

THE LAST CUENTISTA

By Donna Barba Higuera

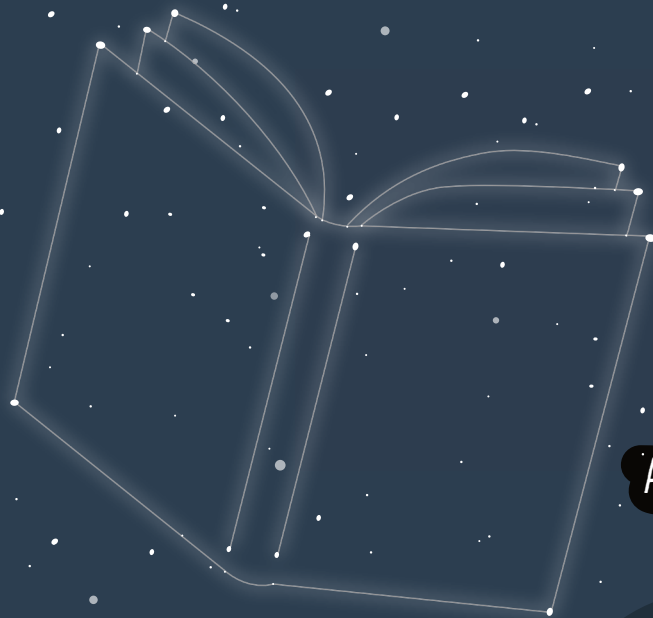
4-WEEK LITERATURE STUDY

Torchlight Constellation Series : Level 6-8

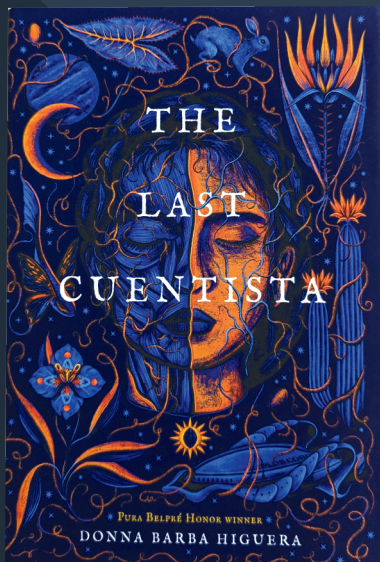
CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

FOLKLORE/FAIRY TALES/MYTH

FUTURISM/SCI-FI



A NOVEL
STUDY



FEATURING:

4-WEEK STUDY SCHEDULE

LITERATURE PRIMER & DISCUSSION INQUIRY

ANNOTATION & READING ASSIGNMENTS

STRUCTURED & PACED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

VOCABULARY

ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS

POETRY STUDY & ANALYSIS

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Author: Tiffany Petty

Note: The author of this book is diligent about assuring the most accurate content possible. If you happen to find an error within this text, please bring it to the attention of Torchlight Curriculum by contacting us at Torchlight@TorchlightCurriculum.com

NOTE

Guide was intended to be printed double-sided while still allowing for cutting of activity materials.



IN THIS STUDY

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BOOK TITLE

A Torchlight Constellation Series Novel Study

This study includes: Literature, Language Arts, & Poetry
Each study may contain other cross-curricular activities

Booklist

The Last Cuentista **wk. 1**

Dreamers by Yuyi Morales **wk. 4**

Optional essay mentor text: *Breakfast on Mars and 37 Other Delectable Essays* **wk. 1**

NOTE: Optional Extension books are listed at the end of each Weekly Checklist Schedule. Please pay close attention to the exact title and author listed. You may find alternate titles if you like, but they might not be age-appropriate.

Optional Companion Readers

The Sea-Ringed World by María García Esperón

Treasury of Magical Tales From Around the World by Donna Napoli

Supplies

Annotation Notebook (from Torchlight, or create your own) **OR**

Transparent sticky notes and a ballpoint pen

Pencils

Highlighters or colored pens

General project supplies (vary based on choice for wk. 1 project)

Poster board

Large format art paper

Colored pencils, markers, paints, fabric scraps, etc...

