

8th GRADE STATE WINNER

Maria's Terruño

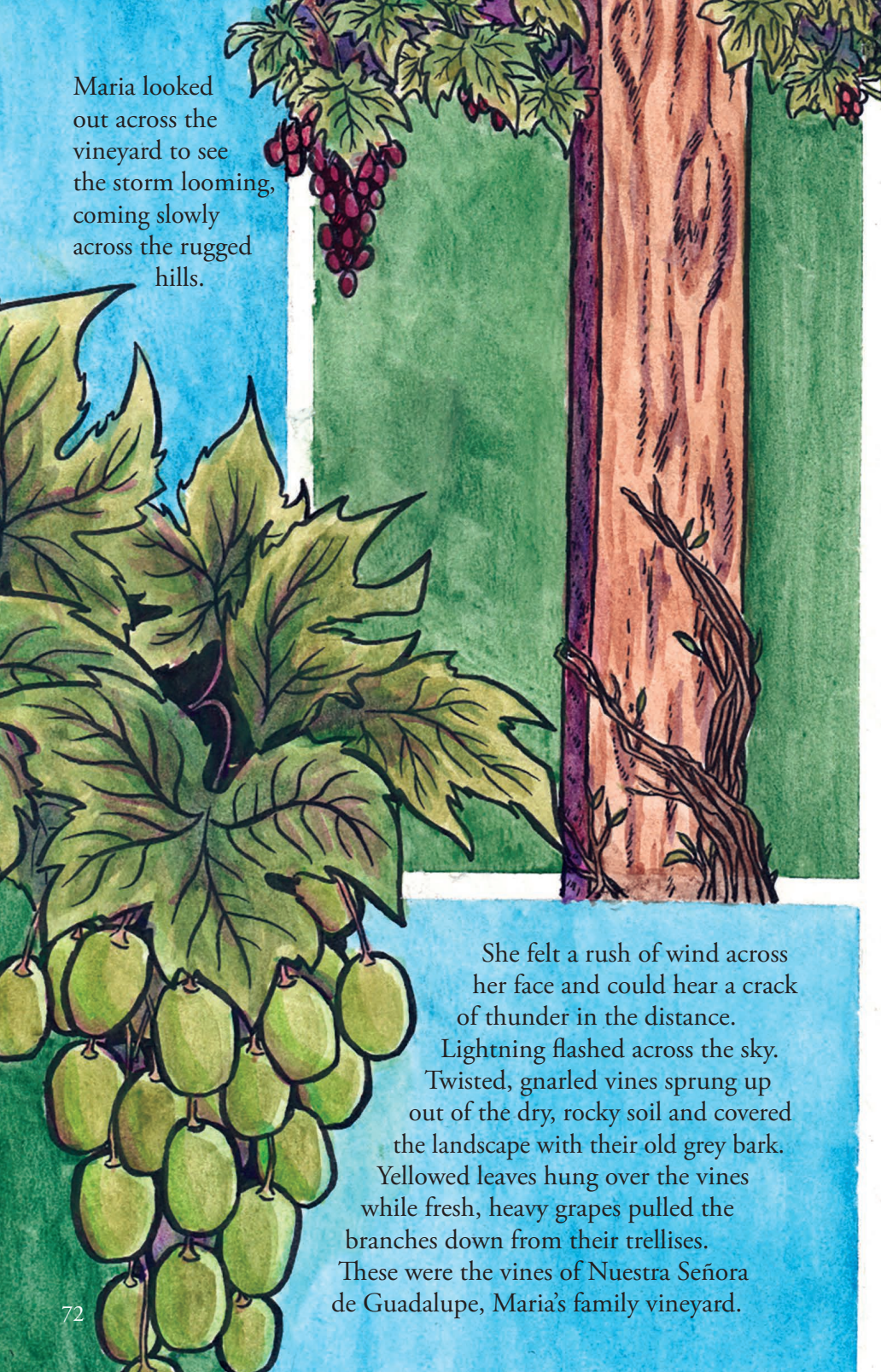
By Audra Devereaux

Tracey Kline, Teacher | Hickman Charter School

STANISLAUS COUNTY

Illustrated by: Florin High School





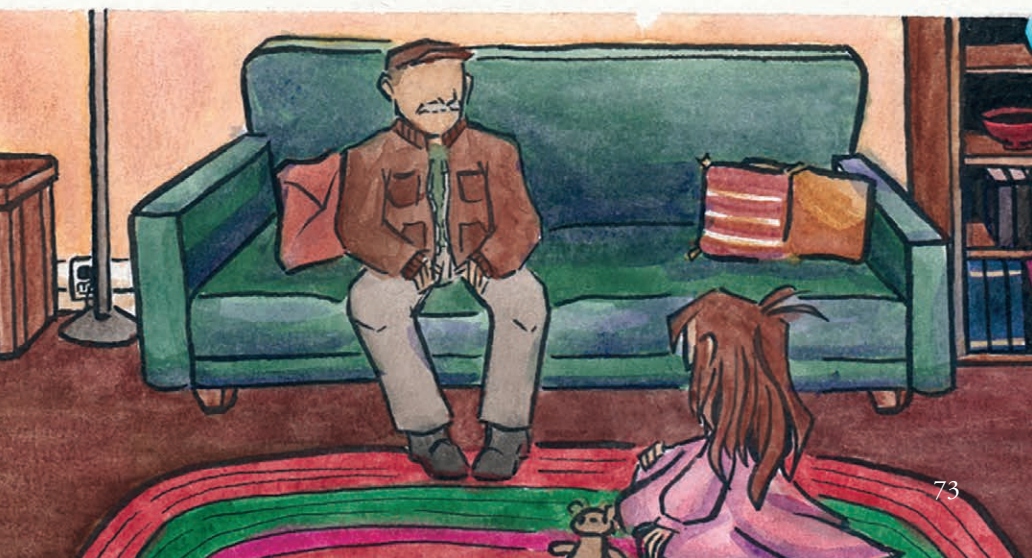
Maria looked out across the vineyard to see the storm looming, coming slowly across the rugged hills.

