

Olinguito Speaks Up: Olinguito Alza La Voz

Cecilia Velástegui

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Emotionally evocative dialogue elevates this picture book about Ecuadorian animals and the power of storytelling.

Filled with richly colored illustrations and expressive dialogue, *Olinguito Speaks Up* tells the story of conservation and the importance of respecting our elders.

Tomás is a Galápagos tortoise who lives in the Ecuadorian cloud forest. Tomás loves to tell stories about his life, though the other animals do not believe that his tales are real until Olinguito comes along. Olinguito is a small animal from the raccoon family who had never been seen by the other animals because he lives way up high in the trees; he tells the animals of other recently discovered species like himself. Olinguito wants to hear Tomás's stories, and he has the patience to wait when the two-hundred-year-old tortoise is forgetful, as when he tells the story of how he arrived in the cloud forest from the Galápagos Islands.

Known as "the fabulous fableist," Cecilia Velástegui, born in Ecuador, has won awards for her novels, including first place in the International Latino Book Awards; *Olinguito Speaks Up* is her first children's book. Able to speak four languages, she wrote this book in both English and Spanish. She excels at capturing the characters' feelings in her dialogue, such as when she writes "'I believe your stories,' a voice whispered... 'Please,' said Olinguito, his voice trembling. 'I'd like to hear more stories.'" She is able to be a storyteller through her characters, painting a picture when she writes "'Absolutely!' Tomás bragged. 'We were sunbathing on the rocky shore of our island, when suddenly we heard booming footsteps. Pirates!'"

The illustrations are rich and painted with watercolors and colored pencil. The original designs were created by Velástegui with completed illustrations by Jade Fang. The highlight of the illustrations are the characters' expressions, depicting in wonderful detail the emotions felt in the text. There are also many different angles used to view the action, creating interest and movement.

A nice section at the end of the book includes facts about the olinguito, a South American map, photos of the animals, and some information about Lonesome George, a real-life Galápagos tortoise. The map is colorful and has many small pictures of landmarks and animals, though a bit of a research is necessary to find out what the pictures show.

Sure to entertain, *Olinguito Speaks Up* will delight children and adults alike.

BETH VANHOUTEN (February 11, 2014)

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