and/or publishers who use this to describe a text; I will use *diversity* (and sometimes *intersectionality*) when I am calling for a more nuanced reading of identity and food. It seems to me that the term *diverse* is meant to encompass more than *multicultural* does: many readers and perhaps some scholars seem to see culture as something mainly or only tied to race and ethnicity, even though culture can more broadly relate to different categories and spaces of shared experiences. Even so, the texts I focus on in this dissertation usually discuss diversity in terms of racial and ethnic identities, so I will use *diverse* with the caveat that the term can also signal connections beyond racial and ethnic identities; the concept *intersectionality* points to these other

aspects of identity as well. Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the term *intersectionality* in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" to analyze the specific experiences of Black women and how they "are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (140). Crenshaw theorizes how previous analyses have ignored the ways that race and gender (and other identity categories) interact to create unique experiences that cannot be reduced to discussions of just race or just gender. *Intersectionality* as a concept has been used by other scholars to begin to account for the ways that identity is multidimensional. As Crenshaw describes in one interview, "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there" ("Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later").

Beyond these tensions in terminology, the blog posts I mentioned above also highlight a "sameness" approach to food that is not inherently problematic—but it certainly can be if readers are unaware of the unintended, colonialist consequences of the way they read food in these texts. By identifying what is the same about us and them, we are less threatened by that which is different. Such a sameness approach, then, is rooted in defensiveness.[3] However, what is chosen to represent this sameness often falls back on white, hegemonic standards of what is normal and what is different. This sameness ideology helps position culinary diversity in relationship to what

[3] Here, I use "us" and "we" to call on a generic group mindset that is oppositional.

people historically in power have found to be normal and delicious. As such, culinary diversity becomes no longer diverse at all but draws a line between the "normal" and that which is "not." As Lisa Heldke points out, "Valuing a colonized culture's cuisine primarily because I find it novel fosters a harmful relation to that culture—harmful to me and to members of that other culture" (*Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* 14). If readers are looking for "authentic" foods to represent diversity, then they may reify notions of cuisines that exoticize and other the cultures about which they are trying to learn or teach their children. Moreover, "[s]ince childhood stories transmit troubling discourses of colonialism and supremacy, it is absolutely critical that these functions of children's literature are revealed, historicized, and interrogated" (Thomas 67). Critically reading how texts talk about food means interrogating the way food is presented in these stories. Moreover, some texts may be labelled as *multicultural* or *diverse* in order to highlight the fact that these texts represent a variety of cultures, ethnicities, cuisines, and national origins. However, this *multicultural* or *diverse* label may be used regardless of whether that representation is positive or productive.

These blog posts raise another question that is related to my previous discussion on aesthetics and didacticism: the phrasing of their commentary showcases how the ultimate goal in reading these texts, for these bloggers at least, is to focus on what the texts teach, rather than appreciating their aesthetic qualities in and of themselves. In this way, there always seems to be an educational, instructive end goal for many of those who are trying to read diverse literature. In these conversations where is the aesthetic appreciation or enjoyment of food for its richness? Or delight in the food simply because food is delightful? Certainly, didactic approaches to literature do not necessarily need to be at odds with aesthetic qualities of literature. However, when aesthetic qualities are neglected to privilege didacticism, critical problems can arise, especially

surrounding issues of ideology. Food and other cultural elements should not always be used as a means to an end: what we eat and how we eat have value in and of themselves.[4] This highlights a larger tension in the books, a tension that I implicitly investigate in my dissertation: how do these texts teach ideologically through aesthetics—and to what ends?

Associating food with cultural identity does not occur only in picture books. A variety of early readers, chapter books, middle grade fiction, graphic novels, and young adult (YA) novels also approach food through this cultural identity lens. These approaches to food can be as varied as the foods themselves, so I see these texts operating across a spectrum.

The Structure of This Dissertation

In this project, I theorize three categories of food in children's and young adult literature:

- *just one bite* books, which are sampling books that involve travel or taste testing small portions of food
- *dish-specific* books, which center one food or dish, how it is prepared, and how it is eaten
- *intersectional food identity* books, which discuss cultural or ethnic identity while focusing significantly on food, cooking, or cuisine

These three categories constitute a spectrum of narrative strategies that range from overly simplistic portrayals of food and culture to nuanced, contextual understandings of cuisine and its

[4] Moreover, if books depicting food are only used to teach about other cultures, they may then only work as windows for outsiders rather than mirrors for the cuisines and cultures being depicted, to use Rudine Sims Bishops' framework ("Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors").

role in identity formation. My analysis of this spectrum emphasizes how readers can reexamine our understandings of identity and how our interactions with each other through food and culture represent those identities. "Food may be a wonderful way to begin creating a connection between Us and Them," Heldke acknowledges, "but no such connection is instantaneous, and even the flexible, interactive welcoming medium of food cannot make it so" (*Exotic Appetites* 177). In order to explore how this spectrum functions, my dissertation proposes a new way of looking at food in culturally diverse children's literature that integrates three areas of study—food, diversity in children's literature (including discussions of multicultural identity), and care ethics.

As discussed above, feminist care ethics began with Gilligan's work *In A Different Voice*, where she outlines how the ethic of care is defined by relationships, and other scholars have followed to broaden ideas of relationality. The ethics of care situates relationships and interpersonal connection at the heart of how individuals work through the world. I use feminist care ethics to analyze how texts for young audiences characterize the role that food plays in understanding, valuing, and representing diverse cultural identities. Thus, I theorize the different ways that texts for young audiences present relationships while representing and teaching about culture and identity through food. In particular, I study the narrative strategies that authors use to create texts for different kinds of young audiences, asking the following research questions:

- How do different kinds of genres and texts for audiences ranging from children to adolescents approach food in order to represent and/or teach about diversity? How are aesthetics and didacticism addressed, implicitly or explicitly?
- What ideological messages about food, as it is tied to identity, arise if we think about food in relational ways, that is, when we view food and relationships through care ethics?
- How can these ideological messages be understood in terms of implicit work (what the

text can accomplish, even if that is not its stated goal) and explicit work (what the text defines as its goal or sets out to teach)?

- How does using a feminist care ethics approach to teaching critical reading provide concrete solutions for reading food in texts for young audiences in productive (not reductive) ways?

Care ethics underscores the nuanced and relational aspects of identity, and I employ this framework to consider food's connections to identity as it appears in the primary texts I have chosen, creating a framework for relational understandings of food. As such, my project argues that food addressed in and through relationships elicits more productive conversations than when food and culture are reduced to just one bite. When food is reduced to just one bite, books establish an "us versus them" mentality, specifically by othering the food practices and cultures not associated with the protagonist of the text.

My work in this project is not meant to question the authenticity of these texts or even to definitively state whether something is authentic. I am not an expert in all of the cuisines and cultures written about in these texts, nor am an I insider of these cultures. Thus, it would be inappropriate for me to base my analysis on whether I think something is authentic or inauthentic. Instead, I approach these texts by emphasizing what work I must do as an outsider to the cultures and cuisines depicted in these texts. If I want to eat, read, and talk ethically about these foods, then I need to call into question my knowledge—both all of the knowledge I think I have and all of the knowledge I know do not have. I turn to scholars who are experts in discussing specific foodways, like Ku, who are already making arguments about culinary authenticity—and have been for years—to examine how we read food in diverse literature for young readers. When these foods are aligned with cultural, ethnic, and racial identity, readers

have specific work they can perform in order to read and think about these foods ethically, particularly when readers are positioned as outsiders to any of these cultures. We are all insiders to our own cultures and cuisines, and we are well-advised to approach food in ways that respect and ethically respond to the needs of the communities making, eating, and, if they choose, sharing these foods. Thus, my dissertation performs two functions: 1) I elucidate how and whether texts represent an ethic of care towards the foods and cultures they portray along with how and whether these narratives invite readers to respond to the foods/cultures they portray according to an ethic of care; 2) I exemplify and model the kind of intellectual work that needs to be done in order to undermine our internalized (racist, classist, etc.) ideologies about food.

Chapter Overviews

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter in this project considers a particular kind of text in children's literature—books that position food as a simple, small portion (bite) of a culture. The way that texts like this try to represent multiple cultures and cuisines raises questions about what I call the *quantity approach*. Instead of spending time on how each of these cultures and cuisines is rich and nuanced, these *just one bite* picture books create reductive stories by portraying culinary differences in superficial ways. In particular, they connect different cultures and cuisines by portraying how multiple cultures eat the same food or share similar ingredients (rice, for instance). In this chapter, I define the quantity approach that *just one bite* books take and how this approach to food and cultural diversity leads to the narratives depicting food in very similar, often homogenizing ways. As such, these texts prioritize a *sameness ideology*: *just one bite* narratives imply that showing appreciation for different cultures through what they have in common is enough to do diverse representation

justice. However, I argue that the sameness ideology in *just one bite* texts actually results in portrayals that homogenize diverse cultural identities and prioritize an essentializing view of humanity. In this chapter, I use feminist care ethics scholarship to describe how choosing to portray food according to the quantity approach and the sameness ideology does not demonstrate an ethic of care. Instead, by focusing so much on what these cuisines have in common, the narratives ironically create moments where they reinforce oppositional relationships surrounding food, which I analyze using discussions of cultural food colonialism and culinary tourism. I contend that, by representing foods and cuisines monolithically, *just one bite* books prioritize othering relationships rather than provide context and respect for the cuisines and people on which they focus.

In chapter three, I discuss *dish-specific* books, the next space in the spectrum of books written for young audiences. These books move away from the sameness ideology to incorporate more cultural context. Still, they are often fairly self-contained in that they provide a limited discussion of how food intersects with different areas of a character's life. These individual moments exemplify how *dish-specific* narratives also portray relational context surrounding the foods they describe. As such, these kinds of texts address a dynamic between unique, individual experiences and shared, cultural experiences often associated with representation. I analyze how different *dish-specific* genres (a picture book, early reader, and middle grade chapter book) work to portray food and culture in relation to characters with various cultural identities and backgrounds. One kind of *dish-specific* book, like Kevin Noble Maillard's *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story*, describes specific experiences with a cultural dish, including making, eating, sharing, and discussing the dish and how it is prepared. In another kind of *dish-specific* book, their titles specify one food while the book may be about more than just the physical food.

For instance, the titles of Angela Ahn's *Krista Kim-Bap* and Debbi Michiko Florence's *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen* associate traditional foods with the main character's name. In all of these *dish-specific* texts, the narrator-protagonists work through conflicts relating to these traditional foods, from learning to make the food to worrying about how ties to that food make other people think about them. Through these conflicts, the books articulate how so-called traditional foods become tied to and/or signify identity. I argue that *dish-specific* books create more productive, nuanced conversations about dishes than *just one bite* books because the narratives provide extended commentaries about the way that food is prepared, eaten, understood, discussed, and valued through specific cultural and relational contexts. In this chapter, I also account for paratextual elements of *dish-specific* texts (glossary, covers, recipes, author's notes, reviews, and so forth) since they can encourage readers to explore and understand the cultures and foods presented in the books in certain ways.

I continue my discussion of this spectrum in chapter four by analyzing *intersectional food identity* books, which include a picture book, a middle grade novel, and two young adult novels that use food both as a metaphor, to represent how protagonists negotiate their identities and relationships, and as a material tool to promote that negotiation. I consider how themes in these texts create opportunities for readers to see representation in intersectional and relational ways, as described through feminist care ethics. Works like Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan's *A Place at the Table* and Elizabeth Acevedo's *With the Fire on High* showcase food in complex, nuanced ways that underscore how food is valued and integrated in cultural identity formation, especially as food is a part of what I describe as their relational networks. In this chapter in particular, I implicitly contend with the idea that YA novels appear to be more complex because they are written for older audiences by including some texts for younger audiences, like picture books

and chapter books, that take a more productive approach to food: these *intersectional food* identity books present food in all of its messy, complex, and diverse reality.

My final chapter focuses on the course that I taught for the internship requirement of my doctoral program in Fall 2019, utilizing principles of anticolonial food adventuring (as defined by Lisa Heldke) and feminist care ethics. I theorize a new way of teaching critical reading to college students in a children's literature course, set within the context of food and based on feminist care ethics scholarship, which I call *relational reading*.[5] This chapter analyzes the student work I collected from my Fall 2019 course (with IRB approval), establishing the different patterns in how students took up course concepts, such as care ethics, relationality, anticolonial food adventuring, and cultural food colonialism.[6] Then, I theorize a way to teach reading that combines the fields of food studies, care ethics, and diversity in literature for young readers. I structure my course with the critical frameworks I demonstrate in earlier chapters while analyzing the spectrum of food books discussing cultural diversity: with these conceptual frameworks, I theorize how to help students minimize reductive readings of food by teaching them to consider context, including their own positionalities, as they read. I argue that students can better describe, both on a personal and an educational level, positive representations of food and culture after discussing care ethics: learning about care ethics allows them to evaluate the relationships they share with the text along with the relationships that characters in the text have

[5] I developed this theory in a course focused specifically on children's literature courses, so that is what I theorize here specifically. However, this pedagogy can be used in other literature courses as well.

[6] IRB-2019-327

with each other. Through this process, students also learn to recognize how they may read texts in reductive ways and/or in ways that perpetuate cultural food colonialism as well as marginalizing and oppressive ideologies about food. Students can also more clearly assess how different perspectives and positionalities affect how texts are read, which leads to less reductive readings of diverse stories and food.

I call this approach to teaching reading, which focuses on individuals, relationships, and negotiation, *relational reading*, which follows a three step process inspired in part by Gilligan's three stages of moral development as she defines them in her work, *In a Different Voice*:

1. Students must be aware of themselves as individuals when reading, that is, be able to understand their own relationship to the text, its cultural material, and ideologies.
2. Students must be able to identify the different kinds of relationships that they see when critically reading, that is, be able to understand how the texts they read are imbued with cultural material and ideology.

Through learning how to do these two things, students gain the critical reading skills to be able to complete the third and final step in this approach to critical reading:

3. Students must be able to negotiate their own reading of the text with other ways of reading.

Ultimately, I recommend how my theory of teaching can be used in a variety of educational settings: with this pedagogical framework, instructors can help students investigate their own ideologies and biases as well as educate students on how to use those reading skills across varied contexts to undermine marginalizing ideologies and enact social change.

Overall, my project addresses how bringing the study of food, diversity, and children's literature together into conversation with one another provides a new way of thinking about

relationships. This reasoning encourages readers to avoid taking up individual stories as the representation of an entire culture (or food) and learn about how to read (and eat) foods in more ethical ways. Food studies, for instance, asks readers to think about food, in and of itself, as a material good; at the same time, it encourages readers to recognize the important context of eating, sharing, and growing food. Scholarship on diversity and representation takes up some of these points about food but in a different way, asking us to think more specifically about the people at the heart of these cultural interactions; this field can then help readers understand food and foodways as it is connected to the humans that interact with it. Finally, care ethics gives us the language to describe how these relationships and interactions with food can be in tension with one another: recognizing context, care ethics considers how our individual desires and concerns may not always match up with those of others.

This relational approach to food helps us theorize about how to read, write, and talk about food, cultural identity, and representation in ways that reflect an ethic of care. In depicting diverse identities, texts must reckon with the tension between wanting to create individual, unique stories while also upholding the ways that people come to understand themselves through community. Once a text has entered the world, however, readers make their own choices about how to read, eat, and think about the ways foods are portrayed. Using a care ethics approach to food, readers can theorize how these texts might better portray relationships—between characters, between foods and culture—in contextual ways that recognize and honor the individual and distinct qualities of food and people. The current approach for many of these texts focuses on the connections and similarities between foods and cultures, so readers will need to work hard to read these texts in ways that prioritize a relational approach to identity. Such a priority would allow readers to take up this important work surrounding representation without

erasing the distinct and unique qualities of food and cuisines that exist alongside the connections and similarities among cultures. With these relational frameworks in mind, readers can then avoid further homogenizing food, peoples, and cultures, as they reexamine their understandings of identity and how their interactions with each other through food and culture represent those identities while they seek connection, community, and understanding. Through this process, readers can begin to consider how complicated cuisine and cultural diversity actually are, rather than experiencing some homogenized, watered down versions that skim the surface of representing various communities. Simply "representing" food—or, rather, the people making food—in a text is not the final answer for the conversation surrounding diversity, identity, and culture because it requires more nuance, more interaction, and more care. Critically reading in this way enables readers to attend more thoughtfully and ethically to the nuances of food and identity.

CHAPTER II: JUST ONE BITE—SAMPLING FOOD, CULTURES, AND IDENTITIES IN PICTURE BOOKS

What are *Just One Bite* Books?

Across the spectrum of texts discussing food in literature for young audiences, *just one bite* books take the most reductive approach. I define *just one bite* books as books that take a quantity approach to diversity that packages culture, identity, and food into small bites for readers. These small bites are usually served together, so that a book ends up focusing on multiple (more than two) cultures and foods but only during small moments. Along with this quantity approach, *just one bite* books create a sample platter of sameness by focusing on these small bites of foods that are similar across multiple cultures, such as rice, bread, or food made for specific holidays or occasions. These hors d'oeuvres may pique readers' curiosity, but the books do not serve up anything more substantial after this initial taste (even if recipes are included in the back). In this way, *just one bite* books raise questions about how quantity approaches to cultural diversity actually homogenize diversity. The importance placed on food as a facet of human and cultural interaction allows us to begin thinking more about two aspects of *just one bite* books. The first includes how *just one bite* books use food to explore relationships between various cultures, and the second focuses on whether these picture books represent an ethic of care as they depict diverse identities and/or whether these narratives present a surface-level form of representation.

In this chapter, I analyze five picture books that exemplify this genre of *just one bite* books: Norah Dooley and Peter J. Thornton's *Everybody Cooks Rice* (1991), *Everybody Bakes Bread* (1996), *Everybody Serves Soup* (2000), and *Everybody Brings Noodles* (2002); and Sandra Richards and Megan Kayleigh Sullivan's *Rice & Rocks* (2016). Utilizing food studies

scholarship and discussions of diversity and multiculturalism in children's literature, I consider how *just one bite* books attempt to create a space for child readers to learn about and appreciate multiple cultures. The texts' focus on finding connections between cuisines may be initially understood as a good gesture towards representing diversity. However, my analysis reveals how these narratives actually prioritize surface-level connection and appreciation of cultures which does not allow for nuanced depictions of foods, identities, or cultures, depictions which would lead to deeper, more productive conversations about food and cultural diversity. Instead, they represent food homogenously, overemphasizing food as something through which humans can easily connect. I outline three narratives strategies in *just one bite* books, which I analyze using feminist care ethics scholarship, to argue that these narrative strategies create reductive representations of identity. These narrative strategies might generally fall under a category of multiculturalism, but defining them more clearly allows room for authors, readers, scholars, and so forth to use multiculturalism in ways that are not so negative or narrow. Certainly, *just one bite* books are not unethical according to every system of analyzing ethics and morality; examining them within a feminist care ethics framework, though, helps reveal some of the ethical quandaries about relationships and care that these books embody. For instance, by seeking connection, these texts overshoot and prioritize a sameness ideology that minimizes difference. These unintended consequences are what I am interested in exploring in this chapter.

Defining the Connections Between Just One Bite *Books and Multiculturalism*

I would like to take the time here to define more clearly the ideas I am working with because multiculturalism is such a fraught concept and because the *just one bite* books I examine in this chapter are often called multicultural in online blogging spaces. The narrative approaches

I discuss in this chapter raise questions about an ethic of care not because they are associated with multiculturalism but because they result in reductive ways of understanding identity specifically related to the way they depict relationships. As I discussed in Chapter One, there are nuances to how the concepts *multiculturalism* and *diversity* are used to conceptualize representation differently. For instance, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas warns how *multiculturalism* can come to imply a simplistic understanding of identity (as it has become synonymous with nonwhite identity), hence why the term *diversity* has grown in popularity, especially in academic circles (65). In "Multicultural Literature and the Politics of Reaction," Joe Taxel explains how the term "refers to education that addresses the interests, concerns, and experiences of individuals and groups considered outside of the sociopolitical and cultural mainstream of American society," meaning that, "[i]n the United States, multicultural education is often interpreted as a reference to groups such as African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic Americans" (143). Both scholars emphasize how multiculturalism, as a concept, inherently describes aspects of representation, especially race and ethnicity. However, some readers, authors, and publishers employ this concept without considering the quality of representation.

Other scholars continue to raise concerns about approaches to representation that are too often surface level and/or homogenizing. In "Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech," Stanley Fish underscores a particular kind of multiculturalism that prides itself on surface-level appreciation. "Boutique multiculturalism," he writes, "is characterized by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection" (378). Fish also describes how

Boutique multiculturalists admire or appreciate or enjoy or sympathize with or (at the

> very least) "recognize the legitimacy of" the traditions of cultures other than their own; but boutique multiculturalists will always stop short of approving other cultures at a point where some value at their center generates an act that offends against the canons of civilized decency as they have been either declared or assumed. (378)

Fish describes how boutique multiculturalists accept a culture so far as it meets their expectations of what is supposedly right or authentic; when these expectations are not met, then boutique multiculturalists no longer deign to give their approval of that culture. Sarah Park Dahlen discusses specific issues with depicting authenticity in children's literature, defining how "False claims to authenticity highlight the risk of essentializing a cultural identity (by defining it too narrowly) and the problem of an outsider misrepresenting a particular community" (26). In one way, *just one bite* books can narrowly represent food, to use Dahlen's language; in another, by choosing to represent so many cultures, an author and illustrator may miss out on key ideas if they are outsiders to a culture or if they are focused on trying to represent everyone. Both Fish and Dahlen describe drawbacks to surface level ways of approaching identity, and they highlight the harm that can occur through this surface level approach.

Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard's edited collection *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature* contains essays that focus on the intersections of food and culture in a section titled "Global/Multicultural/Postcolonial Food", which demonstrates how multicultural approaches to food can be productive. When these essays were written, *diverse* was not yet beginning to replace the term *multicultural*, which means their points about food align with a more nuanced understanding of multicultural. Their analyses of multicultural food underscore stories that do not reinforce a monolithic or simplified understanding of identity, and their work implies that multicultural stories can prioritize quality representation and not just quantity. For

instance, Dong "explores how food functions as a complex signifier in representing Chinese and Japanese American identity through analyzing two memoirs about girlhood told from the child narrators' points of view" ("Eating Different" 138). Dong's analysis reveals the important ways that food becomes a part of these individuals' identities as food and cultural identity become inextricably tied together. Dong also implies that these books showcase cultural and family contexts, which is a significant part of understanding someone's identity formation especially as this happens with and through food. Similarly, Ballard analyzes how "food, cooking, and the rituals that surround them in Latino and Latin American children's literature reflect gender roles, cultural identity, and power structures inherent in family dynamics" (167). Ballard speaks to the role food plays in cultural identity formation and how the protagonists "have gained strength through" these mentoring relationships surrounding food (179). Dong's and Ballard's analyses emphasize how multiculturalism in general may not be the issue. Rather, they demonstrate how scholars can pay more attention to specific narrative choices being made that either reinforce or undermine productive conversations about identity.

Common threads appear across Thomas's, Taxel's, Fish's, Dong's, and Ballard's discussion of multiculturalism, which I use to begin identifying the narrative approaches used in *just one bite* books. These scholars caution about a kind of multiculturalism that is surface level, and they also imply that the multiplicity in multiculturalism should be handled with care, so to speak. In this chapter, I want to define more clearly how these two issues of surface-level appreciation and representing multiple cultures, described in various ways by these scholars, manifest specific problems in children's picture books about food. First, this chapter addresses how multiculturalism often equates to a quantity of representation, with little regard for the quality of that representation. *Just one bite* books take the quantity approach by opting to focus

on several cultures but only providing small snippets of those cultures. Quantity representation is simplistic because it focuses on representing as many cultures as possible; when texts are limited by genre conventions, like page length or page size, only so many details can be provided in a text when so many cultures are being represented. Going forward, then, I will use the phrase *the quantity approach* to describe when a text is representing multiple cultures but doing so in superficial ways.

I also discuss how, in *just one bite* books, a sameness ideology accompanies this quantity approach. Discussing boutique multiculturalism, Stanley Fish describes a phenomenon in which boutique multiculturalists ignore difference in favor of a central humanity (379). Seeing identity in this way prioritizes what people have in common, which can obscure the harm, marginalization, and/or oppression some people experience. *Just one bite* books foreground this sameness ideology by focusing on one kind of dish—rice and beans; rice; soup; bread; noodles—as the connector for the different characters and families in the books. This connection between similar dishes comes at the cost of nuance in identity, in cuisine, and in experience. Moreover, the books imply that food is a universal experience that characters (and perhaps readers) can connect to, regardless of whether that food is thoughtfully depicted. In this way, *just one bite* books focus on a central tenet of humanity (food) at the expense of real and lived cultural and culinary diversity.

For instance, Dooley and Thornton's *Everybody* series focuses on how Carrie, the protagonist of the series, lives in a "delightful multicultural neighborhood," a description included in the front flaps of the hardback editions of *Everybody Serves Soup* and *Everybody Brings Noodles*. Each book presents Carrie as she travels from neighbor to neighbor, trying the different foods that they are making (rice, bread, soup, and noodles), and then ultimately

returning to her own home. The narratives characterize Carrie's neighbors as people she briefly interacts with, and she takes their food and their recipes from them; through this characterization, the books suggest that readers can achieve an appreciation of diverse identities by interacting with those different from one's own positionality, having a recipe from another culture, or trying foods from other cultures. These are all superficial activities that focus on what an individual gets out of a transaction with another human, which is an othering way to frame representation and identity. Understood through feminist care ethics, this plot structure, involving Carrie's interactions, avoids a variety of contexts about how identity and food are connected. The stories themselves are surface level, which stems from the quantity approach they use, and so they privilege a singular, individual experience (the food the protagonist tries or observes) without situating how other dishes and culinary experiences exist in each culture and within each family.

Sandra Richards and Megan Kayleigh Sullivan's *Rice & Rocks* uses the quantity approach in a slightly different way than Dooley's books. The book begins with Giovanni worrying about his friends coming to dinner at his home, where his grandmother is making them Jamaican rice and beans; he does not specify that he is ashamed of the dish, but his tone is not positive. With his magical parrot, Jasper, Giovanni travels to different parts of the world (all places where his friends' families are from) to learn that many cultures eat rice and beans and that he should be proud of the way that his grandmother and his culture cook rice and beans. Giovanni learns about what other cultures eat, and, like Carrie, he returns home to his culture with a renewed interest in and appreciation of his culture's foods, all thanks to the *other* cultures. This return home is a convention of *just one bite* books, where the readers and protagonists return to their culture of comfort; it also mirrors the typical "home-away-home" trope found in much of children's literature. As in Carrie's case, Giovanni's adventures provide superficial

depictions of culture and cuisine, which reinforces the dominant sameness ideology *just one bite* books feature.

These two problematic narrative choices, the quantity approach and sameness ideology, result in stories that depict identity and relationships in entirely and, in my opinion, excessively positive ways. This is an effect stemming from what I call *toxic positivity*. I see toxic positivity, much like toxic masculinity, as an additive element that becomes toxic over time: small doses are not the issue but repeated examples make this overly positive tone harmful while some instances of toxic positivity may be even more harmful than others. While positively portraying relationships may not seem harmful initially, this narrative approach can contribute to harmful marginalization when it repeatedly depicts food and character interactions as overly cheerful and, at times, unrealistic. For instance, interactions between neighbors are never perfect nor are they always positive, yet the *Everybody* series depicts them as such. Moreover, when a text adheres to traits of this excessive kind of positivity, it washes over any conflicts, historical oppressions, forms of marginalization, and harm that may have been perpetuated by any of the cultures presented but especially the culture that is implied to be dominant. For instance, cultures and countries who have colonized and are colonizing a group of people may be presented in the same text together without concern for or reference to the historical (and oftentimes contemporary) harm that has been done. Toxic positivity is not the same thing as the quantity approach or the sameness ideology; rather, it is a symptom of those two issues. Together, the quantity approach, sameness ideology, and toxic positivity create overly simplistic narratives about food and culture that, while seemingly harmless (because they are positive representations of culture), in fact reproduce harm as they overgeneralize and frequently whitewash cultures. This harm occurs because these narrative elements together produce a singular story of food interactions, to

describe them according to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's discussion of "The danger of a single story." Adichie says that: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (13:04-13:16). Creating overly positive stories, which focus on quantity rather than quality and reinforce how we are all the same, results in a stereotype that food interactions are naturally positive and easy, which further marginalizes the colonial histories surrounding many foods and cultural interactions.

I hope to emphasize in this chapter that scholars do not need to demonize the concept of multiculturalism altogether. Indeed, scholars like Ballard and Dong suggest that multiculturalism can be a good thing. Instead, scholars need to define more clearly what kind of multiculturalism we are discussing when we discuss it. From my observations, pop culture conversations are often discussing a quantity approach when they talk about multiculturalism. They rarely discuss the quality of those representations, which would be one approach to multiculturalism that more closely aligns with the children's literature scholars I have discussed so far in this chapter. I also want to underscore that I am not trying to demonize bloggers or readers outside of academia, especially not those I discussed in the introduction. Instead, I want my work in this chapter to exemplify how scholarly conversations can address the issues that these pop culture conversations bring up and how the approaches these favored books take to representation and identity do have consequences. By revising our definitions and examining more closely books that have been labelled multicultural, we scholars can better attend to issues of equity and justice, including the deconstruction of quantity approaches to depicting and discussing identity. *Just one bite* books reveal specific issues related to taking a quantity approach to identity because everyone cannot be represented well in just one story. Examining *just one bite* books reveals the

consequences of quantity approaches, especially to food and identity.

The Quantity Approach, Sameness Ideology, and Superficial Depictions

Just one bite books portray identity in simplistic ways through the quantity approach to food and culture, and the resulting narrative strategy is ultimately at odds with the authors' and publishers' expressed desire to represent multiple cultures positively. Dahlen explains how "The [publishing] industry continues to rely on 'single stories,' thus painting cultures and experiences as though they are monolithic and unvaried" (27). Dahlen's commentary connects with Adichie's discussion of why stereotypes are harmful, and both Dahlen and Adichie emphasize why single moments of representation cannot fully realize an entire group's identity. As *just one bite* books work to serve readers only a small portion of a cuisine, they often portray an entire cuisine in a monolithic way. Multiplicity within a cuisine, across regional and transnational varieties of a dish, is lost, too, when *just one bite* books characterize food as authentic through singular representations. Depicting a number of cultures in singular moments ultimately results in superficial portrayals of identity and culture.

A superficial depiction might include limited details that correspond with general knowledge. For instance, texts sometimes only name or present the type of bean used in a dish with very limited details; describing the kind of bean in this way relies on the reader to know the taste, texture, smell, and so forth of that bean. However, if the book is supposed to be about representing foods and cultures for readers who may or may not have experienced that food before, this reliance on reader interpretation fails to communicate the ideas the books say they do. Fish underscores the consequences of superficial appreciation: "the boutique multiculturalist will accord a superficial respect to cultures other than his own, a respect he will withdraw when

he finds the practices of a culture irrational or inhumane" (382). The word superficial is key: because the respect may easily be withdrawn on certain occasions, the respect is one-sided. I discuss later in this chapter how thinking about respect through an ethics of care framework reveals issues with establishing this kind of relationship. While I do not see the consequences Fish describes here actually happening in the narratives themselves, this approach opens the possibility for people to mimic the superficial respect the narratives cultivate.

As I have mentioned, when books represent multiple cultures through a quantity approach, they may erase important nuances about cuisine and culture by failing to consider what the quality of that representation looks like. Superficial stories happen partly because their narratives include limited cultural details: because the books are trying to do too much by showing too many cultures, the information is naturally limited by the boundaries of the genre and what information can be contained in those few pages. These boundaries lead to scenes where important sensory or cultural contexts are surface level or not there at all. Moreover, the quantity approach creates an environment in which the cultures and cuisines depicted in the books began to look very similar. The differences that scholars often call for when looking for diverse representation are replaced by an emphasis on the people in the book rather than the food. In essence, the books implicitly suggest that people might look different, but that is "okay" because they eat the "same" food. Stanley Fish points out that essentializing humanity is a hallmark of boutique multiculturalism: "a boutique multiculturalist does not and cannot take seriously the core values of the cultures he tolerates. The reason he cannot is that he does not see those values as truly 'core' but as overlays on a substratum of essential humanity" (379). Thus, Fish argues that the boutique multiculturalist mindset stems from the idea that there is an "essential humanity" that we all possess, something that makes us all human and something that

connects us all. “We may dress differently, speak differently, woo differently, worship or not worship differently,” he adds, “but underneath (or so the argument goes) there is something we all share (or that shares us) and that something constitutes the core of our identities” (379). This turn back to an essential humanity, as Fish describes it, is what I call the sameness ideology—that we are, at our core, all the same because we are humans. The phrase “or so the argument goes” underscores Fish’s skepticism that this essential nature of humanity is a solid foundation upon which to build an argument, a skepticism I share about *just one bite* books.

Approaches to diverse identities in *just one bite* books align with the boutique multiculturalist attitude Fish defines. The main motifs of these books are not food but people, as the titles of the *Everybody* series emphasizes by placing “everybody” before the foods. Because diverse food is not as important as a common humanity, then it does not matter what cultural marker (food, holidays, and traditional clothing, for example) a book discusses if, in the end, everyone is the same. This is what I call the *sameness ideology*, which is an approach to identity that recognizes what people all have in common at the expense of what makes them different. A sameness ideology prioritizes likeness and connection, even if those connections are superficial or tenuous. As I will discuss later in this chapter, relational approaches to identity recognize connection, but they also emphasize that our differences also matter. A sameness ideology, I will argue, is an oppositional framework for seeing identity, whereas a relational framework accounts for differences and connections equitably. My use of “oppositional” and “relational,” above and throughout the rest of this chapter, specifically reference Mary Jeanette Moran’s discussion of how feminist scholars define the self-other dynamic: “Gilligan and many feminist scholars following her have contended that an independent, autonomous subject must, by its very nature, conceptualize anything outside the self as threatening to that self. In contrast, the relational self

acknowledges its debt to others as well as its responsibility to them—a much less oppositional dynamic" (76). Because *just one bite* books reinforce a sameness ideology, the details and nuances we find in cultural and culinary identities are either lost or indistinct.

