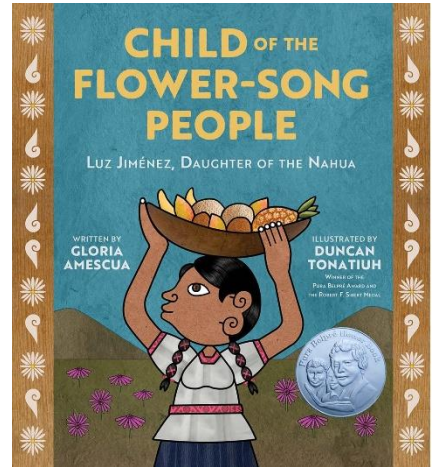


# Child of the Flower-Song People: Luz Jiménez, Daughter of the Nahua

Dear teachers,

Thank you for your interest in sharing *Child of the Flower-Song People*, a book about the indigenous Nahua community. Here you will find some suggested questions and activities for before, during, and after reading. They can be modified as needed according to grade and time available. We suggest extensions for older students throughout. The appendices at the end of the document include several printouts and resources for activities. We also attached a PowerPoint that may also be modified to guide discussion.



## Before Reading

Today we are going to read a book about a girl named Luz Jiménez who grew up in Mexico. Here are some things we are going to learn today. By the end of the lesson, you will be able to (*Slide 2*):

1. Identify some indigenous or native words and customs from Mexico
2. Discuss how indigenous people have faced and continue to face discrimination
3. Understand why some people work to preserve indigenous language and culture

Can you guess which languages Luz speaks? Yes, Luz speaks Spanish. She also speaks an indigenous language called Nahuatl. There are many indigenous languages in Latin American countries like Mexico. Indigenous means that people and their language are native, or the first to exist in their land, before Europeans arrived and colonized it. Do you know the names of any indigenous or Native American people who lived here first and continue to live here today? (*Ioway, Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux (Dakota), Yankton Sioux (Nakota), and Ho Chunk (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska)*).

Nahua people like Luz live in Mexico but also in many other countries. Let's check out a map to see where they live today (*Slide 3, depending on grade you can identify or ask students to identify Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua*). Notice that there are not only Nahua communities living in Latin America or where the Spanish arrived, but also in The United States, Canada, and in Poland as well due to migration or people needing to move to other parts of the world.

Do any of you have family members who speak Nahuatl like Luz? Spanish adopted some words from Nahuatl, so some Spanish speakers know and use them too. Have you heard of any of these Nahuatl words? (*Slide 4*).

**1. Preview (*Slide 5*):** Look at the flowers on the first pages (*copyright page and pgs. 1-2*).

Discuss in groups of 2: What color are they? Estimate: how many petals do you think they have? Can you guess what kind of flowers they are? Do you know why these flowers are special to Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States?

**For discussion after students share:**

These orange flowers are called "cempasuchil" in Mexico which means "twenty petals". This word is not Spanish but Nahuatl, the language spoken by indigenous people before the Spanish conquered Mexico and introduced the Spanish language. Let's try saying it together, *sem-pah-sue-cheel*. In English we call this flower a marigold.

Have any of you seen the movie *Coco*? You might have noticed that cempasuchil or marigolds create a bridge between the Land of the Dead to the Land of the Living.

Cempasuchil flowers have a powerful smell and for that reason, native people from Mexico believe that they help guide spirits home on the Day of the Dead so that they can visit their loved ones. They are used to decorate cemeteries and altars with things that deceased family members liked when they were alive to welcome their spirits back home. Look at this picture of an altar with marigold flowers (*Slide 6*). While we listen to the story, you will hear about other ways that flowers are important to indigenous communities in Mexico.

2. **Preview (*Slide 7*)**: Look at the next few pages (*pages 3-11*). The main character is named Luz and she grows up in Milpa Alta in Mexico. Guess from the illustrations: what does Luz learn to do at home and at school? Do you know how to do any of these activities? Who taught you to do them? Which would you like to learn and why?

**Alternative preview for older students**: Look at the style of the illustrations. Where do you think this style comes from? Look at the hook-like symbols next to some of the characters. What do you think they represent and why might they be important to the story?

Discussion: The illustrator, Duncan Tonatiuh, is Mexican and American. His artwork is inspired by Pre-Columbian art, particularly that of the Mixtec (Aztec) codices. His aim is to create images and stories that honor the past, but that are relevant to people today. The hook-like symbols show that the person is talking, like a word balloon in a comic. You can have students explore codices through one of the following links:

Spanish: <https://codices.inah.gob.mx/pc/index.php>

English: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668122/>

## While Reading

1. (Stop after reading page 9, *Slide 8*) Where are Luz and her mother in this picture? How do they look different from the children and teacher? Why is there no school for Luz? Is that fair? How would you feel if you could not go to school?

