

TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

Nana's Big Surprise/ Nana, ¡Qué Sorpresa!

written by Amada Irma Pérez

illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

***Reading Level:** Grade 3–4

Interest Level: Grades 3–5

Guided Reading Level: O

**Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points:** 3.9/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the Spache
Readability Formula

Themes: Childhood
Experiences and Memories,
Families (Grandparents),
Home, Immigration, Sharing
and Giving, Siblings, Animals,
California, Collaboration,
Conflict Resolution, Coping
with Death, Empathy and
Compassion, Kindness and
Caring, Latino/Hispanic/
Mexican Interest

SYNOPSIS

Finally, the day arrived when we all piled into our old blue station wagon and drove to meet Nana at the bus station.

"There she is!" I cried. Through the bus window, I could see her familiar flowering rebozo... It was strange not seeing Tata next to her.

Nana's move from Mexico should be a joyous occasion. But this summer Nana is coming to Los Angeles, California because Tata, beloved husband and abuelo, has died. Amada and her five brothers hope to cheer her up with a surprise—a coop full of fluffy yellow chicks, just like the ones Nana raised with Tata in Mexico. But no matter how hard everyone tries to make Nana feel better, it seems like nothing can bring a smile to her face. That is, until one day the chicks reveal a surprise of their own.

Award-winning author Amada Irma Pérez gently explores universal themes of family, love, loss, and memory in this third collaboration with artist Maya Christina Gonzalez, whose bold and beautiful collage paintings leap from the page. *Nana's Big Surprise/Nana, ¡Qué Sorpresa!* offers comfort, feathers, and even laughter to readers of all ages.



BACKGROUND

Author's Note: "It was natural for us to invite Nana Chuy (my Mama's mother) to live with us, especially after Tata Porfirio died and Nana was sad and lonely. This story is based on my memories of that unforgettable time she spent with us. We laughed, cried, hugged, sang, danced, and shared many stories. Being together made the sadness easier to bear.

Our elders are a treasure. The amazing stories they share of their experiences (like raising chickens that turn out to be roosters!) enrich our lives like nothing else. Many cultural traditions included opening our homes and hearts to our elders to create temporary or permanent extended families. Even though it hurts when we lose them, it also reminds us that we are all part of the natural cycle of life and death. Remembering our loved ones with an altar on *El Día de los Muertos*, November 2nd, helps us bring their memory back to life."—Amada Irma Pérez

Building a Chicken Coop and Raising Chickens: Raising chickens is a popular endeavor. Fresh eggs are said to taste better and work better for baking. Many people appreciate knowing about their food's origins. Chicken manure can be composted, which gardeners appreciate. A chicken coop requires two square feet of floor space for each chicken and one nest box for every three hens. The coop needs feeder and water containers, a door and adequate ventilation. Chickens also need an area for a "run" that is fenced to keep them in and protected from predators, including household pets. Day-old chicks can be bought from a farm supply store and will take about six months to lay eggs; older birds produce eggs sooner. This series of blog posts from the Farmer's Almanac offers more information on building a chicken coop and obtaining and raising chicks (<http://www.almanac.com/blogs/raising-chickens>).

Pasodoble: Paso doble means "double step" in Spanish. The dance acts out a Spanish bullfight, with the lead dancer playing the part of the matador and the follower acts as the leader's cape or shadow. This YouTube video gives an example of the music and accompanying dance (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD7Tr6p8HQo>).

El Dia De Los Muertos/Day of the Dead: This holiday is celebrated on November 1st and 2nd in Latin America. It honors deceased loved ones with festivals and family celebrations. People set up candlelit altars in their homes to help the dead find their way back. Altars can include some of the deceased person's favorite foods or possessions. Families then go to the graveyard to picnic, visit, celebrate and clean gravesites. This National Geographic site explains, "Assured that the dead would be insulted by mourning or sadness, Dia de los Muertos celebrates the lives of the deceased with food, drink, parties, and activities the dead enjoyed in life (<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/dia-de-los-muertos/>). Dia de los Muertos recognizes death as a natural part of the human experience, a continuum with birth, childhood, and growing up to become a contributing member of the community. On Dia de los Muertos, the dead are also a part of the community, awakened from their eternal sleep to share celebrations with their loved ones." See <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/celebrations/day-of-the-dead/> for more student-friendly information and photos.

