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WOW REVIEW

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VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 4

Summer 2022

Global Perspectives on Journeys of Healing and Recovery

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WOW Review: Volume XIV Issue 4

Summer 2022

Global Perspectives on Journeys of Healing and Recovery

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Introduction and Editors' Note

When we brainstormed the theme of this issue, we were thinking mostly about COVID-19, but the reality is children are constantly navigating complex and difficult events. While some of the reviews include the word trauma, the purpose of this issue is to highlight the healing journeys of characters, rather than attempting to label an event as traumatic. As editors, we asked ourselves, “How are the characters finding their way through difficult life experiences?” We hope that as you read these titles and share them with children, you also find ways to heal and keep moving.

Some of these titles stress the role of language in encouraging a sense of hope and safety. In the picturebook *Abuelita and Me* (Carranza, 2022), Abuelita’s words, “What happened is not our fault. We are not the ones that need to hide,” support a young Latina child navigating microaggressions encountered as they walk to the market or take public transportation. In the bilingual picturebook *Maxy Survives the Hurricane/Maxy sobrevive el huracán* (Chansky & Marcial Acevedo, 2021), the words of a grandmother help Clarita and her dog, Maxy, cope with the aftermath of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico, “There is no need to fear rain. Not every rain storm is a hurricane.” These grandmothers’ words carry intergenerational wisdom, a wealth of knowledge shaped by their experiences coping and healing from life’s challenges.

Other titles highlight the power of story in creating a sense of belonging during painful immigration journeys. In the graphic novel *Isla to Island* (Castellanos, 2022), Marisol is forced to leave Cuba at a young age due to an unsafe sociopolitical climate. The written stories she finds at the school library allow her to develop needed connections between her beloved Cuba and her new home in New York. Similarly, Areli tells her own story of connecting in the picturebook *Areli Is a Dreamer* (Morales, 2021). She finds herself while listening to stories about Ellis Island and the millions of immigrants before her who came to the United States in the hope of building a brighter future.

The last two titles featured in this issue are set in intimate spaces within households marked by loss or sadness at the coming loss of a loved one. Told from a grandchild’s perspective, *Last Week* (Richardson, 2022) creates a window into Flippa’s family as they experience her last days when she decides on an assisted death. What is the best way to say goodbye? In *The Tunnel* (Howden, 2022), a young boy and his mom navigate what seems to be the loss of his father. By spending time alone inside an imaginary tunnel, the child finds some comfort and the strength to return home. Both of these stories invite readers to consider the importance of heart-searching and soul-searching in the healing process.

Please consider submitting a review for our future issues. The editors welcome reviews of children’s or YA books that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives around these themes:

Volume 15, Issue 2 – Themed issue on intergenerational relationships (Winter 2022) – submission deadline is November 15, 2022. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives, especially perspectives that are influenced by interactions of children and young adults with other generations (e.g., grandparents, family members, adults in their community).

Volume 15, Issue 3 – Open theme (Spring 2023) – submission deadline February 15, 2023. The editors welcome reviews of global or multicultural children’s or young adult books published within the last three years that highlight intercultural understanding and global perspectives.

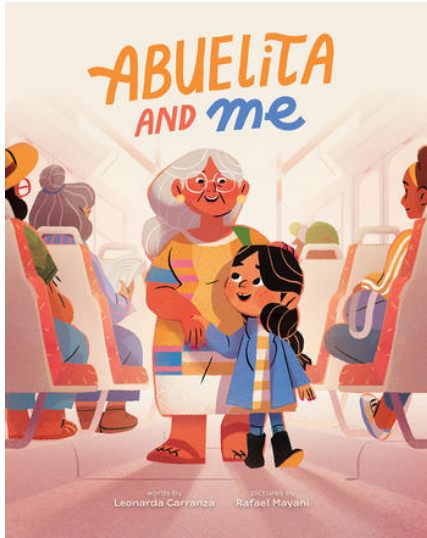
María V. Acevedo-Aquino and Susan Corapi, Co-editors

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Based on a work by María V. Acevedo-Aquino and Susan Corapi at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-4/2/>.



