



Omar S. Castaneda  
**Abuela's Weave/  
*El tapiz de Abuela***

*A BIG Culture lesson from the Flint Institute of Arts.*



## Information

Esperanza is a young Guatemalan girl who learns to weave traditional Mayan tapestries from her grandmother, Abuela. As Abuela shares her gift with her granddaughter, they plan to sell their goods in the city market place. Since Abuela is concerned that the birthmark on her face may scare away customers, Esperanza must cope with the responsibility of selling the weavings in the crowded city streets by herself. After overcoming her fears, Esperanza bravely sets up her weaving stall in the open-air city market. She is a big success with shoppers who appreciate the quality of her grandmother's weavings. She also learns a lesson about family tradition and trust. **Abuela's Weave** is rich with details about Guatemalan life and culture. Special attention is given to the importance of the market place in the culture and economy of Guatemala.

The author, Omar Castaneda (1954-1997) was born in Guatemala City and moved to the United States as a child. Guatemala is the focus of his books written for young adult readers such as **Among the Volcanoes** and **Imagining Isabel**.

Enrique Sanchez, the illustrator, lives in Bar Harbor, Maine. He was born in the Dominican Republic and studied art there. After his studies, he moved to New York to be a graphic designer for Sesame Street. He has illustrated many picture books including **Amelia's Road** and **When This World Was New**.

## Guatemalan Weaving

The Mayan Indians from the highlands of Guatemala have made colorful, vibrant, textiles for thousands of years. These beautiful fabrics have been used as the traditional clothing for men, women and children living in the rural villages. More than 200 mountain villages have their own woven clothing designs. They are based on community stories and symbols that have personal meaning to the weavers.

The Indians who live in Guatemala are descendents of the ancient Maya who, thousands of years ago, were one of the greatest civilizations in the Americas. Today most of the Indians farm land in the mountainous regions where they live in small villages. In many villages people live and work in the same way they have for centuries. They grow crops such as beans, squash, corn and tomatoes.

Women weave with a "back strap" loom. It is a small loom that ties around the waist and onto a fixed object like a tree. Women use the back strap loom because it is lighter and more portable. Guatemalan men, who are also expert weavers, use larger, heavier floor looms shared in local weaving centers. The woven fabrics the men make on the bigger looms are wider and are produced for sale in the markets. Women weave garments on the back strap loom for their families and also weave items for sale in the market.

Ever since ancient times, cloth has been made from cotton and other native plant fibers. Natural dyes from berries and minerals were used for coloring the cotton threads. Today women continue to weave with cotton. A single garment can take several months to weave. The Spanish introduced sheep and wool, however, today wool is used less than cotton for weaving.

Young Guatemalan girls continue to take pride in learning to weave the repeated patterns of flowers and geometric shapes they learn from their mothers and grandmothers so that the tradition is passed on from one generation to the next.

## Preparation

- Read the book, **Abuela's Weave**, to the students.
- Review the vocabulary list,
- Discuss Guatemalan weaving. Especially notice the pictures of the back strap loom and the colorful weavings in the illustrations.
- Discuss one of the following ideas:
  - Interpersonal relationship of Esperanza and her grandmother.

- Learning from an older relative how to make something.
- Why people in the market prefer hand-made weaving to machine-made cloth.
- Why Esperanza was afraid to go to the market by herself.
- How it feels to be scared of trying something new.
- Play “Weaving Movement Game”
  - This helps students understand the weaving pattern of over one, under one, motion.
  - 6-8 students stand in a row to be the warp threads. Remind them that warp threads hold still and are straight.
  - Line up, with enough space between each “warp thread” for a person to pass.
  - Have a student act as the weft, passing between each warp.
  - As the weft passes behind and in front of each wrap the class says “over” or “under.” When the weft reaches the end of the row, the student returns in the opposite direction going under and thread previously passed over, and over one previously passed under.
  - This physical action may help the students visualize the weaving process better.

## Vocabulary

- **Abuela:** Spanish for grandmother.
- **Back Strap Loom:** A small, light loom in which the weaver ties one end of the warp around the waist and the other around a fixed object, like a tree. The weaver leans back to create tension on the warp.
- **Contrast:** The amount of difference within an element of design. For example, a shiny texture contrasts with a dull one, or a light color contrasts with a dark color.
- **Guatemala:** A country in Central America, located south of Mexico. (About the size of Tennessee. The population is over 8.3 million with more than 60% are Mayan Indians.
- **Huipil:** A blouse with a rectangular collar decorated with colorful woven designs.
- **Maya:** Pre-Columbian ancestors to the present day Guatemalan Indians. The Maya created one of the greatest civilizations in the Americas.
- **Popol Vuh:** The sacred book of the Maya.
- **Quetz:** Large colorful Central American bird with golden-green and scarlet plumage and long tail feathers.
- **Repetition:** Created by design elements such as line, shape or color that are used more than once in a design. For example, repeating rows of color in a Guatemalan weaving.
- **Texture:** The way a surface feels or looks like it feels
- **Warp:** The set of threads in woven fabric that are held under tension on a loom and run lengthwise.
- **Weave:** Interlacement of warp and weft
- **Weft:** The horizontal threads that are woven through the warp of the weaving. The set of threads that cross the warp at a right angle. The weft threads are woven over and under the warp threads closely together.

## Visual Arts Lesson — Grades 2 & 3

### Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about Guatemalan weaving.
- Create a weaving.
- Understand the element of texture and the design principles of contrast and repetition in weaving.