Just one bite books provide some details, so as to distinguish between the ethnicities they depict, but this detail often reifies superficial markers of identity and difference. For example, Richard's *Rice & Rocks* relies on geographical markers and wildlife in the illustrations to distinguish among the different settings that Giovanni enters, featuring limited details about the cuisines Giovanni encounters. These markers are never connected to the food but instead signal that Giovanni is truly in a different place than his home. Giovanni first travels to Japan, where he watches a Japanese family eat while sitting at a table. At this point, Giovanni has shrunk small enough to ride astride his magical parrot's back, so they observe the family from the tree. The accompanying text sits at the bottom of the illustration in a separate card that is framed in a wood that may be Japanese in origin, although this is never specified. Of all of the illustrations in which he visits different locations, this image of Japan is the only one that depicts actual people eating or attempts to illustrate the food discussed. The people in this image are hard to identify as the illustrations are not that detailed; for example, a young person, wearing pigtails, sticks chopsticks into their mouth, while another young person leans across the table with chopsticks, reaching into a large bowl of what is probably sekihan, the food being discussed. The accompanying text reads that "**Sekihan**, red rice boiled with red adzuki beans, is a traditional Japanese dish" (Richards n.p., emphasis in original); the bowls in the image are filled with a lighter color (white or beige) with small red dots throughout. This moment connects sekihan to a specific culture, but this connection is superficial as it only identifies where the dish is from and that it is traditional. Labelling sekihan as a Japanese dish hints at a plethora of cultural details,

for instance, why Japanese folks eat the dish, how it is eaten in Japanese settings, and why it is traditional, which is an important marker implying that there is historical context for why the dish is still significant. While the book does not necessarily need to include every detail about the history of sekihan, only making a textual connection between Japanese dishes and an apparently Japanese setting reinforces a surface-level identification. The moment also implies an assumption that the reader understands what Japanese cuisine or identity looks like, which leaves open the possibility that this understanding is based on racist and/or Eurocentric understandings of food since so much of children's literature reifies these hegemonic standards. In other words, labelling a dish as Japanese does not provide cultural detail; it just provides a signifier for Japanese culture which then opens up the possibility for readers to rely on their own assumptions and images of what Japanese food, people, or culture look like. While it is fairly clear that the small red dots are supposed to be the red adzuki beans described in the text, the image lacks the detail needed to specifically identify these as beans of any kind. If the book is about the food, then the choice to create an illustration in which the food is not detailed and cannot be seen clearly is a problem. The lack of this detail implies that the emphasis is on how this setting and these people are different from Giovanni, even though he is supposed to be seeing how they are alike. Here, there is a disconnect between what the words encourage readers to focus on (the sekihan) and what the illustration depicts (maybe sekihan?).

Rice & Rocks provides some culinary details, but these details are limited, that is, what types of beans are used or that they are eaten for certain occasions. Sensory details, like the way these beans taste, look, smell, or feel, are left out. The text does not explain that "[i]n Japanese cooking, Azuki beans (or Adzuki beans) are almost exclusively used in making Japanese sweets or pastries. … For this instance, however, Azuki beans make a rare appearance in a non-sweet

dish that is rather unique to Japanese cuisine" (*Just One Cookbook*). The book depicts other bean dishes that are savory, so this positioning could imply to readers that sekihan is a savory dish, even though the book does not explicitly communicate this. Other readers may know that red beans are often used in sweet dishes in Japanese and other East Asian cuisines, so leaving this knowledge may lead them to assume the same thing here. In fact, without outside research, I myself initially assumed that the red beans in this dish were sweet because of my limited knowledge about Japanese and other East Asian cuisines. By not indicating that sekihan uses red beans differently than other Japanese dishes, the narrative overlooks important culinary details that would allow readers to better conceptualize the culinary history of the dish as well as how the dish tastes. What is also missing from the images is the context about why this group of people is eating sekihan, although the words attempt to provide this context. "Sekihan is served on special occasions, like birthdays and holidays," Oku, Jasper's bird friend from Japan, tells Giovanni (Richards n.p.). In the picture, though, it is hard to tell if this is a special occasion—a woman sits wearing a kimono, but no one else is dressed the way she is. Unless a reader knows Japanese customs, this image may appear to be a regular dinner. Thus, there are several moments in this spread where readers need to rely on their own knowledge of Japan, which opens up many possibilities for misunderstanding. Moreover, if the book is trying to teach about different cuisines, the lack of these details undermines that mission.

The disconnect between the image and the text reinforces how this page spread provides superficial details about sekihan. In each place he visits, Giovanni meets more birds who reassure him that people from these places eat rice and rocks, but the book never illustrates these dishes for readers. The text specifies the ingredients: the Puerto Rican bird, Idalia, says that "We call it **arroz con gandules**, rice with pigeon peas" (Richards n.p., emphasis in original), and

Flint, the bird from New Orleans, tells Giovanni that Louis Armstrong ate red beans and rice. With this scene, the book introduces two new kinds of beans but does not describe how the beans are different from each other. In describing the New Orleans dish, the book simply states that the New Orleans rice and beans recipe contains red beans and rice without mentioning how the beans and rice might differ from one culture to another.[7] Such a statement does nothing to distinguish it from the Japanese dish represented a few pages before or to differentiate it from the Jamaican stew shown at the end of the book, which also features a large bowl of red beans and rice. In addition, the New Orleans dish and the Puerto Rican dish are never actually pictured in the book, so the story never provides readers visuals to compare to Japanese sekihan or Giovanni's rice and rocks. Instead, the narrative tends to set up a traditional scene wherein the text does not explain how the beans are different from the beans Giovanni eats or how their tradition differs from Giovanni's. In fact, these details are not really even included about Giovanni's family: the book only communicates that "On Sundays, it's a tradition in our family to eat" rice and beans (Richards n.p.). Moreover, when Giovanni visits Japan, the book does not tell the reader who is eating sekihan or whether this is a family eating together, so the relationships between the characters are not clear. Instead, I receive enough information for Giovanni to understand how he is like the Japanese people eating sekihan but not necessarily enough for me to understand how these foods are different or hold different cultural significances. How, then, is Giovanni himself gaining this understanding? The missing

[7] The New Orleans dish "is a simple and economical preparation of red kidney beans combined with aromatics, spices, and pork and then simmered until tender and served over a bed of cooked rice" (Simmons 243-44).

information leads readers to a surface-level understanding of any culture because the narrative provides factual information that is removed from a specific, relational context, a topic which I discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

Dooley's books provide some information about how characters gather and prepare food, which gestures to how food can be thought about as a finished product as well as a process. However, the books never connect gathering and preparing food to cultural or culinary difference. Of the scenes in the books, very few portray someone who is actually preparing the food; if the scene does show this interaction, the prominent part of the illustration are the utensils used to make the dish being discussed. The illustrations do not show characters picking up or using the utensils; instead, they lay inanimate on the table. In the opening scene of *Everybody Bakes Bread*, for instance, Carrie and her brother Anthony fight with one another over who gets to knead the Italian bread that their mother is making (n.p.). However, their mother is turned away, staring out a window. There are no clear signs of her working with bread dough or the utensils laid out in the scene, that is, nothing looks used or dirty; there are no signs either that she has been working with them prior to the moment that is illustrated. The words say only that "Mom was making my great-grandmother's Italian bread with me and Anthony" (n.p.). This attention to detail in food utensils *seems* to create an atmosphere that is sensitive to the physical aspects of how food is made, but the imagery does not actually follow through in depicting the preparation process.

Limited and simplified details also happen in the *Everybody* series when Peter J.

Thornton illustrates food through monotone color schemes and limited shapes.[8] Perry Nodelman notes how "pictures can communicate much to us, and particularly much of visual significance—but only if words focus them, tell us what it is about them that might be worth paying attention to" (211). *Just one bite* books primarily rely on the story's words to explain what we are supposed to see in the accompanying image, rather than directing readers' attention to what is important: the simplified images result in even more reliance on the words than what Nodelman initially describes, such that the words sometimes are the only thing that help distinguish one food from another. In fact, the lack of detail in the bread imagery in *Everybody Bakes Bread* makes bread of two different cultures look almost indistinguishable from one another. In one scene, Carrie visits Nabil and Amalia's family; the narrative states that they run a Middle East Bakery and that their grandmother is from Lebanon. Carrie watches Nabil and Amalia pull pocket bread from the ovens. The pocket breads look round with a barely domed top; the edges are lighter than the center part of the bread, which is a warm tan color (*Everybody Bakes Bread* n.p.). A few pages later, Carrie travels to Bernardo's house, where she learns about pupusas, a dish the book implies is from El Salvador because Bernardo is from El Salvador. The pupusas are presented on a large platter in the center of the table, and they look practically identical to the pocket breads shown a few pages before. Perhaps the difference is that the pupusas seem less domed than the pocket breads or this could simply be based on the angle of the illustration. The

[8] I would like to add that I recognize that illustrators have different styles and use aesthetics for different purposes. However, illustrative style is still a narrative choice, one that I argue fails in this instance because the illustrative choices here reinforce these problematic narrative elements.

setting of the scene is one of the only things that helps distinguish the pupusas from the pocket breads.

The minute details in the accompanying text can briefly help readers distinguish the differences between Nabil and Amalia's pocket bread and Bernardo's pupusas, though these differences are not depicted in the illustrations. With the pocket bread, Carrie narrates how "The bread flattened as it cooled, and it was just like a damp cloth. You could roll it or fold it or scrunch it into a ball," mentioning a few sentences later that "we ate fresh bread with a thick dip called hummus" (*Everybody Bakes Bread* n.p.). The accompanying illustration does not include the hummus with the pocket bread, contributing to how the book continues to lack distinctiveness between these different breads. When she arrives at Bernardo's house, Carrie describes how his grandmother "led her into the kitchen, where Bernardo was eating something round and yellow with melted cheese coming out of it" (n.p.). One illustration depicts Carrie sitting down to eat the pupusas, just as she is about to bite into it. Again, the illustrations lack the detail included in the words, missing an opportunity to distinguish visually between the pupusas and the pocket bread. By homogenizing these foods through the illustration, the visual aspects of *Everybody Bakes Bread* are at odds with its textual details, which undermines the text's goal to illustrate a multicultural neighborhood

I acknowledge how the superficial details in *just one bite* books give enough information for readers to have learned something new. However, I am concerned that, because *just one bite* books take such a superficial quantity approach to this factual information, readers may not understand how food and cuisine are connected to someone's cultural identity. Dan Jurafsky in *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu*, writes, "To explain how and in what way cuisines are different or similar, and how they change over time, I propose a theory called the

'grammar of cuisine,' which suggests that cuisine is like a language" (177). He explains:

> Just as a language has an implicit grammar that native speakers know even if they can't explain, a cuisine has an implicit structure, a set of rules about which foods go together, what constitutes a "grammatical" dish or meal in the cuisine. This implicit structure of cuisine consists of rules about how dishes are structured out of ingredients, meals are structured out of dishes, and entire cuisines out of particular flavor combinations and required cooking techniques. Each of these kinds of structuring helps explain the nature of cuisines and their similarities and differences. (178)

Jurafsky describes the sort of information that provides the specificity that helps readers distinguish between culinary similarities and differences. Without the differences, we begin to receive homogenous depictions of cuisine, an issue I analyze in the next section. There are many aspects of cuisine that Dooley's or Richard's respective books miss. These *just one bite* books rarely account for cultural preferences, such as why certain kinds of rice, beans, flour, or noodles might be used in making the food they describe. When this information is included, as when *Rice & Rocks* mentions the different kinds of beans used, it still lacks a sense of that cuisine's grammar, that is, how that ingredient is tied to a certain cuisine. For instance, the books rarely discuss the cultural traditions associated with eating a certain kind of ingredient. These details about food, including why specific varieties are used in the dishes the books describe, would begin to account for the nuances of food across cultures. Accounting for these differences would encourage readers to do more than simply think about the similarities across culture; instead, readers could have tools to begin thinking about how the multisensory qualities of food are different and significant across cultures, even as multiple cultures all eat a specific ingredient like rice. Moreover, the realities of food production and cultivation do not have a place in these

books. Creating food occurs in some cooking scenes in the *Everybody* series and is implied by some eating scenes in both Richard's and Dooley's books, which also further implies that these foods and ingredients were produced and cultivated *somewhere*. The titles of Dooley's books rely on verbs about cooking processes: *cooks* rice, *bakes* bread, *serves* soup, *bring* noodles. However, these eating and cooking scenes are rarely depicted, and, when they are shown, they lack specificity about what cooking processes are happening, why the characters are eating the food they are, or how the food is tied to a larger culinary tradition. These details would help readers begin to understand the nuances of the culinary heritages of these characters.

If *just one bite* books were really about the food, then these details and nuances would either be included in the books, or, when they are included, these details would be better developed than they are. Instead, the texts homogenize the foods and cultures they depict. Because the books portray an essentialized understanding of humanity, akin to what Fish describes, then the food does not really matter, which explains how the books gloss over important nuances of these foods. I argue that this homogenization is a consequence of a quantity approach to food and identity because the space where nuance and detail could be provided is taken up with additional cultures instead. These details are glossed over in favor of a shared culinary experience that the narrative encourages readers to connect to in superficial ways, and this surface-level connections do not align with an ethic of care. As such, I next theorize how *just one bite* books do not enact an ethic of care as they prioritize and encourage oppositional relationships by further othering the cultures and food practices they showcase.

Relationships, Care, Food: Reductive Representations of Identity

So far, I have identified how *just one bite* books take a superficial quantity approach to depicting multiple cultures as well as how they adhere to a sameness ideology that results in homogenous storytelling about cuisine. These two issues are also accompanied by a tone that I associate with toxic positivity: throughout these narratives, the characters, conflicts, and relationships are all depicted in overly positive ways. As a result, these problems are represented without nuance, and these texts avoid the ways that conflicts are indicative of larger relationship issues. This toxic positivity obscures more detrimental ways *just one bite* books position cultures against each other. This overtone, I argue, ultimately masks the problematic ways these narratives portray cultural identity. By implying that relationships between cultures are always positive, *just one bite* books erase vast histories of oppression and marginalization, especially as this oppression has happened through food. This positive tone misrepresents character interactions, obscuring how the protagonists other the cultures with which they interact. The books' paratext markets them as promoting and honoring diversity in a very positive tone, while the protagonists' actions imply something else: a more othering approach to food and culture. I find that this toxic positivity stems from the sameness ideology since these ideas are often shortened to phrases like "we all get along" or "here's how we're all connected," an attitude to which several blogs I have discussed ascribe. This overly positive approach to cultural interactions creates questions about whether an ethic of care is established in these texts; as a result, I critique the relationships I see in *just one bite* books.

This overly positive attitude misses a critical component of understanding diversity as conceptualized through feminist care ethics. Feminist care ethics scholars argue that our identities are relational; that is, how we see ourselves is formed through the relationships we

have with others. Marian Barnes, Tula Brannelly, Lizzie Ward, and Nicki Ward describe how "central to the development of a distinctive ethical perspective built around the significance of care in all our lives is the understanding that humans are relational beings. We do not start out as autonomous individuals who have to seek to make relationships with others. Rather, our survival from birth is dependent on the care we receive from others" (3). Our identities are both positively and negatively shaped by the kinds of care we do or do not receive as well as the positive and negative relationships with have with other human beings. Care ethics focuses our attention on these relationships specifically to mediate ethical decision making and theorizes how to account for these relationships as we make decisions to minimize harm to both ourselves and others. Our needs and others' are negotiated so that ethical decisions are not one-sided and the context for each ethical decision is recognized and honored.

These varying dynamics create specific contexts in which ethical decisions are made. Nicki Ward warns of "the danger of decontextualising people's lives and the importance of analysing the way that different processes may produce different and discriminatory experiences" ("Care Ethics" 61-62). Ward seems to suggest that neglecting to pay attention to these contexts and the needs of different people in the webs of their relationships can result in reestablishing inequities and further marginalizing individuals, causing even more harm, especially if the trauma of systemic oppression has been ongoing. Dooley's and Richard's books depict relationships, certainly, but simply illustrating a relationship does not mean that characters' interactions are relational or aligning with an ethic of care. Next, I examine how the narratives ideologically position the protagonists in relationship to the food, identities, and cultures depicted in the books, and I define how these interactions fail to represent identity as relational, which results in protagonists othering and harming other characters or entire cultures.

Protagonists and Culinary Troubles

Throughout these narratives, the protagonists experience personal conflicts that they resolve by traveling and tasting foods from different cultures. These travels tend to prioritize the self, which raises questions about how *just one bite* books focus on self-oriented culinary transactions that contribute to reductive approaches to cultural diversity. In Dooley's *Everybody* series, for instance, one central problem inspires Carrie's trips to each of her neighbors' houses, and each problem is relatively easy to solve, meaning that these problems are not necessarily complex nor do they involve issues with identity. In *Rice & Rocks*, Giovanni's problem is related to his identity, unlike Carrie: Giovanni's identity problem is resolved as he magically travels to other places and learns about their culinary customs. Besides the fact that the solution to Giovanni's issues is not a realistic one, the book implies that identity issues are resolved by comparing the self to others as Giovanni is reassured about his family's meal by observing others eat. Overall, *just one bite* protagonists experience conflicts related to something they themselves need to solve, and the solutions they find are simple and/or the conflicts are magically resolved because of their interactions with others.

As their adventures might suggest, these protagonists travel from house to house, and, along the way, they often serve as a tour guide for readers, which exemplifies how the narratives begin to ideologically align readers with these culinary travelers. The context surrounding these protagonists suggests that they are also "culinary traveler[s]" as Lisa Heldke defines this position ("But is it Authentic" 387). In general, culinary travelers are characterized by their curiosity about other cultures' foods, especially as that food becomes marked as something true and authentic to that culture. Culinary travelers learn something about themselves by experiencing

something other than themselves: in the case of *just one bite* books, they may even solve issues through their interactions with others without necessarily recognizing those other people with respect, nuance, or care. Heldke points out that:

> in tasting the foods of their Others, Euro-American culinary travelers often move along an implicit conceptual chain that begins with the recognition that one is in the presence of a flavor one has never before encountered, and ends with an "understanding" that this flavor stands as an authentic marker of the "true nature" of the ethnic Other—and, therefore, the thing that separates one most fully from this other. ("But is it Authentic?" 387)

Even though Carrie interacts with her neighbors with well-founded intentions, she performs as a kind of culinary traveler because the series literally and ideologically positions her as the (white) traveler entering Othered contexts. Giovanni's racial identity is not specified, but the illustrations depict him as a character of color; the story also establishes part of his ethnic and cultural identity by explaining that he is Jamaican. This context is important for understanding how his travels work slightly differently than Carrie's: even though Giovanni is not depicted as white, his actions and the way he travels and observes the other cultures and cuisines still constitute culinary travel in Heldke's terms. Heldke's points do not explicitly connect with feminist care ethics, but they do relate to how Gilligan first conceptualized an ethic of care as a framework to describe decision making that considers the needs of the self and other. Gilligan explains how behaviors that focus only on the self's needs do not establish an ethic of care because such actions do not account for how "self and other are interdependent"; thus, the needs of the self and other should both be understood as important factors in ethical decision making (74). Even as they may attempt to make connections, culinary travelers in *just one bite* books participate in

othering these foods and characters because their actions are framed within a narrative that ideologically positions foods from elsewhere as "not theirs," even when the books imply that they are similar or the same. This recognition facilitates an awakening that reinforces knowledge about the self as the protagonists compare themselves to the others they interact with: this positioning does not value the interdependence Gilligan theorizes and so the protagonists remain self-focused throughout their journeys. The culinary travelers also encounter foods that the narratives set up as authentic representations of the different cultures depicted in the narrative, which further facilitates this awakening.

As they travel, the protagonists participate in culinary tourism in different ways. Lucy M. Long defines culinary tourism as "adventurous eating, eating out of curiosity, exploring other cultures through food, intentionally participating in the foodways of an 'other,' and developing food as tourist destination and attraction" ("Culinary Tourism" 390). Long acknowledges that culinary tourism is not an inherently negative phenomenon, but it does raise important issues surrounding colonialism (399), homogenization (401-02), and authenticity (402). When one travels and eats, she points out, there is more at stake than simply bringing a bite to one's mouth, something that should be taken into consideration as one eats. Yet *just one bite* books do not recognize or imply that these unintended consequences of culinary travel even exist. Instead, the books depict culinary journeys as entirely positive experiences, for both the consumer and the culture/cuisine being consumed, and this overtone represents one example of toxic positivity in *just one bite* books. Moreover, the stories focus on the protagonists' experiences and thought processes as they tour different cuisines: I argue that *just one bite* books, when they focus exclusively on the tourists' experiences, demonstrate how Heldke conceptualizes culinary travelers who participate in problematic explorations of culture.

When she visits each of her neighbors, Carrie treats them as a part of a culinary transaction. Heldke acknowledges "that *all* works of cuisine involve transactions between dish (cook) and eater," which "calls us to *attend* to the particular kinds of transactions represented in the cross-cultural experience" ("But is it Authentic?" 391, emphasis in original). Heldke suggests, then, that eating food means intentionally and thoughtfully navigating our identities and cultures and, especially, putting relationships squarely in the center of food transactions. Heldke's suggestion is an idea that aligns with feminist care ethics work about relationality and relationships. As Nicki Ward writes, "When we fail to understand and engage with people in all of their complexity, we compromise their ability to be a whole person in all of the activities of their life" ("Care Ethics" 61). From a care ethics standpoint, the continued focus on Carrie's needs, at the expense of portraying her neighbors' needs with depth, represents how Carrie's relationships with her neighbors are one-sided and unidirectional. Everything that happens in the narrative concentrates on what Carrie receives from her interactions; her neighbors' feelings and thoughts, especially after she has left their houses, are not privileged nor do the narratives hint at them. Moreover, the narratives repeatedly emphasize how Carrie's neighbors are different from her; while these differences could lead to nuanced discussions of identity, the texts do not prioritize a relational way of understanding identity as they reinforce othering ways of viewing food.

Many of the illustrations in *Everybody Bakes Bread* focus on how Carrie reacts to the food that her neighbors make, not why they are making the food nor how they prepare their bread differently than her mother does. In other scenes, when these food elements are included, the reader's focus is still drawn to Carrie. For instance, in one scene, Carrie stands out because the rays of light from the lamp highlight her as she receives the food from Mrs. Ambrose. This

focus occurs even though Mrs. Ambrose is in the center of the illustration and of the page spread; moreover, she is the one who has baked the bread and is giving it to Carrie. Bang notes that "We notice contrasts, or, put another way, contrast enables us to see"; these "contrast[s] can be between colors, shapes, sizes, placement, or combinations of these, but it is the contrast that enables us to see both patterns and elements" (100). How Carrie appears in the illustration contrasts with how Mrs. Ambrose is situated. Because the light falls on Carrie's face, meeting her hairline and moving down the rest of her face, the illustration sharpens the contrast between Carrie and her more subdued background, which emphasizes Carrie over the woman making the bread and sharing the bread with her. As such, this contrast encourages readers to understand Carrie's tasting journey as important and perhaps one with which they should associate themselves. The conversation that accompanies this scene also prioritizes what Carrie needs over information about Mrs. Ambrose. She arrives just as Mrs. Ambrose has finished baking "Barbadian coconut bread"; the woman invites her to sit and try the bread (*Everybody Bakes Bread* n.p.). Carrie wastes no time as she eats, asking, "What should I tell my mom about the rolling pin?" Mrs. Ambrose tells her, "Ohhh, tell her we loaned it to our niece," and Crystal, Mrs. Ambrose's daughter, follows with "But you're welcome to come back anytime your mother needs something" (n.p.). Carrie narrates that Crystal responds "sweetly," which reiterates how the book uses a positive, kind tone throughout different events. Overall, the whole interaction with Barbadian coconut bread focuses on Carrie: the other characters are not dynamic and their identities only exist to serve Carrie's culinary travels. Thus, Carrie's interactions with Mrs. Ambrose in *Everybody Bakes Bread* reduce Mrs. Ambrose to an other with whom Carrie performs a culinary transaction.

All the books in Dooley's series position Carrie as a culinary traveler, but I find that

Everybody Serves Soup does so in a poignant way: when Carrie decides to shovel her neighbors' yards to earn money for her mother's Christmas present, she ends up gathering recipes from her neighbors. Even though she is there to help her neighbors, Carrie tastes their food and collects recipes from them with the idea that she "could make her mother a collection of soup recipes from the neighborhood for Christmas" (n.p.). Such sharing does seem to imply community, but I see the narrative emphasizing something else since Carrie fails to see the recipes given to her as anything more than a gift she can give to her mother. This moment suggests to me that Carrie, once again, engages with her neighbors through culinary transactions. When she arrives at the Shinzawas' house, Carrie reflects on how she "wasn't making much money, but [she] was starting to get an idea" for her mom's present (n.p.). She asks Mrs. Shinzawa for the recipe: "When Mrs. Shinzawa didn't know the English word, she showed me the ingredients. Wendy helped translate as I wrote on the back of a leaflet about supermarket specials" (n.p.). This moment suggest that Carrie does know something about Mrs. Shinzawa's identity, but the text does not explain what language Mrs. Shinzawa knows, leaving out details that could help flesh out Mrs. Shinzawa's character. Regardless, not knowing words in English is one way to mark Mrs. Shinzawa and her cuisine as different from Carrie. Carrie does not linger on how Mrs. Shinzawa does not know the English words, and the scene does not provide any more detail about how Mrs. Shinzawa moves through the world or approaches cuisine differently because she does not know certain English words. The solution to their communication conundrum is simple since Wendy can translate, and Carrie leaves with the recipe soon after, moving on to the next neighbor. Like Mrs. Ambrose, Mrs. Shinzawa is marked by how she is different from Carrie and how this difference—her ethnic cuisine—serves Carrie in this culinary transaction: this moment exemplifies how, even when connection is made, the narrative creates an oppositional

relationship between Carrie and her neighbors by marking them as other and different from her. For Carrie, the recipes neither represent the unique culinary backgrounds of her neighbors nor does she pause to consider how these soup recipes differ or how they could be connected beyond being just soups. In these ways, Carrie does not recognize her neighbors' identities as unique.

Carrie's interactions with her environment lack ethical care, and Giovanni's actions in *Rice & Rocks* are similar, even though his actions can be read differently since he is not white. He is still a culinary traveler, nonetheless. *Rice & Rocks* works similarly to Dooley's series; however, the plot of the book revolves around Giovanni actually traveling to different places specifically to see their food, even though readers never observe him eating those foods, which makes Giovanni an even more obvious culinary traveler. The narrative encourages readers to trust the narrator's viewpoint, yet the relationships we see between Giovanni and his friends and other folks outside of his culture lack care because they reinforce an oppositional view of relationships. For instance, Giovanni does not approach his friends and ask them about their family's food traditions; instead, he takes it as a truth that the singular eating experiences he observes of each culture are authentic and automatically applicable to his friends' lives. He also never interacts with the people that he travels to meet and the foods that he eats. He is only a voyeur above them, implying another telling visual dynamic since, as Bang asserts, "the upper half of a picture is a place of freedom, happiness, and power" (69). In this position *over* the cultures he's observing, Giovanni has power, which reinforces the power dynamics surrounding culinary travelers.

Carrie and her neighbors and Giovanni and his friends seem to enjoy eating food with one another, but enjoying food does not automatically equal an ethical caring relationship that

addresses the needs of both self and other.[9] This context reveals the ethical issues that arise through these interactions. The publishers and authors frame these narratives as appreciating or celebrating representation, but, in reality, they end up othering characters of color. Overall, the books position any culture or family outside of Carrie's or Giovanni's as Other; positioning these characters in this way associates those families only with what Carrie and Giovanni get out of a so-called transaction. The books do not ideologically address Carrie's or Giovanni's relationships with these others that they supposedly care about or how these characters negotiate the needs of self and other.

These foods are only seen through the protagonists' eyes, which presents an additional problem. Heldke describes a self-oriented approach to cuisine: "To value a culture simply because it brings me into contact with something different from my own is to value it because of an incidental fact about myself; such a form of appreciation makes my experience the most relevant aspect of the exchange, and makes me the only relevant measure of the interest of a cuisine" (*Exotic Appetites* 15). Heldke warns about intentional or unintentional searches for authenticity or experiences with something that is authentic, especially since focusing on what the self receives out of a culinary transaction leads to adventurers failing to recognize a cultural artifact, like food, as something meaningful outside of its usefulness to them. Moreover, as Dahlen maintains, "What one believes or perceives to be authentic and what is actually authentic is at odds and raises the question of who decides" (26). Through an ethics of care framework, it becomes apparent that this mindset reinforces what the self needs or gains, without incorporating

[9] Giovanni only eats with his friends at the end of the book. When he goes to Japan, Puerto Rico, and New Orleans, he only observes the food or, sometimes, people eating the food.

others' needs. For instance, *just one bite* books lack connections to food's larger relationship to culture, and the characters' own understanding of their culinary identity is missing. These details would undermine a predominant focus on the protagonists' eating experience and honor the home culture and cuisine that is being consumed. Instead, the narratives prioritize the protagonists' perception of the foods they encounter.

Only eating food in ways that serves her best, Carrie fails to connect beyond a surface level with her neighbors' culinary identities. Eating their food does not help Carrie learn anything additional about her neighbors but, rather, helps her better understand herself. This one-sided interaction leaves out critical voices and perspectives that might depict the interactions differently or might even consider Carrie's movements as part of a larger marginalization of ethnic food. In *Rice & Rocks*, this self-oriented approach is even worse: the narrative erases the people responsible for making the food or portrays them without a developed identity. Both Giovanni's and Carrie's cases show how *just one bite* books, then, imply that these culinary identities are not significant. Because each culture receives one image—essentially one page, a single moment of the book—the focus of the book is less on these cultures and more on the protagonists' journeys. How each narrative ends—with the protagonists' return home—reinforces this self-focused exploration of food. While a common trope in children's literature, this return home has further othering implications, especially when considered through feminist care ethics and Heldke's discussion of culinary travelers.

Privileging Home Culture

The return home suggests a self-oriented approach to eating: it is okay to eat (and read) other cultures for one's own understanding and personal gain without thinking of who this may

impact. Examined through Heldke's theory of cultural food colonialism and a care ethics approach to relationships, this lack of consideration has implications for the quantity approach to food that *just one bite* books employ. Heldke, in "Let's Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism," expands on her concept of cultural food colonialism which she originally defines in her book *Exotic Appetites*. Reflecting on her own food adventuring, Heldke theorizes how her interactions with food "bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the attitude of various nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European painters, anthropologists, and explorers who set out in search of ever 'newer,' ever more 'remote' cultures they could co-opt, borrow from freely and *out of context*, and use as the raw materials for their *own efforts* at *creation and discovery*" ("Let's Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism" 395, emphasis added). Cultural food colonialism describes a self-centered attitude towards food from other cultures that exoticizes and others the food of those cultures, which effectively others the culture and people connected to those foods. By taking and appropriating foods as representations of cultural capital, cultural food colonialists operate within a mindset that privileges the individual and the transaction, with little thought of what or who comes after. Heldke connects searches for authenticity with cultural food colonialism, noting that "Exotic food is understood as authentic precisely *because* of its strangeness, its novelty. Because it is unfamiliar to me, I assume it must be a genuine or essential part of that other culture; it becomes the marker of what distinguishes my culture from another. Whatever is so evidently not a part of my own culture must truly be a part of this other one" (398). Thinking about this mindset through a feminist care ethics lens reveals how such a self-centered attitude devalues identities as points of connections across varied contexts that require negotiation, which fails to create an ethic of care across these relationships. This mindset prioritizes an oppositional relationship because it focuses only on whether the self connects or does not connect with

something else; if I focus only on what I experience (and I see this experience as genuine, novel, and/or different from me), then I am in a position to decide potentially the value of the thing with which I interact. This position does not account for how my actions, regardless of my intent, impact those around me because I do not see my identity connected to those relationships. While Dooley's and Richard's books try to portray multiple cultures, the return to the protagonist's "home" cultures emphasizes the cultural food colonialist attitude that Heldke first describes and that I have utilized in this chapter.

Combined with the text, the final images in four of these *just one bite* books imply that returning home—to one's home culture and to what is comfortable and familiar—is the ultimate goal of the protagonists' food exploration. This reinforces the idea that exploring cuisine is a practice that enriches the self but does not necessarily account for the culture or people associated with or making that cuisine: focusing entirely on the self, this way of approaching identity is oppositional because it reinforces othering, oppositional ideologies about identity. This is at odds with *just one bite* books' intended goal to represent a multicultural world and/or neighborhood in positive ways as the end result involves reductively portraying identities. Exploring how other people live and eat and then simply coming back home does not provide adequate insight into the realities and experiences of those who are different from the explorer, which harkens back to the superficial nature of quantity approaches to representation. For example, the first three books in Dooley's *Everybody* series end by focusing on what Carrie has gotten out of these interactions, and so the narrative encourages readers to disregard the people Carrie visits. In the final images of *Everybody Cooks Rice* and *Everybody Bakes Bread*, Carrie sits with her family after visiting each of her neighbors and eating their foods. The words emphasize that Carrie is now satiated from eating with the other families. She exclaims in both

books that she has consumed too much at the other houses to eat her mother's own food: "I told Mom that I was too full to eat" (*Everybody Cooks Rice* n.p.) and "I couldn't eat another bite. Practically everybody was baking bread this morning!" *(Everybody Bakes Bread* n.p.). Yet in *Everybody Bakes Bread*, she eats "a piece of warm Italian bread dipped in olive oil and garlic." Even though Carrie is satisfied from eating, it is the home cuisine she partakes in last and the home cuisine to which she returns. The illustration does not imply anything about her being too full to eat her mother's food. The conversation references how she has eaten other foods at her neighbors' houses, but the illustrations center Carrie and her family as they are the only thing in these illustrations, accentuating their importance. The other families are no longer referenced, and the narrative encourages readers to focus only Carrie and her family.

