



Classroom Guide for POEMS TO DREAM TOGETHER/POEMAS PARA SOÑAR JUNTOS

written by **Francisco X. Alarcón**
illustrated by **Paula Barragán**

Reading Levels

*Reading Level: Grades 2-3

Interest Level: Grades 2-7

Guided Reading Level: M

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.6/.5

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Dreams, Family, Community, Peace, Ecology/Respect for Living Things, Latino/Hispanic Interest

Synopsis

In this collection of seventeen bilingual verses, Francisco X. Alarcón explores the role of dreams in terms of the hopes and aspirations of individuals, community, and humanity at large. The simple free verse poems celebrate childhood experiences, family, Mexican American culture, the environment, peace, and the future. Bold, stylized illustrations help to make the poet's visions even more vivid.

Background

Alarcón's family first came to the United States from Mexico in 1917. He himself was raised in both California and Mexico, and he says that is why he wrote these poems in both Spanish and English. Some of the poems came to Alarcón "after working with schoolchildren who wrote about their personal dreams." Other poems reflect Alarcón's own dreams. This book has won numerous awards including the ALA Notable Children's Book award in 2006.

Teaching Tip

This is an excellent book to use in your celebration of National Poetry Month in April.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background information, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. Have did you show what you are feeling? Do you ever express yourself through art, stories, dance, or poetry? Why?
2. How are poems different than stories?
3. What kinds of poetry do you like? What is your favorite poem?
4. What are some things you and your family do together?
5. What dreams for the future do you have? Why is it important to have dreams?

Exploring the Book

Display the front cover of the book for students. Ask them what the boy is doing. What clue does the title give to help in figuring this out?

Read the title aloud and ask students what is unusual about the title.

Page through the book. Ask students what they notice about many of the poem titles. What do the titles have in common? Then ask students to comment on the illustrations. How would they describe them?

Finally, read aloud the author's introduction.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out some of the things that are important to Francisco X. Alarcón, the author of the poems in the book.

Teacher Tip

Exclaim beforehand that Francisco X. Alarcón uses what is called "poetic license" in his work. His poems have very little punctuation and few capital letters. Poets sometimes work this way to create certain effects.

VOCABULARY

1. Draw attention to the different forms of the word *dream* used in the book. Start a list on the chalkboard and invite students to add forms of the word. Then challenge students to use each word in a sentence. Point out that the words might be used as verbs, nouns, or adjectives. Sample word list:
dream: *dreaming, dreams, daydreaming, dreamed/dreamt, dreamer, dreamy, dreamland, dreamboat*

2. Review different ways to help determine word meaning while reading. For example:
 - separate the two words in a compound such as **farmworker**
 - use illustrations for words such as **tongs, succulents, adobe**
 - use other words in the poem such as “just lies down on the floor” and “to rest” for **exhausted**

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the poems and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. Read the poem “Waking Dream.” How do you wake up? How are sleeping dreams different than waking dreams?
2. What does the writer dream in “In My Dreams?” Why is there no word for war?
3. In “Questions,” why does the poet say that some questions have no answers?
4. In “Daydreaming,” what is brainstorming? Why does the poet compare it to daydreaming?
5. What does the poem “Nightmares” mean? If people have dreams of freedom, but don't include everyone, why is that a nightmare for those who are excluded?
6. Read “Adobes.” Why are adobes like people?
7. In “Question to Mamá,” what is the question? How do you help out at home? Whom do you help?
8. Who does the work in “Family Garden?” How is tending the garden like tending the dreams of family members?
9. In “Life Is a Dream,” how does looking at a photo album make the family feel? Why is it fun to do this?
10. Read “The Same.” How are pebbles in a riverbed alike? How are they different? How are people alike and different?
11. In “Blessed Hands,” how does the poet feel toward farmworkers? Why?
12. What is the poet's message in “Dreaming Up the Future?”

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might find examples of when the poet writes about dreams.
- The **Illustrator** might research and create an illustration of different kinds of silks jockeys wear.
- The **Connector** might find other poems about dreams.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each poem as the group reads it.
- The **Investigator** might look for other books of poetry for children by Francisco X. Alarcón.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

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 reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. The poet writes that "California is a big dream come true for my family." What dreams does your family have? Which ones have come true? How do people make dreams come true?
2. Which poem in the book is your favorite? Why?
3. Which illustration do you like best? Why? How does it help you understand the poem?
4. Remind students that April is National Poetry Month. Suggest that students write their own poems about a dream they have had or a dream they have for the future.
5. Reread the poem "Dreaming Together" on the last page. Ask students to talk about what kinds of reality people can dream together. How do people make dreams come true? What are some things people are working on together to make happen in your community and country? Invite students to write about such an example.

