



**Classroom Guide for**  
**LOVE TO MAMA: A TRIBUTE TO MOTHERS**  
Edited by **Pat Mora**  
illustrated by **Paula S. Barragán M.**

### Reading Level

\*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades 1–6

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.5/5

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Mothers and Grandmothers, Love, Family, Admiration, Latino Heritage

### Synopsis

Although the poems in this book are about mothers and grandmothers, the writers of the poems include both men and women of Latino descent. Love, humor, understanding, and joy all have their place in these works. They convey an exuberance and a warmth of familial feelings. The poems, with a free use of Spanish words and phrases tucked into them, convey a vivid sense of a cultural heritage. The poets represent a wide spectrum of Latino voices, from award-winning writers to a fifteen-year-old high school student, and their poems bring forth memories and contemporary events from their Puerto Rican, Cuban, Venezuelan, and Mexican American backgrounds. Of this book, the editor Pat Mora says, “Poems, like music, carry us to the deep feelings we hide inside. All the talented Latino poets in this book wrote to share their love for their mothers and grandmothers. . . . All are proud to be Latino writers.”

### Background

Pat Mora, a renowned poet of works for both children and adults, helped establish April 30th as Día de los niños/Día de los libros (Day of the Children/Day of the Books). This occasion is a yearly celebration of childhood, books, languages, and cultures. Its goal is to encourage bilingual literacy among all children. Mora recalls her own mother who “in

English or Spanish . . . could make words flow or fly” and an aunt who “read us books and told us stories in English and Spanish when we were in bed at night.”

**Teaching Tip**

Plan to use LOVE TO MAMÁ as part of your celebration of National Poetry Month in April. You may also want to use it again in May for Mother's Day.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What is special about a mother? A grandmother?
2. What do you like about poetry? Do you have a favorite poem? What is it?
3. How would you honor or celebrate a parent?
4. Should poems always rhyme? Have you ever read any that don't? What were they like? Were they easier or more difficult to understand than poems that rhyme?
5. How do you show what you are feeling about someone? Have you ever expressed your feelings in poetry? What do you think of the experience of writing poetry?

**Exploring the Book**

Display the book and read the title, including the subtitle. Ask students what a tribute is. How do you pay tribute to someone?

Review the parts of the book including the dedications, introduction by the editor at the beginning of the book, biographical information about the poets and illustrator, and glossary of Spanish words at the back of the book. Talk about how each of these items will help students gain meaning and enhance their enjoyment of the poems.

**Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Ask students to think about why the poets wrote these poems and why Pat Mora collected them into this book.

Have students discuss what they think they might learn from this book.

**VOCABULARY**

Point out that many of the poems in this book include the names of colors. These are used in different ways to create pictures in the reader's mind. Some of the colors mentioned are:

gold	brown	silver	sky-blue
green	bright yellow	pink	gray
white	yellow-white	orange	red

Have students read these poems, then tell how the color words add to the picture painted by the poet.

“Palomita”

“Mi mamá cubana”

“Hidden in Abuelita’s Soft Arms”

“Abuelita Wears a Dress”

“Song to Mothers”

“My Grandmother Had One Good Coat”

## READING AND RESPONDING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to help guide their understanding of the book. Encourage students to refer to passages in the book to support their responses.

1. In “Palomita,” why is the little girl happy?
2. Why do you think Abuela decides to enter Fina in “The Race?”
3. What is the setting for the stories the grandmothers tell in “Las abuelitas?”
4. Who does the child in “Growing Up” want to be like? Why?
5. How is the grandmother in “Mi abuela” different from other grandmothers? In what ways is she like or not like your grandmother(s)?
6. Why does the boy think he is a millionaire in “My Tongue Is Like a Map?”
7. How do you think the child feels in “I Helped My Mom Not to Be Late for Work?” How does the mother feel?

8. Why does the child in “Mi mamá cubana” thank her mother?
9. Why does the grandmother pick prickly pears in “My Grandmother Is Like a Flowering Cactus?”
10. Why does the boy run from his father’s station wagon in “Hidden in Abuelita’s Soft Arms?”
11. Why is everyone surprised when the grandmother dresses up in “Abuelita Wears a Dress?”
12. Why does the grandmother give away her coat in “My Grandmother Had One Good Coat?”
13. Why does the poet like the mother’s laugh in “Songs to Mothers?”

### Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Questions section of this guide to help group members explore the poems. Encourage students to make up other questions as well.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines or phrases that reveal certain feelings such as pride or joy.
- The **Illustrator** might draw pictures showing his or her personal interpretation of one or more of the poems.
- The **Connector** might find examples of poems written about mothers and grandmothers by people representing other cultures.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each poem for the group.
- The **Investigator** might find additional books by Pat Mora.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

**Reader's Response**

Encourage students to keep reader's response journals as a way of engaging with the poems and focusing their thoughts. Some questions that students might address are given here.

1. Which poem in this book is your favorite? Why?
2. How do the poems help you understand Latino culture?
3. How are some of the poems like little stories?
4. How are some of the poems like snapshots of a moment in time?
5. Which poems make you smile or laugh? Which ones are more serious?
6. Think about some of the poem titles. How can a tongue be like a map? Why is the grandmother like a flowering cactus?

**Other Writing Activities**

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for them to share and discuss their work.

