

MANY VOICES LITERATURE SERIES



a
**Multicultural
Reader**

COLLECTION ONE

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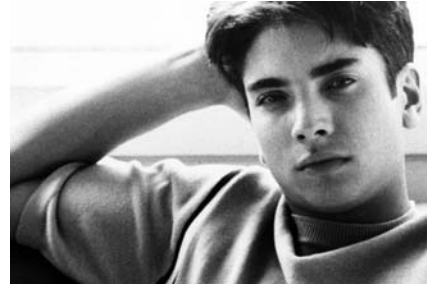
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Ten Thousand Things



A Chinese American college girl who struggles with her parent's expectations. A Greek American boy who learns a lesson from a cranky shopkeeper. Two African American friends who get caught in the crossfire of gang warfare.

In *Many Voices*, you will hear the familiar sound of English, but in tones and accents that have a distinctive ethnic flavor. The writers who make up the conversation are primarily African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American, groups that together represent nearly 40 percent of all students in the United States. But writers from other ancestries contribute as well, including those of Greek, Italian, Jewish, and Arabic heritage.

An ethnic identity can make life more difficult for people, but it may also contribute much meaning and joy. The Chicano poet, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, wrote recently, "I cling to my culture because it is my skin, because it is my heart, because it is my voice, because it breathes my mother's mother's mother into me. . . . I am blind without the lenses of my culture."

Many of us don't come into contact with people from other ethnic groups in meaningful ways. We may go to work and school with them, but never strike up true relationships. Literature gives us the opportunity to learn what we otherwise might never know. Against the backdrop of ethnicity, the characters in these stories, essays, and poems raise questions common to us all: Who am I? How important is my family? How do I conduct my relationships with others? How does the outside world influence me? Quality literature may provoke more questions than answers, but they are the questions that everyone should ask.

You read multicultural literature for the same reasons you read other kinds of literature: out of curiosity and because you want to see your own life reflected back at you in the stories of others. Most of all you read because you want to be transported to another world and entertained. Reading ethnic literature is unlikely to make you unlearn all of your prejudices. But it may help you to figure out which differences among ethnic cultures actually matter. The Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks said, "I believe that we should all know each other, we human carriers of so many pleasurable differences. To not know is to doubt, to shrink from, sidestep or destroy."

Finally, you should remember that ethnic or not, writers are individuals practicing a very personal art. You can't assume that what they write is characteristic of others who share their racial or ethnic identity. As the noted poet Elizabeth Alexander wrote in one of her poems: "I didn't want to write a poem that said 'blackness / is,' because we know better than anyone / that we are not one or ten or ten thousand things."

Just like you know better than anyone else that *you* are not one or ten or even ten thousand things.

Concept Vocabulary

You will find the following terms and definitions useful as you read and discuss the selections in this book. Each word is defined and then used in a sentence.

assimilation the process of fitting in to a new culture or becoming like others in that culture

Learning a language and social customs is important to *assimilation*.

bigotry prejudice; intolerance

Assuming that people from a certain race have little to offer is *bigotry*.

bilingual speaking two languages fluently

It was clear to the other students that Miguel was *bilingual* after he delivered his speech perfectly in both English and Spanish.

biracial having a dual racial heritage

Because she was *biracial*, Stacey celebrated both Japanese and American holidays.

civil rights the freedoms and rights a person may have as a member of a community, state, or nation. Civil Rights, when capitalized, refers specifically to African Americans' struggle for freedom and fair treatment in the 1960s.

"It's my *civil right*!" Bill protested, insisting that he be allowed to make a phone call from the precinct.

culture a characteristic set of beliefs and practices of a racial, regional, religious, or other social group

In the Vietnamese *culture*, members of an extended family often live together under one roof.

