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WOW REVIEW

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VOLUME XII, ISSUE 4

SUMMER 2021
A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

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WOW Review: Volume XIII Issue 4

Summer 2021
A Climate of Change

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Introduction and Editors' Note

Change, be it environmental, circumstantial, or personal, is always present. While change is often difficult, it creates tension that precipitates growth and creates opportunities for new, unexpected directions. The reviews in this issue focus on people and places undergoing external and internal change, offering characters new insights and direction.

Two of the stories take place in vibrant U.S. neighborhoods humming with life. In *Everything Naomi Loved* the neighborhood is being gentrified. As a result, a favorite tree is felled, neighbors move because their buildings are sold, and businesses close to make way for luxury apartments. As each part of their neighborhood changes, Naomi and Mr. Ray document those changes on a mural they are painting, until the mural itself is torn down. But Naomi holds onto her past story by taking a piece of the mural with her as she moves to a new home. In *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, the protagonist Merci lives with her mother, next to her grandparents and her aunt, so has a rich extended family life. But it takes some middle school drama for her to realize just how rich and wonderful that family life is.

Three of the stories take place in war zones. *Dancing Hands*, the picturebook biography of Venezuelan pianist Teresa Carreño, narrates the journey of the young girl and her family who escaped conflict in their home country only to encounter the United States Civil War. Invited to play for President Lincoln who had lost his son, Teresa used music to make a change for Lincoln and his grieving family. As she became world-renowned, she continued to use her music and influence to work for change for women. In another biography, *Sachiko* tells the story of a young girl's survival after the Nagasaki atomic bomb blast in 1945 Japan and how she finally decided to use her life experience to work for peace in the middle of conflict. In the Spanish language picturebook *La noche mas noche* from Mexico, a young boy and his parents attempt to cross a sea in a fishing boat, leaving all behind. Throughout the narrative readers have a window into the boy's thoughts as he tries to process all that is changing around him.

Several of the titles are gripping stories of internal change in which the illustrations reflect the growth of the characters. In *Each Kindness*, Maya arrives in a new U.S. school, seeking to make friends. Told from the perspective of Chloe, one of her classmates, the story focuses on her life-changing realization that she has lost the opportunity to reach out to Maya in kindness. Only after Maya moves away does Cloe understand the ripple effect of her unkind acts. In *Sulwe*, skin tones are the struggle. When she is called names, a young Black girl wishes she could exchange her darker skin for a lighter shade. A star ("Sulwe" in a Kenyan language) takes her on a journey exploring the story of two sisters, Night and Day. Just like Night, Sulwe realizes that the world needs all shades of light and dark in order to thrive.

Two of the titles take place in the Philippines. In *Everlasting Nora*, the young protagonist lives with her mother in Manila's oldest cemetery. Nora has to grow up fast when her mother disappears, and the girl has to face the consequences of her mother's poor choices. However, Nora realizes she is not alone when her community of neighbors among the tombs help her find her mother and bring her home. President Duterte's war on drugs is the background for *Patron Saints of Nothing*. When his pen pal cousin is killed, Jay heads to the Philippines to uncover the truth about Jun, and in the process begins to appreciate the culture of his father.

This is the final issue in which Prisca Martens is a co-editor. Thank you, Prisca, for all of your work on WOW Review! And welcome to María Acevedo-Aquino, the incoming co-editor.

Upcoming calls:

Volume 14, Issue 2 – Theme: STEM titles (Winter 2022) – Submission deadline: November 15, 2021. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural books with subjects that are related to STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

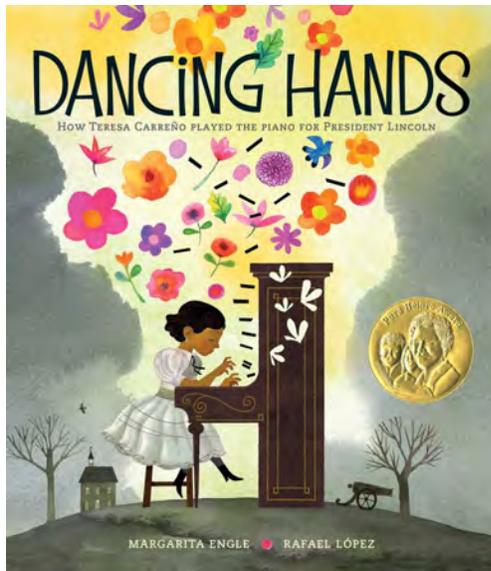
Volume 14, Issue 3 – Theme: Open (Spring 2022) – Submission deadline: February 15, 2022. The editors welcome reviews of any children’s or YA book that highlights intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

Susan Corapi and Prisca Martens, Co-Editors

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Dancing Hands: How Teresa Carreño Played the Piano for President Lincoln

Written by Margarita Engle

Illustrated by Rafael López

Atheneum, 2019, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1-4814-8740-5

This picturebook recounts Maria Teresa Carreño’s historic visit to the White House to play the piano for Abraham Lincoln. Engle carefully crafts a story of the tiny but fierce musical prodigy that hums in a waltz of symmetry and contradiction to Rafael López’s carefully crafted mixed media illustrations. On the cover Teresa Carreño is depicted playing a

piano. Her hands are dancing across the piano and the dark keys of the piano float into the sky along with flowers and sunshine. An aura of her tropical homeland of Venezuela surrounds and protects her as the dark gray tones of the South American revolutionary war and the unknown fog of emigration to the United States encroach upon the lighter tones of her childhood innocence. Within this contrast, Teresa’s figure is framed—a Latina in a white dress bowing her head in concentration as she plays the piano. López’s art juxtaposes how the complexities of Carreño’s journey as a childhood prodigy, immigrant, and international figure can show us how music reconciles the dark and light sides of grief, war, and change.

