
Reading Differences

Teaching sequence for *La Mariposa*

written by Francisco Jiménez, illustrated by Simón Silva
Houghton Mifflin, 1998

About the book

This book conveys a picture of the life of the son of migrant workers in California. It communicates a great deal about the business of entering another culture. The metaphor of the butterfly's development helps to structure the book and mirrors the emergence of Francisco, the central character.

The book raises questions of how new arrivals learn language and how they find a foothold in a new classroom. It touches on moral and cultural questions, such as the way cultures receive newcomers and the difficulty of knowing how to behave in a new context.

Structure of the teaching sequence

The teaching sequence focuses on the way Francisco's story is told in parallel with the life cycle of the butterfly and involves whole-class, group and paired reading, drama and observational drawing. The suggested sequence of seven sessions can be adapted according to the interest of the class, but the aim should be to ensure an in-depth engagement with the themes and style of the book.

Links to the national curriculum and the primary national strategy (PNS)

The work relates to the requirement in the English national curriculum programme of study for reading: *a range of literature drawn from a variety of cultures and traditions; myths, legends and traditional stories* (8e and 8f).

It also connects with specific teaching objectives in the *PNS Framework for Teaching* for years 3 and 4 to do with reading and responding to texts from different cultures.

Anticipated outcomes

Through reading and discussing the book, and related work in drama, children will:

- explore the theme of migration and the way people become part of a host culture
- actively engage with social and moral issues such as how new arrivals learn a language and how schools can welcome them
- appreciate how an extended metaphor, like the butterfly's development, can help them understand what is happening in a story
- learn about how the text and pictures relate to one another and the complementary styles of author and illustrator.

Resources and preparation

- Enlarged photocopies of some key illustrations from the book for paired and group work: Francisco looking out in tent (page 4), Francisco drawing butterfly (page 22).
- A map of the western states of America.
- Materials to construct a large chart showing the life cycle of a butterfly.
- General knowledge about migration and reasons for moving to different countries, linked to work in history.
- Understanding about an insect's life cycle, perhaps from close observational drawing prior to or during the reading, linked to work in art and design.
- Information about California and Mexico to enhance the sense of place conveyed by the story.

Teaching sequence

Session 1: The butterfly's story

Read the whole text aloud to the class and allow some time for discussion. Why is the story called *La Mariposa* and why is the butterfly important to Francisco?

In some ways this book can be seen as the butterfly's story. Discuss how the book follows the different stages of development of the butterfly: the caterpillar, the cocoon, the butterfly's emergence and its flying away. Make a large chart with the children to show the life cycle of the butterfly and discuss how important the butterfly and its development is to Francisco. Keep the chart on display.

At what point in the year does the story begin and when does it end? This is signalled clearly in the story. Discuss the evidence with the class.

Session 2: Learning a new language and culture

How hard would it be to go into a new class where you did not know the language at all? Read the passage 'Miss Scalapino started speaking to the class and Francisco did not understand a word she said...when he went to bed, he heard her voice in his head.'

To give the class the experience of being immersed in a new language, ask a speaker of a language other than English to teach the class for 10 minutes. The 'lesson' could consist of reading or telling a short story to the class in the new language, and then asking questions about it. Alternatively, the children could participate in a drama in another language. There is one strict rule: 'No English!'

After this experience, discuss with the class how it feels to be taught in a different language and whether they could understand anything. Discuss children's own experiences, if appropriate, of being educated in a new language. Discuss what strategies Francisco could use to learn English. Was it a good idea to stop him speaking Spanish? Why did Miss Scalapino do that?

Session 3: Exploring characters through drama

Francisco often stays in the classroom during recess. In paired talk, ask children to discuss why he does this and why they think this is. What is difficult for him about being in the playground?

Ask the children to make a freeze-frame or tableau of a playground scene where children are playing and having fun and Francisco is on the edge of things. Ask them to bring the scene to life as Francisco walks through the playground between the children. They should freeze again at a signal from you. Ask the class to say what kinds of things the children might have said and thought about Francisco, and what Francisco might have thought as he walked through the playground.

