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# WOW STORIES

CONNECTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM  
VOLUME X, ISSUE 2

Summer 2022

Using Story Explorations to Engage with Fairytale Text Sets

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**WOW Stories: Volume X, Issue 2  
Using Story Explorations to Engage with Fairytale Text Sets  
Summer 2022**

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## Introduction and Editors' Note

In this issue of *WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom*, we feature voices of elementary teachers as they share their experiences implementing an Out-of-School Time Program called Story Explorations. We are the creators of Story Explorations and we also observe teachers and students as they engage in the activities embedded in the Explorations.

Our work began in the summer of 2021 with an idea for creating an Out-of-School Time literacy program for intermediate grade students. To open this issue, Marlene Flores describes our holistic planning process in her article "From Ideas to Implementation." She also shares how we connect picturebooks to hands-on literacy and STEM activities that pique students' curiosity and foster their creative thinking while building their comprehension strategies. Marlene's article includes titles from the Story Explorations text sets that WOW readers can check out on their own.

Three classroom teachers contribute vignettes to this issue in which they share their experiences of implementing Story Explorations in their respective Out-of-School Time Programs. In the first vignette, "Reading and Responding to Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk," Monica Escobedo shares how students in her program planned tableaux and applied soundscapes (Leland et al., 2017) to *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005) a fairytale variant of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Kellogg, 1997). Escobedo states that she has "never seen so much enthusiasm for reading" among the students.

In her vignette, "Let's Make a Deal: Bartering Like Juan," Carmen Rodriguez shares how students learned to barter like Juan, the main character in *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005), through a modified version of the gameshow *Let's Make a Deal*. Rodriguez's activity culminated with students taking their new bartering skills outside of the classroom to barter with family members. WOW readers can read Rodriguez's vignette to find out what students ended up with at the end of the activity.

In the final vignette, "A Story Exploration at North Valley Elementary School," Sylvia Najera highlights literacy and STEM activities connected to *Red Ridin' In the Hood* (Marcantonio, 2005), a fairytale variant of the classic fairytale, *Little Red Riding Hood* (Pickney, 2007). The students in Najera's program designed pieces for a game called *Loteria*, and created a hydraulic system found in Lowrider vehicles. Najera details how these activities engaged students' family members in meaningful ways.

As the creators of Out-of-School Time Story Explorations Programs, we didn't expect such an overwhelmingly positive response from teachers, students, and families. We hope WOW readers will connect with and enjoy reading these vignettes. We also hope these vignettes will inspire readers to check out the text sets and create their own story exploration activities for students in their classrooms. We invite readers who create these experiences to write about them and then submit their own vignette to *WOW Stories*. We would enjoy reading these vignettes!

Mary Fahrenbruck and Marlene Flores, Guest Co-Editors

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## **From Ideas to Implementation: The Process of Creating Activities for Story Explorations**

Marlene Flores

"This is so much better than regular reading! I wish we had more time to do these activities. I love working with craft stuff. Making my mini me was fun, then I could pretend to be the giant with my mini me model." – Bernadett, Grade 4

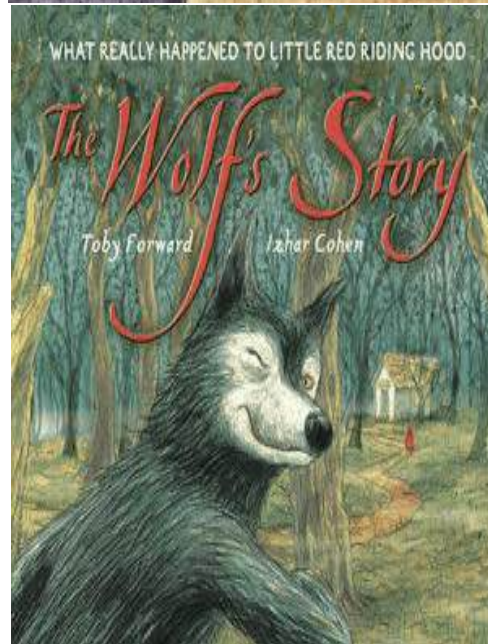
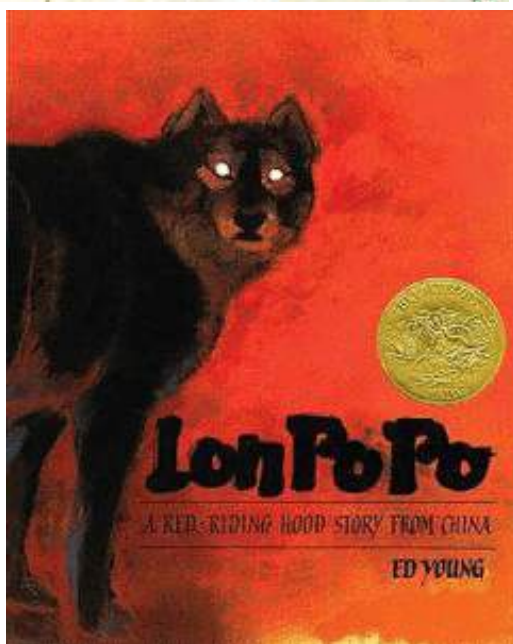
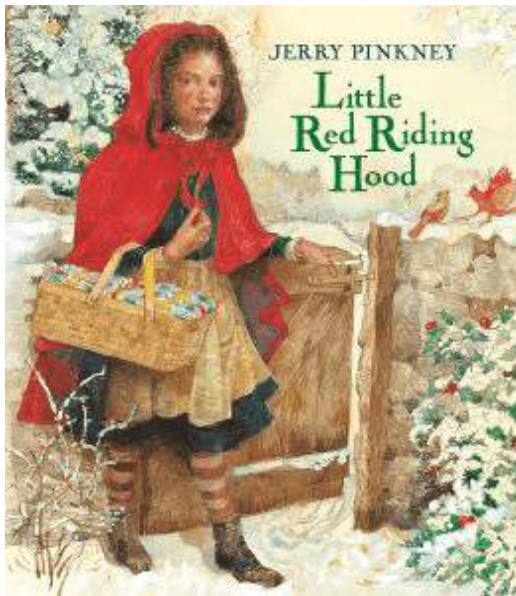
"I love this type of stuff, because it really makes me think." – Logan, Grade 4

