



A TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

THE *Pura* Belpré

PROJECT



Original Stories by Pura Belpré
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Illustrations and Puppets by José López
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Synopsis

Teatro SEA is bringing back the “**Story Hour with Pura Belpré,**” a reenactment of her legendary “Bilingual Story Hour,” giving a new generation of children the opportunity to be a part of this cultural, creative and interactive experience that combines storytelling with puppets. Audiences of all ages will be engaged from beginning to end, as Ms. Pura Belpré acts out her famous tales including: *Pérez & Martina*, *Juan Bobo*, *The Three Magi*, and many more.

This educational and entertaining performance will motivate children and parents to be “creative” readers.



Perez and Martina.

This Puerto Rican folktale describes the adventure of Martina, a Spanish cockroach of high degree, and her many suitors. One by one she rejected their offers to marry her, but when Perez the Mouse asked for her hand, she gladly accepted. After a wonderful wedding, they settled into married life. But alas! Their joy was all too brief.



Juan Bobo.

Juan Bobo is a folkloric character on the island of Puerto Rico. Often-times considered a “trickster”, Juan Bobo struggles with following directions. Sent off by his mother to find work, he causes one disaster after another and always manages to lose his payment. Although the name “Bobo” implies silly-like behavior, the naiveté of Juan Bobo points to a hidden virtue or helpful way to approach life. For nearly two centuries, a collection of books, songs, riddles and folktales have developed around him. Hundreds of children’s books have been written about Juan Bobo in English and Spanish.

The Three Magi.

The story begins on the eve of the Three Kings’ Day, commonly referred to as Twelfth Night or Epiphany. The Magi packed up their freshly washed camels with food and pastries, jugs of water and traveled across the desert as night fell, but they were bewildered when the star that guided their path each year didn’t seem to shine for them. Eventually, the star appeared, and they followed it for hours. In the morning they realized they traveled all night in a complete circle. A little black beetle informed them they were deceived and introduces them to a little gray mouse who explains to the horses (that were jealous of the camels) conspired with the fireflies to pretend they were the famous star. The mouse was appalled by the deception and went to Father Time’s house and set his clock back twenty-four hours to assist the Magi in completing their task.





Who was Pura Belpré?

Pura Belpré was a talented author and storyteller who wrote and reinterpreted Puerto Rican folk tales. Belpré was born in Cidra, **Puerto Rico**. In 1919 she enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. Soon thereafter, she interrupted her studies in order to attend her sister Elisa's wedding in New York. As it turned out, except for brief interludes, Belpré was to remain in New York for the rest of her life.

Her Spanish language skills soon earned her a position as Hispanic Assistant in a branch of the public library at 135th Street in Harlem. It was while working in the children's division that Belpré discovered her passion for storytelling, her love for children's literature and her interest in librarianship. Pura Belpré was also a magnificent storyteller and puppeteer with a deep and evocative voice. In 1926, she began her formal studies in the Library School of the New York

Public Library. As a course requirement, Belpré wrote her first folktale using a story she had heard as a child from her grandmother in Puerto Rico. This story, *Pérez and Martina*, became the first Puerto Rican tale to be shared with children at a story hour in the public library.

In 1929, due to the increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans settling in southwest Harlem, Belpré was transferred to a branch of the NYPL at 115th Street. She quickly became an active advocate for the Spanish-speaking community by instituting bilingual story-hours, buying Spanish language books and implementing programs based on traditional holidays, such as the celebration of Three Kings Day. In her efforts to reach children and adults, she attended meetings of civic organizations such as the Puerto Rican Brotherhood of America and La Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana. Through Belpré's efforts, the 115th Street branch became an important cultural center for the Latino residents of New York City.

In 1940, Belpré was invited to present a paper about her work with the Spanish-speaking community of New York City at the conference of the American Library Association in Cincinnati, Ohio. While in Cincinnati, Belpré met her future husband.

Belpré, who had been working as a children's librarian, decided to take a leave of absence in 1944, and at the end of the year, resigned her position to go on tour with her husband and to devote herself to writings. Belpré's first book, "Pérez and Martina: a Puerto Rican Folk Tale", had been published by Frederick Warne in 1932. Her second story, "The Three Magi", was published in 1944 as part of the anthology "The Animals' Christmas" by Anne Thaxter Eaton. Once she stopped working in the library, Belpré pursued her literary ambitions in earnest. During this period she compiled a collection of tales titled "The Tiger and the Rabbit", including others, which were some of the first English collections of Puerto Rican folk tales published in the United States. Consequently, she became a well-published writer, editor and translator. Although she collected children's tales from many countries, her primary concern was the preservation and dissemination of Puerto Rican folklore.

