Juvenile Fiction

Grandma Fina and Her Wonderful Umbrellas
Benjamin Alire Saenz
Geronimo Garcia, illustrator
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Pilar Herrera, Translator
Grandma Fina attracts attention as she strolls through her neighborhood with her yellow umbrella and matching shoes and purse. As she cheerfully greets neighbors, children and grandchildren, everyone notices that Grandma Fina's umbrella is torn. Grandma Fina is aware that her umbrella is old and tattered, but she still thinks it is wonderful. Her friends and family, however, have their own ideas and, at a surprise birthday celebration, each of them gives Grandma Fina a new umbrella in a color or pattern offering a distinctive reminder of the giver. Graciously, Grandma Fina accepts the gifts and brings them to her friends at the Community Center. When the ten elderly women step out for a walk, each of the friends is carrying one of the new umbrellas while Grandma Fina happily holds her torn, but wonderful, yellow umbrella.

This bilingual early reader is the first children's book by Saenz, an author of novels, poems and short fiction for middle readers. Each page contains blocks of the Spanish and English texts with the English text having only a few Spanish phrases that can be understood from context. The story is long enough to satisfy a young reader ready to move beyond the simplest beginning readers. The vocabulary is somewhat challenging, but the repetition of words and phrases through the characters? conversations provides the opportunity for mastery. The brightly colored pictures follow Grandma Fina's meandering walk through the neighborhood and around the blocks of text.

The story will be an enjoyable read-aloud in either language as well as a title to offer to the newly independent reader who is not quite ready for a chapter book. Despite the proliferation of umbrellas, no rain falls in this sunny book and the umbrellas are used for protection from the heat. The friendliness of neighbors and family depicted in the book is, as Grandma Fina says, “Wonderful!”

Janis Ansell