

Activities for *The Twenty-five Mixtec Cats*

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A. Dramatic Teacher Reading:

Engage students in physical gestures like the swishing and swooshing of herbs. Have students contribute vocally with the howls of coyotes, meows of cats, etc. Use visual props such as a hat or handmade scarf.

B. Dramatic Student Reading:

Assign students to read the different roles of the healer, evil healer, baker, butcher, etc. Encourage them to read their lines at different "speeds" or intensities. Coax them into showing ever greater emotion.

C. Analyze the book's illustrations with students.

What are those things floating around the border of each painting? (The artist calls the borders *viñetas* or vignettes. The vignettes contain moons, coyotes, adobe homes, cats and other elements common to the lives of the people in this village. If students were to illustrate stories based on their own lives, what sorts of things would they draw in their vignettes? (School buses, modern buildings, cars, people, school books, computers, etc.)

D. Art Projects:

Mixtec cat masks can be made from paper plates. Rubber bands can be used to hold mask onto the head or for half-length masks (covering the nose through the forehead) straws can be used as handles. Brooms can be made from most any stick with paper fringes banded around the bottom.

E. Creative writing and Spanish language exercise:

On the blackboard, write the Spanish words for three major themes in the story. Example: *gato* (cat), *pueblo* (village), *mercado* (market). Have students create sentences using these Spanish words. (Example: There once was a *gato* who lived in a *pueblo* and always hunted for mice at the *mercado*.) Note: ESL students can reverse the languages, using the English words while writing in the first language.

F. Math links:

Use the scenario of the 25 cats to explore simple arithmetic or even population. Simple arithmetic: If each of the 25 cats ate 2 tortillas per day, how many tortillas would they eat in a week? ($25 \times 2 \times 7 = 350$) If a 5 lb. sack of masa (corn flour) yielded 40 tortillas, how many bags of masa would you need to feed the cats each week? ($350/40 = 8.75$). Let's say you used 9 sacks of masa. How many tortillas would you have left over per week? ($9 \times 40 = 360$; $360 - 350 = 10$). Population: Let's say that of the 25 cats, 12 were female and had litters of 4 each. How many cats would there be then? ($13 \text{ male} + 12 \text{ female} + (12 \times 4) = 73$). Now try figuring totals for the next two generations!

G. Creative writing, “feeling” the story:

First, explore evocative verbs for the way animals, such as cats and coyotes, may move: (creep, climb, run, lope, gambol, leap, etc.) What are other verbs for “fear”? (be afraid, feel uneasy, be terrified, dread, worry, feel nervous, etc.) Let students write on the following theme: "A cat you'd never seen before followed you home from school. It paced in front of your door all day and meowed outside your window all night."