

Rushcart Players

Cuentos Del Àrbol

A Bilingual Musical Play
Una Obra Musical Bilingüe



Study Guide

“Cuentos Del Àrbol” or **“Tree Tales”** is a delightful bilingual musical drawn from Spanish and Latin American folklore. The play is designed to bring Spanish to life for students studying the language; and to make theatre accessible for students, parents and grandparents for whom English is a second language. Because the play is presented in a bilingual format, it provides literacy enhancement in both language and the arts. The stories within the piece offer pride in the cultural heritage of Spain and Latin America while also providing access to the arts and arts education without a language barrier.

The centerpiece of all the stories is a tree (Un Arbol) that has sheltered, shielded and nurtured countless characters that have passed her way over the years. The tree’s caretaker, Arbolita, shares three of these stories with Tomas, a storyteller, who is looking for tales for his collection.

The stories included are *“The Garden of the Golden Oranges,”* adapted from a Spanish legend, told in the oral tradition; *“Juan Bobo”* or *“Silly John”* originating in both Mexico and Puerto Rico about a boy who makes silly mistakes that serve him well; and *“Caperucita Roja”* or *“Red Riding Hood”* a perennial favorite in Spanish and English households, told with a Latino beat and rhythm. With a burst of energy, the finale sends audiences off uplifted—clapping, dancing, and delighted.

“Cuentos. . .” is filled with a fiesta of Latino and Hispanic themes, indigenous to locale, but universal to the human experience. The range of ideas for discussion includes many value clarification and strength of character issues. Young audiences will be enchanted by the colorful lore and spirited beat that enable Arbol to lift her branches and find new ways to grow each day.

ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

This Study Guide is designed to facilitate discussion and encourage projects in connection with viewing the bilingual musical, *“Cuentos Del Àrbol.”* Certainly there are many areas beyond those included in this Study Guide that you as teachers or parents might explore. It is our hope that you will use this Guide as a

springboard to discovering the connections to the many themes and levels of each of the stories as well as the rich cultural colors and customs of the Latino world.

PRE-SHOW

Prepare your class for the theatre event they will soon attend. Some of the ideas that you might share are the fact that a professional theatre company named Pushcart Players will be coming to your school or theatre. The actors will sing, dance and act out stories that were adapted by a playwright from Spanish and Latino folktales.

- Discuss the differences between television programs, movies and live theatre.
- Discuss the fact that a theatre performance is recreated each time it is performed and is affected to some extent by the presence and response of each audience. There is energy felt by the actors from the audience and the audience from the actors, and the forthcoming performance in your school or theatre will be recreated especially for you!
- Use the summaries of each of the stories on the following pages to familiarize students with the content of the play. This will further help them enjoy the stories as they unfold on stage.

When students enter the theatre or auditorium, they will see a “pre-set” of the show. The costume pieces and set pieces will suggest some of the characters they will be seeing in the show.

- If they see a crown, can they guess what kind of character will wear that costume piece?
- What kind of character would use the hoe or rake that’s pre-set?
- The milking bucket?
- The little red cape with a hood? And so on.

Familiarity with some of the elements of theatre and theatre terms will also be helpful. Here is a partial list which you may want to define and discuss in terms of how they are used and how they affect the play:

Vocabulary Words In Connection With Theatre

Stage Curtain(s)	Wing Space	Actors	Director	Musicians
Technicians	Choreographer	Scenery	Costumes	Props
Stage Manager	Lights	Sound	Music	Playwright
Script	Score	Dialogue	Composer	Comedy
Tragedy	Mystery	Designer	Vision	Creation
Imagination				

Vocabulary words in connection with the play will be listed following the summary of each of the stories.

OPENING

“Cuentos Del Arbol” (“Tree Tales”) opens with a burst of color, song and dance in the title song, “Cuentos, Cuentos Del Arbol.” Tomas then introduces himself as a storyteller, and Arbolita, the keeper of the tree sings the song, “Un Arbol,” revealing her source of many tales over the centuries.

