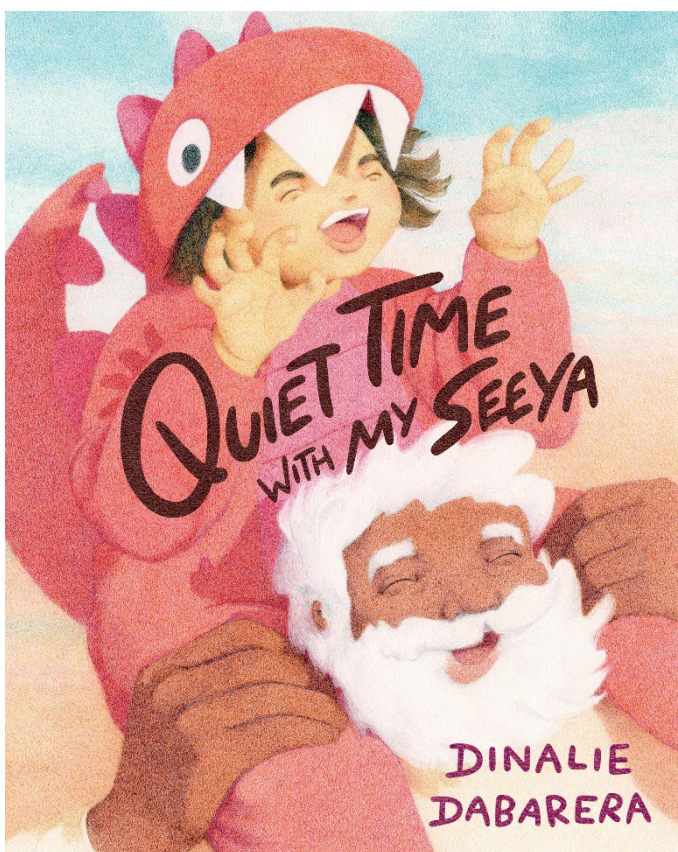


Quiet Time with My Seeya

By Dinalie Dabarera



A gorgeously illustrated and deeply endearing story about a young child and the special days she spends with her grandfather from the CBCA shortlisted illustrator of *The Cat with the Coloured Tail*.

RECOMMENDED FOR

Preschool and K-Year 1

THEMES

Language, multilingual and immigrant families, grandparents, cultural identity, Sinhalese-Australian culture

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SYNOPSIS

Time with my seeya is quiet time. Mum says that's because Seeya and I speak different languages. But that doesn't matter to us, because my seeya and I like all the same things...

Whether they are playing dress-ups, going on adventures, making pittu, or reading to each other, any time shared between Sona and her seeya – her Sinhalese grandfather – is full of delight and bursting with love.

Dinalie Dabarera's debut solo picture book is a heart-warming meditation on the immutable bond between grandparent and grandchild, brimming with sweet mischief and tender insight.

A WORD FROM THE CREATOR

There is a huge part of my life and my relationship to my family that has been shaped by being of two cultures. My relationship with my family is a loving one, but like so many families, it hasn't always been easy. We have always had to manage the challenge of communicating across very different perspectives with limited access to a common language.



'Seeya' means grandpa in Sinhalese, which is my first language and the one my parents still speak to us at home. Over time (and alongside my childhood desire to assimilate) my Sinhalese deteriorated, which made it especially hard to communicate with my grandma, who spoke almost no English at all. In the later years of her life, I felt this limitation particularly keenly. There was so much about her that I didn't know and much of what I did know was second hand.

I'm lucky that despite all these challenges, my grandma always made it easy to understand that she loved me. I remember her in a brown cardigan and long braid, plaiting my own hair in the mornings to get me ready for school, and afternoons spent watching her favourite

soaps, when she would catch me up with her surprisingly adept explanations of their tangled plot lines. Even as I got older and no longer needed her care, she remained warm and generous with her hugs and her smiles, and there was always a spot beckoning to sit by her side.

