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Review of *Only For a Little While*

Written by Gabriela Orozco Belt

Adult/ Educator Reviewer: Mary E. Leon, PhD

Child/ Student Reviewer: Zavier R. Leon, 5th Grade Student



Gabriela, B. (2023). *Only for a Little While*. HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN: 9780063206

Adult's Review:

Only for a Little While—written by Gabriela Orozco Belt and illustrated by Richy Sánchez Ayala—dives lightly into the plight of a family as they deal with job loss and a home transition. A father, mother, and two daughters move in with the father's sister and her own family while he looks for a new job and a new place to live. Throughout the story, the protagonist's family—a latino family—reassures each other that this set of circumstances will only last por un ratito—only for a little while. In addition to weaving in this refrain of por un ratito, the book features other seamless switches between English and Spanish. The main themes of the book are resilience, togetherness, and normalization of multi-family homes and major life disruptions. The author does a wonderful job of touching on these themes in subtle ways that will most likely connect with students facing their own unique challenges outside of school.

Many children's books that are intended to teach (some) Spanish rely on repetition of refrains or one-to-one correspondence between illustrations and vocabulary. Only for a Little While does not. It is a book that assumes that readers have either a certain familiarity with Spanish, or a comfort with hearing a language they don't understand but can try to intuit. The aim of the book does not seem to be to teach Spanish, but rather to normalize it, even when it is not explained or understood by everyone in the audience. As the United States quickly heads towards a future in which it boasts the world's second largest Spanish-speaking population (estimated by 2060, surpassed only Mexico), exposing students to Spanish can only be beneficial. Even if the goal of incorporating Spanish-language materials into core curriculum classrooms is not to teach Spanish or to equip students to use the language, celebrating and normalizing the use of Spanish (and other languages) will prepare students with empathy and tolerance for linguistic diversity.

The book's illustrations are bright and engaging, making it an ideal book for a classroom read-aloud. Even if a teacher does not speak Spanish, this book could serve many purposes in the classroom. Teachers could use this book and enlist the help of Spanish-speaking students as local experts to read the book aloud to the class, having them read the book entirely, or helping to read or pronounce the portions in Spanish. Teachers should keep in mind, however, that young students, especially, may not readily make the connection between their English-language literacy abilities and their ability to read Spanish. That is to say that a student—regardless of their comfort reading in English—may not feel the same level of comfort or have the same amount of practice reading in Spanish, and teachers should be careful to not assume that a student will be able to jump in to help or read at a moment's notice. Students should be invited to participate in reading and allowed time to prepare to avoid public struggle. Teachers can also use this book to model linguistic curiosity and exploration by inviting students into the process of researching meanings and pronunciation.

Only for a Little While also features a variety of topics that are prime to encourage critical thinking and cultural inquiry. Teachers can use this book to invite conversation on concepts of home and family, to talk comparatively about Latino cultures (the protagonist's parents are from Mexico and Costa Rica and cultural differences are subtly introduced in the text), and to discuss

emotional regulation and resilience. The book will most likely appeal to third and fourth graders and their teachers, and is also a fantastic book to consider for a personal home collection or library selection.

Student's Review:

We read the book out loud together, then conducted our student review in a mock-podcast format, with me (Mary Beth) interviewing Zavier to learn his perspective as the target audience for this book.

Mary Beth (MB): Now that we've read *Only for a Little While* by Gabriela Orozco Belt, let's talk about the book, what was great about it, and who you think would enjoy it. First of all, what was the book about?

Zavier (Z): It was about a family who had to live with their cousins because the dad—Papi—lost his job. They had to live at their cousins' house because they didn't have money to stay in their own house.

MB: And what did you like about the book?

Z: Well, it uses English and Spanish. I speak a little Spanish because my dad is Peruvian and you both speak Spanish at home but I still didn't understand all the Spanish in the book. I think it could be difficult for people who don't speak Spanish, but the book gives clues to help you understand. Like in the beginning it explains what *por un ratito* means and by the end you probably will know.

MB: That's interesting! Do you think it would be easy or hard for a teacher to read this book to a class? What about your class right now?

Z: I think it'd be easy because it's a short or medium book. It's not a chapter book, but it's also not for young kids like in first grade.

MB: How do you think the students in your class would respond to this book?

Z: All of the kids in my class don't speak Spanish. But a kid who does speak Spanish would feel good if their teacher read this. They'd be happy because not a lot of books have Spanish in them in the United States in our schools.

MB: That's a thoughtful observation. What emotions do you think a Spanish-speaking student might feel if their teacher read this book in class?

Z: Good! They'd feel proud to hear Spanish in a book and they could maybe help the other students learn.

MB: That sounds wonderful! Last year you had a teacher who spoke English and Spanish, and this year I think your teacher only speaks English. If a teacher who doesn't know Spanish wanted to read this book to their class, what advice would you have for them?

Z: I would say they should read the book on their own before they try to read it in class. That way they can look up the Spanish words and even how to pronounce them, or they can ask a friend who does speak Spanish to help them practice.

MB: Those are great ideas! What grades would you recommend this book for?

Z: Second to fifth.

MB: Noted. Okay! Final question. I want you to think hard on this one: What are two things this book can help students learn?

Z: Two things?! That's hard. First, that not every family is perfect. In this book there was a bossy cousin. But you just have to keep going and not let it get to you.

MB: Do you remember what the sisters kept saying to each other to encourage each other? That it was solo por un ratito—only for a little while.

Z: Yeah. So it's good not to take your anger out on people. Things are just for a little while and you can get through them.

MB: Especially with the support of your family, right?

Z: Yes. Even if your family isn't perfect, you can make it through together.