

Opuestos: Mexican Folk Art Opposites in English and Spanish

written by Cynthia Weill

wood sculptures from Oaxaca by Quirino and Martín Santiago

About the Book

Genre: Concept Book

Format: Paperback, pages 32

ISBN: 9781947627680

Reading Level: Grades K-1

Interest Level: Grades Birth-3

Guided Reading Level: A

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Animals, Art (Sculpture), Beginning Concepts, Bilingual, Cultural Diversity, Dual Language, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest, Native/Indigenous Interest, Opposites and Antonyms, Mexico, Photographic Illustrations, Spanish

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/opuestos

SYNOPSIS

Cynthia Weill's book of Mexican folk art introduces young readers to opposites in Spanish and English. These whimsical little animals, carved and painted by hand, make learning about opposites fun. Up and down, tall and short, left and right--all inside a beautiful book.

En este libro de artesanía mexicana, ¡Cynthia Weill le enseña a niños sobre Opuestos en español e inglés! Estos animalitos fantásticos de Oaxaca, tallados y pintados a mano, hacen aprender sobre Opuestos divertido. Arriba y abajo, alto y pequeño, izquierda y derecha--todo adentro de un libro encantador.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Oaxaca and Oaxacan Folk Art

Oaxaca is a state in southwestern Mexico. Its topography shapes life there; the Sierra Sur and Sierra Norte mountain ranges crisscross the state, separating cities and creating isolated geographic pockets of villages. Because of the geographic separation within the state, Oaxaca has long been a highly diverse area; sixteen distinct groups are registered as indigenous communities, centered around various villages and areas. There are five families of indigenous languages spoken in Oaxaca (with many variants within each one), along with Spanish. For more information see <https://indigenoumexico.org/oaxaca/oaxaca-a-land-of-amazing-diversity/>.

Oaxaca is well-known for various types of folk art produced by artisans across its many villages. Oaxacan folk art traditions include ceramics, textiles, woodcarving, basketry, and more. For photos and descriptions of various types of Oaxacan folk art, see www.fofa.us/meet-the-artists. Some art forms are practiced only in a certain village or area, or by certain families.

Oaxacan Woodcarving Tradition

While it has roots in indigenous Zapotec culture, modern Oaxacan woodcarving is a relatively new folk art form, developed in the last 60 years. Creating and selling these carvings as a family business has had an enormous economic impact for the artists.

Today, there are three main Oaxacan villages where woodcarving is practiced, with certain families leading the industry in each village. Each family, or in some cases, individual artist, has its own unique style. Carvings are often animals, but can also include imaginary creatures (alebrijes), humans, saints, nativity scenes, angels, mermaids, skeletons and more.

Oaxacan woodcarvings use the wood from the copal tree, which is soft to carve and very smooth when sanded. Artists carve the wood with pocket knives, machetes, or kitchen knives. Then they sand the carving and paint it. Oftentimes members of a family each have different jobs, working together to carve, sand and paint. Mass-produced carvings are often sold as inexpensive souvenirs, while carvings by notable artists are considered valuable collectibles.

For more information, including many images of artists and carvings, see www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/Oaxacan-wood-carvings.html#.ZA8-fi2ZM0p.

The art pieces featured in *Opuestos* have been acquired by the Field Museum of Chicago as part of their Permanent, MesoAmerican Collection. For more information on the Field Museum, see www.fieldmuseum.org/. To learn more about the MesoAmerican Collection at the Field Museum, visit www.fieldmuseum.org/department/cultures-of-mesoamerica-and-central-america.

USING THE FOLK ART SERIES

An intentional plan for repeated readings and conversations will help students engage more deeply with the books in the Cynthia Weill Mexican Folk Art series (www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series). For instance, for each title you share with students:

