

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF HOPE

BY
TERRY CATASÚS JENNINGS

ILLUSTRATED BY
RAÚL COLÓN

REVIEWS

From Holiday House:

To turn a shabby little house into a welcoming home, all it takes is a big-hearted family eager to help others. . . and a little hope. La casita offers a home for those who don't have anywhere to go. It's a safe place in a new land, and Esperanza is always the first to welcome them. An inspiring, semi-autobiographical story of how immigrants can help each other find their footing in a new country, accompanied by the rich and vivid illustrations of award-winning artist Raúl Colón.

"It was a little house. Una casita . . .

It was small.

It smelled like old wet socks. . .

But even though they were far from home,

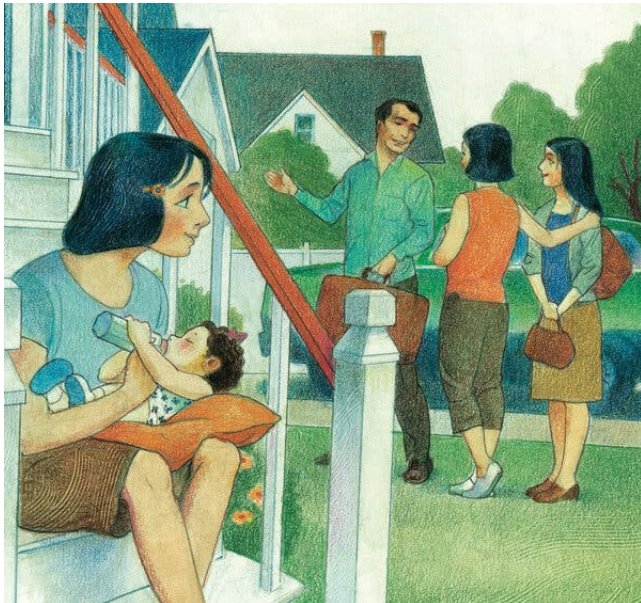
The family was together."

The New York Times

CHILDREN'S BOOKS
OCTOBER 30, 2022

Where the Heart Is

Five new children's books explore the meaning of home.



THE LITTLE HOUSE OF HOPE (Neal Porter, \$18.99, ages 4 to 8), by Terry Catasús Jennings, is an uplifting story of arrival. When Esperanza, Manolo and their parents come to the United States from Cuba, they can only afford a small house that smells like “old, wet socks,” but they are safe and happy to be together. Raul Colón’s illustrations emphasize their connection; one beautifully composed spread depicts each family member at work or school before bringing them together around a table, reading. Together they enjoy “the memories of home bubbling in Mami’s pots,” together they work on their little house. Before long, others join them — an aunt with her baby, a Mexican family in need of shelter — and the house becomes a true starter home: a way for new arrivals to find a foothold in the States and for all the members of this warm community to contribute and support one another.

BOOKLIST

The house may be small and rickety, but Esperanza and her family are happy to be living in the casita, because they are together and safe. Now far from their old home of Cuba, the casita is where they'll make their new home in the U.S. As family and friends also begin arriving to the U.S. in search of a place to go, Esperanza's family opens the casita's doors to those that need help, and soon the small house becomes a lively and bustling home for many. Award-winning Colón uses a mixed medium of colored pencils and watercolor to create his distinct artwork that

is rich in color and texture and beautifully encapsulates the warmth the casita provides. Jennings'

semiautobiographical story portrays the immigrant experience in several different ways, but everyone's story is connected through their shared hopes, aspirations, and determination, all of which will be relatable to readers who have gone through a similar experience when immigrating

to the U.S. A valuable story about the importance of generosity and community.

