

Vámonos: Mexican Folk Art Transport in English and Spanish

written by Cynthia Weill
 wooden sculptures from Oaxaca by Martín Melchor, Agustín Tinoco Cruz, Maximino Santiago, and Avelino Pérez

About the Book

Genre: Concept Book

Format: Hardcover, pages 32

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Reading Level: Grade K

Interest Level: Grades Birth–3

Guided Reading Level: D

Spanish Guided Reading Level: D

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Animals, Art (Sculpture), Bilingual, Diversity, Dual Language, Imagination, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest, Native/Indigenous Interest, Mexico, Photographic Illustrations, Spanish, Vehicles In Motion and Transportation

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/vamonos

SYNOPSIS

You're invited on a trip to a special place and there are many ways to get there. You could take a bike, a bus, or even a boat! The folk-art pieces were lovingly handmade by Oaxacan craftsmen Augustín Tinoco Cruz, Martín Melchor, Maximino Santiago, and Avelino Pérez—all of whom have longstanding relationships with Cynthia Weill. *Vámonos* will spark a life-long love of languages and libraries in young readers. Grab your favorite person to read with and *let's go!*

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Oaxaca and Oaxacan Folk Art

Oaxaca is a state in southwestern Mexico. Its topography shapes life there; the Sierra Sur and Sierra Norte mountain ranges crisscross the state, separating cities and creating isolated geographic pockets of villages. Because of the geographic separation within the state, Oaxaca has long been a highly diverse area; sixteen distinct groups are registered as indigenous communities, centered around various villages and areas. There are five families of indigenous languages spoken in Oaxaca (with many variants within each one), along with Spanish. For more information see <https://indigenoumexico.org/oaxaca/oaxaca-a-land-of-amazing-diversity/>

Oaxaca is well-known for various types of folk art produced by artisans across its many villages. Oaxacan folk art traditions include ceramics, textiles, woodcarving, basketry, and more. For photos and descriptions of various types of Oaxacan folk art, see <https://www.fofa.us/meet-the-artists>. Some art forms are practiced only in a certain village or area, or by certain families.

Oaxacan Woodcarving Tradition

While it has roots in indigenous Zapotec culture, modern Oaxacan woodcarving is a relatively new folk art form, developed in the last 60 years. Creating and selling these carvings as a family business has had an enormous economic impact for the artists. Today, there are three main Oaxacan villages where woodcarving is practiced, with certain families leading the industry in each village. Each family, or in some cases, individual artist, has its own unique style. Carvings are often animals, but can also include imaginary creatures (alebrijes), humans, saints, nativity scenes, angels, mermaids, skeletons and more.

Oaxacan woodcarvings often use the wood from the copal tree, which is soft to carve and very smooth when sanded. The wood sculptures in this book are carved from the wood of the flowering jacaranda tree, which has similar qualities. Artists carve the wood with pocket knives, machetes, or kitchen knives. Then they sand the carving and paint it. Oftentimes members of a family each have different jobs, working together to carve, sand and paint. Mass-produced carvings are often sold as inexpensive souvenirs, while carvings by notable artists are considered valuable collectibles.

For more information, including many images of artists and carvings, see <https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/Oaxacan-wood-carvings.html#.ZA8-fi2ZM0p>

The art pieces featured in *Vámonos* have been acquired by the Field Museum of Chicago as part of their Permanent, MesoAmerican Collection. For more information on the Field Museum, see <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/>. To learn more about the MesoAmerican Collection at the Field Museum, visit <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/department/cultures-of-mesoamerica-and-central-america>

USING THE FOLK ART SERIES

An intentional plan for repeated readings and conversations will help students engage more deeply with the books in the Cynthia Weill Mexican Folk Art series (<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/>)

cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series). For instance, for each title you share with students:

