FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Juvenile Fiction

Relativity/Relatividad
Michael Smith
Octavio Olivia, illustrator
East West Discovery Press
978-0-9832278-3-0
(September 30, 2011)

Critical thinking skills are vital for success in today's world. Much of the text on handheld devices, computers, and online search engines minimizes the need to connect the dots, to recall knowledge, and push beyond the obvious. Michael Smith addresses this in his new children's book, *Relatividad/Relativity*. This bilingual rhyming story—no easy feat in two languages and perfectly executed here—gently guides elementary school children to begin thinking critically.

Can critical thinking skills and focus be taught, by what method, and at what age can the process begin? *Relatividad/Relativity* is a clear and fun lesson that wrangles these complicated topics to a workable and enjoyable method for learning. The text on each page of *Relatividad/Relativity* compares and contrasts near and far, slow and fast, and so on.

Once presented, however, the author emphasizes that there are no extremes or hard-and-fast rules—instead there is relativity. Smith charges the reader with finding out what relativity is and follows up with, "There is no high, there is no low, just levels of something taller or below." Here the Spanish sentence reads better, "sólo niveles de arriba abajo," which translates to above or below—a sharper, more visceral explanation of relativity.

Lush illustrations by Octavio Oliva move the story along, providing the perfect amount of visual stimulation to keep children engaged from start to finish; warm, friendly, encompassing, they're a refreshing departure from the anime or superhero styles of many children's books today. Teachers and parents will also enjoy the flow between Spanish and English and will find that reading the story over and over again is a pleasure rather than irritating.

The Center for Applied Linguistics estimates that more than half the States now offer Spanish/English dual-language programs in elementary schools. And, according to the most recent US census, there are 47.8 million Hispanic residents in the country, with a projected

doubling in the next thirty years. This represents 15.5 percent of the current US population. Worldwide, Spanish is among the top three languages spoken by more than 450 million people. What better statistics to support children's books that teach difficult to parse subjects and encourage bilingual learning to prepare for a time when proper Spanish is as important to speak as proper English. Smith and Oliva do an outstanding job here, as they have in earlier collaborations.

Traveler and explorer Michael Smith is the author of award winning children's books including *What in the World!*, *Questions for Kids*, *My Ducky Buddy*, and *Thomas the T. rex*.

Illustrator and Folk guitarist Octavio Oliva collaborated on Smith's award-winning title *My Ducky Buddy* and another children's book, *Who is Behind the Door*. Oliva resides in Los Angeles.

Dindy Yokel