

ABeCedarios: Mexican Folk Art ABCs in English and Spanish

written by Cynthia Weill

photographs by K.B. Basseches

wood sculptures from Oaxaca by Armando Jiménez, Moisés Jiménez

About the Book

Genre: Concept Book

Format: Paperback, pages 32

ISBN: 9781643796345

Reading Level: Grades K-1

Interest Level: Grades Birth-Gr 3

Guided Reading Level: A

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

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

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/abecedarios

SYNOPSIS

This beautifully-illustrated, bilingual ABC book is fun for young readers and the adults reading with them. Each letter is illustrated with a photograph of a hand-carved animal rendered in the eye-catching bright colors of the traditional folk art of Oaxaca, Mexico. The author's choice of animals is delightfully quirky and provides a great opportunity to practice different letter sounds in Spanish and English.

This is the perfect book for laying the foundations of bilingual literacy for a young child, and makes a great gift for new parents, toddlers, and appreciators of Mexican folk art!

Este libro ABC bilingüe es bellamente ilustrado y divertido para niños y los adultos que leen con ellos. Cada letra está ilustrada con una fotografía de un animal tallado a mano en los colores brillantes del arte tradicional de Oaxaca, México. La selección de animales de la autora es encantadoramente peculiar y brinda una gran oportunidad para practicar diferentes sonidos de letras en español e inglés.

¡Este es el libro perfecto para iniciar la alfabetización bilingüe para un niño joven y es un gran regalo para los nuevos padres, niños pequeños y fanáticos del arte tradicional Mexicano!

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 <https://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, From Author's Note:

"The animals in *ABeCedarios* were handmade by the Jiménez family, who lives in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Brothers Armando and Moisés carved the creatures. Their children Alex, Nancy, and Eduardo sanded each one. Then the figures were lovingly painted by their wives, Antonia and Oralia. Armando and Moisés are the grandsons of Manuel Jiménez, founder of the Oaxacan woodcarving tradition. Eighty other families in their town of Arrazola also make woodcarvings."—Cynthia Weill, author

Additional Information

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 <https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/Oaxacan-wood-carvings.html#.ZA8-fi2ZM0p>.

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

English and Spanish Alphabet

Spanish Alphabet from Author's Note:

We have left the letters "ch" and "ll" in *ABeCedarios* even though the Real Academia Española removed them from the Spanish alphabet in 1994. These familiar sounds, along with "rr" are still in use in the living language.

English Alphabet

It's important to correctly enunciate letter sounds during alphabet discussions with children, being sure to clip them and not inadvertently add an extra schwa sound (e.g., /l/ instead of "luh" for l). For modeling of correct letter sound pronunciation in English, as well as modeling correct mouth position, the "Secret Stories Better Alphabet Song" video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3M_rdef7sw) is a helpful resource.

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 (<https://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 do you know about the Spanish alphabet? How is it similar or different from the English alphabet?
- 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?

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, *ABeCedarios: Mexican Folk Art ABCs*. Ask students to notice how the title is written. Can they spy the "ABC?" Explain that *ABeCedarios* means "alphabets" in Spanish; this book is an alphabet book in two languages. If students know Spanish, ask them to predict one letter and Spanish animal word combination that could be in the book.
- 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's note 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 alphabet book based on the cover art. Ask students to share one letter they know and one animal that might be on that book page.
- 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 (<https://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.
- K.B. Basseches is an artist, photographer, and writer whose work has been exhibited and published nationally. Most recently she has been teaching art in virtual settings for public schools in Richmond, Virginia. She lives in Richmond with her husband, teenage son, and several elderly cats.

- Armando and Moisés Jiménez are the grandsons of Manuel Jiménez, founder of the Oaxacan woodcarving tradition. Everyone in their family helped to make the pieces featured in *ABeCedarios*. After Armando and Moisés carved the figures, Moisés's children and Armando's son sanded the pieces. Then Armando's and Moisés's wives painted each figure.
- You may also wish to show students this video interview from KidLit TV (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFR0mcl0YFQ>) with Cynthia Weill in which she shows photos and describes in more detail how the artists 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 animal the book uses for each letter of the alphabet
- How the English and Spanish words for each animal sound and look the same and different
- How Oaxacan woodcarvings of each animal look

Encourage students to consider why the author and artists would want to share this book and the alphabets 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:

Letters and words:

Ask questions like:

What letter is this?

What sound(s) does this letter usually represent?

What word(s) on this page start with this letter? What other words start with this letter?

What do you notice about the English and Spanish words on this page? How are they the same and how are they different?

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 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.

