Oda a una estrella
Author:
Pablo Neruda
Reader:
Lise Jones

At the top of a vast skyscraper one night, a man does what many have dreamed of, and plucks a star from the sky. He slips away through the dark streets with the star in his pocket, but his impulsive action brings him more trouble than he could have imagined. He returns home with the stolen star, hoping to keep it for himself, but it throbs with an astral intensity, as if it wants to return to the night sky, attracting a crowd of passers-by. Realising that he cannot keep the star any longer, he slips out again into the night, and gently casts the star into the river, where it glides away free like a fish.

One of the Spanish speaking world's most famous and best loved poets, Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda wrote many lyrical and poignant poems on the everyday and the extraordinary. Ode to a Star exquisitely describes how the light of a celestial being cannot be contained in our lacklustre world. The simple but expressive illustrations by Elena Odriozola add another dimension to the poem, providing a graphic interpretation of the poet's verse. In both words and pictures, it is the details that are the most moving, touching elements of our own everyday experience. Together they will open the young reader's eyes to the possibilities of poetry, providing a wealth of mental and physical images to stimulate their imagination.

The poem has been interpreted as a meditation on the nature of beauty and liberty, and on whether possession of wealth brings happiness. It has also been suggested that Neruda was commenting on how precious gifts such as art and poetry should shine for everyone. Elena Odriozola's illustrations interpret the poem with a subtlety that allows the reader to create their own images in their mind's eye. The pictures reflect the brilliance of both the words and the star by contrasting their intensity with the brooding isolation of the nocturnal city, the humdrum domesticity of the man's home, the anonymity of the crowd that gathers outside. The simple lyricism of the poem is echoed in the sweep of a staircase and the skilled arrangement of planes on the page. The muted colour palette and minimalistic design throw little unexpected details into relief, as a solitary figure leans out of the window of a tall building, or a face peeks out from between curtains. The settings have a sense of space and emptiness, emphasising the man's solitude and despondency. In contrast, the final page is a celebration of light, movement and freedom as the crystalline star escapes into the night amongst the red gold fishes.

This book would be an excellent introduction to Pablo Neruda for readers young and old, as the evocative illustrations help to give form to the poetic imagery This particular poem has not been widely translated, and an illustrated version would be much appreciated by English speakers, who would undoubtedly be inspired to read more of Neruda's work.