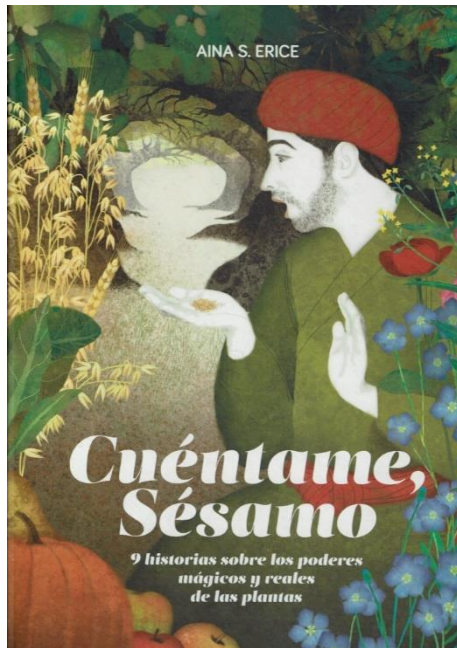


Tell me Sesame. 9 stories about the magical and real powers of plants



Author and illustrator: Aina S. Erice

Illustrator: Jacobo Muñiz

Publisher: A Fin de Cuentos

City: Bilbao

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Book cover: Hardcover

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Can a book have it all? Could a book combine a collection of fairy tales and stories by the author together with informative content and activities in a coherent, entertaining and graceful way?

If we thought that fairy tales had already been analysed from every possible perspective, this book makes us realise how wrong we are.

An incredibly original and brand new vision, focused on something that in isolation and at first glance seems to be of no great interest (even less for children and young people), but presented in such an attractive, varied and entertaining way that turns this a-lot-of-things compendium into a bedside book.

But first, due to its numerous ingredients and active principles, we at La Espumadera consider it necessary to recommend the reading of above-mentioned picture book in accordance with the following...

UTILISATION PROSPECTUS

Firstly, read the summary of the popular fairy tales that appear on it, to refresh those stories that are surely well-known. Secondly, go to the pages that contain the detailed information about thousands of plants and their fruits and how they can have an important role in the fairy tale that comes along with it. Lastly, gloat on the illustrations that guide us through the written story and the real appearance of plants.

SEDIMENTOLOGY

Read the picture book sipping carefully, taking the time with each detail. The prime moment for an appropriate enjoyment of the read could be after the daily tasks, to allow the content to settle down.

WARNING

High doses of the book could cause an addiction and desire of more knowledge about how plants intervene in the development of stories from here, there, now and ever.

IN CASE OF ACCIDENTAL OVERREADING

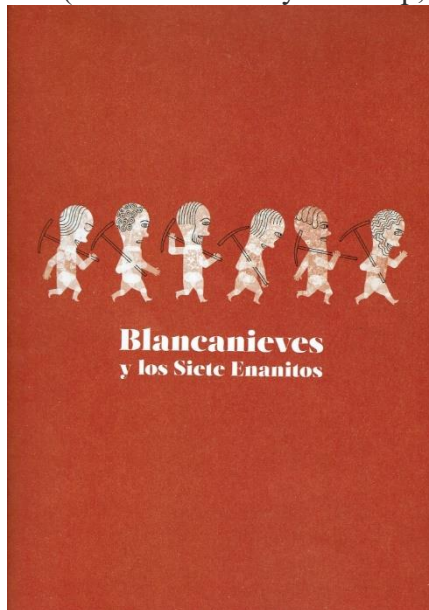
Close the picture book, leave it near to you, so that when the effect of the received information disappears you can go back to the pages to continue with the magic influx that gets you to know more about those herbs which are so present in our lives.

If you want to find it out keep on reading because the book we are going to talk about today has achieved it.

Analysis

Summary. In this book, a total of nine very well-known popular tales of oral tradition, are collected as an ideal excuse to talk about what this picture book is focused on and which turns out to be a determining element for the development of all the tales: plants.

In an original way that arouses a lot of curiosity, some of the plants that take part in the stories are introduced to the reader, both in a tangible and explicit approach (for example *Snow White*'s apple, or *Hansel and Gretel*'s chocolate? house), as well as in an implicit one (herbs that make you asleep, poisonous plants, roots with alleged magical powers...)



Iconographic or visual aspects. There is such a diversity of texts and contents in this book that the thought of illustrating it might lead us to believe that the result will inevitably be overloaded.

However, Jacobo Muñoz gets the opposite. His illustrations lighten up the content, envelops it and creates a space where it feels comfortable, unique and gathered up.

Playing with the colours derived from each of the vegetal elements shown as the protagonists of the stories, the illustrator recreates the *ultra-familiar* characters of those tales and gives them his own personality and individual vision. Large, full-page drawings, which serve to illustrate each story, alternated with others that accompany and are interspersed between the informative text, in such a harmonious way that the text cannot be imagined without the accompanying image.



A curious detail might be the game he proposes with the introduction of elements that are clearly unconnected to the period of time, however have a role inside the story. So, let's look for them! Here's a hint: they are silhouettes superimposed on the drawing. Have you seen any of them yet?

In addition, the text itself intersperses different typographies, with the colours of the theme, which help us to focus our attention on the most relevant information.

It is, in short, a whole (text and image) so well integrated, so compact and balanced, that it is impossible to acknowledge the existence of one without the other.

