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## "Like Raindrops on Granite": A Dialogic Analysis of Full Cicada Moon as Crossover Scholarship

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In Marilyn Hilton's (2015) verse novel *Full Cicada Moon*, which opens at the end of 1969, tween protagonist Mimi Yoshiko Oliver moves from Berkeley, California, where her father earned his PhD and where she is surrounded by her mother's family, to Hillsborough, a small town in Vermont, where her father has taken his first college job as an assistant professor. The daughter of an African-American father, James, and a Japanese mother, Emiko, Mimi starts seventh grade mid-year in her new school as the only child of color in her class. The discrimination—both subtle and overt—from teachers as well as classmates, is relentless, but Mimi has learned some effective strategies for maintaining her sense of self. Throughout the novel, the recurring metaphor of "raindrops on granite" exemplifies how Mimi and her family persistently, repeatedly counter the racism that they face daily from people who have no experience with a biracial child or a mixed-race family. As Papa is dropping her off on her first day of school, Mimi narrates the following oft-repeated exchange:

“Just remember,” he says,  
be kind, be respectful, and persist.”  
“Like raindrops on granite,” I say,  
because we know that's how I persist--  
*drip, drip, drip*  
until the granite cracks. (Hilton, p. 31)

This metaphor of raindrops on granite reflects how Mimi deals not only with daily racial microaggressions but also with resisting rural New England gender expectations that didn't exist in Berkeley. Mimi aspires to be an astronaut—a career goal that most of her new teachers find laughable. Rather than give up these aspirations in the face of so much resistance, Mimi gains a new sense of self through consistent racial counter-aggressions, her repeated confrontation of gender norms, and her determination to stay instead of move again to build her own identity while she tries to find her way. We will discuss each of these three means of resistance in detail but would first like to turn briefly to reflecting on the composition of this essay, which we have crafted as an example of crossover scholarship, an idea that Michelle H. Martin designed with the goal of encouraging more scholarship on diverse texts in the field of children's literature.

### Crossover Scholarship

In Martin's January 2017 essay in *The Lion & The Unicorn*, "Brown Girl Dreaming of a New ChLA," she laments the lack of diverse scholars in children's and young adult (YA) literature and considers "crossover scholarship" a first step in confronting the long-term problem of diversifying the field. According to Martin, White academics need greater cultural competence to effectively mentor emerging scholars who come from diverse backgrounds and/or who write about diverse topics that are often outside the lived experience of White senior scholars. Unlike children's literature, a genre defined by audience, "Crossover scholarship . . . points squarely to authorship and the writer's crossing racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, gender and other identity boundaries to write about people who live and look differently than the scholar does" (Martin, 2017, p. 98). When student scholars of color seek to write about their own backgrounds but are mentored by White scholars who lack familiarity with the minority culture, senior scholars often redirect their students to engage in (Caucasian-focused) research with which they are more comfortable. Since Martin considers "excellence in research and writing . . . more important than writing only from one's own background or realm of experience" (p. 98), she concludes the essay with a framework for effective crossover scholarship—primarily intended for White senior scholars and mentors—that offers an *academic* response to Junko Yokota's primary-text question: "What needs to happen" (to diversify the field of children's and YA literature) (2015)?

Though our configuration differs from that described by Martin, since we are both scholars of color, we nevertheless engage in crossover scholarship as we continue to gain more cultural competence about each other's backgrounds by exploring aspects of Hilton's novel that speak to intersections of our distinct ethnic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. Montiel Overall (2009), whose scholarship lies in the field of library science but is still pertinent to the study of diverse children's literature, defines cultural competence as "becoming more knowledgeable about diverse cultures and using this information in ways that lead to greater understanding of diverse populations and thereby increasing library use..." (p. 199). She goes on to say: "It begins a lifelong process of learning about cultural differences to effectively reach those who would benefit the most from library services" (p. 200). In the context of this essay, we seek to apply this dynamic approach to cultural competence as a framing to understand each

other's cultural and ethnic backgrounds, analyze the intersections of our lived experiences with that of Mimi, and, in so doing, accomplish the work of crossover scholarship.