The ending of *Everybody Serves Soup* underscores Carrie's return home as well as what she has gained from that journey in a similar way. She describes to her little brother Anthony "about [her idea for] filling a blank book with pictures and recipes" (n.p.). Even though the recipes were freely given, Carrie has taken them without consideration of their situated existence in the world, a consequence of the book's focus on what Carrie receives from this culinary transaction. Carrie's mother is always cooking something in the books in the series. However, *Everybody Serves Soup* never depicts Carrie's mother making any of the soups for which Carrie gathered recipes because, by the time the story has ended, Carrie has not even given her mother the recipes; she has only told her brother that she has collected them and figured out what to give their mother for Christmas. The narrative provides no opportunity to define how or to what extent Carrie's mother has caring relationships with her neighbors. Once again, the *Everybody* series prioritizes the home culture and the home cuisine of the protagonist. *Everybody Brings Noodles* is the only book that does not end with Carrie returning home. Instead, the book

illustrates Carrie receiving recognition, almost like a prize, during the neighborhood block party. Madame Bleu says: "Before we dance and hand out sparklers, we have one special person to thank: the one who talks with everybody. She's the one who got us all talking with each other. She shares her talent with us every day. That person is … Carrie!" (n.p.). Madame Bleu specifically recognizes Carrie's talent and her role in preparing the block party. This ending, although different from the other books, maintains Carrie as the focal point of the culinary journey.

Unlike Carrie, Giovanni does not eat the other versions of rice and rocks that he travels to learn about, so his culinary journey ends a little differently. Instead, his attitude about his own version of rice and rocks has changed. The book ends on a positive note, which replicates the toxic positivity I described earlier: Giovanni and his friends all eat together, and everyone appears to be happy. When his friends arrive for dinner, he first announces: "Rice and beans are my grandma's specialty. … On Sundays, it's a tradition in our family to eat it" (Richards n.p.). Giovanni situates this dish within the context of his home cuisine and his family traditions. This moment in the narrative sets up the opportunity for Giovanni's friends to connect their experiences with different versions of red beans and rice to Giovanni's. His friends do not immediately respond to this commentary, but Giovanni waits to see how they react to the dish. As each child eats, they comment on how the dish is similar to what their family makes, repeating some of the details that the birds gave to Giovanni during his adventures:

> "Mmmmmm, I love this!" said Emily. "It is just like the dish my abuela makes, arroz con gandules! I think I'd like another serving, please."
>
> "I have not had red beans and rice since my last visit to N'Awlins. This is really good," said Gabby, putting another spoonful in her mouth.

Aaron looked confused. “Are we celebrating something?”

At first, the characters’ statements seem to situate the food within different cultural contexts, but they are actually superficial comments. For instance, Aaron’s comment does not reference sekihan or Japan, and Emily and Gabby repeat the details Giovanni already learned earlier in the book. This moment, I would argue, instead focuses on how Giovanni’s problem is resolved because his friends like his family’s dish. In response to Aaron, Giovanni says, “We are celebrating family, friends, and traditions” (n.p.). Then, Giovanni narrates: “I grinned, glad that my friends liked rice and rocks” (n.p.). The word *glad* reminds readers of Giovanni’s early concern that his friends will not like his family’s dish, and so the book ends with Giovanni’s relief that his friends are enjoying the meal, especially since each character is smiling. This ending is also significant because Giovanni’s friends only appear in the final three pages of the book. There are no moments in the book when Giovanni’s friends are characterized within their cultures: we never see them eating their versions of rice and beans and we never see their homes or the contexts in which they eat. In these final moments, Emily, Gabby, and Aaron are only depicted through a framework that privileges Giovanni, his identity, and his struggle. Neglecting to include this context, the book may encourage readers to make generic assumptions about cultural identity, food, and authenticity, and these surface level assumptions can do more harm to those communities.

Giovanni’s return home not only emphasizes his newfound appreciation of his grandmother’s dish. The final moments also reiterate that returning to the home culture is most important: just as Carrie returned home to eat her mother’s food, so too does Giovani return to eat his grandmother’s dish, which the illustrations underscore. While illustrations of food may be lacking throughout the rest of the book, that is not the case for the final scene when Giovanni

eats dinner with his friends and Grandma. In one illustration, Giovanni's Grandma serves Jamaican stewed chicken with rice and beans while Giovanni and his friends stand around Grandma holding out their bowls. She sets down the big bowl of rice and beans in the middle of the table, which is accompanied by a bowl of chicken and two side dishes (one green, which may be asparagus or green beans, and the other yellow, which could be plantains or lemon slices). In this image, the rice and beans are more clearly illustrated than they have been in any other place in the book—grains of rice appear separate from the beans, which have some shape to them rather than being a small wash of color. On the next double-page spread, when the children begin eating the rice and rocks, the beans and rice are enlarged, which makes it easier to see some of the smaller details of the dish like the separate grains of rice and the curve of the beans. Adding in the other foods helps situate Giovanni's home food within a larger context of Jamaican cuisine: Grandma mentions specifically that they "are having Jamaican stewed chicken with rice and beans" (n.p.). This moment implies that rice and beans are eaten with something else, not on their own; however, similar clarifying details are not provided for the Japanese, Puerto Rican, or New Orleans rice and bean dishes. Providing details for the home cuisine reinforces the divide between home and away (self and other, alike and unlike) that I have been critiquing. Moreover, carefully illustrating one food but not carefully illustrating others implies that Giovanni's rice and beans are more important because they are worth more detail and effort.[10] By carefully illustrating the food from Giovanni's home culture, the narrative deemphasizes food from other

[10] Although it is possible that the lack of detail could be attributed to the illustrator's style, the wallpaper in Grandma's house and the plants in the Puerto Rican scene, for example, are exceptionally detailed.

cultures, which reiterates an approach to relationships that only prioritizes the self and the self's experiences. Once again, this *just one bite* book ends by focusing on the protagonist, their experiences, and the importance of their home culture.

When people interact with food of other cultures in a way that prioritizes only their needs, they reassure themselves that the other culture is truly different from them. At the same time, this interaction bolsters their own sense of their respective cultures, highlighting how their own experiences may be better or more important. We recognize these final moments as a return because of how the narratives position the otherness or strangeness of the other foods represented in comparison to the protagonists' cuisines. Plus, the protagonists *literally* return home. The two protagonists return with two different understandings of their adventures—Richard's Giovanni approaches the other foods as a way to learn how to appreciate his own food, and Dooley's Carrie comes home full while not necessarily "appreciating" her mother's food any differently. Still, they both return home to their own foods and culture.

Care ethics describes how the needs of the self and others outside the self must be mediated, but, in the case of these *just one bite* books, the needs of others are generally missing from the narrative or, at least, dismissed and minimized. While other characters are included in the text, what they need (emotional needs, physical needs, "everyday" needs) is never included from their viewpoint. For instance, Giovanni invites his friends to dinner, but this invitation does not imply care because dinner only serves to calm Giovanni's concerns about his cuisine: who his friends are (besides the superficial touchstones) and what they care about are not incorporated into the narrative. Someone's needs cannot be accounted for if they are not depicted or if time is not taken to discover them. Thus, these eating moments do not reflect an ethic of care because the experience is one-sided and because they reinforce aspects of cultural food colonialism.

Readers know only about Carrie's and Giovanni's concerns and issues, and the other characters are given little time in the narrative for readers to develop an understanding of who they are outside of a dish that is momentarily presented. Dooley's books do not explore how Carrie spends additional time with her neighbors or what those relationships might not constitute, especially as this is not narrated in the story. The narrative, then, cannot encourage readers to even imagine that these conversations are happening elsewhere in the storyworld because they are never even suggested. In *Rice & Rocks*, readers rarely see the people from the cultures that Giovanni observes; the only representation happens when Giovanni's friends appear, and, even then, that moment is too brief to create cultural empathy.

Narrative Approaches to Identity that Do Not Establish an Ethic of Care

This chapter focuses on two major aspects of *just one bite* books. First, *just one bite* books take a quantity approach to representation; opting to depict multiple cultures, these narratives prioritize superficial details to portray several cultures at once. Second, these superficial, surface-level details result in a sameness ideology dominating the text. Because *just one bite* books concentrate on the details that are similar across these cuisines, they create homogenous depictions of culture by prioritizing an essentialized view of humanity. Accompanying these two elements is a toxic positivity that obscures the protagonists' problematic culinary travels, so *just one bite* books also fail to account for the nuances of relationships and how this impacts identity. Overall, I find that these narrative elements do not establish an ethic of care and reinforce problematic ways of discussing food, identity, and cultural diversity.

Yet the traits in *just one bite* books that I find problematic are traits that other readers find

admirable. The variety of cultures and the connections through commonality that these books focus on are elements that Amazon customer reviews and descriptions of the story praise, which underscores the concerns I have about the ethical implications of how these books can be perceived. The back of *Everybody Cooks Rice* (the first book of the series) boasts, for example, a review from the *School Library Journal*: "Yes, everybody cooks rice, and everybody eats rice—these commonalities do bring us together, a lesson worth repeating again and again." But does everyone cook rice in the same way or eat the same kind of rice? Is it not an overstatement to say that everyone does? *Pragmatic Mom*, a blog run by Mia Wenjen where she "blogs excessively about diverse children's books (picture books through middle grade)," lists *Everybody Cooks Rice* on her "17 Wonderful Multicultural Picture Books About Food." Wenjen describes how "All the recipes for these dishes that Carrie sampled are in the back of the book too! Everyone has rice for dinner on Carrie's street, but with such great variety from around the world. This is such a charming book!"[11] These reviews only account for the surface messages of the book, but commonalities do not automatically signify connection and relationship.

As I have discussed, I distinguish *just one bite* books from other food books talking about identity precisely because of their approach to representation. When we identify the kind of approach that *just one bite* books employ, we can recognize how this framework for talking

[11] It is notable that Wenjen uses *diverse* when describing what she does in her blog, but she uses *multicultural* as she creates a list of these picture books. There does not seem to be any indication from her posts that she defines these terms differently; this conflation highlights how using these two concepts interchangeably can make it hard to pinpoint issues related to narrative choices.

about representation creates a paradox. First, *just one bite* books portray surface level ideas about "Us versus Them," which reinforces othering ideologies that rely on an understanding that identity is easily summarized in one food. Then, these narratives imply that we are all the same, a dangerous ideology that homogenizes and ultimately erase identities. *Just one bite* books thus are defined by an inherent irony of depicting everyone as the same and reinforcing an Us versus Them (self versus other) mindset. This approach is ironic because, by trying to bring everyone together and find connection, an oppositional relationship is created: as Fish discusses with boutique multiculturalism, anything that might fall outside of what constitutes an accepted "essentialized view of humanity" is labelled as other. Thus, the sameness ideology I have discussed is not actually about connection because it leads to an inherently oppositional way of understanding identity. While *just one bite* books seem to represent multiple identities, this irony results from representing foods and cuisines too broadly (incorporating too many identities means not enough time for details) or too narrowly (one specific food to represent an entire cuisine). As I continue exploring in this project the spectrum of food identity books for young audiences, I call for a more nuanced understanding of identity informed by feminist care ethics. *Just one bite* books are ultimately about how people interact with and through their foods, even if those interactions are questionable and problematic. Feminist care ethics emphasizes how these food interactions require balance and a recognition of nuance. Othering happens in *just one bite* books because of this imbalance in relationships and understanding identity and because these narratives do not follow through on the possibilities of relational ethics that they hint at with the relationships they depict.

Depicting relationships does not equal depicting relational identity. As fictional characters in a book, the protagonists themselves do not need to be responsible or held

accountable for these othering food ideologies, especially because the relationships they have with their neighbors and friends seem positive. The protagonists laugh with their friends, enjoy time with their families, and eat with other people; overall, the characters seem happy or they end up being happy. But just because a relationship is portrayed positively does not mean that the relationship establishes an ethic of care. Care ethics emphasizes that relationships, interactions, and identities are not one-sided and should not be treated as such. Thus, it is what the protagonists represent *ideologically* here that interests me the most. The protagonists' interactions in the narrative world seem like they are based in a more caring, understanding attitude of identity because they are constructed in a positive tone. However, these interactions can be characterized differently if read critically: if returning home is the end goal when readers explore culinary diversity, then making sustained connections and negotiating those connections is unnecessary. But sustaining a caring relationship involves more than returning to one's home without a thought about the people one has left behind.

A snapshot of a culture does not and cannot ever adequately encompass the cuisine of any culture because this singular moment does not honor the situatedness of our identities. Instead, considering identity in a situated manner requires, as Moran writes, a "kind of attentiveness [that] emphasizes, among other things, how such factors as race, gender, disability, class, age, and sexuality contribute to the development of a sense of self and of the ability to act on behalf of that self and others" (81). *Just one bite* books portray food and identity without gesturing to the other elements related to identity that Moran describes—and they do not necessarily need to gesture to every aspect of identity. However, *just one bite* books do not engage with *any* elements related to the situated nature of food and culture nor how those are tied to aspects of identity. Food is superficially related to culture, which is superficially tied to race

and identity; the characters Carrie visits are one-dimensional people identified only by their ethnic identity, while Giovanni never even meets the people whose food he voyeuristically observes. Michelle Moody-Adams describes how "we often encounter situations, feminist thinkers argue, in which it is morally necessary to attend to the concrete identity, history, and needs of the other" (259). These narratives do not frame Carrie's and Giovanni's actions as ethical decisions, even as interacting with other people and their food *does* involve ethical decisions. Carrie's and Giovanni's actions are problematic because they do not have the opportunity to engage with the nuances of identity that Moody-Adams identifies. They are also problematic because the narratives position this as ideologically acceptable. Likewise, the narratives neglect to include the histories and needs of the other characters with whom Carrie and Giovanni interact. As Atkins and Bowler assert, "Eating the 'other' is therefore not an 'innocent' activity" because "[i]t has economic, social and cultural implications to add to the political echoes from the past" (285). These *just one bite* books ultimately fail to attend to the connections of food and identity by relying on the notion that one meal can represent an entire culture. Thus, this quantity approach, where everyone is included but no one is fully characterized, is what is limited.

CHAPTER III: EATING IN THE MIDDLE—FOOD THEMES IN DISH-SPECIFIC BOOKS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

What Makes *Dish-Specific* Books Different?

Dish-specific books are the next set of texts in the spectrum I analyze in this project: these are texts for young audiences that commonly focus on one dish to represent cultural diversity. The books I have selected here are dish-specific because they tend to consider how characters eat, prepare, and interact with one particular cultural dish. Other foods and dishes may be mentioned, but *dish-specific* books have an extended focus on a singular recipe. (A separate issue is whether the book implies that this recipe is one an entire culture would use or is a recipe within the context of a family and how it celebrates their cultural heritage.) I have observed that *dish-specific* books can be picture books, early readers, and chapter books, and, in these stories, food becomes tied to protagonists' identity through eating and cooking scenes with family members and friends, which are prominent parts of dish-specific narratives. *Dish-specific* books stand out from *just one bite* books because they begin to place food into specific contexts: these narratives provide information to readers about ingredients, preparation processes, and eating scenes that *just one bite* books do not. As such, this narrative difference provides clues about the role specific dishes play in cultural identity. In this chapter, then, I theorize how *dish-specific* books are a step up in the spectrum because readers begin to receive more context for a specific dish. In particular, food in context of the culture, the people, and the foodways differentiates *dish-specific* books from *just one bite* books. This context manifests primarily in two ways: cultural context (situating food within a larger understanding of a culture) and relational context (how a particular family or character experiences a culture through their relationships with others and food). Readers can understand this new way of thinking through two different frameworks:

feminist care ethics, which can direct our attention to the way that relationships and care impact how we see ourselves, and foodways scholarship, which emphasizes dynamic ways of conceptualizing food, that is, ways of seeing food that honor its fluidity, flexibility, and nuance. Throughout these narratives, readers receive more of the multisensory elements through an extended focus on one dish, which, I argue, leads to a more dynamic way of conceptualizing identity.

The first kind of context introduced in *dish-specific* books is cultural context, which these stories often incorporate through glossaries, recipes, and notes from the author and/or illustrator to further educate readers about the cuisines (and cultures) portrayed within the narrative. These paratextual elements maintain the "instructive" tone *just one bite* books include as this material exemplifies the more explicitly educational components of the text, though the written and/or visual narrative components of picture books can also be didactic. In longer *dish-specific* books, this information is usually incorporated into the narrative, with the characters explaining the context (to the reader or another character); preparing the recipe and explaining the steps they took; or describing the ingredients with which they work. In this way, *dish-specific* books, like *just one bite* books, are also an apt medium for readers to consider how the pedagogic and aesthetic elements of a texts work together or against one another. Looking at *dish-specific* books, I analyze how paratext and illustrations, when present, work to describe the identities presented in the book; for longer *dish-specific* books, without paratext and illustrations, I examine how the information usually found in paratext and illustrations is incorporated into the narrative. I will explore how the interplay between narrative and this extended context can influence how readers understand food, cuisine, culture, and/or identity in a given text. I conclude that, by providing this culinary and cultural context, *dish-specific* books begin to

present well-rounded stories about the connections between food and identity.

This cultural context is not the only context that *dish-specific* books provide as these texts also incorporate relationships as an important aspect of food. As I discussed in Chapter Two, *just one bite* books do not portray relational ethics, especially because they neglect to establish connections between food and relational ways of conceptualizing identity. In contrast, *dish-specific* books add what I call relational context when they discuss food and identity, which adds another layer of detail and nuance to the foodways these narratives depict. Moreover, *dish-specific* books do not showcase the kind of toxic positivity that *just one bite* books do; that is, they do not over-simplify how complex identity is, nor do they promote the sameness ideology. Instead, food and consequently relationships are depicted as messy in these books, and so the stories about identity are more realistic and more complex. Throughout *dish-specific* narratives, characters struggle with food, including its tastes, its smells, its textures, and preparation practices along with family and cultural practices associated with those foods. This narrative approach, I assert, leads to *dish-specific* books that complexly portray relationships and relational understandings of identity as they surround food; as a result, *dish-specific* narratives create more respectful, nuanced stories about food and identity than *just one bite* books.

Foodways scholars emphasize that food plays an important role in how people understand themselves and each other. "What foods we eat, how and when we prepare, serve, and consume them, are all types of identity work," Amy E. Guptill, Denise A. Copelton, and Betsy Lucal explain in their book *Food and Society: Principles and Paradoxes* (19). This identity work is "activity through which we define for ourselves and others who we are socially and culturally" (Guptill, et al., 19). *Dish-specific* books include these kinds of details about the social and cultural elements of foodways. Similarly, Atkins and Bowler emphasize how "foodways … often

represent an important expression in our identity, both as individuals and in reference to a broader ethnic, class or religious grouping" (273). Centering a specific dish, depicting examples of that dish, and incorporating different aspects of the dish's foodways: these narrative moments allow readers to better understand the complex identity processes that characters go through. As such, these narratives avoid the problematic homogenizing of identity that *just one bite* books indulge because *dish-specific* books seem to evoke a particular understanding of how food exists in a myriad of contexts in our lives, one that recognizes the importance of food in our relationships and the ways that foodways impact our identities. Moreover, Emma-Jayne Abbotts's work on agency and food in *The Agency of Eating: Mediation, Food and the Body* highlights how humans and food interact through eating. She suggests a framework for understanding such interactions with food as "a model in which it is situated in interactions between bodies, the material world and discourse. Agency thus becomes understood as *relational*, continually produced through dynamic interplays and interactions, and *distributed* across ever-shifting heterogeneous networks of people, matter and knowledge" (Abbotts 21, emphasis added). Abbotts underscores how food itself impacts people and how it has its own agency, which provides one way to think about the kind of multisensory details *dish-specific* books include. By including elements of foodways that appeal to readers' senses, *dish-specific* texts help readers envision multiple aspects of foodways, which these texts then situate within specific cultural and relational contexts.

The aforementioned foodways scholars do not mention feminist care ethics, but their work highlights relationships, interactions, and identity in ways that are foundational to feminist care ethics. For instance, in "Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory, and International Relations," Fiona Robinson reminds us that "the substantive moral content of care ethics is

normally said to focus on three main elements: attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness" (121). These three ideas are useful to describe the kinds of relational context *dish-specific* books provide for characters' interactions with each other and with food. As these books demonstrate, we are *attentive* when we take the time to listen to the needs of others; we are *responsible* when we take the time to understand how these needs may be affected or neglected by us; and we are *responsive* when we pause to respond to what someone else needs from us. Robinson also emphasizes how "a moral practice that is profoundly contextual and focuses on the moral situations arising out of concrete relationships is necessarily one that is attentive and responsive to the needs, claims, fears, and hopes of particular moral subjects" (121). This framework, then, can also help us observe how, when protagonists struggle with something related to food, other characters concentrate on the protagonists' individual needs—and protagonists, in kind, do the same for other characters. For instance, each book introduces a specific conflict related to a specific dish; sometimes the characters work to solve this conflict while other times the book extends that relational identity work outside of the story world (for instance, when Kevin Noble Maillard emphasizes the work that needs to be done to recognize and reclaim Native traditions). Robinson adds that such a practice of care "must be attentive insofar as it can assume no 'ideal' moral situation, but must listen to and learn from the particular standpoint of real individuals" (121). Thus, no singular struggle or situation should represent an entire culture nor should it be seen as something that can be easily solved via some version of a universal ethical principle. Instead, care ethics highlights how individual standpoints and perspectives should not only be recognized but also valued and privileged as a solution or multiple solutions are sought out. *Dish-specific* books introduce this relational identity work as protagonists work through different conflicts related to the dishes they make and eat.

Yet *dish-specific* books are not without their faults, which is why I position them as the middle part of the spectrum of the theoretical position I am advancing. *Dish-specific* books do provide a lot of context, but there is a drawback to picking one dish as a focus: this narrative strategy can make it seem like the book or food is representative of an entire culture or cuisine, which connects to issues related to authenticity I discussed in Chapter Two. What happens when readers uncritically consume the food they are reading about based on popular notions of what is authentic in the culinary world? Although *dish-specific* books do not present multiple foods within a given cuisine and foodway, they do provide stories that are more well-rounded than *just one bite* books. However, these stories are not quite as fleshed out as *intersectional food identity* books when it comes to the culinary and relational context they provide. Additionally, a second issue arises when *dish-specific* books provide context in the paratext: authors and publishers rely on readers to read and interpret the paratext, which is often included in the back of the book and at the end of the narrative. The *dish-specific* books make connections to larger cultural practices in the paratext, but these connections can only be recognized if readers take up the paratext in conversation with specific moments they read about in the storyline. This is not to say that *dish-specific* books do not have their place, but readers must attend to them in different ways with different critical reading strategies, something I discuss more fully in Chapter Five. Moving across the spectrum of books about food and cultural diversity, we can begin to see how these *dish-specific* stories introduce more specific relational contexts for the cultures and cuisines they discuss (as relational is defined through a feminist care ethics framework). Thus, in this chapter, I qualify the advantages and drawbacks of *dish-specific* narratives.

I have selected two picture books, an early reader, and a middle grade chapter book,

which exemplify the *dish-specific* genre.[12] Kevin Noble Maillard's picture book *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story*, illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal (2019), provides paratext that expands on the narrative elements to educate readers about foods, peoples, and cultures. In this picture book, Maillard describes different features of fry bread as a Native family cooks the bread and explains how fry bread is tied to Native history. Debbi Michiko Florence's early reader *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen* (2017), illustrated by Elizabeth Vuković, is the first in a five book series about a young girl, Jasmine. In this first book, Jasmine's family prepares to make mochi for the New Year, or "Oshogatsu" (101), and the narrative discusses gender and age as they are tied to cultural and familial foodways surrounding mochi making. The book concludes with an author's note and a microwave mochi recipe for readers. In Angela Ahn's *Krista Kim-Bap* (2018), a middle grade chapter book, Krista encounters several challenges in school—a Heritage Month project; popular girls trying to befriend her (which consequently creates tension between her and her long-time best friend, Jason); and a Celebration of Dance program. As the description on the back of book describes, with the Heritage Project, "Krista has mixed feelings about being her school's 'Korean Ambassador,'" which becomes a central part of the plot. With her grandmother's help making kimbap for the Heritage Project, Krista begins to resolve other issues. Besides exemplifying *dish-specific* narrative strategies, the two longer

[12] Annette Wannamaker and Jennifer M. Miskec "loosely defin[e] Early Readers as those books that children are first able to read entirely on their own" (4). They add that these books "most often (though not always) are published in series; contain an extended narrative that is likely to be broken into episodes; and that feature repetitive, sometimes formulaic, plots featuring the same characters" (4).

books that I examine here also associate traditional foods with the main character's name, as their titles suggest. Overall, each of these *dish-specific* books portray how the narrator-protagonists work through conflicts relating to these traditional foods, from learning how to make the food to worrying about how ties to that food make other people think about them. Through these conflicts, the books also articulate how traditional foods become tied to and/or signify identity.

Foodways, Sensory Clues, and Cultural Context

Dish-specific books are unique because they portray food within the context of material foodways, culture, and people. Michael A. Di Giovine and Ronda L. Brulotte in "Introduction: Food and Foodways as Cultural Heritage" describe the kind of context that *dish-specific* books tend to introduce: "how we eat, and what we eat, and when we eat, and with whom we eat, all uniquely vary from place to place, group to group, time to time—thanks to longstanding geographic, economic, social, and cosmological differences throughout the world" (1). By providing a detailed discussion of one dish, *dish-specific* books provide more information about foods and cultures than *just one bite* books. The sustained focus on one dish especially allows readers to see the dish in more of its complexity, for instance, how folks eat it, what they like (or maybe do not like) about it, how the food tastes, what its textures are like, and how the dish is significant to a family and their cultural heritage. Likewise, readers receive more aesthetic, sensory details about the food, which add to a fuller depiction of the foodways surrounding a specific dish. Lucy Long describes how, "As a conceptual model, foodways systematizes the exploration of how food is woven into everyday life and personal history" ("Introduction" 8). Depictions of foodways that relate to individuals' experiences encourage audiences to

understand different aspects of food and people's interactions with and through food. Along with this, the context provided is from an insider perspective, and so readers are aligned with those who have a cultural connection to the food rather than an outsider-viewer-traveler. Because of this, *dish-specific* books portray foodways in more respectful and more nuanced ways than *just one bite* books, which, frankly, makes for a better storyline. Overall, food depicted within specific cultural contexts results in more dynamic portrayals of food and cultural identity in *dish-specific* texts than *just one bite* books; that is, the multi-faceted nature of food is more obvious and clear and thus identity is represented in more dynamic ways in these narratives.

Sensory Details in Recipes, Ingredients, and Preparation Processes

Dish-specific books incorporate elements, such as recipes, ingredients, and preparation processes, that provide readers with sensory clues about the dishes: these sensory clues exemplify how *dish-specific* narratives discuss the material aspects of foodways more than *just one bite* narratives. When they are included in paratext, these narrative elements are complementary to the storyline and are aligned with culinary details included in the plot of the book. The books, then, present readers with the opportunity to connect the details about food found in the storyline with these additional elements and vice versa, which can enhance how audiences experience the dishes in each story. Recipes, ingredients, and preparation processes in *dish-specific* books work differently from the same elements when they are included in *just one bite* books because *dish-specific* narratives and *just one bite* texts approach food from different ideological spaces: *dish-specific* books are about the food and how it may be connected to individual and cultural identity, while *just one bite* books focus on a generalizable, universal human identity. With this added information, *dish-specific* books encourage readers to

conceptualize food and identity in more complex ways than *just one bite* narratives.

Recipes in *dish-specific* texts give us step-by-step instructions for how to make a food: they can inform readers about the smell or look of a certain food or ingredient, and they can even point to the physical qualities of food and how people use their bodies to make food. Moreover, "[r]ecipes in children's literature-based texts can provide a significant cultural context to better understand the characters' lives through food," Jodie Slothower and Jan Susina point out in "Delicious Supplements: Literary Cookbooks as Additives to Children's Texts" (22). Sometimes, recipes are included in paratext at the end of the book, as in picture books or early readers with illustrations, but they can also be found within the narrative as well, though these recipes are less step-by-step for the reader to follow on their own. *Dish-specific* books also include details about ingredients, oftentimes appearing in the recipes but not always: these ingredients allow readers to begin imagining how these different flavors and textures constitute a specific dish, and readers can see how characters respond to those flavors. As such, ingredients also help readers better conceptualize a dish because they can see how characters respond to food's multisensory qualities and maybe even think about the choices characters make when including certain ingredients in their dishes (for example, when cooks are limited to what they can include because of geography or money). Last, *dish-specific* books provide more information about preparation processes, which especially emphasize the science and physics of cooking. These details also hint at different textures, different flavors, and different ways of eating. Utensils, as well, can help readers imagine what is important in someone's kitchen and why certain utensils have cultural significance (like the special hammer used to pound mochi in *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen*).

Recipes, ingredients, and preparation processes can be instructive, then, not just about

how to make a dish but also about culinary and cultural practices. These recipes might even be unique to individual families, which demonstrates how this genre gestures to multiple culinary practices and foodways. Slothower and Susina suggest that recipes "also have a way of expanding a text, as Sarah Sceats observes: 'Written recipes have the peculiar metaliterary status of anticipating the creation of material entities and events beyond the text'" (Sceats qtd. in Slothower and Susina 22-23). Even if a reader does not make the dish, a book including information about how to make a dish points to specific material details about food. Florence's *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen* and Maillard's *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* include formal recipes, with ingredient lists and step by step directions in the back of the books alongside author's notes; Ahn's *Krista Kim-Bap* does not include a formal recipe but, instead, incorporates detailed scenes of Krista and her grandmother making the titular food, which I suggest works as an enacted recipe. In *Fry Bread*, the steps involved in the recipe are illustrated earlier in the book so that the illustrations help readers/eaters visualize the process of making fry bread, which is later outlined in the recipe. In *Jasmine Toguchi*, the recipe included is a simplified, microwave version for making mochi, although why it is simplified is not made explicitly clear. Still, details in the mochi recipe provide readers the opportunity to think about mochi's sticky texture and the different ways it can be eaten. In this way, the aesthetic qualities and educational qualities of these books work in harmony to contextualize what is being eaten: they reveal the multisensory dimensions that allow readers to see how the material aspects of foodways connect to someone's identity.

In Maillard's *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story*, the preparation process for fry bread is connected to several illustrations that point to important aspects of culture, like food, shape, art, history, place, nation, and community. The illustrations and text work together to

underscore the different sensory qualities of fry bread as an important part of Native foodways, gesturing to how these material aspects are connected to culture. The first spread starts with "Fry bread is food," followed by a list of ingredients that are then illustrated:

> Flour, salt, water
>
> Cornmeal, baking powder
>
> Perhaps milk, maybe sugar
>
> All mixed together in a big bowl. (Maillard n.p.)

In this image, five children follow after a grandmother with long hair who holds a bowl and a small child who has a spoon in their mouth. The text on this page leaves out some of the ingredients that are depicted in the illustration, which are later included in the recipe. For instance, one child with a red striped shirt carries a cup of liquid (perhaps water or milk—the illustration is unclear) in one hand and, in the other, two packets with "Active Dry Yeast" written on them. This ingredient is not included in the free verse poem, but it is included in the recipe in the paratext at the back of the book: the recipe specifically lists "½ oz. of dry or instant yeast" as an ingredient, adding that this is "approx. 2 packages" (n.p.). In step two, the recipe directions state to "add yeast, sugar, and salt to the cooled cornmeal, along with small sprinkles of water to moisten the mixture. Gradually add flour, using a metal whisk or potato masher to get rid of lumps. Sprinkle water to keep dough moist but thick. Cover with a damp cloth and let rise for 3 hours" (n.p.). This instruction fills in what the children and grandmother will do with the ingredients they are holding, and this scene and the details in the recipe demonstrate an interplay characteristic of *dish-specific* books. The recipe is a factual genre with specific steps and culinary details, but it leaves out the relational aspects of cooking. Yet the illustrations and the poems demonstrate how people interact with the physical aspects of the fry bread ingredients.

The scene, then, situates this dish within the context of this family, underscoring how *dish-specific* books are primarily about sensory experiences grounded in specific contexts.

The next few pages provide additional sensory details specifically about fry bread dough, focusing on details about the middle state of the preparation process. Between this page and the page turn to the next scene, however, mixing the ingredients to form the dough is left out.[13] The first page spread only has the ingredients to make dough, while the next page spread illustrates how the dough is already formed. The turn of the page implies that the dough has already been prepared, while the recipe (included later) provides specific details about this step of the process, as I quoted above. Moreover, the instructions can clue readers into textural elements with words like *moisten* and *lumps*: "Gradually add flour, using a metal whisk or potato masher to get rid of lumps. Sprinkle water to keep dough moist but thick" (Maillard n.p.). These textural aspects of fry bread are depicted in the illustration, which encourages readers to consider how the characters enact the recipe as four sets of hands work the fry bread dough like the instructions in step two describe. Although mixing the dough is not illustrated, the text accompanying the first fry bread dough illustration points to its other physical qualities:

> Fry bread is shape
>
> Hands mold the dough
>
> Flat like a pancake
>
> Round like a ball

[13] Nodelman suggests that "we can use our store of previous knowledge to create a cause-and-effect relationship among the various parts of the picture that postulates the existence of time within it and lets us guess at the story it might be conveying" (110).

Or puffy like Nana's softest pillow (Maillard n.p.)

The words underscore the shape and texture of the fry bread dough through three similes.[14] The recipe, however, does not describe the texture or shape in this way, specifying only that cooks should mix the dough and then "make golf ball-sized portions." In this case, the illustration fills in what the recipe lacks, which are the details of cooking together, of making something together. In the illustrations that follow, each step of making the fry bread is visualized for the readers: frying the dough in a pan of oil and listening to it sizzle; tasting the bread and seeing its different colors; combining other ingredients with fry bread to make new dishes; sharing food with loved ones. Each spread exemplifies the different ways that the text and paratext have a reciprocal relationship, which reinforces how exploring the sensory qualities of fry bread through relationships presents a well-rounded description of this dish.

