

A Common Core
Curriculum Guide to
A SONG of FRUTAS

By Margarita Engle
Illustrated by Sara Palacios

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Grades P-3 • Ages 4-8



BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

“Mango, limón, coco, melón” are some of the fruits children will sing about in Margarita Engle’s story of a young girl’s visits with her abuelo in Cuba. Abuelo is a *pregonero*, or a singing fruit vendor, and life is *sabroso* (“tasty”) to the little girl as the two sing and dance their way through lively neighborhoods, meeting customers and other sellers.



The little girl loves her trips to Cuba and wishes for “friendship between countries” so she can visit more often and “maybe somehow, someday, [Abuelo] can also fly high and wide across the glittering deep sea to visit us.” Upon her return home to the United States, she stays in touch with her abuelo by writing letters. The letters, or “a hug made of words,” are especially appreciated as travel restrictions between the US and Cuba have strained relations between families for years. The author’s note at the end of the book explains more about los *pregoneros*, Spanglish, and the effects of travel restrictions on Cuban and Cuban American families.

Sara Palacios’s vivid illustrations and the use of Spanish words throughout the story transport young readers to a warm island filled with sweet treats—none as sweet, perhaps, as the loving relationship between Abuelo and his nieta.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature (RL) that ask children to ask and answer questions about key details in a text, (RL.K.1–RL.2.1), retell stories, demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson (RL.K.2–RL.2.2), and describe characters, settings, and major events in a story (RL.K.3–RL.2.3).

The questions below focus on key components of the story and can be discussed in partners, small groups, or as a whole class.

1. This prereading activity will set the stage for *A Song of Frutas* by focusing on the story's setting. As you look through the pictures, make predictions about the setting and how that is important to the story. Notice that this book has Spanish words mixed in with the English words. Why do you think the author included both languages? Where does this story take place? What do you already know about Cuba? Can you find it on a map?



2. “As we walk, our footsteps like drumsticks, our heads like maracas, shaking bright food shapes while we chant with a rhythm.” What are the little girl and her abuelo doing? Act out the scene with a partner.

3. Why do the little girl and her abuelo sing as they sell fruit? What words from the story help to explain this?

4. How do the illustrations and the words work together to tell this story? How do the townspeople feel about the little girl and her abuelo and their fruit? How can you tell? Why do you think the fruit words are written in a different style from the rest of the text?

5. The little girl says, “Sometimes, people walk along the street beside us, arguing about prices.” Do you shop anywhere where you argue about prices? How is this similar to or different from where you shop?

6. The little girl describes a New Year's tradition with *uvas* (“grapes”). What is the tradition? What traditions do you celebrate, especially around the New Year?

7. One of the little girl's wishes is for “friendship between countries.” What does she mean by this? Why is this important to her?

8. How does the little girl feel at the end of the story? How do you know? What words on the last few pages of the story help us understand how she feels about her abuelo and about writing letters to him?



9. Once you've finished reading, practice retelling the story using either the "Who-What" or "Five Finger Retell" activity.
- Complete a "Who-What" reading response by writing two complete sentences to answer the following questions:
 - Who is the most important character?
 - What did they do?
 - Turn to a partner and retell the story using the "Five Finger Retell." Use each finger to explain each story element.

Find the accompanying reproducible activity sheet at the end of this document.

CRAFT/STRUCTURE

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (RL.K.4-RL.2.4), think about the overall structure of the story (RLK.5-RL2.5), and assess the author's point of view (RLK.6-2.6).

10. Watch this short video (RockaLingua.com/Videos/Fruits) to learn the Spanish words for different fruits. Then look through the pictures of fruit in *A Song of Frutas* and practice saying these new words aloud.

11. Be a word detective! Work with a partner to use context clues to find the meaning of the following Spanish words used in the story. Use the sentence stems provided to help explain your reasoning.

I think *pregoneros* means _____ because _____

I think *tamalero* means _____ because _____

I think *la yerbera* means _____ because _____

I think *el viandero* means _____ because _____

I think *el manisero* means _____ because _____

I think *cucuruchos* means _____ because _____

I think *el mani* means _____ because _____

I think *la dulcera* means _____ because _____

I think *los caramelos* means _____ because _____

Find the accompanying reproducible activity sheet at the end of this document.



12. Margarita Engle uses figurative language to bring her stories to life for her readers. Figurative language is used to help describe something ordinary in a new, creative way. Simile is one example of figurative language. Similes compare two different things, usually with the words like or as. Review each of the similes below, and think about how the language helps you better understand the story.

“...as we walk, our footsteps like drumsticks, our heads like maracas, shaking bright food shapes while we chant with a rhythm...”

What simile(s) does the author use?
Hint: What two things are being compared?



“...all our hopeful poems flying like songbirds who glide and soar through wild sky...”

What simile does the author use?



13. The little girl narrates this story, telling it from her point of view. Why do you think the author chose to have the little girl tell the story? How might it have changed if told from Abuelo's perspective, or from a customer buying fruit?