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 Diffy 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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Based on a work by Kathy G. Short at <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/xiv-4/3/>.



Areli Is a Dreamer

Written by Areli Morales

Illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Random House Studio, 2021, 40 pp

ISBN: 978-1-98489-399-4

Spanish edition, 978-0-59338-008-6 (*Areli es una dreamer*)

Areli Is a Dreamer is a true story based on the author's immigration experience as a child and later as a beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (<https://www.uscis.gov/DACA>) program, established in 2012 by the U.S. Homeland Security to allow certain individuals who came to the United States as children to request

deferred action for several years and be eligible for work authorization.

In a rural town in Mexico, Areli lives with her Abuela and big brother Alex. Every Sunday, they wait anxiously for their parents' phone calls, who live in the U.S. They remind them of their promise that one day they will all be together. Alex was born in the U.S., while Areli was born in Mexico. They live with their Abuela in Mexico, knowing Alex will travel first to reunite with their parents, who live in New York. One day, Alex travels to the U.S. and Areli continues with her life and starts preschool at the local school near her Abuela's house. Areli hears she will soon travel to New York to reunite with her family, and a family friend she has never met will take her. Once she relocates, she faces new challenges, such as learning a new language and understanding she is not a citizen, and perhaps will not have the same privileges as her brother. The family also experiences challenges because they are undocumented. Nevertheless, Areli learns that her immigration journey could bring opportunities for success.

Areli Morales' narrative is so authentic and realistic that it allows readers to understand Areli's mixed feelings. On the one hand, Areli is sad to leave her Abuela, her school, and her community, saying "I don't want to go to New York!" At the same time, she is happy and hopeful to join her parents and brother. Areli fears leaving behind her world, everything she knows, capturing a real immigration tension from a child's perspective when she says, "I want to stay here with you! And my friends. And my home. Please don't make me go, Abuela."

Luisa Uribe's authentic illustrations invite readers into Areli's story. Her drawings reflect Areli's environment, such as the hens running around while the cousins play escondite or hide-and-seek at Abuela's home in Mexico. Uribe skillfully illustrates the emotions of Areli and her family, ranging from excitement while talking on the phone with distant parents or her and Abuela's inconsolable facial expressions when they need to separate. Uribe's illustrations capture the essence of the suburb and rich visual details of New York, illustrating the streets and busy walkers around the street. The illustrations allow readers to visualize the setting and character mood, such as the images portraying Areli's joy when she arrives at her parents' apartment.

This book is also helpful in talking about issues such as the suffering of children when they are separated from their parents. The immigration process involves the changes and stress that come

with moving to another country, worrying about the immigration status of parents, becoming familiar with a different school system, and leaving family and friends behind. While learning a language, emergent bilinguals' interactions with other children are affected because they cannot fully express themselves and share their knowledge. From a child's perspective, this is a traumatic experience to which the community must pay attention and requires professional support to promote the socio-emotional stability of children.

Some realities are harsh but are worth discussing so young children understand the difficult experiences of immigrant families. Areli's story upholds the notion that children can persevere to adapt to a new country and understand family love across borders. With this authentic cultural understanding, children can see themselves reflected in these experiences or relate to what is happening in their community.

One book that can pair with *Areli Is a Dreamer* is *Finding Home: The Journey of Immigrants and Refugees*, by Jen Sookfong Lee and Drew Shannon (2021), narrating the immigration journey of Lee's family that started with her grandfather, who came from China. This book depicts the trajectories of immigrants and their reasons for immigrating or requesting asylum as refugees. Another pairing is *Waiting for Papá/Esperando a Papá*, by René Colato Laínez and Anthony Accardo (2015), a bilingual book about Beto, a young Salvadorian child who longs for his father as he endures a family separation. Also *Dreamers*, by Yuyi Morales, (2018), is rich in lyrics and captures the hopes and strengths immigrants bring when they move to the U.S., to make a new home after leaving everything behind.

