

The Power of Story to Engage Global Citizens

By

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“The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.”

—African Proverb

Most of us are familiar with the Nigerian proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” But what if that village didn’t see that child? What if that village didn’t teach that child that they deserved to be heard, that they belonged, that they mattered? Should we be surprised that this child might rebel or even destroy the village? When we try to understand the recent events in the streets of some American cities, people crying to be heard, wanting to be seen, risking their lives to matter, we have to ask ourselves: What is my role in this? How did I see that child in my classroom? How did I provide them with the skills to be heard? How did I let them know that they mattered? As history-social science educators, we have a unique role to play in answering these questions. By doing

so, we help move the goal forward of what Thomas Jefferson laid out as the purpose of education when he stated, “An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people.” Our survival as a free people. All of us. The collective. The common good. So where can we start? We start where we have expertise and abundance: in the stories of our nation’s people.

Latino Leaders Speak

Latino Leaders Speak: Personal Stories of Struggle and Triumph is a collection of stories about our nation’s people, edited by the Honorable Mickey Ibarra who served as Director of The White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs under the Clinton

administration and Maria Perez-Brown who is an author and leader in television programming and development.

I have been waiting for a book like *Latino Leaders Speak: Personal Stories of Struggle and Triumph* for a very long time. This book is a compilation of inspiring short speeches given by Latino leaders who come from all walks of life and who made and continue to make a difference in the reshaping of this experiment we call America. From the stories in the speeches, you will read about personal accounts of resilience, compassion, courage, and yes, the importance of education. That is why when the California Global Education Project was approached to write the accompanying curriculum for this project, we welcomed this opportunity to partner with the Latino Leaders Network in making these powerful stories accessible to all educators who teach and inspire adolescents from middle and high school to early college.

The learning activities in this curriculum are organized around real-world global competencies that encourage all students to investigate the world, communicate effectively, recognize perspectives, and take action. Each set of learning activities is focused on a leader and his/her/their story in the book and begins with a framing question that relates to the experience of the Latino leader being studied. Questions such as *Why is it important to be proud of your heritage?* or *How might you contribute to a better world?* or *What does it mean to have a voice?* engage students to think about the experience of the Latino leader and what they might learn and apply to their own lives. Graphic organizers, robust question-discussion activities, short video

clips, and civic action opportunities further support the key lessons of each of the highlighted speeches and calls for both educators and students to activate their learning and leadership. Each segment presents a “hook” to engage students and is designed to fit easily with topics of discussion in courses including Ethnic Studies, U.S. History and Geography, English Language Arts, Health, Science, and any other discipline where the stories of people who struggle and triumph in order to create a better society are important.

The Latino Leaders Speak curriculum and associated chapters from the book are available for [free download](#) at CalGlobalEd.org.

Global Book Bags

In 2015, U.S. Census Bureau data showed that California had the largest racial/ethnic minority population in the United States. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, California is now home to a quarter of the foreign-born population nationwide. Indeed, by 2050, minorities will be the majority in America. We are a multiracial, multiethnic, multi-religious society; a microcosm of the human diversity of the planet. This brings both a great opportunity and responsibility. How do we prepare our youth to live, work, play, and thrive in communities with such rich and multifaceted landscapes? Here is where stories about people from different parts of the globe, including our own local communities, could help inform the questions students will raise, challenge stereotypes, and move us closer to a “more perfect union” for all people.

Global Book Bags are learning re-

sources developed by the California Global Education Project that use children's literature featuring stories from around the world to help inform students' view of the world. The book bags are designed to assist K-5 students in practicing their global competence and literacy skills and engage parents/guardians in learning activities. Each Global Book Bag consists of a globally themed age-appropriate book, a set of instructions, and materials necessary to complete the learning activities described in the instructions. Students take the book bags home for 4-5 days to share with an older family member. Ideally, a teacher has as many book bags as students in the class so that each week students can receive a different book bag. At the end of the week, when students return their weekly book bags, the class can engage in a variety of learning activities that allow them to share what they learned from their book bag. Book bag instructions are in both PDF and Word formats to allow the teacher to make any necessary adaptations to meet the needs of their students.

