

I speak in Náhuatl
the language my grandma says
her people... learned
from the birds.

Jorge Argueta



A Movie in My Pillow/Una película en mi almohada

Jorge Argueta
Elizabeth Gómez [Illustrator]
Children's Book Press 2001

Grade Levels

K-4

Curriculum Areas

Spanish and English Language • Art • Social Studies

National Language Arts Standards

NL-ENG.K-12.8

DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Students will write creative pieces [poetry, fiction, or non-fiction] employing aesthetic principles appropriate to each genre.

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Art Education Standards

NA-VA.4 UNDERSTAND THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES

Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places.

Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

National Social Studies Standards

NSS-G.K-12.2 PLACES AND REGIONS

Students should understand how culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Objectives

To introduce to students that poetry may draw upon the influences of other cultures.

To introduce to students that poetry, mythology and art perpetuate traditions and customs of a culture or ethnic group.

To draw upon library resources, multimedia and the Internet to develop research skills.

To become familiar with the cultural context of the poetry and images that Jorge Argueta and Elizabeth Gómez use to communicate with their audience.

To draw upon the ethnic, popular and folk art of Mesoamerican cultural heritage for their own poetry and art work.

Overview

This bilingual collection of poems for children opens with a simple ode to the cultural diversity in the Mission District of San Francisco, the "Neighborhood of Sun," in Argueta's words. In poetry and picture, the reader is gently moved into the experiences of

a child in the Salvadoran community of that city. Throughout Gómez's delightful folk-art illustrations, parakeets periodically appear as symbols of the Salvadoran family, sometimes as joyful bursts of color, other times upside down amidst the terror of armed conflict. The pain of flight from a beloved country rift with civil war is poignantly conveyed. Yet with equal resonance, we hear the optimism and joy of a family that is finally reunited "like a big nest with all the birds inside" in a hope-filled city of giant buildings.

INTERNET EXERCISE
A Movie in My Pillow
Jorge Argueta
Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez
Illustration Page 2



Immigration
Elizabeth Gómez

Jorge Argueta came to America from San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador. His poems are based on life in his country. These poems are his dreams, memories--the movie in my pillow.

Using the Internet research where El Salvador is in Mesoamerica.

Activity

Looking Exercise #1 will provide an introduction to the Quetzal. Combining natural and cultural history explore the story of the Quetzal, a beautiful bird found in the cloud forests of El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and other parts of Central America. Endangered today, the bird holds a place of honor in Mayan and Aztec tradition.

LOOKING EXERCISE #1:
A Movie in My Pillow
Jorge Argueta
Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez
Illustration Page 26



Quetzal Bird
Biologybase: Birds-Resplendent Quetzal
Robert B. Hole, Jr. 1995-2005

How is the quetzal portrayed in the art of Mesoamerica? The Maya?

What is the mythology that draws Jorge Argueta to the Language of the Birds?

A large part of his memories and dreams are of the environment—the plants the animals. One bird that is shown by the illustrator is the quetzal. Where does this bird live?



Language of the Birds/Lengua de pájaros
Elizabeth Gómez

Activity

A Movie in My Pillow is bilingual. The text appears in both English and Spanish, with the languages given equal emphasis; neither the English nor the Spanish version is referred to as a translation. It is appropriate that ideas like these appear in both English and Spanish:

And in my dreams
I speak in Náhuatl
the language my grandma says
her people... learned
from the birds.

Y en sueños
hablo en náhuatl
la lengua
que mi abuelita dice...aprendieron
de los pájaros.

Birds and the Ancient Mesoamerican

"The ancient Mesoamerican believed that nine or thirteen different heavens existed... The fourth and fifth were the sphere of fire, and birds belonged to the god of fire...All species of birds were found in the fourth heaven, and from there they carne to Earth. "

Read more about birds in Mesoamerican culture: Mesoamerican Desconocido: myths and legends

http://www.mexicodesconocido.com.mx/ingles/cultura_y_sociedad/fiestas_y_tradiciones/detalle.cfm?idsec=15&idsub=64&idpag=432

Mesoamerican people today give a variety of answers when asked about the quetzal. "Yes," they say, "a quetzal cannot survive after it is captured. It will die of a broken heart. That is why it is the bird of freedom." Some believe that the bird's feathers will fall off if touched by a human hand. The quetzal may still thrive as a symbol, but its survival as a living bird is in great peril...as the bird; the mythology handed down from generation to generation is in peril. [Victor Montejo. *The Bird Who Cleans the World and other Mayan Fables*. 1991]

Activity

Create an outline image of a Quetzal and write a poem or story and place it within the frame.



