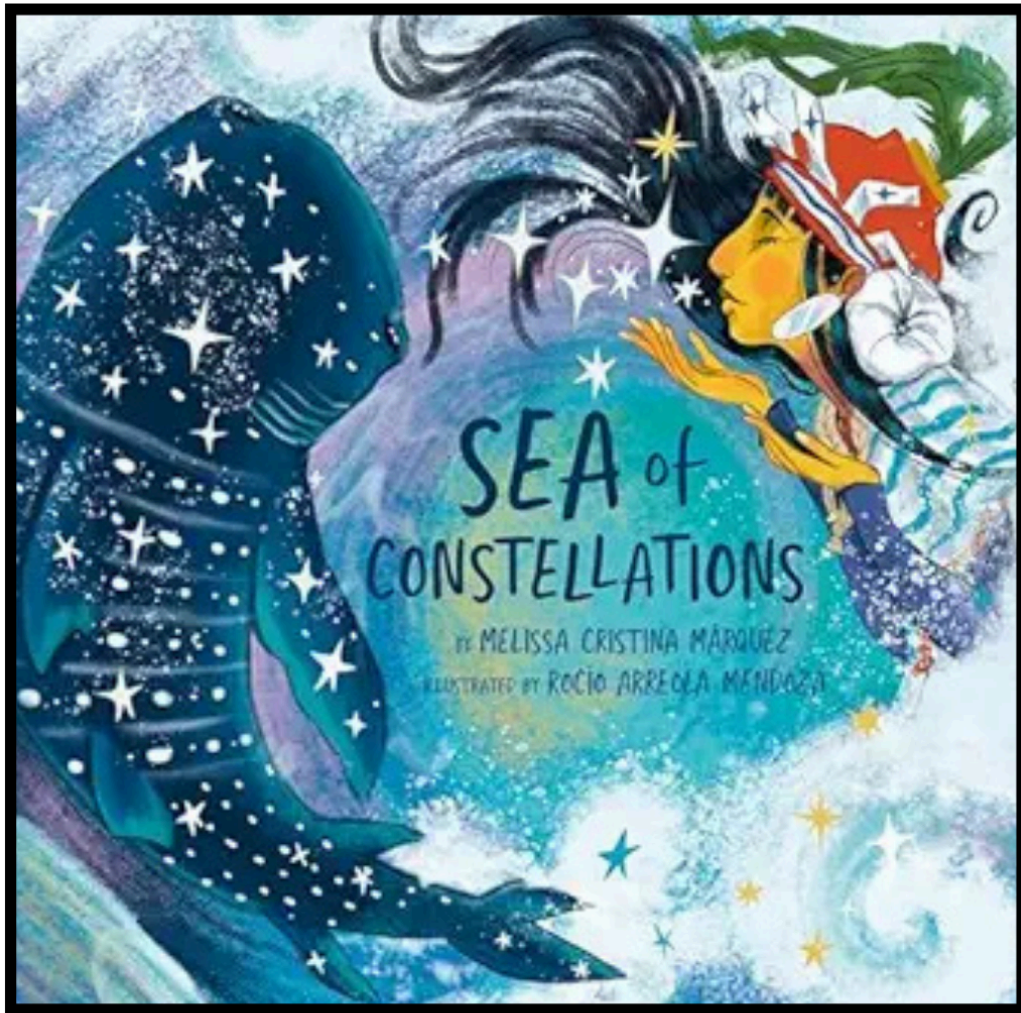


América's Book Award

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



PRODUCED BY THE CONSORTIUM FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
PROGRAMS
WRITTEN BY KRISTINE WITKO



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This educator's guide was written to support using *Sea of Constellations* in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. Produced by the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) at the University of Arizona on behalf of the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) and the Américas Award, it was written in 2026 by Kristine Witko, Curriculum Consultant, with support from Katrina Dillon, Assistant Director of Outreach at CLAS.

ABOUT THE AMÉRICAS AWARD

CLASP founded the Américas Award in 1993 to encourage and commend authors, illustrators, and publishers who produce quality children's and young adult books that portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinx communities in the United States, and to provide teachers with recommendations for classroom use. CLASP offers up to two annual book awards, together with a list of honor books and commended titles. For more information concerning the Américas Award, including additional classroom resources, please visit the [CLASP website](#).

The awards are administered by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) and coordinated by both Tulane University's Stone Center for Latin American Studies and the University of Arizona's Center for Latin American Studies. Generous support is also provided by Florida International University, Michigan State University, Stanford University, University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Los Angeles, UNC-Duke Consortium in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Florida, University of Michigan, University of New Mexico, University of Texas at Austin, University of Utah, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Vanderbilt University.

ABOUT CLASP

CLASP's mission is to promote all facets of Latin American studies throughout the world. Its broad range of activities include the encouragement of research activities, funding of professional workshops, advancement of citizen outreach activities, and development of teaching aids for the classroom.



