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Oral tradition in the classroom: The relationship between the use of culturally appropriate reading material and reading comprehension

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ORAL TRADITION IN THE CLASSROOM: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE USE OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE READING MATERIAL AND
READING COMPREHENSION

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education: Bilingual/Cross-Cultural

by
Celina Lynn Arredondo-Montoya
June 1994
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ABSTRACT

This research project explores the relationship between the use of culturally sensitive reading material and reading comprehension among Spanish-speaking language minority students of elementary school age. The culturally sensitive material comes from the oral traditions of the Mexican culture which has been tape recorded and transcribed into Spanish, the language the contributors spoke in. The material used for the project was generated from first and second generation Mexican people from various regions of Mexico now living in local areas.

The present project is based on the belief that there is a connection between the use of culturally appropriate reading material and reading comprehension. To investigate this, the research uses a whole language approach to evaluate student comprehension based on whole language principles. These principles include the beliefs that cultural familiarity with text gives learning more purpose, that texts must be meaningful and relevant in order for comprehension to occur, and that prior knowledge plays a significant part in student’s ability to interact with what they read in order to construct their own understandings. These and other whole language ideas are fully discussed in this project in relation to using oral traditions in the classroom which will show how the whole language philosophy supports the use of culturally relevant materials in the classroom.

The participants in this project are four second grade students whose dominant language is Spanish. The data collected from these students measures their comprehension of three orally transmitted stories from the Mexican culture. This data comes from response journals, student paired sharing activities, and researcher participation with student paired sharing
groups. The questions students respond to for each story come from a list of Response Prompts which guide students to write and speak in personally significant ways about what they know, think, and feel. They also reveal if students are able to: 1) refer to story events, 2) discuss character traits, 3) discuss character motivations, 4) relate the story to their own lives, and 5) infer, predict, and speculate about the story. Students are evaluated for comprehension with these five points, which appear in checklist form, and which are included in this project.

A case study approach is utilized to thoroughly evaluate each student’s ability to comprehend. The results are organized into four student portfolios and are discussed in relation to student comprehension as measured by the Evaluation Checklist. Student results are also compared to determine cultural similarities among responses.

The material this project contains are designed to be taught in Spanish to students whose dominant language is Spanish. An English translation of each piece is given for the teacher’s convenience.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*Tortillitas pa' mamá
Tortillitas pa' papá
Las quemaditas pa' mamá
Y las bonitas pa' papá.*

The nursery rhyme above is part of the oral tradition of Mexican culture which has spanned generations of ancianos (old ones), and niños (children). There has always been a deep relationship between the old and the young in Hispanic culture, a culture enriched by cuentos, chistes, and advinanzas (stories, jokes, and riddles) that make up an oral literary heritage. This heritage gives children a strong cultural foundation in life. In his book *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), Rudolfo A. Anaya writes a story about Ultima, an old curandera, or healer, and what a young boy learns from her that shapes his future by rediscovering his past. Then again in Anaya’s second book, *Heart of Aztlan* (1976), Crispin, an old barrio poet, recounts stories that young men gather to hear. They learn from his experience and knowledge. These characters, although fictional ones, exemplify real life ancianos, or old ones, who make up part of the extended family which has been a natural part of Hispanic family life. The folktales, nursery rhymes, and songs children hear from these elder family members carry messages which speak to their day-to-day existence. Moreover, oral traditions in these forms are full of wisdom, individual and social values, perceptions of life, cultural identities, and universal concepts and values. These traditions enrich children’s personality and enculturate them to their culture.

Oral traditions can be incorporated into the formal education of children. The classroom can be a forum to present and preserve Mexican orally
transmitted folklore that has come down through the generations. Hispanic heritage can be made relevant to Mexican children in a classroom with recorded oral transmissions and accompanying activities devised so that they can become an integral part of the bilingual classroom. Bilingual educators can consciously choose to include folktales and other oral traditions which include the indigenous language of their students in their curriculums so that the language already used by them is maintained and developed. Not only can school learning take place but self-respect and human dignity can be promoted using oral traditions as transmitters of the culture's collective experience. Students engrossed in reading because the material makes sense, is satisfying, and is related to their worlds can be the outcome of using oral traditions in the classroom.

Ample research has been conducted on the importance of preserving the oral traditions of various cultures (Williamson, 1990; Hickey, 1991; King and Stahl, 1990; Totten, 1989; Polley, 1989; Cintron de Esteves and Spicola, 1982). Using orally transmitted stories, songs, and poems from past generations to teach literacy in the classroom have been examined as well (Sears and Bidlake, 1991; Morgan, 1991; Cooper, 1990; Wendelin, 1986; Scott and Seidman, 1986; Epstein, 1990). To add to our existing knowledge base, this project will record and transcribe stories, songs, poems, and lullabies from parents, grandparents, and bilingual students. The oral traditions will then be used in a variety of classroom activities to promote literacy in reading and reading enjoyment. Specifically, this project will examine the relationship between culturally appropriate knowledge in oral literature and student's reading comprehension.
Background to the Study

Should Mexican students maintain what has been created in the past? The cultural values contained in the oral traditions presented in this project are of great worth due to their effectiveness in guiding and strengthening a child's self-perception and self-worth. Strong self concept and feelings of security within the school environment are vital elements of education in general and of bilingual education in particular. The value of a project such as this, therefore, rests in the empowering nature achieved by utilizing the student's primary language to learn academic content using culturally appropriate material. Thus academic learning is ultimately related to pride in one's language and cultural identity with instructional material. In this way, Mexican children can be empowered to succeed academically and socially in what is a very different and puzzling school environment.

Present educational theories now expound the use of genuine text and content-rich curricula in the classroom (Rumelhart, 1980; Weaver, 1988; Garcia, 1991; Farnan & Fearn, 1991). Whole language, for example, advocates the use of culturally generated sources of learning for teaching all subjects. The widespread inclusion of this idea in today's classrooms sets the stage for the use of oral literature as a means for providing culturally appropriate and familiar reading material to Mexican students.
The Problem

The Mexican people share common roots and a long historic past. Previous generations have kept cultural traditions alive by telling, retelling, singing and singing again, the *leyendas*, *poemas*, and *canciones de cuna* (stories, poems, and lullabies) integral to everyday life. Today, however, connections with the past have been blurred and obscured. Orally transmitted stories, poems, songs, and lullabies have not been kept active and alive. The importance they once had as social commentary, as statements on moral styles of living, and as artistic expression have been relegated to the memories of the older generation who maintain the old cultural traditions. Instead of gathering around the feet of the storyteller to hear an entertaining tale, today's youth are more likely to sit in front of a television and watch a video. Hollywood prevails over *la historia*. In today's society, cultural identity and belonging have taken the forefront in numerous battles for civil rights and equality. This makes the present an appropriate time for a reemergence of an aspect of cultural identity that holds the promise of redefining and reaffirming that identity. Oral traditions of the Mexican people, awakened and applied to the teaching of literacy could keep alive in children their connection to the past and foster positive attitudes about reading and reading materials that come from their own oral heritage.

Text which engages readers in an interaction with the author and with their previous experiences can make for more enjoyable reading. Furthermore, when students are allowed to read and learn from culturally sensitive, well-known material, they are more likely to have better reading comprehension. For this to happen, however, it is necessary to collect appropriate learning material that promotes genuine interest, learning, and knowledge. Equally important is the collection of reading materials which will, through cultural familiarity, foster
higher levels of comprehension.

This project will examine this issue by collecting and transcribing the songs, stories, poems, and lullabies from the oral tradition of the Mexican people. They will be used in the classroom for reading instruction to determine if there is a connection between the use of culturally appropriate materials and higher levels of comprehension among Spanish-speaking students.

Statement of the Problem

A major problem in the education of language minority students is the non-use of the student's cultural knowledge, values, and identity in mainstream classroom instruction. This is important because prior knowledge can be a valid source for students to draw upon to gain academic success. Therefore, there is a need to overcome this problem by developing curriculums that promote the use of culturally appropriate materials containing examples of cultural values and identities which Spanish-speaking language minority students can relate to.

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between culturally appropriate knowledge found in the oral traditions of Mexican second grade students and student's reading comprehension?

Definition of Terms

1. Oral Tradition: Literature in oral form told and retold by people of a certain group or area. Stories, legends, tales, poems, riddles, jokes, proverbs, tongue twisters, sayings, and lullabies are all included in an oral tradition. Also called
oral narratives, oral culture, unwritten transmissions.

2. Literacy: Functional literacy is often related to basic writing (coding) and reading (decoding) skills that allow people to produce and understand simple texts (Williams and Snipper, 1990, p. 1).

3. Reading: A process by which children can extract a sequence of cues from printed texts and relate these, one to the other, so that they understand the message of the text (Clay, 1991, p. 22).

4. Whole Language: A learning technique approach that emphasizes the integration of the language threads of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking within the context of meaningful communication; includes the idea of moving away from isolated, fragmented approaches such as in regular “grammar” period outside the context of the writing process (Parsons, 1990; p. 88).

5. Response Journals: A notebook or folder in which students record their personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on what they read, view, listen to, and discuss in addition to how they actually go about reading, viewing, listening, and discussing (Parsons, 1990; p. 87).

6. Reading Comprehension: Understanding what is read. Reading comprehension is a process of getting meaning from print (Temple & Gillet, 1989, p. 172). Comprehension is divided into three categories according to whole language educators: literal comprehension, which refers to recall, to remembering or recognizing what was read or heard; critical comprehension, which involves the ability to evaluate what was read and provide support for one’s conclusions; and creative comprehension, which includes emotional response and the ability to relate what was read or heard to one’s own life (Weaver, 1990, pp. 169-170).
Theoretical Framework

In order to promote student's reading comprehension by using oral traditions in the classroom, a solid theoretical basis most appropriate must be found. The whole language philosophy of teaching contains numerous theoretical aspects which can be applied to the inclusion of oral traditions in a classroom curriculum. These aspects are: 1) emphasis on culturally appropriate materials, 2) emphasis on teaching for meaning, 3) emphasis on the social nature of learning, and 4) the use of authentic text. The Contextual Interaction Model (CIM) can also provide a theoretical basis for the inclusion of culturally appropriate learning materials in the classroom.

Culturally Appropriate Materials

Whole language adheres to the theory that prior knowledge and experience is essential for learning to occur (Anderson, 1977 as cited by Hernández, 1991). This theory is called schemata, or schema theory in whole language terms, and it attests to the importance of relating new knowledge to relevant prior knowledge in order for learning to take place (Weaver, 1988). The use of transcriptions of orally transmitted material can aid in this process by being ever-present and easily accessible for reference when necessary for new learning to occur. Allowing prior cultural knowledge to have value in the classroom ensures that children understand reading content. And learning to read with culturally relevant schemas will result in greater understanding and meaning of the text.

Teaching for Meaning

Whole language philosophy is opposed to exercises which have no real meaning for the learner (Weaver, 1990). It takes the stance that exercises are usually for the purpose of fulfilling a teacher's assignment and have no intrinsic
value for the learner. But using culturally sensitive material for teaching reading activates knowledge structures that in fact do have meaning for minority students, thus the purposes and meanings for the student are emphasized (Hernández, 1991). Whole language is considered a meaning-emphasis approach by Weaver (1988), who says that "meaning is not in the text itself but rather develops . . . during an active transaction between reader and text" (p. 48). Mexican students reading stories based on their oral tradition would already have some prior knowledge, thus they would be able to make connections between prior knowledge and school texts.

**Social Nature of Learning**

The social aspects of oral traditions applies to whole language as well. Classroom materials which affirm the social nature of all persons are necessary in a whole language classroom. Orally transmitted literature has at its core a strong and enduring social nature. Meanings and memories which are socially formed have a valuable place in whole language teaching beliefs (Weaver, 1990). Whole language educators believe in devising experiences and using materials which affirm the social nature of learning. Reading material derived from the oral traditions of students can be an excellent reading source due to the fact that this material is embedded in their social context. By their very nature, oral traditions are embedded in the social life of everyday experiences - experiences which are imbued with cultural and familial morals, standards, and interpretations. The sharing of rhymes, lullabies, and folktales is a social event. Cultures having oral traditions consider them respected forms of communication and cultural learning.

Culturally appropriate material can also offer students connections to social and situational factors with which to interpret and understand what they read.
Whole language practices accept a variety of interpretations of all types of literature and adheres to the belief that potential meanings are more important than one exact meaning (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991). In the same way, oral transmissions are interpreted and re-told in ways which reflect the differences in each teller. Based on one’s past and the voices contained therein, potential interpretations are devised and passed on to other family members or to the community at large (Bakhtin, 1986). There can also be conventions of language shared with others regarding a particular piece of oral literature. This reinforces the idea of classroom as community (Ornstein and Levine, 1993) which whole language proponents employ and in which oral traditions are based.

Use of Authentic Text

Learning to talk occurs when a child is engaged in the authentic use of language. Learning to read is accomplished through the same process as well, when authentic texts are used as reading sources (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991). Oral literature passed down through the generations can certainly be considered authentic, as it reflects the existence of a culture from the seriousness of religion to the silliness of comedy.

Authentic language and text is at the core of whole language philosophy. Speech and text are authentic when they are used for a variety of everyday, true-to-life purposes (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991; Goodman, 1986). Whole language classrooms provide environments which are full of language experiences and opportunities for interactions with print. These types of environments can be beneficial to language minority students. They can surround these students with comprehensible input for learning either their dominant or second language.
The authentic language inherent in folktales, fables, and nursery rhymes, coupled with student's cultural knowledge will allow for the integration of student prior knowledge and author information. This, according to whole language proponents, creates good readers (Goodman, 1986). In addition, using authentic texts promotes comprehension. Skill-based lessons on comprehension taught in isolation disengage the learner from the totality of text.

But when texts are kept "whole, real, and relevant" (Goodman, 1986, p. 26), literacy develops naturally. Oral literature which is originally told and retold for real purposes and real audiences does not contain the artificial or contrived language found in basal reading material. Thus, its use in whole language classrooms is suitable and appropriate (Valencia, Pearson, Peters, and Wixon, 1989; Goodman, 186).

The Contextual Interaction Model

The CIM, devised by Carlos E. Cortès (1986), is a way to evaluate the educational experiences of language minority students. It illustrates how non-school societal factors affect aspects of the school's context and process (see Figure 1). The research presented in this project can be organized and interpreted by this model to show the influences of oral traditions (societal context) on methods of utilizing cultural knowledge for instruction (educational input), and reading instruction and activities (instructional elements), and reading comprehension (student outcomes).

Figure 2 illustrates the model as it relates to the present project. Oral traditions are part of a culture's heritage and community. This fact places these traditions appropriately with the Societal Context factors in the Model. Showing teachers how they can use oral literature in the classroom fits properly
with the Educational Input Factors context. The transcriptions of the recorded oral literature gathered for this project qualify for inclusion with the Instructional Elements factors and the Student Qualities factors are made up of attitudes such as acceptance of self and desire to learn due to familiarity with instructional materials. Lastly, the Student Outcomes factors include reading comprehension as this is the student ability which will be measured. The interaction between these factors is at the core of the Contextual Interaction Model. Educational achievement is influenced by a variety of societal and school factors within specific contexts, and through the Model, a basis for comparing these contexts is given in order to "identify different ways in which sociocultural factors interact with and influence educational experience, including educational achievement" (Cortès, 1986; p. 23). As this project investigates the relationship between the use of oral traditions in the classroom and reading comprehension, the societal and school factors Cortès discusses will become visible as they relate to the present problem.
Figure 1
The Education of Language Minority Students

A Contextual Interaction Model

Societal Context
The Societal Curriculum

Family
Institutions
Heritage
Language status
Prosocial skills
Community
Education level
Other sociocultural factors
Socio-economic status
Mass media
Culture/ethnicity
Occupational opportunity
Genres of language use
Attitudes/perceptions of school

School Context
The School Educational Process

Educational Input Factors
Staff knowledge of language minority students' (LMS) background
Staff knowledge/use of effective instructional strategies for LMS
Staff expectations of LMS
Staff proficiency in L1 of LMS
Staff attitudes toward L1 of LMS

Instructional Elements
L1 development opportunities
L2 acquisition opportunity
Prosocial skill development opportunity
Positive teacher-student interactions
Selection and coordination of appropriate core and supplementary curricula
Use of appropriate English and non-English language materials

Student Qualities
Oral proficiency in L1/L2
Academic skills in L1/L2
Attitudes toward L1/L2
Skills in L1/L2 use
Perceptions/expectations of teachers and school
Attitudes toward teachers and school
Prosocial skills
Self-image
Life goals
Motivation
Sociocultural attributes

Outcomes
Academic achievement
Language proficiency
Prosocial skills
Self-image
Other cognitive/affective skills
Figure 2
The Education of Language Minority Students Using Oral Traditions in the Classroom

Based on the Contextual Interaction Model

- **Societal Context**
  - The Societal Curriculum
  - Oral Traditions

- **School Context**
  - The School Education Process

**Educational Input Factors**
- Teacher knowledge of culturally appropriate learning materials such as oral traditions

**Instructional Elements**
- Transcriptions of recorded oral literature

**Student Qualities**
- Acceptance of self, desire to learn due to familiarity with instructional material

**Outcome**
- Reading Comprehension
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Oral narratives have long been viewed as a major source in keeping cultural traditions alive. An oral medium has passed on traditions in storytelling in most cultures around the world. The oral traditions that members of a distinct cultural group preserve through retellings are cultural indicators of beliefs and morals. They exemplify what is considered humorous or what is considered frightening. In all, they demonstrate what is at the heart of the people. And coming from the heart, oral traditions bear cultural knowledge which is specific, relative, and familiar.

For the purposes of this literature review, oral traditions will be viewed as examples of culturally appropriate learning material imbued with prior knowledge and familiarity. The relationship this project will investigate is the connection between the use of culturally relevant reading material and student’s reading comprehension. To understand this connection requires an investigation into many areas of research and academic literature.

This review will be structured around the research question presented on page five of this project. First, it will be important to examine literature that deals with how others have gathered oral traditions for preservation, analysis, and use. Secondly, the review will show what research had been done on the relationship between culturally appropriate literature, such as oral traditions, and student’s reading comprehension.
ORAL TRADITION COMPILATIONS

Early Studies

Publications on Mexican oral literature date back to the 1900's. These early compilations of Mexican oral literature are anthropological in nature (West, 1988). The researchers use a one-to-one methodology in which they interview residents of small communities, taping or writing out in long hand their renditions of orally transmitted narratives.

