



ÉRASE UNA VEZ

A Spanish Comprehension-Based
Readers Program™

Bring Spanish to Life Through the Power of Storytelling

Webinar presented by
Kristy Placido and Carrie Toth



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Mission and Vision of Érase una vez

Érase una vez: A Spanish Comprehension-Based Readers Program™ is a four-level, acquisition-driven program that provides learners with opportunities to interact and engage with compelling stories and exciting cultural content. By learning in an intercultural context, students acquire communication skills and content knowledge while exploring the products, practices, and perspectives of Spanish-speaking cultures.

Level 1: Four reader units

Levels 2-4: Five reader units each

Érase una vez: A Spanish Comprehension-Based Readers Program™ Mission

Our mission is to foster language acquisition through compelling, comprehension-based readers and story-driven instruction. By delivering **rich, contextualized input**, we empower learners to develop **communication skills** naturally and confidently. Rooted in **intercultural content**, our program nurtures curiosity, understanding, and **meaningful engagement** with the Spanish-speaking world.

Érase una vez: A Spanish Comprehension-Based Readers Program™ Vision

We envision language classrooms where communication is **acquired through stories**, not drills—where students learn by understanding, not memorizing. **Érase una vez** promotes a **shift toward acquisition-driven instruction**, enabling students to connect across cultures and perspectives through comprehensible input and authentic narratives that reflect the diversity of the Spanish-speaking world.



Welcome to *Érase una vez*: A Spanish Comprehension-Based Readers Program™

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to *Érase una vez: A Spanish Comprehension-Based Readers Program™*!

This program was created by Spanish teachers and language acquisition specialists who believe that learners thrive when language instruction is rooted in compelling stories, rich input, and intercultural connections.

Érase una vez is built on the understanding that language is acquired—not memorized—through exposure to meaningful, understandable messages. Each unit centers around a carefully chosen comprehension-based reader, providing students with a natural path to acquisition through engaging narratives and scaffolded support. Throughout the program, learners interact with high-frequency structures, explore cultural perspectives, and develop confidence as communicators in Spanish.

The program’s design aligns with acquisition-driven instruction and the principles of Comprehensible Input. Students aren’t just learning about language—they are using it in context, with increasing independence and curiosity. Each unit invites learners to make cultural comparisons, reflect on diverse perspectives, and discover appropriate ways to interact across cultures.







With *Érase una vez*, you’ll find the support, structure, and flexibility to meet students where they are, and move them forward on their journey toward intercultural competence and communicative proficiency.

We’re thrilled to share this program with you and your students.

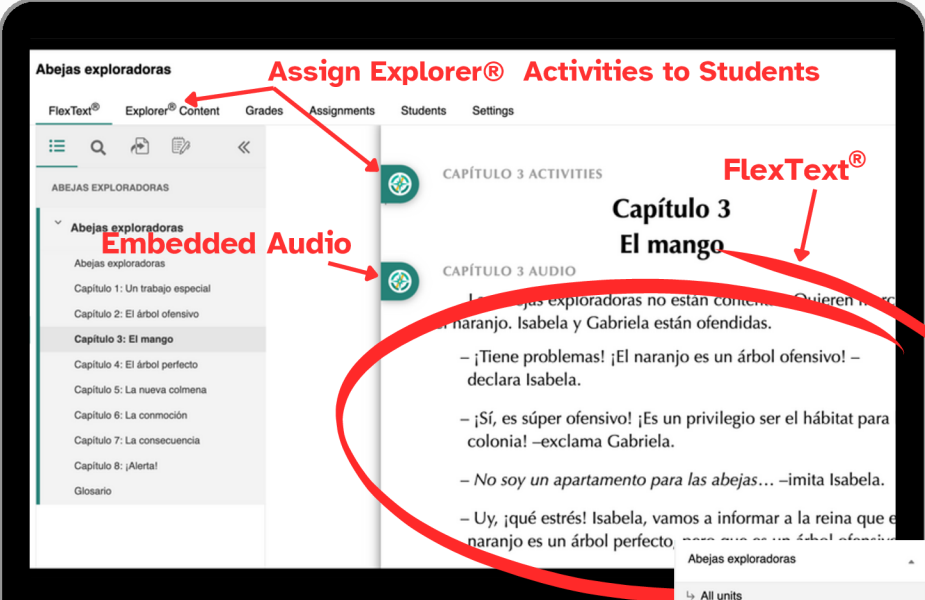
Warm regards,

The authors of *Érase una vez*

Kristy Placido Carrie Toth Nelly Andrade-Hughes
Katie A. Baker A. C. Quintero

Feature	Definition	Teacher Pack	Student Pack
 FlexText® Readers	Digital readers for the selected level	✓	✓
 Audiobook	Audio version embedded in each FlexText®	✓	✓
 Explorer Activities	Interactive assignments, assignable by the teacher	✓	✓ (if assigned)
 Teacher's Guide	Slideshows, warm-ups, printables, assessments, and answer keys	✓	✗
 Program Guide	Each level comes with a guide that teaches you how to confidently use the program	✓	✗
 nuq'ang	Interpretive and interpersonal content for each reader plus access to a content library of 100+ courses on a variety of topics	✓	✓ (if assigned)

Optional components: Softcover copies of each reader in this program are also available for purchase.



Assign Explorer® Activities to Students

FlexText®

Embedded Audio

Capítulo 3 El mango

– ¡Tiene problemas! ¡El naranjo es un árbol ofensivo! – declara Isabela.

– ¡Sí, es súper ofensivo! ¡Es un privilegio ser el hábitat para colonia! – exclama Gabriela.

– No soy un apartamento para las abejas... – imita Isabela.

– Uy, ¡qué estrés! Isabela, vamos a informar a la reina que el naranjo es un árbol perfecto...