Quetzal Frame

Royal Academy Aztec Children's Guide
<http://static.royalacademy.org.uk/files/aztecs-student-guide-16.pdf>

LOOKING EXERCISE #2:

A Movie in My Pillow

Jorge Argueta

Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez

Text and Illustration Page 10

Alienation of newcomers is common, but it is not always recognized nor understood. It is challenging for immigrants to become accustomed to a new place and adjust to the novelty of everything around them, from language to social mores. Others need to make them feel welcome by applying empathy and compassion, and imagining themselves in the shoes of the new arrival.



When We Left El Salvador/Cuando salimos de El Salvador

Elizabeth Gómez

What are the possible results or consequences when people feel like outsiders in their surroundings? Write an essay or poem in reaction to the poem written by Jorge Argueta: *When We Left El Salvador/Cuando salimos de El Salvador*.

Reflect on personal emotions associated with being an outsider. Recognize newly arrived Americans' feelings and experiences. Empathize with new immigrants who encounter alienation and isolation living in a new land.

Analyze the poem about immigration. Read the poem: "When We Left El Salvador/Cuando salimos de El Salvador." Request that students close their eyes as they listen to the poem, to remain free of distractions. Remind them to listen without talking. After the poem is read, describe a time when you felt like an outsider, or when someone may have judged you without knowing you and/or being aware of your circumstances.

Ask students to describe their reactions during the first reading of the poem. Read it first in Spanish. Cluster student responses as they speak. Sample discussion questions include:

How did you feel when you did not understand the language?

What did you want to do when the reader begin to recite in a language with which you were unfamiliar?

Were you able to pick up on any aspect of the poem—emotion--despite not knowing the language?

Hand out copies of the poem in English and Spanish; read it aloud or have students read it. Have students analyze and discuss the poem. Have students relate their experiences to those of immigrants. Some discussion questions include:

What did you learn from this experience and the poem that might help you to better understand the feelings of immigrants in the future?

How might you act differently toward someone when you recognize that s/he might be feeling like an outsider?

Activity

Many poems in the form of myths and legends [stories] are passed down from one generation to the next via storytelling.

Through some of the myths and legends children learn about the modern Pipiles [indigenous people of El Salvador who speak Náhuatl, the language of the Ancient Aztecs] or others that are researching Mesoamerican culture, learn them from their elders. Jorge Argueta states, "when I was a boy I was always delighted to listen to my mother or grandmother whenever she wanted to tell me animal stories. Some, she insisted, were true stories from the past, closely related to Mesoamerican way of life. For my mother and grandmother, the teachings of the grandmother and grandfathers and the village elders have intrinsic values and powerful messages. It does not matter what the story is; you can always interpret the message. All are intimately linked to our ancestral culture. They must learn to respect and appreciate those animals and plants that are closely related to our human existence, agriculture, and religion."

After reading, "My Grandma's Stories", find a creation story from one of the native peoples of the Americas. Use a Venn diagram to organize the similarities and differences you find in that creation story.

My Grandma's Stories

Mita's stories
Filled her shack
With stars

Milta's stories
put smiles
on our faces

Mita's stories
are old
like the mountains

Mita's stories
are like the songs
of the crickets

If I close my eyes
I hear them
in the wind

**LOOKING EXERCISE #3:
A Movie in My Pillow
Jorge Argueta
Illustrated by Elizabeth Gómez
Text and Illustration Pages 20-21**



Yo-yo
Elizabeth Gómez

What is going on in this picture? Describe everything you see. Do you have a favorite game? Research games from around the world and compare and play them on the playground.

Kids Games
<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

Resources

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Argueta, Jorge. *Moony Luna/Luna, Lunita Lunera*. San Francisco, California: Children's Book Press. 2005.

Argueta, Jorge. *Los Arboles estan colgando del Cielo/Trees are Hanging from the Sky*. Greenwood Books. 2005.

Argueta, Jorge. *Xochitl and the Flowers/Xochitl, La nina de las Flores*. Greenwood Books. 2003.

Bowes, Ann LaBastille. "The Quetzal: Fabulous Bird of Maya Land." *National Geographic Magazine*. January 1969.

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Press. 1991.

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. *Quetzal: Sacred Bird of the Cloud Forest*. New York: Morrow Junior Books. 1996.

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Robert B. Hole, Jr. 1995-2005
<http://www.interaktv.com/birds/speciesaccounts/resplendentquetzallg.html>

Cloud Forest Alive-QuetzalCam
<http://www.cloudforestalive.org/tour/qcam/quetzaldetails.htm>

El Salvador en Imagenes
<http://www.4elsalvador.com/>

The History Art and Culture of Ancient Mesoamerica
<http://www.ancientmexico.com/index.html>

Kids Games
<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

The New Americans Latinos In America
http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/foreducators_lesson_plan_11.html

The Royal Academy of Art Aztec Children's Guide
www.royalacademy.org.uk/files/aztecs_cgguide.pdf