- Use the “Before Reading” resources prior to the first reading to build background knowledge about and appreciation for the artwork and its connections to Oaxacan culture.
- Read the book several times across different sittings, focusing on either or both the English and Spanish text.
- Let students know prior to each reading whether you’ll be having a “straight through” read aloud or a “stop and talk” read aloud; you might also mark pages of particular interest to go back and study more closely after finishing the book, or ask students to join in reading with you once they are familiar with the book content.
- You might use some of the “During Reading” resources below during one reading, and others during a subsequent reading.
- Consider using some of the “During Reading” prompts as “think-pair-share” or other partner discussion questions to allow more students to share their thinking aloud.
- Consider using a document camera or sharug the book in small groups to give students the chance to look at and discuss the woodcarving illustrations up close.
- You might read for different purposes each time, or engage in different “After Reading” discussions and interdisciplinary activities after each reading.
- Make the book available for independent student browsing, as well as to reference during follow-up experiences from the “After Reading” or “Interdisciplinary Resources” sections.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What are some different ways illustrators make the pictures in books? (E.g., paint, drawing, computers)
- What do you know about different types of transportation? What are different ways students travel to school?
- What if the illustrations in a book were made of woodcarvings? Listen to the parts of the word “woodcarving.” What do you think a woodcarving is? Can woodcarvings fit inside books? How do you think it would work to illustrate a book with woodcarvings?

You may want to chart student responses so you can refer back to them during or after reading.

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book. If students do not know, explain that *Vámonos* means “let’s go” in Spanish.

- Ask students to predict what “Mexican Folk Art” means. What does the title make them think about the art in the book?
- Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, and author/illustrator information, photos and dedication. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Talk about the word “transport” in the subtitle and connect its meaning to the cover illustration. Have students predict what they will see on the pages of this book based on the cover art. Brainstorm a few other modes of transport.
- Call students attention to the bilingual text. Have them point to examples of English and Spanish.
- Read Authors’ and Illustrators’ Biographies: Share this information from the book, explaining content as needed for younger students.
- Cynthia Weill has worked for years with artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico to create books for children in Spanish and English. *Vámonos* is the seventh title in her First Concepts in Mexican Folk Art series (<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series>). When Cindy isn’t working on a book, she likes to read and go to the library. To get there she has taken many modes of transport, including a skateboard, but nowadays she usually walks. Visit Cindy online at cynthiaweill.net.
- Read the blog post by Cynthia Weill where she shares the process of collaborating with craftspeople from Oaxaca (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2022/11/01/collaborating-with-oaxacan-folk-artists-across-the-years-a-guest-post-by-cynthia-weill/>)
- The folk-art pieces in *Vámonos* were lovingly handmade by the craftsmen Agustín Tinoco Cruz, Martín Melchor, Maximino Santiago, and Avelino Pérez. They are from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, which is known for its beautiful wood carvings. Agustín, Martín, Maximino, and Avelino are delighted to use their artesanías (handicrafts) to show their favorite ways to get to the library.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Where everyone in the book is going, and what modes of transport they use to get there
- How the English and Spanish words for each transportation word are the same and different
- How Oaxacan woodcarvings of animals show what’s happening in the story

Encourage students to consider why the author and artists would want to share this book and the opposite pairs presented this way with young people.

During Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3, 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Pause during reading to focus on:

Modes of transport:

Ask questions like:

What mode of transport does this set of pages show?

Have you ever traveled by _____? What was it like? Was your experience like the picture shows, or different? How?

What are you wondering?

What are you thinking about where the animals are going? Why? What clues did you use?

Artwork:

Note: These questions are adapted from the Visual Thinking Strategies approach for encouraging critical thinking through discussing artwork with young people (<https://vtshome.org>).

Look carefully at this woodcarving artwork. What do you notice? What's going on?

What makes you say that? Point to what you mean.

Look again. What else do you notice?

How are the illustrations on these two pages (English and Spanish pair) the same? How are they different?

Did anyone's else's comments change or add to your thinking?

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The book contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of developmentally-appropriate strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: Look at a photo or picture that represents the word, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, explain the meaning of a word to a partner, act out the meaning of a word, explain how the meaning of one word is the similar and different to another word.

Note: The list below pulls keywords from the authors' and illustrators' biographies and author's note in addition to the English alphabet book text.