**Discussion**: Luz and her mother are passing outside the school and looking through the window. They wear indigenous Nahuatl clothing while the children and teacher inside the school wear European-style clothing. Luz wears her hair in braids while the girl in school wears a bow. Did you notice that Luz and her mother have darker hair and skin? The teacher and the students are “mestizo” or have both European and indigenous heritage. Many people in Latin America also have African heritage. Indigenous people like Luz are discriminated against or treated as less important because they follow indigenous customs and speak Nahuatl, a native language of Mexico. Although indigenous people today can now go to school, they often still face discrimination or are treated badly by non-native people.

**Extension for older students**: *You can show students the timeline at the back of the book and point out that Luz was not paid as she was promised for her contributions to a book project. You can mention that minoritized communities today are sometimes not recognized for their contributions and/or are expected to volunteer their time to teach others about native culture.*

Can you think of other examples of discrimination you have seen or read about? What can we do to stop to discrimination? (*Depending on the grade you may discuss segregation and lack of funding for education, how stereotypes can keep indigenous people and other minoritized groups from getting jobs, housing, bank loans, etc. You can also connect with lessons they may have already learned about the Civil Rights Movement in the US, voting rights, etc.*)

**2.** (Stop reading after page 14, *Slide 9*) How would you feel if someone told you could no longer speak your native language or wear your own clothes? Did you know that students used to be punished for speaking languages other than English here in the United States? Is it fair that students are punished for speaking Nahuatl? Why or why not? (*Can discuss the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism, and how having strong skills in your first language helps students learn their second language because skills transfer, and research shows that bilingual students are not confused by learning two languages*) Why is it important for Luz to remember Nahuatl and Nahua ways? (*Can discuss how language, traditions, and stories are part of who she is, her identity, she is proud of who she is and doesn't want to lose her heritage, preserving language and culture can improve children's self-esteem*)

**3. Make a prediction:** How do you think Luz will protect the Nahua language and culture? What will she do?  
**Extension for older students:** Why do we teach languages other than English in the US? (*Students who speak those languages can feel proud of their heritage, by learning another language all students can understand other cultures, appreciate diversity or how people think in different ways, and work with people who speak those languages other countries or help people in jobs like nursing and business. The US has no official language. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Because national origin includes the native language spoken by immigrants, people in the US have the right to receive help in their own language at federally funded institutions like many hospitals.*)

### **After Reading (Slide 10)**

**1. Predictions.** Did Luz protect the Nahua language and culture in the ways you had predicted or in other ways? What did she do to help?

**Extension for older students:** Do an online search about indigenous communities in Mexico. How many schools teach indigenous languages? Where are they? Where else can children learn about Nahua or other indigenous cultures in Mexico?

**2. Inference:** How do you think the children feel when they look at the statue of Luz Jiménez? Why do you think they feel that way?

Discussion: They may feel proud that she is part of their heritage and history. It may make the children feel good to see someone who looks like them be admired and recognized for all the important work she did like inspiring artworks and teaching Nahuatl language and Nahua culture in the University of Mexico. Having a statue means that her life and indigenous communities are important, should be remembered for their contributions, and should be appreciated today.

**3. Ask Questions:** In groups of two: Imagine you could talk with Luz. What questions would you ask about her life? (*You can model, "I would like to know what it was like to live during the Mexican Revolution and if she had family who fought in the war", etc.*) Depending on the grade, you could discuss possible answers as a whole group, research the questions online, or record questions on the board and have small groups take different questions and share how they think she would answer.

## Activities (See Appendices below for printouts):

**1. Art project (Slide 11):** Have students make a tissue paper marigold to take home or send to the Sioux City Public Museum to be included in an altar display for the Day of the Dead. Have them use the instructions on the PowerPoint slide or Appendix A.

**Extension for older students:** Have students create a Day of the Dead altar to honor Luz Jiménez. Students could bring things from home to physically construct an altar, including her photo by searching “Luz Jimenez writer” online, or draw an altar. Have students brainstorm things that, based on the reading, Luz would like to have on the altar that she enjoyed during life. Include or draw the following indigenous elements on the altar to represent the 4 natural elements:

**Earth:** cempasúchil, orange marigold flowers that help guide spirits back with their smell

**Wind:** papel picado, brightly colored cut-out paper banners that wave in the breeze

**Fire:** candles, also used to guide Luz’s spirit back to visit

**Water:** A cup of water for Luz who might be thirsty after her journey

**2. Timeline:** Make copies of Appendix B (a modified timeline from the end of the book), choosing either the advanced version on pg. 1 or the simplified version with illustrations on pg. 2. Leave the left-hand column of each table intact, cutting it out together. Cut the boxes for the right-hand column apart so that, according to what they remember, students can organize them in chronological order by lining them up next to the left-hand column.

They can check their answers by referring to the PowerPoint (*Slide 12, simplified version with illustrations*). Ask students to discuss in groups of 2 which event is most interesting or surprising to them and why. Select groups or ask for volunteers to share their responses for the class.

**2. Write a Poem:** Have students write a poem about Luz’s life, either as a class or individually. It could be free form or follow an “I Am” poem template in Appendix C below.

**Extension for older students:** Have students write about their own lives as a follow-up activity to develop their own sense of worth and pride.