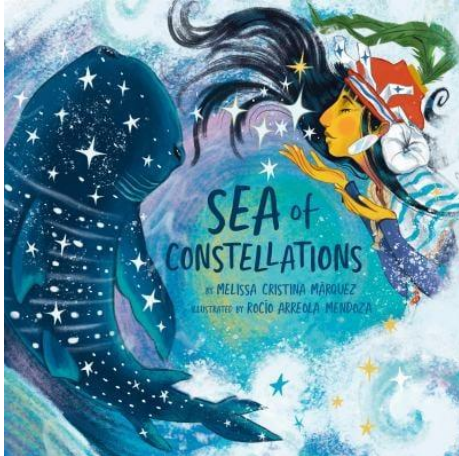
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OVERVIEW

Sea of Constellations

Written by Melissa Cristina Márquez and illustrated by Rocío Arreola Mendoza

Published 2024 by Penguin Workshop

ISBN: 0593523601

THEMES

Kindness, Generosity, Friendship, Teamwork, Courage, Perseverance

SYNOPSIS

Maren the whale shark loves her life as the biggest, brightest fish in the sea. She spends her days exploring the water around her and finding fresh new snacks as she travels. But one day, the ocean goes dark and Maren's adventures come to a halt. With only the glow from the scales on her back and her best friend, Remy the remora, by her side, Maren sets out on her greatest quest yet—to cross the ocean and ask the Aztec goddess Huixtocihuatl about the darkness and to figure out how to bring back the light. Along the way she meets new friends and exemplifies the power of sharing!

Melissa Cristina Márquez, Forbes 30 Under 30 Honoree, globally renowned shark scientist, and author of *Mother of Sharks*, is back to introduce a variety of fish and other fun sea creatures in this picture book celebrating community, friendship, and supporting others in times of need. Brought to life by Rocío Arreola Mendoza's stellar illustrations, this ocean adventure is sure to educate and excite young readers about the sea while passing along positive lessons to be used on land.

READING LEVEL

Grades K – 3 / Ages 5–8



REVIEWS

★ “This gentle aquatic fable reminds us that friendship and selflessness can be powerful beacons against fear and hopelessness, even in times of darkness. A visually appealing tale with a sound message sure to resonate with readers.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

★ “Touching upon the importance of sharing and kindness, this lovely picture book also introduces a beautiful ocean world and Aztec mythology to young readers.”
—*School Library Journal, starred review*

AWARDS

- Americas Award Commended Book, 2025



APPLICABLE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

K-12 READING

Key Ideas and Details

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.



K-12 WRITING

Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing

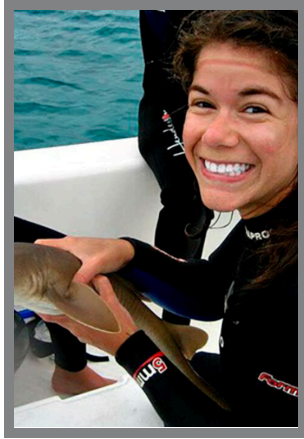
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MELISSA CRISTINA MÁRQUEZ



Melissa Cristina Márquez is a fiercely proud Hispanic marine biologist, wildlife educator, professional speaker, and presenter. She has given two TEDx talks on sharks and female scientists, and her work has been highlighted in NPR, *Allure*, Disney+, BBC, *National Geographic*, *Good Morning America*, and more. In 2021, Melissa was featured on the *Forbes* 30 Under 30: Science list and the *InStyle* Badass 50 Women list. Melissa holds a BA in marine ecology and conservation from New College of Florida and an MS in marine biology from Victoria University. Born in Puerto Rico and raised in Mexico, Melissa aims to bring attention to the importance of diversity and inclusion with her writing.

IN HER OWN WORDS: ABOUT ME

Taken from “About Me” from <https://melissacmarquez.com/>

“Growing up, I never saw any women shark scientists, and I often questioned if my dream job was even attainable. It’s a belief I hold close to my heart: representation matters. That’s why my first TEDx talk, “Sharks and Female Scientists: More Alike Than You Think,” was so important to me. In it, I shed light on the reality of being a shark scientist and called out the media for failing to showcase diverse perspectives in the field. The response was overwhelming. Thousands of views flooded in within the first weeks alone. It was a humbling experience that reinforced the importance of speaking up and advocating for greater diversity and inclusion in science. Since then, I’ve had the privilege of engaging at global forums like the United Nations, National Academy of Science, Oxford, University of Western Australia Global Leader Experience, and the National Science Policy Symposium.

Currently, when not filming for TV shows at sea, I lead diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in marine science, challenging norms through my publications and advisory roles with Women in Ocean Science, Beneath The Waves, Minorities in Shark Sciences (MISS), PangeaSeed, and SEETurtles. Holding a Master of Science in Marine Biology from Victoria University of Wellington, I’m also an author of children’s books including the Wild Survival series (Scholastic) and Mother of Sharks (Madre de los Tiburones), and Sea of Constellations (Océano de constelaciones), with my latest (Leo’s Lobo or El Lobo de Leo) set to release in February 2026 by Penguin Random House.”



CLASSROOM RELEVANCE AND APPLICATIONS

How can kindness inspire others? In *Sea of Constellations*, Melissa Cristina Márquez weaves a tale that is inspired by Aztec mythology. Readers are introduced to Maren, a whale shark whose glowing spots illuminate the ocean depths. When darkness suddenly overtakes the sea, many creatures become frightened and lost. Determined to help her friends, Maren shares her glowing scales with those in need. Maren and her best friend, Remy, decide to speak with Huixtocihuatl, the Aztec goddess who rules the sea. Although each act of generosity leaves her with less light of her own, she continues helping others. Alongside her friend Remy, Maren embarks on a journey to discover the source of the darkness and restore light to the ocean. Along the way, she learns that her kindness has inspired her friends to come together and support her.

Sea of Constellations has a range of themes, including kindness, generosity, friendship, teamwork, courage, and perseverance. This book proves that even a small act of kindness can make a big difference. It also shows the importance of community, as once all of the sea creatures banded together, they were able to continue their mission and find Huixtocihuatl. Teachers can use this story to spark discussions about empathy, helping others, and the importance of working together to solve problems.