desegregation the act of breaking down the barriers that separate ethnic groups

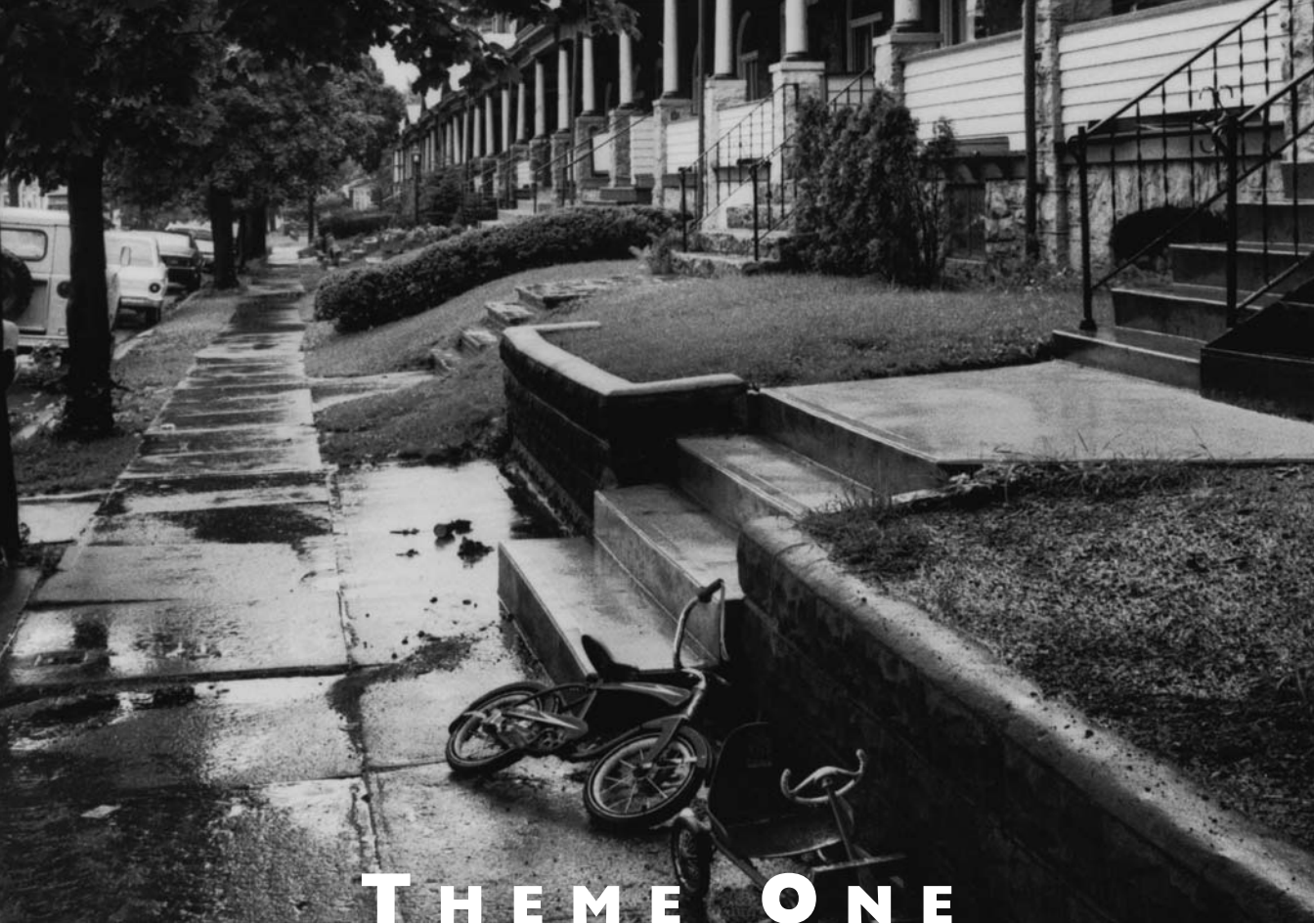
In order to achieve *desegregation*, some school districts transport students by bus from the schools in their own neighborhoods to more distant schools.

discrimination a biased attitude or act of prejudice against a group

Barring members of a certain race or religion from a club or organization is an act of *discrimination*.

diversity variety; differences. In the study of human culture, diversity refers to the differences among individuals and groups of people in society as a whole.

The racial *diversity* of the yearbook staff mirrored that of the school population.



