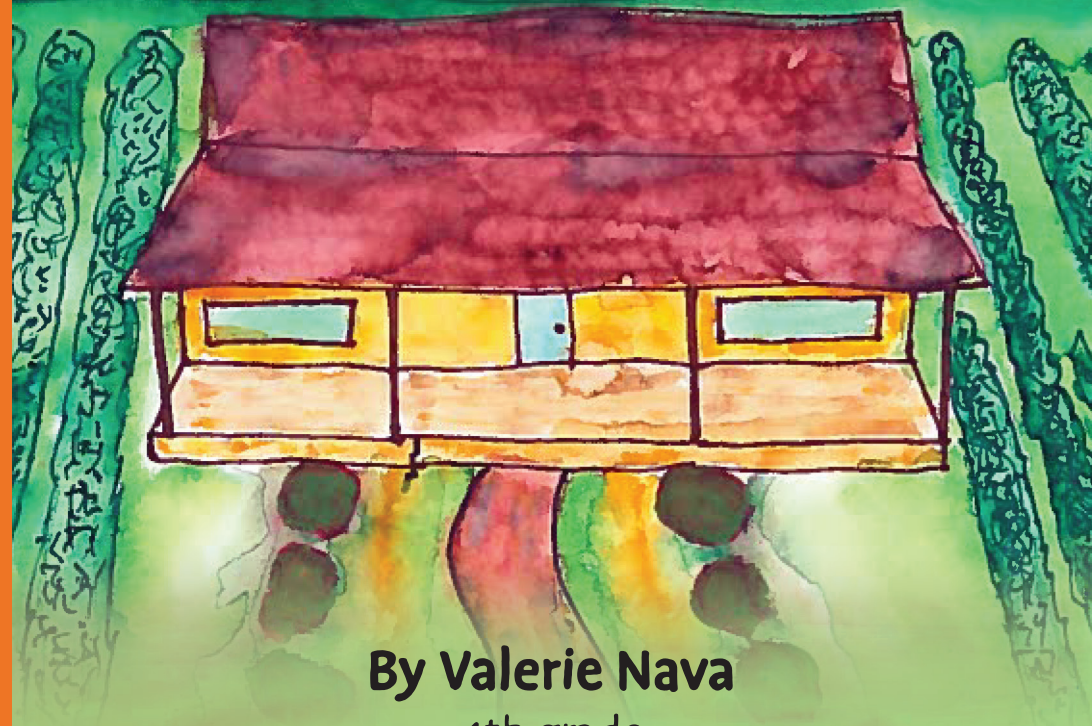


THE STRAWBERRY OWNER



By Valerie Nava

- 4th grade -

Ronald Reagan Elementary School

Chris Lavagnino, Teacher
Madera County

Illustrated by Delta High School

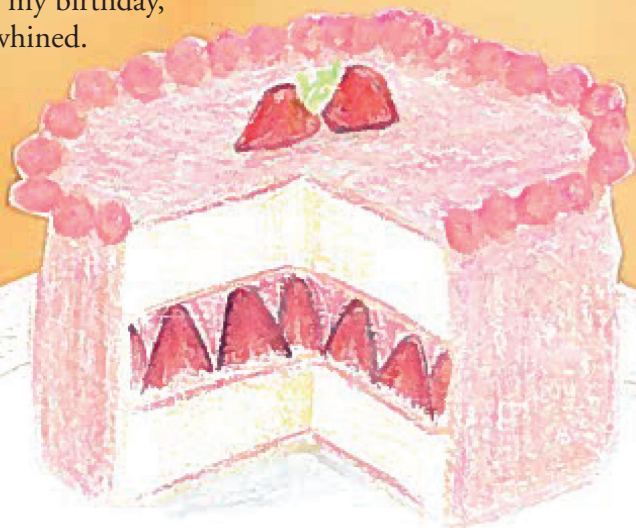


Lillian and her family grew lots of strawberries in the fields around their house in Chowchilla, California. On her 10th birthday, she asked for something she really, really wanted: a pet dog.

“Can I please get a pet today?” Lillian asked.

“No, I don’t think you’ve earned that kind of responsibility,” said her mom.

“But it’s my birthday,” Lillian whined.