Bernadett and Logan participate in Story Explorations, an Out-of-School Time Program that challenges their thinking while stimulating their creativity. Based on these quotes, it's clear they enjoy reading new stories and working on projects that extend their thinking about each story. In this article, readers learn more about the Story Explorations, an Out-of-School Time Program offered to public schools located in southern New Mexico.

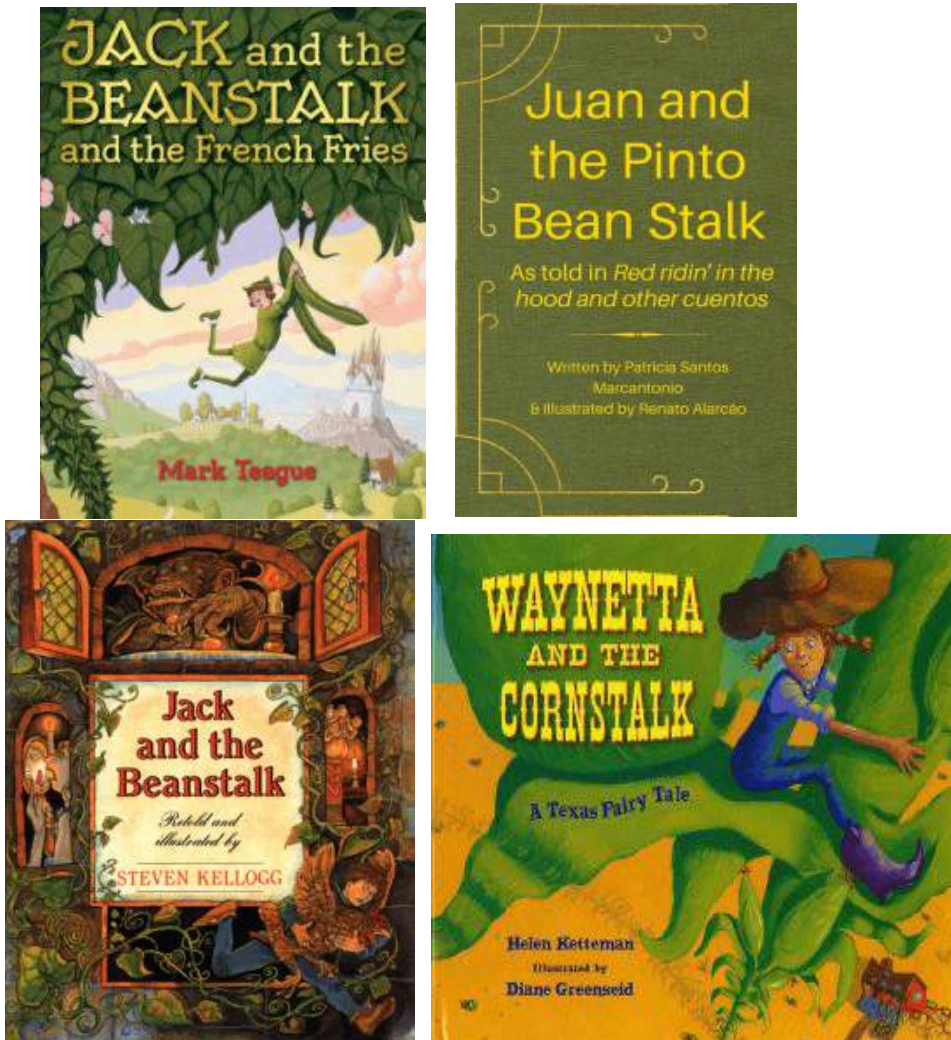
### **Story Explorations**

Story Explorations is a program offered twice each academic year that engages students in grades 4, 5, and 6 in literacy activities designed around a thematic text set. The explorations are supported by STEM activities with an emphasis on six areas of language arts: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing (NCTE, 1996). These explorations help students improve their proficiencies in language arts. The aim is that these skills transfer into their regular school day learning and beyond.

Foundational to Story Explorations are high quality, culturally and linguistically relevant picturebooks (See Galleries 1 and 2). Students explore each picturebook by connecting hands-on activities that pique their curiosity and foster their creative thinking while building their comprehension strategies. Various genres are explored in this program such as fairytales and their variants, poetry, and folklore.



Gallery 1. Picturebooks for Fall Story Explorations: Red Ridin' In the Hood



Gallery 2. Picturebooks for Spring Story Explorations: Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk

Story Explorations is a program offered by the STEM Outreach Center at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico, U.S. The STEM Outreach Center provides high-quality, innovative Out-of-School Time Programs (<https://stemcenter.nmsu.edu/out-of-school-time-programs/sp-home.html>) to the communities of southern New Mexico. The mission of the Center is to build a strong framework that supports STEM education for under-represented students in area school districts. The STEM Center currently works in seven districts with over 400 teachers to provide programming to over 5,000 students.

The creation of Story Explorations stemmed from a need for a literacy program for intermediate grade levels. At one time, only STEM programs were offered to intermediate students. Additionally, instructors expressed a need for students to engage with books outside of their regular school day to explore, engage, and pique the students' interest.

