

Let's Make a Deal: Bartering Like Juan

Carmen Rodriguez

The city of Sunland Park is home to Desert View Elementary School, one of three elementary schools in the city. Sunland Park is located in southern New Mexico, on the border of El Paso, Texas, USA and separated from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico by the Rio Grande River. Sunland Park has a population of about 18,449 people. Desert View has an enrollment of about 400 students from kindergarten to sixth grade with a 99.8% Latinx enrollment. Desert View Elementary provides a space for all students to thrive and uses creative approaches for enrichment learning while encouraging students to think outside of the box.

Desert View Elementary works with the Out-of-School Time Program, part of the STEM Outreach Center at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. These programs bring many benefits to the school. "Afterschool programs can support social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, reduce risky behaviors, and provide a safe and supportive environment for children," stated Esmeralda Frias, assistant principal at Desert View (personal communication, April 28, 2022). The STEM Outreach Center offers many programs such as Story Explorations where students explore fairytales and their variants, poetry, and Latinx folklore!

Story Explorations

In Story Explorations, we look at *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* (Marcantonio, 2005) a fairytale variant of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Kellogg, 1997). We study other variants of the fairytale through explorations, which consist of literacy activities like Reader's Theater and Soundscapes (Leland, et al., 2017). Other activities provided for us in the lesson guide book incorporate literacy, art, and STEM activities such as Golden Dreams for Juan, Win the Ogre's Gold, and Bartering Deals.

Wait, did I say bartering? Yes, bartering can serve as more than a history lesson for students. By learning about bartering, children can learn a tool for meeting their needs and getting items they want without spending money. They also learn that items do not have to have a specific dollar value attached to them be valuable.

Bartering is the trading of services or goods with another person when there is no money involved. When it comes to students, how does it work? The students in Story Explorations have fun discovering how to barter at school, home, and the community.

We see students bartering all the time in school, but do they know they are bartering? Many times, they exchange an eraser for a pencil in class or an apple for a cookie in the cafeteria. To them, it's just an exchange. How can students understand that bartering is the exchange of goods and/or services? We start by making a connection to the story *Juan and the Pinto Bean Stalk* from *Red Ridin' in the Hood* (Marcantonio, 2005). In the story, Juan's mother asks him to sell Old Vaca, the family car. Old Vaca is the family's nickname for their station wagon. When Juan comes upon a viejito, Juan tells the

viejito that he would like to sell his car. Viejito holds out his hand and opens it to show three dried pinto beans. Juan has a choice. He must decide if the beans are worth the price of Old Vaca. Bartering, Juan asks for two hundred dollars instead of the beans. Viejito laughs and says to Juan, “These are not ordinary beans, they are magic.” (Marcantonio, 2005, n.p.). When bartering the students need to stop and make a choice just like Juan and consider the best way to accomplish an exchange.

Learning to Barter the Fun Way

Students learned a fun way of bartering and making choices by playing a game called Let’s Make a Deal from Story Explorations (See Figure 1).

Let’s Have Fun and Let’s Make a Deal!

I called students to the front of the room and offered them a chance to pick a prize hidden in the boxes. When they picked a box, we turned it around and saw the prize they won hidden inside. To make it interesting, I bartered with them about whether to keep what they won or to trade for an envelope (See Figure 3). The envelope could be something better or it could be a zonk. two adults presenting in front of multiple students seated in chairs set up to look like an audience



Figure 1. Let’s Make A Deal



Figure 2. Cachetadas: The Zonk Prize

“I thought it was fun because we can get prizes and it was challenging because you had to pick an envelope,” said Jaiden. As we played and made deals, students became more excited and gave their opinions to their friends of what they thought was a better deal.

As the game was played students had multiple opportunities to barter for prizes. When the game ended, all students had a prize that they had bartered to keep. “The game was really fun to play because I want everyone to win a prize,” said Jacob.



Figure 3. Mrs. Rodriguez Barterers with a Student

After the Let's Make a Deal game ended, I was able to see whether students had learned how to barter. I gave students five minutes to barter among themselves. I was interested to observe students attempting to barter a large bag of chips for a puzzle wooden toy. "I learned that bartering is hard, because only one person bartered with me," said Kamila.

Some students struggled to do an exchange with the prizes they won. "I had a very hard time bartering with the others, but I thought the game was fun. I learned how to barter," said Julian.

Bartering at Home and in the Community

Students were ready to start bartering with others outside of the classroom. I gave each student a mini cow figure (their own vaca, if you will) that they took home to barter with a family member or neighbor. I encouraged students to trade up for something that they valued more than their cow figures. They were instructed to trade for a different item at least five times and to keep a list of the exchanges. Would it be hard or easy? I wondered how successful they would be.

Maya said, "I like the Let's Make a Deal game because we can get nice stuff but doing it at home was intimidating." Maya started with her mother. She bartered her cow figure for some dimes. Next, Maya bartered with her father, trading the dimes for some gum. Then she bartered the gum for some chips with her brother. She bartered the chips for a ball from her sister. Finally, she finished bartering, exchanging the ball for her niece's key chain game (See Figure 4). Maya was successful and came out a winner!

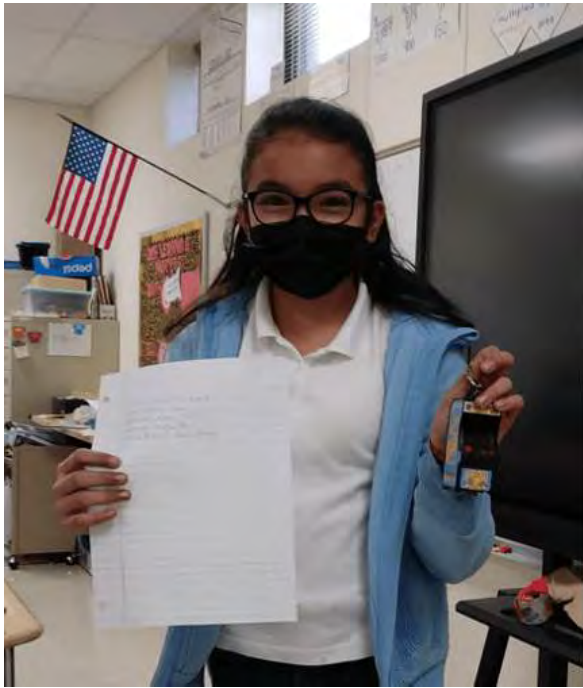


Figure 4. Maya Shares Her Bartering List and Key Chain Game



Figure 5. Javier Shares His Bartering List and Crystal Growing Kit

Javier was ready for the challenge to barter at home and the community. First, Javier bartered the cow figure for a doughnut with his mother. Second, he traded the doughnut for Girl Scout cookies with his father. Then he bartered the cookies for two chocolate bars. After, he traded the two chocolate bars for a large box of cookies with his grandmother. Finally, Javier went to his neighbor's house and traded the big box of cookies for a crystal growing kit (See Figure 5). "It was fun. My family was excited to barter," said Javier.

When he took the big box of cookies to his neighbor's house, Javier stated about the experience, "My neighbor was having fun and they looked at a series of things to barter with me." Javier's mom appreciated how the exploration provided an opportunity for him to experience bartering and recycling, at one point referring to the saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Javier was not only successful at bartering at home and the community but came out with a valuable life lesson.

In conclusion, there are many reasons, lessons, and activities for students to learn how to barter. Students had a fun time bartering with each other, family and the community. Students will have history lessons and life skills they can use for the rest of their life and come out as winners thanks to their experiences with Story Explorations.

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