

RATIONALE

The objects that surround us are involved in building our identities as individuals and as communities. When we ask someone to tell us about the artefacts that surround them, they often reveal stories and memories connected to these objects. They also reveal stories that tell of our shared values and cultural practices.

Authors and illustrators working on texts for children that centre on migration journeys often embed artefacts of value within their stories to illuminate the ways in which the migrant characters maintain connections with family, draw strength from their cultural and linguistic heritage so that they might negotiate their new worlds.

For instance, Tan's multi-layered graphic novel *The Arrival* is an excellent example and opens with his unnamed protagonist carefully wrapping and placing a photograph of his family in his suitcase before embarking on a journey to a strange land. This picture accompanies him on his migrant journey, providing a much-needed memory link to his family, but it also serves as reminder of who he once was when he moves to the new world, making friends and negotiating his new environment.



ADVICE FROM MEDIATORS

While artefacts can be a great source to promote storytelling, they have to be used sensitively because many children may have been in positions where they had to leave valuable objects behind. In these instances, children can be invited to recreate objects of importance using art.

Nehal from Cairo used a book called *The Squirrel and the Box* about a squirrel who had to migrate frequently in search of food. The squirrel would pack its most important objects in a box. Nehal gave all her children boxes and asked them to pack memories, fears, and objects. The children kept the boxes in a safe space and shared items in storytelling time.

Katie, a mediator living in Scotland, read an extract to her children about a boy having to flee his country in the middle of the night. She asked her children to create cultural suitcases and draw in the objects they would like to take with them. She used this activity to help build empathy for the character and to promote conversations about things that matter.

The mediators noticed that children picked objects that evoked stories connected to people who were important in their lives, stories connected to how they had used the objects and stories where they had taken the objects on journeys as a means of connecting the present to the past.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Children can create displays of their objects and provide labels for others to read why the objects are important. Mini exhibitions of children's work can be set up even in public spaces (e.g., in a café or library hallway) with appropriate arrangements made in advance (such as anonymity of children's work, access and approval to display in a given space/location).

Questions can help children as they look at the objects and discover that each has a secret story to tell.

- What is the object used for?
- Who would use the object?
- What material is the object made from?
- Where was the object made?
- When was the object made?

TAKING NOTES OF THE CHILDREN'S RESPONSES

As children interact with objects, take note of the multiple dimensions in which they engage with things: through touch, gesture, emotional responses, object manipulation, emplacement of object in the immediate environment, stories and memories the object brings up, etc.