Throughout their lives, Belpré and her husband maintained their residency in New York's Harlem. In addition to her work in the library and her literary activities, Belpré participated in numerous cultural and civic organizations during her lifetime. Pura Belpré died on July 1, 1982 leaving a rich literary legacy. Several of her books, long out-of-print, are finally being reissued, and giving a new generation of children the opportunity to enjoy them.

Her Legacy

- Pura Belpré was the first Puerto Rican librarian to be hired by the New York Public Library system.
- She enriched the lives of Puerto Rican children in the USA through her pioneering work of preserving and disseminating Puerto Rican folklore.
- She was an active advocate for the Spanish-speaking community, and she helped by instituting bilingual story hours, buying Spanish language books, and implementing programs based on traditional holidays, such as the celebration of Three Kings' Day. In her efforts to reach children and adults, she attended meetings of civic organizations such as the Puerto Rican Brotherhood of America and La Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana.
- The Pura Belpré Award is a children's book award presented every year to the Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth. The Pura Belpré Award is co-sponsored by REFORMA: the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA).
- The Northeast Chapter of REFORMA named its children's book achievement award in her honor in the 1980s.
- In the Bronx, New York Public School 64 on Walton Avenue near 170th Street has been named after her.
- A documentary film about the life and work of Pura Belpré was produced in 2011 and is available for viewing at the *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños* at Hunter College.

Activity 1 - How can you help your community?

- Ask your students if they feel inspired after learning about the legacy and work of Pura Belpré.
- Discussion points:
 - How did Pura Belpré help her community?
 - Do you think her actions helped bring more opportunities for women and to the Latino community in NYC?
- Ask students to write an essay (it could be a paragraph, 5 or 10 lines, depending on the grade level of the students) on how we can help our community through humanitarian efforts. You can help them by asking the following questions:
 - We all are good at something; maybe it is sports, dance, arts, school, etc. How can you improve these skills? How can you use these skills to improve the lives of others in your neighborhood?

What is the difference between a folk tale and a fairy tale?

FAIRY TALE.

A fairy tale is a fanciful tale of legendary deeds and creatures, usually intended for children.

“Fairy tale, a story, usually for children, about elves, hobgoblins, dragons, fairies, or other magical creatures.”¹

FOLKTALE

A folktale is a story that has been told for a long time by a group of people.

“Folk tale, a tale or legend originating and traditional among a group of people or folks, especially one forming part of an oral tradition.”²

¹ The Random House Dictionary of the English Language. New York, 1966, p.511.

² Ibid, p.551.

Activity 2

1. Discuss the difference between Fairy tales and Folktales. Ask students if they can think of examples of fairy tales and folktales.
2. Divide your students into groups and have each group read folktales from different cultures. Have them tell their stories through role-playing.
3. Have your students interview a family member, friend or neighbor about their favorite stories. (Kids can write or record the story.) They should include some background on the story: what culture it comes from, who told the story (name and/or relationship to the child), the storyteller’s age, how their family member/neighbor learned of the story, and so on.
4. Have the students share these stories with the group, Pura Belpré Style (they can make the story into a dramatic reading by adding simple costumes and different voices, or they may choose a story to turn into a skit, a play or add puppets to it, when they share it with the rest of the group.)
5. Then, create a book of the stories so others in the community can enjoy them.



Puerto- Rico - Facts:



Puerto Rico is considered a territory of the United States. Its official name is the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is located in the Caribbean Ocean. It is the smallest of the Greater Antilles Islands, which include Cuba (the largest), Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

Puerto Rico is often referred to as Borinquen, or Borikén, indigenous names, as well as Isla del Encanto, and Perla del Caribe. Puerto Ricans refer to themselves as Puertorriqueños or Boricuas.

Puerto Ricans are a mix of Taino Indian, Spanish and African cultures.

The country is one of few in the world that is officially bilingual! The primary languages are both Spanish and English.

Bomba, plena and trova music can be heard throughout the streets of Puerto Rico during parties and celebrations, Merengue music and dancing is also popular. Salsa music was invented by Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York City and was exported to the island.

The Coqui frog is native to Puerto Rico and is considered a Puerto Rican symbol. It measures only one inch in length, and its powerful melodic voice and high-pitched song can be heard for miles on the island.

Puerto Rican cuisine, or cocina criolla (as termed by the locals), is unique, even though it is a blend of Spanish, African, Taino Indian and American culinary traditions.