In *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen*, Jasmine's family prepares to make mochi for the new year, and the plot in the last half of the book follows the different steps involved in this process. This early reader incorporates fewer visual sensory details than the picture book previously discussed, but there is still space for Jasmine to describe what she sees, smells, hears, feels, and tastes. The interplay between Jasmine's narration and the author's notes, in particular, helps readers ground their understanding of mochi-making within a specific family and relational context, which I discuss later. The beginning of the book focuses more on how Jasmine, her sister, and her parents prepare for the extended family to come visit as well as how Jasmine desperately wants to help make mochi and find a way to subvert her family's rules about making

[14] Free verse poems seem to be an apt genre to describe food as the lyrical nature of the poems can enhance the multisensory of qualities of the food it describes.

mochi. In some places, the author's notes and Jasmine's narration about the story events match each other, which creates an opportunity for readers to conceptualize making mochi through two different formats. For instance, Jasmine explains how "Obaachan and Mom spoke Japanese to each other as they washed and soaked the special sweet rice at the sink" (37) along with how, "In the kitchen, the rice cookers set on timers were already steaming, filling the kitchen with the smell of rice. My mouth watered" (53). In both places, Jasmine provides details that can help readers think through the beginning steps involved in making mochi. *Washed* and *soaked* emphasize the water used in this process, hinting at how water might sound as it hits the rice; *special* and *sweet* are adjectives used to describe the rice itself, which could perhaps help readers distinguish the kind of rice used for mochi from other kinds of rice (even though the specific variety of rice is not named in this moment). Additionally, the scene highlights Jasmine's physical response to the smell of cooking rice, implying that her mouth waters because the smell is appealing to her. Florence adds to these sensory details in the author's notes: "A day before mochi-tsuki," she writes, "the special mochi rice has to be washed and soaked" and "[t]he next day, the rice is steamed in big batches" (102). These details demonstrate how the preparation process (as the author describes it) aligns with how the protagonist describes the process, but the notes provide additional context for understanding this process. Working together, these two elements of the text create opportunities for readers to understand mochi more fully, focusing on the food and the protagonist's experience with it.

In the author's note, Florence also names and describes the utensils used to make the mochi in more detail, adding another element to the mochi foodways depicted in the book. She explains how, "While it is still hot, the cooked rice is placed in a mortar called an usu (*oo-soo*). It can be made out of stone or wood. A special mallet or hammer called a kine (*kee-neh*) is used to

pound the rice into mochi. The wooden hammer is heavy and it's very hard work to pound the rice" (102). Florence provides the Japanese names of the utensils and clarifies what materials these utensils may be made of, which can likely be attributed to the additional text found in early readers. Such details can help readers envision how the kine might sound as it strikes against the rice in the usu or how the texture of the usu and kine feel against one's skin. Jasmine describes some of these details during the narrative, too, including how heavy the kine is and how, when she has her "hands around the wooden handle," the handle "felt smooth from all the years of my family's hands gripping it" (47). Jasmine's description adds textural details about the kine, although she does not she describe the materials used to make the usu, nor does she use the Japanese names for these utensils. She also implicitly connects this sensory experience (how the hammer is used and worn smooth) to her specific familial context (the role her family's hands played in smoothing the wood of the kine's handle). The author's notes, then, complement Jasmine's story, which can encourage readers to understand multiple sensory elements associated with making mochi.

In the author's note, Florence emphasizes this multisensory experience again when she describes what happens when pounding mochi. "To keep the rice from sticking to the mortar," Florence explains, "another person reaches into the mortar between pounding to wet the rice and turn it" (102). Florence underscores mochi's sticky texture here and adds in details about why the rice needs to be turned, something Jasmine describes as the process happens. "After Uncle Jimmy hit the mochi three times," Jasmine narrates, "Uncle Ray reached into the usu to turn the mochi to keep it from sticking to the bowl. Uncle Jimmy hit the mochi again. Uncle Ray dipped his hands into the bowl of water before spinning the mochi another time" (75). Together, this scene and the author's notes encourage readers to envision the process of making mochi and to

consider how the sticky texture of the mochi impacts the preparation process. Through this combination, the book reiterates how the process itself is important to developing the mochi correctly. Jasmine's narration, however, contextualizes this process within her family's own traditions, which hints at the relational context the book also provides.

Krista, in *Krista Kim-Bap*, learns to make the titular food, kimbap, with her grandmother for her Heritage Month Project. This middle grade chapter book lacks illustrations, which the other *dish-specific* books incorporate, so the sensory details about kimbap are communicated through words: this narrative choice showcases how some *dish-specific* books provide sensory information mainly through textual detail. While visual details may benefit certain readers more, including sensory details only within the narrative creates different opportunities for readers to experience the foodways Krista describes. As such, I do not see this lack of visual detail as a limitation of this kind of *dish-specific* text. Instead, this text exemplifies how visual detail, illustrations, and paratext are not the only way to incorporate foodways contexts. The narrative situates making kimbap within the larger scope of Krista's relationship with her grandmother and her schoolmates, which reiterates a unique dynamic of *dish-specific* books. Krista begins by nervously reaching out to her grandmother:

> "I want to learn about Korean food, Grandma. I want to find out what it is that makes me Korean, and I think it's the food." I was starting to ramble now. "You know how I love kimchi and rice and soup and bulgogi and I always have. I just ate it. But with Jason for example, he thought kimchi was weird at first and it's only because he's my friend that he likes it now, because he's not Korean. He wasn't born knowing or liking it. But I was." (Ahn 31)

Krista connects her cultural identity (being Korean) with eating Korean foods: for Krista, being

Korean means being born with a love for Korean food. This moment encourages readers to begin making connections between what Korean food is, what it looks like, and what it tastes like and how eating Korean food says something about how Krista sees her Korean identity. After this "ramble," when she asks her grandmother to help with the heritage month project, her grandma replies, "Friday, we make kimbap" (Ahn 32). Her grandmother does not describe why she chooses kimbap, and Krista does not argue or disagree, and so this phone call establishes kimbap as the specific dish in this narrative, even as other Korean foods are mentioned. This *dish-specific* book, then, sets up the connection between sensory food experiences and relational identity that I have been discussing.

Unlike the other books I have discussed here, *Krista Kim-Bap* does not include a recipe for kimbap: instead, Krista describes extensive details as she makes kimbap with her grandmother. When they begin making kimbap together, Krista first watches carefully as her grandma begins working on the kimbap:

> I watched her lay out the ingredients. Sheets of dried seaweed, eggs, beef, carrots, spinach, yellow pickled radish. "You wash spinach. Wash very well." She bent down into a cabinet and pulled out a colander. "Then you wash carrots," Grandma ordered.
>
> She proceeded to fry the beef she had bought at the store while I washed. I washed for a long time. I was afraid of doing it wrong. She had started a pot of water to boil and after I finally handed her the spinach she dumped it in the pot of boiling water. (34)

Following this are several more orders for what Krista needs to do to work alongside her grandma (Ahn 34-35). These scenes serve as a kind of enacted recipe, which is the closest thing to a recipe that readers receive in this book, as the scene details the ingredients that they use and describes the steps they take (either from Krista's commentary or Grandma's explicit

instructions). This scene helps readers conceptualize kimbap as Krista and Grandma prepare the ingredients (cooking spinach, slicing carrots) for the dish, gesturing to the physical changes of the ingredients as they prepare kimbap. After they make the food, Krista wonders how she can incorporate this experience into her class presentation and decides to ask her grandmother to help her make food in the class (Ahn 98). The class demonstration repeats the actions of the previous scenes where they make kimbap, and Grandma and Krista present the recipe to Krista's classmates, reinforcing the processes and knowledge readers learned earlier in the book. Through these different scenes in which characters make kimbap, the narrative honors Krista's relationship and individual cooking experience with her grandmother while also pointing to specific culinary details about this traditional Korean dish.

Cultural Context

With recipes and ingredients, we begin to understand more of the material differences across cuisine. *Dish-specific* books also provide details about culture, practices, and geography that *just one bite* books do not: this information can be found within the narrative itself (for instance, a character and/or the protagonist may explain the context to another character, directly to the reader, or to themselves in internal monologue) or in some form of an author's note. In picture books, the traditions discussed in the narrative occur through narrow, focused plotlines; the author's notes, then, fill in any gaps that are left out of the narrative about the culture. Author's notes help clearly communicate what the author says they are intending for readers to take away and can help frame readers' understanding of the text. Like the paratextual recipes, the author's notes are written from the author to the reader/eater. Authors may provide cultural context for the dish, explain how geography is connected to the food, detail important aspects of

the food's history, or describe how the dish differs across regional cuisines. These details allow readers/eaters to see the dish more fully, and they help emphasize the importance of recognizing a cultural/shared identity *and* an individual identity since the food described in the book is not meant to be a singular representation for an entire cuisine or culture. Erick Castellanos and Sarah Bergstresser describe how "food as culture" and "food as nature" are two tropes Eivind Jacobsen uses in food rhetoric (Jacobsen qtd. in Castellanos Bergstresser 201). They suggest an additional trope

> that draws on [a] link between culture and geography: food as heritage. From this perspective, food becomes both a symbolic and economic resource. It is a way to link the past with the present and create a connection between the present [and] the future. Envisioning food as heritage becomes a way to authenticate and validate the existence and the practices of a culture and becomes a way to commodify the culture itself. (202)

Castellanos and Bergstresser emphasize how geography and place create an additionally meaningful context to understanding the foodways that surround a dish. Author's notes and other details included in the narrative help readers/eaters conceptualize a dish amongst a variety of foodways by considering geographical context, for instance. In this way, the authors acknowledge and emphasize how food is not a sole marker of identity and how food and identity are informed by a variety of experiences. The authors' notes underscore how the eating and cooking moments depicted in the book are singular, specific interactions that gesture to other shared cultural experiences.

Maillard's notes address how his book, *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story*, is one way to reclaim lost and marginalized histories; as such, out of the texts I examine in this chapter, Maillard spends the most time providing cultural context surrounding the book's

specific dish. In these notes, Maillard situates the fry bread experiences within a larger understanding of where fry bread came from, why it is important in Native communities, and how the simple ingredients make more than a simple food. Maillard's notes in *Fry Bread* are, thus, impressively extensive—and they need to be, especially as Native peoples are reclaiming Native foodways and telling Native histories. Maillard starts his author's note with the history of where fry bread came from:

> It is commonly believed that the Navajo (Diné) were the first to make fry bread over 150 years ago. The basic ingredients may appear simple—flour, salt, water, and yeast—yet the history behind this community anchor is anything but. Despite colonial efforts throughout American history to weaken tribal governments, fracture Indigenous communities, and forcibly take ancestral lands, Indian culture has proven resilient. In strange, unfamiliar lands, exiled Natives strived to retain those old traditions, and they create new ones, especially for food. (n.p.)

With this acknowledgment, Maillard describes fry bread as a complex food with a complex history, and he sets up the more detailed discussion that will follow about how fry bread represents resilience, collective trauma, and community. The rest of the author's notes detail the same threads the book does, corresponding to each section of what fry bread is—how fry bread is food, shape, sound, color, flavor, time, art, history, place, nation, everything, and "us." These titles, so to speak, accompany the respective passages/free verse poems found throughout the book which provide more detail about what is happening in the illustrations. For instance, towards the end of the notes, Maillard emphasizes Native peoples' current existence and how fry bread can represent this resilience: "While so much of United States Federal policy has acted to weaken Indigenous governments and undermine tribal sovereignty, Native nations continue to

exist and demand recognition of their endurance and strength by the United States. Native America is not a past history of vanished people and communities. *We are still here*" (Maillard n.p., emphasis in original). Maillard connects fry bread with current presence; that is, he emphasizes how fry bread is both connected to a history and to current practices and lived experiences, which underscores how Native nations struggle to be seen and heard.

Maillard also explains how fry bread is diverse, as are the communities who eat fry bread, providing more information about how Native foodways are connected to Native cultures. The "Fry bread is color" spread depicts different colors and textures of fry bread, while the children eating the bread are of different colors with different expressions of their identities (Maillard n.p.). Fry bread, then, also metaphorically describes how there is no one way to look Native. In the author's note, Maillard acknowledges this deliberate choice to depict a variety of Native peoples: "there is an enormous range of hair textures and skin colors. Just like the characters in this book, Native people may have blonde hair or black skin, tight cornrows or loose braids" (n.p.). Maillard resists the idea that fry bread is a singular food without variety, just as Native identity is not a singular experience without diversity. Throughout the text and the author's note, Maillard devotes time to emphasizing that fry bread is a food that draws people together, represents community experiences and identities, but is still itself unique and different across multiple contexts.

Like *Fry Bread*, *Krista Kim-Bap* also highlights specific historical cultural experiences that are tied to shared trauma, which the narrative reveals through Krista's interactions with her grandmother. These historical experiences ground how Grandma makes kimbap, although the book incorporates fewer details surrounding this shared history compared to *Fry Bread*. When she comes to Krista's class for the Heritage Month Presentation, Grandma tells the class about

Korean heritage: “I tell you something about old Korea,” she begins; “When I was young, Korean people suffered a lot. We had war. We had nothing. I was hungry a lot. Everybody was hungry. We never waste one bit of food. After the war, many Koreans remembered being hungry, so we made our food with so much joy. We were happy to eat” (Ahn 123). Grandma describes what it was like to grow up during the war, saving every bite of food they could, and she emphasizes how this shared experience impacted how generations of Koreans thought about and ate their traditional foods. Grandma continues: “But I think because of suffering, we still remember that we are so happy to live and to eat. Even if young people know nothing about the suffering, they can feel it, in the food. This food that all Koreans eat is in our hearts. Today, I show you some of my heart and some of Krista’s heart” (Ahn 124). The phrasing here emphasizes a cultural, shared identity and an individual, situated identity—yes, this dish is related to how Koreans eat but also the making of it in this class, in this way, is unique to Krista’s family.

Jasmine, in *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen*, talks about her family’s traditions for making mochi, which the author’s notes connect to traditional Japanese culinary practices during a New Year’s celebration. Like the other two *dish-specific* books I have discussed so far, this early reader points to broader cultural experiences as they are connected to one dish, although these experiences are about a singular cultural celebration and they are coded more positively than the experiences discussed in the other two books. In the first few pages of the book, Jasmine describes how she, her sister, and her parents “were getting ready for mochi-tsuki. Every year our relatives come over to our house to celebrate New Year’s” (6). “In my family,” Jasmine states, “you had to be at least ten years old to make mochi. This year would be Sophie’s [Jasmine’s sister’s] first time getting to help. I’m only eight” (6-7). Jasmine is determined to

participate in the family tradition, so she decides to help the men in her family. “It was tradition for Dad, the uncles, and the boy cousins to turn the cooked rice into the sticky mochi by pounding it in a stone bowl with a big wooden hammer,” she says; “That’s what I could do. I could pound mochi with the boys!” (9). During the events of the story, Jasmine describes what the men and women do to make mochi while she waits her turn; the author’s notes later connect these gendered roles with cultural practices associated with making mochi. Jasmine continues to describe ties between gender roles and culinary practices when she narrates how her father and uncle set up a table “where the women would roll mochi tomorrow” (42). Later, she details how “Over at the table, Mom and Obaachan pulled pieces off the giant ball of mochi and passed them down to my aunties and cousins. Mochiko, rice flour, was sprinkled across the table like snow so the mochi wouldn’t stick to the tablecloth” (75-6). An illustration of the women accompanies Jasmine’s description in which they pull the small, round balls of mochi from a large one, roll it in mochiko, and lay them on a platter. “Traditionally,” Florence explains in her author’s note, pounding the rice “has been considered a job for men” (102), while “[i]t is traditional for the women to form the mochi treats by pinching pieces off the hot ball of mochi and rolling them into smaller balls” (103).[15] Florence adds additional cultural context to the sensory experiences Jasmine describes in the book, connecting family practices with larger cultural practices. The author’s note reinforces how the practices of Jasmine’s family are both unique (her family requires them to be a certain age) and tied to a larger cultural experience (certain roles are

[15] Florence does not explain why these roles are gendered, although her previous statement (that the kine is heavy and the labor is really difficulty) implies this may have to do with a gendered understanding of men’s strength.

assigned to different genders). Jasmine also connects the celebration with the titular food: "we spend the entire day making mochi, Japanese sweet rice cakes. It's hard work to make mochi, but there's a reward—eating the gooey treat afterward" (6). Later, Florence explains how "Mochi (*moh-chee*) is a Japanese treat made from sticky rice" and how mochi "usually looks like a small white ball" (101). She also explains how mochi can be eaten in different ways, for instance, how it "can be put in a soup of vegetables and broth called ozone (*oh-zone-ee*) to eat on New Year's morning. Mochi can also be toasted. Some people like to eat it with sugar and soy sauce" (103). Florence expands on Jasmine's discussion, providing cultural details—how mochi is made, how it can be used in different ways, during which celebrations it gets eaten—that allow readers to see different aspects of mochi foodways.

The paratext included in some of these books provides context that enables readers to understand the identities and cuisines depicted in the books in a more well-rounded way. When paratext is not included, cultural and culinary context are provided within the narrative itself. In both cases, the information reinforces some of the educational qualities of *dish-specific* books. When present, the pictures provide visual elements of food: regardless of whether the narrative provides visuals, the stories linger on the aesthetic, sensory qualities of food. The interaction between context and narrative, then, creates a space that gestures to how foodways a part of someone's identity.

Struggle and Conflict—Avoiding Toxic Positivity

Dish-specific books integrate cultural context with relational context, which creates the conditions for understanding the relationships and the experiences that the characters have. As such, the context sets up unique opportunities to understand the narratives' central conflicts from

a feminist care ethics perspective. Each book depicts a particular struggle or conflict related to food, and these struggles create moments for readers to explore foodways and identity as the characters struggle because of the food—either because they want to make it or because of how someone else perceives their food and culture. As readers think about these struggles and conflicts, especially within the cultural context I reviewed earlier, it becomes apparent that the protagonists' relationships and how they see themselves and their food because of others *does* matter. This is the insider perspective I described earlier—rather than looking in on someone else as they eat, like Giovanni in *Rice & Rocks*, readers are aligned with the protagonists' struggles and conflicts because of the information we receive about their internal conflicts. The focus remains on how the insider is struggling, worrying, thinking, feeling—outsiders are included, but we are not in the outsiders' headspaces. This narrative strategy can help readers pay more attention to what is happening with these characters and the food because both are more fleshed out in these texts than *just one bite* narratives. The relational context enables this more dynamic way of seeing identity and food, which I conceptualize through feminist care ethics.

Describing how food and identity are connected, Guptill et al. state that "We engage in identity work by learning to like and dislike particular dishes and choosing to consume certain foods but not others. Because food is literally consumed through the social act of eating, it plays a significant role in the social construction of identity" (18). For instance, Jasmine is unable to pound mochi for the New Year because of two issues related to food which are tied to her age and gender. Being Japanese American, while an important part of her identity and the plot of the book, is not the issue dealt with in the book or the issue that needs to be solved. Rather, the book focuses on the unique context surrounding Jasmine's identity issue and how she faces specific obstacles to her resolving this issue, which cannot be generalized to all Japanese Americans.

Relational context in *dish-specific* books manifests in several ways—helping a character to find a way to eat something they like; helping a character deal with outside pressure and how outsiders perceive them; naming them something special to honor and support their hard work; resolving multiple relationship conflicts. These interactions help readers see how food is more than just something these characters eat because it tastes good or because it nourishes them—the implicit importance of food is highlighted better by this relational context, rather than the oppositional context we see in *just one bite* books. Foodways scholars often describe the social nature of eating and food, and I think adding in relationality, how feminist care ethics frames this dynamic, can provide insights into the productive work that *dish-specific* books accomplish.[16] Feminist care ethics scholar Robinson writes, for instance, that "Because it is a practical rather than a theoretical, principled morality, care ethics must refer to particular contexts—specifically, particular relations among concrete individuals. In general, the focus has been on the types of moral responses that emerge from within close, personal relationships" (120). Robinson's use of the term relational implies that there are relationships and connections between groups and/or people. So, a relational context emphasizes how the books do not only depict how characters eat food. These experiences with food are certainly part of the characters' work to understand themselves better; however, food *with* others is an integral part of that understanding because food itself is relational.

In these books, family and relationships play a key role in the story as the protagonists solve the issues related to food, which subsequently helps them understand themselves better. As

[16] One foodways scholar does write about "how eating draws bodies together into networks of relatedness" (Abbotts 34).

Nicki Ward points out, “Identity is about belonging, it is forged through processes in which we develop an understanding of ourselves in relation to other people, our commonalities and the attributes we share, but it is also that which marks us out as different” (“Care ethics” 58). This dynamic between individuality and community implies movement since identity is not static: I highlight this dynamic as a way to understand how these books can help readers consider the context surrounding the food and relationships portrayed in these novels. These books situate the foods and cultures discussed within webs of relationships since all of the characters struggle with food and identity *with* other characters.

Krista experiences several interpersonal conflicts in *Krista Kim-Bap*, but the specific conflict that relates to food occurs when her teacher asks the class to complete a project for Heritage Month where students are encouraged to “explore [their] background in some way” (Ahn 18). This project becomes a way for Krista to address different aspects of her Korean identity, which helps underscore how her ethnicity is not the only thing that defines her. The teacher explicitly states, “I do not want a list of facts and figures about a country” and asks for them “to tell [her] how this country or countries have impacted you and your life” (20). Krista becomes interested in Korean food and she says that eating Korean food feels a certain kind of way. In her report for the heritage assignment, Krista ends with: “The foods that we eat around our dinner table together as a Korean family teach me more about being a Korean girl living in Canada than reading any Korean history books would” (128). This revelation, though, is not positioned as something that Krista needed to realize in order to truly be herself. Instead, the novel showcases how this is one aspect of her identity and how thinking about food as she shares it with her family and friends helps her understand who she is as a whole. Krista experiences multiple conflicts alongside this project—more generally figuring out what it means to be her

version of Korean-Canadian; tension in her relationship with her grandmother, who is always criticizing her; and how to manage her relationship with her best friend Jason because other students want to hang out with her. Making kimbap with her grandmother is what leads to Krista resolving these various conflicts, even if they seem so disparate.

Krista's webs of relationships enable her to complete her heritage project, which further empowers her to develop and even repair some of her relationships. Over the course of the book, Krista's friendship with Jason becomes worn down; as she begins to understand her Korean identity better, her relationship with her grandmother grows. Krista is able to reconcile with Jason because of her grandma's cooking and eating together with her family, both of which help put into perspective what is important in a friendship. Making kimbap with her grandmother, as I discussed earlier, helps connect Krista with this woman who intimidates her *and* helps repair Krista's friendship with Jason. Krista's grandma helps Krista and Jason see that they need to communicate with each other about their frustrations: "Jason, maybe you think you know how somebody close to you feels. But people very deep, like ocean. The view is not clear. I think best way is talk, very open…" (Ahn 144). At this point, Grandma gets distracted, but the message has hit home for Krista—"I knew she wasn't just talking to Jason, she was talking to me too" (144). After dinner, Krista and Jason are finally able to talk through their frustrations. Throughout these scenes, the novel makes clear how important relationships—and working through those relationships—are to Krista and how her identity is shaped throughout the novel. Making kimbap and eating Korean food is what connects Krista with her grandmother, who is then able to see Krista's conflict and provide the advice that Krista needs. In this way, the food in the book is a catalyst for solving Krista's issues, rather than simply one way to describe her Korean identity.

In *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen*, Jasmine's family calls her Mochi Queen after she

helps pound mochi because she is the first person under 10 and first girl to participate in this aspect of the tradition. This triumphant moment signals how working through this struggle with the titular dish empowers her: "Mom came around the corner holding a plate with the biggest mochi ever. Wowee zowee! It was toasted golden and sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, just the way I liked it. 'Jasmine Toguchi,' Mom said again as she placed the plate in front of me. 'You are the Mochi Queen!'" (Florence 97). In this moment, her name is a positive reference, awarded to her by her mother (and, by extension, her family, which I will talk about a little later) for working hard to prove them wrong—that she is not too young and not too weak to pound mochi. At first, Jasmine's family pushes back when she wants to help make mochi: her sister, Sophie, and her cousin, Eddie, both tease her, telling her she cannot pound mochi because she is too young and not strong enough. Her Uncle Jimmy sympathizes with her but tells her it's best to wait (68). Eventually, her dad listens to her and gives her a chance: "Dad came into the room. 'So, Jasmine,' he said, 'tell me why you should be allowed to pound mochi'" (69). In response, Jasmine explains how she is strong and responsible, asserting the qualities that she possesses which make her good for the job: "I stood tall. 'Because I'm a bigger girl than people think. I follow directions. Like when Mom tells me to clean my room. … And I'm helpful! I'm going to help Mrs. Reese paint her shed'" (69). Her uncle and father do not seem sure at first: "Finally, Dad and Uncle Jimmy looked at me. Then they looked at each other. 'Jim,' Dad said, 'maybe it's time to break tradition.' Uncle Jimmy smiled and nodded. 'You can pound mochi,' Dad said to me" (69-71). This interaction between the characters reiterates how this is a key relational moment: sharing this look connects Dad and Uncle Jimmy, which they then extend to Jasmine. Similarly, Dad and Uncle Jimmy connect through their words and then turn this connection to Jasmine. This permission (and then support) from her father and uncle lead Jasmine to accept her

newfound role in the family. However, Jasmine's dad does not just give her permission to pound mochi. He also helps her pound the mochi with the hammer when she struggles to lift it: "Dad came up behind me and wrapped his hands around mine. His hands were warm against my cool skin. I breathed in the peppermint smell of his favorite gum. 'You can do it,' Dad whispered as, together, we lifted and dropped the hammer" (84-85). Even though Jasmine feels like a failure for not being able to lift the hammer very well, her family is proud of her. When they are all finished, her family cheers her on and congratulates her, her mother calling her Mochi Queen as a sign of honor and presenting her with the first mochi they had made:

> Obaachan raised her teacup. "You strong girl!"
>
> Everyone else came into the living room, cheering. Even not-so-mean cousin Eddie was clapping.
>
> "But it's not midnight yet," I said. I almost drooled smelling the sweet mochi.
>
> "I think today we learned it's okay to break some rules," Mom said.
>
> I waved Sophie over. She sat next to me and together we ate the first mochi of the year! (97-98)

Obaachan's comment is significant not just because she is the first to compliment Jasmine: she also connects Jasmine's strength to her gender. Earlier in the book, Obaachan is one of the first family members to tell Jasmine that she cannot pound mochi because she is a girl, so this recognition signals a turning point in how Obaachan sees her. Obaachan's response exemplifies the responsive and responsible aspects of care that Robinson describes. Jasmine's mom even acknowledges how rules do not always make for the best scenarios. Her comments echo Robinson's point that care is relational and contextual: being responsive, attentive, and responsible requires some stepping away from rules and principles. Last is Jasmine's sister,

Sophie, who has repeatedly expressed how she is unconfident in Jasmine's ability to help. The book ends with Jasmine and her sister sharing the first mochi of the year, surrounded by their family, which appears in a full page illustration. This final moment, which highlights Jasmine sitting with her family, brings together the various webs of relationships Jasmine explores in the book, enabling her to experience an important family food tradition while also finding her place along the way.

The conflict in Maillard's *Fry Bread* makes it stand out from the other *dish-specific* books discussed in this chapter because the narrative describes a struggle that is not something the characters experience with each other, like Jasmine with her family. Instead, Maillard emphasizes that the conflict surrounding fry bread relates to a long, painful, traumatic history shared by Native peoples. As such, my analysis of *Fry Bread* differs because the struggle is communal, rather than internal or personal. Making fry bread, the book implies, is a way to come together to share and honor that history, both as a way to heal and as a way to reclaim what was stolen. Maillard begins his author's note by explaining that "The story of fry bread is the story of American Indians: embracing community and culture in the face of opposition" (Maillard n.p.). As such, the book focuses on scenes that connect to larger struggles shared by different Native communities. The scene titled "Fry Bread is History" especially emphasizes this struggle (n.p.). In a double page spread, five young children sit across from two elders (one holding a red haired baby) who tell the children stories. The tone of the image is somber, and the characters are heartbroken: some children have tears in their eyes; one child leans forward with their mouth agape, as if in shock; and the expressions on the two elders' faces is downturned. The accompanying poem reiterates this trauma:

The long walk, the stolen land

Strangers in our own world

With unknown food

We made new recipes

From what we had (n.p.)

As the poem suggests, fry bread historically emerges from Native struggles and resilience, both of which stem from stolen land and erased histories. Devon Mihesuah explains how, "Despite tribes' lack of connection to frybread precontact and their dependency on American food manufacturers to provide the ingredients, many frybread advocates associate not eating frybread with not being Indian" (55). Mihesuah also acknowledges that, "While some Natives eat frybread as a way of signifying cultural identity, others connect frybread to the inadequate foods given to tribes by the U.S. government and believe it a symbol of colonization" (55). Maillard's note gestures to the history Mihesuah describes, and he underscores how fry bread is more than just something that Natives eat, that it signals the violent histories and relationships Native people experienced at the hands of their colonizers. Together, the author's note and this poem also create an opportunity for readers to understand why fry bread is important to so many Native communities and why there are so many moments in the book that focus on community and togetherness. As such, the book models the attentive, responsive, and responsible qualities of relationships that can constitute care and how those qualities can impact relational identity.

The book incorporates several moments where characters make fry bread together and then eat the food together, which reinforce this relational way of understanding fry bread. In an illustration accompanying the "Fry bread is sound" poem, three children sit and wait for the fry bread to be ready, while someone stands out of frame holding tongs as the fry bread dough sizzles in a hot pan (Maillard n.p.). By portraying so many people involved in the cooking

process, this moment begins to emphasize community as a part of making the bread, hinting at the book's larger motif of community as an important aspect of the survival of Native peoples. In one scene a little later, "Fry bread is flavor," different characters prepare additional ingredients for the spread, and in the next scene, "Fry bread is time," they all sit down together to share the food (n.p.). The accompanying poem in this scene highlights connection once again:

> On weekdays and holidays
>
> Supper or dinner
>
> Powwows and festivals
>
> Moments together
>
> With family and friends (n.p.)

The illustration underscores the phrase "together with" as the characters hug each other while they sit down at the table. They all physically touch in some way, which illustrates a physical manifestation of the connections fry bread can initiate. Overall, these scenes emphasize how fry bread is tied to relationships and conflict, and the book centers a relational approach to food which encourages the readers to make similar connections among food, identity, and conflict.

Despite these connections, fry bread is a contentious food, which Maillard acknowledges in his notes. "Even though fry bread is common to so many tribes," Maillard writes, "it can still be controversial" because "[i]t is a highly subjective food" (n.p.). In another section of the notes, he clarifies how "there are some Natives who strongly oppose fry bread because it exacerbates existing health problems. For these critics, fry bread is an easy target for a much larger problem of being forced to deviate from a traditional Indigenous diet" (n.p.). Adding in the differing opinions, Maillard underscores another relational aspect of food—that eating and making dishes, even as they are seen as cultural staples, is still subjective and individual, and one food

experience cannot be associated with multiple communities without acknowledging that individual context. In this way, Maillard replicates the tension between individual experiences and shared cultural experiences, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of fry bread, how it is eaten, and why it is important in Native communities.

But What's Missing? Qualifying *Dish-Specific* Texts

Maillard's *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story,* Florence's *Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen*, and Ahn's *Krista Kim-Bap* create stories about protagonists and characters that honor their culinary and cultural identities without reducing them to stereotypes and homogenized stories. I have explored how the illustrations, paratext, cultural context, and relational context demonstrate how the characters' identities and how they eat are unique because these books work through a duality of individual and cultural identity. Food texts in literature for young readers do not always distinguish how an individual's experience with cuisine and culture is connected to larger culinary experience, for instance, how it differs or how it is similar. If they do not make these nuances of identity and experience clear, books can homogenize shared culinary and cultural experiences. Such homogenization is often weaponized against members of diverse groups so that experiences that "look different" from this homogenized story are discounted and delegitimized.

Instead, the books I have analyzed here underscore insider experiences related to eating and spending time together which are tied to larger community and cultural experiences. Moreover, each book points to complex histories and cultures (although they do this successfully to varying degrees). As Sybil Durand and Marilisa Jiménez-García put forth, "our view of cultural diversity must uphold that literature about Latinx, Asian, Black, and Indigenous peoples

reflects entangled histories and stories of conquest manifesting in racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity within each ethnic group" (3). Each of these books situates the protagonist's struggle with food within the caring (and sometimes not-so-caring) relationships surrounding them, and these struggles are resolved through these relationships and the food that they share with their loved ones. These books help reveal how food can be approached in relational ways and how food exists in a constellation of identity rather than as a sole marker of identity: these two narrative strategies, then, can help avoid representing a singular, monolithic food story. As care ethics emphasizes, identity is situated and contextual, even when connections are made between members of a culture, and these are two ideas that *dish-specific* books highlight. Each book is about an individual family and *their* tradition, even as each book also makes it clear that these traditions stem from cultural and ethnic histories. These books, then, are likely not intending to teach that one food itself is how to understand an entire culture. Instead, food is viewed through a relational lens, which we can see when we focus on how these relationships and interpersonal connections help the protagonists negotiate their problems. Still, I see some potential drawbacks with the ways *dish-specific* books focus on one dish. These drawbacks do not necessarily undermine the productive work these narratives do but instead highlight how *dish-specific* books are not framed to discuss certain aspects of cultural complexity. Instead, *dish-specific* narratives require certain reading strategies to avoid potentially reductive readings of culture and food. Examining paratext and concerns about authenticity helps reveal some of the drawbacks to *dish-specific* approaches.

Paratext, as I have argued, can be useful material for including more specific, factual details about a dish. However, my argument about paratext relies on the premise that the paratext is even read and thought about, which may not always happen and can certainly not be

guaranteed. In my analysis above, I described moments where paratext mirrors the information presented in the storyline, but there are also times when the paratext explains something that never happens during the narrative. For instance, *Fry Bread*'s extensive notes give detail about Native foodways and experiences that the plot does not; this disconnect raises a question for me about what the creators anticipate readers will do with that information.[17] Moreover, the books present the paratextual elements in very different ways from the narrative. In the paratext, the words are smaller and written in paragraphs; some illustrations are included, but the paratext focuses much more on the words than the illustrations. In *Fry Bread*'s notes, there is even a reference page with endnotes. These elements point to a different intended reader who is perhaps older and/or more familiar with this way of writing. The recipes also point to an older reader as the instructions focus on actions children are usually not allowed to do (like frying the dough in hot oil). Perhaps the paratext suggests a dual audience, one the text implies will be able to converse about these different elements. Regardless, paratext seems to be an essential part of understanding what is happening with the dishes, which underscores that the context provided in the paratext *is* important. As Barnes et al. highlight, "[u]nderstanding the context and practices of care is important to understanding the difficulties and complexity of messy care situations in order to know what citizens require in the way of care" (14). Readers can only understand the context if they know what to do with it once it is given to them, and I have questions about what these narratives are encouraging readers to do with these details when they are included in the

[17] Although free verse poems like "Fry Bread is History" may gesture to the historical information Maillard presents in the notes, readers must already know about the forced removal of Native peoples in order to make connections between fry bread and that event.

paratext.