Although the book is written for upper elementary students, the themes of loss, isolation, and gender discrimination have far-reaching implications for teenage and adult audiences. The crisp illustrations carefully beg the pondering of deep questions: How is music a universal language and how do we use music to connect with others, especially those who are unfamiliar? How do we use our own talents to assert our self-value and overcome the challenges of life? How can we use our passion to challenge the prejudices of the dominant society that may be applied to us and used to question our rightful place in society?

For me, as a Venezuelan-American, this book is life-changing. As a young girl, I knew of Teresa Carreño’s legacy. When my mother and I lived in Caracas, Venezuela (Maria Teresa’s birthplace), we would trek along la Avenida Paseo Colón and pause at the Teresa Carreño Cultural Complex. We would sit on a bench along the opposite street or within its gardens and I would listen to my mother tell stories of this great woman, whose music still to this day moves Venezuelans with her melodies as a symbol of national pride. My mother reminded me, as does Engle’s author’s note at the end of the book, that despite her natural ability to woo international audiences, she still had to overcome the stigma of being a free, entrepreneurial woman who “divorced three times before finding happiness with her fourth husband”. Thus, Teresa Carreño’s story is one that serves to teach girls how important the fierce determination of the heart is in moving mountains and nations and paving the dreams of girls everywhere who are inspired by her resilience and

fortitude. Teresa Carreño was not dubbed Le Leona (The Lioness) for kowtowing to dominant ideas of gender roles in her time.

Dancing Hands: How Teresa Carreño Played the Piano for President Lincoln can be paired with other books that explore music as a focal point for identity, growth, and the shattering of dominant perceptions of gender such as *Drum Dream Girl* (Margarita Engle & Rafael López, 2015); *Miguel and the Grand Harmony* (Matt de la Peña & Ana Ramirez, 2017); *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* (Katheryn Russell-Brown & Frank Morrison, 2014); and *Trombone Shorty* (Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews & Bryan Collier, 2015).

Born in Los Angeles, Cuban American author Margarita Engle is an award-winning writer, holding accolades such as a Newberry honor, Pura Belpré, Golden Kite, Walter, Jane Addams, and NSK Neustadt. She also served as the 2017-2019 Young People’s Poet Laureate. Most of her books depict influential Latin American figures across international history.

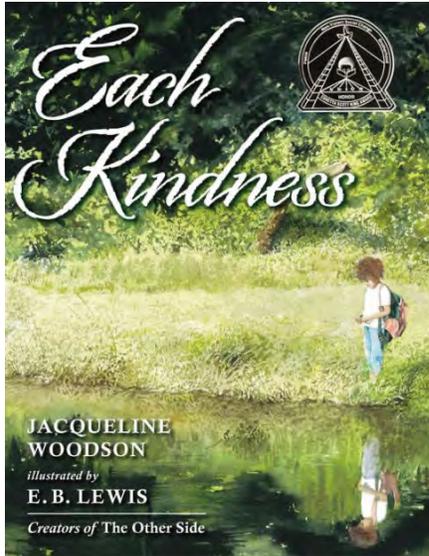
Illustrator Rafael López was born in Mexico City and lives in San Diego. His legacy is defined by his art. He is an internationally recognized illustrator holding multiple honors including the 2017 Tomás Rivera Children’s Book Award, two Américas Book Awards, and three Pura Belpré honors. Among other diverse projects, his Urban Art Trail Movement seeks to bring diverse communities together through the creation of large-scale murals that can be found across shared communal spaces such as children’s hospitals, public schools, and under freeways. He also created two official posters for the Obama presidential campaign in the 2008 and 2012 in an attempt to secure the Latinx vote.

Francis Maffi-Mahmood, Texas Woman’s University

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Each Kindness

Written by Jacqueline Woodson

Illustrated by E.B. Lewis

Penguin, 2012, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-0399246524

Jaqueline Woodson tells a story of what it is like to be a new student at school and not have friends because you look, act, and live differently than your classmates. Maya is a new girl at a school in the U.S. who is not liked by her classmates. She wears hand-me-down clothes and plays with old toys such as jacks and jump ropes. Chloe, the narrator of the story, along with the other students in the class, never give Maya a chance because she is different from them. Each day Maya comes to school and tries to

make friends, but her classmates ignore her, not even making eye contact. As the story continues Chloe begins to question her decision to treat Maya as an outcast.

Then one day Maya does not come to school. The teacher discusses kindness with the class and performs a demonstration with a pebble and a bowl of water. As she drops the pebble into the water, she points out the ripples and connects those to kindness. One small act of kindness will continue to spread just like the ripples in the water. At this point Chloe's guilt and regret with how Maya has been treated become clear. Chloe decides that when Maya returns, she will be kind and reach out to her. But day after day Maya's seat remains empty. Then one day the teacher informs the class that Maya will not be coming back because her family moved away. Chloe is filled with regret and sadness about the kindness she had not shown and thinks of all the things she wishes she had said to Maya. The watercolor illustrations are magnificently done by E.B. Lewis and fill each page of the book. Lewis uses muted colors and large brush strokes to create life-like works of art on each page of the story.

