



Cultural Garments and Textiles

The Gabi That Girma Wore depicts the process by which the Gabi, a traditional Ethiopian garment, is made. In the last few spreads, the reader sees Girma wearing his Gabi on “visits with faraway friends, and the festive occasions that Girma attends,” including Christmas and Easter services; the reader also sees Girma wearing his Gabi while eating an Ethiopian meal with injera bread, gathered around the gebeta, the basket upon which the meal is served. Backmatter extends information about the Gabi. Invite families and community members to come into the classroom to share the traditional garments and textiles from their cultures, such as kimonos, trajes, kilts, ribbon skirts, saris, and more. Use anchor charts to capture information about the different textiles, how they are made, and their cultural significance. As part of this exploration of cultural garments and textiles, students can also read [What Your Ribbon Skirt Means to Me: Deb Haaland’s Historic Inauguration](#), and [The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family](#).

Focusing on Verbs

The Gabi That Girma Wore uses a fictional narrative to explain the process of creating the versatile Gabi. After reading the book together, ask students to name the steps in the process from what they remember of the reading. Record these steps on chart paper. It’s okay if students don’t remember everything. Next, ask students how the authors inform readers about each step in the process (students will likely say something about words & pictures). Go back to the beginning of the book and reread the first two pages aloud. Ask students what they notice about text placement. On each two-page spread, there is a final line in a larger font that follows a simple pattern: “to x (insert verb) the Gabi that Girma wore.” Have students locate those verbs as you reread the book and list them. Remind students that sometimes, text size and placement can be a clue for readers, telling them something is important.

Text Structure: Cumulative Tales

The first identified example in Western children’s literature using the cumulative tale structure is “The House That Jack Built,” an 18th century British nursery rhyme. *The Gabi That Girma Wore* loosely uses a cumulative narrative structure to convey the story. Another book that uses a loose version of the cumulative narrative is [Thank You, Omul!](#), written and illustrated by Oge Mora. Read aloud both books and ask students to compare the ways in which they are similar and different. In each, students might notice rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration. They may not have the words for those terms, but they can notice how the

text sounds. Have students list some of the objects or people that repeat in each story. As a class, compose a piece of shared writing that follows the structure of a cumulative tale. Students could collectively invent a fictional story, or as in *The Gabi That Girma Wore*, write a cumulative tale about making something from start to finish using students’ prior knowledge.

Weaving: How Fabric Gets Made

The Gabi That Girma Wore is a wonderful vehicle for collaboration between classroom teachers and art teachers. For several years, coauthors Fasika Adefris and Sara Holly Ackerman cotaught a weaving class at the International Community School of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. Invite an agricultural scientist or botanist from a regional university to speak to the class in person or via video conference about the cotton plant. Next, invite local fiber artists, including weavers, to demonstrate the ways in which cotton and wool are transformed into garments and textiles. Ideally, students will have the opportunity to try out weaving and knitting or crocheting as part of the process. Students can compare their hands-on experiences with the process mapped out in *The Gabi That Girma Wore*.

Exploring Ethiopian Culture

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop noted that all children need books that are “windows and mirrors.” For some of your students, reading *The Gabi That Girma Wore* is a mirror; for some of your students, the book is a window into another culture. Spend some time exploring contemporary and traditional Ethiopian culture. After you’ve read the book aloud once, go back to the beginning and ask students to tell you what they notice about Ethiopia based on the illustrations. What questions do they have? Work with your school librarian to curate different resources about Ethiopia via the digital databases available to you through your school and/or public library. Perhaps you can share a meal comprised of Ethiopian dishes and traditional injera bread, as depicted within the book, and invite local community members to speak about their Ethiopian culture.

References

Bishop, R.S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 1(3), ix–xi.

These Teaching Tips were created by Dr. Mary Ann Cappiello.



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