

FOUR FRIENDS

TEXT BY MARÍA BARANDA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JUAN GEDOVIVUS





MARÍA BARANDA was born in Mexico City. She is a poet, storyteller, and translator. She studied Psychology at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). Her work has been translated into English, French, Lithuanian, and German. She has contributed to publications such as *Casa del Tiempo*, *La Gaceta del FCE*, as well as the magazines *Revista de la Universidad de México* and *Vuelta*.

She was a recipient of the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA) scholarship in the Programa Jóvenes Creadores for poetry in 1990 and 1995, and the FONCA/Rockefeller scholarship for essay writing in 1997. She was a member of Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte (SNCA) from 1999 to 2005. She has received multiple awards and recognition for her work, including the Premio Nacional de Poesía Efraín Huerta in 1995 for *Los memoriosos*, the Premio Iberoamericano de Poesía Villa de Madrid, Spain, in 1998 for *Moradas imposibles*, the Premio Castillo de la Lectura in 2001 for *Tulia y la tecla mágica*, the Premio Nacional de Poesía Aguascalientes in 2003 for *Dylan y las ballenas*, the Premio El Barco de Vapor in 2003 for *Silena y la caja de secretos*, the Premio Castillo de la Lectura in 2004 for *Ángela en el cielo de Saturno*, the Premio FILIJ de Cuento para Niños in 2004 for *Un lugar en el mundo*, the International Books on Board for Young People Honor List in 2008 for *Marte y las princesas voladoras*, and the White Ravens Honor List in 2008 for *Hago de voz un cuerpo*.

FOUR FRIENDS

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FOUR FRIENDS

First edition in English, 2026

Original title in Spanish: CUATRO AMIGOS

Text: Alicia María Dolores Meza Baranda

Illustration: Juan Luis González Gedovius

Translator: Varinia del Ángel Muñoz

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Viaducto Tlalpan núm. 100, esquina Periférico Sur,

col. Arenal Tepepan, 14610, Ciudad de México

ISBN complete electronic work in English: 978-607-8870-87-5

ISBN electronic volume in English: 978-607-2604-48-3

Free dissemination. No sale allowed.

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PRESENTATION

Four Friends is a literary proposal that joins the **Árbol** collection, which the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE, National Electoral Institute) makes available to children with the intention to disseminate, in a simple and enjoyable way, topics related to civic education and democratic values.

This publication is part of the Estrategia Nacional de Cultura Cívica 2017-2023 (National Civic Culture Strategy 2017-2023), which aims to strengthen our civic culture by acknowledging that solidarity, trust, and engagement are necessary conditions for social organization in the public sphere.

This volume offers children throughout the country a story that places us among a group of animals who decide to show solidarity with some of those who have lost their homes. In this scenario, writer María Baranda and illustrator Juan Gedovius develop a story where the characters actively participate in community life with responsibility, a sense of justice and respect for individual freedom. In a simple manner, the fictional events serve as a splendid analogy for the rules of coexistence that accommodates everyone.

With this publication specifically aimed at preschool children, we aim to encourage reflection on the democratic values established in our laws and to delve into the relevance that these values demand in our social interactions. The story highlights the importance of participation based on agreements, which strengthens our daily life in democracy and goes beyond participating in electoral processes.

Parents and teachers will find in this little literary work a very valuable tool to accompany children in the process of recognizing the conditions of a society that lives in a democracy, such as active participation by its members, respect for plurality and diversity. This publication is, above all, an invitation to joyful reading. It is an opportunity to recognize ourselves through the characters in this fiction and discover how much we can accomplish if we direct our daily actions towards enhancing the democratic life that our society demands.

One night in late summer, something terrible happened. The mangrove where the blue-glassed duck, the swift fox, the gray rabbit of the long ears, and the little green toad, among other animals, lived, had completely burned down.

No one knew how it had all started. However, they had heard some noises, like a loud and painful growl:

“Grrrrr. Raaaaagh.”

“Oh, what a scary scare!” said the little green toad as he jumped so high that he frightened everyone.



“Oh, what a frightful fright!” replied the swift fox, wanting to run away quickly. But neither of them dared to do anything.

“Remember that we are a family, and for that reason, we must never split up,” said the rabbit.

“Of course,” replied the duck. “Let’s search together for a new territory. But hurry, my feet are burning.”

The little toad suggested they should look for a place with water. The fox simply started running after his friends.

