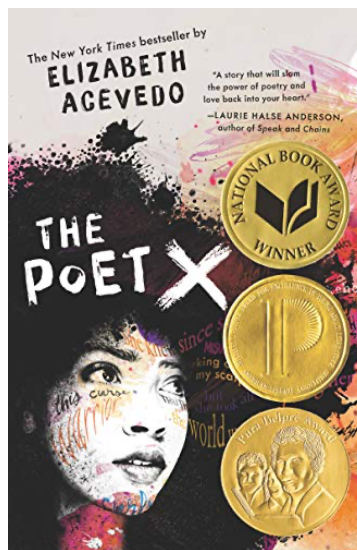


Second Reaction: Voices of Melanin

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

Carlota Holder



The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo is a breath of salty air from the islas during the hot summer months. A novel written in verse about growing up latine in Harlem. A novel many multilingual latine students can easily relate to. It's written in three parts; Part I In the Beginning Was the Word, Part II And the Word Was Made Flesh, and part III The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness. The novel sequences Xiomara's struggle with her identity until she recognizes her voice, just the way it is, glows in the dark.

This novel should be accessible to youth in schools because students can find representation on the pages and between the verses. Students can relate to growing up while also battling an identity crisis. Acevado writes in both English and Spanish throughout the novel. She

doesn't italicize the language, but instead amplifies the normalcy of honoring one's bilingualism and heritage tongue. She shares her religious struggles as she starts to rebel against her mother's generational traditions. Something I went through myself in my teenage years, with no books like Acevedo's to guide me through the dim tunnel of establishing my own multifaceted identity.

As a teacher, I've taught students like Xiomara who struggle with their identity, even their mother tongue to the point they need their English Language (EL) teacher to interpret in order to communicate their emotions and their new beliefs to their own parents. While some of the subjects and themes may be controversial, it's nothing out of the ordinary for our current teenaged youth. Instead of limiting their exposure, we must embrace their growth to young adulthood. We must accept their curiosity, their social lives, their complex identities, their language, their beliefs, and guide them, not limit them. We must allow them to amplify their experiences in writing, with model texts like *The Poet X*.

The Poet X represents many themes from religion, coming of age, sexuality, shame, the power of multilingualism, and generational trauma. These are all themes that youth can relate to whether or not they are multilingual, white, black, or brown. Elizabeth Acevedo models for students how to use their own authentic voice when writing for a class assignment. Even the process of writing is modeled with rough drafts and final drafts. A text like this could also be paired with another multicultural text, *The Crossover*, to model other examples of novels written in verse.

Teachers could also use this text to make connections to recent dramas that students may be familiar with like, *In the Heights*, *Gordita Chronicles*, *One Day at a Time*, or the most recent *Father of the Bride*. The characters in these dramas also face the same issues as Xiomara in *The Poet X*. As our students' worlds become more diverse, so should the texts they engage in. Gone

are the days where students should be required to read “classics” to compete with their white, affluent peers. Now is the time to read “banned” books and amplify the voices of our students.

About the Author

Carlota Holder is the Director of Academic Language for the Neighborhood Charter Network and co-founder of the Multilingual Education Reform Collective of Indianapolis (MERCIndy). Previously Carlota served as an EL teacher, for both Kindezi and Enlace, and the EL Coordinator for Enlace. Carlota has over a decade of experience working with language learners. She has also experienced the challenges of being an English language learner student in rural Indiana. Her grade level experiences range from kindergarten to 8th grade with both English language and Spanish instruction. As the Director of Academic Language her goal is to create a learning environment where all students are viewed as language learners in the academic setting and to provide an equitable education for all students regardless of language, cultural background, and/or socioeconomic status.