



## Teacher Guide for *Tomás and the Library Lady*

Dear teachers:

Here are some ideas to serve as a guide for incorporating *Tomás and the Library Lady* into your classroom. At the end of this guide are handouts in English and Spanish for a fun family literacy activity, The Word Walk. To see how this guide was used in a classroom, read Rashmi Kumar's teacher commentary at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/commentary.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/commentary.html).



Developed by Martha Kateri Ferede, Ed.M., 2006,  
for the Family Involvement Storybook Corner  
on the Harvard Family Research Project website

Access it online at:  
[www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/teacher\\_guide2.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/teacher_guide2.html)

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Harvard Family Research Project

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Martha Kateri Ferede developed this guide for teachers to use **Tomás and the Library Lady** in their elementary school classrooms. The guide is intended to help teachers build students' literacy through school, home, and community connections, especially during the summer and particularly with Latino families. The guide consists of a lesson plan for use in the classroom and activities to promote summer learning—including a family literacy handout, **The Word Walk**, in both English and in Spanish.

Having immigrated to Canada from Ethiopia as a child, Martha experienced firsthand the ways that families make sense of new educational opportunities for their children. She has taught elementary school in one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Toronto and has worked with immigrant families searching for ways to support their children's classroom learning.

Resource teacher Rashmi Kumar and her team piloted this guide in their third-grade classroom, adapting it to their particular classroom community.

## Introduction

This guide is designed to help teachers build students' literacy through school, home and community connections and show families how cultural experiences and community resources can serve as powerful education tools. The guide will also help you to promote your students' summer learning—in particular, literacy learning—to prevent the “summer slide” in literacy that many children experience over the summer months.

This guide focuses especially on Latino families. It provides you as a teacher with ways to reach out to and engage Latino families—including activities and a handout that invite Latino families to use their language, culture, and skills to support their children's learning. At the center of the guide is a true story from the childhood of Tomás Rivera, a migrant worker who grew up to become a chancellor at the University of California. As a child, Tomás acquired his love for storytelling from his grandfather and his love of reading from a librarian. His story, as recounted in Pat Mora's **Tomás and the Library Lady**, is an inspirational tale for students and their families.

The lesson plan below contains discussion questions you can use before and while reading **Tomás and the Library Lady** in your elementary school classroom. The lesson plan also suggests several “integrated learning ideas” that you can use to build other student skills in addition to literacy. You can use this lesson plan at any time during the school year, but the additional activities at the end of this guide—including a family literacy handout in English and Spanish—will help you in particular to encourage summer learning.

## Topic

**Building connections among school, home, and community: Promoting students' literacy with Pat Mora's *Tomás and the Library Lady*. Includes a special focus on summer literacy learning and Latino families.**

**Suggested age group: Grade 3** (Note: The family literacy handout is also suitable for younger children)

Book Information: Mora, P. (1997). *Tomás and the library lady*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers. Hardcover. Also available in paperback from Dragonfly Books, with editions in both English and Spanish (*Tomás y la señora de la biblioteca*).

Plot Summary: Tomás, a Mexican American child of migrant farm workers, travels seasonally between Texas and Iowa with his parents, younger brother, and grandfather. In Iowa, the grandfather, who tells Tomás stories in Spanish, encourages his grandson to visit the local library to find new stories. There, a kind librarian introduces Tomás to the joys of reading by selecting books for him and listening to him read aloud. Tomás spends many summer days reading at the library. Every evening at home, he delights his family by reading library books to them in English. Before Tomás leaves at the end of the summer, the librarian greets his grandfather in Spanish, which Tomás has taught her, and presents Tomás with a book of his own. Tomás's story was inspired by the real-life experience of education leader Tomás Rivera, a son of migrant workers who grew up to become chancellor of the University of California, Riverside.

Family Involvement Summary: This book tells the story of a migrant worker family that provides stable and loving support for their child's learning, despite mobility and frequent economic hardship. Tracing the development of Tomás as a reader, the story portrays the power of oral storytelling as a form of family literacy and celebrates the joys of intergenerational learning and bilingual literacy. The story shows the importance of the library as a community support for children's learning. The story also shows how a family can initiate and support a child's connection to sources of learning in the community, such as the library, and affirms the child's ability to connect his or her family to the community.

