

CURRICULUM & READING GUIDE

FOR *WE THE INTERWOVEN*, VOLUME 2

CREATING POWERFUL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



THE POWER OF STORY

We the Interwoven began as an idea, a vision to find storytellers who could help us “listen” to what it means to be a new American living in the heart of our country. This series provides a bridge for discussion and understanding into the complex topics surrounding Iowa communities and the impact of our state’s changing cultural landscape.

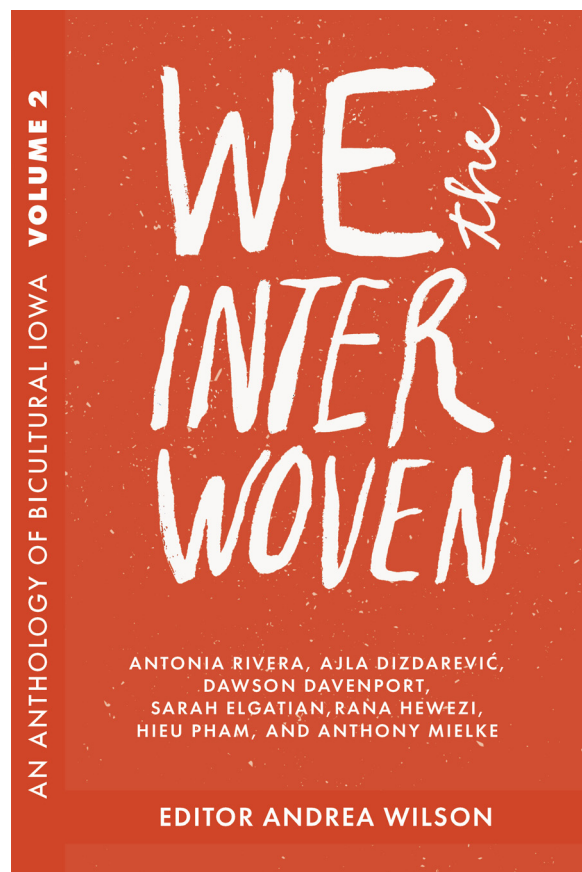
Story is an empowerment tool and a psychological springboard into a healthier future for all of us. When people are able to access the power of narrative for a purpose and are given a platform that allows these stories to take hold in the collective psyche, the arc of their future changes, as does our collective future. As Iowa high schools, colleges, and universities have begun to adopt our anthologies into their diversity curriculums and communities have used them to facilitate difficult conversations on race and immigration, we have seen this change begin to take effect at an exponential level.

These stories are the experiences of individuals sharing both their sorrows and their joys, and they offer a window into a collective of voices that merit our listening. Our newest residents have much to teach us about the American experience, and with Iowa as the setting, the dimensionality of the heartland begins to shine. Through these stories, we may be able to find threads that help us weave a more authentic representation of modern American life, bringing us closer to her ideals of liberty and justice for all.

EVERY STORY NEEDS A BEGINNING

The series is written through the Bicultural Iowa Writers’ Fellowship (BIWF), the state’s first residency for emerging writers who are immigrant, first-generation, or second-generation Iowans. The program residency and book series were created by Andrea Wilson and Alisha Jeddelloh, who both grew up in small Iowa towns with growing diversity. Columbus Junction, Wilson’s home, houses over 13 different minority populations from across Latin America as well as substantial populations of Congolese and Chin Burmese. Jeddelloh’s home of Fairfield is the location of the world-renowned Maharishi University, bringing citizens and visitors from across the globe.

Many readers of *We the Interwoven* have been surprised to discover the Iowa written about in these stories is very different from the image they held in their minds. Each writer shares their experience in visceral and moving language. Each story is a window into another world, another land, another people, and all of the traditions they brought to Iowa’s fields of opportunity.



ABOUT *WE THE INTERWOVEN*

We the Interwoven is the state's first book series written by emerging writers who are immigrants and non-native Iowans. The series is a testimonial to the story of today's Iowa—a uniquely beautiful tapestry woven from people of many backgrounds, many of whom are experiencing America for the first time through the lens of our state. The story of Iowa most represented in literature is one of European descendents and farming communities; however, Iowa's story is much more dimensional than it appears. *We the Interwoven* allows the evolution of Iowa's cultural story to be told by the voices of those who are living these changes, those who have come to America from other lands to make this their home. In raising their voices directly through this series, readers can gain new perspectives of the many threads woven into the tapestry we call home.