Soft pastels (fine chalk pastels)

Masking tape or painter's tape

Black mixed media paper (9"x12" or larger)

Cardboard (a bit larger than your planet (bowl), ref. p. 28)

Plain paper and a cutting mat would work too

X-acto knife or box cutter

6" or larger bowl (dependent on paper size) for tracing circle

RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM PAIRINGS

MATH

AoPS

HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

The Moral of Our Stories by Torchlight Curriculum (TBA)

The Big History Project
OR

OER PROJECTS World History

THE ARTS

The Art of Rock & Roll, vol. II by Torchlight Curriculum (TBA)

LEGEND

★ Spine
📻 Quality Audiobook

💬 Special Note

⚡ Activity

🎵 Music

📄 Document Needed

"wk. #" indicates the week the book starts in the schedule

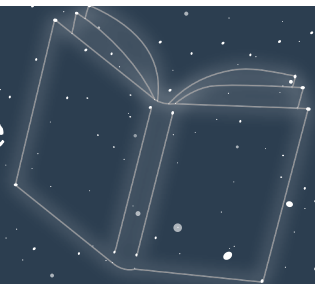
📖 Book Club Readers

Overview Study Schedule

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Learner	Reading & Annotation daily	Reading & Annotation daily	Reading & Annotation daily	Reading & Annotation daily
	Vocabulary Study daily	Vocabulary Study daily	Vocabulary Study daily	Vocabulary Study daily
	1 Act. + 1 Project	2 Activities	1 Activities	1 Activities
	Poetry Reading	Poetry Reading & Analysis	Poetry Reading & Analysis	
		Structured Writing Opportunity		Structured Writing Opportunity

Learner & Learning Partner	Reading (LP - If done separately)	Reading (LP - If done separately)	Reading (LP - If done separately)	Reading (LP - If done separately)
	Book Club/ Discussion x1	Book Club/ Discussion x1	Book Club/ Discussion x1	Book Club/ Discussion x1
	Word Wander x2	Word Wander x2	Word Wander x2	Word Wander x2
		Writing Opportunity 1: Phase 6		Writing Opportunity 2: Phase 6

Note: Please read the Torchlight Constellation Series Learning Partner Guide before beginning your studies.



Week 1 Schedule

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Reading & Annotation	Ch. 1—2 Annotation Lesson (if needed)	Ch. 3—4 & Annotate	Ch. 5 & Annotate	Ch. 6—7 & Annotate	Ch. 8—10 & Annotate
Book Club/ Discussion					Week 1 Reading
Vocabulary	Study	Study & Word Wander	Study	Study	Study & Word Wander
Activities	Watch Tasting History		Story Starters Around the World		
Writing					
Poetry				First Read-through	

PREP

Print or acquire Annotation Notebook and go over Learner Annotation Introduction and Instructions. Annotation Notes can be cut out and affixed onto the inside cover of the learner's Annotation Notebook for reference if the learner has chosen to use their own notebook.

Cut out Vocabulary Study Cards for week 1.

WEEK 1 SUPPLIES

Student Book
Varied art supplies (see activity to allow learner to choose supplies).

Weekly Checklist Style Study Schedule: Week 1

Reading & Annotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Annotation Lesson (if needed) <input type="checkbox"/> Read Ch. 1—2 and annotate <input type="checkbox"/> Read Ch. 3—4 and annotate <input type="checkbox"/> Read Ch. 5 and annotate <input type="checkbox"/> Read Ch. 6—7 and annotate <input type="checkbox"/> Read Ch. 8—10 and annotate
Book Club/ Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Week 1 Reading Discussion
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Study <input type="checkbox"/> Word Wander <input type="checkbox"/> Study <input type="checkbox"/> Study <input type="checkbox"/> Word Wander
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ⚡ Have your learner look up the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Colorado, United States. This is where Petra and her family live, near the foothills of the mountains. <input type="checkbox"/> ⚡ Notice at the beginning of chapter 1 Lita makes Petra a hot chocolate with cinnamon. This drink will be revisited later. Your learner might like to learn a bit about where this Mesoamerican drink originated and even try a simplified version, although they might prefer to leave the peppers out! After vetting for your learner's needs, watch <i>Tasting History with Max Miller: Aztec Chocolate - Blood & Spice</i> here. <input type="checkbox"/> ⚡ Story Starters Around the World Project (This can be scheduled over a multiple-week timeline if desired).
Writing	
Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> First Read-through. Get a sense of the poem and start thinking about the meaning.

