

THE HERD OF CO

TEXT BY SILVIA MOLINA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CECILIA RÉBORA





SILVIA MOLINA has led literary creation workshops and has been a fellow at various national and international institutions. She has served as the editorial director of CIDCLI and Ediciones Corunda; National Coordinator of Literature and Publishing Coordinator at the INBA (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes); President of the Seminario de Cultura Mexicana; and a full member of the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua.

She has won numerous awards, including the Premio Xavier Villaurrutia for *La mañana debe seguir gris*; the 1984 Premio Antoniorrobes de Literatura Infantil for *La creación del Sol y de la Luna*; the Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil Juan de la Cabada for *Mi familia y la Bella Durmiente cien años después*; the Premio Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz for *El amor que me juraste*; the Premio de Literatura Juvenil Leer es Vivir for the young adult novel *Quiero ser la que seré*; and the Premio Antonio García Cubas from the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) in 2011 and 2015.

Her work has been translated into English, French, German, and Italian. Some of her publications for children include: *El papel*; *El algodón*; *Los cuatro hermanos*; *Leyendas nahuas de la creación*; *La creación del hombre*; *La leyenda del sol y la luna*; *El misterioso caso de la perra extraviada*; *Los tres corazones: Leyendas totonacas de la creación*; *Las dos iguanas: Leyendas mayas de la creación*; *El abuelo ya no duerme en el armario*; *Marina y el pirata*; *El diario de Sofía*; *Quiero ser la que seré*; *Zapatos nuevos*; *Martín Martín fuera del gallinero*; *Le comieron la lengua los ratones*; *En estado de gol*; and *Dientes de conejo*.

THE HERD
OF CO

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THE HERD OF CO

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THE HERD OF CO

Text by Silvia Molina
Illustrations by Cecilia Rébora

PRESENTATION

In Co's herd, calves have fun in different ways, but at one point they do not agree on how to play the king's game. Paco, one of the bigger calves, takes control: he proclaims himself king, and starts to order the rest of the *Coquitos* around. This game not only replicates the model of ancient monarchies, but also the essence of any authoritarian regime that does not respect the right of its citizens to participate in decision-making and the future of social affairs. Later, one of the mother elephants talks to the calves and helps them to understand the value of a democratic system.

The purpose of *The Herd of Co* is to help our girls and boys understand and appreciate that Mexico is a representative, democratic, and sovereign republic. Through a fiction, Silvia Molina's text and Cecilia Rébora's illustrations come together to offer children and teenagers throughout the country the opportunity to learn what a democratic system like ours means and compare it with other political models.