One of the most prominent personalities in the collection and study of Mexican lore is Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa. Espinosa considered folklore to be an integral part of a culture. Through his collections he promoted the teaching of the Spanish language in schools and of the preservation and study of several forms of oral tradition. One of Espinosa's earliest publications, entitled The Spanish Language in New Mexico and Southern Colorado (1911) lists versos, dichos, and proverbios (verses, sayings, and proverbs) passed down through the generations (West, Ed., 1988). This early collection did not include information as to the source of the material or how it was collected, transcribed, or how it was intended to be used in the classroom.

Espinosa's love of Mexican lore was continued by his son, J. Manuel Espinosa. The younger Espinosa, in fact, produced a model of how folktale collection should be presented. In its time, his model served as the standard. Espinosa's book, entitled Spanish Folktales from New Mexico (1937) included accurately rendered texts with English summaries and notes about the contributors, all of which his model expounded. By the 1950's, however, this model was obsolete as work by Arthur L. Campa demonstrates. In Treasure of the Sangre de Cristos: Tales and Traditions of the Spanish Southwest (1963). Campa offers greatly rewritten accounts of the oral tales he collected instead of...
adhering to the original renditions.

A vast amount of oral literature was collected by Lorin W. Brown, Jr. From 1936 to 1941 Brown focused on collecting folktales from elderly residents of isolated communities in northern New Mexico. With time, this method of collecting material from the elderly was dismissed as an unreliable source but at that time, it was not considered passé (West, 1988). Brown also gave extensive background information on the narrators and the circumstances of the collection. He set the materials in the context of the people and communities from where the material came. His collections were presented as an orderly overview of village life in the particular region in New Mexico where the informants lived.

Another exemplary collection of oral traditions is Elaine K. Miller's *Mexican Folk Narrative from the Los Angeles Area* (1973). Miller's fieldwork netted eighty-two narratives from twenty-seven contributors with all the narratives being tape recorded and transcribed. She includes a section on informant biographies and presents the tales in the colloquial Spanish used by the informants. English translations are given, as are comparative notes.

Mexican folksong compilations are also attempts to preserve and maintain oral traditions. Américo Paredes published one such compilation entitled *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (1976). It is one of the first to emphasize the Mexican heritage rather than Spanish heritage (West, 1988). The book serves as a representative collection of folksongs from the Texas-Mexican border and each song is prefaced by an extensive essay regarding historical information necessary for its meaning to come through.

Folk games have not been given equal treatment in comparison to other genres of Mexican folklore. A notable article, however, was written by Inez
Cardozo-Freeman in which she analyzes games and songs she gathered from Mexican women living in Mexico and the United States. Entitled Games Mexican Girls Play (1975), Cardozo-Freeman concludes that the games Mexican women recall playing as young girls reflect their personal attitudes about their life situations. Thus the seemingly trivial nature of the folk games can lend extensive information towards a cultural analysis of the group of people. More analytical than textual, this compilation is nevertheless another attempt to preserve oral tradition.

Recent Studies

The procedures utilized for collecting oral literature in recent compilations are as varied as the cultures from which this literature comes. Most texts, however, are transcriptions of narrated texts taken by a field collector who conducts one-on-one interviews with informants. Some researchers (Turner, 1993) believe that the strongest insights into the cultural traditions preserved through oral narratives come from repeated interviews with informants instead of a one time session.

Most texts are transcribed in the language they were given in, then translated into English. Researchers have noted, however, that translations tend to synthesize and paraphrase the direct expression of storytellers, thus it is preferable to leave orally transmitted texts in the language of their narration. Nevertheless, English transcriptions are necessary so that the general public may have access to these collections (Robe, 1980).

One method of collecting oral literature is through an ethnographic approach. Martin, in her book Songs My Mother Sang to Me (1992), collected texts by immersing herself into the daily lives of her relatives. The interviews were
conducted in the course of family gatherings with several people present at one time. The interviews were conducted in whatever language, English, Spanish, or a mixture of the two, that the interviewee felt most comfortable using. The interviews were transcribed word for word, then edited so that the text flowed and had continuity. Important among these ethnographic studies is the emphasis on transcriptions that are “true to the voice of the narrator” (Martin, 1992, p. xxiv), although repetitions and unrelated conversation are deleted.

Some oral tradition collections are based on the field recordings other scholars have collected. These recordings, some transcribed and published and some not, form the basis for library research projects on oral literature. The narratives compiled for these types of collections are generally grouped together to prove a point of some sort. Bascom’s book *African Folktales in the New World* (1992) offers stories which support his hypothesis that African motifs can be found in tales whose origins were believed to be purely from the United States.

Collections based on earlier field recordings are also compiled for their own sake. Robe (1980) grouped and categorized the oral narratives collected by R. D. Jameson, a previous scholar, and presented them in *Hispanic Legends from New Mexico*. These sorts of collections forego analysis or comparative studies and focus on the preservation of oral narratives through written documentation. The belief that this literature is worth preserving for coming generations is inherent in these collections. Hamilton (1987) says that “imaginative use of language and ideals illuminate for us a human condition” (p. 74) and perpetuate “the unbroken circle of communication” (p. 75).
ORAL TRADITION AND READING COMPREHENSION

Early Studies

In order to examine the early literature on reading comprehension as related to the use of culturally appropriate instruction and materials, it will be helpful to look at some early theories of reading.

For some time, researchers have recognized reading as an active process instead of a passive one (Goodman, 1967; Kolers, 1969; Wardhaugh, 1969; Rummelhart, 1977). Early theories, however, took a "bottom-up" view of reading which viewed reading as a decoding process identifying the author's meaning through printed words. Meaning was gathered, in this view, from the parts (words) to the whole (sentences). Problems with reading comprehension were attributed to difficulty with decoding and deriving meaning from print (Rivers, 1964, 1968). Reading proficiency was measured, then, on decoding sound-symbol relationships. In addition, the audiolingual approach emphasized oral dialogues which promulgated the belief that listening was more important than reading and speaking more important than writing.

At the same time, early studies did recognize the importance of background knowledge (Fries, 1963). Sociocultural meanings derived from background knowledge or experience were seen as having a wide influence on reading comprehension. Fries discusses how second language readers must relate the linguistic meaning of reading material to cultural factors in order for total comprehension to occur. Rivers (1968) also acknowledged the importance of the role of background knowledge in having a thorough understanding of the meaning of a text. Nonnative readers, she says, need to maintain a bond between culture and language. Nevertheless, the focus of early theories of
reading is decoding and interpreting text from the bottom up. Culture-specific knowledge plays no major part in the methodology or instructional practices these theories promoted.

The psycholinguistic model of reading, first discussed by Goodman (1967), gives another view about reconstructing meaning from text. In this model, readers are not expected to use all textual cues to further comprehension. Instead, reader comprehension is judged on the ability to make correct predictions about a text, thus minimizing reliance on textual cues. This point of view sees readers as reconstructing meaning by using the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic systems of a language and using the cues from each system to predict meaning. Furthermore, predictions are confirmed by relating them to past experience and language knowledge. In the 1970's, Goodman's theory sparked a number of articles which connected first and second language reading with his theories. The decoding model came to be categorized as an inadequate model of the reading process as it failed to recognize student expectations about a text based on knowledge of the language and its workings (Eskey, 1973; Saville-Troike, 1973). Instead, reading is now being viewed as an active process with readers being active processors of information.

Dissatisfaction with the audiolingual method surfaced at this time as well. Researchers began to note that oral proficiency did not automatically generate reading comprehension. They began to advocate the teaching of reading for its own sake instead of merely to produce oral skills (Eskey, 1973; Saville-Troike, 1973).

In 1979, Coady introduced a model based on the psycholinguistic model. His model suggests that a reader's background knowledge and conceptual
abilities interact to produce comprehension. This was the beginning of a "top down" approach to reading competency. Several researchers embraced this view (Carrell, 1981; Steffensen Joag-dev, and Anderson, 1979) which considers the reader an active participant in the reading process, making predictions and processing information on the path to comprehension. The influence of the reader's prior experience and background knowledge plays a significant role in achieving comprehension as well. Carrell's research discusses the importance of "content schemata" (prior knowledge in content areas), and "formal schemata" (prior knowledge of the rhetorical structure of the text) within the framework of recent schema theory and the influence of schema on reading (Carrell, 1981).

Recent Studies

One of the main components of the various teaching techniques for increasing reading comprehension among language minority students is that student's reading material be culturally sensitive and appropriate for them. Recent studies posit a connection between the use of this culturally relevant material and increased reading comprehension among language minority students (Hernández, 1991). The findings presented in this part of the literature review will give support to the premise that reading comprehension among Mexican language minority students, as well as literacy in general, will increase when culturally appropriate reading material, which includes the oral narrative transcriptions prepared for this project, is used in the classroom.

Research in the reading field has consistently revealed that learning is more apt to occur when students have prior knowledge with the subject matter
Prior knowledge is the basis for schema theory, which says that it is essential that new knowledge be related to relevant prior knowledge in order for learning to occur. Schema theory also asserts that new information must be interpreted on the basis of relevant prior life experiences so that the new knowledge can be comprehensible (Rumelhart, 1980).

Life experiences and language experiences students bring with them to the classroom can serve as valid sources from which to learn also. By academically building upon these intact knowledge structures, language minority students can develop more complex understandings of the subject matter at hand (Flores, Cousin, and Díaz, 1991). Teachers validate the present knowledge their students have by using culturally sensitive materials which have greater relation to the experiences in which they have actually engaged.

Ethnographic studies have been carried out which have relevance to the use of culturally sensitive background knowledge in the classroom and the relationship to its use and reading comprehension levels. One of these studies is the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii (Au, 1980). The program developed culturally sensitive reading activities to use with native Hawaiian children. These activities were based on the "talk-story" which is a traditional method of telling stories among Hawaiian natives. In the talk-story, narrator and audience alike contribute to the telling of the story. Responses overlap and events are discussed out of sequence in the talk-story but it is a culturally familiar method of storytelling. For this reason, KEEP incorporated this storytelling approach into the lesson format for classroom reading. First, students orally discuss experiences relating to the story to be read. The text is
then read by students. After reading, relative prior experiences are again discussed with the teacher’s intervention. That KEEP was a success can be attributed to the fact that students were allowed to learn through culturally appropriate strategies which activated their existing cultural knowledge bases. The program also placed high priority on reading comprehension and less emphasis on phonics skills. This in turn led to greater comprehension. In addition, the change in focus from phonics instruction to comprehension is another reason behind the program’s success.

The students involved in the Kamehameha program were given the opportunity to learn from more than one perspective (Bleich, 1988). Furthermore, the perspective they learned best from was based on a culturally sensitive speech event unlike traditional lesson structures. A related study conducted by Nichols (1989) identifies the importance of grounding literacy in storytelling styles which come from the oral traditions of students. Conducted in South Carolina, the study provides a description of oral traditions that children from a small rural community bring to the classroom and share using distinctive styles of storytelling. Nichols found that the themes and motifs contained in the oral narratives appeared in the student’s writing in the classroom as well. This fact leads the researcher to state that literacy has a connection to orality. Nichols concludes that classroom use of culturally familiar knowledge from oral traditions can be the basis for reading and writing instruction under the premise that cultural literacy can be manipulated to produce academic literacy. Culturally appropriate instructional approaches can be devised based on the student’s storytelling methods and their familiarity with traditional folkloric themes.
It is interesting to note that the writing of the students in the South Carolina study contained references to the stories that have been passed down to them through an oral medium. This is an indication that students enjoy writing (or reading) about the familiar. Prior knowledge is the underlying motivator (Spencer, 1988). More evidence to support this point is found in a study done by Moll and Diáez (1987). These researchers write about the approach they developed to assist Spanish-speaking students with their writing skills. Through extensive ethnographic research they found that students were very concerned about social issues relating to their lives. Thus the researchers developed writing topics concerning these issues and found that significant changes in the writing of the students came about when they wrote about societal problems and their relationship to their own lives. In the same way that the South Carolina students include well-known themes from stories they have prior knowledge of in their own writing, so these students are motivated to write when their writing topics focus on community-based knowledge, with which they have substantial experience. These students write more, organize their writing better, and write with greater coherence. Their writing experiences are made academically relevant when a different perspective, one which takes student’s background and culture into consideration, is employed to teach them.

The contribution of prior knowledge to comprehension is the basis for the question posed by a group of researchers from a northern U.S. state (McKeown, Beck, Sinatra, and Loxterman, 1992). The purpose of their study was to investigate the effects of background knowledge in a content area on comprehension. These researchers divided 48 fifth graders into two groups and prepared instructional modules for each on the French and Indian War.
understanding the text to be read, the other module did not provide any background knowledge. The results show that the group receiving the background knowledge was more successful in remembering the most important information from the text, was better able to respond to key questions, and had a better grasp of the underlying motives of the people involved in the war.

Comprehending text, say Anderson and Pearson, "is the interaction of new information with old knowledge" (1984, p. 37). It is precisely this point that researchers Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez, and Lucas (1990) demonstrate in their study conducted with Mexican-American students in Northern California. The study focused on the strategies the students used when reading English and Spanish and the knowledge sources they called upon in order to construct meaning from what they read. Among their findings is evidence that student's familiarity with the genre affects their comprehension. Reports, an unfamiliar genre for these students are the most difficult for them to comprehend and recall. The students performed best on the Spanish story which was taken from a basal text used in Mexico. Familiarity with the story itself as well as with the story genre accounts for the better understanding the students have in this genre.

Students relying on their store of old knowledge are better able to interpret new knowledge on the basis of the old. Thus, meaning making is achieved. Furthermore, these students draw upon cultural knowledge with which to interpret text and this type of knowledge allows them to interact with the text more successfully.
Summary of the Review

This review begins by detailing early and recent literature demonstrating methods of collecting oral traditions for preservation and analysis. Early collections are anthropologically based and rely on a one-on-one interview between the researcher and the contributor. Literature gathering techniques in the 1930's stressed accuracy in text rendition, while embellished and rewritten oral texts were common in the 1950's. By the 1970's, oral renditions of traditional literature are transcribed and presented using the colloquialisms and code-switching the informant speaks with at the tale's original telling.

Recent oral literature collections present stories and other narratives which are transcribed in the informant's language, then translated into English. The one time one-on-one interview is still utilized, although some researchers believe that several interviews are necessary in order to capture true insight into the cultural traditions of the people. Some recent collections take an ethnographic approach. Others are compilations of recordings gathered by other scholars and grouped together as evidence of a particular theory or hypothesis. Collections have also been published that forego analysis and educational or anthropological theory. These sorts of collections are attempts to preserve oral traditions in print for future generations for the sake of the culture’s oral existence.

In discussing the relationship between the academic use of oral traditions and reading comprehension, early theories of reading are discussed which demonstrate most markedly the evolution of reading theory from thirty years ago to the present. There is discussion of the “bottom-up” view of reading as well as the audiolingual approach and the psycholinguistic approach. The importance
of culturally specific knowledge in assisting student comprehension is
discussed in relation to each theory mentioned.

The findings in several recent studies reveal that reading comprehension
among language minority students increases when culturally appropriate
materials are utilized. Reading research has shown that prior knowledge in a
particular genre or area of study is important for learning to occur. Students
must be allowed to relate old knowledge to the new so that new knowledge is
comprehensible. Furthermore, life experiences and language experiences
students bring to the classroom can be valid learning sources when teachers
build upon this intact knowledge. Student's present knowledge can best be
used when they are taught with culturally appropriate materials which relate to
past experiences they have had.

Studies conducted in the classroom provide evidence which demonstrates
the connection between greater comprehension and culturally sensitive
materials and teaching approaches. Traditional classroom materials and
teaching structures are put aside in these studies and students are given the
opportunity to learn from that which is culturally familiar. In some studies, this
familiarity is based on the oral traditions which are a part of the students culture
and upbringing. Cultural literacy can be a stepping stone to academic literacy
when culturally appropriate materials and teaching strategies are developed to
accommodate it.
CHAPTER THREE
DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research project will focus on providing a probable answer to the research question presented earlier. That question specifically asks what the relationship is between culturally appropriate knowledge and reading comprehension. The following methodology will describe the plan to be used to collect the data necessary to answer this question. Through careful analysis and observation, knowledge will be gained that will support the classroom use of culturally sensitive and familiar reading materials in order for language minority students to comprehend text.

Data Needed

In order to systematically answer the research question, it is necessary to have classroom reading material available which is culturally appropriate. Being that the emphasis in this project is on oral traditions, the reading materials used are transcriptions of orally transmitted stories, all of which come from the Mexican culture and which will be read by Mexican children (see Appendix A). Secondly, data will be collected that can evaluate student’s reading comprehension. This data will come from three sources:

1) response journal writings,
2) observation of paired student sharings of response journal entries, and
3) researcher participation with paired student sharings.

The three data sources will be collectively analyzed. For each story read, five evaluation points will measure comprehension. These points, arranged in checklist form, will determine student’s written and oral ability to:

1) make reference to one or two events in each story,
2) discuss story character traits in relation to the questions asked for each story,
3) discuss author and character motivations in each story,
4) relate each story to their own lives to arrive at their own interpretations,
5) go beyond literal story events and infer, predict, and analyze story meanings according to personal story interpretations.

Sample Evaluation Checklists are given in Spanish and in English in Appendix C. In addition, selected questions students will respond to are included in Appendix B. Called Response Prompts, these questions help students respond in personally significant ways to the ideas, situations, and characters they read about.

Subjects

The subjects of this study are four second grade students whose primary language is Spanish and most of whom were born in Mexico. Dioselina, age 7, is a very quiet, subdued child who had just recently begun reading fluently in Spanish. Her writing skills are emerging slowly. She lives with her natural parents and a younger sister, age 4. Liobardo, age 7, comes from a family of 3 brothers and 2 sisters. He is the youngest and was born in the United States. His parents do not attend parent conferences, respond to notes sent home, or return telephone calls. Some negative influence has affected Liobardo's life, either at school or at home as is evidenced by his constant swearing and negative remarks about children of other races. He can be a good student when motivated to be so, thus his inclusion in this study. He has a very vivid imagination as well. Rosario, also age 7, is an excellent student. She reads
and writes in Spanish and has begun showing great interest in reading and writing in English. She doubts herself at times, however, and tends to conform instead of venturing forth on her own. Her parents are very involved with Rosario’s education and see to it that all homework is completed and returned. Rosario has a 2 year old sister. Juan, age 8, is another bright student. He reads and writes in Spanish and is competent in all areas of study. He is a quiet, small boy who loves to draw and color. His mother and father are also involved with Juan’s education at home. Juan’s father comes in occasionally, asking for a page or two of homework in English so he and Juan both can improve their English skills.

