

Little Crow To The Rescue (El Cuervito Al Rescate)

Victor Villasenor

Felipe Ugalde Alcantara, Illustrator

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In a world where grown-ups are always right, young readers will be delighted by this bilingual story, which teaches that even the youngest one can teach an adult a thing or two.

Frustrated by the crows that steal his chicken's corn, the narrator asks his father why he can't ever catch them. Laughing, his father tells him a story passed down through the generations from the boy's great-grandfather in Mexico. It begins with two crows watching farmers sow a field of corn. Father Crow is teaching his son, Little Crow, to be wary of people, who are nice enough to provide feed, but are also likely to zing stones at crows to scare them off. After some consideration, the young crow has a revelation. His insight provides crows all over the Americas with a better way to protect themselves from the sneaky habits of humans.

The most endearing moment of the story is Father Crow's delight at his son's astute observation: "Father Crow was astonished! He gave out a long, huge, mighty cry that could be heard across the entire valley! 'My son is a genius!' he crowed. 'He has taught me something new!'" It is easy to imagine little readers basking in some of Little Crow's happiness at his father's recognition and remembering when they too did something brilliant in their parent's eyes.

The author is an accomplished writer with multiple novels and children's books to his credit, including his memoir, *Burro Genius*, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. His style is direct and plainspoken, within the grasp of second- and third-graders. The clean lines of the text marry well with the immensely appealing illustrations, which are done in bold colors and strokes, blending the iconic nature of mural art with the pleasurable immediacy of a child's drawing. The book is set up with the text on the left page and art on the right, with a small illustration between the English and Spanish passages. For example, an illustration of Uncle Fly-Too-Late lamenting his broken wing with an "aw-shucks" look on his face is complemented by a tiny primitive drawing of a crow trying to dodge a rock.

In a couple of passages it feels as though Villaseñor hasn't fully fleshed out the story to the degree he would like. In the conclusion, it seems that there would have been more to write about how animals teach humans important life skills, but the author ran out of space. Regardless, Villaseñor's love for his family's story and his desire to share it is plainly felt. This folk tale of how parents and children can learn from each other will be easily welcome in any home.

NAOMI MILLÁN (April 9, 2007)

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