



Inquire to Learn!

There are many ways in which *The Laughing Rabbit/ Marvellous Mexico* can be used as a base for Inquiry Learning. This is just one suggestion.

Session 1

Using the Big Book, share-read *The Laughing Rabbit*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of rabbits, jaguars, trickster stories, Mexican culture, and the moon.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion

Rabbits and Trickster Stories: *What is a trickster character?* Share with the students that trickster characters use cunning and trickery to get what they want. Often, trickster characters are smaller and more vulnerable than other characters in the story. Tell the students that Rabbit in *The Laughing Rabbit* is a trickster character.

Jaguars: *When you think of jaguars, what sort of character do you think of?* Share with the students that jaguars are big cats that are native to the Southwestern United States, Central and South America. They are very important figures in Mexican culture and are often portrayed as powerful figures. However, in the folk tale *The Laughing Rabbit*, Jaguar is a foolish character.

Mexican Culture: Direct the students to the border art on the title page and to PP. 2–3 of *The Laughing Rabbit*. Ask, *What do you notice about the border art and the colours of the house, furniture, and Maria's clothes?* (they are very colourful) Share with the students that Mexico is known for its folk art and its colourful houses. Mexican women are also known to wear colourful, decorative clothing.

The Moon: *Have you ever looked at the full moon and seen images? What did they look like?*

Text and Illustration Based Inquiry Questions

Cover: Look at the cover and read the title. *What is Rabbit doing?* (bouncing on a springy grape vine) *What does Jaguar look like he is about to do?* (pounce) *Do you think Rabbit and Jaguar look like they are friends? Why/why not?*

PP. 2–3: Revisit the text and ask, *What do you think Roberto and Maria will do now that they have no more food? Which animal is the strongest: a jaguar or a rabbit? How has the author hinted that the rabbit might outwit the jaguar in this story?* (by using the words *tricky rabbit*) *How has the illustrator supported the author's message?* (by showing the jaguar asleep and passive and showing the rabbit awake and alert)

PP. 4–5: Revisit the text and illustration and ask, *How do you think Roberto and Maria are feeling?* (guilty and sad that they are going to eat their pet rabbit) Ensure the students understand that rabbits are commonly eaten in many parts of the world. Revisit Jaguar's speech: *"They are going to eat you! I hope they give me a piece,"* and ask, *How would you describe Jaguar's speech?* (heartless, uncaring, and cruel)

PP. 6–7: Revisit the text and illustration and ask, *What has Rabbit done?* (played

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a trick on Jaguar) Return to the word *tricky* and, as a class, brainstorm synonyms e.g. cunning, crafty, sly, sneaky, deceitful, wily, devious, dodgy. Ask, *How would you describe Jaguar now?* (foolish)

PP. 8–9: Revisit the text and ask, *Why has the author used the word “hunting” instead of “looking”? What is Jaguar going to do when he finds Rabbit?* (eat him)

PP. 10–11: Review the first paragraph and ask, *How does this confirm the idea that Jaguar is foolish?* (because he didn't eat something else while he was looking for Rabbit, he just put up with being hungry) Review the first paragraph on P. 11 and ask, *What is Rabbit doing?* (he is stalling for time while he thinks up a plan) Continue reading the text and ask, *Why was Jaguar confused?*

PP. 12–13: Review the text and ask, *How should Jaguar have been able to tell that Rabbit was tricking him?* (by looking at the roof of the cave and seeing that it wasn't falling down) *Do you think Rabbit will come back? Why/why not?*

PP. 14–15: Review P. 14 and ask, *How has Jaguar shown again that he is foolish?* (he is so focused on getting revenge on Rabbit that he forgets to take care of his own need to eat) *What happens if you pull a springy vine down and then let it go?* (it springs up) *Why was this a foolish thing for Jaguar to do?* (because he wanted to eat Rabbit, but now Rabbit has shot up to the moon) *Why is Rabbit laughing?* (because he tricked Jaguar and he is having fun whizzing through the sky)

P. 16: Review the text and ask, *Why is Rabbit still laughing at Jaguar?* (because Jaguar has never been able to catch him) Share with the students that there are a number of cultures that have stories about the rabbit on the moon and that *The Laughing Rabbit* falls into the category of folk tales that seek to explain how things came to be.

Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Invite the students to learn about how jaguars have been portrayed in Mexican culture, particularly by the ancient Maya, Aztec, and Inca peoples.

Enable the class to make jaguar and rabbit masks, leaving the mouth area unobstructed.

Divide the students into groups and have them act out scenes from *The Laughing Rabbit*. They could wear their masks and perform for another class.

Encourage the students to learn about the moon and the images that can be seen on it e.g. the man on the moon, the woman on the moon, the rabbit on the moon. What has caused these patterns on the moon's surface?

Share-read other stories from Mexico, such as *Blanca Flor* (a Mexican version of *Snow White*), *The Bear Prince*, *The Gypsy Queen*.