The four students in this study will receive the same curriculum to determine the relationship between the use of culturally appropriate materials and comprehension among Spanish-speaking students. When measuring comprehension, each student’s journal entries and oral responses will be evaluated separately in accordance with the five evaluation points contained in the checklist. Data from each student will then be compared.

**Methodology**

A case study approach was chosen as the best approach to answer the research question. Case study approaches have provided sound documentation of effective educational practices among linguistically and culturally diverse students (Garcia, 1991). “The results of these studies,” says Garcia, “do provide important insights with regard to general instructional organization, literacy development, academic achievement and the perspectives of students…” (p. 3). Anderson (1990) says that a case study
approach concerns itself with how things happen and why they happen. Explanation, according to him, is the emphasis. He also states that a wide range of methodologies is important, as is the need for multiple sources of evidence.

With Anderson’s words in mind, this project will utilize several methodologies within the case study approach to measure reading comprehension. Response journals are one way this will be achieved. After each of three stories has been read, students will be asked to respond to the story in writing. The students will be asked a question taken from the Response Prompts in Appendix B, which challenge students to call upon their personal feelings to devise meaning. Parson states:

... the search for meaning starts with [student’s] own feelings and experiences. They need help to chart and explore those beginnings and then to “step-back” and analyze them. They need to see the study of literature as an opportunity to learn more about themselves and the world around them (p. 12).

Another means to gather information will be through observation of student paired sharings in which students share what they wrote and verbally respond to each other’s ideas and feelings. Lastly, the researcher will directly participate with students as they share their writings. This participant/observer method, used in ethnographic as well as case studies, is an ideal method for teachers because teachers have access to group activities and can observe students from the closest range (Woods, 1986). As participant/observer, teachers can keep detailed records of objective observations and subjective feelings regarding student comprehension (Spradley, 1980, as cited by Galindo, 1988). In addition, all interactions will be tape recorded for future reference to a particular session.
Data Collection

Data will be generated and collected with the use of three stories from Mexican oral traditions. The stories, recorded and transcribed into Spanish, are, *La China Poblana, El sapo, and La fortuna de Juanito*. After students read each story, response prompts will be given pertaining to the following areas:

1) literal retellings of story events,
2) traits exhibited by story characters,
3) author and character motivations,
4) relation of story aspects to personal experiences,
5) inference, prediction, and speculation based on student's own story interpretations.

Students will record their responses in their journals. Different questions will be asked for each story and for each data source, i.e., journals, paired sharings, and researcher participation. Response journals will be collected after each story and analyzed for evidence of reading comprehension based on the five evaluation points on the checklist. Researcher notes and tape recordings will be analyzed and interpreted as well. Students will read one story a week.

Intervention

Students will read aloud one story a week as a group with the teacher. The teacher will not do any direct teaching per se, but instead will act as facilitator and guide students through the readings. Students will be allowed to openly make comments, ask questions, or make predictions throughout the course of the story as they wish.

Before beginning the research, a simple survey will be taken pertaining to
the student’s knowledge of what oral traditions are and whether they can name or tell some of the oral traditions they are familiar with. In addition, to preview the three stories they will read for this project, another survey will be taken to determine which students have previously heard these stories.

After each story, the teacher will explain the activity in which they will engage, that of journal writing, paired sharing of journal writings, or participant/observer paired sharing. The response prompt will then be given orally, discussed to ascertain that students understand the question, then written on the board for students to refer to. Students will be further instructed to write as much or as little at they want, to use inventive spelling, and to draw a picture of what they wrote about after they are done writing.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Type of Analysis

In this chapter, data is analyzed to measure comprehension. The results are discussed in order to answer the research question:

- What is the relationship between culturally appropriate knowledge found in the oral traditions of Mexican students and student's reading comprehension?

As has been indicated earlier, a case study approach is being utilized to more clearly understand this relationship. Each student, therefore, will be evaluated individually based on his or her answers to the response prompts and whether or not they meet the Checklist criteria for comprehension. An in-depth look at student writings will organize the date into four student portfolios that will be compared and interpreted later.

Data will also be organized around three data collection sources in which:
1) students write in response journals which are analyzed for comprehension based on the Evaluation Checklist,
2) paired sharings of response journal entries are observed to determine if varied perspectives on each story will positively affect comprehension as measured by the Checklist,
3) researcher participates with student interactions in a paired sharing group, asking questions and sharing ideas as the students do, and basing comprehension on the same Evaluation Points found on the Checklist.

Table 1 outlines the three data collection sources and the response prompts given for each story. Included here as well are the evaluation points which pertain to each question. Student responses will be considered "correct" if the
coinciding evaluation points can be met with responses to either question. Subsequently, comprehension will have been achieved if the evaluation points are satisfied.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY</th>
<th>DATA SOURCE</th>
<th>RESPONSE PROMPTS</th>
<th>EVALUATION POINTS SATISFIED WITH A &quot;CORRECT&quot; RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La China Poblana</td>
<td>Response journal</td>
<td>1. What was your favorite part of the story? Tell what it is and why you liked it.</td>
<td>*1. Make reference to 1 or 2 events in story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. When you think about this story, what picture or image comes to your mind?</td>
<td>4. Relate story to own life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El sapo</td>
<td>Paired sharings of response journal entries</td>
<td>1. Who do you think was the most important character in the story? Why do you think so?</td>
<td>5. Infer, predict, or analyze according to personal interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Is there a character in the story you think would make a good friend? Tell why.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La fortuna de Juanito</td>
<td>Researcher participation in paired sharing groups</td>
<td>1. What does this story remind you of in your own life?</td>
<td>1. Make reference to 1 or 2 events in story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. If you were the teacher, what would you want your students to remember about this story?</td>
<td>3. Discuss author or character motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Relate story to own life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Infer, predict, or speculate according to personal interpretations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*numbers coincide with numbered points on Evaluation Checklist*
Results

Analysis of each student portfolio shows that all four students achieved comprehension based on the Evaluation Checklist devised for this project for most of the story questions. The checklists for each student are contained in this chapter. The results of this analysis indicate that culturally appropriate materials positively affect the reading comprehension of Spanish-speaking language minority students. Student responses, transcribed or rewritten for the purposes of this project, will reveal that this is so, as will interpretation of these results.

Other noteworthy results include the amount of writing the students were able produce as compared to the writing they did for stories which were not from their oral traditions. Rosario mentioned that it was easier for her to write about La fortuna de Juanito because she had heard it so many times before. This undoubtedly contributed to comprehension but could be true of any story, whether it be culturally appropriate or not. The difference became most marked when Dioselina stated that she enjoyed studying in school the same stories she listened to at home. She felt glad that she could discuss the story she had studied in school with her parents without having to retell them the story. Thus the fact that Dioselina and the others have a connection between home and school in the form of oral traditions seems to have made reading more enjoyable for them and comprehension attainable when linked to their own experiences.

Another significant result was the way the students were able to think about the stories in a manner that caused them to actively apply their prior knowledge and experience to the questions asked. Their responses were enthusiastic and fluent, lending support to their comprehension of most aspects of the stories.
This fact pointed to their ability to be critical readers.

**Case Study: Juan**

The survey taken before students began reading the stories revealed that Juan had previously heard *La China Poblana* and *La fortuna de Juanito* and had heard tales similar to *El sapo* before. All the stories, he said, were told to him by his grandfather. A look at Juan’s Evaluation Checklist in figure 3 shows that Juan met the criteria for comprehension for each story.

In Juan’s journal responses to the first story, *La China Poblana*, Juan was able to make reference to two literal events in the story which are Catarina being lost at sea and the holy men’s predictions that this meant she was to travel to distant countries. Juan also discussed the character traits of Catarina, saying she was brave, and was able to relate the story to his own life by stating that he would like to travel to different countries like Catarina did. Juan inferred that Catarina was scared while lost at sea in the darkness, although the story does not explicitly state that she was scared or that it was dark. The question was: What was your favorite part of this piece? Tell what it was and why you liked it. Juan’s response was:

La parte que me gustó más era cuando Catarina se perdió en el mar. Me hace que tenía mucho miedo cuando estaba sola en el agua y el oscuro. Pero era valiente. Y los hombres santos dijeron que ahora Catarina iba a viajar por todo el mundo y eso es que pasó porque comenzó en China entonces vivía en México. Me gustó esta parte porque me gustaría viajar a otros países a ver el mundo y la gente diferente.

The part I liked best was when Catarina was lost at sea. It seems to me that she was very afraid when she was in the water and the dark. But she was brave. And the holy men said that now Catarina was going to travel all over the world and that is what happened because she began in China, then she lived in Mexico. And I liked that part because I would like to travel to
other countries to see the world and different people.

Juan’s second journal entry in response to the second question signified that he was able to relate the story to his own life experiences by relating the miracle he believed happened in his life to the one which happened to Catarina. He was also able to infer that a miracle from God was responsible for the flowers appearing on Catarina’s dress. The story does not say an actual miracle took place, but Juan inferred this based on his own story meanings. The question was: When you think about this story, what picture or image comes to your mind? Juan wrote:

Imagine que puedo ver que alegre estaba cando encontré mi patines. Un día hace mucho los perdí y mi mamá y yo rezamos a los santos pa’ que pudieramos encontrarlos. Era un milagro como el milagro que pasó a la falda de Catarina. Yo creo que Dios puso esas flores en su falda y los santos me ayudaron encontrar mis patines.

I imagine that I can see how happy I was when I found my skates. One day a long time ago I lost them and my mother and I prayed to the saints so that we could find them. It was a miracle like the miracle that happened to the skirt of Catarina. I think that God put those flowers on her skirt and the saints helped me find my skates.

For the second story, El sapo, data was collected through observation of Juan sharing his journal responses with Rosario. As his checklist indicates, Juan’s responses satisfied the evaluation points for this story as well (see figure 3). The first question was: Who do you think was the most important character in the story? Why do you think so? Juan’s written response was:

Antonia era la persona más importante en este cuento. Era la culpa eya que su hijo murió. Ella debería a decirle más fuerte a su hijo que cosas malas pueden pasar si alguien mata a un sapo. Se me hace que eya tenía tanto miedo que no estaba pensando muy bien y por esto su hijo no podía parar con las bromas que dijo. Antonia sabía que algo malo iba a pasar y no sabía como salvar a su hijo.
Antonia was the most important person in this story. It was her fault that her son died. She should have told her son more strongly about the bad things that can happen if someone kills a toad. It seems to me that she was so scared that she was not thinking straight and because of this, her son couldn't stop making jokes. Antonia knew that something bad was going to happen and she didn't know how to save her son.

In the paired sharing group, Juan read his response to Rosario. She read hers as well, then the two began discussing each other's answers. Through Juan's written response and his oral interaction with Rosario, it was determined that Juan made reference to two events, those of the son's death and the killing of the toad. He also discussed the character traits of Antonia and inferred that she was too scared to "think straight," thus her reason for not convincing her son to believe in the evilness of the toad.

The second question for El sapo was: Is there a character in the story you think would make a good friend? Tell why. Juan wrote, and later read, this response:

No me gustaría tener ninguno de éstas personas en este cuento como amigo. El ijo no hace caso a su madre y siempre dice bromas y se riye cuando debe estar serio porque no le ace que pasa. Y Antonia siempre yora y no sabe come salvar a su ijo de la máhica del sapo. Y el sapo es feo y malo y la única cosa que quiere acer es matar a la gente porque esto le ace más grande y más fuerte.

I would not like any of the characters in this story as friends. The son did not mind his mother and he always tells jokes and is laughing when he should be serious because he does not care what happens. And Antonia is always crying and she does not know how to save her son from the toad's magic. And the toad is ugly and bad and the only thing he wants to do is kill people because this makes him greater and stronger.

In this response, Juan discussed the character traits of all three characters; the son, who is misbehaved and tells jokes at inappropriate times, Antonia, who cries and does not know how to protect her son from the toad's magic, and the
toad, who is ugly and mean. Juan also describes the son’s motivation for telling jokes about serious matters by saying that the son doesn’t care what happens to him. Lastly, he makes an inference about the toad’s motivations by writing that he only likes to kill people for the greatness and strength it receives from killing.

For the last story, *La fortuna de Juanito*, the researcher participated with Juan and Rosario’s sharing group. Juan shared his previously written response to the question: What does this story remind you of in your own life? Juan’s response was:

Este cuento me acerca pensar de algunos primos míos que siempre tienen juguetes mejores que los que yo tengo. En el cuento, Juanito siempre tiene cosas mejores que sus hermanos mayores y los hermanos se enojan como yo me enojo cuando Sergio mi primo siempre se ríe de mí porque no tengo “Nintendo” o “Sega Genesis.” En el cuento los hermanos tratan de tener los mejores regalos para el Rey pero Ranita siempre acelos regalos porque ella es una ranita mágica.

This story makes me think of some cousins I have that always have better toys than the ones I have. In this story, Juanito always had better things than his older brothers and the brothers get mad like I get mad when Sergio my cousin always laughs at me because I don’t have “Nintendo” or “Sega Genesis.” In the story, the brothers try to have the best gifts for the King but Little Frog always makes the gifts because she is a magic little frog.

Juan again read this entry in his sharing group, of which the researcher was a member for this question. Analysis of this entry revealed that Juan was successful in making reference to story events in that he mentions that Juanito is able, through the magic of Ranita, to present better gifts than his brothers to their father, the King. He also mentions the anger the brothers feel at being bested by their younger brother. Secondly, Juan related an event in the story to an event in his own life by writing about the similarity between the anger he
feels about not having the toys his cousin has and the anger Juanito’s brothers feel about the inferiority of their gifts as compared to Juanito’s.

Juan’s oral responses regarding this prompt also satisfied an Evaluation Point on the Checklist. In the course of the paired sharing interaction, Juan was asked if he felt sorry for the older brothers. The following is a portion of the tape recorded conversation that ensued in which Juan clearly analyzes the story events in light of his personal life experiences:

Researcher: "¿Tienes lástima para los hermanos, Juan? “Do you feel sorry for the brothers, Juan?"

Juan: Pues, sí, po’que quieren que su padre sea alegre pero cada vez que les dan un regalo, el regalo de Juanito es mejor.
Well, yes, because they want their father to be happy but every time they give him a gift, Juanito’s gift is better.

Researcher: ¿Qué te gustaría pasar en vez de que pasó en el cuento? What would you like to happen instead of what happened in the story?

Juan: Me gustaría que Juanito dijera a sus hermanos que no quería enojarlos y si comenzaban a tratar Juanito mejor y no reírse de él, pues, Juanito pudiera compartir con ellos la mágica de Ranita. (pause) Yo hiciera la misma cosa, ya sé, po’que no es cosa buena estar enojado con su familia.
I would like for Juanito to tell his brothers that he did not want to make them mad and if they started to treat Juan better and not laugh at him, well, Juanito would share Little Frog’s magic with them. I would do the same thing because it’s not a good thing to be mad at your family.

The last question for La fortuna de Juanito was answered in written form in the student’s response journals, then discussed in groups. The researcher
again joined Juan and Rosario’s group and listened as Juan read his response to the question: If you were the teacher, what would you want your students to remember about this story? Juan wrote:

La gente debe amar a los que están en su familia y no reyirse de las cosas que acen o los amigos que tienen. Los padres deben amar a sus hijos lo mismo y no amar un hijo más que otro.

People should love those that are in your family and not laugh at the things they do or the friends they have. The parents should love their children the same and not love one child more than another.

Juan touched upon author motivation with this response and further gave evidence of satisfying this evaluation point when he stated:

Juan: Se me hace que este cuento se trata más de la familia de una ranita que se cambia a una princesa.

It seems to me that this story is more about the family than a little frog that changes into a princess.

This remark also demonstrates that Juan made a personal interpretation of the underlying meaning of the story based on the meanings he created out of his own feelings.
NAME_________________________________________

Figure 3
EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Juan

### EVALUATION POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION POINTS</th>
<th>LA CHINA POBLANA</th>
<th>EL SAPO</th>
<th>LA FORTUNA DE JUANITO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to make reference to 1 or 2 story events</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>Question 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ability to discuss character traits</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q2 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to discuss author or character motivations</td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q1</td>
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<td>4. Ability to relate story to own life</td>
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<td>5. Ability to infer, predict, or speculate on story meanings according to personal interpretations</td>
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- indicates that students were not required to fulfill this evaluation point for this story.
Case Study: Rosario

Rosario had previously been told all three stories. The results of Rosario’s comprehension evaluation can be seen in figure 4. In all, Rosario’s Checklist indicates that she successfully answered most of the questions, thus satisfying most of the evaluation points. It was difficult for Rosario to answer the questions requiring her to discuss author or character motivations, as figure 4 reveals.

Beginning with La China Poblana, Rosario’s written response to the question asking her to discuss her favorite part of the story was:

La parte que me gustó más era cuando las flores se aparecieron en la falda de Catarina. No sé cómo se pusieron ay, pero creo que Dios las puso ay porque cosas así no pasan si Dios no lo hace y yo pienso que me gustó esta parte porque me gustan las flores y estar alegre todo el tiempo como Catarina estaba alegre cuando vió las flores en su vestido.

The part I liked best was when the flowers appeared on Catarina’s skirt. I don’t know how they got there but I think God put them there because things like that don’t happen if God does not do it and I think that I liked this part because I like flowers and being happy all the time like Catarina was happy when she saw the flowers on her dress.

The references Rosario made to story events were the appearance of the flowers on Catarina’s dress and the fact that this event made Catarina very happy to behold. Rosario also relates the story to her own life by saying that she is similar to Catarina in that she likes flowers and enjoys being happy. In addition, Rosario was able to infer that God was responsible for making the flowers appear on Catarina’s dress according to her personal interpretation of story meaning.