14. What do you think the little girl is thinking about when writing and sending the letters to her abuelo? How can you tell?



WRITING

The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing narrative, informative, and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (W.K-2.1), to inform (W.K-2.2), and to write narratives (W.K-2.3).

15. This story is about a young girl's visits to her abuelo in Cuba. Create a scrapbook journal and write about a place or person you have visited. Use details to describe what you did and saw so readers can picture your visit in their minds as they read. Be sure to include colorful, labeled illustrations.

16. Do you think children should have the opportunity to travel abroad and visit other countries? Explain your answer using examples from the book or your own life.

17. Making lapbooks is an engaging way to show what you've learned about a specific topic. Make a mini-book about Cuba using other books or the internet to research basic information about the country. Include details about the country's flag, capital, climate, culture, animal habitats, holidays, and/or foods. Here are different templates you can use: HomeSchoolShare.com/typeitin_lapbook_templates.php

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Music

1. Celebrate the rhythm and language of this story by singing the "Song of Frutas" in rounds. Set the words of the song to a rhythm, and practice singing all four lines. With your classmates, split into two groups and then sing the "Song of Frutas" in rounds.

Round 1: Mango, limón, coco, melón

Round 2: naranja, toronja, plátano, piña

2. In the author's note, Margarita Engle writes that "El Manisero" is a famous song about a singing peanut vendor. Did you know that "mani" means peanut? Listen to a recording of the song. What do you notice about it? Why do you think it slowly gets softer at the end? How does it relate to *A Song of Frutas*?

3. Become more familiar with Cuban music by singing the Cuban song "Guantanamera," and keeping the beat with a percussion "instrument" of your choice. For example, consider using a pencil to keep the beat or make maracas with dry beans and water bottles. Watch a video of the song here: [YouTube.com/watch?v=blUSVALW_Z4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blUSVALW_Z4)



Social Studies

1. Learn more about Cuba by taking a virtual video tour! You can watch Cuba for Kids at [YouTube.com/watch?v=Lcg8clnaq74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcg8clnaq74) and Cuba—A Virtual Field Trip at [YouTube.com/watch?v=vNN8ce2RT3k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNN8ce2RT3k). Then create a K-W-L chart to track what we Know, Want to know, and Learned after watching the video(s).

Find the accompanying reproducible activity sheet at the end of this document.

2. Make a new friend by joining a pen pal program! Programs like International Pen Friends and Kids for Peace give participants the opportunity to learn about other cultures and build peace by collaborating on projects that address real-world issues.

Art

1. Did you know Havana is famous for its abundance of classic American cars? Research what classic American cars look like, and learn to draw them. Why are there still so many classic cars on the streets of Cuba today? Consider reading *All the Way to Havana* by Margarita Engle, illustrated by Mike Curato, to learn more.

KEEP ON READING!

— OTHER BOOKS ABOUT CUBA —

Good-bye, Havana! Hola, New York!

By Edie Colon, illustrated by Raúl Colón

Definitely Dominguita series

By Terry Catasus Jennings, illustrated by Fatima Anaya

Alicia Alonso Takes the Stage

(A Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls Chapter Book)

Illustrated by Josefina Preumayr



— OTHER PICTURE BOOKS BY MARGARITA ENGLE —

Dancing Hands: How Teresa Carreño Played the Piano for President Lincoln

Illustrated by Ra-fael López

The Flying Girl: How Aída de Acosta Learned to Soar

Illustrated by Sara Palacios

Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music

Illustrated by Rafael López

Bravo!: Poems About Amazing Hispanics

Illustrated by Rafael López

Orangutanka: A Story in Poems

Illustrated by Renée Kurilla

A Dog Named Haku: A Holiday Story from Nepal with Amish Karanjit and Nicole Karanjit

