ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Soledad Suspiros
Rigoberto Gonzlez
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Sigh-sighs. Soledad, a Puerto Rican girl, earns her nickname from all the sighing she does around the house in her New York City neighborhood. Her mother and father both work at night, so when Soledad comes home from school the house is empty, except for the sounds that her world revolves around: “Mami at the laundry. Wash-dry-fold. Titi, Papi’s sister, at the clothing store, where the price tag sensor sings, bleep-bleep!” These are the remembered noises that fill her loneliness while the only child waits for her family to come home.

Although Soledad looks six or seven years old, the noise presentation seems more appropriate for a younger audience. The author, an award-winning poet and writer, has a particular interest in latchkey children. As the son and grandson of migrant farm workers, GonzÃ¡lez was a latchkey child himself; he also worked in after-school programs and wants to help children understand that using their imagination can open up new worlds.

Soledad and her friends look for shoes, elephants, and bizcochos out of the shapes of clouds, and turn a simple catch-all box into a treasure chest of possibilities. Nedelsy and Jahniza help their friend Soledad see that this box of books, crayons, and other miscellany can be used for countless hours of entertainment, braiding ribbon in her hair, or making watercolor pictures.

The bilingual English and Spanish text is well done; it’s especially enjoyable to see how different machines make different noises in the two languages. The price tag sensor “bleep bleeps” in English, but “pip pips” in Spanish. A short glossary explaining Puerto Rican food dishes (gandules and piraguas) would have been useful, perhaps along with the recipes for these dishes.

The illustrations are bright and warm, adding to the feeling that perhaps Soledad’s situation isn’t as bleak as it might first appear. The children all wear bright, primary colored clothing and even the brick walls have a warm glow to them.

This story will reach many children who find themselves in a situation similar to that of this well-named heroine (Soledad means “solitude”). Her sighs of loneliness become sighs of contentment by the end of the book, once her friends have helped her see things in a different

light. Perhaps *Soledad Suspiros* will inspire other children to look at the world around them through the eyes of another.

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