

# Comprehension

## Genre

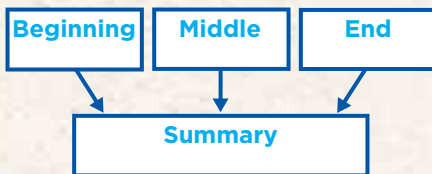
**Realistic Fiction** has real-life settings, well-developed characters, and realistic problems and solutions.



## Generate Questions

### Summarize

As you read, use your Summary Chart.



## Read to Find Out

How does Ana Rosa's community come to appreciate her talents?

# The Gri Gri Tree

from

# The Color of My Words

by Lynn Joseph

illustrated by Marla Baggetta



**N**o one had to point out that I was different from everyone else in our village. It was clear from the first day I began climbing the gri gri tree and staying up there for hours.

“What’s wrong with your daughter?” neighbors asked Mami.

“She’s not right in her head,” they answered themselves, when Mami only shrugged her shoulders.

Papi would say, “Nothing wrong with sitting in a tree. It’s the same as sitting on a porch except it’s higher.”

Roberto would climb up with me sometimes but he got bored quickly and swung down, yelling like a monkey. Angela shook her head at me and said I would never be a real *chica*, because *chicas* do not climb trees when they are twelve years old.

Not even Guario understood, although he tried. He asked me once what I did up there. That was more than anyone else had **ventured** to **inquire**.

I told him I looked around.





He asked if I didn't think I was wasting a lot of time, when I could be doing something to prepare for my future such as studying English.

Guario always had his mind on the future. Sometimes I think that he was tormented by all of us who didn't particularly care what tomorrow was going to bring. And really, what was there to know—either it would rain or it would not. But it was definitely going to be hot and Mami was going to cook and Papi was going to sit on the porch and the radio was going to play *merengues* all day. That was for sure.

Besides, I already knew what I wanted to do in my future. I wanted to be a writer, but only Mami knew that. If I told Guario, he would say I was **unreasonable**. If I told anyone else, they would laugh. But in my gri gri tree, I could be anything I wanted to be—even a writer with words for everything I saw from my leafy green hideout.



I could see the ocean glittering silver in the sunlight. I could see people trudging along the dusty road from Sosúa; some balancing buckets of water on their heads. I could see boys playing baseball in the schoolyard with a tree branch bat and a rubber band ball. I could see the river, meandering over rocks, hungry for rain. Far off in Puerto Plata, I could see Mount Isabel de Torres, a green giant with misty white curls dancing 'round her head.

I could see the sleepy lagoon and the sad little homes of the lagoon people. I could see the birds that flew past my gri gri, their ruby-and-gold velvet feathers shimmering on their tiny bodies. I could see the rainbows that glowed in the sea-sky after a rain passed. I could count the sunset roses in Señora Garcia's backyard. I could see my teacher climbing the hill near her house, and I could see Papi sitting on our porch, nodding off to sleep.



Then one day I saw something that I had never seen before and I was so scared that I almost fell out of the tree. There I was looking at the sea when suddenly out of it rose a giant monster, tall and black and covering the sun with its shadow. Before I could scream, the monster fell back into the sea.

I scrambled down the tree quickly and ran toward my house, shouting “Papi, there’s a monster in the sea!”

Papi woke from his siesta. “¿*Qué pasa?*”

“A monster,” I repeated. “A giant sea monster and it’s coming this way!”

I shouted inside the house. “Mami, come quick. There’s a monster in the sea. I saw it.”

Mami came outside and Angela followed her. They were drying their hands from washing the lunch dishes.

Everyone looked at me as if I were crazy.

“It’s true,” I said, jumping up and down.

Mami made me sit down and describe exactly what I saw. Before I had finished, Angela shouted my news to her best friend walking by. Then Papi waved over some of his domino-playing *amigos* and told them what I saw from on top of my gri gri tree.

Soon our porch was surrounded with people all asking me to tell my story again.







