

Let's Work: Mexican Folk Art Trabajos in English and Spanish

written by Cynthia Weill

Palm Weavings from Puebla by The Master Artisans of Chigmecatitlán

About the Book

Genre: Concept Book

Format: Hardcover, pages 32

ISBN: 9781947627154

Reading Level: Grade 1

Interest Level: Grades Birth-3

Guided Reading Level: G

Spanish Guided Reading Level: F

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Art (Palm Weaving), Dual Language, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest, Native/Indigenous Interest, Spanish, Bilingual, Photographic Illustrations, Occupations and Jobs, Beginning Concepts, Mexico, Community Helpers

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/let-s-work

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

SYNOPSIS

Cynthia Weill scores again with an early concept book that bring every kind of job to life, including the work of the dedicated palm weavers of Flavio Gallardo's workshop, whose miniature palm weavings illustrate this playful book, teaching children words for work in two languages. The weavers live in the village of Chigmecatitlán in the Mixteca part of the Mexican state of Puebla.

With tremendous skill and patience, the artisans of this region practice palm weaving, a craft which came to Mexico even before the arrival of the Spanish in the early 15th century. Imagine being able to hold all of the illustrations in one book in the palms of your hands. You can do that with the tiny weavings in *Let's Work!* Most pieces are no larger than a dime!

Cynthia Weill triunfa una vez más con un libro de primeros conceptos que trae a toda clase de trabajo a vida, incluyendo el trabajo de los tejedores de palmas del taller de Flavio Gallardo, cuyas tejidas de palma ilustran este alegre libro, enseñándole palabras sobre el trabajo a niños, en dos idiomas. Los tejedores viven en el pueblo de Chigmecatitlán en la parte Mixteca del pueblo mexicano de Puebla. Con estupenda habilidad y paciencia, los artesanos de esta región practican el tejido de palmas, un arte que vino a México antes que siquiera vinieran los españoles en el siglo 15. Imagina poder tener en tus manos todas las ilustraciones, en un solo libro. Puedes hacer esto con los tejidos minúsculos en ¡Vamos a Trabajar! La gran parte de las piezas no son más grande que una moneda!

BACKGROUND

Puebla, Mexico and Palm Weaving

Puebla is a state in east-central Mexico just north of Oaxaca. The state has both mountainous highlands and lowland river valleys. It has a rich history of indigenous peoples, especially the Mixtec, and was a key location in the Spanish occupancy of Mexico.

Palm weaving—creating objects by weaving strips of palm leaves—has been practiced in Mexico for hundreds of years. Palm is used to create baskets, mats, hats, and more. In the 1950s, a family in Puebla began using palm to weave miniature items like those in this book. The family started a workshop in their town, where the items for this book were created. These items take a great deal of skill and precision to make, as they are around the size of a coin. It takes between two and four hours for two people, often a married couple, to create one figure. They are popular collectibles within Mexico and among tourists.

The Children's Book Council shares photos and more information about the making of the miniatures in this book at <https://www.cbcbooks.org/2019/12/09/cbc-highlight-lets-work-the-7th-book-in-the-first-concepts-in-mexican-folk-art-series-cinco-puntos-press-2019/>. For photos and descriptions of examples of other types of Mexican folk art, see <https://www.fofa.us/meet-the-artists>

The art pieces featured in *Let's Work* 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 if the illustrations in a book were made of objects someone made using weaving? Can woven objects fit in books? How do you think it would work to illustrate a book with woven objects?
- What occupations, or jobs, do people have in our community? What are examples of community helpers?