She felt a rush of wind across her face and could hear a crack of thunder in the distance. Lightning flashed across the sky. Twisted, gnarled vines sprung up out of the dry, rocky soil and covered the landscape with their old grey bark. Yellowed leaves hung over the vines while fresh, heavy grapes pulled the branches down from their trellises. These were the vines of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Maria's family vineyard.

Maria walked up the hill with her dog, Manchego, following behind her. As she looked down into his face, she instantly remembered the day she got him. It was around five years ago when she was 7.



On that day, Maria remembered sitting on her family's woven rug, listening to her abuelo.





"Mari, I went to town today."

"Really, Abuelo? What for?" she asked excitedly.

"I bought you something."



"A present?"

"You could say that," Abuelo said, smiling. He took a round, fluffy little ball out of his pocket and set it in Maria's lap. It was warm and soft and it slowly uncurled into a little black and white puppy.

"Oh, thank you, Abuelo!" she said, hugging him deeply. "What should we name him?"

"I think we should name him after our favorite queso, Manchego. His colors match." Manchego barked in approval.

"Be sure to take good care of Manchego, Mari."



Maria's mind came back to the present as a rumble of thunder sounded not far off in the distance. Maria hadn't been getting along with her family lately. She missed her abuelo because he passed away a few years ago. She wanted to help with the vineyard, but her parents didn't think she was old enough.



"Too bad, Manchego, we're always in the way," she said aloud, sighing. Then her abuelo's voice came to her again, as if he was standing just beside her.



“Always remember, Mari. Vines like to live in poor soils. It takes them a long time to produce grapes good enough to make wine. But once they do, they get better and better for decades, even over 100 years.”





She could see Mama and Papi running, getting clippers, woven baskets, and other things for picking the grapes. Her many brothers and sisters must have been back in la casa.



“When my father came here from Mexico, into California, he saw these hills and they reminded him of home. The soil here in Santa Ysabel is sandy and rocky, with just enough clay, perfect for growing winegrapes. So he planted varieties that he brought from Spain. Tempranillo, Garnacha, Verdejo. He built this very house from the stones in the nearby riverbed, baking the red roof tiles out in the hot sun.”

Maria would lean forward, listening intently.

“You have to focus on vine growth and encourage the shoots to grow big. Then you prune the smaller, weaker shoots off, strengthening the main shoots. The fruit is more flavorful and delicious that way. Grapevines don’t like rich soils. They like difficult soils. They need to struggle in order to make great wine. We are the same. People like difficult challenges. We have to struggle in order to become great.

“With ancient vines, roots can grow up to 30 feet deep. Not unlike us. I want you to remember that. Our culture, our family is very deep.”

“Do you know what *terruño* is?” he would ask her.

“The taste of the soil in the wine, the taste of the place the grapes were grown. The French call it *terroir*. *Terruño* is what makes the wine special. It is the climate, the soil, the plants and animals of the area, even the alma of the winemaker. They all come together to create the flavor, the *terruño*.”



She looked down at her dog's face, looking up at hers. "Abuelo was right, Manchego. These vineyards are important. They are our history, our story. The story of our family. Abuelo would want me to help with the harvest, no matter what."



Just then, it started to sprinkle.

"If we act now, we may be able to harvest in time, Manchego. Even if Mama and Papi don't want me to, I know that it's the right thing to do."

Maria rushed down into the vineyard to her parents, grabbing an extra basket.



About the Author



\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\ **Audra Devereaux** \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\

13 years old

Audra wrote and rewrote this story many times. In fact, it wasn't until the sixth draft that she felt the story was complete. Her story idea came from reading books about making wine, and her favorite aspect was creating the story's characters. She especially liked it when her main character, Maria, gets the dog, Manchego. Audra loves to read and thinks that being a published author herself is really cool.

About the Illustrator



Andrea Fonseca

Florin High School

Alexandra Pease, Art Teacher

Location and landscape inspired Andrea. The Honors Art junior researched Santa Ysabel, the setting of “Maria’s Terruño”, to properly illustrate the plants, wildlife, and general landscape native to the region. Additional research on vineyards, even down to grape trellises, helped Andrea bring this story to life. After planning out each page, Andrea sketched the illustration, then lined them with black ink, and finally colored all the pages with watercolor.

Andrea enjoyed the process for two reasons. First, the story, a genuine, interesting, and most importantly, descriptive read, was fun to illustrate. Secondly, this tale resonated with her as it reminded her of the stories her cousin, from Mexico, may write.