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TITLE INFORMATION

THE FIG TREE

Heather S. Lonczak
Illus. by Claudia Varjotie
IngramSpark (34 pp.)
\$18.00 hardcover
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BOOK REVIEW

A grumpy girl learns an important lesson from her grandfather about a special tree in this picture book.

After a bad day at school, Lydia joins her grandfather sitting under a fig tree. He describes how he spent his day pruning and caring for the tree. Lydia can't quite understand putting so much effort into looking after the tree: "Why go to all of that trouble for something that just stands there not doing much of anything?" But as her grandfather recounts the way the tree has sheltered him over the years, the delicious food made from its fruit, and the beauty it brings to the yard in every season, Lydia realizes how special it is. And as she develops an admiration for the tree, she discovers that she no longer feels grouchy. Lonczak's meditative text uses a simple enough vocabulary for independent readers to peruse comfortably. The slow pace and focus on appreciation make it a good choice for bedtime or gratitude-centered classroom reading. Varjotie's soft-edged illustrations, which feature cartoonish animals and light-skinned humans against painterly backgrounds, match the relaxed tone. Lydia's facial expressions seem to let go of her grumpiness much earlier in the images than the text, but the connection she feels to her grandfather, who helps her learn to really see the tree, comes through clearly. A reference to Lydia's Spanish-speaking father in the soothing tale pays tribute to mixed-heritage families.

This intergenerational lesson smoothly encourages readers to share a girl's gratitude for the natural world.

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