

Poetry

FIELDNOTE

Steven Alvarez

Today tutored
two fourth graders
in tandem, Lili and Maria,
our trio reading poems.
We shared one book
all wondered at an illustration
of two curious children peering over
the edge where the sidewalk ends
perhaps peering into a cavernous gap:
And Maria— “*Ay dios mio*, their *perro* is going
to fall.”
Today: poetry. Everyday: poetry.
Bueno, vamos a leer. Together let’s go:
conjuntos:
rhythms bouncing Germanically
to some spot where all roads end
basta ya no más
no street begins

but some nouns growing *naranjas*
and prepositions *brillando* as crimson crystal
y purple *pajaros* resting on conjunctions
y *los verbos* scattering in wind smelling
like peppermint.
And Lili— “I think the poem in the fields or the *finca*.”
And Maria— “I think *wind* and *begins* kinda rhymes.”
“Yeah.”
“¡Sí!”
Trio of laughter. *Conjuntos pues.*
You like to speak Spanish?
And Maria— “With *mi mamá* and *papá*, yeah. But not with my
teacher.”
Your teacher *habla español*?
And she— “*Tries* to speak to me, but I don’t like to talk to her in
Spanish because *estamos en la escuela*.”
When do you speak Spanish?
And Lili— “*Solamente en la casa or con mis amigos.*
Pero a veces here too when I talk to Maria’s mom.”
And Maria— “Me too, when I talk at home, but I talk to my brother
in English and Spanish, but more English.”
And Lili— “And sometimes to *chamacitos*.”
But why do you like to speak Spanish with me?
And Maria— “Because you are nice, and you speak both.”
I think I speak more English than Spanish, *como ahorita, verdad*?
And both— “¡Sí!”
And Lili— “See you are doing it, *eso me gusta*.”
Ándale that’s one for the code.
Our last stanza
and *conjuntos* we stepped slowly
through the measure following arrows
over rapid lines
back from that grammatical park
ojalá que to someday return
bringing back *regalos* from another syntax
and dutifully sharing lexicons.
What about those arrows and measured walks?
And Lili— “Because it’s the *camino* to the place to see the picture on
the front.”
Returning to the cover.

And Maria— "*Claro que yes.*"

And Lili—"To the end of the *calles* too."

And Maria—" *Pobre perro.*"

Maria and Lili formulated their own poem responses,
and they read their poems
as they turned their backs to the gap
at the end of the *calles*.

And Lili:

*the parque is like the forest
y los arboles son bien verdes
and we go there on Sundays sometimes
and have barbacoa and we visit*

Applause from her audience.

And Maria:

*hablo español and English con mi familia
y mis padres están orgullosos de mí
porque tengo buenas notas
y tengo muchas metas y me dicen
con ganas mijita porque tu futuro
es nuestro futuros.*

Applause.

After this I asked

both to write a paragraph
comparing the poems. Maria
sped through her writing
pointing to *español* in both poems
and *familia* at the beginning
of the journey to where the *calles* end.

Lili sighed and stared at her page
and Maria would pause and cheer her friend
and they both finished their paragraphs together
and read them *conjuntos*.

Lili's mother said *hola* and Maria and I
said *hasta luego* to Lili and then her mother
I asked Maria why she helped Lili.

"Because she gets mad that she can't write and read like me. But I like
to help her because she's my friend."

But you don't give her the answers.

"No because the teacher told me when I help people you don't give
them answers."

You like to help people.

“Mostly the little ones I read to them because it’s fun.”

I think I know what you want to be when you grow up, but what do you want to be?

And Maria—“A teacher.”

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