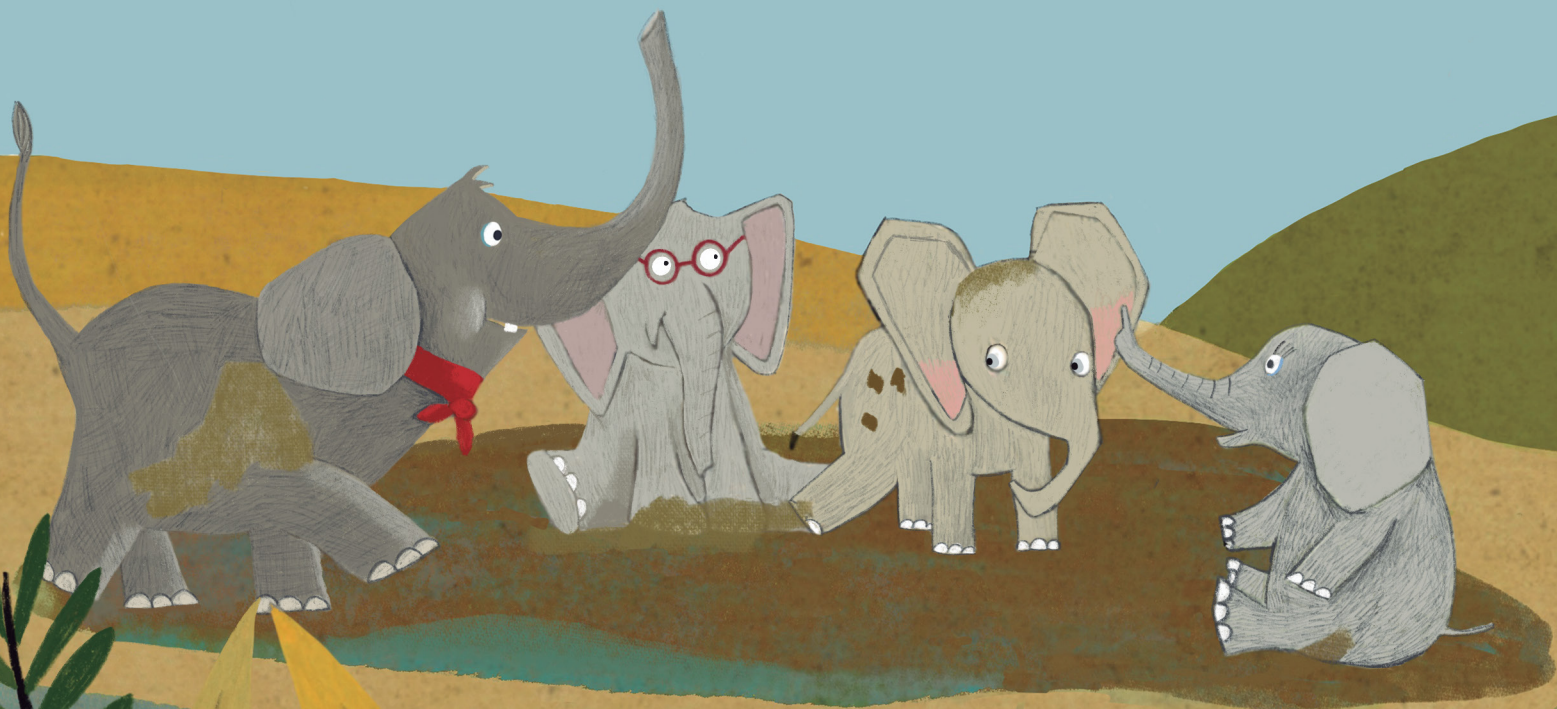
In the final section of this brief literary work, relatives, teachers, and caregivers will find a very useful tool to accompany children while learning the basic concepts regarding democracy, and the importance of citizen participation in the election of their leaders. We hope that readers of all ages, not only children, enjoy a pleasant moment reading this work, which is so meaningful for their lives as responsible and committed citizens.

I

Rain had been pouring down all night long. The *Coquitos* from Co's elephant herd were sleeping, protected by their mothers, and surrounded by all of the other elephants so ferocious animals could not attack them.

When Paco, Nico, Pico, and Soco opened their eyes, everything around them was green and cheerful. There were large puddles to jump in and an plenty of grass to train their clumsy trunks by pulling bunches of brush.

They drank their milk and ran to play, but shy Soco, barely three weeks old, had preferred to stay close to her mother.



The older female elephants watched the calves run, wallow in the water, and cover themselves in mud while Soco laughed with delight. They were happy to see them grow healthier and more mischievous every day.

The *Coquitos* frolicked so much that they soon felt tired. They stopped playing and each one of them sought protection beneath their mother's legs anxious to quench their hunger and thirst, and to take a nap. They were so charming that it made all the herd members happy just to watch them.



II

In the afternoon, Soco was refreshed and she walked over to Nico and Pico, holding Big Paco's trunk. Paco was the biggest and oldest calf, and had been playing elsewhere with his parents. The *Coquitos* were arguing about what to play. They had enough mud on their bodies and were exhausted after running and jumping all morning, and now they wanted to play a different game.

"Let's play hide-and-peek," said Nico, moving his long and beautiful eyelashes.

"Boring!" retorted Pico, wagging his tail.

"Let's play ball," proposed little Soco, making a big effort.

"I don't like that game," exclaimed Nico, adjusting his glasses, which kept slipping down his trunk.