The Bicultural Iowa Writers' Fellowship is fostered through the Iowa Writers' House (IWH), a nonprofit literary center whose mission is to centralize access to Iowa's literary resources in a single organization that provides programming, workshops, and a welcoming community for all. Since its founding in 2015, the Writers' House has built a community of over 3,000 writers and delivered cross-genre programs to writers of diverse ages, races, and life situations. Today it has become an integral part of the beautiful ecosystem of Iowa lit.

"*We the Interwoven* was monumental in opening doors in my writing journey. It wasn't only about writing some stories, it was about those stories and my identity receiving validation. It was about having my platform amplified so others like me could hear those stories. The impact of being in the first bicultural anthology cannot be overstated, from providing a direct path to getting my first full-length publishing deal with the University of Iowa Press to connecting me with literary contemporaries exploring what it means to be a BIPOC creative in America. It is an experience I will always champion. A shining example of a process that puts in the work and scooches the chairs free for people like me to have their seat at the table."

Chuy Renteria, inaugural BIWF fellow and author

FROM A PAST FELLOW



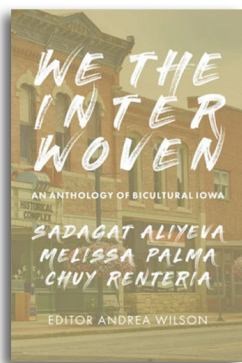
ENHANCE YOUR READING EXPERIENCE

Reading can change our hearts and minds, but fully engaging with a story often takes place as much off of the page as it does on it. That's why we've provided online resources in addition to this reading guide, available at wetheinterwoven.com/curriculum. There you can get to know each of the writers of the *We the Interwoven* series, view video readings of their stories, find printable worksheets, learn tips on how to best conduct a discussion group, and more.



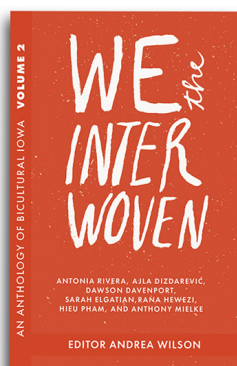
wetheinterwoven.com

The first two volumes of *We the Interwoven* have led conversations on challenging issues, impacting communities around the state. Below are just a few of the accomplishments of the series thus far. Head to wetheinterwoven.com to see even more of the impact, including author achievements and our campaign to get the series in every library in Iowa.



VOLUME 1

- Candidate for the "One Community, One Book" program of the UI Center for Human Rights
- Chosen discussion book for the City High United Latina Association
- Recommended as a National Standardized Test Excerpt Passage
- Sold out twice during its first printing



VOLUME 2

- Nominated for consideration as an All Iowa Reads selection
- Featured on the Iowa Public Radio's Culture Buzz with John Busbee
- Over 100 copies donated to libraries around the state through philanthropy from the 100+ Men Who Care: Hawkeye Chapter

DISCUSSING COMPLEX CULTURAL NARRATIVES



Discussing stories that feature real people of different backgrounds and races along with complex societal issues can be emotional and even challenging. It is expected that readers will have varying views, and the series was designed to create an opportunity to discuss and share ideas. It may be helpful to know, however, that the primary goal of this series is for readers to learn about themselves through what they experience in the texts. By sharing in discussion, readers can see and understand how their own personal histories inform how they experience each piece and allow them to relate to the story. They can see how every reader has similar experiences in some way—a lens of a life through which to view the life of another.



It is helpful to remember that we all have a story and a history. All of our lives are relevant within discussion; however, the beauty of a democracy is that we each are able to have and express our own opinions. For this reason, and also to enjoy discussion as a learning experience for all, it is important that no one dominates the conversation and that all responses are respected and respectful.

Our ultimate goal is to learn from each other.

