Share a Story, Light Your World
Comparte una historia, ilumina tu mundo

Book Discussion & Activity Guide

Jenni Arvin & Sylvia Garcia
All over the world libraries are dedicated to the principle of sharing the gift of literacy with the people they serve. They house books containing the precious stories of world cultures. Some are written versions of tales which began as oral stories handed down through generations. Librarians also reach beyond their buildings with ingenious methods of delivering books to neighborhoods where access to libraries is limited or to remote areas where libraries do not exist. Many extend their library services with books and information on the Internet.

Pura Belpré introduced to the New York Public Library System, and thereby to libraries everywhere, the necessity of including all cultures in library service. She understood the importance of welcoming those who speak languages other than the one predominantly spoken in an area. She pioneered the concept of providing materials so that all children who come to the library may have the experience of seeing themselves, their language and their heritage reflected in words and pictures.

The objective of this program, intended for children in grades 1-3, is to honor the legacy of Pura Belpré by demonstrating the ways in which the richness of a culture is reflected in its literature. Children will see and create visual elements, and hear and repeat sound patterns and rhythms from the Latino cultures. This introduction to the contribution of Pura Belpré will foster an appreciation of how the blending of other cultures has enriched our national heritage. Her candle helped light the way to cultural understanding.
**Buenos Días***
(Opening song to the tune of Frey Felipe or Are You Sleeping?)

Buenos Días, buenos días,  
Cómo estás? ¿cómo estás?  
Muy bien, gracias,  
Muy bien, gracias,  
Y usted? ¿y usted?

Good morning, good morning,  
How are you? How are you?  
Very well, I thank you,  
Very well, I thank you,  
How about you? How about you?

(Note: Buenos tardes or Buenos noches may be substituted for Buenos Días.)


**Imaginary Ball Toss***

The wonderful thing about an imaginary ball is that it can be any size or shape to fit all hands! Begin by asking the children to think about their place of birth. The leader will begin by holding the imaginary ball, saying his or her name and where he or she was born. The leader will “toss” the ball to a child and say, “¿Y tú, de dónde vienes? Where are you from?” That child then says his or her name, where he or she is from, and “tosses” the imaginary ball to another in the group. If a child does not know his birthplace, he may always say, “Aquí, here!”

*Activity adapted from:  
Meet Pura Belpré and author Lucía González

Pura Belpré was born around 1900 in Puerto Rico, but as a young woman she came to live in New York City. She eventually went to library school and became the first Puerto Rican librarian in the New York Public Library system. Working in a library branch in the area of the city where many Puerto Rican immigrants lived, she purchased books in the Spanish language, held bilingual story hours, and helped the children celebrate the holidays of their native land. She also wrote children’s books which shared her native Puerto Rican folklore (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College CUNY, n.d.). Today there is an award honoring the memory of Pura Belpré, which is given each year to Latino authors and illustrators whose children’s literature best represents Latino culture.

Author Lucía González was born in Cuba but, like the children in the story, she came to live in the United States, and she understands the feeling of being in a new country with a new language. Like Pura Belpré, she grew up to become a bilingual librarian, puppeteer, and storyteller. Ms. González also works with organizations dedicated to making certain that library services are available for Latino and Spanish-speaking people ("Lucia Gonzalez," 2010).

Pura Belpré medal image from: http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/index.cfm
Cold winters of the Great Depression are especially hard for residents of El Barrio, a neighborhood of newcomers who have left their native Puerto Rico in search of jobs in New York City. They long for Decembers in their balmy homeland.

Hilda and Santiago must daily pass the library, which they believe to be only for those who speak English. When a kind librarian visits their school with stories and puppet shows in English and Español, she assures them that the library is a welcoming place for all. She says that at the library someone will both speak with them and provide for them books in their language.

The children bring their family and friends to hear the librarian, Pura Belpré, light the storyteller’s candle and tell the familiar tale of Pérez and Martina. When she suggests they bring their beloved celebration of El Día de los Reyes to her New York library, word spreads through the community. Together to transform the library into a tropical setting for a fiesta of traditional drama, dance, and music.

