

- I. BOOK TITLE- **Vitali's Count-astrophe**
- II. AUTHOR'S NAMES- Dani Brown, Domenic Brunet, Sofia Wright
- III. TEXT OF BOOK

1. PAGES 1-2: In the heart of Quba, Azerbaijan, four-year-old Vitali was getting ready for preschool with his siblings. He loved going to school to talk to his friends. On his walks to school, he loved watching the wild animals. Uh oh! Vitali needed to catch up! He got distracted by a cat. (Illustration: Vitali walking to school with six other children, older than him. They walk through a street in Quba on a nice day, and a stray cat follows them. FOOTNOTE: Azerbaijan: country bordering the Caspian Sea)
2. PAGES 3-4: When he got home from school that day, his parents and grandparents were sitting at the table, waiting for him. "Come here, my little geda (Footnote: boy)," his mom said. "We are moving to Toronto." Young Vitali didn't understand, exactly, as he was still learning English with his mom. "Toronto?" Vitali thought, "Do they have a soccer team?" (Illustration: Vitali comes home from school to find his entire family sitting at the kitchen table. When Vitali hears the news, it is obvious that he doesn't quite understand the meaning of the move.)
3. PAGE 5-6: So, Vitali counted and packed up his belongings: dah (Footnote: 10) shirts, shesh (Footnote: 6) stuffed animals, sesa (Footnote: 3) trains, and yeki (Footnote: 1) soccer ball. and got on a plane with his family. But when the plane landed in Toronto, the cold air was too sharp on Vitali's cheeks. "Ouch!" He said as he walked off the plane. (Illustration: Vitali packing clothing and items within his room. The numbers float in the air over his bed, with both English and Juhuri translations floating through the air. The next page shows Vitali's red cheeks in pain when he walks off of the plane.)
4. PAGE 7-8: Vitali decided to have a good attitude about moving, even though he was scared about starting a new school. "Do the kids even play soccer?" he worried, as he only saw several kids carrying hockey sticks on the way to his first day. When Vitali got to school, the first lesson of the day was counting. Vitali was excited. His grandma taught him how to count when he was two back in Azerbaijan! (Illustration: Vitali in the car on the way to his first day of school, looking out the window at all of the ice hockey rinks outside of the school. It is obvious that it is very cold. The page after should show Vitali walking into the classroom, with a friendly teacher and fellow students.)
5. PAGE 9-10: When the teacher told everyone to count to ten, Vitali thought it would be *too* easy. Vitali knew that "ten" meant "dah" in his native language. But when Vitali said "yeki" and the rest of the class said "one", everyone turned around. Vitali felt his cheeks get red while he watched everyone in the class look funnily at him. He realized he hadn't memorized all the numbers in English! Thankfully, the teacher told everyone soon after to continue counting aloud.

(Illustration: Vitali with super red and rosy cheeks, sitting in the classroom, feeling super embarrassed. The numbers in the air, similar to pages five to six, have started to blur.)

6. PAGE 11-12: “Two, three, four, five, six...” the rest of the class continued. Vitali was confused. He knew the words for numbers in his native language, but not in English. Vitali remembered his home in Quba. He thought about how easy math was in his kitchen, where he would help his mother count foods in the kitchen. “Haft (Footnote: 7) apples!” He loved showing off his counting skills to his parents. (Illustration: Vitali sitting quietly in a classroom with a thought bubble. The thought bubble expands into the scene of him with his mother in an Azerbaijani house.)
7. PAGE 13-14: Vitali came back to the classroom and started writing down the numbers in English. That night when he got home, he memorized one, two, three, four, and five. Vitali was laying in his bed after his first day of school. He didn’t want to worry his parents, so he told them that school went well. But Vitali couldn’t sleep. (Illustration: Vitali snaps back to reality and writes down things in his notebook in the classroom. The next page shows him laying in bed, unable to sleep.)
8. PAGE 15-16: Vitali was frozen in bed, for what seemed like an eternity, thinking about his old friends. He even missed the stray kitties he would see on his walks outside. And still, he couldn’t seem to fall asleep. The next morning, Vitali was excited to go to school to show off he learned the first five numbers. When he was asked to split the class into two teams, he proudly said “one, two, three, four, five” while counting students to be on his soccer team. (Illustration: Vitali laying in bed, bird's eye view, with his eyes wide open. The next page shows him saying “one, two, three, four, five,” in the gymnasium normally.)
9. PAGE 17-18: Vitali paid attention to the next numbers. “Six, seven, eight, nine, ten.” This would be easy for Vitali to memorize, as he already knew “ten!” The rest of the day, Vitali was quiet in school. He didn’t want to speak in class because if he got an incorrect answer, it would be embarrassing. He even sat alone at lunch. He was worried the other students wouldn’t want to talk to him because he spoke English much slower than the rest of them. (Illustration: Vitali writing in his notebook the next five numbers Vitali was to memorize that night. Illustrations of snapshots throughout the day of him at school alone while other kids are talking in groups.)
10. PAGE 19-20: When he got home. Vitali told his parents again that school was good. But when he climbed back into bed, tired after a long day of school, he still couldn’t fall asleep. Vitali tossed and turned in his bed. Was he too hot? Too cold? No, he thought. He was fine. He just couldn’t sleep. He turned over to look at his clock. “Six AM?” he thought; Vitali smiled. He remembered the word for six in

