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Allie, First At Last: A Wish Novel



Synopsis

Allie Velasco wants to be a trailblazer. A trendsetter. A winner. No better feeling exists in the world than stepping to the top of a winner's podium and hoisting a trophy high in the air. At least, that's what Allie thinks . . . she's never actually won anything before. Everyone in her family is special in some way -- her younger sister is a rising TV star; her brother is a soccer prodigy; her great-grandfather is a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. With a family like this, Allie knows she has to make her mark or risk being left behind. She's determined to add a shiny medal, blue ribbon, or beautiful trophy to her family's award shelf. When a prestigious school contest is announced, Allie has the perfect opportunity to take first -- at last. There's just one small snag . . . her biggest competition is also her ex-best friend, Sara. Can Allie take top prize and win back a friend -- or is she destined to lose it all?

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Gr 4-6 • In this realistic middle grade novel, Cervantes introduces a Latina fifth grader, Alyssa, otherwise known as Allie, who is struggling to find her place and identity as the third of four siblings in a family full of successful, award-winning individuals. She considers herself a failure when compared to Harvard-bound Adriana; his soccer whiz older brother, Aiden; and his younger sister Ava, a TV commercial star. Yet this is only half of the family: Allie's mom is a news

anchor, and her dad is a fireman. It seems that everyone has won trophies and completed "firsts" — even her great grandfather is famous as the only World War II recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor alive in the state. Fifth grade can be rough, filled with changing relationships and an intense self-centered focus. Allie tries, but often fails, to be understanding when a new friend's help on her science fair project is a disaster and former best friend Sarah chooses the same topic for the Kansas Trailblazer Contest. The first-person narrative captures the disquieting feelings that often accompany the preteen years, including the protagonist's insights on her language proficiency and efforts to make the right decisions. VERDICT This will appeal to middle grade girls, particularly for independent reading. — Ruth Quiroa, National Louis University, IL --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Allie, First at Last: "A sweet middle-grade read that promotes compassion and empathy over competitiveness." -- Kirkus Reviews, starred review "Laced with Mexican-American language and culture, this realistic drama is filled with gentle humor, big lessons, and even bigger heart." -- Publishers Weekly Praise for Gaby, Lost and Found: "A timely, touching and nuanced portrayal of real-life challenges experienced by children in mixed-status families." -- Kirkus Reviews "An emotionally compelling story." — School Library Journal "A timely and important story about immigration, deportation, and abandonment wrapped in a warm-hearted tale that will appeal to all." -- Sonia Manzano, Emmy Award-winning actress who plays "Maria" on Sesame Street and Pura Belpré Honor Award-winning author of The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano.

I really enjoyed this book. Perfect for the younger reader, 4-5th grade. The lessons Allie learns are very important and timely, particularly for those struggling with confidence, friendships, and finding oneself among their family. It also touches on the theme of competition. There are touching moments with the great-grandfather (bisabuelo) that brought me to tears, and funny laugh-out-loud moments. I highly recommend this book for your middle-grade student/child.

Purchased for my 9 year old. The story was nice but didn't grab her attention as I had hoped. She was not challenged with the material.

Excelente

I hate cats, but I love anything Angela Cervantes writes. That's how good it is. The way she hits the diversity within the Latina experience is real and right on target. Also the family story just makes you want to give this book a hug. Every upper elementary classroom should have a copy of an Angela Cervantes book -- I'm serious.

Fifth grade can be a tough year. It certainly was for me. As kids approach and enter adolescence, many begin to grapple with who they are and who they want to be. Meanwhile, they may fall out with longtime friends who are going through the same transitions. While experiencing these growing pains and periods of uncertainty, kids can find comfort in books. Reading about characters who are undergoing the same journeys and struggles can help young readers see that they're not alone. It's normal to feel out of place and unsure of oneself. Allie Velasco is a fifth-grader trying her best to discover her identity and make her mark on the world around her. For Allie, that means being the best at something. Not that she's sure what that something is. While her siblings excel at acting, soccer, and community service, her mother has been voted Best News Anchor of the Year, and her great-grandfather is a war hero, Allie is keenly seeking out her niche and putting a lot of pressure on herself to succeed. Frankly, I wish Allie, *First at Last* had existed when I was in fifth grade. Although it's been a couple of decades since I experienced my own tween tribulations, it was almost therapeutic to revisit that stage of my life through Allie. And I'm certain there are plenty of young readers out there today who will relate to her as well. This book is sure to appeal to kids who are "finding themselves," having friend problems, or feeling eclipsed by siblings. But don't go thinking that this book is all sadness and doubt! Angela Cervantes fills the pages with humor that's sharp with hints of snark and sarcasm, but never mean. For example, Allie and her best friend write a song about her cat called "It's Not Easy Being Fluffy. I approve. Also, although Allie faces challenges and insecurities, she still demonstrates strength and self confidence by assertively confronting rude kids in her class, nurturing a loving relationship with her sister and bisabuelo, and demonstrating a deep, natural appreciation for her Mexican-American roots. A great role model indeed.

So many important and timely themes are touched upon and/or dealt with in depth in *Allie First at Last*. What the author does exceptionally well is to create such warm, interesting and genuine

characters that as a reader I just want to see them all get what they want and I don't even realize I am learning these life lessons. Sibling rivalry is a dominant theme--what middle school child wouldn't benefit from reading about that? But also there are tremendous examples of friend relationships and of cross-generational respect and love within a family. The author does a great job of creating an interesting story line to keep the reader engaged and then propelling the reader forward with nice pacing. Her touches of humor add so much to the reading experience. This book would be an excellent starting point to engage a child in discussion with family. In a classroom situation it could stimulate expression of many viewpoints which might through discussion be sorted out in a non-threatening way. Most of all, I found this book to be an enjoyable read and I would highly recommend it.

Allie, First at Last shares the same qualities that I found so endearing about Cervantes' previous book, Gaby, Lost and Found. I love how this author captures the drama of family relationships and school friendships. She understands what the dynamics are like for grade school kids and shows a real sympathy for the emotions and challenges of her characters. There are some very funny moments, and others that are truly poignant. I appreciate that the story contains admirable adults who play an important role in their kids' lives as well as strong friendships between the young characters. It's nice to see something besides dysfunctional parents and mean girls! My 9-year-old daughter enjoyed both books and we're looking forward to more!

I adored "Gaby, Lost and Found," and the author's second book did not disappoint! Full of extremely vibrant and lovable characters, readers will be able to relate to Allie's frustrations as she strives to be #1 at something. I laughed and cried a lot throughout the entire novel. The lessons Allie learns and the courage she demonstrates are exemplary and a much-needed example of bravery and kindness. In addition, this book celebrates diversity, family, friendship, and love. I absolutely loved it and am sharing the book with every middle grade reader I know.

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