

A Sampling of Bilingual Children's Books

Getting back in touch with your inner child

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: January 17, 2012



We're lucky that public libraries in Southern California carry bilingual children's books. I started taking another look at them when an adult ESL student said how much it helped his English to read them.

Since then, I have used bilingual books in my ESL teaching for practicing English pronunciation, discussing differences in punctuation styles, and discussing cultural differences. I also enjoy the incredible artwork.

I don't restrict my reading to Spanish-English books. But it does get challenging if the language uses a different writing system, such as Korean Hangul. In those instances, you aren't able to easily compare the two languages.

Below is a sampling of bilingual Spanish-English books that you can find at your local public library. They will help you to get back in touch with your inner child. If you have children, ask them to read the stories aloud to you.

CAT IN THE HAT / *EL GATO ENSOMBRERADO*

By Dr. Seuss

Spanish translation by Carlos Rivera
(New York: Random House, 1967)

This title is a children's classic. The translation loses the rhyme scheme, but the comically illustrated story in patriotic colors (red, white, and blue) is still very enjoyable

A boy and his sister Sally are stuck at home on a rainy day with nothing to do. Then a tall, mysterious cat-like creature comes knocking at their door. Will they be able to clean up his mess before their mother comes home?

--*Yo sé algunas nuevas suertes--*
dijo el Gato Ensombrerado--.
Muchas suertes buenas.
Yo se las mostraré.

"I know some new tricks,"
Said the Cat in the Hat.
"A lot of good tricks
I will show them to you."

BEAN SOUP: A COOKING POEM / *SOPA DE FRIJOLES: UN POEMA PARA COCINAR*

By Jorge Argueta

Illustrated by Rafael Yockteng

(Groundwood Books / House of Anansi, 2009)

A young boy shows you how to make bean soup with garlic and onions for your family. It's very simple and memorable the way he explains it. Follow him as he comfortably navigates through

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A Sampling of Bilingual
Children's Books

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his family's kitchen.

Yockteng uses a calm, warm palette of grayish muted colors to illustrate Argueta's cooking poem. Asterisks indicate where a young reader needs to ask for an adult's help, such as when warming up tortillas.

*Tu casa
está olorosa
como la tierra
en las primeras
lluvias de invierno.*

Your house
smells wonderful
like the earth
after the first
winter rains.

LITTLE CROW TO THE RESCUE / EL CUERVITO AL RESCATE

By Víctor Villaseñor

Illustrated by Felipe Ugalde Alcántara

Spanish translation by Elizabeth Cummins Muñoz

(Houston: Piñata Books / Arte Público, 2005)

Father Crow educates his son Little Crow about the cleverness of humans as they watch a farmer and his son planting corn. Little Crow listens carefully, and even comes up with a smart idea of his own. This story is one of many passed down to Villaseñor from his father, who heard them from his mother Doña Margarita and so forth.

It is a well-designed book. The vibrant outlined-figure illustrations by Alcántara are frame-worthy. The text pages have a persimmon-orange gradient applied to them, and bird tracks cross the top and bottom. A changing mini-illustration resides in the space separating the English text from its Spanish translation.

TEXT SAMPLE: Shaking his head, Father Crow continued, "Humans would never have survived if it hadn't been for all the birds and animals that saved them."

Con un gesto negativo, Papá Cuervo continuó, --Los humanos no habrían sobrevivido si no fuera por todos los pájaros y animales que los salvaron.

THE FIRST TORTILLA: A BILINGUAL STORY

By Rudolfo Anaya

Illustrated by Amy Córdova

Spanish translation by Enrique R. Lamadrid

(Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2007)

A blue hummingbird leads Jade to the angry Mountain Spirit who has withheld rain from the villagers. With her offering of food, she asks for rain to save her village's crops of bean and squash. While there, the appeased Mountain Spirit gives her another gift.

Anaya partly created his story from an Aztec myth about the discovery of corn. He explains more in his "Author's Note." Young readers will easily be able to relate to Córdova's mural-style illustrations painted with nice, bold, thick strokes.

TEXT SAMPLE: Her father had said that she might fall from the cliff like a bird without wings. But if she didn't go the entire village would suffer. / "Yes, I will go," she decided.

Su papa le había dicho que se podía caer del acantilado como un pájaro sin alas. Pero si no se iba, el pueblo entero sufriría. / "Bueno, iré," decidió ella.

Happy browsing!

A writer who is grateful for public libraries

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