Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

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Critical Peritextual Analysis: Critical Possibilities of Peritext in Books for Young Readers

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With persistent scrutiny of educators' conversations regarding race, culture, gender, and sexuality, we have witnessed educators recognizing the need to draw on as much information as possible when reading books with representations outside of their identity in developmentally accessible ways. For example, with the growing awareness of the importance of considering the power dynamics inherent in the authorship and publication of children's books, we have seen our education and literature students rely on additional materials beyond the narrative to critically analyze the books they read. In order to help adult and child readers adopt a critical orientation towards the peritext—an important and underutilized part of books—we offer the Critical Peritextual Analysis framework (CPA). This approach is intended to help scholars and educators rely on an important and underutilized part of books—the peritext—to adopt a more multidimensional critical stance towards any text. While we previously conducted an in-depth analysis to demonstrate one potential application of CPA (a focus on the relationships that are named in peritextual material) (Sivashankar et al.), we broaden the scope of this framework in this essay by critically evaluating all aspects of the various marginal elements in children's texts across multiple formats. Below, we examine books targeted towards different age ranges (board book, picturebook, and early reader) to demonstrate how using CPA to analyze peritextual matter offers valuable insights into issues of justice and equity in children's literature, and we conclude with implications for teachers.

Conceptual Framework: Critical Peritextual Analysis

Critical Peritextual Analysis is a framework that invites readers to employ critical literacy practices when engaging with a text's peritextual materials. Peritext, as defined by Gérard

Genette, includes the "elements inserted into the interstices of the text" (4-5). This includes materials such as the front and back covers, prefaces, blurbs, endpapers, authors' and illustrators' notes, glossaries, maps, dedications, title pages, excerpts from reviews, references to related publications, recipes, frequently asked questions, writing and discussion prompts, etc. The peritext includes both visual and verbal elements, such as a written author's note or the illustrations on the endpapers. CPA allows for the analysis of the interplay between the visual and verbal elements of the peritext. These peritextual materials may be created solely or collaboratively by the author, illustrator, or publisher of the work. Peritext is found across all genres, inclusive of fiction and non-fiction, and a book's elements might be used to identify the genre of a text. Peritext can also blur the binary opposition between fiction and nonfiction as there are often nonfiction peritextual elements inserted in the book that provide context to a story that might otherwise be categorized as fiction. While we examine texts that would likely be considered fictional here, books that would be considered non-fiction also include peritext that can be fruitful to analyze through the CPA framework.

It is likely that teachers might explore the peritext of a book on their own; however, when it comes to mediating books with children in the classroom, peritext is often explored only in a cursory way, if at all, with children. This, in turn, leads to peritextual literacy skills not being modelled effectively for children. We maintain that it is essential for readers of all ages to understand the critical potential of peritext to grapple with more complex understandings of cultural representations within the narrative. Although scholars have argued that the peritext promotes literary analysis/comprehension (Sipe and McGuire), few academics have called for it to be a site for critical literacy.

We align with Paulo Freire and those who followed his work in drawing on the ideas of "critical literacy" (Cervetti et al.) and "criticality" (Muhammad) to refer to specific ways of "reading the word and the world" (Freire). Critical literacy involves considering which groups have power and which do not, whose perspectives are represented and whose are not, and how the cultural and historical context of a text impacts the reading of the text—both when/where it was written and when/where it was read over time (Muhammad). These questions or considerations could be applied to any aspect of identity including but not limited to race, disability, religion, language, and class, and to complex ideas surrounding justice. Critical literacy involves asking questions such as "Whose story is this? Who benefits from this story? Whose voices are not being heard?" (Reese 390).

As with any application of a critical literacy approach, CPA is inherently dynamic, responding to the text, the context, and the readers in a given reading, so it can't be prescribed or scripted. We propose CPA to help readers critically analyze the peritext to gain deeper understandings of how power and justice relate to the narrative. In the first iteration of our research into peritext and critical literacy, we argued that CPA can be used to investigate how creators of picturebooks use the peritext to establish relationships with the cultures that they depict within their stories (Sivashankar et al.). We argued that the peritext is a rich site to gain deeper understandings of the dynamics of authorship and power involved in the production of the picturebook. This information can help readers think critically about a book's subject matter, authorship, authenticity, and accuracy.

