



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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*“We hope to support each other, to give voice to the needs of our nation and the international community, to learn to live in peace and justice.”*

-Beverly Vaughn Hock,  
Director, Reading the  
World

I recently attended Reading the World X, a conference for students, teachers, librarians, authors, illustrators and anybody else interested in the world of children’s literature. Within the first five minutes I was in tears, as the multi-talented and endearing illustrator and writer Ashley Bryan stood on the stage, turning the pages of his large picture book *What a Wonderful World*, while a duo of musicians accompanied him, one movingly singing the words of this well-known song. It is a moment I will never forget, for its uplifting feeling of the connectedness of all of us – a vivid contrast to the state of politics and the daily headlines in my morning paper.

That is one of the greatest contributions this conference makes: It reminds us that we are not only linked by our interest in bringing together children and the best literature possible, we are also connected by our devotion to multiculturalism - the idea that to appreciate each other we must cele-

brate and embrace our differences, even as we find our common concerns. Children’s literature is a perfect forum for this, since it opens, as Hock says in her welcoming statement, “the eyes, ears, hearts and minds of children and young adults to the voices and cultures found throughout the Bay Area and around the world.”

The conference includes keynote speakers, presentation sessions, a book market and book signings. I was drawn to the first presentation by its title: “Black Rainbows: The Color and Self-Images of African American Girls is for All Ages.” Marie Celestin talked about the damage done to some young African American girls by the preference given, both in their social lives and in their families, to those with lighter skin. We watched clips from her documentary in which 20 African American girls, ages 10 to 20, talk about their experiences growing up. The girls are passionate and articulate, some breaking down into tears as

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they share the pain of not being light enough or having the wrong hair or being too skinny.

“Changing Lives, Bridging Community with Storytelling,” presented by author and educator Jack Zipes, was based on the work of the 10-year-old Neighborhood Bridges Program in Minneapolis. Currently funded by a 3-year federal grant, this innovative program brings together children’s theatres and classroom teachers. The basic philosophy of this program, Zipes told us, is “to allow children to become storyteller of their own lives.” Weekly for 33 weeks, an actor works with the teacher to help the students write, act out and talk about their lives, thereby allowing them to get insight into their own stories.

The auditorium speakers were wonderful, too. Author Laurence Yep used an heirloom gold pocket watch to reflect on his family’s history. Artist Peter Sis talked about growing up in

Czechoslovakia, and his self-deprecating manner and amazing talent charmed everyone. Illustrator and retired dancer Leslie Tryon compared illustrating to choreography – both are dependent on the gesture, she told us.

Sunday morning brought me back to tears again, but this time of laughter, as poet and author Naomi Shihab Nye told a hilarious story of mistaking a private residence for a museum. Her engaging style and casual yet impassioned speech made for a memorable and moving presentation.

This year, with a visit from my two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter imminent, I visited the booksellers, and left the conference with not only a rejuvenated sense of the importance of my work, but a bag of beautiful multicultural books and puzzles as well. It was, as usual, a weekend to remember.