

TOO MANY TAMALES

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by Gary Soto, illustrated by Ed Martinez
Themes: Families, Holidays, Multicultural
Grade Level: PreK-9 (ages 4 to 9)
Running time: 8 minutes

SUMMARY

This is a Christmas story that features a Hispanic family. It's also a tale about why it's better to tell the truth than to panic and try to cover up a problem. In the story, a girl named Maria helps her mother make tamales for the Christmas meal. When her mother leaves the kitchen for a few minutes, she tries on her mother's ring. Later, after her uncles, aunts and cousins have arrived, Maria realizes the ring is missing. She panics, and gets her cousins to help her eat all the tamales, trying to find the ring. When they find nothing, Maria realizes she has to confess to her mother—who, it turns out, has been wearing the ring all along. As the family cooks up another batch of tamales, Maria learns to laugh at herself and at what has happened.

OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and listen to a Christmas story about a Hispanic family.
- Children will appreciate the importance of telling the truth and not covering up mistakes.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Introduce the title of the program and make sure that children know what a tamale is (a food made from corn meal, or masa, and meat). Explain that in Mexican-American and other Hispanic families people often eat tamales on holidays like Christmas. Ask them to remember the title as they watch the story.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Ask children to explain the title of the program. Who thought there were too many tamales? Why were there too many? Go back through the movie, pausing at the clues that Maria should have remembered, before she started eating the tamales. (Maria's mother takes the bowl from her before the tamales get made, and Maria's mother and father, not Maria, are the people who put the tamales together.) Ask children to share how they think Maria should have handled the situation.

Connect the story to social studies by talking about different kinds of Americans and the different ways they celebrate holidays. Review what children saw in the program. Ask them to identify ways in which Maria's family Christmas is like, and different from, their own. Have children list foods that are served at holidays in their families. If possible, arrange for children to taste tamales and other ethnic holiday foods.

Connect the story to math by having students make "tamales" from twists of paper. Have students take turns counting the paper tamales and using them in story problems. To illustrate the idea of probability, place a picture of a ring inside one of the twists of paper. Ask students to identify their chances of drawing the tamale with the ring out of a bowl of all the tamales.

Connect the story to communications arts by having children present the story as a class play. Encourage children from non-Hispanic cultures to rewrite the story, using foods from their own families instead of tamales.

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