How My Parents Learned to Eat
By Ina R. Friedman
Illustrated by Alan Say

If you are looking for a book to introduce students to multicultural families or acceptance of different types of families, *How My Parents Learned to Eat*, is a great place to start.

This short story by Ina R. Friedman is narrated by a young multi racial girl. The story tells of how she became
comfortable eating with both fork and chopsticks and being a part of a modern family without giving up the traditions of her families past. She tells the story of how her parents John who was an American Sailor and Aiko who was Japanese meet and how they overcame cultural bias and differences. One of the things the young couple worried about was there ability to use the utensils required to eat in a different culture. Aiko was as unfamiliar with forks and knives as John was with chopsticks. This historical fiction does a wonderful job of pointing out some of the differences between cultures while embracing the fact that humans all have the same emotions and fears regardless of race or cultural background.

How to use this story in the classroom:

You might want to begin a lesson on How my parent learned to eat by asking questions to access prior knowledge. Have you ever visited a different country? Does anyone have parents or ancestors from different countries or cultures?

Students can use dictionaries to find out the meaning of words in the story that they may not be familiar with.

Students may bring in items from home that are from different cultures or countries to share with class.

Have students complete a Venn Diagram comparing traditions in Japan with traditions in America.
About the Author:

The author of How My Parent Learned to Eat, stumbled across the idea accidentally. "My “aha” moment came when I had lunch at the home of a Japanese friend who is married to an American. Her three year old used chopsticks to eat her rice, without dropping a grain. Then she picked up a spoon and neatly ate her jello. Wouldn’t it be fun to write a book about grown-ups having to learn to use each other’s eating utensils, I wondered. The author of How My Parent Learned to Eat, stumbled across the idea accidentally."

(Sanders, 2009) Ms. Freidman has also written other books for children and young adults that
address different cultures. She emphasizes that if you are going to write about a culture different from their own they need to do lots of research to ensure the story is accurate.

**About the Illustrator:**

The illustrator of the book is Allen Say. Allen Say used beautiful watercolors to portray the characters in Ms. Friedman's short story. Mr. Say was born in Japan and always dreamed of being a cartoonist. He studied under his favorite Japanese cartoonist Noro Shinpei. (Amazon, 2015)

Works cited:


[http://www.inarfriedman.net/](http://www.inarfriedman.net/)