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ENGL 112B

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Annotated Bibliography: Contemporary Realistic Fiction and Cultural Differences

For my annotated bibliography I want to focus on books that have characters trying to find the balance between two cultures. The novels that I have chosen for my bibliography deal with situations where at least one of the characters in the novel are living in a place that conflicts with their familial upbringing. I chose to focus on cultural differences based on my own personal experiences with juggling the strict Asian traditions my mother has instilled in me and the American culture that I am constantly surrounded by. In high school, many of my friends and I shared similar issues of being obligated to do extra studying during our free time rather than being able to try other activities like our non-Asian friends. Had I known about some of these novels that are in my annotated bibliography, then it would have made my life a lot easier when I was an adolescent.

The centerpiece of my annotated bibliography is the novel *The Fold* by An Na. The novel is about a high school junior, named Joyce, going into the summer of her senior year. She has a few insecurities about herself but faces her physical insecurities head on when she is faced with a decision whether or not to alter her Asian physical trait of folded eye lids. These novels are only a handful of many other contemporary realistic fiction novels that can inspire teens who are going through the troubles of trying to balance two cultures to find a happy medium between the two worlds they live in. The purpose of presenting these novels is to not only help teens find a compromise between their two cultures, but to also understand that having multiple cultures can be an advantage. Hopefully, these novels can help teens find the similarities in their two cultures and/or find a way to make their differences work with each other.

Bedford, Simi. *Yoruba Girl Dancing*. Penguin Books, 1994. Print.

In the tradition of *The Whiteness of Bones*, the poignant, funny, and utterly winning story of an African American girl's metamorphosis into an upper-class English schoolgirl-with an edge. Bedford, who herself survived leaving Nigeria behind for England, turns her heroine's passage through the labyrinth of race and culture into a bitter sweet but triumphant odyssey. (<http://www.amazon.com/Yoruba-Girl-Dancing-Simi-Bedford/dp/0140232931>)

Despite the color of her skin, Remi, the main character, considers herself an English woman because of her experience and the culture she identifies with. This would be a good read for a young reader struggling to find strength in sticking up for what culture they identify with despite their physical appearance.

Chen, Justina. *Nothing But the Truth [and a Few White Lies]*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2006. Print.

"Getting her fortune told by a Taiwanese 'belly-button grandmother' (who feels up her navel) instead of attending the spring dance is just one of the joys of being Patty Ho, a covertly snarky 'hapa' (half Asian, half white) struggling with her dual heritage. Patty's domineering mother is determined to make her a good Taiwanese girl. Gangly Patty, no 'China doll,' longs to be white like her long-gone father..." –VOYA

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/332807.Nothing_But_the_Truth_and_a_few_white_lies)

I would recommend this novel because it shows the disagreement between an American raised daughter and a traditional Asian mother. The two cultures always clash because one culture is very

conservative while the other usually encourages freedom to express individuality. This novel will be a good source for teens that have that struggle with their parents.

Crew, Linda. *Children of the River*. Laurel Leaf, 1989. Print.

Sundara fled Cambodia with her aunt's family to escape the Khmer Rouge army when she was thirteen, leaving behind her parents, her brother and sister, and the boy she had loved since she was a child. Now, four years later, she struggles to fit in at her Oregon high school and to be "a good Cambodian girl" at home. A good Cambodian girl never dates; she waits for her family to arrange her marriage to a Cambodian boy. Yet Sundara and Jonathan, an extraordinary American boy, are powerfully drawn to each other. Haunted by grief for her lost family and for the life left behind, Sundara longs to be with him. At the same time she wonders, Are her hopes for happiness and new life in America disloyal to her past and her people?

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/238821.Children_of_the_River)

I would recommend this novel to teens who are scared to accept another culture because they would feel as though they were abandoning their origins. This novel shows that it is possible to accept another culture and incorporate your origins as well: there is no obligation to only identify with only one culture.

Danticat, Edwidge. *First Person Fiction: Behind the Mountains*. Scholastic Paperbacks, 2004. Print.

First Person Fiction is dedicated to the immigrant experience in modern America. In *Behind the Mountains* Edwidge Danticat tells the story of Celiane and her family's struggles in Haiti and New York. It is election time in Haiti, and bombs are going off in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. During a visit from her home in rural Haiti, Celiane Esperance and her mother are nearly killed. Looking at her country with

new eyes, Celiane gains a fresh resolve to be reunited with her father in Brooklyn, New York. The harsh winter and concrete landscape of her new home are a shock to Celiane, who witnesses her parents' struggle to earn a living, her brother's uneasy adjustment to American society, and her own encounters with learning difficulties and school violence. (<http://www.amazon.com/First-Person-Fiction-Behind-Mountains/dp/043937300X>)

This would be a good novel to teach to teens because it demonstrates the difficulties of having to immigrate and assimilate in a new country. Having to learn a new culture and realizing that your old country isn't as wonderful as you thought is not an easy thing to endure and teens will hopefully appreciate the struggles that families similar to Celiane's family have to endure.

Hidier, Tanuja. *Born Confused*. Scholastic Paperbacks, 2003. Print.

