



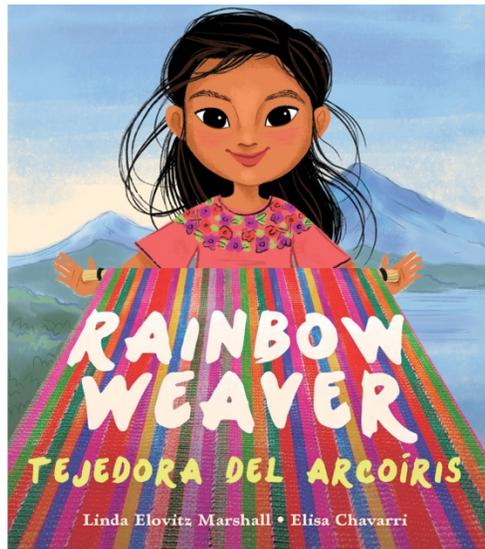
Américas Book Award
www.claspprograms.org
2017 Commended Title



Rainbow Weaver: Tejedora del Arcoíris

Written by Linda Elovitz Marshall and Illustrated by Elisa Chavarri

Curricular Resource



Book Summary

Ixchel wants to follow in the long tradition of weaving 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 preparing her weavings for market. If they bring 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 first 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 Maya women before her. Grades K-3

Themes:

- Poverty/access to education
- Environment and concerns for the environment
- Traditional technology/clothing
- Modern Maya culture of highland Guatemala

Author information

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.

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 now lives with her husband and their daughter, cat, and dog in northern Michigan.

Book context

Rainbow Weaver takes place in a highland Maya community in Guatemala. As the authors mention in the pronunciation guide, there are many different Maya languages and peoples. The highland areas of Guatemala have a large proportion of these people today. These are the descendants of the ancient Maya communities who lived throughout Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. The indigenous Maya peoples in Guatemala have fought for their abilities to speak their native languages in schools and in homes, and to be recognized as a part of the Guatemalan nation.

Ixchel participates in many activities typical of highland Maya communities, including the Kaqchikel Maya – the particular Maya speaking community which influenced this book. Many Maya women today wear traditional clothing (*traje*) which consists of a skirt and blouse woven in a particular style. People familiar with the clothing can identify the village from which someone is from based on the patterns (colors and designs) in the weavings. Traditional weaving is done on a backstrap loom, the style depicted in the illustrations in the book.

The name Ixchel is a variant of the name Ix Chel, a Maya goddess. Ix means goddess and Chel is translated as rainbow or moon. Ix Chel is the moon goddess and influences the realms of fertility, midwifery, medicine, and weaving. Much of what we know about Maya deities comes from Contact period sources, dating to the time of the Spanish conquest, thus you may see similarities between the idea of patron saints (who represent a particular craft) and the Maya deities. For instance, St. Sebastian is the patron saint of pin cushion makers, just as Ix Chel served a similar role for weaving.

In addition to the background of the highland Maya communities, this book brings to the fore many of the issues which are faced by these residents, such as access to education and poverty. Ixchel's mother sells weavings in the market (mostly to tourists) to raise the money necessary to send Ixchel to school. There are low rates of education in many highland Maya communities due to high rates of poverty and the barrier this presents to education. Students must pay for books, notebooks, and uniforms, an expense many cannot afford. Many schools also do not teach in Maya languages, so students are not exposed to their language and culture through school activities.

Activity Ideas

Activity 1: Environment and helping your community

Think about how Ixchel cleaned up her community. What are ways you could help your community? In groups, brainstorm activities you could do to help clean up in your community.

Activity Extension: Combine with One Plastic Bag

Have students read *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia* by Miranda Paul and Elizabeth Zunon. This book shows the power of cleaning up plastic bags and recycling in Gambia. Have students compare the images, imagery, and reason behind cleaning up the community. Although they had different goals in mind, the two main characters reached the same conclusion about cleaning up their villages. Have students make a compare/contrast chart for the two books which could be turned into a short writing piece depending on grade level.

Activity 2: Traditions

Ixchel wants to help her mother weave. Weaving is a traditional activity for Maya people in highland Guatemala. What is a tradition? What traditions do you have in your family? Describe a traditional activity which your family performs. Draw a picture of what that tradition looks like. (If students have trouble thinking of a tradition, suggest they think about holidays and traditions they might perform at holidays like decorating a tree, lighting a menorah, or making cookies).

Activity 3: Weaving Patterns

The Maya weavings identify people's home towns. Have students draw their own weaving patterns. What characteristics would they put in the weavings to identify them as being from their town/school/family? Have them describe the important patterns in the weavings they drew.

Extension activity: Combine with lessons about the Ancient and Modern Maya

Combine with an extended lesson on the Ancient and Modern Maya. Suggestions for resources include, for teaching about the Modern Maya, *Signs of Change* and *Beyond the Book*. *Beyond the Book* is a children's book which teaches about modern Maya culture in Yucatan – a good comparison between the traditions, clothes, and background seen in *Rainbow Weaver*. *Signs of Change* provides activities and

discussions to learn about the Modern Maya. *Maya Culture in the Classroom* and *Introducing the Ancient Maya to the Classroom* provide background information on the Ancient Maya as well as hands-on activities about Maya counting, numbers, and writing.

Additional Resources:

Educator Guide from Lee and Low:

https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/381/Rainbow_Weaver_Teacher_s_Guide_2017_PDF_FINAL.pdf

Guided Reading Questions

Why doesn't Ixchel's Mother let her weave with thread?

What does the sale of the weavings pay for?

What materials does Ixchel weave with at first? What happens with these weavings?

What material does Ixchel end up weaving?

What happened as a result of Ixchel's final attempts at weaving?

Reflection Questions

How does Ixchel having to sell materials to get money to go to school make you feel?

How is this similar or different from your experiences in school?

How does Ixchel's participation in weaving make her feel? Why do you think she feels this way?

What are similarities and differences between Ixchel's life and your own? How do these similarities and differences tell you about the Maya culture of Guatemala?