

Cultural Literacy Studies

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At an annual series of talks on current books, titled “Books and Coffee” and held at Purdue University in 2012 each Thursday from February 2 to February 23, Carolyn Johnson, the director of the Diversity Resource Office, made the point that what she called “cultural literacy” was required of readers who would make sense of the various viewpoints represented in the book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot, a white woman who wrote about the unacknowledged use of a black woman’s DNA for medical research.

Due to a previous publication commitments, we are not able to publish Carolyn Johnson’s talk, but we present here revised versions of three other talks in the series, which also celebrate the theme of cultural diversity. The first article about the book *Caleb’s Crossing*, which was discussed during the 2012 series by Professor Kris Bross. It argues that certain acts of historical imagination are necessary for readers to register what it once meant for non-white person to attend Harvard University. The second article is based on my humorous discussion of world-wide responses to Stieg Larsson’s best-selling book *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (龍紋身的女孩). The audience laughed throughout and enjoyed selections from the music of Elvis Presley that were played on cue with the project of the PowerPoint slides. (Readers of *FWLS* can hum along as they suck the sweets of this article.) The third article we present is by Professor Jennifer Freeman-Marshall, who uses an analysis based on cultural literacy to discuss the book *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky* by Heidi W. Durrow. Readers will find this important concept defined in each context, whether the culture of tattoos or ethnic divisions.