Areli Morales Romero was born in Puebla, Mexico, and moved to New York City to join her family. She is an early childhood bilingual educator, working as a substitute teacher in New York. Her Twitter is @arelinyc. *Areli Is a Dreamer* is her first picturebook. Her story is also available in Spanish as *Areli es una dreamer*.

Luisa Uribe has illustrated more than ten books and was awarded the 2018 Society of Illustrators Dilys Evans Founder's Award for *The Vast Wonder of the World*. She lives in Bogota, Colombia. You can find more information about her artistic work at @lupencita on Instagram or Twitter and her website www.luisauribe.com.

Myriam Jimena Guerra, Texas A&M University-San Antonio

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Isla to Island

Written and illustrated by Alexis Castellanos
Atheneum, 2022, 192 pp
ISBN: 978-1534469235

Isla to Island is a nearly wordless graphic novel in which Alexis Castellanos tells the story of Marisol’s experience as an Operation Peter Pan child who emigrated from Cuba, her isla, to New York City, her island. As an immigrant living in an English-only speaking household, Marisol strives to learn a new language and culture and live without her beloved mother and father. The book opens with black and white photo album panels depicting Marisol’s parents, their wedding, and a baby photo of Marisol with her father—quickly followed by full color images of this young family’s life in 1958.

In Cuba, Marisol enjoys a happy life at home, in the botanical gardens, in school, and through books before the Cuban Revolution. The indoctrination and violence of the Castro regime makes Marisol’s parents fearful for their only child. With a photograph of her family and a red hibiscus flower from her father, Marisol at age ten flees from her isla and flies from Havana to the U.S. with other children leaving their families, homes, and culture. When she disembarks in New York City, Castellanos’ images are rendered in grayscale with Marisol’s red flower the only color on most pages. She is welcomed to her new island by a kind couple she appears to have never seen before. Bits of Elvis Presley’s song “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” complete the sad, somber mood of these panels. With English also spoken exclusively at school, Marisol struggles and is bullied by classmates. Fortunately, her life begins to change when she starts her menses and finally forms a bond with her host mother.

Color creeps back into the panels when Castellanos depicts Marisol noticing the stack of books in another student’s backpack. Full color explodes on the pages when Marisol runs toward the school library and discovers books about plants. Through this connection to nature and a kindly librarian, she deals with her loneliness and being taunted at school. Readers will applaud when her host father finally takes the family to the botanical garden greenhouse—a place where Marisol feels alive.

Through the books she reads and shares, Marisol helps her host family acknowledge the cultural losses she has experienced. Her home life improves when she and her host mother cook Cuban recipes together and her host father builds her a bookcase and they hang green plants in her bedroom. Spring comes and so does a letter from Cuba. Colorful images of spring and summer show Marisol’s budding life in the city with friends and even dancing with host father. When fall comes and school begins again, Marisol overcomes her shyness and speaks for the first time in the book, “Hi, I’m Marisol.” The story ends with a series of colorful panels that show Marisol reuniting with her parents, dressed for her quinceañera, her high school graduation, at work as a teacher, and finally her own family posing with her parents on their 40th wedding anniversary in 1985. These panels are presented with photo album corners, repeating a design from the opening pages of the book.

The back matter includes a recipe from Marisol’s kitchen, information about Operation Peter Pan, and an author’s note. Castellanos provides a brief history of Cuba’s political struggles and information about Operation Peter Pan, which for two years provided visa waivers and a foster program for Cuban children. In her author’s note, Castellanos says this story was inspired by her mother’s immigrant experiences; she came to the United States through the Freedom Flights, which brought more than 175,000 Cubans to the U.S. between 1965 and 1969.

