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A Movie in My Pillow

Jorge Argueta
Elizabeth Gomez, illustrator
Children's Book Press (Apr 9, 2001)
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In this collection of children's bilingual poems, the author establishes the central image of the title in a brief poem preceding the title page: "Daddy Daddy know what? / Last night I saw a movie / in my pillow (una pelÃ-cula en mi almohada)." Poet and teacher Argueta captures the memories of his childhood after fleeing the civil war in El Salvador with his father. He effectively balances Jorgito's range of emotions and experiences as he adjusts to his puzzling new life.

"Neighborhood of Sun / Barrio Lleno de Sol" in the San Francisco Mission District is a rich, multicultural family where "you can taste a soup of language in the wind." Telling details flesh out the boy's life like a movie in "When We Left El Salvador / Cuando Salimos de El Salvador," as he recalls leaving behind his mother, little brothers, and grandmother with no goodbyes. "Soup of Stars" tells of times that they would "go to bed without eating…the stars were our soup."

Jorgito's voice is authentic and ingenuous. Through the images in "Wonders of the City / Las Maravillas de la Ciudad," readers understand the palpable contrasts between the two worlds, where chickens that used to sleep beside him are now dressed in plastic bags for sale in the market. Some poems, like the playful concrete "Yo-yo," recreate the simple joys of life—sidewalk games, riding bicycles, admiring his father's orange truck, and making new friends. When Jorgito longs for El Salvador and seeks the familiar in his new surroundings, a tape of his grandmother's voice sustains him. The joyous final poems mark the arrival of his mama and brothers, and Jorgito takes on the role of "best guide in town."

The fanciful, primary-colored paintings by GÃ³mez (illustrator of Upside Down Boy / El NiÃ±o de Cabeza by Juan Felipe Herrera) make each scene of the "movie" vivid. Perhaps her most evocative illustrations accompany the powerful poem "With the War / Con La Guerra" with a haunting face, reminiscent of Edvard Munch's "The Scream," howling in the wind. The side-by-side Spanish and English texts offer a perfect opportunity for bilingual studies.
PEGGY BECK (July / August 2001)

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