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, carved, woodcarving, sanded, armadillo, buffalo, coyote, dolphin, elephant, flamingo, gorilla, hippopotamus, iguana, jaguar, koala, lion, llama, monkey, nutria (also known as coypu), gnu, ocelot, penguin, quetzal, rat, fox, snake, turtle, unicorn, vicuna, wapiti, yak, zedonk

Academic

crafts, tradition, handmade, founder

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 was one animal in this book? What letter started that animal word?
2. What did the artwork look like for [animal?]? What was the animal doing in the picture?
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? Tell the steps to make a woodcarving sculpture.
5. Which pages had letters that are not in the English alphabet? What animals were on those pages?

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. Were any of the animals in this book new to you? What are you wondering about the [animal]? How could you find out more information?
2. What did the animal artwork make you imagine? Give an example.
3. Which pages had animals that are not real? Why do you think the authors made the “X” page the way they did?
4. What did you notice about the English and Spanish words in this book? Give an example how they were the same or different.
5. Would you have chosen the same animals for each letter as the author? If not, what would you have chosen instead?
6. Why do you think the author Cynthia Weill decided to make this book the way she 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 was your favorite animal page? Why? What did that page make you imagine?
2. Choose one animal page. 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.
3. If you could meet the author of this book, what would you ask them or tell them?
4. If you could meet the artists who made these woodcarvings, what would you ask them or tell them?
5. 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?
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 alphabet (topic-specific or general).** Have students illustrate the words for the letters. If your class speaks multiple languages, create a multilingual alphabet using the book as a guide.
- **Use the animal words to work on other phonological awareness skills or concepts about print.** For instance, sort the animal words based on how many syllables they have, or count how many letters are in each word.
- **Watch the interview with Cynthia Weill about how the woodcarvings were made** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3M_rdef7sw). Work as a group to write a "How To Make an Oaxacan Woodcarving" procedural ("How To") text based on the information in the video.
- **Read other alphabet books.** Make connections and comparisons between texts. Make a list of features of the alphabet book genre. For a list of Multicultural ABC concept books check out: <https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/multicultural-abc-alphabet-books>.
- **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.

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 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

- **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.
- **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 2-D and 3-D. Have students sort other items into 2-D vs. 3-D.

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.
- **Talk about how woodcarving artists look at a branch's shape and features to imagine what it could become.** 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

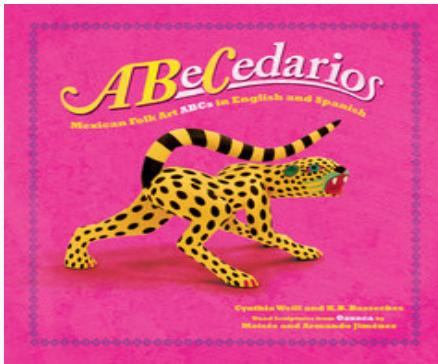
- **Play a version of "Statues" in which students have to start by posing like one of the animals in the book.** Have them try to move around the room like that animal would move while you are not looking.
- **Learn yoga poses that relate to some of the animals in the book.** Refer back to the book illustrations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

School-Home Connection

- **Have students choose a topic and work on an alphabet list with their families.** Encourage students to make up items for difficult letters if they can't think of real words. Encourage families to include words from languages other than English 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?



Ordering Information

General Order Information:
leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:
leeandlow.com/books/abecedarios

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.

Moisés Jiménez

Armando and Moisés are the grandsons of Manuel Jiménez, founder of the Oaxacan woodcarving tradition. In the late 1950's, shepherd Manuel Jimenez began making wooden animals. The pieces were bought by a folk-art store owner in Oaxaca City. When the creatures were quickly purchased by tourists, Manuel was asked to make more. Seeing Manuel's success, other local artisans began to imitate his work.

Today more than eighty families in the pueblo of Arrazola make their living by carving wood. The town lies below the archeological ruins of Monte Alban. Many tourists, after a visit to the ruins, come to Arrazola to buy wooden figures. Carvers use the copal tree which grows plentifully in the mountains around their town. They make all sorts of things from the wood. To begin the process of making a figure, Armando and Moises first carefully look through their woodpile. They say they can see the creature inside of each log. Next, they carve the figure with a large knife called a machete. When completed the figure must dry for several days.

Everyone in the family helped to make the pieces featured in *ABeCedarios*. Moises's children, Nancy and Eduardo, and Armando's son Alex sanded the pieces. Then Armando and Moises's wives, Antonia and Oralia, painted each figure.

K.B. Basseches is an artist, photographer, and writer whose work has been exhibited and published nationally. Most recently she has been teaching art in virtual settings for public schools in Richmond, Virginia. She lives in Richmond with her husband, teenage son, and several elderly cats.

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