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Un libro para mí/A Book for Me: Spanish/English Bilingual Literature in Early Childhood Education

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Un libro para mi/A Book for Me: Spanish/English Bilingual Literature
in the Early Childhood Classroom

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in
Education and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program

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Thesis Advisor

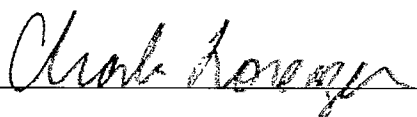


Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why Spanish?	3
In the Classroom	3
Literature Review	4
Foreign Language Education	4
Benefits of Foreign Language Education	5
Neurological Benefits of Language in Early Childhood	6
Academic Benefits of Language in Early Childhood Education	6
Sociocultural Benefits of Language in Early Childhood Education	6
Second Language Development	8
Need and Benefits of Native Language Development.	8
Parents	9
Why Bilingual Literature?	9
Identity	9
Building Bridges	10
Cultural Awareness	10
Methodology	11
Results	12
<i>The Language of Amigos</i>	13
Limitations and Future Research	34
Conclusion	34
References	36

Introduction

Why Spanish?

With the increase of immigration in the United States, the Spanish speaking population is rapidly growing (Daly, 2018). According to the United States Census Bureau (2015), the Hispanic population of 55 million makes up 17% of the total population and is projected to grow to 119 million by 2060. Approximately 23.5% of the 55 million are elementary and high school students (United States Census Bureau, 2015). With this, there is a strong necessity to address both the needs of Spanish speaking students and preparing non-speaking Spanish students to effectively communicate in the real world.

In the Classroom

Seventy-seventy percent of all English Language Learners are Spanish speakers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Bilingual students have received the label of English Language Learners (ELL) defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) as students who, "...participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the same academic content and achievement standards that all students are expected to meet". Many of these students struggle in the regular classroom setting and most general education teachers are unprepared as few teachers speak Spanish fluently or at all. Programs for English Language Learners mostly exist outside of the general education classroom. These students receive instruction that hinders acknowledgment, development, and celebration of native language, which is detrimental to the development of culture and identity (Bauer & Gort, 2012; Reyes, 2012, Soto, 2010). The traditional term of *English Language Learner* used to label students who do not speak English implies a deficit in language rather than strengths of a native language. The newly adopted term *emergent bilingual* highlights students'

abilities in both their native and second language (Reyes, 2012). This emergent bilingual approach allows teachers and students to support English language development while celebrating growth and awareness of diverse languages.

On the other side of this problem is the need for students to both learn and master foreign languages in order to communicate, collaborate, and compete in a global society. There is a need for teachers to incorporate Spanish into classrooms as early as possible because children have the greatest capacity to learn a language when their brains are still rapidly developing, allowing for greater mastery of language skills and faster acquisition. Foreign language programs exist but effective programs are rare, few qualified teachers, minimal spots in these highly competitive programs.

Literature Review

Research on this topic falls under three overarching categories: foreign language education, second/English language development, and bilingual literature. The area of foreign language education focuses on the mental, academic, and social benefits of learning a second language (Castaño, 1999; Ramos, 2006; Reyes, 2012). The domain of second/English language development delves into the need for Spanish and native language support in the general education classroom (Bauer & Gort, 2012; Reyes, 2012, Soto, 2010). Research on languages, specifically bilingualism and biliteracy, has increased in recent years, as the student demographic becomes more diverse. Reyes (2012) notes that, although there has been consistent research in this area in terms of bilingualism, bilingual education, and native language maintenance since the 1970s, there are limited studies that focus on biliteracy in young children. Themes that emerged from area of bilingual literature include supporting native language development, celebrating

culture; create a sense of identity, and bridging gaps between school and home by creating a literacy relationship within families (Agosto, 1997; Hu, et. al., 2012; Von Drasek, 2005).

Foreign Language Education

Spanish education in the early childhood classroom is implemented in a variety of ways including immersion, partial immersion, dual language, and foreign language education. Ramos (2006) critiques foreign language classes because they rely heavily on grammar translation, memorization, and scripted dialogue which result in a mundanely repetitive and artificial understanding of language.

Full and partial immersion education.

Immersion education is an intense approach to language learning as all of the academic subjects are taught in the second language. With the immersion in the language, students cultivate native-like pronunciation and most students become bilingual (Stewart, 2005). Partial immersion programs utilize instruction in a foreign language specific in certain subjects or times in the day (Dolean, 2015). Ramos (2006) notes that although this program yields successful language acquisition, it requires highly qualified teachers who possess pedagogical content knowledge and the ability to teach in both languages.

Dual language education.

The goals of dual language education include academic achievement, mastery in languages, positive exposure and attitudes toward other cultures through balanced instruction in two different languages (Ramos, 2006). A 1963 study was conducted on a program for Cuban refugees in Miami, Florida where first through third grade education was offered in native language in the morning and a second language in the afternoons. As one of the first in the

nation, this program yielded successful results in language acquisition in concordance with academic content (Ramos, 2006). In 2017, the program continues to demonstrate success; this is evident in third grade state standardized test scores in Math and English Language Arts which have been consistently equal to or higher than the state average since 2007 (Florida Department of Education, 2017). The outcomes of this program inspired other schools in the area as well as other states to adopt similar programs over the intervening years (Ramos, 2006).

Benefits of foreign language education.

Students who receive foreign language education reap a myriad of neurological, academics, and sociocultural benefits. These benefits are further enhanced when instruction is received beginning in elementary schools. Stewart (2005) states that foreign language study, “...when introduced in the early elementary school years, has wide-ranging benefits for academic success...Beyond the obvious benefits of being able to communicate with speakers of another language and developing an understanding of other cultures and cultural perspectives...increased cognitive skills, higher achievement in other academic areas, and higher standardized test scores.” (p. 13).

Neurological benefits of language in early childhood.