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. What do students predict what the book will be about? Talk about the subtitle. Talk about the Spanish word *trabajos* (jobs).
- 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? Ask students to look closely at the artwork to predict how the figures were made. Talk about what job the figures seem to be doing. Brainstorm other jobs students may see in the book
- 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.
- Author Cynthia Weill first encountered miniature palm weavings while visiting the State Folk Art Museum in Oaxaca, Mexico. The museum staff helped her locate the makers,

a group of artisans in the village of Chigmecatitlán in the Mixtec mountains of the neighboring State of Puebla. This is Cindy's sixth book in the First Concepts in Mexican Folk Art Series (<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series>). Visit her online at cynthiaweill.net

- Bryant Boucher works all over the world as a professional photographer. This is his first book for children.
- The miniature palm weavings in *Let's Work!* Were made by master artisans in the village of Chigmecatitlán in the Mixteca region of the Mexican state of Puebla. Most pieces are slightly larger than a coin. It takes tremendous skill and patience to weave each one. The artisans of this region have been making crafts since before the arrival of the Spanish in the early 16th century. The pieces from *Let's Work* are so small you could hold them all in your hands.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out:

- What jobs the book shows
- How the English and Spanish words for each job word are the same and different
- How palm weavings show how each job could look

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:

Jobs:

Ask questions like:

What job does this page show? What would someone do if they had that job?

What does the artwork show people doing?

What are you wondering about this job?

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?

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

Mexican, folk art, palm weavings, Chigmeatitlán, painter, balloon seller, cowboy/cowgirl, equestrian, clown, dancer, gardener, hair dresser, nurse, doctor, chef, waitress/waiter, bike racer, boxer, carpenter, electrician, teacher, librarian, photographer, musician, soccer player, jockey, fisherman/fisherwoman, computers, taxi driver, fires, baseball, athlete

Academic

miniature, figures, master, artisans, encounter, museum, locate

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 jobs do you remember from the book?
2. What did the artwork look like for [job]? What were the people doing in the picture? What details did you notice?
3. What did the book information tell us about how the artwork was made?

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 artwork make you imagine? Give an example.

2. Which jobs have you seen in real life? How are the palm weavings the same and different than the real life examples you've seen?
3. Why do you think the author chose the jobs she did? Would you have made the same choices if it was your book? Why or why not?
4. What did you notice about the English and Spanish words in this book? Give an example how they were the same or different.
5. Why do you think the author wanted to make this book?

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. What was your favorite page? Why? What did that page make you imagine?
2. What job would you choose? Why?
3. Choose two jobs from the book. How are they the same and how are they different? Show your thinking on a list, with a labeled picture, or on a Venn diagram.
4. What other jobs do you know? Which would you add to this book? What would the pictures look like?
5. Choose one palm weaving to study closely. Look at a real photo example of someone doing that job. How is the palm weaving artwork the same or different than the photo? Write your ideas in a list, make a Venn Diagram, or draw your ideas and add labels.
6. If you could meet the author of this book, what would you ask them or tell them?
7. If you could meet the artists who made these palm weavings what would you ask them or tell them?
8. If your family started a workshop to teach others how to make something, what would you teach?

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.multilinguallearning-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 might it feel like to do a job that takes a lot of patience and careful work, like creating miniature palm weavings? Give an example from your own life of a time you had to do a job patiently and carefully. What are some things you could do to help yourself be patient and careful? What could you do if the work gets frustrating? Act out what it might be like to be two people working on a palm weaving together. What would they say to each other? How would they encourage each other? What if one of them got frustrated?
3. Creating each sculpture, 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 "Let's Work."** Have each student choose a job, create an illustration, and compose a sentence for each page, starting with "You can be a..." or team up to create sentences connected by commas like the book. If your class speaks multiple languages, create a multilingual book using the format of *Let's Work* as a guide. Use the text to practice concepts about print. For instance, count the words per page or write "You can be a _____." sentences on cards to mix up and fix.
- **Use the job words in the book to practice phonological awareness concepts.** Give phonological clues for students to guess a job (E.g., "This has two syllables and rhymes with "prancer" for "dancer" or "This starts with the blend /cl/ and ends with an /n/ sound for "clown.")
- **Read other books about jobs and community helpers, such as Quinito's Neighborhood/El Vincindario de Quinito** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/quinito-s-neighborhood-el-vecindario-de-quinito>). 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.
- **Work with students to set up your dramatic play area as an weaving artists' workshop.** Include a work table, pictures of palm weavings for inspiration, pieces of raffia or something similar, and finished "woven" items such as hats or woven mats. Also provide a cash register or other materials for "selling" art. Encourage students to pretend to be a community of artists' creating and selling their art.