6. Introduce similes to the class and explain that these are comparisons of unlike things that are characterized by the words *like* or *as*. Give as an example the simile in the poem title "My Grandma is Like a Flowering Cactus." Point out that the grandmother who is loving and generous is being compared to a ripe cactus full of delicious fruit.

Explain that metaphors are also comparisons, but without the use of the words *like* or *as*. Give as an example this metaphor from "In My Dreams:" *whales become opera singers of the sea*. Explain that opera singers make beautiful music as do whales in this poem that celebrates life on Earth.

Help students find other examples of similes and metaphors in the poems. Then challenge them to write their own comparisons using similes and metaphors.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the story aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on the students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in one of the poems.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Social Studies

Some students will not know who César Chávez was. Before introducing the poem "Dreamer of the Fields," assign a group to research his role in working for the rights of farmworkers. Have students report to the class on what issues he addressed and how he accomplished his goals.

After the class reads the poem, have students answer the question: What was the "great dream" of César Chávez? Why is it important to remember it?

Science

Review the five senses with students—sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell. Point out that poems often evoke these senses either directly or indirectly. Create a chart like the one shown here, including an example for each sense. Have students find other examples in the book.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Sight | “let your eyes do the exploring” (from “For Better Dreams”) |
| Touch | “right then, <i>Papá</i> kisses her” (from “Life Is a Dream”) |
| Hearing | “when we hear ‘ <i>César Chávez!</i> ’ the voices and the laughter of farmworkers” (from “Dreamer of the Fields”) |
| Taste | “the prickly pears she knows are ripe and sweet” (from “My Grandma Is Like a Flowering Cactus”) |
| Smell | “I feel like one happy onion” (from “One Happy”) |

Art

In the poem “For Better Dreams,” Francisco X. Alarcón tells readers to “hop on a dream.” Suggest that students interpret these words in a painting, collage, or other form of artwork. Set aside time to exhibit and talk about students’ work.

Language Arts

The poems in this book offer an opportunity to teach or review several poetic devices. Introduce and discuss the following examples from the book. Then encourage students to find other examples.

Repetition

Have students identify the words—“who is now”— that are repeated in “Dreaming Up the Future.” Explain that repetition is used for emphasis.

Personification

Ask students to find lines in “Dreamer of the Fields” in which blackboards do something human (“the blackboards singing”). Explain that personification can be used to get a reader’s attention, in this case because blackboards aren’t expected to sing.

Alliteration

Have students note the words that start with the same sound in lines such as these from “Family Garden:” “take time to tend.” Point out that alliteration adds to the sounds of a poem.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francisco X. Alarcón was born in Wilmington, a district of Los Angeles, California, but moved with his family back to Guadalajara, Mexico, at the age of six. As a result, he thinks of himself as bi-national, bicultural, and bilingual. In addition to *Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para soñar juntos*, Alarcón's books for young people include the four-book Cycle of the Seasons series, published by Children's Book Press, an imprint of Lee & Low Books. Alarcón has won many awards including the Pura Belpré Author Award Honor, the Chicano Literary Prize, and the PEN Oakland Josephine Miles award. Alarcón lives in Davis, California, where he teaches and directs the Spanish for Native Speakers Program at the University of California.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Paula Barragán lives and works in Quito, Ecuador, her city of birth. She earned a BFA in graphic design and illustration at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and has also studied in Paris and San Francisco. Barragán is a painter as well as a printmaker and carpet designer. Her fine art pieces are in museums in Great Britain, Italy, Ecuador, and the United States. Other children's books that Barragán has illustrated include *Spicy Hot Colors*, *Cool Cats Counting*, and Lee & Low's *Love to Mamá: A Tribute to Mothers*.

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para sonar juntos* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/91/pb/poems_to_dream_together_poemas_para_sonar_juntos

BookTalk with Francisco Alarcón:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/alarcon.mhtml>

Video Interview with Francisco Alarcón:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/alarcon_interview.mhtml

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/91/pb/poems_to_dream_together_poemas_para_sonar_juntos (secure on-line ordering)

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