To do this, I and my colleague, Mary Fahrenbruck, explored stories that felt welcoming and relatable to intermediate students. We decided to focus on a fairytale theme for each exploration. Our first Story Exploration is titled Red Ridin' in the Hood and the second is titled Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk.

Both short stories are part of a collection found in *Red Ridin' In the Hood and Other Cuentos* written by Patricia Santos Marcantonio and illustrated by Renato Alarcão (2005). *Red Ridin' In the Hood* is a fractured fairytale based on the classic Red Riding Hood story.

In *Red Ridin' in the Hood* (Marcantonio, 2005), Roja must make her way through the city to her sick Abuelita's apartment. Roja encounters Lobo Chavez hopping down the street in his low rider car. After Roja refuses a ride from Lobo Chavez, he races to Abuelita's apartment building where he plans to impersonate Abuelita. Lobo Chavez's plans are foiled when the police arrest him for planning to eat people and for impersonating Abuelita. The story ends with Roja and Abuelita driving off in Lobo Chavez's low rider.

*Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005) is a fractured fairytale based on the classic Jack and the Beanstalk story. In *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk*, Juan is unmoved by his mother's wishes of a better future for him. Juan skips school to go to the beach and hangs out at the local 7-11 convenience store, eating microwave burritos. One day, Juan's mother instructs him to sell their old, beat up car, Old Vaca. Juan sets off and meets a wheezing old man who trades Juan a handful of pinto beans for Old Vaca. This story follows the traditional plotline of an angry mother who throws the beans out the window where they grow into a beanstalk. Juan climbs the beanstalk, encounters a giant, steals the giant's treasures, chops down the beanstalk, and lives happily ever after.

To begin developing each story exploration, Mary and I created a story map. We made a web of ideas for explorations that we thought intermediate grade students would enjoy (See Figure 1). This process allowed us to record all ideas, regardless of limitations.

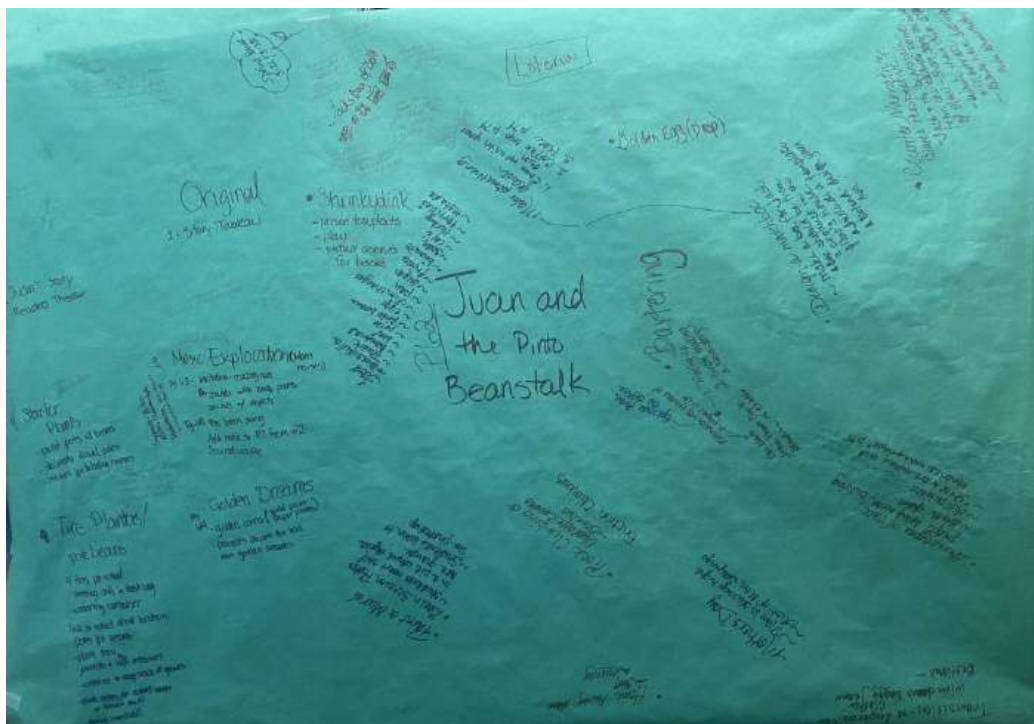


Figure 1. Brainstorming Map



The next step was to select explorations that met our criteria:

1. Time length of each session. Explorations need to fit into a 90-minute session. More involved explorations can be divided into two or three sessions if needed.
2. Number of activities. Activities need to fit within the timeline of a 30-session program.
3. Feasibility of materials. Each exploration needs to fit within the program budget constraints.
4. Transportability of materials. Materials need to be able to be transported to school sites by instructors. All materials must fit into a vehicle.
5. Academically and developmentally appropriate. Explorations need to align with student's academic and developmental milestones.
6. Seamless alignment to the picturebook. Explorations need to connect to the stories in obvious ways.

Our next step was to put the explorations in order of implementation. Then the fun began! We developed each exploration. For more complex explorations, we ordered the materials and experimented with them (See Figure 2). We wanted to make sure the explorations could be successfully implemented as planned.



Figure 2. Marlene Experiments with Materials

The next step was to compose each exploration using a template for uniformity that included relevant information for teachers. The template included background information about the story and about the activity planned, the steps for implementing the plan, the materials needed, and an activity to extend the activity into the students' homes.

Finally, we advertised Story Explorations to teachers at participating school sites. During our first Story Exploration, 15 teachers agreed to implement *Red Ridin' In the Hood* (Marcantonio, 2005). For our second Story Exploration, 16 teachers agreed to implement *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005). We were both surprised and excited by the success of Story Explorations.

In this issue of *WOW Stories*, three teachers who agreed to implement Story Explorations have written vignettes about their experiences. They discuss how students related to the stories and activities, and how these explorations have brought joy to their teaching experience.