- Use the “Before Reading” resources prior to the first reading to build background knowledge about and appreciation for the artwork and its connections to Oaxacan culture.
- Read the book several times across different sittings, focusing on either or both the English and Spanish text.
- Let students know prior to each reading whether you’ll be having a “straight through” read aloud or a “stop and talk” read aloud; you might also mark pages of particular interest to go back and study more closely after finishing the book, or ask students to join in reading with you once they are familiar with the book content.
- You might use some of the “During Reading” resources below during one reading, and others during a subsequent reading.
- Consider using some of the “During Reading” prompts as “think-pair-share” or other partner discussion questions to allow more students to share their thinking aloud.
- Consider using a document camera or sharug the book in small groups to give students the chance to look at and discuss the woodcarving illustrations up close.
- You might read for different purposes each time, or engage in different “After Reading” discussions and interdisciplinary activities after each reading.
- Make the book available for independent student browsing, as well as to reference during follow-up experiences from the “After Reading” or “Interdisciplinary Resources” sections.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What are some different ways illustrators make the pictures in books? (E.g., paint, drawing, computers)
- What if the illustrations in a book were made of woodcarvings? Listen to the parts of the word “woodcarving.” What do you think a woodcarving is? Can woodcarvings fit inside books? How do you think it would work to illustrate a book with woodcarvings?
- What do you know about words that are opposites, or antonyms?

You may want to chart student responses so you can refer back to them during or after reading.

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book. If students do not know, explain that *Opuestos* means “opposites” in Spanish. Talk about what “opposites” means. Brainstorm a few examples of opposite words.
- Ask students to predict what “Mexican Folk Art” means. What does the title make them think

about the art in the book? Also discuss the term “wood sculptures.”

- Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, and author/illustrator photos and dedication at the end. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustrations? Have them predict what they will see on the pages of this opposite book based on the cover art. Ask students to share one pair of opposite words they know.
- Call students attention to the bilingual text. Have them point to examples of English and Spanish.
- Read Authors' and Illustrators' Biographies: Share this information from the book, explaining content as needed for younger students.
- Cynthia Weill's fascination with the crafts of Oaxaca began while she was working in Mexico as a Fulbright exchange teacher. She has published eight books in the First Concepts in Mexican Folk Art series (www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series), which features different folk art of Oaxaca. Cindy lives in New York City and online at cynthiaweill.net.
- Quirino and Martín Santiago are brothers who carve wooden figures. They draw inspiration from the world around them—observing their own livestock and domestic animals like cats and dogs. Quirino and Martín created the figures in *Opuestos* with help from their family members.
- You may also wish to show students this video www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJsYiaudabE that introduces the Santiago brothers and their family members, with video and more detailed description about how they created the woodcarvings used in the book illustrations. (Or, you might view the video as part of an activity in the Interdisciplinary Resources section of this guide.)

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Which opposite words the book includes
- How the English and Spanish words for each set of opposite words look the same and different
- How Oaxacan woodcarvings of animals show the meaning of the opposite words

Encourage students to consider why the author and artists would want to share this book and the opposite pairs presented this way with young people.

During Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3, 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Pause during reading to focus on:

Opposites:

Ask questions like:

Why are these words opposite?

How do these pictures show the words _____ and _____?

Show me the word _____ with your body. Show me the opposite word _____.

Artwork:

Note: These questions are adapted from the Visual Thinking Strategies approach for encouraging critical thinking through discussing artwork with young people (<https://vtshome.org>).

Look carefully at this woodcarving artwork. What do you notice? What's going on?

What makes you say that? Point to what you mean.

Look again. What else do you notice?

Did anyone's else's comments change or add to your thinking?

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of developmentally-appropriate strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: Look at a photo or picture that represents the word, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, explain the meaning of a word to a partner, act out the meaning of a word, explain how the meaning of one word is the similar and different to another word.

Note: The list below pulls keywords from the authors' and illustrators' biographies and author's note in addition to the English alphabet book text.

Content Specific

folk art, sculptures, Oaxaca, carve, livestock, domestic animals, asleep/awake, inside/outside, high/low, day/night, face/tail, left/right, open/closed, big/little, long/short, fast/slow, sitting/standing, hello/goodby

Academic

crafts, inspiration, observing, figures, family members, alike/different, many/few, together/apart