A unique aspect of this book is that it provides many opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, with connections to marine science and Aztec mythology. As a marine scientist herself, Márquez introduces readers to ocean life through the character of Maren. Students can extend their learning by researching whale sharks and other sea creatures, exploring ocean ecosystems, learning about bioluminescence, or investigating the challenges facing marine environments today. While students will begin learning about Huixtocihuatl through the story and the glossary at the end of the book, they can further their learning by delving deeper into Aztec mythology and Indigenous Mexican cultural traditions.

Students can connect with many of the book's themes through writing, discussion, and creative projects. For example, they could write about a time when they showed kindness to someone, or when someone showed kindness to them. In response to the theme of courage, they could also describe a time when they were scared but persisted and faced their fears.

The book's vivid illustrations stand out and would lend themselves well to art and science activities. For instance, the book contains a glossary at the end with illustrations and definitions of sea creatures, and students can create their own designs of sea creatures that they research independently. The glossary also contains gods from Aztec mythology, with illustrations that depict their powers. For example, Huixtocihuatl, goddess of salt and seawater, has waves of water flowing from her hands and is shown in yellow face paint, similar to the color of



An Educator's Guide to *Sea of Constellations* by Melissa Cristina Márquez

Mexico's corn or maize. Students can likewise research an Aztec god and draw illustrations that relate to their powers and Aztec cultural heritage.

Sea of Constellations provides a powerful lesson that the kindness we give returns to us. As Huixtocihuatl says at the end of the book, "We can get through any scary situation when we have kind friends to help us through those dark times." Although some journeys may be overwhelming on our own, challenges become more manageable when people come together to support each other. Maren's example shows us that we can find our way through the darkness with the help of a friend.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Before reading the book with students, you may want to introduce some of the important themes, activate any prior knowledge, and generate interest and anticipation through the following activities and/or discussion questions:

VOCABULARY

Aztec
constellation
gloomy
heavens
Huitzilopochtli
Huixtocihuatl
remora
scale
sob
whale shark

ACTIVITY 1: PICTURE WALK

Pique students' interest, activate prior knowledge, and introduce the book through a picture walk.

PROCESS:

1. Show students the front and back cover of the book. Ask them to predict what they think the book will be about. Then, slowly flip through the pages of the book without reading any of the words. As students ask questions about each picture they see, guide them to make inferences based upon their observations. Focus on who, what, when, where, why and how questions such as: "What is happening here?" "What will happen next?" "Who do you think this is?" "How does she feel? What makes you say that?"
2. Once students have read the book, return to their thoughts and predictions, comparing them to the actual events of the book.



ACTIVITY 2: OBSERVATION CHARTS

Observation charts offer one way for students to pique their interest about a book they will begin to read. As students will be analyzing illustrations from the book, it is helpful to select pages in advance that may spark some interesting conversations. Examples include the following:

- pages 1–2 (Maren swims through the sea)
- page 4 (Huixtocihuatl stands elegantly in the sea)
- pages 9–10 (the black fish accepts a shiny scale)
- pages 13–14 (Maren passes out scales to a dozen sea creatures)
- pages 17–18 (Maren and Remy swim through a dark sea)
- pages 19–20 (Maren's friends bring their shiny scales to light her way)
- page 24 (Huixtocihuatl holds Maren in her hands)
- pages 27–28 (Maren glows as the brightest light in the sea)

PROCESS:

1. Explain to students that they are going to be working in small groups. Each group will rotate around the room to view and discuss each image. One person will be the recorder at each table. When looking at an image, students will spend at least one minute silently reflecting on what they see and thinking about the questions, “What do you see?” “What do you think is happening?” “How does this illustration make you feel?” Then, students will discuss their thoughts in the small group. The recorder will write down their reflections and answers to the questions on the observation chart. Sticky notes can also be used to record the group's thoughts. Explain to students that they will have a set amount of time at each image. When time is up, the teacher will give a signal, and each group will move to the next image.
2. Divide students into small groups. Place an image and marker at various tables or stations in the classroom. Direct each group to the table or station where they will begin. Begin the activity. Continue rotating groups through the images until each group has seen each image.
3. Hang up all of the observation charts with comments. As a whole group, discuss each illustration, giving students time to share and respond to what they posted. Keep the charts posted throughout the reading and discussion of *Sea of Constellations*. Allow students to revisit them and discuss them as they think more about what the images represent.



ACTIVITY 3: PAY IT FORWARD

This activity helps students think about the importance of kindness, empathy, and support systems in their own lives. As a result, it will prepare them to think about how characters in *Sea of Constellations* help each other through scary moments.

PROCESS:

1. Tell students that soon, the class will read a story about characters who have to navigate a dark and unfamiliar world. They will need to rely on kindness, friendship, and teamwork to find their way. In preparation for reading this book, they can think about ways people show care to them, or the way they show care to other people.
2. Ask, “What does it mean to be kind? What are some examples of kindness?” The teacher may provide an example to start the conversation, such as holding a door open for someone or donating food to a food bank. Invite students to share out their ideas.
3. Then, ask students, “Now think of a time when someone was kind to you, or when you were kind to others. What happened?” Give students think time. Then ask them to share in a think-pair-share. Those who feel comfortable sharing their experiences can share out to the group.
4. Tell students that they will work in a group to share some of their stories and think of a way they can intentionally show kindness to others in their community. An example could be holding a food drive, doing a bake sale and donating the proceeds, or spending quality time with a young sibling.
5. Give students time to come up with a short presentation of their idea. They can deliver a brief oral presentation with a visual supplement, such as by drawing an illustration of this kind act and then explaining its impact in words.
6. After each group presents, the class can discuss the positive impact that this act of kindness may have on an individual or a broader community.
7. Students can think back to this activity as they read the book and see how the characters' actions influence each other, kindness helps others, and working together makes it easier to face challenges.

