



Abuelita and Me

Written by Leonarda Carranza

Illustrated by Rafael Mayani

Annick Press, 2022, 32 pp

ISBN 978-1-77321-610-2

Spanish edition, 978-1-77321-659-1 (*Abuelita y yo*)

This powerful picturebook portrays the trauma experienced by a child of color for whom stepping outside the front door means daily exposure to microaggressions and racism. A young Latina girl is excited about visiting her beloved Abuelita, but notices that sometimes people make faces or get up and walk away when her Abuelita sits next to them. As they get on a bus in a Canadian city, the driver assumes that her grandmother is trying to ride for free, not recognizing that she

is elderly and needs to sit down to find the money in her purse. No one speaks up and the girl feels helpless. When they arrive home, she no longer wants to go outside, fearing she will be yelled at. Abuelita assures her that they are not the ones who have done something wrong, giving her the courage to face her fears and Abuelita the courage to speak the next time they take a bus into the city.

This book is a gentle and effective reminder that even small actions like a glance or a comment can cause trauma for a young child, leading them to withdraw from daily interactions and to wonder why they and their family are treated as problems. Although the conclusion does not result in sustained or systemic action to work towards equity, it does portray a personal act of challenging inequity. This book encourages exploration of systemic racism, recognizing that racism has gone beyond individual effects on a person of color to racism as integrated into the working of society. Mayani's illustrations are particularly effective in capturing facial expressions and using warm colors to convey the strong bond and joyful interactions between the child and her grandmother.

This picturebook can be read alongside other books on racism for young children, such as *A History of Me*, by Adrea Theodore and Erin Robinson (2022), in which a young Black girl feels reduced to only her race during classroom discussions of slavery. She finds perspective and strength in her mother's stories about being the only Black child in her school. *Why? A Conversation about Race* by Taye Diffys and Shane Evans (2021) is a conversation in which young Black children ask adults questions about why people are protesting. *Sometimes People March* by Tessa Allen (2020) is a book for young children on why people choose to march in order to work towards broader systemic change and provides a strong pairing so children can see both personal acts to challenge inequity and broader social movements.

A search revealed that the majority of books for young children on racism focus on famous musicians, politicians, and athletes who overcome prejudice to succeed, or are historical fiction, such as *Freedom Summer*, by Deborah Wiles and Jerome Lagarrigue (2001), set in 1964 during desegregation in the South, in which a white boy and a Black boy go to swim in the town pool, only to find it filled with tar. These historical depictions are significant, but children also need books set in their current worlds to process the racism they see in their daily lives.

Leonarda Carranza is from El Salvador and holds a degree from the University of Toronto in Education for Social Justice. She lives in Brampton, a city belonging to Treaty 19 of the ancestral territory of the first Indigenous nation of the Mississaugas of the Credit in Canada. She also writes adult essays about language loss and identity.

Rafael Mayani is a Mexican artist based in Vancouver. His digital art is heavily inspired by the bright colors and organic forms typical of art from Mexico and the beauty of natural landscapes in Canada. He creates whimsical characters that play with form, scale, color, and perspective in a range of media from picturebooks to magazines and newspapers, and even murals in Slovenia.

This is an important book that directly addresses a common occurrence in the lives of children of color across North America and reveals the trauma they experience due to systemic racism.

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona

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