

## Don't Say a Word, Mamá/No digas nada, Mamá

written by Joe Hayes  
illustrated by Esau Andrade Valencia

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction

**Format:** Paperback, 32 pages

**ISBN:** 9781935955450

**Reading Level:** Grade 2–3

**Interest Level:** Grades K–3

**Guided Reading Level:** M

**Spanish Guided Reading:** M

**English Accelerated Reader® Level/  
Points:** 2.5/0.5

**Spanish Accelerated Reader® Level/  
Points:** 3.1/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** AD550L

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Families, Mothers, Siblings, Kindness and Caring, Sharing and Giving, Generosity, Food, Humor, Latino/Hispanic/Mexican Interest

**Resources on the web:** [leeandlow.com/books/don-t-say-a-word-mama-no-digas-nada-mama](http://leeandlow.com/books/don-t-say-a-word-mama-no-digas-nada-mama)

### SYNOPSIS

An amusing tale, about sisterly affection and motherly appreciation. You can never have too much love for your family, but you can have too many hot chiles!

Author Joe Hayes and artist Esau Andrade team up to deliver an affectionate tale about siblings and familial love. Two sisters try to outdo each other with generous gifts. Each new offering from one sister to the other is a secret to everyone except their mother who is tasked with keeping quiet. This fun read aloud will have readers crying out, “Don’t say a word, Mama!” Until, of course, she does.

El autor Joe Hayes y el artista Esau Andrade se unen para ofrecer una historia afectuosa sobre los hermanos y el amor familiar. Dos hermanas intentan superarse entre sí con generosos regalos. Cada nueva ofrenda de una hermana a la otra es un secreto para todos, excepto para su madre, que tiene la tarea de guardar silencio. Esta divertida lectura en voz alta hará que los lectores griten: “¡No digas una palabra, mamá!” Hasta que, por supuesto, lo hace.

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

### Growing Tomatoes, Corn, and Hot Chiles

Tomatoes grow on bushy vines. They need lots of sun and hot weather to grow well. There are many different sizes and colors of tomatoes, from teeny-tiny to bigger than a softball, and including red, orange, yellow, green, purple, and striped varieties. Tomatoes are one of the most popular plants to grown in a home garden, and many people think home-grown tomatoes are the best tasting. For more information on growing tomatoes, see <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/growing-guide-to-tomatoes/>.

Corn plants straight and can grow up to 12-15 feet tall. Ears of corn grow out of the sides of the plant, with corn kernels (the corn seeds) covering each ear. There are several types of corn but sweet corn is the type most people today think of eating. It's picked when its not finished growing so the kernels are softer. Corn needs lots of sun and soil nutrients to grow successfully, and it must be planted near other corn plants so it can be pollinated by the wind. For more information on growing corn, see <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/growing-guide-corn/>.

Peppers grow on small, bushy plants. Peppers can be sweet or hot. The spiciness of a pepper comes from compounds in the fruit called "capsaicins." A pepper's heat can be rated on the Scoville Heat Scale; a sweet pepper is zero Scoville Heat Units, while the hottest variety of chili pepper can be up to 1,000,000 units! Peppers need hot weather and sun to grow. Hotter weather and drought conditions can make chile peppers spicier. For more information on growing peppers, see <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/growing-guide-peppers/>.

## 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:

- Do you have siblings? What are different ways siblings can treat one another?
- Have you ever kept a fun secret from a family member or friend? What's fun about keeping a secret or surprise? What's hard? What might it be like when the secret gets revealed?
- What are some vegetables people might grow in a garden? What do people do with vegetables they grow?

You may want to chart student responses questions so that you can refer back to them during or after reading. You could also have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

## 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, *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*. 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?

Book Walk: Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, bilingual text, and author and illustrator biographies.

Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies: See the inside book cover or end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think this author wrote this book for young readers?

Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the reading when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

Have students write feeling(s) in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out:

- What does the title mean "Don't Say A Word, Mamá?"
- What's the secret in this story? Does it stay a secret?

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

## 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.

## Content Specific

tortillas, sidewalk, corn, tomatoes, hot chilis, ears of corn, hijolé (Spanish slang for "wow"), pozole pot

## Academic

proud, luckiest, ripe, half, poor, surprise, shrugged, firm, suddenly, racket

# 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. Who are the characters in this book? How are they related to each other?
2. How do Rosa and Blanca treat one another?
3. What does Mamá say about her daughters?
4. When Rosa and Blanca grow up, what do they do?
5. What do the sisters plant in their garden?
6. What do the sisters do when the tomatoes are ready? What do they say to Mamá?
7. What happens with the tomatoes?
8. What happens with the corn?
9. What do the sisters plan to do with the chili peppers? What actually happens?
10. How do the sisters figure out what's been going on?
11. Why does Mamá say she decided to spoil the surprise?
12. What happens as the neighbor begins to run out of spoons?
13. How does the story end?