## What We Learned from Creating Story Explorations

Story Explorations began as an idea that, with trials and errors, developed into a successful Out-of-School Time Program. Much of the success stems from our reflections about what we have learned from interacting with teachers and students.

**Fairytales are timeless.** We learned that fairytales still hold their magic with intermediate grade students. Students still enjoy listening to and learning with traditional fairytales as well as fairytale variants. As Geraldine, a fifth-grade Story Explorations participant, stated, “I’ve had fun learning new stories and doing the projects. We don’t get to do projects all the time during regular school.”

**Not all ideas are good ideas.** We learned while brainstorming ideas for activities in Story Explorations that some activities had limitations. Initially, we believed the sky was the limit. For example, we wanted to give teachers car tires to make planters for an activity in the Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk Story Exploration. We discarded this idea because of the transportability of materials criteria.

**Too many activities.** We learned that the number of activities we created were too numerous to fit into a 30-session program. We kept the most pertinent activities. This allowed for a deeper exploration of the stories we had selected.

**Teachers will adapt.** We learned that teachers felt confident in adapting the activities to meet the needs of the students. For example, Carmen Rodriguez, one of the program instructors and authors in this issue of WOW Stories, adapted one of the activities to resemble a popular television game show illustrating how she relates the activity to students.

**Programs relate to school and home.** We learned that we could design activities that students could take home to engage their families. Families responded positively, resulting in deeper home-school relationships.

We were grateful for the opportunity to follow up with teachers and students through observations, surveys, and focus group meetings. Their feedback provided us with helpful tips that we plan to use to create equally successful programs in the future.

## Moving Forward

The success of the fairytale themed Story Explorations has motivated us to create two new story explorations with a mythological theme. Based on what we learned about our process and the ways that students engage with the explorations, we anticipate that more teachers will want to implement these Out-of-School Time Programs and even more students will want to participate.

Marlene Flores is a Program Specialist at the STEM Outreach Center at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA.

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## **Reading and Responding to Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk**

Monica Escobedo

Loma Linda Elementary School is located near the border of two countries (U.S. and Mexico), two states (Texas and New Mexico), and three cities (Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA; El Paso, Texas, USA; and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico). The proximity to these borders leads to the arrival of new students on a constant basis.

There are approximately 303 students from kindergarten through sixth grade currently enrolled at Loma Linda Elementary. Of these students, 98% are Latinx with the remaining 2% comprised of African American, Caucasian, and other heritages. Loma Linda Elementary is a Title 1 school which entitles 100% of the student population to receive free meals at breakfast and lunch. Despite Loma Linda Elementary being a Title 1 school, there is a 1:1 ratio of Chromebooks for students.

I have been teaching for 17 years, most of those years in kindergarten and first grade. This is my third year of teaching fourth grade but my first year of teaching at Loma Linda Elementary. When I went into teaching, I always thought that I would stay teaching in the lower primary grades. Never had I thought that I would teach fourth grade. Never had I thought I would enjoy it as much as I do. I guess the saying is true: Never say never. Teaching fourth grade has been a wonderful experience. I enjoy the conversations and bonds that I have formed with the fourth graders in my class.

### **Story Explorations at Loma Linda Elementary**

I am privileged and honored to be a part of a new program called Story Explorations, brought to Loma Linda Elementary by New Mexico State University (NMSU). Story Explorations is a brand new Out-of-School Time Program that is part of the NMSU STEM Outreach Center.

Story Explorations for grades 4-6 takes place after school, twice a week from 3-4:30 p.m. Many of the activities in Story Explorations focus on the six language arts: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing (NCTE, 1996). Each of the activities throughout the program build on each other. Each activity is presented with a purpose, some background information, and many visual representations.

At the beginning of each activity I make sure to go over expectations and objectives with students. I also make it a point to invite connections for students. I find making connections to be very conducive for the students as a critical reading comprehension strategy that helps them make meaning of what they are reading. When students make connections to the texts that they read, they make sense of what they read. They also retain the information better and engage more with the text itself.

During their time in Story Explorations, students explore various genres including fairytales and fairytale variants, poetry, and folklore. During the program duration, students engage in literacy and STEM activities that promote and expand comprehension and their creative thinking. I also notice how Story Explorations leads to students' individual creativity.

## Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk Story Exploration

During one of the first Explorations, students were reintroduced to the classic fairytale of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Kellogg, 1997). The classic fairy tale tells the story of a poor country boy named Jack who trades the family cow for a handful of magic beans, which grow into a giant beanstalk reaching high into the clouds. When Jack climbs the beanstalk, he finds himself in a castle with an unfriendly giant who has many riches.

Following this Exploration of the classic story, students were introduced to a fairytale variant called *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005), which has an injection of modern Latinx culture, providing a twist on the traditional forms while sustaining a freshness of their own (see Flores in this issue of WOW Stories for a summary of *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk*). For example, instead of selling a cow, Juan's mother sends him out to sell the family car who they named Old Vaca. Vaca is the Spanish word for cow. Another example, instead of Jack's mother being concerned about Jack working on the farm, she is more concerned about Juan doing something with himself, going to college, getting a degree, and a better job.

## Responding to Stories with Tableau and Soundscapes

The Story Explorations for *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005) invite students to use drama as a response to the story. Students were introduced to a Tableau, which is visual recreation of a still or frozen scene from the story. They were also introduced to another reader response strategy called Soundscapes (Leland et al., 2017). Soundscapes are based on the work of Foley artists (<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-foley-artist/>), the people who create sounds to make a movie or TV show more realistic.

