

What comes to mind when you think of the color brown? In *Tan to Tamarind*, author Malathi Michelle Iyengar invites young readers to explore a diverse collection of poems and images – some sweet, some spicy, some warm, some cool, some musical, some boisterous and exuberant, some silent and elegant – all associated with beautiful shades of brown. These lesson plans will help you use *Tan to Tamarind* in your classroom.

Introducing the Book

Before reading *Tan to Tamarind*, try brainstorm with your students. Name a color and ask them to spend three to five minutes writing down everything that comes to mind when they think of that color during a 3- to 5-minute period. Do this exercise for a few different colors – red, blue, etc. Use brown as the final color for this exercise. If you like, you can have your students share and discuss what they come up with. Did most students come up with the same images, or did students' answers differ considerably? Ask students *why* they think these particular images popped into their heads at the mention of this color or that color?

Next, share some realia with your students. Let them see, touch, smell, and if possible taste some of the things mentioned in *Tan to Tamarind*: tea leaves, cardamom, cloves, fresh ginger (with the peel still on), a topaz stone, autumn leaves, an old sepia photograph, cocoa powder, chocolate, henna powder, sand, seashells, an adobe pot or statue, nutmeg, allspice, gingerbread, a sandalwood box, coffee beans ... Of course not all the items described in the poems will necessarily be available for you to bring into the classroom, but the idea is to provide children with some concrete, sensory experiences that will help them connect with particular images when they read or hear the poems. (Check for allergies before any and all taste tests!)

Explain that you are going to be reading a book of poems about the color brown, and that these items they're passing around are what Malathi Michelle Iyengar, the author of this book, thought about when writing the poems. Give your students time to react to these items. Which ones did they think of when they made their brainstorming lists? Which of these items are familiar to them, and how so? Which ones have they never seen or heard of before?

Now you're ready to read the book!

Ways of Reading Poetry

After an initial read-aloud of *Tan to Tamarind*, try going back to the book on a different day and having your students experiment with different ways of reading some of the poems. Students can combine echo reading, call-and-response reading, pre-planned turn-taking, and cumulative reading. Here are some examples:

Example 1: "Cocoa" (for two voices)

Reader 1: Brown.

Reader 2: Brown.

Reader 1: Cocoa brown.

Reader 2: Cocoa brown.

Both readers: Sweet, dark chocolate brown.

Reader 1: Bittersweet cocoa,
Reader 2: frothy steamed milk.
Reader 1: A mug of hot chocolate,
Reader 2: Smooth and creamy brown.

Reader 1: Tasty, toasty brown.
Reader 2: Delightful, delectable brown.

Reader 1: My cocoa fingers
Reader 2: curl around a steaming mug
Both readers: of rich, dark cocoa brown.

Example 2: “Spruce” (for a group of voices)

All voices: Brown
Solo voice 1: Spruce brown.
All voices: Rich, melodic spruce brown.

Solo voice 2: Violin, guitar and bass
Solo voice 3: built of spruce wood, burnished brown.
Voices 2&3: A honey-colored melody
Solo 4: drifts along our narrow street.

All voices: Humming, strumming brown.
 Ringing, singing brown.

Solo 5: Abuelito's precise, brown fingertips
 move along the violin's strings.
Solo 6: Papá's guitar travels
 through a maze of shifting chords.
Solo 7: Tío winks at me from behind the *contrabajo*
 as my hands clap out a staccato pattern:
Half of group: *Taka taka tak!*
Whole group: Rapid spruce brown.

Try having your students read aloud in pairs or small groups, giving them time to plan and practice, then present to the class. Encourage them to think about rhythm, timing, and pitch as they plan how they will read.

Lesson Plans

Here are some lesson plans using some of the poems from *Tan to Tamarind*. These lessons are based upon the California State Standards for Third Grade, but can also be modified and adapted to address academic standards for other elementary grades.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing: Creating Poems

Students make use of their understanding of parts-of-speech and utilize descriptive language to write their own poems about the color brown.

California Writing Standards Addressed: *Writing Applications*

2.2 *Writing Applications*: Write descriptions that use concrete sensory details to present and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.

1.2 *Writing Strategies*: Write legibly in cursive or joined italic, allowing margins and correct spacing between letters in a word and words in a sentence.

Materials:

• Choose several from the following list: cinnamon sticks, nutmeg, tea leaves, copper (such as a penny or a copper cup, pitcher, or decoration), polished brown stones (e.g. polished in a rock tumbler – or precious stones such as topaz, if available), cocoa powder, coffee or coffee beans, henna leaf (mehendi) powder, sand, gingerbread, etc. You can use photographs of these and other beautiful brown images, but try to have at least some physical items rather than only photos.