Isla to Island can be paired with other graphic novels that focus on traumatic experiences in childhood and young adulthood. In *New Kid*, author-illustrator Jerry Craft (2019) portrays Jordan Banks’ experiences as a seventh grader negotiating the culture of a new middle school. Jordan endures micro- and macro-aggressions as he finds his place as a Black student among his predominately white and affluent classmates. Another pairing is a graphic novel with a historical perspective, *When I Grow Up: The Lost Autobiographies of Six Yiddish Teenagers* by Ken Krimstein (2021), who illustrated the six essays in the book. Cultural, religious, and political threads run through their stories that illuminate these teens’ emotions and experiences with their families and friends.

Author-illustrator Castellanos was born and raised in Florida. She notes she grew up with family stories about Cuba and stories about making new lives in the U.S. When they left their isla, her relatives brought family photo albums that served as prompts for their rich and vivid storytelling.

Judi Moreillon, Tucson, Arizona

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Last Week

Bill Richardson Émilie Leduc



Last Week

Written by Bill Richardson

Illustrated by Emilie Leduc

Groundwood Books, 2022, 63 pp

ISBN 978-1-77306-566-3

Did you know that there are six hundred four thousand and eight hundred seconds in one week? That's a lot of seconds but not enough for a grandchild who is counting the hours, minutes and seconds that are slipping away. "Make every second count" (p. 12) is what Gran always says. And that is exactly what Gran does during her final week of life—talking to friends on the phone, visiting with others who stop by, sharing remember-when stories, spending time with family, and celebrating her long life with family and friends in a Canadian setting.

The black and gray illustrations, along with the beautiful

book design and the uncomplicated text, exquisitely depict the love between a pale-skinned child and grandmother. Each chapter begins with a white double-page spread with the day of the week displayed. Readers learn about what Gran does that day. Each chapter closes with the grandchild counting the seconds left till the end of the week as well as a double-page spread completely in black, signaling the end of the day as well as the grief that is occurring in the home. For example, on Tuesday the door buzzer rings all day. The grandchild's job is to greet visitors, take their coats, and put their food contributions in the kitchen. Later that night the child wakes and watches her father cry, his shoulders shaking with grief as he stares at all of the food in the refrigerator.

When no one calls or visits on Thursday, Gran and grandchild drink tea together and Gran retells her miraculous birth story. "One minute you weren't there, and the next minute you were, with all your fingers and all your toes, and your eyes wide open" (p. 36). The grandchild responds, "You were there when I was born. And now I'm here for you" (p. 39). Gran says, "For when I'm set free" (p. 39). The illustration shows them hugging and comforting each other.

On Saturday, Mom explains what will happen on the last day. The doctor will give Gran medicine to help her relax and sleep before she takes the last medicine. The grandchild wonders, "Will it hurt?" (p. 53). Later after Gran takes a nap the child inquires, "Are you sure?" and Gran says, "Yes" (p. 54). This honest conversation helps the grandchild come to terms with Gran's decision. When the final day of Gran's life arrives, the grandchild finds a colorful surprise on the balcony as a goodbye gift. This sensitive and heart-rending story shows how difficult it is for family when losing someone they love.

Although *Last Week* is one of the first children's books on medically-assisted death, there are numerous titles for children on grief and death that could compliment this current book. These books include *The Sour Cheery Tree* by Naseem Hrab and Nahid Kazemi (2021), *Some*

Days by María Wernicke and Lawrence Schimel (2020), and *One Wave at a Time* by Holly Thompson and Ashley Crowley (2018).

Author Bill Richardson, who lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, experienced a death with dignity when his partner's mother chose a medically assisted death. He watched her say goodbye to family and friends at the very end and noticed how the people sat around, talked, laughed, told stories and ate. He told CBC News that he was struck by how different mourning was because they could prepare for it.