The second question for this story, that of the image that comes to mind when thinking about this story, Rosario answered in this fashion:

Pienso de Dios cuando leo este cuento porque Dios ayudó a Catarina mucho en este cuento. Mi papi dice que era un milagro que pasó a Catarina cuando no murió en el mar y cuando su vestido se cambió de
blanco a flores. Dios hace que cosas buenas y bonitas pasan, dice mi papi.

I think of God when I read this story because God helped Catarina a lot in this story. My father says that what happened to Catarina was a miracle when she did not die in the sea and when her dress changed from white to flowers. God does good and beautiful things, my father says.

This response reveals that Rosario had knowledge of story events in that she mentions Catarina being lost at sea and again, makes reference to the flowers appearing on Catarina's dress. Rosario also interpreted the story based on her own beliefs, saying that God was responsible for helping Catarina through the miracles he performed for her benefit. In her paired sharing interaction with Juan, Rosario repeated her belief in miracles and stated that she wished God would perform a miracle for her as He did, in her opinion, for Catarina.

For the story El sapo, Rosario thought the most important character was Antonia, the mother. She explained why in her second journal entry:

La mamá que se yama Antonia era la más importante. Las madres tienen que cuidar a sus hijos. Antonia quiso cuidar a su hijo pero no sabía cómo hacerle creer que el sapo era malo. El sapo mató al hijo. Pero la madre hizo que esto pasó porque no cuidó a su hijo muy bien. Se durmió. La caja no era bastante fuerte. El sapo entró de todos modos.

The mother named Antonia was the most important. Mothers have to watch their children. Antonia wanted to watch her son but she did not know how to make him believe the toad was evil. The toad killed the son. But the mother made this happen because she did not watch her son very well. She fell asleep. The box was not strong enough. The toad got in anyway.

Rosario was able to relate only one story event in this entry, which was that Antonia fell asleep when she was guarding the box where her son slept to protect him from being harmed by the toad. Most of her response, however, was inference and speculation based on her own story interpretations. She
inferred that Antonia did not know how to make the son believe in the evil toad, that the toad killed the son, and that the son’s death was Antonia’s fault.

Rosario did not discuss character motivation in this entry, nor was she able to elaborate on a question Juan asked her relating to the son’s reasons for not wanting to believe that killing a toad was a bad omen. The following excerpt from the paired sharing activity between Rosario and Juan, was transcribed as follows:

Juan: Y qué crees tu que... era... que crees... ¿porque no quería creer el hijo que cosas malas iban a pasar cuando mató a la ranita?
And what do you think... was... what do you think... why didn’t the son want to believe that bad things were going to happen when he killed the frog?

Rosario: ¡Era sapo, no rana!
It was a toad, not a frog!

Juan: Ah, sí. Pues, (pause) el sapo era malo pero el hijo no creía que era algo malo a matarlo. ¿Por qué?
Oh, yes. Well, (pause) the toad was bad but the son didn’t believe that it was something bad to kill it. Why?

Rosario: Reía y hizo bromas. Pero no sé porque.
He laughed and made jokes. But I don’t know why.

Juan did not pursue the answer to his question any further. But in this short exchange, Rosario clearly was not successful in identifying with the son to speculate and discover the motivations behind his disbelief.

Rosario’s answer to the second question for this story, which asked which character would make a good friend, contained reference to story events and character traits as well as speculation and prediction, but again, did not contain information about character motivation. She wrote:

Antonia, no. El hijo, no. El sapo, ¡NO!! No me gustaría tener éstas
personas como amigos. No me gusta gente que matan a animales, como el hijo. No me gustan madres así. Y no me gustan animalitos que son malos y que hacen mágica que no es bueno y que parecen como monstruos y asustan a la gente. El sapo asustó a la madre y debe parar en haciendo eso porque se va a morir un día de veras entonces él va a ser el que es asustado.

Antonia, no. The son, no. The toad, NO!! I wouldn't like to have these people as friends. I don't like people who kill animals, like the son. I don't like those kinds of mothers. And I don't like small animals that are bad and who make bad magic and who look like monsters and scare people. The toad scared the mother and it should stop doing that because it is going to die one day for sure then it will be the scared one.

The story La fortuna de Juanito reminded Rosario of her best friend. She answered the question about what the story reminded her of in her own life by writing:


This story makes me think of a friend of mine. She is older and she doesn't go to this school. Her name is Judid. We play every day at my house. Little Frog and Juanito played like us. Little Frog was a good friend. Juan loved her very much. He didn't mind that she was a frog. Judid is a good friend also. She plays nicely with me and she doesn't hit me. Little Frog did the same. She loved Juanito.

This response demonstrates that Rosario likened the friendship of Juanito and Ranita to the friendship she shares with her friend Judid, thus she satisfied the Evaluation Point of relating the story to her own life. She also touched upon story events in that she mentioned that Juanito and Ranita played together and that Juanito loved her regardless of being a frog. Furthermore, Rosario was able to infer that Ranita was a good friend because of the way she treated
Juanito.

In the tape recorded paired sharing activity, Rosario was able, for this story and this question, to discuss character motivation unlike before. She was asked by the researcher why she considered Ranita such a good friend. Her response was:

Ranita tiene que ser una amiga buena porque . . . pues, es rana y si quiere cambiarse a princesa . . . y es de veras princesa porque ya oí este cuento y sabía que se iba a cambiar a princesa. Pero tiene que portarse bien y hacer que Juanito la ama porque . . . co . . . como . . . no se va a poder cambiar a princesa si alguien no la ama y si nadie quiere casarse con ella. ¡Se queda ranita si nadie la ama!

Little Frog had to be a good friend because . . . well, she’s a frog and if she wants to change into a princess . . . and it’s true that she’s a princess because I’ve already heard this story and I knew that she was going to change into a princess. But she has to behave and make Juanito love her because . . . how . . . how . . . she won’t be able to change into a princess if someone doesn’t love her and if no one wants to marry her. She’ll stay a frog if no one loves her!

With this response, Rosario demonstrated that she was able to go beyond the text and determine underlying character motivations, thus she was successful in meeting this Evaluation Point for this story.

Rosario answered the last question for this story by saying that if she were the teacher, she would want her students to remember that stories such as this one were entertaining but that magic spells and characters such as the ones in this story were not real. It was unclear what Rosario was trying to say when she read her journal entry out loud, but her meaning became evident when she explained orally what she meant. She wrote:

... los cuentos así son buenos a leer. Me hacen reír o me acen triste. Las personas no son de veras y la mágica no es de veras, es de mentiritas. No ay reyes y no ay brujas y no ay ranitas que pueden hablar. Pero cuentos así son chistosos a leer.
... stories such as this one are good to read. They make me laugh or they make me sad. The characters are not real and magic is not real, it's a little lie. There are no kings and no witches and no little frogs that can talk. But stories such as this one are funny to read.

This entry does not make reference to most of the evaluation points required for comprehension for this question as the Evaluation Checklist requires. Rosario’s response is mostly related to her own account of fantasy and reality, thus she was given credit for being able to analyze the story according to her own ideas (see Rosario’s Checklist, figure 4).
EVALUATION CHECKLIST

NAME: Rosario

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION POINTS</th>
<th>LA CHINA POBLANA</th>
<th>EL SAPO</th>
<th>LA FORTUNA DE JUANITO</th>
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<td>1. Ability to make reference to 1 or 2 story events</td>
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- indicates that students were not required to fulfill this evaluation point for this story.
Case Study: Liobardo

Liobardo successfully reached comprehension, in most areas of evaluation as measured by the Evaluation Checklist, for all stories. As his responses indicate, Liobardo’s ability to detail the relation between the stories and his own life was weak. The responses dealing with character traits and character motivations were the strongest, revealing Liobardo’s success with character analysis. His Evaluation Checklist is found in figure 5. Liobardo had previously heard all three stories.

Liobardo’s favorite part of *La China Poblana* was the appearance of the flowers on Catarina’s dress. His journal response satisfied all the evaluation points, even the ones on character traits and character motivations, which were not required for this question, except for the point on relating the story to his own life. Liobardo’s entry said:


I liked the part at the end. Catarina’s dress grew flowers. God put them on the dress. Catarina was sad. She missed her country. The flowers made her happy. She thought of her country when she saw the flowers then she was not sad. Now she wanted to stay in Mexico. She was a good person who liked helping the children. She was friendly.

The story events Liobardo referred to were the appearance of the flowers and the fact that Catarina missed her homeland. He also mentioned Catarina’s goodness and friendliness, and stated that she was motivated to stay in Mexico now that she had the flowers on her dress to remind her of home.

Finally, Liobardo inferred that God was responsible for the flower’s appearance
on Catarina's dress according to his personal interpretation of the story.

Liobardo was equally successful with meeting the evaluation points required for the second question for this story. In his response to the question about the image that comes to mind when reading this story, Liobardo made a brief reference to his own life, but did not give much elaboration on its connection to the storyline. He wrote:

Las flores aparecieron con relámpago y trueno. Pienso en esto. Imagino esto. Los ninyos ya se fueron. El relámpago no les pegaron. No dolía a Catarina tampoco cuando pegó el relámpago en su vestido. Catarina rezaba por las flores. Quería que le recordaba de su país. Amaba a Dios. Dios hizo que el relámpago pegara su vestido porque sabía que Catarina estaba triste. Me gustaría vivir en China.

The flowers appeared with lightening and thunder. I think of this. I imagine this. The children had already gone. The lightening did not hit them. It didn't hurt Catarina either when the lightening hit her dress. Catarina prayed for the flowers. She wanted to remember her country. She loved God. God made the lightening hit her dress because He knew that Catarina was sad. I would like to live in China.

Liobardo referred to the story event when the children were unable to cheer Catarina up, thus they left. Shortly after, the flowers appeared on her dress. He also discussed more of Catarina's traits in that he said that she prays and that she loves God. This could be considered inference as well, as the story does not explain this outright. Liobardo discussed character motivation in much the same way he did in the first response, implying that Catarina was praying for something to remind her of her home while she was so far away from it. His image of thunder and lightening, purely his own, suggested that he was able to speculate based on his own interpretations of how the flowers were made to appear. The mention of his desire to live in China verified that Liobardo remembered that Catarina was from China and although it was a vague
reference to his own life, he was given credit on the Evaluation Point on his Checklist for relating the story to his own life.

In the story *El sapo*, Liobardo thought the most important character was Antonia, the mother. He explained why in this response which he read aloud and discussed with Dioselina in their paired sharing group:

Antonia la mamá es más importante porque eliya es la mamá. Tuve que proteger a su hijo. No hizo eso. Amaba a su hijo pero el sapo era más fuerte que su amor. Penzaba y penzaba cómo proteger a su ijo pero su ijo no le escuchaba. Se puso nerviosa. Entonces estaba bien asustada cuando vio su hijo muerto. Pensaba que le iba a matar.

Antonia the mother is the most important because she is the mother. She had to protect her son. She did not do that. She loved her son but the toad was stronger than her love. She thought and thought of how to protect her son but her son would not listen to her. She got nervous. Then she was very scared when she saw her dead son. She thought that the toad was going to kill her.

Liobardo’s references to the fact that the son did not listen and that Antonia tried to protect her son signified he was able to recall story events. The character traits he identified were those of Antonia, saying that she loved her son, and that she was nervous about her son’s inability to take her warnings seriously. Liobardo discussed character motivation by inferring that Antonia’s love for her son caused her to think so hard about how to save him from the toad’s evil. The last sentence of this entry revealed that Liobardo was successful in predicting Antonia’s feelings had the story continued, saying, as the story did not, that Antonia was frightened for her own life upon seeing her dead son.

The responses Liobardo gave, both written and oral, in answer to the second question for this story indicated that he met all evaluation points necessary for comprehension for this story. Liobardo gave his opinion about which
character would make a good friend in this entry:

Antonia será amiga buena. Porque le gusta proteher a los que el sapo va a matar. El sapo era feo y mallo y vino para revenga. Antonia estaba cerca de la caja dondo el hijo dormía para que el sapo no se metiera. Amigos te ayudan así.

Antonia would make a good friend. Because she liked protecting those that the toad is going to kill. The toad was ugly and bad and he came for revenge. Antonia was near the box where her son slept so the toad would not get in. Friends help you like this.

This response revealed Liobardo was again able to retell story events by his mentioning of Antonia’s desire to protect. The character traits he discussed were the toad’s evilness and Antonia’s helpfulness. Antonia’s motivation for guarding the box, writes Liobardo, was so that the toad did not get inside. Furthermore, the toad’s motivation for getting in the box was revenge upon the son.

During the paired sharing of responses between Liobardo and Dioselina

Liobardo speculated on why the toad was so evil. He said,

Liobardo: ... y ese sapo era tan ... tan ... ma ... tan malo. ¿Cómo se pudiera hacer tan ... ta ... tan grande?
... and that toad was so ... so ... bad ... so bad. How could he make himself so ... so ... so big?

Dioselina: Yo no se.
I don’t know.

Liobardo: Oh, l’yo si sé! Es porque pues ... pues ... se nació debajo de una roca y la roca lo estaba haciendo así (moves hands to show that the rock was flattening the toad) y no le gustaba porque le dolía y ... y ... pues no le gustó y por eso se puso bien malo.
Oh, I know! It’s because well ... well ... he was born underneath a rock and the rock was making him like this (moves hands to show that the rock was flattening the toad) and he didn’t like that because it hurt and ... and ... well he didn’t like it and this is why he became so bad.
Liobardo’s journal entry for the first response prompt for *La fortuna de Juanito* detailed what this story reminded him of. In this question, however, students were supposed to write about what the story reminded them of in their own lives. Liobardo did not answer the question this way. Instead, he wrote:

Otras cosas más interesantes pudieran pasado a Juanito, no cosas como coser una camisa o que aprenda un perro. Estas cosas no son interesantes. Juanito quiso hacer cosas más interesantes. Juanito quiso usar la máica de Ranita para cambiar papel a dinero.

Other more interesting things could have happened to Juanito, not things like sewing a shirt or training a dog. These things are not interesting. Juanito wanted to do more interesting things. Juanito wanted to use Ranita’s magic to change paper into money.

Although Liobardo did not relate the story to his own life per se, his mention of magically making money out of paper denotes the importance he places on money in his own life. He was able with this response, however, to make reference to two story events which involved the tasks of sewing a shirt and training a dog as gifts for the King. Liobardo speculated about Juanito’s desire to perform more interesting tasks to win the King’s favor as well as his motives for wanting to take advantage of Ranita’s magic. The Evaluation Point Liobardo did not meet with this written response was the one pertaining to relating the story to his own life.

The participant/observer activity for this question gave the researcher an opportunity to prompt Liobardo into discovering a relation between this story and his own life. But despite the attempts made to stimulate Liobardo’s thinking, he could find no relation between any aspect of this story and his personal experiences.

The second entry Liobardo made for this story focused on friendship as being the idea he would most want others to remember about this story. His
journal entry contained these words:

... Juanito y Ranita eran amigos. El Rey y sus hijos eran amigos. La princesa y Juanito eran amigos. Le gustaban tener amigos porque necesitaban a alguien con quien hablar y estar. Debes tener amigos porque te ayudan y darte dinero. Ranita dio muchos regalos al Rey pero no dinero.

... Juanito and Little Frog were friends. The King and his sons were friends. The princess and Juanito were friends. They liked having friends because they needed someone to talk to and be with. You should have friends because they help you and they give you money. Little Frog gave many gifts to the King, but not money.

Liobardo discussed story events in this entry by stating that Ranita gave the King gifts. He discussed character motivation by saying that the characters liked having friends in order to have companionship. Lastly, Liobardo’s inference skills were evident when he wrote about the character’s friendships with each other, inferring by their actions in the story that they were indeed friends.

As in his other entries, Liobardo did not relate his writings about the story to his own life. Furthermore, observation of and participation in Liobardo’s and Dioselina’s paired sharing exchange revealed Liobardo’s inability to make story-life connections:

Researcher: ¿Las amistades en el cuento te recuerdan de amistades que tú has tenido? Do the friendships in the story remind you of the friendships you have had?

Liobardo: ¿Amistades? Friendships?

Researcher: Sí, un amistad es cuando tienes un amigo y Uds. comparten sus vidas uno con el otro. Yes, a friendship is when you have a friend and you two share your lives with each other.

Liobardo: Oh. Ah . . . no.
Researcher: ¿No? ¿Que no tienes amigos?
No? Don’t you have friends?

Liobado: Sí, pero no como en el cuento.
Yes, but not like in the story.
Figure 5
EVALUATION CHECKLIST

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- indicates that students were not required to fulfill this evaluation point for this story.
Case Study: Dioselina

Only two of the three stories were familiar to Dioselina. She had not heard *El sapo*. Dioselina’s checklist (figure 6) demonstrates that her comprehension of *La China Pobiana* and *La fortuna de Juanito*, the stories she knew, was greater than her comprehension of the other story, which she did not know. Dioselina’s success with the Evaluation Points on all stories, however, was haphazard at best. Her ability and inability to meet Evaluation Points varied from question to question.

The first journal entry Dioselina produced for *La China Pobiana* was in answer to the question about her favorite part of the story. She wrote:

> Me gustó la parte cando Catarina no estaba triste más. Echaba menos a su casa. Las flores eran bonitas para eya. Mi mami tien falda con flores también pero yo no, yo tengo blusa con rosas. Ahora Catarina va a cocer flores en cada veztido y bluza que tiene como los veztidos mexicanos.

I liked the part when Catarina was not sad anymore. She missed her house The flowers were pretty for her. My mother has a skirt with flowers too but I don’t, I have a blouse with roses. Now Catarina will sew flowers on each dress and blouse she has like the Mexican dresses.

Evaluation of this response reveals that Dioselina remembered one story event, that of Catarina missing her home. She also related the story to her own life by discussing the clothes she and her mother have that are like Catarina’s. Dioselina was also able to predict what would happen if the story continued by saying that Catarina would now sew flowers on all her clothes.

Dioselina’s response to the question about the image that came to her mind when reading this story was:

God. It is God who helped Catarina. He took away her sadness. I see the face of God. Catarina saw the flowers on her dress. She wanted to see more yellow roses. I would have liked to have seen yellow roses from God, too.

