



Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale

Carmen Agra Deedy , Michael Austin (Illustrator)

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Martina the beautiful cockroach doesn't know coffee beans about love and marriage.

That's where her Cuban family comes in. While some of the Cucarachas offer her gifts to make her more attractive, only Abuela, her grandmother, gives her something really useful: un consejo increíble, some shocking advice. At first, Martina is skeptical of her Abuela's unorthodox suggestion, but when suitor after suitor fails the Coffee Test, she wonders if a little green cockroach can ever find true love. Soon, only the gardener P'rez, a tiny brown mouse, is left. But what will happen when Martina offers him caf' cubano?

After reading this sweet and witty retelling of the Cuban folktale, readers will never look at a cockroach the same way again. Also in Spanish and audio, Carmen Agra Deedy delivers a deliciously inventive Cuban version of the beloved Martina folktale, complete with a dash of caf' cubano.

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale Details

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Author : Carmen Agra Deedy , Michael Austin (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale for online ebook

Ronyell says

“Martina the Beautiful Cockroach” is a Pura Belpre Honor Book by Carmen Agra Deedy along with gorgeous illustrations by Michael Austin and it is about how a young and beautiful cockroach named Martina tries to find a good husband by following her Cuban grandmother’s advice in spilling coffee on her suitor’s shoes. “Martina the Beautiful Cockroach” is a beautiful Cuban folktale that everyone who loves books about bugs will definitely appreciate.

Carmen Agra Deedy has done a superb job at writing this story about a young cockroach’s attempts in finding the perfect husband. Carmen Agra Deedy makes the story hilarious and creative at the same time as the reactions that each of the suitors give to Martina after she spills the coffee on them is extremely hilarious and amazing as the suitors get easily angry at Martina, not knowing full well about how Martina cleverly tries to find the perfect husband by their behavior and I think that the way that Martina tries to find her perfect husband by testing their personalities is a stroke of genius since I have never heard anyone try to find their perfect mate by testing their temper (which makes me think about doing this just to test their personalities). Michael Austin’s illustrations are extremely beautiful and exaggerated at the same time as Martina is drawn to be extremely beautiful with her fluttering eyes and her smooth figure and Michael Austin has also shown comical sides to the illustrations as Martina’s suitors look enormous and out of place and they always wear a cocky expression on their faces which goes along nicely with their personalities.

“Martina the Beautiful Cockroach” is a truly brilliant book about how respecting your elders can help you in your most dire situation and about what true romance is all about and many children who love Cuban folktales and bugs will definitely love this book. I would recommend this book to children ages five and up since the language might be difficult for smaller children to understand.

Review is also on: Rabbit Ears Book Blog

Kathryn says

This was great! An unexpected treat. Luminous artwork and a fine "moral" to the story that is clever and sweet, not preachy. (The only thing I found weird was that the suitors for Martina the Beautiful Cockroach were NOT other cockroaches but lizards and pigs and such... but, hey, it is a fable!)

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

What a delightful story! I'm going to spill coffee on the shoes of any potential husbands I may come across. Great idea! I love Michael Austin's illustrations, especially the picture when she's meeting Perez the mouse and her antennae are curled in the shape of a heart. So cute! I highly recommend this Pura Belpre honor book!

Emily says

The telling of this Latin-American folktale is presented with beautiful illustrations and has Spanish words dispersed throughout the story. The beautiful cockroach, Martina, though she has many handsome suitors to choose from, needs the advice of her Cuban grandmother to choose one who is beautiful on the inside as well. The story follows along with her as she does the “Coffee Test” with many interesting animal characters, all who show their true colors and prove to be less than what she desires in a husband, until the very end when she is met with a huge surprise as she is about to perform her test again.

The variety of characters in this book would lend itself well to doing a reader’s theater that would be really fun for students. I would use this book as a read aloud and shared reading for grades 2 and 3 as there are many opportunities for the teacher to use a variety of silly voices. This would also be a great book to do a character study with, comparing and contrasting the characters in this book and discussion their qualities along with the main lesson of the story, that it is what’s on the inside that counts. I love how much Cuban culture is on display in this book and the lesson that it teaches, so it is definitely a WOW book for me!

