

TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

Rainbow Weaver/ Tejedora del arcoíris

written by Linda Elovitz Marshall

illustrated by Elisa Chavarri

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

***Reading Level:** Grades 3–4

Interest Level: Grades K–4

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes: Families, Collaboration, Traditions, Conflict Resolution, Courage, Perseverance, Cultural Diversity, Education, Environment/Nature, Recycling, Human Impact On Environment/Environmental Sustainability, Imagination, Kindness/Caring, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest, Leadership, Poverty, Responsibility

SYNOPSIS

High in the mountains of Guatemala, young Ixchel yearns to follow in the long tradition of weaving beautiful fabrics on backstrap looms, just as her mother, grandmother, and most Mayan women have done for more than two thousand years. But Ixchel's mother is too busy creating and preparing her weavings to sell at the market. If the weavings sell at a good price, they will have money to pay for Ixchel's school and books. And besides, there is not enough extra thread for Ixchel to practice with.

Disappointed, Ixchel searches for other weaving materials. First she tries weaving with blades of grass, and then with bits of wool, but no one would want to buy the results. As she walks around her village, Ixchel finds it littered with colorful plastic bags. There is nowhere to put all the bags, so they just keep accumulating.

Suddenly, Ixchel has an idea! She collects and washes the plastic bags. Then she cuts each bag into thin strips. Sitting at her loom, Ixchel weaves the plastic strips into a colorful fabric that looks like a beautiful rainbow—just like the weavings of Mayan women before her.

Inspired by the talented Mayan craftspeople, *Rainbow Weaver* is a sweet celebration of tradition, resourcefulness, and creative recycling. Readers of all ages will be inspired by Ixchel and her community, and will want to find their own ways to repurpose the everyday items around them.



BACKGROUND

This story was inspired by the author's friendship with a Guatemalan couple that started Mayan Hands, a fair trade organization of weavers in Guatemala. A portion of the proceeds from the book benefit weavers from the Mayan Hands and Maya Works cooperatives.

Guatemala: Guatemala is located in Central America, bordering Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. The landscape includes mountains, beaches on both the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, and volcanoes. Lake Atitlan, the deepest lake in Central America, was formed by a volcanic eruption. The mountains are cool (one-third of the population lives in highland villages), and the lowlands are warm and humid. More information about Guatemala can be found here: <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/guatemala/#guatemala-volcano.jpg>.

The Maya: The Mayan empire flourished in the area that is now Guatemala and surrounding countries between AD 250 and AD 900. Now, about half of the people of Guatemala are of Mayan descent. There are 21 different Maya groups living in Guatemala. Different languages distinguish the groups. There are many Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. In Guatemala alone, there are twenty-three Mayan languages, and in different regions of the country, words and pronunciations differ. Learn more from the Minority Rights Group International: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49749d163c.html>.

Backstrap weaving: Backstrap weaving is a traditional skill passed down by women in Mayan communities. According to Mayan legend, the goddess Ixchel, who represents female empowerment, taught the first woman to weave. (Note: Ixchel is the name of the main character in *Rainbow Weaver*.) Baby girls are given the tools for weaving at birth and begin learning to weave around age eight or nine. One end of a backstrap loom is secured to a strap around the weaver's back and the other end is attached to a fixed object like a tree or post. Sticks at the top and bottom hold the vertical threads. The colors of the vertical threads determine the design of the weaving. The weaver passes horizontal threads through the loom to make fabric. A backstrap loom is portable; it can easily be rolled up and carried.

(See more, including a short demonstration video of backstrap weaving, at <http://www.mayatraditions.com/artisans/techniques/backstrap-weaving>.)

Fair trade organizations: Money earned from selling woven products is important to many Mayan families; often this income is necessary for children to attend school. Fair trade organizations like Mayan Hands (<http://www.mayanhands.org/>) help women organize into groups and provide business advice to help them sell products for a fair price around the world. More information on how weaving is passed down between Mayan women can be found here <http://www.mayanhands.org/culture/meaning-function-of-mayan-textiles/>. For older students, this documentary about Mayan Hands details the importance of weaving in helping women lift their families out of extreme poverty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcUoDBdChVY&t=1158s>.

Weaving with recycled plastic bags (From the author): The Mayan people in contemporary Guatemala are among the most skilled, artistic weavers in the world. Yet they face many problems: poverty, lack of education, and unemployment. To earn money for food and education, Mayan weavers have begun repurposing plastic bags as "threads" that they weave on traditional backstrap looms. Using ancient patterns and techniques, the Mayan weavers now employ plastic threads as well as traditional threads to create beautiful purses, clutch bags, placemats, coasters, pencil cases and baskets. Sold through fair trade cooperatives in the United States and other countries, their products bring much-needed money to the weavers' families. At the same time, the weavers help clean their villages and keep traditional Mayan cultural values alive.