Extensions

Books

Treasury of Norse Mythology by Donna Jo Napoli
 The Epic of Gilgamesh by Kevin Dixon
 Gilgamesh the Hero by Geraldine McCaughrean

Other

The Fifth Season by N.K. Jemisin (adult sci-fi)

Videos

The Epic of Gilgamesh, The King Who Tried to Conquer Death by Ted-Ed ([video](#))
 The Epic of Gilgamesh by Crash Course ([video](#))
 Gilgamesh and Enkidu, BFFs by Extra Credits ([video](#))

Older learners

The Paris Review: Feminize Your Canon: Rosario Castellanos ([Article](#))
 Norse Mythology by Neil Gaiman

WEEK 1: VOCABULARY

nurture (p. 3)

V. To care for and encourage growth or development.

Ex. Petra was nurtured by her parents and close-knit family.

wince (p. 10)

N or V. A slight involuntary grimace or shrinking movement in anticipation of pain or distress.

Ex. As the book slammed, Petra winced.

morbid (p. 16)

Adj. Disturbing and unpleasant, relating to death and disease.

Ex. Quinn had a morbid curiosity in roadkill.

consensus (p. 17)

N. A General agreement.

Ex. There was a consensus on climate change amongst world leaders.

dogma (p. 19)

N. Principles laid down by an authority as true without question.

Ex. Their beliefs had morphed into dogma.

cognizance (p. 21)

N. Knowledge, awareness, or notice.

Ex. Any cognizance about baking was welcomed by the new bakers.

stasis (p. 33)

N. A period or state of inactivity.

Ex. The puppy's burst of energy was followed by a long period of stasis.

tailings (p. 62)

N. Geology term. The leftover matter from mining once the valuable parts are removed.

Ex. The tailings pond was a collection of water, crushed rock, and trace metals.

POEM: PASSPORT

By Rosario Castellanos (1925 - 1974)

Woman of ideas? No, I've never had one.
I never repeated others (out of modesty or
faulty memory).

Woman of action? No, not that either.
It's enough to look at the shape of my feet
and hands.

Woman, well, of word. No, not of word.
But, yes, of words--
many, contradictory, oh, insignificant,
pure sound, sifted empty of arabesques,
a salon game, gossip, foam, oblivion.

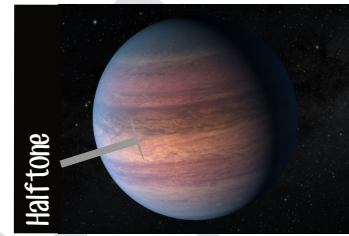
But if a definition is necessary
for the identification card, note
that I am a woman of good intentions,
and that I have paved
a direct and simple route to hell.

Questions to ponder and ideas to consider:

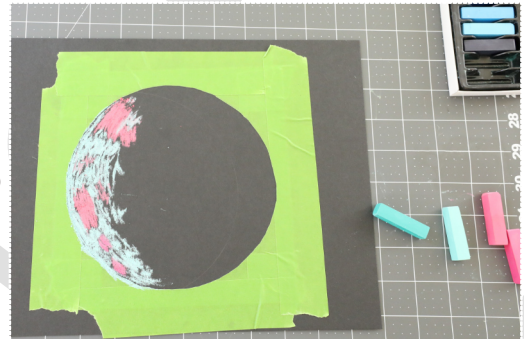
- Who is speaking? We know one thing for sure about the speaker, what is that?
- How does the author initially identify (who she believes herself to be)? How does she describe her words? Does this help you understand how she feels about her words? Do you think she feels this way, or is she told she should feel this way about her words?
- How does she ultimately identify? How does she feel about choosing an identification?
- Understand the aphorism, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions," means a person doing what seems good and right can lead to unintended negative consequences. Considering that we know, she is an outspoken woman of words living and writing during the 1960s and 1970s, what do you think her "good intentions" were, and what consequences do you think she suffered?
- Note: Rosario Castellanos was one of the most influential Mexican literary voices of the 20th century. She was looked after by a Mayan woman who told her Mayan legends as a child. She said this was where her love for language came from. Stories have power. She was a feminist and a Catholic, which helps us understand both the perspective of this poem and its religious reference.

be halfway between the colors I use for my shadow edge area (dark turquoise and dark pink) and the white I will use for our full light area.

You will notice that I chose my colors beforehand, making sure I had a light turquoise and a darker one, the same with my pinks. I start by adding color to the first third of my planet. It does not need to be perfectly filled in. Roughly place the color where you want land versus water. We will be finger-blending afterward to get it smooth and well-filled.

