

Eala: Mother Swan/ La Madre

Ayn Cates Sullivan

Paige Ozma Ashmore, Illustrator

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In the empowering picture book Eala, a bullied boy learns that magic lives in each human being.

In Ayn Cates Sullivan's bilingual picture book *Eala*, a magical swan helps a boy to learn the truth about who he is.

Hugo's grandmother told him stories of Eala, a magical white swan who could teach him much. But Hugo is bullied by his brothers for his belief in magic until he doesn't know what to think anymore. He just knows that he is different.

Hugo goes to the river while he's crying. There, swans gather just before their flight among the stars. Eala is moved by Hugo's tears, and takes him to recover the pieces of his soul that were lost when life was hard and others were unkind.

Turning black to blend with the night sky, Eala tells him to remember the ancient magic. Hugo promises to do so, after which the book nods to the constellation Cygnus (the Swan) as a reminder of people's inner magic.

The book tackles childhood differences in a tactful manner. In its sensitive story, the contrast between Hugo's mocking, rock-throwing brothers and the gentle, supportive love he receives from his grandmother, who understands his belief in magic, is strong. With support, Hugo comes to see that he is part of a beautiful universe, and that life itself is magical.

The book's English and Spanish paragraphs appear on the same page, making it easy for speakers of one language to pick up vocabulary in the other. The text is accessible and consistent in its reading level in both languages. Its descriptions are often poetic: "Mother Swan flapped her great wings and they flew between the crack of night and day."

Small graphics enliven the pages of text. The book's colorful artwork has a childlike style, but still portrays the grandeur of the universe well. The smiles on the faces of the sun and moon make the cosmos seem to be a welcoming place, and Hugo's excitement and joy at realizing that he is part of the majesty he sees around him is palpable. The font is both elegant and easy to read.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (April 29, 2021)

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