Textual aspects. The weight of *Cuéntame Sésamo* (*Tell me Sesame*) is carried by the text. There is a lot to be told. In fact, that is the reason why we must be careful: the excess of information can be overwhelming, hence we insist on a paused and split reading, because the informative content is not to be missed.

When a book holds such a variety of types of texts, finding the adequate way to communicate in each and every of them can be a challenge.

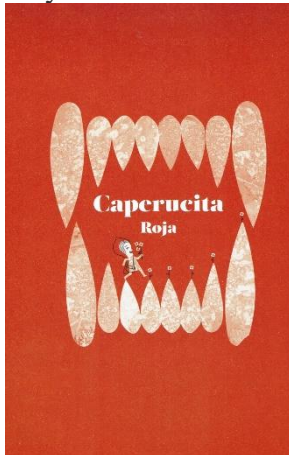
Aina S. Erice demonstrates her enormous ability for dissemination and her great gifts as a communicator and storyteller, managing to combine up to four different types of texts in the same work without being creaky or overloaded.

But let's make a step-by-step approach and focus on each content in a more concise way.

- **Fairy tales**

There are a lot of fairy tales compilation examples. Most of them are not collected nor organised under any specific criteria because all of them are considered under the heading "fairy" or "wonderful".

In the case of *Cuéntame Sésamo (Tell me Sesame)*, there is in fact an order. The reason why these are the chosen stories: the vegetal world enclosed in them.



The writer manages Snow White's apple or Cinderella's pumpkin to become an important role in each story. These simple and humble vegetables take precedence over the archetypal characters that have traditionally been the relevant ones.

Moreover, she succeeds in summarizing the tales without losing the essence of each one of them. A quick read with simple and direct language – that even keeps the key data of the story, tells us these so-familiar-tales in a way that *almost* seem new to our eyes.

- **The author's tales**

The new stories created by the writer based on one of these *herbaceous* elements (be it an apple, the olive oil or the dye used to turn clothes red, among others) are simple but all of them hide a little mystery that marvellously reveals itself when finished. They are an explanation just as possible or impossible as the fairy tales where they are coming from that leaves you with a satisfaction feeling for having found the possible *crux* of the matter.

- **Facts and curiosities about the plant world**

As the most informative style, Aina changes the narrative register and turns herself into the noticeable disseminator that she is. And she does so by using one of the resources that works best among young readers: questions.

If there is something characterizing of the child stage is their ability to ask themselves thousands of questions about the world around them. These questions are the ones that the author throws at us like hooks in which we all, young and old ones, are happy to bite.

Such curious information as the number of apple varieties that can be found in the world or get to learn the process to dye clothes and the difficulty of achieving certain colours.

A full variety of information in which she includes fruit, paper, roses, building materials, mirrors and even a volcano. In a very natural and coherent way she guides us through this information just as it was actually a tale that you are eager to find out where it will take you.



- **The activities**

After this amount of information, the best thing to do is put into practice some of what we have learnt. That is why the activities are the perfect finishing touch to each and every story, piece of knowledge or plant element.

All the activities follow the same narrative outline: a recipe with the necessary ingredients/utensils and steps to follow in the preparation process.

There is a wide range of propositions: sweet and savoury food recipes, wood houses or oil lamps construction. All of the propositions are different, original and approachable.

- **And more...**

The author's eagerness to disseminate knowledge is such that at the end of the book we can find a small review of the writers to whom we owe the collected fairy tales.

A small detail that shows the respect with which she approaches traditional literature and these marvellous tales in particular. Aina S. Erice's work journey values the knowledge and wisdom that can be absorbed from them, as well as the enormous richness they represent for the history of universal literature.

Conclusion

Why an informative book about the plant world and its relationship with fairy tales?

As the Publisher A Fin de Cuentos states in its declaration of intent: *"This book wants to convince you of a great truth: Fairy tales are nothing without plants"*.

This picture book suggest a different approach to the plant world, while the readers can rediscover the classic fairy tales – familiar to everyone, and see them from an alternative perspective. The author succeeds in collecting literature and knowledge to make us closer to the world of vegetables and plants through nine fairy tales in which some element of

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this world plays a main role which, in case of missing, the story wouldn't be able to exist. What would Snow White's tale be with no apple? Or the Three Little Pigs with no wood?

The title itself, *Cuéntame sésamo (Tell me Sesame)*, in reference to the story of Ali Baba, leads us to enter a cave full of treasures... And as we go deeper into the album, we realise that the treasure hidden in the book comes from plants, and that these have played a very important role in the stories that are presented to us.

We would like to point out the great publishing success of A Fin de Cuentos in the production of this book. This is not the first time that we have reviewed material from this Bilbao-based publishing house, with a catalogue of titles on a wide variety of subjects. Our first and happy encounter could't have been better: the wonderful Spanish edition of [El Kalevala Canino](#) by **Mauri Kunas**. We really enjoyed it when we it landed on our hands.

We also had the chance to talk to Teresa, its editor, and we were delighted to spend some time talking about our passion and what never ceases to surprise us with each and every picture book than ends in our hands.

This is a valuable book whose goal, as the author points out, is to **plant curiosities**; a material that both alone or accompanied is able not only to guide the readers to enjoy the plant world and discover a lot of information, curiosities and much more, but also to give the plants the importance they have in the world we live in.