In this essay, we broaden this framework beyond a focus on relationships to engage critically with depictions of power and justice in *any* book's peritextual materials. While using CPA, readers transfer critical literacy practices frequently recommended for use in analyzing the

narrative to their evaluation of the peritextual material. These practices might include disrupting commonplace thinking, interrogating multiple perspectives, unpacking socio-political issues, and taking social action (Vasquez et al.). CPA involves reading the peritext critically, reading the peritext in conjunction with the narrative, and then mediating the text (including the peritextual material and narrative) with young readers. This framework can be utilized by educators, scholars, librarians, caregivers, and anyone who reads with young children.

Focal Texts

We have chosen to explicate our framework by close reading the peritext of 1-2 representative texts for each of three formats for different age ranges: board books, picturebooks, and early readers. Our focal texts, which we use to demonstrate CPA, were all published in North America within the past decade and feature native and immigrant populations whose racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities are underrepresented and misrepresented in literature for young children.

In our analyses below, we model how in-depth analysis of a single text can lead to the possibility of nuanced and critical readings, even with the youngest of readers. Hence, we chose books which contain examples of peritext that we believe provide tangible opportunities for CPA, which, in turn, will help readers nurture their capacity to analyze peritextual matter more critically. That said, while not all children's books lend themselves to such obvious applications of CPA, we maintain that, because all books contain peritext to one degree or another, any text can be analyzed using CPA.

Below, we model CPA by examining our focal texts through a set of questions listed in table 1. These questions can be applied to any book to help orient readers toward a critical view of the verbal and visual elements of the peritext. They are not listed in any particular order and

are not prescriptive; readers could employ any and all that are relevant. This list can be used as a springboard for generating additional questions that are specific to readers' contexts and to the text being read. For each of the formats below, we bring up multiple questions from table 1 that came up for us while analyzing the focal texts. Some questions come up in just one section, while others are relevant across two or even all three formats. We urge readers—both young and old—to use CPA in ways that honor their own cultural and linguistic heritage.

Board Books: *Besos for Baby* and *Sonrisas for Baby*

It may seem that board books are too short and simple to have peritext worth analyzing. However, we contend that precisely because they may have less peritextual material than books for older readers, the peritext in even the most straightforward board books can provide an ideal entry point for CPA. In this section, we analyze two board books, both written by Jen Arena and illustrated by Blanca Gómez: *Besos for Baby: A Little Book of Kisses* and *Sonrisas for Baby: A Little Book of Smiles* (hereafter referred to as "*Besos"* and "*Sonrisas*," respectively). Both books oscillate between English and Spanish as they follow a baby who interacts with different objects and people by giving and receiving kisses or smiles. Below, we demonstrate how readers can interrogate assumptions about the intended audience of a text (Questions 1 and 2) and how examining the visuals in a book can inform understandings of representation (Question 3).

(De)centering of Language

Besos and *Sonrisas* each contain peritext alluding to the use of Spanish in the book: the front covers, back covers, and illustrated glossaries on the final double-page spreads. Given the bilingual nature of these books, many of the critical questions that arose during our analysis of the peritext involved language (Question 1). In both *Besos* and *Sonrisas*, the title, synopsis, and

publication information are all in English. Furthermore, the synopses of the books promise the reader "simple Spanish words" (back cover). It is noteworthy that only the Spanish is described as "simple"; this is a book clearly intended for young readers (the back cover of *Besos* lists the age range as 0-3) and the English text is only marginally more complex than the Spanish. Readers may question: why not state that *both* the English and the Spanish words are simple? Likewise, in *Sonrisas*, the "simple Spanish words" are described as being "sprinkled throughout" the narrative (back cover). The term "sprinkled" connotes situations in which one wants *just* enough of something to not be overwhelmed; in these books, the synopses indicate, the Spanish functions more like a spice that makes a dish more flavorful than a central ingredient.