The afterword is written by Dr. Stefanie Green, the co-founder and president of the Canadian Association of MAiD or Medical Assistance in Dying, which is followed by a list of resources for parents. Gee (2022) interviewed Richardson and learned that he wrote the book in a single sitting, but didn't come up with the idea of using time and counting until later. Richardson believes there is comfort in numbers and that they can be quantifiable. In addition, he intentionally chose not to assign a gender to the grandchild because it doesn't matter in the context of the story.

Richardson has written over 25 books for adults and children such as *The Promise Basket* (2019), *The Bunny Band* (2018), and *The Alphabet Thief* (2017). He has had various careers as a radio broadcaster, children's librarian, Whole Foods stocker, and a writer (Lederman, 2022).

Illustrator Emilie Leduc from Montreal, Quebec has degrees in Graphic Design and Animation. She has written and illustrated several children's books, including *All Year Round* (2015) and *Un Panda Tricote* (2013) in French. Visit Leduc's work at <https://www.emilieleduc.com/>

Last Week is like a consoling hug, sharing grief, mourning, and love through the eyes of a young child.

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Deanna Day-Wiff, Washington State University

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Maxy Survives the Hurricane/Maxy sobrevive el huracán

Written by Ricia Anne Chansky and Yarelis Marcial Acevedo

Illustrated by Olga Barinova

Translated by Yarelis Marcial Acevedo, Francheska Morales García & Sharon Marie Nieves-Ferrer

Piñata Book, 2021, 32 pp

ISBN: 978-1-55885-918-0

This bilingual picturebook tells the story of a puppy named Maxy who lives in Puerto Rico in a happy house. On sunny days Maxy explores the outdoors. On rainy days he takes naps or play games and read books

with his favorite person Clarita. One day people begin prepping for a hurricane. They store objects that could be blown away by strong winds, fill buckets of safe water for drinking, secure windows, and gather canned food, candles, and batteries in case there is an electricity outage. The night the hurricane passes is dark as “Thunder rumbled, the wind blew hard, lighting struck and it rained hard for hours and hours.” Hurricane María causes severe destruction with fallen roofs, trees and electric poles and flooded houses. Maxy and Clarita wait in long lines to get food, gas, and drinking water. The day the electricity comes back is Maxy’s favorite day; however, Maxy is now terrified of rain, wind, and thunder. Clarita and her grandmother help Maxy cope with his fear by listing “the reasons why we need water to live.” Little by little Maxy internalizes that “you don’t have to be scared, not every rain is a hurricane.”

There are several elements that make this book phenomenal. First, the relevant use of Puerto Rican Spanish through the incorporation of the word *sato* (a mixed-race dog) in the written text; however, there are other instances where a more standard Spanish is used instead of the common Puerto Rican word. For example, the translators use the word *ventiladores*, rather than *abanicos* (to refer to the fans) or *refrigerador* instead of *nevera* (to refer to the refrigerator). These decisions could have been made by the editors, rather than the translators. Still, these decisions can prompt conversations around languages and linguistic repertoires. Another strength is how this story addresses trauma and stress after a natural disaster through an animal rather than a human character. This strategy offers readers, particularly young ones, a distant and safe space to connect with the difficult experience and range of emotions experienced by Maxy. It also positions Clarita as a strong child able to cope with trauma while she supports her beloved pet. While not explicitly stated in the story, their relationship can be a source of reciprocal kindness and recovery because Clarita and Maxy are both healing through Abuela’s reminder that, “There is no need to fear rain. Not every rain storm is a hurricane.” In addition, Maxy offers a perspective on the changes that affect animals and ecosystems after a storm.

The illustrations are also a strength in this picturebook. Clarita’s house is modern with windows that were very popular in the 1990s and short pillars on the balcony that are still common in many houses across the archipelago. Clarita, her family, and community members have different body shapes, hair styles, heights, and skin colors. In addition, the double spread showing the community after the hurricane accurately depicts houses made of different

materials, like cement, wood, and zinc sheets. Toward the end of the story there is an image of an animal that looks like a coquí. Luckily, the written text does not mention the coquí. Otherwise, the visual representation would have not been ideal because coquíes are not green. Perhaps, another layer of light brown would have helped with the representation. However, the population of young coquíes drastically declined after Hurricane María (Agencia EFE, 2018). Therefore, the coquí-ish illustration could create an opportunity to explore ecosystem-wide damages through the eyes of this beloved small arboreal frog.