They argued for a while but couldn't come to an agreement. They were about to start fighting when Paco suddenly took over and imposed the king game on them all. The other calves were so small that they had no idea what it meant. King?

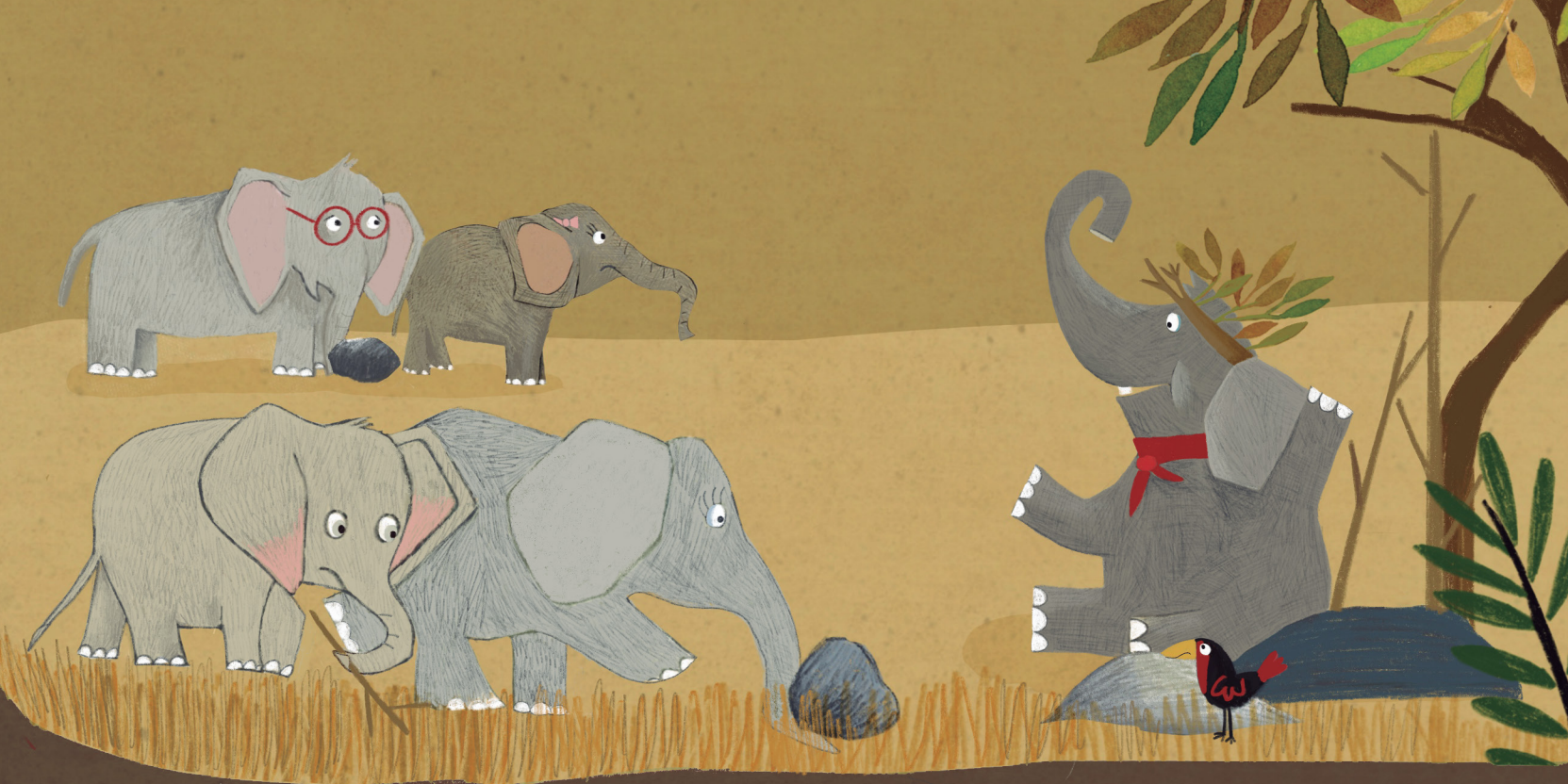
"Haven't you heard about the lion? He's so powerful that he rules everywhere," said Paco.