Another drawback to *dish-specific* books occurs because they do focus on one, sustained moment of a food. *Dish-specific* narratives exist in a liminal space because, unlike *just one bite* texts, these stories do not single out one dish to represent multiple cultures (for instance, multiple versions of soup or multiple breads). However, focusing on one dish for one culture can reinforce that this dish is an authentic one and this version is an authentic version of this dish. These books, even as they highlight the variety of important cultural dishes, can have the opposite effect of solidifying certain kinds of culinary authenticity. While I do not believe this is what the books intend, I think the possibility for them to be read this way still exists because the dish is only represented in a limited way in the story. This narrow version of authenticity can then be weaponized, an issue I addressed with *just one bite* books in Chapter Two.

Questions about culinary authenticity and literary authenticity in children's literature align in their concerns about narrowly representing entire populations of peoples, cultures, and practices. Children's literature scholar Cristina Rhodes acknowledges that "According to [Rudine Sims] Bishop, reflecting the rich and multifaceted realities of minoritized children and adolescents is vital to their ability to realize their identities and to interact with the world around them" (1). Likewise, Sarah Park Dahlen clarifies how "Being authentic to oneself can collide with one's writing being authentic to a culture. The tension between the two derives from the fact that, though one's own story may be authentic to oneself, cultures are not monolithic" (24) and "What one believes or perceives to be authentic and what is actually authentic is at odds and raises the question of who decides" (26). As Rhodes and Dahlen suggest, there are important nuances to consider between creating individual stories that respectfully reflect cultural and identity practices while at the same time not reinforcing or homogenizing entire identities and

cultures. As we move along the spectrum of food books written for young audiences, books begin to account for these nuances. These nuances are also considered in food studies scholarship, as in *Eating Korean in America: Gastronomic Ethnography of Authenticity* where Sonia Ryang asks: "When a food item travels across the globe, can it retain its authenticity? Or does authenticity in fact mean something other than simply being original? What is authenticity after all?" (19). With these questions, Ryang, throughout the rest of the book, emphasizes the need to think about food contextually on a global scale, while also accounting for the personal, individual food experiences that happen in everyday life.

Ultimately, because the books focus on one dish and one protagonist, audiences may only receive one world view of that dish. Readers who do not (or cannot) exercise certain critical reading skills may not read these nuances or even recognize that these nuances exist in the first place. Despite all of the productive work *dish-specific* books accomplish, problems can arise if readers take up these texts to learn about culinary authenticity without seeking to understand the cultures, contexts, and cuisines from which these foods develop. These potential issues with paratext and authenticity place *dish-specific* books in the middle of the spectrum I theorize in this project. *Intersectional food identity* books, the next set of texts in this spectrum, begin to address some of these issues associated with narrowly focusing on one dish. These books, as I will discuss in chapter four, expand on the kind of relational and cultural context that *dish-specific* books introduce.

CHAPTER IV: STINKY TOFU AND FLAMBE SHRIMP A LA EMONI— RELATIONAL IDENTITY AND FOOD IN INTERSECTIONAL FOOD IDENTITY BOOKS

I have discussed in previous chapters how questions about authenticity can help us better understand how food and identity are complexly tied together. Understanding authenticity in more nuanced ways helps to avoid homogenous views of cultures and foods and to account for a range of connections between food and cultural diversity. Sarah Park Dahlen has pointed out, for instance, that unique, individual experiences and broader, shared cultural experiences are two ways of conceptualizing authenticity, and these two kinds of experiences can be at odds with one another or even contradict each other. Durand and Jiménez-García analyze books that create "stories [which] resist stereotypes about youth of color by depicting characters that are embedded in heterogeneous cultural communities made up of individuals who perform their identities in varied ways" (15-16).They highlight how "[c]ritical readings of such texts can reveal to readers how youth of color, including U.S. born and immigrant youth, contend with social issues related to race, ethnicity, nationality, language, sexuality, and gender," and, like Dahlen, they acknowledge "how definitions of these identities are sometimes contested within their communities or larger national and institutional contexts" (15-16). *Intersectional food identity* books, as I call them, address this dynamic between individual stories and shared cultural experience by presenting multiple aspects of foodways and creating multiple opportunities for readers to observe how food is eaten and taken up in these texts. Through this intersectional approach to food, *intersectional food identity* books employ the kinds of storytelling elements that Durand and Jiménez-García describe above.

Intersectional food identity books focus on food as it exists within a complex web of identity, not just ethnicity but how ethnicity, gender, race, class, age, and so forth, all work

together to impact how people come to understand themselves. These narratives incorporate these intersections to varying degrees in the text and to varying prominence. Feminist care ethics scholar Olivia Hankivsky, in "Rethinking Care Ethics: On the Promise and Potential of an Intersectional Analysis," emphasizes how an intersectional approach to care ethics can be beneficial. As I discussed in Chapter One, Hankivsky explains that:

> gender, race, sexual orientation, geographic location, immigrant status, ability, and class, among other factors, converge to produce a social location that is different than just the sum of its parts. A central tenet of intersectionality theory is that social identities are not mutually exclusive and do not operate in isolation of each other, nor is it sufficient to simply "add" them to each other to create a lens for examining social locations, experiences, and concomitant needs. (255)

Cultural identity may be the most prominent identity depicted in the texts I examine in this chapter, since we tend to associate food most closely with cultural and ethnic identity. For the sake of this dissertation project, then, I analyze these books mainly in terms of cultural and ethnic identity while gesturing towards other aspects of identity that these books develop, though I certainly see connections to these areas warranting more analysis in the future. Even so, the books make other connections to identity through the relational contexts they portray, which helps authors define cuisine in more complex, intersectional ways.

In addition, *intersectional food identity* books portray multiple social aspects of foodways. Foodways scholars often discuss the close connections between identity and food and the social aspects of eating that develop from such connections. In *Food and Society: Principles and Paradoxes*, Guptill, et al., write that "Examining the 'how' of foodways highlights how the symbolic meanings of foods are often established and maintained through **rituals**, social

activities performed primarily for their symbolic significance, rather than for practical ends" (19, boldface in original). Books like Danny Ramadan's *Salma the Syrian Chef*, Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan's *A Place at the Table*, Elizabeth Acevedo's *With the Fire on High*, and Gloria Chao's *American Panda* illustrate meals, food rituals, and social interactions in which food is an integral part. Overall, these stories integrate food into the everyday life of the protagonists and characters so that food is not used simply to educate someone about another culture or teach about an essentialized understanding of humanity. In the "Introduction" to *Culinary Tourism*, Lucy Long similarly discusses foodways, and she describes how, "As a conceptual model, foodways systematizes the exploration of how food is woven into everyday life and personal history" (8). Moreover, she writes, "food is a resource for enacting and constructing group identity as well as for symbolic communication" (Long, "Introduction" 9). As Long's work suggests, foodways scholars can inform how we think about food broadly in *intersectional food identity* books as these narratives portray multiple elements of foodways wherein the foods are "woven into everyday life and personal history," to borrow Long's language.

I see the work of Durand and Jiménez-García, Guptill, et. al., and Long connecting as they talk about personal, unique experiences of culture alongside connected and shared cultural experiences. Likewise, in *Eating Korean in America*, Sonia Ryang discusses how food experiences are both individual and shared. She comments:

> One eats because one is hungry, but more often than not one eats not simply because of hunger but because of habit, convention, a need for socialization, or in accordance with ritual rules or established practices on particular occasions, and so on—that is to say, one eats socially. The social aspect of eating makes the act more complicated than may be understood from the aforementioned story of the worker and the capitalist. Sociality and

> social relations accompany not only wealthy people eating plentiful quantities of gourmet food but also poor people eating lesser amounts at soup kitchens or charity outlets. *In sum, eating happens in society even when one is eating alone and feels as if one is eating purely to fill one's stomach*. (119, emphasis added)

Ryang highlights both eating together and alone, describing how humans do not eat just because we need fuel: we also eat as social creatures, and, when we share food, we establish social connections and relationships. This interplay, Ryang seems to suggest, is an inherent part of how we eat, and *intersectional food identity* books take time to showcase these dynamics on multiple levels. Ryang's ideas also connect back to feminist care ethics and how, as I have argued, when books incorporate relational approaches to identity, they create relational context which provides readers with details that allow them to read more thoughtfully and carefully—and, even perhaps under the right circumstances, ethically.

Even as they approach these ideas from different fields, the above scholars describe an interplay between individual and shared experiences that I first discuss in Chapter Three: *intersectional food identity* books develop this interplay in a way that I believe leads to texts providing relational context for culinary and cultural diversity. Food in these books is not framed as something special or exotic that readers are supposed to use to learn about these characters' cultures; as a result, *intersectional food identity* books avoid the kind of othering that Heldke describes, where we are in the presence of something truly different. Heldke describes this as "the recognition that one is in the presence of a flavor one has never before encountered, and ends with an 'understanding' that this flavor stands as an authentic marker of the 'true nature' of the ethnic Other—and, therefore, the thing that separates one most fully from this other" ("But is it Authentic?" 387). Even if readers are in the presence of something different to their regular

culinary experiences, the tone, plot, and characters in the books do not linger on this sense of difference nor is difference portrayed in an othering way. Instead, the books are about the protagonists' experiences, feelings, desires, fears, relationships, and conflicts, especially as those things happen because of or are represented by food. By portraying individual experiences which are informed by relational contexts, *intersectional food identity* books avoid broad, generalizable experiences with food which emphasize a homogenous humanistic experience.

This relational context is further developed through characters' relational networks, which are those webs of relationships that help them understand themselves and their cuisines. The narratives portray an "everyday life" aspect of foodways through the relational networks surrounding the protagonists. Feminist care ethics scholar Hankivsky describes how "A distinguishing feature of care ethics is the recognition that humans are concrete beings, who exist in mutually interconnected, interdependent, and often unequal relations with each other" (253). *Intersectional food identity* books reflect this notion of connection and interdependence because they portray the various relationships the protagonists have and how these relationships intersect or cause friction. Food is not a singular note of the protagonists' lives, meaning their identity is not reduced to one food from their culture, nor are their experiences with food entirely positive. Instead, food is interwoven throughout many aspects of their identities, relationships, and relational networks.

These webs of relationships represent systems of living that prioritize the give-and-take nature of relationships, especially when food is involved, which leads audiences to see food in relational contexts. Negotiation within these relational networks becomes an important part of how these characters resolve food conflicts and make sense of their cultural foodways. By recognizing the main character's negotiation between their own sense of identity and how others

perceive their identity, *intersectional food identity* books exemplify how diverse texts for young audiences can address the myriad ways that identity, food, and culture intersect. Discussing interactions with food more generally, foodways scholar Emma-Jayne Abbotts, in *The Agency of Eating: Mediation, Food and the Body*, describes how "This relationship between eaters, foods and locale is not, however, static, but instead has to be continually remade and recreated, and especially as new foods and ways of preparing and eating them are integrated into regional and national foodscapes" (97). *Intersectional food identity* books mirror the relationship that Abbotts describes as she observes "food and knowledge in the context of local food festivals, food heritage and nationalized food" (80). Lan Dong discusses processes of negotiation as they relate to food in "Consuming Vietnamese America One Bite at a Time: *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* and *Inside Out & Back Again*." As she analyzes two Vietnamese American novels about food and identity, Dong describes a "fusion of culinary and cultural elements [that] leads to a realization of a selfhood based on an interstitial subjectivity" (149). Dong's assertion helps describe something similar that happens in *intersectional food identity* books, as the culinary and cultural elements come together to help someone understand their own identity. Dong continues, writing that, "As a result, their processes of creolizing food through consumption and practices reflect their attempts at negotiating their various interstitial identities. Both narratives are anchored around food, 'a critical medium for compliance with and resistance to Americanization,' as Jennifer Ho has proposed" ("Consuming" 151). Dong suggests that how characters manipulate and/or adjust their eating practices represents an important negotiation in their identities.

These webs of relationships, then, are defined by negotiation, a characteristic that points back to my discussion of an individual-shared dynamic since characters negotiate their wants and needs with those of family, friends, and acquaintances. The books ultimately exemplify the

impact that this negotiation can have on the protagonists by helping them understand their identities, strengthen their relationships, or resolve a conflict. *Intersectional food identity* books showcase how the protagonists resolve food conflicts by working with and/or thinking about how others are incorporated into their sense of self. In most cases, the characters cannot resolve anything without recognizing themselves in relationship to other folks, i.e., without thinking about their relational networks. Arguably, negotiation is an inherent part of all identities, but these novels center how characters negotiating multiple cultures must learn to find their individual sense of identity within the framework of the world and the personal relationships they have with those around them. Overall, *intersectional food identity* books place the messiness of these negotiations on full display: the characters struggle, disagree, cry, and rejoice, and they rework how they see themselves, experience food, and interact with others through detailed relational networks. By exemplifying the relational aspects of food, these novels account for a more nuanced understanding of the ways that culture and identity work recursively.

With a feminist care ethics framework, I examine an intersectional approach to foodways that four texts take, demonstrating how it is an inherently relational approach to food and identity. First, *intersectional food identity* books can range in genre, but they are alike because they incorporate food into the framework of the protagonist's identity, presenting food as a part of the complex network of ways that we come to understand and define ourselves. In this way, these texts differ from *just one bite* books and *dish-specific* narratives because food is not always the main topic of the book, as it is often a motif and metaphor: this slight change in focus provides an opportunity for the narratives to make sustained and nuanced connections between food, culture, and identity. Second, *intersectional food identity* books also range in the depth and breadth of what they cover. I thus start my analysis with Danny Ramadan's picture book *Salma*

the Syrian Chef, illustrated by Anna Bron, and I discuss how the narrative focuses on the different people in Salma's relational network: these friends enable a kind of relational autonomy that allows Salma to make her mother's favorite dish, which Salma desires to create so she can hear her mother's laugh again. I then turn to Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan's middle grade novel *A Place at the Table* as it expands on the complicated connections between relationality and identity that *Salma* suggests. My analysis focuses on the main friendship between the two protagonists, Sara and Elizabeth: their interactions with food provide an opportunity for me to discuss xenophobia and explore how connection does not automatically create a caring, supportive relationship. Next, I analyze Elizabeth Acevedo's *With the Fire on High* and how Emoni's culinary innovations reflect how she comes to understand herself, where culinary identity is the core identity in the protagonist's relational network. Food is both something Emoni works with and something that serves as an analogy for her identity. Last, I examine Gloria Chao's *American Panda* and how food is used metaphorically to represent how the main character, Mei, learns to negotiate her relationship with her parents, specifically her mother. This negotiation in particular resembles Gilligan's germinal discussion of an ethic of care and the negotiation between self and other. These four narratives emphasize the main character's negotiation between her own sense of identity and how others perceive that identity, and they illustrate how the young protagonists navigate life through their respective cultural perspectives and positionalities.

Ultimately, these books highlight how the protagonists' complex web of interdependent identities, relationships, and experiences is not reducible to one bite. Through my analysis, I establish how *intersectional food identity* books both center individual stories and indicate cultural practices, a combination that addresses the nuances that Durand and Jiménez-García

describe. Additionally, I connect how *intersectional food identity* books portray cultural foodways to how feminist care ethics conceptualizes interconnected webs of identity. I argue that, in these texts, food is seen as part of someone's relational network, which highlights how webs of relationships help the protagonists move through their lives and explore their cultural foodways. By making this relational network a prominent part of the book, *intersectional food identity* books attend to distinct aspects of the characters and protagonists' social identities and how they interact with others. This approach, I contend, results in narratives that provide nuanced and thoughtful representations of cultural diversity and food.

Foul Shami and Relational Networks in *Salma the Syrian Chef*

In *Salma the Syrian Chef*, illustrated by Anna Bron, Salma wants to make her mother foul shami, "a warm salad of sorts, [which] is the most common breakfast item you'd find in Damascus" (Ramadan, "Salma's Foul Shami"). Salma and her mother have arrived in Canada, and the narrator describes their current family dynamics: "Mama used to giggle with her friends in the refugee camp. It sounded like the ringing bells on the older boys' bikes. Now, after a long day of job interviews and English classes, Mama barely smiles when tucking Salma in" (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). In this quotation, there is a contrast between Mama's previous giggle and how she now "barely smiles" as well as a contrast between experiences: spending time with her friends in camp versus stressful social and professional situations. Through these contrasts, this moment in the text establishes Mama's pain and how Salma notices this pain. This picture book focuses on how Salma prepares to make foul shami to express care and love for her mother. However, Salma is only able to make the dish because of the interactions she has with her relational network, which is constituted by her friends from the welcome center as well as adults

at the welcome center who support her in buying the ingredients and preparing them. As such *Salma the Syrian Chef* represents how Salma's relational network enables her to care for her mother. Even though this picture book may share some structural elements similar to *dish-specific* texts, like focusing on one food, this narrative aligns more with features of *intersectional food identity* books because food is a metaphor for care and a motif related to the relationships that make up Salma's relational network. The title of the book, *Salma the Syrian Chef*, even directs readers' attention to the focal point of the novel, Salma, which signals how the ideological framing and context in this narrative is different from *dish-specific* texts as food serves a different rhetorical purpose.

The book emphasizes multiple aspects of Salma's identity as a young girl who does not quite know the language and who has come to a new place: these intersections bring with them specific challenges and heartache. Early on, the narrative establishes that Salma and Mama are separated from Father, who is still in Syria, and that they likely face specific challenges because of their refugee status, including navigating a place where most people do not speak their native language. Salma tries to make Mama laugh with jokes and drawings "[b]ut all she gets is Mama's sad smile, full of love but empty of joy" (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). One day in the playroom of the Welcome Center, Salma talks with some of the other characters: "'I think Mama misses Syrian food,' Salma tells Nancy and the other kids. 'I want to make her foul shami'" (n.p.). Salma recognizes what Mama misses, food, a moment which establishes how food is tied to care in this book. Salma's comment sparks conversation from the other children, who add in foods and dishes they miss, too: "'I miss kushari,' Ayman says. Salma tastes the salty, spicy Egyptian dish on her tongue. 'I miss the way my mama made masala dosa back in India,' Riya adds. Evan misses arepas. He just arrived from Venezuela. But none of them have heard of foul

shami, and Salma doesn't know how to make it" (n.p.). The conversation with her friends reinforces the role food plays in identity and connection as they each reminisce about a favorite dish. Additionally, this scene specifies places and foods that emphasize the breadth of Salma's relational network: she knows several people who share the specific kind of turmoil she experiences in having to leave her home. Through these moments, the narrative establishes that Salma believes that food is a way to help her mother heal.

Salma faces challenges, though, to make the dish, challenges that relate specifically to the agency she has and lacks because of her age and her native language. These challenges establish what Salma's relational network assists with and how these challenges point to multiple aspects of Salma's identity. One adult, Jad, helps Salma find the recipe, but she soon "realizes: she doesn't know the English names of any vegetables!" (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). The narrator describes how "Salma reads the Arabic words. She is scared of looking silly in this new place where hardly anyone knows her language" (n.p.). This quotation connects language and food, and it depicts how language has become a barrier for Salma because other people do not speak the same language she does. Salma negotiates this situation on her own: she does not know English, and so she decides to communicate in a different way by drawing each of the ingredients to help her find what she needs. Then, Ayesha, another adult, helps Salma to the supermarket, where they successfully gather the ingredients. The next scene introduces another part of Salma's relational network, Amir and Malek. On one page, Amir, Malek, Salma, and Ayesha stand around a table: "Back at the Welcome Center, Salma organizes her vegetables on the kitchen table. 'My mama won't be laughing at all if I use a knife,' Salma tells Amir and Malek, who came together from Lebanon. 'Can you help me chop these vegetables?'" (n.p.). Ayesha is posed next to Salma, placing a chef's hat on her head. In the scene on the adjacent

page, Salma, Amir, and Malek laugh together as they prepare the onions. “She blushes when Malek kisses away Amir’s onion tears,” the text reads, and “[t]he three of them giggle” (n.p.). The illustration reinforces the joy the three of them share as they prepare ingredients. In this scene, Salma holds out the bowl for Malek and Amir to add the onions. The word “giggle” implies how this is a moment of positive connection, which the illustration underscores as all three are pictured laughing with tears streaming down their faces. The illustration and words mainly focus on what the three are doing with the ingredients, but the words also indicate how Salma knows what her mama likes and maybe even needs when she points to a specific ingredient and way of making the dish that tailors the experience to her mother’s tastes. Together, Ayesha, Malek, and Amir form the parts of Salma’s relational network that enable her to find the ingredients and begin the dish for her mother.

The book introduces another character, Granny Donya, as part of Salma’s relational network after “Salma realizes she forgot the spices. ‘Mama likes sumac with her foul shami’” (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). Because she is young, Salma does not automatically have access to all of the ingredients, and when she forgets an ingredient, she cannot go to the grocery store again, assuming that the store would have sumac; additionally, Salma may not have the money to purchase the sumac. Instead, Granny Donya steps in and provides the sumac for Salma. All seems to be going well until Salma drops the olive oil for the dish and breaks the bottle, so Salma cannot add it to the dish: “[s]he sits on the floor and cries,” as several people stand behind her with concerned looks on their faces (n.p.). One person even reaches down to help wipe up the spilled olive oil. Nancy tries to comfort Salma when Salma says, “All I wanted was to make Mama laugh, and look at the mess I made” (n.p.). In the double-page illustration, Nancy has placed her hands on Salma’s shoulders, as they both look at the bowl of foul shami: “‘What I see

is a dish made with love,' Nancy whispers. 'I don't think it's missing a thing'" (n.p.). Salma does not react in this page spread, so it is not entirely clear if Nancy's words truly comfort Salma. Instead, the page turn brings readers into Salma's home, which moves readers' attention from the Welcome Center connections in Salma's relational network to the care she has for her mom.

The illustration on the next page portrays Salma rushing to Mama as soon as she walks in. The turn of the page foregrounds the importance of Salma and Mama's relationship, especially as this is the moment when Salma will present the dish to Mama. "When Mama comes home that night," the text reads, "Salma blocks her way into the apartment. 'Don't be mad!'" (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). Salma's comment anticipates Mama's emotions, which indicates how Salma does not want to cause Mama harm, especially since she has already indicated she misses Mama's smile, and the moment reiterates how important Mama is to Salma. The double page illustration shows Mama looking over Salma's head at the table Salma has prepared. The accompanying text reads "Mama frowns. 'What happened?' Salma opens the door. 'I couldn't find olive oil.' On the table, a bowl of foul shami awaits. 'You made this for me?' Mama asks" (n.p.). Interestingly, Salma chooses to lie to her mother about the olive oil rather than explain what truly happened, perhaps so as to not disappoint her mother by explaining that she had the olive oil but then lost it. Regardless, the characterization in this quote again highlights the attentive dynamics of their relationship: Mama's frown is not implied to be disappointment that Salma omitted one ingredient from the meal but rather concern for Salma since she seems distressed.

The issue is resolved immediately, when Salma's neighbors and friends from the Welcome Center, the people in her relational network, stop by to help. This pivotal moment emphasizes how important Salma's relational network is to her. They all crowd the door and

surround Nancy, who holds the olive oil: "Before Salma can answer, the door opens again. 'We brought olive oil,' Nancy says. Salma jumps in excitement. And then Mama breaks into a long, sweet laugh, like the echo of bells" (*Salma the Syrian Chef* n.p.). Salma's "excitement" reiterates the effect her relational network has on her as they provide this important ingredient, and the description of Mama's laugh mirrors the language used earlier in the book as the bell sound is used in both places. In this moment, Salma is finally able to hear what she has been looking for the whole time, and the final scene reiterates how Salma's relational network—Salma caring for her mother; Salma's friends and the adults from the welcome center listening to Salma's needs and ultimately supporting her—result in successful care work. Salma can finally make her mother feel better: "'Mama,' Salma says while Mama tucks her in that night, 'when I'm with you, I feel at home,'" to which her mother replies, "Your smile is my home" (n.p.). In an interview with the CBC, Ramadan describes these narrative choices and emphasizes how Salma's relational network works as an aspect of the book, though he does not use that word:

> Salma is facing this big challenge of cooking a traditional meal that she's never cooked before. She has no idea how to do any of those things or where to get the ingredients. She's faced with a lot of challenges as she's trying to navigate a world that speaks a different language. But then all of those people—who are from different backgrounds and different colours—are coming together to support her and help her. It felt like an appropriate way of talking about the power of community and the power of self-motivation toward engaging in a new community and embracing it. (*CBC Radio*)

Ramadan's words underscore how Salma's sense of autonomy is empowered by the relationships that she has with those in her community.

Food, Friendship, and Xenophobia in *A Place at the Table*

The plot of Saadia Faruqi and Laura Shovan's *A Place at the Table* revolves around sixth grade Muslim Pakistani American student Sara and Jewish British American student Elizabeth becoming friends in a cooking club at their middle school in Maryland, and the book exemplifies how *intersectional food identity* narratives connect food to both positive and negative aspects of identity negotiation. The narrative is told in chapters that alternate between Elizabeth's and Sara's points of view, and it incorporates story elements about middle school bullies, immigrant parents, and food's role in the protagonists' lives. These alternating points of view accentuate the relationship Sara and Elizabeth have as well as emphasizing how other characters impact their relationship. Both perspectives provide opportunities for readers to consider how Sara and Elizabeth belong to each other's relational networks and how their respective relational networks interact with and affect each other. *A Place at the Table* specifically addresses racialized issues surrounding food as well as xenophobia, and the narrative portrays a relationship where food is shared and where these issues must be worked out, which represents how these protagonists learn to negotiate their relationship and their relational networks. This novel portrays negotiation between peers and young people developing their identities, and the narrative demonstrates how *intersectional food identity* books can also address the connections among food, care, friendship, and identity.

Sara is initially wary of Elizabeth's friendship, and she shuns any friendly remarks that Elizabeth makes. Sara's mother, Mrs. Hameed, runs the school cooking club to earn extra income for their family; she integrates a focus on South Asian dishes into the activities. When Mrs. Hameed expresses her worries about the cooking club, Sara remarks, "no matter how boring I find Mama's cooking club, I'll try to win over that girl Elizabeth and make sure the club

is a success. How hard can it be?" (Faruqi and Shovan 30). And so Sara volunteers to be Elizabeth's partner one day during cooking club (56), and the two discover that both of their mothers are immigrants studying for the citizenship test (65). "Before I can talk myself out of it," Sara narrates, "I admit, 'It's nice to know I'm not the only one feeling weird around people'" (65). However, the girls soon realize that they are experiencing the world in two different ways, and Elizabeth struggles with Sara's specific experiences with racism and xenophobia as Elizabeth tries to understand how best to be Sara's friend. For example, in one chapter early in the novel, Sara overhears Elizabeth, Micah, and Maddy talking. Maddy describes how Sara's "mom's not even American" and how Maddy's "dad says they should only hire PLU at this school,'" which Maddy later explains stands for "People like us" (47). Sara then reflects on the racism and xenophobia she has experienced throughout her life as she listens to them talk:

> I think of the way Mrs. Kluckowski spoke to Mama outside the FACS room before the rest of the class showed up, all snide and superior. I remember the time the clerk at the grocery store snarled, "Stupid Arabs!" at Baba as he struggled to find change in his wallet. I think of all the times since I came to this school when a teacher has scoffed at me or a student has glared. The message is clear: *You're different. You're not wanted*. (47)

Sara keeps this internal monologue to herself and chooses to walk away from the other kids as they talk. Elizabeth tries to protest at lunch in the next chapter when Maddy says, "What difference? They're all a bunch of foreigners," and she tells Maddy that "My mom is a 'foreigner'" (53). Maddy simply replies that "Your mom doesn't count. She's English" (53), which reinforces how these two immigrant women are perceived in different ways because of their race and ethnicity. These experiences then trickle down to their daughters so that several

conversations between Sara and Elizabeth revolve around the microaggressions and outright racist comments directed at Sara and her family.

Maddy's character and her comments especially emphasize how relational networks are not always made of positive relationships and how these relationships can have extended effects. As such, Elizabeth's friendship with Maddy is one way in which Elizabeth confronts how she experiences race and food differently than Sara, as the book depicts multiple occasions where Maddy makes offensive comments about the food they are learning about in the cooking club. Early in the book, Elizabeth reflects on how she desperately wants Maddy to stay in cooking club: "All week, I try to persuade Maddy to stay in cooking club. … But Maddy won't listen. 'I just want to make normal food,' she says" (Faruqi and Shovan 74). Maddy's comment demonstrates how what she perceives as "normal" food is not the food that the cooking club makes. This way of thinking about "normal" food emphasizes a divide between self and other ("that which is different from me") that Heldke describes: "the recognition that one is in the presence of a flavor one has never before encountered, [ending] with an 'understanding' that this flavor stands as an authentic marker of the 'true nature' of the ethnic Other—and, therefore, the thing that separates one most fully from this other" ("But is it Authentic?" 387). The comment also represents how the novel situates "alimentary racism," within the narrative, which Lan Dong defines as "a form of ethnocentricism [sic] and homogenization of food where Western and Westernized foods are valued as the norm, while ethnic foods are viewed as disgusting, unclean, or inferior" ("Consuming" 149). Maddy's character provides an opportunity in the book to discuss marginalizing views of food and cuisine, but she is not the only character to make problematic remarks about food.

On occasion, Elizabeth herself says things to Sara that are racially insensitive and

offensive, although Elizabeth's comments come from a different ideological place than Maddy's. Elizabeth does not intend to offend Sara, so her comments read as unconsciously biased forms of racism. The narrative provides moments where Elizabeth works through how her own seemingly innocent comments about Sara and food have racist undertones and offend her friend. In one scene, when Elizabeth describes herself as "sugar" and Sara as "spice" in their friendship, "Sara freezes outside the doorway, her smile gone. 'Why am I spice? That's kind of racist" (Faruqi and Shovan 117). Sara references a long history of associating spice with race, regardless of whether she knows specific details about that history. As Gitanjali Shahani writes about the spice trade, "By this I mean that the experience of tasting these ingredients [these spices] was also an experience of imagining the racial others associated with their production or cultivation. In imaginative renderings of the spice trade, they were incarnated as Indian boys and Indian queens, Blackamores and Bantamen" (30). Elizabeth, however, does not understand this reference. "How is that racist? I only took sugar because I like to bake," Elizabeth responds, thinking, "Why is Sara so defensive? It's not like I'm challenging her to a sauté-pan duel. Sara squares her shoulders. I get the feeling I'm supposed to know the answer to this question" (Faruqi and Shovan 117). Elizabeth's commentary highlights how she is unaware of how racial connections to food have impacted and might even still impact Sara.[18] Elizabeth immediately thinks that

[18] It should be noted, however, that neither of the girls reference how sugar has also historically been tied to racism. Shahani explains that "To eat it [sugar] … is to partake of a strange cannibalism in which we also eat the bodies that cultivated it. What we taste, as Walker reminds us, is blood sugar" (*Tasting Difference* 47). This oversight might be associated with the

Sara's reactions are "defensive," describing Sara's body language, "squares her shoulders," to reinforce how she perceives Sara as being defensive. In this moment, Elizabeth's comments are reminiscent of all-too-common scenarios when "defensiveness" is used by those with power and privilege to undermine the reactions of marginalized folks. Even though Elizabeth believes that she means well since she did not intend to hurt her friend, her comments reinforce how people in privilege fail to see how moments like this, when they are being called out, are informed by historical oppression and marginalization.

Sara's subsequent commentary, which fills in the gaps in Elizabeth's knowledge, reinforces how this discussion of food is informed by historical oppression and marginalization. The moment also reinforces how marginalized populations often become responsible for explaining oppression, more generally, and racism to privileged people. Sara pauses and replies to Elizabeth: "I don't know how to explain. …It's more of a feeling. My family's from a part of the world that people associate with spices. It's a whole stereotype. Someday I'll tell you about my neighbor Mrs. Miles. … It's like I can't even cook without someone pointing out—you pointing out—that I'm exotic. I'm different. And you're my friend" (Faruqi and Shovan 118). Sara's discussion of exoticism reinforces how the divide between what is considered "ethnic food" and "normal food" is always a part of the conversation for her: no matter how much Elizabeth likes the Pakistani dishes that Sara's mother makes, there will be people who see that food as ethnic and exotic and thus bad. Sara's comment, then, helps illustrate the harm of the dynamic Heldke describes, a dynamic often defined by alimentary racism, as well as

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authors or with the characters within the storyworld; regardless, I think it stems from the narrative's focus on how Sara experiences alimentary racism.

demonstrates how Sara pushes back on this dynamic. This moment is further underscored by the fact that, earlier in the novel, Sara discloses the story about Mrs. Miles to the reader:

> When I was nine years old, our neighbor Mrs. Miles told everyone she was moving away because she couldn't stand the smell of curry at all hours of the day. I was so confused. She had always been nice to us, waving from her porch and letting the twins play with her little white dog. Did the smell of curry bother her that much? To me it always felt like home and weekday evenings. (60)

Though Sara does not tell Elizabeth this story at the moment, Sara's experience with Mrs. Miles again specifically reiterates how ethnic foods can be vilified. Despite Sara's explanation, Elizabeth still feels defensive: "'I was trying to say that we work well together,' I protest" (118). "Then say that," Sara simply but firmly replies (118). The firmness of Sara's reply reinforces how Sara sets a specific boundary and explains how this kind of description can cause harm. This moment especially represents how the cooking club creates a space where Elizabeth and Sara must discuss issues surrounding how folks respond to ethnic foods; for Elizabeth, she must learn how to negotiate her own positionality to be a better friend, while Sara negotiates how to interact with her friend about an experience that has always (unfortunately) been a norm for her.

