

There Is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me

by Alice Walker • Illustrated by Stefano Vitale
Harper Collins Publishers



Reviewed by
Deb Bunnell

Sometimes you read a story to your class to help teach a concept, other times to share the background of a song, still other times the story is the song reworked as a book. Alice Walker's *There Is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me* is pure pleasure. The invitation to read this book is threefold.

First, the title itself arouses curiosity by the turn of the phrase. As Walker uses this technique throughout the book, the reader looks forward to the next page while regretfully leaving one behind. This backward or upside down way of looking at everything—for example, “There is a road at the bottom of my foot walking me”—supports discussion and experimentation. Multiple interpretations inspire exploration and are a natural springboard for creative classroom activities.

Second, Stefano Vitale's illustrations are magnificent images based directly on the text. Rich colors beckon you to look closer to find playful details on each page. The images stimulate the eyes while simultaneously giving pleasure. The illustrations present only one possibility for each statement. Even as these pictures present a possibility, they are, as the text, open to interpretation, thereby encouraging exploration in the Orff classroom.

The third invitation is the author herself, Alice Walker. Walker's best-known work is *The Color Purple*, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983. She has written novels, stories, essays and poems. Her work typically focuses on the struggles of African American women in societies that are racist, sexist and violent. She has received more than a half dozen literary awards in addition to the Pulitzer

Prize. Walker partnered with illustrator Catherine Deeter to create three earlier children's books: *To Hell with Dying*, *Finding the Green Stone* and *Langston Hughes: American Poet*. Walker is a living literary icon.

Unlike her typical themes, *There Is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me* is a gentle celebration of life with an emphasis on nature and creativity. In an author's note Walker says: “One day I went walking in the forest near my house with my dog, along an old logging trail. Redwoods rose to left and right, the sky was brilliant blue with a few threads of

clouds, the earth was scented with spring. As I walked, the wonder of myself as part of all this overcame me. I began to sing: ‘I come out of You, my Love. I come out of You!’ Over and over, with the greatest gratitude and joy. As soon as I got home, my big black lab trotting just as happily beside me, I wrote this book, which was not a book then, but a thank you note.”

A threefold invitation to enjoy a book, by an award-winning author, that makes one smile is not to be ignored. There is a book at the bookstore buying me.

