



## NINE DAYS TO CHRISTMAS

*A Story of Mexico*

BY MARIE HALL ETS & AURORA LABASTIDA

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## **Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico** Marie Hall Ets , Aurora Labastida

Published over 30 years ago, Nine Days to Christmas remains fresh and relevant. Ceci's first Christmas posada party and pinata have made her Mexican town come alive for generations of readers. "The youngest child will be completely transported by this lovely story".--The Atlantic. Three-color illustrations.

## **Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico Details**

Date : Published November 1st 1991 by Puffin (first published September 18th 1959)

ISBN : 9780140544428

Author : Marie Hall Ets , Aurora Labastida

Format : Paperback 48 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Holiday, Christmas



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## From Reader Review Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico for online ebook

### Julia says

Beautiful chalk drawings on gray paper. A long story (picture) book about a little girl in a well to do family in Mexico city. (the maid figures prominently in the story.) Little girl is going to have her first Posada and she is so excited. Very clear picture of daily life in this town. Sweet ending.

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### Book Concierge says

The subtitle is: A Story of Mexico, and this picture book details the preparations and festivities surrounding *las posadas*, a procession and celebration of Joseph and Mary seeking shelter in Bethlehem. When Ceci's mother tells her that she is now old enough to stay up for the festivities, she promises that Ceci will be able to have her very own posada, complete with a piñata!

This is a charming story, and the illustrations by Ets are wonderfully detailed. They really took me to the streets of Mexico City. I found myself pouring over the drawings, picking out details, such as the name of stores, the traffic policeman, the tortilla makers, or gaily decorated market stalls. I particularly loved the one drawing where Ceci is with the family's maid, Maria, on her morning errands; Ceci stands near Maria, clutching the hem of the maid's skirt. It's just a loving image, and I have memories of similar events in my childhood.

I didn't find anything about Labastida in the Goodreads profile, so I did a little extra research and found THIS article from Illinois.edu. Labastida was the children's librarian at the Benjamin Franklin Library in Mexico City. She wrote most of the text of the book, although Ets did polish it. Their collaboration successfully brought the story to life.

My only complaint about this Caldecott-winning picture book, is that most of the drawings are almost uniformly gray, except for a few highlights of bright color – a shawl, Ceci's hair ribbons, a striped awning, etc. On the other hand, this technique clearly focuses the viewer's attention on key elements of the illustration.

I think this is a book I'll want to read again ... at Christmas time, while listening to my favorite Mexican Christmas songs album.

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### Jazmin says

Wow I really enjoyed reading this story! First of all because I am Mexican and I know all about the Christmas tradition. Ceci the main character which is a little girl made the story fun. She couldn't wait for the day of her posada to come. I really liked how she chose a star pinata for her posada because like the story

explained, the star lead the three wise men to Jesus. This story brought me good memories and I really liked how I can relate to this story. Overall, I really like the whole story and illustrations as well!

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### **Calista says**

This is part of my Wintertime tales. It is a Christmas story and it's a very different kind of Christmas story. It takes place in a village in Mexico. It is about, Ceci, a little girl gets her very own piñata for her first Posadas. These are special Christmas parties 8 days before Christmas, one per day at a different house. They include a piñata. Ceci picks out a star. There is like a myth with this star.

It is a wonderful story. I didn't think a whole lot of the art. There was a whole lot of beige which I don't like. Not my taste. It is a longer story. The kids grew restless and they both gave it 2 stars. When they read together, the nephew will always follow the niece's lead.

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### **Evan says**

This fabulous picture book might seem a bit outdated, but it does a great job of telling an authentic story based in Mexico in English, explaining a couple of traditions like 'las posadas' and 'las piñatas' to children unfamiliar with how Mexicans celebrate Christmas. But the religious information is outweighed by the descriptions of a traditional Christmas in Mexico.

