



**Classroom Guide for**  
**ABUELA'S WEAVE**  
by **Omar S. Castañeda**  
illustrations by  
**Enrique O. Sanchez**

### Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Reading Level: Grades 3-4

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5.9/.5

Lexile Measure®: 960 AD

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 5.5

### Themes

Family Traditions, Overcoming Fear, Grandparents, International

### Synopsis

"Pull back hard," old Abuela said. "Make it jolt, so the threads stay close, like family."

Esperanza's Abuela, her grandmother, is unmatched in her skill in weaving traditional Mayan tapestries. She has shared her gift with her granddaughter, and now they plan to sell their goods at the market. However, the birthmark on Abuela's face may scare customers away. So Esperanza must cope with the city streets and find buyers alone.

Not only does Esperanza turn out to be a big success with the shoppers, she also learns an important lesson about family tradition and intergenerational trust. This is a book rich in authentic Guatemalan details.

### Background

Guatemala is spread over 40,000 square miles (about the size of Tennessee) in Central America. It has a population of over 8.3 million people, more than 60% of whom are Mayan Indians. Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan Indian from Guatemala, was the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize Winner. The major exports of the country are coffee, cotton, sugar, and bananas. While the country has an elected president, the military has a strong presence in the government.

Weavings are a source of great pride for Mayan women. The process begins with dyeing cotton fabric in rich colors extracted from the environment: black is from coal; blue from clay; yellow from the blackberry tree. Traditionally, women have created

elaborate clothing and fabric that incorporate not only designs based on community lore, but also individual symbols that speak to private experiences. A single garment can often take two to three months to complete.

## **BEFORE READING**

### **Prereading Focus Questions**

Before students read the story—or have it read to them—you might want them to discuss one of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What is tradition? What is traditional craft? (Teachers can bring some samples to show what traditional craft is, e.g., Chinese paper cuts, Mexican blankets or pottery. Explain that different cultures make things that are "traditional" to their own culture. These things are called "traditional crafts." These crafts are often passed on from one generation to the next.)
2. What kind of family traditions do you share at home (e.g., on holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, going to the park on weekends, etc.)?
3. Have you ever learned from an older relative how to make something? Did you enjoy learning the new skill?
4. Did you ever work hard to make something beautiful? How did you feel when it was finished? Were you nervous about showing it to other people?

### **Vocabulary**

If there are Spanish-speaking students in the class, you may want to list the Spanish words in the text (huipile, abuela, abuelita, fiesta, ocho, septima, avenida) on the chalkboard before reading, and ask the Spanish-speaking students to demonstrate how to pronounce these words and to explain their meanings.

### **Setting a Purpose for Reading/Listening**

Have students examine the cover of *Abuela's Weave*. Ask students what the older woman and the girl are holding. Point out the Mayan figure in the background. Explain that such figures are found in Mexico and Central America. Allow students to look at the first few pages of the book. Then have them brainstorm about what the book may be about.

Have students write a few questions that they hope will be answered by the time they finish reading the story. After students finish reading the story, have them check to see if their questions have been answered.

## **AFTER READING**

### **Discussion Questions**

You may want to ask the students the following questions to stimulate discussion: Where did the story take place? Who is the main character in the story? How would you describe Esperanza? How would you describe her grandmother?

### **Reader's Response Journals**

To promote active reading, you might wish students to keep a reader's response journal as they read the story. The journal will help students personalize what they are reading. Ask students to write their reactions to people and events in the story.

1. For emerging writers/readers, you might ask them to do the following:
  - Draw a picture of your favorite part of the story and in a few lines describe what is happening in the picture.
  - Draw a picture of your two favorite characters in the story and in a few lines describe them.
2. For children who can already write, you may ask them to write their thoughts on the following questions: What kind of person is Esperanza? Do you like her? Why or why not? Would you, like Esperanza, feel nervous about going to the city to sell something? Do you think Esperanza was right to worry about Abuela's birthmark frightening people? Why or why not? Why do you think people preferred Abuela and Esperanza's work to the machine-made cloth?