For the Tableau strategy students worked in small groups of four or five to recreate a scene of their choice from the story using facial expressions and poses with their body to convey action or movement and to help students visualize the characters, setting, and plot to further increase comprehension. Props were not necessary but students enjoyed creating them for their Tableaux.

Some students gravitated toward the actual climbing of the beanstalk. One student positioned green streamers on the floor to look like the beanstalk. He pretended to climb up the beanstalk and used his hand to show he was looking a long way down (See Figures 1 and 2). Another student played the part of the giant saying "Fe fi fo fum. I smell the blood of an Englishman!" This verse is heard in both *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Kellogg, 1997) and *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005). Students recognized the verse as alliteration. Students had learned about alliteration in a previous lesson in their regular day time class. Students were able to identify the repetition of sound which they said gave them a visual cue as to what or how the giant acted anytime Jack/Juan was in the castle.



Figure 1. Streamers to Represent Juan's Beanstalk



Figure 2. Student Climbs the Beanstalk



Figure 3. Two Students Create a Story Tableau

Doing the Tableau strategy gave the shyest of students the opportunity to shine. A few students are quiet and rarely volunteer to take part in anything. However, the story Tableau gave them a way of showing off their creativity without having to speak to an audience (See Figure 3). Instead they were able to show their creativity with a movement or expression, which seemed to be more at their level of socialization.

The second exploration incorporated the Soundscape Reader Response strategy (Leland et al., 2017). For this strategy, students added sound into the story to help them visualize the characters, setting and plot to increase comprehension further. Students created a soundscape for the story of Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk (Marcantonio, 2005). They incorporated chairs being dragged to make the sound when Juan's mother pulled up a chair so she could sit down to speak to him. They used foam cushions from the classroom reading area to make the sound of Juan running into his mother (See Figure 4).



Figure 4. Students Create the Sound of Footsteps with Foam Cushion



Figure 5. Student Creates the Sound of Crashing Waves Using a Tub of Water

A student clicked her tongue to make the sound of Juan’s mother showing disappointment. They incorporated a music byte into the reading to show the music that Juan was listening to with his friends while on the beach, and they used a tub of water and their hands to simulate the waves crashing on the beach (See Figure 5).

### Creating a Passion for Stories and for Reading

Students who typically do not participate in activities were more than willing to contribute to the soundscapes to bring the story to life. I had never seen so much enthusiasm for reading.

The next day the students in the Story Explorations group wanted to perform their reading and soundscape to friends in their regular classroom. The performance was a huge success! Next thing I knew, I had a handful of students who wanted to know if they could join Story Explorations. Story Explorations is becoming the new “in” thing for Out-of-School Time Programs.

I have a passion for reading, and I hope that I can pass that passion onto students in my classroom. As a classroom teacher I can see the value of what it is to give students a variety of literature. I want them to have an appreciation for their own cultural heritage as well as those of others. And these stories definitely connect to students' culture and language.

Monica Escobedo teaches 4th grade students at Loma Linda Elementary School located in Anthony, New Mexico, USA.

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## Let's Make a Deal: Bartering Like Juan

Carmen Rodriguez

The city of Sunland Park is home to Desert View Elementary School, one of three elementary schools in the city. Sunland Park is located in southern New Mexico, on the border of El Paso, Texas, USA and separated from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico by the Rio Grande River. Sunland Park has a population of about 18,449 people. Desert View has an enrollment of about 400 students from kindergarten to sixth grade with a 99.8% Latinx enrollment. Desert View Elementary provides a space for all students to thrive and uses creative approaches for enrichment learning while encouraging students to think outside of the box.

Desert View Elementary works with the Out-of-School Time Program, part of the STEM Outreach Center at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. These programs bring many benefits to the school. "Afterschool programs can support social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, reduce risky behaviors, and provide a safe and supportive environment for children," stated Esmeralda Frias, assistant principal at Desert View (personal communication, April 28, 2022). The STEM Outreach Center offers many programs such as Story Explorations where students explore fairytales and their variants, poetry, and Latinx folklore!

### Story Explorations

In Story Explorations, we look at *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005) a fairytale variant of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Kellogg, 1997). We study other variants of the fairytale through explorations, which consist of literacy activities like Reader's Theater and Soundscapes (Leland, et al., 2017). Other activities provided for us in the lesson guide book incorporate literacy, art, and STEM activities such as Golden Dreams for Juan, Win the Ogre's Gold, and Bartering Deals.

Wait, did I say bartering? Yes, bartering can serve as more than a history lesson for students. By learning about bartering, children can learn a tool for meeting their needs and getting items they want without spending money. They also learn that items do not have to have a specific dollar value attached to them be valuable.

Bartering is the trading of services or goods with another person when there is no money involved. When it comes to students, how does it work? The students in Story Explorations have fun discovering how to barter at school, home, and the community.

We see students bartering all the time in school, but do they know they are bartering? Many times, they exchange an eraser for a pencil in class or an apple for a cookie in the cafeteria. To them, it's just an exchange. How can students understand that bartering is the exchange of goods and/or services? We start by making a connection to the story *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* from *Red Ridin' in the Hood* (Marcantonio, 2005). In the story, Juan's mother asks him to sell Old Vaca, the family car. Old Vaca is the family's nickname for their station wagon. When Juan comes upon a viejito, Juan tells the

viejito that he would like to sell his car. Viejito holds out his hand and opens it to show three dried pinto beans. Juan has a choice. He must decide if the beans are worth the price of Old Vaca. Bartering, Juan asks for two hundred dollars instead of the beans. Viejito laughs and says to Juan, “These are not ordinary beans, they are magic.” (Marcantonio, 2005, n.p.). When bartering the students need to stop and make a choice just like Juan and consider the best way to accomplish an exchange.

### Learning to Barter the Fun Way

Students learned a fun way of bartering and making choices by playing a game called Let’s Make a Deal from Story Explorations (See Figure 1).

