

PEACHTREE

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Martina the Beautiful Cockroach A Cuban Folktale

Written by Carmen Agra Deedy | Illustrated by Michael Austin

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Martina una cucarachita muy linda: Un cuento cubano

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Martina the beautiful cockroach doesn't know coffee beans about love and marriage. That's where her Cuban family comes in. While some of the Cucarachas offer her gifts to make her more attractive, only *Abuela*, her grandmother, gives her something really useful: *un consejo increíble*, some shocking advice. At first, Martina is skeptical of her Abuela's unorthodox suggestion, but when suitor after suitor fails the Coffee Test, she wonders if a little green cockroach can ever find true love. Soon, only the gardener Pérez, a tiny brown mouse, is left. But what will happen when Martina offers him *café cubano*?

After reading this sweet and witty retelling of the Cuban folktale, readers will never look at a cockroach the same way again. Carmen Agra Deedy delivers a deliciously inventive Cuban version of the beloved Martina folktale, complete with a dash of *café cubano*.

FOLKTALE ORIGINS

Folktales are entertaining stories passed down from one generation to another. Storytellers keep this traditional form of literature alive. In an original retelling of the traditional folktale, Carmen Agra Deedy puts her own unique spin on Martina the Cockroach.

The story of Martina the Cockroach and Perez the Mouse is one of the best known in Latin America, but there are many variants on this popular folktale. The basic tale type is recognizable across all versions and retellings, while the motifs may vary.

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach is the story of a little cockroach who marries a mouse, and according to the internationally accepted AarneThompson Classification System, it is labeled as tale type 2023. This tale type is known as “Little Ant Marries” or “Little Ant Finds a Penny.”

Folktales are often shared orally, and with every retelling comes a new element that slightly alters the story over time. The stories often reflect elements of the culture it is shared in. The AarneThompson Index helps storytellers, teachers, librarians, and scholars identify and trace a tale through its many different titles in different languages. Within this tale are a bundle of motifs, or tale elements, that can vary according to the culture.

Carmen Agra Deedy's picture book weaves together many of the traditional motifs that show up time and time again in retellings around the world. Below is a chart of some examples and the cultures they can be traced back to.

FUN FACTS

If you thought illustrator Michael Austin made Martina green just for fun, think again! The Cuban cockroach is bright green and can also be found right here in the United States. Here are some interesting facts about these colorful insects:

- *Panchlora nivea* is the scientific name for the Cuban cockroach. It's also known as the “green banana

cockroach,” because of the belief that it came into the US in shipments of bananas.

- The name *Panchlora* comes from the Greek word *pan*, meaning all, and *chloros*, meaning green. You might recognize *chloros* from the word chlorophyll—the green pigment in plants that helps them make food.
- The full scientific classification for the Cuban cockroach is:
 Kingdom: Animalia (Animals)
 Phylum: Arthropoda (Arthropods)
 Class: Insecta (Insects)
 Order: Dictyoptera (Mantids and Cockroaches)
 Family: Blaberidae
 Genus: *Panchlora*
 Species: *nivea*
- The Cuban cockroach is in the Blaberidae family, which includes giant cockroaches. Other roaches in this family include the Giant Cockroach and the Madagascar Hissing Cockroach.
- Cuban cockroaches are native to Cuba, but are sometimes found in the lower United States, along the Gulf Coast from Florida to central Texas. They prefer a subtropical or tropical climate.
- Cuban cockroaches do not like to come indoors, preferring to live in woodpiles, thick vegetation, and the trunks of palm and coconut trees. The young cockroaches are often found in leaf litter and debris. Cuban cockroaches are not considered pests, since they don't generally come into houses.
- Like other cockroaches, Cuban cockroaches develop in three stages: the egg, the nymph (the young insect), and the adult. This life cycle is called incomplete metamorphosis, because the young do not change appearance from nymph to adult or use a cocoon to mature.
- Adult cockroaches love to climb and are very strong fliers. They range in length from three-quarters of an inch to an inch.
- Cuban cockroaches are attracted to light, so they are often found near sources of artificial light like street lights. They are also nocturnal—active at night and rest during the daytime.
- Like other cockroaches, Cuban cockroaches are scavengers—animals that feed on dead or decaying matter, like rotting food, plants, dead animals. They will even eat soap and paper.
- Though many people do not find most roaches very appealing, some keep them as pets! The Cuban

cockroach is valued as a pet for its beautiful bright green color.