Martin's framework is comprised of ten recommendations for scholars and students when engaging in crossover scholarship—the reading and critiquing of literature that sits outside of a scholar's lived experience. For this essay, we will focus on five of these.

1. According to Martin, scholars and minority students must talk about intersectionalities in the texts as well as in their own experiences, about how to navigate the difficulties of living in the interstices of multiple cultures, and they must both learn to do “inward gazing,” reflecting to understand one's own biases in light of this scholarship, which can unearth difficult truths about unexamined assumptions.
2. Students and scholars should “recognize what you know and don't know” (p. 100) and also know how to obtain the necessary information to fill that gap, rather than seasoned scholars requiring students to study only the texts and theory that are familiar to them.
3. Scholars and their mentees should know *why* they are engaging in crossover scholarship and be prepared for challenges from other scholars—especially senior scholars in those diverse fields and from the focal backgrounds. Being thoughtful, reflective, and critical about this work will help counter those challenges.
4. Along the same lines, scholars and students should “[b]e prepared for the research to change you” (p. 101) Confronting one's own biases as part of the process of literary analysis can expand one's boundaries and spheres of knowledge about the world. Moreover, scholars should be ready and eager to learn from one another, especially from those who have already begun this crossover scholarship journey and in whose footsteps scholars who are new to this work would do well to tread.
5. Above all, resonant through all of these recommendations, is the exhortation to *listen*. Listen to fellow scholars, to students, to communities of color and Native communities whose traditions, stories, and experiences are being written about, analyzed, and examined in this kind of scholarship. Martin says, “Encouraging thoughtful, self-reflective, and well-considered crossover scholarship written by those who will become the next generation of children's literature scholars will stretch all of us” (p. 102).

Martin's recommendations are intended to push seasoned scholars and students alike to be mindful, diligent, and intentional about how they interact with one another, with texts, and with both the scholarly and the wider community to embrace and promote diverse scholarship and the work of minoritized scholars. In this essay on *Full Cicada Moon*, the authors are striving to follow a selection of Martin's recommendations, thereby modeling responsible crossover scholarship.

### **Why these Scholars? Why this Book?**

We chose *Full Cicada Moon* for this work of crossover scholarship because while Hilton's story does not reflect either of our backgrounds fully, it sits at the crossroads of our two lived experiences. J. Elizabeth (Liz) Mills is Hapanese (half-Japanese, half-White), with a Japanese mother and a White father who taught Japanese. Though she grew up listening to her mom tell stories in Japanese, the books she could read about Japan were in English and primarily written by Western missionaries, featuring curated, often culturally-biased content. Reading *Full Cicada Moon* therefore had a profound effect on her because although she is in her early 40s, this book is the closest she has ever read to a "mirror book" (Bishop, 1990): one that features a first-generation mother like hers, an academic father like hers, food from two cultures like the food in her family, bullying and microaggressions similar to those Liz experienced, and a female protagonist who is attempting to create a third, hybrid identity all her own, the way Liz did as a child and continues to do today. Liz devoured this book, unable to believe how closely it resembled her own experience. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) framework of mirrors, windows, and doors took on new meaning as Liz felt she was seeing so much of herself in Mimi, despite all the ways in which the character is unique and different from Liz. As a result, Liz sometimes inadvertently replaced Mimi's identity with her own (Mimi's father is African American; Liz's is White), which then changed how Liz read Mimi's experiences and interactions.

An African American, Michelle grew up in the South like Mimi's father, James, did and both his academic career at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) and his attempts to help his daughter navigate spaces in which she is the only child of color resonated with Michelle. Throughout more than 20 years as a professional academic, Michelle has racially integrated two English Departments. Furthermore, both Michelle and her daughter, now 15, have experienced many instances of being the only people of color—at selective national Girl Scouting events, in

high-performing academic classes, at costly camps, etc. Both these connections between our lives and Mimi's story and the intriguing nature of our responses to different passages made us eager to write together about this novel.