In his investigation of the appropriateness of early childhood foreign language education Dolean (2015) found children can distinguish between languages as early as the prenatal period and empirical data proves that the learning capacity for a foreign language declines with the increase of age. The Critical Period Hypothesis explains the neurological component of the cognitive abilities in terms of language acquisition. As noted by Brown (2007), this theory outlines that language acquisition more successfully accomplished during a critical window of

development and after this period language acquisition more difficult due to neurological influences such as pruning. Brown's (2007) Critical Period Hypothesis further delineated Lenneberg's (1967) and Dekeyser's (2000) earlier research findings indicating that these abilities decline before the age of puberty between the ages of six to seventeen due to cerebral lateralization of function, an irreversible neurological process. Furthermore, starting the language acquisition process at an early age helps students develop native pronunciation (Stewart, 2005).

Academic benefits.

Dolean (2015) notes the cognitive benefits of bilingualism as high academic achievement, increased brain activity and, grey matter, and greater creativity than monolinguals. Stewart (2005) found that foreign language study enhances academic progress across content areas, which correlates with higher scores on standardized tests; the positive correlation is stronger when students receive foreign language instruction beginning elementary school. Although initial delays in native languages are common, students eventually catch up to peers and their literacy skills will benefit from the cross-language transfer (Dolean, 2015).

Sociocultural benefits.

Sociocultural advantages include increased communication skills, social interaction, and the breaking of cultural barriers and stereotypes. Levine (1992) states that foreign languages promote global understanding and effective communication skills when working with people of diverse cultures.

Second Language Development

Of the approximate 5.1 million emergent bilingual students nationwide 79% speak Spanish (Delbridge & Helman, 2015; Ramos, 2006). According to National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth report, roughly 87% of Spanish speakers are enrolled in English-only programs which means the development of native language skills are not considered (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Need and benefits of native language development.

Studies conducted by Soto, Soltero-Gonzales, and Reyes (2012) found that native language exploration occurred naturally even in English-only classrooms as “using bilingualism and biliteracy is part and parcel of who they are, of their world, and of their learning process” (Soto, 2010; Bauer & Gort, 2012; Reyes, 2012, p. 253). In a case study, Soltero-Gonzales and Reyes (2012) observed emergent bilingual preschoolers whose native language was Spanish and second language was English. They found that through the children’s use of Spanish in the classroom in capacities such as interacting with peers, letter and sound symbol relationships, representing ideas led to a deeper understanding of the concepts in English (Bauer & Gort, 2012). Cognitive studies in biliteracy have found that reading skills, such as phonological awareness in a child’s native language, will transfer to their skills in a second language (Lindsey et al. 2003; Jared et al. 2011; Durgunoglu 1998). Reyes (2012) found that creating opportunities in the classroom for bilingualism, biliteracy, and translanguaging practices was crucial in students’ academic progression.

Parents.

Parents of English speakers feel the learning of a second language enriches their children's education as they can learn another language and engage in cultural experiences while still receiving academic instruction (Ramos, 2006). Chumak-Horbatsch (2010) found parents of immigrant students want their children to maintain abilities in their native language while still learning English.

Why Bilingual Literature?

A foundation for emergent bilinguals can be set in the early childhood classroom through the implementation of bilingual picture books. The need for quality language instruction inspired publishing companies to produce more bilingual books (Daly, 2018). Agosto (1997) noted teachers do not have to be bilingual to share bilingual literature with students and can utilize tools like glossaries, pronunciation guides, and native guest readers. Development of native and second language is crucial to the academic progression of emergent bilinguals (Hu, et. al., 2012; Reyes, 2012). Bilingual literature provides authentic support through the development and application of skills in context including vocabulary building, phrases, native expression, and storytelling (Hu, et. al., 2012). Agosto (1997) demonstrates that bilingual books can be used to introduce new topics or support independent reading as it can ease frustration and exhaustion of emergent bilinguals (Von Drasek, 2005). Furthermore, Wessels and Trainin (2014) state the importance of showing students words written in other languages.

Identity.

Bilingual books help students gain a stronger sense of identity in the classroom with the opportunity to interact with their native language (Agosto, 1997; Hu, Chen & Li, 2012; Von Drasek, 2005). When teachers neglect to acknowledge or celebrate native language, a student's

development of culture and identity can be detrimentally effected (Reyes, 2012). In a 2012 case study with emergent bilingual preschoolers, Reyes found that native language exploration occurs naturally and the use of native language leads to deeper understanding of concepts in the second language. This echoes Agosto's (1997) findings which suggested that the use of first language promotes confidence in emergent bilinguals. Students who see themselves and their language represented in a book are empowered by a sense of identity and feel their native language is an asset (Hu, et. al., 2012).

Building Bridges.

Many scholars found that bilingual literature bridges gaps between home and school, as it enables families to participate in their child's education (Agosto, 1997; Hu, et. al., 2012; Wessels and Trainin, 2014). Reading, sharing, and speaking about literature in home language creates opportunities for families to discuss books together and maintain native language (Daly, 2018; Wessels and Trainin, 2014). Agosto (1997) offers that bilingual literature can also assist parents in learning a second language with their student. This is echoed in the findings of Wessels and Trainin (2014) as they found reciprocal benefits; parents can better support their children's English language and literacy development.

Cultural awareness.

Bilingual books provide an opportunity for emergent bilinguals to showcase their background while allowing native English speakers to develop cultural awareness and an appreciation of language (Agosto, 1997; Hu, et. al., 2012; Von Drasek, 2005). Incorporating bilingual books in the early childhood classroom instills the value of language, which Von Drasek (2005) noted as a stepping stone to introducing native English speakers to diversity (Hu, et. al., 2012). Geneva Gay (2000) pioneered culturally responsive teaching as a methodology for

teachers to "...bridge difference ways of knowing and engages students from non-dominant cultures in demonstrating their proficiencies in language usage, grammar, and mathematic knowledge and other tools they use to navigate their everyday lives" (Kozleski, 2010, p. 3). This pedagogical standpoint can be implemented through the use of bilingual books as students engage with second/foreign languages and gain a stronger cultural understanding. Agosto (1997) asserts that bilingual literature is as valuable to English speakers as bilingual students, to which Reyes (2012) suggests that native English speakers can become emergent bilinguals in a second language.