"Grandma says that the lionesses hunt for him and that's why they protect us so much. Wherever he goes, the lion imposes his strength, and when he roars, fear. He is the king and he gives the orders. Period."

Speechless, Nico and Pico stared at Paco. They did not understand at all. Finally, the brave Soco expressed her opinion, and said she was sleepy.

"I will be the king," Big Paco trumpeted.

He had his cousins collect stones, grass, and mud to build the king's throne. Once it was ready, he sat down and made Soco scratch his back. He made himself a crown with fallen leaves, and started barking orders: to clean his nails, to cover his ears with mud to



protect them from the sun, to carry water in their little trunks to bathe him, to scratch his back, to dance for him...

Soon, they were so tired of following Paco's orders that Soco forgot all about her shyness, and protested:

"What time does the game start? I'm tired."

"Haven't you noticed? It's already started. He who is king rules and everyone else obeys, like it or not. And now, I'm king, and you are my subjects."

"Sub...what?" replied Nico angrily.

"The people that serve me. Understand? I command, and when I die, you will obey my son, the prince. It's that simple. And now, Soco, Tico, Nico, and Pico, make me a big fan because I'm hot."

Soco started to cry, and her mother ran to her, trumpeting and moving her enormous ears, anxious to see what had happened to her little daughter.

III

Soco's mother was annoyed. She told them that if they were not able to play together nicely, then they could each go off and play on their own.

"You have to come to an agreement," she exclaimed. "There are no princes or princesses among us, nor kings that impose their will."

Soco hid under her mother. Every once in a while, she would peek her head out to look at Paco.

"But each of us wants a different game," grunted little Nico, pulling up his glasses. "That's why we were fighting a while ago."

"Then vote," said the elephant wisely. "Each of you will propose a game. Those in favor will raise their trunks. The game with most raised trunks wins. This process is known as electing something by voting for it."

"What happens if I don't feel like playing that game?" grumbled Paco.

"You can watch your cousins play and everybody is happy."

"All of us?"

"Some win and some lose, but nobody fights. You can argue, of course, but peacefully."

Nico and Soco paid lots of attention to the conversation. Pico only flapped his big eyelashes and looked at Paco, who had made them sweat.

"Then," said Paco, "I propose we play the emperor game."

The calves looked at each other and asked what it was about. Mother elephant said:

"It's the same as the king game. Emperor, sultan, monarch, all mean the same. It's the way some herds were organized in the past. Just like some human groups. Exactly the same. Well, maybe not exactly, because for centuries those forms of organization made things unfair for everyone. Those that lived in palaces lived very well, but many



others didn't. So humans learned that the best way life could offer everyone similar conditions was if they voted for leaders who would work for the well-being of the entire community. These human beings are called *ministers* or *presidents*."

"But kings and princesses still exist, don't they?"

"Yes, they do. They exist because they have been around for centuries. And there are very beautiful princesses in some countries! But things are not like they used to be. Some humans love their kings, princes, and princesses, because they represent their traditions and their history, and they have lovely celebrations. But, the most important thing is that those people can now express their opinions about what is happening and participate in all the decisions being made. Also, not all human groups have had kings and princesses: some never have, and that's not bad, they simply organized themselves differently since the beginning."

"Sultan," echoed Paco, "I would like to be a sultan. That sounds nice."

"Sultan, indeed! Let's see, those in favor, raise your trunks!" said Soco's mom.

None of them did it.

"Now, propose a game and I will make sure no one cheats."

"Is it alright for you to watch, Auntie?" asked Paco.

"Of course. That way, there will be no doubt about the election, and about your votes."

The calves proposed several games, and hide-and-seek was the one that raised the most trunks.

Nico protested, pulling his glasses up:

"I won't see a thing. And I won't be able to find anybody."

"Nico," said Soco's mother, "come over here."