The multimodal glossaries resemble a collection of flash cards, with each word defined in a white rectangular box containing an image from the narrative and the corresponding word first in English and then, underneath, in Spanish. Furthermore, on the back cover of each book, in large, colorful print, the only Spanish word in the title is clearly defined: "Besos/Sonrisas means kisses/smiles!" The structure of this phrase underlines the way the book's creators position English as the dominant language. The converse (that kisses/smiles means besos/sonrisas) is also true, of course. However, despite the relatively equal use of the two languages in each narrative, the peritext in these books positions Spanish as the one that needs to be translated and English as the one that conveys the fundamental concept of a word.

When peritext centers English, it simultaneously centers Anglocentric ways of being and knowing. For example, the synopsis of *Besos* says that the use of Spanish words in the narrative "proves that love is the same in every language" (back cover). However, using CPA can help readers question this universalizing tone: Is love the same in every language? At a literal level, no, of course not; most languages have their own unique words for love. Furthermore, many

languages have multiple words for love which depend on the context and the relationship of the subject to the object/person. Most importantly, people from different cultures express love in vastly different ways, and kisses in particular take on significantly diverse meanings. CPA encourages readers to bring a critical focus on language and consider multiple cultural and linguistic perspectives that might not be foregrounded in a book.

In using CPA, it is also important to analyze peritext that may be absent. As is the case with most board books, *Besos and Sonrisas* do not include significant information about the authors and illustrators. In instances such as these, readers can also inquire into the epitext (additional materials related to a book, such as author websites or interviews with the creators) to understand how the different aspects of the creators' identities may impact the production of the stories (Question 5). Reading the epitext of *Besos* and *Sonrisas*, however, complicates the Anglocentric focus that we can infer from reading the peritext of the book. For instance, the illustrator, Blanca Gómez's website reveals that she is from Madrid, Spain, which in turn is a country that has a colonizing history and has exerted dominance through the Spanish language in Central and South America. This leads us to the question of whether we should view Spanish as a dominant or a marginalized language in the context of reading these board books.

As CPA is specific to the context in which a book is being read, it is also important for readers to consider the context of Spanish as either a marginalized or colonizing language. In a Central or South American context, Spanish might be read as a language imbued with the history of colonization. However, in the case of *Besos* and *Sonrisas*, which were published in the United States, where Spanish is often perceived as inferior to English, the fact that English is prioritized over Spanish feeds into the narrative of global dominance of English. CPA is dynamic and

requires that readers take both global and local context into consideration when analyzing peritext for power dynamics, culture, and history.

Intended Audience

The relationship between English and Spanish in *Besos* and *Sonrisas* provides insight into the intended audience of the books (Question 2). Because English is positioned as primary and Spanish as secondary, it follows that the primary audience of *Besos* and *Sonrisas* is English speakers. The Spanish in these books thus functions as "windows" for English-speaking readers rather than "mirrors" for Spanish-speaking readers (Bishop).

While we don't suggest educators try to have an in-depth discussion of intended audience with very young children, we argue that considering audience can help educators understand how the texts they read position even their youngest students. In other words, because peritext—and a synopsis in particular—can function as an invitation into a narrative, teachers can ask whether they—and, even more importantly, the children they read with—are part of that intended audience or not. CPA can thus help teachers evaluate whether to change or add to the books they make available to their students to ensure that all students experience texts that were designed with them in mind. Alternatively, educators might choose to resist the intended audience and reposition their Spanish speaking students by reading only the Spanish text, reinventing the book as a "mirror" text for them.

Representation in Text and Images

In addition to questions about language and intended audience, educators can use CPA to compare the text and images in the peritext, specifically asking who is included and who is not (Question 3). Representation is central with CPA, and these two books directly invite teachers to

examine representation through the use of the word "everyone/todos." The synopsis for *Besos* begins by saying that "Everyone has kisses for Baby…" and the one for *Sonrisas* begins with "Everyone has smiles for Baby" (back covers). Here, teachers can ask: Who is included in "everyone"? In *Besos*, "everyone" seems to be mostly nonhuman characters such as perro/dog, sol/sun, and mundo/world. The two human characters who appear alongside Bebé/Baby are Mami/Mommy and Papi/Daddy. All three humans have fair skin and the family structure is heteronormative. Missing from "everyone" in this book are people with darker skin, family structures that differ from the two-parent, heterosexual norm, and people with varying abilities.

