

Pedro and the Monster Eaters / Pedro y los devoradores de monstruos

By Xequina María Berbér
Illustrated by C. Rod. Unalt

SUMMARY



ABOUT THE BOOK

GENRE: Nonfiction 978-1-55885-991-3
Hardcover 32 pages, 8 ½ x 11

Pedro came from a family of artists who created papier-mâché sculptures. With newspaper, cardboard and glue, they made piñatas, masks and *mojigangas*, giant puppets used in parades and festivals in Mexico. As a boy, he helped his family by collecting newspapers in the neighborhood. When he got older, he began making the large figures himself. The family had to make new ones every year because all the *mojigangas* were burned after the events!

One day, Pedro became very sick. He had a high fever, slept a lot and had very scary nightmares. In his dreams, the giant puppets came to life and chased him. But suddenly, fierce animals with long, sharp teeth and claws came to his defense and ate up all the monsters! The animals called themselves *alebrijes*. When he was well, he began to recreate the beasts from his dream using paper and glue; he painted his creations with bright colors and intricate patterns. Soon, people came from all over to buy Pedro's monster eaters.

Loosely based on the life of artist Pedro Linares, this bilingual picture book for young readers pairs the fascinating origin story of one of Mexico's most well-known folk arts with striking illustrations of the magical creatures. This is a perfect choice for parents and teachers interested in sharing the world of art with their kids.

THEMES

Art, Artists, Folk Art, Cultural Traditions, *Alebrijes*, Family, Dreams, Monsters, Mexico, Latino/Hispanic Interest, Nonfiction

VOCABULARY

Pedro and the Monster Eaters / Pedro y los devoradores de monstruos has a number of words that your students may not be familiar with. Before or after the reading, review some or all of the words listed below.

Content Specific

Cartoneros, *mojigangas*, *alebrijes*, *piñata*, sculpture, mold, *papier-mâché*, puppet, mask, parade, festival, monster, hollow, nightmare, imagination, fantastical, landscape

Academic

create, defend, terrorize, intricate

ELL / ESL Teaching Strategies

Invite students to draw their own *mojiganga* masks using the words found in the text: "large faces," "bright eyes," "toothy smile," and "colorful flowers." Then ask students to use their new masks to dance and twirl in a parade around the classroom.

Before Reading

(Prereading Standards, Craft & Structure, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas)

Prereading Questions

1. What special cultural or religious holidays does your family celebrate?
2. How do you celebrate these holidays? What foods, music or special traditions do you do together?
3. How do these celebrations and holidays with your family make you feel?
4. Have you learned to make any special decorations for these celebrations?
5. Have you ever dreamed of a fantastical creature? What did it look like?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Key Ideas & Details, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas)

1. Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *Pedro and the Monster Eaters / Pedro y los devoradores de monstruos*, means. Ask students to make predictions about what they think the *alebrijes* are based on the illustration on the last page.
2. Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, English and Spanish text, illustrations and the Author's Note.
3. Have students practice saying the word *alebrijes* together.

Establishing a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details)

Ask students to read to find out:

1. What do you dream?
2. How do we overcome a nightmare?



Encourage students to consider why the author, Xequina María Berbér, wants to share this story with young people. Ask students to consider why this text is presented in both English and Spanish.

After Reading

Discussion Questions

Use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension and facilitate a deeper appreciation of the story. Encourage students to refer to the text and the illustrations to support their responses. To build close reading skills, students should cite evidence to support their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details)

1. Who are *cartoneros*?
2. What kinds of things do Pedro's family members make in their workshop?
3. Why are *cartoneros* important for parades and festivals?
4. What was Pedro's job when he was younger?
5. As he grew older, what did his new job become?
6. What was Pedro's nightmare about?
7. What did the clouds change into?
8. What did Pedro use to make the *alebrijes*?
9. What do the *alebrijes* look like?
10. What did people buy the *alebrijes* to help with?