### Let’s Have Fun and Let’s Make a Deal!

I called students to the front of the room and offered them a chance to pick a prize hidden in the boxes. When they picked a box, we turned it around and saw the prize they won hidden inside. To make it interesting, I bartered with them about whether to keep what they won or to trade for an envelope (See Figure 3). The envelope could be something better or it could be a zonk. two adults presenting in front of multiple students seated in chairs set up to look like an audience



Figure 1. Let’s Make A Deal



Figure 2. Cachetadas: The Zonk Prize

“I thought it was fun because we can get prizes and it was challenging because you had to pick an envelope,” said Jaiden. As we played and made deals, students became more excited and gave their opinions to their friends of what they thought was a better deal.

As the game was played students had multiple opportunities to barter for prizes. When the game ended, all students had a prize that they had bartered to keep. “The game was really fun to play because I want everyone to win a prize,” said Jacob.



Figure 3. Mrs. Rodriguez Barterers with a Student

After the Let's Make a Deal game ended, I was able to see whether students had learned how to barter. I gave students five minutes to barter among themselves. I was interested to observe students attempting to barter a large bag of chips for a puzzle wooden toy. "I learned that bartering is hard, because only one person bartered with me," said Kamila.

Some students struggled to do an exchange with the prizes they won. "I had a very hard time bartering with the others, but I thought the game was fun. I learned how to barter," said Julian.

### **Bartering at Home and in the Community**

Students were ready to start bartering with others outside of the classroom. I gave each student a mini cow figure (their own vaca, if you will) that they took home to barter with a family member or neighbor. I encouraged students to trade up for something that they valued more than their cow figures. They were instructed to trade for a different item at least five times and to keep a list of the exchanges. Would it be hard or easy? I wondered how successful they would be.

Maya said, "I like the Let's Make a Deal game because we can get nice stuff but doing it at home was intimidating." Maya started with her mother. She bartered her cow figure for some dimes. Next, Maya bartered with her father, trading the dimes for some gum. Then she bartered the gum for some chips with her brother. She bartered the chips for a ball from her sister. Finally, she finished bartering, exchanging the ball for her niece's key chain game (See Figure 4). Maya was successful and came out a winner!

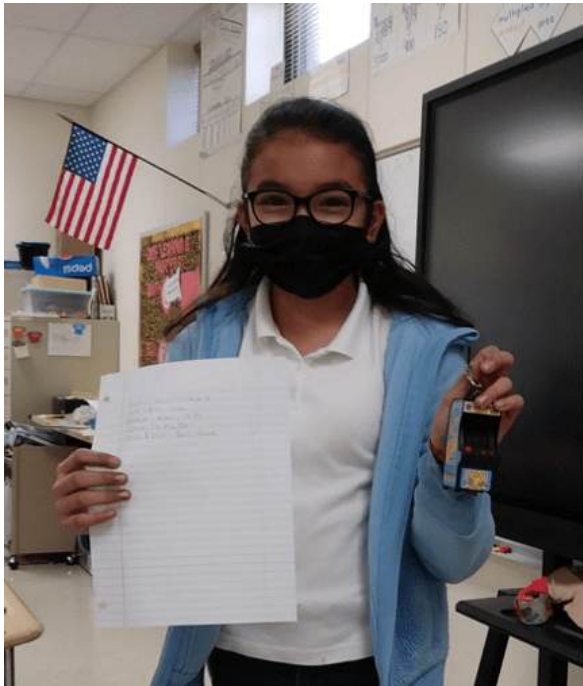


Figure 4. Maya Shares Her Bartering List and Key Chain Game

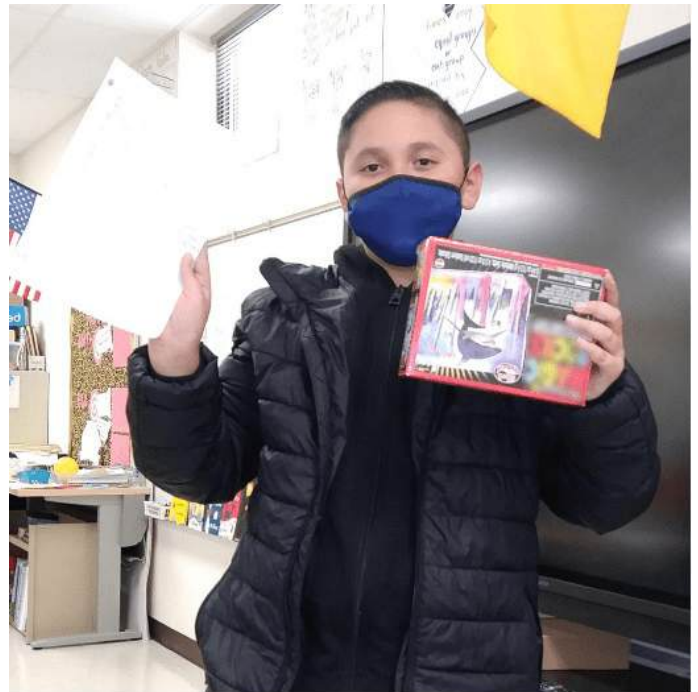


Figure 5. Javier Shares His Bartering List and Crystal Growing Kit

Javier was ready for the challenge to barter at home and the community. First, Javier bartered the cow figure for a doughnut with his mother. Second, he traded the doughnut for Girl Scout cookies with his father. Then he bartered the cookies for two chocolate bars. After, he traded the two chocolate bars for a large box of cookies with his grandmother. Finally, Javier went to his neighbor's house and traded the big box of cookies for a crystal growing kit (See Figure 5). "It was fun. My family was excited to barter," said Javier.