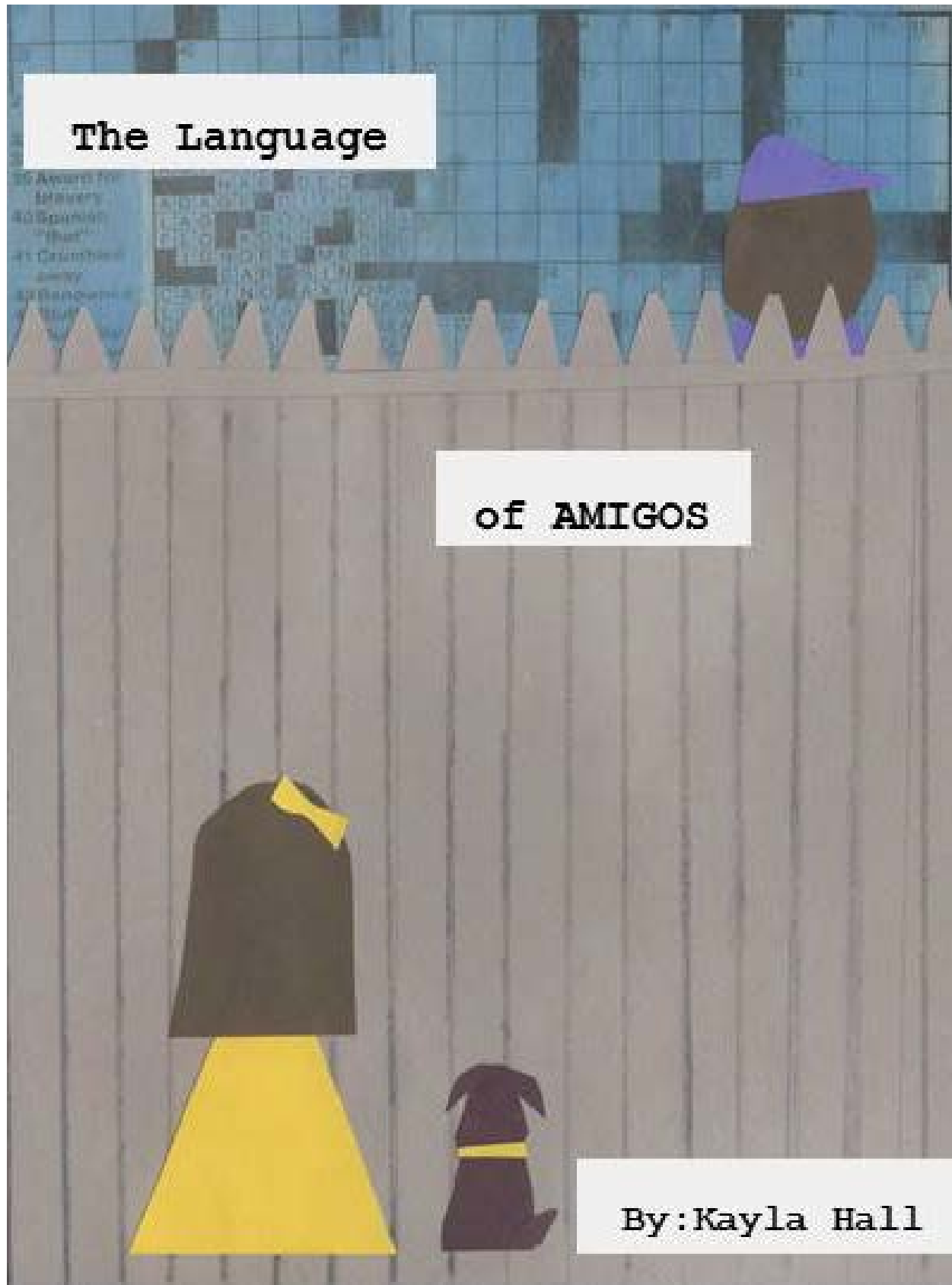
Methodology

Therefore, this study will bridge student and instructional needs in the areas of foreign language and English Language through the power of bilingual literature. After examining and identifying the benefits of bilingual literature in early childhood education, this study seeks to assemble an original Spanish/English bilingual children's book in accordance with the findings of the literature review. The results of this study will be presented in a Weebly website (<https://thelanguageofamigos.weebly.com/>) designed for educators, parents, and students. The following tabs will be used to organize the information: Why Spanish?, The Book, About Me and References. Why Spanish? will highlight the need for Spanish education in the early childhood classroom. The Book will display the original bilingual book including the text and illustrations created from this research. About Me will provide a short description of the book and website author. The goal of this website is to act as a medium for sharing the original Spanish/English bilingual book with educator, parents, and students.

The Language of Amigos uses both languages in sentences to infuse the languages together instead of provided two texts per a page segregating the languages. Spanish vocabulary is highlighted through the use of all capital letters and a different font. The sentences were constructed to provide Spanish vocabulary in context to promote language development for both monolingual and bilingual students. The illustrations were specifically crafted to provide visual context for readers, so that all readers can use both language and visual clues to determine meaning of any unknown words. Additionally, a glossary in the back of the book will provide translations for Spanish vocabulary. Illustrations will be handcrafted using the medium of layered paper and text will be digitally added.

Results

The bilingual children's book, *The Language of Amigos* aims to meet needs of monolingual English speakers and emergent Spanish/English bilingual students. *The Language of Amigos* features a young girl named Elizabeth who only speaks English. One day, a boy, Telmo, moves in next door and she wants to be friends, but Telmo only speaks Spanish. Together, they work to overcome their language barrier and teach each other words from their language. Their language barrier is visually represented by a fence throughout this story, with one character on either side. In the end, the characters are seen on the same side of the fence to represent their success in overcoming the language barrier between them. Furthermore, the characters are depicted in a minimalistic nature to allow readers to create their own interpretation.