To explore the intersections between our identities through the process of reading this book, we decided to keep a synchronous log to track our reactions to the poems, the imagery, and the metaphors throughout the book. (For an excerpt of the seven-page, two-column dialogue, see Table 1). As we read, we discussed—asking each other questions, listening to one another, verifying experiences, and expanding our knowledge about each other's culture and history along the way. In the sections of the novel where the two cultures of Mimi's family come together in interesting ways, our conversations became animated as contrasts between our backgrounds emerged, thereby bringing to the surface the ideas that contributed to the thesis of this essay: that Mimi gains a new sense of self through her consistent racial counter-aggressions, her repeated confrontation of gender norms, and her determination to stay instead of move again to build her own identity while she tries to find her way. This dialogic and deeply personal analysis provided a test case for Martin's crossover scholarship framework and set the stage for a scholarly discussion of the hybrid, mixed-race experience that Hilton constructs in *Full Cicada Moon*. We feel that this point-by-point discussion of ideas from the text that resonated with one or both of us enabled us especially to explore three of the points from Martin's framework— inward gazing, recognizing what you don't know, and listening to one another.

Table 1. Excerpt of Dialogue Between Liz and Michelle

<b>Liz’s Reactions</b>	<b>Michelle’s Reactions</b>
<p>P. 2 Struck by “Oriental” then realized the time period in which the story is set. I remember having to fill out my ethnicity at the start of school when I was a kid. Don’t remember the categories, but I do remember not feeling like I fit any of them and I don’t remember my family helping me figure this out. Love that Mom says “check all that apply”—uncharacteristically rogue for a Japanese woman of her generation.</p>	<p>P. 2 - “Oriental”- outdated term. What does it mean/signify for you? Clearly, Mimi rejects it in favor of Japanese. What’s it like to have to “choose” in such official circumstances (I’ve never had to choose)?</p>
<p>Pp. 9, 22, 37 I love the mixing of Japanese and African-American food culture here. I grew up with Japanese food on July 4th mixed with hot dogs and potato chips.</p> <p>P. 103: “Is it me that makes people here act so chilly?/Or is it my family?/We are American,/we speak English, we eat pizza/ and pot roast,/ and potatoes sometimes.” I love this line—it breaks my heart because I remember thinking, I’m not any different and yet at the same time I’m entirely different.</p>	<p>P. 9 Black-eyed peas &amp; collard greens. This is a BIG DEAL in SC (and probably in the South in general). You eat collard greens on New Year’s Day for dollars you’ll have in the New Year and black-eyed peas for pennies. When I spent one New Year in IL and couldn’t find fresh collard greens at all, I was distraught. This is from Mimi’s dad’s tradition. Though it’s unexplained, that’s where my mind went when I read it.</p>
<p>There were so many aspects of this story that resonated with my own biracial story that at times I forgot that instead of being half-Japanese and half-White like me, she is half-Japanese and half-Black. And thus some of the discrimination she is facing is on a whole other level because of that. I’ve so rarely seen any book that so closely mirrors my own experience that I superimposed my own experience. I faced discrimination just because of my Japanese half; but that doesn’t mean that I then understand all of Mimi’s experience, because the other half of her ethnic makeup is also an object of ostracization.</p>	<p>True. More to think about because you have a “half” from privilege, and Mimi has two halves that were both discriminated against by white Americans. Important comparative details.</p>

### **Mimi's consistent racial counter-aggressions**

Many of the daily conflicts Mimi faces in middle school are examples of microaggressions. Building on ideas from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Pérez Huber and Daniel Solorzano (2015) define racial microaggressions as:

A form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place. They are: (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms; (2) layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on People of Color. (p. 298)

