

Preparation or Enrichment Activities for Classes Reading: "Uncle Snake," "The Twenty-five Mixtec Cats," and "The Moon Was at a Fiesta"

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I. Linking the stories with other subjects in class:

A. Geography: Where is Mexico? Where is Oaxaca, Mexico? How would students describe the topography, vegetation and climate of the regions where these stories take place?

B. Social studies: Who are the Mixtecs? The Zapotecs? What is an "indigenous people?" What would it be like to come from a small village and move all the way to an American city to work?

C. Cultural empathy/understanding: Why do students think the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca watch the moon carefully through each phase, each season? (Please see author's note at the back of "The Moon Was at a Fiesta.") Why do village healers use herbs instead of sending their patients to a hospital? Why do you think the neighbors were so nervous about the cats? Have you ever been afraid of something that was harmless, or even helpful? In the old days, lightning made the ancients think of giant snakes. And caves were thought of as entries into a whole different world! What do rainclouds, lightning, and caves make *you* think of?

II. Creative Writing Exercises--using the stories as jump off points. Students can create their own stories orally, in writing, in groups or alone.

A. What do you think became of the "evil healer" or witch? Did she find a new mask? If so, where?

B. How would the nighttime fiesta have turned out if the bulls had organized the party for armadillos and asked nearby villagers to join them by the river?

C. What if Uncle Snake had not danced at each fiesta? What if he had not set out offerings for the cave? Would he and the cave snakes still be trapped inside?

D. Suppose the mermaid and *monigote* (festival doll) wanted their own fiesta. Where would they have it? Who would they invite? What would they eat? And would they get married?

E. Healers often gather medicinal roots and herbs from the forest while they're walking alone under a full moon. What would the good healer and evil healer do if they came across each other's path?

III. Art projects based on the above three books:

A. Students can draw what intrigues them about each story.

B. Students can combine these drawings, adding cutouts, to create murals that tell each story visually. Such murals, or even simple drawings, may then be used to adorn classrooms, halls, the auditorium, etc.

C. Mixtec cat masks can be made out of paper plates, snake faces out of paper bags, etc.

D. Teachers at some schools have gone so far as to make up songs about kittens, full moons, and snakes. Students can make up songs and dances together, dramatizing the neighbors, the two healers, the cats and coyotes for *Cats*; the moon, the sun, and the *padrinos* for *Moon*; and the boy, the cave snakes, and the *nahual* for *Snake*. The important thing is to loosen up and have fun!

IV. Students can write letters asking questions about our books; about what inspired the author to write each story, about his collaboration with the artist who lives in Mexico, about the artwork itself, etc. We also welcome more general questions about writing, reading, and works in progress.