

# Los Gatos Black on Halloween

by Marisa Montes, illustrated by Yuyi Morales • Henry Holt and Co., 2006

Reviewed by Denise Coughlin

**M**any of us have students struggling to learn in our English-speaking classrooms because Spanish is their first language. The bilingual book, *Los Gatos Black on Halloween*, is a good vocabulary lesson for both Spanish and English speakers. The author takes a traditional tale of creatures coming to life on Halloween to attend a dance at midnight. Through rhythmic poetry, Marisa Montes weaves a simple Spanish lesson, complete with English translation.

*Los gatos black* are the first characters in the parade of creatures traveling to the Monster Ball. All the traditional Halloween characters are included, from eerie pumpkins to *los fantasmas*, or phantoms. When they arrive at the haunted *casa*, they hear "Forgotten music, tinkling, clear ... *La musica* the dead can hear."

As they boogie, bop and do the hop, they are suddenly terrified by *tres raps* at *la puerta*. The creatures are terrified, and quickly retreat. I don't want to spoil the surprise and tell you what the "monsters most abhor," but they carry little bags and yell "Trick or Treat!"

Older elementary school children will find this book intriguing because of the illustrations and humorous ending. The content includes "The corpses with their cold, dead eyes, *Los muertos* from their coffins rise," which is more appropriate for intermediate-age students.

In music class, this book can be used to create a simple sound piece to create something more complicated, resulting in a Halloween performance. Simple percussion instruments could be added to enhance the sound words. *Los gatos* yowl, hiss and scream. *Los esqueletos*, the skeletons, creak, groan, and prance. *Los peros* (the dogs) howl, and bloodhounds bay at *medianoche* (midnight).

To retell the story with music, students could compose a theme for the creatures in the book. Each monster could have their own piece, and they could be combined into a rondo form. Or, as each creature enters, a layer of music could be added. A dance piece for the Monster Ball could be the finale.

The creatures can be used to inspire movement, as they parade toward the haunted *casa* in their unique way. *Las brujas* fly, swoop, swish and swoosh on their brooms. Gravesites shiver and shake as corpses rise. Once at the haunted *casa*, they boogie, bop, waltz and glide. All of

these ideas could be combined into a final Halloween performance.

An enrichment lesson could include the Saint-Saens composition, "Danse Macabre." Once students have experienced the book and viewed the wonderful illustrations by Yuyi Morales, their imaginations will be primed to listen to the Saint-Saens piece.

The excellent illustrations and wonderful poetry make *Los Gatos Black on Halloween* a good bilingual addition to your book collection.

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