Downloadable Teacher's Guide Files

- Premium Teacher's Guide
 - TG Audio Files
 - 01-08 Abejas exploradoras En marcha Warm Ups Assign | Share
 - Prep 4 Success Unit
 - Capítulo 1 Teacher's Guide
 - Capítulo 2 Teacher's Guide
 - Capítulo 3 Teacher's Guide
 - Capítulo 4 Teacher's Guide

The reading cycle

Pre-reading:

PQA; Make predictions (Word cloud; Images from reader; etc); Map Talk; Preview of chapter events or culture; reinforce or intro new unknown vocabulary

During reading:

Read; Discuss in the moment; Vary mode of reading; comprehension checks

Post-reading:

Follow-up activities; Process the text a second time; Discussion; Games

Planning:

Assess/reassess vocabulary knowledge
How to prioritize vocabulary:
High-frequency?
Useful?

crunchy	school
cupboard	stapler
eggplant	there is
food	to browse
lawyer	to coach
man	to fly
money	to have
pretty	to want

Intervention

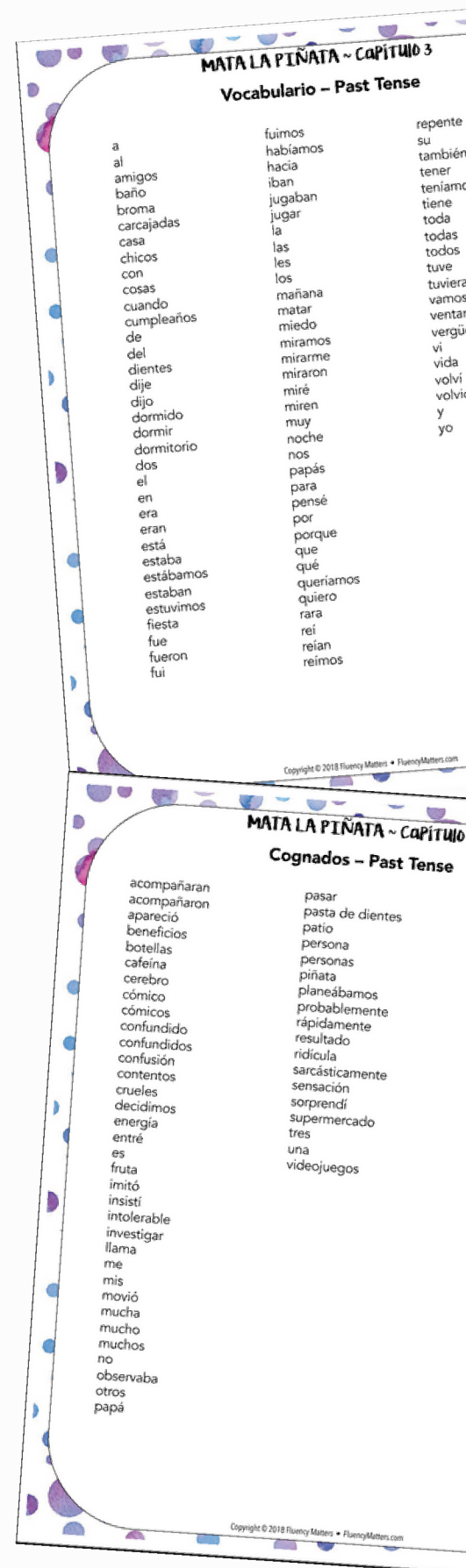
**Acquire through
repeated exposure**

Which of these words are the highest frequency for a novice student? Would that change for intermediate students?

Preparing to Teach a Reader

Before introducing the reader to students:

- Read the reader thoroughly. Jot down any cultural, grammatical, or other elements that might be highlighted with students during the unit.
- Look over the Prep 4 Success Unit and the Teacher's Guide to become familiar with the contents. (These are located in the Explorer® tab of Learning Site®).
- Look closely at the Teacher's Guide. Each chapter contains a list of vocabulary words contained in the chapter and another list of cognates in the chapter. It is helpful if students already know a large amount of the words used in the reader. If they do not, take a look at the included Prep 4 Success Unit. If the main gaps appear to be addressed there, additional planning may not be needed prior to starting the reader. If after completing the Prep 4 Success Unit students are still struggling with vocabulary and/or comprehension, we recommend creating short daily vocabulary lists, review activities, or bellringers, to build their vocabulary prior to starting the reader. It might even be beneficial to start with an earlier unit, even from a lower level. It would also be helpful to assess/re-assess vocabulary knowledge prior to each chapter to find gaps in knowledge. This would allow the teacher to intervene prior to beginning the chapter with some additional pre-reading activities to introduce/reinforce key chapter vocabulary.
- Another important factors to consider is the usefulness of a particular word (and this will vary based on a student's proficiency level as we evaluate the importance of individual vocabulary words over time), and the overall frequency with which the word occurs in everyday language usage. A higher frequency word (e.g. "wants") would be prioritized over a low frequency word (e.g. "beehive").
- If a word is used extensively and frequently throughout the book, students can typically acquire it through that repeated exposure. If a word is only used once or twice in the book, pre-teaching is probably not necessary. Students can be told the meaning of the word at the moment if needed for comprehension. This will be sufficient and will not impede their global comprehension.



The Prep 4 Success Unit

Each reader in this program comes with a Prep 4 Success Unit. These are optional mini-units which typically require about seven or eight hours of class time to complete. Prep 4 Success Units help teachers prepare students for the language they would experience during the process of reading a Comprehension-Based Reader. If students already know most of the vocabulary presented in Prep 4 Success, the teacher may choose to skip the unit or to skip individual components of the unit. If students are not already familiar with the vocabulary and structures presented in Prep 4 Success, teaching this brief unit before beginning the corresponding reader will be well worth the time spent.

Each Prep 4 Success Unit contains three sets of vocabulary vignettes. Completing each vignette will take approximately two or three class hours. Each vignette moves from input featuring new vocabulary words, to practice understanding and using the new words in context, to learning a story that features the words, to reviewing the story. Each reader has its own unique Prep 4 Success Unit. We will provide an overview of the first vignette of the *Papálotl* Prep 4 Success Unit to familiarize teachers with the format of these units. (We showed you examples from *Llama en Lima* in the webinar so you could see multiple examples!)