Illustrator Lulu Delacre’s soft ambered drawings evoke the era. On each page she includes bits of newspaper clippings that capture information from the time period.

Alia Muhammed Baker, the librarian of Basra, values her library’s role as a place for the exchange of ideas and as the home of a historic collection. When war threatens, she is refused permission to move her treasured books to safety. She secretly begins to move books out of the library. As fire engulfs the town, she enlists the help of neighboring merchants. The books are saved by being moved first to a restaurant and then to storage in her own home and the homes of friends. Alia dreams of the return of peace and the opportunity to rebuild the Library of Basra.


From a blue truck in Azerbaijan to a donkey cart in Zimbabwe, this story celebrates the dedication of groups and individuals bringing books to remote areas of the world. In Kenya camels haul books and a “tent library” to nomadic desert villages; elephants bring book cartons to isolated mountain areas of Thailand. By boat, van, bus, mail and wheelbarrow, the joy of books is shared with children who have no other sources of reading material. Some programs use book exchanges; others can only allow children to enjoy the precious cargo during the program visit. These mobile librarians live the belief that “Libraries are services, not buildings.”

Living way up in the Appalachian mountains, Cal only wants to help Pap plow and fetch sheep. Unlike his sister, he wants no part of sitting “stoney-still a-staring at some chicken scratch.” Then once each month and through all kinds of weather, a lady on horseback begins to bring books to their door. She asks nothing in return, and Cal marvels at her bravery. One snowy night he comes to sister with a book, and she patiently begins to teach Cal to read. On her next delivery, the Book Woman explains that this is how she is rewarded.


For older readers, this is the in-depth story of the Depression-era WPA project that placed Kentucky librarians on horseback to deliver books to isolated Appalachian schools and mountain cabins. These pack horse librarians saddled up each day, braving the weather and treacherous terrain. They brought books, magazines, health information and handmade scrapbooks of recipes and quilt patterns offered to them by grateful readers who wanted to give them something in return. One of WPA’s most successful programs, the tough pack horse librarians provided for their isolated mountain region access to books and the vision of a wider world.

Son of migrant farm workers, Tomás spends hot summers under a shade tree listening to stories told in Spanish by Papá Grande. Eventually Papá Grande sends him to a nearby library to learn some new stories. He finds a welcoming librarian who offers him books which transport him to places he has never seen. She allows him to take these stories home to share with his family at night. This is the true story of Tomás Rivera, who valued education and became a university chancellor and national educational leader.

Biblioburro: A True Story from Colombia by Jeannette Winter. Beach Lane Books, 2010

Wanting to share his book collection with others, Luis buys two burros, Alfa and Beto. Together they make the difficult journey to carry books to children in the faraway hillside villages of Colombia. The children eagerly await his visits to hear the stories he shares and borrow books from the crates toed by his burros. Based on a true story, schoolteacher Luis Soriana understands the power of reading to change lives. Through donations his collection has grown to 4,800 books, and he brings the joy of reading to over 300 people each weekend.
The Librarian on the Roof  
by M.G. King; Illus. by Stephen Gilpin.  
Albert Whitman & Co., 2010.

Feisty new Head Librarian RoseAleta Laurell brings a fresh spirit to the oldest library in Texas. She renovates, updates technology, and adds books for her Spanish-speaking population. However, conventional methods fail to raise funds for a children’s department to provide her rural youngsters a first opportunity for exposure to books, reading, technology and art. RoseAleta takes her tent and ingenuity to the library’s roof, vowing to camp there until the needed $20,000 has been collected. RoseAleta braves fierce storms and winds, remaining at her post until the town rallies to gather twice the needed funds.

The Inside-Outside Book of Libraries  
by Roxie Munro and Julie Cummins  

From the grandeur of the Library of Congress to the one-room library on Ocracoke Island, this is the story of how libraries across America serve the reading public. Libraries are found in homes, on Navy ships and in prisons. They lend books in Braille and in languages other than English. One library even lends tools!
* Have you ever visited a faraway place where everyone spoke a language that you could not understand? How did that make you feel? Would you be more comfortable if someone spoke a few words to you in your own language?

