

# **LA LEYENDA DE LA LLORONA TEACHER RESOURCES:**

## *Complete Lesson Plans for the Embedded Readings*

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## **NOTES FOR THE TEACHER:**

This unit is primarily intended as a model on how to build an embedded reading. Teachers can also use it as material for a comprehensible level I cultural unit.

### **WHAT DO STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW BEFOREHAND?**

Before reading, the assumption is that students will already know:

1) Some basic vocabulary and structures, such as:

**there is, lives, is, is called, goes, has, looks at, is happy,  
in, from, with**

2) The main question words:

**where, to where, who, why, how many, what**

### **WORD CHOICE**

Each version of the story is written with tightly controlled, carefully selected vocabulary. *High frequency words* are the target; these are the words that students can use in a variety of language situations—the most often used words in the language that can be used to say almost anything with a bit of imagination.

### **WORD COUNT IN EACH VERSION**

A version of the story is told at each step. Each version is a complete story. The story is expanded with each telling. Details and drama keep appearing with each new version. There are always some unanswered questions in every version all along the way, but the basic story is still there.

Here is how the story grows numerically and conceptually. Details and drama are added with each retelling:

	<b>Total Words in Version</b>	<b>Added Vocabulary in Each Version (New and Familiar)</b>	<b><u>Additions to the Story in Each Version</u></b>
<b>Version A</b>	20	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bare bones version of the legend (pun intended)</li><li>• A woman has two children</li><li>• She pushes them in the river</li></ul>
<b>Version B</b>	41	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Her children yell and cry a lot.</li><li>• Her children die.</li></ul>

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<b>Version C</b>	105	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The woman’s name is María.</li> <li>• She has a husband.</li> <li>• Her husband leaves.</li> </ul>
<b>Version D</b>	162	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• María’s husband does not come back.</li> <li>• She is poor.</li> <li>• Her children are hungry.</li> <li>• She returns to the river to look for her children.</li> </ul>
<b>Version E</b>	235	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• María is crazy.</li> <li>• She jumps into the river and dies.</li> <li>• She returns in the night and looks for her children.</li> <li>• Now she is called La Llorona.</li> </ul>
<b>Version F</b>	291	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People believe this story is true.</li> <li>• People have seen her in the night.</li> </ul>
<b>Version 1G</b>	364	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• María thinks everything is great with her family.</li> <li>• She thinks of a plan to get rid of her children.</li> <li>• She is sorry for what she has done.</li> </ul>
<b>Version H</b>	441	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People say that this really happened.</li> <li>• Her husband leaves with another woman;</li> <li>• La Llorona either kills children she finds in the night, or she takes them away to be her children forever!</li> </ul>
(Final version) _____	<b>1,660</b> total words in all versions		

There are 1,660 total words in all 8 versions combined, which is about half the total amount of words in a short novel for language learners. If students read each of these as we present them in class and then review all of the versions a couple of times, they will have read almost 5,000 words in **interesting**, **comprehensible** and **culturally authentic** Spanish. Triple play. This is as close as it gets to authentic material for novices. Not bad for level I.

### **WHY SHOULD WE EVEN CARE ABOUT LEGENDS?**

We need to teach our students to treat legends with more respect. The famous British writer and philosopher G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) put it this way:

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**"It is quite easy to see why a legend is treated, and ought to be treated, more respectfully than a book of history. The legend is generally made by a majority of the people in the village who are sane. The book is generally written by the one man in the village who is mad."**

G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (Colorado Springs: Shaw, 1994). P. 47

The legend of **La Llorona** is one of most well-known and enduring Hispanic folk tales in the Southwestern U.S. and Mexico. The tragic story of the young mother that murders her children in a moment of despair has had staying power for centuries. And this is not the only such story. There are similar tales in other cultures. The ancient Greeks, for example, had the legend of **Medea**, who also drowned her children. The tragic difference with **La Llorona** is that the murdering mother is punished by becoming a cursed wraith and is doomed to wander endlessly in search of her children.