When I had told it for the fourth time, Señor Garcia, the *colmado* owner, began to laugh.

“You must have fallen asleep in the tree and had a bad dream, *cariño*,” he said.

“No,” I replied, shaking my head. “I saw it.”

But his words had relieved everyone’s fears of a sea monster. “Yes,” they agreed. “You must have imagined it.”

“No, you idiots,” I wanted to shout. “I didn’t imagine anything.” But I kept quiet because Mami and Papi would not like it if I shouted at the neighbors and called them idiots. That was for sure.

As everyone sat down on the porch to share a drink and talk about my sea monster, I slipped away and ran to my gri gri tree. I heard Mami calling me, but I pretended I didn’t hear and climbed up the tree fast. I needed to find out if what I had seen would come back again.

I sat down on my usual branch and tucked a few leaves away from my eyes. Then I stared at the sea. I looked so hard and for so long that its blueness filled up my eyeballs and I had to blink a lot so I wouldn’t go blind.

The afternoon faded into evening and the sea’s blueness turned gray. I watched and waited. My stomach made grumbling noises but I covered them with my hand.

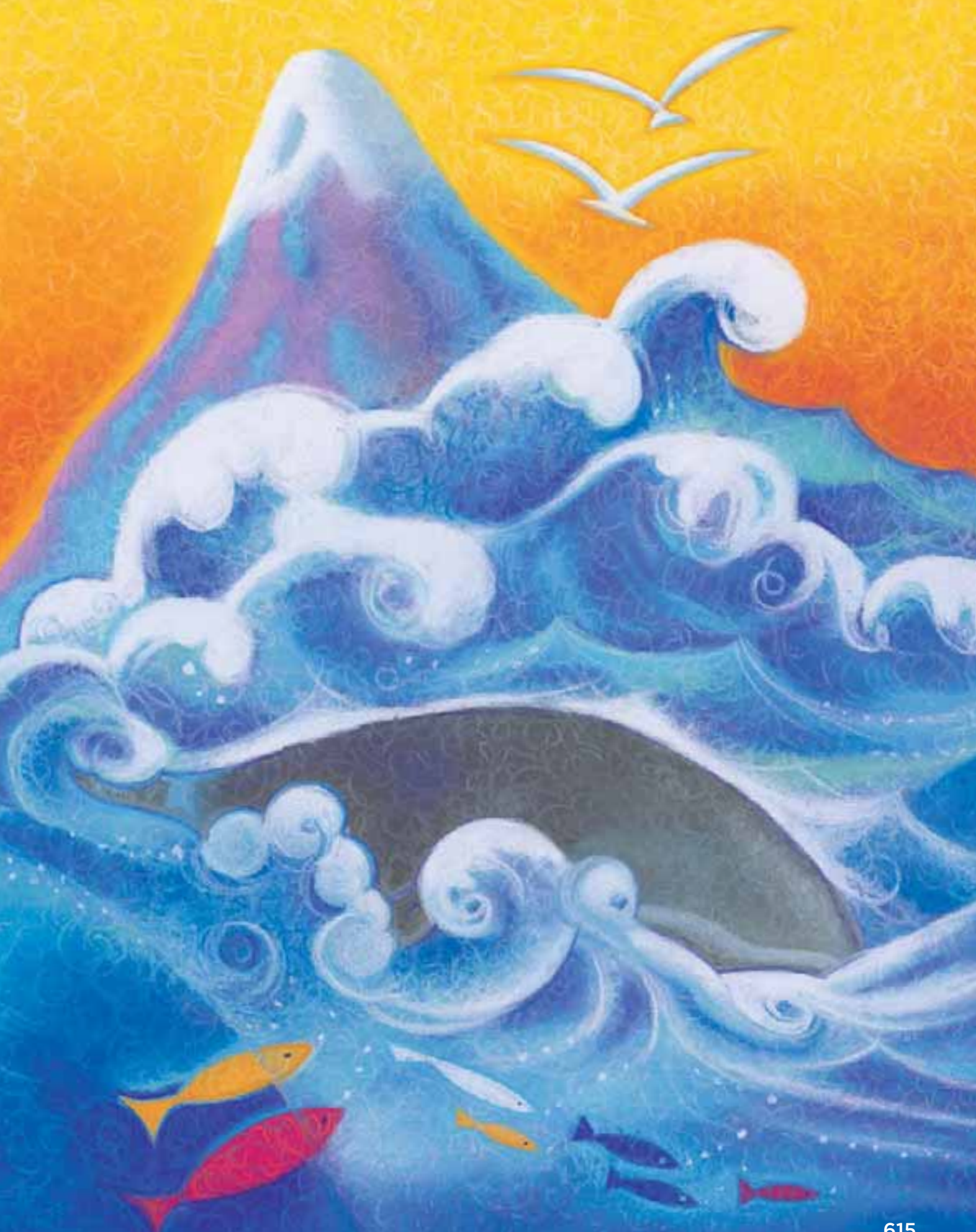
Then, just as I began to think that maybe I had imagined it after all, I saw a splash of white water. The splash of water rose up, up until it was high in the air like a magic fountain.