Activity 3 - Heritage

1. Ask your students, what is their definition of “heritage”.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says: the traditions, achievements, beliefs, etc., that are part of the history of a group or nation.

Explain to your students that the concept of heritage is shaped by one’s country of origin, languages, rituals, foods, traditions, and other forms of culture such as dance and theatre.

2. After discussing with your students what heritage means, ask them to research their own heritage. Ask them to bring some photos or images related to their heritage for the next class for discussion.

3. Provide magazines, paper, scissors and glue for your students, With the photos/images they brought from home, plus some they can find in class, have them create a collage about their heritage. They must include in their collage the phrase: “I am proud of the following aspect of my heritage....” or “The most important thing about my heritage is”

4. Each student must share with the class what the images on their collage represent and share the most important thing about their own heritage with the group.

Styles of Puppets used in The Pura Belpré Project

What is a puppet?

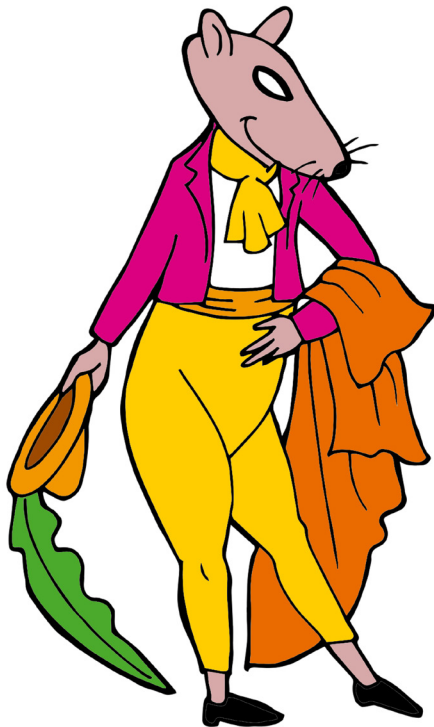
Puppets are objects that appear to be alive when manipulated by a human hand. There are many types of puppets!

We used the following styles:

Hand or glove puppet (Martina & Pérez) - These are puppets controlled by one hand which occupies the interior of the puppet. Larger varieties of hand puppets place the puppeteer's hand in just the puppet's head, controlling the mouth and head, and the puppet's body then hangs over the entire arm. A sock puppet is a particularly simple type of hand puppet!!

Shadow Puppets (The Three Magi) - A cut-out figure held between a source of light and a translucent screen. Untypical, as it is two-dimensional in form, shadow puppets can form solid silhouettes or be decorated with various amounts of cut-out details. Color can be introduced into the cut-out shapes.

Object Puppet (Juan Bobo) - Object puppets are often created with found or everyday objects, sometimes created in the performance or pre-created, The object puppet will often take on character by the quality of manipulation and voice to suggest to the audience what the object has become (now that it is no longer itself).



