



## Classroom Guide for **HOME AT LAST**

by **Susan Middleton Elya**  
illustrated by **Felipe Davalos**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grades 2–3

Interest Level: Grades 1–4

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Guided Reading Level: O

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.3/5

### Themes

Immigration, Adjusting to a New Home, Learning a New Language, Mother-Daughter Relationships, Homesickness, Overcoming Obstacles, Self-Confidence, Latino Interest

### Synopsis

When the Patiño family moves from Mexico to the United States, Ana and her parents have to make adjustments. Ana quickly learns to fit in at school, and she also learns to speak English. She and her father, who works in a canning factory, practice their new language at home. The transition isn't so easy for Ana's mother, however. She spends most of her day at home with Ana's young twin brothers and is afraid to learn English. Errands in the neighborhood often present problems and seemingly insurmountable challenges. Not until one of the twins gets sick does Mama realize she, too, must adapt. Ana and her father support Mama as she attends night school to learn English, and they are there to celebrate with her when she succeeds.

### Background

The United States has always been an important destination for immigrants from other countries. People come for a variety of reasons. These include: they are immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, family preferences, employment preferences or opportunities, diversity programs, and refugee/asylum cases. One of the top five countries that currently accounts for legal immigrants in the United States is Mexico. The states with the highest immigrant populations of Mexicans are California, New York, Florida, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. According to U.S. Census data, people of Mexican heritage now number more than twenty million people—13% of the U.S. population.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before reading the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What do you think it would be like to move to another country? What do you think would be different? Why is it sometimes hard to change?
2. How can we help new students in who come to our class or school from a foreign country?
3. What are some things you can learn from newcomers to our school or your community?
4. How do you feel before you have to take a test? What do you do to prepare for a test?
5. How do you think language can be both a barrier to and a means of communication?

**Teacher Tip**

HOME AT LAST is a good addition to your back-to-school collection. You may also wish to include this book as part of your reading for Hispanic Heritage Month, which is observed from September 15 to October 15.

**Exploring the Book**

Display the book cover and read aloud the title. Ask students where they think home is in the story. What do they think the title means?

Have students study the front and back cover illustrations. Ask students where they think the girl and her mother are. Where have they been? Where do you think they are going? Where do you think the father is? What is he thinking?

Share the dedications on page 3 with students. Ask students what clues the dedications offer about the story.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Have students read to find out about the people depicted on the book's cover, and where their home is.

**Vocabulary**

Write the following words on the chalkboard. Point out that the words are all verbs in their present tense forms. Tell students that each word appears in the story in the past tense. Have students copy the words as a list and then write the past tense form alongside each word when they find it. Remind students that some verbs change their spellings in the past tense form, and other verbs have irregular past tense forms.

After students have paired all the present and past tense words, let them work with partners to take turns using each present tense and past tense word in sentences. Encourage students to use a dictionary if they are unsure of a word's meaning.

enroll	surround	practice
boil	suggest	overcharge
snap	shoo	trudge
pace	nod	find
borrow	choose	wave
wonder	stand	ring
grab	notice	hurry

## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, review comprehension, and develop students' understanding of the book. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations to support their responses.

1. Why do you think the Patiño family has come to the United States?
2. What food is probably canned at the factory where Ana's father works? Why do you think so?
3. Why does Ana like her new school?
4. Why do you think Ana's mother is reluctant to learn English? Why might it be harder for her than for Ana and Papá?
5. How do some people treat Mamá when they can't understand her?
6. Why does Mamá finally agree to learn English?
7. How do you think Mamá feels when she starts her classes? Why does she learn to like them?
8. Why is Mamá able to get chicken on sale the second time?
9. Why does Mamá say "We're home" at the end of the story?
10. Why will it be easier for Ana and her family once her mother knows English?

### Literature Circles\*

If you are using literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that convey Mamá's feelings as she tries to cope with her new home.
- The **Illustrator** might create pictures of scenes not shown in the book, such as Papá working at the canning factory.
- The **Connector** might find other books about immigrant families.

