HERE I AM
Story by Patti Kim and Pictures by Sonia Sánchez

How do you make a new country feel like home? An old keepsake . . . a new friend . . . and a little time. This emotional story follows a young boy on his journey from the land that he loves to a land where he feels lost and alone. He struggles with the tremendous task of creating a new life for himself and finds joy in something that, at first, seemed like a loss.

About the Author

Patti Kim knows what it feels like to have to find one’s place in a new country. She left her beloved homeland behind when she moved from Korea to the United States at the age of four and was miserable until she started school and learned to speak English. There she made friends, found her niche, and eventually grew comfortable in her new home.

Ms. Kim wrote this story to help other immigrants realize they are not alone and to encourage them to find their own places where they, too, can say, “Here I am.”
Tips and Suggestions for Reading Wordless Picture Books

The key to “reading” illustrations is to look closely at the details, perspectives, repetitions, actions, and movements within them to discover their meaning and their message. As you read together, model “reading” the story in sequence, using expressive language and rich vocabulary. Explain the action by using as many detailed words as possible to describe what you see. Add sound effects for emphasis and voices for each character. Narrate the story as if there were words or captions under the pictures and ask questions that prompt use of reading strategies such as questioning, predicting, and inferring.

Always ask:
What does the picture tell you?
How does the picture help us know what happened?

BEFORE READING

• Discuss what it would be like to move to a new place where you didn’t know anyone, where the food was different, and where you didn’t speak the same language or have the same traditions. Ask: What would you do to make the new place your home? What would help you feel comfortable and confident? What do you think would be the most difficult challenges?

• Look at the front cover and have the reader describe the boy. Ask: Does he look like he knows where he is? Does he look confident? What in the picture makes you think that? (He looks confident and happy. He is alone in the city and appears to know where he is going.) Consider the title: What could it mean? (Sample response: Look at me – I am here; or here I am and I belong here.)

• Look at the title page: How is this different from the cover? (The boy looks confident on the cover and dreamily happy on the title page. On the cover, the letters of the title are filled in with city images, and on the title page they are plain. The cover illustration is very realistic, and the title page is more imaginative.) How does the title change its meaning between the two pages?

• For younger readers and/or readers who need more support, take a picture walk before reading. “Walk” through the story to get the gist by looking at the pictures, asking questions, and making predictions. Then go back a second time to read more closely.
While Reading

• Establish the sequence from left to right and from top to bottom by pointing to the pictures on the first page in order.

• Model analyzing the first five pictures. Establish the setting: Where is this taking place? (on an airplane, in an airport) What do you see in the picture that tells you that? Introduce the characters and the mood: How does the boy feel about leaving his homeland? (He is sad.) How does the family feel about entering the new country? (They are excited and happy to be starting a new life.) How can you tell? (Point out facial expressions, body language, and gestures.) What do the signs say? (They are gibberish.) What does that tell you about the way the family is feeling about coming to a new country? (It shows that the family could not read English, yet they were still able to find their way.)

• Discuss the pictures on the next page. Invite inference: In the last picture, why is the boy standing alone with his arms spread out? Why are the colors muted and dull? (He feels lost in the crowd coming through customs. He is blending into a place where nothing seems familiar. He wants to find his place, but cannot.)

• As you move through the book, point out the sequence, model the narration, and show how details such as colors establish the mood. Talk about what the red dot could be and what it represents. Connect the idea that it was in his pocket when he felt so lost at the airport; and, when he holds it, it brings him comfort.

• Focus on the magical red dot. The boy takes out the red dot, holds it up to the light, and it magically "grows" into something beautiful. Point out that the red object is now like a seed. It "sprouts" memories and happy thoughts. Why does the seed comfort the boy? (It comes from his home. It reminds him of home. It is something familiar in an unfamiliar land.)

• Focus on how the boy feels in school. Does he like his new school? (No.) How do you know? (his facial expressions and the sad picture where he is sitting outside alone) Be sure to point out the words on the board and conversation in the classroom. Why are all the words blah? (It shows he doesn’t understand and/or that he is disinterested in the conversation.) Why is the little girl laughing? (She might be laughing at him or at something that was said. Either way, he feels like an outsider, which only makes him feel worse.)