ACTIVITY 4: REVIEW OF GENRE

Prepare students to read *Sea of Constellations* by having a discussion of genre.

PROCESS:

1. Write “fiction” and “nonfiction” on the board. Ask students, “How would you define a fiction book?” Have them turn and talk then select a few to share with the class.
2. Write down the shared class definition. (Ex. Fiction is a story or poem created from the author's imagination. It may have characters, a setting, a problem, a solution, and a lesson learned.)



3. Ask, “How would you define a nonfiction book?” Have them turn and talk then select a few to share.
4. Write down the shared class definition. (Ex. Nonfiction is based on facts, real events, or real people. It explains, informs, or persuades by giving information).
5. Ask students to point out examples of fiction around the classroom. Then, ask them to point out examples of nonfiction. (Have some examples ready to use in case students need guidance.)
6. Hold up *Sea of Constellations* and ask: What genre do you think this book is? Why do you say that?
7. Say, “This is a fiction book because it is a story with characters created from the author’s imagination. This book has characters, a setting, a problem, a solution, and a lesson learned.”
8. If time allows, read the blurb aloud to the class. If relevant, ask them about any other historical fiction books they may have read in class as a point of comparison.

GUIDED READING QUESTIONS

Before reading

1. Do you think this is a fiction or nonfiction text? What makes you think that?
2. This book is fiction. It has characters, a setting, a problem, a solution, and a lesson learned.
3. Based on the title and the illustration, what do you think this story will be about?
4. Read the blurb on the front cover. Who are the characters? What do you predict will happen in this story?

During reading

Transferable Questions

1. (Every few pages) What is happening?
2. Who are the characters? What do we know about them?
3. How does the character feel? How do you know?
4. What lessons can we learn from this book?

Text-Based Questions

1. What do we know about Maren?
2. What problem do the sea animals encounter?
3. What solution does Remy propose?
4. Who is Huixtocihuatl?
5. How does Remy feel when Maren gives him a shimmery scale?
6. How do the other fish feel when Maren gives them shimmery scales? How can you tell?
7. What problem begins to emerge in the middle of the book?
8. How do the other sea creatures help Maren?
9. What does Huixtocihuatl say when Maren arrives?



10. What lesson does Maren learn at the end?

After reading

1. Have you read any other books about similar themes? Examples can be activism, social justice, community, resistance, cultural pride, or family. What happened in those books? How were they similar or different?
2. Have you read other books by the same author or illustrator? What were those books about and was this one similar or different?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

There are so many different ways one can approach a unit on the themes discussed in *Sea of Constellations*. The context in which one is teaching is of paramount importance. Not only do we need to consider the age/grade level of the students, but also students' own personal backgrounds and family histories. As with any lesson, it's important to consider the needs of your students and plan accordingly. With this in mind, we've provided a variety of extension activity ideas and resources below that can be used in conjunction with the book.

APPROACH 1: LITERACY CONNECTIONS

To expand the literacy connections made when using *Sea of Constellations*, consider including the readings discussed below.

“New Shoes for Leo”

Similar to *Sea of Constellations*, *New Shoes for Leo* by Lauren Agra Deedy tells a heartwarming story of kindness. In this book, a young boy named William is helping his family create a care package for their family members in Cuba. As his family packs supplies like clothing, food, and medicine, William wonders what he can contribute to a young cousin named Leo. Once William learns more about Leo and all the similarities they share, such as a love for baseball, William goes on a mission to figure out the perfect gift for his cousin. This book shares a lesson about the importance of kindness and the way that giving to others—with no expectation of receiving anything in return—can nevertheless result in immense fulfillment.

PROCESS:

1. Begin by asking students questions like, “What are some ways people show kindness to others?” “Have you ever been given a gift that felt really special to you?”



2. Explain, “Today we will read a fiction book called *New Shoes for Leo* by Lauren Agra Deedy. Take a look at the cover. What do you notice? What do you think this story will be about?”
3. Say, “This is a book about a boy named William who is helping to create a care package for his family members in Cuba. A care package is a box or container full of things people need. As we read today, we will notice what our main character, William, does to show kindness.”
4. Read the book. Occasionally stop to ask comprehension questions: “Who are the characters? What do we know about them? What is happening? Are you noticing a problem? How is the problem solved? What can we learn from this book?”
5. Upon finishing the book, ask students to summarize the key events in the story. Ask if any of them has ever sent a care package to a family member, or if they received a caring gift from their relatives. How did it feel?
6. Make the connection to *Sea of Constellations*: “How are these two books similar? How are they different? What lessons do they teach us?”
7. As a post-reading activity, teachers can offer choices such as writing a thank you note for an act of kindness received by the students, researching more about the care packages sent to Cuba by relatives, or analyzing ways that many immigrants give back to their family members in their home countries.

APPROACH 2: THE OCEAN ECOSYSTEM

In this activity, students can learn more about the ecosystem that was introduced in the story. They can learn how living things in the ocean are interconnected and depend on each other for survival.

PROCESS:

1. Start by asking students, “What kind of living things can be found in the ocean?” and “What is an ecosystem?” Lead a brief discussion about how plants, animals, and their environment work together as a system.
2. Explain how in *Sea of Constellations*, the ocean represents more than just a setting; it is a complex ecosystem where each sea creature plays an important role. Like Maren, Remy, and the other sea creatures depend on each other, real ocean ecosystems also involve dependence and balance.
3. Watch one or more videos about the ocean ecosystem. Examples are listed below:
 - a. [Ocean Habitats & Ecosystems](#)
 - b. [Let's Explore the Oceans | Take a Field Trip Under the Sea](#)
 - c. [Oceans 101 | National Geographic](#)
4. Ask students: What did they learn?



