

used my four favorite words to answer her: “Why, yes! Of course!” So, I did several more revisions before it worked in this new format. But the actual writing time was very quick. I had it in pretty good shape in about six months.

Is writing hard for you?

I love to write, but that doesn't mean it is easy. Some stories, like ESTELA'S SWAP, come quickly and the revisions go smoothly. Others, like my book, THE RECESS QUEEN (which is, by the way, a very short book) took me seven years to write. When I start a story, I never know how long it will take me to finish it. When I get stuck on one book, I work on another. But I keep thinking about the one I'm having trouble with!

What advice do you have for young writers and illustrators?

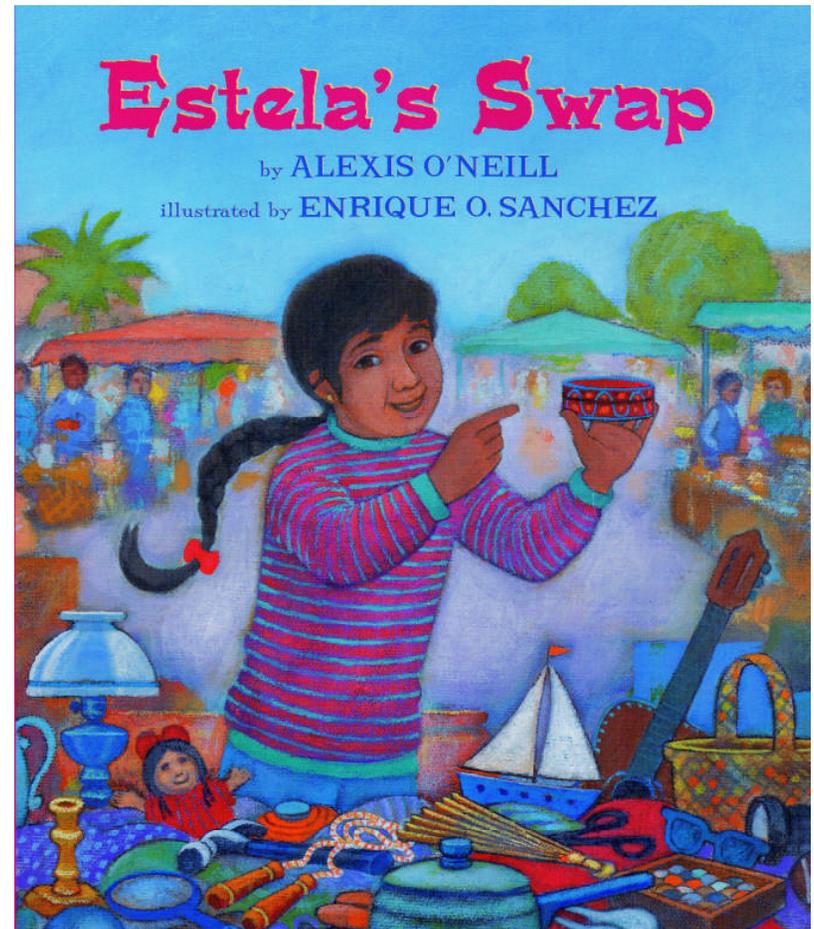
Tune into your world. What you take for granted might be unusual to kids in other parts of the country. Keep a small notebook or sketchbook with you always to jot down observations or things you wonder about. Begin to think, “How is life here different or the same as it is in other parts of the country?” Hang around other people who like to write and draw. Experiment with language or design. Play with words and images. Share your drafts or sketches with others with similar interests. And have fun!



Because You Asked . . .

Questions & Answers

About ESTELA'S SWAP and Author Alexis O'Neill



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Alexis O'Neill
Garage Sale on a Cold Day in the Desert
Photo by Allan Boeshaar

ABOUT WRITING *Estela's Swap*

by Alexis O'Neill

Why did you write ESTELA'S SWAP?

I moved to California from New York after I married my husband, David, who was brought up here. One of my new experiences was going to swap meets. I loved seeing kids selling items to earn money for the things they wanted instead of just expecting their parents to pay for everything. The kids were great at bargaining! The swap meet setting was so different from anything I had seen back East. So, I thought I'd like to write a story about a slice of life in contemporary Southern California that also showed how the bargaining process worked.

What is a "swap meet"?

A swap meet in Southern California is like giant garage sale, except that all the sellers are in one location such as a big parking lot. People rent one or many parking spaces and set up a display of the items they want to sell. Some people just put their goods on blankets on the ground. Some display their goods on tables. Others set up fancy

booths. Buyers walk up and down the aisles to see what they want to buy. They can hear music as they walk or stop for a snack. Whole families like to wander up and down the aisles. It's a fun way to spend a morning – and get some bargains!

What do you like best about swap meets?

Bargaining! Before I learned how to bargain, if you told me a price, I paid that price. But once I swung into the rhythm of the swap meet, I began to love haggling over a price. It was a game – and I became really good at it! When I asked a seller, "How much?" I began to use words like, "Can you do any better than that?" or "You want a dollar for that? How about fifty cents?" I learned that I had to be willing to walk away if the price was too high, no matter how much I wanted something.

What is ESTELA'S SWAP really about?

Even when things don't work out as you have planned, you must never give up your dream. Estela may not have earned the money she had hoped for on that one Sunday, but her heart grew from the act of helping and giving. Because of these experiences, her dream of will be even more meaningful when she is able to attain it.

What was it like to write this book?

Actually, ESTELA'S SWAP began as a short chapter book. When I sent it to the editor at Lee & Low Books, she asked me if I would be willing to rewrite it as a picture book. I



Illustration by Enrique O. Sanchez from ESTELA'S SWAP