READING GUIDELINES

The foundation of this project is the anchor standards for reading listed below, provided by the **Common Core State Standards Initiative**. We've included the guidelines to help students get into the mindset of what they are reading and what they can "listen" and "look" for.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

— CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

THE STORIES IN *WE THE INTERWOVEN*

are about Iowa, but in reality, states all across the country are experiencing migration and demographic changes to their communities. In short, while these are Iowa stories, we hope that they will be relevant to readers across the United States. In the publishing process, we send the book to various writers to read ahead of time and provide a quote that can be inside the front cover. These quotes, which you may have seen in other books you've read, are called blurbs. Having well-known writers read your book is a way to show potential readers that it has merit. The writers who have supported our book are some of the top writers today on the subject of immigration.

HERE'S WHAT WRITERS SAID ABOUT *WE THE INTERWOVEN*, VOLUME 2

"What a beautiful, moving, haunting collection of stories. This project, and the Bicultural Writers' Fellowship that produced it, gives me hope for what's possible in the future. By crafting the stories of their lives and sharing their struggles and accomplishments, these writers offer a generosity of spirit and the kind of insight that creates connections—with readers, with strangers, with the many different people who make up Iowa, the U.S., the world. This book is a triumph."

Michele Morano, author of *Grammar Lessons: Translating a Life in Spain*



"These voices map a landscape, and in language both intimate and poetic, they reveal the many words for home."

Inara Verzemnieks, author of *Among the Living and the Dead*



"*We the Interwoven* is exactly the sort of antidote we need to the kind of othering that could lead to catastrophic future outcomes. It accomplishes the vital mission of humanizing issues that are all too often relegated to abstract or overly politicized realms."

Melissa Studdard, author of *I Ate the Cosmos* and host of *VIDA Voices & Views*

ABOUT THIS BOOK



At six years old, Antonia Rivera crossed the border from Mexico with nothing but the doll in her hands. Ajla Dizdarević's family brought traditions across an ocean after leaving a home torn apart by the Bosnian War. Sarah Elgatian's grandmother played cards and spoke of a country her Armenian-American grandchild had never known. Hieu Pham couldn't relate to all of her mother's Vietnamese traditions, but when she became a mother herself, everything changed. Rana Hewezi grappled with tragedy in her Egyptian family's past and the power of a name in determining her fate. Anthony Mielke couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to his birth story than he had been told. A member of the Meskwaki Nation, Dawson Davenport was born into a world that was not told in the history books.

How do we make our way in a society that looks nothing like the one our families once knew? How do we find a sense of belonging in a past and a place we've never been, or in a world that feels as if it's changing faster than we are?

These seven stories take us on a ride through the heart and the moral conscience as they explore how we find identity and make a future in an America that is still deciding its own.

Each feature includes a translation published alongside the story in order to provide accessibility to the bicultural language communities and to honor the language. The book also includes cultural glossaries and artist statements to help readers contextualize the work and connect with the writers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



OPENING QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be in community with others?
- What is the value of culture and cultural identity to you?
- What do you know about your own culture or your family's heritage that reading this book made you remember?
- What do you believe America's culture is?
- What is your experience of Iowa and of being Iowan?
- What do you hope we might gain from conversation today?
- What do you want to discuss about what you read in the book today?

STORY QUESTIONS



"I, ANTONIA" AND "DEAR CIEL" BY ANTONIA RIVERA

- What did you learn from *I, Antonia*?
- What did you feel when you read about Antonia's experiences as an undocumented immigrant?
- How did the poem *Dear Ciel* influence your reading experience of *I, Antonia*?
- What does it mean that a changing federal policy can affect a person's family stability?

"A DRINK TO END ALL DRINKS" **AND "ŠTA DA VAM KAŽEM"**

BY AJLA DIZDAREVIĆ

- What did you learn from *A Drink to End All Drinks*?
- What did you feel when you read about Ajla's family tradition?
- How did the poem *Šta Da Vam Kažem* influence your reading experience of *A Drink to End All Drinks*?
- How do cultural and family traditions impact younger generations?





“WHAT WE OWE OUR MOTHERS”

BY HIEU PHAM

- What did you learn from *What We Owe Our Mothers*?
 - What did you feel when you read about Hieu’s experiences as a new mother?
 - What do we owe our parents? Our children?
-



“A NEW DIASPORA”

BY SARAH ELGATIAN

- What did you learn from *A New Diaspora*?
 - What impact do you believe surviving the Armentian genocide had on Annig as a person? As a grandmother?
 - What did you feel when you read about Sarah’s relationship with her grandmother?
 - What role do grandparents play in passing on a family’s culture?
-



“A GATEWAY TO JENNA”

BY RANA HEWEZI

- What did you learn from *A Gateway to Jenna*?
- What did you feel when you read about the death of Issam and how it affected the entire family, including Rana’s mother and Rana herself?
- How do names and language impact who we are?



