



Alma and How She Got Her Name by Juana Martinez-Neal

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*Age Range: 4–8 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: PreK–Grade 2 (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

What’s in a name? For one little girl, her very long name tells the vibrant story of where she came from—and who she may one day be.

If you ask her, Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela has way too many names: six! How did such a small person wind up with such a large name? Alma turns to Daddy for an answer and learns of Sofia, the grandmother who loved books and flowers; Esperanza, the great-grandmother who longed to travel; José, the grandfather who was an artist; and other namesakes, too. As she hears the story of her name, Alma starts to think it might be a perfect fit after all—and realizes that *she* will one day have her own story to tell. In her 2019 Caldecott Honor Book, Juana Martinez-Neal opens a treasure box of discovery for children who may be curious about their own origin stories or names.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ “Martinez-Neal’s first outing as author is a winner—her velvety and largely monochromatic pencil drawings, punctuated with cherry red, teem with emotional intimacy. It’s an origin story that envelops readers like a hug.” —[Publishers Weekly](#), **starred review**

★ “Martinez-Neal brings her gentle story to life through beautiful graphite- and colored-pencil artwork set against cream-colored backgrounds. Soft blue and red details pop against the charcoal scenes, which perfectly reflect the snapshots of Alma’s family. While Alma feels enriched by learning her family’s history, she is also empowered by the knowledge that she will give her name, Alma, its own story.” —[Booklist](#), **starred review**

★ “The softly colored images and curvilinear shapes that embrace the figures evoke a sense of warmth and affection. At the story’s end, the only tale readers have not heard is Alma’s. ‘You will make your own story,’ states her father. A beautifully illustrated, tender story to be shared with all children, sure to evoke conversations about their names.” —[School Library Journal](#), **starred review**

“Throughout, grayscale print transfer illustrations have a soft visual texture, and subtle colored-pencil highlights in pink and blue hues enliven each spread. The pictures end up stealing the show in their depiction of the sweet closeness between Alma and her father. They also convey a subtle, supernatural connection between Alma and

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publicity@candlewick.com

her ancestors, whose images in the family photos make eye contact with her outside of her father’s awareness.”
—[The Horn Book](#)

“Mostly monochromatic against a cream background, the illustrations—print transfers with graphite and colored pencils—are delightful, capturing the distinctive essences of Alma’s many namesakes. . . . A celebration of identity, family and belonging.” —[Kirkus Reviews](#)

“Every piece of Alma’s name, she discovers, comes to her from someone in her family, and, as she and her father talk, Alma feels a new sense of connection. . . . This is a tender outing for children ages 4–8.” —*The Wall Street Journal*

“[Martinez-Neal’s] mostly black-and-white graphite and colored pencil drawings with splashes of red (suggesting now) and blue (capturing then) provide an additional, enhancing narrative: the family’s Peruvian roots, Alma’s avian and floral interests, her bilingual drawings, her historically inspired style sense, even a peek at Esperanza’s worldly treasures. Names are so much more than a collection of letters and sounds, Martinez-Neal reminds. The book’s final words, ‘What story would you like to tell?’ become an invitation for readers to share and claim each of their own, distinctive stories, histories and identities.” —[Shelf Awareness](#)

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A Caldecott Honor Book
- An Ezra Jack Keats Writer Honor Book
- An American Library Association Notable Children’s Book
- A National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Books for Young People
- A National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children’s Book in the Language Arts
- A Charlotte Huck Award Recommended Book
- A *Booklist* Editors’ Choice
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
- A New York Public Library’s list of 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- A Chicago Public Library Best Book
- An Evanston Public Library 101 Great Books for Kids List Selection
- A Monarch Award Nominee (Illinois)
- A Kansas National Education Association Reading Circle Recommended Title
- A Texas Library Association 2 x 2 Reading List Selection

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Teachers’ Guide](#)
- [Activity Kit](#)
- [Teaching Resources and Discussion Questions from Read Across America](#)
- [Family and Classroom Discussion Guides from the Anti-Defamation League](#)
- [Colorín Colorado Author Interview](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

Alma and How She Got Her Name is a picture book I wrote and illustrated to share the story of my name and my own family. It was incredible to see how young readers embraced the story because they could see themselves in it. In creating it, I purposely left the illustrations as open-ended as I could: the little girl, Alma, as well as all of her family are rendered in pencil with the color of their skin being the paper itself, to encourage all children to more easily see themselves in them.

When *Alma and How She Got Her Name* won a Caldecott Honor, I was thrilled—not just to have this recognition of my work, but also because it meant that many more children would be able to read Alma’s story and to discover and celebrate the stories of their own unique names, origins, and families.

Sadly, in the last couple of years, *Alma and How She Got Her Name* has been included on banned book lists. I tried so hard to make a book for all young readers; I can only ask why. What is it about the story of a little girl’s name and her family that they want to keep from children?

*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.