

Broken Body, Restored Identities: Empathy as a Healing Force in and through Ruth Behar's *Lucky Broken Girl*

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's seminal work "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" (1990), holds relevance today as it reminds us of the crucial role books play in children's lives. For children from marginalized groups it is imperative to see themselves represented. For children from dominant or well-represented groups, it is necessary to learn about and understand experiences beyond their own. When children see themselves in stories they feel like they belong and often gain courage to take on their own obstacles in life. At the same time, when children can see characters living in situations and conditions unlike their own their worldview extends beyond the mirror and allows them to take another person's perspective. As Katie Egan Cunningham (2015) reiterates, "When we see others' life experiences we gain inspiration and often build an ethic of understanding" (p. 7). We gain empathy.

In considering the questions about empathy presented in this call for proposals, Ruth Behar's Pura Belpré Award winning book *Lucky Broken Girl* (2017) comes to mind as a powerful story that addresses empathy twofold. Within the bounds of the story, young Ruthie Mizrahi finds the strength and courage to navigate her world as a 10-year-old girl who has just emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba and who spends a year bed-ridden after a car accident leaves her in a full-body cast. Much of this courage stems from the empathy and support she receives from those who surround her, but especially her group of diverse friends. Beyond the boundaries of the book itself, Behar's work fosters empathy when readers can feel Ruthie's pain(s) and challenges presented not only by her physical constraints but also by the various aspects of her racial, linguistic, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic identities. Using Dr. Bishop's work as a framework, this paper will examine *Lucky Broken Girl* as a critical work that both depicts and fosters empathy through Ruthie's painful yet triumphant story. It will address the questions: *How is empathy represented in or created by children's literature? How does children's literature encourage readers to empathize with those who have been marginalized?*