Awards and honors for *Rainbow Weaver* include:

Junior Library Guild Selection, Junior Library Guild



VOCABULARY

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

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

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

The story 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 strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

weave, thread, fabric, market, “good price,” backstrap loom, cloth, batten, strand of yarn, countryside, village, stalls

Academic

designs, additional, littered, discarded, gathered, dull, disappointed, clump, clogging, shreds, “beam with happiness”

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:

1. Do you know anything about weaving? Have you ever seen anyone weave or tried it yourself?
2. What are some ways young people can earn money? Why might young people want to earn money? How might the money young people earn help their families?
3. Have you ever wanted to do something and been told “no” by your parents? How does that feel? What do you do when you're told “no?”

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)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author and illustrators' dedications, glossary and pronunciation guide, illustrations, and author's note. Point out that the book is bilingual.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out about:

- why weaving is important to Ixchel's family
- what Ixchel does when her mother tells her she is too young to weave
- how Ixchel's creativity helps her family and her village

Encourage students to consider why the author, Linda Elovitz Marshall, would want to share this story with young people.



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 evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

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

1. What does Ixchel's mother say when Ixchel asks to weave?
2. Why does Ixchel want to weave?
3. What does Ixchel see when she walks past the field? Where are the bags from?
4. What does Ixchel decide to make? How?
5. What does Ixchel try first for thread? Why doesn't it work well? What does she try next? Why doesn't that work well either?
6. Why does seeing all the bags make Ixchel angry? What happens when she rips up a bag?
7. What does Ixchel do with the bags? Remember her steps in order.
8. How does the fabric she creates look? What makes it better than the weaving she did with grass and wool?
9. What happens in the village when Ixchel starts collecting more bags?
10. How does Ixchel's mother react when she sees Ixchel's weaving?
11. What happens at the market? How does selling the weaving make Ixchel feel?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)
(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

1. What can we learn about Ixchel's family based on her conversations with her mother? What can we learn about her village based on the author's descriptions?
2. How does Ixchel's mood change as she tries different weaving strategies? For instance, how do you think she feels when she's making her loom? While she's weaving with each material? When she finishes?
3. What can we learn about Ixchel's personality from how she approaches the challenge of finding a way to weave?
4. Based on Ixchel's comments about her different weaving attempts, what are the characteristics of a good weaving?
5. Why do you think the author chose the title *Rainbow Weaver*?
6. Why do you think the neighbors decided to help Ixchel collect bags? How does collecting bags have more than one positive effect?
7. What do you think would be different about a weaving made with plastic bags instead of one made with thread?
8. Besides the fact that she sold her weaving, what are the reasons Ixchel "beams with happiness" at the end of the story?



“Inspired by an organization of weavers in Guatemala, Marshall presents here an uncomplicated story meant to stir and inspire. Chavarri’s digital artwork furthers the inspirational intent.”

–*Kirkus Reviews*

“A detailed author’s note at the narrative’s conclusion explains the inspiration for this tale. . . . VERDICT An uplifting offering that would be a wonderful addition to picture book collections and STEAM programs.”

–*School Library Journal*

“An author’s note describes the real-life story that inspired Marshall’s fiction, an inspiring example of ingenuity, dedication, and small actions with big results.”

–*Publishers Weekly*

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 reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. How do Ixchel’s actions in this book demonstrate *determination* and *persistence*? Give specific examples of how she responded when faced with various obstacles. What is an instance in your life when you demonstrated these qualities? What were the obstacles you faced?
2. How does Ixchel demonstrate *creativity* in this story? How are you creative?
3. How does Ixchel demonstrate *patience* in this story? Consider both her problem-solving process and her actions while weaving. What’s a situation you had to approach patiently? Is being patient a strength of yours or a challenge?
4. Describe how weaving is a family tradition for Ixchel. What traditions do you have in your family?
5. How is this a book about taking care of the earth and recycling?
6. Read the author’s note. Why do you think the author wanted to “bring attention to the work of the Mayan women?” Why is Mayan weaving an important tradition?