### Other Writing Activities

Students can choose to write one of the following:

1. Pretend that you are Esperanza. Write a letter to a friend telling the friend about your day in the market. Let your friend know how you felt about everything that happened.
2. Continue the story. Write about what happens when Abuela and Esperanza return home from the city. Tell what happens the next time they go to market with their weaving.

Be sure to remind students to save their work in their writing portfolios.

### ESL Teaching Strategies

1. After students have read the story several times or had it read to them, create a story frame, a close version of the story. For example, the story frame might begin this way:

*Abuela's Weave* is about a girl named \_\_\_\_\_ and her \_\_\_\_\_. Esperanza and her abuela are \_\_\_\_\_ cloth that they will sell in the \_\_\_\_\_.

2. In *Abuela's Weave*, Esperanza was afraid of going to the market by herself. Encourage students to write about something they were once scared to do, but now enjoy (e.g., swimming, bicycling, roller skating, etc.)

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

In order to integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you might want to have students complete some of these activities.

### Social Studies

1. Have students look at the illustrations to deduce how the Mayan Indians live. What kind of houses do they live in? How do they get food?
2. Have two students do research about Guatemala. Suggest that they find out information such as the size of the country, its capital city, the products it exports, and its climate. Have students present their information to the class in the form of an interview. One student might take the part of Esperanza and the other student could be a reporter asking her questions about her country.
3. Ask students to locate and photocopy or draw a reproduction of the Mayan calendar. As students display their work, have them explain the significance of the calendar.
4. Ask volunteers to draw a map of the United States and Central America, showing the position of Guatemala in relation to this country.

### Art

1. Have students draw posters to "advertise" *Abuela's Weave*. Suggest students look in newspapers to see how publishers advertise books. Explain that the posters should be illustrated in a way that gives readers a hint about the book's contents.
2. Ask if any students have ever done weaving. If so, suggest that the student bring in a sample of the weaving. If the student has a small craft loom, ask that the student bring it to class to demonstrate the skill.
3. Point out the colorful patterns in the clothing and borders at the bottom of the pages in the book. Tell students to design their own patterns—a design that is repeated over and over again.

### About the Author and Illustrator

**Omar S. Castañeda** (1954-1997) was born in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and moved to the United States when he was a child. His birth country was a focal point of his travels and his books, which include two young adult novels, *Among the Volcanoes* and its sequel, *Imagining Isabel*. His adult novel, *Cunumn*, was a finalist for the Boston Globe Literary Press Award. He received his bachelor's degree in English and a master's in fiction writing from Indiana University. He taught writing at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington.

**Enrique O. Sanchez** divides his home between Bar Harbor, Maine and Florida. He was born in the Dominican Republic and studied architecture at the Santa Domingo University and fine arts at the Bellas Artes Institute. He then moved to New York to study set and scene design and worked as a graphic designer for Sesame Street. While he is primarily a fine artist, he has illustrated many picture books, including *Amelia's Road*, *Confetti*, *When This World Was New* and *Estela's Swap*.

**Awards & Reviews****Parents' Choice Award Honoree****Notable Children's Book, *Smithsonian***

"The story centers on showing respect for our elders, an appreciation of the extended family and the importance of learning folk arts that have been passed on through generations. Young Latinos will see their own family's reverence for abuelitas (grandmothers) validated in a story in which the old and familiar clearly triumph over the "new and improved." –*San Francisco Chronicle*

"An excellent first showing...ationship is warm and the many authentic details are vividly described. Handsome, appealing, and sure to be useful." –*Kirkus Reviews*

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Other books illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

***Amelia's Road*** at: [http://www.leeandlow.com/books/10/hc/amelia\\_s\\_road](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/10/hc/amelia_s_road)

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