

Child of the Flower Song People: Luz Jiménez, Daughter of the Nahua

By Gloria Amescua and Duncan Tonatiuh

Teaching Guide by Luz Yadira Herrera

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS TO EXPLORE

Use the glossary in the book to find the meaning of some of these words, and then research the meaning of the others.

anthropologists

Aztec

Indigenous

loom

metate

maguey

Malintzin

Nahua

Nahuatl

popote

Spaniards

Tepozton

xochicuicatl

SETTING-UP THE READING

- Show the cover and ask students what they notice about the landscape, the colors, the patterns, Luz's clothing, hair, etc. Then, ask them what they think the story might be about.
- Show a map of central Mexico and point out Milpa Alta on a map. Then, compare the map of present-day Mexico City with a map of ancient city Tenochtitlán.
- Share some brief facts about the history of the Nahua, who are also known as the "Aztecs" or the "Mexica" (for more on names, read scholar David Bowles' [article](#)):
 - Some facts might include geographical location, religious beliefs, government system, the size of the population at the time of the invasion by the Spaniards, language, and customs.
 - Share some widely known words with a Nahuatl origin: chocolate, chili, chipotle, coyote, mole, tomato, avocado.
- For a great resource to learn and share about the Nahua, see [here](#) and [here](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Gloria Amescua writes that the Nahua are those who "lost their land, but who did not disappear" (p. 2). Discuss what you think this means.
 - **Extension Activity:** Find Mexico and Spain on a [map](#). Learn more about the [Aztec Civilization](#) and [Mesoamerica](#). Also, learn about the people called "[Conquistadors](#)." Note the things you see, think, and wonder about.
2. Growing up, Luz hears stories from elders about Malintzin, who is called the "betrayal of the Aztecs" (p. 5). Research the story of Malintzin. Malintzin is also known as "La Malinche." Discuss why she might be perceived as a betrayer. An excellent place to start your research is [here](#) and [here](#).
 - **Extension Activity:** The author writes that Malintzin "cries with the wind at night." Why might this be? Does this remind you of any other stories or legends you have learned? (Hint: look up "[La Llorona](#)").

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (continued)

3. The author writes that native or Indigenous people like Luz did not have access to school at first. When they finally received a public education, the schools did not allow them to wear their traditional clothes or speak their language.
 - Why did this happen?
 - Who made this decision?
 - How do you think native children and their families felt?
 - **Extension Activity:** How does this compare to the schooling experiences of native people in the United States? (Hint: Research “Indian Boarding Schools.” [Here](#) is a good place to begin.). Create a short video or slide presentation on the connections you learn between the experiences of native people in Mexico and the United States.

4. In school, Luz learns the Spanish language, traditions, even wears different clothing.
 - Discuss the differences between the Nahua and Spanish ways of being. Use a T-chart to write and sketch the differences between the two cultures.
 - **Extension Activity:** Even though Spanish is now the primary language of Mexico, it is not the only language used in the country. Research the most widely spoken languages in Mexico. Label a digital or printed map of Mexico with the most commonly spoken languages.

5. Luz found many ways to keep her culture and traditions alive. How did she do this? What inspired her to remain hopeful and share her experiences?

6. What was Luz’s dream? How were her life and dreams interrupted by the Mexican Revolution?
 - **Extension Activity:** Learn about the Mexican Revolution. Identify some essential facts: Who were some key figures? When did it take place? What were the goals of the revolution? What happened in the country during this time? Learn more [here](#) and [here](#). Create a timeline with significant dates and events.

7. How did Luz’s life change when she arrived in Mexico City? Why do you think artists were interested in her “strong features” and her Nahua traditions? (p. 19-21).
 - **Extension Activity:** Explore the painting by Diego Rivera called “[The Weaver](#)” (you can also see it [here](#)), which features Luz Jiménez weaving! Paint your version of “The Weaver” using Rivera’s famous painting as a model. Add any colors that you like!

8. The author writes that through Luz, the world came to know “the spirit of Mexico.” Discuss what the author means by that and how it happened. Create a digital poster or a slide presentation on how Luz shared Nahua ways of being with the world.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (continued)

9. How was Luz finally able to make her dream of becoming a teacher a reality? How does Luz show us that we can learn from anywhere, including outside of school?
 - **Extension Activity:** What is your dream? What would you like to do when you grow up? How can you make those dreams a reality? Draw a picture of yourself and include images or words that describe how you see yourself in the future.
10. How did Luz collaborate with professor Fernando Horcasitas? Why was this collaboration important?
11. Discuss what this quote at the end of the story means to you: “Luz breathed life into *xochicuicatl*, the flower-song of the Nahua, and carried their fading voice into the future.”