Dioselina referred to the event of the flower’s appearance in this entry. She speculated on Catarina’s desire to have seen more yellow roses appear, and she expressed her opinion that she would have liked to have seen yellow roses appear as well. This opinion was considered to be an example of relating the story to her own life.

Dioselina’s written response to who she thought was the most important character in El sapo was:

La mamá es la más importante. Porque ella sabía la verdad de que puede hacer un sapo malo. Sería mejor si ella ubiera pegado a su hijo porque estaba riéndose tanto. Y sería mejor si ella ubiera escondido su hijo en otra casa muy lejos del sapo.

The mother was the most important. Because she knew the truth about what an evil toad can do. It would have been better if she would have hit her son because he was laughing so much. And it would have been better if she would have hid her son in another house very far away from the toad.

In this response, Dioselina met only two Evaluation Points. She made a vague reference to a story event in that she said that the mother knew the truth about the toad’s capacity for evil. Secondly, she gave her own interpretation of what the mother should have done, thus satisfying the Point regarding the ability to infer, predict, or speculate. Dioselina’s oral responses to this question in the paired sharing activity with Liobardo touched upon character traits in this exchange:

Dioselina: Se me hace que la mamá era miedosa.
It seems to me that the mother was fearful.

Liobardo: Pero tú no escribiste eso, tú no loiste eso.
But you didn’t write that, you didn’t read that.

Dioselina: Yo sé. (pause) Pero es cierto. (pause) ¿Que no recuerdes que siempre estaba llorando?
I know. (pause) But it’s true. (pause) Don’t you remember that she was always crying?

Liobardo: Si. Lloraba y lloraba. Si. Miedosa.
Yes. She cried and cried. Yes. Fearful.

In the second question for El sapo, Dioselina satisfied even fewer Evaluation Points than in the first question for this story. The character she thought would make a good friend was the mother. She wrote:

La mamá pudiera ser mi amiga. Es buena. Y tiene amor. Y no le gustaba que el sapo pudiera lastimar al ijo. No le gustaba al sapo porque era tan malo.

The mother could be my friend. She is good. And she has love. And she didn’t like that the toad could hurt the son. She didn’t like the toad because he was so evil.

Dioselina was only able to discuss character traits in this entry. But in a conversation she had with Liobardo during the paired sharing component, she did relate the story to her own life when she said:

Dioselina: ... es como la mía. Porque mi mami me ama y es buena también porque nunca quiere que me lastimo y cuando me tumbo siempre quiere ver si salió sangre.
... she is like mine. Because my mother loves me and she is good also because she never wants me to get hurt and when I fall down she always wants to see if blood came out.

For the last story, La fortuna de Juanito, Dioselina was better able to satisfy the Evaluation Points through her oral answers than through her written entries in her journal. For the first question, for example, Dioselina wrote that this piece reminded her about a princess. But her journal entry failed to give enough
information to evaluate her on. She wrote:

Me recuerda de una princesa. Este cuento tiene una princesa. Yo era una princesa para Halloween. Tenía corona.

It reminds me of a princess. This story has a princess. I was a princess for Halloween. I had a crown.

By mentioning that she was a princess for Halloween qualified for relating the story to her own life, as lacking in elaboration as the mention was. Orally, however, Dioselina was able to elaborate on the idea that the story reminded her of a princess. As participant in the paired sharing group of Dioselina and Liobardo, the researcher was able to prompt Dioselina into giving a more detailed response so that comprehension could be more easily determined.

Researcher: ¿Te recuerda de una princesa? Díme de ésto.
It reminds you of a princess? Tell me about this.

Dioselina: El cuento tenía una princesa y me gustaría ser una princesa.
The story had a princess and I would like to be a princess.

Researcher: Díme por qué.
Tell me why.

Dioselina: Ah... ah... la... pues la princesa que era Ranita tuvo ropa bien bonita y suave y tuvo pelo bien peinado y... como joyas y anillos y corona y guantes y...
Ah... ah... la... well the princess who was Little Frog had very pretty and nice clothes and had nicely combed hair and... like jewels and rings and crown and gloves and...

Researcher: Y te gustaría tener éstas cosas de veras.
And you would like to have these things for real.

Dioselina: Uh huh. Y la Ranita quisiera cambiarse tanto porque ella recordaba cómo sentía vestirse tan elegante.
Uh huh. And Little Frog wanted to change herself so much
because she remembered how it felt to dress so elegantly.

This conversation revealed that Dioselina remembered the description of the princess' clothing and jewels, thus the Evaluation Point on story events was satisfied. In addition, she gave Ranita's motivation for wanting to change into a princess again as being Ranita desire to dress in such a fashion. This part of her answer also qualified for the ability to speculate, predict, or infer, as she is speculating that wanting elegant clothes was Ranita's motivation.

For her last journal entry, Dioselina was only able to write one sentence in response to the question about what she would want her students to remember about this piece. She wrote, "Que es un cuento bonito y que todos están contentos al fín del cuento" ("That it is a pretty story and that everyone is happy at the end of the story"). The fact that Dioselina referred to the story's happy ending minimally satisfied the Evaluation Point about making reference to a story event but nevertheless, she was given full credit. The remaining Points were not satisfied with this response, but in the paired sharing component in which the researcher participated, Dioselina was able to relate the story to her own life. In the researcher/student interaction, Dioselina said:

**Dioselina:** Me gusta cuando los cuentos terminan con todos contentos.
I like when stories end with everyone happy.

**Researcher:** ¿Me puedes decir por qué, Dioselina?
Can you tell me why, Dioselina?

**Dioselina:** Sí. Porque me gusta que cuando todos en mi familia están contentos como ahora porque mi papi ahora tiene trabajo y mi mami ahora está contenta.
Yes. Because I like it when everyone in my family is happy like now because my father now has work and my mother is now happy.
**Figure 6**

**EVALUATION CHECKLIST**

Dioselina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION POINTS</th>
<th>LA CHINA POBLANA</th>
<th>EL SAPO</th>
<th>LA FORTUNA DE JUANITO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to make reference to 1 or 2 story events</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
<td>Question 1 X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Question 2 X</td>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>Question 2 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ability to discuss character traits</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to discuss author or character motivations</td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ability to relate story to own life</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q2 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q2 X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ability to infer, predict, or speculate on story meanings according to personal interpretations</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
<td>Q1 X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q2 X</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- indicates that students were not required to fulfill this evaluation point for this story.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION
Interpretation

The results of this project match what the current research and literature recommend for increasing reading comprehension. The value of prior cultural knowledge and cultural familiarity with the reading material is realized in this study just as previous studies reached the same realization. Using culturally sensitive reading materials activates knowledge structures that have meaning for Spanish-speaking language minority students, thus greater comprehension ensues.

The literature dealing with whole language philosophies of meaning-gathering provide a strong foundation upon which to build a curriculum based on authentic text, cultural knowledge, potential meanings and interpretations, and the social nature of learning. Combined, good readers emerge.

The data this study produced coincides with current reading research concerning schema theory as well. Case study participants were allowed to interpret the stories they read on the basis of relevant prior experiences and were encouraged to evaluate story content by drawing upon their own beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Students were able to go beyond concrete thinking and became skilled at interpretive, critical thinking. Freedom to live within the story experience made this possible.

This data also attests to the validity of the Contextual Interaction Model. Teacher knowledge of culturally appropriate reading material such as stories from a culture's oral traditions, coupled with transcriptions of this oral literature for classroom use produced students who were willing to read, write, and
respond without intimidation. The outcome, as proven by the Evaluation Checklist, was comprehension in most areas.

Conclusions

Analysis of the data collected for this research project makes it possible to state that there is a positive relationship between the use of culturally appropriate reading materials and reading comprehension among elementary school age Spanish-speaking language minority students. Response journal entries as well as observation of student interactions with each other reveal that comprehension which goes beyond literal story retellings was achieved through these classroom techniques. When given the opportunity, the research shows that students were successful at applying what they knew to what they read. Subsequently, deeper, more analytical thinking emerged.

The cultural familiarity of the stories read combined with the whole language-based Reader Response approach to reading and writing produced efficient readers. The students were willing to take risks in sharing their personal experiences as related to what they read because they were continuously assured that all interpretations would be accepted. The response prompts served as guides around which students shaped their thinking. They also helped them analyze the works, make generalizations from them, to elaborate on what they read, and to draw thoughtfully supported conclusions.

Several similarities between the student's responses can be identified as being culturally-based. Each student, for example, believed that a miracle from God made the flowers appear on Catarina's dress in La China Poblana. The miracle is the climax of the story, although the story does not actually say that a
miracle took place. But all students were able to go beyond the text and, perhaps due to their families' beliefs in the existence of miracles, were able to infer that a miracle took place in the story. Juan and Rosario, in fact, refer to their parent's beliefs in miracles in the course of their writing.

The cultural belief that these students shared about the existence of miracles added to their understanding of the most significant story event and fueled their responses to the question. These responses, more interpretive and personal, nevertheless indicated that story meaning had been constructed based on cultural knowledge of miracles.

Another culturally-based similarity was observed in the repeated reference to God. Both Rosario and Dioselina wrote about God as the image that came to their minds when reading La China Pobiana. Similarly, Liobardo's image of thunder and lightning had to do with God as well. The student's socio-cultural familiarity with the topic of God allowed them to express themselves freely yet critically. The culturally appropriateness of the story contributed to this freedom which in turn led to their meaning-centered responses.

Culturally-based responses were found in the student's answers to the question about the most important character in El sapo. All four students wrote and spoke about Antonia, the mother in the story, as being the most important character. And all said, in one way or another, that her importance stemmed from the responsibility she had to use a more effective means to convince her son to believe in the evil the toad could do. That Antonia should have taken heavier precautions to protect her son was another idea that was seen in the student's responses. It could be that the student's cultural upbringing about the social status of women influenced their choice for the most important character.
It is interesting to see that all the students in some way blamed the mother for the son's death. Whether this is truly a cultural phenomena or not is uncertain, but it seems evident that the students have a view of women that sees them as being the ones who suffer because of their weaknesses.

In the question about the character who would make a good friend, both Juan and Rosario could find no redeeming qualities in any of the characters. They both stated that none of the characters would make good friends, giving similar reasons such as their dislike of people or animals who kill and dislike of evil magic. Juan and Rosario could have drawn their reasons for not wanting the characters as friends from cultural or familial standards of exemplary character traits for friends. The traits these characters had were probably not considered virtuous ones.

The belief in superstitions could have shaped some of the student’s comprehension of the story El sapo as well. Most of the students seemed to have accepted the possibility and even more so, the probability, that story events such as these could happen. This fact, added to their belief in what can happen to non-believers, contributed to their understanding of the story on a more literal level. At the same time, however, their interpretive skills were evident as they discussed Antonia’s responsibility to her son.

In the story La fortuna de Juanito, most of the students were able to make connections between the text and their own lives. Juan, in his response to the question about what he is reminded of when reading this story, discussed the relationship between Juanito and his brothers and himself and his cousins. Rosario, in the same question, discussed a special friendship and likened it to the friendship of Juanito and Ranita. Finally, Dioselina was reminded of the
princess costume she wore for Halloween that resembled the clothes and jewels of the princess in the story. Comprehension of the story was due, in part, to these sorts of connections between reader, real life, and the text. The similarities the students were able to find between story happenings and their lives allowed them the freedom to elaborate upon their ideas.

Examination of the four Checklists points to the conclusion that the students in this project were best able to answer comprehension questions based on literal story events and inference, prediction, and speculation. The thorough understanding of story events most likely came about due to their repeated hearing of the stories at home and the continued discussion of the stories at school. This familiarity made it possible, as evidenced by the data, to write about and discuss concrete story events with ease. The strength of the student's abilities in the areas of inference, prediction, and speculation seems to be linked to their strength in retelling story events. Their complete knowledge of the sequence of events allowed students to delve deeper into their own thoughts to arrive at different interpretations and to substantiate their own conclusions. Moreover, freedom of expression was augmented due to the use of stories which were culturally familiar.

The comprehension lessons given for each story incidentally produced visible improvement in student writing abilities as compared to writings they had previously done on stories which were not culturally familiar. The combination of lessons based on stories which the students knew and enjoyed hearing again and again and appropriate response prompts which compelled students to draw on their own feelings and past experiences, produced students who had no difficulty knowing what to write. In fact, none of the students ever
complained about not having anything to write about. Student writing was more focused, easier to understand, more descriptive, and prior knowledge and experience was discussed in better relation to the response prompt given.

Implications

Previous research and literature in the fields of bilingual education and whole language and in the area of reading comprehension make it clear that knowledge about how to increase reading success for Spanish-speaking language minority students is available. It is also clear, however, that there is much non-use of student’s cultural knowledge, values, and identity to increase comprehension. There is a need to provide curriculums that promote the use of culturally appropriate materials such as stories, songs, poems, and the like, gathered from the oral traditions of the Mexican culture so that cultural knowledge can be assigned the educational importance it deserves. Culturally appropriate materials containing examples of cultural morals and identities which Spanish-speaking students can relate to need to be given the opportunity to work in favor of student’s academic success.

The whole language-based comprehension activities utilized in this research project worked. Moreover, they worked extremely well with the culturally relevant stories. Such activities, says Farnan and Kelly (1988),

provide opportunities for students to reflect upon the literature as a lived through experience. If students never come to see literature as offering possible other worlds for them to inhabit, a powerful connection between themselves and the work is lost.

So that language minority students have maximum learning opportunities, changes must be made in the methods and materials used to educate them.
The classroom can not only be the forum to present and preserve the oral traditions of the Mexican culture, it can be the place where changes in perspective about their value can begin.
SPANISH AND ENGLISH TRANSCRIPTIONS OF STORIES

The following stories are selections from the material which was gathered for this research project. They come from the oral traditions of the Mexican culture. The stories were tape recorded from various first and second generation Mexican adults and then transcribed into Spanish, the language in which they were told. English translations are given for each piece in order to make the collection accessible to teachers who do not speak Spanish as well as to the general public.

The fieldwork for this project netted a vast amount of material. Several more stories were collected but not included here along with poems, lullabies, and songs. The selections that appear here were chosen based on the ease with which teachers can utilize the comprehension techniques discussed in this paper as they read and study each story. They were also chosen with a child's interest in mind. But most importantly, the oral narratives presented here, along with the one that are not, are examples of strong transmitters of cultural heritage since it is through these that oral traditions are continued.
La China Poblana

En la costa de México, al sur de la capital, queda el anciano puerto de Acapulco al lado de la mar. Hoy es balneario popular y moderno. Pero en días antaño cuando governaban los españoles sobre el territorio de México, Acapulco se conocía como un pueblo quieto y sonoliento que solo despertaba un día al año. Ese día ocurria cuando el galeón de Manila, navegando desde la Filipinas, entraba al puerto de Acapulco después de un viaje largo y desolado atravesando el Océano Pacífico.

Comerciantes de varias ciudades mexicanas como Puebla, Mexico, San Luis Potosí y Veracruz estaban en el puerto para saludar el galeón de Manila. Estos comerciantes esperaban ansiosamente la oportunidad de hacer ofertas por los perfumes, encajes y sedas de las Filipinas y por la porcelana delicada y especies aromáticas de China.

En el día del desembarco, el capitán del galeón platicaba en quietas con un comerciante de Puebla. Cerca, sentada en un empaque de seda, estaba una muchachita con piel de oro, ojos vergonzosos, y una expresión de miedo por su rostro.

-Compré esa cosa tan preciosa en Manila- exclamó el capitán, -de unos piratas portugueses. Dice ella que fue bautizada en China y que su nombre cristiano es Catarina de San Juan.

El comerciante maravillaba de la belleza de la niña.

-Es esquisita- murmuro el comerciante. -A mi esposa de muchos años le es imposible tener hijos y se enamoraría de ella a primera visita.

-Entonces es de usted- contestó pronto el capitán. -Lívesela a su esposa. Después de todo, mi nave no es para chiquillas, una que más parece princesa que muchachita del pueblo.

-Estoy de acuerdo. Una princesita- dijo el comerciante. -Y mi esposa la tratará así mismo.

El comerciante se llevó la chica a Puebla en su carroza. La una vez miedosa pronto perdió su miedo del comerciante y la tierra extraña que estaba conociendo. Sabía poco español que aprendió del capitán del galeón. Pero con las pocas palabras que conocía le explicó al comerciante que nació en China, que entonces tenía diez años y que su nombre en China había sido Mirrah o sea amargamiento.
-Una vez- le dijo, -me había extraviado por cinco días. Estaba muy chica entonces. Mi familia me había encontrado flotando en una madera flotante en el puerto. Después de esto se profetizó por hombres santos que tomaría jornadas largas y conocería tierras extrañas. También profetizaron que al fin lograría encontrar la paz en una de éstas tierras. Pronto después de que me encontraron mi familia fue a la costa para escaparse de una plaga que cayó sobre el pueblo y allí fue que me capturaron los piratas y me llevaron a Manila. Seguramente me hubieron hecho esclava si no fuera sido por el capitán del galeón de Manila quien me compró.

Catarina vivió felizmente con el comerciante y su esposa en Puebla. Cuando se desarrolló como mujer pasaba su tiempo ayudándole a los pobres y enfermos. La conocían por todo Puebla por sus hechos de benevolencia y devoción a los que viven en la miseria.

Los niños amaban especialmente a Catarina. Cuando la bola de niños y niñas la arrodeaban en el jardín del convento de la monja, les contaba por horas enteras cuentos alegres y divertidos.

Es cierto que Catarina estaba feliz con su vida. Pero a veces no podía sentir más que nostalgia por su país natal. Un día de primavera le dijo a los niños que tenía demasiada tristeza para jugar con ellos. Los niños, viendo los ojos de llanto de Catarina y su carita subidamente fruncida, se fueron a jugar en otra parte, uno tras otro, hasta que ella sola se quedó reflexionando en el jardín con sus pensamientos lejanos.

De repente todos los niños la arrodearon de montón. Se reían con gusto y cada niño llevaba un ramo de flores a su querida señora China. Luego tuvo lugar un milagro maravilloso cuando los niños le entregaron a Catarina los ramos de flores que habían hechos. Las preciosas flores se aparecieron en la blusa blanca y su falda larga. Viendo tanta belleza hizo desaparecer para siempre la tristeza en el corazón de Catarina. Desde entonces se vestía en blusas suaves y faldas bordadas delicadamente con flores.