Quiet Time with My Seeya is both a celebration of the warmth and resolve of my grandmother's love, and an acknowledgement of the depth of what is at risk of being lost, when we lose a common language. So many children grow up in families like mine. I hope this book can add to our collective understanding of what it means to be a family, and what it means to love.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION PROMPTS

NB: You may need to modify some of the following questions if you have Sinhalese-speaking students in your class. If this is the case, encourage them to explain the words 'seeya' and 'aiyoo' in the story and to share any other Sinhalese words if they feel comfortable doing so.

- **Before Reading:**

Show the book's cover and run your fingers over the title as you read it out loud. Prompt engagement by asking questions such as:

- What might the word 'seeya' mean if I told you the girl and the elderly man in the illustration are related? [Answer: Seeya means grandpa in Sinhalese – one of the two official languages of Sri Lanka.]
- What can you find on the cover that helped you guess the answer to that question?
**Note to teachers: if students do guess what the word means use the opportunity to congratulate them and explain that it isn't always necessary to know a word or language to be able to communicate...and that this story is going to show how.
- Where might people speak Sinhalese?
**Note to teachers: unless you have students with a Sinhalese heritage in your classroom, it may be necessary to explain that Sinhalese is one of two official

languages of Sri Lanka. It may also help to locate Sri Lanka on a map of the world and showing some Google images of life in Sri Lanka.

- Sri Lanka is far from Australia. Does anyone in the class have a relative who has come from another country where they speak a language other than English?
- [Addressing those students who put their hands up] What name or names do you use for your relatives?
- Do you think the girl and her seeya 'like spending time together'? What on the cover told you that?
- Do you think they are always 'quiet' together? What on the cover helped you answer that question?

Let's find out more about these two and the 'quiet' times they share together.

- **Comprehension:**

Read the story through once and, after finishing, ask the following questions to assess how well your students have understood the story:

- Why don't the girl and her seeya know all the words when they read to each other?
- Does speaking a different language mean they don't have fun together?
- What sort of things do they like doing together?
- Why isn't sharing the same language a problem for them?
- How do you think the girl and her seeya feel about each other?
- How can we show people that we love them without using words?

- **Visual Literacy:**

Reopen the book and turn to the page where the girl and her seeya are playing a hand-held video game. Explain that words aren't necessary here either as the six small images tell us a lot about just how good Seeya is at beating the baddies. Encourage students to explain in their own words what is happening in each of the images.

- **Visual Literacy:**

Go back a few pages to show that sometimes the way a word is shown on a page tells us a lot, too. Look at the first double-page spread where Seeya sneezes. Is he sneezing quietly

here? What is it about the way the word 'aaachoo' is shown that helped students realise that the first half of his sneeze is loud and the second half is even louder? [Answer, the letters get bigger on the page, they are in bold and are so loud Seeya's book goes flying and the girl's hair is blown sideways.] Now turn to the page where the girl and her seeya are playing with the toy dog and describe how the way the words look tells us about the sounds they make.

- **After Reading:**

Once finished, close the book and talk a little about family trees. You may find drawing your own family tree is useful in demonstrating the concept, along with positions of parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts. Encourage students to either draw their own family tree or (if you think anyone might be uncomfortable doing this) learn to make a tree with branches labelled in another language.

- **After Reading:**

Turn to the pages featuring the girl and her seeya making pittu. Explain that pittu is a steamed rice flour and coconut dish that is eaten in Sri Lanka, the country where Seeya was born. Turn to the page featuring the six illustrations showing how to make pittu in the story. Explain that just as the girl and her seeya don't need to speak the same language, we don't need words to see how pittu is made. Encourage students to have a go at describing in their own words how to make pittu based on the images. Recipes for pittu are widely available on Google and YouTube so a lovely way to finish off reading this story would be to make pittu in your classroom for everyone to share...But don't be messy! [NB: Pittu can be made without the traditional machine, it just needs to be steamed.]



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dinalie Dabarera is the author and illustrator of *Quiet Time with My Seeya*. Her previous book, *The Cat with the Coloured Tail*, written by Gillian Mears, was nominated for the Children's Book Council Australia Award for New Illustrator, as well as multiple other industry awards including an Australian Book Industry Award. She lives and works on unceded Gadigal land (Sydney, Australia). Visit her at dinalie.com.