Vocabulary

<i>Un arbol</i>	A tree
<i>Cuentos</i>	Tales
<i>Vive por siglos</i>	Can live for centuries
<i>La Vida</i>	Life
<i>Una brisa</i>	A breeze
<i>Un hogar</i>	A home
<i>La tierra</i>	The ground
<i>Sabios y bobos</i>	Wise and foolish

<i>Ricos y pobres</i>	Rich and poor Cabreros y campesinos Goatherd and peasant
<i>Una princesa</i>	A princess

THE GARDEN OF THE GOLDEN ORANGES

The Garden of the Golden Oranges is adapted from a Spanish legend, told in the oral tradition and set in the fertile valleys and splendid heights of the Sierra Nevada. It is about dreams, visions, challenges and commitment. In this story, a young shepherd, Diego, journeys to the sun, the moon and the stars, in search of the Garden of the Golden Oranges, which, a wise old man assured him, would lead him to the most beautiful girl in the world to marry. His exhausting journey, filled with many temptations along the way, leads him back to his pasture where he is surprised to find that the happiness for which he was searching was always, quite simply, at home.



Vocabulary

<i>Mas bella del mundo</i>	Most beautiful in the world
<i>Jardin de las Naranjas de Oro</i>	Garden of the Golden Oranges
<i>El sol</i>	The sun
<i>La luna</i>	The moon
<i>Las estrellas</i>	The stars
<i>Muy felices</i>	Much happiness
<i>Muy contentos</i>	Much contentment

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Talk about dreams and visions of the future.
- Why is it important to set goals for ourselves?
- Why is it important to “reach for the highest star?”
- Why is it important to push ourselves to do a little better each day?
- What are some of the distractions or “temptations” that can cause us to lose sight of our goal(s)?

EXERCISES AND PROJECTS

- Create a “photo” album (photos can be drawings done by students) chronicling Diego’s journey.
- Have students write a diary or journal as though they were Diego, telling of his encounters and how he felt about them.
- Have some students write a diary as though they were Angela, Diego’s childhood friend, telling of how she felt when Diego left and while he was away.
- Have students research the countryside in the Sierra Nevada and describe the route that Diego may have taken.

[Note: For Spanish Language Classes — use the above writing exercises to develop writing and language skills in Spanish]

JUAN BOBO (Silly John)

Juan Bobo has its origins in both Mexico and Puerto Rico though it is reminiscent of folktales from many cultures around the world. It is about a boy, Juan, who makes silly mistakes, but in the end, good things happen. When his Mama sends him to the grocer to exchange a chicken for a sack of potatoes, she instructs him to speak politely to people he meets along the way and Juan promises that he will do so. He searches his memory and recalls his mother greeting someone politely at a funeral with “My sympathy and regrets on this sad occasion.” The first people Juan sees are a bride and groom. They of course are offended by the greeting and recommend that next time he should say, “Live long and happy.” Juan applies the advice he is given with each subsequent encounter but is sad because his greeting is always inappropriate. But in the end, he sees bumbling thieves and inadvertently drops his bag of potatoes on their heads (from the tree where he is hiding). Frightened, the thieves run off and leave their coins behind, so Juan goes home a wealthy boy. An up-tempo tango celebration suggests that life is now sweet and wonderful for Juan and his Mama.



Vocabulary

<i>Muy rico</i>	Very rich
<i>Mi pena y pasame en esta occasion than dolorosa</i>	My sympathy and regrets on this sad occasion
<i>Viva! Viva! Que vivan largos y felices dias!</i>	Hurrah! Hurrah! Live long and happy!
<i>Le deseo dos por cada uno que tenga</i>	I wish you two for every one you have
<i>Nada de saludos, tengo que Ofrecer ayuda</i>	Nevermind a greeting, just offer to help
<i>Amable</i>	Polite
<i>El consejo</i>	Advice

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Each time Juan Bobo met someone, he greeted him or her with the greeting that was appropriate for the prior encounter.
- What was missing in Juan's thinking and logic each time?
- Discuss following directions.
- Discuss the value of taking and giving advice.
- Discuss the terms, "common sense" and "thinking things through."
- Why is it important to consider, evaluate and if necessary, modify advice for our own needs?
- Discuss what it means to have motives, goals and objectives.
- What were Juan's motives in greeting people as he did?
- Discuss the importance of sincerity and good intentions.