Discuss as a whole class how the school could have welcomed Francisco more and included him in the class. Could his teacher have made a difference to this?

Explain that you are going to take the role of Miss Scalapino. Suggest that the children question you about what the school did for Francisco as a shy new boy with no English.

Out of role, use shared writing to make a list of ways in which the school could have welcomed Francisco, made him feel more at home and helped him to learn English.

Session 4: Francisco's parents' story

Francisco's parents are migrant workers from Mexico, working in California. Look at a map of the western United States and Mexico with the children and trace the journey that Francisco's family might have made to get to their quarters in Tent City. Ask the class why they think people migrate like this, even if it means living in difficult circumstances and learning a new language. Does anyone in the class have direct experience of moving like this, or indirectly from their parents or grandparents?

Ask the children in groups of four to take roles as Francisco, Roberto, their mother and their father. They should prepare two scenes:

- before they leave Mexico, in which the mother and father explain why they are going to the USA and how the boys should behave there
- when they are in the USA, discussing some of the problems of life there together.

Ask two or three groups to perform their scenes for the class.

Session 5: Author and illustrator

Read the book to the class again. Ask the children to think about the style of the author and the style of the illustrator as they listen to the story and look at the pictures. Show the pictures to the whole class. Discuss which are the best pictures and ask the children how they would describe them. Make comparisons and contrasts with any well-known illustrators the children are familiar with, for example Quentin Blake, Michael Foreman or Caroline Binch. What is distinctive about Simón Silva's style?

Ask the children to discuss the way that Francisco Jiménez has written the book. What is special about his writing? How does he convey atmosphere and feelings? Are there any phrases or sentences in the story that the children particularly remember?

Finally, look with the class at an enlarged version of the page at the back of the book that gives details of the author and illustrator. How does knowing these details of the lives of the author and illustrator make a difference to the way they feel about the story? Read to the children the dedications that the author and illustrator have written at the very beginning of the book. Discuss with the children why the author and illustrator both dedicated the book to their teachers, and why Francisco Jiménez called the main character Francisco.

Session 6: Francisco's story

Discuss what kind of a boy Francisco is. Compare him with other boys – how is he alike or different?

Give groups of two or three children a photocopy of the picture of Francisco looking at the caterpillar in the jar when he first goes into Miss Scalapino's classroom. The picture should be photocopied onto A3 paper so as to leave plenty of space for writing around the picture. Ask the children to make notes about Francisco under some of the following headings:

- what Francisco notices in the world around him
- what Francisco is interested in
- who Francisco talks to and gets on with
- what Francisco imagines and daydreams about
- how Francisco reacts to real-life situations – the fight, being given the prize, the butterfly coming out of the cocoon
- what Francisco says, in English and in Spanish, and how he begins to learn English.

Hold a discussion based on their annotations. How does the picture of Francisco reflect some of the things they have noticed?

Session 7: Francisco and the butterfly

Go back to the chart that shows the butterfly's life cycle and ask the children why the butterfly is so important in the story. Why does Francisco spend so much time watching the butterfly? What is it about butterflies that fascinates him? Look back at the passage that describes Francisco trying to read the butterfly book.

Look at the part of the book where Francisco notices the caterpillar has spun itself into a cocoon. 'Gently, Francisco stroked it with his index finger. It seemed so peaceful.' How was Francisco feeling before this, and does this change affect the way he feels? Record children's responses.

Now read again the part of the book where Francisco sees the cocoon crack open, and where the class goes out into the playground to release the butterfly. Discuss with the children what the butterfly means to Francisco and the bond he feels with it. Look at the front and back covers and discuss the links between them. Who is 'La Mariposa'? Record children's responses.

What are the key events in Francisco's development, for example drawing the butterfly picture, the fight, winning the prize, giving the butterfly picture to Curtis? Consult the children about how to represent, on the chart of the butterfly's life cycle, the stages in Francisco's life in California, and how he changes and emerges in the time covered by the book.