5. Tell the class that they will do more research independently and draw their own ecosystem. Just like the illustrator, Rocío Arreola Mendoza, painted beautiful depictions of the ocean depths, students will be able to do the same in an educational illustration of an ecosystem.
6. This project may take a week or longer for students to conduct research, develop their illustrations, and prepare a short presentation.
7. Students can present their completed ecosystem model to the class. They can explain the animals they included, the relationships between them, and how they depend on each other. They can also describe what happens if part of their ecosystem changes (just like the darkness overcame the ocean in the story), which can lead to a discussion of the importance of balance and homeostasis.
8. Afterward, students can make connections to the book. What did this research teach them about Maren's journey?

APPROACH 3: RESEARCH AZTEC HISTORY AND CULTURE

Sea of Constellations incorporates Aztec culture, beliefs, and mythology. Maren seeks the help of Huixtocihuatl, the Aztec goddess of salt and seawater. Aztec mythology would consider Huixtocihuatl to be one of the three provider gods who gave people the three life essentials: food, water, and salt. Learning more about Huixtocihuatl and other Aztec gods can help students better understand the symbolism in the story while developing an appreciation for this important indigenous civilization.

PROCESS:

1. Tell students, "Now that we have read *Sea of Constellations*, let's learn more about Aztec history and culture that we can see infused throughout the story."
2. Ask students to review the end of the book together. Read the glossary about Huixtocihuatl and Huitzilopochtli. What have they learned? What else are they curious about?
3. Explain that Huixtocihuatl was seen as an important provider god in Aztec mythology. She contributed to the sustenance of life by giving salt. Other provider gods gave water and food. Learning more about Aztec history can help the class to appreciate the cultural context of this book.
4. In class, students can break into groups to conduct research on different aspects of Aztec culture, history, or mythology. Some topics may include Aztec gods and goddesses, Aztec architecture, indigenous Mexican traditions, or the influence of Aztec culture today.
5. Students can develop a project based on what they have learned, such as through a short video, a poem, a slideshow, a poster, a work of art, or a story.



MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

To complement and enhance teaching about *Sea of Constellations* we've compiled the following multimedia resources that are available at no cost online.

INTERVIEWS WITH MELISSA CRISTINA MÁRQUEZ

- Read ["The Picture Book Buzz - Interview w/Melissa Christina Marquez, Rocio Mendoza, Review of Sea of Constellations"](#)

In this interview, both Márquez and the book's illustrator, Rocío Arreola Mendoza, talk about *Sea of Constellations*, with topics such as the inspiration for the book, where they enjoy writing and illustrating, and the number of revisions that they had to undertake. Both author and illustrator share an appreciation for each other's work and a love for the project of creating this book together.

- Watch ["Living Among Sharks: The Reality of Marine Biology and Research | Melissa Cristina Márquez"](#)

In this video podcast, Márquez shares all about the life of a marine biologist! She talks about her career trajectory, her foray into writing books for children, and her interest in studying sharks. The author also passionately talks about the importance of representation (both as a woman and as a Latina) in STEM and aims to inspire a younger generation to follow their interest in marine biology and see where it leads.



COMPLEMENTARY LITERATURE

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Titles marked with * are Americas Award recognized titles.

**A-Ztec: A Bilingual Alphabet Book* by Emmanuel Valtierra. Levine Querido, 2025.

From *Chocolatl* and *Axolotl* to *Guacamole* and *Quetzalcoatl*—open up this spectacular treasury of Aztec words from A to Z! Award-winning artist Emmanuel Valtierra brings young readers an enchanting bilingual journey through twenty-six words, concepts, and gods central to Aztec and Mexican culture. Each page features a letter of the alphabet paired with captivating poetry in both English and Spanish, kaleidoscopic illustrations inspired by ancient Aztec codices, and pronunciation guides to help families explore these beautiful words together.

**Barrio Rising: The Protest that Built Chicano Park* by María Dolores Águila and illustrated by Magdalena Mora. Dial Books, 2024.

Barrio Logan, one of San Diego's oldest Chicane neighborhoods, once brimmed with families and stretched all the way to the glorious San Diego Bay. But in the decades after WWII, the community lost their beach and bayfront to factories, junkyards, and an interstate that divided the neighborhood and forced around 5,000 people out of their homes. Then on April 22, 1970, residents discovered that the construction crew they believed was building a park—one the city had promised them years ago—was actually breaking ground for a police station. That's when they knew it was time to make their voices heard. *Barrio Rising* invites readers to join a courageous young activist and her neighbors in their successful twelve-day land occupation and beyond, when Barrio Logan banded together and built the colorful park that would become the corazón of San Diego's Chicane community. Also available in Spanish/también disponible en español: *El barrio se levanta*

**Churro Stand* by Karina N. González and illustrated by Krystal Quiles. Abrams, 2024.

On a hot summer's day, Lucía and her brother accompany their mother to sell delicious, sugary churros on the bustling streets of New York City. But when a thunderstorm rolls in, and the customers are chased away, Lucía's mother must improvise with a little bit of magic and lots of amor.

Diego Rivera: His World and Ours by Duncan Tonatiuh. Harry N. Abrams, 2011.

Diego Rivera, one of the most famous painters of the twentieth century, was once just a mischievous little boy who loved to draw. But this little boy would grow up to follow his passion and greatly influence the world of art. After studying in Spain and France as a young man, Diego was excited to



return to his home country of Mexico. There, he toured from the coasts to the plains to the mountains. He met the peoples of different regions and explored the cultures, architecture, and history of those who had lived before. Returning to Mexico City, he painted great murals representing all that he had seen. He provided the Mexican people with a visual history of who they were and, most important, who they are.

**Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales. Neal Porter Books, 2018.

Dreamers is a celebration of making your home with the things you always carry: your resilience, your dreams, your hopes and history. It's the story of finding your way in a new place, of navigating an unfamiliar world and finding the best parts of it. In dark times, it's a promise that you can make better tomorrows. This lovingly-illustrated picture book memoir looks at the myriad gifts migrantes bring with them when they leave their homes. It's a story about family. And it's a story to remind us that we are all dreamers, bringing our own strengths wherever we roam. Beautiful and powerful at any time but given particular urgency as the status of our own Dreamers becomes uncertain, this is a story that is both topical and timeless. The lyrical text is complemented by sumptuously detailed illustrations, rich in symbolism. Also included are a brief autobiographical essay about Yuyi's own experience, a list of books that inspired her (and still do), and a description of the beautiful images, textures, and mementos she used to create this book. A parallel Spanish-language edition, *Soñadores*, is also available.

**Growing an Artist* by John Parra. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2024.

Today is a big day—the first time Juanito gets to help his papi on the job as a landscape architect! Throughout the day, Juanito sketches anything that catches his eye: a nest full of baby birds, a nursery with row upon row of plants and flowers, and more. Father and son travel from house to house, pruning, weeding, mowing, and turning overgrown and chaotic yards into beautiful spaces. A few of the clients don't appreciate Papi's hard work, like Juanito's classmate who pretends not to see him. But Papi always feels pride in owning his own business and in a job well done. And at the end of the day, Juanito may get the chance to turn his artistic eye toward landscape design—just like his papi.

**Hopeful Heroes: More Poems About Amazing Latinos* by Margarita Engle and illustrated by Juliet Menéndez. Godwin Books, 2025.

Prepare to be inspired by this empowering collection of poetry that tells a larger story about fortitude and community across Hispanic history. From environmental activists such as Christina Figueres to record breaking athletes like Pelé, each role model featured is a legend in their own right. There's no better time to champion the accomplishments of this remarkable group of unsung heroes from all across Latin America! Those profiled in this collection include Anacaona, Martín de la Cruz and Juan Badiano, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Micaela Bastidas Puyucahua, Simón Bolívar, Mariana Grajales Cuello, Ana Roqué de Duprey, Julio Garavito Armero, Ramón Fonst Segundo, Christiana Figueres,



Juano Hernández, Gabriela Mistral, Martín Chambi de Coaza, Marina Núñez del Prado, Noé Canjura, Nicolás García Urriburu, Pelé, and Rigoberta Menchú Tum.

Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell, illustrated by Rafael López. Clarion Books, 2016.

What good can a splash of color do in a community of gray? As Mira and her neighbors discover, more than you might ever imagine! Based on the true story of the Urban Art Trail in San Diego, California, *Maybe Something Beautiful* reveals how art can inspire transformation—and how even the smallest artists can accomplish something big. Pick up a paintbrush and join the celebration!

**Menudo Sunday* by María Dolores Águila and illustrated by Erika Meza. Dial Books, 2025.

Sundays are the best: that's when a little girl and her mamá, abuelitos, tías and primos all gather together to eat yummy menudo, a traditional Mexican soup. But when playtime with the cousins and family dogs gets out of hand and Abuelito Esteban's special bowl of menudo breaks, everyone has to pitch in to make a new batch! Through all the menudo mishaps and sneaky snacks for perritos with wagging tails, young readers will giggle as they learn to count from 1-15 in Spanish and English. Bonus materials at the back of the book include a glossary of Spanish words, a note from the author, and tips for hosting your very own Menudo Sunday!

**My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña. Kokila, 2019.

When Daisy Ramona zooms around her neighborhood with her papi on his motorcycle, she sees the people and places she's always known. She also sees a community that is rapidly changing around her. But as the sun sets purple-blue-gold behind Daisy Ramona and her papi, she knows that the love she feels will always be there.

**Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale* written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2013.

Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote opens with festive scenes of the Rabbit family preparing for Papá Rabbit's homecoming. Musicians, family and friends gather to welcome home Papá who had traveled north to work in the carrot and lettuce fields, years before. Plates of mole, rice and beans are prepared in anticipation of his arrival and the house is strung with papel picado. When Papá Rabbit doesn't arrive, his son Pancho decides to sneak away in the dark of the night to find him. The reader follows the young rabbit as he travels north with the aid of a sneaky coyote by train, by river, by tunnel, and by desert. Tonatiuh bravely presents the controversial issue of illegal immigration through the lens of a children's fable. Inspired by 14th century Mixtec codices and traditional folklore, the author / illustrator presents the sometimes startling realities of many modern day immigrants in a form which can be appreciated by both young and old alike. (Grades Kindergarten and up)



Classroom Resources: [Educator's Guide for Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale](#) written by Katrina Dillon on behalf of CLASP.

**Photographic: The Life of Graciela Iturbide* by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Pena. Getty, 2018.

Graciela Iturbide was born in México City in 1942, the oldest of 13 children. When tragedy struck Iturbide as a young mother, she turned to photography for solace and understanding. From then on Iturbide embarked on a photographic journey that has taken her throughout her native México, from the Sonora Desert to Juchitán to Frida Kahlo's bathroom, to the United States, India, and beyond. *Photographic* is a symbolic, poetic, and deeply personal graphic biography of this iconic photographer. Iturbide's journey will excite readers of all ages as well as budding photographers, who will be inspired by her resolve, talent, and curiosity.

