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The Rowdy, Rowdy Ranch

Alla en el Rancho Grande

By Ethriam Cash Brammer

Illustrated by D. Nina Cruz

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Ages: 2-5

With its sunflower wind and its tree full of chickens and its amazing stars, *The Rowdy, Rowdy Ranch* is a wonderful place for any child to spend the day. Ethriam Cash Brammer's bilingual (English/Spanish) text is brief and simple, but offers a lyricism and loveliness that even the youngest reader can appreciate: "We drove through the countryside and a rush of sunflower wind flapped through my dog's ears." This is a tale of excited youngsters discovering life in the country as they feed horses, play hide-and-seek under a "canopy of green leaves, golden threads and giant ears of corn," ride on pigs, climb haystacks, and slide "down the granary chute on the backs of sunbeams and laughter." But this is also a story about stories, and the lesson here is as much for adults as it is for the very young: we all need narrative—as much as air, as much as food—to tell us who we are and who we might become, or to remind us if we begin to forget. *The Rowdy, Rowdy Ranch* knows that the tales we breathe in almost unconsciously as children will help determine whether we believe that magic is possible, that songs wield power, that the world is worth its weight in sorrow.

D. Nina Cruz's remarkable illustrations are high-spirited and action-packed (forget the joystick—all you need is fingers to turn the pages), and kids will love finding the little dog (Buffy, according to the name on her bowl) who appears throughout. (Yes, she's in the final picture; keep looking.) And speaking of the last illustration, it's a wonderful two page spread, featuring the children, (in the foreground, ranged all around in sleeping bags) portrayed in luminous color, as if, after the unforgettable day just coming to a close, their bodies are still tinged with excitement. The adults, outlined in moonlight, sit in darkness in the background, a remarkable visual representation of the mysterious, low-voiced night talk of grown-ups that is so comforting to children as they drop off to sleep. The corn, bathed in a lunar glow, holds its private conversations with the wind. And a guitar, emptied of song, leans in shadow as the quieter music of the moon and stars takes over.

The Rowdy, Rowdy Ranch is a big-hearted book that will give children a happy, safe feeling, while also encouraging them, like Abuela's (Grandma's) chickens, to try their wings. This book knows that the way to keep going is sometimes through a story or a song ("the music of [Grandpa's] tears" is what secures the ranch for all of them), and dares to ask, what is a heritage, after all, if not sunflowers? if not the stars? if not the tales

we get by heart? The prevailing advice for children’s book authors is to de-emphasize the importance of adults, but Ethriam Brammer presents a picture of a large and loving family of several generations, and here at El Rancho Grande (as in life itself) the older members are a vital part of all the world-building the kids are (unknowingly) engaged in as they go about the day, their eyes full of sunlight and greenness and familiar faces, their heads full of stories (like this one) that will “keep [them] warm for the rest of [their lives.]”

— Ann Stapleton