For Mimi, these racial microaggressions are incessant, beginning as early as the first chapter of the novel. In Martin's yet unpublished research on Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, she has developed the term "racial counter-aggressions" that suggests an individual's persistent and systematic resistance, over time, to racial microaggressions. One of the primary tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the ordinariness of racism. According to CRT theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, racism, rather than being aberrational, is the "common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country"—it's "normal science" (2012, p. 7) and therefore expected. Economic or material determinism, another tenet of CRT, proposes that "racism is much more than a collection of unfavorable impressions of members of other groups. . . it is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" (p. 21). Idealists believe that since race is socially constructed, once people's racist and discriminatory attitudes change to more positive ones, social change will naturally result. However, economic determinists posit that these changes must benefit the dominant group economically and socially; otherwise, both the racist institutions and practices *and* the racist attitudes persist. Since Mimi is a child, operating among young peers and subject to her middle school's administrative system, her impact is small and local but nevertheless profound because of the changes she makes with her persistent racial counter-aggressions. She does change the attitudes of those around her, but more importantly, she influences her friends, her school's administration, and at least one neighbor to be more inclusive, which impacts not just Mimi but also the children of color and the White students who attend the school with Mimi as well as those who will come after she leaves. Mimi's actions and

words will act as her raindrops on the granite she encounters around her—in the town, at the school, and even with the next-door neighbor, Mr. Dell. She is making lasting change, and while doing so, dismantling, in small ways, the systems of oppression that have heretofore been invisible to the White people—adults and children—maintaining them.

Early in the novel, although Mimi has developed some strategies for performing racial counter-aggressions, her responses are still immature and somewhat tenuous. In “Reflections,” Mimi and her mom take a bus from Berkeley, California to Vermont to meet her father who has gone ahead. On this bus, a White woman who has been knitting throughout the ride has been eyeing Mimi and her mother. When the bus nears their destination, the woman asks Mimi if she is adopted. Mimi points to her mother and says, “She’s my mom” (Hilton, 2015, p. 13), but the woman refuses to believe her. In “Arriving,” when they reach Hillsborough and Mimi points out her dad, too, the woman replies, “Yes, I see” (p. 13), does not smile, and walks away, clearly disapproving of their mixed-race family. Mimi chooses this opportune moment to stick out her tongue at the woman’s back. This event takes place at the beginning of the book, and one can read Mimi’s reaction as a bit naive, perhaps both because this is only the first of many raindrops Mimi will catalyze in her new home city and because she did not need these defense mechanisms nearly as much in Berkeley as she will need them in Vermont.

Mimi’s relationship to culturally significant food reveals much about her journey throughout the novel. In “Hungry,” Mimi’s mother makes her *obentō*, a Japanese lunch—one that Mimi presumably took to school in Berkeley. However, at this new school, where she is the only child of color, Mimi is less willing to be brave and eat her Japanese lunch. Instead she leaves it in her locker and suffers through turkey tetrazzini that “tastes like a ball of paste” (p. 38) and canned peaches that “are not like the ones Mama preserved in California” (p. 38) just to fit in and be less noticeable, to convince herself and others that she’s American. Later in the book, in “Crush,” she has more fully embraced who she is and her cultural heritage, and she proudly eats her *obentō* at lunch in front of her new friends, Timothy and Stacey. She also shares her lunch with a new African-American boy, Victor, thinking to herself, “I wonder why I ate so many cafeteria lunches last year/when I could have eaten this yummy food instead” (pp. 255-256). This example shows a progression in Mimi from trying to avoid being different and demonstrating her uniqueness to finding allies and learning to trust her own voice and sense of self. Another raindrop on the granite of the community, the school, and her own friends.

