

Domitila: A Cinderella Tale from the Mexican Tradition

adapted by Linda Jewell Reinhart Coburn
illustrated by Connie McLennan

About the Book

Genre: Folk Tale/Fairytale

Format: Paperback, \$10.95
32 pages

ISBN: 9781885008435

Reading Level: Grades 4-5

Interest Level: Grades K-5

Guided Reading Level: S

Spanish Guided Reading Level: S

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
5.1/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: 920L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Cinderella Around the World / Cultural adaptations, Conflict Resolution, Folk Tales and Fairy Tales, Dreams and Aspirations, Families, Friendship, Optimism and Hope, Overcoming Obstacles, Courage, Identity, Self Esteem and Confidence, Kindness and Caring, Mexico, Pride, Responsibility, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/domitila

leeandlow.com/books/domitila--2

SYNOPSIS

Domitila is not only “sweeter than a cactus bloom in early spring,” she is also a talented cook and an amazing leather artist. Most of the classical elements of a Cinderella story can be found in Domitila. A gentle weaving of her mother’s nurturing with strong family traditions is the secret ingredient for Domitila to rise above hardship to eventually become the Governor’s bride. Moreover, with a firm belief in simplicity and realism, Domitila makes a lasting impression as a triumphant Cinderella in her humility, service, and unassuming modesty.

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

The Story of Domitila: Excerpted from the Publisher's Note

The story of Domitila—a young girl who loves her home and family—had its origins with the Rivero family of Hidalgo, Mexico, generations ago. Although real names of all persons and places have been changed, the rich accounts of values, quests, conflicts, and joys have emerged as vivid strains of local folklore. As with all stories told and retold, facts meld with fantasy to create a magical mix.

Cinderella Stories

Cinderella stories have a rich history across many cultures. According to Abilene Public Library (<https://abilenetx.gov/1013/History-of-Cinderella>), the earliest known Cinderella story is the Greek story *Rodophis*, recorded between 7 BC and 23 CE. There's also a very early version from China, Ye Xian, from about 860 CE. The first written version appears to be from Italy in 1634. This story, *Cenerentola* by Giambattista Basile, included familiar details like an evil step mother and sisters and a nobleman looking for the owner of a lost shoe. The Disney story of *Cinderella* was adapted from the French author Charles Perrault's version. This version included magical details like the pumpkin, fairy godmother and glass slipper. The German Grimm Brothers also wrote a darker version of the story in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, published in 1812. For more information see <https://abilenetx.gov/1013/History-of-Cinderella>.

There are hundreds of versions of Cinderella from all over the world that share common elements, but also vary in cultural details. Most versions share the themes of changing luck or fate, and kindness, love, and other virtues triumphing over evil and greed.

Lee & Low Cinderella Series

- *Abadeha: The Philippine Cinderella* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/abadeha>
- *Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/angkat>
- *Anklet for a Princess: A Cinderella Tale from India* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/anklet-for-a-princess>
- *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/jouanah>
- *The Prince's Diary* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-prince-s-diary>

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:

- Explain that you will be reading a Cinderella story set in Mexico long ago. Have you heard the story of *Cinderella* before? What happens? (Have students share experiences with the tale to start a discussion of how different versions are both similar and different.)
- What details might you expect from a version of Cinderella set in Mexico?
- What do you know about themes of kindness and love vs. evil and greed from reading other stories? How might these themes relate to a Cinderella story?
- This story is an example of a fairy tale. What do you know about fairy tales? What are some of the characteristics of a fairy tale?

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, endpapers with a map of Mexico, author/illustrator biography (on jacket back flap), title page, illustrations, borders and proverbs around the text, publisher's note, recipe, and glossary.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out:

- what happens in this version of the Cinderella story
- how the Mexican setting impacts the details of this version
- how the themes in this book compare to other Cinderella stories

Encourage students to consider why the author, Dr. Jewell Reinhart Coburn, would want to share this story with young people. Mention that Dr. Coburn has adapted two other versions of the Cinderella story from different cultures, as well as numerous other traditional tales from different cultures.