When he took the big box of cookies to his neighbor's house, Javier stated about the experience, "My neighbor was having fun and they looked at a series of things to barter with me." Javier's mom appreciated how the exploration provided an opportunity for him to experience bartering and recycling, at one point referring to the saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Javier was not only successful at bartering at home and the community but came out with a valuable life lesson.

In conclusion, there are many reasons, lessons, and activities for students to learn how to barter. Students had a fun time bartering with each other, family and the community. Students will have history lessons and life skills they can use for the rest of their life and come out as winners thanks to their experiences with Story Explorations.

Carmen Rodriguez is an instructional assistant at Desert View Elementary School located in Sunland Park, New Mexico, USA.

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## **A Story Exploration at North Valley Elementary School**

Sylvia Najera

North Valley Elementary School is located in San Miguel, New Mexico, a rural area of southern New Mexico near the international border of the United States and Mexico. Students from the surrounding communities of La Mesa, San Miguel, Chamberino, and other small communities nearby make up the predominately Latinx (95%) enrollment of 268 students. North Valley is one of 27 schools in the Gadsden District. The school is special for many families in the community. Generations of family members have attended North Valley Elementary, and now their children and grandchildren are attending the school with a goal that their younger family members are academically challenged and encouraged to succeed to the best of their abilities.

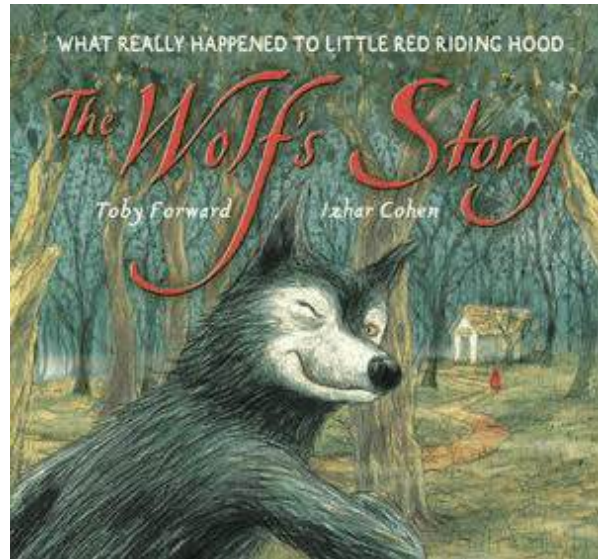
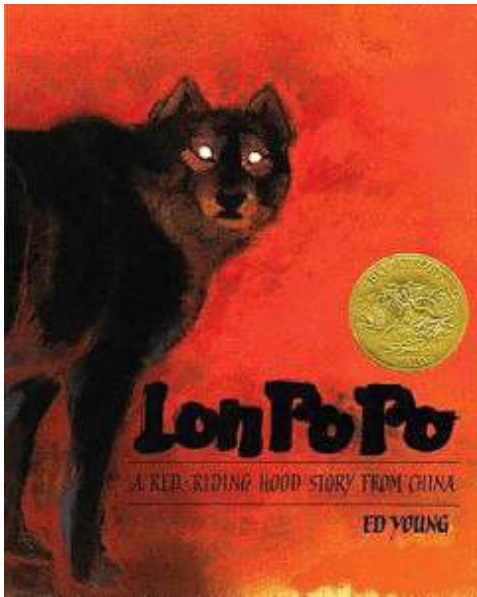
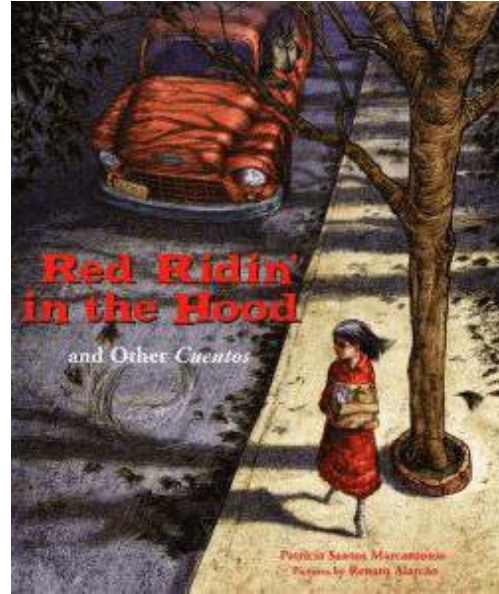
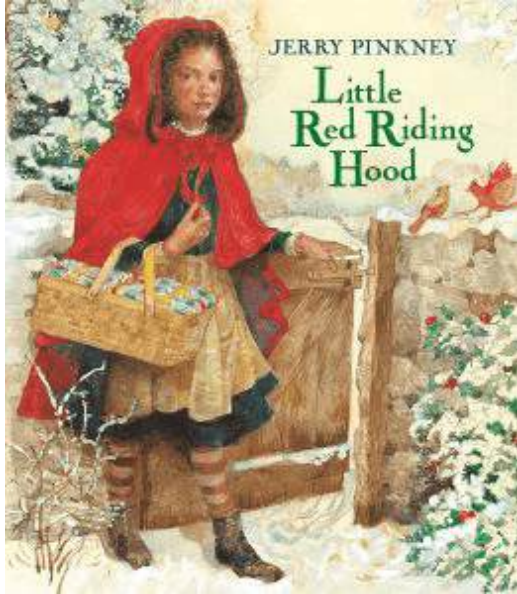
I have been teaching at North Valley Elementary for 23 years now. I have had the privilege to teach monolingual English curriculum and in a dual language setting at most grade levels from first grade to sixth grade. The school has been a dual language school for more than 14 years. As an educator, it is rewarding to see many of the North Valley Elementary students earn top ten honors and become valedictorians in the high school. Many students continue their schooling to become local nurses, doctors, business owners, and other productive citizens representing North Valley as the beginning of their educational endeavors.