FOCUS ON ILLUSTRATIONS

- Duncan Tonatiuh’s illustrations are inspired by the Mixtec codices—ancient Mexican manuscripts that tell stories (history and legends) through pictures. Historians categorize the codices or manuscripts from ancient Mexico into three categories: The Borgia, the Mixtec, and the Maya. You can see some examples of these [here](#) and [here](#).
 - What are some similarities and differences you see between the illustrations by Duncan Tonatiuh and the codices you researched? Draw a Venn Diagram to sketch or write out the similarities and differences.
- The illustrations show a speech scroll (a spiral) in front of the elder’s mouth on page 6 (and throughout the book). Discuss what you think the spiral represents. Review the Borgia, Mixtec, or Maya codices. Can you identify any speech scrolls in any of those manuscripts?
- Look at the illustrations of Iztaccíhuatl and the Popocatepetl (on pages 13-14). What do you see in the silhouettes of the mountains (they are volcanoes!)?
 - **Extension Activities:** Research the legend on the origin of the Iztaccíhuatl (sleeping lady) and the Popocatepetl (smoking mountain). Why is it considered a love story?
- Look at the illustration of Luz’s face silhouette on page 28. What do you notice in the background? Why do you think Duncan Tonatiuh decided to represent the illustration in this way?

FOCUS ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

- Luz listened to the stories that the elders shared—stories that were passed down from generation to generation. Share some ways your family and friends share stories?
- Luz liked to share her culture and traditions. Share some of your family and community traditions. Share some ways you share other aspects of your culture with others.

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FOCUS ON STORYTELLING

Gloria Amescua uses different literary devices in the storytelling, including metaphors and characterization, to describe what Luz did and what she felt. Let's explore these.

Metaphors: Think about the metaphors you see throughout the story and explain what each means. How can you add metaphors to your writing?

Metaphor (Write an excerpt)	What I think it means
<i>Luz wove all these old stories into her heart. Through them she tasted bitter sorrow—how the Nahua suffered—and the sweet joy—how her people survived.</i>	Luz learned all the stories of her people. She felt sad at the suffering they endured and felt proud that their culture lives on even after all their suffering.
<i>Luz carried an empty place inside.</i>	
<i>A secret longing began to bud in her heart. The secret fluttered lightly like wings in her chest.</i>	Luz really wanted to go to school and learn to read.
<i>The budding flower in Luz's heart might have withered. But it did not.</i>	
<i>The world recognized the beauty and strength of the native people after five hundred years of being in shadows.</i>	

Characterization: Think about what happens to Luz throughout the story, think about the feelings that emerge, the things that she does, and the dreams that she has, and what she does to make them happen. Here are some questions that can help you navigate characterization:

What do you learn about Luz in the beginning, middle, and end of the story?	
What are some feelings Luz reveals throughout the story? What are some things that brought Luz joy or sadness?	
What are some things Luz does to share about her language and culture with others?	

Draw a mind map that shows Luz's thoughts, feelings, actions, and dreams.

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FOCUS ON CONTENT CONNECTIONS

Science

- Draw and describe the life cycle of the maguey or the corn plant.
- What can you make from maguey or corn?
- Luz learned about herbs that can be used as medicine. Do some research on the herbs and plants that help to heal us.
- The Popocatepetl is considered an **active** volcano and the Iztaccíhuatl is considered a **dormant** volcano. Explain the differences between the two volcano types in a digital poster, a video you narrate, or a drawing. Create a model that shows how volcanoes erupt! Learn more on volcanoes [here](#).

Art

- Explore art by Diego Rivera. Discuss how Rivera's art depicts native people.
- Explore other artists that represented Indigenous people. Create a presentation through a medium of your choice that shows what you learn about the artists that your researched and their art. (Hint: [Fernando Leal](#), [David Alfaro Siqueiros](#), [Tina Modotti](#))

Geography

- Take a 3D tour of [Popocatepetl](#) and [Iztaccíhuatl](#) volcanoes on Google Earth. What do you notice? What questions do you have? How can you find the answers?

For more additional resources on Luz Jiménez, including images, a timeline, and glossary, visit author Gloria Amescua's website at gloriaamescua.com/for-educators.

Suggested texts to Pair with *Child of the Flower Song People*

- *Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns: A Mesoamerican Creation Myth* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *The Princess and the Warrior: A Tale of Two Volcanoes* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Diego Rivera: His World and Ours* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard and Juana Martinez-Neal
- *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade
- *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* by Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac
- *We Are Still Here!: Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* by Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac
- *Gaawin Gindaaswin Ndaawsii / I Am Not a Number* by Dr. Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer
- *Molly of Denali* (PBS animated series): <https://pbskids.org/molly/>