Extension / Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Craft & Structure)

1. Pick an *alebrije* in the book. What animal(s) does it remind you of?
2. Why do you think this traditional art form is popular in Mexico?
3. What animals would you use to make an *alebrije*?
4. Pedro's first job was collecting newspapers and making piñatas. What kind of job would you like to have?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purpose, and Production & Distribution of Writing)
(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Craft & Structure, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas)

1. Which parts of the book did you connect with the most?
2. Describe a time when you feared something and overcame it.
3. Describe a time when you created something. Was it successful? What were some of the challenges you faced?
4. Pedro created the first *alebrijes*. Draw a picture or write about something you would like to create.
5. Write a song or poem about how it feels to spend time with family and work on an activity together.



ELL / ESL Teaching Strategies

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use)

Below, please find strategies that may be helpful to use with English Language Learner students.

1. Review all of the vocabulary. Have students make predictions about the word meaning, and then create and share an action for each word. Invite students to write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture or create a list of synonyms and antonyms.
2. Assign ELL students to partner-read the book with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another or listen to the more fluent reader. Students who speak Spanish can help with pronunciation or read the Spanish alongside a student reading the English text.
3. Ask each student to write three to five questions about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
4. After the reading:
 - a. Review the illustrations in order and ask students to summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - b. Working in pairs, have students retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary or opinion about what they have read.
5. Create a presentation on a festive celebration from your family or home country. Remember to describe the art, food, music or rituals/traditions for your classmates. Share photos, artifacts, clothing or a craft related to the celebration.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college- and career-ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence and use technology and digital media strategically and capably.)

Use activities below to help students integrate what they have read with other curriculum areas. These activities may also be used for extension activities, advanced readers and creating a home-school connection.

English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas) (Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration) (Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge)

1. Ask students to think about their favorite form of art (music, drawings, sculptures). Have students list out adjectives and descriptive phrases and words to describe their favorite art. Point out some of the art made in the book. Ask students to write an ode or poem to their favorite art or artist. Students should be encouraged to use similes, sensory details, imagery and colorful adjectives to describe their favorite form of art or artist.
2. Invite students to use the text and illustrations to find supplies that were in Pedro's family workshop: glue, tissue paper, paint, cardboard, brushes, flour, water, bowls, toys, newspaper, molds, etc. Then have students list out abstract ideas/nouns such as friendship, love, anger, fear, joy, sadness, peace. Invite students to create a "sculpture" of these abstract ideas and encourage them to use the workshop supplies.
3. Ask students to research more about some of the artists that were mentioned in the Author's Note. How do you think Pedro Linares influences some of the work of these other artists?

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas) (Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge)

Share with students general information about Mexico. Show them a map of the country, talk about its history, language and cultural traditions. Working in small teams or pairs, have each group focus on one cultural aspect of Mexico to research and present to the class:

- a. Language
- b. Music – Mariachi
- c. Music – Bachata
- d. Holidays
- e. Food – Main Dishes
- f. Food – Desserts
- g. Flowers and Plants
- h. Animals – Land
- i. Animals – Sea
- j. Historical/Famous Figures

Ask students to research different parts of the world or their own home country that use masks or costumes in celebration. Consider the following places:

- a. Australia
- b. Brazil
- c. Colombia
- d. France
- e. Greece
- f. Hungary
- g. Mexico
- h. Philippines
- i. Russia
- j. United States (particularly New Orleans)

Science

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas)

1. Study the illustration on the Author's Note page at the end of the book. Have students list the animals that were inspired to create these *alebrijes*.
2. Have students create an easy “How to” craft instruction sheet to share with the class. Be sure students include a list of supplies needed and quantities of each followed by step-by-step instructions. Easy ideas include: how to carve a pumpkin, how to mix paint colors and make a rainbow, how to draw a smiley face, how to make a necklace, how to make a birthday card, how to decorate a cake.
3. Using flour and water, have students try out different proportions to find out how to make their own glue to collage different papers on cardboard.
 - a. Students should hypothesize what might happen when the glue sits overnight, and how long it will take to dry.
 - b. Students can compare and contrast each type of paper and learn about density and porosity. Paper choices can include: newspaper, tissue paper, printer paper, construction paper, notebook paper, Post-It note paper, etc.



