



## We Love California!

**Gabriella Francine**

**Phil Velikan, Illustrator**

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*Love for the Golden State shines through in this information-packed journey through California.*

As Gabriella Francine introduces California's elementary-age children to their state symbols, she seeks to generate pride in that state's rich history, bountiful resources, and stunning landscape. These aspects of *We Love California!* are woven together with a thin plot line that keeps the book from becoming page after page of information.

Francine introduces readers to Olivia and Avery, two girls in search of adventure. Their goal is to collect all of California's state symbols. They first appear in a photograph, sitting in a car made out of a cardboard box. Then, through cartoon-like illustrations, the story enters the girls' imaginations, where the car becomes real and the pair drives off for a trip around the state. Soft pencil and watercolor art brings this part of the journey to life.

From California's beaches to its mountains, forests, and valleys, the girls cover much of the northern and central parts of the state, including the state capital. Along the way, they encounter key symbols such as the state tree, flower, insect, reptile, seal, motto, nickname, and more. The state song, "I Love You, California," is included in its entirety. Partway through their journey, a grizzly bear—the California state bear, of course—joins them and takes over much of the teaching. In the end, the girls are called to lunch, returning them to real life and ending their journey.

Francine ensures her book offers more than pages of rote information. While her story line is thin, it sufficiently weaves the facts together. This isn't primarily a storybook, after all. And although the use of the bear seems a bit contrived, and may seem so even to young children, the plot moves the reader along and keeps things interesting. The bit of history sprinkled in with the facts provides helpful context, but the symbols remain in the spotlight throughout.

The artwork appears unfinished. Background colors bleed through the characters, and the appearance of the bear seems inconsistent in one or two spots. The skin and fur tones change on some pages. When this combines with the overall cartoon-like quality, the illustrations inadvertently appear almost like a child's, albeit an accomplished one. Sweet and showing promise, the images need polish to have a satisfying, professional look.

The book will certainly be useful for teachers, homeschooling families, and any parent who wants to inspire in their child a love of, and appreciation for, their home state of California. Although it appeals mainly to an audience from the Golden State, it would be enjoyable for any child who might one day visit there.

DIANE GARDNER (August 27, 2013)

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