The picture book, *Rain School*, by award-winning author and illustrator James Rumford, is a notable, culturally connected story about the educational experiences of youngsters in Chad, Africa. Formerly teaching and volunteering in the country is what compelled Rumford to share the story of the town's primary school, hoping to expose readers to the value of learning in a different culture. Partly told through the voice of a young boy, Rumford demonstrates an appreciation for the traditional customs of the community by providing visual descriptions about the area and its resources while he illustrates the scenes with vibrant colors, patterns, and realistic depictions of the people.

After enticing the reader with a glimpse of Chadian ways of living, via the illustrations and dialogue, Rumford calls his reader into the action as he relates the conversations of the young children on their way to school. Guided by their older siblings, children make way to attend their first day of school, only to realize that they must first build their school. The teacher quickly instructs them to gather materials of the land and shows them how to create mud bricks to make walls and desks. Students also help gather grass for roofing and collect wooden stools for classroom seats. When the building is finally completed, they eagerly begin learning the alphabet by reciting and writing in their notebooks. The students routinely return to school for nine months, but as the season changes, the school days come to an end, and the building is left to stand alone. Strong storm winds and rain reshape the schoolhouse to its earlier beginnings of mud piles and weathered
Once the storm clears, nothing remains. However, the students don’t seem to be disheartened about the lost structure; they feel competent and confident that they have learned all there is to learn and have relocated their acquired knowledge to their notebooks and minds. Rumford ends by telling of a new school year when students journey to the grounds, ready to build their classroom again.

Rumford has created a text with simple words and illustrations, but the content and implications are deep. In light of the economic plight of this country and considering its limited resources, Rumford effectively depicts a seemingly disheartening outcome of climate changes through simple illustrations and with a youthful voice and presents an optimistic attitude about the devastation. Rebuilding the school every year is part of what is learned in schools in Chad, Africa.

Through this story, readers will be able to compare their education to that received by others in another country. In addition, they can discuss the value of different ways to learn and retain information even when available resources are different. The compassionate text and illustrations reveal that these circumstances are not to be seen as reasons why education cannot exist, but should stand to show the strength and will for which education should exist. Rumford’s underlying theme is that education is valued and sought despite economic circumstances and environmental conditions. The desire for all children to receive an education is a message that emanates from this picture book with words that may be simple, but content and implications that are deep.

For the teacher who shares this story with his/her students, discussing some of the literary elements presented in the story such as setting, theme, voice, climax, and tone could help to enhance the comparisons made by readers regarding their own educational experiences. Much of the story is told through the pictures. Thus, this picture book can be utilized to teach the strategy of using pictures to aid in comprehension and in making predictions. Young readers will enjoy *Rain School* because it will give them an expanded perspective of how students from another part of the world receive an education and also encourage them to value the experience of learning.

**About the Author**

*Lakia M. Scott* is a doctoral student in the Urban Education program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her primary research interests are urban literacy and international literacy awareness programs. She is an avid reader of children’s books and fictional novels, but also enjoys tutoring and mentoring young adults. As a frequent international traveler who seeks to better understand the educational experiences of young students from countries that exhibit deplorable conditions, she hopes to bring about awareness in order make education an equitable experience for all.