In Hispanic culture there are scores of versions of the La Llorona legend. It is kept alive in our time through storybooks, recordings, and particularly the oral storytelling tradition that is passed down from generation to generation. Grandparents and other storytellers in almost every Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. and Mexico still tell versions of it to children.

### **WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS LEGEND THAT FASCINATES PEOPLE?**

This story keeps our attention because it deals with archetypes, common scenarios and recognizable feelings and fears:

- |                       |                 |                |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| • loving wife         | • abandonment   | • suicide      |
| • single mother       | • helplessness  | • repentance   |
| • crazy mother        | • poverty       | • consequences |
| • irritating children | • loneliness    | • fear         |
| • victimized children | • need          | • darkness     |
| • love                | • desperation   | • open water   |
| • family              | • impulsiveness | • the unknown  |
|                       | • murder        |                |

### **OBJECTIONS TO TEACHING STORIES LIKE LA LLORONA**

Students love this legend because it is not a cleaned-up Disney story with a happy ending. Most legends are about getting better, developing virtue. In *La Llorona* the main character becomes worse. Self-development is a two-way street—not everyone becomes a better person over time. Some get worse. Adolescents know this. And this is one reason they like the story—at last someone is telling the other side.

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They also love that it is a *real* story, one that their Spanish speaking peers know. And now they can understand it in Spanish. They also love that it is darker. They love that we are not reading about a perfect family or a perfect situation, but that there is something else happening; that we do not hide the dark details as we tell it and the story unfolds with each version. When they are done they ask for more stories like this one because it feels more real than most of the stories they are forced to read in school.

Nevertheless, some adults will be put off by this legend, thinking that students need protection from such stories. Certain aspects of it are disturbing. It is a sad and scary tale that is filled with tragedy. Not only is the main character not redeemed at the end, but she is doomed to suffer eternally—and she even drags others down with her. There are many chilling elements in it: abandonment, starvation, murder. But it can be these very dark elements that make it interesting because dark stories are developmentally appropriate for adolescents. Beyond elementary school, themes in literature naturally become more serious. And we do not need to protect students from serious and scary stories. Scary stories help students to practice facing their fears.

In the book *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman writes a satisfying variant of a G. K. Chesterton quote:

**"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."**

*La Llorona* is one of those tales that is more than true. It has crucial lessons for adolescents in a compelling and compact form that is rarely found. Students need to know about the dragons they will encounter, not merely to scare them, but to prepare them. In *La Llorona*, the dragons of choosing a spouse poorly, letting pride rule, and acting impulsively when one is upset are sadly not defeated. In this sense the legend is more of a tragedy than a horror story. It is a cautionary tale, a bad example where students can see the poor decisions at each step along the way. With insight and reflection they may be able to avoid some of these snares in their own lives. It may help them to beat their own dragons.

The supernatural element in the story can be another objection. A ghost suffers eternal punishment in this legend. But we should encourage skeptics to consider that the supernatural in literature is not always what it appears to be. The story does not ask us to believe in ghosts or an eternally punitive afterlife. The supernatural here is a metaphor. It is a literary device to get people to think and feel more deeply.

There are elements like this in other works of literature that have hearty approbation in most schools. *Harry Potter* is encouraged reading for students in elementary, middle and high school. And there many scary and supernatural elements in it like a wizard that wants to kill Harry, deadly spiders, werewolves, and even a dead girl that goes around the school crying all the time (Moaning Myrtle). Should English

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teachers be told they may not use or recommend *Harry Potter*? Or *The Lord of the Rings*? Or *The Chronicles of Narnia*? Or *Shakespeare*?

Neither the darkness of this story nor the supernatural elements are convincing arguments against using it with students that are in middle school or older. This is a classic tale from the culture of the Spanish-speaking world and one that students deserve to know. Shakespeare contains many gruesome and supernatural elements, particularly *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*. There are witches, spirits, ghosts, gods and fairies in those plays. There is also plenty of death, pain and suffering. There are suicides, agonizing decisions, and violence (think *Romeo and Juliette*). Should English teachers not teach Shakespeare because those elements in his plays?