Illustrated by Ruth Jeyaveeran

Miguel's Brave Knight: Young Cervantes and His Dream of Don Quixote

Illustrated by Raúl Colón

The Sky Painter: Louis Fuertes, Bird Artist

Illustrated by Aliona Bereghici

— OTHER BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY SARA PALACIOS —

A Way with Wild Things

By Larissa Theule

Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match

By Monica Brown

Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border

By Mitali Perkins

How to Code a Sandcastle

By Josh Funk

Here I Come book series

By D. J. Steinberg

'Twas Nochebuena

By Roseanne Greenfield Thong

My Day with the Panye

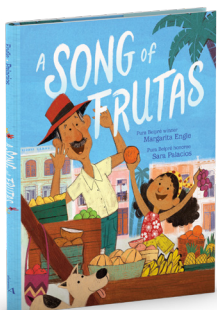
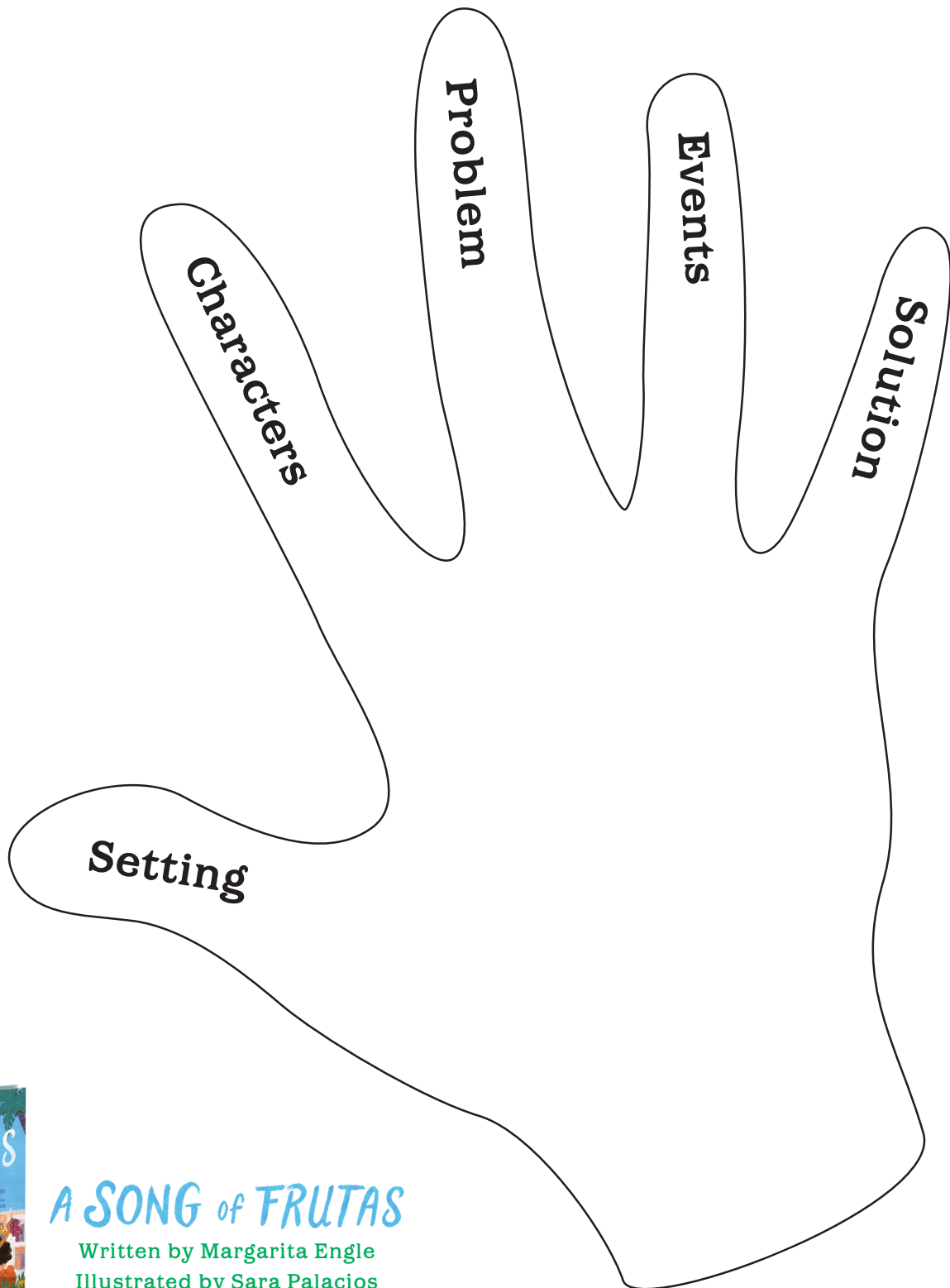
By Tami Charles

Melissa Cardinali is a literacy teacher and librarian. She lives in New York City with her husband, two young sons, and way too many books to fit in her apartment.

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FIVE FINGER RETELL

Once you've finished reading, practice retelling the story.
Use each finger to explain each story element.



A SONG of FRUTAS

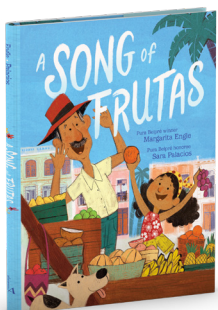
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REPRODUCIBLE

LEARN ABOUT CUBA

Once you've finished taking a virtual video tour of Cuba, use this chart to figure out what you've learned, and what you want to know.

Know	Want to Know	Learned



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BE A WORD DETECTIVE

Work with a partner to use context clues to find the meaning of the following Spanish words used in the story. Use the sentence stems provided to help explain your reasoning.



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because _____

I think *tamalero* means _____

because _____

I think *la yerbera* means _____

because _____

I think *el viandero* means _____

because _____

I think *el manisero* means _____

because _____

I think *cucuruchos* means _____

because _____

I think *el mani* means _____

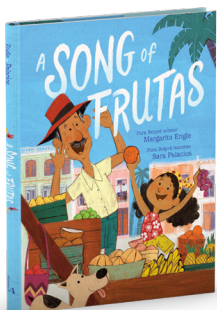
because _____

I think *la dulcera* means _____

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I think *los caramelos* means _____

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