

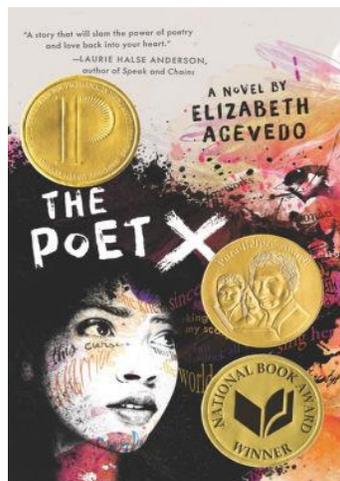
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Review of *Poet X* Written by Elizabeth Acevedo

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Madison Jones
Collins Hill High School

Student Reviewer: Maria Vargas Gottschalk, 11th grade



Acevedo, E. (2017). *Poet X*. New York, NY: HarperCollins

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Adult Review: Madison Jones

Poet X (2017) is a story of conflict—conflict with family, with self, and with God. Xiomara, a young Dominican woman, navigates the complexities of forming her own identity amongst the cultural and religious pressures she faces at home, and she does so through her poetry. Partially through her first relationship, Xiomara learns the importance of establishing her own identity aside from the identities of her parents and twin brother. Acevedo’s novel follows Xiomara’s growth as a woman, sister, daughter, and most of all, an artist. As a response to the world that is continually labelling her, Xiomara forges her own identity: *Poet X*.

The novel *Poet X* (2017) occupies two underrepresented areas in most classroom libraries, in that it speaks to the specific challenges of a young Dominican woman through the form of free verse poetry. From an educator’s perspective, Acevedo’s work presents several opportunities for instruction in the classroom. Her work serves as a wonderful example of relevant poetry for students to model their own writing after. As far as student interest is concerned, I can barely keep this book on my shelf. Regardless of race or gender, my high school students find Acevedo’s honesty refreshing and engaging; however, students who share Xiomara’s specific experiences obviously interact with the text on a different, more personal level.

The very characteristics that make this novel so powerful for readers can make it a complicated but worthwhile text in the classroom. The main character struggles deeply with her religious identity and poses several criticisms about the construction of women in her culture. Acevedo writes honestly and openly about religion, sexuality, and many of the other challenges teenagers face on a daily basis, and this honesty can spark contentious but necessary conversations in the classroom.

Student Review: Maria Vargas Gottschalk

I identified with the main character of *Poet X* because I face the same pressures she writes about. *Poet X* is forced to celebrate a religion that she is not sure is right for her. X’s mom is very Catholic and is all about the church. She believes that everything that is done out of school or church is sinful. This affects Xiomara’s life because it stops her from doing regular teenage stuff like dating, going to Poetry Slam, or simply hanging out with different people other than Caridad (her best friend) and Xavier (her twin brother). It also affects her in the way that she doesn’t know any more if she believes in this cruel God that her mom is forcing her to meet—in a God that won’t allow her to do “normal” teenage stuff. Even though all these questions and doubts are rising about God, her mother still forces her to go to confirmation class, and X is too scared to tell her the truth. I can identify—not with her physical appearance because we are total opposites in that regard—but with the expectations and standards we always have to meet as young women. Not only females but all teenagers who are struggling to find their identity can understand the core of this book, all the doubts and questions.

My favorite part of the book is when *Poet X* talks about her relationship with Arman. I don’t like it just because they are dating or because she is challenging or disobeying her mom but because this one person gives her the courage she needs to push her. Without pressuring her or asking her questions, he helps her find herself; he just listens and points out the person she didn’t know was inside of her. Their relationship is about him showing her that he believed she could do anything she wanted, and there is no shame. He doesn’t push her to be the smartest or to have the best grades, and as a result, she starts to let go of the pressure of others and focuses on herself. I think that is why this story is important. It shows it is okay to make your own identity even when everyone wants so much from you, and I would recommend it to anyone.

As part of my review, my teacher and I worked together to create a poem inspired by my reading of this book:

Poet X

A society burned her soul—
Forced her to go unnoticed,
Project an over confidence
That ached and ate
Her whole.

A mother's hugs
Only burnt until
Her bones

Turned brittle.
But he pushes her to
an identity
She didn't know
Existed.
Another soul
Where she could
Cuddle up
Against.

She defied adversities
that stood in her way:
Abuse.
Pain.
Trust lost—
Forgot...
Then, a new God.
Her own—
Full of breaks
despite her mistakes.

The poetry that scared her
repaired her.
The fear that drove her
wrote her...

She found herself in
the very place she hid.
Poet X.