This story provides a lesson to children about bullying, friendship, acceptance, and kindness. Woodson wrote the story with realistic interactions between Maya and Chloe to which students can relate. Students also see themselves in the story due to the diverse children Lewis depicts in the beautiful illustrations.

Teachers would be able to teach several different lessons using this story, including accepting differences, kindness, and acceptance. Other books on kindness and acceptance that pair well with *Each Kindness* are *The Day You Begin* (Jacqueline Woodson & Rafael López, 2018) and *The Invisible Boy* (Trudy Ludwig & Patrice Barton, 2013).

Jaqueline Woodson was born on February 12, 1963, in Columbus Ohio. Her youth was split between South Carolina and Brooklyn. She writes in a style that explores

boundaries—social, economic, physical, sexual, and racial. She has won many awards for her works throughout the years including a Coretta Scott King, Newbery Honor, and a Langston Hughes medal. She is also the recipient of the international Hans Christian Andersen and Astrid Lindgren awards.

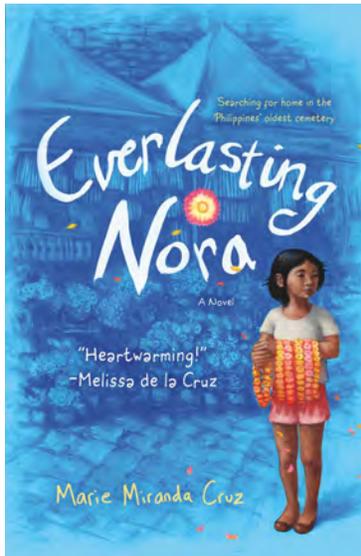
E.B. Lewis showed artistic talent even as a young child. His preferred medium is watercolor, and he has illustrated over 70 books. His works have won numerous awards, including the Orbis Pictus Award, Coretta Scott King, and Caldecott Honor. Lewis currently lives in New Jersey.

Lindsey Escamilla, Texas Woman's University

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Everlasting Nora

Written by Marie Miranda Cruz

Starscape, 2018, 287 pp

ISBN: 978-0-7653-9459-0

Nora and her mother take up residence in a mausoleum in Manila’s North Cemetery in the Philippines after they lose Nora’s father in a devastating fire. They live day to day with money they earn from Nora’s flower garlands and doing laundry service. 12-year-old Nora longs to go back to school and live in a real home. She meets Jojo, who was born in the cemetery and lives with his Lola. Nora resists becoming friends with Jojo but she is forced to rely on him when her life is turned upside down when her mother goes missing. Told in first person

from Nora’s present-day perspective, the story describes Nora following clues that uncover her mother’s gambling and loans from unsavory people. Nora is left to rely on help from the people who live with her in the cemetery and on friends like Jojo whom she had feared. She stands up to violent thugs and faces her fears in her pursuit to bring her mother home. Nora learns that home may come in the most unlikely of places and that family is not always the people to whom you are related by blood.

The setting of *Everlasting Nora* in the North Cemetery in Manila parallels real life for many poverty-stricken people in Manila. Many families have lived in the cemetery for generations. Bayanihan, the Filipino essence of community and the spirit of unity and cooperation which is at the heart of Filipino culture, is something that Cruz wanted to ensure was represented in the story. When Nora tangles with the thug that her mother was last seen with, she finds that her neighbors at the cemetery are there to help her.

Cruz’s research for the story is reflected in the authentic descriptions of “squatter life” that comes across through details of the tombs and mausoleums people live in and their odd jobs and work to make a day’s wage and provide food. Cruz lived in the Philippines as a child, and while she feels that her memories from that time are fairly accurate, she “had to concede to the fact that many things have changed in the Philippines during that time” and so she used other means to make sure that the story maintained authentic representations of the culture, people, and customs of the country (Cruz, personal communication). She spent many hours researching the life of people who live in the cemetery and relied on “sensitivity readers,” one of whom resided in the Philippines.

Cruz sees her book as both a window and a mirror for her audience. She wanted “to tell a story from a perspective that is rarely seen in children’s literature and from a setting many people, kids and adults, have never seen” but she also wanted to make sure that “Filipinos all over the world would be able to see themselves in a story, to show them that Filipino stories are important.” She

accomplishes this with witty storytelling on the subject of people living in poverty in the cemeteries while maintaining the authenticity of important cultural customs. She interweaves Tagalog throughout the book in an easy flowing manner that feels natural to the story.

One text that would pair well with *Everlasting Nora* is *The Bridge Home* by Padma Venkatraman (2019) which is set in India. While representing different cultures, both books provide authentic representations of children living in poverty and express the resilience of children and their will for survival. Another text that would pair well is *The Island at the End of Everything* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave (2017) which describes the Filipino culture in an authentic way for the times represented. Through journeys in search of their mothers, the strength and determination of the characters is evident, along with their growth in their ideas of home and sense of belonging in a place least expected.

Marie Miranda Cruz was born in the Philippines and grew up there and in the United States while her father was in the United States Navy. She lives in Los Angeles with her family. For more information, visit her website.