## Lesson Plan

### *Lesson Plan Objectives*

- » Support students' continued literacy progress over the summer months
- » Engage all families, but particularly Latino families, in thinking about their role in their children's academic learning during out-of-school time, especially during the summer
- » Develop a notion of continued literacy among students and families
- » Promote storytelling as an important form of literacy

### *Before Reading Tomás and the Library Lady With Your Class*

You can begin by brainstorming with your students, using the following prompts:

- » What are the different ideas and/or words that you associate with a library?
- » From whom do you seek help in the library?
- » If you have been to a library, what are your favorite parts of the library?

In your students' reading-response journals, have them write the title, *Tomás and the Library Lady*. Ask them to look at the cover picture and write responses to these questions:

- » What do you think this story will be about?
- » What do you notice about the name "Tomás?"
- » Do you visit the library? When? Where? At school or another library?

»What are your favorite types of books to read?

### **Integrated Learning Idea: Language and Literacy**

Put up a chart paper to list Spanish words with English translation for words you encounter in the text—starting with the name “Tomás.” Add to this list as you read the storybook together. You can also engage students in a discussion about the different languages they have heard at dinner tables and family reunions.

### ***Tips for Reading***

For discussion purposes, you can divide the storybook (in either its English or Spanish translation) into subunits of halves or thirds, depending on the amount of available time and classroom literacy level. Dividing into subunits will allow time for reflection and for revisiting ideas.

### **Discussion Questions for the First Third of the Book**

- » What time of the year is it? What descriptions help you figure this out?
- » What is very special about Papá Grande?
- » Why does Papá Grande suggest Tomás go to the library?

### **Integrated Learning Idea: Math and Geography**

Post a map of the United States. As you begin reading the book, have students place a pushpin or sticker where Tomás and his family start driving and another at their destination. Connect the two with string. Ask your students:

- How long do you think it took them to drive this distance?
- About how many miles do you think they traveled?
- What part of their car tells them how far they have traveled?

### **Discussion Questions for the Second Third of the Book**

- » In this section of the story, Tomás goes to the library for the first time, and the library is described like this: “Its tall windows were like eyes glaring at him.” What do these words tell you about how Tomás felt about going to the library?
- » Who did Tomás meet at the library, and what did this person do to help Tomás? Ask the class to share any personal stories they have about different librarians they have met and how the librarians helped them.
- » The book states that, when Tomás began to read, “He forgot about Iowa and Texas.” Why does it say he “forgot?” (Did he *really* forget?)

### **Integrated Learning Idea: Language and Literacy**

Explain what a simile is if your students are ready to tackle such language nuances. Have students use similes to describe how they feel before taking a test at school or when starting their summer vacation.

### **Discussion Questions for the Last Third of the Book**

- » How did Tomás read to his grandfather? Why do you think that he read like that?
- » How did Tomás and the library lady feel about Tomás leaving?
- » Tomás had a very special role in his family by the end of the story. What was it, and why was it so important?

### **Integrated Learning Idea: Language and Literacy**

Write down a list of the various languages that students speak in the class or grade level. Discuss the value and importance of bilingualism.

## **Activities About Summer Learning**

### ***The Importance of Summer Learning***

The activities that follow can help students and their families appreciate that learning doesn't just happen while in school but can occur over the summer within families and communities. These activities help demonstrate that summer learning occurs not just in formal, organized programs, but also in informal settings—for example, during a walk around the neighborhood. Students can come to see the wide range of things that they can learn about over the summer and the many people who can be their teachers during this time. Finally, students can recognize how what they learn during the summer connects to what they learn in school.

### ***How to Use These Activities***

As the school year draws to a close, you can use the reflection activities below to help your students and their families think about the importance of summer learning. Depending on the amount of classroom time you have, you can pick and choose from this collection of activities. Or, you might move directly to sharing the family literacy activity, a tool for families to use over the summer to promote students' literacy.

### **Reflection activities**

#### ***In-class activities***

- » Lead the class in a discussion about what they remember learning last summer—a new skill, some new information—that was important to them. If they are having trouble remembering, you can give some examples, such as learning to cook a special dish, play a new game, or how to swim. Ask students to also consider where and with whom they learned these things. Perhaps they learned from a relative, a neighbor, at a community center, or at a parent's

workplace. Then have students draw a picture or write about themselves doing this activity, indicating whom they were with, and where it happened.

» Have students work together to list some of the new information or skills they have learned in school over the past academic year. Solicit class ideas for where students might go in their neighborhoods or in the larger community this summer to learn more about these same subjects or to practice these skills. Discuss how reinforcing school learning over the summer can help prepare students for school next year.

### *Family connection activities*

These two following activities use storytelling, an important form of literacy.