EXERCISES AND PROJECTS

- Paper Bag Dramatics: Fill paper bags with assorted items (i.e. a paper clip, a twig, a hankie, a pair of glasses, a key); Divide class into small groups. Have each group develop a little story or play using the props (items in the bag) in some way within the story.

[Note: For Spanish Language and/or Culture Classes, use props connected with the language/culture and/or have students do the presentation in Spanish]

CAPERUCITA ROJA

The classic tale, **Caperucita Roja** (Little Red Riding Hood), a perennial favorite in both Spanish and English speaking households, is the last of the stories that Arbolita offers Tomas for his collection. Presented with a Latin beat and a Castilian twinkle and grin, our little heroine Marguerite takes a basket of Bastilitos and Café du Leche to Grandmama. Justice triumphs when Grandmama finds help to overcome the villain and Caperucita Roja promises never to speak to strangers again!

Vocabulary

<i>Una nina</i>	A girl
<i>Mi abuela</i>	My grandmother
<i>Un desconocido</i>	A stranger
<i>Quien es?</i>	Who is it?
<i>Que ojos tan grandes tienes</i>	What big eyes you have
<i>Que orejas tan grandes tienes</i>	What big ears you have
<i>Que dientes tan grandes tienes</i>	What big teeth you have

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Discuss why Caperucita Roja's mother instructed her to go directly to Grandmama's cottage and not to talk to strangers along the way.

- Why was it difficult for Caperucita Roja to follow these instructions?
(Discuss her personality, sunny disposition, friendly, outgoing nature, etc.)
- When Caperucita Roja first met the person in the woods, she was uncomfortable with him. What were some alternatives she might have employed when he first started talking to her?
- What were some alternatives when she got to Grandmama's cottage and sensed something peculiar about Grandmama? (Perhaps discuss seeking help from a neighbor, calling 911 or other emergency measures)



EXERCISES AND PROJECTS

- Write a newspaper article (or draw a series of pictures) that tells what happened when Caperucita Roja set out to take a basket of goodies to her Grandmama.
- Roleplay some of the situations presented in the story (i.e. Divide the class into groups and have each of them have the opportunity to be both the “stalked” and the “stalker;” the loving parent or grandparent and the innocent child, etc).

[Note: For Spanish Language Classes – Implement the above exercises in Spanish to develop writing skills and spoken language skills]

FINALE

Tomas tells Arbolita that he must be on his way, but thanks her for the wonderful stories, which he will now share with people in other parts of the world. A spirited reprise of “Cuentos, Cuentos Del Arbol” sends audiences home with dancing feet, clapping hands and a happy heart.

GENERAL EXERCISES AND PROJECTS IN CONNECTION WITH “CUENTOS DEL ARBOL”

- Create a patchwork quilt entitled “A Latino Heritage” (Or “Spanish” or “Portuguese” or “Hispanic” or other Heritage) by having each student create a picture or design representing the part of the Latino world from which he/she or some one he or she knows came. This can be done with fabric or by drawing on squares of paper and making a paper reproduction of a quilt. Hang it in your classroom or in the hallway of your school or home.

- Plan a Spanish/Latin American Festival in which students share foods, costumes/clothing, musical instruments, music, art work, crafts, designs and other significant aspects of Latino heritage.
- Make a piñata in your classroom. There are many websites with excellent suggestions for this creation. Break it open on a special occasion or for a celebration.
- Celebrate Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) in your classroom or school. This is a day (comparable to our July 4th) commemorating Mexican victory over the French in 1862 against great odds at the Battle of Pueblo. Cinco de Mayo today is an opportunity for Mexican-Americans to celebrate and share traditions with friends of different heritages.

You may want to modify or add to the discussion points and exercises above depending on the grade level and prior theatre experience of your students. There are many other ways in which Spanish and Latin American studies might be brought to life within the classroom. Let the curtain rise on new and imaginative ways to learn about language, heritage and the arts!

Cuentos Del Arbol was written by Ruth Fost

Translated by Felipe Gorostiza and Cari Gorostiza

Music was composed, arranged and performed by Larry Hochman