And off they went. Along the way, they encountered a beautiful dove with white wings, an orange beak, and a tiny red dot next to its left eye. In its beak, it carried a ribbon. It looked at everyone with care. It was the gray-eared rabbit who dared to ask:



“What do you have in your beak?”

“A ribbon.”

“And who gave it to you?” the duck asked, adjusting her blue glasses.

“A giraffe who lives in the village.”

“The village?” everyone asked in unison.

But the dove suddenly took flight and they never heard from it again.

The four friends continued searching for a new place to live. They explored places they had never been before, climbed up the mountain slope, listened to the hooting of an owl, saw the bright moon in the sky, and decided to sleep after many hours of travelling.



They woke up as the sun shone everywhere around them. The rabbit said, "Listen to that whisper, like the wind, like flowers, like..."

"Oh, rabbit, you're always so romantic in describing everything," said the duck, whose heart was starting to beat faster.

"Shhh," ordered the fox, "we can't hear like this."

"Whishhhhhhhhhhhhh" could be heard all around the place.

They looked high and low, in front and behind when the beautiful white dove appeared on a tree branch.

"But what are you doing here?" she asked. None of them wanted to answer.

"Do you want me to take you to our village? It's very close."

"Yes," the duck timidly replied.

"Well, that's great," said the dove. "Follow me, I'll take you there."

They followed her and arrived at a place with a not-so-big lake surrounded by small houses, adorned with flowers of many colors.

"Whose houses are these?" the rabbit wanted to know.

"They belong to all of us, to anyone who wishes to live in peace."



None of the four friends understood how someone could choose to live in a place just because they wanted to.

Suddenly, they heard the whistle of a mockingbird that was nearby, listening to their conversation.

“And where do you come from?” the mockingbird asked them.

“We come from a place we had to flee,” the toad told her.

“And why?”

“Because it burned down or was set on fire.”

“By whom?” the mockingbird was surprised.

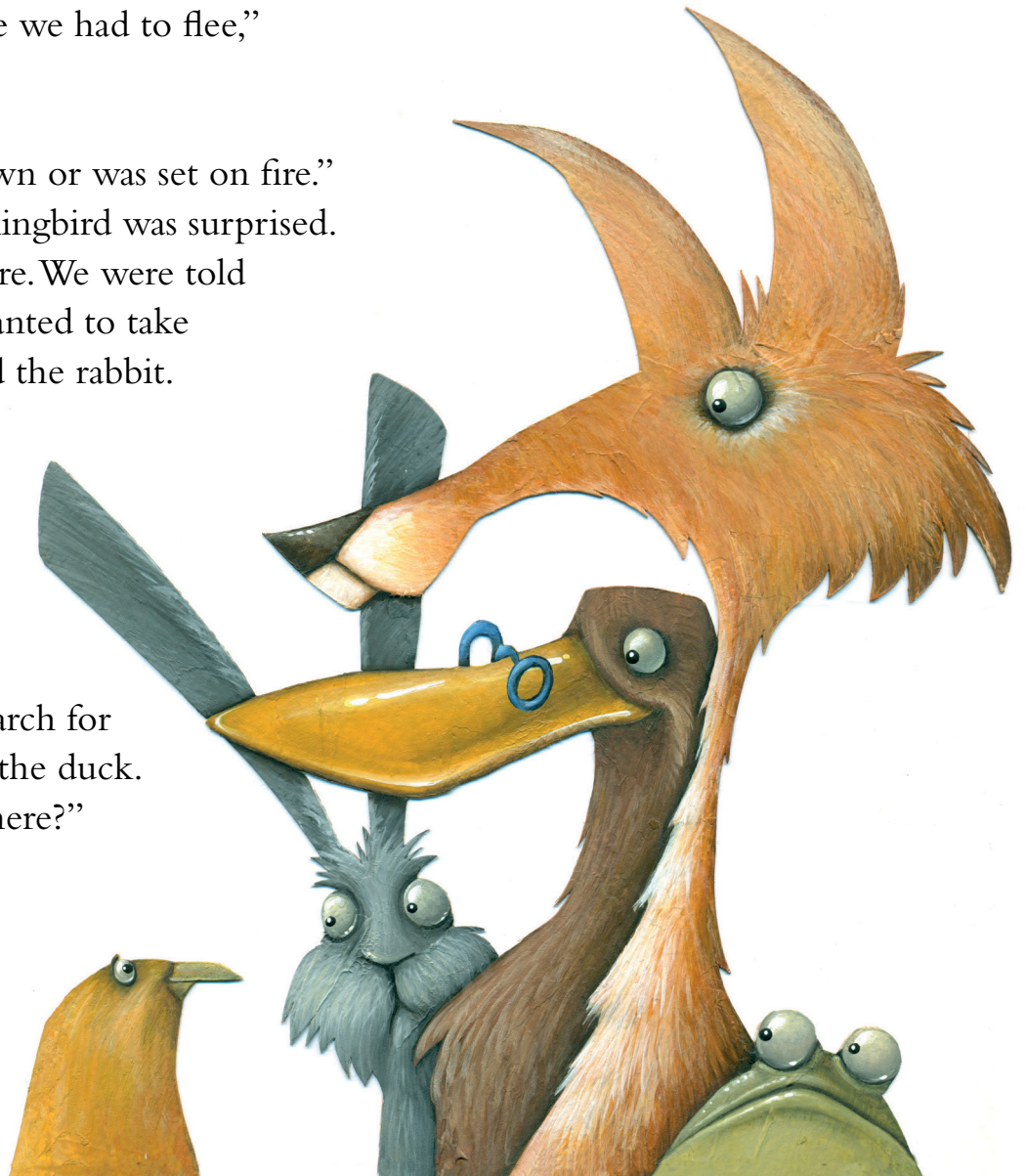
“We don't know for sure. We were told it was some men who wanted to take over the place,” explained the rabbit.