THEME ONE

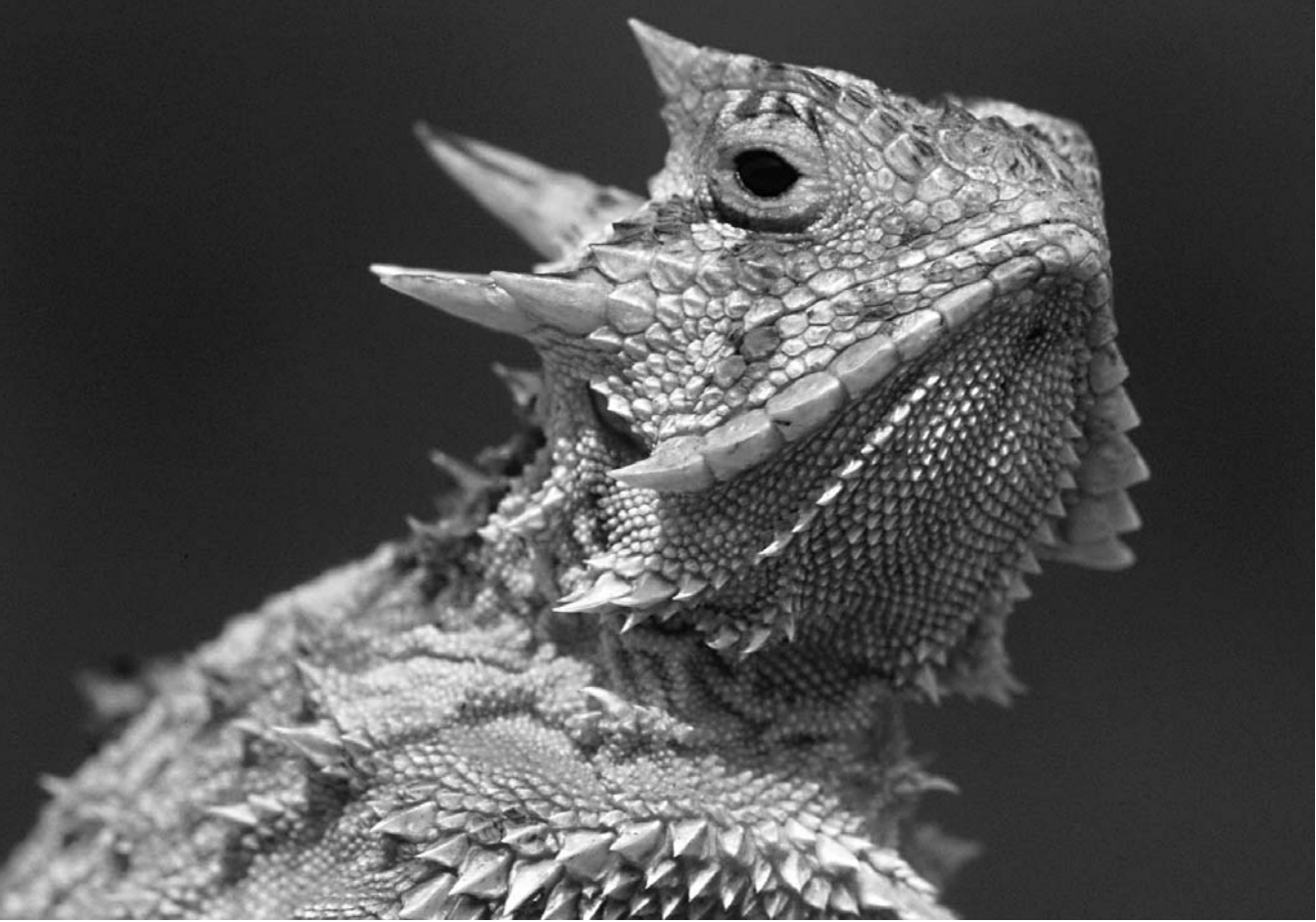
Families: Comfort and Conflict



Daddy...hesitated as if to clear his
throat, then answered,

**“When you’re family, you take
care of your own.”**

“The Horned Toad”
—Gerald Haslam



The Horned Toad

Gerald Haslam

E

xpectoran su sangre!" exclaimed Great-grandma when I showed her the small horned toad I had removed from my breast pocket. I turned toward my mother, who translated:

"They spit blood."