Después de la muerte de Catarina, las mujeres de Puebla honraron su memoria haciendo y vistiéndose de vestidos como los de ella. Hasta le anadieron lentejuelas para embellecer sus vestidos. Normalmente vestían con estos vestidos los días de fiesta pero la moda se extendió por todo México. Y como se les llama poblanas a las mujeres de Puebla se dió el nombre de China Poblana al vestido. La China Poblana quiere decir la mujer china de Puebla.
The China Poblana

On the coast of Mexico, south of the capital, lies the ancient seaside port of Acapulco. Today it is a popular, modern resort. But in the olden days of Spanish rule over the country of Mexico, Acapulco was a quiet, sleepy town which only awoke for a single day each year. That day was when the Manila galleon, sailing in from the distant Philipines, docked in the port of Acapulco after a long and lonesome voyage across the Pacific Ocean.

Merchants from several Mexican cities, like Puebla, Mexico City, San Luis Potosi, and Veracruz would be at the port to greet the Manila galleon. These merchants anxiously awaited the opportunity to bid for perfumes, laces, and silks brought from the Phillipines and for the delicate porcelains and aromatic spices that had come from China.

On the day of the landing, the captain of the galleon talked quietly with a merchant from Puebla. Close by, sitting on a bale of silks, was a little girl with golden skin, shy eyes, and a frightened expression on her face.

"I bought that precious thing in Manila," the captain exclaimed, "from some Portuguese pirates. She says she was baptized in China and that her Christian name is Catarina de San Juan."

The merchant marveled at the beauty of the child. "She is exquisite," the merchant murmured. "My wife of many years, who is unable to have children of her own, would fall in love with her at first sight."

"Then she is yours," the captain answered quickly. "Take her to your wife. After all, my ship is no place for a young girl, a girl who looks more like a princess than an ordinary child."

"Yes, I agree! A little princess," said the merchant. "And my wife and I will certainly treat her like one!"

The merchant took the little girl back to Puebla by horse and carriage. The once frightened girl soon lost all her fear of the merchant and the strange land she was experiencing. She knew only broken Spanish, which she had learned from the captain of the galleon. But with the few words she knew, she explained to the merchant that she had been born in China, that she was ten years old, and that her name in China had been Mirrah, or Bitterness.

"Once," she told him, "I was lost for five days. I was quite little then. My family found me floating on a piece of driftwood out in the harbor. After this, it was
prophetized by holy men that this meant I would take long journeys and visit strange lands. They also prophetized I would find a place of peace at last. Soon after I was found my family went to the seashore to escape a plague which had beset our village and it was there that pirates captured me and took me to Manila. I would have surely become a slave girl, had the good captain of the Manila galleon not bought me."

Little Catarina lived happily with the merchant and his wife in Puebla. As she grew to womanhood, she spent most of her time helping the poor and the sick. She was known throughout Puebla for her good works and devotion to the down-trodden.

The children especially loved Catarina. As boys and girls clustered around her in the garden of the nun's covenant, she told them gay, amusing stories, hour after hour.

Catarina was very happy with her life, it is true. But sometimes she could not help feeling homesick for her native country. One day in Spring, she told the children she was much too sad to play with them. The children, upon seeing Catarina's tear-filled eyes and softly frowning face, left to play elsewhere, one by one, until she was all alone in the garden, alone with her far away thoughts.

Suddenly, all the children came rushing back. They laughed gaily and each child had a bouquet of flowers for their beloved Chinese lady. Then a wonderful miracle took place as children handed Catarina the little wildflower bouquets they had made. The lovely blossoms appeared on her plain white blouse and full skirt. The sight of such beauty made the sadness in Catarina's heart vanish forever. From this day forward, she always dressed in soft blouses and skirts decorated with delicately embroidered flowers.

After Catarina died, the women of Puebla honored her memory by making and wearing dresses like hers. They even added sequins and spangles to enhance the beauty of their outfits. They usually wore their dresses for fiestas but the fashion has spread all over Mexico. And since the women of Puebla are called poblanas, the costume is called La China Poblana, or the Chinese woman from Puebla.
El sapo

Antonia, viuda de un soldado, vivía con su único hijo en una casita muy pobre en las afueras de una ciudad. El muchacho trabajaba cortando leña en el vecino bosque, y así día tras día, año tras año. Un día volvió como de costumbre, por la tarde, con su hacha al hombro. Mientras sorbía su cafecito, le decía a su madre que la raíz de un árbol muy viejo había encontrado un sapo que fue hecho una tortilla de un hachazo.

La pobre vieja se llenó de aflicción al escucharlo, pidiéndole que por favor la acompañara al sitio para quemar el cadáver del animal.

-Háis de saber- le dijo- que el sapo nunca perdonan al que lo ofende. Si no lo queiman, resucita, busca a su matador y no descansa hasta arreglar las cuentas con él.

El buen muchacho rió grandemente del cuento, intentando convencer a la pobre vieja de que aquello era nada más que un cuento popular, bueno para asustar chicos molestos, pero no para asustar a un macho como él. Ella insistió, sin embargo, de que ambos fueran a quemar los restos del animal.

El muchacho resistió, pero inútil fueron sus bromas, inútil sus quejas de lo distante del sitio, del daño que podía causarle el sereno de aquella tarde de noviembre, siendo ya tan vieja. Por fin tuvo que decidirse a acompañarla.

Facilmente dieron con el árbol recién cortado, pero por más que buscaron entre las ramas desprendidas, no apareció el cadáver del sapo.

¿No te lo dije? exclamó ella con los ojos llenos de lágrimas- ya se ha ido; ahora ya no tiene remedio esto.

-¡Pero que tontería, preocuparnos tanto así! Se lo habrán llevado las hormigas o se lo habrá comido algún zorro hambriento. ¡Caramba, que cosa, llorar por un sapo! Lo mejor es volver a casa, que ya viene anocheciendo y la humedad es dañosa.

Regresaron, pues, a la casita, ella llora y llore, el tratando de distraerla con detalles sobre el maíz al que prometía buena cosecha; luego volver a las bromas y reídas. Era casi noche cuando llegaron. Después de un registro minucioso por todos los rincones, cosa que excitó otra vez la risa del muchacho, comieron en patio en silencio, a la luz de la luna, y luego él se quiso acostar en la cama para dormir, cuando Antonia le suplicó que por aquella noche nomás, consintiera en dormir encerrado dentro de una caja de
madera que ella poseía.

El muchacho protestó vivamente. Cómo se le ocurre a la pobre vieja en hacerle dormir con aquel calor dentro de una caja que seguramente estaría llena de sabandijas. Pero tanto le rogó la anciana, que como el muchacho la quería tanto, decidió aceder a su tonto capricho. La caja era grande, un poco encogido, pero no estaría del todo mal. Arreglaron la cama, se metió él adentro, y la viuda tomó asiento al lado de la caja, decidida a pasar la noche vigilando la caja para cerrarla apenas hubiera la menor señal de peligro.

Pasando la media noche, la luna muy baja bañaba la casita con su luz, cuando de repente un bultito negro, casi imperceptible, salto por la puerta que no se había cerrado por en gran calor que hacía. Antonia se estremció de angustia.

Allí estaba, por fin, el vengativo animal, sentado sobre las patas traseras, como meditando un plan. Que mal había hecho el jóven en reírse! Aquella figurita negra, inmóvil en la puerta llena de luna, se agrandaba extraordinariamente, tomaba proporciones de monstruo. Pero, ¿si no era más que uno de tantos sapos que entran a la casa cada noche en busca de insectos? Un momento respiró sostenida por ésta idea. El sapo dió un saltito, luego otro, en dirección a la caja. Su intención era obvia. No se apresuraba, como si estuviera seguro de su presa. Antonia miró con espantosa expresión de terror a su hijo; dormía, vencido por el sueño, respirando acompasadamente.


Antonia no se atrevió a hacer el menor movimiento. Toda su vida se había concentrado en sus ojos. La luna bañaba enteramente la pieza. El sapo continuó hinchándose por grados aumentó, aumentó más, y aumentó hasta triplicar su volumen. Permaneció así por un minuto, en que la pobre vieja sintió pasar por su corazón todos los ahogos de la muerte. Ahora el sapo fue reduciéndose, reduciéndose, reduciéndose hasta llegar a su tamaño normal, saltó a tierra, se dirigió a la puerta, atravesó el patio y se perdió entre las hierbas.

Entonces se atrevió Antonia a levantarse, toda temblorosa. Violentamente levantó la tapadera. Lo que sintió fue tan horrible, que a los pocos meses murió víctima del espanto que le produjo.
Un friazo salía de la caja abierta, y el muchacho estaba helado y rigido, hecho piedra bajo un inexplicable baño de escarcha.
The Toad

Antonia, widow of a soldier, lived with her only son in a very poor house on the outskirts of a city. The boy worked cutting wood in a nearby forest, and day after day, year after year, he did this sort of work. One day he returned in the evening as usual with his ax resting on his shoulder. While he drank some coffee, he told his mother that as he was cutting the at the roots of an old tree, the tree fell over from the blow of the ax and flattened a toad as flat as a tortilla.

The poor old woman was filled with fear upon hearing this. She asked him if he would accompany her to the spot so she could burn the remains of the toad.

“You should know,” she told him, “that a toad never pardons he who offends it. If you don’t burn it, it will revive itself, and will look for its killer and will not rest until it has evened the score.”

The good boy had a great laugh at this story. He tried to convince the poor old woman that this was nothing more than a popular tale to scare bothersome children. It would not scare a man like himself. She insisted, nevertheless, that they both go to burn the remains of the animal.

The boy resisted but his jokes were useless. So were his complaints about the distance to the spot as were his warnings about the harm the stillness of that November evening could cause her, seeing that she was now so old. In the end, he had to resolve himself to go with her.

It was easy to find the newly cut tree, but as much as they searched among the cut down branches, the cadaver of the toad did not appear.

“Didn’t I tell you?” she exclaimed with her eyes full of tears. “It has already gone. There is no solution to this situation now.”

“But what stupidity to concern ourselves like this! The ants probably got it or a hungry fox ate it. Darn it, what kind of a thing is this, to cry for a toad! The best thing to do is to go home. It’s getting dark and the humidity is harmful.”

They returned to the little house, she, crying and crying, he, trying to distract her with details about the corn crop that was promising a good harvest, then he resumed telling jokes. It was almost dark when they arrived. After a search of all the corners of the house, something that made the boy laugh again, they ate in the patio in silence by the light of the moon. Then the boy wanted to go to sleep. Antonia begged him to consent to sleeping enclosed in a wooden box that she owned for that night only.
The boy protested wildly. How could it occur to the poor old woman to make him sleep in this heat inside a box that was surely full of vermin? But the old one begged him so much, and the boy loved her so much, that he decided to go along with her silly whim.

The box was large, a bit cramped, but it wasn't all bad. They fixed a bed, he got inside, and the widow sat by the side of the box, determined to spend the night watching the box vigilantly and ready to close it at the smallest sign of danger.

After midnight, the low moon bathed the house with its light. As expected, a black object, almost invisible, jumped through the door which had not been closed due to the enormous heat. Antonia was filled with anguish.

There it was, in the end, the vengeful animal, sitting on its hind legs as if it were devising a plan. How wrong it had been for the boy to laugh! That black figure, unmoving as it stood by the door full of moonlight, made itself extraordinarily large and took on the proportions of a monster. But, wasn't it just like one of the many toads that came into the house looking for insects? For a moment, she breathed a sigh of relief at this idea. The toad gave a little jump, then another, in the direction of the box. Its intention was obvious. It was not hurried, as if it was sure of its task. Antonia looked with a fearful expression of terror at her son; he slept, overcome with his dreams, breathing complacently.

Quickly she closed the lid of the box quietly. The animal did not detain itself. It continued jumping. It was at the foot of the bed. Suddenly, with an incredible jump, it landed on the lid.

Antonia did not dare make the slightest movement. All her life she concentrated into its eyes. The moonlight bathed the box. The toad continued to swell up by degrees and got bigger and bigger until it had tripled in size. It stayed like that for a moment, in which the poor old woman felt all the misery of death pass through her heart. Now the toad got smaller, smaller, and smaller until it returned to its normal size. Then it jumped to the floor, headed to the door, crossed the patio, and lost itself among the weeds.

Antonia then decided to get up, trembling as she was. She lifted the lid violently. What she felt was so horrible, that after a few months, she died of fright from the scare she got.

A great coldness came out of the open box, and the boy was frozen and stiff, turned into stone underneath an inexplicable bath of frost.
La fortuna de Juanito

Había una vez un rey dotado con tres hijos. Un día les dijo a los tres que ya eran bastante mayores para que salieran a buscar su fortuna.

Hablándole al mayor le dijo, -Hijo Mayor, sería bueno que salgas a buscar tu fortuna.

Con esto el rey ordenó que ensillaran a un caballo y el hijo mayor salió en busca de su fortuna.

-Adiós, querido padre- le dijo a su padre antes de salir en busca de su fortuna. Pasó algún tiempo vagando de un lado a otro. Por fin salió del bosque a un terreno desarbolado donde brillaba fuertemente el sol. Al centro estaba una cascada. Muchos años atrás alguien le puso el nombre de La Cascada.

-Tengo sed- pensó Hijo Mayor.

Desmontó su caballo y se hincó a la orilla del charco para beber agua. Parecía estar con mucho lodo.

-¿Está sucia esta agua.- Pero tenía mucha sed. Al agacharse para beber saltó una ranita sorprendiéndolo descuidadamente.

Dijo la ranita, -Joven, si te casas conmigo, te traeré agua pura y fresca para beber.

Hijo Mayor dijo, -¿Qué? ¿Yo? ¿Casarme con una rana? ¿A poco crees que estoy loco?- Inmediatamente, tomó un bocado del agua sucia, montó su caballo y se marchó.

Continuó a recorrer y vagar hasta que pronto vio casas en la distancia. Cabalgó hacia ellas y se detuvo enfrente de una que tenía un letrero indicando “LA TAZA LIMPIA.” Era un jacal chico de adobe pero adentro estaba tan limpio como una taza recién lavada.

Pidió agua para su sed y alimentos para su hambre. Los mozos trajeron comida y agua. El agua estaba fresca y refrescante y la comida deliciosa. Hijo Mayor le dió las gracias a Dios por su buena suerte. El dueño necesitaba de alguien que ayudara con el restaurante y por eso le ofreció trabajo como serviente. Hijo Mayor aceptó graciosamente.

Pasó el tiempo y ahora le tocaba a Hijo Segundo partir de la hacienda en
busca de su fortuna.

El rey se despidió deseando que todo le fuera bien.

-Vaya con Dios.

Hijo Segundo tomó el mismo camino donde se fue Hijo Mayor. Se fue errando y vagando hasta que pronto llegó a la misma cascada.

-Hace mucho calor. Tengo mucha sed.- pensó. Era un día muy caluroso. Desmontó, se hincó a la orilla de La Cascada y estaba listo para beber el agua sucia cuando brincó la ranita que sorprendió a Hijo Mayor.

-Joven, si te casas conmigo, te traeré agua pura y fresca.

Hijo Segundo se rió. -¿Yo? ¿Casarme con una rana? ¡Si no estoy loco! No deseo casarme con una rana.

Trató de beber agua de sus manos ahueiadas en forma de taza pero el agua todavía estaba muy sucia. Montó y se fue al trote de su caballo. Pronto llegó a La Taza Limpia donde se reunió con su hermano mayor.

Le dieron agua fresca para tomar y un plato de tacos para comer. El dueño necesitaba alguien que cuidara al ganado. Le ofreció ese trabajo a Hijo Segundo. Hijo Segundo aceptó con gusto pues comería bien y estaría en compañía de su hermano mayor. Él era de un rancho y sabía cuidar ganado.

Pasó el tiempo y ahora le tocaba a Hijo Menor cuyo nombre verdadero era Juanito, a partir de la hacienda en busca de su fortuna. Juanito era el más bondadoso de los tres hermanos y deseaba quedarse con su amado padre.

Dijo el rey, -Ahora, Juanito, te toca a ti ir en busca de tu fortuna como han hecho tus hermanos. Después de un año, mi deseo es que vuelvan todos para que pueda verlos de nuevo.

Juanito estuvo de acuerdo y a media mañana salió de la hacienda en busca de su fortuna. El sol calentaba furiosamente. Pronto vio la cascada.

-Hace mucho calor y tengo mucha sed.- Desmontó, se quitó el sombrero, se hincó a la orilla de la cascada y se agachó para tomar agua de sus manos ahuecadas en forma de taza.

Otra vez brincó la ranita sorprendiendo a Juanito.
-Joven, si te casas conmigo, te traeré agua mucho mejor que ésta.

Juanito no creía que ésto fuera posible. Lentamente, recobró su sentido.

Sentía la sed en su garganta. Odiaba tomar agua sucia.

-Muy bien, tengo mucha sed y no me gusta tomar agua sucia. Me casaré contigo- le contestó Juanito.


Juanito levantó la roca y vio varios escalones dirigiéndose a una caverna. Caminando por los escalones hacia Juanito venían tres servientes, elegantemente vestidos, llevando una charola de oro con jarillas de agua helada, pura y fresca y en su alrededor vasos de cristal bordados con oro y plata. Juanito se sentía como si estuviera soñando.

Después de tomar el agua helada que apaciguó su gran sed, fue llevado a su alcoba donde podía bañarse y descansar. Su caballo fue llevado a la caballería donde le dieron avena para comer y agua fresca para tomar.

Juanito se bañó y pronto se durmió en una cama blanda y cómoda y dulcemente enperfumada. Nunca había dormido en cama más blanda. Dumió largo rato. Cuando despertó se sintió refrescado y sin cansancio.

Lo esperaba la ranita sentada en una silla al lado de la cama.

- ¿Te gustó el agua fresca que tomaste?

-Por supuesto- contestó Juanito- estaba muy buena. Muchísimas gracias.

-Te puedes quedar aquí hasta que tú quieras.

-Muy bien, pero le he prometido a mi padre, el rey, que en un año volvería a visitarlo. Tengo que cumplir con mi palabra.

-Muy bien- contestó la ranita.