Sonrisas also claims to portray "everyone." The visual glossary includes "everyone/todos," thereby not only translating into Spanish/English, but also providing a visual definition of "everyone/todos." There is some diversity in this group of people—certainly more than in *Besos*—in terms of race, age, and gender. However, many are missing. For example, there are no people with visible physical disabilities and none dressed in non-Western clothing. Likewise, "family/familia" also appears in the visual glossary and the same Mami/Mommy and Papi/Daddy appear alongside the protagonist from *Sonrisas* as well as the baby from *Besos.* With the two babies presenting as a boy and a girl, this updated image of "family/familia" fits traditional, heteronormative images of family even more than the one in *Besos*. Educators might use the peritext to initiate young children into critical reading by modeling their own thinking about representation. For example, they could point out examples of families they know who look different from the one represented in the books. Alternatively, they could note that the visual definition of "everyone/todos" is not fully inclusive. Depending on where children are in their linguistic development, teachers could ask them for their ideas of who else might have a kiss/smile for Baby.

Language and representation are just two of the themes that CPA can offer as educators read board books with young children; we encourage any critical analysis of the peritext of even the simplest of books. Using CPA with board books can lay the foundation for more complex critical analysis of peritext as children grow older and turn to other texts.

Picturebooks: *We All Play*

We All Play by Cree author and illustrator Julie Flett provides similar opportunities for more critical and nuanced readings of the text through the inclusion and prominence of the peritext. This picturebook is described on the flap copy as "[celebrating] the interconnectedness of nature and the wonder of play." *We All Play'*s lyrical narrative both tells and shows humans playing in harmony with the rest of nature, while frequently repeating the message, "We All Play." While the book is grounded in Cree perspectives, the flap copy indicates a wide intended audience by saying this book "belongs on every bookshelf." *We All Play* offers an inclusion of the reader through the word "We" (Question 2). All readers—including those who don't speak Cree—are part of the interconnectedness portrayed in the book. In this section, we address questions 4, 1, and 5 from table 1.

Information about the Creator and Peritext as the Site of Counterstorying

CPA allows readers to use the peritext to critically explore how the cultural perspectives of the book's creators affect their understanding of the text (Question 4). Especially in the context of predominantly non-Indigenous authors and illustrators telling Indigenous stories in children's literature, critically analyzing notes about the creation of the book can help readers to think about how the author's understanding of the world is impacted by their deeply connected cultural networks and experiences. CPA allows readers to go beyond judging a book as culturally

authentic or inauthentic, instead critically considering contextualized issues of power in texts that are rooted in indigeneity and its ties to land and the environment. In light of the gatekeeping of Indigenous stories in children's literature, Flett's insistence on her ties to both her family and her land is itself an act of resistance to colonial practices that have historically enforced displacement from community and place, which continue to this day. Below, we demonstrate how CPA allows readers to see how the peritext solidly grounds Flett's story in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Flett frequently mentions her relationship to a family member—and consequently, her kinship with the land—within the peritext. This inclusion signals what is referred to as "personal relationships, and this is" "[o]ne of the most common ways that publishers, authors and illustrators attempt to establish cultural authenticity" (Sivashankar et al. 495). They establish these relationships "by referencing or invoking specific relationships to people living in the region being portrayed. References to these relationships appear most frequently in dedications or authors' and illustrators' notes or bios" (Sivashankar et al. 495). Flett's dedication page includes an impactful note, reading, "kinanâskomitin, dad, for your gentle heart and the medicine of your humor. Growing up with you taught me about our connections to the land that inspires so much of the work I do." Through the acknowledgment of how her relationship with her father influenced this narrative, Flett grounds the story in the intergenerational knowledge and respect for the land that has been passed down to her. The dedication page has a background that is the same color blue as the words of the title on the title page, directly facing the dedication page. This subtle visual connection demonstrates how connected Flett's dedication is to the central theme of the book; to fully understand that "we all play" requires that we acknowledge her

relationship with her father and with the land. Reading the dedication note provides the readers with opportunities to understand the story and the cover and title page images with more nuance.