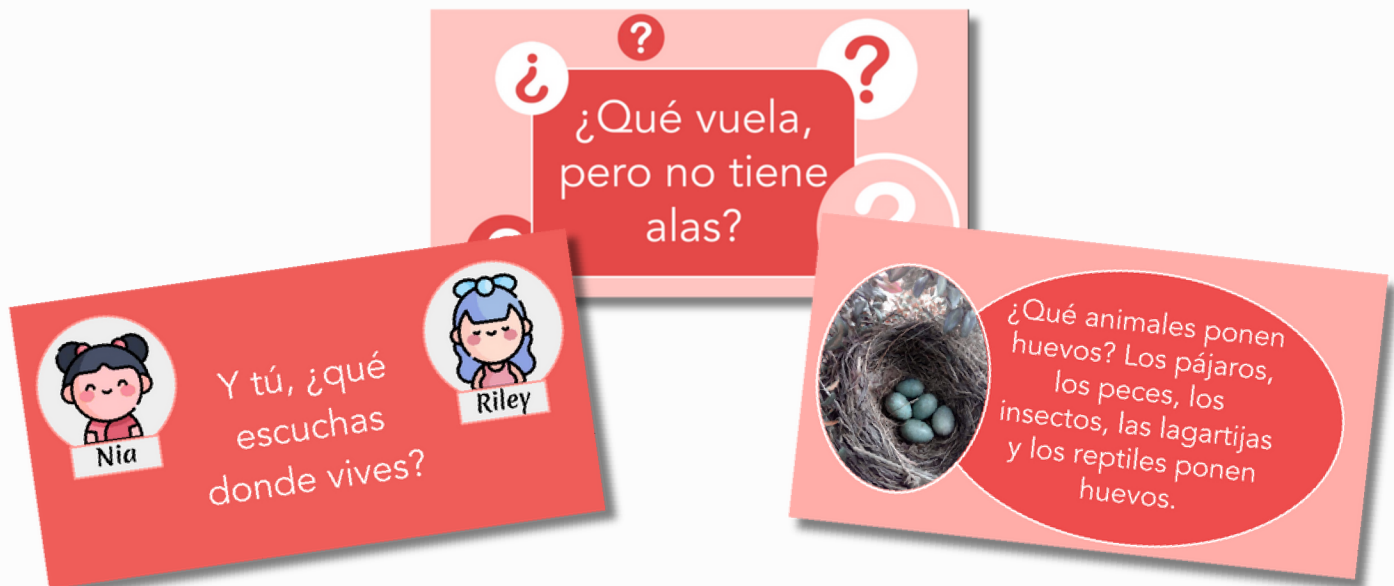
Vignette 1: Lesson Plan

Core Structures: come, bebe, pone los huevos, escucha, vuela/volar, alas

Vignette 1, Day 1, Activity 1: Vocabulary Presentation

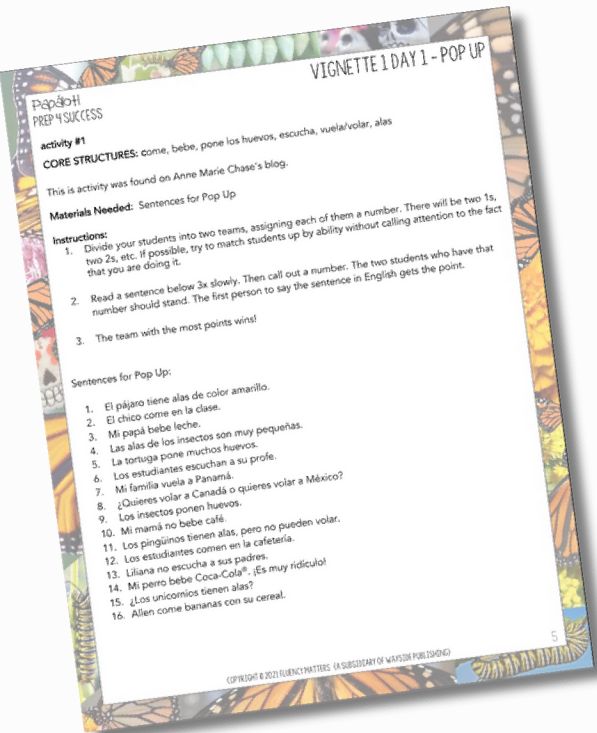
A slideshow presentation is provided for the teacher to guide the students through the process of familiarizing themselves with the first of the three sets of vocabulary in the Prep 4 Success Unit.

For each word or phrase of the vignette, the slideshow provides scenarios which the teacher can use to provide meaningful input with the new vocabulary. The vocabulary presentations also set up contexts for upcoming activities in the Prep 4 Success Unit.



Vignette 1, Day 1, Activity 2: Pop Up

This is a zero prep activity in which students compete in pairs against the rest of the class. Assign each pair of students a number. Read a sentence 3x slowly. Then call out a number. The pair of students who have that number should stand. The first person to say the sentence in English gets the point.



Sentences for Pop Up:

1. El pájaro tiene alas de color amarillo.
2. El chico come en la clase.
3. Mi papá bebe leche.
4. Las alas de los insectos son muy pequeñas.
5. La tortuga pone muchos huevos.
6. Los estudiantes escuchan a su profe.
7. Mi familia vuela a Panamá.
8. ¿Quieres volar a Canadá o quieres volar a México?
9. Los insectos ponen huevos.
10. Mi mamá no bebe café.
11. Los pingüinos tienen alas, pero no pueden volar.
12. Los estudiantes comen en la cafetería.
13. Liliana no escucha a sus padres.
14. Mi perro bebe Coca-Cola®. ¡Es muy ridículo!
15. ¿Los unicornios tienen alas?
16. Allen come bananas con su cereal.

Vignette 1, Day 1, Activity 3: Running Dictation

Each student has a job: (A) the runner: goes to the hallway, reads a slip, memorizes the sentence, and runs back into classroom to dictate the sentence to the writer; (B) the writer: writes the sentences that the runner dictates to him; and (C) the illustrator who illustrates the sentence.