Jessica Horton, University of Arizona

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Everything Naomi Loved

Written by Katie Yamasaki and Ian Lendler

Illustrated by Katie Yamasaki

Norton Young Readers, 2020, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-1-324-00491-2

Everything Naomi Loved invites the reader/viewer into a neighborhood community experiencing change brought on by gentrification in a U.S. city. We accompany Naomi as she says goodbye to her friends and neighbors one by one when their homes and businesses are sold, torn down, and replaced with buildings advertising “luxury living.”

The first pages provide insight into Naomi’s world before gentrification begins. Readers are

immediately invited into her community through the illustration on the first page, a bright image of Naomi smiling, flanked by a rainbow, looking out her window towards the street. The next page, a double-page spread, shows the reader her view of a neighborhood as a community that is “alive” (p. 2). Apartment buildings and businesses are side-by-side with cars driving by, bicyclists sharing the road, and a sidewalk filled with pedestrians and street vendors. Balloons inch toward the sky. The colors are warm and vibrant; the sky is a happy yellow. Yamasaki’s illustrations are beautifully rendered to reflect the look and feel of murals with bright colors and large images of meaningful people, buildings, and objects.

Readers learn about all the things Naomi loves: the beautiful tree near her apartment building, the creation of images with sidewalk chalk, the local business owners, and most of all her friend, Ada. Then Naomi learns that a new building is coming, most likely to replace something that will be torn down. It ends up that “something” is Naomi and Ada’s beloved tree. Mister Ray, one of the local business owners, offers to paint a mural for them to remember it. He says what becomes a repeated mantra throughout the text, “Things change” (p. 13). He explains that, where he is from, murals are painted in remembrance of what has been lost.

As Naomi’s neighborhood continues to be gentrified, more and more things are added to the mural, including Ada, whose family must move away after their apartment building is sold. Finally, the story reaches its climax when Mister Ray must close his business. Naomi and Mister Ray paint a mural of each other to say goodbye. The book ends as Naomi’s family finally must move. After the mural wall is torn down to make space for more new luxury apartments, she keeps a piece to take with her to her new neighborhood. The book ends on a hopeful note that “a new world will grow” (p. 36) in Naomi’s new home.

Everything Naomi Loved does not shy away from the changes, often unwanted, that gentrification brings, changes which are often invisible to those who move into a newly gentrified space. The illustrations and text sensitively honor what is lost because of gentrification—actual communities and relationships, not to mention homes and businesses—while still maintaining a sense of hope as displaced people start over in new spaces. This makes the book appropriate for all ages, for those experiencing gentrification in their own neighborhoods and for those who may benefit from or are uninformed about gentrification. It would be a worthwhile introduction to a social science unit focused on housing and economic inequality, redlining, structural racism, urban blight, voting rights and representation, and other issues related to gentrification.

Texts that would pair well with *Everything Naomi Loved* include *Africville* by Shauntay Grant and Eva Campbell (2018), *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting and Ron Himler (1993), *This Side of Home* (2017) by Renée Watson (2017), and *Halsey Street* by Naima Coster (2018). Another pairing is the article “They Just Moved into an Austin Neighborhood. Now They Want to End One of Its Traditions” (<https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/austin-car-clubs-gentrification/>) by Peter Holley (2021).

Co-author and illustrator Katie Yamasaki is a native of Detroit and has taught Spanish both there and New York City. She is a muralist, having come to recognize the power of symbols after 9/11. Her grandfather was chief architect of the Twin Towers and experiencing the way those buildings were used as symbols for the pro-war movement caused her to think about the power artists have to create community symbols. This influence is clearly seen in *Everything Naomi Loved* with Mister Ray’s, and later his and Naomi’s, murals containing representations of the people who gave Naomi’s neighborhood its vitality and who were lost to gentrification. Readers understand the importance the murals have as symbols to Naomi’s community. More information on Katie Yamasaki is found at her website (<https://www.katieyamasaki.com/>).

Co-author Ian Lendler is an award-winning writer of several books who lives in the San Francisco Bay area. For more information, visit his website (<https://ianlendler.com/>).

Amy Burke, Texas Woman’s University

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Merci Suárez Changes Gears

Written by Meg Medina

Candlewick, 2018, 355 pp

ISBN: 978-0-7636-9049-6

Merci Suárez is a sixth-grade student in South Florida but most importantly is a member of the very tight and proud Suárez family, a Cuban-American family who lives together on the same street in three little houses. Merci lives with her mother, papi, and brother Roli. Her Tía Inés and twin cousins live in one of the casitas and her Lolo (grandfather) and Abuela (grandmother) live in the other casita. They go from house to house as if each were their very own, sharing food, games of

dominoes, and other rich day-to-day experiences.

Merci seems comfortable or even passionate about most of her life at home with the exception of watching her twin cousins. They are terrors and she does not like the responsibility. She realizes, though, as she goes to a new private school, that maybe she should not be so proud of her casita. Merci has been given this extra responsibility of babysitting the twins because her beloved Lolo is battling Alzheimer's. Merci is also unable to try out for a sport that she loves because of this responsibility. It is clear throughout the novel that family comes first and there is no arguing with that. The bond and love among the family is untouchable and representative of what familia means to so many Latinx people.