Bookending the story are both the dedication page mentioned above and a "Dear Reader" note from the author. In the Dear Reader note at the end of the book, Flett speaks directly to the reader: "Animals play. And we play too: kimêtawânaw mîna." She details ways that readers, especially child readers, might have played during the reading of this book through sounding out the words, or "getting up to jump and hop like the animals and kids in the story." In the next paragraph, Flett shares again that it was her dad who taught her about the interconnectedness of humans and nature. She writes: "whether we are running and hopping through the grass or rolling along the street or pondering creatures in the creek, we are all connected, living in relationship and in care to one another, in kinship. In Cree, this is called wâhkôhtowin" (author's note). Through these notes, Flett contextualizes the narrative by explicitly stating her own commitment towards the earth and familial values of the connection and play between humans and animals. Reading this peritext allows readers to view the narrative through the Cree lens of humans' kinship with—not dominance over—nature, rather than through the eurocentric worldview that humans are separate from and better than other aspects of nature.

In sharing her intentions for this book, Flett details ways that readers might have played during the reading of this book through sounding out the words, or "getting up to jump and hop like the animals and kids in the story." She signs off the author's note expressing her happiness to have shared this story with readers, affectionately calling them "hoppers and wigglers and wobblers and wanderers—and wonderers" (author's note). Flett gives multiple entry points for how play may have taken shape in this book: sounding out words rhythmically, getting up to engage in gross motor play, etc. Flett also solidly grounds this narrative in her own personal

perspective on children's need for play. Not only do these notes offer opportunities for more nuanced readings, but they also help adult readers reading with child readers to remember that an approach to learning about these topics can and should happen through play. Using CPA with *We All Play'*s peritext invites readers to trust play as a valid social justice response to this narrative in that it relies on joy and curiosity, which are crucial in the exploration of issues of justice with young children (Albin-Clark and Archer).

In addition to offering opportunities to view this book as grounded in a Cree perspective by hearing personal information directly from the author, the biography of Julie Flett also highlights the awards earned by the book's creator, including the Governor General's Award and the American Indian Library Association Award. The mention of these awards shed light on the "affiliative relationships" that the author has with associations that prioritize and award diverse children's literature (Sivashankar et al. 491). The mention of these awards can provide additional context to the publishing field's prizing of Flett's qualifications to be telling the story of *We All Play. (De)centering Language*

While using CPA to analyze the front cover of *We All Play*, readers will note the images of the three (presumably) Cree children playfully scurrying through the grass, chasing a butterfly, and those of the bobcats smiling, playing and observing. The title of the book in English is placed over the Cree translation, and the former is in a bigger font than the latter. In thinking about the font size, the spine of the picturebook contains the English as well as the Cree titles in the same size, and the Cree title is fully capitalized, unlike its equivalent in the front cover. CPA enables readers to consider how this choice might have been made in order to potentially invite non-Cree readers and attract a wider audience for this book.

The back cover consists of a small blurb, mostly written in English with two Cree words at the end, along with an image of two Cree children lying on the grass playing with butterflies. The inclusion of Cree words following English words again assumes a non Cree-speaking reader, and yet the inclusion of these words in the stone blue color is significant in the context of the marginalization and erasure of Indigenous languages, and the need to consider them as equally valuable with the dominant English language.

Like *Besos* and *Sonrisas*, *We All Play* includes a glossary at the end of the book, though in this case, the glossary consists of a "List of Animals." In the first column, labeled "English," are the English names for the 15 animals that appear in the book. In the second and third columns, the words for "one" and for "more than one" of the animals are written in Cree. In the final column, the Cree words for "younger, smaller, cuter" animals are listed. Though the majority of the text in the narrative is in English, the peritext centers Cree as an essential language in the understanding of this story. By pointing out the English words and *not* labeling the Cree words, the typical relationship between multilingual books published in English-dominant societies is reversed. Three quarters of the page is taken up by Cree words, and only the first column is directly translated into English. For every English word, three variations of the word are given in Cree, demonstrating the complexity of the language. On this page, Cree is the central, dominant language, while English is the language in need of labeling (Pérez and Enciso). Traditional glossaries might provide readers with word-for-word translations (e.g., In Cree, the word *rabbit* is *wâpos*), but more sophisticated, complex glossaries such as this one can allow for an appreciation that different languages can help people think in different ways (e.g., In Cree, there is a word for *rabbit—wâpos—*but there is also a special word to use if you wanted to talk about a younger and smaller rabbit: *wâposos*).

