

Children's Literature Reviews

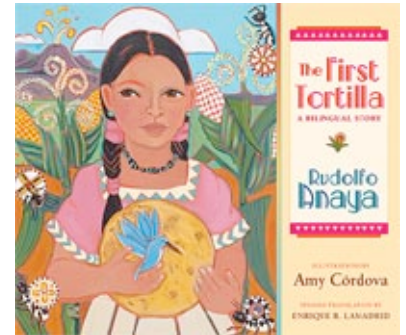
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The first tortilla : a bilingual story

Rudolfo Anaya ; illustrated by Amy Córdova ; translated into Spanish by Enrique R. Lamadrid.

Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2007.

[32] p. : col. ill. ; 23 x 27 cm.



Annotations:

Guided by a blue hummingbird, Jade brings an offering to the Mountain Spirit who lives near her village in Mexico, and asks if he will send rain to end the drought that threatens the people. Includes information about the legend on which this story is based and facts about corn.

State and Provincial Reading Lists:

[Land of Enchantment Book Award, 2008-2009](#) ; Nominee; Children's Book; New Mexico

Horn Book Guide:

Spring 2008 Picture Books Rating 3, Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

Reading Measurement Programs:

Accelerated Reader
Interest Level Lower Grade
Book Level 3.6
Accelerated Reader Points **0.5**

Lexile, MetaMetrics, Inc.
Lexile Measure 540

Reading Counts-Scholastic
Interest Level 3-5
Reading Level 2.7
Title Point Value 3
Lexile Measure 540

Reviews:

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

In the Mexican village where Jade lives, the Mountain Spirit of the volcano is angry because the villagers have failed to honor him. So the rains do not come. Without the rains, there is no food, so the people face starvation. A blue hummingbird tells Jade she can succeed in climbing the mountain to ask that the Mountain Spirit send rain. Jade takes a bowl of beans and squash with some chili powder sprinkled on it as an offering. She endures the quest, mentored by the blue hummingbird. Jade's bowl of beans and squash is acceptable tribute, and the Mountain Spirit agrees to send rain. Jade is also given a gift of food stored in a cave by ants. Jade returns to the village with yellow, blue, red, and white corn, a new food the villagers learn to grow--although the text says, "They scattered kernels of corn in their garden and said a prayer of thanks," and corn must be planted; scattering

just does not do the trick--Dried kernels are crushed in the metate with the mano. Jade adds water to make masa, pats out a pancake, cooks it on a hot stone near the fire, and everyone eats. Jade names it "tortilla," but there is no mention of the original Huichol word or what a "torta" is. Jade goes from home to home teaching women to make tortillas. During the harvest fiesta, the people thank the Mountain Spirit for giving them corn. Glossary in English and Spanish, and a brief author note on how Anaya used the Aztec legend the origin of corn in his version of the story (q.v. *The Legend of Food Mountain* by Harriet Rohmer from Children's Book Press in which a giant ant helps Quetzalcoatl bring corn to the first people.) A recipe for making basic masa and tortillas can be found on www.cookingupreading.com in the listing for this title. 2007, University of New Mexico Press, \$16.95. Ages 5 to 9.

María E. Gentle (Children's Literature)

This bilingual picture book about Jade, a young girl from a small Mexican village, tells the story of the first tortilla. Jade's village is near starvation due to a severe draught. The bean and squash plants are dying. A blue hummingbird tells Jade the reason for the draught. The village has been ungrateful to the gods, in this case the Mountain Spirit. Over her parents' objections Jade sets off on a mission. First she prepares a gift for the Mountain Spirit, then guided by the blue hummingbird Jade manages to avoid falling boulders and reaches the mountain top. The Mountain Spirit, pleased with her gift and her bravery, grants her wishes and gives her a gift as well--the gift of corn. Jade returns to the village, the corn is planted, and so it goes. Eventually Jade mixes the dried, ground corn with water and makes the first tortilla. The rich, bold and vibrant illustrations complete the legend. It is a story of bravery and one that makes a child the star. A glossary is included, along with an author's note. This is a wonderful addition to any multicultural collection. 2007, University of New Mexico Press, \$16.95. Ages 6 to 10.

Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Spring 2008)

To plead for rain to save her people, young Jade follows a hummingbird to see the mountain spirit. Impressed by her courage, the mountain spirit gives Jade the gift of corn, and Jade prepares and names the first tortilla. Anaya incorporates elements from Mexican legends into his original story. Cordova's swirling folk-art illustrations are richly layered. *Glos.* Category: Picture Books. 2007, New Mexico, 32pp, 16.95. *Ages 4 to 9.* Rating: 3: Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

Subjects:

- [Droughts Fiction.](#)
- [Spirits Fiction.](#)
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- [Courage Fiction.](#)
- [Hummingbirds Fiction.](#)
- [Spanish language materials--Bilingual.](#)
- [Mexico--History Fiction.](#)

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- [Lamadrid, Enrique R.](#)
- [Córdova, Amy.](#)

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