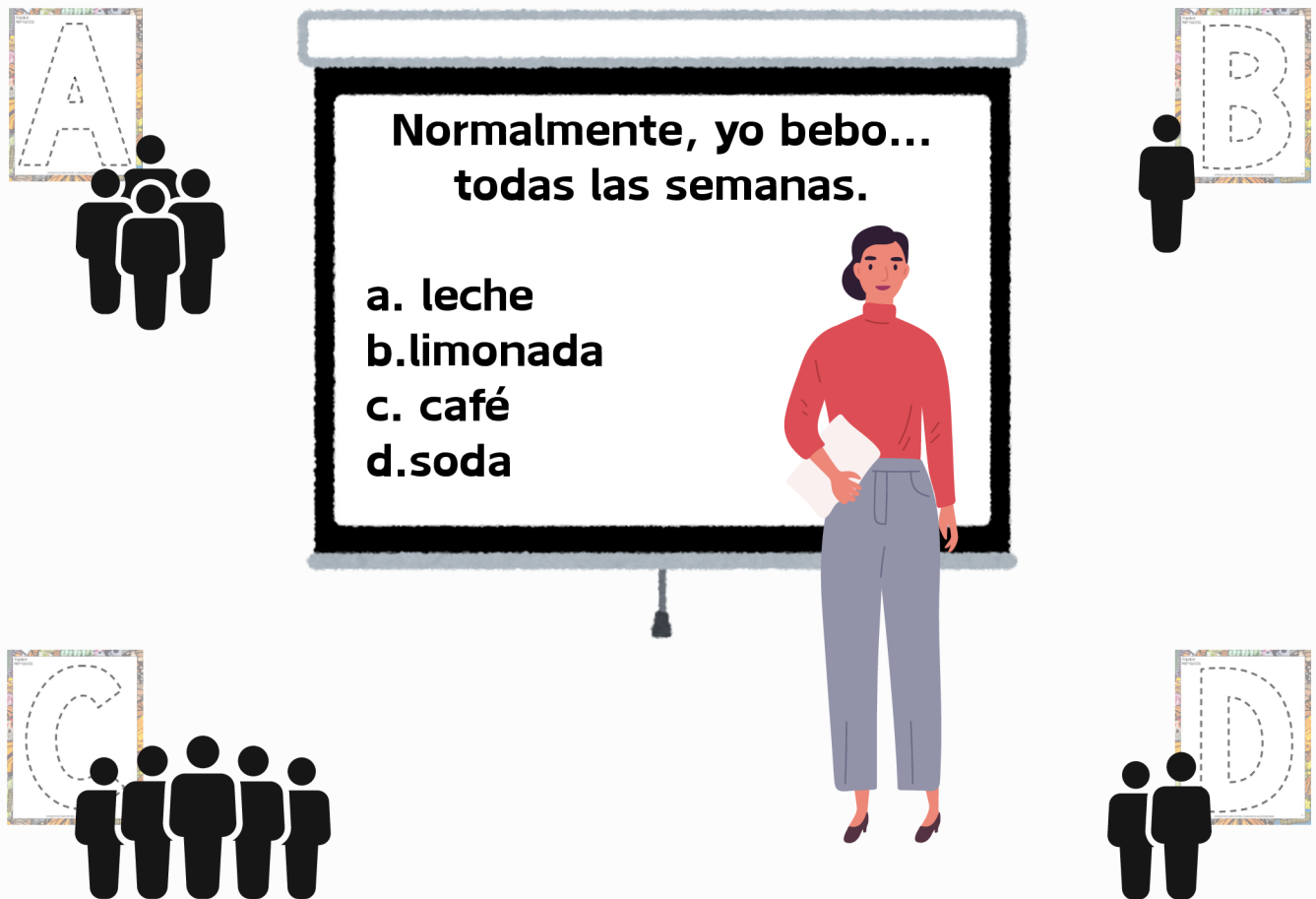
After the sentences are written on the dictation sheet and the illustrations are completed and paired with the sentences, the students should put the sentences in a logical order to form a story.

Hay una tortuga.
La tortuga está en la playa.
La tortuga pone huevos en la playa.
La tortuga escucha el océano y va al agua.
Hay un pelícano que tiene alas grandes.
El pelícano vuela sobre la playa y ve los huevos.
El pelícano no se bebe los huevos; se come los huevos.
El pelícano vuela sobre el océano con un huevo en la boca y la tortuga lo escucha.

Vignette 1, Day 2, Activity 1: Four Corners

Hang the Four Corners posters (labeled A, B, C & D) in the corners of your classroom. Show each question using the provided slideshow and ask students to walk to the poster that represents their answer.

Take time to ask follow up questions based on their answers.



Vignette 1, Day 2, Activity 2: Tell Class Story (Rookie and Pro scripts)

Two story scripts are provided. For teachers who would like more structure, the “Rookie” script provides all of the details. For teachers who would like more creative freedom, the “Pro” script allows teachers to “co-create” details of the story together with the class.

Teachers may wish to have student actors act out the story during the telling, or after the initial telling of the story.

Vignette 1, Day 3, Activity 1: Question Quandary

Display the question words for the students (quién; qué; dónde; cuándo; por qué; cómo)
Students will write five questions about the class story using five question words (one will not be used).

Read the rookie, semi-pro, or pro version of the story changing the details that your students added to the story yesterday.

After each paragraph, pause and give students time to write a question about the information you read using one of the question words.

Repeat with the following paragraphs of the story.

After reading the entire story, collect the students' papers; read one or two questions per paper (depending on class size) and randomly choose students to answer the questions. You could also use these questions to play a game, do a Kagan structure activity such as Numbered Heads Together or Quiz, Quiz, Trade, or simply have students trade papers with another student and answer their questions.

Vignette 1, Day 3, Activity 2: Last Wo-o-man Standing Story Retell

Have all students stand and close their eyes. No peeking! Make a series of true and false statements about yesterday's story or use the statements provided based on the Rookie version of the story. After making the statement and repeating it twice, count out loud from 1-10. When you reach 10, have students raise their hand if the statement is true and keep their hand down if it is false.