The story takes place as Merci begins attending Seaward, a private school, where she is one of the few students with a scholarship and so is not of the same socio-economic status as most students. Seaward has strong academics which is very important to her parents but as a sixth grader, not so important to Merci. The socioeconomic status of the other students forces her to feel "less than" and sometimes lie or want to cover up her life. She feels as though she needs to compete with other students when they talk about vacations and weekend fun. By the end of the book, she realizes the value of all that she has right on her street and within the casitas.

There are opportunities throughout the book for Latinx girls to connect with the feelings and experiences of Merci. Though they might not be from the same Spanish-speaking Cuban culture and connect to the food at El Caribe, a store where her aunt works, they can find many other connections to validate their experiences and emotions. Merci recognizes throughout the story that others will be given the benefit of the doubt before she is and sharing her feelings about this can help students of color realize they are not alone in similar situations. Merci wishes that she had money and a new bike like several of the girls

but her family does not have the money, so she has to work and save. This again is a validation in the story that can serve students as they go to school among privileged students with whom they compare themselves. Lastly, Merci has an unbelievable bond with Lolo and she shares the pain she feels as Alzheimer's affects him, their relationship, and the entire family. Her love for him and the pain she feels is also something that students can feel. Whether that pain is because they left their grandfather on the other side of the border or because he has passed away, it demonstrates that it is acceptable to grieve as people and situations in life change.

Merci Suárez Changes Gears can be paired with other books written for young adolescents and particularly the Latinx community such as *The House on Mango Street* (Sandra Cisneros, 1991) in which another young Latinx girl is creating who she is and who she will be. Another possible pair is *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Muñoz Ryan, 2002) in which Esperanza shares the feelings from a young Latinx perspective of living in a new country and grieving. These books can help young ladies who are underrepresented in literature across the United States feel empowered.

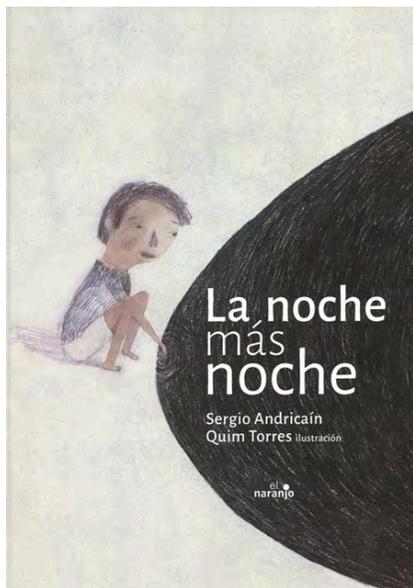
Meg Medina is a first-generation Cuban American. She grew up in New York with her mother and sister, speaking both English and Spanish in her home but mostly Spanish with extended family. She has won many awards, including the Newbery Medal for this book. She continues Merci's story in *Merci Suárez Can't Dance* (2021). Meg's books are fiction but reflect different experiences that Meg has lived and seen. For more information, visit her website (<https://megmedina.com/>).

Talle Gómez, Texas A&M Commerce

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La noche más noche

Written by Sergio Andricaín

Illustrated by Quim Torres

Ediciones El Naranjo, 2017, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-6078442423, Spanish edition

The main character hears his parents whispering to hide the fact that they must leave home because of hardships. Soon, his maternal grandmother arrives to join in the private conversation. His father and then his mother tell him about a journey they must take, leaving their home. It is a dark night when he and his parents cross the sea like many other migrants. They travel in his father's fishing boat and face difficulties as they sail the seas. They arrive but unfortunately, like many journeys traveled before this one, not all

family members survive.

La noche más noche touches on the social world crisis of immigration and serves as a tribute to the hundreds of thousands of families who have left behind their homes and traveled in search of a hopeful future. The book is dedicated “A todos los que han dejado atrás su país guiados por la brújula de la esperanza/For those that have left home guided only by the compass of hope.” The book is only available in Spanish and is published in Mexico. The author was inspired to write this book as he traveled by boat and glanced out into the massive sea. He remembered how scared he felt even though he was safe on his boat. He could not imagine all the migrants who travel the lonely, dangerous, dark, and never-ending sea. He wrote this book for all those migrants that take this journey and travel with hope in their hearts.

The beautiful illustrations and text do an amazing job describing the struggle of a child trying to process what is entailed in embarking on this lifetime journey. Readers connect to the main character through the first-person narration as he walks them through his experiences. The front cover depicts the main character by himself. The front endpapers have a single illustration of a boat on blank blue and cream-colored papers. The back endpapers are the same illustration except instead of blue, they are black and cream-colored papers. All of the other illustrations fill the page spread, inviting readers into the main character's life and journey. The minimal color choice and visual art media texture also aids in this. Quim Torres does not disclose the art materials used for this book, however, it looks like he utilized charcoal, color pastels, color pencils and ink.

La noche más noche can be paired with books about personal immigration journeys involving hope for a better life, escaping a war zone, and other reasons that make people willing to leave their homes. These books include *La Frontera: El viaje con Papá/ My Journey with Papá*, by Deborah Mills (2018) and *A Story like the Wind* by Gill Lewis (2017).

This book can also be paired with books like *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh (2013) and *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna (2016).