The Language

of AMIGOS

By: Kayla Hall



Someone

moved

in next door...

I hoped

it was

a

friend

for me.



Through the fence, I saw a boy.

I waved,

"Hello!"

He answered back in words

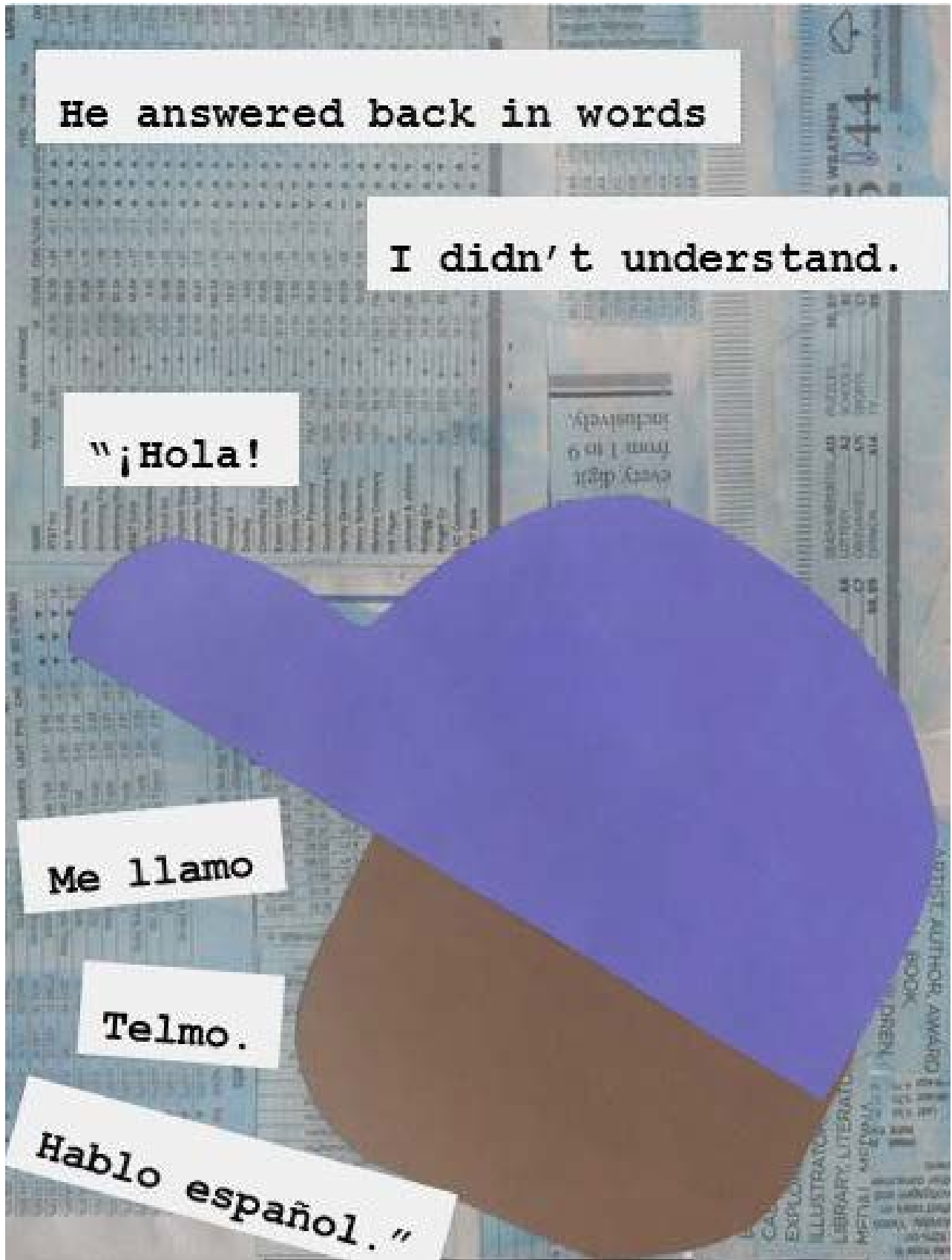
I didn't understand.

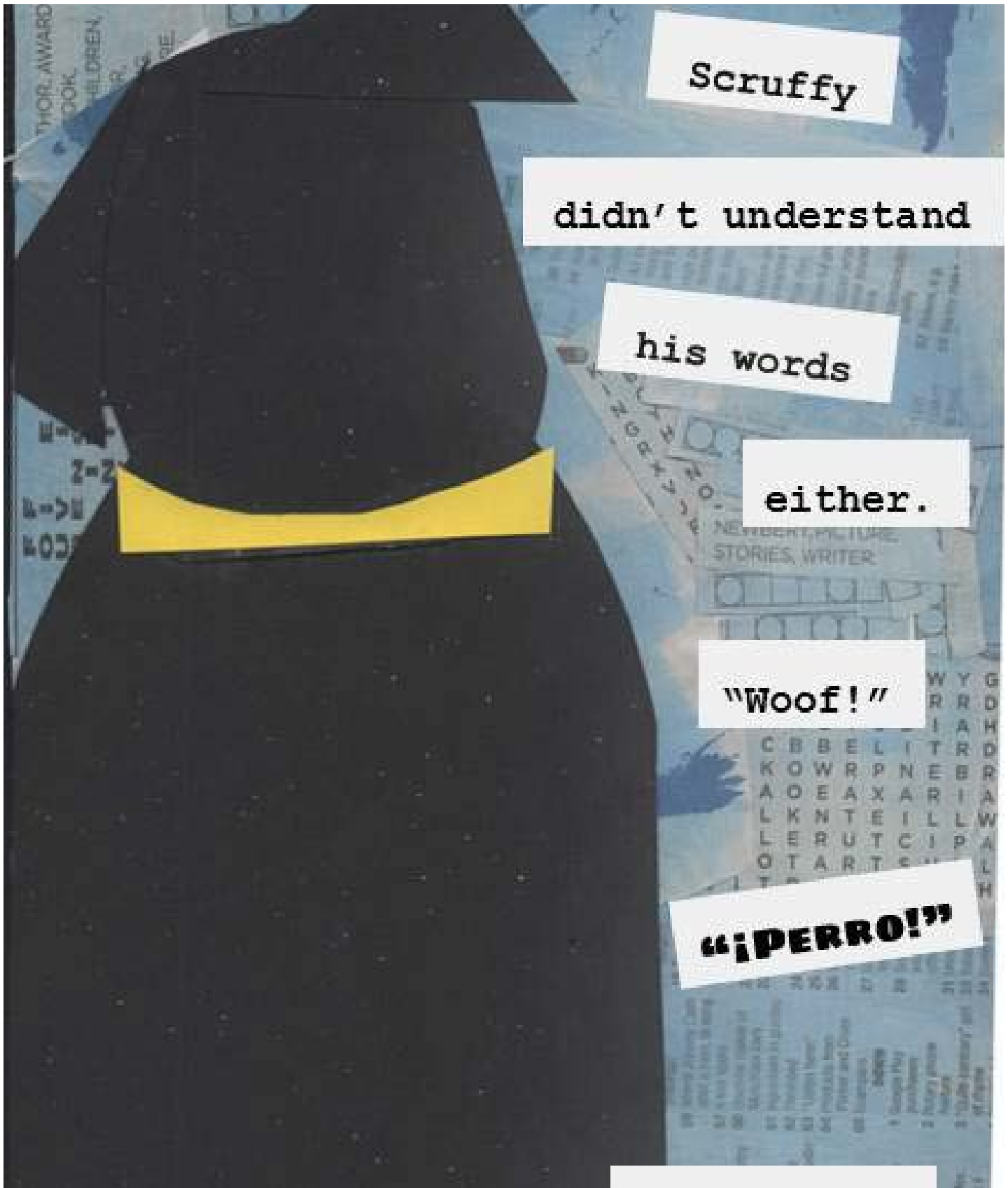
"¡Hola!

