

Guide to:

I'm New Here

Written and illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien

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Language: English.

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Genre: Fiction

Lexile: AD390L

Grade Level:

Kindergarten – Grade 3

Featured Countries of Origin:

Guatemala, South Korea,
Somalia

Themes: Language learning,
courage, belonging,
determination

Publisher's Synopsis

It can be scary being new in school. Maria, Jin and Fatimah are new to their American elementary school. The words that they hear around them and see on the page are confusing. They each long for the language that they know and the friends who understand them. They feel as though they don't fit in—alone, confused and sad. Watching those around them, each new student slowly gains the confidence to engage with their new classmates. They realize that their peers and teachers are supportive, welcoming and excited to learn what they have to share. Though Maria, Jin and Fatimah come from different cultures, they soon find that they share many similarities with students in their new American school. Likewise, their peers have the chance to learn about different cultures and languages and discover some of the many faces of friendship.

What We Love

This simple yet profound story is a wonderful jumping-off point for conversations about starting school in a new country. While the characters feel loneliness and uncertainty, they use their internal resilience to create a place for themselves in their new school communities. The story highlights the rich knowledge and strengths that the students bring with them.

Background



Research shows that one of the best predictors of immigrant newcomer success is the quality of their school. To improve school climate for immigrant students, teachers should address bullying with restorative justice methods, build strong personalized relationships with students and encourage family engagement. Learn more here: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/23/02/making-schools-welcoming-place-immigrant-students>

Vocabulary

- Flow: To move in one direction
- Fly (Flew): To move quickly through the air
- Scribble: To write or draw quickly
- Scratch: To write or draw on a surface
- Stumbles: Makes errors while speaking
- Patterns: Things that repeat in a predictable way
- Tremble: To shake with fear
- Strange: Not known before
- Twists: Moves with a turning motion
- Edges: Lines where an object begins
- Perfect: To reproduce to original without any flaws
- Pounds: Throbs or pulsates



Graphic by Freepik

I'm New Here (continued)

Pre-Reading Focus Questions

- An immigrant is someone who comes to live in another country. Why would someone want to move to _____ (your town or city)?
- Have you ever been somewhere and everyone was speaking a language that you did not understand? How did you feel?
- Have you ever tried something new? How did you feel about doing it?

After-Reading Discussion Questions

- Maria does not understand the new language. How do the illustrations show us the differences in how she felt at home and how she feels now in her new school?
- Jin could read and write in his home language. How does he feel now that he cannot read and write yet in English?
- Fatimah felt like she was part of her class at home. How can we tell she does not feel comfortable at her new school?
- How does Maria connect with the other students? Did she only need to speak the same language as the students to make new friends?
- What does Jin do to practice the new language?
- How does Fatimah take part in the lesson? How do the illustrations show how she is feeling?

About the Book Author/Illustrator (from publisher)

Anne Sibley O'Brien knew she wanted to be an artist by the time she was seven. Born in Chicago, she moved with her family to New Hampshire on her first birthday. Six years later, her parents were hired as medical missionaries and assigned to serve in South Korea. She was raised bilingual and bicultural, living in the cities of Seoul and Taegu, and on the island of Kojedo. She has illustrated more than 25 picture books, including the Jamaica books by Juanita Havill (Houghton Mifflin) and the Talking Walls books by Margy Burns Knight (Tilbury). Anne lives on Peaks Island in Maine.

Extension/Higher-Level Thinking

- Maria, Jin and Fatimah feel alone, confused and sad at the beginning of the story. At the end of the story these characters feel at home. What do you notice in the illustration on the last page that shows the reader they feel at home? What are some things at your school that make you feel at home?
- Draw a picture of a time that you felt nervous or scared to try something new. Draw another picture about a time you felt safe and comfortable. Share these with another student and ask them how they can tell which picture you felt nervous/scared and safe/comfortable. Which details gave you these clues?
- Everyone deserves to feel they are part of the school community. What are ways students and teachers can help a new student feel comfortable and included? Think of a time you included someone. How did that make you feel?

Interdisciplinary

This story can be connected to units on building classroom community, culturally responsive instruction, individual development and identity.

Additional Resources



[Reader Engagement Guide with readers theater, scripted conversation, movement game and welcoming signs](#)



[Video of author Anne Sibley O'Brien reading I'm New Here](#)

About the Consultant Nicole Kwmuntis

Nicole Kwmuntis co-authored and provided guidance for this guide. She is currently a reading specialist for students in grades K-4 at Malden Public Schools in Massachusetts. During her tenure in Malden, she has advocated for the literacy development of multilingual learners and supported extended learning experiences for multilingual learners beyond the school day.

About The Immigrant Learning Center

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (The ILC) of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to help immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about immigrants and immigration in the United States, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, produces valid, reliable and objective multidisciplinary research on immigrants and immigration to the United States. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>. The ILC can also be found on Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube and LinkedIn.