Activity:

1. Re-read a couple of the poems from *Tan to Tamarind*. Tell students that today they will be writing their own poems about the color brown.
2. Pass around the items collected. Ask students to brainstorm sensory words that describe these items (smooth, rough, shiny, sweet-smelling, powdery, etc.) and what these items “remind them of” or “make them think of” (ex., Sand makes me think of a day at the beach. Cocoa powder reminds me of baking with my grandma.)
3. Read students the following samples, which demonstrate the format they will use to write their poems (and/or write your own poems as a samples using this format):

Brown is powdery.
Brown is sweet.
Brown is cocoa powder.
Brown is when I help Grandma
with the Christmas baking.

Brown is crunchy.
Brown is nutty.
Brown is cashew.
Brown is trail mix when I go
camping with my dad.

Brown is smooth.
Brown is polished.
Brown is my violin.
Brown is playing every note
perfectly.

Brown is sparkly.
Brown is glittery.
Brown is my sister’s makeup.
Brown is when she lets me and my
friends try out her bronze eyeshadow
at my slumber party.

4. Have each student choose one beautiful brown item about which to write. (Students can choose from among the items already presented, or can think of an original subject.)
5. Have each student write down two adjectives or adjective phrases that describe his or her subject.
6. Have each student write a phrase describing a memory or association related to the subject (“what it reminds you of” or “what it makes you think of”).
7. Now students put their poems together:
Line 1: “Brown is [first adjective].”
Line 2: “Brown is [second adjective].”
Line 3: “Brown is [name of the object].”
Line 4: “Brown is [phrase describing ‘what it makes you think of’].”
8. Ask for volunteers to read their poems to the class.
9. Have students recopy their poems neatly, in cursive writing, to post in the classroom.

10. Students can mount the finished copies of their poems onto different shades of brown construction paper, to be displayed on a wall or bulletin board with the heading “What is Brown?” or “What does brown mean to us?”

More language arts ideas ...

Here are a few more ideas for using *Tan to Tamarind: Poems About The Color Brown* in your classroom.

• Color Thesauri

Brainstorm thesaurus entries for all the major color words. Students can write or type these words onto two sheets and paste them into manila folders, which can then be laminated and kept in students' desks for use during all kinds of writing activities. Remind students to use the color thesauri when writing – for example, if a student is writing about a “red” apple, s/he can use his/her color thesaurus to find a more interesting word or one that describes a more specific shade of red. Example of how some entries in a color thesaurus might look:

Blue – azure, cyanic, cerulean, sky-blue, baby-blue peacock-blue, beryl-blue, turquoise, sapphire

Yellow – lemon, canary, sulfur, gold, golden, blonde, citron-yellow, maize,

Red – scarlet, crimson, carmine, cherry, ruby, brick-red, rusty, flame-colored, fiery, vermilion

Azul – acua, azul celeste, azul cobalto, azul marino, azul turquesa, añil, opalino

Amarillo – amarillento, azafrán, ambarino, cantú, dorado, limón, ocre, rubio

Rojo – Colorado, carmesí, bermejo, coral, encarnado, escarlata, rubí, carmín, rojizo, cereza

• Family photos

The poem “Sepia” deals with an old photograph of a loved-one. After reading and discussing this poem, have your students bring in old family photos to share with the class. Students can write poems about these photos and post them in the classroom.

•Sweets Drinks

Three of the poems from *Tan to Tamarind* – “Tan”, “Cocoa”, and “Coffee” – describe special sweet beverages. Ask your students to name special sweet beverages prepared in their homes or communities. Make a list – lassi, kheer, champurrado, boba tea, shakes, smoothies, fresh-squeezed lemonade, ginger tea, Thai iced tea, etc. Have students write poems about their favorite drinks. Then ask families to bring in traditional drinks for a taste-testing party. (Be sure to check for allergies before students taste!) Make a class-book of beverage recipes. Read parts of the following books, or make them available for students to peruse independently:

The Biography of Tea, by Carrie Gleason

The Biography of Coffee, by Adrianna Morganelli

MATHEMATICS

Making Graphs

Students create pie charts and bar graphs to represent information about favorite types of chocolate; use the information from these graphs to answer a series of questions.

California Math Standards Addressed: Number Sense

3.1 Compare fractions represented by drawings or concrete materials to show equivalency and to add & subtract simple fractions in context

3.1 Use a variety of methods, such as words, numbers, symbols, charts, graphs, tables, diagrams and models, to explain mathematical reasoning.

