

rather serve as suggestions. Other forms of research may be needed depending on the book being examined or the questions that have surfaced. The research findings may provoke new questions that lead back to a re-examination of the photographs, illustrations, and written text. This re-examination may in turn generate new questions for additional research.

Within our working model, we suggest six research strategies to inform the exploration, answer existing questions, and prompt new ones.

- Researching authors and illustrators may provide insight regarding how the creators' backgrounds impact the work. If they have provided direct commentary about either their creative processes or their experience with the culture being portrayed, such information may prove vital to understanding elements within the book.
- Looking at other photographs of the culture being represented may shed light on the critical process. The additional photographs can be compared with information from any of the other research.
- Reading other books related to the same culture may provide alternative perspectives that clarify or confound.
- Taking notes within the cultural setting may illuminate how that culture functions.
- Interviewing knowledgeable people may offer viewpoints in developing a critical understanding of the book.
- Knowing the time period in which the story is set may prove crucial to understanding the illustrations and written text in the book. Information regarding the historical context can be gained by using a variety of resources, some of which are represented in the other research categories. For example, in the course of interviewing a knowledgeable person, questions can be asked regarding life in the time period depicted in the book. Photographs from the time period

can be used as a source of reference in critically examining the book as well as other books.

In the course of our exploration, we passed through several stages in developing our understandings of socio-cultural issues in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. After our first successes with identifying inaccuracies in the illustrations and written text, we seemed to be strongly oriented toward identifying every possible flaw in the book. Perhaps because we were engaging for the first time in a detailed critical socio-cultural analysis of a picture book, it was difficult to stop finding flaws. After having exposed all of the inauthentic elements that we could find, we were shocked by what we discovered.

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Frankly, we were depressed at finding so many negatives in a book that we loved. How could we love a book that contained what we now saw as problems? We were especially saddened by the fact that we had exposed so many inaccuracies in a book that provided a valuable positive perspective on life in the Arab world.

While the universal value of literacy and the joy of learning to write one's name are central points of the book, the authors accomplish something much more important. They depict the young Egyptian as an ordinary boy, a perspective that stands in contrast to the media-generated view of Arabs. In *Battling Dragons* (Lehr, 1995), Heide and Gilliland state that one of their primary reasons for writing this book was to:

help counteract the awful stereotypes of Arabs that children are presented with in many and subtle ways in cartoons, in sitcoms, in comic books, even in commercials: Arabs as bloodthirsty fanatics who wave scimitars around, Arabs as rich sheiks driving around in Cadillacs, Arabs surrounded by harems of seductive veiled women, Arabs as terrorists, as bad guys. (p.107)

Only after shifting our focus to find the authenticities in the images and text did we arrive at a different appreciation of the complexities of the book. We found many authentic elements within both the illustrations and written text. This shift of focus enabled us to regain positive feelings toward the book. However, our opinions were now more informed because we knew exactly which elements within the text resonated for us and which did not. These complexities increased our appreciation of the work as a whole and the multiple challenges with which authors and illustrators must struggle in creating any artistic work.

There seems to be a common belief that some books should not be used in the classroom because of inaccuracies. However, by eliminating such books from the classroom, a form of censorship, an opportunity for critical literacy is removed from the curriculum. Such books are crucial to provide fertile ground for developing a critical stance. In examining any book that portrays a culture, authentic and inauthentic elements will be present. Books with both elements are necessary to support children in uncovering how culture is portrayed and in developing strategies to examine books critically.

Although our inquiry mined information concerning cultural events, social situations, life in modern Egypt,