

## ¡El Cucuy!

written by Joe Hayes  
illustrated by Honorio Robledo

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction (Folktales)

**Format:** Paperback, pages 32

**ISBN:** 9780938317784

**Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** K-3

**Guided Reading Level:** P

**Spanish Guided Reading Level:** P

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
3.7/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** 770L

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Folktales, Behavior, Family (Siblings, Parents), U.S.-Southwest, Mexico, Cautionary Tale, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/el-cucuy](http://leeandlow.com/books/el-cucuy)

## SYNOPSIS

So, you've been in trouble. Your parents tell you they're calling the bogeyman. You laugh. There's no such thing! Then—you hear a sharp knock. Standing at the door is the oldest man you have ever seen. It's el Cucuy (coo-COO-ee)! With that big red ear, he hears everything! In this cautionary tale, storyteller Joe Hayes tells about two girls who didn't believe in el Cucuy until he snatched them up. But of course, the story has a happy ending.

Con que haz estado haciendo travesuras. Tus papás te dicen que le van a hablar al Cucuy. Te riés. ¡No existe! Entonces: escuchas un fuerte golpe en la puerta. Y ahí esta el hombre más viejo que jamas haz visto. ¡Es el Cucuy! Con esa gran oreja roja, ¡escucha todo! En esta historia admonitoria, el cuentista Joe Hayes habla de dos niñas que no creyeron en el Cucuy hasta que se las robo. Pero claro, el cuento tiene un final feliz.

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

### “El Cucuy”

“Indeed, who hasn’t heard of el Cucuy? Can anyone grow up without hearing at least one teasing reference to the bogeyman? Whatever his name, he is probably the most universal figure in folklore.

Along with La Llorona, el Cucuy is very familiar to Mexican children and Spanish speakers throughout the American Southwest. He is even more widely known by the name of el Coco or el Cuco. References to him appear as early as the sixteenth century in Spain, and some even claim that the coconut (el coco) was so named by Spanish explorers because the three round indentations resembling eyes and nose on the shaggy brown fruit reminded them of a bogeyman.

In the Southwest, however, el Cucuy is the preferred name, perhaps because, in addition to meaning coconut, and figuratively one’s head, un coco is also a little child’s word for a minor injury, like the word boo-boo in English.

If the children hear of a spook named el Coco, it’s only when they are very young. When they are older and need a firmer hand to guide them, they are introduced to el Cucuy. The name has a much more ominous, mysterious quality to it. It reminds me of the strange hooting noise masked dancers sometimes emit at the Indian pueblos in New Mexico, and I suspect the name bears the stamp of some Indigenous language. On the other hand, Rubén Cobos, the great scholar of Southwestern folklore and language, sees it as an amalgam of coco and the startled expression: ¡Uy!

It seems as though the invocation of the bogeyman was at one time a standard part of child rearing in almost every culture. There are many, many stories of lazy, disobedient children whose feet are set back on the straight and narrow path by an encounter with the local ogre, and I’ve offered a fairly standard version. I’ve combined things I’ve heard from many different friends and acquaintances down through the years with details from my own imagination. The old stories, especially the cautionary ones, can seem rather brutal when viewed in the light of contemporary sensitivities, and although I’ve softened this telling somewhat, in the interest of authenticity I’ve kept it a bit harsh. Fortunately, as do most of the good old stories, it has a happy ending!” *–Joe Hayes, author*

## 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:

- Has an adult ever told you a story to “scare” you into being good? What was the story?
- What is a story you’ve read or heard in which something bad happens to someone who doesn’t behave or isn’t kind? What happened? (Remind students to think of fairy tales they know.)
- Have you ever heard of the “bogeyman?” What do you know about him?

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

### 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 and subtitle of the book, *¡El Cucuy!: A Bogeyman Cuento in English and Spanish*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- **Book Walk:** Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, bilingual text, and Author’s Note at the end. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Notice how it says, “as told by” instead of “by” the author. What clues does that give students about what type of book this is?
- **Read Author’s Biography:** See the end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think he wrote this book for young readers?
- **Encourage students to stop and jot** in their reading notebooks during the reading when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.
- **Have students write feeling(s)** in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out:

- Who is el Cucuy and what does he do in this story?

- What do the characters in this story learn because of el Cucuy?

Encourage students to consider why the author, Joe Hayes would want to share this story with young people.