Materials:

- Two or more different types of chocolate (dark chocolate, milk chocolate, bittersweet chocolate, "swirl" chocolate, etc.), in the form of bars that can be easily broken into small squares
- Blank pie charts divided into slices according to the number of students in class, bar graph template(s) or graph paper, colored pencils, chart paper
- Before starting this activity, make sure none of your students are allergic to chocolate!

Activity:

1. Re-read the poem "Cocoa" from *Tan to Tamarind*.
2. Divide the chocolate bars into little squares and give each student one square of each type of chocolate. Invite students to notice and describe the distinct shades of the different types of chocolate. Have students make predictions about which type they'll like best.
3. Select one type of chocolate and have all students sample that type at the same time. Ask for descriptive words about how the chocolate tastes (sweet/bitter/creamy/rich/etc.), and write them in one column on the chart paper. Repeat this procedure for each type of chocolate used.
4. Ask students to think about which type of chocolate they liked best. Use a show-of-hands to count how many students chose each type, and help students record this information in two different forms: a bar graph and a pie chart. (Ex., "Okay, I see five hands for milk chocolate. Let's say we'll use yellow for milk chocolate, so we'll color five slices yellow on our pie chart. What about the bar graph? Find the column where we wrote "milk chocolate." Let's color in five squares in that column.")
5. Use the bar graph and pie chart to pose questions and have students explain their answers. For example:
 - Which type of chocolate was the most popular with our class? Which type was the least popular?
 - How many more students chose milk chocolate as their favorite than chose dark chocolate as their favorite?
 - What fraction of the class preferred "swirl" chocolate? Can you express this fraction in lowest terms?
 - Was one particular type of chocolate preferred by more than half of the class? More than two-thirds of the class? More than three-fourths of the class? Was any type of chocolate preferred by less than a third of the class?
 - Which display did you use to answer these questions – the pie chart or the bar graph? Why? When is it easier to use the pie chart, and when is it easier to use the bar graph?

SOCIAL STUDIES

Adobe Houses

Students read about adobe dwellings and compare them to other historical and present-day dwellings.

California History/Social Science Standards Addressed:

3.2 Students describe the American Indian nations in their local region long ago and in the recent past, in terms of:

1. The national identities, religious beliefs, customs, and various folklore traditions.
2. How physical geography including climate influenced the way the local Indian nation(s) adapted to their natural environment.
3. The interaction of new settlers with the already established Indians of the region.

Materials: Books *The House I Live In: At Home In America* (also available in Spanish as *La casa donde vivo: aquí en América*) by Isadore Seltzer; copies of the page about adobe houses (one copy per student or one copy for every two students)

1. Re-read the poem "Adobe" from *Tan to Tamarind*. Ask students where they think the narrator of this poem lives. What type of climate is described in the poem? What is a mesa?
2. Explain to students that adobe houses were first built by the Pueblo peoples (including the Hopi and others), indigenous to what is now the Southwest United States. Later, many of the Spanish Missions were made of adobe. Adobe houses are still being constructed today in the Southwest and in Mexico and Latin America.
3. Show the picture from *The House I Live In* of the adobe house in New Mexico. Invite students to comment on the drawing. What do they notice about the house? Do all adobe houses look just like this one?
4. Pass out the page with the passage about the adobe house. Have students popcorn-read this page. Then ask comprehension questions, such as:
 - What ingredients are used to make adobe?
 - How are adobe houses particularly suited for life in the desert?
5. Ask students to compare and contrast adobe houses with the dwellings of other indigenous American peoples they might have studied. What could be some reasons for the differences between these different types of dwellings? Why did some groups build adobe houses while others, for example, built plank houses or constructed brush shelters?
6. Ask students to think about why the Spanish used adobe in the construction of many of the missions. Who were the laborers who built some of the missions?
7. Ask students why they think adobe houses are still built today. How might living in a modern adobe house be different from living in one of the still-standing ancient adobe houses?

Additional resources...

Other poets have also written poems for children about adobe houses. Have your students read and discuss some of these poems. How are they similar to the poem in *Tan to Tamarind*? How are they different?

Resources:

- ❑ *My Mexico/México mío* by Tony Johnston – This book contains a few poems about adobe houses, and one poem called "Adobe Brick" ("Ladrillo de adobe").
- ❑ *This House is Made of Mud/Esta casa está hecha de lodo* by Ken Buchanan – A book-length poem in which a child narrator lovingly describes a home made of "mud".

Our House

How would you describe your house? Writer Arthur Dorros describes various houses, including an adobe house, a houseboat, a cave-house, and a car that serves as a temporary "house" for a homeless family. Read this book with your students and have them write paragraphs describing their own houses. This is a great opportunity to practice skills such as paragraph structure, the writing process (editing, revision, etc.), use of descriptive language, writing conventions, etc.