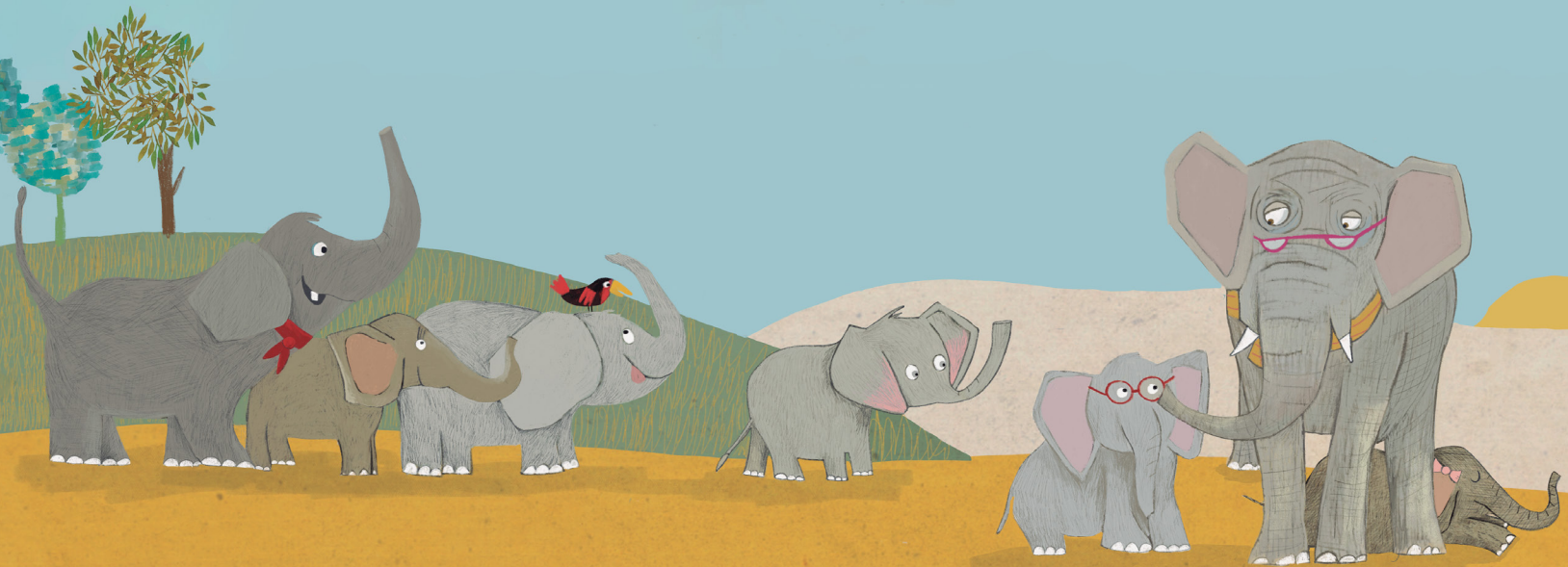
She adjusted Nico's glasses and explained to him that when you vote the majority wins.

“As I already explained: losers can accept and play, or watch the others play. But there must be no hitting nor pushing. Whatever you decide to do, the majority must be in agreement. That's what humans call *democracy*: the right of the majority to freely elect, remove, and hold accountable those to whom they grant the power to guide and care for others. Other members of the herd, like me, must also participate. So rules are established by everyone, and we all monitor that they are followed.”

The calves played for a while and when it was Soco's turn, no one could find her. They looked for her here, there, and everywhere. And they searched again, and still nothing. It was getting dark, and an enormous and brilliant moon had risen. The little elephants started yelling, “Soco, Soco!”, but still nothing.

Finally, Nico saw her at a distance, sleeping under her mother, and they all laughed.

“And you said you couldn't see anything, Nico!”



IV

The older elephants were chatting cheerfully with Granny Coco—who the herd was named after—when the calves all started to do what Soco had done. They were so sleepy, they could hardly keep their eyes open. They were exhausted, and it was very cold.

Paco was letting his mother caress him with her trunk, which tickled him a little when he decided to ask her about the king, and the sultan, and the monarch, and the



ruler, and the president, and all those words he did not know. His mother explained it all just as Soco's mother had done: they are the different ways in which herds in the savannah and all over the world organize themselves.