Awards for Nana's Big Surprise/Nana, ;Qué Sorpresa! include:

- **Américas Award Commended Title**, Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs
- **International Latino Book Awards, Best Children's Picture Book, Bilingual, 2nd Place**
- **Tejas Star Book Award Finalist**, Texas Library Association



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 story 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 strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: 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, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

family business, chicken coop, Mexicali, Mercado, cradle, Mexican Revolution, rebozo, chicken mole, corn kernels, “wrinkled her brow,” aisles, fresh hay, diary, pasodoble, roosters, hens, grave, altar

Academic

amazement, familiar, blurted, expert, chirped, sobs, flapped, clucked, responsibility, produce, delicious, cycle, natural, grieve, comfort, honor

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:

1. Have you ever arranged a surprise for someone? How were you hoping the person would react? How did s/he react?
2. Have you ever been around someone you care about when s/he was really sad? How did the person act? How did you feel? What did you do or say?
3. What do you know about taking care of chickens? Have you ever seen a chicken coop? Why might someone want to raise chickens?

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)

Talk about the title of the book. Then 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?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, illustrations, author and illustrator's dedications, author's note and family photographs, and note about the artwork. Point out that the text is in both Spanish and English.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out about:

- what is Nana's big surprise
- how Nana reacts to the surprise initially and as time goes on
- how a family takes care of a family member in need of support

Encourage students to consider why the author, Amada Irma Pérez, would want to share this story with young people.



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 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 does the family build in their yard? Why do they build it? How do they hope Nana will react?
2. What do the children remember about visiting Nana in Mexicali?
3. What do the parents bring home?
4. Why is Hector excited to see Nana?
5. What does the family see when the bus pulls up?
6. How does Nana react when she sees the chicken coop?
7. What do the children hear Nana doing in her room? What do they do to try to make her feel better? Does it work?
8. What does Nana teach the children about the responsibility of taking care of chicks?
9. As the months go by, what do the children do for the chicks each day? What does the girl write in her diary?
10. What does Nana do in the yard that surprises the girl? What do they do together? How does the rest of the family react when they arrive home?
11. What woke the family up the next morning? What did they find when they went outside? How did they react to finding out the chicks were all roosters?

12. What does Nana tell her family when she comes into the kitchen the next day? What does she want to do?

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. How are the family's feelings about Nana reflected in their preparations for her arrival?
2. How did the brothers act on the way home from the bus station? Why can it be hard to keep a surprise a secret?
3. Why might Nana's voice be "sometimes-sad, sometimes-happy" when she tells about raising chickens? How can memories be both happy and sad?
4. How does Nana feel about being at her grandchildren's house? What does she mean, "I miss Tata so much, it hurts deep in my heart?" Why do you think its hard for the children to accept her sadness?
5. Why does Nana "wrinkle her brow" when she wonders if she'll be able to find the right chicken feed? When she goes to the grocery store with her grandchildren, why does she find the soap aisle upsetting? How can moving somewhere new be overwhelming, especially in Nana's situation?
6. Why do you think Nana encourages the children to talk, read and sing to the chickens? Do stories truly make them produce delicious eggs or might Nana have a different purpose?
7. What does Nana say when she gathers her family around her in the yard? What does she mean, "birth, life and death are a cycle that every living thing must go through?" What does she mean, "It's natural to grieve, too." Why are these ideas comforting?
8. Are you surprised to find out the chicks are roosters? Were there any clues during the story? Why do you think Nana and the rest of the family didn't realize sooner?



“[T]his poignant tale of family love and grieving is ideal for reading aloud in either language, especially to children coping with deep losses of their own.”

—Booklist

“[T]his book is warm and well-balanced. The transition between languages is uncommonly smooth, and both languages hold equal value.”

—Foreword Reviews

“Gonzalez’s rich pastels and cartoonish chicks combine with Pérez’s powerful depiction of family love to prevent the story from becoming maudlin....Sweet, realistic, comforting.”

—Kirkus Review

9. How do you think the family feels about Nana leaving? How might her leaving be both happy and sad?

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

1. Make a list of information from the text about Nana, including her life experiences, knowledge and her values. Include examples of what she teaches her grandchildren. Based on this information, what words would you choose to describe Nana as a character?
2. Create a chart or timeline to describe how Nana's emotions changed over the course of the story. Consider how she felt when she arrived on the bus, when she first saw the chicken coop, when she went grocery shopping, etc. Be sure to think about times when she likely experienced multiple emotions at once.
3. Read the author's note, in which Amada Irma Pérez says that when her Nana lived with her family after her Tata died, “being together made the sadness easier to bear.” How does being together during sad times help a family “find comfort,” as Nana says

in the story? Write about a time when being with your family was comforting.

4. The story of the chicks that turned out to be roosters is a funny one for the author's family. What's the value of a funny family story? Write about a funny story from your life and why it's important to you.
5. In her author's note, Amada Irma Pérez says, “Elders are a treasure.” What does she mean? Describe supporting examples from the story and your own life.

ELL/ESL 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 Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students 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 describing a grandparent, telling a funny family story, or about what they learned about raising chickens.
- 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 English Language 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.