Elizabeth and Sara continue to work together inside and outside of the cooking club, and they decide to enter a dish in the international festival sponsored by their middle school (Faruqi and Shovan 78). They brainstorm how they can combine elements from British and Pakistani cuisine, and this aspect of the plotline provides an opportunity for readers to think about xenophobia and racialized issues surrounding food. In the end, they decide to make Halwa Cuppa Tea ice cream—"One scoop of Earl Gray mixed with chunks of halwa, a few pistachio pieces, with a sprinkle of coconut and chocolate flakes on top" (301)—which combines British

Earl Gray tea with Pakistani doodh ka halwa (221).[19] They make halwa together during the cooking club, and Elizabeth suggests the Earl Gray tea as it was her "grandmother's favorite" (230). Elizabeth and Sara face several obstacles before they can successfully make the dish for the competition, though, and these issues culminate during a critical moment in the novel when Elizabeth convinces Sara to use the new ice cream machine in the cooking club room: "A shiny silver contraption emerges from the box. I know what that is. An ice cream maker, the rapid-freeze kind they use on television cooking shows," Elizabeth narrates (224). In the following chapter, Sara's doubts foreshadow what ends up happening with the machine: no one is supposed to use the machine yet, and Sara's mother could get in trouble if anything happens to it. Mrs. Hameed has already dealt with Family and Consumer Science teacher Mrs. Kluck's dirty looks, and Sara knows her mom needs the cooking club. As Sara thinks to herself, "[Elizabeth is] not the one with everything to lose. Mama will be in so much trouble if anything goes wrong. Mama and Baba have enough to worry about without me acting like a disobedient daughter" (231), especially since Mrs. Hameed is "responsible for this ice cream machine, this FACS room, and everything inside it" (234). Sara immediately thinks of her parents and her mother because she

[19] The recipe included at the end explains that "Halwa is a group of dense, sweet confections eaten in South Asia, the Middle East, and other parts of the world. There are several different types of halwa, such as carrot, lentil, or nut. A variety of bases are used to create halwa, such as semolina, milk, or butter. The base determines its consistency, which ranges from pudding to cake. This is a milk-based halwa. It will be the consistency of a thick porridge after heating, but once it's chilled for several hours, it will resemble a soft bar like a brownie" (Faruqi and Shovan 315).

knows that the consequences for something going wrong would fall on her mother's shoulders, which the word "responsible" underscores. Despite Sara's fears, the two go ahead and develop their ice cream recipe, but in their rush of excitement, they forget to clean the machine, which sits with curdled and sour ice cream over the weekend.

Sara and Elizabeth must face the consequences of their actions when they return to school after the weekend is over. This scene introduces another aspect of their relational network: when others are harmed because of their actions, Sara and Elizabeth have different reactions and must attend to those relationships in different ways. First, the reader receives Sara's perspective and how she feels terrible about her actions potentially harming her mother. The woman who manages the Family and Consumer Science room where the cooking club is hosted, Mrs. Kluck, is angry: "She interrupts [the principal] loudly. 'Someone vandalized my machine!'" (Faruqi and Shovan 253). "Mrs. Kluck [even] scoffs and wags a finger at Mama," Sara narrates; "'I've seen what happens in that cooking club,' [Mrs. Kluck] says, practically spitting. 'I'm surprised no one's lit the classroom on fire. They're barely supervised'" (254), and she tells Mrs. Hameed that "Your cooking club should be banned" (255). Neither Sara nor Elizabeth has the courage to step forward to own up to what happened, but they both immediately reflect on how their actions will affect the people they care about. Sara narrates:

> There's a huge bubble in my stomach, but this time it's anger. Not only at Elizabeth, but at myself, too. Angry that my dumb mistakes could cost my mama her job. How could I have been so stupid, so reckless? I feel the anger growing inside me, filling up my eyes and mouth and nose. I can't take it anymore. I stumble away from her and out into the hallway with the other girls. (257)

Sara uses multiple negative words—*dumb*, *mistakes*, *stupid*, *reckless*—to describe her actions

and herself so that her inner monologue reads as self-flagellation. Sara is filled with negative feelings, and her thoughts are reminiscent of the kind of thinking that Gilligan describes about the self-other negotiation and minimizing hurt (74). Gilligan writes that women attempting to enact care may feel negatively when their actions have caused others harm and, thus, they wish to reduce or repair that harm. This moment reaffirms the different relational networks at play: the scene points to Elizabeth and Sara's relationship, obviously, but it also points to the relationship that Sara and Elizabeth share with Sara's mother. This scene also highlights the relationship between Sara's mother and Mrs. Kluck and how Sara and Elizabeth are now implicated in that relationship. Negotiating a relational network requires considering not only how others feel but also the consequences of one's own actions on others, as this scene exemplifies.

In the next chapter, Elizabeth's narration provides a different perspective of the events, and so she describes those relationships in different ways, which showcases how she characterizes her relational network. These differences reflect different concentric circles of caring, as Nel Noddings calls them. Noddings describes how

> We find ourselves at the center of concentric circles of caring. In the inner, intimate circle, we care because we love. … As we move outward in the circles, we encounter those for whom we have personal regard. Here, as in the more intimate circles, we are guided in what we do by at least three considerations: how we feel, what the other expects of us, and what the situational relationship requires of us. Persons in these circles do not, in the usual course of events, require from us what our families naturally demand, and the situations in which we find ourselves have, usually, their own rules of conduct. (*Caring* 43)

Noddings defines how we may enact care in one layer of our relationships because we love

someone, while there are circles of care that we enact outside of that inner circle based on the different relationships we hold with people. Nodding's description of "circles of caring" is one way to describe relational networks and how Elizabeth thinks through the consequences of her decisions. Even though Mrs. Hameed is not in the center of Elizabeth's concentric circle of caring, she is a part of Elizabeth's relational network, both because Elizabeth has gotten to know her through Sara and because Elizabeth has worked with Mrs. Hameed in cooking class. Mrs. Hameed then may be one of "those for whom we have personal regard" (Noddings, *Caring* 43), and so Elizabeth cares for her. Thus, Elizabeth feels terrible because using the ice cream machine was her idea, and she can fully comprehend how her actions might have disastrous consequences for Sara and her family. Elizabeth realizes that "Sara was counting on me. If our recipe won that TV spot, it would have meant tons of orders for her mom's catering business. Not only from Pakistani and other South Asian families, but from all kinds of people who love delicious food. Now that's never going to happen" (Faruqi and Shovan 267). In this moment, Elizabeth thinks about the consequences of their actions as a chain reaction: she sees what she did and how there are extended effects because of these actions, something that Noddings describes. "Chains of caring are established," Noddings writes, "some linking unknown individuals to those already anchored in the inner circles and some forming whole new circles of potential caring. I am 'prepared to care' through recognition of these chains" (*Caring* 44). Elizabeth imagines not just how this will affect Sara's mother but also other families who might seek out this food, pointing to the kind of caring chain that Nodding describes. While the relational networks may seem the same because the same people are involved in each network, there are different relationships between characters so that those connections signify how Sara's and Elizabeth's realizations are different. These differences are especially evident from how Sara and Elizabeth talk about the

situation differently. Sara does not have to talk about Pakistani and South Asian families specifically because she already sees things from this perspective; as a part of that community, she does not necessarily need to mention them. Elizabeth's comment represents how her understanding of food has grown and how she comprehends the experience that Mrs. Hameed has had. This nuanced depiction of a relational care network emphasizes how *intersectional food identity* books incorporate multiple aspects and experiences with food, which underscores how these kinds of texts provide a holistic picture of the connections between food and identity.

Sara and Elizabeth eventually own up to what has happened so Sara's mother does not get in trouble, but the two must also confront what happened between them and how this has damaged their relationship. The scene where they reconcile represents how the book focuses on Sarah and Elizabeth's negotiation as the central relationship: for other issues in the book to be resolved, Sara and Elizabeth first must resolve their friendship, which enables them to work through their other relational networks. Although she is reluctant, Sara eventually realizes that "No matter how hard I try to avoid thinking about Elizabeth, her friendship warms me like a mug of hot chocolate" (Faruqi and Shovan 283). Even though the situation has impacted them both, Sara describes their relationship in a positive way, and the hot chocolate simile reinforces how their friendship brings her comfort by calling on a culinary image of comfort and deliciousness. When the two finally talk, Sara does not hold back: "'I'm still upset with you,' I tell her severely. 'I know. But it wasn't a hundred percent my fault.' [Elizabeth] has a pleading look on her face. I sigh. 'It takes two hands to clap,' as Baba always says. I was right there with you. I had the key. You didn't force me to do anything'" (287). Sara recognizes how Elizabeth feels as she describes her body language and interprets her facial expression; Sara's sigh exemplifies her acknowledgement that she participated in this situation too. Elizabeth is grateful that Sara speaks

to the role she played: Sara describes how Elizabeth "relaxes. 'Thank you for saying that. I don't want to fight,'" she replies; "We've got to stay friends. We complement each other" (287). Her second statement—that the girls complement each other—also represents how Elizabeth has listened to Sara's needs and learned from them.

By reconciling, the two girls can begin brainstorming how they will make the ice cream for the competition, which adds another piece to the relational network the novel portrays. The ice cream competition brings together their families and showcases how their negotiation results in care for multiple people in multiple spaces. Elizabeth's brother, David, invents a way to use a bicycle to churn the ice cream: Elizabeth describes how her "whole family helped me and Sara [make the ice cream] today, all of us together" (Faruqi and Shovan 296). Elizabeth's relational network intersects with Sara's, providing the relational tools that enable them to compete in the festival, although they do not win. The festival also inspires Sara to find a way to use her art to help her mother's business, which the final competition scene highlights: "I've also printed out flyers with Mama's catering menu and prices. They sit in a neat pile ready to be handed out. My HAMEED'S KITCHEN logo is on the top of each flyer" (301). As they build their friendship, Sara and Elizabeth must negotiate emotions and their past experiences, and this negotiation enables them to think about their relational networks, consider their many relationships as they make decisions and, ultimately, cook delicious food together.

Culinary Innovations and Sense of Self in *With the Fire on High*

Unlike the protagonists I have discussed above, Emoni connects with food because she wants to be a chef and cooking is a part of her professional goals; like the other protagonists, food is also tied to Emoni's sense of self. As such, Elizabeth Acevedo's YA novel *With the Fire*

on High adds an intersection in which personal self is tied to professional self to demonstrate how Emoni understands herself and how she can then make her way in the world. The novel situates this culinary desire alongside Emoni's roles as a mother to her daughter Emma (affectionately called Babygirl) and as a senior about to graduate high school. *With the Fire on High* establishes Emoni's Black and Boricua identities within the scope of her culinary journey, and the novel explores her identity as a young chef who also brings together her cultures in her cuisine. Emoni and her daughter live with Abuela, Emoni's Puerto Rican paternal grandmother, which establishes a strong connection to her Boricua heritage; her mother died during childbirth, so her connections to her Black heritage are more limited, which the narrative emphasizes through Emoni's conversations with her mother's sister, Aunt Sarah. Food in the novel reveals Emoni's innate sense of culinary innovation; this ingenuity highlights the ways that Emoni innovates to resolve the different tensions that she experiences in the novel and how this culinary journey helps her to better conceptualize how these two ethnic identities are part of her culinary heritage. In this chapter, I focus on the main conflict of the novel, Emoni's desire to be a chef, which is affected by her lack of time, money, and professional training. Emoni creatively responds to these challenges in order to take a culinary class she has dreamed of taking and to travel to Spain for an immersive internship experience. However, it is not the culinary class that ultimately makes Emoni a chef; instead, seen through a relational framework of identity, the novel prioritizes how her relationships bolster Emoni's confidence as a young chef.

With the Fire on High emphasizes a relational understanding of Emoni's culinary innovations—that is, the food Emoni makes is not simply for her to enjoy; rather, she creates food as an aspect of care. The novel establishes early (and often) that Emoni is known for her culinary innovations. "Something special *does* happen when I'm cooking," Emoni admits

(Acevedo 17). “Angelica [Emoni’s best friend] thinks it’s because we live in the hood, so we never have exactly the right ingredients—we gotta innovate, baby,” while her mother’s sister, “[A]unt Sarah says it’s in our blood, an innate need to tell a story through food” (17). The idea of innovation, of working with the ingredients one has, reiterates how Emoni’s culinary innovations reflect intersectional aspects of her identity, both that she is from a place with limited resources and because her family has this shared history and love of food. In every culinary situation, Emoni pauses, assesses the dish (what is lacking, what is needed), and reimagines the dish anew, according to what is available to her. Noddings writes that “[t]he receptive mode is at the heart of human existence,” indicating that receiving the other enables care to happen (*Caring* 33). This means being attentive to the needs of others; in Emoni’s case, this occurs through her culinary storytelling.

Emoni’s innate ability to innovate results not only in delicious dishes but also in supportive care work. For instance, this ability to think creatively about food is highlighted when Emoni makes dinner for Angelica’s date with Laura. Emoni reflects: “Something inside me stops laughing at her dreamy expression. My girl is truly in love and *I’m choked up at having been a part of making that night special for her*” (Acevedo 183, emphasis added). The novel also illustrates Emoni’s relationship with her grandmother through food, highlighting how their relationship is bolstered by their shared love of cooking and eating. As Emoni remarks early in the novel, “when ’Buela [as Emoni affectionately calls her] tasted it (whatever ‘it’ was) she says it was the best thing she’d ever eaten. How it made her whole day better, sweeter” (16). In both instances, Angelica and ’Buela’s positive feedback reinforce Emoni’s sense of culinary self. She admits, “I don’t know if I really have something special,” recognizing, too, though, “I do know I’m happier in the kitchen than anywhere else in the world” (17). In these ways, the novel

implicitly associates Emoni's understanding that she is meant to be a chef with the moments she knows her food is loved and appreciated, that her care has been recognized.

The narrative underscores Emoni's relationship with her grandmother by depicting the foods made in their kitchen and how the food that Emoni makes emotionally impacts her grandmother, especially encouraging her grandmother to remember a strong sensory moment in her childhood. One night, Emoni narrates, "'Buela and I are making music alongside the radio, the clanging of pans, the mortar against the pestle, our voices humming" (93). They make "fragrant yellow rice with cilantro," mentioning that "[s]omehow, black-eyed peas found their way into the rice" (92). Emoni also describes how "[t]he chicken looks juicy, and smothered in onions, it's cooked perfectly *without a thermometer*" (92, emphasis in the original). When Abuela takes the first bite, she is brought to tears, telling Emoni how the food takes her "back [to] a memory of being a little girl and staring out at the ocean" (93). "Even that memory," Abuela says, "of longing for what I was afraid of warms me up. Like a candle being lit from the inside. You were given magic, nena" (93). The narrative juxtaposes Emoni's positive descriptors of the food—*fragrant*, *juicy*, *perfectly*—with the positive words Abuela uses to describe how the food made her feel—*warm*, *magic*, the candle simile. The interplay between these positive words exemplifies how this scene emphasizes Abuela and Emoni's relationships and how Emoni's food impacts her grandmother.

This scene also represents how Emoni is learning to negotiate between her own cooking intuition and what she is being taught in her class. For instance, Emoni narrates: "I plate 'Buela's portion using one of the lessons I learned from the cul-arts textbook: the starch on the bottom and the protein on top, sauce spooned over both; a separate bowl for the salad" (92). These two spaces, home versus school, represent how Emoni navigates the tension between personal

innovation and societal expectation. After Abuela tastes the meal, Emoni's commentary reiterates her sense of unease about what the class is teaching her: "I don't know much about pathogens and storing sugar, but damn if I don't know how to cook good food that makes people hungry for more, that makes people remember food is meant to feed more than an empty belly. It's also meant to nourish your heart. And that's one thing you won't ever learn from no textbook" (93). Emoni focuses on the social aspect of eating, of making people feel good through food, which relates to the social element of eating that Ryang theorizes. As such, Emoni rejects a purely clinical approach to cooking, even though she understands why this approach exists or may even, occasionally, be necessary.

The novel illustrates how Emoni's culinary identity builds her relational network by establishing connections to her mother's side of the family, and the only connection Emoni has to her mother's culinary roots is through Aunt Sarah. The shared love of food between Emoni and Abuela repeats in Emoni's emails to Aunt Sarah, highlighting how Emoni's innovative nature stems from another part of her family. Describing their exchanges, Emoni explains how Aunt Sarah "sends me family recipes when she has a moment to type them out, although she cooks the way I do: *no actual measurements, only ingredients and partial directions*. When I *remix* the recipes and make them my own, I send them back to her so she can see how her niece hooked it up" (Acevedo 55, emphasis added). The very language Emoni uses reiterates the idea of creating something new, of working with food to negotiate the spaces in which she exists. This moment also describes how Emoni cooks like her mother's side of the family. Through these emails, Emoni connects with her Black heritage and her family's take on Black cuisine by reading the recipes, remixing them, and sharing her remixes. As she writes one time, "Thanks for your last recipe for fried green tomatoes. The story of how you and my momma used to eat the

green tomatoes straight from the vine made me smile" (180-81). The emails that Aunt Sarah shares, along with the precious memories of Emoni's mother, are the only way that Emoni can connect to her Black heritage and her maternal family's cuisine. Additionally, the emails are interwoven into Emoni's narrative, which further highlights how these aspects of her identity are ever-present in her mind, even though they are not the central conflict of the novel.

Through these emails, Emoni gains a new sense of her culinary heritage, which exemplifies how *intersectional food identity* books point to protagonists' intersecting identities as the key framework for understanding why food is important to how the protagonists see themselves. The emails hint, too, at how this connection to her aunt and this part of her relational network helps Emoni figure out a way to raise money for the class to go to Spain, as she asks for "the family's version for stuffing," stating, "I have an idea I think I could use to raise money" (Acevedo 206-7). Emoni suggests to her teacher, Chef Ayden, that the class expand the menu offerings for the Winter Dinner (210). The class also comes together to brainstorm other ways to expand the Winter Dinner, such as auctioning off different services of their parents like landscaping, and the event raises enough money so that each student only owes $275 (225). Emoni still worries about finding the remaining money, "but," she says, "I know that I did more for this single day that I ever thought possible, and that's something to be proud of" (226). The pride Emoni takes in what she accomplishes is bolstered by how the diners receive her food. As she acknowledges, "Every recipe that went out has my thumbprint on it, and whether people enjoyed the meal falls on me" (221). And after dinner, everyone gushes over the dishes, singing her praises. Finally, it is her aunt's confidence and pride in her that enables Emoni to accompany her peers on the trip, since Aunt Sarah gathers money from her mother's side to send Emoni off on her trip:

> Aunt Sarah is my email auntie, the strongest connection to my mother, *my kitchen confidante*, but she's never sent money before, never organized that side of the family to send me a gift. I look out the window at the clouds parting in the same way my bad mood is, sunlight peeking through both, and I know for a fact *there's more than one kind of magic in this world*. (236, emphasis added)

Emoni connects clouds parting with the solution her mother's family provides, emphasizing this positive change by focusing on the new bits of sunlight she sees. Thus, through the support of her family, including 'Buela and Angelica, Emoni finds a solution to what she has been working hard for all along—a chance to apprentice with a professional chef to hone her skills.

While Emoni's trip to Spain appears to be the culminating part of the novel, I have chosen to focus on *how* she gets to Spain, rather than her time in Spain, because apprenticing for Chef Amadí in Spain is not what makes Emoni a chef (although that relationship is important, too). It is also not the moment when Emoni finds out she got into Drexel, the school that has a great culinary arts program Emoni has been hoping to attend (Acevedo 351). Instead, all of the little moments before, when she is still trying to find her way, define Emoni's culinary sense of self: her grandmother's faith in her hard work, her best friend's appreciation of the love she put into the dinner she fixed for Angelica and Laura's date, as well as Aunt Sarah's pride in sharing recipes and hearing Emoni's new innovations. By integrating Emoni's relationships with her culinary journey, the novel privileges a relational conversation about the foods that Emoni makes and eats. As Emoni says, "Although my food doesn't give me any memories, it has always been looking back; it's infused with the people I come from. But it's also a way for me to look forward: to watch the recipes that from my roots transform, grow, and feed the hungriest places inside of me" (382). Food, then, is an integral part of her identity as well as the key to

understanding how Emoni comes into her own as a chef who is also a mother, a granddaughter, a friend, a classmate, and a niece. As the novel ends, Emoni writes one final email to Aunt Sarah, detailing how excited she is to come visit Sarah and her family and how Emoni created a dish using her own name: "As to your last assignment, I did make up a recipe inspired by my name.… so I decided to make a remix of flambé shrimp à la Emoni, because what better way to take a leap of faith than to set something on fire and trust it will not only come out right, but that it will be completely delicious?" (388). No matter what Emoni faces, she finds a way to make it through using food and the love of those close to her.

Internal Conflict and Negotiating the Self-Other Dynamic in *American Panda*

Gloria Chao's *American Panda* focuses on how Mei learns to navigate the different aspects of what it means for her to be Taiwanese-American while also trying to understand what it means to be a good daughter and what it means to be authentically herself. The negotiation between our own desires and others' desires (for themselves and for us) constitutes how we come to understand ourselves. In Mei's case, she struggles primarily between wanting to be a dancer and fulfilling her parents' wishes for her to become a doctor; on top of this, Mei comes to like a Japanese American boy, even though her mother wants her to marry someone who is Taiwanese. Before the novel begins, her parents have disowned her brother because he decided to marry a woman who might not be able to have children (he is their only son and the oldest child), and this conflict between Mei's brother and her parents exacerbates her inner turmoil. Food reappears throughout the novel as an analogy for Mei's conflicting feelings, which reveals the ways that Mei tries to negotiate her circumstances to find a solution that satisfies her parents and herself. This parental clash is a common trope in adolescent literature, as Roberta Seelinger

Trites describes in *Disturbing the Universe*. "The role of parents in adolescent literature," Trites writes, "is one of the defining characteristics of the genre. Since Anglophone cultures, by-and-large, usually accept as a given the premise that adolescents must separate from their parents in order to grow, the literatures of these cultures reflect the same bias" (53). The novel is written in an American context featuring an American higher education system, and so Mei separating from her parents in order to go to college reflects this Anglophone trope, even as part of Mei's cultural background reinforces how she is indebted to and still connected with her parents. Moreover, the novel primarily focuses on how Mei wants to find a way to incorporate her American culture, often represented as what she wants to do and what she finds enjoyable, with her Taiwanese culture, often represented by her parents' desires and stipulations. Additionally, during several major moments in the novel, Mei and the other characters eat together or share food so that food is interwoven throughout the setting and into the backdrop of the novel's important turning points. Food in the novel thus symbolizes Mei's conflicts, while interacting with food facilitates the resolution of those conflicts.

The first chapter, entitled "Stinky Tofu," highlights how Mei disagrees with her mother's world view, which is the first part of Mei's relational network that is developed. Mei narrates: "The stench of the restaurant's specialty walloped my senses as soon as I entered. Even with seventeen years of practice, I didn't have a fighting chance against a dish named *stinky tofu*. I gagged" (Chao 1, emphasis in original). Mei never outright says she does not like stinky tofu, but "stench" and "gagged" all imply her dislike of the tofu dish, whose name itself references its pungent aroma. Also, Mei does not describe the "stinky tofu" in any other way, nor does she detail its ingredients or what it looks like, reinforcing her disdain for the food since she uses no positive descriptors. Right after this, Mei points out: "My mother sniffed and smiled. 'Smells

like home,'" but Mei does not respond (1). Mei's mother *does* like stinky tofu, as she associates it with home, which implies a connection that she has with this dish that Mei does not. Their differing reactions to the stinky tofu establish the difference between what Mei feels and what her mother feels. As such, stinky tofu serves as a metaphor for Mei and her mother's relationship as well as Mei's negative feelings towards her Taiwanese heritage because of her parents' strict expectations. Similarly, Dong suggests how food serves as a metaphor for protagonists' feelings when analyzing two Vietnamese American texts: "The absence of familiar Vietnamese food in Alabama, exemplified particularly by the central trope of papaya, is a constant reminder of what has been left behind. As a missing and longed-for object, the fruit helps reveal her feelings of loss, confusion, and displacement" ("Consuming" 159). Stinky tofu does not symbolize loss or confusion for Mei as the papaya does for Hà in *Inside Out & Back Again*, the book referenced in Dong's quote above. However, stinky tofu does work as a metaphor in the book for Mei's feelings, perhaps aversion and frustration, all things she feels when she thinks about Taiwanese culture or her parents' expectations. Stinky tofu, like papaya, signifies a character's tumultuous relationship with the world and certain cultural expectations. Moreover, this metaphor is one way in which *American Panda* exemplifies how *intersectional food identity* books incorporate multiple aspects of foodways, such as reactions to food and relationships with others through food, as part of the protagonist's identity formation.

The novel again highlights Mei's and her mother's differing worldviews when Mei's mom begins discussing potential acceptable husbands (i.e., Taiwanese men); this time, egg fried rice is the dish that acts as a motif for Mei's feelings. Mei's mother criticizes Mrs. Ahn, the mother of one of these potential bachelors: "I tell her, stop trying to make such hard things. Even her *dànchǎofàn* is bad. Who can't make egg fried rice?" (Chao 38). During her mother's

commentary, Mei remains silent. Inwardly, though, she quickly narrates: "*Me*, I thought, but I didn't want to remind my mother that I would be a bad wife for Eugene Huang because I couldn't cook" (39, emphasis in original). Mei silences herself again, trying to make a decision that will cause her mother the least amount of pain. Moreover, Mei believes that her silence is best, choosing to not assert herself so that she is not in turn hurt by what would likely be her mother's harsh words. By not being a potential good wife, Mei would indeed be disappointing her mother, something she establishes frequently throughout the first couple chapters of the book. Perhaps Mei also might see this disappointment as a way of hurting her mother. Regardless, because Mei hesitates to assert herself, she ignores how keeping such secrets hurts her. In this moment, the negative perception of food or, at least, an interaction with food, underscores how the novel uses food as a metaphor for Mei's feelings about her parents' expectations. This negotiation, between Mei's feelings and what she perceives are her mother's concerns, reiterates how Mei accounts for different aspects of her relational network as she attempts to make decisions and navigate in the world.

Mei's silencing ultimately causes more problems than it solves because she prioritizes only the needs of others, which is highlighted through the negative comments she makes about the food or herself in relationship to cooking. These problems stem from the fact that Mei is not considering her own needs. "When only others are legitimized as the recipients of the woman's care," Gilligan points out, "the exclusion of herself gives rise to problems in relationships" (74). Not being honest with herself results in multiple issues throughout her relationships; for instance, Mei and her mother fight more, and, when Mei seeks her brother's advice, she explains that she feels the weight of her decisions resting heavily on her shoulders. She then likens her secrets with making dumplings: "It was like trying to contain three spoonfuls of stuffing in a

dumpling—it was so overfilled the skin barely met on any side. All the secrets threatened to spill at any moment. If I ever tried to finish the dumpling, it would explode when I squeezed—meat and veggies everywhere" (Chao 127-28). Mei feels she must suppress her own wishes for her parents, creating new secrets and effectively over-stuffing the dumpling. The novel further emphasizes this analogy when Mei admits that she overstuffed dumplings once, and her parents consequently scolded her very harshly because, for "parents who grew up with nothing and scrimped and saved every grain of rice, wasting was punishable" (128).

Mei continues to remain silent about her wishes, allowing her parents to believe that she agrees with their plan for her to become a doctor. These choices reinforce how Mei prioritizes the needs of those in her relational network over her own, with food as the way to represent the impact of these choices. Eventually, the dumpling of Mei's life explodes when her parents discover that she has seen her brother, Xing, even though they forbade her after disowning Xing. During this time, Mei finally reveals to them that she cannot be a doctor, that she feels torn between her Taiwanese culture and her American culture:

> I wanted to shove all the secrets back in. Back where they couldn't *hurt anyone except me*. *But the dumpling had exploded—meat, veggies, secrets everywhere, unable to be gathered up and shoved back into hiding.* And a tiny part of me was glad. I hated that piece of me. It was selfish, just like my father had said. I wanted the secrets out because I couldn't handle it anymore. (191, emphasis added)

Mei feels relieved that she is no longer keeping secrets, i.e., no longer hurting herself, but frames this relief as "selfish." Gilligan describes how "the language of selfishness and responsibility … defines the moral problem as one of obligation to exercise care and avoid hurt. The inflicting of hurt is considered selfish and immoral in its reflection of unconcern, while the expression of care

is seen as the fulfillment of moral responsibility" (73). Mei emphasizes how she hates herself for feeling that relief because it has caused her parents' pain: her actions are selfish not just because her father says so but because she was not able to protect others from being hurt. By describing this situation in this way, Mei reveals how she fails to recognize the ways that her parents are complicit in creating the situation that they now all find themselves in. Instead, Mei grieves how she has destroyed her relationship with her parents, taking all of the responsibility for the pain caused by her secrets and her parents' disappointments.

Throughout *American Panda*, Mei sees herself as the one person responsible for committing all of this hurt, primarily focusing on her own actions. By the end of the novel, though, she begins to redefine and reframe her relationships with her parents, reconciling with her mother and making amends in her relational network. In one of their meetings, her mother tells her: "I'm sorry it took me so long to see, especially when I suffered in similar ways. I *do* want you to be happy. That's all I've ever wanted for you. But now I see—your idea of happiness doesn't match mine. Mei, I want more for you than me. I always have" (Chao 273-74). This meeting provides an opportunity for Mei and her mother to work through their diverging desires. In this way, Mei moves towards Gilligan's third stage, where the self and other are taken into account together when making ethical decisions (74). "In separating the voice of the self from the voices of others, the woman asks if it is possible to be responsible to herself as well as to others and thus to reconcile the disparity between hurt and care," Gilligan writes (82). The pizza restaurant where Mei and her mother meet, Bertucci's, symbolizes how far their relationship has come since Mei chooses the place and her mother agrees to eat at a restaurant she had previously refused to visit. In their final meeting scene, Mei narrates how "The waitress served our pizza, pasta, and salad all at once to be eaten family-style. Asian-style" (Chao 300). In

this moment, the mixing of food and eating styles signifies how Mei and her mother have negotiated a balance between both of their desires. Mei's "mother [even] reached for the food first," saying, "I love pizza. It's like an oyster pancake, but with chee-se" (300).[20] These words also juxtapose a Taiwanese dish with an American dish, reiterating how Mei and her mother have found some kind of balance. The novel does not imply that these two meetings with her mother solve all of their disagreements. Instead, Mei and her mother can finally meet on a regular basis, while her father, as Mei's mother tells her, "misses you and Xing but won't admit it" (301). Mei's father still does not approve, but the end of the novel indicates that his disapproval may not be a fixed reality. While there is no resolution to Mei's conflict with her father, the possibility that he may come around underscores how relationships always require negotiation and that no one solution can ever be a permanent fix to the issues at hand.

Intersectional Food Identity Books and Relational Context

As I have discussed, *intersectional food identity* books situate food experiences within particular conflicts the protagonists face, which are defined by and resolved with their relational networks. As such, each book discusses an intersectional issue that the protagonist encounters. The protagonists use food to maintain or repair their relationships with others, and these relationships are situated both in personal and cultural experiences. Noddings describes how "[s]ituations of relatedness are unique," and she works to "build a picture of one-caring from a

[20] Mei describes how her mother "separated the word 'cheese' into two syllables, the way it's pronounced in Mandarin" (Chao 300). Chao thus uses "chee-se" to give a sense of how Mei's mother speaks.

collection of concrete and unique situations" (*Caring* 30). Likewise, cultural foods are situated within the unique spaces that these characters occupy, which showcases the relational context that surrounds cuisine and culinary experiences.

Overall, these novels focus on the challenges that Salma, Elizabeth, Sara, Emoni, and Mei face, and they detail the tensions that are an inherent part of how we form our identities. When we read food, as these novels demonstrate, we are encouraged to see it as one of many aspects of the protagonist's identity as the novels also incorporate discussions of gender, language, nationality, immigration, class, race, and ethnicity. Food may be used as an analogy for characters' feelings or their relationships, as in *American Panda*, or it may be sustained by their connections with family and friends, as in *With the Fire on High*. The narratives depict the challenges that the protagonists face within webs of relationships, which inspires dynamic stories about food and identity, and negotiation becomes a key feature of *intersectional food identity* books. In all, food in these novels does not exist without context; it is always situated within the network of the protagonist's identity but taking center stage of the novel for different reasons. Moreover, these novels honor the ways that these protagonists experience the world differently because of their respective cultures, while they also provide readers the opportunity to connect foods associated with each of their cultures and how they understand themselves. Rather than representing all Syrian, Pakistani American, Jewish, British, Taiwanese-American, Boricua, or Black communities, these novels highlight the distinct ways that identities are complicated, even when associated with traditional foods.

CHAPTER V: FOOD, COMMUNITY, AND PERSPECTIVE—PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONAL READING AND ANTICOLONIAL FOOD ADVENTURING

Going forward, I make connections between the kinds of reading and analysis I have performed throughout this dissertation and how my analysis exemplifies why audiences need to consider critical reading skills when they think about food and cultural diversity in texts. As such, I theorize that relational reading, especially when reading texts about diversity, involves not taking one author's story or one character's experience for granted. "How have other readers attended to the book?" and "How does my positionality impact how I read?" are both questions critical readers can learn to answer.

Relational Reading, a New Pedagogical Strategy

As I have established throughout this project, many narratives for young people utilize food as a way to represent cultural diversity. Using food to discuss cultural diversity is not an inherently problematic approach; however, it can become reductive if audiences read these texts in ways that reinforce homogenizing and colonial ideologies about food and cultural diversity. In particular, uncritical reading can create reductive perceptions of cultures and foods since understanding cultural diversity, like anything else, is influenced by our biases and ideologies. I propose that readers should learn to recognize how their ideologies affect the way that they understand, analyze, and evaluate texts: this recognition can become an important part of undermining or resisting stereotypical, colonial, and/or racist readings of culturally diverse texts. Critical reading strategies can prepare readers to more thoughtfully read and interact with culturally diverse texts about food. For instance, many people interact with food, within and

outside of literary texts, in forms of what Heldke defines as cultural food colonialism, wherein food adventurers seek out food from "other" cultures: by refusing to critically examine their (the readers') interactions with food, food adventurers further colonize these cultures when they take and experience foods to bolster their own cultural capital. Even with the best intentions, readers of food in culturally diverse children's literature can unintentionally perpetuate problematic and othering ideologies surrounding food.