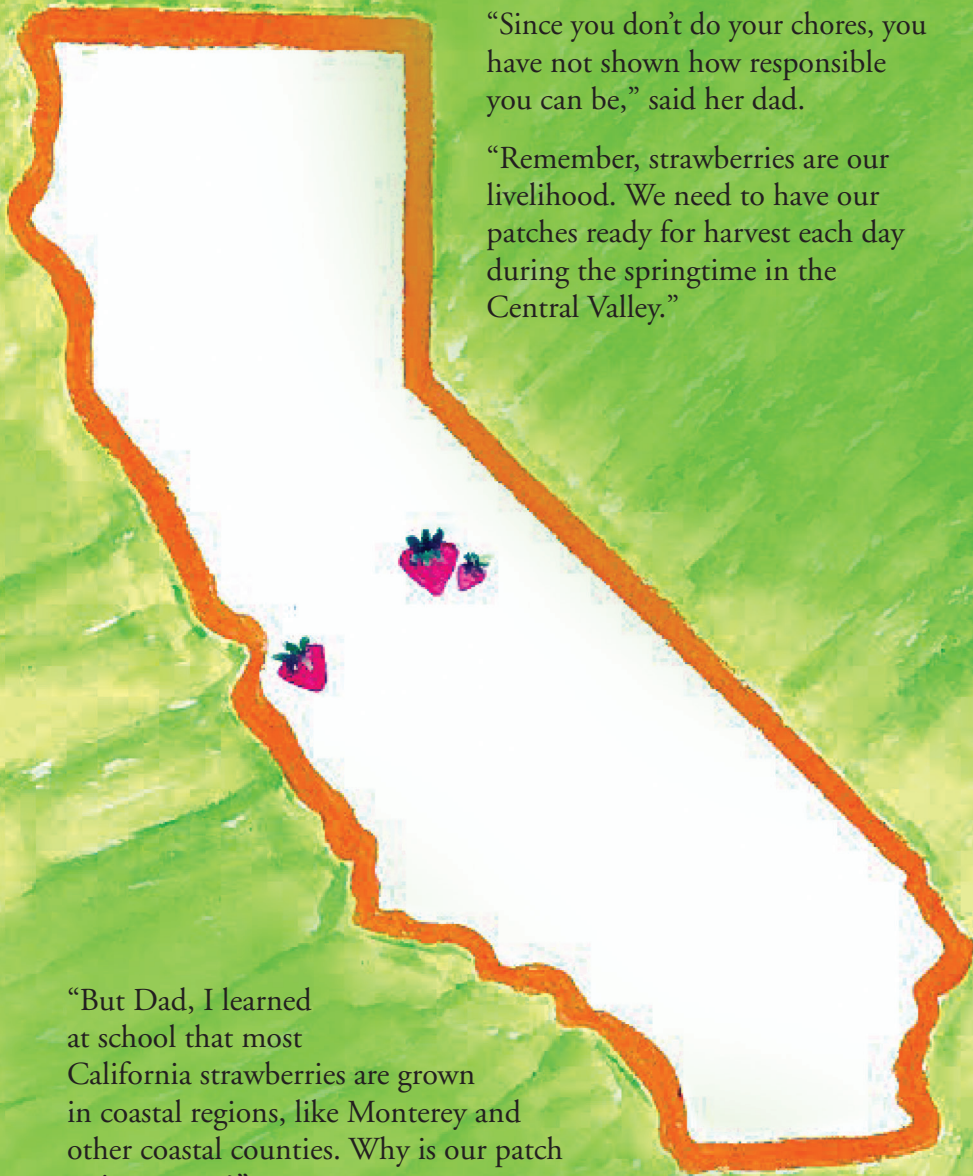
“Since you don’t do your chores, you have not shown how responsible you can be,” said her dad.

“Remember, strawberries are our livelihood. We need to have our patches ready for harvest each day during the springtime in the Central Valley.”

“But Dad, I learned at school that most California strawberries are grown in coastal regions, like Monterey and other coastal counties. Why is our patch so important?”

“Mija, Central Valley strawberries are just as important – and delicious – to the people who live here,” explained Dad.

Lillian barely heard his answer, because she was already starting her chores.



One Saturday morning, one of her chores was to pick strawberries by hand. As she picked them one by one, she knew that she needed to put the ripe ones in her basket immediately; otherwise she might be tempted to eat them all! As she worked, she heard a small sound from the ground.



“Hi,” said a sweet voice.

“Who said that?” questioned Lillian.