Maxy Survives the Hurricane/Maxy sobrevive el huracán can be paired with other picturebooks addressing hurricanes such as *Alicia and the Hurricane/Alicia y el huracán* by Leslea Newman and Elizabeth Erazo Baez (2022) and *The Tree of Hope: The Miraculous Rescue of Puerto Rico's Beloved Banyan* by Ana Orenstein-Cardona and Juan M. Moreno (2022). Both stories are about community, recovery, and rebuilding after Hurricane María. *Hurricanes!* (Gibbons, 2019) is an informational book about how hurricanes are formed and categorized. *Over in the Wetlands: A Hurricane-on-the-Bayou Story* by Caroline Starr Rose and Rob Dunlavey (2015) describes families of animals in the wetlands of Louisiana preparing for a hurricane in their bayou habitat, and *Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans* by Phil Bildner and John Parra (2015) focuses on a garbage man whose kindness and dedication made a huge impact in his community in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

Ricia Anne Chansky is a professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez, and directs the large-scale humanities project “Mi María: Puerto Rico after the Hurricane.” This project is part of a larger curriculum of disaster pedagogy that highlights the role of self-narrating and witnessing in recovery processes. The curriculum creates spaces for students to support the narrators as they reposition themselves as protagonists in their life stories and re-envision themselves as active agents after experiences of trauma (<https://mimariapr.org/>).

Yarelis Marcial Acevedo is completing a Master of Arts in English Education at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez. She collaborated with Ricia Anne Chansky in the “Mi María: Puerto Rico after the Hurricane” project, including the creation of the Children’s Literature Exhibition.

Olga Barinova is a freelance children’s book illustrator based in Calgary, Alberta, who has illustrated over five picturebooks. She likes to design fun and quirky characters that can entertain readers. Her work is inspired by traditional, hand-made illustration, as well as bright color palettes and lots of details. Visit <http://olga.barinova.ca/> to find more about Barinova’s illustrations and characters.

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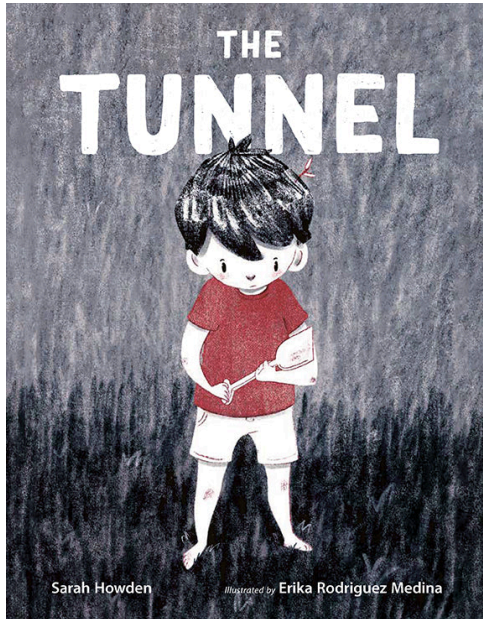
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The Tunnel

Written by Sarah Howden

Illustrated by Erika Rodriguez Medina

Owlkids Books, 2022, 32 pp

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When turning the initial pages of *The Tunnel*, the reader immediately realizes something bad has happened with illustrations of a sad child and mother. The illustrations are shades of gray and black, detailing a quiet home that wasn't always that way. One cannot help but feel the loneliness of the main character. The pale-skinned, dark-haired child describes struggles with connecting to others; for example, when their mother gives a tight hug, the child does not always hug back. Or when an aunt visits and asks "Are you okay?" the reader can plainly see the discomfort on the child's face.