— *Michelle Ortega*

SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

A family just arriving from Cuba is searching for an affordable place to call home when they find it: La Casita. It is a small house, and it has a bit of a musty smell, but Esperanza, Manolo, and their parents (who are light-skinned) see something more. Through hard work and dedication, they begin to slowly repair La Casita, making the little house a home. Each family member also works hard to learn English, and they form new friendships with families that are also looking for help, offering them a warm home in La Casita. Time goes on, and friends and family come and go from the little home; every time they do, Esperanza offers them a gift of hope as they set out. Colón's trademark watercolor and color pencil illustrations begin by showing the uncertainty of a new place with a gray, almost stormy sky as the backdrop to the unfamiliar, and then move on to depict a loving family, warm home, sunny outdoors, and the hopes and dreams of many who face difficulties in their attempts at a better life. The poetic Spanish text (an English edition, *The Little House of Hope*, is also available) deftly conveys these hopes and fears in an accessible way to young readers. VERDICT A great selection that honestly presents the hardships and the victories of families working hard for a bright future. — Selenia Paz

KIRKUS

With hope, love, and hard work, you can make a house a home.

Forced to leave their beloved Cuba, a young girl named Esperanza and her family find themselves in a new country, starting over. After searching and searching, they finally find a little house—la casita—to call their own. It smells a bit like “old, wet socks” and has shabby furnishings, but they are safe, together, and happy. Mami and Papi work multiple jobs day and night. Whether it’s doing schoolwork, learning English, or completing chores, the entire family works hard and helps each other. A few months later, Mami’s sister is able to flee Cuba and moves in with them. When Mami meets a woman newly arrived from Mexico with her husband and children, Esperanza’s family makes room for them in la casita even though they have little space. Over time, many immigrants are offered refuge in the house until they are able to gain a footing in their host country and move on to homes of their own, never forgetting la casita that gave them hope when they needed it most. Beautifully illustrated using Colón’s trademark scratched-watercolor technique, this book reflects the stories of many a refugee family and humanizes a group of people often othered. In an age-appropriate way, it touches on the complicated reasons people leave their homes. Spanish words and hints of Cuban culture are scattered throughout. Characters’ skin tones range from pale to light brown. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A little house indeed, but this inspiring tale offers a lot of hope. (*Picture book. 5-8*)

Payal Doshi

The Little House of Hope pulls at your heartstrings when one family despite their struggle and hardship opens their home and hearts to others in need showing us the importance of kindness, hard work, and the meaning of family. I cherished being invited into la casita and being a part of Esperanza’s family. An absolute heartwarming read that feels like a warm embrace!

-- Payal Doshi, Author, *Rea* and *The Blood of the Nectar*

THE HORN BOOK

A “little house” is at the center of this story about generosity among members of an extended immigrant family and the stability they provide for one another. When Esperanza, her brother, and their parents emigrate from Cuba, they need a place to live that “doesn’t cost too much money.” They find la casita. “Even though they were far from home, the family was together. They were safe. They were happy in la casita.” In an economical and sensory-rich text, Jennings describes the family’s new life in the United States. Esperanza’s parents each work two jobs, and she and her brother have responsibilities around the house. “After work and after school,” la casita holds “the scrumptious smells of beans and sofrito and plantains—the memories of home bubbling in Mami’s pots.” Relatives arrive from Cuba, and later a family from Mexico: “La casita offered a home for those who didn’t have a place to go.” Colón’s (*Imagine!*, rev. 9/18)

signature crosshatched drawing style brings out the house's character. His watercolor and colored-pencil illustrations in a palette of muted greens, blues, and oranges show the many roles la casita plays as it evolves, expanding to become a haven for hope. In her introductory author's note, Jennings shares her own immigrant family experiences that inspired the story.

LETTYCIA TERRONES

BEAGLES AND BOOKS

Esperanza, her little brother Manolo, and her parents move from Cuba to the United States. They find a house that is within their budget to rent. During the week, her parents work to make money at their many jobs and Esperanza and her brother work hard at school and doing household chores. On weekends, the family collaborates on making "la casita" a home. When family or friends need a place to live, Esperanza's family welcomes them with open arms utilizing all parts of the house including the garage to make space.

What I love about this story is young children get a first hand account of moving to the United States as an immigrant and the many reasons why families leave their homelands. Kids not only see the work ethic of both Esperanza's family and her extended family but also their absolute willingness to lend a hand to others. Inspired by her own childhood, Catasús Jennings tells a story full of heart and hope. La casita became a home because of the people that lived in it. You can feel the love and support through Catasús Jennings' descriptive text and Colón's warm watercolor illustrations evoke a nostalgic feel. Thanks to the author for sharing a copy with my #bookexcursion group. *The Little House of Hope* celebrates its book birthday tomorrow on June 14, 2022.