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. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

Content Specific

rancho, sun-bleached, cactus bloom, townsfolk, adobe casa, cistern, shawl, leather-making, sandals, money pouches, canyons, plains, Governor's mansion, banquets, platter, *nopales*, weeds, servant, spirit, leather strip, carved, saddle, stablemen, embroidered, silk, serape, pueblos, widow, tortillas, enchiladas, tamales, *chili relleños*, fiesta, spurred, gallop, "turn of events," dismounted, bride

Academic

poor, gentle, generous, majestic, violently, crumble, remained, damp, musty, shivered, determined, grand, noble, scowled, prized, respect, roused, scolded, common, contrite, disgust, puckered, flavor, surly, delicacy, devoured, marveled, immediately, plight, stammered, sorrowfully, grief, presence, transfixed, tenderness, lingered, gasped, wretched, hesitantly, puzzled, shrugged, arrogant, exquisitely, rash, generations, headstrong, talents, gossip, vast, cunning, kindly, smugly, smirk, sympathy, scheme, encouraging, cruel, lazy, tangled, spellbound, resolved, urged, familiar, fragrance, graciously, pondered, aware, confidently, harsh, astray, plot, snare, prosperity, citizens, reunited

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 do Domitila and her mother work on together? What does Mama tell Domitila?
2. What happens when the rain comes? How do the characters respond?

3. What happens when Domitila serves Timoteo the nopales? How does he react? What does Domitila tell him?
4. What happened when Domitila returned home to her parents' house?
5. Why is Timoteo "puzzled" the next day? What "rash decision" does he make?
6. What happens when Timoteo meets Malvina?
7. What is Malvina's plan?
8. What does Timoteo find when he reaches the fiesta?
9. What does Timoteo realize about Domitila once he meets her?
10. What happens to each character at the end of the story?

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 can we learn about Domitila as a character from the opening scenes?
2. What do Domitila and her parents' reactions to the challenges brought by the rain tell us about their family values?
3. How do you think Domitila felt, or what might she have been thinking, as she left for the Governor's mansion?
4. How does Timoteo's Abuela impact the events of the story?
5. What words does the author use to describe Malvina and her actions? What does this collection of words say about her as a character?
6. How is life different for Domitila once her father marries Malvina?
7. How are Timoteo's experiences during his search for Domitila different than his life in the Governor's mansion? What impact do you think this has on him?
8. Were you surprised at the way Domitila reacted to meeting Timoteo at her mother's grave? Why or why not?
9. Why do you think the author chose to include Timoteo telling his children Mama's advice, and not Domitila?
10. Do you think there was magic in this version of Cinderella? Why or why not? Do you think more magical elements would have made the story better, or do you like it the way it is? Why?
11. Why do you think the author adapted the Cinderella story into this version? What ideas do you think she hopes readers will think about or discuss?

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. Mama always tells Domitila, "Do every task with care, and never, ever forget to add a generous dash of love." What does this advice mean? How does Domitila follow this advice? Brainstorm several ways you could follow this advice in your life.
2. Draw a heart map for Domitila as a poor young woman. (For an explanation of heart maps and a template, see <https://blog.heinemann.com/heart-mapping-at-home-meaningful-authentic-writing>.) What feelings, people, memories, places, things, or questions do you think would be in Domitila's heart, based on the information shared in the text? Using a different color, add additional ideas for when Domitila became the Governor's wife.
3. Create a Venn diagram comparing Mama and Abuela. How are their lives the same and different? How do they think similarly and differently?
4. Make a list of words that the author uses to describe Timoteo and his actions at the start of the book. Make another list of words used to describe him and his actions at the end of the story. How did Timoteo change during this story?

ELL 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. The Spanish version, *Domitila: Cuento de la Cenicienta basado en la tradición mexicana* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/domitila--2>) presents ample opportunity here to encourage students to engage with both languages. Have one student read the English translation and one student read Spanish translation (if applicable in your classroom). Both students who are reading the translations should be biliterate in both English and Spanish. Ask students to compare their experiences. What was it like reading the story in English? What was it like reading the story in Spanish? Have students discuss the different translations and how they are similar/different.
3. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
4. Have students give a short talk about some important advice someone gave them. If needed, provide sentence stems like, "_____ told me _____. It was important because _____. One way I used this advice was _____."

5. The book contains some 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.

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. Flip through the pages of the book and focus on the characters' faces on each page. Describe how their faces look and name the emotions they convey. (You might also notice their body language.) Use sticky notes to label various emotions. Ask students to act out specific sections of the story, using their faces and bodies to help convey how the characters felt. (Examples: Domitila working with her mother, Domitila leaving for the Governor's mansion, Domitila serving the nopales, Domitila finding out her mother died and meeting her spirit, Timoteo deciding to search for Domitila, Malvina and Pereza hatching their plan.)
2. Discuss some of the strategies Domitila uses to manage difficult feelings (e.g., remaining determined, choosing kindness). Ask students, "How could these strategies help you in your own life? What other strategies could also be helpful?"
3. Revisit the text to pay special attention to the proverbs included on each spread. Divide students into small groups. Have each group reflect on one proverb. Ask them to explain what they think it means and how it relates to the story, and to give an example of how it could relate to present-day life. As a class, discuss which proverbs are most meaningful to your classroom community. Display them in your classroom and refer to them when relevant.

