



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“We believe that children’s literature has a vital role in the life of every child. Books support artistic, emotional and intellectual growth and development.”***

-Beverly Vaughn Hock,  
Director, Reading the  
World

For the second year in a row, I attended the Reading the World conference at the University of San Francisco. This amazing and moving conference is dedicated to the concept that literature can foster empathy, inspire curiosity, support creativity, create change and open minds – all while thoroughly entertaining. Perhaps what I like most about this two-day event is that it pulls me away from my daily tasks and helps me to regain an overview of what I am doing. The passion that abounds in every room reminds me of what it means to hand one child one book – and what a difference that can make for that child forever.

Some of my favorite authors were there, sharing their views on literature, children, multiculturalism and their own part in the creation of books. I will never look at the paper towel dispenser in a public bathroom again without remembering Ed Young’s description of pulling off “about 50

feet of paper towels” so he could write a first draft.

Much of his talk was about teaching Chinese calligraphy to children, by showing the derivation of each character. It was fascinating to see a drawing of a bird and watch as – with a series of animation-type drawings – he demonstrated how it becomes the character for bird. He also showed us some compound Chinese characters, such as the words virtue, shame, realization, forgiveness and sorrow. I love that these words are described with pictures – it makes their meaning seem more visceral than intellectual. If you have never read any of his books, I would highly recommend his Caldecott Honor book *Seven Blind Mice*, which is a subtle and gorgeous picture book about the importance of taking everyone’s view into account.

Alma Flor Ada was a perfect contrast to Ed Young. While he was about the visual, her speech was an incredible

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example of using words to create images. She talked about learning to read by the time she was three, because her grandmother made each letter into a story. The two horns on a vaca (cow) became the V; the ears on a burro became a B. Her conviction that each book she read was written just for her led to her insight that in a way that is true, since each reader takes away his or her own unique experience. And we could all agree when she said her books invite each reader to find “the inner melody of your own words and a mirror for the inner radiance of your own souls.”

I was also thrilled to hear Katherine Paterson, the author of the well-known *Bridge to Terabithia*. She talked about spending her early years in China, and then four years in Japan when she was in her twenties. I loved her comment that “the language we speak

shapes our thoughts and feelings” – I totally agree.

In this short column, I am unable to do justice to all the speakers and workshop leaders. There was Joyce Carol Thomas, who proclaimed “a mind is a wonderful thing to stimulate.” And Linda Sue Park, author of the Newbery Award winning book *A Single Shard*, who talked about living what she called a hyphenated life – in her case, being Korean-American. I was sorry to miss the final keynote speaker, publisher, author, drummer and linguist Matthew Gollub, but I am sure he was as excellent as the others. With its multicultural approach to the world, this conference provides a welcome reminder to all of us that embracing our diversity can only make us stronger.

*More information on Reading the World can be found at:*

<http://www.soe.usfca.edu/departments/ime/rtwconf/conference.html>

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