

Gigante

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The story begins when Leon wakes up on a beach in a world where he is a giant and all the inhabitants are tiny, and seemingly have no interest in him. His first instinct is to explore and find out about where he is, and as he wanders around, the reader sees that this place is set in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Leon is fascinated with how this world works and the daily life of the people, and the images beautifully show his wonder and curiosity to find out about the activities of all the people there, and his questions about what they are doing and why. He observes how busy and occupied everybody is, and he and the book offers some reflections on their society, in the contrasts of what is beautiful, industrial, and practical. But while the people are all busily dedicated to their tasks, Leon notices that everything seems very grey and restricted, and the people refuse to interact with him even though he wants to make himself useful, until he shines the yellow light of his torch on the world, and this illumination seems to change the attitude of the people, and bring colour into the picture. They become more friendly and receptive to him, but his desire to keep exploring means he leaves them disappointed. To further improve the greyness around him, Leon uses his red pen to add more colour, which brings more energy and happiness to the people and sparks a sense of community among them. When he enters the water he releases its blue, and introduces fun and amusement to the working lives of the people, who also now begin to follow him and seek his company. Now Leon brings music and other fun activities to this world, but now he also starts to regret being set apart from the people by his size. And he still doesn't quite understand everything he learns about where he is. But by now Leon is now starting to feel tired from his experiences, and so falls asleep, to reawaken back home among his own toys and familiar things.

In the Spanish market this book is labelled for children of four and above, and the pictures and the basic story would certainly appeal to young children of this age. However, there is also much more to be revealed by the book for older children, beyond the probable age that the young boy in the story and the pictures would appeal to. This book could be aimed at younger children but would continue to entertain them and give them food for thought for several years. It contains many questions implied by the reactions of the people and by the questions Leon has, which the author leaves open: why are the people so uninterested in making friends with Leon at first, and yet when he shines his yellow light on their lives why does Leon prefer to continue exploring the world and finding things out than to stay and have fun with the people who now want to be his friends? There are many metaphors, some more obvious and others that would need more thought (the people on the shopping streets seem to swarm in all directions, but actually is it only back and forth?). The story gives frequent examples of first impressions – Leon is excited and impressed by the industrious activity of everyone – and then reassessing these first impressions and seeing what is lacking – the colour and the sense of belonging and community. And again, this is also contrasted with a desire to continue to learn instead of stopping to enjoy himself and be sociable in more obvious ways.

A fun aspect of this book is the many cultural references to famous people. They pop up in the illustrations so that readers can look for them, from all sorts of sources, from modern and historical, popular and under-appreciated figures, like the Beatles to Buffalo Bill, characters from Dickens and Hilma af Klint. These people are from different parts of Western culture and so would not pose any problem in translation to an Englishlanguage readership. The text provides a little information about these people, but the idea is clearly to spark further discussion and encourage more questions and investigation by the reader(s). This aspect once again makes the book clearly one that is meant to be read by older children, with an adult, or in a group, and as a way of opening discussions and different ways of interpreting the story. It would make an ideal schoolbook for classroom discussions and the exchange of ideas, and to leading on to further topics that could go almost in any direction a teacher might intend, and so could be used to stimulate specific topics or simply to open up debate and inspire children to ask questions and develop their thinking and curiosity.

The text of the book is divided into very brief narrative segments to be read alongside the illustrations, and the accompanying text which works as an aid to the reading. Linguistically there would be no problem in the translation to English. Any cultural references are not restricted to a Spanish audience so could be easily transferred to English. And the language is well-crafted to infer ideas without straying from a simple and accessible structure. The only issue for a translator would perhaps be therefore to match the details and capture all the author's intentions - which might mean extra-close scrutiny for possible references or suggestions.

The appeal of this book is quite wide-ranging, given that the questions it brings up open up possibilities to curious minds, even into adulthood. It can be enjoyed by young children simply for the pictures and basic storyline of exploration and discovery, but with a bit of encouragement, it also proposes many many suggestions and ideas for older children to think about and ask questions about. Its main objective seems to be educational, raising general questions about our world, and more specific interest in certain people from the past few centuries. It also uses a variety of ways, deliberate and implied, to help readers to do this, and to provide parents or grown-up readers with material to encourage children to ask these questions. If there is any problem with the marketing of this book, it might be that the most obvious market - judging by the cover - is not as wide as it should be. This book has an enormous amount of potential to expand children's minds, but also has a large appeal for the simple enjoyment of the story and illustrations. It brings up many issues and subjects that are prevalent in today's climate and important for children to be aware of, and would universally appeal to children in the UK as in Spain.