- The **Summarizer** should provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find books about life in Mexico.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Two such books you may wish to refer to are: *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 1994) and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### **Reader's Response**

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. What did you learn about communication in this book? Do you think it's a good idea to learn another language someday? Why?
2. How are the illustrations important to this book? How do they help you understand the characters and their feelings?
3. How will the experiences of Ana's twin brothers in the United States differ from hers?
4. How do the family members in this story show they care for one another?

### **Other Writing Activities**

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. The Patiños come from Mexico. Where is your family originally from? Interview a family member to find out and then write a paragraph about this place.
2. Make believe you are Ana. Write a postcard to a friend in Mexico about your new life and experiences in the United States.
3. Challenge students to retell the story from Mamá's point of view.
4. In the story, the character who changes the most is Mamá. Write a paragraph comparing her at the beginning and end of the story.

### **ESL Teaching Strategies**

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Encourage Spanish speakers to read aloud the Spanish words and phrases in the text. Have them teach the rest of the class how to say these words correctly. Then ask the Spanish speakers to share other words or phrases that relate to the story. For example, students might tell their classmates the Spanish words for items in the grocery store. Have students make a chart showing the Spanish and English words for each phrase.

2. Preteach key English vocabulary to help keep English language learners focused on the story. Post essential key words in an accessible spot in the classroom.

3. Make an audiotape of the story and allow students to listen to it as they follow along in the book. Speak or read slowly so students can follow. Also be sure to explain idiomatic phrases such as “running a fever.”

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES**

To integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you may wish to have students complete some of the following activities.

#### **Language Arts**

Write the similes below on the chalkboard. Explain that a simile is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things using the word *like* or *as*. Ask students identify the two things being compared in each simile. Then talk about how comparisons like these make the story more interesting to read.

- He [the clerk] shooed her [Mamá] away like he would a bird in the park.
- The bare windows looked like a row of open mouths in the growing darkness.

#### **Social Studies**

1. Locate Mexico on a map or globe. Have students answer questions such as:

What countries share borders with Mexico?

What is the capital of Mexico?

What body of water borders Mexico on the east? On the west?

2.. Students might research Mexico's cultural past and make posters showing things a visitor would see there.

3. Students might find it interesting to research the ways in which Mexico's food, clothing, music, and art have influenced United States culture. Then have students record and present the information graphically. They might make booklets; posters, charts, and/or graphs; a play or other dramatic performance; a computer presentation; and so on.

#### **Citizenship**

Point out to students that not everyone in the book is patient or helpful to the Patiño family. Discuss how rude or unsympathetic behavior makes people feel. Then work with students to brainstorm a list of ways to make a newcomer, especially one from another country, feel at home in your classroom, school, and community. Encourage students to keep these ideas in mind during the year.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR**

**Susan Middleton Elya** is a native of Urbandale, Iowa, and now lives in Danville, California, with her husband and their children. Elya, who has a degree in Spanish and a masters in English from Iowa State University, taught Spanish for ten years to junior high school students.

Elya is the author of three other books for LEE & LOW that teach Spanish to children. These are *Say Hola to Spanish* (1996), *Say Hola to Spanish, Otra Vez (Again!)* (1997), and *Say Hola to Spanish at the Circus* (2000).

**Felipe Davalos** is an award-winning illustrator of numerous children's books including *All the Way to Morning*, *Punia and the King of Sharks: A Hawaiian Folktale*, and *Secret Stars*, for which he was awarded a Pura Belpré Illustrator Award Honor. Davalos is a native of Mexico who now makes his home in Sacramento, California.

HOME AT LAST has received several honors. These include:

- "Choices," Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)
- Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, NCSS/CBC

"A well-told story of triumph and family solidarity." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"The characters' growth and new experiences show how a family pulls together and makes its new surroundings 'home'." —*School Library Journal*

### Resources on the Web

For reviews, awards for **Home at Last** visit:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/homeatlast.html>

To view the electronic version the **Home at Last Active Reader Classroom Guide** go to: <http://www.leeandlow.com/teachers/guide49.html>

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

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