*La Llorona* is not in every Spanish curriculum, but the simplified versions of it in this unit meets the standards for teaching world languages. It is also an aspect of Spanish speaking culture that deserves to be taught.

*La Llorona* is not just a language lesson and it is not mere entertainment. It can help teach students to cope with life. This authentic legend depicts cruelty and violence; it is not, as students have noted, a Disney story. Some students may be uncomfortable with the issues raised in it, but rather than ignoring those feelings, folktales like this can be used to help young people work through difficult issues in their own lives. That has always been a benefit of telling legends and fairy tales. Stories like this, where characters deal with familiar fears in an extreme setting, can help students come to terms with their own dilemmas.

One of the most noted child psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Bruno Bettelheim**, was an advocate of helping children to grapple with their fears through folk stories. His classic book on the subject is *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976). In it

*“When we allow children to wrestle with their fears through stories they become better prepared to deal with the real world.” –Bruno Bettelheim*

Bettelheim argues that when we allow children to wrestle with their fears in remote and symbolic ways through stories, they become better prepared to deal with issues in the real world. They will have a better idea of how to think and act because of the deep and even disturbing emotional impact of stories. Bettelheim claimed that folktales are an educational tool that can help children become adults.

### **OTHER NOTES ABOUT THIS UNIT**

- STEP-BY-STEP. Although the Embedded Reader book is a stand-alone text, this unit is most effectively taught as a lively, interactive series of lessons. Help students through the legend step by step. Walk them through it and show them how the drama, anticipation and horrific details unfold with each new version.
- THIS UNIT IS WRITTEN FOR TEACHERS. This document was made for teachers. It is a model to help teach the story with embedded reading, actions, drawing, student interaction and acting. Opportunity to reflect and learn is built in at every step all along the way in the lesson plan. There are metacognitive pieces for teachers to present to their students between the versions.



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- **DIALOGUE.** There is added dialogue between characters beginning in version D, which brings the story to life even more by adding more personalized language to it. Take advantage of the dialogue to recruit actors from among your students to act out some versions of the story.
- **REPETITION FOR ACQUISITION.** Some new words are repeated many times in the story and in the questions that follow. We want to be sure students acquire those new words. Notice the word **vuelve**, for example. It is probably a new word for students at this level, so it is worked into the versions and the questions many times.
- **ADDITIONS TO THE STORY.** Vocabulary and structures are added throughout all parts of the story in every succeeding version. Details are not merely tacked on to the end of each new version—they are intertwined and added sequentially and dramatically.
- **EASY ADDITIONS.** Not every addition to the story is a brand new word for students. Typical level I students will already know some of the words that are added to each version. Some additions are "easy" vocabulary (such as *grande* and *rápido*) that students will already know. This can be a relief and a confidence booster for students. It delights students to recognize that not every word is new. They feel affirmed and more confident that they actually do know some Spanish already.
- **UNANSWERABLE QUESTIONS.** Some questions that are asked in some versions of the story have no clear answers. Not every detail is revealed. Some details emerge in later versions, and some are never revealed. Teach your students to say **No sabemos** (We don't know) when one of these questions without an answer is asked. This is another bit of metacognition—helping students to realize what they DO NOT know and CANNOT know from the text.
- **SKIP AROUND.** There is no need to complete every single version of the legend or to do every single activity. Each version of the story is complete, so teachers can end the series of lessons at any point along the way to match their time constraints and the level of their students. If your students know all or most of the vocabulary in a version of the story, skip up to a version with more vocabulary and more complexity.
- **USE IT NEXT YEAR.** If there is not enough time in your schedule or if your students are not ready for the story, put it off for a while. Save it for next year. Do what you can this year and come back to the next version next year.