"But we have a queen," Paco insisted.

"No, young one. We have no queen."

"Of course, we do—Granny."

"Coco does not act like a queen. No, this is different, because the majority of us agreed that she should be the one to lead us. She is wise and she guides us, which is not the same thing."





When it stops raining here, and the grass and trees dry up, and there is no water, she will take us somewhere else to look for it and to find salt and food. She knows the paths; she has travelled them since she was little. So, so many years. In addition to this, she also protects us. She is our matriarch.”

“Our what?”

“Our matriarch, the female elephant who, because of her experience and knowledge, is respected and loved by the herd. This is how we are organized, but all of us must cooperate and pay attention so she can fulfill her duty and lead us well. We must work for the good of the group. We must all be committed; you’ll see when you grow up. And anyone who isn’t, must leave.”

“But we all obey her...”

“No, Paco. We do not obey out of fear. We trust in Coco because we know she only wants what is best for us. We are free to leave if we want to, but then we would be in danger of being hurt by lions and hyenas, or we would die of thirst or hunger. Haven’t you heard that in unity there is strength? She is here for the good of us all, as I told you.”

Paco had drunk his milk, as had the others, and soon fell sound asleep.

The older members of the herd formed a circle around the mothers with calves, while Granny Coco kept watch, with their help, of the surrounding area to make sure everything was quiet.



TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS

Democratic Participation

The Herd of Co is a book that was conceived for young children. Its aim is to help Mexican children approach, in a playful manner, the concept of a democratic system, the form of government that prevails in our country, in contrast to other systems, such as ancient monarchies.

Although this is a work of fiction, the objective of the last pages is to highlight the main attributes of the form of government that our country has adopted and identify them in the narrative.

In Co's herd, the calves have fun in many different ways, but there comes a time when they do not agree on what to play. Paco, one of the bigger calves, takes control: he proclaims himself king and starts to order the rest of the *Coquitos* around. After a while, Soco, a young female elephant, tired of obeying, states that she does not understand the game and Paco explains it to them:

“He who is king rules and everyone else obeys, like it or not. And now, I'm king, and you are my subjects.”

“Sub...what?,” replied Nico angrily.



“The people that serve me. Understand? I command, and when I die, you will obey my son, the prince. It’s that simple.”

With that statement, the elephant Paco is replicating not only the model of ancient monarchies, but also the essence of any authoritarian regime. In these models, the concept of citizens, as such, does not exist, or their right as citizens to participate in the decision-making process and in the shaping of social affairs is not respected.

Soco’s mom, noticing that the baby elephants could not agree on what to play, intervened:

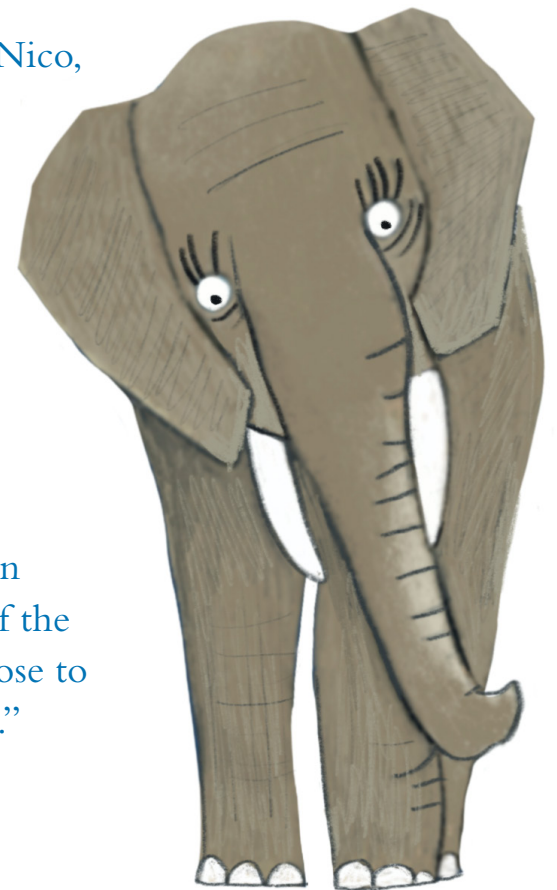
“You have to come to an agreement,” she exclaimed. “There are no princes or princesses among us, nor kings that impose their will.”