Social Studies/Geography

- **Locate Mexico on a map.** Find the state of Puebla. Talk about the author's biography that says she first learned of palm weavings from the State Folk Art Museum in neighboring Oaxaca. Find Oaxaca on the map. Act out a scene about Cynthia Weill visiting the museum, seeing the weavings, asking the museum staff about them, learning about the artists who made them, and traveling to Puebla to meet them and plan a book together.

Science, Math, and STEM

- **Look at photos of a palm tree.** Discuss the parts of the tree (trunk, leaves, etc.) Look at the palm weavings and talk about what part of the palm tree was used to make them. Chart students' questions and discuss possible answers. (For instance, some might wonder how the

palm strips become different colors.) If possible, give students the chance to observe palm leaves and/or something made from palm in real life.

- **Compare and contrast a palm weaving illustration from the book to a 3-D figurine or toy (to represent a real woven figure.)** Talk about the difference between the 2-D photo and 3-D object. Have students sort other items into 2-D vs. 3-D.
- **Create picture cards for the different jobs in the book.** Have students explore ways to create different categories and sort the jobs in different ways. (E.g., jobs that sell something, jobs that build something, jobs that use a vehicle, jobs with lots of movement, etc.)
- **Study the photo on the book jacket of all the palm weavings piled in someone's hands.** Talk about how the photographer made them appear larger by zooming in. Use a phone or tablet to experiment with zooming in on an item and making size comparisons (e.g., "It is really the size of a _____." Now it looks like it is the size of a _____.")

Art

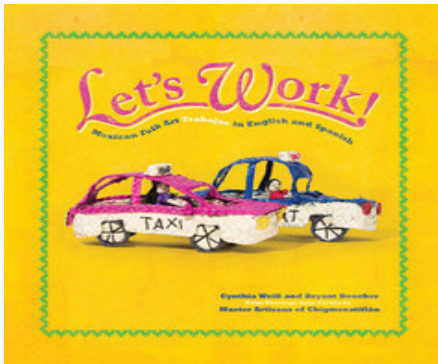
- **Write words for a class book of jobs as described above.** Have students create 3-D artwork to illustrate each I (e.g., clay, recycled materials sculptures, block or LEGO buildings) and photograph it. Make connections to the process used to illustrate the book, and talk about the transition from 3-D creation to 2-D photo

Physical Education

- **Learn or create yoga poses or other movements that relate to some of the jobs in the book (e.g., dancer pose).** Use some of the movements to play Simon Says or charades

School-Home Connection

- **Work with students to brainstorm inclusive interview questions for their family members about jobs.** For instance, "When you were a kid, what job did you want to have when you grew up and why?" "Who is someone you appreciate for doing their job in your community? Why?" Share responses
- **Ask family members if they'd be willing to come talk to students about their job, or share a photo and written blurb about what they do at work.**



Ordering Information

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By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:
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 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.

Bryant Boucher works all over the world as a professional photographer. This is his first book for children.

The Master Artisans of Chigmecatitlán

The miniature palm weavings in *Let's Work!* Were made by master artisans in the village of Chigmecatitlán in the Mixteca region of the Mexican state of Puebla. Most pieces are slightly larger than a coin. It takes tremendous skill and patience to weave each one. The artisans of this region have been making crafts since before the arrival of the Spanish in the early 16th century. The pieces from *Let's Work* are so small you could hold them all in your hands.

REVIEWS

"An eclectic array of careers--balloon seller, electrician, clown, librarian, hair dresser, equestrian--are presented, one per page, in both Spanish and English, creating an engaging opportunity for young readers to build vocabulary in two languages while encountering a unique craft practice that has endured since the 15th century." – *Publishers Weekly*

"There's always reason to celebrate when Weill returns with another double delight in her First Concepts series (Animal Talk, BCCB 10/16, etc.). The concept this time around is jobs, in a narrative that asks little listeners to consider what they want to be when they grow up." – *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://www.leeandlow.com)