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## JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

### “Solo”

By Gabrielle Baut

Illustrated by Allison Shanahan

*This short story was inspired by one of my students in Italy. She was in seventh grade and had just arrived in Italy from north Africa. After the first lesson I gave to her class, she very shyly approached me. She told me I was the first person in the school with whom she could truly communicate. Her school had no accommodations for newcomers, no classes to teach Italian to immigrants, and since most teachers and students had very negative attitudes toward the African students they did not seem to care if she understood or not. She told me how lonely she was. I only saw her class once a week due to how large the school was, so our conversations were infrequent. When my time in Italy was over, she gave me a charm from her home country with some orange beads (my favorite color) to remember her by. She thanked me for speaking English with her each week. I have never forgotten her or her story.*



**Solo - alone, only one, by oneself**

I just moved here, to Italy. In my homeland of Morocco, we speak Arabic and French, and study English at school.

I am *solo* at school. The other students speak Italian. Some teachers know a little English or French. No one speaks Arabic like me. They smile at me and ask, "how are you?" I say, "fine, thank you" even though in my heart I am lonely.

Some things are fun *solo* - it is fun to read a book *solo*, draw a picture *solo*, or sing a *solo*. But now I am *solo* all the time, and that is not so fun.

I walk to school *solo*. I eat lunch *solo*. I study *solo*.



### **Amici – friends**

In Morocco I had *amici*.

We played together, laughed together, and ate food together. Always, I felt content and joyful with my *amici* at my side. My *amici*, however, could not come to Italy with me. I came here *solo*, on a boat. I live now with my aunt (*zia*, in Italian).

The students here already have their *amici*. It seems like they have been *amici forever*. I long to communicate and feel the closeness I had before.

How do you make *amici* when you do not speak the same language? Some days it feels like I am invisible to them.

I remain *solo*.



### **Triste - sad**

During class I copy the work from the board. I hear the teacher say my name.  
I look up.

Everyone is looking at me.

Teacher says my name again and asks a question I do not understand.

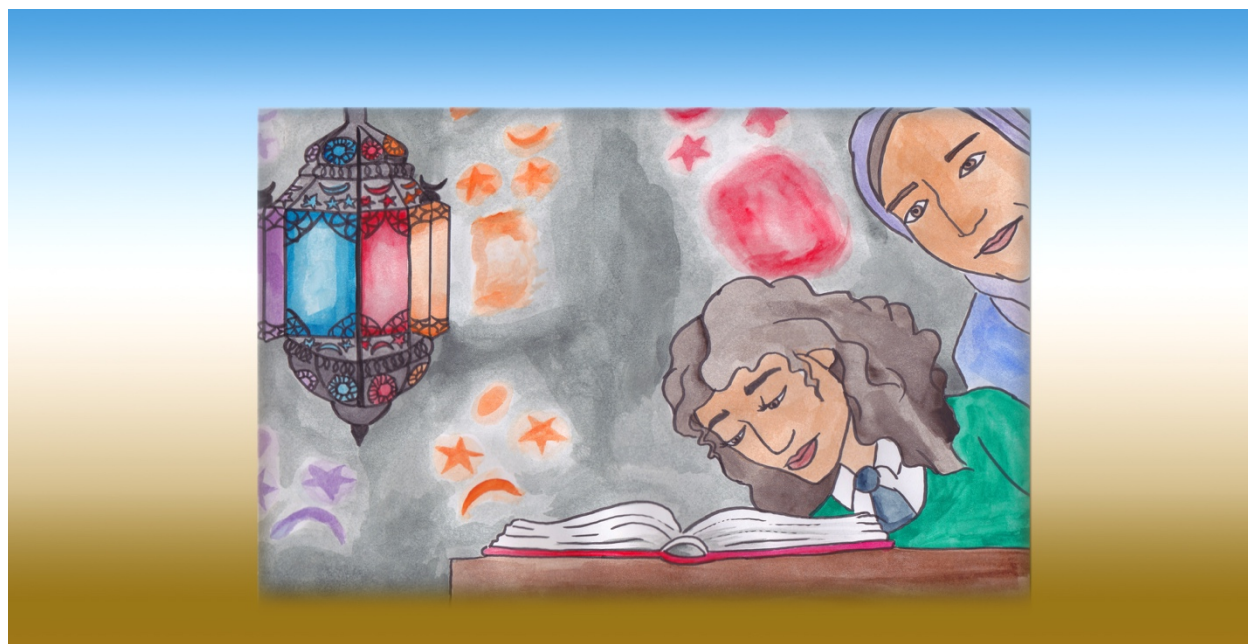
I stare at her, confused, panicking. Trying to make sense of the words she says to me.

She repeats, more slowly, this time pointing at the work on the board. She does not use any vocabulary I recognize.

I guess at the answer, but it is clear I am wrong. Someone behind me snickers. Someone else kicks them under the table. I look down.