“But each of us wants a different game,” grunted little Nico, pulling up his glasses. “That’s why we were fighting a while ago.”

“Then vote,” said the elephant wisely. “Each of you will propose a game. Those in favor will raise their trunks. The game with most raised trunks wins. This process is known as electing something by voting for it.”

Later on, the female elephant said:

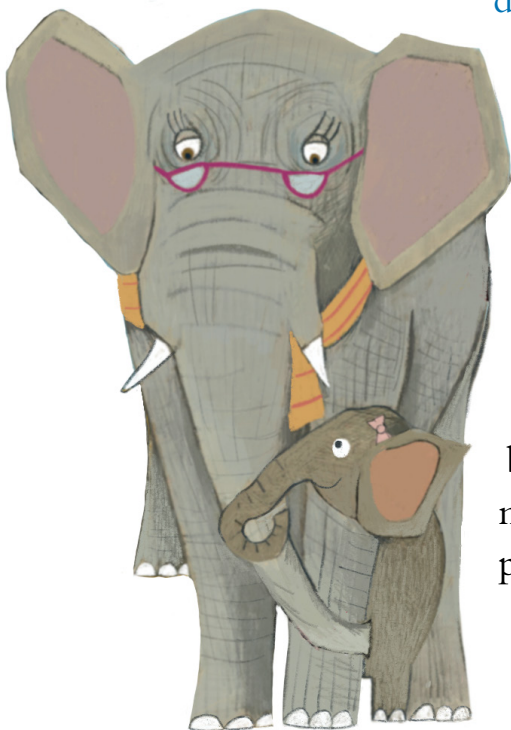
“... Whatever you decide to do, the majority must be in agreement. That’s what humans call *democracy*: the right of the majority to freely elect, remove, and hold accountable those to whom they grant the power to guide and care for others.”



The Estrategia Nacional de Cultura Cívica (National Strategy for Civic Culture) 2017–2023 states that our country is ruled by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, in Article 21, states that all people have the right to participate in the government of their countries and that the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government. It also states that such will must be expressed through genuine elections.

Further on in the story, Paco, while delightfully being caressed by his mother, asked her about kings, sultans, and princesses, and she answered as follows:

“It’s the same as the king game. Emperor, sultan, monarch, all mean the same. It’s the way some herds were organized in the past. Just like some human groups. Exactly the same. Well, maybe not exactly, because for centuries those forms of organization made things unfair for everyone. Those that lived in palaces lived very well, but many others didn’t. So humans learned that the best way life could offer everyone similar conditions was if they voted for leaders who work for the well-being of the entire community. These human beings are called *ministers or presidents.*”



Although young children are usually attracted to stories, either real or fictitious, about kingdoms, distant in time or space, it is important for them to become familiar with the idea that at the concert of nations in our modern world, human rights include political rights and citizens are no longer subjects.

“But kings and princesses still exist, don’t they?”

Although it is true that some countries still have monarchies that represent the traditions and history of their people, their citizens can express their opinions about what goes on and participate in all decision-making processes. Also, not all human groups have had kings and princesses: some never have and that’s not bad, they simply organized themselves differently.

The Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States), our maximum law, in its article 35, establishes that all citizens have the right to vote and to be voted in, as well as to associate freely with others to participate in political issues.

“But we have a queen,” disputed Paco.

“No, young one. We have no queen.”

“Of course, we do—Granny.”



“Coco doesn’t rule as a queen. No, it’s different because the majority of us agreed that she would govern us. She’s wise and she’s our guide, which makes it different. This is how we are organized, but all of us must cooperate and pay attention so she can fulfill her duty and lead us well. We must work for the good of the group. We must be committed; you’ll see when you grow up.”

