

Word Travelers: And the Missing Mexican Molé

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Raj Haldar and Neha Rawat's *Word Travelers and the Missing Mexican Molé* is an exciting middle grade mystery.

After trick-or-treating on Halloween, best friends MJ and Eddie see a candy bar in their haul whose label is misspelled. This prompts them to look up the origin of the word “chocolate” in a magic book that spins above their heads, transporting them to Mexico on the Day of the Dead. There, they meet Rosa, who asks MJ and Eddie to help her find her missing grandmother, the only person who knows her family’s secret molé recipe, which is needed for the Día de los Muertos celebration.

As the trio zooms from clue to clue at a pace that mirrors Rosa’s sense of urgency, they are pitted against sneaky Groucho Gary, who is trying to steal the recipe to save the day. In the process of their adventures, they learn about Mexican culture and the origins of words in the English language. They are fueled by empathy and their thirst for knowledge; their cleverness and exuberance is sure to invoke joy, wonder, and curiosity.

There’s a glossary at the back of the book, and its explanations of the origins of common words are informative and entertaining. However, it includes words that children may already know, while excluding less familiar ones and complex ones, like triskaidekaphobia (the fear of the number thirteen). Still, throughout the book: most meanings are discernible in context. And the book’s emotive cartoon illustrations dance across the page, featuring the ghost of Frida Kahlo, Mexico’s Island of Dolls, and other endearing images.

The middle grade mystery novel *Word Travelers and the Missing Mexican Molé* balances its didactic content with a fun adventure.

AIMEE JODOIN (November / December 2021)

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