MAKE YOUR OWN BOOK ACTIVITY

In *Martina The Beautiful Cockroach*, three prospective suitors offer their hand in marriage to the eligible, green bachelorette. Carmen Agra Deedy and Michael Austin's book tells the story from Martina's side of the lamp post. Now we need YOU to help the guys reveal the flip side in your own book.

Use the activity sheet at the end of this guide to print, fold, and write your version of what happened to make your own book.

VOCABULARY

Abuela, *café cubano* and *un consejo increíble* add a dash of Spanish spice to the English version of *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*. The story is completely translated in the Spanish version of the book, entitled *Martina una cucarachita muy linda*.

Abuela

ah-BWAY-la

This word means “Grandmother.” Martina's Abuela plays an important role in the story. How does she help Martina find a good husband?

adiós

ah-dee-OSE

This is Spanish for “good-bye.”

mi amor

mee ah-MORE

This term of endearment translates into English as “my love.” Pérez calls Martina his *amor* after she passes the Coffee Test.

café cubano

kah-FEH coo-BAH-noe

Café cubano means “Cuban coffee.” You can tell from the name that this drink comes from Cuba. *Café cubano* is strong, yet tasty. People drink it in the morning, after meals, and when they visit with friends. Martina does the polite thing by offering her suitors *café cubano*, but there's nothing polite about splashing it on their shoes!

“¡Caramba!”

kah-RAHM-bah

This word is an expression of surprise. In English, it might mean “wow!” or “goodness!” When you write an expression like this in Spanish, you use two exclamation

points: one upside-down at the beginning of the word, and one right-side-up at the end. What effect do you think the extra exclamation point has? Does it make the expression more powerful?

un consejo increíble

oon con-SEH-hoe een-creh-EE-bleh

Consejo means “advice,” and *increíble* means “incredible” or “shocking.” What *consejo increíble* does Abuela give to Martina? Why is it so very *increíble*?

Don Cerdo

don SEHR-doe

Don is a title for very important men. It is like “Mr.” in English, except *Don* shows even more respect and honor. Can you believe Martina spilled coffee on Don Gallo, Don Cerdo and Don Lagarto? Now Abuela's advice seems even more shocking! Cerdo, as you may have guessed, is the Spanish word for “pig.” No wonder Don Cerdo is so sloppy!

Don Gallo

don GUY-yoe

Gallo is the Spanish word for “rooster.” How do you think Don Gallo's name is reflected in his personality and the way he acts?

Don Lagarto

don lah-GAHR-toe

Lagarto means “lizard.” Don Lagarto certainly seems slithery enough to live up to his name!

¡Gronc! ¡Gronc!

GRAHNK GRAHNK

This is the way a pig squeals in Spanish. Do you think it sounds anything like “oink oink?”

Havana

hah-BAH-nah

Havana is the capital city of Cuba. Havana is rich in history, trade, and the arts, all of which are centered in a section called Old Havana. Old Havana is the core of the original city and the place where Martina makes her home.

hola

OH-lah

This word, the opposite of *adios*, means “hello.” Remember not to say the “H” at the beginning of the word; it's silent.

¡Ki-ki-ri-kiiii!

kee-KEE-ree-KEEEE

This is the way to say “Cock-a-doodle-doo” in Spanish. Don Gallo yells this when Martina spills coffee on his nice shoes.

Mamá

mah-MAH

This is the Spanish word for “Mom” or “Mommy.” It's similar to the English word “Mama.” What are some other Spanish words from the story that look or sound like words you know in English?

una mantilla

OOH-na mahn-TEE-ya

A mantilla is a delicate scarf made of lace or silk. To dress up, a woman drapes it over her head and shoulders, wearing it along with a peineta. Doesn't Martina look beautiful in her mantilla and peineta?

Martina Josefina Catalina Cucaracha

mar-TEE-nah hoe-seh-FEE-nah kah-tah-LEE-nah coo-kah-RAH-chah

This is the name of a beautiful Cuban cockroach in search of the right husband. But why is Martina's name so long? Traditionally, in Cuba and throughout Latin America, people gave their children two or three first names so that the children would be protected by many different saints. Nowadays, people may give their children several first names in order to honor family members. *Cucaracha* is the Spanish word for “cockroach.” You may have heard it in a popular song.