Because Mimi's skin, hair, and eyes mark her as visibly different, several students' curiosity about these aspects of who she is could provide opportunities for cross-cultural exploration but in reality make her vulnerable to racist encounters that she then has to manage. In "Kim and Karen," two girls in Mimi's class act like they want to be her friends but ultimately only want to satisfy their own curiosity: about Mimi's hair, her family, her life in California, her ability to speak a foreign language, her parents, her skin color, etc. On the one hand, readers can understand their curiosity because these girls have never gone to school with a child of color. On the other hand, their approach feels far more aggressive than friendly. Hardly able to get a word in edgewise, Mimi persists through their barrage of questions, assumptions, and conclusions, answering most of their questions, regardless of how odd or offensive they are. For instance, they want to know if, when she tans in the summertime, do her palms tan, too. They also suggest, with questions about Mimi's dad, that they would expect her African-American dad to be violent when his daughter breaks his rules against speaking only English and not Japanese. Kim and Karen even ask to touch Mimi's hair, and she allows them to do so. When she has at last had enough, she narrates, "My lunch is done/and so am I/with Kim and Karen" (p. 61). As Mimi matures, her methods of performing racial counter-aggressions become more nuanced and mature as well. In this case, rather than resisting overtly as she does with the woman on the bus by sticking out her tongue, instead of getting upset with Kim and Karen and telling them off, she simply shuts the conversation down. Later, she also teaches them a bad word in Japanese—an act of subversion that her mother eventually discovers and for which Mimi must apologize to Kim and Karen.

Not all of Mimi's friends act so aggressively around her and single out the ways in which she's different and separate. Timothy, a boy who lives next door with his great-uncle, Mr. Dell, befriends Mimi, and they immediately connect through a friendly snowball fight. In "April Vacation," they talk about their families, and Timothy learns about Mimi's passion for astronomy (Mimi learns about Timothy's uncle's telescope), but at no point does Timothy make Mimi feel othered or different than he is.

After Timothy leaves, I realize he didn't ask me  
all the usual questions.  
Maybe he doesn't care about them.  
And that makes me smile. (p. 140)

Timothy doesn't ask the probing, pointed questions that Kim and Karen ask, and in so doing Mimi and Timothy build a normal, ordinary friendship, one that teaches Mimi that she's not the only one with family difficulties and secret ambitions that run in opposition to current gender norms in Vermont (Mimi wants to learn how to use woodworking tools for her science project and one day become an astronaut; Timothy wants Mimi's dad to teach him how to bake bread and cook.) Timothy's unwavering acceptance of Mimi for who she is contributes to her growing self-confidence.

As Mimi spends more time in Vermont, she becomes more mature, and that maturity leads to an evolution of the responses she has to the microaggressions she faces from adults in her community. The poems "Shopping," "Excuses," and "The Exchange" illustrate how much patience Mimi has gained in her persistent resistance against these microaggressions—this time not from a classmate but from a stranger, a store clerk. In "Shopping," Mimi and Stacey visit a department store a few days before Christmas, in search of a scarf for Mimi's mother Emiko. After trailing the girls, the clerk treats Mimi as if she has shoplifted, although this department store does not even sell records, the item the clerk sees Mimi putting into her purse. The clerk wastes no time being nasty to Mimi and orders the girls out of the store. Mimi's initial flash of embarrassment gives way first to resignation and then resolve to confront the clerk, and her fears, on her own. By adopting an attitude of thoughtfulness and respect instilled in her by her parents, and relying on her own ingenuity, Mimi purchases the scarf, asserts her right to be a customer, and uses her voice as additional raindrops on the granite she encounters in the store. Through this counter-aggression, Mimi leaves an imprint on both the clerk and on herself. Mimi acquires a different perspective on this unfortunate event by discussing it with Stacey and her mom, who immediately look for excuses and seem uncomfortable with Mimi's account of the encounter, which has indeed made discrimination and exclusion visible for them, likely for the first time. Notably, Liz read this passage one way; Michelle read it completely differently. Michelle assumed that the clerk follows Mimi because she's half Black; however, because Liz had in many ways inserted herself into Mimi's experiences, and also because Liz, too, has been followed and been under suspicion while shopping, she assumed the encounter occurred because Mimi is half-Japanese, too. Michelle's assumption comes from long experience with African Americans being profiled in this way, but it came as a surprise to her that a Japanese American might have been similarly profiled. Since Hilton doesn't explicitly state why the clerk treats

Mimi this way, this ambiguity enables readers to either impose their own experiences, if this situation mirrors their own, or to learn from Mimi's unfortunate encounter that this does in fact happen and to ask why.