Dimple Lala doesn't know what to think. Her parents are from India, and she's spent her whole life resisting their traditions. Then suddenly she gets to high school and everything Indian is trendy. To make matters worse, her parents arrange for her to meet a "suitable boy". Of course, it doesn't go well- until Dimple goes to a club and finds him spinning a magical web. Suddenly the suitable boy is suitable because of his sheer unsuitability. Complications ensue.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/766319.Born_Confused)

Teens who are trying to resist their original culture should read this novel because the main character tries to resist her parents but in the end conforms to their ways. This novel would be a good lesson for those teens similar to Dimple Lala; those who don't want to embrace their culture of origin because it isn't "cool". This novel can teach teens that perhaps their culture of origin is something they can relate to rather than trying to push it away.

Kwok, Jean. *Girl in Translation*. Riverhead, 2010. Print.

When Kimberly Chang and her mother emigrate from Hong Kong to Brooklyn squalor, she quickly begins a secret double life; exceptional schoolgirl during the day, Chinatown sweatshop worker in the evenings. Disguising the more difficult truths of her life like the staggering degree of her poverty, the weight of her family's future resting on her shoulders, or her secret love for a factory boy who shares none of her talent or ambition. Kimberly learns to constantly translate not just her language but herself back and forth between the worlds she straddles.

(<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7362158-girl-in-translation>)

I would recommend this novel to teens that struggle between the strict Asian culture and their constant need to be perfect. This is a good novel to introduce the expectations of many Asian families and to provide an incite of the constant need to succeed in America and the pressure there is to put one's personal needs and wants aside to help the family succeed.

Na, An. *A Step From Heaven*. Speak, 1997. Print.

A Korean-American girl tells the story of her acculturation into American life beginning from the day she leaves Korea as a young child and ending when she is a young woman. While growing up into the sky on the flight from Korean to America, the four year old Young Ju concludes that they are on their way to heaven-American is heaven! After they arrive, however, Young Ju and her parents and little brother struggle in their new world, weighed down by difficulty of learning English, their insular family life, and the traditions of the country their left behind.

(<http://www.anwriting.com/astepfromheaven.html>)

I would recommend this novel for a teen because it shows the life of a child becoming an adult when she first arrives to America. She arrives thinking that she is in the greatest place in the world, but as she grows older she realizes that the adjustment was very hard. This would be good novel for first generation teens whose parents had to go through the struggles of trying to assimilate to American culture.

Na, An. *The Fold*. Putnam Juvenile, 2008. Print.

Joyce never used to care that much about how she looked, but that was before she met 'JFK'- John Ford Kang, the most gorgeous guy in school. And it doesn't help that she's constantly being compared to her beautiful older sister, Helen. Then her rich plastic-surgery-addict aunt offers Joyce a gift to 'fix' a part of herself she'd never realized needed fixing-her eyes. Joyce has heard of the fodi surgery, a common procedure meant to make Asian women's eyes 'prettier' and more 'American', but she's not sure she wants to go through with it. Her friend Gina can't believe she isn't thrilled. After all, the plastic surgeon has shown Joyce that her new eyes will make her look just like Helen; but is that necessarily a good thing? (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1800712.The_Fold)

I would recommend this book to teens of all different circumstances because it has a little bit of all high school drama in it. I would particularly recommend this novel to teen girls because many of the issues that this book talks about relates to trying to adjust a physical appearance to accommodate another culture's definition of beauty. The trials of Joyce trying to juggle her Korean culture and American upbringing begin to clash and how she deals with the clash will be helpful for teen girls in her situation.

Park, Linda. *When My Nmae was Keoko*. Yearling, 2004. Print.

Sun-hee and her older brother Tae-yul are proud of their Korean heritage. Yet they live their lives under Japanese occupation. All students must read and write in Japanese and no one can fly the Korean flag. Hardest of all is when the Japanese Emperor forces all Koreans to take Japanese names. Sun-hee and Tae-yul become Keoko and Nobuo. Korea is torn apart by their Japanese invaders during World War II. Everyone must help with war preparations, but it doesn't mean they are willing to defend Japan. Tae-yul is about to risk his life to help his family, while Sun-hee stays home guarding life –and– death secrets. (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/613218.When_My_Name_Was_Keoko)

Not only is this novel a contemporary realistic fiction novel, but it also can enlighten teens about what went on historically during World War II in Korea. The main characters in this novel fight and resist the government to stay true to their culture. This would be a good book for teens to learn how some people had to struggle to maintain their cultural identity and how important it is to some individuals to maintain their origins.

Sterling, Shirley. *My Name is Seepeetza*. GroundWood Books, 1998. Print.

Her name was Seepeetza when she was at home with her family. But now that she's living at the Indian residential school her life has changed as well. Told in the honest voice of a sixth grader, this is the story of a young Native girl forced to live in a world governed by strict nuns, arbitrary rules, and a policy against talking in her own dialect, even with her family. Seepeetza finds bright spots, but most of all she looks forward to summers and holidays at home.

I would recommend this novel to teens that are living away from their families or teens who have just moved to another country. Just like Seepeetza, teens that are unhappy with their new surroundings because they can't assimilate or their culture is unwelcome can always find solace with

their families. From this novel, teens can hopefully learn to stay strong when their surroundings are bringing them down because of their cultural differences.

(http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/831792.My_Name_Is_Seepeetza)