### Materials

Railroad board die cut frame approximately 7 x 10”

Assorted wooden beads

Assorted plastic pony beads

Pipe cleaners

Glue, masking tape

Tissue paper  
Assorted yarn

## Procedure

### Session 1

- Review the book of **Abuela's Weave** especially noticing the pictures showing weaving. Discuss with the children the technique of weaving using a back strap loom. Show some examples of real weaving and a loom if available. Talk about the element of texture, and how the principles of repetition and contrast are important in the weaving examples.
- Start the weaving process by setting up the warp with an odd number of pipe cleaners. Place a dot of glue on the inside back of each pipe cleaner as it is placed on the back of the frame. Use masking tape to set the pipe cleaners so they will dry in place.
- Show the students how to twist the pipe cleaner in a loop or spiral at the ends that extend over the edge of the frame. The pony beads can also be added to the ends of the pipe cleaners for added decoration.

### Session 2

- After demonstrating the over/under action of the weft, show the students the variety of materials that can be woven into their warp threads. Not only can they use a variety of thickness of yarn, other materials can also be used such as ribbon, twisted tissue paper, and jumbo pipe cleaners. The large wooden beads can be strung into the weaving or tied on the ends of the warp pieces. The ends of each warp piece can be left to fall over the edge of the frame or, if desired, the warp piece can be woven in another row.
- Once the weft is finished, place the weaving on a piece of colored railroad board for display.

## English Language Arts Lesson—Grades 2 & 3

### Objectives

Students will:

- Compare narrative and expository texts on weaving.
- Fill in a Venn diagram with observations about two books.

### Materials

Two books: **Abuela's Weave** and non-fiction book about weaving such as **The Weaver's Gift**

Unlined paper with large Venn diagram of two overlapping circles

Pencils and crayons

### Process

- Read the two books and talk about the differences between fictional and non-fictional weaving accounts.
- Students will fill in Venn diagrams with their observation of the books.
- Diagrams can be colored in to show the three parts.

### Resources

Lasky, Kathryn. **The Weaver's Gift**. New York, London: Frederick Warne, 1980.

## Social Studies Lesson #1—Grades 2 & 3

### Objectives

Students will:

- Apply weaving techniques to make potholders.
- Make a cost analysis of their product to establish a price for their product.
- Set up a “booth” to sell their potholders.
- Analyze their cost/net profit/selling strategies.

## Materials

- Potholder looms
- Assorted colored loops for weaving

## Procedure

- Gain permission from the school's administration to set up a booth for students to sell their products.
- Purchase looms and loops.
- Teach students the weaving techniques.
- Set up a weaving center in one part of the classroom that can remain up and running until all materials are used up and/or enough potholders have been made to supply a booth.
- Discuss cost analysis with the students to establish a selling price for the potholders. Role-play seller/customer scenarios.
- Set up a booth for the students to sell their "wares" on a special events day when adults are sure to be in the building. (Hint: Let parents and teachers know about the students' booth ahead of time to ensure that enough "customers" are available and ready to buy.)
- Following the event, analyze the cost/net profit with the students. Discuss what went well, difficulties, interpersonal reactions, future plans, and how to use or to distribute profit.

## Social Studies Lesson #2—Grades 2 & 3

### Objectives

Students will:

- Be able to explain the difference between cottage industries and factories.
- Learn that geographical location has great impact on goods produced by the individual for sale to others in a community.
- Compare goods produced in Guatemala (**Abuela's Weave**) to Vermont, U.S.A. (**Ox-Cart Man**).
- Create a Venn diagram of goods-comparison.

### Materials

- Books: **Abuela's Weave** and **Ox-Cart Man**
- Large Venn diagram for whole classroom use
- Student-size Venn diagram

### Procedure

- Read **Abuela's Weave**. Explain that cottage industries are when family members make products in their own home to provide for their own needs/wants or to sell/trade to others in their community. Compare this type of production to factory production.
- Discuss the effect that geographical location has on cottage industries as to what raw materials might be available for use in their production. Have students generate a list of materials noted in **Abuela's Weave**.
- Read **Ox-Cart Man** and go through the same steps as above.
- Using the large Venn diagram, compare the items taken to market to sell in the two regions represented in the stories.
- Locate both on map. Compare climate and geography.
- Have students fill in their own Venn diagram comparing the goods.
- Display students' work on bulletin board.

### Suggestions for Follow-Up

- Social Studies
  - Look at the illustrations in the book and have students deduce how the Mayan Indians live, their houses, clothing and food.
  - Compare a map of the United States and Central America showing where Guatemala is located in relation to the USA.

- Language Arts
  - Draw a picture of two favorite characters in the story and a written description.
  - Imagine you are Esperanza and write a letter to a friend about going to the market. Let the friend know about the sights and sounds of the market and how it felt to experience selling the beautiful weavings.

## Michigan Curriculum Connections

### Visual Arts

ART.2.VA.E.1                      Apply knowledge of materials, techniques, and processes to create artwork.  
 ART.5.VA.E.1                      Explain how visual arts have inherent relationships to everyday life.

### Social Studies

SOC.IV.1.EE                      Describe and demonstrate how the economic forces of scarcity and choice affect the management of personal financial resources, shape consumer decisions regarding the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services that affect the economic well-being of individuals and society.  
 SOC.IV.4.EE                      Explain how a free market economic system works, as well as other economic systems, to coordinate and to facilitate the exchange, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

## Resource materials

Audio Visual Program. **Gente del Sol**. Tucson, AZ: Crizmac, 1991.  
 Castaneda. **Abuela's Weave**. New York: Lee and Low Books, 1993.  
 Joyner & Monaghan. **You Can Weave!** Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, 2000.

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