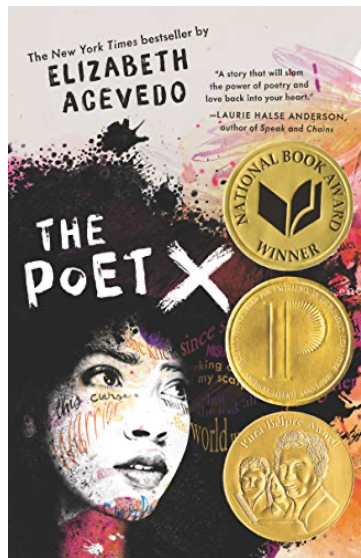


## First Opinion: Words Are More Powerful When Shared

Elizabeth Acevedo. *The Poet X*. New York City, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018. Print.

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The Poet X is a masterfully written and deeply moving story of Xiomara, a Dominican American teenager experiencing the difficult duality of wishing to disappear and to be truly seen. It was a story I listened to and read. The spoken word of author Elizabeth Acevedo brought another level of power to the verses. Acevedo writes the story as a connecting set of poems. This in itself was so meaningful to me as a Latina who also used poetry to both express myself and try to identify myself as a teenager.

Xiomara, like many young Latinas, wakes up every day having to prepare for battle. She battles boys and men and their inappropriate, disrespectful reactions to her body. She battles her

mother, who unknowingly is attempting a second chance at life through her daughter. She battles against the religion of her mother. She battles negative feelings towards her father. She battles with and for her brother, her twin, who is also gay and has not come out to their parents. She battles her feelings for a young man she meets at school. She does this mostly with her words, both audibly and written, though she does not shy away from using her fists when necessary.

*The Poet X* teaches us that some battles can be avoided through communication of the words we guard deep within. Some battles are started or ended with words yielded as weapons. Yet, for a teenager questioning everything, speaking truth to power is much more difficult. Verbalization of feelings and questions can lead to negative responses instead of open arms. Xiomara poses the question, “Why does listening to his commandments mean I need to shut down my own voice?” (57). She expresses the feeling of being silenced by the religion her mother has chosen for her.

*The Poet X* teaches us the power of our words, spoken and unspoken. It teaches us that when words that have been left unspoken go up in flames (literally in this case), so do pieces of our hearts. After her mother burns the notebook containing all of her poems, Xiomara writes, “My heart feels like it’s been burned crisp” (309). Xiomara finds an advocate in her writing teacher, Ms. Galiano, who tells her, “words give people permission to be their fullest self” (345).

When we ban books like *The Poet X*, we take away opportunities for our kids to feel seen, to feel that their words and stories matter. We take away their power. Andratesha Fritzgerald (4) states that the first step in antiracist universal design for learning is to honor our students. We can honor them by sharing our power. Kids fight for power and control of their own lives from such an early age. The only weapon they have is their voice, their words. When they read stories like *The Poet X*, they can be empowered to share their own stories, to write, to

communicate, to express themselves in some way. As Acevedo writes, “There is power in the word” (353). Let us not be afraid to share that power.

### **Works Cited**

Fritzgerald, Andratesha. *Antiracism and universal design for learning: Building expressways to success*. CAST, 2020.

### **About the author**

**Allison Segarra Hansen** is a motherscholar, professor, and entrepreneur. She is passionate about educational equity for all students PK-20. She believes that the most important gift we can all give one another is our stories. When we share our stories we allow others to connect with us authentically, we can engage with one another more deeply, and we can begin to see the world from different perspectives.