Me llamo

Telmo.

Hablo español."





Scruffy

didn't understand

his words

either.

"Woof!"

"¡PERRO!"

Then,

he pointed

at the

“GATO!”



window.

There sat

an orange

cat.



The next day,

I saw

Telmo

in his garden.

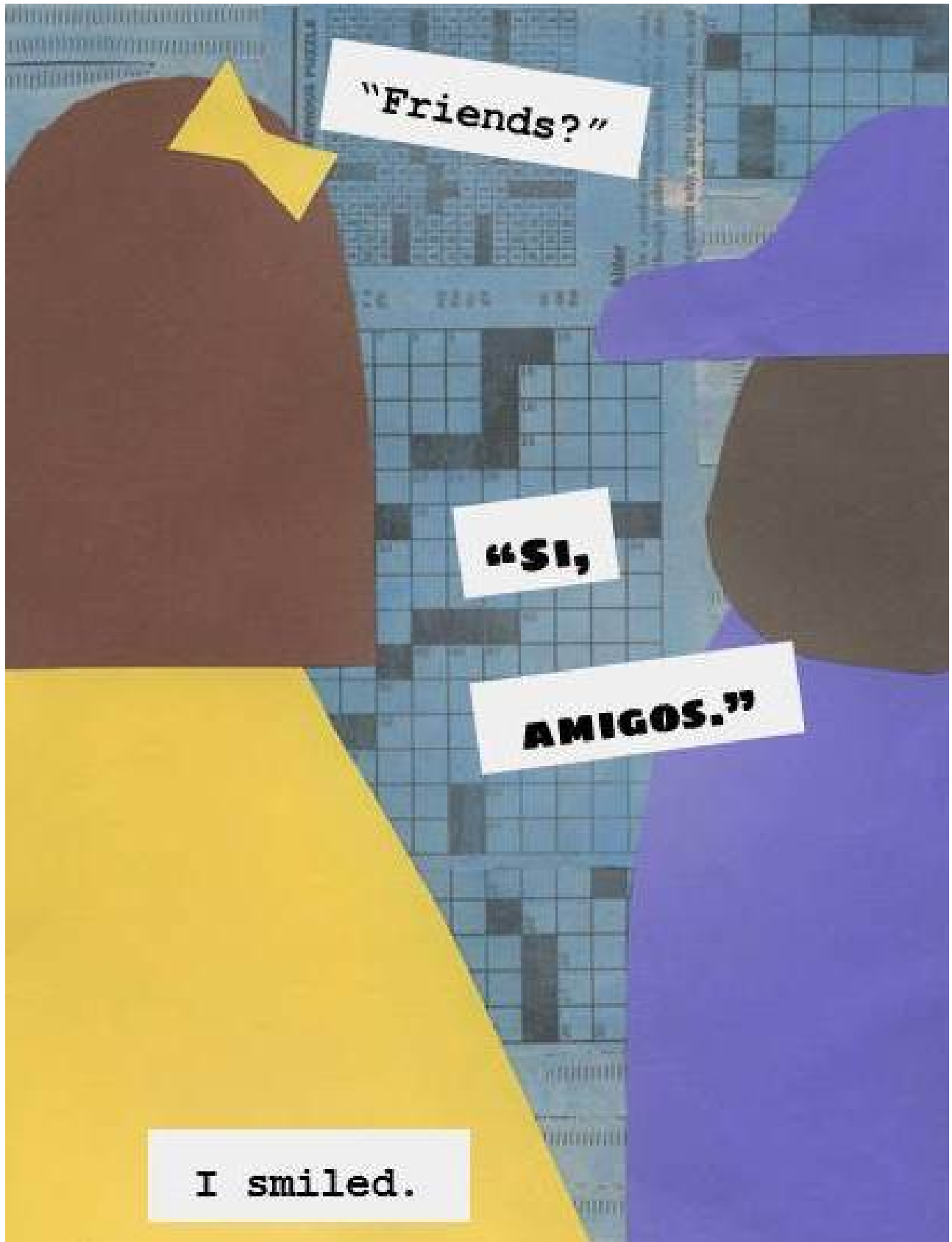
He reached

his hands

over

the fence.