• Focus on how the boy changes everything. Why does he call to the little girl? (Perhaps he’s lonely and wants to make a friend, he might recognize her from school, he might still be feeling angry and just wanted to shout.) What happens after he drops the seed? (The girl picks it up and skips away.) What is his reaction to her taking it and leaving? How do you know? (He’s angry based on his facial expression and arm gestures.) Before turning the page, have the reader predict what the boy will do. Confirm the prediction by analyzing the next two pages.

• As you read on, note what happens to the boy as he interacts with his neighborhood for the first time. His facial expressions change as he forgets about the seed and his anger at having lost it. What happens when he sees the girl who took his seed? Carefully go through each frame by either narrating or having the child or student give a detailed description of what is happening in each picture. Ask: Why did he give the seed back to her? Why is the seed sprouting in his hand? What does that represent? (The sprouting seed represents the beginning of their friendship. He was able to give it back to her because he wanted to be her friend.) What does the planting of the seed on the next page symbolize? (the “growth” of their friendship as well as the boy finally “taking root” in the new country)

• The next two pages show the family returning to the park throughout the year. Focus on the physical changes in the park—but also the changes in the family and how they feel in their new home.

• The last page shows the boy on the bridge. How does the boy feel at the end of the book? What do you see in the picture that tells you that? (He is happy: his smile, the colors, his reflection, the sailboat) What does the bridge symbolize? (The journey from his old life to his new one.) How does the picture change the meaning of the title? (The picture shows that he has blended into his new life. He feels like he belongs.)
**AFTER READING**

- Reread the story asking the reader to narrate either alone or on alternate pages with you. Encourage dramatic expression in voice, elaboration, and word choice.

- Have the reader summarize the story by identifying the sequence of events (beginning, middle, end) and by using temporal words, such as first, next, later, and last, to explain the progression.

- Identify the plot elements and match each to the page that most clearly illustrates them. (Problem – he feels alienated in his new country, third double page spread. Climax – he gives the girl the seed and they become friends, fourth double page spread from the end. Resolution – he feels at home, last page.)

- Determine the theme (message) of the story. Ask: *What is the author saying about friendship?* (It can begin with a simple gesture.) *What is the author saying about facing new challenges?* (You need to have the courage to step out of your comfort zone and open your mind to new experiences.) *What is the author saying about culture and tradition?* (It is important to hold onto things that have meaning for you, but it’s also important to share those things while growing to appreciate the culture of others.)

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**Respond by Writing, Speaking and Listening**

**RESPOND BY WRITING**

- Create dialogue bubbles on sticky notes and attach them to the book where appropriate.
- Choose a favorite illustration and write a description of it. (Scribe for younger children).
- Write a sensory poem. Divide writing paper into six sections, one for each of the five senses plus one for emotions. Brainstorm words derived from the illustrations that fit each category. On separate paper, arrange and combine the words from each section into phrases that describe what happened in the story and combine those to create a poem.
- Find a first person account of a child’s immigration to the United States. Identify similarities and differences between what happened to the boy in the book and what happened to the child in the real-life account.
- Create a handbook that lists things to do to “get to know” a new place to live. Be sure to include both the activities and the personal interactions shown in the story.
- Write a paragraph describing what you would take with you if you were going to move to a new country. Explain why you would take the object and what it represents.

**RESPOND BY SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

- Retell the story incorporating gestures and dialogue.
- Record a narration of the story and use it to read the book with a friend or with parents.
- As one of the characters, give a first person account of how the family acclimated to the new country.
- Become a local reporter. Interview a friend or relative who immigrated to this country. Ask them about the challenges they faced, and how they were able to take the first step outside their comfort zone so that they could eventually say Here I am.
- Become a television expert. Research immigration in your part of the country and prepare a five-minute presentation for a newscast.

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**Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (Grades K-3)**

Anchor Standards for Reading Literature: 1, 2, 3 and 7
Anchor Standards for Writing: 1, 2, 3
Anchor Standards for Speaking/Listening: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6
Anchor Standards for Language: 3