In *Exotic Appetites*, Heldke posits that the answer to the problem of cultural food colonialism, what she sees as the process of becoming anticolonial food adventurers, involves recognizing when and how we perform cultural food colonialism. Heldke suggests that this process of becoming an anticolonial food adventurer involves an inward, retrospective attitude, and she emphasizes how "We who are systematically privileged—whether by virtue of race, class, education, or gender—cannot escape the fact that, in every choice we make, every action we take, we exercise that privilege" (*Exotic Appetites* 171). Rather than ignoring our privilege, Heldke notes, we should acknowledge it and then come to terms with recognizing how it affects the way we see the world around us. This recognition requires new ways of thinking and acting in the world so that we can avoid further disenfranchising and marginalizing people and their cultures. Heldke thus argues for "self-questioning," which she explains "can work to challenge the hierarchical dichotomy that separates knowing, powerful subject from known, subordinate object," which is a dichotomy, she says, that "serves as one of the defining elements of the colonizer's attitude" (173). I see Heldke's assertions connecting with metacognition and self-assessment, which are pedagogical concepts I have used throughout the courses I have taught. So, I took up those ideas again as I centered Heldke's theoretical concerns about and solutions to cultural food colonialism in my Fall 2019 ENG 125 Internship Course, titled "Food Adventuring

and Narratives for Young People."[21]

I have found Heldke's argument to be useful in thinking about the unintended consequences of how texts for young audiences talk about food; however, her position tends to maintain a sharp dichotomy between self and other even while trying to undermine colonialist attitudes toward food adventuring. I recognize that her discussion of cultural food colonialism needs to discuss this binary since the behaviors involved in cultural food colonialism *are* othering. However, I realized that finding a way to teach this to undergraduate students as well as recognize in myself how I could avoid these behaviors involved a conversation that reconciled and honored differences rather than maintained them as oppositions. Reconciling differences involves more than just acknowledging how cultures and people exist differently or are in opposition with one another, a standpoint that often reifies a self-other binary. If someone thinks about the self-other binary only as self *versus* other, then they may fail to see how the world is interconnected and how people are interdependent, often relying on each other despite and because of differences, which might be described as a self *and* other dynamic. Reconciling differences must involve some recognition that human identity is formed through interdependent relationships with others, which enables individuals to actively work through whatever conflicts may arise because of our differences in perspectives and positionalities. In this way, reconciling differences involves centering relationships so that those relationships become an inherent part of the way we see the world. Hence, the course and my scholarship turned to feminist care ethics to equip students to better understand their own relationships with the texts they were reading and the cultures depicted therein.

[21] IRB-2019-327

Feminist care ethics, as I have discussed, focuses on key ideas such as relationality, negotiation, listening, and interpersonal connections, and I turned to Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* to think more about Heldke's discussion of cultural food colonialism and the interactions people have with food. In this germinal text, Gilligan focuses on the different voice she hears across women's stories about moral decision making:

> The different voice … is a relational voice: a voice that insists on staying in connection and most centrally staying in connection with women, so that psychological separations which have long been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom no longer appear as the *sine qua non* of human development but as a human problem. (xiii)

Gilligan notes that to be separated from one another is not an individual problem in development but a problem with humankind and that a relational voice focuses on connection. As I mentioned in Chapter One, instead of thinking about ethics in terms of rules and universal principles, "This ethic, which reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships, evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent" (74). This third perspective exists in a continuum alongside a first perspective, focused mainly on the self, and a second perspective, focused mainly on the other (74). Thus, an ethic of care involves paying attention to the fact that we always already exist in relationships while navigating these relationships through an ethic of care means attempting to minimize hurt for all parties involved. Such interdependency and interconnection encourage us to revisit the "Us versus Them" dichotomy Heldke discusses, which enables us to re-envision where and how we stand within our diverse relationships. This approach to relationships would provide a central insight for my students when we talked about the consequences of cultural food colonialism.

Gilligan's specific theory of care provided the students with concrete ways of thinking

about being anticolonial food adventurers. Taken together, then, Heldke's and Gilligan's theories allowed the class to identify, problematize, and seek solutions for potentially othering interactions of food and identity. While Heldke and Gilligan theorize from two different scholarly perspectives, they both focus on the importance of considering our roles and responsibilities in relationships. They also both conceptualize how identity is constantly negotiated. Together, these theories prioritize relationships, in this case, about and through food, in different ways, which leads to a perspective that enables us to consider food's role more fully in how we come to understand ourselves and our cultures.

I used the connections between these scholars to plan course content to help students better understand what is at stake in different narratives for young people about the complexities of food, identity, and culture. Some of the course's *just one bite* books address diversity and multiculturalism through food primarily by emphasizing the "sameness" that different cultures share when it comes to certain foods or eating habits. However, this particular understanding of "sameness" does not align with an understanding of interdependence as it fails to recognize the realities of negotiation and responsibility inherent in all relationships. Moreover, for the texts that took a different approach, students still needed to challenge themselves to think about how they read these texts, as one of the goals of the course was to "ask questions about our own motivations for eating and reading about certain kinds of food" (Appendix A). Students would accomplish this by "learning about cultural food colonialism in order to recognize the subtle ways that food narratives play into cultural food colonialism," another goal of the course (Appendix A). Because some texts are productive in their conversations about food and identity and others are more reductive, the class needed space to think through how texts approach food differently. Some texts *do* portray food and culture in positive and respectful ways, so students

needed to consider how these books exist on a spectrum of how they approach food and culture.

As we analyzed these texts, I emphasized critical reading and writing skills throughout the course by designing assignments that asked students to analyze not only the literature but also their own approaches as readers to these texts. Students could begin to recognize the subtle ways they played into cultural food colonialism, for instance, when they saw a food as "authentic" or not. Since we would not be necessarily eating these foods but reading about them, I needed to consider how to use Heldke's theories when reading food, i.e., how to apply her theories to literary representations of food. Certainly, eating food involves specific material conditions and experiences, while reading food lacks this materiality; as such, reading food can feel removed from eating food because readers may not feel that they are participating in cultural food colonialism as they themselves are not actually eating the food. With that said, I outlined several course goals that would allow us to think about children's literature from Heldke's anticolonial food perspective, and I created assignments to engage students in critical reading and thinking, such as short literary analyses focused on close reading; discussion leading questions that would bring together ideas from the course with the literature we were reading for the week; projects that would analyze a specific aspect of food in a text; and multimodal work that would bridge the gap between reading about food and experiencing food as a material object (Appendix A). One of my original questions for the course was "What happens to readers' perceptions of and interactions with food when we're reading the food, rather than physically eating it?" (Appendix A). Over time, my focus switched, and I began asking, "How can students become critical readers of food in these texts, and what impact could those critical reading strategies have on their learning?" (Appendix A). Throughout my own research and my reflections on how I interacted with and read food prior to the course, I theorized that the answer

lies somewhere in becoming critically aware of oneself as a reader.

Based on the successes of this course as well as the adjustments that needed to be made for the future, I propose teaching critical reading using feminist care ethics theory: in order to minimize reductive readings of food, I teach students to consider context, including their own positionalities, as they read. I argue that students can better understand cultural food colonialism (both on a personal and an educational level) and its negative effects after discussing care ethics while thinking about the relationships they share with the text and the relationships that characters have between each other. With these skills, students can more clearly identify different perspectives and positionalities when reading texts, which can lead to less reductive readings of culturally diverse stories and food. *Relational reading*, as I call this approach to reading, focuses on individuals, relationships, and negotiation and is based on these principles, inspired in part by Carol Gilligan's theory:

1. **Students must be aware of themselves as individuals when reading, that is, be able to understand their own relationship to the text, its cultural material, and ideologies**. This first step addresses Gilligan's "self" stage, which is defined by "an initial focus on caring for the self in order to ensure survival" (74). Questions in this section include: What aspects of critical reading challenge you, and in what aspects do you succeed? What perspective or positionality do you hold when reading the story, and how does this align with who the story is about? What knowledge do you bring to the table when reading or discussing a book?
2. **Students must be able to identify the different kinds of relationships that they see when critically reading and be able to understand how the texts they read are imbued with cultural material and ideology.** This second step addresses Gilligan's

"other" stage of moral development "which is articulated by the concept of responsibility" and during which "the good is equated with caring for others" (74). Within this set of questions, the text serves as the "other." This aspect of critical reading asks: What is your relationship to the text? What are the relationships between the characters in the text? What is the text's relationship to you (the student)? What is the author's relationship to the text they've written and the community and culture they're writing about? What is the text's relationship to the world around us, including ideology and cultural material? What patterns or themes does the story use to communicate about identity and culture?

With these two sets of questions, students can learn to identify how someone individually approaches the text along with understanding how the text exists in the world. Students then gain the skills needed to work within the third and final step in this approach to critical reading:

3. **Students must be able to negotiate their own reading of the text with other ways of reading**. This third step brings together the "self" and "other" Gilligan outlines in her theory; she describes how "The third perspective focuses on the dynamics of relationships and dissipates the tension between selfishness and responsibility through a new understanding of the interconnection between other and self" (74). What does a particular reading of the story privilege? What does one reading of the story miss because it focuses on this aspect? What kind of bias do you, the reader, bring to the table? How does this hinder other readings of the text? How can you situate your reading of the text with other readings of the text? How can you use research to better understand context or information that you don't know and the text doesn't provide? How can you—and will you—reassess your reading of the text with the new

information you have gained?

I combine care ethics theories about relationships and negotiation with Heldke's concept of anticolonial food adventuring as I focus on teaching students to reassess their own positions as readers and eaters of food. I identify critical reading skills as reflective processes for evaluating one's own relationship to the text, and I argue that students can begin to create more productive readings of a text using these strategies. While this course focused specifically on how these ideas can be applied to reading culture and food in texts for young readers, this pedagogy can be applied to more than food in literary texts: with this approach, instructors can help students investigate their own ideologies and biases as well as educate students on how to use their reading skills across varied contexts.

Building a Class for Critical Reading of Self and Texts

The course began with the main principle that critical reading is more than the specific tasks a reader performs to make sense of the text's argument or main theme. Instead, it is a way of continually understanding one's own reading process and how ideology constructs that process. To establish critical reading as something we would do all semester long, I planned the first half of the course to focus on specific critical reading practices and important concepts, like Heldke's discussions of authenticity and cultural food colonialism. The first summative assessment, the Foundational Ideas project (Appendix B), helped students engage in critical reading techniques and course concepts through small assignments due throughout the first few weeks of the course. The Foundational Ideas project encouraged students to think about themselves as individuals before we began the actual content of the course since "This first project asks you to situate yourself as both a critical reader and a critical writer focused on

children's literature" (Appendix B). This assignment would also help build our community, which helped to establish another facet of relationship as the course's theme.

During the Foundational Ideas Project, students completed two main tasks, with the first part of the project focusing specifically on how they could become critical readers of children's literature by first becoming critical readers of themselves. In this section, Reading Critically, students learned to identify their strengths and weaknesses as readers, since identifying these characteristics better prepares students to critically read in a variety of ways with a variety of texts. After reading about techniques for critically reading and discussing these ideas in class, students worked individually to identify different kinds of critical reading skills, chose and practiced skills that seemed most helpful to them and the kinds of learners and readers that they felt they were, and discussed with peers the ways that they used these skills to read critically. For the assessment portion of the project, students submitted their reading notes on the first two scholarly readings of the course, with their choice of methods and annotations based on a short article about reading critically.[22] In the second week of the course, they swapped reading notes with a peer and the pair peer-reviewed each other's notes, providing feedback on the areas of critical reading that needed improvement. Through this activity, students had the opportunity to discover critical reading skills they were not aware of or did not realize they needed to improve. For instance, in one set of peer review notes, Student B suggested to their peer that "One important question to ask is how the article could be biased. I think this can always be taken into

[22] The two scholarly readings were Carrie Hintz and Eric Tribunella's "Introduction for Students" in *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*" and Lisa Heldke's "The Quest for Authenticity" in *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventure*.

account." Since the course would be focusing on understanding different perspectives and positionalities, this was an important critical reading skill to recognize. Similarly, Student A proposed that their peer should "try to connect back to topics that we talked about in class," which was something I would stress throughout the course: an important aspect of critical reading is thinking and reading in context, i.e. relating the reading back to our discussion of food, culture, and identity.

Critical reading of the self, in step one of relational reading, focuses primarily on metacognition, which involves identifying what one knows and how one knows it. So, I also assigned formative assessments in which students more specifically discussed their learning as they progressed through the course. This assignment, called Learning Notebooks, combined any homework, classwork, writing prompts, reading checks, group work, discussion notes, and so forth, that students had completed. Every three or four weeks, students would submit a couple of assignments according to a given prompt: sometimes I asked for specific homework or classwork, and other times students selected assignments of their choice that they felt showcased their learning. Along with the other assignments, I asked students to discuss "why you think these things show your learning. What specifically about them shows that you've learned something in the class?" In this assignment, students wrote metacognitively about the work they were doing in the class, a learning moment that exemplifies how this course focused on critically reading the self.

Metacognitive awareness of learning encompassed reflecting on their struggles and successes in reading in the course as well as discussing what they felt as they learned new material and encountered different genres. In the Learning Notebooks, students had space to identify where their learning was happening in the course and how specific assignments

exemplified this learning: through this assignment, students could become critical readers of themselves as they learned to apply their analysis skills to their own reading processes. For instance, as Student M considered the discussion of Firoozeh Dumas's *It Ain't So Awful Falafel*, they noted that

> The two days from *It Ain't So Awful Falafel*, I recorded both of the discussions from class. The first which was student lead [sic] helped me with seeing how food was seen in the novel and *how to correlate that with positives and negatives associated with food and culture*. The second day, the student discussion leaders really looked [at] the theme of the book which was based on how we treat others based on stereotypes we may have about them. It helped me to *look at the theme and then identify examples of theme* based on it. (emphasis added)

In the italicized statements above, Student M pinpoints the literary analysis skills that they felt are necessary to understanding the nuances of food in these texts. Thus, Student M exemplifies how to analyze one's personal critical reading skills by discussing how those skills change over time and how activities and experiences can influence this skill development. Their commentary also illustrates how this thinking process allows readers to comment metacognitively about the actions they take when they read a text, which was an important aspect of critical reading in this course if students were going to learn how to read in less reductive ways. Through these assignments, students worked on the first step of critically reading by understanding how they grew as readers.

Struggling with Critical Reading of the Texts

Even after the Foundational Ideas project, some students struggled with the literary analysis aspect of critical reading in the course, which is part of the first stage of relational reading. This first stage also involves taking the skills needed to critically read the self and applying those skills to critically reading texts. I had designed assignments like the Short Analyses, the Midterm Paper, and the Final Project to help students transfer these skills to reading the novels and picture books in more analytical ways. Ultimately, these assignments were meant for students to move away from themselves and their personal reactions to the text, so they could learn to focus more on what was happening in the text, what patterns were being established in the story, and what conclusions we could draw from making observations about the text. These assignments provided students with the opportunity to focus more on stage two of relational reading, but their work in these assignments actually reveals the struggles students had in transitioning to stage two.

In the Short Analyses, I asked students to "pick one quote or passage that really stands out to you and think through the language that this quote/passage uses" and consider the following questions: "What is the text saying? What are we supposed to take from the text? What kind of meaning can we make from paying attention to this quote/passage?" (Appendix E). These questions were used throughout the semester, and students wrote a Short Analysis for each text that we read in the class. Students had some significant breakthroughs with course concepts in this assignment, especially Heldke's discussion of cultural food colonialism, but they usually summarized the novels, which exemplifies how they struggled with one of the course's critical reading skills. In early short analyses, when we were analyzing how texts reinforce cultural food colonialism, some students would avoid critiquing the text's use of cultural food colonialism,

which implied to me that they did not completely understand the term or how to critically read for it. For example, in Short Analysis #1 (turned in during the third week of the course), Student G discussed how cultural food colonialism appears in Norah Dooley's *Everybody Serves Soup*:

> Cultural food colonialism when broken down means food from tradition from different parts of the world being taken, and adapted to appeal to a new audience. In the book, Carrie compiles a recipe book from the different families from her neighborhood, who derive [sic] from different parts of the world, as evident to how they are drawn in the illustrations, their last names, and by the traditional soups they make for Carrie. When Carrie compiles these various recipes, *she is inadvertently engaging in cultural food colonialism*, which sounds bad, and from a certain point of view it is. (emphasis added)

In this assignment, Student G provided a definition of cultural food colonialism in their own words and then related this back to one of the books that we read for the week, Norah Dooley's *Everybody Serves Soup*, the third book in Dooley's *Everybody* series. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the main character, Carrie, tries to earn money for the perfect Christmas present for her mother; Carrie travels house to house in her multicultural neighborhood, sampling each soup that her neighbors make, and she ultimately decides to collect the recipes and give them to her mother for Christmas. Student G makes important connections about Carrie's actions in her neighborhood and how this relates to our course concept, cultural food colonialism. However, Student G's work does not quite provide their own analysis because, even when they do have an example, they summarize what happens in *Everybody Serves Soup* without explaining why Carrie's actions constitute cultural food colonialism. Instead, Student G student hedges, saying "sounds bad, and from a certain point of view it is." Student G's hedge also exemplifies students' resistance to naming an action as cultural food colonialism. This resistance is an important part

of understanding how students negotiate Heldke's theory because Student G's hesitation indicates that they, at least, have some reservations about analyzing how texts use cultural food colonialism.

Ultimately, Student G avoids critiquing *Everybody Serves Soup*, which could reflect their struggle to move out of stage one of relational reading (where the reader focuses on their understanding of the text) and into stage two, where they would need to think more about the different ideological implications of how the book portrays the characters' relationships. Even as Student G attempts to analyze Dooley's book, their comments reveal how they have focused more on their feelings about the text, rather than on one of the ways this picture book portrays relationships between a young white girl and her neighbors, who are predominantly people of color. The phrases "sounds bad" implies that cultural food colonialism might not actually be as bad as the theory or our conversations in class indicated. Following this up with "and from a certain point of view it is" further suggests that there are multiple ways to view the effects of cultural food colonialism, which avoids Heldke's main point—that, whether intentional or not, cultural food colonialism negatively impacts culture and peoples since it further colonizes them. Student G's hedging emphasizes how students struggled to negotiate their own feelings and concerns about intentionality and cultural food colonialism while thinking about how these picture books and novel actually portrayed cultural food colonialism. This pattern indicated to me that, even though I thought students were ready to move towards the next stage of relational reading, to critically read texts, they were, in fact, not ready as they still needed to work through their own feelings about cultural food colonialism.

This resistance to critically reading the text also implies to me a hesitation to critically read oneself. I realize now that I gave students few assignments that asked them to identify the

information about culture and food that they were bringing to the text, and I assumed that they could transfer the skills it takes to understand oneself as a reader to understanding oneself as an eater. Even though I thought this inward reflection was explicit, reading Student G's work made me realize that this was actually an implicit part of the course and my assignment. Because this question was implicit, I could not understand why students constantly asked whether intentionality excused someone's actions of perpetuating cultural food colonialism. As Student G considers Carrie's intentions, then, they highlighted one of the main questions students had in the course—how do intentions help us think about how and when cultural food colonialism happens and by whom? Throughout the course, students often asked whether intention could change whether a food adventurer was participating in cultural food colonialism. This was a question that I was not originally prepared to answer and something I perhaps took for granted in my own understanding of Heldke's theory. Regardless, this question about intention aligns with Heldke's points about self-questioning as it provides students the space to think about why intention is something that concerned them. Such a question indicates to me that students who could see themselves in characters like Carrie might want some way to absolve themselves of any cultural food colonialism they had participated in, since they felt it was unintentional. In a way, then, this thinking aligns critical reading of what happens in the text with critical reading of the self and how one feels and thinks about what happens in the text, even as students were trying to find ways to avoid responsibility. During these conversations, I spoke from my own experiences of reevaluating how I ate and explored foods from different cultures. I knew from past teaching experiences that students often do not have the language to describe their privilege(s) or how that privilege impacts the way that they move through (or eat) in the world. In order to move forward, to understand what to do with this new way of seeing food and culture, the class needed to attend

to these feelings—both to this sort of reaction to the text and to their inclination (even if implicit) to dissuade themselves of the guilt that those tensions about eating may be revealing to them.

Critical Reading Concerns

While I noted student successes, the struggles I mentioned above indicated to me that I needed to pause and address these additional concerns about students' ability to critically read themselves; only then could students critically read texts in ways that aligned with stage two of relational reading and not just stage one. Over time, these concerns manifested into two categories. First, a prominent issue with the Short Analyses assignment developed, in that students wrote summaries more than analyses: even though many of the students could analyze quotes and examples during class discussion, their written work tended to lose focus, and so they would rely on summary to try and make their point about the text. Second, students tended to concentrate on whether these texts were "relatable" or not, defining relatability in terms of what they, individually, could connect to. These critical reading concerns needed to be addressed before students could move into the third stage of relational reading where they would learn about how to negotiate between their observations of the text and other ways of reading these stories.

Focusing on Analysis, Not Summary

Over time, the Short Analyses developed into a place where students responded to the readings on more of a personal level. Even though students were supposed to focus on close reading the texts, their personal commentary implied that they were unsure of how to talk about the texts in critical ways, either by using course terms or analyzing the texts. Instead, students

tended to summarize what they saw happening in the text and then they either tried to connect it to a theme of the course or reflected personally on how this made them feel about the story. I did not expect to observe this pattern, but it revealed that some students were still focusing on themselves when trying to critically read the text, while others lacked the language and skills needed to analyze what they were observing. For instance, Student J discussed Mei's relationship with her mother in Gloria Chao's *American Panda* in one Short Analysis. They acknowledge that Mei's mother sees American culture differently because she was raised in a different place, but they go on to focus on their reactions to different elements of the story: "*I like* how the quote is left on a voicemail as well" and "They may not even be important messages but *I believe* her mother just wants to talk to her because she is lonely" (emphasis added). Both judgments of the text do not reference the disagreements Mei and her mother have about what being a good daughter means, and they do not account for how the conflict between Mei and her mother also manifest in Mei's troubled relationship with her Taiwanese heritage, all of which are in constant negotiation and conflict with one another.

In Week 11 of the course, I tried to remedy this tendency towards summary during our discussion of *It Ain't So Awful Falafel* by walking students through a close reading of different passages about food. In this exercise, we tried to determine the implied reader of the text. We focused on word choice and what it meant for the author to include or exclude information in the text, which helped students visualize the differences between what the reader brings to the text and what the author brings to the text. While I had not originally conceptualized teaching analysis in this way, this process helped readers distinguish between stage one and stage two of relational reading. Students could identify the implied reader, i.e., the kind of reader that Dumas imagined when writing the story, and they could compare their own knowledge of a food with

the observations that we made about what the book included. Through this activity, students also could compare their positionality to the perspective of Dumas's implied reader, which enabled them to think about their relationship to the text. Stage one asks, "What perspective or positionality do you hold when reading the story?" and "how does this align with who the story is about?", while stage two considers "What is the text's relationship to you (the student)?" and "What is the author's relationship to the text they've written and the community and culture they're writing about?" These two sets of questions can help readers reframe their own understandings of how a text portrays a food or culture.

In their notes, Student A details our discussion of stuffed grape leaves in Dumas's *It Ain't So Awful Falafel*:

- P. 111
  - stuffed grape leaves
    - not getting the Persian language
    - given descriptions of how they make it and its ingredients
      - cilantro
      - turmeric
        - fragrant
        - author does not provide much information
          - believes that the reader knows this ingredient
      - onions
      - ground beef
      - grape leaves
        - described as precious
          - hard to acquire
          - from Iran
      - mint [23]

Student A notes how we analyzed each of the ingredients mentioned and identified what kinds of information the author provided. Did Dumas explain what an ingredient was? Did she give context for where someone could buy it or how the ingredient tasted or made the dish taste?

[23] Formatting of student's notes slightly adjusted for spacing purposes only.

These kinds of questions gave us clues as to whether the author was assuming the reader knew the information (hence that detail *was not* provided) or assumed the reader would not know the information (hence that detail *was* provided). This information helped us identify the intended audience, at least in these moments. Student B reflected in their Learning Notebook that "I believe this work also displays my understanding of how to discover if the book is written for someone of the culture or an outsider of the culture. This shows up in the way the author describes certain food dishes because the author is either implying we know about the culture or we don't, and therefore given a description of the food." Because of the success of this lesson, I revised how I would use Short Analyses in future courses. In the revised assignment, students would focus on three different ways of thinking about the text—quotes and examples; observations they gathered from looking at their examples; and conclusions they could draw by analyzing their examples while thinking about course terms. Reframing the assignment in this way would hopefully help students to focus on finding examples and drawing conclusions from those examples rather than summarizing the story or personally responding to the story.

Knowing who the book is written for also enables students to think about what they already know about a culture or food as well as whether the book is supplying that information for them, both goals of stage one of relational reading. If the book does not give them that information and the reader does not already know those details about a dish or culture, then it may mean that the book is not written with them as the audience; this also indicates that, as they read, there may be context that they miss about a particular dish or history that they do not know about a particular cultural practice. In order for that student to then make an argument about how that book discusses food or how it uses food as a theme, they would need to negotiate that missing context. What do I know? What don't I know?—these are the questions that readers

must ask themselves before they can begin to say that a book does or does not perpetuate cultural food colonialism, and these are the questions that help them with negotiation, the third stage of relational reading that I have outlined.

It's More than "Being Relatable"

Through these assignments, students learned how to pay attention to themes of food, culture, and identity, which was the main focus of the first part of the course—critical reading of texts and critical reading of self. As I stressed most especially in the second part of the course, an important part of reading about culturally diverse identities stems from recognizing one's own position in relationship to the text, aspects of stage two of relational reading. For instance, as a white woman reading about a Taiwanese-American teenage girl, I need to be aware of why I am reading this text and how my own positionality leads to an understanding of identity, food, and culture that could be potentially colonial, reductive, homogenizing, or all three. To avoid such behavior, then, readers need to reanalyze our own positions; that is, we need to practice critical reading of the self and a text by asking ourselves questions like, "What is your relationship to the text?; What are the relationships between the characters in the text*?*, and What is the text's relationship to you (the student)?". Readers must answer these key questions before they can begin to read in ways that align with stage three, which moves beyond focusing on how one feels about the text: this stage encourages readers, instead, to practice metacognitive awareness of the ideological effects that their readings produce. What good does it do for someone to read a text and step away from it with their own stereotypes of eating reproduced? Readers must interrogate their readings for bias by asking questions such as

- What does this reading of the story privilege?

- What does one reading of the story miss out on because it focuses on this aspect?
- What kind of bias do you, the reader, bring to the table?
- How does this hinder other readings of the text?
- How can you situate your reading of the text with other readings of the text?

The second part of the course incorporated care ethics as a way for us, as a class, to become metacognitively aware of how we read stories and how those readings affect other readers and audiences of these texts.

Thinking in this way about the books we were reading brought with it a new pedagogical challenge. For many students, the idea of "relatability"—emotionally connecting with a specific character with whom the reader identifies—became a main topic of the course since many students believed that texts are good if readers can relate to them. However, relatability is only one way that children's literature can be viewed, and thinking only about relatability can obscure conversations about ideology, that is, the ways in which these texts produce and reaffirm normative ways of thinking. Readers focusing on relatability tend to focus on clichés about normative, privileged understandings of what adolescence and childhood look like along with what children should learn. For instance, students would often focus on the relationships between parents and young adults in the YA novels by saying that readers can relate to how Mei's mother treats her because she acts like a lot of mothers. I do not mean to sound entirely dismissive of relatability as a pedagogical tool; in the context of my course, however, this focus on relatability created a challenge to the kinds of critical reading I was trying to teach.

Besides generalizing mothers as well as young adult experiences with their mothers, this understanding of *American Panda* avoids the tension highlighted in the text by Mei's constant fights with her mother. The novel revolves around Mei trying to understand what it means to be

Taiwanese-American and what it means to be a good daughter; in the novel, food works as a motif and a metaphor for Mei's conflicts. In one way, focusing on what the novel teaches young adults ignores the wide variety of audiences potentially reading this book since young adults are not the only readers of YA texts. Reading this way privileges a reader's personal, individual understanding of what it means to be a young adult without considering the multiplicity of readers that exist. This is not inherently a problem, but such reading lacks both a critical approach to how someone individually reads and a critical approach to the relationship a reader has with a text. Instead, readers would need to imagine what these texts did for a variety of audiences since children's literature is written, published, and selected by adults and, hence, children and adolescents would not be the only audience for the text (even if they were the intended audience).

In another way, this focus on relatability stems from many readers privileging the "teaching" values of young adult texts over the ideological aspects of novels. This often results in cliched understandings of the novel's theme, such as "perseverance is important" or "it's important to love yourself." While we certainly talked about the ideological messaging of these books, students tended to steer these conversations towards the "morals" and "values" and "lessons" scattered throughout these texts. When students focused on clichés like these as the "morals of the story," they ended up avoiding a discussion about the nuances of how Mei negotiates her Taiwanese-American identity, her culture, and her relationships with her mother, father, brother, and boyfriend. Student D does something similar as they discuss Jenny Han's *Clara Lee and the Apple Pie Dream*: "This is an important line in the book. It is so important because it is possible that some of the children reading this book may have had similar situations to Clara Lee, and hearing this could help them realize that their differences make them unique

and not less than anyone else." Student D's work reiterates this discussion of relatability that continued to pop up, even when I reminded them that we have to question and define who we think of when we talk about readers relating to these texts since we cannot possibly know every single child in the world or what they would find relatable. Note, for instance, how Student D does not describe or define who these children are, though the implication is they are not white. Discussing relatability with the class, I brought up that they often defined relatability in terms of what they thought would be relatable for a stereotypical child and that they did not consider all of the different identity factors that make childhood look different for each child. For these reasons, readers must work to address other ways of reading, and they must learn to incorporate those other readers and ways of reading as valid understandings of the text, as described in stage two of relational reading.

I now believe that this idea of relatability could be a way that students were trying to understand ethics of care theory, even though I was trying to emphasize that the "relatability" they were talking about was almost always one-sided: students often focused on what they, individually, found relatable, which indicated that they were actually in stage one of relational reading. Reconsidering the course and teaching these ideas, I recognize now that a key idea was missing, something that I teach in other courses but did not in this one. I only recognized this after reviewing Student A's work since they mentioned it several times after learning about it in another course—Rudine Sims Bishop's "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." In their midterm paper, Student A writes:

> According to Rudine Sims Bishop, "when children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society in which they are apart [sic]

> of' (Bishop). Bishop expresses the severity that children's literature can have on a child, which in turn can affect their overall development as well as how they view those that are culturally and racially different than them. It is extremely important for children to be exposed to diversity throughout the course of their childhood in order to understand and appreciate the cultural differences surrounding them.

Student A first focuses on mirrors (what Bishop first references in the direct quotation) but turns to windows at the end of their discussion. Certainly, windows are an important part of Bishop's theory, but she also stresses that mirrors are just as important if not more important for populations who are underrepresented in literature. By only focusing on windows, Student A reinforces the idea that books about cultural diversity work to help readers learn about cultures that are not their own.

Looking over Student A's work made me realize that I never gave students the opportunity or the tools to really describe anything beyond their own understanding of the text. This critical step is an aspect of the third step of critical reading—learning to negotiate how an individual understands a text and the effects or ideologies that this reading produces—that needed to be emphasized more in the course. While I did ask them to look at reviews and responses from other readers, we did not really discuss why that was important nor did we have the language to describe what was happening in these responses. If ethics of care is about not just recognizing those outside of oneself but also listening to their voices, then students needed a way to describe these different reactions so that their responses would not be focused on an idea of relatability defined solely from their perspective. In order for students to understand why we needed to have more context if they wanted to discuss a text in terms of relatability (other ways of reading a novel, for instance), they needed the language to describe what this negotiation

looks like, which care ethics provides.

Introducing ethics of care earlier in the course might have made students more invested in the conversations we were having since it required them to realize that texts act on the world. Many students were already thinking about these connections between food, identity, and care, but the aspects of relationships and responsibility were missing since we had not covered them in class. In their work after they read important quotes from care ethics scholarship, students acknowledged their relationship to the text as a reader far more than they had in any of their work prior to discussing scholars like Gilligan. In student analyses of *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel* by Firoozeh Dumas (the first novel we read after discussing ethics of care theory), some students specifically acknowledged ideas about negotiation, identity, and relationships. As Student G states, "In closing, the book *It Ain't So Awful Falafel*, shows three different characters with ignorance, and it shows how their malice and willingness to be educated vary across the different characters. In understanding how these factors apply to ignorance, and then *we can try to help* the ignorant understand situations they may not fully understand" (emphasis added). In this assignment, Student G acknowledged the patterns of ignorance we saw in the book as displayed across three different characters and how they interacted with Cindy's family. Then, Student G associated themselves with other readers of this novel, pointing to how characters or readers with knowledge of a culture or food must interact with those who lack that knowledge in order for ignorance to be challenged. That is, knowledgeable readers (and eaters) must negotiate their understandings of the world with those who do not know as much about a food or culture as they do. Similarly, Student B wrote, "By understanding the ideas projected in this book, *we may be able to better understand* how 'outsiders' of American culture feel and how they might act like Cindy's actions throughout the story and might *relate* to her journey of trying to fit in with

American culture" (emphasis added). Student B implicitly distinguished this "we" as members of the course or, even, readers more generally who are "insiders" of American culture. While they still generalized one kind of audience, Student B recognized that negotiation of some sort needs to happen, that a relationship needs to be formed in some way. Beyond these connections, Students B and G both exemplify how students began to use care ethics language (about relationships, about people) to describe the things happening in the book, and their work suggests that reading this theory changed the way they used their critical reading skills.

Reimagining Relationships: Effectively Teaching Anti-Colonialist Approaches to Food

As I have noted previously, critical reading in the course began with the first stage of relational reading, by recognizing one's own individual perspective and what that entailed. We then moved to the second stage of relational reading, which involved paying attention to the literary techniques stories use to create relationships with readers. The course was working toward the third stage of relational reading, and we answered some questions in that third stage. However, I ultimately needed to develop the teaching strategies and framework more to fully scaffold students into this third stage. While students could more successfully identify what other reading perspectives might look like, I still needed to emphasize how this negotiation means "reevaluating what one already knows in the context of the new information and new knowledge one gains," the defining aspect of relational reading in stage three.

Certainly, we situate each of our reading experiences within our perspectives of the world, which creates unique ways of reading texts. Moreover, cultural knowledge differs from person to person: accounting for one's own gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, class/socioeconomic status, and so forth while reading encourages students to understand that

their specific reading may ignore important context that other reading perspectives provide or recognize. As I mentioned above, reading texts relationally involves more than finding characters relatable. If, for instance, individuals who are outsiders to the cultural experiences depicted in *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel* read the book and only think that the novel's portrayal of conflict between a mother and daughter is relatable, they ignore how that conflict is situated in a complex web of emotion, relationship, gender, food, immigration, and culture. The central conflict in *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel* is not reducible to just the mother-daughter relationship between Cindy and her mother, and, by focusing only on that, readers continue to contribute to reductive conversations about culture.