Engagement with Epitextual Materials

At times, book creators will provide references or links to epitextual information—or materials related to the text, but beyond the book itself—within the peritext. CPA encourages a critical perspective to exploration of epitext (Question 5). On the page opposite the glossary in *We All Play*, there are several paragraphs that provide more information about the pronunciation of the Cree words. The note begins by highlighting the orthographic system used in the book Standard Roman Orthography, or SRO. This highlights to readers that not only do different languages exist, but so do different alphabet systems. The conclusion of this note includes a link to the Cree Literacy Network, which provides the "Translation into Plains Cree (y-dialect) edited in Standard Roman Orthography" (pronunciation note). The specificity of this note both highlights the work of this organization and teaches those unfamiliar with Cree that there are different dialects. Supplementing the pronunciation guide is a link to the website for the publisher where readers can hear audio pronunciation of the Cree animals listed in the glossary. Readers can leave this page with both an appreciation of the richness of Cree and some external, multimodal resources to learn more about the language and its dialects.

Another instance where the Cree Literacy Network is mentioned is in the copyright page of Flett's text. This page includes content in black and white, against a gray background for the most part. The exception is the Cree Literacy Network logo, which is in full color, and thus stands out due to its brightness. In addition to this logo, the copyright page (peritextual material) also states that "Greystone Books gratefully acknowledges the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples on whose land our office is located." Readers can employ CPA to study the phrasing of this land acknowledgment to understand the intent behind the publisher's inclusion of this statement. They might subsequently navigate to the Cree Literacy Network webpage

(epitextual material) to learn more about the intentions of this organization and viewing the resources available there, such as other recommended books, poems, stories, and songs available on the network's webpage.

As seen in *We All Play*, the picturebook format often offers rich opportunities for readers to engage in CPA to consider issues of diversity and justice.

Early Readers: *Astrid and Apollo and the Magic Pepper*

In the section below, we demonstrate the application of CPA to examine the peritext of the early reader, *Astrid and Apollo and the Magic Pepper* written by V. T. Bidania and illustrated by Evelt Yanait (henceforth referred to as "*Magic Pepper*") by featuring Hmong American characters. This early reader portrays the twins, Astrid and Apollo, spending time with their Grandma and Uncle Meng, picking vegetables and scouring for the rare magic pepper. In keeping with the idea that the early reader category is "[a]imed at newly independent readers" (Miskec and Wannamaker 1), the peritext of these books is also oftentimes geared primarily towards child readers. We have noticed, in our study of the language in the marginal elements across our focal texts of board books, picturebooks, and early readers, that the audience for the peritext shifts from predominantly adults to predominantly children across this spectrum. This is one of the reasons why it is crucial for teachers to examine the peritext of early readers using a critical analytical framework. Additionally, early readers tend to be introduced during a period in elementary education when students are rapidly gaining independent reading skills and strategies, and there is a risk of these books being used solely for skills-based instruction. Thus, it is especially important for educators to use CPA to critically mediate the peritext of early

readers in their classrooms. Below, in our employment of CPA to *Magic Pepper,* we address questions 3, 4, 6, and 7 from table 1.

Culture and Diverse Perspectives

In employing CPA to analyze the front cover of *Magic Pepper*, educators can demonstrate to students how the illustrations explicitly showcase cultural artifacts (Question 3). The protagonists—twins, Astrid and Apollo—are excitedly beaming at a red chili pepper (which the peritext later reveals to be the "Hmong pepper"). Additionally, Apollo is carrying a basket (which, again, the peritext explains is the "karr, a Hmong basket") filled with cucumbers ("More About Hmong Farmers"). CPA can also make the educators aware that Asian and Asian American protagonists are portrayed with bright and curious eyes, and not with the problematic slant eyes which appear in many other texts about Southeast/East Asians and the diaspora ("Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen"). Checking for racist depictions of characters should be a factor of analysis for educators in choosing books to share with young readers. Analysis of the first peritext readers often encounter, the front-cover illustrations, in the process of text selection can help educators distinguish caricatures from the more sensitive portrayals of Southeast/East Asian characters.

