

INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO THE WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

a review by Mark I. West

Allan Wolf. *The Blanket Where Violet Sits*. Candlewick Press, 2022.

MARK I. WEST is a Professor of English at UNC Charlotte, where he teaches courses on children's and young adult literature. He has written or edited twenty-five books, including *Liminal Spaces in Children's and Young Adult Literature: Stories from the In Between* (Lexington Books, 2024). His articles have appeared in various national publications, such as the *New York Times Book Review*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Americana*, and *British Heritage*, as well as many academic journals. Before entering academia, he worked as an early childhood educator and professional puppeteer.

ALLAN WOLF currently lives in Asheville, NC. He earned an MA in English from Virginia Tech, where he taught for several years before moving to North Carolina. He has written many books for children and young adults, including *The Snow Fell Three Graves Deep* (Candlewick Press, 2020) and *The Day the Universe Exploded My Head* (Candlewick Press, 2019). He is the premiere winner of Jaki Shelton Green Performance Poetry Prize, funded by the North Carolina Poetry Society. [Watch his performance.](#)



When my now grown-up son was four, he attended a pre-school located about five blocks from our home. Weather permitting, I often walked to the preschool to pick him up at the end of the school day, and then we would take a leisurely stroll home. On one of these strolls, he suddenly asked me if the sun was going to expand and swallow up our planet. His question came out of the blue, and it took me by surprise. I had no idea where he heard this information, but I thought it best to answer his question truthfully. "Yes," I said, "but that won't happen for millions of years, so we don't need to worry about it." He pondered my answer for a few moments, and then he asked, "Will that be the end of everything?" I said that it would be the end of everything on our planet. At this point during our stroll we were walking by Thai Taste, his favorite restaurant. He then asked, "Will it even be the end of restaurants?"

I flashed back on this memorable conversation with my son when I read *The Blanket Where Violet Sits* by Allan Wolf, a children's author from Asheville,

NC. Like my son, Violet, the young girl who stars in this picture book, takes an interest in the workings of our vast universe. Wolf taps into children's natural curiosity about the cosmos, but he also keeps his story grounded in the day-to-day life of children. Just as my son related the fate of our planet to his favorite restaurant, Violet combines stargazing with eating a night-time picnic in a park.

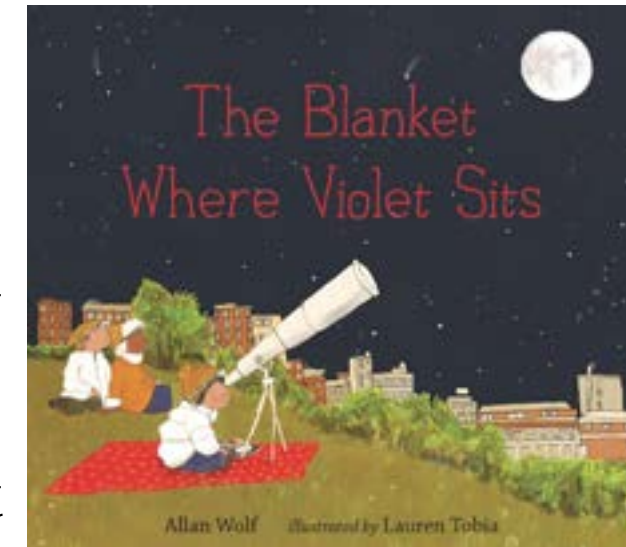
The Blanket Where Violet Sits begins with Violet and her parents going to a city park at twilight. They bring with them a blanket, a full picnic basket, a telescope, a book about space travel, and a toy rocket ship. Most everything is packed in a large wagon pulled by one of the parents, but Violet clutches the toy rocket ship in her hands as children often do with their favorite toys. They settle in for an evening of stargazing. As the story progresses, it gets darker and darker until the sun goes down and the stars fill the night sky.

Like the nursery rhyme "The House That Jack Built," *The Blanket Where Violet Sits* is

told in the form of a cumulative rhyme. The opening line reads, "This is the blanket where Violet sits, eating a sandwich, an apple, and chips." From this beginning, the story expands outward to the "bustling city" where Violet lives, to the planet "with a moon so pretty," to the sun, to the solar system, to the galaxy, and finally to "the known universe." Following each outward step, the story circles back to Violet sitting on the blanket. The book ends with Violet sleeping in the wagon with the blanket tucked up around her and her beloved rocket ship in her arms.

Lauren Tobia's lush illustrations perfectly capture the sense of wonder that Wolf evokes with his poetic descriptions of our universe. In some cases, Tobia's illustrations transcend Wolf's text. Several of the illustrations,

for example, depict Violet flying through the universe in her rocket ship even though Wolf



does not even mention the rocket ship in the text. Tobia's illustrations show the universe as Violet imagines it while looking through the telescope.

The Blanket Where Violet Sits provides a reassuring depiction

of the universe. While Wolf and Tobia present the cosmos as being vast and wondrous, it still seems like a stable and safe place. In this book, there are no ominous black-holes or dying stars consuming planets and restaurants. The scary universe that my son worried about on our stroll home some twenty-five years ago is not the universe Violet ponders during her stargazing picnic. I think that at some point during their schooling, children should learn about the less-reassuring

aspects of the universe. However, *The Blanket Where Violet Sits* is intended for young children, and for this audience Wolf's cozy exploration of the universe makes for a perfect bedtime story. ■

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ABOVE An illustration from the book by Lauren Tobia