The author, Sergio Andricaín, was born in 1959 in Havana, Cuba. He has published over 19 picturebooks and more than 10 research studies. Several of his books were selected for the Tejas Star List in 2020-2021. He started a nonprofit called Fundación Cuatrogatos with Antonio Orlando Rodríguez in Miami, Florida. The foundation promotes educational projects, cultural projects, and Spanish-language reading. He has been the director of his nonprofit since 2012 and currently resides in Miami, Florida. For more information see Sergio's blog (<https://sergioandricain.wordpress.com/2020/09/22/de-libros-y-de-amigos/>); also see the foundation's webpage (<https://www.cuatrogatos.org/donaciones.php?lang=en>).

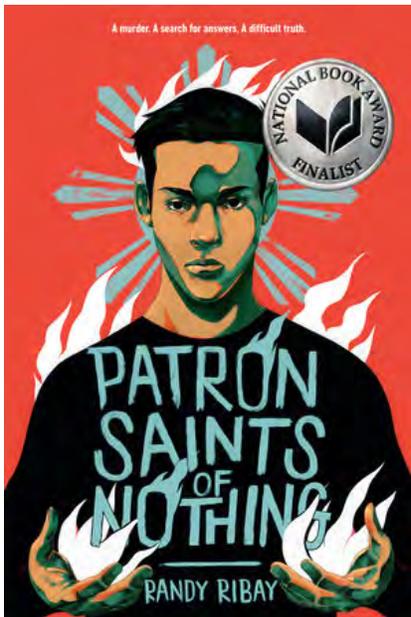
Award-winning illustrator Quim Torres was born in Castellsera, Spain and resides in Barcelona. He has illustrated several picturebooks. He studied Gestalt psychology and art therapy and teaches self-discovery art workshops. For more information, see his webpage (<https://quimtorres.com/About-Quim>); see also his publisher's webpage (<https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Quim-Torres/184132851#:~:text=Quim%20Torres%20is%20an%20award,and%20author%20based%20in%20Barcelona>).

Nallely Aguayo, University of Arizona

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The Patron Saints of Nothing

Written by Randy Ribay
Kokila, 2019, 318 pp
ISBN: 978-0525554912

Jay Reguero at first seems to be a typical American high school senior, relieved that he is accepted into the University of Michigan. The reader quickly learns that Jay is a half Filipino, half Caucasian American, born in the Philippines, but living in the United States since he was one-year-old. Though he has visited the Philippines, he does not see himself as anything other than American, as his upbringing taught him very little about his Filipino heritage. One strong tie to the Philippines is his cousin, Jun, the same age as Jay. For years Jay and Jun wrote letters back and forth, but for

reasons that Jay seems unable to articulate, he stopped writing to Jun about four years prior to the beginning of the story.

The plot really gets going when Jay comes home from school and is told that Jun was shot dead by police in the Philippines for being a drug dealer. Jay had known that Jun had been thrown out of the house by his uncle at age 14, but the news that Jun had become a drug dealer? Inconceivable. To make matters worse, no one in Jun’s family will talk about it. After receiving a mysterious picture of Jun on Instagram, along with a message asking if he was Jun’s cousin, Jay decides that he must go to the Philippines to find out the truth. The story that follows is one in which Jay discovers what is currently happening in the war on drugs in the Philippines. Coinciding with this is his realization of how little he knows about his Filipino heritage and the richness that it could add to his life.

Author Randy Ribay shares the same heritage as his protagonist, having also been born in Manila, the child of a Caucasian American mother and a Filipino father, giving this story high cultural authenticity. The book is dedicated to “the hyphenated,” which is a term that Ribay uses to describe people whose heritage is of two cultures. The story is told through Jay’s lens, which, as a typical American teenager, has a limited Filipino perspective. He is shocked at how most Filipinos support the way in which President Duterte of the Philippines has dealt and continues to deal with the country’s drug problem. Jay is horrified that his family supports Duterte, even though one of their own was killed (murdered, in his eyes) in the Filipino war on drugs.

Another topic genuinely depicted is the description of the poverty that Jay sees in

Manila, but this is balanced by a representation of people who are middle and upper middle class. Given that a large portion of the Philippine population is Catholic, the story shows a realistic portrayal of that aspect of Filipino culture, as Jay's family are loyal Catholics. The title of the book also reflects this cultural connection.

The cover art of *The Patron Saints of Nothing*, by Jor-Ros, prominently displays a teenage Filipino male with white flames coming from his hands, shoulders, and head. In an interview, Randy Ribay states that while he was growing up, he never saw artwork in or on the cover of a book that showed a Filipino and he was clearly pleased with the cover for this book.

The Patron Saints of Nothing could easily be paired with books that address drug use. *DUTERTE VS SHABU 2017: The Philippine War on Drugs*, by James Bergson (2017), is a non-fiction report that analyzes what has happened in the Philippines in regard to President Duterte's aggressive response to drug problems. This report would give readers solid factual background information that Jay in *The Patron Saints of Nothing* is not privy to. The young adult novel *My Fate According to the Butterfly* by Gail Villanueva (2019) would also pair well with *The Patron Saints of Nothing*. The story is set in present-day Manila with a young main character whose life is impacted by drug use, in this case that of a parent. Another book pairing is *Bone Talk* by Candy Gourlay (2018), a coming-of-age story set in the Philippine province of Bontoc in 1899. It contains valuable historical information that brings to light how the present-day culture of the Philippines has been shaped by the events of the past, in particular the invasion by the U.S.