LaDonna Ritter says

Martina has reached the age of twenty-one days. As with all lady cockroaches, this is the time for her to select her mate. The other ladies shower her with gifts and advice for finding the right mate. Martina listens carefully. Then her grandmother gives totally shocking advice. How can spilling coffee on the suitor's shoes help Martina find a good husband?

Carmen Agra Deedy retells this delightful Cuban folktale in a way that transports us to the cozy street lamp in Old Havana. We sense the strong family ties and rich culture of, yes, even Martina's cockroach family. Abuela, Martina's grandmother, knows that it is in adversity that true character is revealed. Will Martina listen to the wisdom of her grandmother?

“Martina, the Beautiful Cockroach” is rich with wisdom for identifying a person's true character revealed through adversity. This is a perfect read-aloud book for K-2 classrooms. It is written and illustrated in a way that will hold students' attention and encourage them to predict what will happen. It is a very good example to illustrate what folklore is, and why it has endured through so many centuries.

I will definitely add “Martina, the Beautiful Cockroach” to my library as a teacher.

Sarah Suffridge says

This book is an adorable complex picture book that falls under the folklore category that I would use in a K or 1st grade classroom. This story is incredibly cute and tells the story of a young 21-day old cockroach named Martina who is looking for a suitor to marry. After receiving advice from her grandmother, Martina spills coffee on the shoes of all of her suitors in order to discover their true character until she is able to find someone for her.

I would use this book as an interactive read aloud in either a kindergarten or 1st grade classroom. This is when students are first learning to comprehend and understand texts, as well as learning the sounds of letters

and beginning to learn to read. Comprehension is such a huge part of reading fluency, and I believe that the exciting, silly, and engaging nature of this story would make for a funny and comprehensive read aloud to young elementary students. In addition, it could launch a science discussion on insects. While this book does not discuss any scientific aspects of cockroaches or insects, it would still be a fun way to get students interested in the topic of bugs and insects that we would study during our science block.

This was a wow book for me because of the cute nature of the story. It was a very unique and original tale that I as a 21 year old enjoyed reading. In addition, this book has references to Spanish culture and also comes in a Spanish version for Spanish speakers. I think this was especially wow to me for this reason, being that it would be an easy and fun way to integrate other cultures into the classroom and even finding a direct way to incorporate the Spanish culture that is so present in our classrooms today and expose all of our students to it.

Crystal Marcos says

I was intrigued to read about something that would never cross my mind as beautiful. I must say, I really enjoyed it! So much so when my sister came over, I told her you have to read this! She enjoyed it too. Like Kathryn, I enjoyed having the Spanish and English words so I could learn. My copy did not have a glossary at the end. =(The illustrators use of colors was perfect, blues, greens, and pinks. It added to the beauty of the folktale. Michael Austin managed to make something most people find repulsive, beautiful. Long lashes and Martina's beauty mark certainly were cute details. I also appreciate how he captured Martina's different moods. For example, when she was fuming angry at that moment, she was not beautiful. Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror when you were really mad? No one is beautiful at that moment. Carmen Agra Deedy version of the story was charming. I love the characters. Especially Grandma and Perez. The ending was oh too cute! Thank you again Children's Group introducing me to a world of books I may have otherwise never known!

Manybooks says

Wow!! Carmen Agra Deedy's (author) and Michael Austin's (illustrator) [Martina the Beautiful Cockroach](#) is simply amazing, evocative, engaging, and easily one of the very best folklore adaptations I have had the pleasure to read (and I say that even though I actually have a bit of a cockroach phobia). And I cannot even decide what I enjoyed more, the luminous, breathtaking illustrations, which not only depict Martina as very beautiful indeed, but also clearly show the character of her suitors (the proud, overbearing rooster, the slovenly pig, the cold-blooded, creepy lizard, and finally, Perez, the sweet and diminutive mouse, who looks just as cute and lovable as he is described and who loves Martina not for her physical appearance, but because she is sweet tempered and strong voiced) or the engaging and often subtly humorous narrative. I have found myself smiling at the many humorous little touches the author uses, such as the age of marriage for a cockroach being 21 days instead of 21 years, or the fact that Martina does not give her hand in marriage, but her leg.

