



## CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

*Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns* can be used to address a variety of Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Below are some of the standards that can be met through the teaching ideas and activities in this guide when adjusted appropriately for students' grade levels. For a complete listing of the Standards, go to [corestandards.org/read-the-standards](http://corestandards.org/read-the-standards).

### Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

### Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

## VOCABULARY

Research shows that reading and discussing unfamiliar words within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to build vocabulary. Use these words as a starting point for a vocabulary study.

### Tier 2 and 3 words

breastplate	myth
descendant	obsidian
dissipate	sacred
elder	spirit guide
Mesoamerican	underworld

### Nahuatl Names and Words

chimalli	tilmatl
Quetzalcoatl	tonatiuh
Mictlantecuhtli	Xólotl

### Names of Places

Apanohualóyan	Mictlán
Cehuelóyan	Pancuetlacialóyan
Chiconahualóyan	Temiminalóyan
Itzcuintlán	Tepeme Monamictlán
Itztépetl	Teyollocualóyan

## ACTIVITIES

### Reading Aloud Nahuatl/Spanish

Nahuatl is the language used primarily in the vocabulary words for *Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns*. The way Nahuatl is written presently follows the syllable rules of Spanish and primarily follows a consonant with a vowel. The sounds for Spanish vowels and consonants are already found in English phonemes. C and Z follow the same rules, and the written accents above the vowels indicate an accented syllable. Here is a simple chart you can use when reading the book out loud. For any names of characters or places, take it easy, syllable-by-syllable, just as you would to pronounce your students' names carefully and respectfully.

Spanish Vowel/ Consonant	Sample Words
a	art, chalk
e	pet, hen
i	me, glee
o	bored, north
u	tutu, loo
h	silent; no sound
ll	same as the y sound
x	ch as in chocolate

### Morphological Word Study

Nahuatl is an agglutinative language, which means it can add several prefixes and affixes to a root word making a phrase into a very long word without spaces. English has long words like this too, like *antidisestablishmentarianism*. As a way to engage in morphological study, have your students identify the similarities to endings of the vocabulary words. Notice how many names of places end with the suffix *-lóyan* (the place where) or *-tlán* (the place of). See what similarities and differences the morphology of Nahuatl has with other languages.

## ACTIVITIES

### Creation Stories

Creation stories can be found throughout history and across the globe, as different cultures and societies attempted to explain how the world and humans came to be. Many of these creation stories are fanciful, and many are also tied to religious traditions. Ask students what creation stories they have heard and what cultures are associated with them. With the help of your school or local librarian, have students research a variety of other creation stories. Many can be found online, but many have also been retold and constructed as picture books. Guide students to compare and contrast these creation stories, noting the themes, patterns, symbols, characters, and tropes they have in common. What language features and genre elements do they notice across the stories? Invite students to compose and illustrate their own creation myths and to tell them to one another in a class recital.

### Art Connection: Codices

Mesoamerican codices were texts produced on bark paper called amate, cotton cloth, or deer hides. They were often folded in an accordion style and read from right to left. They depicted genealogies, calendars, daily life, lists of tributes paid, or accomplishments through pictographs and glyphs. Since new rulers and the Spanish often destroyed them as a way of conquering people, few Mixtec, Mayan, and Aztec codices from before and after the Spanish conquest survived. Today, most remain in México under the care of the National Institute of Anthropology and History but also in European libraries and museums.

Many children may be familiar with the popular video game Minecraft and the acquisition of wool for paintings, papyrus for paper, and using plants for dyes in the game. Have students look at the colors in these codices and infer what could have been used to color them. They may be surprised to learn that Mesoamerican illustrators used cochineal, indigo, cuscuta, achiote, shells, minerals, soils and coal for colors that have lasted until today.

### Art Connection: Codices *(continued)*

As an extension, have students practice their visual storytelling by using the codices as mentor texts. Here are some codices to show students:

Madrid Codex from the D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in México  
[mexicana.cultura.gob.mx/es/repositorio/detalle?word=C%C3%B3dice%20Huichapan&r=2&t=2056](http://mexicana.cultura.gob.mx/es/repositorio/detalle?word=C%C3%B3dice%20Huichapan&r=2&t=2056)

8 Deer “Jaguar Claw” from the Códices de México exhibition at the D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in México  
[codices.inah.gob.mx/movil/contenido.php?id=11-PhotoSwipe1600200357635](http://codices.inah.gob.mx/movil/contenido.php?id=11-PhotoSwipe1600200357635)

Have students create wordless picture books or graphic novels, using two-dimensional figures as characters. Tape or glue several pages together and fold in an accordion style. You can refer to this codex exercise from the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute: [blogs.uoregon.edu/mesoinstitute/about/curriculum-unit-development/codices/codex-exercise/](http://blogs.uoregon.edu/mesoinstitute/about/curriculum-unit-development/codices/codex-exercise/).

### Connection to Día de los Muertos

*Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns* follows the journey of Quetzalcoatl to the underworld, through the nine levels on his way to Mictlán, just as the dead were thought to have done. It is believed that the journey took four years to complete. In those four years, the living honored their loved ones with offerings through altars. Tonatiuh’s book offers a rich connection to the cultural practice of Day of the Dead, or Día de los Muertos. Many cities have celebrations in early November, and your students may even have traditions for this day. Ask students to interview their families and community members about any cultural practices related to Día de los Muertos. Families are also a great source of knowledge and can come into your class and present. Research whether museums or organizations in their city host a celebration. Have your class create altars with pictures of loved ones they want to honor and cempasuchil (marigold) flowers at school.