In the story, the protagonist Ceci is awaiting her first 'posada', a pre-Christmas party which is thrown by a different person, in a different home, for each of the nine nights leading up to Christmas. School lets out about a month before and she spends her days anxiously awaiting 'las posadas' since this is the first year her mother has decided to hold a posada at her home (since Ceci is finally in kindergarten and grown up enough for such festivities). As the child of the family holding a posada, she will be able to have her own posada for the children, with an accompanying piñata which she is ever so excited to pick out.

The day comes when her mother takes her to the traditional 'Old Mexican market' (rather than the new supermarket) to pick out a piñata. The story's climax takes place at the party, where the children line up to break open and knock down the very piñata Ceci took careful time to pick out. While she laments its being broken, the star surprises her at the end by turning into a real star (which apparently happens to each piñata chosen by a little girl holding her first posada).

The message of the story is a bit hokey, but overall it is a great introduction to Mexican culture (specifically that which surrounds this important holiday) for students/children unfamiliar with such themes. The illustrations by Marie Hall Ets are beautifully evocative, painstakingly drawn in pencil to depict real-life scenes with certain things colored providing highlights. At 48 pages, it is a bit longer than most children's picture books because the text is fairly complex, with 3-5 long sentences per page and dialogue.

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### **Maria says**

This is one of my absolute favorite holiday books. Naturally, the art is similar to *Gilberto and the Wind* with taupe backgrounds, pencil drawings accented with white and yellow. This story however also uses pink which adds orange and browns to the spectrum as well. The story is set in Mexico in the 50's and is about a little girl's first posada. I like it for it's depiction of culture as well as having a more universal story about imagination and love that is not unlike the *Velveteen Rabbit*. One thing that strikes me about the story is that they fill the pinata with oranges and lemons in addition to candy and peanuts. It seems like that would hurt to break especially given that pinatas at that time had terra cotta pots inside instead of paper mache. Anyway, I love this story and someday would like to have a posada of my own.

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### **Kiah Albritton says**

Written and illustrated by Marie Hall Ets, *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico* won the 1960 Caldecott Medal. This was my first read of the book; I thoroughly enjoyed both the story and illustrations. It was a beautiful tale of young Mexican girl, Ceci, and her first Christmas party. The intended audience for this book is kindergarten-second grade children. Although, it's not a chapter book, there are multiple paragraphs of text on most pages. I do think the text is too heavy for a kindergartener, but it would work well for early elementary. The plot is well-developed, and this would be a great book for children to begin exploring themes in literature. The illustrations are also age appropriate and provide solid substantiation for the story. After examining the artwork, it appears Ets used pencil and paint because of the shading and bold colors. Ets' style is best described as folk, as the art is reminiscent of traditional Mexican imagery. The illustrations and the story pair together in a special way. For example, in one scene, Ceci sees the neighbor's cat about to attack her birds in their cage. The entire scene is illustrated using pencil lines and shading, however the birds, cat, and Ceci are painted with bold colors. It allows the reader to further focus on the most important aspects of each scene. This is Ets' style throughout the story. *Nine Days to Christmas* is an effective tool to teach children about holidays in other countries and cultures. This would be a wonderful book to create good reading habits over winter break when school is out. The plot is developed enough for schools to use the book for reading programs and create a short quiz.

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### **Tatra says**

Don't ask me why this was one of my favorites as a kid, except it is magic.

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### **Elizabeth S says**

I was surprised by how much I liked this book. At first glance, the artwork was totally not my style. But as I read and really looked at the pictures, I noticed and enjoyed the delicate detail of the pictures, yet with the simple feel that supports the story nicely.

And the story, oh, it is cute. And I really mean that. The little girl, kindergarten age, wants to know what it is like for the ducks in the pond, so she fills the bathtub and gets in and tries quacking... and it almost makes me want to fill my tub and try quacking myself. What fun! But ultimately it is a Christmas story, with a

charming ending.

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### **Josiah says**

*Nine Days to Christmas* is, in my opinion, right up there with the very best Caldecott Medal winners and Christmas picture books. All throughout, I was truly amazed by the fabulous complexity of the drawings created by Marie Hall Ets, and by the sensitive story that evokes a memorable sense of the magic surrounding Christmas.