## **VOCABULARY IN EACH EMBEDDED READING VERSION**

**Highlighting** indicates compound verbs (some of these may also be new)

### **CORE VOCABULARY**

<b>se llama</b> <i>is called</i>	<b>hay</b> <i>there is</i>	<b>vive</b> <i>lives</i>	<b>es</b> <i>is</i>
<b>está contenta</b> <i>is happy</i>	<b>va</b> <i>goes</i>	<b>tiene</b> <i>has</i>	<b>mira</b> <i>looks at</i>
<b>en</b> <i>in</i>	<b>de</b> <i>from, of</i>	<b>con</b> <i>with</i>	

### **VERSIÓN A**

<b>hay</b> <i>there is</i>	<b>hijos</b> <i>children</i>	<b>el río</b> <i>the river</i>
<b>una mujer</b> <i>a woman</i>	<b>va a</b> <i>goes to</i>	<b>empuja</b> <i>pushes</i>

### **VERSIÓN B**

<b>bonita</b> <i>pretty</i>	<b>grita</b> <i>yells</i>	<b>se muere</b> <i>dies</i>
<b>familia</b> <i>family</i>	<b>llora</b> <i>cries</i>	

### **VERSIÓN C**

<b>esposo</b> <i>husband</i>	<b>ahora</b> <i>now</i>	<b>otra vez</b> <i>again</i>
<b>guapo</b> <i>handsome</i>	<b>está triste</b> <i>is sad</i>	
<b>se va</b> <i>leaves, goes away</i>	<b>es pobre</b> <i>is poor</i>	

### **VERSIÓN D**

<b>adorables</b> <i>adorable</i>	<b>quieren comer</b> <i>they want to eat</i>	<b>busca</b> <i>looks for</i>
<b>están contentos</b> <i>they are happy</i>	<b>quieren ver</b> <i>they want to see</i>	
<b>vuelve</b> <i>returns</i>	<b>¿Dónde está?</b> <i>where is?</i>	

### **VERSIÓN E**

<b>está loca</b> <i>is crazy</i>	<b>la noche</b> <i>the night</i>	<b>por fin</b> <i>finally</i>
<b>tengo hambre</b> <i>I am hungry</i>	<b>también</b> <i>also</i>	
<b>salta</b> <i>jumps</i>	<b>La Llorona</b> <i>The Weeping Woman</i>	

### **VERSIÓN F**

<b>dicen</b> <i>they say</i>	<b>la leyenda</b> <i>the legend</i>	<b>la verdad</b> <i>the truth, true</i>
<b>pequeña</b> <i>small</i>	<b>todos</b> <i>everyone</i>	<b>siempre</b> <i>always</i>
<b>en poco tiempo</b> <i>in a short time</i>	<b>pueden ver</b> <i>they can see</i>	<b>realmente no sabemos</b> <i>we really don't know</i>

### **VERSIÓN G**

<b>piensa (en)</b> <i>thinks (of)</i>	<b>niños</b> <i>children</i>	<b>rápido</b> <i>fast</i>
<b>dinero</b> <i>money</i>	<b>grande</b> <i>big</i>	<b>un poco</b> <i>a little bit</i>
<b>comida</b> <i>food</i>	<b>yo sé</b> <i>I know</i>	<b>están muertos</b> <i>they are dead</i>
<b>no le gusta ver</b> <i>doesn't like to see</i>	<b>siguen gritando</b> <i>they keep yelling</i>	
<b>sigue gritando</b> <i>keeps yelling</i>		

### **VERSIÓN H (versión completa)**

<b>pasó</b> <i>it happened</i>	<b>al lado de</b> <i>beside</i>	<b>sigue buscando</b> <i>keeps looking for</i>	<b>agarra</b> <i>grabs</i>
<b>otra</b> <i>another</i>	<b>el agua</b> <i>the water</i>	<b>sigue llorando</b> <i>keeps on crying</i>	<b>lleva</b> <i>takes away</i>
<b>va a volver</b> <i>is going to return</i>	<b>pueden oír</b> <i>they can hear</i>	<b>tan</b> <i>so</i>	<b>para siempre</b> <i>forever</i>
<b>¡Qué triste!</b> <i>How sad!</i>			

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Nombre \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Clase \_\_\_\_\_