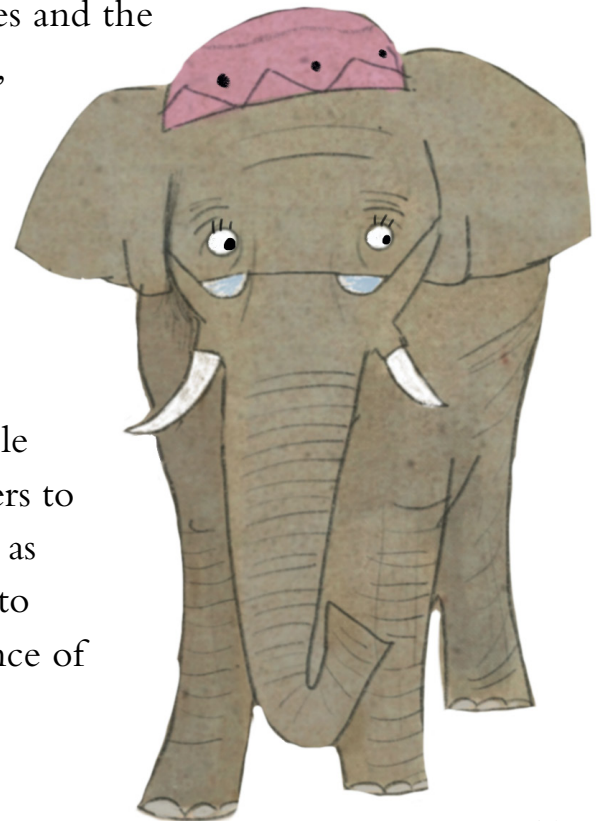
The Mexican Constitution, in its articles 39 and 40, states that Mexico is a democratic,

representative, and sovereign republic. In other words, its government resides, essentially and originally, in the people, and, therefore, we all have the right and the duty to participate in political life. The elephants of this herd organized themselves in a similar manner: they elected the grandmother as their leader and she represents all of the elephants because it was a decision of the majority. And they are all aware that they must be vigilant to make sure she fulfills her duty and contribute with whatever is needed for the well-being of the herd. The female elephant explains it as follows:

“Other members of the herd, like me, must also participate. So rules are established by everyone, and we all make sure that they are followed.”

And so, game by game, the *Coquitos* learn the rules and the importance of democracy: to elect a representative, to not fail to participate in decisions made by the whole herd, to respect those with different opinions, to abide by the decisions of the majority, and to collaborate and make sure there is fairness and harmony for all, among other values.

In order for this story to be meaningful for people of all ages, we invite caretakers, relatives and teachers to carry out a shared reading with young children, so as to enjoy the words and the images, and to be able to reflect on and discuss democracy and the importance of all citizens as active participants in public life.





THE HERD OF CO

The Bembo Std font family was used.



CECILIA RÉBORA totally enjoyed finding shapes in the clouds in her childhood.

She earned a Diploma in Literary Creation at the Sociedad General de Escritores de México (Sogem), in Mexico City, and she studied Illustration at the Escuela de Artes Aplicadas Josep Serra i Abella in Barcelona, Spain.

She has worked as a professional illustrator since 2000. In 2011 she won the first place in the Segundo Catálogo Iberoamericano de Ilustración organized by the FIL, Fundación SM and the Ilustradero. She was a FILIJ (Feria Internacional del Libro Infantil y Juvenil) Ambassador in 2018. Her work has been selected to be included in several national and international catalogues.

Cecilia enjoys having a warm cup of coffee in the morning, she has two cats, and loves to discover new sites in town riding a bike with her children and her husband. She is currently dedicated to illustrate books and objects and to teach plastic arts and creativity to children.



This work is part of the **Árbol** collection and, although intended for children, its final pages include a section that allows adults to dialog with both, girls and boys, about the most important notions addressed in the story.

In *The Herd of Co*, calves have fun in different ways, but at one point they do not agree on what to play. Paco, one of the bigger calves, takes control: he proclaims himself king, and starts to order the rest of the *Coquitos* around. After a while, Soco, a young female elephant, tired of obeying, states that she does not understand the game.

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