Ceci, a young girl living in Mexico, is excited about her upcoming *posada* celebration, her first one. It will be held nine days before Christmas, and means a whole new array of experiences for Ceci. The new experience that she looks forward to most of all is the piñata that she gets to choose for her posada.

For Ceci, the piñatas in the Mexican market come to life, and when they discover that she is a girl on the verge of celebrating her first posada, each one of the piñatas clamors to be her choice; after all, they know that something very special can happen to a piñata chosen by a girl for her very first posada, because it will be a piñata that she loves.

Ceci decides upon a piñata representation of the Christmas star of Bethlehem to use at her posada, but when it comes time for all the children at the party to break the piñata open with a stick, Ceci does not want to be a part of it. She loves her Christmas star piñata, so how can she smash it? Ceci finds, though, that when the star is finally broken open, it is not really broken at all. Something truly special has happened for her very first piñata, and now she and the star have worked together to form an important, lasting sign of their mutual connection.

This story is tender and sincere, while also providing real Mexican cultural flavor. I am very impressed with *Nine Days to Mexico*; I knew that I wanted to give it two and a half stars, but whether I would round it up or down was a very close call. I would recommend this book to anyone.

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### **Christine says**

I liked most of the artwork in this Caldecott Medal book, but really didn't care for the style of the piñatas which seemed cartoonish and a bit out of place next to the drawings of people and everyday scenes. I enjoyed the story and reading about the Mexican Christmas tradition of Las Posadas from the point of view of a little girl, though we read it a bit late since it takes place before Christmas!

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### **Crystal says**

1960 Caldecott winner

I enjoyed some aspects of this book very much. Having lived in Texas many years and in San Antonio specifically, it is fun to see Los Pasadas portrayed in this way. There are many good things about this book and it was probably pretty amazing for its time, but there are certainly better ways to learn about the Mexican culture than this book now. There were things here and there that just struck me as being not quite okay.

The dedication actually started me on the wrong foot with the thanks to "all the little Mexican friends and relatives." I kind of cringed with the "little." Perhaps they truly meant little children, but....

Anyway, the following post explains it well - <http://labloga.blogspot.com/2007/07/w...>

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### **Jennifer (JenIsNotaBookSnob) says**

Some problematic stereotypes, but, likely groundbreaking for the time. It seems to be a bit hit or miss with some of Mexican heritage not having a problem with the book and others upset by the number of sombreros, sandals and so on.

The whole thing was just sort of 'meh' for me. It felt like there was an attempt to get it right and it's not as crazy bad as say "Tikki Tikki Tembo", but, it doesn't meet the expectation for modern multicultural literature.

Definitely quite wordy, illustrations are a bit drab for modern children. Recommended for those reading all the Caldecott winners.

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### **Satia says**

Another holiday themed children's book. The illustrations for this one are deceptively simple and remarkably evocative. The story wasn't that interesting to me but might engage a child or even another reader. For more and for further exploration suggestions:

<http://satia.blogspot.com/2010/12/cal...>

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### **Kathryn says**

#### **4.5 STARS**

A charming, sweet story about the posadas (special parties leading up to Christmas) and little Ceci getting to hold her very first one, with all the excitement and impatience that comes along with waiting for something special. The most exciting part of this is that she will have a pinata and gets to choose her very own. It's a gentle story, perhaps a bit overlong (especially for those used to today's picture books that zip along) but I savored it. Though have no experience to judge, it feels authentic and avoids the cliches or characterizations about another culture one might apprehensively expect from a book of this era. Ceci's emotions and imagination were easy for me to relate to and I especially empathized with her crisis at the end and felt that the resolution was beautiful, capturing both the magic of Christmas and the wonder of childhood. This book won the Caldecott in 1960; while the illustrations aren't in a style I'm typically drawn to, and some of them did not appeal to me, I loved others and felt they really captured the spirit of the characters and a great sense of place.

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