The idea of spilling coffee onto a potential suitor's shoes in order to discover how he might react if angered, is furthermore not only an interesting and workable narrative tool, one which strips the pretense from Martina's suitors and shows their true characters, her Abuela's advice is actually something based on simple common sense (before marriage, it is a very good idea to be aware of how your significant other will act

and/or react, and it is especially important to know how he/she might react if angered). In Martina's case, the coffee test saves her from some very unsuitable (if not dangerous) matches. But when she meets Perez, the coffee ends up on the other foot (her own), as Perez also has a Cuban grandmother (at that, I laughed until tears came, so funny, so adorably ironic, and I knew that the two were and are definitely meant for one another).

From a multicultural point of view, I also appreciate the fact that Martina's suitors are not other cockroaches, but different kinds of animals; Martina the Beautiful Cockroach thus also both presents and promotes intercultural and interracial relationships and marriage. There is never a sense of Martina's animal suitors being culturally or ethnically unsuitable, they are unsuitable due to their undesirable character traits (pride, anger, sloth, some of the seven so-called deadly sins). And in the end, Martina's love interest and potential bridegroom is a mouse, and not a cockroach. In fact, throughout the course of the story, not one cockroach suitor appears, which I think is an interesting and thought-provoking touch, as it counters the idea of having to marry within one's own narrow cultural and ethnic sphere.

I would recommend this wonderful folktale adaptation to anyone who enjoys the former, and honestly, even if you do not like bugs, this is a story which is in no way creepy or uncomfortable; Martina and her Abuela are both beautiful and lovable, and Perez the mouse is simply adorable, of course. The only animals that I personally find potentially frightening are the choleric, blustering rooster and the creepy, snake-like lizard. Thus, even if you do not find insects appealing, you will most likely adore this wonderful and sweetly humorous retelling of a Cuban folktale.

Jenny says

A clever and fun folk tale where beautiful Martina is trying to choose a husband. Her Cuban grandmother warns her that it will be easy to find suitors but challenging to make a good choice. So she must use the Coffee Test...spill a little coffee on each potential suitor's shoes and see how they react.

This is fun to read aloud...especially the various suitors' proposals, "Martina Josefina Catalina Cucaracha, beautiful muchacha, won't you be my wife?" And the illustrations are a wonderful fit...and even manage to make the cockroach look pretty (quite a feat in my opinion! I think cockroaches are disgusting creatures.)

Clever and funny and great word play.

Lisa Vegan says

I must express my gratitude to the Picture Book Club at the Children's Books group. I. Never. Would. Have. Picked. This. Book. Up. And. Read. It. Never.

It turns out from a note on the back inside cover that the Cuban Cockroach, *Panclora nivea*, has an iridescent green coat/beautiful and is a vegetarian, which was not quite enough to sell me but made me less squeamish.

However, the book charmed me.

Oh, I chortled my way through it. It was amusing, and heartwarming too. Interspecies marriage, hmm, but

somehow it ended up working.

The illustrations are strikingly beautiful, really special.

What a pleasant surprise!

Jennifer Cochran says

When I started this book, I immediately questioned whether I was going to like it because the main character was a cockroach, and those creatures aren't usually given the spotlight. Despite my aversion to this book, I still read it with a relatively open mind, and I am so glad I did! This book had me laughing from the beginning sentence to the end punctuation. Not only was this book hilarious, but it was beautifully illustrated. This book outlines and follows Martina's "difficult" journey to find a husband suitable for her and her family. Each of her family members is so excited for Martina's future, but advice from Martina's grandmother makes the story hilarious and Martina's decision making somewhat challenging.