Content Specific

folk art, Oaxaca, wood carvings, tricycle, car, plane, bike, bus, boat, "on foot," taxi, skateboard, horse cart, library

Academic

transport, "modes of transport," handmade, delighted

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance

comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What modes of transport do you remember from the book?
2. What did the artwork look like for [transport mode]? What were the animals doing in the pictures? What details did you notice?
3. Where were all the animals going?
4. What did the book information tell us about how the artwork was made? How do the artists feel about sharing their woodcarvings in the book illustrations?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What did the animal artwork make you imagine? Give an example.
2. What clues in the artwork show that the animals are going to the library?
3. Which modes of transport have you seen in real life? How are the woodcarvings the same and how are they different than the real life examples you've seen?
4. Which pages from the book show ways people often get to the library in real life? Which modes of transport would be more unusual? Why do you think that?
5. Why do you think the author chose to have all the animals going to the library? Would you have made the same choice if it was your book? Why or why not?
6. What did you notice about the English and Spanish words in this book? Give an example how they were the same or different.
7. Why do you think people take different modes of transportation to travel to the library or school? Why doesn't everyone take the same mode of transportation? What factors influence how we travel places?
8. Which of these modes of transportation have you used? Which would you like to try? Which is your favorite? Why?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in independent or collaborative writing, artwork, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Think about the modes of transport shown in the book. What's one way to sort them (or most

of them) into two groups? Make a word or picture list showing your two groups.

2. What other modes of transport do you know? Which would you add to this book? What would the pictures look like?
3. What was your favorite page? Why? What did that page make you imagine?
4. Choose one woodcarving. What kind of animals are in it? Look at a real photo of one of the animals. How is the animal artwork the same or different than the real animal? Write your ideas in a list, make a Venn Diagram, or draw your ideas and add labels.
5. If you could meet the author of this book, what would you ask them or tell them?
6. If you could meet the artists who made these woodcarvings, what would you ask them or tell them?
7. If your family worked together to make artwork, what kind of artwork would you do?

Multilingual Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners. The book language used may differ from children's oral language. Comparing any differences will help children read and understand the story. Words can hold different meanings in other types of Spanish around the world.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Have students give a short talk about a way they like to travel and why.
4. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
5. If applicable, have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Did they know the word in English? Did they know the word in Spanish? If it was an unknown word in English, did the identification of the Spanish cognate help them define the word? Consult ¡Colorin Colorado! for more ideas on how to use cognates in the classroom with MLs: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/using-cognates-ells>
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilingualllearning-toolkit.org/>

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. How did making this book take teamwork? Give examples from the information shared in the book. How do you think teamwork made this book better? What might have been hard about having so many people work together to make a book?
2. What does it feel like to make something that takes many steps to finish (like the woodcarvings)? Give an example from your own life. What are some things you can tell yourself as you work on a long or difficult project?
3. Creating each woodcarving, let alone a whole set for a book, would take a lot of time for the artists. What advice do you have for someone working on a goal that will take time to achieve? What do you tell yourself to keep going?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts and Foundational Skills

- **Create a class version of “Vámonos.”** Choose a destination that will be meaningful to all students (e.g., the cafeteria, the playground, a community landmark). Brainstorm enough modes of transport that students can work in pairs to illustrate them. Have students compose a sentence for each page, starting with “You can go...” or team up to create sentences connected by ellipses like the book. If your class speaks multiple languages, create a multilingual book using the format of *Vámonos* as a guide.
- **Use the text to practice concepts about print.** For instance, count the words per page, write the words of some sentences on cards to mix up and fix
- **Use the transport words in the book to practice phonological awareness concepts.** Give phonological clues for students to guess a mode of transport. (E.g., “This has one syllable and rhymes with “fuss” or “This starts with a /b/ sound and ends with a /s/ sound” for “bus.”)
- **Read other books about modes of transport or going to the library, such as *Follow that Map!* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/follow-that-map>) and *Pran’s Week of Adventure* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/pran-s-week-of-adventure>).** Make connections and comparisons between texts.
- **Read other books in Cynthia Weill’s Mexican Folk Art series** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series>).
- **Compare and contrast the topics, words, and artwork in each book.**
- **Set up your dramatic play area with materials for students to act out the work of a woodcarving family.** Provide safe pieces of wood (or cardboard boxes, or foam) and foam swords or other safe tools for acting out “carving.” Provide burlap scraps or brown paper to be “sand paper” and paint brushes and cups to serve as imaginary paint. If possible, display photos or other reference materials related to the woodcarving craft. Also provide a cash register or other materials for “selling” art. Encourage students to pretend to be families creating and selling art as a team.

