

NCCLR QUICK GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

How to Use Bilingual Books



Use this quick guide for practical, manageable ideas on how to use bilingual books in the classroom and at home.

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THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
**Cultural and Linguistic
Responsiveness**

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Children who are bilingual benefit from books of all kinds—books in English, in their home language, and in both languages. Strategies for using books to strengthen children’s languages are central to any early childhood classroom, but they are especially important for classes with children who are dual language learners (DLLs). You may wonder about the best way to use bilingual books with DLLs. Here are some ideas!

Bilingual books come in a variety of formats:

- Side-by-side translation in the same book
- Translation published as a separate book
- Sprinkling of words in a second language throughout a story that is written primarily in English



The format will impact the way you use the books in the classroom.

Pre-read books in the home language.

Before you read any bilingual book to children, talk to them about the book in their home language. This activity can include looking through the pages, discussing the pictures, asking the children what they think the book might be about, and introducing ideas and words that are key to the story. This approach allows DLLs to fully understand the story, learn new concepts, and talk about any questions before hearing the story in their second language.

Alternate languages on different days.

Read a bilingual book in one language on one day, and switch to the other language on the second day. Ask questions and discuss the book on both days so that everyone, regardless of language, has a chance to participate in the discussion.

Pick out special vocabulary words.

Bilingual picture books are a great way for children (and teachers) to learn new vocabulary words because the language is presented in context. The bilingual glossaries that are often at the end of these books are great resources for new words. Bilingual picture books also provide an opportunity to compare letter sounds and cognates. Every time you read a book, focus the children’s attention on one or two words and then use and discuss those words in both languages.

Cognates: Words in two different languages that have a common origin, such as “education” in English and “educación” in Spanish.

Invite family members to read to the class.

Ask parents or family members who speak multiple languages to visit the class and read stories to the children in the language that feels most comfortable. Having bilingual books available allows all family members, regardless of their language preference, to read to the children in small or large groups. It also sends a message to both adults and children that all languages are valued and respected.

Encourage families to use bilingual books and bilingual strategies at home.

Help family members find their own sources for bilingual books. Many local libraries have multilingual collections, particularly for children. In addition, help family members understand the importance of their children using both their home language and English after they leave the center. Depending on their English fluency, you might want to suggest to family members that they use different languages on different days at home. Or encourage them to ask their child to retell a story in English.

Explore ways to find bilingual books.

In addition to checking books out of your local public library, you can purchase books from a number of sources, browse the catalogs of multicultural/multilingual publishers, and ask staff members from other bilingual educational programs in your community where they are acquiring bilingual books; you might want to suggest to directors of these programs that you exchange or trade bilingual books on a regular basis.

If your aim is to build a classroom library and you have limited resources, consider organizing a book drive. Local businesses rely on an educated and literate community, so you may even want to approach business leaders in your area and ask them if they would be interested in contributing to your “library fund.”



A Small Sampling of Bilingual English/Spanish Books for Preschool Children

Side-by-side translation in same book

Tía's Tamales by Ana Baca

ISBN#: 978-0-826350-27-5

Braids/Trencitas by Kathleen Contreras

ISBN#: 978-1-933032-27-6

Magda's Tortillas/Las tortillas de Magda by Becky Chavarría-Cháirez

ISBN#: 978-1-558852-86-0

Margaret and Margarita/Margarita y Margaret by Lynn Reiser

ISBN#: 978-0-688147-34-1

My House: A Book in Two Languages/Mi Casa: Un Libro en Dos Lenguas by Rebecca Emberley

ISBN#: 978-0-316234-48-1

Words in second language sprinkled throughout book

¡Hola! Jalapeño by Amy Wilson Sanger

ISBN#: 978-1-582460-72-7

The Miracle of the First Poinsettia: A Mexican Christmas Story by Joanne Oppenheim

ISBN#: 978-1-841482-45-3

Skippyjon Jones in Mummy Trouble by Judy Schachner

ISBN#: 978-1-606864-18-0

Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin by Duncan Tonatiuh

ISBN#: 978-0-810938-72-4

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale retold by Carmen Agra Deedy

ISBN#: 978-1-561454-68-6

Translation published as a separate book

Carry Me/Llévame by Rena D. Grossman

English Edition ISBN#: 978-1-595721-80-8/Spanish Edition ISBN#: 978-1-595722-23-2

Read to Me/Vamos a leer by Judi Moreillon

English Edition ISBN#: 978-1-595720-14-6/Spanish Edition ISBN#: 978-1-932065-50-3

Lola at the Library/Lola en la biblioteca by Anna McQuinn

English Edition ISBN#: 978-0-756979-31-7/Spanish Edition ISBN#: 978-1-580892-14-8

Out of the Ballpark/¡Jonrón! by Alex Rodríguez

English Edition ISBN#: 978-0-061151-96-5/Spanish Edition ISBN#: 978-0-061151-97-2

Abuela by Arthur Dorros

English Edition ISBN#: 978-0-140562-25-5/Spanish Edition ISBN#: 978-0-140562-26-2