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What is one pair of opposite words you remember from the book? What do those words mean?
2. What did the artwork look like for [word pair]? What were the animals doing in the pictures?
3. Which animals from the book live near you? Which have you seen in real life? Which animals live in other places? Where does a _____ live?
4. What did the book information tell us about how the artwork was made? How did the artists get ideas for their animals?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Look again at this page. Why do you think the author and artists decided to use this artwork to illustrate this pair of opposite words?
2. What did the animal artwork make you imagine? Give an example.
3. What did you notice about the English and Spanish words in this book? Give an example how they were the same or different.
4. How else could you show the meaning of [opposite pair]? How would you make the picture if this was your book?
5. Why is it helpful to know opposite words? Why do you think the author decided to make this book the way they did? What do you think they hope readers will learn, think, or remember?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in independent or collaborative writing, artwork, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What other opposites do you know? Which pair would you add to this book? What would the pictures look like?
2. What was your favorite page? Why? What did that page make you imagine?
3. Choose one animal woodcarving. Look at a real photo of that animal. How is the animal artwork the same or different than the real animal? Write your ideas in a list, make a Venn Diagram, or draw your ideas and add labels.
4. If you could meet the author of this book, what would you ask them or tell them?
5. If you could meet the artists who made these woodcarvings, what would you ask them or tell them?

6. If your family worked together to make artwork, what kind of artwork would you do?

Multilingual Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners. The book language used may differ from children's oral language. Comparing any differences will help children read and understand the story. Words can hold different meanings in other types of Spanish around the world.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student share three questions about the book. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Have students give a short talk about an animal they like.
4. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose MLs to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
5. If applicable, have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Did they know the word in English? Did they know the word in Spanish? If it was an unknown word in English, did the identification of the Spanish cognate help them define the word? Consult ¡Colorin Colorado! for more ideas on how to use cognates in the classroom with MLs: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/using-cognates-ells>
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. How did making this book take teamwork? Give examples from the information shared in the book. How do you think teamwork made this book better? What might have been hard about having so many people work together to make a book?

2. What does it feel like to make something that takes many steps to finish (like the woodcarvings)? Give an example from your own life. What are some things you can tell yourself as you work on a long or difficult project?
3. How might the artists have felt when they saw their woodcarvings pictured in this book? What are some possible thoughts they may have had? View the video of the artists seeing the finished book for the first time (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJsYiaudabE>). Look at their faces. What could they be thinking or feeling? What makes you think that?
4. Creating each woodcarving, let alone 26 of them for the alphabet, would take a lot of time for the artists. What advice do you have for someone working on a goal that will take time to achieve? What do you tell yourself to keep going?

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts and Foundational Skills

- **Create a class opposite words book.** Have students illustrate the words for the word pairs. If your class speaks multiple languages, create a multilingual book using the format of *Opuestos* as a guide.
- **Use the opposite words to work on other phonological awareness skills or concepts about print.** For instance, sort the opposite words based on how many syllables they have, or count how many letters are in each word.
- **Read other opposite books, such as *Quinito, Day and Night / Quinito, día y noche* by Ina Cumpiano** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/quinito-day-and-night-quinito-dia-y-noche>). Make connections and comparisons between texts.
- **Read other books in Cynthia Weill's Mexican Folk Art series** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/cynthia-weill-mexican-folk-art-series>). Compare and contrast the topics, words, and artwork in each book.
- **Set up your dramatic play area with materials for students to act out the work of a woodcarving family.** Provide safe pieces of wood (or cardboard boxes, or foam) and foam swords or other safe tools for acting out "carving." Provide burlap scraps or brown paper to be "sand paper" and paint brushes and cups to serve as imaginary paint. If possible, display photos or other reference materials related to the woodcarving craft. Also provide a cash register or other materials for "selling" art. Encourage students to pretend to be families creating and selling art as a team.
- **If time allows, have students watch the Read OUT LOUD from KidLit TV where Cynthia Weill reads the book *Opuestos*** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHrkjpSGG6s>).

Social Studies/Geography

- **Locate Mexico on a map.** Find Oaxaca. Notice the major mountain ranges that cross the state. Look at photos of these mountains. Make a list together of ideas about what it might be like to live in a place with a lot of big mountains.
- **Watch the interview with Cynthia Weill about how the woodcarvings in the companion title to this book, *Abecedarios*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/Abecedarios>) **were made** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3M_rdef7sw). Pause the video to chart students' observations about each step in the process.
- **Read another book about an Oaxacan sculptor, Manuel Jiménez Ramírez:** <https://>

www.leeandlow.com/books/dream-carver-el-tallador-de-suenos

Science, Math, and STEM

- **Compare and contrast an animal woodcarving illustration from the book to a 3-D animal toy (or a real wood sculpture, if you have access to one).** Talk about the difference between the 2-D photo and 3-D object. Have students sort other items into 2-D vs. 3-D.
- **Pick an unfamiliar animal from the book to research as class.** Brainstorm research questions on a chart, and then use online resources or other books to learn new facts