Juanito estuvo muy feliz en su nuevo hogar. Podía pedir por lo que se le antojara en el corazón. Ranita le había complacido con ropa nueva. Los servientes le traían ricas comidas y fruta fresca diariamente. Cada tarde se sentaba por la cascada y pasaba largas horas platicando con Ranita,
sobándole su verde piel suavemente. Ella le hablaba en una voz suavecita y a Juanito le gustaba cuando hablaba. Le encantaba su dulce voz.

-Cómo me encanta tu dulce voz- pensaba.

Hasta Relampago, el caballo de Juanito, estaba contento en su estable limpio. Los servientes lo cuidaban bien, bañándolo y cepillándole su crin y cola larga diariamente, llevándole alfalfa para comer y agua, pura y fresca, para tomar. Su cuerpo fue almojazado hasta que quedó tan liso como un espejo.

Pasó el año. Habló Ranita -Hoy tus hermanos mayores pasarán. Debes esperarlos por la roca grande. Se reirán de ti y te harán burlas. Pero no les pongas atención que no saben lo que hacen.

Juanito subió a la roca grande y esperó ansiosamente a sus hermanos. Cuando se aproximaban vieron a Juanito de inmediato y se pusieron a reír. Suponían que Juanito había aceptado la petición de matrimonio de Ranita. Se burlaban de él que nunca se había oído de tal cosa y que era una tarugoda que un hombre se case con una ranita. Tan fuerte se reían que casi se cayán de sus sillas de cuero sujetadas con correas por debajo de sus caballos.

Juanito se quedó quieto. No dijo nada. Se sentía tonto y no quería cabalgar con sus hermanos. Esperó hasta que habían desaparecido de la vista y luego ordenó -Servientes traigan a Relampago. Tengo que visitar a mi padre.

Al oír la orden los servientes trajeron al elegante caballo quien ahora cargaba una brillante silla de plata bien pulida con brida de oro y riendas de seda. Su blanca crin brillaba en la luz del sol y su cuerpo estaba blanco y blando como nube flotando por el cielo.

Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo saludaron con calor al rey con un fuerte abrazo y pronto se sentaron en el patio platicando de su suerte. Pintaron con palabras bonitas a las muchachas con quien pronto se casaban.

El rey les preguntó -¿Y qué de Juanito? ¿Lo han visto? ¿Por qué no vino con Uds.? ¿También se encontró con un bella dama como las de Uds?

Se pusieron de risa los hermanos. -Juanito es un tonto. Creó en una rana en la cascada. Prometió casarse con rana! Todavía está alli. ¡Qué tonto!

Pronto después llegó Juanito en su caballo elegante con su brillante silla de plata. El rey lo admiró a primera vista.

-Bienvenido, Juanito. ¡Qué gusto me da volver a verte! ¿Pero, qué es esto que prometiste casarte con rana?

-Sí, papá, es cierto. Estoy contento allí. Me tratan bien y todos me cuidan. Voy y vengo al gusto. La región alrededor de la cascada es hermosa y me encanta la vida allí. Trabajo duro solo cuando me da la gana.

-Pues dijo el rey acordándose la silla de plata, -no creo que es una rana ordinaria. A Juanito le gusta mucho. Parece ser mansa y muy dulce. Creo que es una rana encantada como en la leyenda que oí cuando era joven.

El rey no estaba tan desilusionado con Juanito como lo estaban Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo. Pero sabía lo que se tenían que hacer.

-Hijos, les voy a regalar a cada uno un perrito cachorro. Díganle a sus novias. En un año deben devolvérmelo y yo juzgaré cuál de las novias será mi favorecida por la belleza del perro. Habrá muchos favores que mi favorecida recibirá.

Cada uno se llevó su cachorrillo. Juanito le dio su perrito a Ranita quien lo echó a la cascada. El perro se undió inmediatamente al fondo. Juanito sabía que el perrito se ahogaría, pero no trató de salvarlo por la fe que le tenía a Ranita.

Se fue a su alcoba para descansar y trató de no pensar como fue insultado por sus hermanos. Pensó en el perrito al fondo de la cascada. Quizás ahora no cumpliera el con su compromiso de boda. El perfume de la cama le causó sueño y pronto se durmió.

Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo dieron sus perritos a sus novias quien ambos trabajaban de mozas en el restaurante.

Los cachorros crecían rápido porque fueron alimentados de los sobros de los platos. Cada muchacha se esforzó para entrevarlos bien y hacerlos obedientes. Cada día se hacían más y más hermosos.

Los hermanos se burlaron de Juanito. Vieron que estaba solo.

-¿Qué le pasó a tu cachorrito?- se relía Hijo Mayor.

-Probablemente murió tomando agua de la cascada- se burló Hijo Segundo.

Otra vez a Juanito le dieron los insultos de sus hermanos. Otra vez se fue cabalgando solo.

-¿De veras soy tan tonto?- se preguntó.

Cuando los hermanos llegaron a la casa del rey se les preguntó- ¿Dónde está Juanito? ¿No vino?

-Está con su ranita- dijo Hijo Mayor.

Pronto después que se habían ido los hermanos, Juanito dijo -Ya es hora que vuelva a visitar a mi padre. Traigan a Relampago.

Los servientes trajeron a Relampago. Dijo Ranita, -Juanito, llévale esta cajita a tu padre. No la abras. Dile que es un regalo de mi parte.

Juanito metió el regalito en su bolsa.

-Adiós, Ranita- dijo Juanito.

-¿Dónde está tu perro, Juanito?- le preguntó el rey después de darse la bienvenida con un fuerte abrazo.

-Ranita lo echó a la cascada, padre. Se ahogó pero me dijo que le trayera este regalito. Juanito sacó el regalo de su bolsa y se lo entregó a su padre.

El rey abrió la caja. Adentro estaba una hermosura de animal tan reluciente como el caballo de Juanito. Era el perro de Juanito. Se asombró el rey.

El animal estaba magnífico. El rey no se decía.

El rey dijo al fin, -Cada uno de mis hijos me ha devuelto un hermosísimo y fuerte perro. Pero miren al perrito chiquito en esta cajita. E perrito es tan bonito y magnífico como los perros grandes aunque pequeño. Creo que Ranita no es rana ordinaria. No me decido cuál perro me gusta más.

Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo se enojaron con Juanito. Tan tonto, pero su
perro parecía traerle más gusto al rey que los gran perros poderosos que ellos trajeron. ¡Esto no debe volver a suceder!

Habló el rey -Les voy a dar a cada uno de mis hijos un largo pedazo de seda. Sus novias han de hacerles a ustedes una camisa de boda. Vuelvan en un año. La que ha cosido la mejor camisa será mi favorecida.

Juanito le dio su pedazo de seda a Ranita que prontamente lo arrojó a la cascada. Flotó un rato en la espumosa agua y luego desapareció. Esto no le molestó a Juanito porque él realmente no deseaba los favores especiales prometidos por el rey.

Se fue a su alcoba y pronto se durmió.

Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo entregaron su seda a sus novias con instrucciones de coser la mejor camisa de boda de México para ser escogida como la preferida del rey y así recibir muchos favores. Nunca tendrían que trabajar.

Pasó el año. Juanito esperó a sus hermanos sabiendo que se reirían de él más que nunca. ¡Y así fue!

-¡Que tonto eres! -se relían. Juanito bajó la cabeza diciendo nada para que se fueran luego él podría viajar sin tener que escuchar más insultos.

El rey saludó a cada hijo con un abrazo y preguntó por Juanito.

Los dos hermanos contestaron como la vez anterior insultando a Juanito y repitiendo lo tonto que fue en comprometerse con la ranita. Demostraron sus camisas de boda cosidas a mano. Cada camisa tenía un hermosísimo cosido. Cada una era una chulada. Cada una estaba perfecta en todo los detalles.

Mientras tanto, Juanito preparaba imprender su jornada. Montó su caballo.

-Llévale a tu padre éste regalo. Dile que se lo mando yo- dijo Ranita.

Juanito tomó la cajita, se la puso en la bolsa y se fue al trote de su caballo.

El rey preguntó -Juanito, no veo tu camisa de boda. ¿Dónde está? ¿Qué le pasó a la seda que te di?

-Ranita le arrojó a la cascada, pero le manda éste regalito.
El rey tomó la cajita y la abrió. Adentro vio una camisita pequeña que de repente saltó como si hubiera estado doblada mil veces. Lentamente empezó a crecer y crecer hasta que tomó forma de camisa de boda linda y elegante, cosa que él nunca había visto semejante camisa cosida con hilo de oro y que relampagueaba de tal modo que cualquier rey hubiera estado orgulloso de ser dueño de tal camisa de boda. Pero el rey otra vez no se decidía.

-¿Cuál me gusta más? ¡No sé cuál!

-Ahora más que nunca creo que Ranita no es rana ordinaria. Creo que ella bien podría salir como mi nuera preferida.- Estaba confuso el rey. La gente seguramente se iban a reírse de él.

Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo se reían de Juanito. Aunque sus camisas no llegaban a ser tan bonitas como la que Juanito trajo en la cajita.

-Sí, padre- dijo Hijo Mayor- ¿cómo podría Ranita ser tu preferida? Te dirán payaso por todo México.

-Es cierto- confesó el rey.

El rey se puso callado por mucho rato. Al fin habló.

-Vuelvan en un año. Traigan a sus novias. Se casarán aquí. Será boda de gala. A cada pareja se le obsequiará su propia casa. Cada pareja recibirá mi tesoro en partes iguales. Soy viejo y solo deseo ver a todos ya casados. Con buena fortuna, me van a agraciar con muchos nietos antes de que me vaya de esta tierra. Pero todavía no me he decidido en cuál será mi nuera preferida. Por eso les estoy dividiendo todo en partes iguales. No sé cuál perro, ni cuál camisa me gusta más.

Cuando Juanito volvió a La Cascada, Ranita le preguntó- ¿Qué desea tu padre ahora? ¿Quiere que volvamos?

-Sí, en un año volveremos. Será una boda de gala. Cada uno se carará en turno. Mi padre entregará su tesoro a todos en partes iguales.

-Muy bien- dijo Ranita. -El día de nuestra boda me pones en esta caja, amárrale con un listón por alrededor de ella y pon la caja en el vagón. Será tirado por dos caballos blancos. Cuando lleguemos a la hacienda de tu padre, has de llevarme inmediatamente a tu antigua alcoba y atrancar la puerta al salir sin abrir la caja. Después de las ceremonias de tus hermanos, vuelve a la alcoba, abres la puerta, y me acompañas al altar donde nos convertiremos...
hombre y esposa.

Cada tarde Juanito y Ranita hicieron planes para su boda mientras charlaban sentados a la orilla de La Cascada. Juanito quería mucho a Ranita y cada día se sentía más feliz que el día anterior. Juanito sentía un gran amor por Ranita. Pero no entendía lo que había estado sucediendo.

Pasó el año. Llegaban los invitados de todas partes de México para celebrar la triple boda de los hijos del rey. El rey opinaba que las bodas se debían celebrar con gran formalidad. Ya se oían las deliciosas aromas de las comidas preparadas para la fiesta. Por toda la hacienda se oían alegres melodías de los mariachis, los mejores de México. Insistió el rey que todos deberían bailar y gozar con alegría.

- ¡Que bailen todos! ¡Que bailen todos! - repetía.

Pronto llegó Juanito en el vagón tirado por dos hermosos caballos blancos y de colas largas.

-¿Dónde está tu novia? - preguntó el rey.

-Está en esta caja- dijo Juanito. - No la puedo abrir hasta que sea nuestro turno para casarnos. Luego la veremos.

-Haz lo que debes- dijo el rey.

Juanito llevó la caja a su alcoba y atrancó la puerta al salir.

Cada novia se vistió de vestido largo que caía en pliegues, con perlas lustrosas en hermosos diseños. La belleza y delicadeza fueron admirados por los invidiados. A todos se les atendía con cortesía royal.

La gente esperaban. El cura preparaba para las ceremonias.

Mientras tanto, Juanito se vestía en su traje de boda. Los servientes admiraban la camisa de seda y maravillaba de quién había hecho tan hermosa prenda.

Hijo Mayor fue casado seguido por Hijo Segundo. Un fulgor solemne y maravilloso llenaba el salón a medida que pronunciaban sus votos.

Juanito fue a recoger a Ranita. Se sentía nervioso. ¿Debería volverse atrás? Tenía que decidirse paronto. Recordó los insultos de sus hermanos. Se sentía
debil. ¿Tendría las fuerzas para soportar los insultos del público?

Abrió la puerta.

¡Que asombro tuvo! Parada donde él puso la caja estaba una dama alta y esbelta, su vestido blanco, largo, y encrustado con joyas tan brillantes que parecía el vestido cosido por ángeles.

Juanito fue deslumbrado por el brillo de su pelo, cada rizo en su lugar, por la belleza de sus ojos, relampagueando como el rocío de la mañana en el prado. Su pelo oscuro, liso, y reluciente como las alas de un cuervo, y que le caía por la espalda. Sus dientes brillaban como perlas.

Juanito le clavo la vista. Sintió la sangre caliente correrle por las venas.

¡Que labios tan rojos! Juanito estaba jubiloso que su Ranita se había convertido en preciosa mujer de mejillas redonditas, brillante pelo negro, y pestañas que dejaban una sombría en su piel de bronce.

Alegre y ansioso, Juanito esperaba. Se abrazaron con felicidad, con ternura.

Juanito le besó la mano y lo siguió lentamente.

- ¡Padre! ¡Ven! Mire! Mire a mi preciosa dama. Ranita no es rana. Se ha convertido en una bella mujer sin igual. Es como un angel. ¡Divina mujer!

El rey se sorprendió de la belleza del ángel caído del cielo. Los invitados se quedaron boquiabiertos al ver al ángel en vestido blanco.

-Siempre he dicho que Ranita no era rana ordinaria. Ahora estoy seguro que no es una mujer ordinaria.- dijo el rey con regocijo.

Viendo que feliz se puso el rey con su futura nuera, Hijo Mayor e Hijo Segundo se morían de rabia. Sabían que ahora nunca compartirían con el tesoro del rey. Tan enfurecidos estaban que salieron corriendo, pusieron a sus esposas en el vagón y salieron en una nube de polvo. Los invitados admiraban a Ranita con delirio que pocos se dieron cuenta de la salida de los dos hermanos.

La amarilla luz del sol, brillante y claro, inundó la región mientras continuaba la fiesta.
En la luz débil de la tarde, se casó Juanito. El rey le daba toda su fortuna a Juanito y Ranita.

Juanito se negó a aceptar el tesoro.

-No puedo aceptar el tesoro, padre. También le pertenece a mis hermanos.

Después de su luna de miel, buscó Juanito a sus hermanos, los hizo volver para que todos vivieran juntos compartiendo su alegría uno con el otro.

Cuando se habían reunido escucharon a Ranita explicar que un día al terminar banándose en La Cascada, sintió de repente un frío mortífero. Volteando la vista vio una bruja mirándola. Sus ojos eran como dos lagos helados y su voz sonaba como candelizo quebrándose. La bruja tenía poderes fuertes quien encantaba a quien le daba la gana. Los rancheros le temían por su hechicería. La bruja la convirtió en rana, prisionera de La Cascada. Tampoco podía librarse de su encanto hasta que un verdadero ranchero accediera en casarse con ella, y así rompiendo el encanto. Ranita había esperado mucho tiempo antes de Juanito.

Tuvieron grandes celebraciones por todo México cuando corrieron las noticias de la rana quien vino a ser princesa.

Pero la alegría de Juanito y Ranita estaba ahora completo. Se había reunido la familia y todos vivían con felicidad.

Y así termina éste cuento.
Juanito’s Fortune

Once there was a king blessed with three sons. One day he told his three sons that they were now old enough to go out into the world to seek their fortune.

He spoke to his eldest son and said, “Oldest Son, it is good that you go and seek your fortune.”

With this the king ordered that a horse be saddled and the eldest son rode off in search of his fortune.

“Good-bye, beloved Father,” he said to his father before riding out in search of his fortune.

He wandered and roamed about the forest, first taking this path then another. Finally he rode out of the forest to a clearing where the sun was shining brightly. In the very center was a small waterfall. Long ago someone had named it La Cascada.

“I am very thirsty,” Oldest Son thought.

He dismounted from his horse and knelt down at the edge of the pool to drink some water. It looked muddy.

“This water is dirty!” But he was very thirsty. As he bent over to drink, a small frog jumped out, surprising him slightly.

The little frog said, “Young man, if you will marry me, I will bring you pure, fresh water to drink.”

Oldest Son replied, “What! Me? Marry a frog? Do you think I am crazy? Immediately he took a small drink of the dirty water cupped in his hands, mounted his horse, and rode off.

He continued his wandering and roaming until soon he saw houses in the distance. He rode towards them and stopped at one with a sign in front that said, “LA TAZA LIMPIA.” It was a small adobe building but inside it was as clean as a freshly washed cup.

He asked for some water for his thirst and food to satisfy his hunger. The waiters brought water and food. The water was cool and refreshing and the food on the plate was delicious. Oldest Son thanked God for his good luck. The owner needed someone to help with the restaurant, so he offered the thirsty
man a job as a servant. Oldest Son accepted graciously.

Some time passed and now it was time for Second Son to leave the hacienda in search of his fortune.

The King wished him well with a family farewell, "Vaya con Dios."

Second Son followed the same trail as his older brother. He wandered and roamed about until soon he arrived at the same waterfall.

"It is very hot. I am very thirsty," he thought. It was a very hot day. He dismounted, knelt at the edge of La Cascada and was about to drink some of the dirty water when out jumped the little frog that had surprised Oldest Son.

"Young man, if you marry me, I will bring you fresh, pure water to drink."

Second Son laughed. "Me? Marry a frog? I am not crazy! I don't want to marry a frog!"

He tried to sip from his cupped hands, but the water was still very dirty. He got on his horse and trotted off into the forest. He soon arrived at LA TAZA LIMPIA where he was reunited with his older brother.

He was given fresh water to drink and a plate of tacos to eat by the owner of the restaurant. The owner needed someone to take care of his cattle. He offered Second Son the job. Second Son was glad to accept, since he would eat well and also be near his older brother. He was a cowboy and had learned the proper care of cattle.

Time passed and now it was time for Youngest Son, whose real name was Juanito, to leave the hacienda in search of his fortune. Juanito was the most kind-hearted of the three brothers and wanted to stay with his beloved father.

