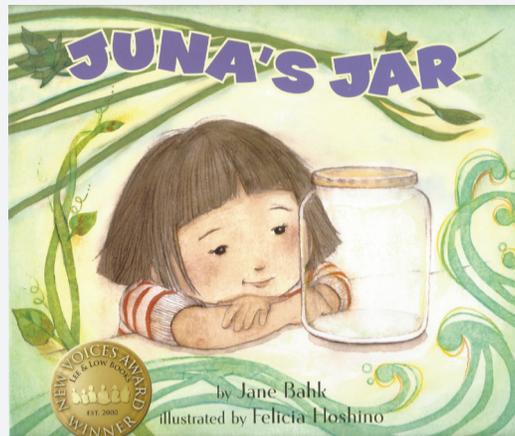


First Opinion: Celebrating Children's Multicultural Literature

Bahk, Jane. *Juna's Jar*. Illustrated by Felicia Hoshino, Lee & Low Books, 2015.

Barbara Z. Kiefer and Brittany Wallace



The Asian/Pacific American Award is given each year to honor and recognize individual work about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage. *Juna's Jar*, the winner of the 2016 award, goes far beyond that description. The book, written by Jane Bahk and illustrated by Felicia Hoshino, celebrates our fully multicultural world and gives children of all cultures insights into friendship, loss, and longing.

Juna, a Korean American girl, is best friends with Hector, a young Latino boy. The pair enjoy going to the park with Juna's empty kimchi jar to collect rocks, bugs, and other artifacts. One day, when Juna goes looking for Hector at his Abuelita's apartment, his grandmother explains to Juna that Hector has gone far away to live with his parents. Devastated, Juna heads back home.

Juna's older brother, Minho, notices her despondent mood and takes her to a pet store to get a fish for the jar she shared with Hector. That night when Juna falls asleep, she dives into the world of her jar in her dreams. She swims with sea creatures, recruiting them to help her find Hector. The following day, the fish grows too large for the jar and Minho helps her put it in the family aquarium. Then Minho helps again by giving Juna a bean plant seedling to replace the fish. Again, at night Juna enters a dreamscape of lush forest, searching for Hector. By morning, the plant has overgrown the jar. Juna replaces it with a cricket and some twigs. That night, she hops onto the cricket's back for a colorful adventure over the city. The cricket brings her by Hector's window, where she sees her old friend sleeping peacefully beside the kimchi jar that Juna had given him.

When the cricket's antennae poke through the jar's lid the next morning, Juna heads to the park to free the cricket. Juna's jar is empty again, and as she wonders what she can find to put in it, a little girl asks if they can put the inchworm she found in Juna's jar. Able to accept Hector's absence, Juna begins a new circle of friendship.

Jane Bahk is a Korean American living in San Francisco, and this story was inspired by her own childhood spent playing with empty jars. Her succinct text is perfect for young readers, with its repetition of words and phrases and its pattern of three dreams and three different classifications of flora and fauna.

Felicia Hoshino's swirling illustrations add movement to the pages and complement the mood of the story. The soft hues of transparent watercolor emphasize the connections between Juna's real world and the dream worlds she visits. And perhaps there is a touch of magical realism that pays homage to Hector's Latino heritage. Would fish, bean seedlings, and crickets really outgrow a glass jar overnight?

Bahk and Hoshino have created a realistic, representative, and imaginative picture book that celebrates American multiculturalism and childhood friendship. In addition to the Asian/Pacific Award, *Juna's Jar* received the New Voices Award for children's literature written by a person of color. The praise is well deserved. *Juna's Jar* is symphony of words and art that will touch the hearts of all readers.

About the Authors

Barbara Z. Kiefer is The Charlotte Huck Professor of Children's Literature at The Ohio State University.

Brittany Wallace is studying early childhood education at The Ohio State University.