



My Abuelita

Written by Tony Johnston

Illustrated by Yuyi Morales

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009

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My Abuelita is a touching story of a little boy who lives with his grandmother, whom he calls Abuelita. The strong relationship between the grandson and his Abuelita is evident from the beginning, “She is my Abuelita. I love her. And she loves me” (p. 2). Written from the perspective of the little boy, he vividly tells about his adventures with his Abuelita during their morning routine as he helps her get ready for her important job. His admiration of her comes through as the little

boy eagerly helps his Abuelita. “Abuelita arranges her things. I help. She arranges herself. I help. Last of all, I crown her with a sweep of stars” (p. 23). This important job remains a secret until the last page. Readers are kept on the edge of their seats as they try to figure out Abuelita’s important job—a storyteller.

Tony Johnston lived in Mexico with her husband and children for fifteen years. Her experiences lead her to write many books which focus on the Mexican culture. She carefully weaves Spanish words throughout the book, sharing the definitions. The descriptive words show the fondness the little boy has for his Abuelita. The illustrator Yuyi Morales, who was born and raised in Mexico, uses several media to create her pictures. She used polymer clay to create the bodies of the main characters. The clothing and other details were created using wire, felting wool, fabric, wood, acrylic paints, metals, and Mexican crafts. The illustrator photographed the layouts and digitally manipulated the photographs. The illustrations are somewhat quirky but nonetheless detailed and poignant. Cultural Mexican elements can be found in the details of the illustrations. The illustrations should be looked at several times, as each time one can find something new. The facial expressions on each of the characters emphasize the love and strong bond Abuelita and her grandson feel for each other. *My Abuelita* has received many honors including a Pura Belpr Honor Book and an ALA Notable book.

My Abuelita can be used to explore intergenerational relationships, learning about the Mexican culture, and teaching similes and metaphors. This book would work well paired with other multicultural books that support the intergenerational relationships. *Grandma’s Gift* by Eric Velasquez (2010) shows a growing relationship between a Puerto Rican grandmother and her grandson as they spend his Christmas break together. Other books such as, *Little Mama Forgets* by Robin Cruise (2006) and *My Dadima Wears a Sari* by Kashmir Sheth (2007), show strong intergenerational relationships. *My Abuelita* is mixed with many enjoyable similes. Some examples of similes that are found in the text are: “Her face is as crinkled as dried chile” (p. 2); “My Abuelita is round. Robust, she says, like a calabaza. A pumpkin” (p. 6); and “She says the words should be as round as dimes and as wild as blossoms blooming” (p. 16). This wonderful use of text by the author makes this book a great tool for teaching this aspect of writing but also to encourage visual cultural images of Abuelita.

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