ELL/ESL 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 Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about the problem-solving process Ixchel used, or about weaving.
5. 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 English Language



Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

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

(Reading Standards, Craft and Structure, Strand 4 and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7–9)

1. Create a chart to summarize the events of the story and highlight descriptive vocabulary. List each type of weaving material in one column (thread, grass, wool, plastic bags) and relevant adjectives in another (e.g., pretty, colorful, expensive, scratchy, thick, boring, etc.) Brainstorm other possible weaving materials and list potential pro and con descriptors (e.g., paper, yarn, bark, etc.)
2. Read *Abuela's Weave*, another story about Mayan weaving in Guatemala (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2350>). Discuss connections between the two texts. What information is consistent across the two books? What additional information does *Abuela's Weave* provide about Mayan weaving and life in Guatemala?

Social Studies/Geography

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production and Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6 and Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

1. Learn more about Guatemala as a class. Have students make travel brochures encouraging tourists to visit.
2. Discuss whether students observe littering anywhere around your school or community. What impact does the littering have? Brainstorm possible ways to help, such as a group clean-up effort, making posters to discourage littering, writing to the school or local paper, etc.
3. Read about the issue of banning plastic bags as a class. Discuss whether plastic bags are banned in your area. Create a chart listing arguments for both sides, or ask students to write persuasive essays supporting one side or the other. This site (<http://www.bagtheban.com/in-your-state>) presents reasons against the bans and this site (<http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/14901/1/The-Effects-of-Plastic-Bags-on-Environment.html>) outlines their harmful effects on the environment. This site presents non-biased information: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx>.
4. Have students research various industries in which fair trade organizations are prevalent, including traditional crafts, coffee, chocolate, bananas, etc. Share findings as a class.

Art

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

1. Have your students try weaving. This site has many ideas for creating looms (<http://buggyandbuddy.com/12-unique-homemade-loom-for-weaving-with-kids/>). Try using different weaving materials and compare and contrast the outcomes. This site even has directions for weaving with dryer lint (<http://www.incredibleart.org/lessons/middle/middle8.html>)!
2. For younger students, use one of the weaving activities above to explore patterning.



- Study photos of various Mayan weaving designs (A Google image search for “Mayan Weaving Designs” yields plenty of choices.) Choose a few designs to describe in detail as a class. Have your students draw or paint designs of their own, incorporating features you discussed.

School-Home Connection

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2 and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6) (Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

- Have students share with their families how the tradition of weaving is passed down from Mayan mothers to daughters. Have each student ask a family member to teach him or her about a skill important to the family (e.g., cook a certain dish, perform a household task or repair, make artwork, play an instrument, etc.). Discuss students’ experiences as a class.
- Have students bring in plastic bags from home and create recycled artwork as a class. This site has many ideas, including simple braided bracelets: <http://www.viralnova.com/plastic-bag-projects/>.
- Ask families to share traditional textiles from their cultures, such as saris, wool tartan, embroidery, knit items, etc. (Look at photos if the actual item isn’t available.) Have students ask family members or research the following questions: What role does the textile play in its culture of origin? How is the item used? How is it made? Compare and contrast findings as a class.

Additional titles to teach about creativity and innovation:

Abuela’s Weave written by Omar S. Casteñeda, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2350>

David’s Drawings written and illustrated by Cathryn Falwell

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2381>

It Jes’ Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw written by Don Tate, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2764>

In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage written by Alan Schroeder, illustrated by JaeMe Bereal

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2712>

Bird written by Zetta Elliott, illustrated by Shadra Strickland

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2516>

Butterflies for Kiri written and illustrated by Cathryn Falwell

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2370>

Etched in Clay: The Life of Dave, Enslaved Potter and Poet written and illustrated by Andrea Cheng

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2815>

Making Magic Windows: Creating Papel Picado/Cut-Paper Art written and illustrated by Carmen Lomas Garza

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2857>

On My Block: Stories and Paintings by Fifteen Artists written and illustrated by fifteen artists

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2800>

Just Like Me written and illustrated by fourteen artists

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2775>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Elovitz Marshall grew up near Boston, graduated from Barnard College, and raised four children and a flock of sheep on a farm in the Hudson Valley of New York. She is the author of several books for young readers and was inspired to write this story by dear friends and founders of Mayan Hands, an organization of weavers in Guatemala. Marshall lives with her family in Selkirk, New York. You can find her online at www.lindamarshall.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Elisa Chavarri is a full-time illustrator who graduated with honors from the Savannah College of Art and Design, where she majored in classical animation and minored in comics. Born in Peru, she was excited to work on this story about traditional weaving because it reminded her of the beautiful textiles from her homeland. Chavarri now lives with her husband and their daughter, cat, and dog in northern Michigan. You can find her online at www.elisachavarri.com.

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

www.leeandlow.com/books/2939 (secure online ordering)

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

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

Book Information for Rainbow Weaver



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*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

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Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2939>

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