his head! He turned over and snuggled with his stuffed cat. (Illustration: Vitali eating dinner with his parents and siblings. The next page shows him tossing and turning in his bed, with a snapshot of him staring at his alarm clock with a very cute stuffed animal.)

11. PAGE 21-22: But even the next night, Vitali was laying in bed. He was so tired because he hadn't gotten a good night's sleep since he moved. Suddenly, Vitali saw his door creep open. Vitali was frightened until he realized it was his dad. "Are you sleeping?" he gently asked. "No," Vitali responded. "I can't." (Illustration: Vitali laying in bed the next night, indicated by slight switches in the organization of his room, like his backpack sitting at the edge of his bed instead of on the floor, to indicate that time has passed. A dark figure appears in his doorway. Vitali is scared, until the page after reveals that the dark figure is only his father.)
12. PAGE 23-34: Vitali watched his dad come in and sit on his bed. "I can help, no problem is too kela (Footnote: big) for me to solve," his dad said. "When I couldn't sleep, my dad would sing me this song back in Azerbaijan...." "I miss it." "Me too," his dad said, "but we can still connect to our language and culture from far away and teach people about it. Now shh! I want to teach you this song," his dad said. (Illustration: Vitali's father sits at the edge of his bed and puts his hand on Vitali's shoulder.)
13. PAGE 25-26 "Chabibu Chabibu Vitali domor Rabbi bu..." Vitali couldn't hear the rest of the song, he had already fallen asleep! When Vitali woke the next morning, he was excited to tell his dad about an idea he had dreamt of. "I want to teach my class Juhuri numbers!" "That's a great idea!" his dad responded. (Illustration: He starts to sing, and the page gets darker and darker until it is revealed that Vitali has fallen asleep in total darkness. Vitali is sitting at the kitchen table with his father, eating some breakfast, and rushing out the door. Translation of lullaby: We hope Vitali becomes the son of a rabbi.)
14. PAGE 27-28 When his teacher asked his class once again to count aloud, Vitali offered to share how to count in Juhuri. "Well that sounds like a great idea!" his teacher exclaimed. Vitali walked to the front of the classroom. He was nervous, but even more excited about sharing his beautiful language with his new peers. He took a deep breath and began. "Let's count to *dah!*" he said. "Oh! Dah means ten," he added. "I'll go first. Yeki, Dudu, Sesa, Chor, Penj, Shesh..." (Illustration: Vitali back in the classroom, looking a little nervous, talking to his teacher after she asks the class. She has a wide smile and welcomes him to the front of the room. The next page shows him standing in front of class, with his back facing us. All of the kids in the class look excited to learn.) *THE END.*

NOTE TO PARENTS:

Dear loving parents,

Our mission for this story is to educate young minds about the importance of a strong connection with one's culture. In many cases, outside pressures tend to influence the way we connect with our culture and languages, especially with children. This story of how Vitali felt the pressure to fit in and conform to the norms of his new life, shows us how sometimes it can be difficult to feel different. The way Vitali was able to connect the Juhuri language with a feeling of comfort and safety after hearing a lullaby from his dad, shows the importance of keeping an open mind and not letting the fear of not fitting in keep you from embracing your true self. Quba is a city in Azerbaijan which is nestled between the Greater Caucasus Mountains to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east. The city is known for its picturesque landscapes, including mountains, rivers, and forests. This city is richly influenced by the Juhuri language which is why we chose to have Vitali's family living there before they move. The Juhuri language has been endangered and has been passed down less intergenerationally. This language used by Jewish people for generations, contains so much rich history that we cannot let it disappear. The importance of conserving languages around the world, especially Jewish languages, is not discussed enough, which is why our book aims to stress the importance of this culture. The *vitali-ty* of a language depends highly on whether or not the language is being passed down from generation to generation. We encourage you to further educate yourselves about the Juhuri language and to keep learning!

Thank you,

Dani, Domenic, and Sofia

AUTHORS' STATEMENT:

One of the most important aspects of one's identity is an understanding of their heritage and culture. Perhaps one of the most inspiring attributes of society is how we all live in unison with one another and respect the different and unique backgrounds everyone inhabits. Our purpose with this book was not so much to discover one's background, but to instead learn how to embrace it and keep it close to one's heart. While living in Toronto, Vitali is immediately tempted to "forget" numbers in Juhuri. Despite this, he finds himself compelled to embrace Juhuri due to the help of his father, which many individuals in similar situations face through generational assistance (Shalem, 2021). Learning about his family's origins with Juhuri excites Vitali to share it with his classmates, and, in the process, sparks his beginning steps in truly showcasing his individuality. His father's symbolic encouragement towards Vitali's demonstration is emblematic of how our families unconsciously inspire us to express who we are and where we come from. His family's experiences in immigration, portraying what many encountered during the mass amounts of emigration after the fall of the Soviet Union, provide a comfortable and close-to-home sense of Vitali's actions (Rubin, Aaron D., and Lily Kahn, 2021). Vitali is but a representation of children, and even some adults, all across the globe who find initial discomfort in presenting their culture. The trials of moving to another country, learning how to live amongst others, and overall becoming accustomed to the land is one of the most challenging experiences someone can encounter. Jewish languages were often seen as lesser when spoken in their new lands, directly worsening the issues surrounding assimilation (Lowenstein, 2000). However, when someone slowly begins to reveal who they truly are to those around them, it's nothing short of enlightening. Because we have decided to produce, for the most part, children's books, our target has accumulated to motivate young readers into quickly

entering this process of ‘self-discovery.’ The true joy of children’s literature, unlike genres and narratives aimed at adult engagement, is its universal factor. A driven and accomplished work of children’s literature can be appreciated by nearly everyone (Hintz, Carrie, and Eric L. Tribunella, 2019). Adding to this quality is the inclusion of carefully drawn illustrations, which provoke a sense of familiarity and participation in the book at hand. Some of the most celebrated works of children’s literature have developed such a reputation because of their compelling ideas of maturity, which can be experienced in all walks of life. Maturing as an individual is due in large part to discovering who one is and utilizing it to the best of their ability. Evidently, this undertaking induces a certain similar attribute to what Vitali experiences in this story. Juhuri, like many other languages across the world, is slowly losing its popularity and fluency. In particular, the aftermath of World War II brought about radical change in the teaching of language in the school environment (Kohen, 2021). For example, possibly due to global conflicts regarding cultural accordance, many Jewish languages, such as Juhuri, saw decreasing amounts of education in the youth. Just as our purpose in this narrative was to relay the already important message of self-expression, so too do we value the preservation of one’s culture. War and other conflicts across centuries have resulted in the diminishment of many fundamental forms of communication for various groups. The intimidation of global conformity can prove to be successful in nearly ending many languages, as shown through how Juhuri is decreasing in home education worldwide (Shalem, 2021), yet society must understand the extremity of this matter and the necessary effort to prohibit this from resuming. By addressing such universal issues at a young age, one can feel inspired to dedicate some aspects of their lives and subsequent adulthood to maintaining their heritage, most popular through teaching future generations. Ultimately, the

gift of children's literature to its readers is a global education of matters that are crucial to family, maturity, and identity.

WORKS CITED

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