When you see that all students have an answer, state the correct answer. All students with the correct answer stay standing. Students with the incorrect answer sit down.

Play until you have a winner...or several!!!

Vignette 1, Day 3, Activity 3: Manipulative Retell

The teacher provides groups of students with cards featuring characters and other symbolic items from the story. The students work together to re-tell the story, using the image cards to "act out" the story.



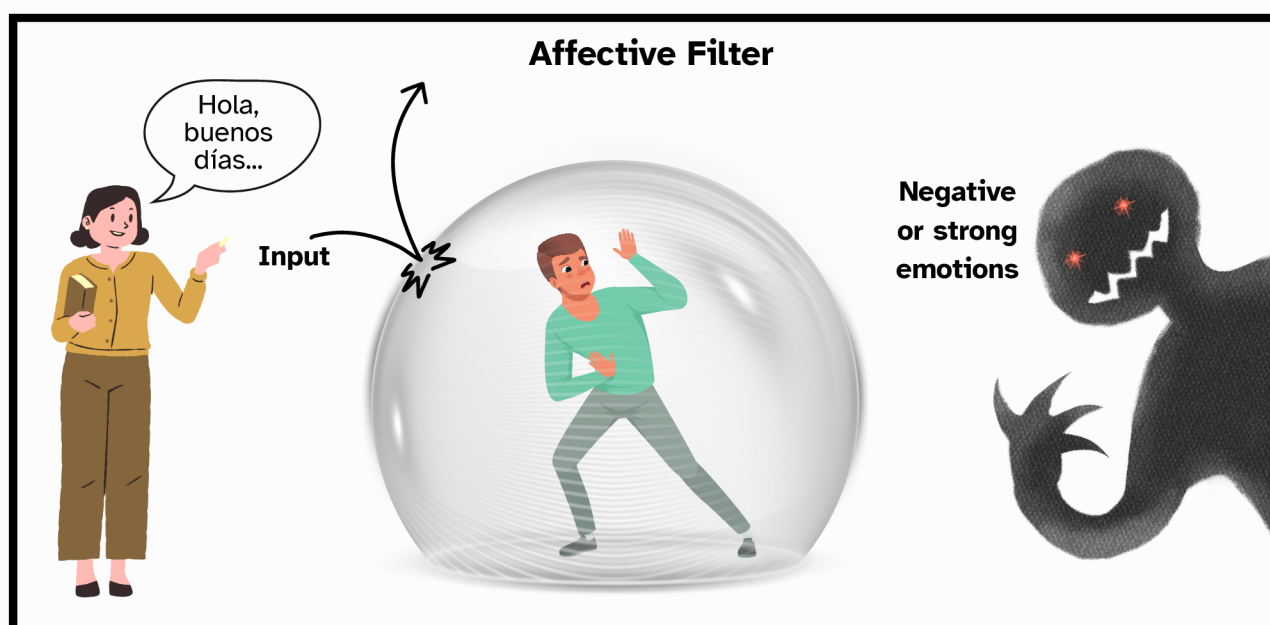
Pre-Reading: Building Context

Activating Prior Knowledge

Before beginning any chapter of a reader, it is considered best practice for the teacher to establish connections between students and the themes or ideas they will encounter in the text. This can be achieved by facilitating class discussions around related topics. For example, if the book focuses on travel, the teacher might initiate a conversation about places students would like to visit. While there are multiple areas that can be explored during pre-reading, it is advisable to concentrate on just one or two, rather than addressing them all.

A **Pre-Reading Discussion Slideshow** is provided for each chapter in every reader. This resource is intended to support spontaneous, teacher-led discussions that help prepare students for the themes, topics, and ideas presented in the chapter. The teacher is encouraged to model key vocabulary that may appear in the chapter or has been previously introduced in the Prep 4 Success Unit.

It is not necessary to address every question in the slideshow. Selecting one or two questions as focal points is often sufficient. When leading discussions, particularly with novice learners, it is essential to maintain a high level of comprehensibility. This includes using cognates, proper nouns, visual supports, writing unfamiliar words on the board, incorporating repetition, and proceeding at a deliberate pace. One of the primary goals of a pre-reading discussion is to help students build familiarity and comfort with the upcoming content. This is key to lowering the affective filter (a psychological barrier that can inhibit language acquisition when students feel anxious, confused, or disengaged). When the affective filter is elevated, students are less likely to internalize the input they receive.



The affective filter is activated in the brain when a student feels threatened, confused, or other strong emotions. It prevents language acquisition from happening as the brain is fully engaged with emotion.

Map Talk

One effective way to introduce the setting of a reader is by exploring its geographical context. The Map Talk activity is included with many of the readers in this program, but it may also be implemented informally by projecting a map onto the screen or utilizing an online map platform.

To begin, provide students with a map of the region featured in the text. Guide them through an exploratory discussion by asking questions about what they observe. The teacher should speak at a comprehensible pace, gesture or point to specific features, check for understanding, and clarify unfamiliar terms by writing them on the board. When possible, draw comparisons between the target geographical region and the local community to help students build connections and deepen understanding.

Teachers may also choose to display the region using Google Maps, including the Street View feature, to allow students to virtually explore specific locations. Additionally, drone footage of the region, often available online, can serve as a visually rich introduction to the area and its environment.

On the following page is an excerpt from the Map Talk teacher script in the *Manatí* Teacher's Guide. Educators are encouraged to adapt, expand, or personalize the script to meet the needs and interests of their students.

