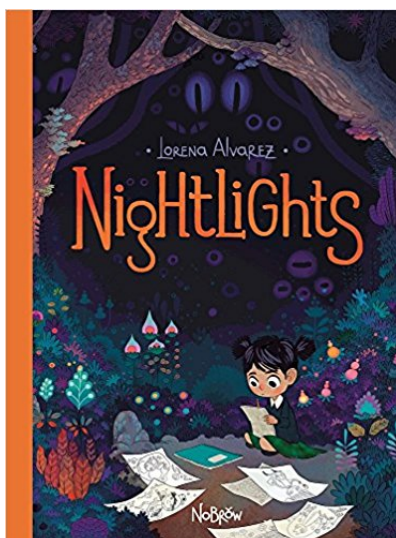


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Review of *Nightlights*
By Lorena Alvarez

Adult/ Educator Reviewer: Michelle Fowler-Amato
Old Dominion
Student Review: Sage Amato, 3rd Grade



Alvarez, L. (2016). *Nightlights*. New York, NY: Nobrow Press.

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Adult Review: Michelle Fowler-Amato

Lorena Alvarez's graphic story, *Nightlights*, begins with an image of young Sandy lying on the floor surrounded by a collection of fantastic creatures and wondrous worlds that she has carefully sketched on loose-leaf paper and in notebooks. These creations come to life in Sandy's dreams. When Sandy wakes, she draws what she has experienced in order to hold on to these memories. The worlds, in which Sandy lives, when she is both dreaming and creating, contrast greatly with the experiences she has at her school. As Sandy and her classmates walk through the wrought iron gate each morning, the nuns admonish the girls who make efforts to distinguish themselves in response to the rigid dress code. This is a school in which those who are different are positioned as "weirdoes," and those who daydream are deemed failures. When Sandy is caught sketching rather than focusing on a math lesson, she is led to a dark room and is told, "You will stay here, while the other girls are using their minds for something useful." In this room, Sandy is, once again, acquainted with Morfie, a strange new friend who leads Sandy on a journey that teaches her powerful lessons about both art and life. Throughout this journey, Sandy discovers that she is stronger and more resourceful than she once recognized.

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Alvarez's vivid illustrations are the highlight of *Nightlights*. This piece is told primarily through picturesque panels that invite readers to peek into Sandy's life, joining her in moments that are both mundane and magical. While less developed, the characters and the worlds that Alvarez created in this piece remind me a bit of those featured in Tomm Moore's beautifully haunting films, *Song of the Sea* and *The Secret of Kells*. It is likely that Alvarez's *Nightlights* would appeal to a similar audience. Though readers of all ages will appreciate Alvarez's captivating illustrations, the nuns' treatment of Sandy and the journey that Sandy takes with her friend, Morfie, might frighten younger children. While my eight year old thoroughly enjoyed interacting with *Nightlights*, there were parts of the story that seemed to confuse her. Though a more mature reader might have picked up on themes and ideas that were not yet meaningful to my third grader, some of the moments that she questioned were a bit unclear to me, as well. In fact, I chose to re-read the last few pages of *Nightlights* multiple times, engaging my husband, who had also read the book, in a conversation about the author's intentions. It is important to note, however, that moments like this can certainly be seen as opportunities for teachers and students to think together about their individual take-ways from a reading experience, as well.

Alvarez's *Nightlights* can serve a variety of purposes in the upper elementary and middle grade classroom. It would be an excellent mentor text to share with writers who are preparing to compose their own graphic stories, as there is much to be learned through

exploring the choices that Alvarez makes. Teachers might invite their classes to look closely at how the text and images work together, or they might encourage student writers to consider Alvarez's decisions in visual design. Teachers might draw on this graphic story to explore the reading of images, too. I think *Nightlights* would also be a wonderful addition to a classroom library. Because Alvarez's story is told primarily through art, *Nightlights* might be of interest to our emergent bilingual learners and to students who are reluctant readers, as this experience will offer them opportunities to draw on visual cues as well as text to make sense of what they are reading. While *Nightlights* might initially be explored independently, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the fascinating worlds that Alvarez has devised, I recommend purchasing multiple copies of this piece, as students will benefit from thinking together about parts of the story that are a bit obscure.

Student Review: Sage Amato

I love graphic novels, so I was excited to read *Nightlights*, by Lorena Alvarez. *Nightlights* is about a girl named Sandy. Sandy loves to draw things from her imagination. It starts out as an ordinary day

until Sandy meets Morfie, a mysterious girl who changes everything.

I really enjoyed reading this book! I really admire the art. I like it because it's so creative, and it looks like the illustrator uses a lot of effort to make these drawings. I like it because I am an artist, too, and it reminds me of my art. The art looks really detailed. It is so detailed that it almost makes me feel like I am in the story.

I think this book is important because it teaches you that you don't just have to be one way, you can be all different types of ways. In the story, the nuns act like everything must be perfect, but Sandy isn't. Sandy continues to draw during class instead of doing what the nuns tell her to do. Drawing puts her in her happy place. Sandy finds a way to draw and learn. She turns her learning into her favorite thing, which is drawing.

I would recommend this book to someone that likes things a little bit scary and super-duper creative!

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