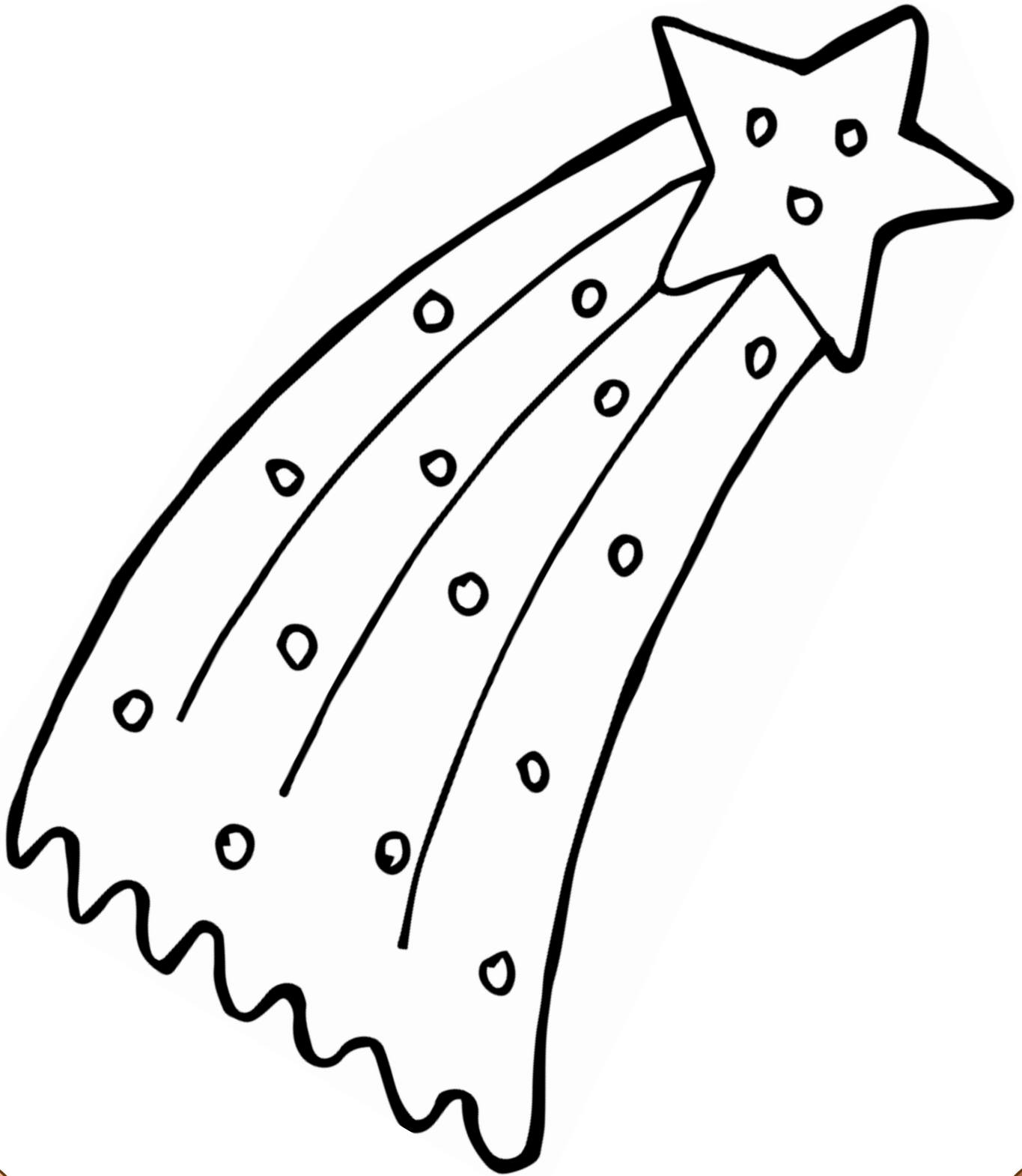
Activity 4

1. Have students research the story of Pérez and Martina in your local library.
2. Read out loud for the group. What are the similarities and differences with the performance they watched?
3. Have students split the story of Pérez and Martina into parts and let them illustrate scenes from the story. Some students may also wish to make puppets for the story, as Pura Belpré did.
4. On how to make some easy puppets with your students, use the link below.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Puppets>

Activity 5 — Color the star that guided the 3 Magi!

Encourage their creativity, with different materials such as: glitter, crayons, yarn, beads, fabric, and more!



Sources:

http://www.colorincolorado.org/librarians/pura_belpre/

<http://www.reforma.org/content.asp?contentid=43>

<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art5443.asp>

<http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/faids/belpref.html>

<http://www.vrm1.k12.la.us/dozier2/fairytales/fairytales.html>

http://www.ehow.com/v/info_8476259_difference-between-folktales-fairy-tales.html

http://iarchives.nysed.gov/xtf/view?docId=1989-03_Belpre.xml;query=;brand=default#bioghistID

About SEA

Founded in 1985, Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. / Sociedad Educativa de las Artes, Inc. (SEA) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment and educational advancement of children and young adults. SEA is one of the few, if not the only, Bilingual/Latin American Arts-in-Education organizations in New York City.

Through an array of effective, comprehensive, and highly powerful Arts-in-Education programs, SEA provides opportunities for children and young adults to examine, challenge and create possible solutions for current educational, social and community issues while fostering their talents, potential and self-esteem.

SEA is responsible for reviving the tradition of doing Children's Theatre in Spanish in New York City, a tradition that was abandoned for more than 18 years. For the past several years, SEA has toured professional theatres, schools, city parks and communities reviving this tradition by performing to audiences of over 75,000 per year.

SEA has also been instrumental in the introduction and education of non-Spanish speaking audiences to Latino Arts and Culture through cultural exchanges with many other ethnic groups and communities. As a result, SEA has been recognized as a leading theater company that offers a repertory of high quality works exemplifying wholesome and educational value, as well as providing a link to Latino Arts and Culture, multicultural understanding and self-esteem for all ages.

In celebration of its 25th Anniversary, SEA opened a brand new state-of-the-art performance space at the Clemente Soto Véllez Cultural and Educational Center in Manhattan's Lower East Side.



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