* How would you feel if your mother told you that you could not go into the library in your neighborhood because it did not contain any books written in a language that you could read?

* Have you ever moved to a new neighborhood where you did not know anyone? What things did you miss about the place you left? How might you welcome a newcomer into your school or your neighborhood?

* Do you think Pura Belpré would be honored to have her name given to a medal that is awarded for the best books written and illustrated by Latino authors or illustrators? Why would this make her happy?

* Do you enjoy visiting the library? What is your favorite part of visiting the library? Would you have enjoyed watching Pura Belpré light her candle and tell a story?

* How do you select books to borrow from the library? Do you like to find stories containing characters who look like you or have some of the same experiences that you have had?

* Do you tell stories at home with your family? What are some of your favorite family stories? Is there someone in your family who a favorite storyteller? What makes that person’s stories so interesting?
Make a Storytelling Candle*

Supplies needed:

- Construction paper
- Orange and yellow tissue paper
- Toilet paper rolls (one for each candle)
- Scissors
- A pencil
- Ruler
- Glue stick or tape

1. Cut a piece of construction paper the same length as the toilet paper roll.

2. Wrap the construction paper around the toilet paper roll and fasten it using a glue stick or tape.

3. Cut 2 12” squares of tissue paper: one from yellow, one from orange tissue. Turn them so that they are at a 45 degree angle to each other.

4. Placing your finger in the middle of the tissue paper, gather up the edges around your arm.

5. Remove your arm and carefully use the eraser end of the pencil to push the center of the gathered tissue paper into the toilet paper roll.

6. Fluffing the ends of the tissue which stick out of the candle will create a pretend flame.

*Candle-making craft adapted from:
http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/kwanza/candles/
Tell a shared story

Libraries around the world hold stories written and illustrated from the traditions of the area. Many of those stories were first told orally, or aloud, and were passed in families from one generation to another. Pura Belpére was from Puerto Rico, where there is a long history of oral storytelling. While she was known for her puppetry and storytelling, she also wrote stories from her native country. One of those, Perez y Martina, has been retold by many authors.


High-born cockroach Martina must select from among many suitors the one she will wed.


Martina’s abuelita devises a plan for her to select from among her suitors. She chooses a little brown mouse who also has a Cuban abuelita!


Selecting him for the nice sounds he makes, Martina weds quiet Ratoncita Perez, who must later be rescued from a pot of onion soup.


Unhappy in her noisy urban setting, Martina chooses to wed a quiet cricket from among her many suitors. They move to the country to enjoy calm nights of making beautiful noises together.

Display these or various versions of other tales and discuss how a story can change by being retold. Have the children sit in a circle. The leader says “Once upon a time... *Había una vez...*” and begins with something familiar to the group. Go around the circle allowing each child to make a contribution to the tale. See how everyone’s ideas change the story! Invite a family or community member to share a favorite story with the group.
Caribbean Musical Fun
Paper Plate Maracas*

Supplies:
Large paper plate
Dried beans or rice
Crayons, marker, or paint
Stapler

(1) Fold the paper plate in half and staple along the edges, leaving a small open space.

(2) Decorate the plate with crayons, markers or paint.

(3) Hold the plate up and fill with a handful of dried beans or rice.

(4) Staple the edge of the plate so that it is completely closed.

(5) Shake the maraca to the beat of the music!

A Conga Line Dance


(1) Some of the children form a line behind a leader, each placing hands on the waist of the person in front of him or her.

(2) As music is played, the line moves around the room in the pattern: step, step, step, kick. The leader can use his or her free hands to move to the music.

(3) The remaining children can keep the beat with simple rhythm instruments, such as their paper plate maracas.

(4) After the first group has danced, the groups exchange places.