Share other folk tales and cartoons about trickster characters that are rabbits (or in Nanabozho's case, takes on the form of a rabbit) e.g. Br'er Rabbit, *Nanabozho and the Maple Trees* (StoryWorld), *Hungry Tiger and Clever Rabbit* (StoryWorld), Bugs Bunny.

Session 2

Using the Big Book, share-read *Marvellous Mexico*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of Mexico and Mexican culture, natural environments, migration, celebrations, dogs, and chocolate.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion and Inquiry

Mexican (Spanish) Greeting: *Does anyone know how to say hello in Spanish? It is hola (OH-lah).*



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Cover and Contents Page: Look at the cover and the image on the contents page of *Marvellous Mexico* and tell the students that Mexico is a vibrant country with many colourful celebrations and festivals. Share with the students that the contents page image is of decorative skulls made from clay or paper mache that are used as part of the Mexican Day of the Dead celebration. They will learn more about Day of the Dead on P. 6.

Location of Mexico/Geography: Look at the map on P. 1 of *Marvellous Mexico* and note the location of Mexico in the Americas and in relation to New Zealand and Australia. Tell the students that Mexico is located in the Northern Hemisphere. Point out Mexico City on the inset map on P. 1 and tell the students that Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. If any of the children come from Mexico or have visited it, invite them to share their experiences.

Mexican Culture: Ask, *Has anyone heard of the Maya and the Aztecs? What were they known for?* Reread P. 1 of *Marvellous Mexico* and tell the students that the Maya, Aztecs, and Inca were highly organized civilizations that lived in Mexico at different times in the past. Share with the students that the Aztec Empire was invaded and conquered by Spain in the early 1500s. The Spanish ruled over New Spain, which later became Mexico, for 300 years. That is why, although indigenous languages are still spoken in Mexico, Spanish is the main language. The Spanish also brought their religion – Roman Catholicism – to Mexico. Today, many Mexicans are Roman Catholics. Reread Fact 1. on P. 6 of *Marvellous Mexico* and tell the students that Mexico City is built on the site of Tenochtitlan, which was the capital of the Aztec Empire. Reread the rest of the facts on PP. 6–7 and discuss how they contribute to a sense and awareness of Mexican culture.

Natural Environments: Reread PP. 2–3 of *Marvellous Mexico* and tell the students that Mexico has a wide range of natural environments. Ask, *Which of these environments in Mexico would you most like to visit? Why?* Discuss that Mexico has a serious problem with ongoing

deforestation, and many of its plants and animals are endangered. Ask, *Why is it important that the Mexican government continues to work hard to look after the diversity of its landscape and the plants and animals that live there?*

Migration: *What is migration?* Tell the students that migration is the seasonal movement of a group of animals from one region to another. Animals migrate in response to temperature, food supply, or for breeding. Reread PP. 4–5 of *Marvellous Mexico* and tell the students that monarch butterflies in New Zealand and Australia have modified their migratory behaviour because our winters are mild.

Celebrations: Reread Fact 6 on P. 6 of *Marvellous Mexico* and ask, *Do you like the idea of Day of the Dead? Why/why not? How and when do we acknowledge friends and family who have died? How do we acknowledge those people who lost their lives in service for our country?* (Anzac Day) Ensure the students understand that Day of the Dead is a celebration of life and death. It is not creepy and it is not associated with Halloween. Mexicans view their dead as still belonging to their community. Day of the Dead celebrations provide them with the opportunity to show love and respect for deceased family members. They do this over more than one day. The celebrations start on October 31 and end on November 2. Families tell stories about their loved ones and cook their favourite foods. In some parts of Mexico, families have picnics or spend the night at the graves of their relatives.

Chocolate: Ask, *What is the connection between chocolate and Mexico?* (chocolate first came from Mexico) *What does the word sacred mean?* Tell the students that if something is sacred it is connected with gods and religious practices. The Aztecs, who came after the Maya, saw cocoa beans as gifts from Quetzalcoatl, the god of wisdom. Share with the students that over the years chocolate has been used in Mexico as a treatment for colds and fevers.

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Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Challenge the students to research and learn about the lifecycle and migratory/wintering behaviour of monarch butterflies in New Zealand or Australia. How have monarch butterflies adapted to suit local conditions?

Encourage the students to pick one of the geographical features on PP. 2–3 of ***Marvellous Mexico*** and learn more about it.

Invite the students to learn more about the traditions, foods, and symbols associated with Day of the Dead celebrations.

Challenge the students to research and learn about other Mexican celebrations or festivals e.g. Carnaval, Mexican Independence Day, Charreada Rodeos, or Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day.

As a class, listen to some mariachi music via YouTube.

Challenge the students to research and list dog breeds named after geographic locations e.g. Chihuahua, Labrador, Rottweiler, Afghan Hound...

Research arts and crafts of Mexico and create some colourful Mexican-inspired art.