

Xchitl la Nia de las Flores / Xochitl and the Flowers

Jorge Argueta

Carl Angel, Illustrator

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"How are you? My name is Xochitl. Do you like flowers?" As Xochitl adjusts to the new language and culture of San Francisco she remembers El Salvador and the beautiful flowers that surrounded her there. After all, her name means "flower" in the Nahuatl language. The move is intended to fulfill her parents' dream of opening a nursery in the United States.

"One afternoon, my mami brings home a pail full of lovely white roses and red roses, sunflowers, and freckle-faced Stargazer lilies." That day Xochitl and her mom sell all of the flowers to their neighbors. "Every day, we meet more and more neighbors and they get to know us." That endeavor inspires papi to rent a small apartment with a back yard perfect for a nursery, but the yard is currently filled with garbage. Taking many trips to the dump, preparing walkways and soil, and buying all the flowers and plants they can afford, Xochitl and her parents get ready for a grand opening party. All of the neighbors come and everyone is in high spirits! The inevitable conflict arises when the grumpy landowner shows up, threatening to have the business closed: "This is a residential neighborhood; it's not a place for entertaining strangers!"

Having illustrated many previous children's books, the artist, whose work can also be seen in galleries and museums in the San Francisco area, does a wonderful job capturing the feelings Xochitl has for flowers. The vibrant colors in the acrylic paintings show the deep pinks, bright yellows, and healthy greens of the nursery.

Based on a true story, *Xchitl la Niña de las Flores* sends a subtle message about the importance of community. Like his characters, the author, a poet, teacher, and author, was born in El Salvador; he moved to San Francisco in 1980. Creating a work of realistic fiction, Argueta has taken many facts and a true story and woven them into an endearing tale of a girl and her family's dream of owning a business in the United States.

Intended for children ages eight to twelve, this book portrays the message of community in a lesson that can benefit people of all ages. Xochitl's community pulls together to save the nursery, swinging the grumpy landowner's opinion to one of support. It is a thoughtful story that will make readers reflect on their own contributions to their community.

BECKY RANKENS (November / December 2003)

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