Information about the Creators

The final section of the peritext in *Magic Pepper* comprises author and illustrator biographies. Readers can learn that the author of the Astrid and Apollo series is a migrant from Laos, now residing in Minnesota. The description of her identity, explicitly comparing her with the characters in the story, attempts to establish her qualification to authentically portray the lives

of Astrid and Apollo (Question 4). This aligns with the idea of "spatial relationships," which refer to "deep connections with the culture depicted because of being born in the region, having visited the space, or because of extended time living there" (Sivashankar et al. 486). Similar to the inquiry around personal relationships in *We All Play,* educators, along with children, can explore how the spatial relationship (the connection to Laos) impacts the narrative of *Magic Pepper.*

Positioning of the Peritextual Matter

Within the first couple of pages in *Magic Pepper*, there is a significant amount of peritext (apart from the title page, copyright page and Table of Contents) to help young readers understand the cultural context for this story about Hmong Americans. The placement of these introductions is as important as the content itself (Question 6). Firstly, we see a page where the characters introduce themselves and their families. While Astrid says that her brother, Apollo, and she "were born in Minnesota," the latter, in his introduction, states that their "mom and dad were both born in Laos. They came to the United States when they were very young and grew up here" ("Meet Astrid and Apollo"). The protagonists, proud of their identity as members of an underrepresented immigrant community, introduce themselves and their family before the story begins. This placement suggests to readers that culture is an explicit and integral part of the story. Following the introductions, we see in *Magic Pepper* that there is a glossary of Hmong words. Typically, glossaries find a place towards the end of books, however, in this early reader, as well as some others published by Picture Window Books: A Capstone Imprint, we find that this glossary on Hmong words appears towards the beginning. Additionally, there is a glossary of English terms that also comes up towards the end in *Magic Pepper* and other early readers like the "Sadiq" series. It can be noted how *Magic Pepper* prioritizes Hmong over English, as

illustrated by the specific positioning of the glossaries, thus reaffirming the publisher's commitment to responsibly highlight the value of culture in these stories to the readers.

What Readers Are Invited to Do

In *Magic Pepper*, not only does the "Hmong Words" section contain words transliterated in English, but it also includes the Hmong spellings for each of the transliterated words, in addition to the phonetic pronunciation in English. For example, the first entry reads thus: "dee (DEE)-cucumber. Hmong spelling: dib" ("Hmong Words"). Including the Hmong spellings acknowledges that the mother tongue of Astrid and Apollo's community is as important to them as English, their adopted language. The inclusion of the Hmong spellings in the glossary also enables educators who might be outside of the Hmong culture to more respectfully share these Hmong words with young readers. Centering their discussion on culture using the peritext in the first few pages of the books, they can then dive into the narrative for a deeper discussion and subsequent critique of how culture plays out in the lives and experiences of the young characters (Question 7).

The peritext after the narrative of *Magic Pepper* begins with a section titled "Facts about the Hmong," followed by a section on Hmong farmers, which specifically relates to the narrative's themes. In employing CPA to examine the facts segment, teachers can invite their students to engage in a close reading of a statement on the Vietnam War: "In the 1950s, a war called the Vietnam War started in Southeast Asia. The United States joined this war. They asked the Hmong in Laos to help them. When the US lost the war, Hmong people had to leave Laos" ("Facts About the Hmong"). Knowing that there is much more to this history than what was included in the note, educators can guide them to critically question which group of people had more power over whom during the Vietnam War, and together, they can inquire into the

complexities involved in the forced displacement and lost lives of the Hmong ("The Journey"), as well as open opportunities for continued learning on this topic using the peritextual notes as a springboard.