### **Mimi's Confrontation of Gender Norms**

Mimi tackles discrimination on a regular basis, not just related to her mixed-race background but related to her gender as well. Coming from a more liberal community in the West, Mimi is initially taken aback by the rules she faces on her first day of school, when she realizes this is a different sort of school than the one she attended in California. The secretary, Miss Holder, chastises Mimi for not wearing a skirt, indicating that school rules dictate that girls must wear skirts or dresses. Mimi's Papa, who has accompanied her, reassures the secretary that he will bring a skirt from home so that Mimi can comply with the rules. "Drip, drip, drip," Mimi thinks to herself: she will need more raindrops to erode this unexpected hurdle.

Unfortunately, Mimi's gender-related troubles don't end with the restrictive dress code. When asked in homeroom what she wants to be when she grows up, almost before the teacher finishes the question, Mimi blurts out, "An astronaut," (p. 35) but when both the teacher and the students laugh at her response, it makes Mimi wonder about her identity and what she can be in this rule-bound school. While this teacher has little confidence that Mimi could succeed in a male-dominated field like aeronautics, another teacher, Mrs. Stanton, who appears a bit later in the novel, believes so firmly in Mimi's aptitude for this kind of career that, without Mimi's knowledge, the teacher recommends her for a scholarship to attend a summer program at Cape Kennedy, and she gets accepted. The novel ends with Mr. Dell, her neighbor and former fighter pilot in the Navy, taking Mimi on the very first flight of her life, which suggests a hopeful future both because Mimi now has an ally who was once a racist enemy and because this ally has a long career involving real-world experience in the skies that he has begun to share with Mimi to help her pursue her dream.

The gender-restrictive rules persist in the vocational classes: only girls take home economics, and only boys take shop. Though Mimi would rather be in shop, she walks her fellow home economics classmates through how she and her dad make corn bread at home. The two-voiced structure of this poem juxtaposes Mimi's insistent, repeated phrase, "This is how we make corn bread" (pp. 249-252), against classmate protestations to the contrary. Mimi never wavers in her confidence that all will turn out fine. She has found her raindrops in this activity.

When at last she wins over the other students and they assert eagerly that “You should taste this corn bread./It’s really good!” (p. 252), the granite has cracked ever so slightly and perspectives have shifted—an example of a racial counter-aggression that has made a difference. Competent and in charge in this poem, Mimi embraces her own authority and her Southern, African-American heritage, prompting these girls to listen to her in a way that they don’t elsewhere, for example in the “Kim and Karen” poem, mentioned earlier.

In fact, Mimi uses her words to make the case for gender inclusion in shop and to push back on the rules, thereby catalyzing an act of civil disobedience among her classmates: the girls stage a sit-in in the shop class, and the boys do likewise in home ec, all in Mimi’s absence because the school has suspended for her defiant behavior of invading the shop class. In “The Principal’s Office,” James stands up for his activist daughter, but Mimi finds her own voice in a conversation with the principal, saying, “We think girls should be allowed to take shop,/and we want to speak up about it” (p. 266). While the students’ efforts lead only to the establishment of clubs for both genders, Mimi confronts the principal’s racist and sexist words by standing up to him in her straightforward, quiet way. In the poem “Decisions,” the principal tells Mimi, “You’re a star student—/a real credit to your race” (p. 333) The narrative says:

I wonder  
if anyone ever said that to Mr. MacDougall,  
or if he has any idea how much it hurts.  
But I nod and make a little smile  
because he’s the principal  
and I don’t know why he called me to his office. (p. 333)

Later in the same poem, when she stands up to leave his office, Mimi echoes the principal’s words back to him, saying, “Thank you, Mr. MacDougall./You’re a real credit to your race” (p. 335). Both of us had strong reactions to this passage. In our dialogic response, Liz wrote: “The principal’s words stopped me in my tracks. And I wonder which race he is referring to?”