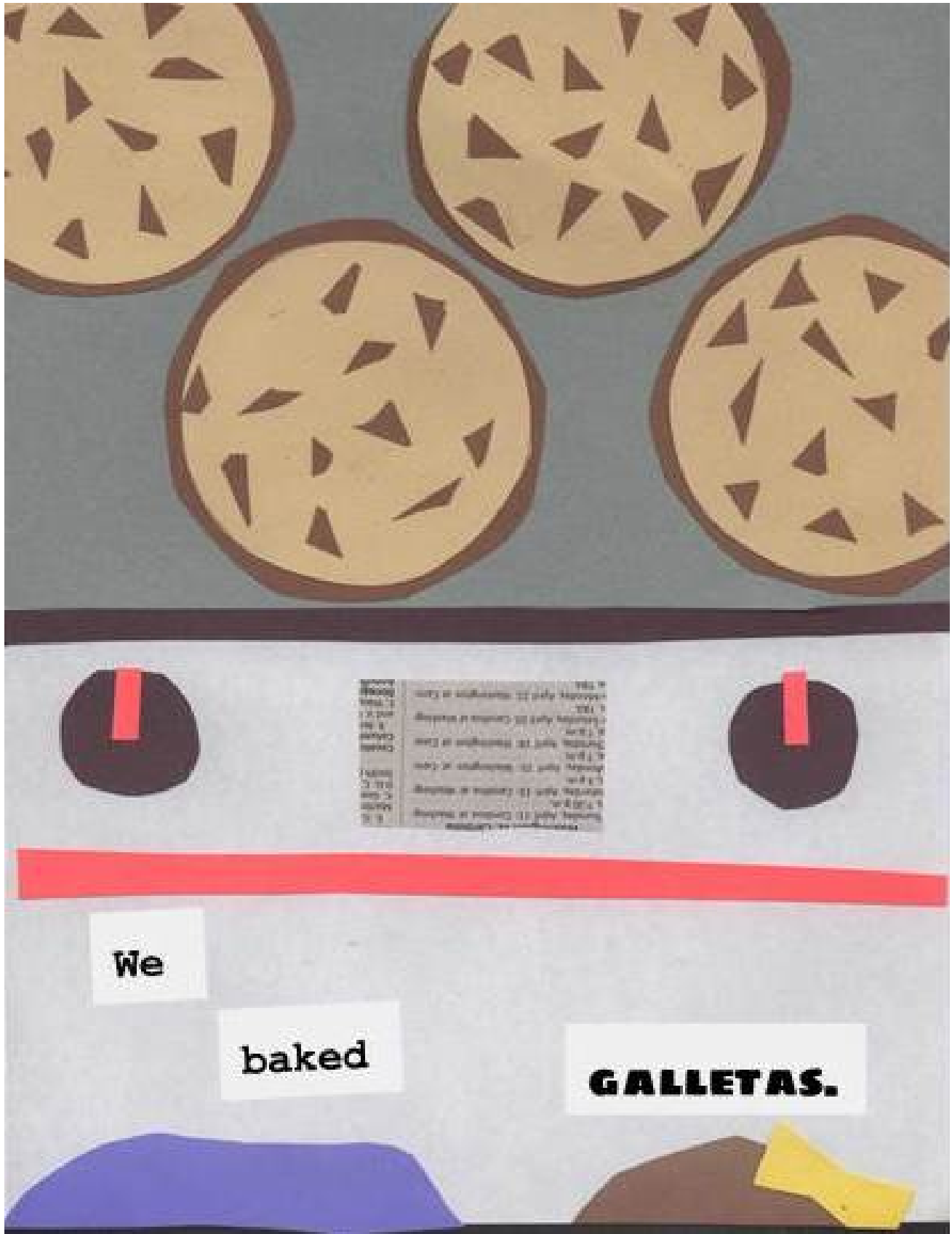
"Friends?"

"SI,

AMIGOS."

I smiled.

