

Roses for Isabella

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Amy Cordova, Illustrator

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A budding writer, young Isabella is thrilled when her teacher announces that one student will be chosen to read his or her work at an upcoming celebration of Pachamama, or Mother Earth, at her school in Ecuador. Through short journal entries and poems, Isabelle shares her family's experiences working on rose farms and ultimately discovers how fair trade practices honor people and the earth.

The Afterword, by Lynn Lohr, a Fair Trade Certified activist, teaches children the basics of how the Fair Trade movement started and what types of items qualify for the designation; she gives concrete examples of how Fair Trade practices help farmers and then lists resources for learning more and recognizing Fair Trade products.

Isabelle's journal entries, written in a different typeface to distinguish them from the narrative, capture the straightforward style and candid voice of a child. For example, when she remembers that her father was fired from his last farm for trying to get help for those farmers who got sick from pesticides, she comments, "I was sad because there was nothing I could do to help [my family]," echoing a sweet, simple, heartfelt sentiment that could have come from any child.

While the larger themes of human rights and economic justice, including the concept of Fair Trade, might be conceptually difficult for very young children, readers around eight years of age can start to understand those ideas through Isabella's explanations: "The roses from the farm where Mama and Papa work cost a bit more, that is why we could build our home."

The strength of award-winning Cordova's illustrations is in her use of vivid, beautiful colors and expression, with her depiction of Pachamama particularly striking. Her colorful borders are also a fun touch.

Some aspects of Ecuadorian culture are mentioned, although additional dimensions would have made the book richer, since its message sometimes overshadows the story. Despite that, exposing children to this kind of book encourages a global awareness that can only serve them as they grow up in a world where issues such as Fair Trade become increasingly important.

ALICIA SONDHI (August 26, 2011)

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