Art, Media, Music and Drama

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas) (Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration) (Writing Standards, Research to Build & Present Knowledge)

1. Have students paint, draw or create a depiction of one of their family's cultural traditions, holidays or crafts.
2. Have students color different animal heads, bodies and tails. How many different colors and patterns can you use? Have students cut out their animals and mix and match with classmates to create their own *alebrijes*.
 - a. Use the link: <https://eslvault.com/mixed-up-animal-printables/> to find free coloring pages of animal body parts to print out for your classroom. Tell students to color each animal body part with bright colors and patterns. Cut them out and assemble them to make your own *alebrije*. Try trading animal parts with a classmate or two!
3. Have students create a video commercial, skit or flyer that advertises *alebrijes* for someone who has never seen one. What would you say? How would you convince someone to buy one? Why is this art so special?
4. Place students in small groups and have them choose one scene from the book to dramatize.
5. Have students illustrate their favorite part of the story.
6. After reading the Author's Note, draw one of the *alebrijes* described in Pedro's nightmare.
7. Have students try to use the attached recipe to create their own glue and papier-mâché sculpture of a simple animal.

Home School Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas) (Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Production & Distribution of Writing, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge)

1. Invite students to interview an older family member about cultural traditions or art forms they practiced as a child. Compare and contrast their elder family member's traditions and experiences with their own. Share with the class.
2. Try to make a mask or an *alebrije* at home with a parent or guardian. Take pictures or video of the process, and then reflect on what it was like. Share your experience with the class.
3. Encourage students to research the origin of one of their family's cultural traditions. When did it start? Why does this celebration exist? How has it changed since its beginnings? Why are these costumes, masks, or art/music still around?

CONNECT WITH THE INTERNET

- *Pedro Linares, Artesano Cartonero* by Judith Bronowski – a documentary on Pedro Linares: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUpOWFBVadI>
- Día de los Muertos in Mexico – <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/culture/whats-on-the-calendar-for-day-of-the-dead-in-mexico-city/>
- Mexico City Alebrije Parade – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico_City_Alebrije_Parade

MAKE A PAPIÉR-MACHÉ ANIMAL SCULPTURE OR MASK

Ingredients:

- Thin Cardboard
 - Tape (such as painter's tape)
 - Tissue Paper
 - Elmer's Glue
 - Water
 - Bowl
 - Wide Brushes
 - Paints
 - A Parent or Guardian
1. Take some cardboard and try bending it, cutting it, and taping pieces together to create an animal. Try a mask or a rabbit, a cat, a dog, a pig, or a butterfly, a bear, or another animal.
 2. In a mixing bowl, mix 1 cup of Elmer's glue with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water.
 3. Apply strips of tissue paper onto your cardboard sculpture. Paint the glue mixture over the tissue paper (one piece at a time) to glue the tissue paper down.
 4. Let the cardboard dry for a couple of hours or overnight.
 5. Paint your animal sculpture with colorful patterns and designs!



 MEET THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR



XEQUINA MARÍA BERBÉR is the author of *Santora, the Good Daughter* (Xipactli, 2001), *The Mermaid Girl* (Bedazzled Ink, 2013) and a collection of short stories, *The Only Female Cross Dresser in Memphis* (Bedazzled Ink, 2021), and she co-edited *Dispatches from Lesbian America* (Bedazzled Ink, 2017).

She has master's degrees in library and information science and women's spirituality. A traditional Mexican healer, she lives in Oakland, California.



C. ROD. UNALT, also known as Christina Rodriguez-Unalt, has illustrated numerous children's books, including *¡A bailar! / Let's Dance!* (Piñata Books, 2011), educational textbooks and publications such as *Spider Magazine*.

An assistant professor and program head of a BFA Illustration program in New Jersey, she earned her MFA in Illustration at the University of Hartford.

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