



***Milo Imagines the World***

Written by Matt de la Peña

Illustrated by Christian Robinson

G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2021, 40 pp

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Milo and his sister embark on their monthly Sunday subway ride through New York City. Milo is bursting with confused feeling of excitement, worry and love. To pass the time on their long ride, Milo observes the diverse people surrounding him and imagines what their lives are like off the subway. He sees a scruffy man focused on a crossword puzzle and sketches how he perceives his life in a disheveled apartment, with his cats, eating tepid soup. He sees a boy in a suit and sketches him riding in a carriage and living in a castle with a butler and maids. He sees a woman in a wedding dress and imagines her in a cathedral getting married to a man who whisks her away on a hot air balloon. He does this with several faces he encounters on the subway. When the train reaches the desired destination, Milo is surprised to see the well-dressed boy that he previously sketched get off at the same stop and head in the same direction as he and his sister. Could Milo be wrong about his initial impressions? Maybe you can't really know people just by looking at them.

From the cover to the pages of the book, we are met with childlike sketches drawn in broad, colorful lines on white background that helps us enter Milo's sketchbook and imagination. The title page invites the reader to go down into the subway station with Milo and his sister. The subway is illustrated with a mix of collage and paint. The neutral colors of the train station in contrast with pops of color are intriguing and inviting to the reader. The simplistic illustrations are made more detailed by reading the descriptive language used by the author. The diversity depicted in the illustrations, coupled with Milo's interpretations as a Black child of the lives of subway riders, including the White child who also gets off at the prison, is a beautiful reminder to the reader that the way a person looks does not directly point to their realities. This book touches on racial biases, incarceration and LGBTQ identities.

This book pairs well with other books for young readers, including *The Proudest Blue* (Ibtihaj Muhammed, 2019), *All Are Welcome* (Alexandra Penfold, 2018) and *I am Enough* (Grace Byers, 2018). These books beg readers to stop and take a second look at those around them and embrace the beauty in the diversity of our world.

*Milo Imagines the World* is written by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson, who are the same duo who brought award winning books to readers including *Last Stop on Market Street* (2015) and *Carmela Full of Wishes* (2018). Both Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson have a passion for writing and illustrating diverse books.

Matt de la Peña is the first Latinx winner of the Newbery Medal for *Last Stop on Market Street*. He grew up a racially confused, working class kid, which influenced him to write books about such characters. He sees the importance of diversity in books saying, “Nothing can replace the unspoken validation a kid feels when they see themselves on the page. It confirms existence.” He is the author of several picturebooks and young adult novels and was honored with the National Council of Teachers of English Intellectual Freedom Award for his work to stand up to censorship after his young adult novel *Mexican WhiteBoy* (2008) was banned from Tucson, Arizona schools when they terminated the district’s Mexican American studies programs (Long, 2016).

Christian Robinson received a Caldecott Honor and a Coretta Scott King illustrator honor for his art in *Last Stop on Market Street* (2015). He grew up in Los Angeles, California and was raised by his grandmother. Growing up, he says he had a hard time reading, so he did not have a great relationship with books, but was drawn to books with pictures. He loved that so much could be communicated with just an image. Robinson found a solace in drawing and today has turned his childhood hobby into a career as an illustrator. He uses images to speak and “reflect the diverse world we live in.” Like Matt de la Peña, Robinson also believes that children need to see themselves in books. He states, “They need to see their gender. They need to see their color, hair texture, their disability, themselves” (Woodruff, 2016).

## References

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