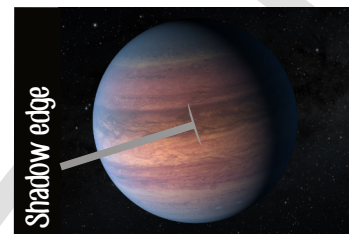


8. Time to blend! Using your finger or a paper blending tool (available at art supply stores), gently rub the soft pastel into the paper, covering the black as best you can. You might prefer to blend one color at a time, washing between, to keep your land and water boundaries well defined.

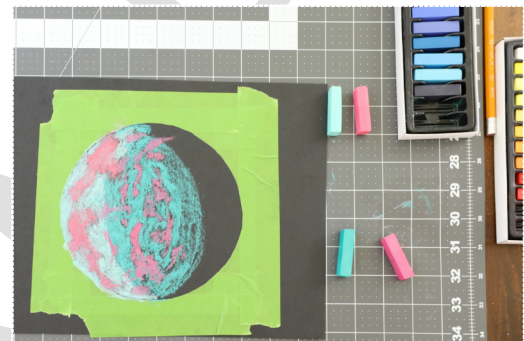


9. We fill in our shadows edge the same way we did our halftone, but with our darker versions of the halftone colors.

Shadow Edge: This is where your shadow is the darkest before it fades into black. You will use your darkest tones for this. Not all objects fade into black, but our planet does due to the lack of light (full shadow) and minimal to no reflection. If we were not using black paper here, we might have to use pastel to fill in the full shadow area with black and blend the shadow's edge color into the black. Your shadow's edge is where your object is turned away from your light, so the light is minimal here. In curved objects, this will be the place your curved object starts to curve away from the light.

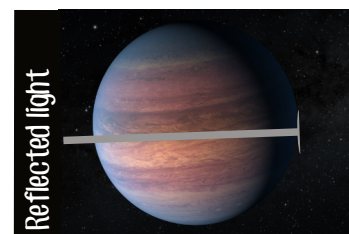


Fill in the shadow's edge area to about half an inch of your full shadow line. Then blend as you did the halftone area, and gently blend into the full shadow line, so your shadow edge colors seem to fade into black at this line. You will also need to blend from your halftone area into your shadow edge area so the lighter colors fade into their darker versions.



10. Now for our reflected light.

Reflected light: This element can be tricky. Reflected light is the light reflected from a surface behind your object back onto the backside of your object. You might not have any reflected light if there are no objects behind your planet, but I do! I will place a moon to the bottom right of my planet, and that gray moon will reflect the slightest bit of light from my light source back onto the back side of my world. So, I need just a bit of light to show up on the outer edge of my planet. My reflected light will be light, but not as light as my full light area, on which I am using white. So, I use my halftone turquoise. I will do this with a light touch by dusting a bit of the light turquoise onto my finger and lightly brushing the bottom right of my planet's edge with it.



11. Next, I add my full light, as located earlier. Using my soft white pastel, I add white from the bottom left

BOOK TITLE: WRITING OPPORTUNITIES

Choose one option for this week's assignment

Week 4

Persuasive Essay

Throughout the book, the value of stories is discussed. Petra, her parents, and Ben feel that history and stories are essential. The Collective sees more value in starting a society free from stories and history.

Option 1: Choose a position:

- A. Stories are important.
- B. Stories are not important.

Write an essay persuading people with an opposing viewpoint to see your perspective. Your stance does not need to be one of the two extremes, but picture it on a sliding scale from important to not important. Wherever you fall closest to, that will be the stance you take.



Comparative Opinion Essay

Option 2: What would we gain versus what would we lose if we all looked, dressed, and acted the same? This is what the Collective calls "sameness." Explore the idea of sameness versus diversity and their drawbacks and benefits.

Creative Writing

Option 3: At the beginning of the book, Lita tells Petra to make her stories her own if she is to become a storyteller. Choose your favorite story (fairy tales work well, but modern stories can also be a great choice) or research and learn a new story from your cultural background. Then rewrite the story, making changes that improve the story or provide modern wisdom you agree with. If you prefer to rewrite some Latin American folktales, refer to the extensions list for week 4.

TORCHLIGHT LITERATURE PRIMER: THE LAST CUENTISTA

Discussion

As with many books for young readers, especially mysteries, there is sneaking around, breaking the rules, potentially dangerous actions, if not just unwise choices. If you think your learner would benefit from such a note, consider that these behaviors are not condoned but used as literary devices to tell a great story. You can also choose to discuss each choice and instance of this behavior as it comes up and the specifics around the dangers or cautions of each example, whether it's a lie or omission of the truth or breaking into someone's personal property.