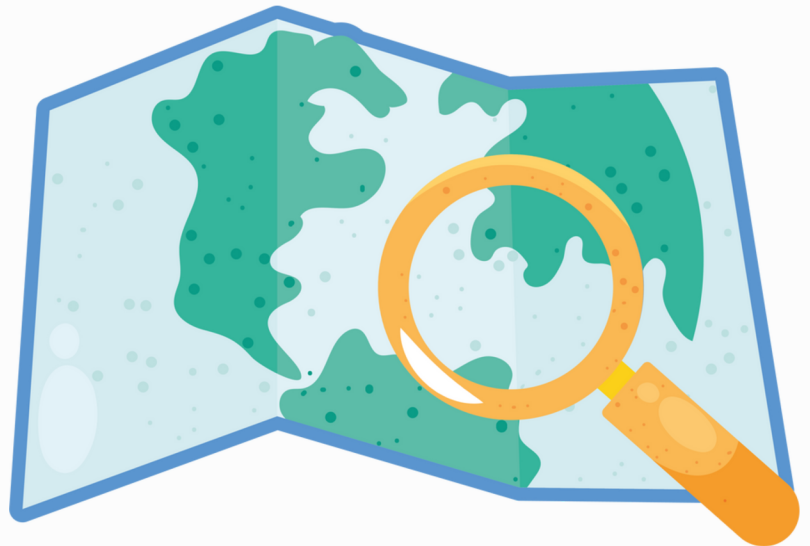
Map Talk: Tips and Suggestions

Highlight geographical features such as mountains, rivers, coastlines, capital cities, and notable landmarks. Compare these to similar features in the local community or region.

Incorporate information about the people who live in the region. Consider discussing population, rural versus urban characteristics, predominant industries, or agricultural products.

Introduce cultural references that may be relevant or recognizable to students, including music, celebrities, sports, or cuisine.

Encourage student interaction with the map. Invite learners to point out features, label regions, or engage in hands-on activities such as drawing or coloring maps.



Map Talk Script Example (excerpt from Papálotl Teacher's Guide)

Observa el mapa.

¿Ves el círculo? El círculo representa a Wilmington, Delaware. Con un marcador de color rojo, escribe «DE» en el círculo.

En el mapa también hay un rectángulo. ¿Ves el rectángulo? El rectángulo representa a Gastonia, Carolina del Norte. Con un marcador de color azul, escribe «NC» en el rectángulo. ¿Ves el óvalo? El óvalo representa a Temple, Texas. Con un marcador de color verde, escribe «TX» en el óvalo.

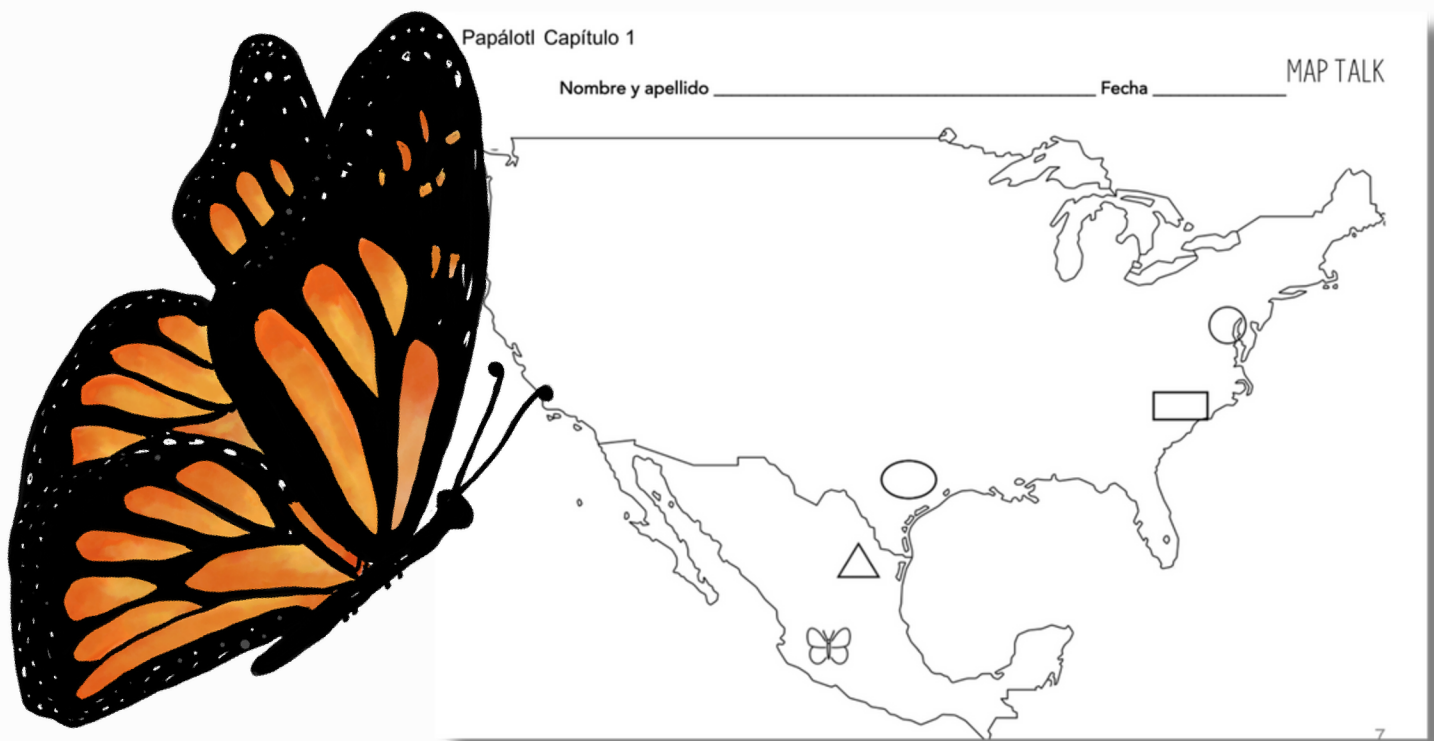
En el mapa también hay un triángulo. El triángulo representa a Monterrey, Nuevo León, México. Con un marcador de color anaranjado, escribe «NL» en el triángulo.

Finalmente, en el mapa hay una mariposa. La mariposa representa a Zamora, Michoacán, México. Muchas mariposas monarca de Estados Unidos migran a Michoacán en octubre. Colorea la mariposa con un marcador de color anaranjado. Con un marcador de color violeta, escribe «MICH.» en el mapa.