*Craft may be accessed http://www.sproutonline.com/sprout/crafts/detail.aspx?id=db20680d-06aa-4d29-9d9a-997a01819c96
The Beloved Coquí of Puerto Rico

On the island of Puerto Rico, home of Pura Belpré, lives a tiny frog called a coquí. Measuring about an inch long, it does not have webbed toes like other frogs and it is born from eggs rather than passing through a tadpole stage. Only the species of coquí found in Puerto Rico sing the sweet night song that is a distinctive “co-KEE coKEE,” and many of the island children think of it almost as a lullaby. Pictures and more information about the coquí are available at http://www.elboricua.com/coqui.html

The coquí often appeared in the tales told by the first people of Puerto Rico.

The Song of el Coquí and Other Tales of Puerto Rico by Nicholas Mohr and Antonio Martorell. Viking, 1995.

In this tale the gods of the indigenous Taina peoples of Puerto Rico were sad because the island was silent, so the tiny coquí were given their sweet night song.

The Song of El Coquí*

El coquí, el coquí
a mí me encanta
es tan lindo el cantar del coquí.
Por las noches al ir a acostarme
me adormece cantándome así:
Coquí, coquí,
Coqui-qui-qui-quí;
Coquí, coquí,
Coqui-qui-qui-qui.

The kokee, the kokee
enchants me,
It is so beautiful, the kokee’s song.
At night when I’m going to bed
it makes me sleepy singing:
Kokee, Kokee,
Kokee-kee-kee-KEE;
Kokee, Kokee,
Kokee-kee-kee-KEE.

To hear the music for this song, “El Coquí” may be found on CD.

De Colores and Other Latin American Folk Songs by Jose-Luis Orozco, Arcoiris Records, Inc., 2009.

A closing song*

Amigos, amigos, amigos

(Tono: Tres ratones blancos)
por Beverly J. Irby y Rarael Lara-Alecio

Amigos, amigos, amigos,
ami gos, amigos, amigos,
iMiren cómo juegan!
iMiren cómo juegan!
Yo quiero a mis amigos, y mis amigos me quieren a mí.

Uno, dos, tres, y Bruno, ¡Como mis amigos no hay ninguno!

Amigos, amigos, amigos,
ami gos, amigos, amigos.

Friends, Friends, Friends

(Tune: Three Blind Mice)
by Beverly J. Irby and Rarael Lara-Alecio

Friends, friends, friends,
Friends, friends, friends.
See how we play,
See how we play.
I love my friends, and they love me.
We love each other; it is fun to see.
We’re friends, and we are a family.
Friends, friends, friends,
Friends, friends, friends.

Image from: http://www.clker.com/search/friendship/1
About Pura Belpre and the award in her honor
http://www.reforma.org/PuraBelpre.htm  This is a concise biography (with photograph) of Pura Belpre, the first Puerto Rican librarian in the New York Public Library system.

http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/index.cfm  This is the Pura Belpre Award home page. A history of the award and the list of award winners is furnished.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D18azJ9Em8A  In a brief video, children’s author Lucía González discusses the pioneering role of Pura Belpre in reaching out and bringing her Latino community into the library.

Learn about and hear from Lucía González

http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived_interviews/lgonzalez.html  This is an extensive interview with Lucía González about her life, her writing, and her work on behalf of Latino families.

http://www.colorincolorado.org/read/meet  The ¡Colorín Colorado! site is a wonderful resource for families and teachers of English Language Learners. This link is for a page featuring video interviews with many of the best-known current authors of bilingual children’s literature.

Puerto Rican culture and wildlife
http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212700/final_website/stories.html  Written by a third grader, this is a traditional Puerto Rican folktale telling the story of how the beetle got his beautiful colors.

http://welcome.topuertorico.org/index.shtml  Contributed by an individual, this site features information about the geography, history, culture, people, economy, government, and foods of Puerto Rico.

http://www.elboricua.com/coqui.html  This is information about the tiny Puerto Rican coquí tree frog. Many myths of the Taina people were created around the coquí.

References


Credits, References

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