» Have students ask a family member at home to tell about something new that the student learned last summer, where they learned it, and who helped them learn it. Students can come back to the classroom to share these stories from their family member either in pairs or with the whole class.

» Invite parents or extended family members to come to the classroom and share their own special stories about something they or a family member learned over the summer when they were children. If the family member does not speak English, find an interpreter to come to class or see if someone in the class feels comfortable interpreting.

### **The Word Walk: A Fun Family Literacy Activity for the Summer**

Just before the summer vacation, have students brainstorm with their families about places they can visit together in their neighborhoods over the coming summer. Introduce *The Word Walk* family literacy activity to students and their families.

» This activity is appropriate for students in third grade and younger. During this activity, parents or other adult family members and children can walk and learn in their neighborhood, and discover special places where literacy learning can occur. In addition to finding out those places where more formal learning can occur, such as a community center, families can also importantly discover those places where informal learning can occur, such as in a store reading labels. *The Word Walk* makes use of typical community settings as well as familial and cultural practices to reinforce literacy skills from the academic school year and help prevent the summer literacy slide.

For children Grade 3 (and younger)

**The Word Walk:  
A Fun Family Literacy Activity to  
Help Your Child Become a Better Reader**

Dear parents and other adult family members:

Words are all around! They are not just in books. In fact, your neighborhood is filled with words! Words to read, to say, and to sing. Take a special Word Walk with your child around your neighborhood. The Word Walk is one way you can help your child become a better reader.

In addition to reading books with your child, there are many other ways to help your child become a stronger reader. For example, children also learn to read by singing songs and by listening to and telling stories.

You can do the Word Walk around your neighborhood any time it is safe. Bring along as many family members as you like! Summer is an especially important time to explore words with your child. By exploring words together in the summer, you can help your child remember the important reading skills he or she learned in school.

During your family Word Walk, you can use all the languages that you speak at home. Also, if you have younger children who are not reading words yet, you can point out specific letters when you look at words together. You can ask your younger children to tell you the “sounds” of the letters.

Remember to bring a pencil and this paper on your Word Walk. And have fun!

## **OUT ON THE WALK**

**Checklist: Remember, you may not find all these places, but you may even find new ones!**

- Library** – Your family can borrow books for free at the public library. All you need is a library card. Ask the librarian how to get one. Many libraries have special free reading activities just for children over the summer, like story hours or summer reading clubs. Ask the librarian about these, too. Find the special section of the library that is the children’s area. Find a book to read or look at with your child right now. On the line below, write down the name of the book:
- 

- Stores** – Ask your child: *What is the name of the store? Look at the signs and labels. Can you name some of the items for sale?*

- Restaurant/coffee shop** – Ask your child: *What flavors of ice cream do they have? See if they have takeout menus to read at home.*

**Community center** – Many community centers have special reading activities and events for children over the summer. See if you can pick up a schedule to read at home. Maybe you can sign up your child right now for a summer time reading activity.

**Playground** – Ask your child: *Can you name the different things you see on the playground? What do you use to climb?*

**A garden** – Ask your child: *What are the names of some of the plants and trees?*

**Bookstore** – Some bookstores that sell children’s books also let families read books with their children when they are in the store. Ask your child: *Is there a special book you like a lot?* Maybe your family can also find this book at the library. Write down the name of the book on the line below:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Street signs and traffic signs** – Ask your child: *What do they say? What shapes are they?*

**Did you find other places with words? List the words here.**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## ON THE WAY HOME

**Storytelling** – You can make up a true story about what you saw and learned on your walk, and ask your child to repeat it; you can ask your child to make up a pretend or silly story about your walk; or you can share a special family story on the way home. You may have other ideas for storytelling, too.

**Singing** – You and your child can make up a song about all the places you saw on your walk or a song that uses some of the words you found on your walk. You may also have a song your family likes to sing, in English or Spanish or your special household language, and you can sing this song on your way home.

## AFTER THE WALK

With your child, you can draw a map of all the places you went to in your neighborhood. Or you and your child can make a list of your child’s favorite words from the walk. If you collected things to read, like books, menus, or schedules, you or other family members can read them with your child now or later.

Developed by Martha Kateri Ferede and Ellen Mayer, 2006  
Harvard Family Research Project ([www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org))

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Para niños Grado 3 (y más joven)

**La vuelta de palabras:  
Una actividad familiar divertida de alfabetización para  
ayudar a que su niño se haga mejor lector**

Queridos padres y otros miembros de la familia:

Las palabras están por todas partes, no solamente en los libros. De hecho, su vecindario esta lleno de palabras! Palabras para leer, hablar, y cantar. Den una Vuelta de Palabras especial con su(s) niño(s) por su barrio. La Vuelta de Palabras es una manera que puede ayudar a su niño ser mejores lector.

