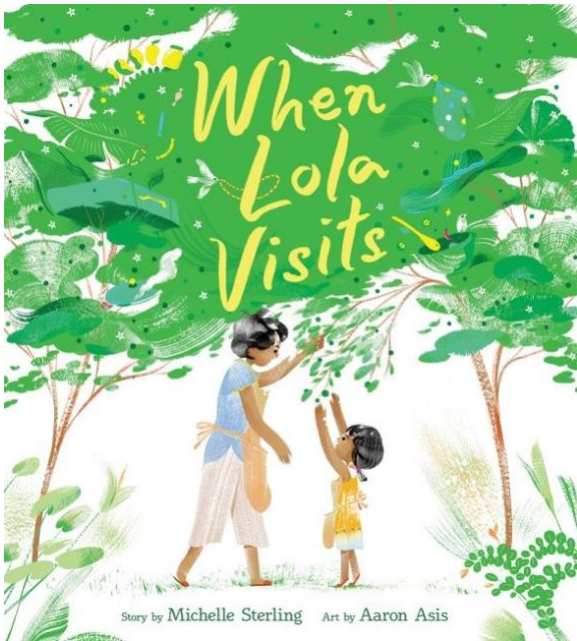


## WOW Review: Volume XIV, Issue 3 (Spring 2022)



*When Lola Visits*

Written by Michelle Sterling

Illustrated by Aaron Asis

Katherine Tegen Books, 2021, 32 pp

ISBN: 9780062972859

This picturebook is a window into Filipino culture from the perspective of a young Filipina girl growing up in the United States. The book also serves as a mirror for Filipino children in the U.S. who experience visits from family flying in from the Philippines and their shared activities during their stay. In this story, the activities are described through the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the various things the main character remembers doing with her lola, which is Tagalog for grandmother.

The story begins with wonder when a little girl tries to recall the beginning of summer. Her mind is instantly filled with a recollection of her lola visiting her from the Philippines and the many memories they share together. Presented as snapshots, some of the sweet moments between the granddaughter and grandmother include cooking sisig (a meat dish served on a sizzling plate), enjoying a fireworks display, preparing lumpia rolls, and eating on banana leaves with their bare hands. The little girl makes numerous comparisons between summer and the different foods, objects, and activities they enjoy together. But when the summer rains come, the little girl must face the bitterness of saying goodbye to her lola. Finding that her life is not the same, the girl learns to find joy again in small moments through the comforting scents of the familiar.

The plot is told through similes and flows easily by featuring common experiences of the young, old, and everyone in between. The story makes numerous references to Filipino food including those not commonly featured in other picturebooks for Filipino American readers. There are also many words from the native language, Tagalog, that add a linguistic dimension to the text. The illustrations are characterized mainly by curved lines and unique brushed strokes suggesting movement and the passing of time. The muted colors also go along with that dreamy effect that the little girl feels as she remembers the memories of summer and her lola. The illustrations are effective in emphasizing the changing moods in the story, such as anticipation, excitement, dreariness, and encouragement.

As a reader with Filipino heritage, this piece is authentic in foregrounding the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren as situated in a Filipino household. It validates the role of grandparents in looking after grandchildren especially when both parents are working. This idea of “extended family” is a core quality of many Filipino households, and the book highlights this in a double page spread of kamayan.

This book would be a great multicultural piece to include in a text set focusing on family coming to visit. The text set could include titles like: *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant and Stephen Gammell (1993) about a big family reunion in West Virginia; *Bigmama’s* by Donald Crews (1998), a story that describes four siblings visiting their grandmother in Cottondale, Florida; and *Amah Faraway* by Margaret Chiu Greanias and Tracy Subisak (2022), which follows Kylie as she visits Taipei, Taiwan to be reunited with her grandmother.

This book is written by Michelle Sterling, a Filipina children’s picturebook author who is also a photographer, speech-language pathologist, and food connoisseur. Her mother is from the Ilocos region in the Philippines while her father is from Manila, the country’s capital. *When Lola Visits* is her debut picturebook. This book is illustrated by Aaron Asis, a Filipino illustrator and graphic designer based in Manila, Philippines. Visit [behance.net/aaronasis](https://behance.net/aaronasis) to follow his expressive artwork.

Elizabeth Isidro, Western Michigan University

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