I would classify this book under the genre of a folktale and believe it would be an appropriate read aloud for grades 1-4. This book would lead to great discussion in any of these grades, but could be independently read, or read in a small group with even deeper discussion in grades 3 and 4. One of the reasons I love this book is because it has so many different uses in the classroom. As a simple read aloud, the rich and diverse vocabulary alone is a wonderful tool to help create a diverse classroom language. It is opening up the students to a different cultural background, and exposing them to a new way of thinking about words. Additionally, there are so many resources available online that this could easily be turned into a reader's theater activity and be performed in front of other students at the school to give the students an opportunity to tell the story in a different way. This activity could also be expanded into the students doing research on cockroaches, possibly creating KWL charts, or writing down questions for further research exploration based on the topics presented in the story. The students could also brainstorm other animals that Martina could have encountered in the story and write those animals reactions to having coffee spilled on them. I think this would be a wonderful activity for the students to be creative and use their knowledge of the text in a fun and inventive way. Additionally, the students could write stories from the point of view of the other suitors who did not win Martina's affections. This activity would be great to compare and contrast versions of the same story, and also a lot of fun for any students.

This book was definitely a wow book for me, and one I will refer back to often during my teaching career. To start, the pictures in this book are dreamy and done with an acrylic flare that makes them simply beautiful. Cuban elements are sprinkled throughout the story, which makes the tale original and authentic. This story was magical and wonderful and after reading, I look at cockroaches in a different light. This story teaches a lesson about how the gift of wisdom is sometimes more profitable than the gift of beauty. Even though this story is intended for younger readers, there are some funny elements and subtle word play that keep adult readers engaged from start to finish. I loved this story and loved the different and unique ways it can be applied to the classroom environment. It is a beautiful story and I cannot wait to read it to my students and relish in their delight as they listen to it, because it is truly a delightful read!

Melissa says

This book was given an award for it's audio version which is absolutely amazing! The story is read by the author herself and is funny and authentic. Martina Josephina Catalina Cucaracha, the main characters is

looking for a husband and she has many to choose from due to her beauty! Her grandmother, Abuela tries to be matchmaker, but Martina is embarrassed by that.

Abuela decides to have a coffee test to find a husband for Martina. This part of the story reminded me of the Abuela and Abuelita Mexican coffee brand. It definitely added some humor to the already funny story for me. The three contestants: Don Gallo the cocky rooster, Don Cerdo the pig, and Don Lagarto the creepy lizard all fail her coffee test. Martina is upset about this, until she notices a mouse that takes her breath away - Perez. She likes him and doesn't want him to go through Abuela's coffee test; however, Abuela is insistent.

I would say that this book is a read aloud MUST! I read the book while listening to the audio version and it really came alive for me, as it would for our students. The illustrations are a must see as well - they are wonderful airbrush illustrations. The book is beautiful, authentic and available in Spanish!

Katie Clark says

Reading folktales is a great way to introduce other cultures to young people. If you are tired of reading the same old clichés in children's stories, Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale by Carmen Agra Deedy won't disappoint.

This story has beautiful, vibrant illustrations that give the cockroach characters and their world liveliness. The story uses some Spanish words as well, which is a fantastic way to start introducing children to another language. The personification of cockroaches is humorous, and children will love seeing the world from a cockroach's point of view. I admit that I am not so fond of cockroaches, but I thought that the depictions of the cockroaches in this book were charming. Who knows, maybe if children grow up reading this book they won't develop the same phobia I have!

Toward the beginning of the story, Martina's grandmother gives Martina some advice to find a partner. She says that she should spill coffee on a suitor's shoe, so that she can see how he treats her when he loses his temper. I think this is such a fabulous piece of advice, and it is so different from advice that the typical princess story provides.

This story would be a great addition to an elementary school classroom. I think that this story would be most appropriate for grades 2-5. This story would be a great part of a lesson about folktales from around the world. Students can choose several different folktales and analyze the moral, and compare and contrast stories.

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach is not only a great example of a high quality multicultural book, but it also has a great moral. I highly recommend this book.

Dolly says

This is a wonderful folktale for young children and it is filled with touches of Hispanic culture, sage wisdom, respect for elders, and the sweet kind of ending you'd expect in a children's story. The illustrations are fantastic, too. We really enjoyed this book and purchased it at the school book fair for our oldest daughter's

Second grade teacher for her class.

This story was selected as one of the books for the May 2010 - Latino reads at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Karol says

What a cute story! I have to say that the title didn't sell me - I mean, who wants to read about a COCKROACH of all things!?! Despite that, I liked this humorous look at following Grandma's advice. Very nicely done. The illustrations were detailed, yet perfectly suited to the light-hearted nature of the story.
