EXAMPLE: Cultural Literacy Reflection-BOOK

Title/Author/Year of Publication: People of the Book, Geraldine Brooks, 2008

What cultures are reflected in this book? This story spans multiple cultures (primarily in Europe and the Middle East) and historical eras, however, the primary culture reflected is Jewish. The story centers around a sacred Hebrew manuscript created in 15th century Spain and chronicles the voyage of the manuscript from modern times back to its genesis.

In what ways are the cultures in this book similar or different from your own cultural experiences and perspectives? As I read about war-torn Sarajevo in the initial chapters of the books, I wondered about connections with my family heritage. My great-grandparents emigrated from Serbia and Croatia in the late 1800’s and my family names, Zupan and Vrtar, reflect the language and culture of Eastern Europe. While I am not Jewish, I appreciated the great efforts in the story to protect and preserve a piece of that culture’s religious history.

Many of the experiences and historical contexts described in this book are quite different from my contemporary American culture. From the dynamics of families, to the religious observations to the hierarchy of society, I found many contrasts to my own experiences. The eloquent writing and thoroughness of the story allowed me to build a greater understanding of the Jewish culture and of the value of the Haggadah.

How did reading this text build on your understanding of the world & other cultures? By reading this book, I expanded my understanding of several cultures and historical eras and have greater insight into the Jewish faith and the geographical areas in which Jews lived throughout history. I think my previous perceptions of where Jews may have lived was more centered around the middle East. I also learned about the war conditions in Sarajevo and the context for the civil war between peoples.

In what ways is the author’s cultural background reflected in this text? I did a little research on the author and found that she is Australian born and she served as a news correspondent in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. All of these experiences are woven into the story People of the Book; the protagonist is Australian, the story is set in Sarajevo and much of the historical context is centered around the Middle East. Additionally, Geraldine Brooks converted to Judaism after marrying her husband, Tony Horowitz.

What did this book make you want to learn more about or take action on related to its theme, context or culture? I think I would most like to learn more about Sarajevo and the conflict in the region. I’m curious to know how the city has rebuilt itself and what current living conditions are like. I’d also like to do some research to see if I could find any family connections in the region. I will probably start with a search on the internet and will also talk to my grandma to see what she can share with me about my ancestors.