“And they burned it down because of that? How awful!”

“Yes, very awful. Many were hurt, and perhaps several animals died. We had to go out and search for a new place to live,” said the duck.

“Do you want to stay here?” asked the mockingbird.

“Can we?” the rabbit asked excitedly.



“Of course, we just need to propose it, discuss it, and vote among all of us in the assembly,” replied the mockingbird.

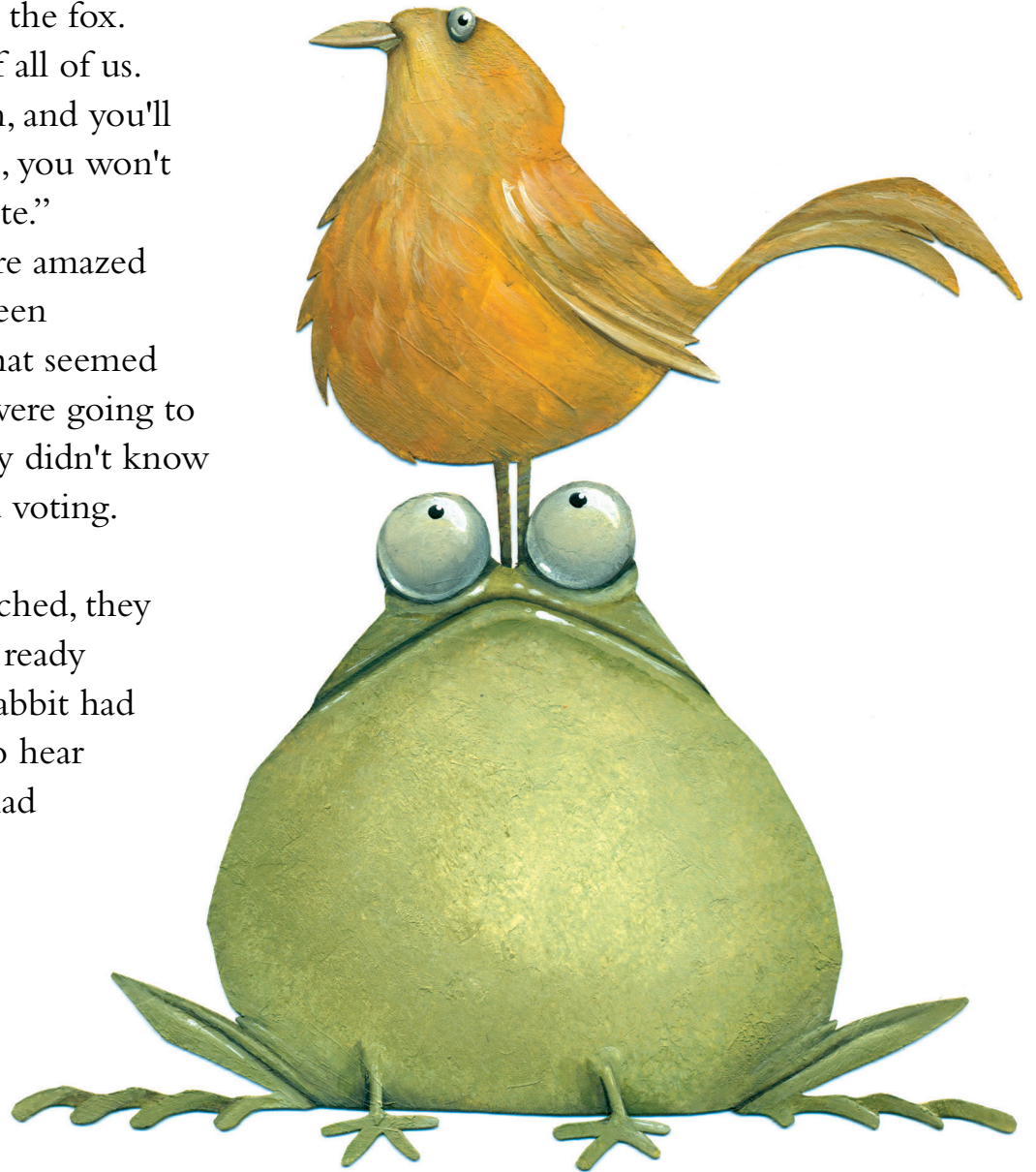
“What's that?” asked the fox.