**LA LLORONA VOCABULARY PRE-TEST / CHECK UP / TEST**

*(The 100 words used in the final and complete version of the legend)*

**Vocabulario básico**

1. en \_\_\_\_\_

2. de \_\_\_\_\_

3. y \_\_\_\_\_

4. con \_\_\_\_\_

5. que \_\_\_\_\_

6. más \_\_\_\_\_

7. muy \_\_\_\_\_

8. mucho \_\_\_\_\_

9. pero \_\_\_\_\_

10. yo \_\_\_\_\_

11. ella \_\_\_\_\_

12. él \_\_\_\_\_

13. un día \_\_\_\_\_

14. mamá \_\_\_\_\_

15. madre \_\_\_\_\_

16. papá \_\_\_\_\_

17. padre \_\_\_\_\_

18. bueno \_\_\_\_\_

19. malo \_\_\_\_\_

20. hay \_\_\_\_\_

21. va a \_\_\_\_\_

22. tiene \_\_\_\_\_

23. mira \_\_\_\_\_

24. ve \_\_\_\_\_

25. se llama \_\_\_\_\_

26. le gusta \_\_\_\_\_

27. ¿Qué? \_\_\_\_\_

28. ¿Quién? \_\_\_\_\_

29. ¿Dónde? \_\_\_\_\_

30. ¿Adónde? \_\_\_\_\_

31. ¿Cuál? \_\_\_\_\_

32. ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

33. ¿Cuántos? \_\_\_\_\_

34. ¿Cuánto? \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión A**

35. una mujer \_\_\_\_\_

36. la mujer \_\_\_\_\_

37. sus hijos \_\_\_\_\_

38. un río \_\_\_\_\_

39. el río \_\_\_\_\_

40. empuja \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión B**

41. bonita \_\_\_\_\_

42. familia \_\_\_\_\_

43. grita \_\_\_\_\_

44. gritan \_\_\_\_\_

45. llora \_\_\_\_\_

46. lloran \_\_\_\_\_

47. se muere \_\_\_\_\_

48. se mueren \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión C**

49. esposo \_\_\_\_\_

50. guapo \_\_\_\_\_

51. se va \_\_\_\_\_

52. ahora \_\_\_\_\_

53. está triste \_\_\_\_\_

54. es pobre \_\_\_\_\_

55. otra vez \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión D**

56. adorable \_\_\_\_\_

57. están contentos \_\_\_\_\_

58. vuelve \_\_\_\_\_

59. quieren comer \_\_\_\_\_

60. quiero comer \_\_\_\_\_

61. quieren ver \_\_\_\_\_

62. quiero ver \_\_\_\_\_

63. ¿Dónde está? \_\_\_\_\_

64. busca \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión E**

65. está loca \_\_\_\_\_

66. salta \_\_\_\_\_

67. la noche \_\_\_\_\_

68. también \_\_\_\_\_

69. mis hijos \_\_\_\_\_

70. La Llorona \_\_\_\_\_

71. por fin \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión F**

72. dicen \_\_\_\_\_

73. la leyenda \_\_\_\_\_

74. la verdad \_\_\_\_\_

75. en poco tiempo \_\_\_\_\_

76. pueden ver \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión G**

77. piensa \_\_\_\_\_

78. dinero \_\_\_\_\_

79. comida \_\_\_\_\_

80. niños \_\_\_\_\_

81. no le gusta ver \_\_\_\_\_

82. siempre \_\_\_\_\_

83. yo sé \_\_\_\_\_

84. siguen gritando \_\_\_\_\_

85. un poco \_\_\_\_\_

86. están muertos \_\_\_\_\_

**Versión H—Version completa**

87. realmente pasó \_\_\_\_\_

88. otra \_\_\_\_\_

89. va a volver \_\_\_\_\_

90. ¡Qué triste! \_\_\_\_\_

91. al lado de \_\_\_\_\_

92. el agua \_\_\_\_\_

93. sigue buscando \_\_\_\_\_

94. tan \_\_\_\_\_

95. pueden oír \_\_\_\_\_

96. sigue gritando \_\_\_\_\_

97. sigue llorando \_\_\_\_\_

98. agarra \_\_\_\_\_

99. lleva \_\_\_\_\_

100. para siempre \_\_\_\_\_

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