KATIEFISCHERWRITES

Esperanza and her family came to America from Cuba and find the perfect house for them. It smells a bit like wet socks, and the furniture is a bit rickety, but the family is together. They enjoy fixing up their casita and especially love the memories contained in their meals. Not everyone they know has the comfort of their own home, and so Esperanza's Papi and Mami invite them to stay. It's tight, but everyone is happy.

Not a single part of this book wasn't beautiful. The story, the art, the characters' joy and generosity, it all comes together into a wonderful read (and re-read) aloud.

The softness of the watercolors gives so much expression, not only to the faces but to the house and setting as well. Even pre-readers love to page through and just soak it all in.

There's so much to absorb in the story, but one feature that particularly struck me is that

there's just the right amount of detail to the reasons as to why people immigrate. It is perfect for growing empathy in children. We sense through Esperanza's eyes the beauty of the home they left behind, and also the bravery it takes to work towards something else.

The author's note at the beginning is really good to share for children who have the attention span for it. The background provides yet another layer of richness to the story.

Resources: This book would pair well with [We Came to America](#) by Faith Ringgold.

Look up the meaning of your student or child's name and make a collage like Esperanza's.

([Nameberry](#) is one option)

Find Cuba on the map, look up pictures or read a book.

MOM READ IT

The Little House of Hope, by Terry Catasús Jennings/Illustrated by Raúl Colón, (June 2022, Neal Porter Books/Holiday House), \$18.99, ISBN: 9780823447169

Ages 4-8

A family arrives from Cuba and finds a home to call their own as they build their new lives in America. In time, La Casita – the little house – welcomes other family members and later, a family who needs a place to call home; together, they all work toward making the casita and America their new home. Terry Catasús Jennings was inspired by anger to write this story, after a realtor claimed to never rent to “Hispanics because they lived four families to a house and always destroyed the properties where they lived”. She was also inspired by the memories of growing up in her own casita. Here, the *Definitely Dominguita* author tells the stories of families who come here to be safe. In quietly passionate storytelling, she tells readers about the fears that spurred these people to leave their homes and come to the States, and she tells readers how these families all worked together to turn the house into a warm, loving casita: adults and children coming together to paint and clean, to mow lawns and make artwork, and how the casita inspired them. A father starts their own landscaping business. A mom starts a daycare in the casita. Another mother secures a job as a high school Spanish teacher, and a father becomes an accountant. A daughter uses her passion for collage to welcome new families to the casita, and when they're ready to move on, sends them off with artwork to display in their home.

Pura Belpré medalist (2006) and Eric Carle Honor (2021) illustrator Raúl Colón pencil and watercolor artwork uses perspective and soft color to create beautiful moments: a family, looking up at la casita; gathered around a table, smiling; confiding in one another; a father, looking through the window and seeing a full home ready to welcome him. *The Little House of Hope* reminds us all that this is what America should be when we're at our best.

MUTUALLY INCLUSIVE

The Little House of Hope by Terry Catasús Jennings and Raúl Colón brings young readers something we could all use a bit more of these days — hope. Following an immigrant family as they settle into their home, this beautiful picture book also highlights the power of community care.

Young readers meet Esperanza and her family as they arrive in the United States from their home in Cuba. They all do their part to make their small house a home. As each family member works hard to establish their place in their new community, they also support other immigrant families by offering them space in their home. Everyone works together, sharing responsibilities as well as music, laughter, and friendship. As families come and go, Esperanza's family's home remains a safe space for families to call their home as they find their way in a new community.

Raúl Colón's stunning illustrations pair perfectly with Terry Catasús Jennings' wonderful story. You can feel the joy and hope of this community on every page.

<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9780823447169>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-little-house-of-hope-terry-catas-s-jennings/1140032972?ean=9780823447169>

https://www.amazon.com/Little-House-Terry-Catasús-Jennings/dp/0823447162/ref=sr_1_1?crid=13FCMFBUYKZ65&keywords=The+Little+House+of+Hope&qid=1651839010&srefix=the+little+house+of+hope%2Caps%2C64&sr=8-1

<https://holidayhouse.com/book/the-little-house-of-hope/>