## 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. Why do you think the sisters get along so well?
2. How were the sisters' decisions about sharing their vegetables the same? How were they different?
3. Why do you think each sister wants their gifts to be a surprise?
4. How do you think the sisters feel when sharing their vegetables in secret?
5. Which illustrations are realistic? Which are made-up? How do the made-up illustrations add to

the story?

6. Why do you think Mamá feels differently about the chili peppers than the tomatoes and corn?
7. Why does Mamá keep saying she's so lucky? Do you agree? Why or why not?
8. What might the sisters decide to do with their gardens in the future? Why do you think that?
9. If you were one of the sisters, would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?
10. Do you agree with Mamá's choices in the book? Why or why not?
11. Does this family remind you of your family? Why or why not?

### 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. What do you think the author's message to the reader is? What do you think he wanted to convey to young readers? Why do you think he chose this story to tell?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What is your role in your own family?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*?
6. What different type of conflicts are presented in *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*? Discuss the sisters' and Mamá's conflicts within themselves, their family, and conflicts in the world. Compare and contrast the different conflicts within the text.
7. Make a list of "a-ha moments" that various characters had in this story. Use a three-column chart. List the character, the experience that changed their thinking or made them decide to take a certain action, and what happened as a result.
8. Which character in this book would you most like to eat dinner with? Share several reasons and include thinking about the characters' traits based on their actions in the story.
9. Imagine a local newspaper found out about this funny story and wrote an article about it. What would the headline be and what would the article say? What quotes might the sisters and Mamá give the reporter?

### Multilingual Learner 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.

1. Assign ML 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 a fun secret or surprise they've kept or been given.
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 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.
6. The book is both in English and in Spanish. Have students read both texts, and compare both. Have students highlight any unknown words in the text, and then record them separately. Have students look up their definitions and share their knowledge about these words, if applicable.
7. Have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Students can begin with one to two pages and gradually increase to a chapter(s) where students highlight true cognates and determine the meaning to the word if they do not already know it. This can also be a great opportunity to also discuss false cognates with students. If time allows, have students reflect on the cognates that they found. 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>.
8. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilingualllearning-toolkit.org/>.



### Actividades en Español Para Apoyo en Programas Bilingües y de Inmersión Dual

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

For the CCSS in Spanish, please check out <https://commoncore-espanol.scoed.net/CCSS-en-Espanol/SLA-Literacy>

1. Asigne el libro *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*. Coloque dos estudiantes juntos para leer el libro en voz alta. Compare las palabras en inglés y en español. ¿Cómo se comparan las palabras? Los estudiantes pueden practicar las palabras que tengan dificultad en pronunciar. Estudiantes pueden tener un cuaderno con las palabras difíciles para hacer referencia en el futuro.
2. Durante el tiempo de cuentacuentos, haga preguntas de comprensión a los estudiantes en inglés y en español para medir el nivel de comprensión en los dos idiomas. Preguntas pueden incluir: ¿de qué se trata el cuento? ¿Conectaste con uno de los personajes en el cuento? ¿Por qué sí o no? ¿Qué parte te gusta más en el cuento?
3. Elija palabras de vocabulario. Los libros ilustrados bilingües son una excelente manera para que sus estudiantes aprendan nuevas palabras de vocabulario porque el idioma se presenta en contexto. Mire a través del libro y asigne las palabras de vocabulario a las ilustraciones del libro. Si es posible, haga fotocopias de las páginas. Estudiantes pueden usar subrayadores en un color para inglés y un color para español para las palabras nuevas. También, puede recordar las palabras en un póster para referencia. Reflexione con sus estudiantes sobre cual palabras ya sabían y cuales palabras aprendieron.
4. En casa los estudiantes pueden pre-leer el libro con sus familias y puede sugerir que lean el libro juntos. Esto ayuda a practicar en leer y en el aprendizaje del vocabulario de los dos idiomas, inglés y español.
5. El uso de cognados puede ser útil en libros bilingües, en español y en inglés. En esta actividad estudiantes pueden buscar cognados en el libro. Los estudiantes pueden trabajar en parejas para identificar y formar una lista si las palabras son cognados verdaderos o falsos. Al final de la actividad es importante distinguir cómo clase la lista de los cognados verdaderos o falsos.