Ahora, vamos a trazar la ruta de una mariposa monarca. Las mariposas monarca son migratorias. Las mariposas monarca vuelan muchísimas millas.

Con un marcador de color rosado, traza una línea que conecte el círculo con el rectángulo. Después, conecta el rectángulo con el óvalo. Luego, conecta el óvalo con el triángulo. Finalmente, conecta el triángulo con la mariposa monarca.

Esta es la ruta de una mariposa llamada Magdalena. Magdalena vuela muchísimas millas de Wilmington, Delaware, a Zamora, Michoacán, para celebrar un día especial con su familia y... con la familia de una persona.



Making Predictions

Making predictions is a great way to get students to connect with and interact with content. Most of our Teacher's Guides, especially at the novice level, contain predictive activities. Encourage students to make predictions based on the book's cover, title, and illustrations. Our readers have various pre-reading options in the Teacher's Guide, and in this Program Guide we will highlight several activities which may be found in some Teacher's Guides or created by the teacher as time allows.

A Bunch of Hunches

A Bunch of Hunches is a predictive activity developed by Jim Wooldridge. This is a Gallery Walk-style activity. Post large sheets of paper around the room and attach an image that relates to the reader. As students view the images they make predictions about the reader based on what they see. They then write their predictions on the paper. The teacher can then follow up with some discussion, and also refer back to the predictions after reading to see if students were correct. For an example of A Bunch of Hunches, see the Pre-Reading file of the Bianca Nieves Teacher's Guide.

Quite the character

The best way for students to become proficient is to regularly expose students to present, past, and future in context. Quite the Character is a predictive activity designed to do just that. Print and hang images of the characters from the reader around the room. Students will make predictions about what each character will do or what they will be like, either creating their own statements or using pre-prepared statements. The teacher can then follow up with some discussion, and also refer back to the character predictions after reading to see if students were correct. For an example of Quite the Character, see the Pre-Reading file of the *Bianca Nieves* Teacher's Guide.



Va a ser importante en la historia.
Va a causar problemas en la historia.
Va a salvar a otro personaje de la historia.

Va a tener muchos problemas.
Va a solucionar un problema.
Va a tener un trabajo importante.

During Reading: Maximizing Comprehension

Pacing

Decide how much to read per session based on student needs:

Break the book into manageable sections to support student comprehension and engagement. A common approach is to read one chapter per day; however, it may be beneficial to read less than a full chapter per session depending on students' reading stamina. Novice learners typically have limited stamina, as sustained focus in a new language can be mentally demanding. To maintain attention and support processing, the teacher should incorporate brain breaks as needed and vary the types of activities used throughout the class period.

Reading Modes

Vary how the book is read to keep students engaged:

Teacher Read-Aloud: Teacher reads aloud in the target language, pausing to clarify items that might be new or difficult to comprehend, taking opportunities to do comprehension checks, and occasionally translating segments of the chapter which need additional clarification. Remember, if comprehension is not taking place, acquisition of language cannot occur.

Partner or Small Group Reading: Allow students to read together and support each other.

Independent Reading: As students become more proficient, they will become more comfortable reading independently.

Student Choice: As students progress through the course levels, greater variation in individual proficiency is to be expected. To accommodate these differences, the teacher may offer flexible reading options. Many students appreciate the opportunity to choose whether to read with teacher support in a small group, in peer groups or pairs, or independently. If self-selection is permitted, the teacher should monitor student choices and be prepared to intervene if time is not being used productively. Regardless of the reading structure, it is important to follow up with whole-class activities that allow for assessment of comprehension and reinforce key content.



Comprehension Checks

Sentence
Paragraph
Page
Halfway point
End of chapter

- Main ideas
- Key details
- Simple inferences

Novice = More scaffolding

Offer choices (“*Did X or Y happen?*”)
Sentence starters
Check in English

Intermediate = More HOTS

Opinion-based prompts (“*Which character made the better decision? Why?*”).

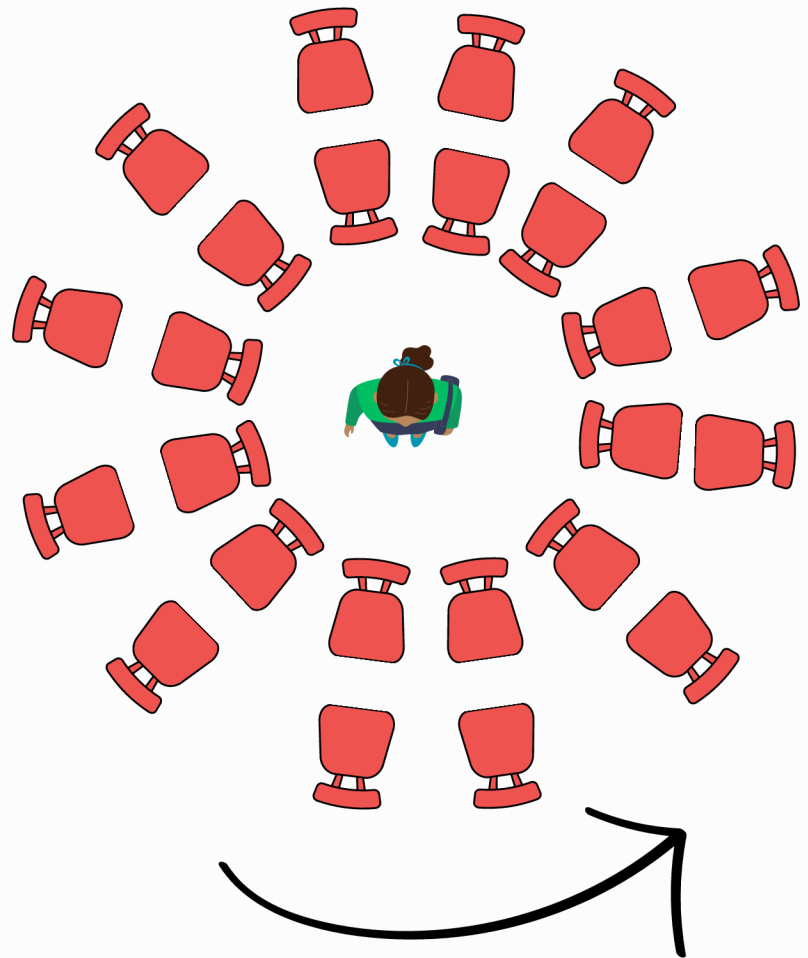
Personal connections (“*How would you feel in this situation?*”).