Art

- **Write words for a class alphabet as described above.** Have students create 3-D artwork to illustrate each letter (e.g., clay, recycled materials sculptures, block or LEGO buildings) and photograph it. Make connections to the process used to illustrate the book, and talk about the transition from 3-D creation to 2-D photo.
- **Write words for a class opposite book as described above. Have students create 3-D artwork to illustrate each pair of opposite words.** Find interesting twigs/sticks or pieces of driftwood. Have students imagine what animal each one could become based on its shape. Have them use paints, glue and craft supplies to bring their ideas to life.
- **View photos of other examples of Oaxacan folk art from <https://www.fofa.us/meet-the-artists> or other online sources.** Have students write or talk about what they notice about each type of art

Physical Education

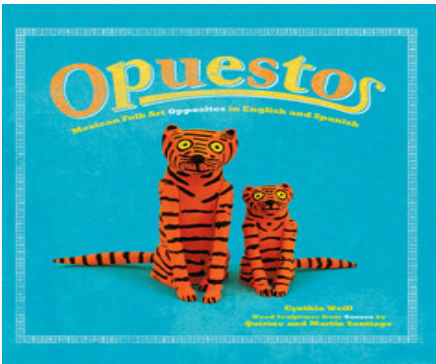
- **Play a version of "Statues" in which students have to start by posing like one of the animals in the book.** Have them try to move around the room like that animal would move while you are not looking.
- **Learn or create yoga poses that relate to some of the animals or concepts in the book.** Refer back to the book illustrations to discuss how each pose reflects the body or movement of an animal, or of the meaning of the opposite words.

School-Home Connection

- **Have students brainstorm pairs of opposite words and bring a list home they can cut into game cards to play "Opposites Charades" with their families.** Practice in class, choosing a card and acting out a set of opposite words for someone else to guess. Encourage families to add pairs of opposite words in any languages other than English that they use at home.
- **Have students work together to dictate or write an explanation of how the artwork for this book was created using family teamwork.** Have students share the explanation with someone at home. Include follow-up interview questions for families to answer

together, such as, "What's one way your family works together to do a job?" "If your family was going to start a business together, what would it be? What would each family member do to help?"

- **Send home simple options for students to work together with one or more family members to create a piece of artwork.** For example: One person draws an outline and someone else colors or paints it in; one person draws a face on a toilet paper tube, another adds clothes, and another adds chenille stems for arms and legs; one person finds a collection of nature items, another person arranges them into a collage or creation, another names the creation and makes a label, and another person photographs it, and texts or emails it to school to share. (Be sure to provide options that will be accessible to families, or send home any needed supplies.) Back at school, talk about what it was like to share the art process with others. What did students enjoy about it, and what was hard?



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By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:
 Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
 New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE CREATORS

Cynthia Weill holds a doctorate in education from Teachers College Columbia University. She has worked as an educator and in the field of international development. She has been fascinated with Oaxacan crafts since 1996 when she taught in Mexico through the Fulbright exchange. She served on the advisory board of the Friends of Oaxacan Folk Art Foundation whose mission is to promote and preserve the artists and artisanal work of the state. She has published eight books that feature the folk art of Oaxaca.

Martín and Quirino Santiago are brothers who carve wooden figures. The figures in *Opuestos* were made in La Union Tejalapam, a Oaxacan village that lies in a valley between the mountains of the Sierra Norte. Martín Santiago, a farmer, began carving in the late 1960s and his brother Quirino followed him into the trade soon after.

The figures are made from the wood of the flowering jacaranda tree. After carving the pieces, the artisans paint them with natural aniline dyes. Making the figures requires enormous skill as the artisans work with machetes on small pieces of wood. Quirino and Martín draw inspiration from the world around them. They observe their own livestock such as goats and cows, domestic animals like cats and dogs, and the wild animals they see such as deer and lynx.

Quirino and Martín carved the figures in *Opuestos* with help from their brother Placido and his sons Calixto and Eloy, their nephew Maximino Santiago, their cousin Julio Jimenez, and Martín's son Jaime.

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