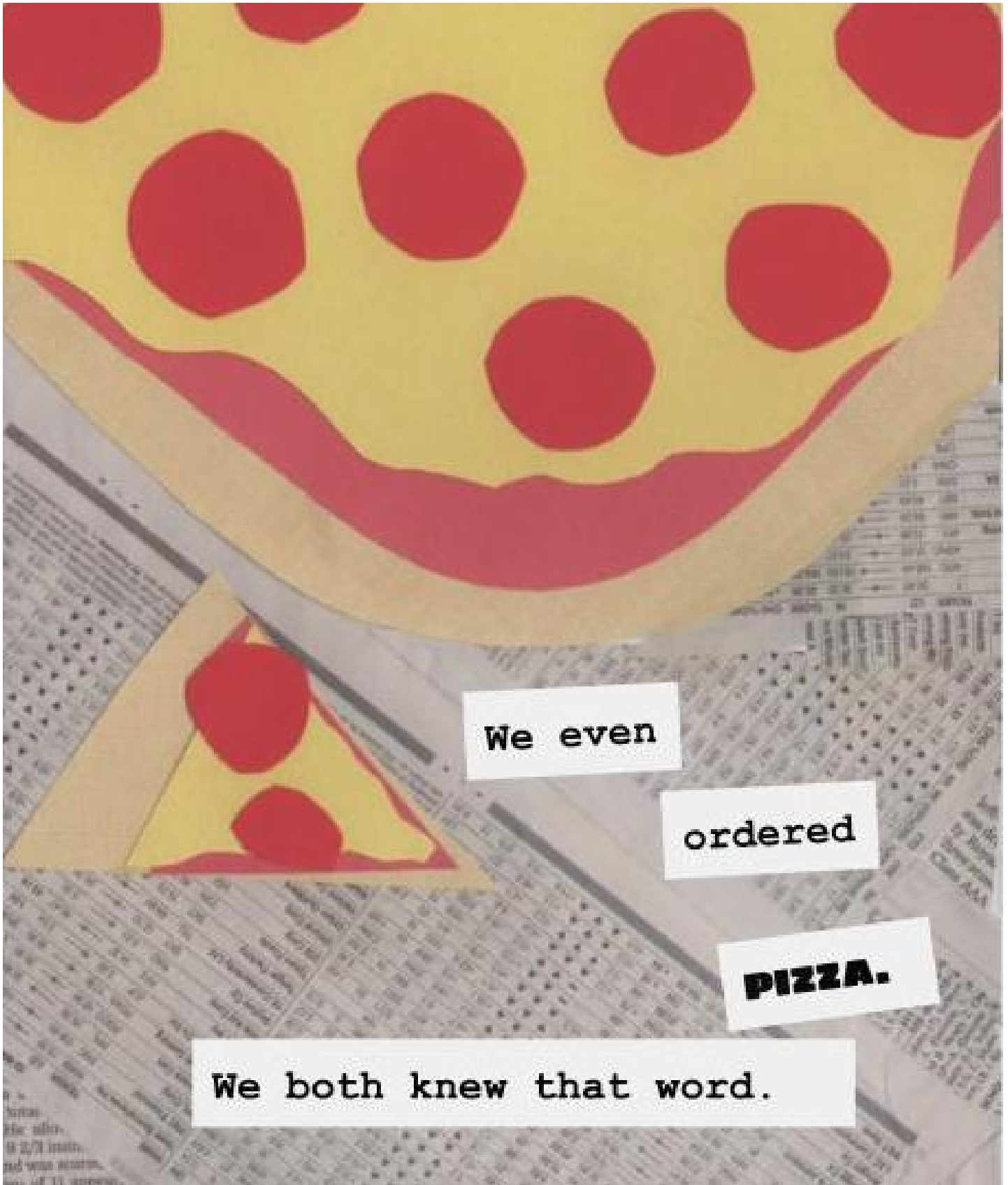




We

baked

GALLETAS.



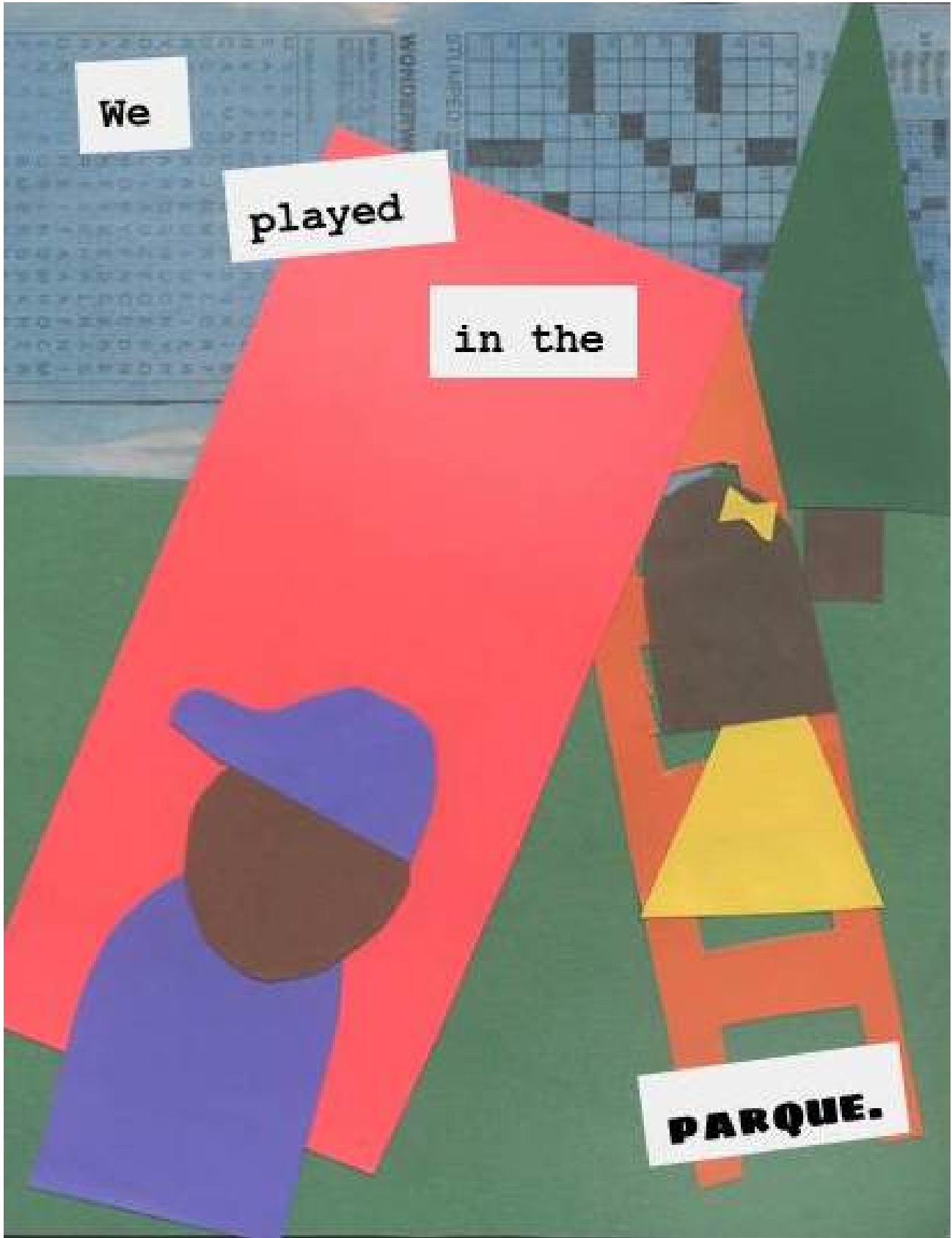
We even

ordered

PIZZA.

We both knew that word.





We

played

in the

PARQUE.