Michelle responded:

I didn’t even ask which race he’s referring to: this is definitely the black piece of her—the same black piece the salesgirl responds to. I LOVE that she throws this right back in his face since to this principal, his own race is invisible; white is the standard and his self-perception is awash with White privilege. What’s more, he

THINKS he's giving her a compliment! She makes his race visible in a way that he's probably never seen it when she throws this same comment back in his face. What a mirror! Love it!

Throughout this event, as Mimi cultivates her activist identity—always ascribing to the raindrops-on-granite philosophy—she uses words to express her desires and dissatisfactions with the current gender-biased situation. Mimi stands firm in her commitment to gender equality and forces the school to create more equitable policies that will enable her to pursue what she loves.

### **Mimi's Construction of Her Own, Hybrid Identity**

From the beginning of the novel, Mimi has been undergoing a process of making a place for herself in this town by forging a third, hybrid, constructed cultural identity. She says, "I am half Mama,/ half Papa,/ and all me" (p. 2); "I am/half my Japanese mother,/half my Black father/and all me" (p. 57). But this is complicated by her realization of the prevalence of double standards related to both her race and her gender: "I have to be/ twice as smart and funny at school,/ and twice as nice and forgiving in my neighborhood/ than everyone else/ to be acceptable./But everyone else can be/only half of that/ to fit in" (pp. 103-104). Mimi struggles with this tension regularly, trying to understand who she is, both as part of and independent from her parents and the cultures they represent.

Who are her parents, and what have they contributed to the hybrid identity that Mimi is creating? Her mother Emiko rarely interacts with others, except for another Japanese woman and eventually the faculty wives, who hold a tea. Thus, Emiko remains more of a background character—cautious, careful, and advising Mimi to do the same. Mimi's father James has a similarly cautious approach, loathe to push back on this new community, insisting that Mimi speak English and admonishing her not to bother their neighbors (especially the grouchy, initially racist Mr. Dell). At the same time, though James did not attend the March from Birmingham to Selma, he did choose to join the March on Washington, because he says it was safer—which perhaps suggests that he, a native of the South, assumed the chance of violence occurring would be greater in Birmingham than in the nation's capital. As a husband and father, he needed to make the safer choice, but notably, he does not make the safest choice of all: staying at home. James's raindrops-on-granite approach to activism differs markedly from Mimi's, but the support they give one another to keep resisting and making change in their own way offers both an excellent father-daughter relationship for readers and a model for how

children can make change wherever they are with the support of a caring adult. Mimi, then, takes a bit of her parents' caution and some of her father's quiet boldness to find her own path to stand up for who she wants to be and what she wants to do. This seems so rare, not just for stories about girls but for stories about girls of color who are trying to discover their own individual personalities. This speaks to the dailiness of Mimi's experience as well. She asks:

Is it me that makes people here act so chilly?  
Or is it my family?  
We are American,  
we speak English, we eat pizza  
and pot roast,  
and potatoes sometimes. (p. 103)

In this statement, she attempts to redefine what it means to be American—a definition that embraces her complex, hybrid identity formed both from the experiences of her parents and also from her negotiation of two very different geographical spaces.

By the end of the school year, Mimi has faced blatant, persistent discrimination based on her racial background as well as on her gender. When James asks Mimi and Emiko to help decide whether or not they should stay in Vermont or if he should accept another academic job in Texas, this represents a pivotal moment not just in the plot of the story but in Mimi's development of her own identity. As she participates in this adult decision, her maturity progresses to a new level. She has the chance to reflect on her time in Vermont and weigh that experience against the uncertainty of going somewhere new. And during the reflection period, Mimi watches the lunar landing, which rekindles her drive to one day become an astronaut, helping her to rediscover and renew her commitment to this dream. When at last she tells Papa she wants to stay, Mimi commits to building her own identity within this once-new/now-familiar space that's so different from Berkeley. She has found her footing in this small New England town, and here she can carve out a place for her biracial, feminist, STEM-loving self in this community of people who don't quite know what to do with her and who are not quite ready to deal with anyone like her. After much contemplation and finally making a decision, Mama agrees with Mimi in her desire to stay. This feels like a turning point for Mimi and her family—after this, the family settles in; they find their niche, and things start to fall into place around

them. While life here is by no means perfect, they have all made the decision to persist, and the raindrops continue to fall on the granite that is Vermont.