Wherever you see a lightening bolt symbol like this ⚡, you will find activity ideas.

Torchlight Intent	The Last Cuentista explores Mexican folklore and the art and importance of storytelling. Higuera meshes futurism and history while asking larger moral questions around our responsibilities to humanity, cultures, and how decision making power should be handled within civilizations.
Possible Concerns	This study was chosen as part of the Comparative Religion study year (TBA), therefore it does feature some minimal religious representation via character's beliefs or culture on pp. 26, 97, 123, 155, 239, & 240. This title includes a character dealing with familial death, momentary paralysis, and dystopian themes of control by threat of mind manipulation.

Reading Insights/Discussion Topics

Ch. 1

⚡ Have your learner look up the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Colorado, United States. This is where Petra and her family live, near the foothills of the mountains.

On p. 3, Petra asks, "*A nagual snake?*" Nagual, can also be spelled nahual, and is a personal guardian spirit believed by some Mesoamerican people to reside in an animal. Your learner might have assumed something close to this from the context sentence that followed, "*But how can the sun and Earth be parents to something part human, part animal—*" This is a great time to go over the "Unfamiliar Words" section of their annotation notes and encourage them to use it, or congratulate them for doing so. Discuss how it can give us more context if we keep track of words we are unfamiliar with.

⚡ At the beginning of chapter 1, Lita makes Petra hot chocolate with cinnamon. This drink will be revisited later. Your learner might like to learn a bit about where this Mesoamerican drink originated and even try a simplified version, although they might prefer to leave the peppers out! After vetting for your learner's needs, watch *Tasting History with Max Miller: Aztec Chocolate - Blood & Spice* [here](#).

On p. 4, Lita says "Y colorín Colorado, este cuento se ha acabado." This saying is difficult to translate into English because it is "un modismo," an idiom. The expression uses rhyming words that don't necessarily make sense but are a fun way to end a story. While we use, "...and they lived happily ever after," or "You've had your fun, the tale is done," and maybe even, "*Snip snap snout, this tale's told out*" to end our fairy tales, in many Spanish speaking countries they use this saying to indicate a story is finished.

READING WRAP-UP DISCUSSION

At the end of a good book, it benefits us to step back, process, sort out, and make sense of what we just read and how it affected us. The reading wrap-up discussion can take place in a comfy area over good food and refreshing drinks. Try to make this something you and your learner can look forward to and connect over.

How would you classify the genre of this novel? Reference Literary genres [here](#).

What questions do you have now that you have finished the story?

What character did you most connect with? What made you feel connected to them?

How did the book make you feel? Explore each emotion and discuss what contributed to it.

Initial Thoughts, Feelings, and Reactions

It's time to zoom out from your reading and process. You've just gone on a journey with your characters and shared their thoughts and emotions. The ending of a great story can be jarring, so let's get all our thoughts and feelings on the table, then we can try to make sense of them.

Did any part of the story take you by surprise?

When you think back on the story, did the author drop hints of the events before they happened?

Is there anything that bothered you about the book or the storytelling?

Were all the characters fully formed or lacking?

Did your viewpoint on the importance of stories change as you read this book? How?

Did your ideas on how we approach societal change alter?

What ideas or big questions from the story stuck with you the most?

Would you have done anything differently than the protagonist if you switched places with them?

Connection

Now that we better understand what we think and feel about the story and its characters, we need to connect our reactions to the text. Use your annotation notes to think about what happened in the book that made you think or feel.

Do you feel the main character was well-chosen, or would you have chosen a different character's point of view? Why?

Do you feel Javier made the best choice he could?

Do you think Javier's sacrifice was worth it? Why?

How do you feel about the Collective's choices and viewpoints?

Think about the points of conflict in the story. What types of conflict were used? Was it always external?

What did the author do to impart Petra's culture to the reader?

What message do you think a reader could take away from this book?

Did making Petra realistically brave and vulnerable change how you connected to her?

The Craft

Let's understand how and why the authors made their choices. Discovering an author's intention within their writing is like guessing a painter's reasoning behind their art. It's not about the author's intentions, but it is about how it affects the reader. And studying how an author craftily plays with emotions or pulls the reader along with their prose is valuable to building our writing skills.

How did the author help you fully understand Petra's motivations and choices?

How did the flashbacks to Petra's memories support the storytelling?

The Last Cuentista was written from Petra's first-person perspective. How would the story change if it was from Javier's perspective, or Voxy's? Does the perspective make an impact on a successful telling?