The King said, "Now Juanito, it is your turn to go out in search of your fortune like your brother have done. After a year has passed, my wish is that all of you return so that I may see you again."

Juanito agreed and in mid-morning left the hacienda in search of his fortune. The sun was furiously hot. Juanito soon spied La Cascada.

"It is very hot and I am very thirsty." He dismounted, took off his hat, knelt at the edge of the waterfall and bent over to drink water from his cupped hands.
Again, the little frog jumped out, surprising Juanito. "Well, young man, if you marry me, I will give you better water than this."

Juanito could not believe his eyes. Slowly, he regained his senses. He felt the thirst in his throat. He hated to drink dirty water.

"Very well. I am very thirsty and I don't like drinking dirty water. I will marry you," replied Juanito.

"Well," said the little frog. "See that rock over there. Go to it and lift it. When you have done so, you will be given water, pure and fresh."

Juanito lifted the rock and saw several steps leading down into a cave. Walking up the step were three servants, elegantly dressed, carrying a golden tray with pitchers of ice-cold, fresh water, surrounded by crystal glasses rimmed in gold and silver. Juanito felt as if he were dreaming.

After drinking the gold water that quenched his great thirst, he was taken to his room where he could bathe and rest. His horse was taken to the stables where he was given oats to eat and fresh water to drink.

Juanito bathed and soon was fast asleep on a soft comfortable bed, sweetly scented with perfume. Never had he slept on a softer bed. He slept a long time. When he awoke, he felt very refreshed and his tiredness was gone.

The little frog was waiting for him, perched on a chair beside Juanito's bed.

"Did you like the fresh water you drank?"

"Certainly, answered Juanito, "it was very good. Thank you very much."

"You may stay here as long as you wish," said Little Frog.

"Very well, but I have promised my father, the King, that in one year I will visit him. I must keep my promise."

"Very well," replied Little Frog.

Juanito was very happy in his new home. He could ask for anything his heart could desire. Little Frog had given him new clothes. The servants brought him rich foods and fresh fruit every day. Each evening he would sit by the waterfall and spend long hours chatting with Little Frog, stroking her green skin gently.
She would speak to Juanito in a soft voice and Juanito listened with pleasure when she spoke. He loved her sweet voice.

“How I love your sweet voice,” he thought to himself.

Even Relampago, Juanito’s horse, was content in his clean stables. The servants took very good care of him, bathing and brushing his mane and long tail every day, bringing him alfalfa to eat and pure, fresh water to drink. His coat of hair was groomed until it was a smooth as a mirror.

A year passed. Little Frog spoke. “Today your older brothers will pass by. You should wait for them by the big rock. They will laugh at you and tease you. But pay them no attention for they do not know what you do.”

Juanito made his way up to the big rock and anxiously waited for his brothers. When they approached they saw Juanito and immediately began to laugh. They guessed that Juanito had accepted the proposal of marriage made by Little Frog. They teased him that their father would also laugh at him. They teased him that it was unheard of and very foolish for a man to marry a frog. They laughed so hard they almost fell off their leather saddles strapped tightly around and under their horses.

Juanito kept quiet. He did not say a thing. He felt stupid and did not want to ride with his brothers. He waited until they disappeared from sight and then ordered, “Servants, bring Relampago. I have to go and visit my father.”

At his command, the servants brought the elegant horse who now had a dazzling, highly polished silver saddle and a golden bridle and silk reins. His long white mane shone brightly in the light of the sun and his coat of hair was white and soft as a floating cloud in the sky.

Oldest Son and Second Son greeted the King warmly with a strong embrace and soon were seated in the patio talking of their fortunes. They described the beautiful girls they would soon marry.

The King asked, “And how about Juanito? Have you seen him? Why has he not come with you? Has he found a beautiful girlfriend as the one you have described?”

The brothers laughed. “Juanito is a fool. He believed a frog at the waterfall. He promised to marry the frog. He’s still there. What a fool!”
"With a frog!" exclaimed the King. "Is it possible? Juanito is not a fool. Well, let us wait for Juanito. We will hear what he has to say."

Soon after, Juanito arrived on his elegant horse with the shining saddle of silver which the King admired at first sight.

"Welcome, Juanito. How happy it makes me to see you again! But what is this I hear about a promise to marry a frog?"

"Yes, Father, it is true. I am happy there. I am well treated and everyone takes good care of me. I go and come as I please. The country around the waterfall is beautiful and I enjoy my life there. I work hard only when I choose."

"Well," said the King, as he remembered the saddle of silver, "I do not think this is an ordinary frog. Juanito likes her very much. She seems to be very gentle and very sweet. I believe she is a magical frog like the legend I once heard as a boy."

The King was not as disappointed in Juanito as were Oldest Son and Second Son. But he knew what had to be done.

"Sons, I am going to give you each a puppy. Give it to your girlfriends. In one year you must return and I will judge which of your girlfriends will be my favorite by the beauty of the dog you return with at the end of the year. There are many special favors that my favorite daughter-in-law will receive."

Each one took his puppy and left. Juanito gave his puppy to Little Frog who tossed it into the waterfall. The puppy immediately sank to the bottom. Juanito knew the puppy would drown, but he did not try to save the puppy because he had faith in Little Frog.

He went to his room to rest and tried not to think of the insults of his brothers. He thought of the puppy at the bottom of the waterfall. Perhaps he should not go ahead with his marriage. The perfume of his bed made him drowsy, and soon he was fast asleep.

Oldest Son and Second Son gave their puppies to their girlfriends who both worked as servant girls at the restaurant.

The puppies grew fast because they were fed food from the plates. Each girl worked hard to train them well and make them obedient. Each dog was becoming a magnificent animal!
A year passed. Juanito waited for his brothers at the big rock. He was sad and confused. Soon they arrived. Each one brought a huge, healthy, powerful dog at the end of a long rope.

The brothers jeered at Juanito. They could see that Juanito was alone.

“What happened to your puppy?” laughed Oldest Son.

“It probably died from drinking the water from the waterfall,” laughed Second Son.

Again Juanito felt the insults of his brothers. Again he would ride alone.

“Am I really such a fool?” he asked himself.

When the brothers reached the King’s house they were asked, “Where is Juanito? Did he not come?”

“He is with his little frog,” laughed Oldest Son.

Soon after Juanito’s brothers were gone, Juanito said, “It is time once again to visit my father. Bring Relampago.”

The servants brought Relampago. Little Frog said, “Juanito, take this little box to your father. Do not open it. Tell him it is a gift from me.”

Juanito put Little Frog’s present in his pocket.

“Good-bye Little Frog,” said Juanito as he rode off.

“Where is your dog, Juanito?” asked the King after they had greeted each other with a warm embrace as before.

“Little Frog tossed it into the waterfall, Father. The puppy drowned but she asked me to bring you this gift.” Juanito took the box from his pocket and placed it in the hands of his father.

The King opened the box. Inside was a beautiful dog as sparkling as Juanito’s horse. The King was amazed.

The animal was magnificent. He could not decide.

The King finally said, “Each one of my sons has returned with a beautiful,
powerful dog. But look at his small dog in this box. This small dog is as beautiful and magnificent as the two big dogs, yet he is so small. I think that Little Frog is not an ordinary frog. I cannot decide which dog I like the best."

Oldest Son and Second Son were angry with Juanito. He was so foolish, yet his puppy seemed to bring more delight to the king that the huge, powerful dogs they had brought. This must not happen again!

The King spoke. "I am going to give each one of my sons a long piece of silk cloth. Your girlfriends are to make you a wedding shirt. Come back in one year. The one that has sewn the best wedding shirt made with this silk will be my favorite."

Juanito gave his piece of silk to Little Frog who promptly threw it into the waterfall. It floated off into the bubbly water and soon could be seen no more. This act did not trouble Juanito because he did not really desire the special favors the King had promised.

He went to his room and was soon fast asleep on his comfortable bed.

Oldest Son and Second Son gave their silk to their girlfriends with instructions to make the best wedding shirt in all of Mexico so that they may become the King’s favorite daughter-in-law and thus receive the King’s favors. They would never again have to work.

A year passed. Juanito waited for his brothers, expecting them to laugh at him more than ever. And so it was!

"How foolish you are!" laughed the two brothers. Juanito lowered his head and said nothing, so that they would leave, then he could travel along without listening to more insults.

The King greeted each son with an embrace and asked for Juanito.

The two brothers answered in the same manner as before, insulting Juanito by repeating how foolish he was to accept marriage with a frog. They displayed their wedding shirts sewn by hand. Each shirt was beautifully sewn. Each was a delight to see. The King could not decide. Each one was so perfect in every way.

Meanwhile, Juanito prepared to begin his journey. He mounted his horse.

Little Frog spoke. "Take this gift to your father. Tell him it is from me."
Juanito took the box and put it in his pocket. Then he galloped off.

The King asked, "Juanito, I do not see your wedding shirt. Where is it? What happened to the silk I gave you?"

"Little Frog threw it in the waterfall, Father. But she sends this gift."

The King took the box and opened it. Inside he saw a tiny shirt that suddenly popped out like it had been folded a thousand times. Slowly it began to grow until in the King's hands it was a wedding shirt, elegant and beautiful, the likes of which he had never seen before. It seemed to be sewn with golden thread and it glittered in a way that any king would have been proud to be the owner of a wedding shirt like this one. But again the King was very confused.

"Which one do I like the best? I do not know which one I like the best!"

"Now, more than ever, I think that Little Frog is not an ordinary frog. I believe she might turn out to be my favorite daughter-in-law. But who would want a frog for a daughter-in-law?" The King was very confused. People would surely laugh at him.

Oldest Son and Second Son were laughing at Juanito, although their own silk shirts were not as beautiful as the one Juanito had brought in the box.

"Yes, Father," said Oldest Son, "how can your favorite be a frog? You will be called a clown by every man in Mexico."

"It is true," confessed the King.

The King was silent for a long time. Finally he spoke.

"Return in one year. Bring your girlfriends. You will all be wed here. It will be a royal wedding. Each couple will be given their own house. Each couple will have an equal part of all my treasures. I am old and my only wish is to see you all married. With good fortune, you will bless me with several grandchildren before I pass on. But I have not yet decided upon my favorite daughter-in-law. That is why I am dividing everything up equally between all my sons. I do not know which shirt, nor which dog I like best.

When Juanito returned to La Cascada, Little Frog asked, "What does your father want now? Does he want us to return?"

"Yes, in one year we will return. It will be a royal wedding. Each one will be
married in turn. My father will distribute his treasure equally between all of us."

"Very well," said Little Frog. "On our wedding day, place me in this box, tie a ribbon around it and put the box in the wagon. It will be pulled by two white horses. When we arrive at your father’s hacienda, you are to take me directly to your old room and lock the door on your way out without opening the box. After your brother’s ceremonies, return to the room. Open the door, escort me to the altar, and we will become man and wife."

Juanito and Little Frog made plans for the wedding each evening as they sat by the edge of the waterfall and chatted. Juanito was very fond of Little Frog and each day became more joyful than the previous day. Juanito felt a great love for Little Frog. Yet he was confused by all that had been happening.

A year passed. Guests were arriving from all parts of Mexico to celebrate the triple wedding of the King’s sons. The King believed that weddings should be celebrated with great ceremony. The wedding feast was complete and delicious aromas filled the air. Throughout the hacienda could be heard the musical sounds of the gay melodies played by the mariachis, the finest mariachis in Mexico. The King insisted that all should dance and be merry.

"Everyone dance! Everyone dance!" he kept repeating.

Soon Juanito arrived in the wagon drawn by two beautiful horses with white manes and long flowing tails.

"Where is your girlfriend?" asked the King.

"She is in this box," said Juanito. "I cannot open this box until it is our turn to be married. Then I will open it."

"Well, do what you must," said the King.

Juanito took the box to his room and locked the door on his way out.

Each bride was dressed in a long which flowing dress with lustrous pearls in beautiful designs. Their beauty and gentleness were admired by the guests. They were treated with royal courtesy by all.

Everyone was waiting. The minister prepared for the ceremonies.

Juanito, meanwhile, dressed himself in his wedding suit. The servant helping him admired the silk shirt and wondered who had made such a
beautiful garment.

Oldest Son was married and he was followed by Second Son. A wonderful soft radiance filled the room with love as each couple took their vows.

Juanito went for Little Frog. He felt nervous. Should he back out? He had to decide quickly. He remembered his brother's insults. He felt weak. Would he have the strength to support the public's insults?

He opened the door. To his astonishment, standing where the box had been placed was a tall and slender maiden dressed in a long flowing white gown bright with jewels and so beautiful it seemed the gown had been sewn by angels.

Juanito was dazzled by the shiny glint of her hair, each curl in place, by the beauty of her eyes that reminded him of fire where it burns blue above the embers. They sparkled like dew on the grass. Her dark hair was smooth and shiny as a crow's wing. Unbound, it fell behind her to the middle of her back. Her teeth glistened like pearls.

Juanito stared. He felt hot burning strength running into his veins.

Her lips were rosy red. Juanito was overjoyed that his Little Frog was now a beautiful maiden with lovely round cheeks, shiny black hair, and eyelashes that made small shadow on her brown skin.

Juanito was overjoyed and anxious. They embraced with joy. She put her arms around his neck and hugged him tenderly.

Juanito kissed her hand and she followed gently as a fawn.

"Father! Come here! Look! Look at my precious maiden! Little Frog is not a frog. She had turned herself into a beautiful woman without an equal. She is like an angel! A divine woman!"

The King was stunned at the beauty of the living angel before him. The guests gaped at the bride admiring her as the loveliest angel they had ever seen.

"I have often said that Little Frog is not an ordinary frog. Now I am certain that she is not an ordinary woman!" rejoiced the king.

Seeing how happy the King was with his soon-to-be daughter-in-law, Oldest
Son and Second Son were stiff with rage. They knew they would never share in the King's treasure. So enraged were they that they rushed out, lifted their wives to the wagons and dashed away in a thick cloud of dust. The guests were so delirious in their admiration of Little Frog that little attention was given their rapid departure.

The sun shone clear and bright, flooding the countryside with its yellow light as the wedding feast continued.

During the soft, warm twilight, Juanito was married. The King wanted all his fortune for Juanito and Little Frog.

Juanito refused to accept the treasure.

"I cannot accept your treasure, Father. The treasure belongs to my brothers also."

After his honeymoon, he found his two brothers and had them return so they could all live together sharing their happiness with each other.

When they were all together again they heard Little Frog explain how one day as she had finished bathing in La Cascada, she felt a sudden deadly cold, and turning, spied an old witch looking at her. Her eyes were like two frozen ponds and her voice had the sound of icicles cracking. The witch was a powerful one who cast spells on whomever displeased her. The ranchers were mortally afraid of her and her sorcery. The witch changed her into a frog who could not leave the waterfall. Nor could she be free again from the spell until a true cowboy consented to marry her, thus breaking the spell. Little Frog had waited long before Juanito saved her.

Great were the celebrations throughout Mexico when the news spread about the frog who became a princess.

For Juanito and Little Frog, their joy was complete. Their families were reunited and everyone was happy.

And thus ends the story.
APPENDIX B

READER RESPONSE PROMPTS
READER RESPONSE PROMPTS

The following questions can be used as prompts for response journal writing. These prompts allow students to connect prior knowledge and personal feelings to what they read. Reader response is a student-centered approach that engages students with the text and encourages them to construct their own understandings of what they have read based on background knowledge they already have. With these prompts, students are given the opportunity to construct their own meanings and by doing so, will become more efficient readers and comprehenders.
READER RESPONSE PROMPTS

1. What did you notice when you were reading?
2. How did the piece make you feel?
3. Who do you think was the most important character in the story? Why do you think so?
5. What does this piece remind you of in your own life?
6. Is any character in this work like you? Why do you say this?
7. Did your feelings about what you read change as you were reading? If so explain how.
8. Is there a character in the piece you think would make a good friend? Tell why. Or is there a character in the piece you would definitely not like to have as a friend?
9. If you were the teacher, what would you want your students to remember about this piece?
10. Do you think the author chose a good title for this piece? Tell why. If you don’t think so, write two more good titles.
11. What do you think was the most important or most interesting part of this piece? Why do you say this?
12. Did you like this piece? Tell why or why not.
13. If a friend asked you about this piece, what would you say?
14. When you think about this piece, what picture or image comes to your mind? Either describe or draw this image and tell why you think this image came to mind.
15. Was there anything about this piece that confused you? If so, what was it?
16. What did the writer do to make the piece work (or not work)?
17. Does any character in the piece remind you of someone you know?
18. Does this piece make you think of anything else you have read? Or maybe of a movie or television show you have seen?
19. What do you think the author might have done to make the piece better? Why do you say this?
20. If the author of this piece were in your classroom right now, what would you like to say to her/him?
21. Once you started this piece, did you want to keep reading it? What about this piece made you want to keep reading? Or if you did not want to keep reading, why do you think you didn’t?
22. What was your favorite part of this piece? Tell what it was and why you liked it.
23. What was your least favorite part of this piece? Tell what it was and why you didn’t like it.
24. Before you started reading this piece, what did you think it would be about? Were you right?
25. Close your eyes and draw a picture in your mind about the setting of the piece. (If the story has more than one setting, choose one that you especially liked or found interesting, and create an image of that place.) Now, draw your image of that place (Farnan and Fearn, 1991).
APPENDIX C
EVALUATION CHECKLISTS IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH
# Puntos de Evaluación

**Nombre:**

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<tr>
<th>Puntos de Evaluación</th>
<th>La China Poblana</th>
<th>El SaPo</th>
<th>La Fortuna de Juanito</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Habilidad de hacer referencia a 1 o 2 eventos en el cuento</td>
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<td>2. Habilidad de discutir rasgos de los caracteres</td>
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<td>3. Habilidad de discutir motivaciones del autor o de los caracteres</td>
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<td>4. Habilidad de relacionar el cuento a su propio vida</td>
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<td>5. Habilidad de inferir, pronosticar, o especular sobre el significado del cuento según interpretaciones personales</td>
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- indica que estudiantes no fueron requeridos a satisfacer este punto para este cuento.
# EVALUATION CHECKLIST

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<td>5. Ability to infer, predict, or speculate on story meanings according to personal interpretations</td>
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- indicates that students were not required to fulfill this evaluation point for this story.
REFERENCES


374-379.