I encourage students to continue striving to excel in all subjects and to participate in sports and any other club or programs North Valley Elementary has to offer. I've been a part of many Out-of-School Time Programs focused on math, reading, and STEM. The programs are fun and convenient to teach because the curriculum and materials are provided for me. Students enjoy participating in the programs offered, and they are exposed to academic skills and strategies that boost their knowledge and interest for their future learning.

One aspect of my teaching involves working with 4th– 6th grade students in an Out-of-School Time Program called Story Explorations. Typically, 14 to 15 students participate in the 90-minute program twice each week. The program runs for 12 weeks in the fall and 16 weeks in the spring.

### **Story Explorations: An Out-of-School-Time Program**

During the 2021/2022 school year, I led a program call Story Explorations. The participants ranged from 3rd to 6th grade. The theme for the fall 2021 semester was based on Red Riding Hood stories. Throughout the semester, students listened to and interacted with a variety of traditional and fractured fairy tales in a text set connected to the theme (See Gallery 1).



Gallery 1. Story Exploration Picturebooks

The feature story from the text set was the fractured fairytale *Red Ridin' in the Hood*, one of several stories in a collection of fractured fairytales from *Red Ridin' in the Hood and Other Cuentos* written by Patricia Santos Marcantonio with illustrations by Renato Alarcão (2005). In *Red Ridin' in the Hood*, Roja encounters Lobo Chavez driving his low rider down Forest Street in the barrio. Lobo Chavez asks Roja if she would like a ride to her Abuela's apartment, but Roja declines. Lobo Chavez decides to go to Abuela's house before Roja gets there. He plans to eat Abuela and then eat Roja when she arrives. Before he can carry out his plan Lobo Chavez is arrested by the police for threatening to eat people. Abuela and Roja live happily ever after.

### Activities from Red Ridin' in the Hood (Marcantonio, 2005)

Several literacy activities in the Red Ridin' in the Hood (Marcantonio, 2005) Story Exploration invited students to engage in drama. Students created their own tableaux and wrote a script and then performed a reader's theater.

Another activity focused on grandparents. Like Roja, students were invited to visit their grandparents. Students could call, use Zoom or visit in person. During their visit students were instructed to interview their grandmothers. Students were eager to present the result of their interviews to the rest of the class during the next meeting. Ian, a fourth-grade student, was surprised to learn some facts about his grandmother. He shared, "Can you believe my grandma didn't get her first cell phone until she was 30 and married?" Danielle, a fifth-grade student, was intrigued to know that her grandmother played games that the family still plays when they get together. Danielle told the group, "My grandma has kept the tradition of playing some of the games she played when she was small like Loteria and hopscotch, which I learned when I was like in first grade."

In the story, Lobo Chavez is arrested for planning to eat people. Roja and Abuela become the owners of Lobo Chavez's lowrider and the story ends with Roja and Abuela driving off to go play Loteria. Two activities connected to this scene in the story. In the first activity students became self-directed learners when they created a replica of the hydraulic system used in lowrider vehicles. They used popsicle sticks, a hydraulic kit (syringes, plastic tubing, and syringe adaptors), and water to make a structure that resembled the front end of a lowrider. Students used the syringes to push water through the plastic tubing that had been attached to the popsicle structure. This action caused the structure to move up and down like a lowrider.

After creating their hydraulic system in class, students were excited to share their engineering design with their family members. Christopher, a fifth grader, said, "My dad said to tell you thank you for introducing me to mechanics and engineering." Jamie, a sixth grader, said, "My grandpa was so excited to see my project. He wanted to try oil to see how it would work instead of water." The responses from family members made the activity powerful and engaging for all of us.

The final activity of the Red Ridin' in the Hood (Marcantonio, 2005) Story Exploration was for students to create their own Loteria game so they could play the same game as Roja and Abuela. Loteria is a game similar to Bingo except players use illustrated cards instead of numbers. Students were eager to design their Loteria cards using the characters and different images from the stories in the text set like Lobo Chavez's lowrider and Abuela's casa (See Figure 1). This activity culminated with students playing their newly created Loteria game during Story Explorations. Afterwards, several students wanted to take the game home to share with their family members. Austin, a fourth grader, asked if he could borrow the game and play it with his family during a family gathering. As he returned the Loteria, I noticed that someone had laminated the big board. Austin's mother had sent me a note stating, "I hope you don't mind, but I laminated the large Loteria board so it can last you longer. We enjoyed playing the game with Austin." It seems that families enjoyed Story Explorations as much as the students!





Figure 1. Students' Loteria Game Cards

Throughout the Story Exploration in the fall semester, students used their background knowledge to connect to new characters, settings and plots portrayed in the different stories. Students enjoyed the different hands-on activities and expressed their interest in engineering and drama. As a result of the rigor and creativity embedded into all the activities, students were eager to share their experiences with other students in our school. Consequently, other classmates are eager to enroll in future Story Explorations.

As a result of implementing the Out-of-School Time Story Exploration Program I saw student engagement increase as students were eager and excited to interact with each new story in the text set. The rigor was evident in every lesson presented and undoubtedly higher than the traditional read-and-answer-questions method that students are used to in the regular classroom setting. Students enthusiastically participated in all activities and were ready to assist their classmates if they were struggling or had questions. As a veteran educator I learned new and innovative ways to make sure students see themselves in an engaging and culturally relevant curriculum. I am looking forward to implementing Story Explorations again in the future.

Sylvia Najera is a Bilingual Dual Language Educator with 23 years of experience teaching from 1st to 6th grade students. She currently teaches at North Valley Elementary School located in San Miguel, New Mexico.

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