“It’s a volcano,” I whispered. I remembered that my teacher had told us how many of the Caribbean islands had been formed by volcanoes that rose out of the sea.

I gasped. Maybe I was seeing the beginning of a brand-new island right next to the República Dominicana. As I kept on looking, a black shape **emerged** out of the fountain of water. It rose and turned, as if doing a dance, and that’s when I saw the gleaming white throat of the sea monster.

It hovered in between heaven and ocean for a few seconds and then fell back into the water with a splash that sprayed salt drops as high as the pearl-pink clouds.







My heart beat furiously and I steadied myself so I wouldn't fall down from the tree. I was right. I had not imagined anything. There really was a sea monster out there. But this time I didn't rush down to tell anyone.

What would the people do, I wondered. Would they try to find it? Or maybe to kill it? Somehow, although I didn't know why, I could tell that the sea monster was not dangerous. It just wanted to swim and splash and jump out of the sea the same way I jumped over the waves.

I climbed down the tree and went home. The first thing I wanted to do was eat, but people were all over the porch talking wildly. "We saw it, Ana Rosa," they shouted. "We saw that big sea monster of yours."

Mami was passing around a plate of *dulces*, the sweet milk candy that I love. She must have just made them because they were still warm and soft.

Children were carrying huge plates filled with different foods that their mothers had made. Angela was directing them to put the food here or there on our big table. I saw plates piled high with *arroz con pollo*, *plátanos fritos*, and *batatas fritas*.

Señor Garcia apologized over and over to me. About a hundred people were gathered on our porch, in the yard, and along the roadside, talking about the sea monster.

"The tourist high-season is coming," said Señor Rojas, who owned a Jeep that he rented to tourists. "We can't let anyone know we have a sea monster hanging around Sosúa Bay."

"But why not?" asked Señora Perez, who sold paintings on the beach. "It could be a tourist **attraction**. Plenty people may decide to come here just to see it."

Half the folks whispered, "He's right." And the other half said, "She's the one who's right."



### Summarize

Summarize what happened after the narrator went home.