## 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.

### Content Specific

el cucuy, bogeyman, cuento, cedar branch, cave, goody-goody, ashes, cactus, goats, mountainside, mounted, burro, bleating, herd, valley, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren

### Academic

shaggy, crooked, raising (children), behaving, helpful, lazy, trembling, hollering, begged, growl, rid, comfort, pleaded, stumble, winding, polite

## 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. According to stories, what does el Cucuy look like? What special body part does he have? What does he do?
2. Who are the three sisters? What details do we know about their family? How are the older sisters and the younger sister different? What do they each say about their choices?
3. How does Papá react to the older sisters' behavior? How do the sisters react to his threats? What finally convinces Papá to actually call for el Cucuy?
4. What does el Cucuy do?
5. What happens while the sisters are in the cave?

6. What happens when the goat boy loses his goat? What else does he find? How does he react to finding the sisters?
7. What happens when the sisters are reunited with their family? What changes as a result of their experience?
8. What lasting impact does the sisters' experience have on their village?

### 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. Why do you think the story of el Cucuy became popular with adults who want children to behave? Do you think it's a good way to encourage positive behavior? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the older sisters acted the way they did? What would you say to them if you could? What would you say to the dad, or the younger sister?
3. What did you imagine at the part when el Cucuy came down from the mountain? What details in the text helped you?
4. What might the father have been thinking after the sisters were taken by el Cucuy?
5. How might the story have turned out differently if the goat boy had made a different choice? What character trait words could you use to describe him?
6. What details about the setting did you notice in this story text and illustrations? How did those details help you appreciate the story?
7. What do you think the characters in this book learned as a result of their experience with el Cucuy?
8. Why do you think stories with "bogeyman" characters have been told for so long across different cultures?
9. Do you think it was the right decision for the father to call the bogeyman on his daughters? What could be other ways he could get them to better behave?

### 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 do you think the author's message to the reader is? What do you think he wanted to convey to young readers? Why do you think he chose this "cuento" (story) to retell, and with these particular details?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What is your role in your own family?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read

*¡El Cucuy!*? Why did you make those connections?

4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *¡El Cucuy!* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *¡El Cucuy!*?
6. What different type of conflicts are presented in *¡El Cucuy!*? Discuss the sisters' and the father's conflicts within themselves, their family, and conflicts in the world. Compare and contrast the different conflicts within the text.
7. Make a list of "a-ha moments" that various characters had in this story. Use a three-column chart. List the character, the experience that changed their thinking or made them decide to take a certain action, and what happened as a result.

### 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 Multilingual Learners to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages 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. Depending on 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 their favorite meal and how they eat it.
5. 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, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. The book is both in English and in Spanish, with Spanish on one side and English on the

other. Have students read both texts and compare both. Have students highlight any unknown words in the text, and then record them separately. Have students look up their definitions and share their knowledge about these words, if applicable.

7. Have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Students can begin with one to two pages and gradually increase to a chapter(s) where students highlight true cognates and determine the meaning to the word if they do not already know it. This can also be a great opportunity to also discuss false cognates with students. If time allows, have students reflect on the cognates that they found. 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>.
8. Consider consulting <https://www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/> for more ideas on how to support Multilingual Learners.

## ACTIVIDADES EN ESPAÑOL PARA APOYO EN PROGRAMAS BILINGÜES Y DE INMERSION DUAL

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

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

For the CCSS in Spanish, please check out <https://commoncore-espanol.sdoe.net/CCSS-en-Espanol/SLA-Literacy>

1. Estas estrategias se pueden usar en la clase de español o en la clase de inmersión dual igual cómo el resto de la guía de actividades.
2. Asigne el libro *¡El Cucuy!* a sus estudiantes. Coloque dos estudiantes juntos para leer el libro en voz alta. Compare las palabras en inglés y en español. ¿Cómo se comparan las palabras? Los estudiantes pueden practicar las palabras que tengan dificultad en pronunciar. Estudiantes pueden tener un cuaderno con las palabras difíciles para hacer referencia en el futuro.
3. Durante el tiempo de lectura, haga preguntas de comprensión a los estudiantes en inglés y en español para medir el nivel de comprensión en los dos idiomas. Preguntas pueden incluir: ¿de qué se trata el cuento? ¿Conectaste con uno de los personajes en el cuento? ¿Por qué sí o no? ¿Qué parte te gusta más en el cuento?
4. Elija palabras de vocabulario. Los libros ilustrados bilingües son una excelente manera para que sus estudiantes aprendan nuevas palabras de vocabulario porque el idioma se presenta en contexto. Mire a través del libro y asigne las palabras de vocabulario a las ilustraciones del libro. Si es posible, haga fotocopias de las páginas. Estudiantes pueden usar subrayadores en un color para inglés y un color para español para las palabras nuevas. También, puede recordar las palabras en un póster para referencia. Reflexione con sus estudiantes sobre cual palabras ya sabían y cuales palabras aprendieron.
5. En casa los estudiantes pueden pre-leer el libro con sus familias y puede sugerir que lean el libro juntos. Esto ayuda a practicar en leer y en el aprendizaje del vocabulario de los dos idiomas, inglés y español.

