



***The Cazuela that the Farm Maiden Stirred***

Written by Samantha R. Vamos Illustrated

by Rafael López

Charlesbridge, 2011, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1580892421

In this cumulative tale, a farm maiden and farm animals prepare the arroz con leche (rice pudding) that will feed people at the town fiesta. The whole farm works together to gather and produce the ingredients needed for the dish. Personified animals play a pivotal role in helping the Farm Maiden prepare for the party. A community comes together to create the party...

but they get too distracted! Music is being made and fun being had when the cazuela (pot) almost overflows. Yikes! Everyone works together to stir again to fix the mistake. The farmers and animals give thanks, and then enjoy the food they worked so hard to make. Food brings communities together.

This book is masterfully written in a way that introduces Spanish words to children learning Spanish, and English words to children who speak Spanish. Vamos carefully includes one new word association on each page of the book by replacing an English word from the previous page with its Spanish counterpart and subsequently building upon the poem. A new element of making arroz con leche is added with the previous elements on each page. The tale thus builds upon itself in a cumulative tale, while reinforcing what was said before. Children can easily remember the word shapes, sounds, and meanings as they are repeated throughout the text. By the end of the story, children will be familiar with some new words (Spanish or English) as well as the process involved in cooking within a farm environment. Additionally, readers get a glimpse into an aspect of Latin American culture that they may not have known about before (the geographical setting is not specified). These engaging elements of language learning and cultural values earned this book the 2012 Pura Belpré Award.

Well-known illustrator Rafael López out did himself yet again with vibrant color work, intricate details, and clear animal personification. Picture-word associations are another important factor in language acquisition and Rafael's work clearly pairs words with pictures as the story progresses. Learning a language can be a daunting task for many, however, this story of the cazuela makes language learning fun and approachable. The poetic verse captivates the reader with rhythm and verse progressions. What better way to remember words than in lyrical form?

“...the cabra gave out spoons,  
the gallina sang a tune,  
the pato beat a tambor,  
the burro plucked a banjo,  
the vac shook a maraca,  
and the campesino and the farm maiden danced...”

Because of the cumulative nature of this tale, any book written in the style of *This is the House That Jack Built* would pair well with this text. Samantha Vamos has written a sequel to this book in the same format entitled *The Pinata That the Farm Maiden Hung* (Samantha Vamos and Sebastia Serra, 2019). Implementing similar literary devices, *The Pot that Juan Built* (Nancy Andrews-Goebel and David Diaz, 2011) is a text of cumulative bilingual poetry related to Latinx culture. This text also includes historical elements alongside the poetry.

Samantha Vamos studied law and practiced both on the east coast and in the Chicago area. Her passion, however, has always been writing and her dream was to write for children. Now a full-time author, she has published nearly 10 titles including concept books like *Alphabet Boats* (Samantha Vamos and Ryan O’Rourke, 2018) and *Alphabet Trains* (Samantha Vamos and Ryan O’Rourke, 2015). She specializes in writing bilingual English-Spanish books as well as books for early childhood. Her first book *Before You Were Here, Mi Amor* (Samantha Vamos and Santiago Cohen, 2009) won the 2010 Washington State Book Award and was described as “Best for Babies”.

Rafael López was born and raised in Mexico City immersed in a culture filled with artistic expression in the form of music, visual art, surrealism, and native culture which all contribute to his unique art style. He is an internationally recognized illustrator collaborating with the likes of Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor in *Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* (2019) and Jaqueline Woodson in *The Day You Begin* (2018), both award winning books. Among other awards, López has won the Pura Belpré Award three times (2010, 2016, 2020) as a high caliber illustrator.

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