1. Suggest that students write a story about a special time with their mother, stepmother, grandmother, or other older female adult with which they have a close relationship.
2. Remind students that April is National Poetry Month. Encourage them to write their own poems about their mothers or grandmothers as a way of celebrating. They may also use their poems to make greeting cards for Mother's Day. Have students write their poems on folded card stock and then add illustrations or other designs.
3. Draw attention to the question and answer format used in the poem "Growing Up." Have students write a dialogue with someone in their family.

**ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies**

Approximately 300 foreign languages are spoken in the United States. Almost ten million children between the ages of five and seventeen speak a language other than English at home. Of these, about seven million speak Spanish. The following strategies will be useful in addressing the needs of students who are English language learners or who speak English as a second language.

1. Draw attention to the glossary of Spanish words and phrases at the back of the book. Invite Spanish speakers to pronounce the words for the rest of the class.

- Have students make an index card for each glossary entry, putting the Spanish word on one side and the English meaning on the other. Students can then use these as flash cards.
2. English speakers will need to use context to understand many of the Spanish words embedded in the poems. Have volunteers “think aloud” as they do this to provide modeling for ELL and ESL students who need strategies for reading.
  3. Pair strong English speakers with Spanish speakers to make recordings of the poems. Both partners will benefit from following along in the book as they listen to the poems.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

#### Language Arts

The poems in this book offer many examples of similes. Explain that a simile is a comparison of unlike things. Similes use the words *like* or *as* to compare things. Give as an example this simile from “Palomita:” *a shower of sunlight falling like drops of gold*. Then have students name the things being compared (sunlight and gold). Write the following similes on the chalkboard and challenge students to identify what they compare. Follow up by asking students to write their own similes.

- *My ears were like a radio* from “My Tongue Is Like a Map”
- *his smile is wider than a slice of watermelon* from “Mi mamá cubana”
- *black buttons shiny as patent leather shoes* from “My Grandmother Had One Good Coat”
- *her house painted yellow-white like a forgotten Easter egg* from “Hidden in Abuelita’s Soft Arms”

#### Social Studies

1. On a map of Central and South America, including the Caribbean islands, have students locate the places of origin represented by some of the poets and the illustrator. These include Puerto Rico, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, and Ecuador.
2. Point out that in the poem “Abuelita Wears a Dress,” the grandmother is going to a celebration called a *quinceañera*. Have students do research to find out more about this traditional occasion. Then help students compare a quinceañera to celebrations in other cultures and religions that take place during the teenage years.

#### Science

Review with students the five senses: sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell. Mention that many of the poems evoke these senses. On poster paper, create a chart like the one shown here. Include an example as shown. Have students find other examples in the poems to add to the chart.

Sight	Touch	Hearing	Taste	Smell
<p>“On the wall there are pictures of Mama and my two aunts.” (from “Hidden in Abuelita’s Soft Arms”)</p>	<p>“their smooth branches” (from “Las abuelitas”)</p>	<p>“She whispered in my ear” (from “I Helped My Mom Not to Be Late for Work”)</p>	<p>“I taste salty, saffron Cuba” (from “Mi mamá cubana”)</p>	<p>“She sniffed the rose” (from “The Race”)</p>

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Pat Mora** is a well-known Mexican American poet and the author of books for adults and children. She has received numerous awards and fellowships including the National Endowment for Arts, the Kellogg National Fellowship, and three Southwest Book awards. Mora, a native of El Paso, Texas, grew up in a bilingual home where books were always important. She earned her undergraduate degree and masters at the University of Texas. In addition to writing, Mora is a university professor and often speaks publicly about multicultural education and leadership. She is mother to three children and currently lives in Kentucky and New Mexico. Her other books for children include CONFETTI, published by Lee & Low Books, PABLO’S TREE, A BIRTHDAY BASKET FOR TIA, TOMÁS AND THE LIBRARY LADY, and A LIBRARY FOR JUANA.

LOVE TO MAMÁ has won numerous awards, including Best Children’s Books of the Year, Outstanding Merit, from Bank Street College, “Choices” selection from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, and Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People.

### **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

**Paula S. Barragán M.** lives in Quito, Ecuador, her city of birth. She earned a degree in graphic design and illustration at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. Barragán is a painter and also a printmaker and carpet designer. Her fine art pieces are shown in galleries in the United States and South America. Her other books for children include *POEMS TO DREAM TOGETHER/POEMAS PARA SOÑAR JUNTOS*, published by Lee & Low Books, and *SPICY HOT COLORS/COLORES PICANTES*. *LOVE TO MAMÁ* was her first picture book.

### **RESOURCES ON THE WEB**

For the latest reviews and awards related to **LOVE TO MAMÁ** visit:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/mama.html>

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/teachers>

### **Other Books by Pat Mora**

**CONFETTI: POEMS FOR CHILDREN**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/confetti.html>

### **BookTalk with Pat Mora**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/booktalk/mora.html>

### **Book Information**

\$7.95, PAPERBACK

ISBN 1-58430-235-6

\$16.95, HARDCOVER

ISBN 1-58430-019-1

9-1/4" X 10, 32 PAGES

INTEREST LEVEL: GRADES 1-6

READING LEVEL: GRADE 3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

THEMES: MOTHERS AND GRANDMOTHERS, LATINO HERITAGE, FAMILY, MOTHER'S DAY

Lexile Measure®: NP

Scholastic Reading Counts!™:4.4

### **Order Information**

#### **On the Web:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/order> (general order information)

#### **By Phone:**

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