"De los ojos," Grandma added. "From their eyes," mother explained, herself uncomfortable in the presence of the small beast.

I grinned, "Awwwww."

But my great-grandmother did not smile.

"Son muy toxicos,"¹ she nodded with finality.

Mother moved back an involuntary step, her hands suddenly busy at her breast. "Put that thing down," she ordered.

"His name's John," I said.

"Put John down and not in your pocket, either," my mother nearly shouted. "Those things are very poisonous. Didn't you understand what Grandma said?"

I shook my head.

"Well . . ." mother looked from one of us to the other—**spanning** four generations of California, standing three feet apart—and said, "of course you didn't. Please take him back where you got him, and be careful. We'll all feel better when you do." The tone of her voice told me that the discussion had ended, so I released the little reptile where I'd captured him.

During those years in Oildale, the mid-1940s, I needed only to walk across the street to find a patch of virgin desert. Neighborhood kids called it simply "the vacant lot," less than an acre without houses or sidewalks. Not that we were desperate for desert then, since we could walk into its scorched skin a mere half-mile west, north, and east. To the south, **incongruously**, flowed the icy Kern River, fresh from the Sierras² and surrounded by riparian forest.³

LITERARY LENS

Pay attention to the role that place, or setting, plays as you read the story.



spanning
extending across

incongruously
inconsistently; not
conforming to
expectations

1 **Son muy toxicos:** Spanish for "They are very poisonous."

2 **Sierras:** the Sierra Nevadas, a mountain range in the western United States

3 **riparian forest:** a forest that runs along the banks of a river

front seat, snuggled close to Daddy, and I heard her whisper to him, "Thank you, Charlie," as she kissed his cheek.

Daddy squeezed her, hesitated as if to clear his throat, then answered, "When you're family, you take care of your own."



LITERARY LENS

Why does the great-grandson feel strongly about the place where his great-grandmother should be buried?

7. **Another Way to Respond** Read “Nikki-Rosa” aloud in class, each person speaking a different line. What did you learn from hearing it this way? Did you prefer to hear it or read it silently?

IT’S DEBATABLE

Divide into two teams, affirmative and negative, and debate the following resolution. You don’t have to join the team that will argue for the position with which you really agree; you may learn more if you argue for the opposite side.

Resolved: Your family has more influence on you than anything else in your life.

WRITING

Literary Analysis: Memorable Characters

Uncle Ralph in “The Warriors” and the great-grandmother in “The Horned Toad” are both strong characters. Pick one and **analyze** the ways the author makes this character come to life in the story. You will want to include background, economic class, lifestyle, speech, personality weaknesses and strengths, and what others learn from the character in your analysis.

Creative Craft: Family Matters

Using “Immigrant Picnic” as a model, write a poem in which family members talk with one another. You might consider writing about conversations at a family gathering, a conflict between two siblings, or a comforting moment between a grandmother and a grandchild.

Telling Your Own Story

This book isn't complete until you tell your own story. Begin by writing about you and your family members. You might consider writing about a memorable family gathering, a relationship you have with another family member, or relatives who immigrated to the United States. Keep your work in a special place as you will be adding to it at the end of each theme.

Glossary of Literary Terms

allusion	a reference to an historical or literary figure, happening, or event
analogy	an extended comparison of two different things that have certain similarities
anecdote	a short, minor incident that illustrates a point in the larger work
author's purpose	an author's reason for writing: to entertain, inform, express an opinion, or persuade
autobiography	a true account of a person's life written by that person
character	a person being written about in a work of literature
characterization	the way in which an author creates and develops a character
climax	the turning point or defining moment in a work of literature; some stories do not have clear climaxes
conflict	the struggle between opposing forces that is the basis of good dramatic writing
connotation	the emotional associations surrounding a word
contrast	showing something against its opposite in order to clarify its meaning
defining moment	the point at which a character experiences or realizes something so significant that it changes his or her life or way of looking at things; sometimes called a turning point