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HEARING-IMPAIRED PICTURE-BOOK HEROINE GETS HER POINT ACROSS WITH HUMOUR AND DETERMINATION

"Lucy: Loud and Clear", from the Topka bilingual T-Tales collection, shows how disability need not limit a child's ability to communicate.

According to UK statistics on the RNID charity website, there are 20,000 children under 16 who are moderately to profoundly deaf. In addition, 840 babies are born each year with significant deafness. These children are seldom depicted in literature at all, let alone in a positive light. But Lucy, the eponymous heroine of Laila Laván's hard-back Spanish/English picture book, is a very determined little girl. The book - recently chosen for inclusion in the new Bookstart booklist - shows how she combats the prejudice of Omar, her teenage brother, who doesn't understand sign language and isn't interested in her "flapping her hands" at him. In the end Lucy finds the perfect way to make him listen to her - a way which will delight young readers and parents alike.

Lucy may have a hearing impediment, but her brother has his own form of deafness based on his expectations of "normality". Readers will hope that, seeing how his little sister takes advantage of what he thinks of as a defect, Omar will begin to understand that obstacles can be used as stepping stones. The full-colour illustrations by Beatriz Iglesias perfectly complement the humour of this upbeat story which the author dedicates to "all resourceful little sisters".

Lucy: Loud and Clear was present at the XVth World Congress of Deaf People held in Madrid in 2007 and is currently featured on <http://www.childreninthepicture.org.uk/bookexamples.htm>, the website of In the Picture, a UK organization advocating the use of images of children with disabilities in children's books.

Each of the bilingual Spanish/English picture books from the Topka T-tales collection deals with everyday situations which children of all types can relate to. In *The Crystal Egg* Ana-Lin goes to visit her cousins at the seaside, and in *The Many-Coloured Love* Maite's family is expecting a new baby. The "differences" in the family structure in each case - Ana-Lin is adopted, Maite has two mothers - is incidental to the story. The 28 page, full-colour, hard-cover picture books in the T-Tales collection are suitable for children aged 4-6 years. They cost 13€ each and are available direct from the publisher's website at <http://www.topkabooks.com>.

Topka believe that a child's life is not limited to their disability, race or biological origin. Nor is family life limited to how many adults there are at home, and whether they are male or female. With this in mind, the main characters in Topka books are different kinds of children who come from different types of family, and the stories deal with the conflicts, situations and dreams which are typical of all children and all families.

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To schedule an interview with Lucía Moreno, the founder of Topka, or for further information about the Topka books, including images (hi or lo-res) please email luciamoreno@topka.es