**Pilgrim Codex* by Vivian Mansour, illustrated by Emmanuel Valtierra, and translated by Carlos Rodríguez Cortez. Levine Querido, 2025.

We, the Vargas Ramírez family, come from a faraway place north of Tenochtitlan called Iztapalapa, Land of Clay Upon Water. A land surrounded by cars and dry grass; a place where the pieces of our small world were scattered. For some time we lived there, but then one day my father heard a beautiful birdsong that rose up and appeared to say *tihui, tihui, tihui*: let's go, let's go, let's go. And so we gathered up our friends who made up that small world and decided to head north, for the other side, and a better life. Together the Boy and his family will journey from the Land of the Frogs to The Place Where Feet Cry to the River Where the Waters Tangle, fleeing Gunmen and braving Coyotes and plunging darknesses as black as an obsidian forest. Originally published in Mexico, *Pilgrim Codex* (Códice peregrino) captures through the eyes of a child one family's part in the ever-changing and fleeting story of the brave migrant warriors who search for a better place to live.

**Popo the Xolo* by Paloma Angelina Lopez and illustrated by Abraham Matias. Charlesbridge, 2025.

Nana is surrounded by family and takes joy in her many grandchildren. She's also tired and feels pain. Soon she begins her transition from life into death, accompanied by her beloved Xolo dog, Popo. Together they go on Nana's journey, and by the end of the story, Nana's family celebrates the many years of love they shared with her. And a grandchild will now care for Popo. Beautifully told by debut author Paloma Angelina Lopez and featuring stunning blend of colored art by Mexican illustrator, Abraham Matias, *Popo the Xolo* helps kids understand how loved ones live on in our memories. An unforgettable picture book that's grounded in the importance of the 9 levels of Mictlān and the role Xolo (show-low) dogs play in Indigenous cultural understandings of present-day Mexico. *Popo the Xolo* is available in both English and Spanish language editions.

**The Circuit* (graphic novel) by Francisco Jiménez and illustrated by Celia Jacobs. Clarion Books, 2024.



An honest and evocative account of a family's journey from Mexico to the fields of California—and to a life of backbreaking work and constant household moves—as seen through the eyes of a boy who longs for education and the right to call one place home. A popular choice for community reads, as well as school curricula and curriculum adoptions, Francisco Jiménez's award-winning memoir, now brought to life in Celia Jacob's beautiful and resonant artwork, is a powerful story of survival, faith, and hope.

**The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* by Francisco Jiménez. University of New Mexico Press, 1997.

After dark in a Mexican border town, a father holds open a hole in a wire fence as his wife and two small boys crawl through. So begins life in the United States for many people every day. And so begins this collection of twelve autobiographical stories by Santa Clara University professor Francisco Jiménez, who at the age of four illegally crossed the border with his family in 1947. "The Circuit," the story of young Panchito and his trumpet, is one of the most widely anthologized stories in Chicano literature. At long last, Jiménez offers more about the wise, sensitive little boy who has grown into a role model for subsequent generations of immigrants. These independent but intertwined stories follow the family through their circuit, from picking cotton and strawberries to topping carrots--and back again--over a number of years. As it moves from one labor camp to the next, the little family of four grows into ten. Impermanence and poverty define their lives. But with faith, hope, and back-breaking work, the family endures.

**The Interpreter* by Olivia Abtahi and illustrated by Monica Arnaldo. Kokila, 2025.

Some kids have one job: to be a kid! Cecilia has two. When she isn't on the soccer field scoring goals, she's accompanying her parents to all kinds of grown-up places, like the DMV, the accountant's office, and the auto shop. She helps them translate from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish. It's an important job, and it can even be fun. It's also hard work. Sometimes Cecilia's second job is so much responsibility, it feels like she'll split in two! Is it time for Cecilia to blow her whistle and call for a time-out? Olivia Abtahi's clever text and Monica Arnaldo's charming illustrations capture a common aspect of life for immigrant and bilingual families while offering a model for teamwork that helps everyone feel understood.

The Perfect Place by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Paola Escobar. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2024.

Lucas goes to the perfect school in the perfect neighborhood. And when he gets perfect grades, he feels like he fits right in. But life at home is not so perfect. His dad's old work truck keeps breaking down. His mom works long hours at her job at the diner. And Lucas has to share his small room with his baby sister. One night, Lucas is awakened by a strange light, which he follows all the way to the place where the perfect people live. Everything there is more beautiful than he could have imagined. But the longer Lucas stays, the more he wonders what it really means to be perfect. Does it mean never making



mistakes? Does it mean rejecting his bustling neighborhood and his loving family? And what's so great about being perfect, anyway? From award-winning talents Matt de la Peña and Paola Escobar comes this heartwarming, uplifting picture book about a boy, at home in two worlds, discovering what it means to be at home with himself.

**Xochitl and the Flowers / Xóchitl, la Niña de las Flores* by Jorge Argueta and illustrated by Carl Angel.

Children's Book Press, 2008.

Miles away from their home in El Salvador, Xochitl (SOH-cheel) and her family make a new home in the United States, but nothing is the same. Xochitl mourns a lovely garden and her family's small flower business, all left behind. Selling flowers on the street soon provides more than income for the Flores family: they begin to make friends with local storeowners and neighbors. But it is not until the family decides to start a nursery in its backyard that Xochitl begins to learn the true value of community in their adopted country. Basing his narrative on real-life events, prize-winning poet Jorge Argueta has crafted a tender, poetic, and moving story about a family's determination to set down roots and about their child's blooming among friends and neighbors. Artist Carl Angel's authentic and brilliant artwork splendidly documents this quintessentially American immigration story. (Grades Kindergarten and up)
Classroom Resources: [Teacher's Guide to Xochitl and the Flowers](#) produced by Children's Book Press and Lee & Low Books.

