My infinity
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Reader's name:
EDDY-ZAMBRANO, Lynn

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Claudia returns from school one day, crestfallen. When Mamá, concerned, asks why, Claudia brushes it off. She insists the family go to the beach, as planned, to make the most of Papá's day off. But once at the beach, she just sits, staring out at the sea. Papá wonders: Did Claudia get into an argument at school? And the truth spills out. Not an argument, heavens no! Claudia's teacher introduced them to a number called "infinity" and Claudia has no clue as to what it means; she's frustrated and upset.

Claudia frames her quandary for Mamá and Papá - and readers – by reviewing what she already knows about numbers. She begins with the number one, using herself to illustrate: "… yo soy una niña; una sola niña, que aunque sea pequeña soy tan 1 como el gigante de un cuento." She moves on to two, three, etc., each time pairing the number with a familiar count noun that is illustrated with numerals and visual examples in the accompanying picture. "¿Pero infinito? ¿Cómo saber que es infinito?" Claudia is stumped.

López Moya's writing is built on important principles of child development and pedagogy. It is only after he has both fully set an accessible context for his audience and demonstrated his protagonist truly needs some adult assistance that he brings Mamá and Papá in to help Claudia over her cognitive hurdle. They talk first about count nouns that in their immensity, like the grains of sand on the beach, "ni siquiera los mayores podemos contarlos;" even these fall short of infinity.

Claudia’s breakthrough moment comes when Mamá and Papá steer her thinking away from numbers, toward the kinds of things that, “…no hace falta contarlas de una en una!” Infinity, they explain, is the realm of the most beautiful things in life, like when you visit Grandma, “la cara de felicidad que se dibuja en su rostro…. es infinita.”

Aguirre Lamas’ illustrations are cheerful and light, simple, uncluttered by a lot of detail. She plays with depth, perspective and proportion. The characters in the whimsical world she draws are not perfect and because of that, so real. Claudia’s bangs are too short and uneven. Papá’s “Dad bod” is on full bathing-suited display at the beach. Claudia’s glasses are shaped like “ ∞ ”. Readers can talk about why that may be after they finish the book.

Writer and illustrator matter-of-factly include newer (perhaps) cultural norms. When Claudia talks about the number two, she points to her mom and dad, they are a couple: “… aunque a veces sean dos papás o dos mamás, siguen sumando 2.” And in regard to gender roles: Whom does Aguirre Lamas show driving the family to the beach? Claudia’s mother, of course.

There is nothing in the book’s story, language, or artwork – not even the tattoo on Mamá’s right arm - that will be a challenge for translation into English. Claudia is such a universally relatable kid. Which one of us hasn’t been absolutely positive, at some point in our school career, like Claudia, that we’re the only kid in the entire class who doesn’t understand what the teacher’s talking about?

This very warm and reassuring story exploring a complex, abstract concept should get a spot – in Spanish, English or any other language - in the 4 to 8-year-old bedtime story lineup.