## ACTIVITIES

### Behind the Success

Although Quetzacoatl received credit throughout Mesoamerican mythology for creating humans, he could not have done so without the help of Xólotl. In fact, many heroes throughout history attained success because of the support of others who did not get to share the spotlight. Discuss this notion with students, asking them to identify noteworthy figures throughout various mythologies and histories who achieved their goals because others helped them. Extend this discussion to give recognition to the people behind the scenes that make things possible for others to be successful. For example, students can make a list of people who have helped their learning be possible in school, such as kitchen staff, custodians, and groundskeepers. Career parents also do not get much recognition, as much of their work is unpaid. Students can write letters or cards thanking these supportive, behind-the-scenes people to let them know that they are appreciated.

### Oral Family Traditions/Stories from home

Many families have oral traditions and stories that they pass down through generations. They can be stories about something that happened to a family member or stories from their town. Some families play games with songs, such as hand-clapping games with two or four players, jump rope, and *pasemisí, pasemisá* (La vivora de la mar) that have specific actions in the game. There are idiomatic expressions, sayings, proverbs, tongue twisters, riddles, and nursery rhymes that families pass on to one another. Sometimes these oral practices exist only in that family and have not yet been preserved in books. As a class, create an anthology of these oral family traditions. Challenge each student to bring to school an oral tradition from home. This can be a wonderful way of encouraging family involvement and validating the student and family cultures.

### Author-Illustrator Study

The publication of his first picture book, *Dear Primo*, was just the start of an award-winning career for Mexican-American author-illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh. Among his many honors are the Pura Belpré Award, Tomás Rivera Award, Sibert Medal, Orbis Pictus Honor, Jane Addams Award, and Américas Award. Invite students to conduct an author-illustrator study. With the help of your school or local librarian, gather a collection of Tonatiuh's picture books for your students to explore. Have them read the books, noting patterns in Tonatiuh's writing and illustration styles. For writing, what themes do they notice across his books? What kinds of characters does he spotlight in them? How does he use language and literary techniques to convey the stories he wants to tell? For illustration, what media does he tend to use? What illustration techniques does he employ, and how do they enhance the written text? Have students read the author's note that Tonatiuh often includes in the back matter of his books. Share Tonatiuh's website: [duncantonatiuh.com](http://duncantonatiuh.com). Encourage students to search for additional biographical information and interviews with him online. Once they have a solid understanding of his writing and illustration style, have students try their hand at using some of his techniques in their own work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In *Feathered Serpent and the Five Suns*, different characters deal with challenges in different ways. When they could not create humans to their satisfaction, the gods became tired and gave up. When Mictlantecuhtli was confronted by Quetzalcoatl, he sought to test and trick him. Quetzalcoatl faced the most challenges, each different from the other, and approached them with different strategies. Ask students to think about different challenges they have faced, and then have them reflect on the following questions:
  - ✦ What do you usually do when you face a challenge?
  - ✦ What strategy/ies usually work well to help you overcome a challenge?
  - ✦ How do you decide which strategy/ies to try?
  - ✦ When does it make sense to step away from a challenge? When does it not?
2. Quetzalcoatl exhibited the characteristics of perseverance and determination to accomplish his goal. Invite students to define what those characteristics mean and provide examples of them. Ask them the following questions:
  - ✦ Have you ever had a project or task for which you did not want to give up?
  - ✦ How did you feel when you finally accomplished your goal?
  - ✦ Do you know any historical figures that never gave up in spite of the odds?
  - ✦ What other books have you read or know about that show perseverance and determination?
3. Quetzalcoatl had several items that helped him on his journey. If you went on an adventure and you could only bring two items with you, what items would you take and why?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DK's Find Out! Mayan Facts for Kids

[dkfindout.com/us/history/mayans](http://dkfindout.com/us/history/mayans)

DK's Find Out! Aztec Facts for Kids

[dkfindout.com/us/history/aztecs](http://dkfindout.com/us/history/aztecs)

University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's Using Native American Legends to Teach Mathematics

[uwosh.edu/coehs/cmagproject/ethnomath/legend/legend1.htm](http://uwosh.edu/coehs/cmagproject/ethnomath/legend/legend1.htm)

Native American Creation Myths and Legends from Native Languages of the Americas

[native-languages.org/creation.htm](http://native-languages.org/creation.htm)

9 Facts About Quetzalcoatl from ThoughtCo

[thoughtco.com/facts-about-quetzalcoatl-2136322](http://thoughtco.com/facts-about-quetzalcoatl-2136322)



# FEATHERED SERPENT AND THE FIVE SUNS

## A MESOAMERICAN CREATION MYTH

by *Duncan Tonatiuh*



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Ages 5 to 9

### PRAISE

- ★ *“Has all the literary elements of a good story and can be used to teach genre, narrative, history, or just quality literature.”*  
— *Booklist*
- ★ *“There’s room for a reader-aloud to ramp up the drama... Playful.”*  
— *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*
- ★ *“Bold use of color and expansive spreads enhance these mythic proportions.”*  
— *Horn Book Magazine*
- ★ *“Told with succinct clarity and a hint of mischief, this rendition begs for rereads... Simply spellbinding.”*  
— *Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ *“Hand-drawn, digitally collaged art, incorporating Mesoamerican styles and motifs, deepens the power of Tonatiuh’s tale”*  
— *Publishers Weekly*

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