Young Adult Literature

**A Second Chance on Earth* by Juan Vidal. Holiday House, 2024.

Have you ever encountered a book that KO'd you, Iron Mike Tyson style? One that hit you square in the face and heart like some abracadabra casting a hex from an unknown planet? For sixteen-year-old poet and b-baller Marcos Cadena, that book is the beat-up copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* he finds among his late father's possessions after Papi is killed in an accident. Marcos' papi has always loomed large in his eyes. So, when Marcos travels to his parents' childhood home of Cartagena, Colombia to spread Papi's ashes, he brings his father's book with him, convinced that Gabriel García Márquez's masterpiece holds the key to understanding Papi's life and accepting his death. In Cartagena, Marcos befriends eighteen-year-old Camilo, a taxi driver and fellow García Márquez fan who appoints himself Marcos' unofficial tour guide. Together, the two boys explore the landscape of Cartagena, from the picturesque streets of Old Town to the poor neighborhood where Camilo grew up. But when Camilo reveals a troubling secret from his past, Marcos must ask himself whether everyone deserves a second chance. Woven through with themes of friendship, family, and forgiveness, this poignant novel in verse is also a love letter to Colombia and to the books of Gabriel García Márquez.

**Brownstone* by Samuel Teer and illustrated by Mar Julia. Versify, 2024.



Almudena has always wondered about the dad she never met. Now, with her white mother headed on a once-in-a-lifetime trip without her, she's left alone with her Guatemalan father for an entire summer. Xavier seems happy to see her, but he expects her to live in (and help fix up) his old, broken-down brownstone. And all along, she must navigate the language barrier of his rapid-fire Spanish—which she doesn't speak. As Almudena tries to adjust to this new reality, she gets to know the residents of Xavier's Latin American neighborhood. Each member of the community has their own joys and heartbreaks as well as their own strong opinions on how this young Latina should talk, dress, and behave. Some can't understand why she doesn't know where she comes from. Others think she's "not brown enough" to fit in. But time is running out for Almudena and Xavier to get to know each other, and the key to their connection may ultimately lie in bringing all these different elements together. Fixing a broken building is one thing, but turning these stubborn individuals into a found family might take more than this one summer.

**Call Me Iggy* by Jorge Aguirre and illustrated by Rafael Rosado. First Second, 2024.

Ignacio "Iggy" Garcia is an Ohio-born Colombian American teen living his best life. After bumping into Marisol (and her coffee) at school, Iggy's world is spun around. But Marisol has too much going on to be bothered with the likes of Iggy. She has school, work, family, and the uphill battle of getting her legal papers. As Iggy stresses over how to get Marisol to like him, his grandfather comes to the rescue. The thing is, not only is his abuelito dead, but he also gives terrible love advice. The worst. And so, with his ghost abuelito's meddling, Iggy's life begins to unravel as he sets off on a journey of self-discovery. *Call Me Iggy* tells the story of Iggy searching for his place in his family, his school, his community, and ultimately—as the political climate in America changes during the 2016 election—his country. Focusing on familial ties and budding love, *Call Me Iggy* challenges our assumptions about Latino-American identity while reaffirming our belief in the hope that all young people represent. Perfect for lovers of multigenerational stories like *Displacement* and *The Magic Fish*.

Clap When You Land by Elizabeth Acevedo. Quill Tree Books, 2022.

Camino Rios lives for the summers when her father visits her in the Dominican Republic. But this time, on the day when his plane is supposed to land, Camino arrives at the airport to see crowds of crying people....In New York City, Yahaira Rios is called to the principal's office, where her mother is waiting to tell her that her father, her hero, has died in a plane crash. Separated by distance—and Papi's secrets—the two girls are forced to face a new reality in which their father is dead and their lives are forever altered. And then, when it seems like they've lost everything of their father, they learn of each other.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez. Ember, 2019.



Perfect Mexican daughters do not go away to college. And they do not move out of their parents' house after high school graduation. Perfect Mexican daughters never abandon their family. But Julia is not your perfect Mexican daughter. That was Olga's role. Then a tragic accident on the busiest street in Chicago leaves Olga dead and Julia left behind to reassemble the shattered pieces of her family. And no one seems to acknowledge that Julia is broken, too. Instead, her mother seems to channel her grief into pointing out every possible way Julia has failed. But it's not long before Julia discovers that Olga might not have been as perfect as everyone thought. With the help of her best friend Lorena, and her first love, first everything boyfriend Connor, Julia is determined to find out. Was Olga really what she seemed? Or was there more to her sister's story? And either way, how can Julia even attempt to live up to a seemingly impossible ideal?

**The Hero's Guide to Summer Vacation* by Pablo Cartaya. Kokila, 2026.

Gonzalo Alberto Sánchez García has never considered himself the hero of his own story. He's an observer, quietly snapshotting landscapes and drawing the creatures he imagines emerging from them. Forced to spend the summer with his estranged grandfather, Alberto William García—the very famous reclusive author—Gonzalo doesn't expect to learn that heroes and monsters are not only the stuff of fantasy. But that's precisely what happens when Gonzalo's CEO mother, Veronica, sends Alberto on tour to promote the final book in his fantasy series for children and Gonzalo must tag along, even though he feels no connection to his grandfather or the books. Together, they embark on a cross-country road trip from Mendocino to Miami in a classic 1968 Oldsmobile Cutlass S convertible named Mathilde. Over the course of ten epic days on the highway, they will slay demons, real and imagined; confront old stories to write new ones; and learn what it truly means to show up for your family.