I do not cry, even though I am *triste*.



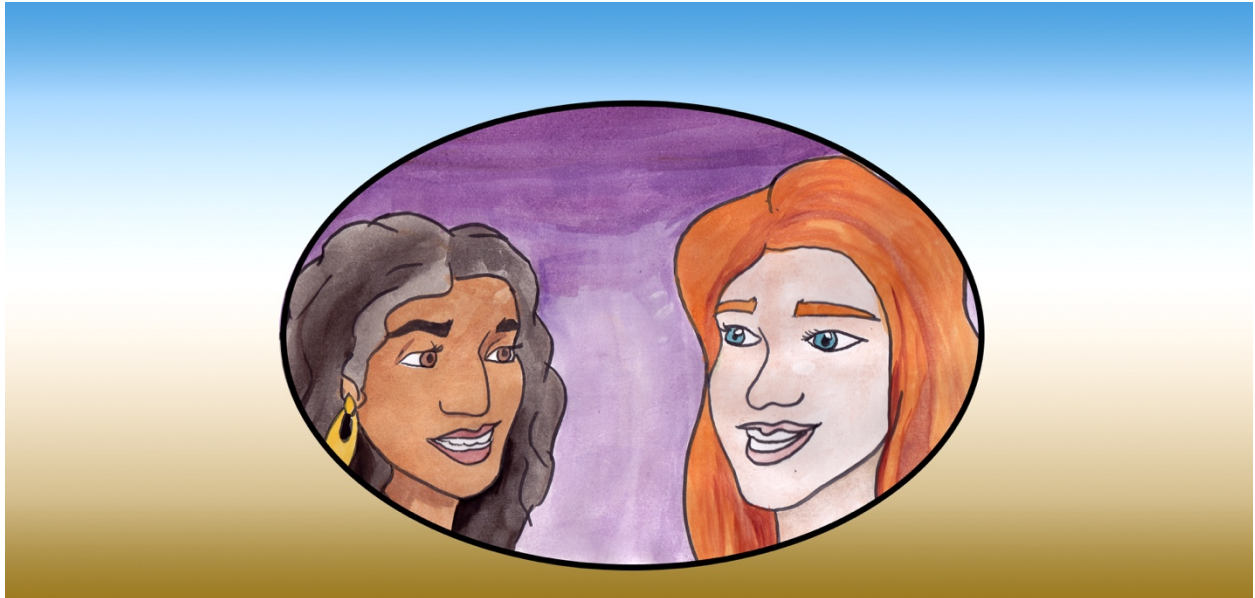


### **Studiare - study**

All day I sit quietly and listen. My teachers give me homework in Italian. I write down everything I see, so I can *studiare* it later.

English is my favorite class. It is the only class I understand. Everything else is a blur. All day I concentrate on the *lezioni* (lessons), but after a while I become dazed from the unfamiliar language. My thoughts are scattered like the light from a lantern.

My *zia* tries to help me, but she does not read very much Italian. She has not been in Italy very long either. “We can *studiare* together”, says *Zia*. I am thankful for her kind support. At least I am not *solo* at home.



### **Amicizia - friendship**

Between classes, a teacher comes into my classroom. She is not my teacher, but I have met her before, she speaks some English. I notice a new student is with her. The teacher tells me this is an exchange student from abroad, and she speaks English.

“Hi!” she says to me, smiling sincerely.

“Hi.” I say to her, nervous, but so happy to be approached in a language I know.

We talk during the whole break and decide to meet after school for *studiare*. I can hardly contain my excitement to speak more with my new *amica*. I feel so relieved to be able to communicate without struggling.

For the first time since I came here, I believe I am no longer *solo*. I am not *triste*. I have found *amicizia*.

### **About Gabrielle Baut**



My name is Gabrielle Baut, originally from Michigan and now a music educator in Garden City, South Carolina. I received my Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Cincinnati. After my undergraduate degree I spent three months teaching English as a foreign language in Italy. On that trip I discovered my passion for language education, and how closely related it is to teaching music. I love to travel and study languages; these experiences and passions have motivated me to pursue my Master of Education in Language, Literacy, and Culture at Coastal Carolina University. I hope to be certified as an English as a Second Language teacher with the goal of someday teaching English abroad.

### **About Allison Shanahan**



My name is Allison Shanahan and I'm originally from Long Island, New York. My undergraduate degree is in Art Education from SUNY New Paltz and my Master's of Curriculum and Instruction from Scranton University. I have been an Art teacher in South Carolina for sixteen years and have a ten-year-old son named Paxton. I am currently working on obtaining my certification in ESOL through Coastal Carolina University. When I became an art teacher, my goal was to teach children how to use art to both express themselves and as a medium to create cross-curricular connections in all of their other subject areas. One of my passions is helping students realize how they can use art in their everyday lives. Through my ESOL certification, I hope to help students use art to express themselves visually and also use it as an avenue to learn how to develop their language skills.