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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

## Review of *Alma and How She Got Her Name*

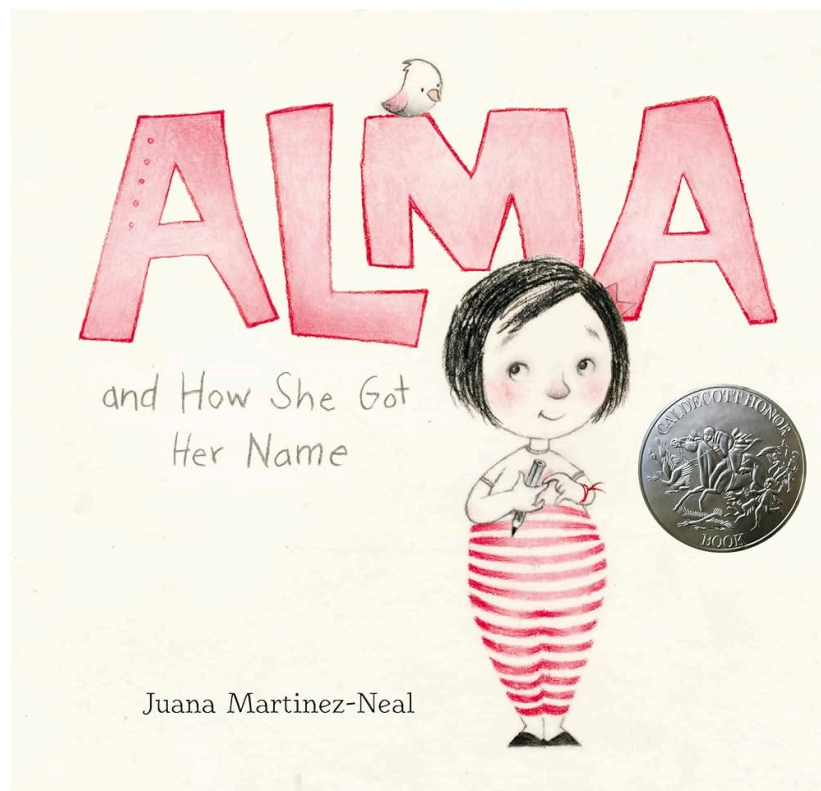
Written by Juana Martinez-Neal

**Adult/ Educator Reviewer:** Shuai Xu, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

**Child/ Student Reviewers:** Lexani Hernandez, Kindergarten Student

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Juana, M. (2023). *Alma and How She Got Her Name*. Candlewick Press.

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## **Adult's Review:**

"Alma and How She Got Her Name" by Juana Martinez-Neal is a heartwarming and beautifully illustrated children's book that explores the significance of names and family heritage. The story centers around a young girl, Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela, who thinks her name is far too long. Her father gently explains the origin of each part of her name, connecting Alma to the ancestors who inspired it. As she learns about her namesake relatives, Alma discovers the richness of her heritage and develops a newfound appreciation for her unique and meaningful name. The book is characterized by its gentle storytelling and charming illustrations, making it an endearing read for both children and adults.

The book is a treasure trove of cultural richness and self-discovery, offering a touching portrayal of cultural heritage and the importance of names in shaping identity. Ideal for young readers, particularly those aged 4 to 8, this book is a gem for parents, teachers, and anyone eager to foster a deep sense of belonging, self-worth, and individuality in young minds. The illustrations also bring the story to life in a deeply meaningful way. Each little family story unfolds with a different picture, allowing readers to imaginatively interact with Alma's old family members. This artistic approach creates a vivid sense of warmth and intimacy, enriching the narrative and deepening the connection between the readers and the characters. Moreover, the availability of the book in both English and Spanish versions extends its reach and relevance, making it an invaluable resource for bilingual families and Spanish-speaking communities. This accessibility further enhances the book's appeal in diverse classroom settings and multicultural curriculums, as it celebrates diversity and encourages children to cherish their own family stories and explore themselves, regardless of language. The combination of its universal themes, engaging storytelling, and beautiful illustrations enriches children's understanding of identity and familial bonds in a profound and inclusive manner, cultivating a resonant and meaningful connection with readers of various backgrounds.

It's essential to approach discussions on family heritage and names with sensitivity to cultural diversity, recognizing that students come from varied backgrounds and may have differing experiences and emotions related to their family histories. Discussions about family can evoke a range of emotions, so creating a supportive environment where all students feel comfortable and respected is key. Also, involving parents in the learning process can provide a more enriching experience, such as inviting parents to talk about their own names and histories together with kids. The book can serve as a springboard for broader discussions on cultural diversity, identity, and heritage, to be a great opportunity to integrate art projects or social studies that celebrate different cultures and family traditions. For example, having students artistically represent their names with colors, symbols, and patterns that reflect their personal or cultural identities, or inviting kids to create family portrait collages that combine different media to represent students' families and cultural backgrounds, and having a show-and-tell presentation. Additionally, the book provides a wonderful opportunity for literacy activities in a translanguaging environment. Students could write stories or poems about their names, mirroring the bilingual nature of the book, interviewing a family member and creating booklets about their family stories in multiple languages. These activities not only reinforce the themes presented in "Alma and How She Got

"Her Name" but also offer rich, interactive learning experiences that foster cultural awareness, personal identity exploration, and linguistic development in a creative and inclusive manner and foster the sense of understanding, empathy, and cultural appreciation.

### Students' Review:

Alma has a big name! Her dad told the full story about how she got her name. We feel like it's so interesting! Our favorite part is, Alma's grandfather liked to draw, and grandfather's name was Jose, and Alma also draws. She drew a cat for her father. And that is how her name was Jose. It's so warm. It's about LOVE.

¡Alma tiene un gran nombre! Su padre contó toda la historia de cómo consiguió su nombre. ¡Creemos que es demasiado divertida! Nuestra parte favorita es que al abuelo de Alma le gusta pintar, el nombre del abuelo es José, y Alma también pinta. Ella dibujó un gato para su padre. Por eso se llama José. La historia es sobre el amor.