Estas actividades solo son sugerencias. Puede encontrar más recursos para apoyar las clases de inmersión dual y bilingües. Puede leer mas en (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2013/11/04/using-dual-language-and-bilingual-books-in-third-and-fourth-grade/>)

### 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. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills do the characters exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How do they demonstrate these skills?
2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions.
3. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with four columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give?
4. Use sticky notes to label the emotions of various characters at different points in the book. Talk about how we can often infer characters' emotions from their reactions to events. Have students choose an emotion that interests them: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, regret, pride, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*.
5. Do you think the author wants the characters in this book to be role models for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not, for each character?

## 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.

### Writing and ELA

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Use sticky notes to add characters' thought bubbles to key scenes in the text.** Talk about using evidence from the text to generate the content of the thought bubbles.
- **Have small groups act out key scenes from the text.** Use both the dialogue in the text and the illustrations to help them decide on characters' lines, expressions, gestures, and actions.
- **Read other stories by Joe Hayes, such as *¡El Cucuy!* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/el-cucuy>).** Make connections between the content, characters, structure, events, and tone of his stories.



- **Talk about the power of oral storytelling.** Show students Joe Hayes's oral version of this story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G73oQkhMp70>.) Compare the book format to the oral version; how does each help readers/listeners appreciate the story in different ways?

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students research gardening in different parts of the world.** Have small groups pick a location and find out what the most popular vegetables are to grow there.

### Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **The paintings of illustrator Esau Andrade Valencia could be compared to those of notable Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo.** Look at paintings by these artists. Make connections to the book illustrations. Invite students to try drawing or painting a portrait of a family member in a similar style.
- **Look again at the illustrations that show what Mamá imagines happened with the tomatoes and corn.** How are these different than the rest of the illustrations? Have students create their own paintings in the same style that show something funny they imagined.

### STEM

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

- **Learn more about the crops included this book.** Have students research the life cycle of each plant, varieties, growing instructions, and/or recipes including those vegetables. If possible, try growing the same plants in your school garden!
- **Use the story context to explore dividing groups in half.** Use manipulatives to represent different collections of "tomatoes" and "corn" and ask students to figure out how many represent half the collection. Or, create story problems about numbers of tomatoes, ears of corn, or chili peppers harvested and finding half of those quantities.

### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

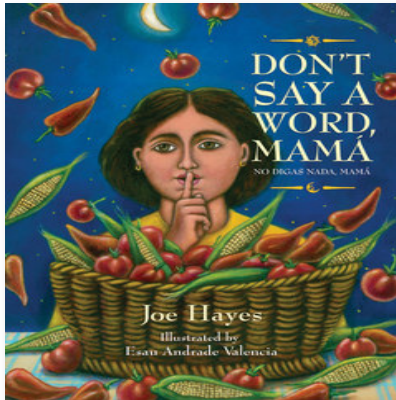
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Develop interview questions as a class for students to ask an adult at home or in their community about their experiences and feelings about surprises, such as, "Do you like surprises? Why or why not?" and "What's your favorite memory of a**

**surprise?"** Share and compare responses at school.

- **Work with students to create a survey about vegetables for them to give to someone outside of school.** List vegetables and ask participants to rate whether they like them a lot, a little, or not at all. Share and record the data collected to decide on what the best vegetables would be if you wanted to plant and share with your family/community.



## Ordering Information

**General Order Information:**

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

**Secure Online Ordering:**

[leeandlow.com/books/don-t-say-a-word-mama-no-digas-nada-mama](https://leeandlow.com/books/don-t-say-a-word-mama-no-digas-nada-mama)

**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 AUTHOR

**Joe Hayes** is one of America's premier storytellers. He grew up in a small town in southern Arizona where he started learning Spanish from his classmates. As Joe got older, he began reading the work of folklorists and anthropologists and gathering the old stories from the Southwest region. His books have received the Arizona Young Readers Award, two Land of Enchantment Children's Book Awards, the Texas Bluebonnet award, and the National Storytelling Network Talking Leaves Award. He lives in New Mexico. Learn more about him at <https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com>.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Esau Andrade Valencia** comes from a family of Mexican folk artists. His paintings are included in the collection of the Museum of Latin American Art as well as in the Downey Museum of Art in California. His books for Cinco Puntos Press include *A Perfect Season for Dreaming / Un tiempo perfecto para soñar* and *Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No digas nada, Mamá*.

## 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](https://leeandlow.com).