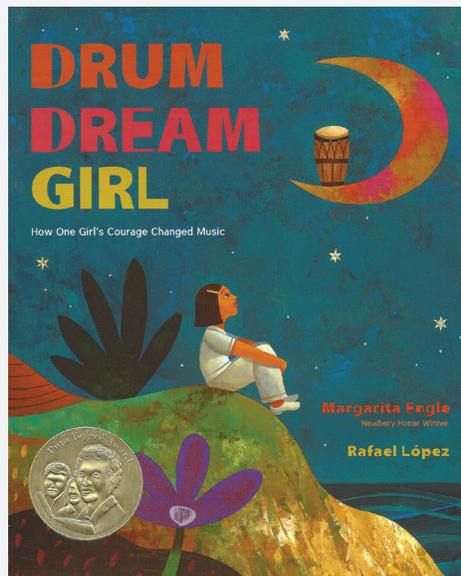


Second Reaction: An Ordinary Girl Dares to Dream Big

Engle, Margarita. *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music*.
Illustrated by Rafael López, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

Joanne Sprunger



“Oh, this is going to be a good book! Look at the award sticker on it.” This was one student’s reaction when I showed the class Margarita Engle and Rafael López’s *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl’s Courage Changed Music*. Several students asked what the award was and what it meant, but this award was a new one for me, so I used Google to help me answer. *Drum Dream Girl* was awarded the Pura Belpré Award, which is given to a Latino or Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays the Latino cultural experience in a work of literature for children or youth (Wikipedia). The beautiful front cover is just a glimpse of what is to come.

Rafael López, the 2016 award-winning illustrator, uses vibrant colors to captivate the reader’s imagination as the story of a young girl’s dream to become a drummer unfolds. Throughout my reading of the story, students made connections and questioned several things: “Why are only boys allowed to drum? Shouldn’t everyone be able to try it if they want to? That’s the rule here!” As we continued reading, the class commented on the page where the girl is dreaming about becoming a drummer. The two-page spread shows the main character with a dream bubble in which she has transformed into a mermaid. The text states: “so the drum dream girl had to keep dreaming quiet secret drumbeat dreams” (unpaged).

Images dance across the pages as the drum dreamer feels the rhythm everywhere she goes, from the outdoor café to the carnivals on the island. Always she is reminded that girls have never played drums. But she dares to be different by dreaming of playing all sorts of drums like tall congas, small bongos, and timbales.

The plot thickens later in the story when the dreamer is asked to join an all-girl dance band. She, of course, wants to play the drums, but her father says “only boys should play drums” (unpaged). One student noted as we continued to read, “She is still dreaming of drumming even though she has been told no. She is not giving up.” The dreamer starts practicing alone and dreaming of the day when she can play the drums. Then one day her father decides to find a music teacher to see if she is worthy of playing the drums. At the end of the story, Engle includes an endnote explaining that this poem was based on true events and the life of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga.

After reading this story, one student noticed how *Drum Dream Girl* was similar to another story we had read called *Violet’s Music* by Angela Johnson:

“Remember how Violet wanted to play music so much but no one would play with her? And she kept looking and looking until she finally found someone to play music with her.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Sometimes you have to keep at your dreams, right?”

The last sentence from this young reader is so telling of what we are trying to teach kids with picture books about life. A good picture book should offer comfort and engagement. It should bring forth a realization.

I would share this book again with my students during a reading of *Violet’s Music* to see if there were similar reactions to the story. Upon further thought, I would like to reread it now that we have had the visiting musicians, circAfrique, a group of drummers who share West African music. This electric group plays a variety of drums and features only one female in the group. I am looking forward to some interesting discussions and comparisons with this group and *Drum Dream Girl*.

Works Cited

Johnson, Angela. *Violet’s Music*. Dial Books, 2004.

Wikipedia. “Belpré Medal.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belpr%C3%A9_Medal.

About the Author

Joanne Sprunger has taught second graders for twenty years in Lafayette, Indiana. She has a degree in elementary education from Purdue University and a Master's degree from Indiana Wesleyan. Sprunger enjoys reading books with kids, planning author and illustrator visits, traveling, and spending time with her three nieces.