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

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strand 6, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 2 and 3)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Read Amada Irma Pérez's other books, *My Very Own Room* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2798>) and *My Diary from Here to There* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2799>). Discuss why the author may have chosen these aspects of her life, along with the story of her Nana, about which to write. (The author's note in each book will have some helpful insight.) What personal connections do students make to each story? What themes are reflected across the three stories? If Pérez were to write another book, what aspect of her life would students be interested in reading about next?
2. In this short interview with the author, she shares that she wrote *Nana's Big Surprise* to "honor" her grandmother: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ztBvmCEqLSA. Discuss what it means to honor someone with a story. Have each student choose someone important to him or her and write a true story honoring that person.
3. This book shares some information about raising chickens. As a class, write a "How To" book or chart about raising chickens, according to Nana. Then, determine which aspects of the topic require more information and divide students into groups to research and add information to various sections. (This series of blog posts from the Farmer's Almanac may be helpful: <http://www.almanac.com/blogs/raising-chickens>.)
4. Read other books about the experiences of immigrant and visiting grandparents, such as *Grandfather Counts* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2399>). Compare and contrast aspects of each story, such as how the family prepares for the grandparent's arrival, relationship of the grandparent and grandchildren, etc.
5. Discuss the usefulness of stories as tools for teaching both information and values. Have students act the part of an elderly person (from a



story, their own family, or imagined) telling a story intended to teach young people. Videotape or record the storytelling.

Science

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4 and 5)

1. Have students research the life cycle of a chicken. Have them present their findings orally and/or as a diagram or other visual display.
2. Have students research the differences between hens and roosters, including why it can be hard to tell them apart when they are young chicks. (This site offers a good start: <https://www.reference.com/pets-animals/difference-between-hen-rooster-4bf7eee725c2346f>.) Practice using context and/or additional research to understand unfamiliar terms, such as “combs” and “waddles.” Have students present findings orally or as a Venn Diagram or other visual display.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4 and 5)

1. Find Nana’s home city of Mexicali on map. Discuss the distance between there and the author’s home in California and the route her bus may have taken. If you’ve read other stories of grandparents visiting or coming to live with families in the USA, find their homes on a map and discuss how they traveled to the US.
2. Have students research Dia de los Muertos (The Day of the Dead.) Assign small groups to present to the class about different aspects of the holiday. Discuss the tradition of setting up an altar to honor deceased loved ones, as Nana plans to do for Tata in the book. Discuss how the holiday is celebratory even though its centered around loved ones who have died.
3. Have students research different cultures’ views on the care of elderly family members. This article (<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/jared-diamond-on-aging-150571>) and this list (http://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/3918/4012970/NursingTools/ch23_CultViewElders_407.pdf) provide somewhere to start. Share findings in oral presentations or create a class chart.

Art

(Writing Standards, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 5)

A note about the artwork: To create the paintings for this book, Maya used acrylic paint on rag paper for the faces, hands, and colored backgrounds. Shen then scanned photos, fabrics, beads, and textured papers into her computer and printed them out in different sizes and colors. She cut out and glue all of these different bits and pieces onto the paintings for a collage effect. Can you identify all of the different elements collaged into each painting?

Read the note at the end of the book describing how Maya Christina Gonzalez created the illustrations. Have students experiment with collage-style illustration to create an image that depicts a family story or memory.

School-Home Connection

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3)

1. Ask students to gather family stories from their parents or grandparents. Share at school in small groups and discuss common themes.
2. Discuss how photographs can preserve memories and stories. Use the photograph of the author’s grandfather weighing grapes and the memory in the text about Tata at his Mercado as an example. Ask students to look through family photographs with their parents or grandparents, if possible. Share photographs and related stories at school. If any student’s families are willing, invite them to school to share family photographs and tell the stories that accompany them.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amada Irma Pérez is an award-winning author, former classroom teacher, and a leading advocate of programs encouraging multicultural understanding. Like many of her students, Amada Irma was born in Mexico and came to the United States as a young child. Her books are based on her own family stories. She travels extensively, gives readings, and leads writing workshops. She lives with her family in Ventura, California. Find her online at <http://www.amadairmaperez.com>.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Maya Christina Gonzalez is a widely exhibited artist renowned for her vivid imagery of strong women and girls. She has illustrated nearly twenty children's books, and her artwork has appeared on the cover of *Contemporary Chicano/a Art. My Colors, My World* was the first book Maya both wrote and illustrated. Books that Maya illustrated include *Laughing Tomatoes*, *From the Bellybutton of the Moon*, and *Angels Ride Bikes*. She lives and plays in San Francisco, California. Find her online at <http://www.mayagonzalez.com/childrensbooks/>.

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.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

www.leeandlow.com/books/2852 (secure online ordering)

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

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

Book Information for Nana's Big Surprise



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*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

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Guided Reading Level: O

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Lexile™ Measure: N/A

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2852

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