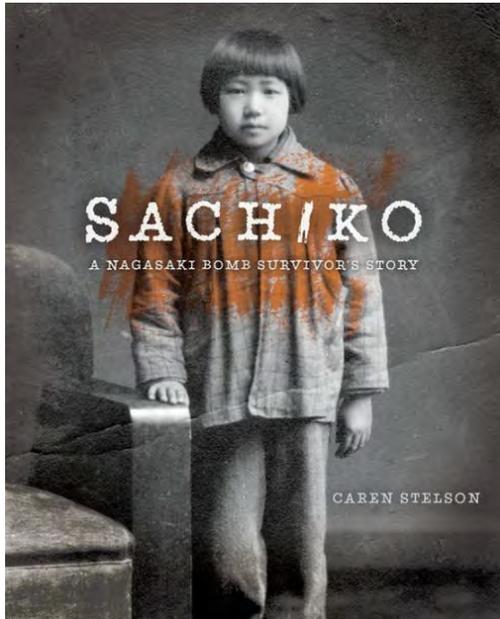
The Patron Saints of Nothing is an outstanding young adult book nominated for many awards, ultimately winning the 2019 Freeman book award (High School), and the 2019 Young Adult Golden Poppy award. In addition, it is listed on nine "Best Books" lists, and nine State and Provincial Reading lists. Randy Ribay is also the author of *After the Shot Drops* (2018), and *An Infinite Number of Parallel Universes* (2015). He currently teaches English, and lives in the San Francisco Bay area.

Sherri Carmichael, University of Arizona

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Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story

Written by Caren Stelson
Carolrhoda, 2016, 144 pp
ISBN: 978-1-4677-8903-5

Sachiko Yasui was playing house with four other young children on a sunny August morning in Japan, patting mud into rice balls and seasoning them with grass. The air raid siren was silent; cicadas sang. And then—she tilted her head. Was that an airplane engine, whining above the clouds? It came suddenly: pikadon. “A brilliant light” + “boom”. It was the genshi bakudan—the atomic bomb. Sachiko was only 900 meters from the hypocenter.

The bomb that signaled the end of World War II was only the start of the struggle for Sachiko and her surviving family. Organized chronologically and told in the third person, this powerful book relates the story of Sachiko’s life from that day onward. Readers will learn not only about the immediate aftermath of the Nagasaki bombing, but the lifelong effects that the radiation and trauma had on Sachiko and other hibakusha—those who survived the atomic bomb. The narration brings readers into Sachiko’s story with powerful immediacy, bearing witness to the horrific realities and repercussions of that day and to the resilience of Sachiko and other hibakusha like her—like the camphor trees that blossomed again the year after bomb, despite their scars.

The book begins with an epigraph from Sachiko Yasui herself: “What happened to me must never happen to you.” After hearing Sachiko speak at a Twin Cities 60th anniversary commemoration, Minneapolis-based author Caren Stelson reached out and began an extensive five-year interview process with Sachiko. Stelson also worked with the Saint Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee in this process. Translators Dr. Takayuki Miyanishi in Nagasaki and Keiko Kawakami in Minnesota helped her understand not only the Japanese language, but important aspects of Japanese culture, such as the symbolic strength of camphor trees in Sachiko’s story.

Stelson traveled to Nagasaki multiple times to interview Sachiko, and while there she spoke with experts, studied the city’s history and culture, and visited memorial and educational sites. In 2012, Stelson’s work resulted in a scholarship to travel to Hiroshima and participate in the Hiroshima City University’s week-long peace symposium. Although Stelson had previously written about aspects of WWII, she immersed herself in literature about the War in the Pacific from various perspectives. Stelson also researched extensively on Martin Luther King, Jr., Helen Keller, and Gandhi when Sachiko cited them as life-altering influences.

With this book, Stelson offers a thoroughly researched, culturally sensitive, and beautifully rendered portrait of Sachiko’s life and thoughts as related by the survivor herself. Without flinching from the hard truths of the atomic bomb and its aftermath, Sachiko offers an illuminating tale of the journey from devastation to peace and purpose.

Stelson’s book has garnered considerable praise since its publication in 2016, including the 2017 Robert F. Sibert Honor Award, the 2017 Orbis Pictus Award for Nonfiction, and the 2016 Cybils Award for Middle Grade Non-Fiction. The narrative structure of *Sachiko* lends a sense of immediacy and emotional impact for readers, helping them developing empathy and engage with diverse global perspectives. The inclusion of factual “inserts” about the topic at hand—related to Japanese history or culture, American perspectives, or WWII generally—offer important context for young readers. The photos throughout put faces to the names in Sachiko’s story, and a reality to the atomic devastation she describes. The end of the book includes an Author’s Note with some information about Stelson’s process, a Yasui family tree, and a glossary of Japanese words with Japanese characters, phonetic pronunciations, and Romanized spellings help English readers better understand unfamiliar content and its significance. A section with further notes on the book’s factual inserts is also included, as are acknowledgments from the author, a bibliography, a thorough list of other useful resources, and an index.