Social Studies/Geography

- **Locate Mexico on a map.** Find Oaxaca. Notice the major mountain ranges that cross the state. Look at photos of these mountains. Make a list together of ideas about what it might be like to live in a place with a lot of big mountains.
- **Watch the interview with Cynthia Weill about how the woodcarvings in the companion title to this book, *Abecedarios*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/>

Abecedarios) were made (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3M_rdef7sw). Pause the video to chart students' observations about each step in the process.

- **Learn together about where the public library or library branch is in your school community.** As a class, write a letter or email to your local children's librarian asking what modes of transport they have observed library patrons using. Practice composing questions with appropriate punctuation.

Science, Math, and STEM

- **Compare and contrast an animal woodcarving illustration from the book to a 3-D animal or vehicle toy (or a real wood sculpture, if you have access to one).** Talk about the difference between the 2-D photo and 3-D object. Have students sort other items into 2-D vs. 3-D.
- **Ask students to brainstorm a list of different ways students travel to school.** What modes of transport do students use where they live to get to school each day. Then poll the class on who takes which mode of transport. Display results as a pie chart or bar graph

Art

- **Write words for a class transportation book as described above.** Have students create 3-D artwork to illustrate each I (e.g., clay, recycled materials sculptures, block or LEGO buildings) and photograph it. Make connections to the process used to illustrate the book, and talk about the transition from 3-D creation to 2-D photo.
- **Talk about how woodcarving artists look at a branch's shape and features to imagine what it could become.** Find interesting twigs/sticks or pieces of driftwood. Have students imagine what animal each one could become based on its shape. Have them use paints, glue and craft supplies to bring their ideas to life.
- **View photos of other examples of Oaxacan folk art from** <https://www.fofa.us/meet-the-artists> **or other online sources.** Have students write or talk about what they notice about each type of art

Physical Education

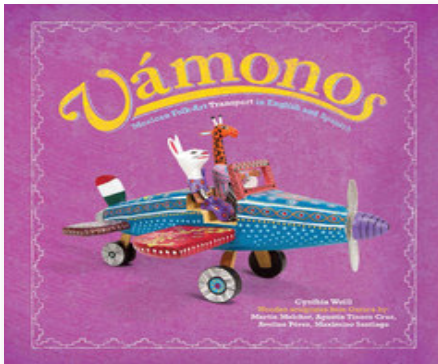
- **Learn or create yoga poses that relate to some of the modes of transport in the book (e.g., airplane pose).** Refer back to the book illustrations to discuss how each pose reflects the shape or movement of the mode of transport.
- **Designate a "library" at one end of the room or outdoor space.** Play an adapted version of "Red Light, Green Light" with students moving in different ways towards the "library." (E.g., walk, run, hop, jump, skip, shuffle, tiptoe, big/little steps, etc.)

School-Home Connection

- **Have students brainstorm modes of transport and bring a list home they can cut**

into game cards to play "Transportation Charades" with their families. Practice in class, choosing a card and acting out a set of opposite words for someone else to guess. Encourage families to add words in any languages other than English that they use at home.

- **Have students work together to dictate or write an explanation of how this book was created using teamwork between the author and artists.** Have students share the explanation with someone at home. Invite families to work together to write and illustrate how they would get to the library (e.g., draw, paint, act out or build 3-D art and photograph.) Invite families to send in their response on paper or text/email if they choose to photograph, and to use the language of their choice. Share and celebrate responses at school.
- **Have students write a poem or a song and sketch about their typical mode they use to travel to the library or school.** Who goes with them? What do they see along the way?



Ordering Information

General Order Information:
leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:
leeandlow.com/books/vamonos

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:
 Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
 New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE CREATORS

Cynthia Weill holds a doctorate in education from Teachers College Columbia University. She has worked as an educator and in the field of international development. She has been fascinated with Oaxacan crafts since 1996 when she taught in Mexico through the Fulbright exchange. She served on the advisory board of the Friends of Oaxacan Folk Art Foundation whose mission is to promote and preserve the artists and artisanal work of the state. She has published eight books that feature the folk art of Oaxaca.

Agustín Tinoco Cruz, Martín Melchor, Maximino Santiago, and Avelino Pérez

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REVIEWS

"This is one extraordinary picture-book journey to the library... Gorgeous, unique art makes this an illustrative standout." – *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Transport[s] readers to an authentic and vibrant Mexican folk art world... A sure favorite for young transportation enthusiasts." – *School Library Journal*

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