6. El uso de cognados puede ser útil en libros bilingües, en español y en inglés. En esta actividad estudiantes pueden buscar cognados en el libro. Los estudiantes pueden trabajar en parejas para identificar y formar una lista si las palabras son cognados verdaderos o falsos. Al final de la actividad es importante distinguir cómo clase la lista de los cognados verdaderos o falsos.

Estas actividades solo son sugerencias. Puede encontrar más recursos para apoyar las clases de inmersión dual y bilingües. Puede leer mas en (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2013/11/04/using-du-al-language-and-bilingual-books-in-third-and-fourth-grade/>).

### 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. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions.
2. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with four columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give? Talk specifically about possible ways the family could have resolved the older sisters' rude behavior without calling el Cucuy.
3. Use sticky notes to label the emotions of various characters at different points in the book. Have students choose an emotion that interests them: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, regret, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *¡El Cucuy!* and then also in an example from modern-day life.
4. Do you think the author wants the family members in this book to be role models for young people or an example of caution? What about the goat boy? Why or why not, for each character?



## 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.

### Writing and English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9; Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9; Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Read other traditional folktales from Spanish-speaking cultures, such as La Llorona** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/la-llorona>). Make connections between texts.
- **Use the story structure as a way to help students plan and write their own cautionary tales.** For instance, "Character behaves badly," "Character has a bad experience with an imaginary creature as a result of their behavior," "Character learns a lesson."
- **Talk about the power of oral storytelling.** Show students Joe Hayes's oral version of this story ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL2jxj\\_UdG8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL2jxj_UdG8).) Compare the book format to the oral version; how does each help readers/listeners appreciate the story in different ways?
- **In small groups, have students read the Q & A with the author found on his website** (<https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com/kids-q-a>.) Have each group prepare a short presentation to explain what the author's answer to one of the questions in their own words, and make connections between the answer and the book.

### Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students research "bogeyman" stories in small groups.** Have each group focus on a region or culture and present their findings to the class. Notice differences and common themes or patterns.

### Art

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

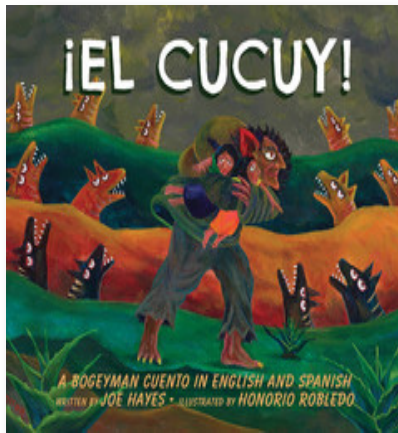
- **Read the section of the author's note that talks about how some researchers believe the origin of el Cucuy is related to the coconut.** Show students a coconut (or a photo of a coconut) and look for the "face." Have students choose their own objects from nature (e.g., a rock, pinecone, shell, etc.) and design a sculpture of a cautionary monster.

Perhaps encourage them to include one notable body part, like el Cucuy's big red ear.

### Home-School Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Develop interview questions as a class for students to ask an adult at home or in their community about cautionary tales or pieces of advice shared with them as children.** Give examples from your own life to spark ideas. Share and compare responses at school.



## Ordering Information

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New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joe Hayes** is one of America's premier storytellers. He grew up in a small town in southern Arizona where he started learning Spanish from his classmates. As Joe got older, he began reading the work of folklorists and anthropologists and gathering the old stories from the Southwest region. His books have received the Arizona Young Readers Award, two Land of Enchantment Children's Book Awards, the Texas Bluebonnet award, and the National Storytelling Network Talking Leaves Award. He lives in New Mexico. Learn more about him at [joehayesstoryteller.com](https://joehayesstoryteller.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Honorio Robledo**, artist and musician, has illustrated four Lee & Low books: *¡El Cucuy!*, *Nico Visits the Moon* and *The Dog Child* with the imprint Cinco Puntos Press, and *Super Cilantro Girl* with Children's Book Press. He and his wife Luana moved to Mexico so their children could grow up barefoot. Find him online at [www.instagram.com/honorio\\_robledo](https://www.instagram.com/honorio_robledo).

## REVIEWS

"Known for his bilingual retelling of the ghost story *La Llorona, the Weeping Woman* (1987), Hayes now delights with his bilingual version of a tale featuring southwestern bogeyman el Cucuy... Not the book for truly timid tots, but this masterfully told story belongs in the hands of those scoffing, hard-case customers who challenge you to find them a really scary story." – *Booklist*

"Kids will appreciate this chilling cautionary tale, best enjoyed during the daylight hours." – *Publishers Weekly*

## 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://leeandlow.com).