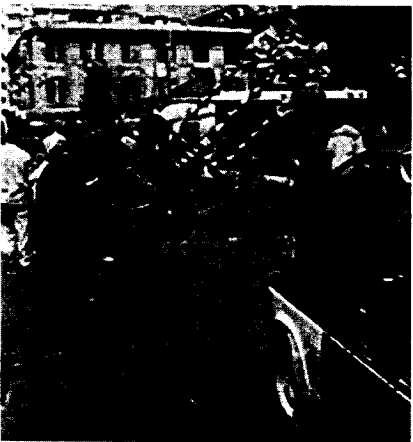


Another example of authenticity in images is included in the portrayal of an *erkhssous* (a traditional herbal drink) vendor. Our photograph from Ataba Square, along with other photos of street vendors helped us see that the book accurately portrays the crucial role that street vendors play in daily street life in Cairo.



Sabil Kuttab



Erkhssous Vendor

Through our extensive back and forth dialogue, we realized that the images and the text in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* were a combination of authentic and inauthentic elements. By using photographs as a point of reference, we could question critically



Termis Vendor
Ataba Square Khan il Khalili

the authenticity of the text and the images. The photos may not always have provided an answer regarding authenticity, but they often helped to create the critical environment for our questions.

At times, photographs did provide answers to our questions. When they did not, a rationale for further study was supported. Our exploration was conducted in a variety of ways, including finding cultural insiders and soliciting their opinions, examining other photographs, reading other books, and researching the backgrounds of the author and illustrator.

Reflections

Whether we are cultural insiders or outsiders, even if we are just beginning to develop a critical perspective, we can go into the community and collect data in the form of photographs, observational field notes, and interviews while conducting ethnographic research. With what we discover, we can further examine a book's images and text as a socio-cultural artifact. Such analysis will deepen our understanding of a book as a social and cultural work.

In Martin Luther King's words, "Education must enable one to sift and weigh the evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from fiction" (1983,

p.41). We believe that this is exactly what we have done with *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*, using as our point of reference our personal experiences and knowledge of modern Egyptian life in various districts of the city of Cairo. Our first encounters with this story were not from a cultural critical viewpoint. Initially, we found this book to be evocative of many things near and dear to our hearts. However, upon reviewing the story through a critical lens, we have made new discoveries about the book, about the cultures the book represents (Ahmed's culture, the authors' cultures, and the culture of the illustrator), and about ourselves as readers and learners. As educators we must carefully examine and attempt to widen and deepen our understandings and knowledge of the cultures that are represented in the literature that we read and use in our classrooms. Along the way, we expand our understandings of those cultures and of the literary works that seek to represent life within them. We also must ask ourselves what the text means for others and for us relative to the world in which we live. □

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