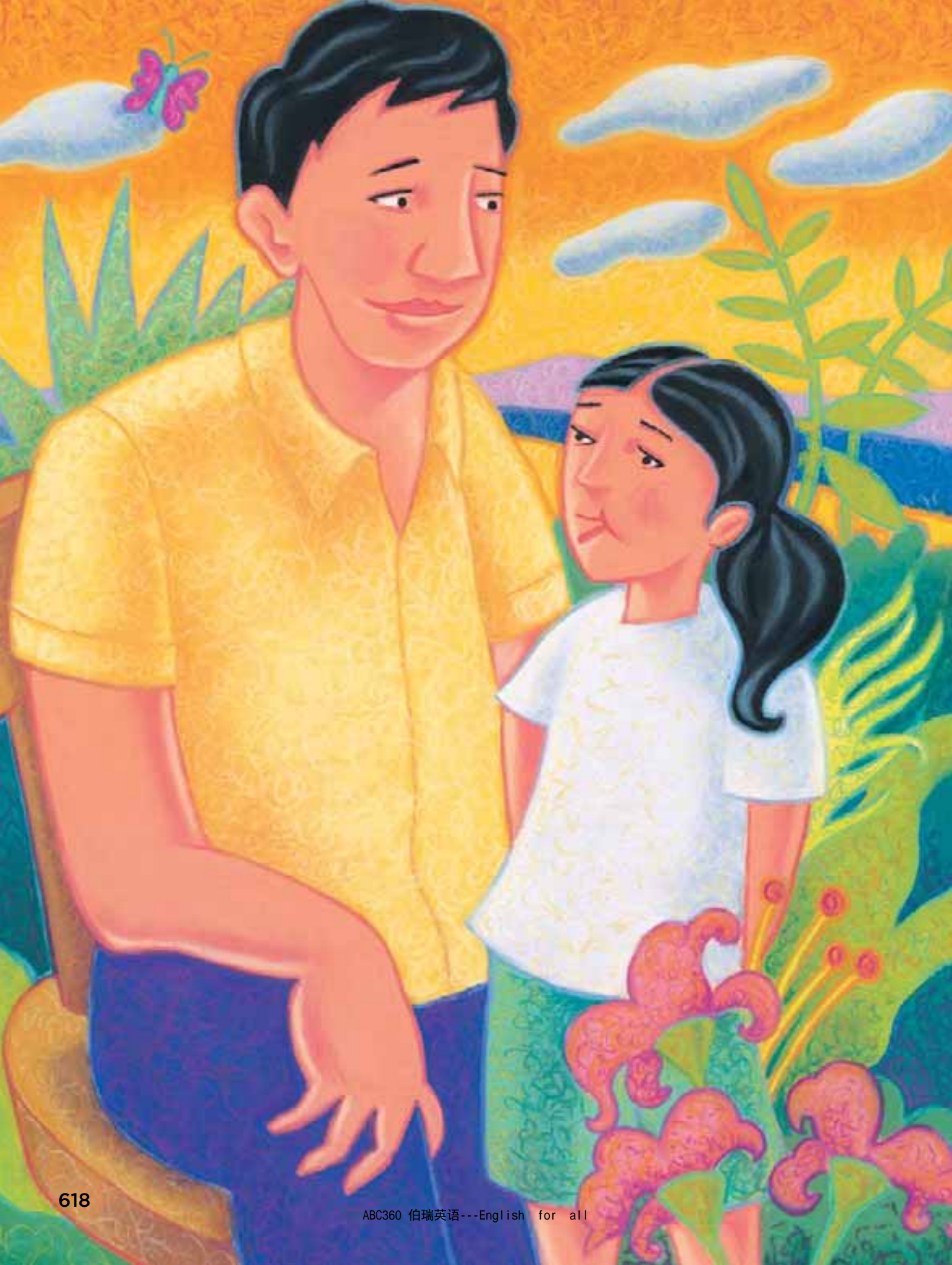


It looked as if we were going to have a big debate on our porch just like the ones that take place when it is a presidential election year. The way everyone was carrying on, soon we would be having people writing *merengues* about the sea monster and there would be sea monster fiestas all over the place just like during elections.

I shook my head and just listened to everyone as I ate a plate heaped high with food. That poor sea monster, I thought.

Then the people began to make a Plan. When Dominicans get together and decide to make a plan, watch out, because there are plans, and then there are Plans, and this was definitely a PLAN!





The first thing the people decided was that someone had to keep watch over this sea monster. Well, everyone looked around to see who would volunteer. That's when we knew the PLAN would not work because no one wanted to do something so stupid as to go down to the sea and watch for the sea monster.