Además de leer libros con ellos, hay muchas otras maneras de ayudarlos a mejorar sus capacidades de lectura. Por ejemplo, los niños también aprenden a leer con canciones o escuchando y contando historias.

Pueden hacer la Vuelta de Palabras en cualquier momento que sea seguro alrededor de su vecindario. ¡Traigan todos los miembros de la familia que usted quiera! El verano es un periodo particularmente importante en la exploración de las palabras con sus niños – eso va a ayudarlos a recordar importantes habilidades de lectura que han aprendido durante el año escolar.

En su Vuelta de Palabras familiar, utilicen todos los idiomas que hablan en su casa. Además, si tienen niños más jóvenes que todavía no saben leer palabras, pueden indicarle las letras específicas cuando encuentren algunas palabras juntos. Pueden preguntarles a sus niños pequeños que le pronuncien el “sonido” de las letras.

Acuérdense de traer con usted un lápiz y éste papel en su Vuelta de Palabras. ¡Y diviértanse!

## DE PASEO

**Lista de Control: Acuérdense, si no encuentran a esos lugares, ¡pueden descubrir a otros!**

- Biblioteca** – Su familia puede prestar libros gratuitamente en la biblioteca pública. Necesitan solo un carné de biblioteca. Pregunten al bibliotecario como obtener ese carné. Muchas bibliotecas tienen actividades especiales gratuitas para niños durante el verano, como horas de cuentos o clubes de lectura. Pregunten al bibliotecario sobre esos también. Busquen a la parte de la biblioteca que es para niños. Encuentren a un libro para leer o mirar con su niño en ese momento. En la línea aquí abajo, escriben el título del libro:
- 

- Tiendas** – Pregunten a su niño: “¿Cómo se llama esa tienda? Mira a las etiquetas y a las señas. ¿Sabes identificar algunos de los artículos en venta?”

- Restaurantes/ cafés** – Pregunten a su niño: ¿Qué gustos de helado tienen? Miren si hay menús para llevar que puedan ser leídos en su casa.

- Centro Comunitario** – Muchos centros comunitarios tienen actividades de lectura especiales para niños en el verano. Ven si encuentran a un programa de esas actividades. Quizás pueden alistar sus niños ahora para una actividad de lectura durante el verano.
- Patio de recreo** – Pregunten a su niño: “¿Sabes nombrar las cosas diferentes que ves en el patio de recreo?”
- Un jardín** – Pregunten a su niño: “¿Cómo se llaman esas plantas y alberos?”
- Librería** – Algunas librerías que venden libros para niños también dejan leer libros a las familias con sus niños cuando están en la tienda. Pregunten a su niño: “¿Hay un libro especial que te gusta mucho?” Quizás su familia puede encontrar ese libro en la biblioteca también. Escriben el título del libro en la línea aquí abajo:

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- Señales de la calle y de tráfico** – Pregunten a su niño: “¿Qué dicen? Que forma tienen?”
- Han encontrado a otros lugares con palabras? Hagan una lista de las palabras aquí.**

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## EN EL CAMINO HACIA SU CASA

**Cuentear historias** – Pueden cuentearle a su niño una historia sobre lo que han visto y aprendido en el camino, y preguntarle que la repita. Pueden preguntarle inventarse una historia o fingir algo sobre su paseo, o pueden cuentearle una historia de familia especial en el camino hasta su casa. Quizás tienen otras ideas divertidas para cuentear historias.

**Cantar** – Usted y su niño pueden inventarse una canción sobre los lugares que han visitado en su paseo o una canción que contenga algunas de las palabras que han encontrado en el paseo. Quizás tienen también una canción que a su familia le gusta cantar, que sea en inglés, en español, o en cualquier otro idioma, y que pueden cantar mientras están de camino hacia su casa.

## DESPUES DEL PASEO

Con su niño, pueden dibujar un mapa de todos los lugares que han visitado en su barrio, o pueden hacer una lista de las palabras favoritas de su niño, entre las que han encontrado paseando. Si han recogido cosas para leer, como libros, menús o programas, usted y otros miembros de la familia pueden leerlos con su niño, ahora o mas tarde.

Desarrollado por Martha Kateri Ferede y Ellen Mayer, 2006  
Traducido por Bianca Maria Stifani

Harvard Family Research Project ([www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org))

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