Hence, when critically reading books about a culture or character unlike themselves, readers can reimagine the relationships they have with the text so that they become aware of how their positionalities towards foods and cultures that are not their own impact their ability to read them. *Relational reading*, as I call this process, involves more than just paying attention to how and why we eat or read certain foods; it foregrounds relationships as a way to help readers understand when they read in reductive or productive ways, which could be called a care ethics theory of reading. Through relational reading, students can see how they bring their own assumptions about foods and cultures to their reading of texts, and so relational reading enables them to understand how certain readings can limit interactions with a text that was actually representing food and culture in nuanced ways or, conversely, in reductive ways. Ultimately, relational reading is also transferable to contexts and topics other than food: in any context, relational reading requires care, nuance, and negotiation, all of which are foundational ideas about situated, relational identities that reside at the heart of ethics of care theory. Connecting foundational ideas of ethics to Heldke's points about self-questioning and anticolonial food

adventuring emphasizes three things: we all exist in relationship with one another; we are all inherently relational beings; and we all must negotiate our wants and needs throughout these complex webs of relationships.

Along with these aspects of Heldke's and Gilligan's respective theories, students still needed to understand the notion of responsibility as the motivation for why we would read relationally in the first place. By revisiting our motivations, we can better understand why we interact with food in the ways that we do. As I described earlier in this chapter, Heldke asserts that, "[when u]sed persistently, self-questioning can work to challenge the hierarchical dichotomy that separates knowing, powerful subject from known, subordinate object and that serves as one of the defining elements of the colonizer's attitude" (*Exotic Appetites* 171). Heldke highlights how the person who holds privilege in a relationship must recognize when and how that privilege comes into play since privileges exist in and on our bodies at all times. From an ethics of care standpoint, we might acknowledge this as part of "the ethic of responsibility [which] rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care" (Gilligan 165). How can we further understand compassion and care in terms of the relationships that literature seeks to establish through food? As Heldke suggests, we need to hold ourselves responsible for how our individual privileges inhibit our ability to see the cultural food colonialism that we perpetuate. Self-questioning, Heldke asserts, can lead to acting against the colonizing tendencies that eating and enjoying food can take on. Moreover, Gilligan's discussion of negotiation aligns with the kind of responsibility and self-questioning that Heldke ultimately emphasizes since "a food anticolonialist attitude cannot rest upon the easy assumption that reducing one's ignorance about another culture is always a positive activity; acquiring knowledge about another culture can, in fact, be just another effect to shore up the relationship of inquiring subject and inquired-

into object" (*Exotic Appetites* 178). Heldke highlights how, even though acquiring knowledge about cultures can certainly help an eater (or, in the case of this course, a reader) think about the background of what they are eating, anticolonialist food adventurers must constantly reevaluate the knowledge they acquire with how they then use that knowledge. If a food adventurer only uses such knowledge about food or culture to bolster their cultural capital or further colonize a cuisine (intentionally or unintentionally), then what they have learned does not constitute an act of care. As such, readers or eaters of food must not think they have come to one solution for being an anticolonialist food adventurer; instead, they must continually consider new ways of avoiding and dismantling cultural food colonialism.

Paying attention to how we stereotypically read food, then, means also knowing that those stereotypes exist beyond narrative worlds. For a course in reading food in children's literature, enacting an ethic of care looks different from caring for another real, material person since the people involved with the reader in this caring relationship are usually fictional characters (with the exception of one nonfictional book that we read). Even so, these fictional characters exemplify cultures and communities that readers may experience outside of storyworlds. Such a challenge means, again, redefining our individual relationships to a text in order to think about how the ideologies we bring to a story are also the ideologies we bring to everyday life and vice versa. In fact, Heldke acknowledges how "Food adventurers who stand outside the cuisine, but who wish to participate in resisting colonial relations, have an obligation to listen carefully to the prescriptions and demands of insiders in all their diversity, and to act in response to them, recognizing that it is always an open question which Them should be attended to" (*Exotic Appetites* 200). This participation might look different in various food settings, but, in the context of this specific course, active participation involves carefully analyzing not only how

texts represent food and identity but also how we respond to these texts. This way of reading can be potentially one-sided, however, if readers do not then also think about how their responses to the story mirror or subvert what a text might be encouraging us to think. Paying attention to what the text does by trying to separate out one's own reading biases, as much as that is possible, is a process that values how the text, as an object, participates in a negotiation of food and identity.

Certainly, these characters cannot speak back to readers in the same way that physical human beings can. Nevertheless, we can see how the conversations among readers (produced by these texts through these characters) serve as the active, speaking-back-to component of an ethic of care, which is a way to get students to actively participate in the third stage of relationally reading. Before the third stage, readers need to recognize how one individually reads a text; then, they can pay attention to what these authors are trying to communicate, particularly if these authors are writing from an underrepresented viewpoint. Together, these two stages lead to the third stage, where readers incorporate that understanding as they reassess their reading of the text. Heldke suggests that "Mutual recognition of colonialism and racism would also certainly transform the actions of eaters" (*Exotic Appetites* 182). That is, "hooks's message, translated in the language of food adventuring, is that our only hope for becoming anticolonialists is placing the colonizing relationship squarely in the center of the dining table; only by addressing colonialism directly through our cooking and eating can we possibly transform them into activities that resist exploitation" (182). Such acknowledgement is the first step of negotiation as it requires us to take responsibility for our privilege.

Students struggled with the aforementioned aspects of Heldke's theories. They could often articulate why they would need to understand her theories: Student E indicated, for instance, that Heldke's discussion of authenticity "Makes us aware, as readers, [of] a bias present

from the author or audience." Similarly, Student A suggested that

> It is also important to understand that sometimes authors unintentionally incorporate themes or stereotypes without even realizing they are doing this. Heldke mentioned this in a sense when she brought up the fact that sometimes cultures state that they were the creators of specific dishes or condiments (ketchup for example), however, there are other cultures that will say that they were the original creators.

Despite these recognitions, students were often unable to connect cultural food colonialism with the ideas of power and privilege. Even after discussing cultural food colonialism repeatedly in class and trying to present different examples and different explanations, many students did not fully grasp the nuances of this term nor why this was relevant to the way we read texts in the course. This confusion emphasizes for me that I needed to wait to introduce cultural food colonialism and discussions of authenticity until students first had a better grasp of how they themselves read these stories. In order to understand why cultural food colonialism negatively impacts people and cultures all across the world, students needed first to understand what they were reading, why they were reading it, and how these texts could be read in different ways.

While students were already thinking about relationships and identity, they needed to have specific language and theories they could use to describe what was happening in a text in regard to relationships. Unlike with Heldke's concepts, students understood ethics of care right away, and my approach to teaching it—with small quotes and passages with context in one handout—seemed to make that easier for them to understand since the theory was introduced through small concepts. After I initially taught care ethics theory, some students seemed to better understand what was at stake when discussing cultural food colonialism. For instance, Student L noted in Short Analysis #5:

> For the purposes of this discussion I will be focusing on the 3rd stage [of Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development]: We make decisions by thinking about ourselves and others and how we exist together and interdependently.
>
> Many people when exploring new and different cultures are very inconsiderate about the food of that culture. They change ingredients and change the very foundation of the food. *Cultural Food Colonialism violates the Ethics of Care system as it relates to food***.** In fact, violating the system is practically the definition of Cultural Food Colonialism. (emphasis added)

Student L struggled with the concept of cultural food colonialism throughout most of the course, so this moment signals a change in their understanding. Once I introduced care ethics, students seemed to understand more fully what the concept was describing as well as why it was important for us to be critiquing how these texts participated in cultural food colonialism. As Student L suggests in the conclusion of their Short Analysis #5: "We have spent a lot of time this semester talking about Heldke and the quest for authenticity and at the time we started discussing it, I didn't really understand the point of it. The last couple of weeks have really made this become clearer, particularly the Cultural food colonialism and ethics of care discussions." This breakthrough in understanding solidified for me that ethics of care theory provided a way for students to understand what was at stake in these texts about food, even as they were not necessarily engaging with those material foods and cultures. It reiterated that texts not only have power but also participate in colonialism, even though they are objects that we read. Moreover, these concepts seemed to be the turning point for students to understand why we were reading these texts, even as many of them still struggled with Heldke's discussion of cultural food colonialism. Even when students could not articulate how a text perpetuated cultural food

colonialism, they could better describe the kinds of relationships we saw in the stories as well as the kind of relationship they shared with the text. Certainly, not all of them made the connection that Student L did, but their statement, "Cultural Food Colonialism violates the Ethics of Care system as it relates to food," helped me reframe my own thinking at the end of the course, encouraging me to emphasize why reductive readings of cultures were harmful.

Relational reading, thus, involves putting one's own self as a reader into conversation with a text and then listening to what that text has to say back. In stage one of relational reading, students must be able to see themselves as a critical reader bringing their own biases and ideologies to the text as they read. Throughout this stage, readers should ask themselves what their motivations for reading are and how those motivations can impact their understanding of the text; readers should also question how their own positionalities can keep them from understanding a story, a setting, or a theme. By engaging in critical reading of themselves while naming the critical reading skills they are using, students can gain the language to describe how they specifically read a story, which better prepares them for the next stage of relational reading. In stage two, readers need to put aside (as much as possible) their preconceived notions about a text, a culture, a food, or a character and read the novel as itself, without judgment of what is "relatable" or "appropriate." In a way, this stage asks readers to let the characters "speak on their terms," without readers' understanding of culture being used to interpret a food or a character's identity. While readers may wish that this task is as simple as setting these biases aside, they must learn that being open to what the novel or characters communicate actually involves carefully researching and listening to all sorts of voices related to the novel. If a reader is an outsider of a culture, then they need to do the work to understand what cultural references are being made and what cultural information they lack while reading the novel. In this way,

relational reading also means listening to other, alternative readings of a food.

Lastly, the third stage of relational reading encompasses, in my opinion, the most important aspect of care ethics: negotiation. By identifying their own ideologies and then researching and listening to other understandings of a text, readers can reconsider where they stand regarding the knowledge gained from listening to other understandings of a text. Hence, I assert that readers gain the tools to reassess how they read a text when they learn from an ethics of care pedagogy that not only focuses on critical reading of themselves but also on how a text works in the world. By providing concrete evidence that their opinions and their readings of the texts are not the only way to understand the text, students who lack the cultural background for culturally diverse novels can begin to realize their own positions to the text. Ideally, then, using this method of learning and teaching can provide ways for us all—not just students—to become anticolonial food adventurers.

CODA: WHY A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD

"Why assume that oversimplified situations should be the rule or paradigm, rather than the exception? Why translate the complexities of existence so that they fit neatly into some preferred grid that privileges certitude over truth?" (Boisvert and Heldke 49)

Food in literature for young audiences certainly connects to identity, and it certainly does so in very complex ways. Throughout my project, I elucidate three different ways that texts for young audiences make connections between food and cultural diversity. I situate these texts on a spectrum ranging from more reductive to more productive approaches to food and cultural diversity. *Just one bite* books, *dish-specific* texts, and *intersectional food identity* narratives exemplify how stories for young audiences employ different narrative strategies that result in different ideological implications for how we can understand food and its connections to identity and cultural diversity. What is certain across all of these texts is that food and relationships often go together, although these stories prioritize relationships and relational identity to varying degrees. Paying attention to these relationships, I argue, provides ways for readers to attend to issues related to diverse representation as seeing food addressed in and through relationships elicits more productive conversations about identity. Ultimately, understanding food in relational ways highlights the situated nature of food and identity, which helps disrupt patterns of seeing one story as an authentic representation for an entire cuisine and culture.

As I have explored, these texts make narrative choices across various genres for a range of young readers, providing stories which are accessible to a range of reader skillsets. However, these narrative choices can have consequences, and I have turned to feminist care ethics to make sense of those consequences as I find it be a theory useful for thinking in outwards and inwards

dimensions. Care ethics often discusses responsibility within relational ethics frameworks: who is responsible, and how are they responsible? Throughout my project, I have internally grappled with this idea of responsibility as my critiques cannot change the reductive ideologies and narrative strategies already present in some of the texts I analyzed. What, then, are we to do with a text once it exists, whether it productively engages with food and culturally diversity or not? I find that, once a text enters the world, once it has left the desks of authors, illustrators, and publishers, the responsibility falls upon readers to engage critically with how these texts connect and represent food and cultural diversity. Certainly, not all readers may take up this responsibility, but I see this as a starting place for what to do with these narratives once they exist. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas asserts that "[a]dvocates for diversity understand that representations are always about power" (66). Likewise, readers must assess the power dynamics between themselves and the texts, characters, authors, and stories being told.

Relational reading, as I have theorized it, involves acknowledging the power dynamics that surround food and eating as well as attempting to do something about those power dynamics while reading about them. Although reading is an individual and private act (reading happens in our heads, after all), we cannot exist only in that headspace and assume that reading individually will reveal everything we may hope it to. Readers have to be educated—not just about various topics but also about the critical reading skills that are necessary to break down marginalizing understandings of food. Readers cannot do this on their own, so reading together is a way to figure out how to read in more productive ways by being in touch with other readers and how they read. As Fiona Robinson writes, "the idea of an ethics of care can be relevant to the question of relations among moral agents on a global scale, provided that it takes account of the social relations, institutional arrangements, norms, and structures through which perceptions of

difference and moral exclusion are created in the global system" ("Globalizing Care" 114). As readers encounter spaces, places, and cuisines that are not their own, ethical decisions about how they end up reading and often choose to read culturally diverse texts have to be considered.

Finally, rules and paradigms as well as singular understandings of identity do not adequately account for all of the ways people exist in the world. Food is one way in which we may look to shared but distinct experiences, but, without reflection, it can easily become a marker of difference that reifies marginalizing and oppressive ideologies about the self-other dynamic. My project argues that, by exploring relationality and interdependence, we can more ethically read and eat what foodways have to offer.

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APPENDIX A: COURSE GOALS

- We'll explore a variety of children's texts across a variety of genres that focus specifically on food in multicultural children's narratives, reading narratives ranging from picture books to novels.
- We'll think about children's literature from a literary perspective.
- We'll investigate and analyze how these texts represent food, identity, and culture.
- We'll read and research about food, identity, and culture, using primary and secondary sources.
- We'll produce literary analyses (of various lengths and genres) to showcase how we investigate how these texts represent food, identity, and culture.
- We'll learn about cultural food colonialism in order to recognize the subtle ways that food narratives play into cultural food colonialism (a concept from Lisa Heldke).
- We'll analyze and propose ways of avoiding cultural food colonialism, what Lisa Heldke calls "anticolonial food adventuring."
- We'll learn about ethics of care and how we can use these ideas to better understand anticolonial food adventuring.
- We'll ask questions about our own motivations for eating and reading about certain kinds of food.

Foundational Ideas Project

Due on Wednesday, September 4, 2019

Encyclopedia Page due in class; Reading Critically notes submitted through ReggieNet

During the first two weeks of this class, we're going to think a lot about what it means to read children's literature ***critically***. This could mean a number of things, something we'll be discussing often throughout the course. But the main point is this—our class is not a book club, and we're not just reading these texts for fun. They're important, and we need to understand what sort of implications they have for the real world.

This first project asks you to situate yourself as both a critical reader and a critical writer focused on children's literature. This project has two components, both of which we'll spend some class time working on.

Part 1: Reading Critically (20 points total)

We'll be practicing critical reading skills throughout the first 2 weeks of class, and you'll be required to submit the different assignments associated with this work. These include:

- Hintz and Tribunella Reading Notes (from 8/21/2019)
- Heldke Reading Notes
- ~~8.26~~ 8.28 Peer Review Notes (this is what you wrote about your peer's reading notes)

Part 2: Encyclopedia Entry (20 points total)

There are a lot of terms and concepts that we'll explore throughout this class, and I want us all to have a resource that we can use together throughout the semester. So, we'll each be responsible for making entries for a class encyclopedia.

More info about each part of this project can be found in the next few pages of this document. As always, let me know if you have any questions!

Part 1: Reading Critically

Hintz and Tribunella Reading Notes

These are any notes that you take while reading Hintz and Tribunella. It also includes the notes that you take while we discuss the first two pages of Hintz and Tribunella.

You should choose 2 questions from the "Analysis Asks," "Interpretation Asks," and "Evaluation Asks" sections of "Critical Reading" and answer them about the article. You can answer the questions while you're reading or at the end, but make sure that you're taking notes using the skills we discussed.

As you read, practice using the skills from "Annotating a Text." After you've finished reading, identify which skills you chose to you use and how they helped you understand the reading better.

Heldke Reading Notes

Read Lisa Heldke, "The Quest for Authenticity" (p. 22-44), and apply the ideas we came

up with from "Critical Reading" and "Annotating a Text." Make sure to bring your answers and your annotations to class (see the instructions below).

Choose 2 questions from the "Analysis Asks," "Interpretation Asks," and "Evaluation Asks" sections of "Critical Reading" and answer them about the article. You can answer the questions while you're reading or at the end, but make sure that you're taking notes using the skills we discussed.

As you read, practice using the skills from "Annotating a Text." After you've finished reading, identify which skills you chose to you use and how they helped you understand the reading better.

8.28 Peer Review Notes (this is what you wrote about **your peer's** reading notes)

Begin by looking at your reading notes. Trade your notes with a partner. As you read your partner's notes, do the following:

- Identify the kinds of annotations they're making
    - How do they draw your attention to an idea—highlighting, underlining, color-coding, starring (or asterisks), question marks, etc? (Make a list of them!)
    - Are they asking questions? How do they ask questions? When do they ask questions? What kinds of questions are they asking—comprehension (trying to figure out what's happening), predicting what will happen next, etc? Reacting?
    - How do they comment on what's happening? Are they connecting things back to class?
- Identify the kinds of critical reading skills they're employing
    - What questions from the "Critical Reading" pdf do they answer? How do they answer? What kind of answers do they provide?
    - What kinds of questions could they think about from the "Critical Reading?"
    - What kinds of conclusions do they draw about the reading?

Part 2: Encyclopedia Entry (20 points total)

There are approximately 40 terms and concepts that we'll cover throughout our course this semester, and there is only so much time at the beginning of the semester to go over them.

So, we'll cover some terms in depth in class (10 or so), and you all will be tasked with researching and compiling information about the rest. (We'll still talk about these terms in class, but we won't go into as much detail as we could.) You will each be responsible for creating an encyclopedia entry page for our classes Crash Course in Children's Literature Encyclopedia. And I encourage lots of creativity when compiling your page!

For this assignment, you must:

- **Include a title for your page**.
- **Provide a more "formal" definition**. (Search the internet, use the texts I've provided, etc. Make sure to include where you got your information from. Make sure to cite your formal definition in some way.)
- **Include your own definition of the term**. (Explain how you understand this term in a paragraph, so around 7 to 10 sentences. Make this definition based on your research, not your assumptions about the term.)
- **Provide 3 examples/ways that you think this term is important to this class** or how you think this term might come up in our class. (Feel free to relate this to our conversations about childhood, children, and fairy tales.)
- **List 2 or 3 places** that someone who wants to understand this term better might find more information about. (Again, search the internet, use the texts I've provided, etc. Make sure to include where you got your information from.)
- **Creatively present** your information in some way, meaning you didn't just write a bunch of information down on a page. Images, memes, visual diagrams—whatever you think works best for helping someone understand your term!

You are more than welcome to use the front and back of your paper (I even encourage it!). I'm not asking for you to become an expert on your term, but I do want to see a well-thought out entry.

Your entry will be graded for the following:

- **Creativity—worth 5 points.** You creatively presented your page in some way (meaning it's not just words on a page--maybe you included a picture that helps explain your term or you provided examples of your term).
- **Required Elements—worth 10 points.** You included all of the elements from the above list.
- **Well-Thought Out Entry—worth 5 points.** It is clear that you took time to complete your entry and that your completed entry will be useful to your classmates.

I will also complete entries for the terms I presented in class, so this encyclopedia really is a class effort. Please take it seriously and try your best to make an entry that we can all benefit from!

APPENDIX C: COURSE TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Agency
Bias
Chapter Books
Characterization
Childhood
Conflict
Context
Diversity
Diversity
Early Readers
Figures of Speech
Focalization
Genre
Graphic Novels
Ideology
Illustrated Texts
Implicit vs. Explicit Ideologies
Implied Author
Implied Reader
Intended Audience
Intersectionality
Literary Analysis
Literary Argument
Motif
Multiculturalism
Multimodality
Nonfiction
Novels
Perspective
Picture Books
Plot Structure
Point of View
Relationality
Social Construction
Stereotype
Theme
Thesis Statement
Translingualism
Visual Literacy

Notes on Ethics of Care and Food

So far in this class, we've talked a lot about how food is portrayed in stories, what that looks like, and how we can think about these choices in positive and negative ways.

One thing we haven't talked a lot about yet is whether a book invites a reader to participate in **cultural food colonialism**, which we can think of in 3 ways:

1. "[food adventurers'] often **obsessive interest in and appetite for the new, the obscure and the exotic**" (Heldke 7)

    (This means that people are obsessed with trying something new that is incredibly "different" from them, which makes it exotic and obscure. Even if people from that culture eat that food everyday."

2. "their **treatment of dominated cultures not as genuine cultures, but as resources** for raw materials that serve their own interests" (Heldke 7)

    (Like with colonization, this means that people with privilege take things from people/cultures as resources for their own lives without thinking about how that particular food or resource works within that culture.)

3. "These two [above] elements are linked together by a third element that plays a supporting role: **the adventurer's intense desire for authentic experiences of authentic cultures**" (Heldke 7)

    (Heldke asks us to rethink how we consider authenticity because food adventurers who participate in cultural food colonialism think about authenticity in really strict ways. Anything that doesn't fit into their understanding of authentic—different, replicable, native—can't possibly be an authentic food.)

But Heldke says that there are ways that you can avoid being a food adventurer that participates in cultural food colonialism. She calls this being an **anticolonial food adventurer**. She says that

> "our only hope for becoming anticolonialists is placing the colonizing relationship squarely in the center of the dining table; only by addressing colonialism directly through our cooking and eating can we possibly transform them into activities that resist exploitation" (*Exotic Appetites* 182).

And that means that, as a critical reader and eater of foods, you have to be aware of the relationships you exist in—with the text and with the food within the text. And ethics of care is all about thinking about our relationships in ethical ways.

Mary Moran states that "According to a relational model of ethics, moral choices prioritize the creation and sustenance of relationships between people. Relational theories of ethics tend to coexist with the idea that the self, too, is relational" (Moran 76).

> If someone is thinking in these terms, they're making moral choices based on the relationships they have with one another. So, I might make a decision that makes sure my mom doesn't get her feelings hurt.

Ethics of care was founded on Carol Gilligan's ideas about moral development, which she

describes happening in 3 stages:

1. We primarily make decisions based on the needs of our individual selves, neglecting the needs of others.
2. We primarily make decisions based on the needs of others, neglecting what we need ourselves.
3. We make decisions by thinking about ourselves and others and how we exist together and interdependently.

Heldke emphasizes that, to be an anticolonial food adventurer, "We who are systematically privileged—whether by virtue of race, class, education, or gender—cannot escape the fact that, in every choice we make, every action we take, we exercise that privilege" (171).

Rather than ignoring our privilege, Heldke notes, we should acknowledge it—and then actually do something about it. She argues for "self-questioning," which "is a healthy and persistent skepticism about one's own motivations—in this case, motivations for eating ethnic cuisines" (171).

In thinking about ethics of care, it also means thinking about how our interactions with a text or a food can impact the world around us, even in the smallest possible ways. It means thinking about how we are all connected, which means also recognizing how we are different.

So, as you prepare to write your short analyses, read the next book on our lists, and research for your final project, you want to think about how you approach food (both in these books and in the world around you) and whether you think about the people making that food or the cultures developing that cuisine.

And, if you're not thinking about those things, how can you start to question those attitudes so that you aren't participating in cultural food colonialism?

Short Analyses (Fall 2019)

- **around 400 words**
- **1 for each required text that we read; 7 in total throughout semester**
- **lowest short analysis grade will be dropped**
- **due throughout the semester**

Throughout the semester, you will be required to think about some aspect of the texts we're reading and analyze it, practicing your literary analysis skills. You should **pick one quote or passage** that really stands out to you and think through the language that this quote/passage uses. What is the text saying? What are we supposed to take from the text? What kind of meaning can we make from paying attention to this quote/passage?

Whatever you pick, you should be able to relate back to our conversations about food and children's literature as well as whatever the theme for that week is. (See the syllabus!)

These short analyses should each be **around 400 words**. I would prefer for them to be **single-spaced and in Times New Roman 12 pt black font** (which adheres to MLA formatting, the default citation style for this course), but I care more about what you write (and how much) rather than the formatting.

These should be submitted on ReggieNet in the correct assignment submission **prior to class**. You should have access to your analysis in class because we will often rely on them during discussion.

You should *always* be answering this question, no matter what else you do in your response: What do the things that you've noticed *mean*? What's that big *"so-what"* that we should be thinking about?

Your responses will be graded on a 7 point scale:

- 7-6 points = a response that goes beyond 400 words, uses quotations from the reading and terms from class, asks questions/explores new ideas
- 5-4 points = a response that is 400 words, uses some quotations and some terms from class, covers the minimum requirements of the assignment
- 3-2 points = a response that doesn't really cover the requirements of the assignment and doesn't really use quotations from the reading or terms from class but puts in a solid effort
- 1 point = a response that does not meet the page requirement (significantly less than 400 words)
- 0 points = a response that simply summarizes the reading or repeats things from another class discussion

Short Analyses (Spring 2020)

- **1 for each required primary text that we read**
- **written prior to coming to class**
- **due throughout the semester**

Throughout the semester, you will be required to practice your literary analysis skills by examining specific examples about some aspect of the texts we're reading and explain what they reveal about this text.

In your short analysis, you should pick one theme or topic that you want to focus on. You can pick something we've been talking about during that specific week of class, or you can choose to focus on something that we've talked about previously.

Once you've selected your topic, you should find **at least 6 examples** of how you see this topic or theme being addressed in the story/text we're reading for that week. Each example should be a specific quote or short passage (around a paragraph or so, not a whole entire page or chapter).

Your job is to examine closely the language in those examples, coming up with some observations and inferences about them. What does a specific word imply to you? Does the text do anything to emphasize a point, like italicize or bold words? You should have **at least 3 observations** about your examples, altogether.

Then, you should write **at least 3 conclusions** you can draw from these examples and what this might mean for how this text contributes to a conversation about children and childhood or other topics we've covered in class. So, your conclusions should specifically mention your example. These conclusions cannot be

- that it teaches children a moral or lesson
- that it makes the book "relatable" to children
- that it's appropriate (or inappropriate) for children

Instead, ask yourself: What is the text saying? What are we supposed to take from the text? What kind of meaning can we make from paying attention to this quote/passage? We're thinking about these texts in terms of discourse (how people talk about things in the world), so you want to also relate your observations back to any outside (secondary) sources we've read in the class, previously or during that specific week.

These short analyses should be typed or handwritten in a readable way and brought to class in hard copy. You should have access to your analysis so that you can participate in class discussion.

The assignment is out of 3 points, with the possibility that you can earn 4 points if you go above and beyond the assignment requirements:

- **4 points** = an analysis that goes well beyond 6 examples, explores new ideas, makes connections to material from the week as well as past ideas we've covered

- **3 points** = an analysis that clearly analyzes 6 examples, explores new ideas, makes connections to material from the week as well as past ideas we've covered
- **2 points** = an analysis that has 6 examples but could be better at exploring new ideas or making connections to material from the week as well as past ideas we've covered
- **1 point** = a response that does not meet the minimum requirements of the assignment
- **0 points** = an analysis that simply summarizes the reading or repeats things from another class discussion

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Short Analysis Example: *Alice Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll

For context, this analysis would receive 4 out of 3 points.

Quotes

1. "It was quite clear that he could neither hear nor see her [Alice]" (Caroll, ch 1, p. 129)
2. "To her surprise she lost sight of her in a moment, and found herself walking in at the front-door again" (Carroll, ch. 2, p. 139)
3. "Alice thought to herself, 'Then there's no use in speaking'"(Carroll 146)
4. "'Don't make excuses,' said the Guard: 'you should have bought one from the engine-driver.' And once more the chorus of voices went on with 'The man that drives the engine. Why, the smoke alone is worth a thousand pounds a puff!'" (Carroll 146)
5. "It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world—if this is the world at all, you know." (Carroll,
6. "'And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time".
7. "Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said: 'one can't believe impossible things.' 'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen" (Carroll 39)
8. "'I shouldn't know you again if we did meet,' Humpty Dumpty replied in a discontented tone, giving her one of his fingers to shake; 'you're so exactly like other people'" (Carroll 48)
9. "'O Tiger-lily,' said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, 'I wish you could talk!' 'We can talk,' said the Tiger-lily: 'when there's anybody worth talking to.' Alice was so astonished that she could not speak for a minute: it quite seemed to take her breath away. At length, as the Tiger-lily only went on waving about, she spoke again, in a timid voice—almost in a whisper. 'And can all the flowers talk?' 'As well as you can,' said the Tiger-lily. 'And a great deal louder.' 'It isn't manners for us to begin, you know,' said the Rose, 'and I really was wondering when you'd speak! Said I to myself, "Her face has got some sense in it, though it's not a clever one!" Still, you're the right colour, and that goes a long way.' 'I don't care about the colour,' the Tiger-lily remarked. 'If only her petals curled up a little more, she'd be alright.' Alice didn't like being criticised, so she began asking questions".

Observations

1. The characters that Alice interacts with are usually rude to her.
2. The other characters usually correct Alice, whether it's how she acts (her manners), what she says, or how she thinks.

3. The other characters act as if Alice is unimportant.

Conclusions

1. Alice is not respected, emphasizing how she really is a pawn to be moved around. In chess, pawns make up the greatest number of pieces, and they are often moved around and sacrificed because they're so usable (**examples 2 and 5**).
2. Nealon and Giroux state that "Our agency is both *constrained* and *enabled* by the contexts in which we find ourselves" (257). For Alice, she starts off with no linguistic agency nor intellectual agency in the Looking Glass world because she never knows what to say and she doesn't know the world and its rules. For instance, every time she speaks, she's criticized or corrected (**examples 4 and 6**), and every time she asks a question or mentions that she doesn't understand something, she is scoffed at (**examples 8 and 9**). (This makes it extremely hard for Alice to become a queen, but she eventually does so by reclaiming her linguistic and intellectual agency, by arguing with Humpty Dumpty, for example, and not putting up with the Red Queen and White Queen's nonsense.)
3. Because Alice is a child and the other characters are adults or, at least, act like adults, this text highlights the relationship between adults and children. Since all of the adult figures act and react negatively towards Alice, the novel emphasizes that adults treat children poorly, often failing to see how children have agency in certain situations. As well, it emphasizes how children are ignored (**example 1**) or corrected (**examples 6 and 7**) whenever it suits adults.

APPENDIX F: LISA HELDKE WORKSHEET

Lisa Heldke, "The Pursuit of Authenticity"

This chapter comes from the following text:
Heldke, Lisa. "The Pursuit of Authenticity." *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*, Routledge, 2003, pp 23-55.

Heldke says that people define culinary authenticity (meaning whether a food is authentic or not) in 3 ways. Describe them below.

1.

2.

3.

Heldke talks about a lot in this chapter. Review the goals of our course below and then come up with 2 things that you think we could use from this article to help us this semester with our goals.

- We'll explore a variety of children's texts across a variety of genres that focus specifically on food in multicultural children's narratives, reading narratives ranging from picture books to novels.
- We'll think about children's literature from a literary perspective.
- We'll investigate and analyze how these texts represent food, identity, and culture.
- We'll learn about cultural food colonialism in order to recognize the subtle ways that food narratives play into cultural food colonialism (a concept from Lisa Heldke).
- We'll learn about ethics of care and how we can use these ideas to better understand anticolonial food adventuring.
- We'll ask questions about our own motivations for eating and reading about certain kinds of food.

1.

2.

3.

Other Heldke quotes for you to consider

Your job here is to read each quote and think about what it means.

Maybe you have a question or a response. Maybe you disagree or agree with what she's saying. If you feel like recording those thoughts, great! Or you can also choose to "think about it" as your homework. Whatever you decide, prepare to come to class ready to ask questions or discuss what she's said.

> "Food is something that many people in the United States think about constantly, while never really giving it much thought whatsoever. … despite all this attention to food, we pay astonishingly little *reflective* attention to it—where reflection might mean something as simple as thinking about who grows one's oranges, or wondering whether Thai people would find the menus in American Thai restaurants to be odd" (Heldke xxviii).

> "Food adventuring, as I conceive it, is in part an attitude, a particular spirit or disposition I embody as I go into a restaurant or a grocery store, as I read a cookbook or talk with a friend about a meal" (Heldke 3)

> "two elements that play an important role in the attitude of many contemporary Euromerican food adventurers and other cultural colonizers: their often obsessive interest in and appetite for the new, the obscure and the exotic; and their treatment of dominated cultures not as genuine cultures, but as resources for raw materials that serve their own interests. These two elements are linked together by a third element that plays a supporting role: the adventurer's intense desire for authentic experiences of authentic cultures" (Heldke 7).

Lastly, here's a description of Heldke's basic concepts from an article by Nick Dreher that might be helpful for you (see citation below):

> "Heldke describes **cultural food colonialism** as the **penchant among Western food adventurers for 'cooking and eating ethnic foods**—most frequently the foods of economically dominated or 'third world' cultures.' Heldke's concept focuses on the way that the **food adventurer—a term she uses to represent a particular group of eaters who seek out new eating experiences**—consumes ethnic food. In this context, novelty, exoticness, and authenticity all help to frame the way these food adventurers eat and think about what they eat." (Dreher, emphasis added)

APPENDIX G: BOOKLIST FOR FOOD IN LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FA19

Novels

- Jenny Han, *Clara Lee and the Apple Pie Dream*
- Gloria Chao, *American Panda*
- Firoozeh Dumas, *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel*
- Kwame Nyong'o, *I Love Ugali and Sukuma Wiki; A Tasty Maandazi; The Yummiest Githeri* (you'll pick one to read during our reading circles)

Picture/Illustrated Books

- Gary Paulsen, *The Tortilla Factory* (you don't have to buy this, but you can if you'd like)
- Aram Kim, *No Kimchi for Me* (you don't have to buy this, but you can if you'd like)
- Jacqueline Briggs Martin and June Jo Lee, *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix*
- Mark Todd, *Food Trucks*

Other

Choose one from Amy Wilson Sanger*, World Snacks Series* to bring to class.