### **A Young Reader's Response**

Given that this novel was the first "near-mirror book" that Liz had ever read, we wanted to get a response to the novel from a young reader for whom this is truly a mirror book. Maya Tukes, one of Michelle's daughter's middle school classmates, has a Japanese mother and an African-American father. Maya gladly agreed to read the novel and offer feedback that we could include in this essay. Maya wrote:

Reading *Full Cicada Moon* as a half Japanese, half black girl, just as the main character, I found myself in the same situations as Mimi [was] in the book. The situation that occurred that I most related to was when Mimi wanted to eat her bento lunch that her mother made but decided not to pull [it] out, at her new school, because she feared that it was too weird for her to be eating her Japanese food. I used to face this problem when I was younger in elementary, but I learned to accept it and eat the food that my mother made me with pride and I was accepted with open arms by my friends and they too learned to love the food I brought for lunch. I found myself relating with Mimi more on the Japanese side, like whenever I tell my friends I'm Japanese or that I speak the language. I always get bombarded with the 'How do you say \_\_\_\_\_?' questions. Other than my similarities with Mimi, I found the book to be very entertaining and the format of this writing style is unique. I thought that the way the book was written in its poetic style was executed very nicely (M. Tukes, email communication, November 12, 2017).

Both Mimi and Maya attest to the fact that having peers embrace what they eat at home with their families and being able to share those customs in a school setting can go a long way toward building lasting friendships. Some scholars have critiqued the school practice of relying on the cultural "low-hanging fruit" of food, holidays, and language for international celebrations (Montiel Overall, 2009; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995), but because food is so central to who we are as human beings, how and what we eat can be incredibly divisive, or it can be a powerful source of a unity. Maya's passage above also parallels the evolution that Mimi undergoes from annoyance at being singled out when she reveals her Japanese identity to embracing what she can bring into her relationships that will enrich her friends' lives and expand their realms of experience. While this is one young reader's response, it is worth noting that Maya responds

more strongly to Mimi's Japanese side in the story; it is possible that due to Hilton's own studies and travels, she is likely more well-versed in Japanese customs and traditions and thus writes a stronger portrayal of Mimi's Japanese side than she does of her African-American side, which may be a more unfamiliar culture for this author. Further research into reader response will be needed to delve more deeply into this area and better understand the strength of both cultural portrayals.

### **Conclusion**

This case study of crossover scholarship has led to difficult conversations between us about the discrimination we have experienced in our own lives. While Michelle was outraged by Mimi's encounter on the bus with the woman who insists that Emiko is not Mimi's mother and by Kim and Karen's relentless questioning, Liz found this unsurprising, since those encounters, too, mirrored her own experience. Similarly, Liz listened in dismay to Michelle's immediate recognition that Mimi had been kicked out of the store for being Black and that the principal's racist comments are likely directed toward Mimi's half-Black side more than toward her half-Japanese side.

The process we established and followed for analyzing and discussing this book is grounded in five of Martin's ten recommendations for conducting crossover scholarship. We asked questions of each other and learned from one another's experiences; we asked how various words, passages, and interactions did or did not resonate with what we know from our own lives; we paid particular attention to instances when we read the same passage in completely different ways, especially when that difference comes from our contrasting cultural/ethnic backgrounds; we stayed alert to which aspects of the story seemed attributable to individual differences and which aspects seemed tied to culture; and we listened to one another. We used Martin's recommendations as a roadmap to explore a work of children's literature through a dialogic process of highlighting personal experiences, asking questions, and learning from one another. This work has indeed changed us both, as it should. In this way, crossover scholarship itself could be conceptualized as an act of counter-aggression, intended to enact powerful, if incremental change in the field of children's literature: academic raindrops on granite.

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