



Cuba 15 by Nancy Osa

Subjects: Cuban Americans; Quinceañera (Social Custom); High Schools

Awards: Pura Belpré Honor Book, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, Best Books for Young Adults

Book List: Latin America

Props: Tiara, dog



Violet Pas does not want to be a *quinceañera* (keen see-a-nera) or have a quinceañero party. Just the thought of standing up in front of all of her family and friends in a pink Pepto Bismol-colored dress proclaiming her womanhood is almost too much to bear. What good could possibly come of such a party? Nothing. Nada. Zip. But her grandmother, her *abuela*, said she must have such a party. (*Speak as Abuela with Cuban accent*) “In Cuba (Coo-ba) when a girl turns 15 years of age, it is the time when all the resto del mundo ass-cepts the young lady as an adult in the eyes of God and Family. And she, in turn, promises to ass-cept *responsabilidad* for all the wonders in the world of adults.”

Well, this was news to Violet, and if it involved a fluffy pink dress and a glittery tiara, (*Put on tiara*) you could count her out! The first and most obvious problem was Violet never wore dresses, let alone tiaras! (*Rip off tiara*) Not ever, no exceptions. You’d think her own grandmother would remember that. But no, she didn’t. The other problem was that Violet didn’t really embrace her Cuban heritage. Although Violet’s father was Cuban, her mother was Polish, and Violet considered herself 100% American. But Violet soon realizes that she really doesn’t have a choice and her mother and grandmother excitedly set the date for her quince.

You would think having a party, guaranteed to result in many life altering moments of humiliation, looming over one’s head would be enough drama for one teenager, but to make matters worse, because of some mistake Violet made in her high school speech class, she must

join the Speech Team and compete in the Original Comedy category. At first she’s not sure what to write a speech about. What was funny? But as the plans for her party progressed and Violet begins to look at her family through the eyes of a writer, she notices that there is actually plenty to laugh about. For instance, her dog. (*Bring out dog*) Except for the extra legs and tail, Chucho looks exactly like a little old man who took a bath in superglue and rolled around on a hairdresser’s floor. It’s true. He has been around so long; no one is quite sure what his true age is. Nor can anyone agree on what color he is, not exactly. And he is really more like a goat than a dog. He will eat anything, especially bits of things that look like they had been thrown away. (*Put dog down*) Then there are her family’s marathon domino games, her father’s sickly watermelon colored polyester pants that leave a good six inches of his green and white striped socks exposed before they meet his brand-new white tasseled bowling shoes, which he was breaking in by wearing around the house. But that’s not all; her *abuela*, who is hosting the *quinceañera* (keen see-a-nera), hires Señora Flora—party planner to the stars. A Cuban woman, whose traditional view of the quince is likely to drive Violet to tears if she doesn’t find a way to laugh instead.

As the speech draws nearer, Violet begins to reflect on who she is and where she is going and where she has come from. Follow Violet as she delivers one laughable speech and finds a new appreciation for her own unique heritage and her own unique voice. (*Hold up book*) *Cuba 15* by Nancy Osa.