Resources:

- ❑ This Is My House (available in Spanish as *Esta es mi casa*) by Arthur Dorros – Has a description and illustration of an adobe house, along with descriptions and illustrations of various other types of houses.
- ❑ A Shelter In Our Car by Monica Gunning, about a mother and daughter who must temporarily live in their car while the mother looks for full-time work.

Native Dwellings

The organization Native Languages of the Americas, a non-profit group dedicated to the preservation of Native American languages, maintains a website with several “Facts for Kids” pages describing various aspects of Native American history. One page is devoted to “Native American Houses” and contains pictures and descriptions of various types of dwellings, including adobe houses as well as wigwams, tepees, longhouses, and others. Students can search here for information about specific types of dwellings, and present their findings to the class.

Resources:

- ❑ <http://www.native-languages.org/kids.htm>
- ❑ <http://www.native-languages.org/houses.htm>
- ❑ Kiki’s Journey by Kristy Orona-Ramirez, about a girl who travels to her grandmother’s adobe house on the Taos Pueblo in Arizona.

Chocolate

Chocolate was originally cultivated and consumed by the Aztecs and other indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. The word “chocolate” comes from the Nahuatl word *xocolātl*. The ancient Aztecs drank hot cocoa, but it was not sweetened like the cocoa most of us are accustomed to today. Instead, hot cocoa was a bitter drink. Talk to your students about the history of chocolate, and help them identify other common foods originally cultivated by indigenous peoples of the Americas – corn, chilies, tomatoes, avocado, squashes, peanuts, etc.

What types of work are involved in producing the chocolate we eat? Who does this work? Talk to your students about the lives of children who work on cacao farms. For resources – including a Fair Trade Chocolate Activity Workbook for grades K-2 and another for grades 3-5, visit Global Exchange’s education page:

<http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/fairtrade/cocoa/fairtradeintheclassroom.html>

Resources:

- ❑ Zapizapu Crosses the Sea: A Story About Being Fair by Diane Abad Vergara – A fictional story intended to help children understand issues in international trade and encourage them to think about the people who produce the tasty treats we enjoy.
- ❑ The Biography of Chocolate, by Adrianna Morganelli – This 32-page-format book, with eye-catching drawings and photographs on every page, provides lots of interesting history about chocolate. It also encourages students’ awareness of and appreciation for the workers, including children, who harvest cacao, and points out the need to preserve the tropical rainforest environments where cacao trees grow.

•Family Celebrations: Weddings

The poem “Ocher” talks about girls with henna-painted hands dancing at a wedding. The tradition of decorating the hands with henna for weddings is present in many areas of the world, including parts of North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in India, where this art is known as *mehendi*. Ask your students about wedding traditions (or other celebrations) in their own families and communities. Students can interview family members about these traditions, and share with the class. If you know a parent or other community member who can demonstrate a tradition such as *mehendi* decoration, try inviting them to visit the class and give a presentation. (Check for skin allergies before applying henna to any student’s hands.)

SCIENCE

• Medicinal plants

In the poem “Adobe”, the narrator’s grandmother uses yucca leaves to treat cuts and scrapes. People around the world have used medicinal plants for thousands of years. Ask your students whether they can name any plants used as medicine in their families or communities. Read the picture book *My Nana’s Remedies/Los remedios de mi nana*, by Roni Capin Rivera-Ashford, in which a little girl describes how her grandmother uses various Southwest plants to treat different ailments. This book also contains an illustrated glossary of medicinal plants of the Southwest. If possible, bring in samples of these plants for students to touch and smell. Another related literature selection is *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, by Gloria Anzaldúa, in which the daughter of a *curandera* in Texas searches for a medicinal plant to save her mother’s life.

• Gemstones

In the poem “Topaz”, the narrator’s mother wears a topaz ring. Topaz is a semi-precious stone and one of the traditional “birthstones”. Have students read about gemstones and how they are formed. Students can also find out what their birthstones are and make a bar graph representing the birthstones of all their classmates. Which is the most common birthstone in the class? The least common?

Culminating Activity: We Are Beautiful.

As a culminating activity to close out the study of *Tan to Tamarind*, make a “We Are Beautiful” wall in the classroom. Provide students with various materials – paints, cut paper, etc. – for making self-portraits. Make sure you have a variety of paints and a way for students to mix paints in order to re-create their own skin-tones. You could also provide Lakeshore “People Colors Crayons” (please don’t conflate skin color with way-of-life by calling them “multicultural crayons”). After students make their self-portraits, hang them on the wall under the banner “We Are Beautiful.” If you have close-up photographs of student’s faces, the photos can also go up on this wall. Make sure all your students know that they are beautiful!