El Morro

ell MOH-roe

Morro is the name of a beautiful old fortress guarding the entrance to Havana Bay. In the second syllable of Morro you must roll the R's. Practice by placing the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth and roll an R sound. It sounds like a cat purring. Don't be discouraged if you can't do it at first! It takes some people a long time to master the rolled Rrrrrrrrrrrr!

muchacha

moo-CHAH-chah

This is the Spanish word for “girl” or “young woman.”

Papá

pah-PAH

Papá is the Spanish word for “Dad” or “Daddy.”

una peineta

OOH-nah pay-NET-tah

A *peineta* is a beautiful comb made of seashell. Traditionally, Latin American women wear *peinetas* in their hair at festive occasions such as weddings.

Pérez

PEH-rezz

Pérez is the little brown mouse who wins Martina's heart in the end. The name Pérez is one version of the English name "Peter."

el perico

ell peh-REE-coe

Perico is a word for small birds of the parrot family. Why do you think Papá sent *el perico* instead of another animal to spread the news about Martina? (Hint: What things can *el perico* do that the other animals can't?)

El Prado

ell PRAH-doe

El Prado is a famous street in Havana. It runs from the sea all the way to the capitol building and is filled with music, shops, and cafes. *El Prado* attracts all kinds of people every day, from boys on skateboards to dancers and artists.

“¡Psssst! ¡Psssst!”

This is the sound a lizard, such as Don Lagarto, might make in Spanish.

señor

see-NYOHR

This is the Spanish term for a man or gentleman. It is polite to address a man as *Señor*, which is the Spanish equivalent of “Mr.”

señora

see-NYOH-rah

This is the Spanish term for a woman or lady. *Señora* is also the equivalent of “Mrs.”

señorita

see-nyoh-REE-tah

This is the Spanish term for a young woman. It is the equivalent of “Miss.”

sí

SEE

Perhaps you've heard this common Spanish word before. *Sí* means “yes.”

Ti-ki-tin, ti-ki-tan

tee-kee-TEEN, tee-kee-TAHN

As you can see from the noises in the story like Don Cerdo's “¡Gronc!,” some sounds in Spanish are different from the ones in English. *Ti-ki-tin, ti-ki-tan* is a way to show the pounding of Martina's heart when she meets Pérez the mouse. In English, it might be something like “thumpity-thump” or “pit-a-pat.”

Tía Cuca

TEE-ah COO-cah

Tía Cuca's name is a pun: Tía means “aunt,” and Cuca comes from the Spanish word for cockroach, *cucaracha*. But wait—*cuca* can also mean “shrewd” or “crafty.” Can you guess what kind of person Tía Cuca might be?

REVIEWS

“Deedy's masterful retelling of this Latino folktale has a rollicking voice imbued with sly tongue-in-cheek humor. The acrylic illustrations, in a hyper-realistic style reminiscent of a softer William Joyce, are rendered in a vivid tropical palette. Shifting perspectives and points of view add vitality to the compositions, and facial expressions reveal both emotions and character traits.

A scattering of Spanish words adds zest to this fine read-aloud.”

—**Booklist**

“The skillfully crafted acrylic illustrations capture the island's ambience... The text flows easily.”

—**Criticas, Starred Review**

“Lively and funny... Fun to compare with other versions, this telling has magic all its own.”

—**Kirkus Reviews**

“Austin's cockroach dwelling is a desirable piece of real estate, with its stairs made of gum wrappers, its wrought-plastic comb railing, and its exclusive mid-Havana address (it's a lamppost). A friendly sprinkling of Spanish words, warmly drawn relationships and a lot of puns all widen the audience for this spirited story.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“Deedy's text sparkles with sly humor... The stunning acrylic illustrations are full of color, light, and humor... This wonderful book will delight children.”

—**School Library Journal**

“Every page crackles with funny rhymes, silly sound effects, and wordplay that even adults will find irresistible.” —*Atlanta Magazine*

“Gorgeously illustrated” —*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

“The humorous use of language, Cuban setting, and beautiful illustrations add to the book’s cultural authenticity.” —*REFORMA Newsletter*

“Beauty and charm are not what we expect in a cockroach, but author Carmen Agra Deedy creates a sweet maiden in her re-telling of a Cuban folk tale about selecting a husband.” —*The Sacramento Bee*

“It is an excellent way to introduce youngsters to the beauty of insects...” —*Sun Herald*