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, 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 versions of the Cinderella story from other cultures, including others by the same author like *Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/jouanah>) and *Angkat: The Cambodian Cinderella* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/angkat>), or additional titles like *Anklet for a Princess: A Cinderella Story from India* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/anklet-for-a-princess>) or *Abadeha: The Philippine Cinderella* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/abadeha>). Compare and contrast the versions, including their settings, characters, cultural details, plot details, and themes.
- Use passages from the book to study adding dialogue to narrative writing, and using precise language to describe characters' talking and actions. For instance, study the scene in which Domitila serves Timoteo the nopales or when Malvina and Pereza steal and cook food for Domitila's father.
- Have students choose a setting and details and write their own Cinderella stories. Ask them to pay special attention to how their versions will reflect some of the common themes present in Cinderella tales.
- Adapt *Domitila* for a Reader's Theater with students – assign multiple students as narrators and different characters. Invite a younger class to attend the performance.

Social Studies, Geography & STEM

(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, 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)

- Have students locate Mexico on a map. Point out that Mexico shares a border with the United States. Then have students use the map to find the state of Hidalgo and the Sierra Madre Mountains.
- Help students learn more about nopales, also called prickly pear. Read the recipe in the author's note, the blurb about this food in *Yum! ;Mmmm! ;Qué Rico! Americas' Sproutings* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/yum-mmmm-que-rico-americas-sproutings>), this list of cactus facts (<https://gran.luchito.com/food/facts-about-mexican-cactus/>), or research other

traditional recipes and Mexican legends about and uses of nopal cactus online. Discuss why the author may have chosen nopales as the food Domitila served. As an extension, make a list of other familiar stories that include food as a key detail and talk about connections between texts.

Art, Media & Music

(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)

- Study the illustrations to make notes (on sticky notes or a chart) about how the details reflect Mexican culture. Sort observations into logical categories, such as clothing, plants, architecture and home décor, etc. Repeat the exercise either with other versions of the Cinderella story, or other books set in Mexico and discuss connections between texts.
- Study the border artwork on each of the text pages. Talk about how the colors and designs relate to the illustrations on the opposite page. Have students choose a proverb from the book, or another proverb that feels important to them. Have them write the proverb and decorate with a meaningful border.

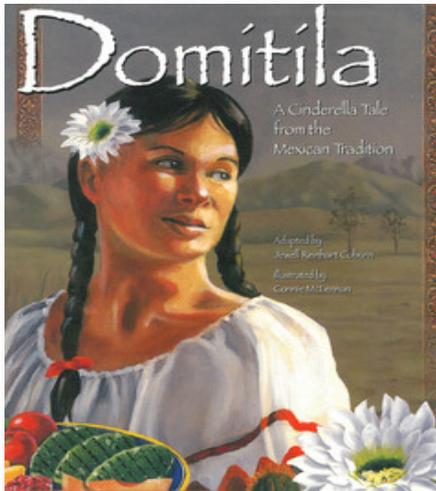
School-Home Connection

(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)

- As a class, compose a short blurb for families that describes the version(s) of the Cinderella story you've enjoyed at school. Have students ask adults at home about Cinderella versions or other favorite fairy tales they enjoyed as children. Share and compare responses at school.
- Make a list of the advice and proverbs offered in *Domitila* for students to share with their families. Leave blank space on the list for families to contribute any proverbs, sayings, or advice they remember hearing often during their own childhoods. Share and compare responses at school.



Ordering Information

🌐 General Order Information:

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📞 **By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

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✉ **By Mail:**

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jewell Reinhart is the author of many books on storytelling and folklore. Dr. Coburn has lived abroad and studied an array of diverse cultures. She is the recipient of a doctorate in Higher Education Administration and of two honorary degrees, plus many literary awards. She is the author of two other titles in Shen's *Cinderella* series. Visit the author's website at <https://jewellcoburnbooks.com>.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Connie McLennan is a freelance illustrator whose work, in a variety of styles and media, has appeared in numerous advertisements, publications, and textbooks. After earning a degree in journalism, she studied at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco. Connie works at home in Rocklin, California, where she lives with her husband, Geoff. She has one adult son, Thomas. In her spare time, she enjoys painting. Visit the illustrator's website at <http://www.conniemclennan.com>.

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.