"STRANGER IN MY OWN WORLD" BY ANTHONY MIELKE

- What did you learn from *Stranger in My Own World*?
- What did you feel when you read about Anthony meeting his Puerto Rican family for the first time?
- Why do you think Anthony's mother didn't tell him about his father?
- How do shame and family secrets affect one's personal and cultural identity?

"BLACK THUNDER: A MESWAKI STORY" BY DAWSON DAVENPORT

- What did you learn from *Black Thunder*?
- What did this story teach you about the experience of indigenous people in America?
- What did you feel when you read about Dawson's struggles with anger and addiction? His recovery?
- What has your experience been with crime? How does this impact your perspective?
- What does Dawson's hope for his own people and their future make you think about your people and your own future?



CONCLUDING QUESTIONS



- Do the issues raised in these stories affect your life? If so, in what ways?
- What perspectives or assumptions did the text disrupt for you?
- When you read the lines like *"I am afraid I might lose everything"* (Dawson) or *"Sharing my story may have consequences"* (Antonia), how did you feel? What risks have you taken by telling your truths to others?
- What did you learn from the glossaries?
- How did seeing the translated pieces affect you? What do you believe about the importance of people maintaining literacy in their native language?
- How do you think we might be able to see our differences as a strength?
- What do you think our state or our community could do as a result of what we have learned through these stories?
- What step might you take, whether big or small, as a result of what you have learned through these stories?
- What is a wish you have for our shared future?
- What do we hope for in the story of America?

WRITING ACTIVITY

Now that you've discussed the book and its stories, this activity will help add another dimension to thinking about the ideas they brought up.

WRITE A SHORT STORY ABOUT YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Everyone in the United States who isn't Native American came from somewhere, even your family—and even Native Americans were often forced to relocate around the country. Do you know the story of how your family came to the United States? To Iowa?

In this activity, take some time to write down what you know about your family story, even if it's only a little. Consider the following prompts as you write. Afterward, share your stories with your fellow readers.

- Who were the “characters”?
- What homeland did they leave, and why did they decide to make the journey?
- Were they “pushed out” by challenging circumstances or “pulled” to a better life? Or both?
- What obstacles did they overcome? Was anyone lost in the journey, or were there great tragedies?
- What hopes were in the hearts of the people who came?
- What area of the US did they first arrive in, and then how did they arrive in Iowa?
- What (if any) traditions or family celebrations remain in the way you live today?
- How has your ancestors' courage and fortitude to change their lives changed the circumstances of your life?
- What might your life look like today if they hadn't come?
- What do you hope for the future of your family in America?

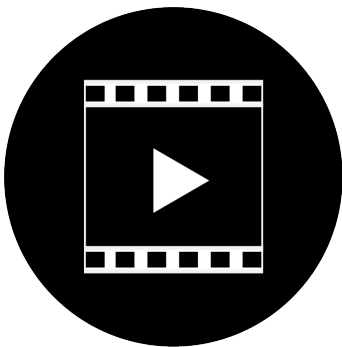
Thank you for engaging with these writers' stories.

We hope they've provided a jumping-off point for thinking about the diversity of stories in Iowa as well as your own experiences.



WANT MORE RESOURCES? HEAD TO WETHEINTERWOVEN.COM

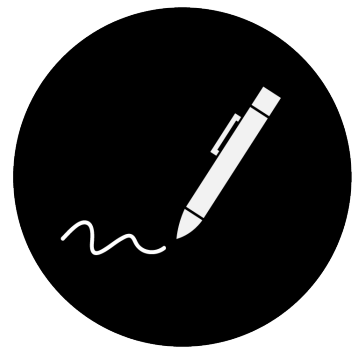
— THERE YOU WILL FIND —



VIDEO READING
SERIES



ADDITIONAL
READING GUIDES



PRINTABLE
WORKSHEETS