Until

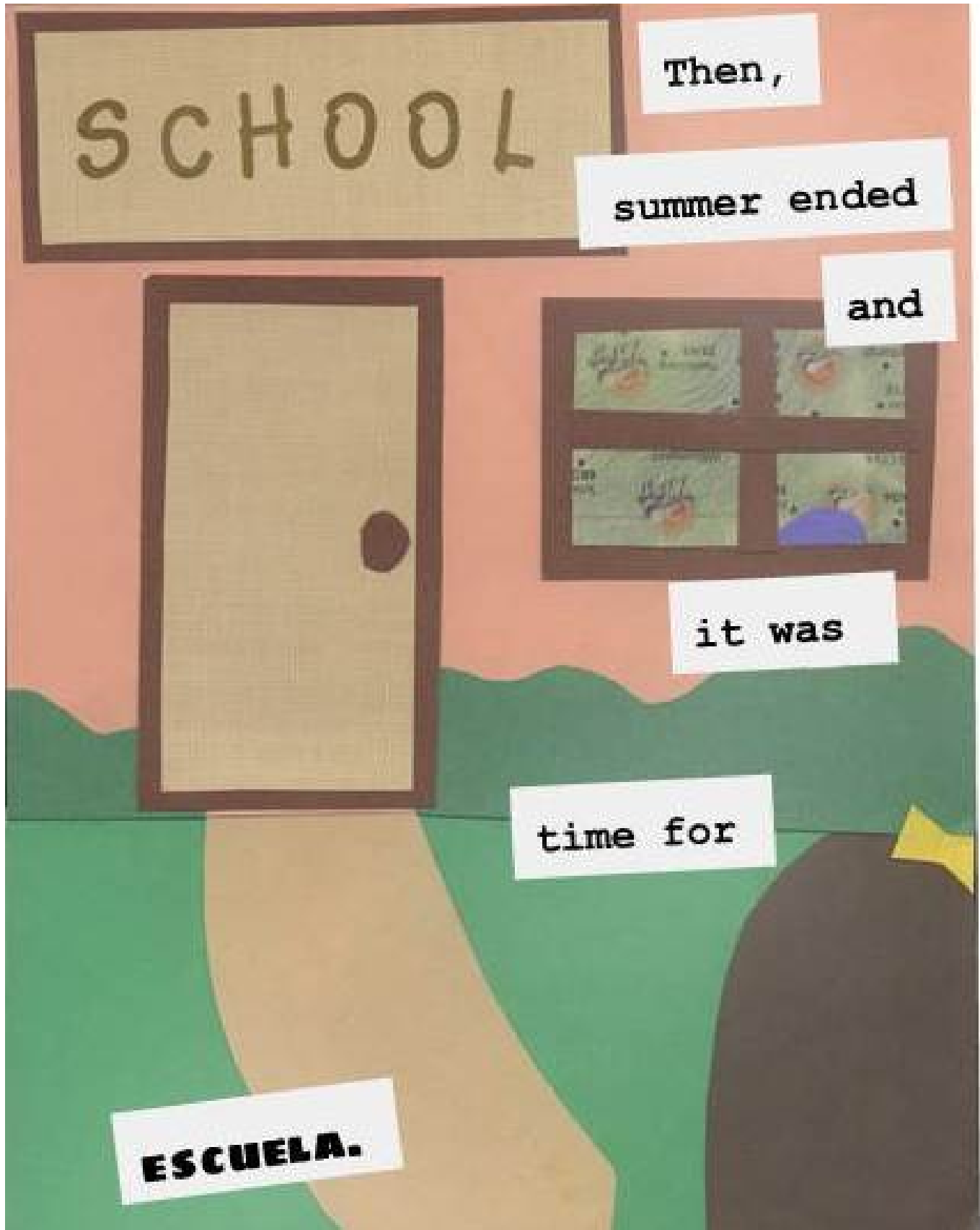
the

SOL

turned

into

NOCHE.









Telmo and

I

even made

our own language

for just us

DOS.



Glossary/Glosario

Blue:	Azul
Book:	Libro
Cat:	Gato
Cookies:	Galletas
Dance:	Bailar
Dog:	Perro
Door:	Puerta
Flowers:	Flores
Friend:	Amigo
Hello:	Hola
I speak:	Hablo
Music:	Música
My friend:	Mi amigo
Night:	Noche
Park:	Parque
Pizza:	Pizza
School:	Escuela
Spanish:	Español
Sun:	Sol
Two:	Dos

<https://thelanguageofamigos.weebly.com/>

Limitations and Future Research

There are a myriad of opportunities for future research in the bilingual literature field based on the findings and results of this project. First, this study only considered the Spanish language, which is the most commonly selected language for bilingual books. With this, more research can be done in the area of bilingual books in other languages which include but are not limited to German, French, Latin, Russian, Burmese, etc. Few bilingual children's books exist in these languages despite the consistently overlooked need in classrooms. Additionally, the created children's book, *The Language of Amigos*, was not implemented in an early childhood classroom, so future research could explore how students respond to this specific bilingual book. Furthermore, a companion book, *El Lenguaje de Friends*, could be made which utilizes the languages in opposition from the original *The Language of Amigos*.

Conclusion

As the United States Census Bureau (2015) confirms, there is a rapid increase in the Spanish-speaking population of the United States, which impacts the student demographics in the classroom setting (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Although scholars have indicated needs for earlier foreign language instruction with strong research supporting cognitive and social benefits there is still a deficit in the early childhood classroom (Dolean, 2015; Castaño, 1999; Ramos, 2006; Reyes, 2012). On the other side, research suggests that instruction for English Language Learners needs a more culturally responsive approach that promotes native language development as well as second language development (Bauer & Gort, 2012; Soto, 2010; Reyes, 2012). While scholars have indicated the benefits of bilingual literature for emergent bilingual students, this study aimed to bridge the areas of foreign language instruction and English Language instruction through the power of bilingual literature (Agosto, 1997; Daly,

2018; Hu, Chen & Li, 2012; Von Drasek, 2005). As demonstrated by the results of this study, bilingual literature can meet the needs of both monolingual and bilingual/English Language Learners in the classroom setting to nurture global citizens who have the skills to effectively communicate and collaborate in the increasingly diverse world.

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