Global connections (“*Where else do we see this issue in the world?*”).

Mixing Bowl

This interactive reading strategy fosters peer collaboration and repeated exposure to text in a dynamic way. Students form two concentric circles, with the inside circle facing the outside circle. Each student is paired with a partner in the opposite circle. Students take turns reading a passage aloud to their partner, stopping each other whenever they don't understand and clarifying by using the glossary, translating aloud, or using context to make a guess.

After a set amount of time, the teacher signals for the outside circle to rotate, creating new pairs. Once seated with the new partner, they show each other how far they got into the text with their previous partner, and begin reading where the partner with the least progress left off. This process continues, allowing students to engage with multiple classmates while reinforcing comprehension, fluency, and interpretive skills.



The Marker Partner Game

In this variation on a true/false activity, divide students into two groups seated face-to-face. Place a marker on the floor or desk between them. Read a statement aloud; if it's true, students race to grab the marker. This low-stakes competition creates excitement and reinforces understanding. Here are two variations of this game which was shared with us by Pennsylvania Spanish teacher Cynthia Hitz.

Marker Partner One on One:

- Line student pairs up facing one another. They should be far enough apart that their heads don't touch when they lean all the way forward bending at the waist. Students can also play while seated on the floor or across from each other at a table or pair of student desks.
- Place a marker, standing on its end, on the floor halfway between the two students, or on the table/desk between them if using that configuration.
- Read the prepared statements aloud one by one. Note that many Teacher's Guides have a specially prepared set of statements for this game for a selected chapter, but original statements can also be easily created. If the statement read by the teacher is true, the first student to grab the marker earns a point. If the statement is incorrect, no one should grab the marker. A marker grab on an incorrect answer results in a lost point.
- The student with the most points at the end of the game is the winner. Have the winners stand and everyone else will give them a round of applause for their prize.

Marker Partner in Teams:

- Configure the students in the same manner as playing one on one.
- For scoring, add up the total points earned by the entire row of students who are all on the same side of the row of markers.
- The team with the most points at the end of the game is the winner. Have the winners stand and everyone else will give them a round of applause for their prize.



Numbered Heads Together

Many Teacher's Guides include this Kagan Strategy, and like many other activities described here, it can easily be created using a set of comprehension questions.

Divide the class into groups of four. If it is not possible to divide students by four, one student in a group of three can participate as both number three and number four. Each student in the group needs a small whiteboard. If there are no whiteboards, a piece of white paper in a sheet protector is an alternative. Each student should write his/her number in the corner of the board.

Ask a question to the class. Give the teams time to discuss and write down their answer. **All** students write the answer on their whiteboards. They need to be sure it is exactly right on every board.

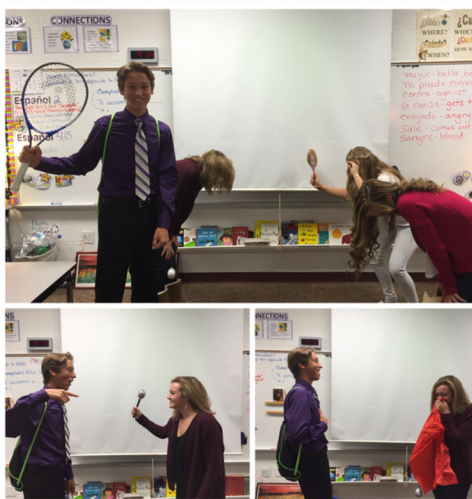
Call out a number from one to four. The student with that number must hold up their board. Correct responses earn a point for the team. This encourages discussion, collaboration, and accountability. Every team with a correct answer gets a point.



Follow Up Activities

There are so many great ideas out there for following up after reading a chapter. We recommend these three which we discussed in our webinar!

Freeze Frame



Scene Machine



Tower of Knowledge



Extending Our Learning Together

If you've attended this webinar together with colleagues, we encourage you to keep the conversation going! We've provided a set of discussion questions here for you. If you attended on your own, we would still encourage you to personally reflect on these questions. Thank you so much for attending our webinar!

Kristy and Carrie

How does shifting to an acquisition-driven instruction model of teaching challenge or affirm your current teaching practice? What are some changes you'd like to try implementing after attending this webinar?

In what ways can storytelling and reading fiction help foster intercultural understanding in your classroom?

When previewing vocabulary (p. 6), how do you decide which words are worth pre-teaching vs. leaving for students to acquire naturally?

Which pre-reading activities (e.g., Map Talk, A Bunch of Hunches, Quite the Character, pp. 11-14) feel most adaptable to your context, and why? Do you have additional ideas for preparing students prior to reading a chapter?

How do you intentionally lower students' affective filter to increase confidence and engagement during pre-reading discussions (p. 11)? Are there some aspects of safety in your classroom that are not within your control?

Which reading mode—teacher read-aloud, partner reading, or independent reading (p. 15)—works best with your students, and why?

How do you balance comprehension checks (p. 16) with maintaining the flow and joy of storytelling?

How might strategies like Mixing Bowl (p. 16) or Marker Partner Game (p. 17) increase student collaboration and engagement in your classroom?

How can follow-up activities such as Freeze Frame, Scene Machine, or Tower of Knowledge (p. 18) deepen students' interpretive and interpersonal skills?

In what ways can students reflect personally or globally on the issues in a Comprehension-Based Reader (p. 16), and how might you guide those conversations?

Which parts of the reading cycle (pre-reading, during, post-reading, p. 5) do you feel most confident in? Which do you want to strengthen?

What evidence will you look for in student work or behavior that shows acquisition is happening rather than memorization?