It was Angela who got the bright idea that since I saw it first, I could keep watch over it from my gri gri tree. Everyone turned to me and nodded their heads.

"Finally, a good reason for her to be up there all the time," I heard Señora Garcia whisper.

Papi was looking at me and nodding his head, proud that his daughter was selected for such an important job. I said, Okay, I would do it.

Then the PLAN continued. Half the people wanted to make signs and announce that Sosúa Bay had a new visitor and it was a one-of-a-kind sea monster. The other half of the crowd shook their heads and said, No, it was too obvious.

"We must be subtle about a delicate matter like this," said Señora Perez. "We must make up a wonderful story about this sea monster, give it a name, make it a friendly monster, and then tell the world. Otherwise all we will do is scare everyone away from this side of the island."

She had a point. A story about the sea monster was much better than a big billboard with an arrow pointing "This way to Sea Monster of Sosúa Bay!"

The idea of it all made me giggle. Wait until Guarío came home and heard all this. I could hardly wait for him to return from the restaurant.

"Well," said Señor Rojas, "what will we name the sea monster?"

"And who knows how to write a story about it anyway?" asked Señor Garcia.

Señora Perez shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know how to write too good, but we could make up something."

Then Mami, who was usually quiet during these kinds of **discussions**, spoke up loud and clear. "Ana Rosa would be the best person to write a story about the sea monster."



I was shocked. This wasn't the same Mami who worshiped silence.

People began to shake their heads. "A child to do something so important?" they whispered.

"Yes," said Mami. "Let us give her a notebook to write in and she will write us a story about the sea monster. If we don't like it, someone else can try."

The way Mami said it, so definite and firm, made people nod their heads in agreement. "Well it doesn't hurt to let her try," they said.

So Señor Garcia went and brought back a notebook from his *colmado*. Mami gave it to me and her hands were cold like the river.

While the grown-ups stayed up late on the porch talking and drinking and eating, I went inside and began to write a story about the sea monster. First I tried to give him a name. But I couldn't think of a good one. So instead I thought about what he looked like. Then I imagined what he must feel like living all alone in the sea, different from all of the other sea creatures.

The fish and animals in the ocean were probably afraid of his huge size and his big nose and long, swishing tail. And they probably didn't want to play with him. Maybe they whispered about how strange he looked. But the sea monster wanted a friend. Deep down, I understood exactly how the sea monster must feel.

I began to write. I wrote page after page in the notebook the people had given to me. When I was finished, it was almost midnight. I went to the porch. Everyone was still there laughing and talking and some were dancing to the music on the radio.

Children were asleep on their mothers' and fathers' laps. Some of the bigger children were **sprawled** out on a blanket on the floor and the *merengue* music was a background lullaby for them.



### Summarize

What kind of plans do the villagers make to publicize the sea monster, and how do these plans lead to the narrator's story?





When the people saw me, they got quiet. Someone turned off the radio. Some woke the children on their laps. Papi moved from his chair and put his arms around my shoulders. He led me to the front of the porch.

Then everyone watched me and waited. I stood there trembling, holding that notebook with my story close to my heart. I knew right then that this was it. The whole world would find out about me.

I stopped thinking. I just started to read. I did not look at anyone, not Papi, or Mami or Angela. I read and read until I turned to the last page of the story. There the other sea creatures invite the lonely sea monster to a big underwater fiesta, even though there is no one else like him around, and even though he is so big that he knocks over many of them with his big nose and tail.

“And the sea monster is so happy that he leaps out of the ocean, sending sparkling waves all around him in a giant ring of light.”

I looked up then and I saw many things at once. I saw Papi sitting on the edge of his chair, strange and silent. I saw Mami with her hands folded and her head bowed as if praying. I saw the neighbors smiling and nodding their heads. Then I saw Guario, who must have walked up to the edge of the porch while I was reading.

It was Guario’s face I **focused** on. He was smiling. My big strong brother who worried about our future, my serious Guario who almost never smiled, suddenly let out a loud whoop and grabbed me up. He spun me around and around.