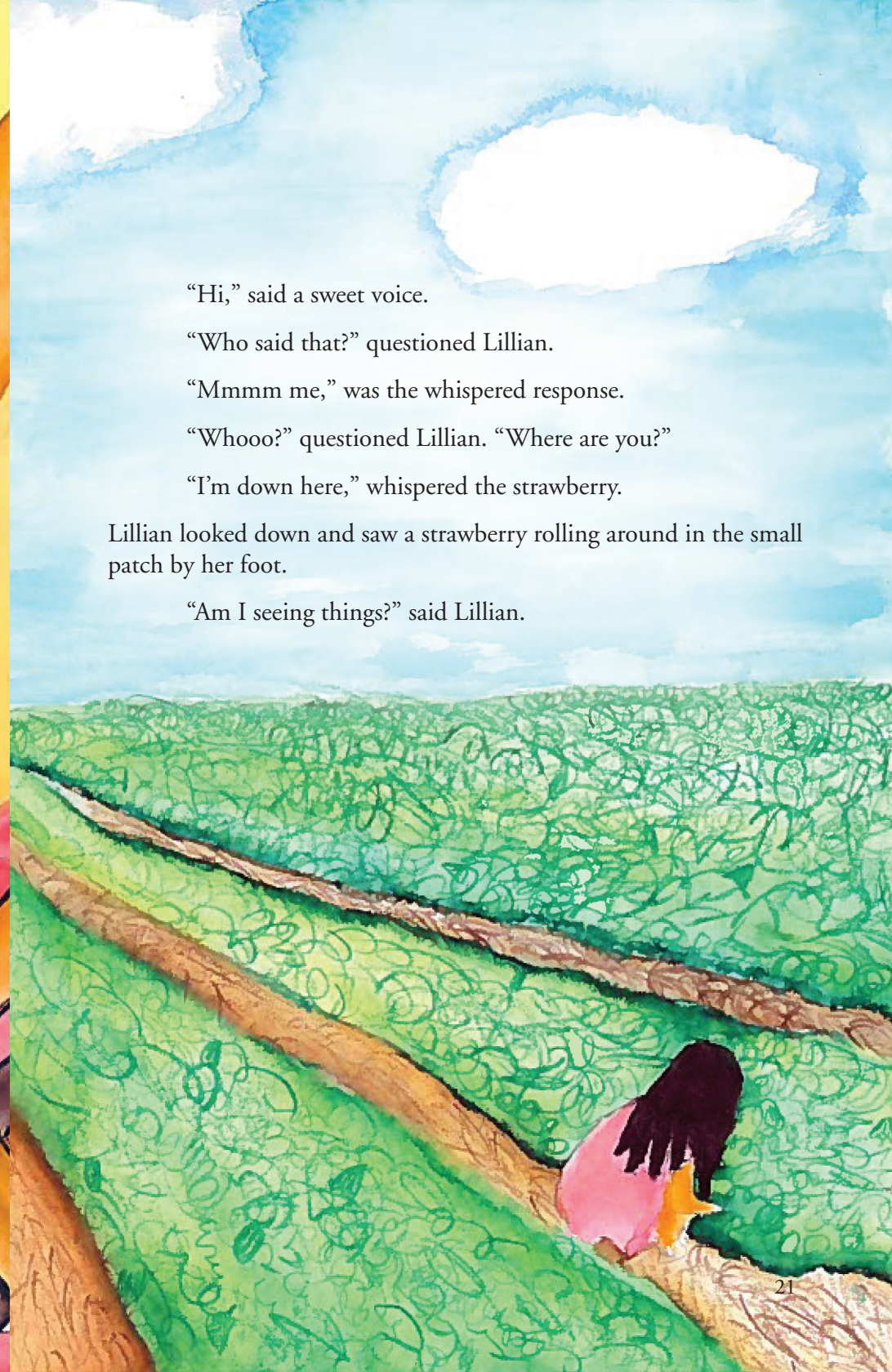
“Mmmm me,” was the whispered response.

“Whooo?” questioned Lillian. “Where are you?”

“I’m down here,” whispered the strawberry.

Lillian looked down and saw a strawberry rolling around in the small patch by her foot.

“Am I seeing things?” said Lillian.





“Nope,” said the strawberry.

“Okay, I think I am going to faint,” explained Lillian.

“Please don’t fall on me,” said the strawberry. “I don’t want to become jam!”

After a moment, the strawberry asked, “I was just wondering: What is that stuff on your face? It looks like you got rained on, but the sun is shining!”

“I’ve been crying. But maybe you can help me! I really want to get a pet, but my parents won’t let me,” said Lillian.

“Why won’t they? You seem berry responsible to me. I watched how careful you were at picking my cousins and how gently you placed them in your basket,” said the strawberry.

“They said that I am not responsible and that I do not do my chores,” said Lillian.



“Well, is that true?” asked the inquisitive berry.

“Well, I guess I have been kind of lazy lately,” considered the girl. “But it is important for everyone to do their part on the family farm. I sure don’t want my mama and papa having to do extra work because of me.” Lillian thought about all the long hours her parents worked on the farm each day.