“It's the gathering of all of us.

Come this afternoon, and you'll see. However, as guests, you won't be able to cast your vote.”

The four friends were amazed but happy. They had been invited to a meeting that seemed interesting. And they were going to witness something they didn't know about: this thing called voting.

As the evening approached, they were very nervous yet ready for the meeting. The rabbit had cleaned his ears well to hear everything, the duck had cleaned her glasses to see better,



the fox made sure his beautiful tail was well-brushed, and the little green toad didn't do anything at all.

The meeting was something they would never forget.

All the animals participated. The mockingbird explained the terrible situation of the four friends, recounting how their place had been burned and why they needed a new place to live.

Upon hearing her, many animals had tears in their eyes, and some even sniffled quietly.



Some of the animals even turned to look at them with a friendly smile. The four friends felt incredibly excited.

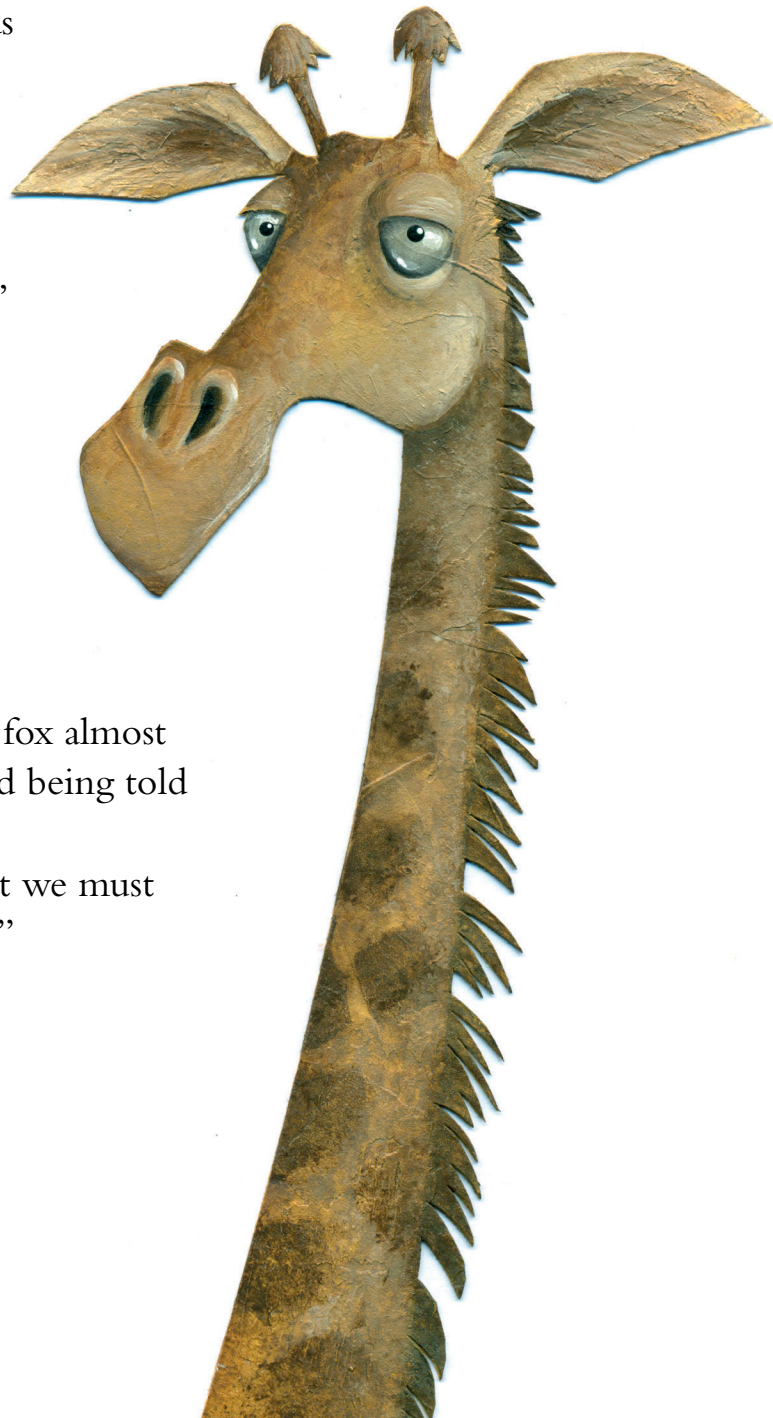
Suddenly, they heard the word “vote” and saw each of the animals saying, “Yes, I vote.” And that meant, in the end, that they had been accepted by everyone.