In addition, the California Global Education Project has created annotated and cross-referenced lists of these children's books, compiling and organizing them around relevant themes and connecting them to global competence indicators as well as social and emotional learning goals. The themes include: Global Citizenship, Geography, Environmental Literacy, Resilience-Restoration-Rebuilding, Social and Emotional Learning, STEAM, and Sustainable Development Goals. A new book list focuses on Identity, Culture, and Social Justice in response to recent events and CGEP's commitment to racial

justice. Bringing the stories of children from around the world into the classroom helps students connect to topics that are of importance to them and facilitates the development of empathy. For example, *The Color of Home* by Mary Hoffman, is the story of Hassan, whose family was forced to flee their homeland of Somalia and make their way to the United States. In his first days at school, Hassan paints two pictures of his home. The first picture depicts his refugee experience: flames, guns, and blood. His teacher responds with, "It's all spoiled." With the help of an interpreter, the teacher gains a better understanding of Hassan's experiences. The next picture Hassan creates is a happier one. Even though Hassan misses his home in Somalia, his second picture depicts a more hopeful outlook as he finds there are many things to like about his new home in America. Many of our students can relate to being the outsider, the newbie, the other, the one misunderstood by people not familiar with his/her/their culture or history. Many can also relate to the trauma that these experiences cause. By sharing the stories of people like Hassan and others, students have an opportunity to see themselves in these narratives and hopefully gain inspiration from them. They start to develop a worldview of humanity that is more empathetic and compassionate towards the experiences of others. The stories also ignite their curiosity: Why is that country at war? Who is responsible? Where are the resources needed to address these problems? What can I do? What is the meaning of home?

Global Book Bag [resources](#), [book lists](#), and workshop information available at CalGlobalEd.org.

Stories are tools for empowerment. They are signposts. They help us find out who we are, what we stand for, and what is possible. As educators, we can bring these stories into our curriculum as well as assist students in creating their own stories. Then, we have to help them sit with their stories, learn how to ask the right questions, and develop their own agency to take action. Dr. Vincent Harding, an African American historian, scholar, and social activist (he drafted Martin Luther King's speech against the war in Vietnam, *A Time to Break Silence*, as well as An Open Letter To President Obama after Osama Bin Laden's killing, *Walk Free My Son*) once said, "This country cannot become its best self until we find ways more effectively of institutionalizing the process of sharing the stories of the elders." He was talking about the elders in the Veterans of Hope Project he helped to create at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. This organization houses over 70 interviews and stories of men and women who are "veterans of movements of social change." But his point could be expanded to include those stories that aren't usually included in our textbooks (like those in *Latino Leaders Speak*) or in the resources we choose for our classes (Global Book Bags).

Burning down a village is an option for those who feel disenfranchised, discounted, dis-abled. Perhaps dismantling the systemic injustices can avoid total devastation. Let us use stories to stoke the fire of compassion and acknowledge the lived experiences of our students. The warmth from that fire will continue to embrace them as they learn and grow into caring and knowledgeable

global citizens. Then, they will not only care for their village, but recognize that the well-being of their village depends on the well-being of other villages, and maybe even work towards a more equitable and inclusive global society. I can't think of a better collective outcome.

More Resources

[Global Oneness Project:](#)

The Global Oneness Project believes that stories play a powerful role in education. Founded in 2006 as an initiative of the Kalliopeia Foundation, they aim to plant seeds of empathy, resilience, and a sacred relationship to our planet. Using stories as a pedagogical tool for growing minds, the Global Oneness Project brings the world's cultures alive in the classroom. Committed to the exploration of cultural, environmental, and social issues, they offer a rich library of multimedia stories comprised of award-winning films, photo essays, and essays. Companion curriculum and discussion guides are also available. Find recorded webinars as well, featuring filmmakers, photographers, and other storytellers discussing insights to their work.

[PBS American Portrait:](#)

PBS American Portrait is a national storytelling project aligned with PBS's 50th-anniversary celebration. This program invites America to participate in a national conversation about what it really means to be an American today. To answer this question, PBS and its partners are collecting photos, videos, and text submissions from across America to capture the state and spirit of our

nation. Share your story now.

[StoryCorps:](#)

Their mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. Short (2-4 min.) stories are available from across America and across racial/ethnic/class lines. These provide an excellent introduction to storytelling and can promote active listening among students.

[The Veterans of Hope Project:](#)

The veterans represent a broad range of social justice struggles, including the southern freedom (Civil Rights) movement, Black Power/Black Arts movement, Chicano Rights movement, Women's movement,

struggles of Indigenous peoples, Gay and Lesbian human rights struggles, as well as activists from South Africa, Mexico, Guatemala, Thailand, Brazil, and South Africa. In the interviews, our elders reflect on their personal histories as well as the values, faith, and practices that have guided their lives and work.

[This I Believe:](#)

Beginning in 1951, radio pioneer Edward R. Murrow asked Americans from all walks of life to write essays about their most fundamental and closely held beliefs. The collection of "This I Believe" essays are available to listen to online or read from published volumes. Curriculum is also available through NPR.