“Little sister, I am buying you a new notebook every month no matter what!” he shouted.

I closed my eyes so I wouldn’t start crying there in front of all the neighbors. Guario always kept his promises. I would be able to write down everything now, everything I thought or dreamed or felt or saw or wondered about. I was so happy I thought I would leap as high as the sea monster.

Then, in the background, I heard clapping. The people had stood up from their chairs and were clapping for me.

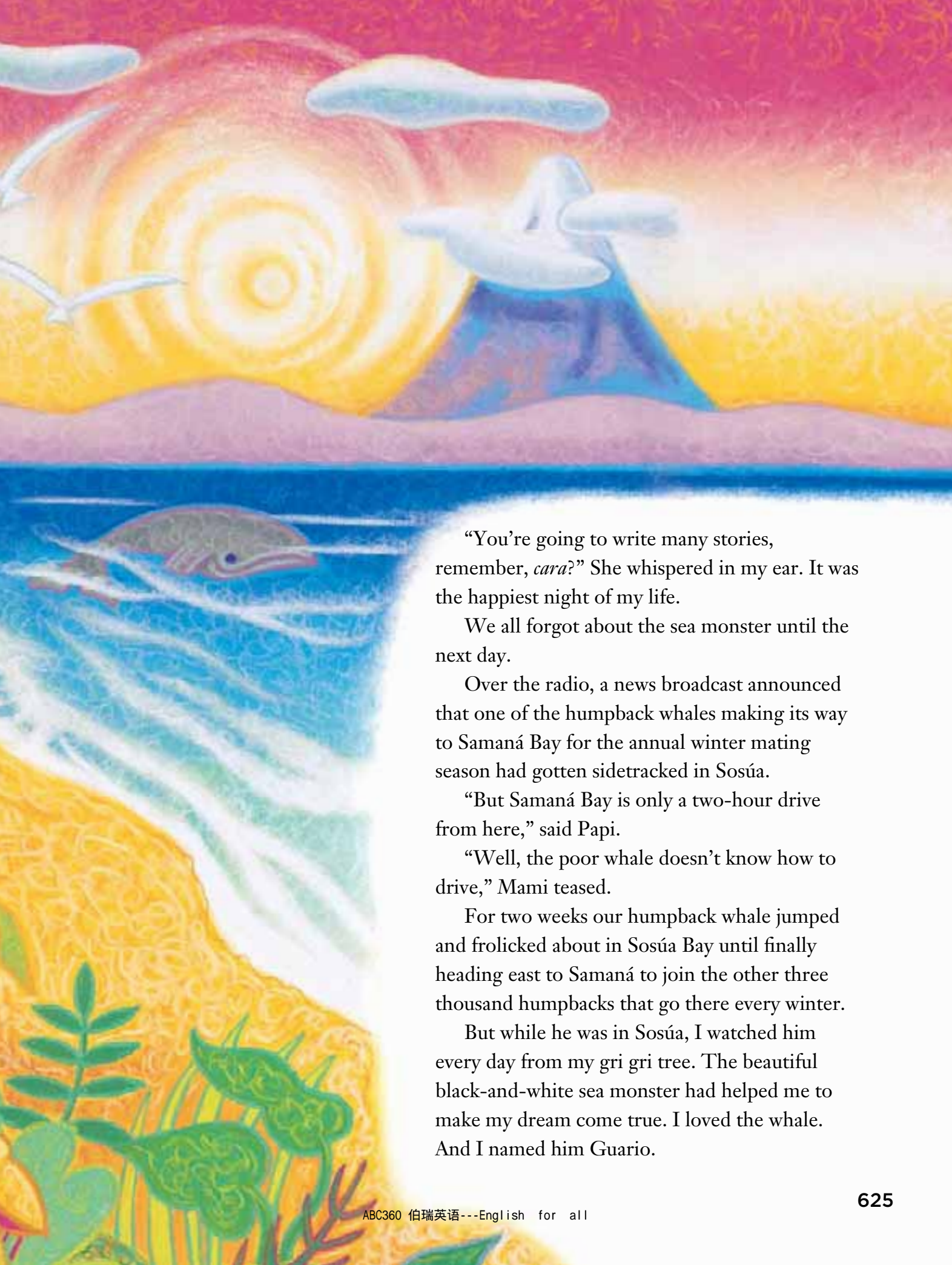
I heard shouts of how great my story was and people congratulating Papi and kissing Mami’s cheeks telling them how lucky it was that I was so smart. I heard Mami saying it had nothing to do with luck. I grinned and went over to her. She put her arms around me and squeezed my shoulders.