After this interaction with an aunt, the child retreats to their room and begins digging a fantastical tunnel. Down, down, down into the ground, past all sorts of creatures who don't seem to notice the intruder. Rodriguez Medina illustrates the deep dark corridors of this child's grief through the tunnel. Whatever has happened to the father, it was life altering. The winding tunnels are filled with insects and moles scurrying about busy with their routines, and this is of some comfort to the child, who may be searching for time to be anonymous while mourning. The only flash of color is the child's red shirt and a dotted trail that marks the path. Everything else is gray, cream, or black.

The child comes out of the tunnel in the backyard, glimpsing home with mother and aunt inside. The child has a moment of quiet, considering leaving and never coming back. As a reader, this moment is heavy with feelings of deep sorrow permeating the page. The child says, "No one knows I'm out here. I could just disappear" (p. 12), but sees their mother in the window, and something nudges them to stay. Perhaps it is the understanding that while this pain is immense, there is someone there for them. Perhaps the child feels ready to find comfort with their mother after some time away. The child returns, climbing back into bed. Their mother comes to check on them, and when she hugs the child, they hug back as tightly as they can. The child's mother notices sticks and twigs in her child's hair and asks what happened, and the child explains. The mother is understanding, saying, "You came back." (p. 30). We are left with the understanding that everyone needs a secret place to get away when grieving.

One book that can be paired with *The Tunnel* is Oliver Jeffers' (2010) book, *The Heart and the Bottle*, about a child grappling with feelings of loss. In this book, the main character takes out and hides her heart so the pain is easier to bear, yet eventually realizes she needs her heart. Both texts are brilliant allegorical examples of how people cope with the pain of grief.

Sarah Howden is the author of *The Tunnel*. She lives in Toronto, Canada and has written several other books for young readers, including the picturebook *Cone Cat* (2020) and the

short chapter books *Misty Copeland: Ballet Star* (2020), as well as *Roberta Bondar: Space Explorer* (2020), part of the series *Fearless Girls: I Can Read! Level 1*, published by HarperCollins.

Erika Rodriguez Medina is the illustrator. She is a Mexican art teacher and illustrator living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her illustrations have been in many children's books and has garnered attention from major publishing houses like Simon and Schuster and Macmillan. Together, Howden and Rodriguez Medina have crafted a beautifully quiet and poignant tale about dealing with trauma.

Sarah Howden said in an interview with OwlKids, "I hope readers will know that it's okay not to always feel happy, and it's okay to not be able to put into words what you're feeling... and to want to be alone, and be with your feelings in your own time. But that sitting in that grief with someone who loves you can ultimately help you through" (OwlKids). She wrote the book from a place of remembering her own struggles with grief as a child. Erika Rodriguez Medina stated that she hopes readers remember that, "they can carve a place for themselves to process big emotions and then come back once they feel ready" (OwlKids).

The Tunnel would make an excellent addition to an elementary counselor's bookshelf. As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other tumultuous events, many children have suffered with little recognition or support for getting through tough times. *The Tunnel* demonstrates that when children are upset, it is okay to feel disconnected and to seek solitude; and when children are ready, someone will be there for them. *The Tunnel* is a comforting book, reminding us that grieving is natural and everyone grieves in their own way. It is particularly lovely that the main character is illustrated as gender neutral so anyone can look at the illustrations and see themselves.

Books about moving through loss and trauma with compassion and honesty are greatly needed in every classroom. *The Tunnel* is one that could easily be loved by many children and families looking for solace in literature.

References

OwlKids (Ed.). (2022, May 3). Creator corner: Author Sarah Howden and illustrator Erika Rodriguez Medina. Owlkids Books.

<https://owlkidsbooks.com/creator-corner-author-sarah-howden-and-illustrator-erika-rodriguez-medina/>

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