Just when the four friends thought the meeting was over, the tall giraffe announced the reading of the rules.

“Rules?” exclaimed the swift fox almost shouting. He had always disliked being told how to behave.

“The rules and the values that we must follow for the well-being of all,” the giraffe explained.

That sounded better, “the well-being.” The little green toad had an immense urge to jump but restrained himself.



The giraffe began reading with a serious tone:

“It is very important to accept ideas and opinions different from our own.

We must ensure that everyone is receiving equal treatment.

We need to coexist peacefully, respecting diverse ways of acting and thinking.

We must take responsibility for the consequences of our actions and treat others with respect.

We should always act and judge based on the truth.

Acting and thinking in one way or another, as long as it is within the laws.

Participating in solidarity in community life, which means the life of all of us.”

Cheers of “hurrah!” were heard from several animals, and some even stood up. It was evident that they were enthusiastic about these principles.



“We could stay here to live,” the rabbit said happily.

“But many of the things that were said are challenging. How are you going to peacefully coexist without suddenly leaping on someone, toad?” the fox expressed his opinion.

The toad became very serious, contemplating the possibility that he might fail. And the fox realized that it was also challenging for him to take responsibility for the consequences of his actions.

“Well, we could give it a try,” the little green toad said excitedly.

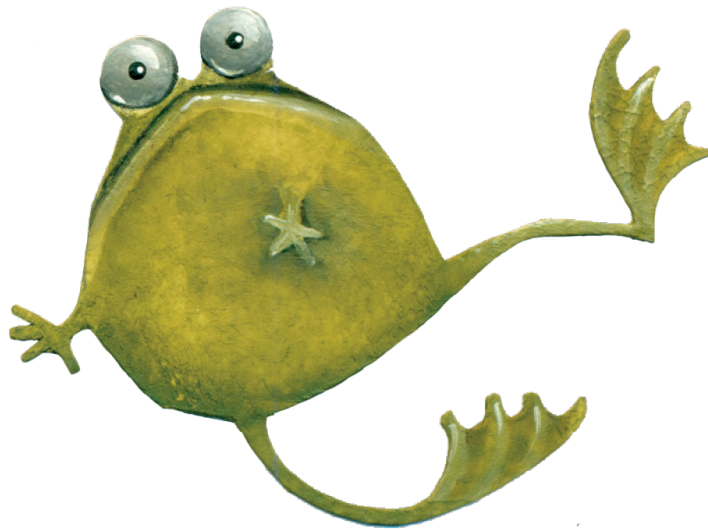
“Here, we would hear the whisper of the wind without anyone burning our place,” commented the long-eared rabbit.

“And we would also help others a lot,” smiled the duck.

That night, they slept together, embracing each other. The murmur of the wind reminded them that the days of the fire were far, far away.



TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS



Everyday Life and Democracy

All children are sensitive and intelligent beings, and they deserve to receive civic education both at school and at home.

For this story to be meaningful for the kids, we invite close adults, teachers, and parents to accompany them in their reading, to enjoy the story, and to discuss and reflect on democracy and diversity in their daily lives, not just during election times.

Democracy goes beyond the procedures of choosing a government through voting, but it relates to all aspects of our social life on a daily basis.

These last pages gather the most important concepts addressed throughout the story of *Four Friends* so that they can identify them in different moments of the narrative:



- *Society* is a space where different groups and individuals who share common or special interests can coexist, grow, develop, and express themselves.
In this story, society is symbolically represented by the duck, the rabbit, the fox and the toad, a group of friends whose space of coexistence is the mangrove.



- We, as Individuals need society to express who we are, to avoid living in isolation, and to feel supported and protected. People and families come together to live in groups, organize themselves, reach agreements, and establish rules so that living together is possible.

Beyond searching for a new place to live, because the mangrove where they used to live was destroyed, the four friends accept the invitation from the mockingbird to integrate into their village to live in a community that supports them in various situations.



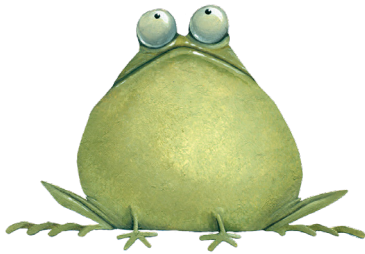
- *Democracy* is a resource for organizing the daily life of societies, solving conflicts, and making it possible so that people can participate in the formation of their governments and the selection of their representatives. It also enables the development of projects for individuals, groups, and countries. Because of that, discussing is of fundamental importance, and voting expresses the will of the citizens.

Voting is both a right but also an obligation, as clearly shown in the narrative when the inclusion of the four friends into the mockingbird's village is subject to a vote by all members of that community.



- It is not enough to simply vote for these principles to be fulfilled; it is necessary to exercise democratic values in our daily lives, because they apply to all citizens, according to the context in which they perform.

These values are present in the rules that the giraffe reads after the vote, which depict the norms and values that everyone should follow for the common good:



- *Tolerance*: to accept ideas and opinions different from our own.
 - *Equality*: to ensure that everyone receives the same treatment.
 - *Pluralism*: to coexist peacefully and to respect diverse ways of acting and thinking.
 - *Responsibility*: to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions and to act respectfully towards others.
 - *Justice*: to act and judge based on truth.
 - *Liberty*: to act and think in different ways as long as it is within the bounds of the law.
 - *Participation*: to engage in community life in a supportive manner.
- The Mexican state is democratic, and the government is formed of three branches: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial.

Just like in the story of *Four Friends*, it is important for us, Mexicans to organize ourselves to develop as a society in coexistence and, through voting, determine who rules us.



It will be very important to listen to the doubts of the children, their experiences, and their opinions about the story and their own experiences regarding this topic, both in school and in their community. We hope that children and their families enjoy this work and that it contributes to their civic education.

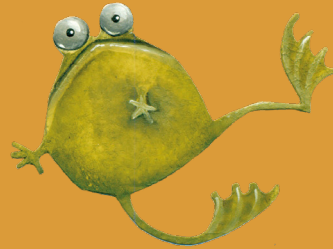


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The Bembo Std font family was used.



JUAN GEDOVIOUS is a musician, storyteller, and illustrator. He was born in Mexico City in 1974. Being self-taught, he has dedicated the majority of his work to illustrating books for children and young adults, earning him awards and honorable mentions. His artwork has been featured in textbooks, magazines, posters, album covers, brochures, manuals, museum displays, stage designs, murals, and large-scale reproductions. He has participated in numerous exhibitions both domestically and internationally.



Four Friends is part of the **Árbol** collection and invites readers to reflect on empathy, diversity, tolerance, justice, and respect, which are fundamental to understanding democracy and living it as a daily exercise of citizenship.

This volume offers children throughout the country a story that places us among a group of animals who decide to show solidarity with those who have lost their homes. It encourages discussions about the importance of helping others and being compassionate.

The final pages of the book include a section intended for adults, providing them with the opportunity to reflect and engage in dialogue with children about the concepts explored in the book, as well as their rights and responsibilities, and the impact on their daily lives.