

A Birthday Basket for Tía

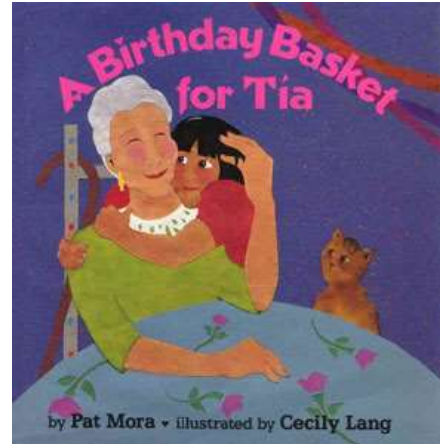
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Simon & Schuster

Anita Canteenwalla and Jean Thornton of Longwood Elementary in Seminole County, Florida, have suggested a *Tia* lesson planning idea for struggling readers that "Brings a Gift to the Whole Class."

This wonderful story is one which we have used in many of our small group Title I Reading intervention sessions. It is an example of a book chosen for its high interest level and low-level vocabulary. This makes it desirable for students who are struggling readers. An additional asset of this story is the setting, a typical American community, and the emphasis on the value of family and rich cultural experiences. Another big plus for our students are the Hispanic characters and the simple Spanish words and phrases.



Since we often work with below level readers who have exited the English for Speakers of Other Languages program, many of them Hispanic, the story of Cecilia and her Tia provides our students with familiar surroundings and customs. In addition, it allows our Hispanic children an opportunity to be peer teachers to their fellow students. Some of our ESOL students can read the Spanish words and almost all of them can properly pronounce the words, thereby modeling for the group. This affords a wonderful success situation for all involved.

Being aware of the appeal of this book, we decided to strengthen reading comprehension by integrating technology. After small group reading sessions, we assigned characters from the story to our students to act out, utilizing costumes and props borrowed from the Music teacher's supply closet. Students then took turns acting out scenes from the story and using a digital camera to capture the re-enactments. They showed they could accurately summarize with this creative activity. Character familiarity, correct sequencing of events, and emphasizing "beginning, middle and end" were easily incorporated.

Carrying this activity one level higher, students created a power point presentation to share with their third grade class. After the photographs were reviewed and selected, the students had to provide a short one or two sentence summary to describe the scenes depicted. They practiced grammar, spelling and sentence structure. By arranging the slides and saving the presentation to a pen drive, the students were able to use their classroom computer and TV to share their creation.

We were concerned that because of their historically low achievement, these struggling readers, many with limited English proficiency, would be nervous or fearful of such public demonstration. However, since they were the only third graders to

have mastered the digital camera and power point presentations, they were excited and proud to present their productions. *A Birthday Basket for Tia* was a springboard for these Title I students to showcase their cultural diversity, their emerging skills and to share their newfound enthusiasm for reading.