Following the glossary of English terms in *Magic Pepper* are sections titled "Talk About It" and "Write It Down" with a few questions meant for both adults (educators, caregivers etc.) and children. These sections are important in any text since they present opportunities for young readers to engage in critical conversations with other readers and older adults. One of the questions posed under this section asks the reader to think about how "farming in Laos is different than in the US" ("Talk About It"). This is an example of a question that could elicit a conversation about culture and geography in a comparative manner. While this section holds much promise in providing opportunities for critical literacy, CPA encourages educators to analyze texts in complex ways and acknowledges that while some aspects of the peritext may be exemplary in their nuanced portrayal of history, culture, language, and identity, other peritextual elements may warrant critique. This in turn can lead to educators working with children to question what children are being asked to consider or do in response to the text. For example, educators might find that certain sections of some texts (for instance, the "Facts About the Hmong" note and the "Talk About It" section in *Magic Pepper* discussed above) engage with the treatment of culture in a superficial manner rather than careful consideration of issues of power and justice.

Implications for Teaching

In light of the scrutiny regarding teaching critical literacy in K-16 schools—particularly regarding instruction about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—we believe that it is imperative

for educators to develop the skills necessary to promote critical literacy in developmentally accessible ways. Without these skills, teachers run the risk of merely viewing topics of equity and social justice as too abstract to incorporate into their teaching (Leland et al.). We offer Critical Peritextual Analysis as one way to empower educators to make critical literacy tangible in classroom reading with young readers.

While we demonstrated how to employ CPA using our own analyses to examine the peritext of two board books, a picturebook, and an early reader, any book—irrespective of the content area, age range, genre, or format—can be analyzed using this framework. It offers educators, librarians, scholars, and caregivers multiple entry points for dialogue around language, power and justice in children's literature. In utilizing CPA, educators may choose to rely on any application of critical literacy—for instance, on race, disability, culture, or environmental justice—relevant to the content and context of a particular book.

At times, educators might use CPA in *preparation* for reading with children, while at other times, they may use the framework *during* and *after* the reading. While we hope the questions we provide offer educators some possible directions for analyzing peritext, we insist that they always prioritize their knowledge of their students as individuals and as a group. We trust that teachers who prioritize relationships with their students will know how to bring in the kinds of critical conversations we advocate for above, while also holding space for emotional and/playful engagement that students might be having with a text.

Peritext often remains an overlooked space, and its critical potential for encouraging conversations about culture, power, and justice is undervalued. While critical literacy approaches have predominantly focused on the narrative of texts, CPA helps highlight the incredible, critical work that creators of books are doing in the peritext, while simultaneously enabling educators to

be critical of texts that perpetuate stereotypes, contribute to the long history of underrepresenting marginalized groups, and sustain injustices of any kind. When working to offer children opportunities for critical literacy, Critical Peritextual Analysis provides teachers with an important lens through which they can analyze, choose, and mediate texts in order to promote justice—and invite children to do the same.

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Table 1

Sample Questions to Use for Critical Peritextual Analysis

1. In what ways are languages other than Standardized English being centered/decentered in the peritext? (*Besos*, *Sonrisas, We All Play)*
2. Who is the intended reader of the peritext and narrative? Who is not the intended reader? (*Besos*, *Sonrisas, We All Play*)
3. How do text and visual elements complement or contrast each other to convey messages about power, culture, and diverse perspectives? (*Besos*, *Sonrisas, Magic Pepper*)
4. What information is provided about the creator(s) of the story and their relationship to this story? Are the creators reinforcing, resisting, or countering dominant narratives about historically marginalized groups? Does the peritext establish that the narrative is a counterstory or does it provide one to complement or complicate the narrative? (*We All Play*, *Magic Pepper*)
5. In what ways is the peritext encouraging readers to engage with epitextual materials (additional information related to the narrative but found outside of the book) in order to provide more accurate and complete understandings of power, culture, and diverse perspectives? (*We All Play)*

6. How are the different pieces of peritext positioned/ordered and what does that say about the priority given to different messages/themes in the book? (*Magic Pepper*)
7. Are there superficial and essentializing portrayals of culture, language, identity, and history in the verbal and visual elements of the peritext? What additional stories and resources can supplement and add nuance to our understandings of the events and people portrayed in the narrative? (*Magic Pepper*)