“Yeah, I really do need to start helping more.”

“That is a great idea! Then they will see how responsible you really are,” said the strawberry excitedly.

Lillian began to brainstorm all the extra things she could do around the property.



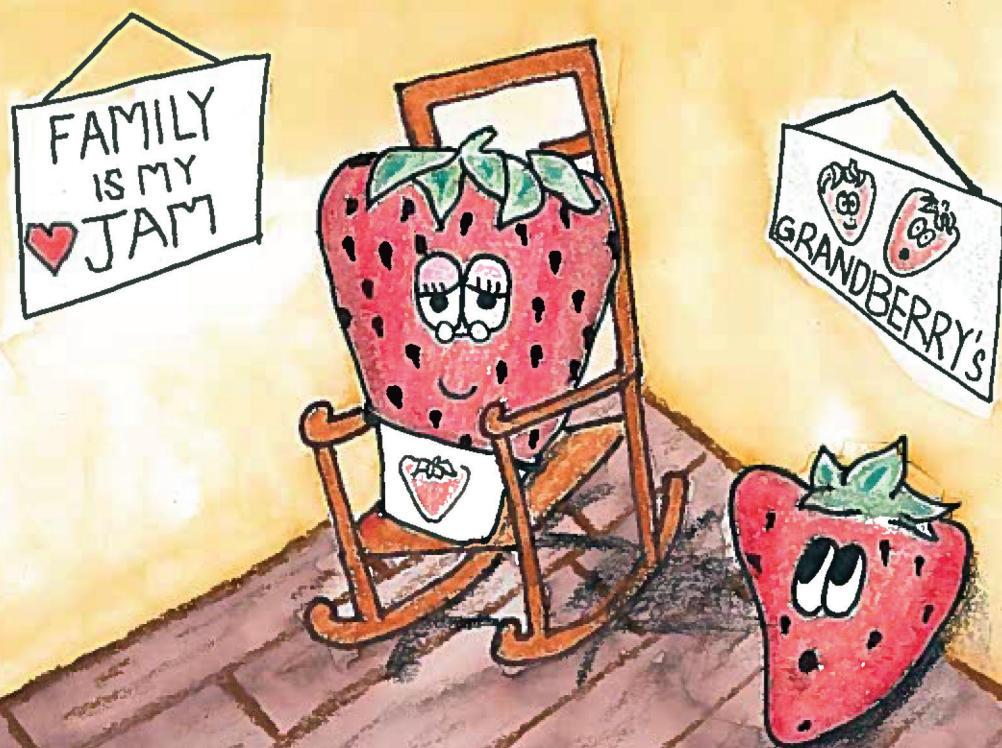
During the morning, she and the berry talked about the history of strawberries and how they got their names. As she was packing things away for the day, she had one final question for her little red friend.

"I've always wondered: How many seeds do you have?"

"Well, I'm not sure. I was told by my great-grandberry that we sometimes have as many as 200 seeds."

"Wow, imagine how many new berries might grow from you!"

The strawberry blushed.