One text focusing on the effects of the atomic bomb, children’s advocacy, or peace movements is *The Complete Story of Sadako Sasaki*, co-authored by Sadako’s brother Masahiro Sasaki and Peace Crane Project founder Sue DiCicco (2020). A text about child peace activists elsewhere in the world is *Dear World: A Syrian Girl’s Story of War and Plea for Peace* by young Syrian refugee Bana Alabed (2017). A text that connects Sachiko’s admiration of peace leaders Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. is *The Radical King*, a selection of speech excerpts edited by Cornel West (2019). This book includes a discussion of how Martin Luther King Jr.’s nonviolence methods were directly influenced by Gandhi himself.

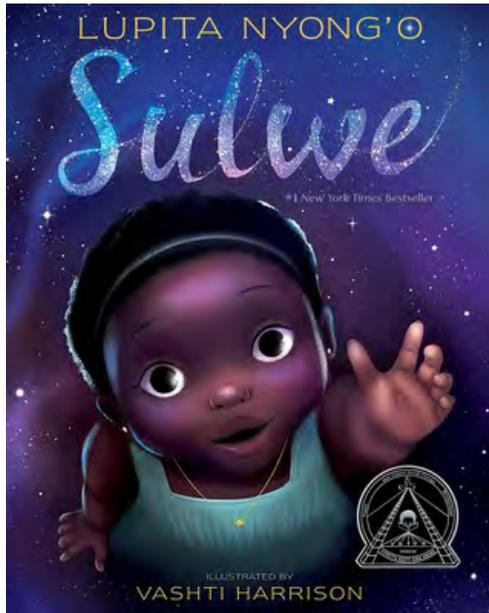
For more information on Caren Stelson’s background and writing process, visit her website or read the interview at <https://lernerbooks.com/contributors/14042>.

Julia Andersen, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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Sulwe

Written by Lupita Nyong'o

Illustrated by Vashti Harrison

Simon & Schuster, 2019, 48 pp

ISBN: 978-1-5344-2536-1

At a time when racial inequity and division is at an all-time high, *Sulwe* turns readers' attention towards a divide within Black culture, colorism.

Sulwe, which means star in Luo (a Kenyan language), is the story of a girl who was born with skin tone the color of midnight and who longs for a fairer complexion. Her family is a beautiful range of shades of brown but Sulwe is the darkest of the family. Sulwe doesn't have many friends at school because of her skin tone and is often made fun of

and called names like "Blacky." Her sister Mich, on the other hand, is affectionately given the name "Sunshine." Sulwe wants nothing more than to have real friends and to have the complexion of her sister and takes drastic measures to try to lighten her complexion but is painfully unsuccessful. She is later visited by a star that takes her on a magical journey to the beginning of time, a time when two drastically different sisters co-existed, Day and Night. The star tells Sulwe the story of how the Day was praised for her beauty, but the Night was shunned and called ugly. Fed up, Night flees the Earth and leaves people with only daylight. It quickly becomes evident that the people need Night. Day misses her sister and goes to find Night and bring her back. Day explains to Night that there is brightness in all colors, and she is her most beautiful when she is at her darkest. This story reassures Sulwe of her inner brightness.

The cover of the book is a captivating illustration of Sulwe surrounded by a celestial background. She has beautiful dark skin and a brightness in her striking round eyes that draws readers' attention. On the first page of the story, Harrison's rendering of Sulwe is breathtaking. Her dark skin nearly blends into the darkness behind her; however, the brightness of the moonlight settles on her hair and skin and even in the twinkle she has in her eyes. Readers' eyes are consistently drawn from the left side of the page to the right with the theme of contrasting colors throughout the book. The variety of shades of brown are beautiful and rich with color. Normally, dark colors symbolize a scary or depressing mood but there is beauty in the darkness of these illustrations. The text and illustrations work in harmony with one another; the illustrations alone, as beautiful as they are, come to life as the reader engages with the text that accompanies the pictures.

The theme of the book is self-esteem and challenges the notion of colorism. The message it delivers is that you are more than your skin, and what is inside each person is significant. The fact that the book focuses on colorism is eye opening as this topic is not often discussed but

well known, especially in Black culture. The book addresses young readers but the message benefits all ages.

Books with similar themes that pair well with *Sulwe* include *I Am Enough* (Grace Byers & Keturah Bobo, 2018), *Happy in Our Skin* (Fran Manushkin & Lauren Tobia, 2018), and *Chocolate Me* (Taye Diggs & Shane Evans, 2015).

The author, Academy Award winning actress Lupita Nyong'o, was born of Kenyan parents and has personally dealt with colorism. She was inspired to write *Sulwe* by a letter from a fan. At the 2014 Essence 7th Annual Black Women in Hollywood event, she shared that the fan wrote to her, "I think [...] you're really lucky to be this black but yet this successful in Hollywood over night." The fan also wrote, "I was just about to buy Dencia's Whitenicious cream to lighten my skin when you appeared on the world map and saved me" (France, 2018). These statements resonated with Lupita and as a result, the story of *Sulwe* was born.

The illustrator, Vashti Harrison, is also the illustrator of *Hair Love* (Matthew Cherry & Vashti Harrison, 2019). She has also authored a book series on the New York Times Best Seller list, *Leaders and Dreamers*. She obtained her Masters of Fine Art degree at California Institute of the Arts where she renewed her passion for painting and drawing and her talent has graced the many pages she has illustrated.

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France, L. (2018, January 19). Lupita Nyong'o penning children's book about colorism. Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/19/entertainment/lupita-nyongo-childrens-book/index.html>

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