## Appendix A: Art Project

### Tissue Paper Cempasuchil Flowers

Marigold flowers are an important part of The Day of The Dead celebrations. They are called cempasuchil (cempoaxochitl) in Nahuatl, an indigenous language of Mexico. The name of this flower in Nahuatl means “the twenty-petal flower”. The creation of this flower is explained in an Aztec/Mexica (Nahua) legend. Two children, Huitzilin and Xochitl, grew up together and fell in love. One day, Huitzilin was called to fight in a war and died. Xochitl was heartbroken and prayed to the sun god Tonatiuh to bring them back together. The sun god, moved by their intense devotion to him and love for each other, granted her wish and turned her into the cempasuchil flower. He then reincarnated Hutzilin into a hummingbird and they were reunited. During Day of the Dead, marigolds are used to guide the dead back to their families’ homes due to their strong scent just like hummingbirds are attracted to the flowers.

### Tissue Paper Flower Directions

- Take 4 pieces of pre-cut paper and stack them on top of each other
- Make accordion style folds every inch (alternating directions)
- Wrap a pipe cleaner around the middle and twist tight
- Cut each end of the folded paper into a point
- Gently pull the layers of paper apart to create fullness in the tissue paper flower





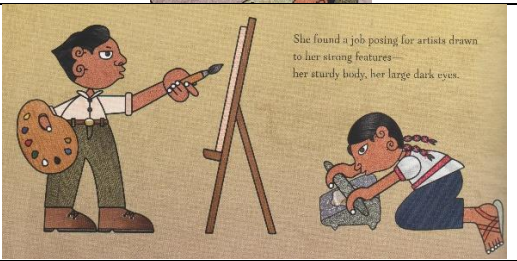


Video link:

<https://youtu.be/5qAp1360wdQ>



## Appendix B: Timeline

<b>FIRST, 1897-1904</b>	Luz grows up in Milpa Alta, Mexico. She learns xochicuicatl, the Nahuatl flower-song poetry, stories about Aztec gods, how her people survived after the Spaniards took their land, how to grind corn, weave, use popote for brooms and herbs for medicine.
<b>SECOND, 1904-1908</b>	There was no public school for native children but suddenly the government requires native children to go to school to learn Spanish language and culture. They are punished if they speak Nahuatl at school and can no longer wear indigenous clothing.
<b>THIRD, 1911-1916</b>	Milpa Alta is the center of the Mexican Revolution, a fight between the Zapatistas, led by revolutionary fighter Emiliano Zapata, and federal soldiers, who kill Luz's father, uncles, and most of the men and boys. Her home and school are burned down.
<b>FOURTH, 1916</b>	Luz's family leave Milpa Alta to live in Santa Anita on the edge of Mexico City. They struggle in the city which is unfamiliar and larger than their hometown. They sell homemade atole, tamales, and handicrafts.
<b>FIFTH, 1920</b>	Luz begins to model for many famous artists working in Mexico who want to honor the native people instead of only paint Spanish heritage of light-skinned Europeans. Luz teaches them about the beauty and strength of the native Nahuatl people.
<b>SIXTH, 1936-</b>	Luz returns to Milpa Alta and applies to be a rural schoolteacher. Without being given a reason, she is rejected. Instead, she continues to teach artists and scholars about Nahuatl culture and language.
<b>SEVENTH, 1956-</b>	A college professor, Fernando Horcasitas writes down Luz's stories in Nahuatl. Her words are published in books that will teach future generations about the Nahuatl people and language. They both teach Nahuatl at the College of Mexico City.

<b>FIRST</b>	<p>Luz grows up in Milpa Alta, Mexico. She learns Nahua traditions like stories about Aztec gods, how to make corn, brooms, and medicine.</p>	
<b>SECOND</b>	<p>Luz begins school and must learn Spanish language and culture. Native children can't speak Nahuatl or wear native clothing.</p>	
<b>THIRD</b>	<p>The Mexican Revolution begins. Soldiers kill Luz's father, uncles, and most of the men and boys. Her home and school are burned down.</p>	
<b>FOURTH</b>	<p>Luz's family leave Milpa Alta to live in Mexico City. It is hard to live in city, which is bigger than their hometown. They sell atole and tamales.</p>	
<b>FIFTH</b>	<p>Luz models for famous artists who want to honor the strength and beauty of native people instead of only light-skinned Spaniards.</p>	
<b>SIXTH</b>	<p>Luz returns to Milpa Alta and applies to be a schoolteacher, but she is rejected. She teaches artists about Nahua culture and language.</p>	
<b>LAST</b>	<p>A college professor writes down Luz's stories in Nahuatl. Her words are published in books. Luz teaches Nahuatl at the College of Mexico City.</p>	

## Appendix C: Write a Poem

### I AM POEM

Imagine you are Luz and write a poem about Luz's life from her perspective.

I am \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjective) (adjective) (adjective)

I remember \_\_\_\_\_

I am proud of \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I will never \_\_\_\_\_

I will always \_\_\_\_\_

### I AM POEM

Now write a poem about your own life.

I am \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjective) (adjective) (adjective)

I remember \_\_\_\_\_

I am proud of \_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I will never \_\_\_\_\_

I will always \_\_\_\_\_