“Children love the animals... The illustrations are WONDERFUL... Great for teaching a lesson on puns, whether for reading OR writing. Also has a great character development component to it about acceptance, kindness, and understanding. Also great to include in a folktale unit...” —*Write Wild*

“Audio books have also gained acceptance as a type of reading, thanks to great recordings like ‘Martina the Beautiful Cockroach,’ written and narrated by Carmen Agra Deedy...” —*Jon Scieszka, Ambassador for Children’s Literature*

AWARDS

- Pura Belpre Medal (Honor Book) —American Library Association, Association for Library Service to Children, REFORMA, National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos, 2008
- Odyssey Award (Honor) —American Library Association, *Booklist*, Young Adult Library Services Association, 2009
- Best Children’s Books of the Year —Bank Street College of Education, 2008
- Notable Children’s Recordings —American Library Association, 2009
- Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People —National Council for the Social Studies, Children’s Book Council, 2008
- Amelia Bloomer Project (Nominee) —ALA Booklist, Feminist Task Force, 2008
- B. White Award (Nominee) —Association of Booksellers for Children, 2008
- Irma Simonton and James H. Black Award for the Best Picture Book of the Year (Honor Book) —Bank Street College of Education, 2008
- Society of School Librarians International Book Awards (Honor Book, Language Arts, Picture Books) —Society of School Librarians International, 2008
- International Latino Book Awards (Best Children’s Picture Book, English) —Latino Book and Family Festival, Latino Literacy Now, 2008
- Americas Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature (Commended Title) —National Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP), 2008
- California Young Reader Medal (Primary) —California Reading Association, CATE, CLA, CSLA 2010-2011
- Children’s Book Award —Florida Reading Association, 2008-2009
- Young Hoosier Book Award (Nominee, Picture Book) —Association for Indiana Media Educators, 2009-2010
- Texas Bluebonnet Award (Master List) —Texas Library Association, 2009-2010
- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (Starred, Primary) —Kansas National Education Association, 2008
- Monarch Award (Master List) —Illinois School Library Media Association, 2011
- Virginia Readers’ Choice Awards (Master List) —Virginia State Reading Association, 2010-2011
- Black-Eyed Susan Book Award (Nominee, Picture Book) —Maryland Educational Media Organization, 2008-2009
- Charlotte Award (Nominee, Primary) —New York State Reading Association, 2010
- Georgia Children’s Picture Storybook Award (Nominee) —University of Georgia, 2010-2011
- Golden Sower Award (Nominee, Primary) —Nebraska Library Association, 2010-2011
- Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Award (Nominee, Grades 3-5) —State Library of Louisiana and Louisiana Center for the Book, 2010
- North Carolina Children’s Book Award (Nominee, Junior Book) —North Carolina Reading Association, 2009

- Patricia Gallagher Picture Book Award (Nominee) —Oregon Reading Association, 2015-2016
- Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Awards (Nominee, Grades K-3) —Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, 2009-2010
- South Carolina Picture Book Award (Nominee) —South Carolina Association of School Librarians, 2009-2010
- Treasure State Award (Nominee) —Montana State Reading Council, 2010
- Volunteer State Book Awards (Master List, Grades K-3) —Tennessee Association of School Librarians, 2009-2010
- Anne Izard Storytellers' Choice Award —Westchester Library System, 2008
- Books All Young Georgians Should Read —Georgia Center for the Book, 2014
- Hispanic Heritage Month Recommended Reading List —Just Read, Florida!, 2013
- Read On Wisconsin! (Primary) —Read On Wisconsin!, 2009
- Storytelling World Resource Awards (Winner, Stories for Young Listeners) —Storytelling World, 2009
- Mockingbird Award (Nominee) —Abilene Independent School District, 2008-2009

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carmen Agra Deedy, a *New York Times* bestselling author, has been writing and traveling around the world telling stories for more than twenty years. Her books have received numerous awards and honors. Carmen has performed in many prestigious venues, but children are her favorite audience. Born in Havana, Cuba, she came to the United States as a refugee and like most immigrants sees the world from multiple perspectives. She lives in Georgia.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Michael Austin is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, a creative director, and the illustrator of several books. He lives in Georgia.

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fold first

Fold Second

In MARTINA THE BEAUTIFUL COCKROACH,
readers enjoy the story from Martina's side of the lamp post.
But, how do these characters feel about the Coffee Test?
Now it's **YOUR** turn to tell some stories!

Flip
SIDE

Written By: _____