“You’re going to write many stories, remember, *cara*?” She whispered in my ear. It was the happiest night of my life.

We all forgot about the sea monster until the next day.

Over the radio, a news broadcast announced that one of the humpback whales making its way to Samaná Bay for the annual winter mating season had gotten sidetracked in Sosúa.

“But Samaná Bay is only a two-hour drive from here,” said Papi.

“Well, the poor whale doesn’t know how to drive,” Mami teased.

For two weeks our humpback whale jumped and frolicked about in Sosúa Bay until finally heading east to Samaná to join the other three thousand humpbacks that go there every winter.

But while he was in Sosúa, I watched him every day from my gri gri tree. The beautiful black-and-white sea monster had helped me to make my dream come true. I loved the whale. And I named him Guarío.



# A Whale of a Time with Lynn Joseph and Marla Baggetta

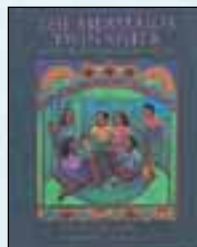
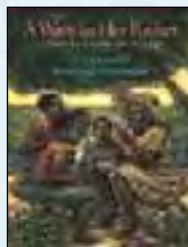
**Lynn Joseph** grew up in Trinidad, an island in the West Indies. While growing up Lynn was good with words and loved learning. Today she combines both passions in her two jobs. Besides being an author, Lynn is a lawyer in New York City. Her talent with words comes in handy by allowing her to make her case in court and on paper. Lynn has two sons and a new home in the Dominican Republic.



**Other books** by Lynn Joseph:

*A Wave in Her Pocket:  
Stories from Trinidad*

*The Mermaid's Twin Sister:  
More Stories from Trinidad*



**Marla Baggetta** is an artist and illustrator whose work has appeared nationally in galleries, books, advertisements, and magazines. She graduated from art school in Pasadena, California. She lives with her husband and two sons in West Linn, Oregon.



Find out more about Lynn Joseph and Marla Baggetta at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Author's Purpose

Although the author's main purpose in writing *The Gri Gri Tree* is to entertain, realistic fiction includes true-to-life details. What details here are realistic?

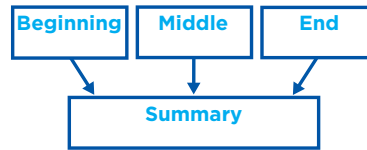


## Comprehension Check



### Summarize

Use your Summary Chart to help you summarize “The Gri Gri Tree.” When you prepare your summary, be sure to include only important events and details.



### Think and Compare



1. Summarize what you know of Ana Rosa’s story about the sea monster. Explain why the author did not include Ana Rosa’s story within “The Gri Gri Tree.” **Generate Questions: Summarize**
2. Reread the last three paragraphs on page 622. Explain what everyone will find out about Ana Rosa. **Analyze**
3. The gri gri tree is a special place for Ana Rosa. Describe a place that is special to you. Explain what it is about this place that makes it special. **Apply**
4. Ana Rosa’s brother is always **focused** on “what tomorrow was going to bring.” Do you think people should consider what might await them in the future? Why or why not? **Evaluate**
5. Reread “A Song For Makaio” on pages 606–607. How is Ana Rosa like Makaio? How do others react to each of these characters? Use details from both selections to support your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**