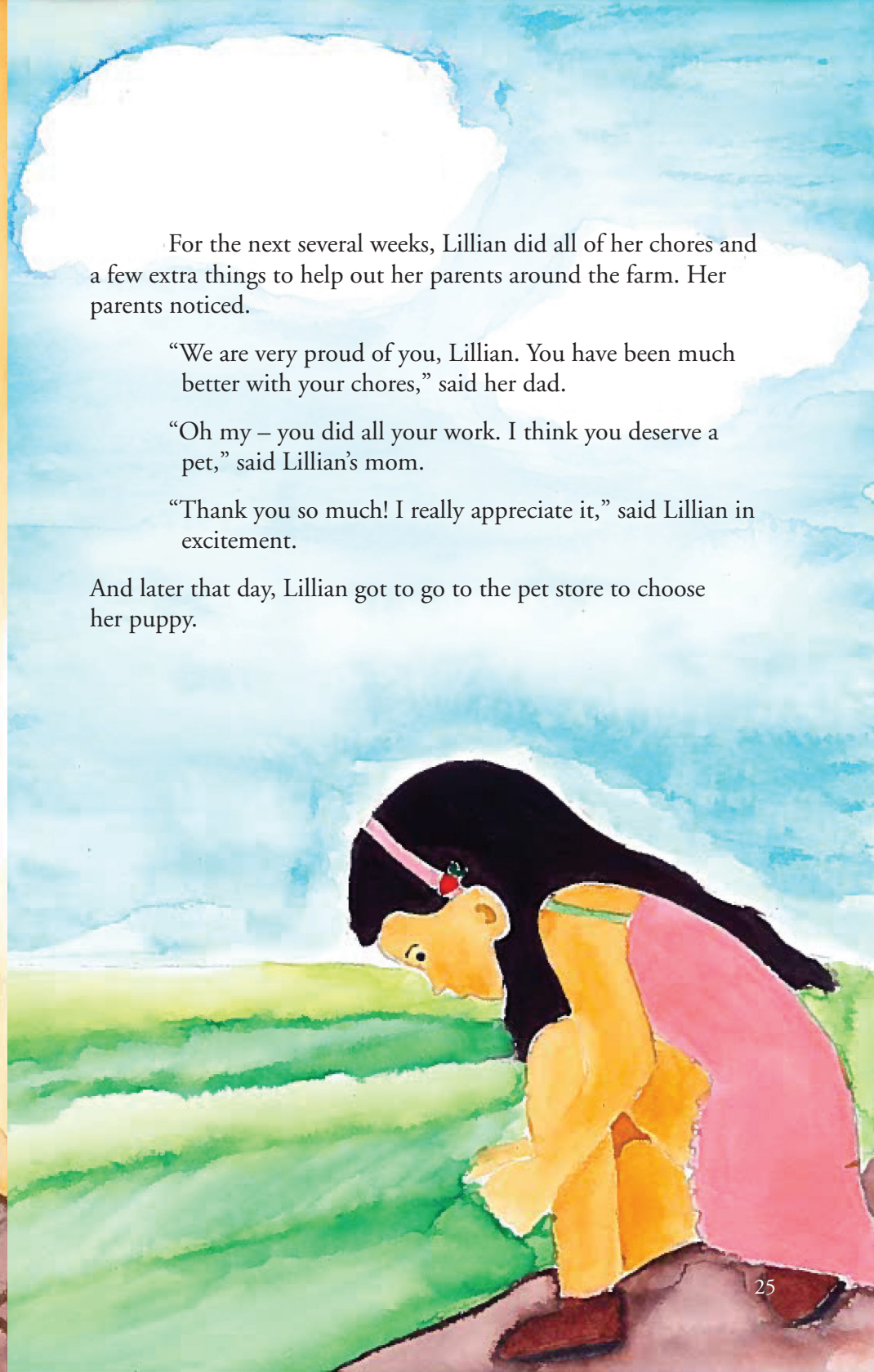
For the next several weeks, Lillian did all of her chores and a few extra things to help out her parents around the farm. Her parents noticed.

"We are very proud of you, Lillian. You have been much better with your chores," said her dad.

"Oh my – you did all your work. I think you deserve a pet," said Lillian's mom.

"Thank you so much! I really appreciate it," said Lillian in excitement.

And later that day, Lillian got to go to the pet store to choose her puppy.



Now each day when her chores are done, the three friends take afternoon walks together. Lillian's parents often look out from the house admiring the change in their daughter's attitude and of her maturing attitude about daily living on a farm. But no matter how much they try, her parents can still not figure out what the little red bump on the dog's back really is.



About the Author:



Valerie Nava, age 9

Fourth grade student Valerie Nava got the idea for her story, *The Strawberry's Owner*, from her love of strawberries and her wish for a puppy. Much like the character in her story, Valerie has always wanted a pet puppy and her parents have said that caring for a puppy is a big responsibility. The main character was named after one of her friends, Lillian. Her favorite part of writing her story was when Lillian's parents saw how she had matured, and she was able to get a puppy! Valerie learned so many facts about strawberries during her research for the story. For instance, she learned that strawberries have an average of 200 seeds per berry. She also talked with her teacher and learned about some of the differences between strawberries grown on the coast and those grown in the central valley.

Valerie has always wanted to be a published author. She made her own book when she was in second grade and is very much looking forward to becoming a published author through the *Imagine this...* Story Writing Contest.

About the Illustrators:



**James Clark, Joy Taylor,
Elizabeth Mandujano, Zoey Mills**

Delta High School | Corrie Soderlund, Art Teacher

The *Strawberry's Owner* was illustrated by four talented artists at Delta High School. James, Joy, Elizabeth, and Zoey started by reading through the story and brainstorming composition and layout ideas. The students divided the work by discussing which aspects of the story were intriguing to each of the students. For example, one student likes creating landscapes while another student prefers to draw objects that are close up. The students divided the work based on their strengths and continued to work together and check in with each other throughout the process. They really enjoyed working together and collaborating on the project. The students used pencil, watercolor, and ink for the illustrations. They thought the story was cute and that the author is very imaginative.