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## **Family Plays**

# SEÑORA TORTUGA

by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

“Fill your head full of  
fantasies, and you’ll  
never know what’s real.

Si no es verdad,  
no es nada.”

## SEÑORA TORTUGA

by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

In this enchanting bilingual play, young Pedro and his family make their home in a barn on the Mexican border. Pedro complains of having nothing and brings his mother many headaches. She invites a hungry woman to share the family dinner once, but this Señora returns time and again to eat and tell fantastical stories of the Enchanted Serpent and Cucuy of Mexican legend, filling Pedro's nights with heroic yet frightening dreams. Surprisingly, Pedro is learning from these wisdom tales, but his mother is suspicious of the Señora until it is revealed that Señora Tortuga holds the thread that ties their past dreams to their future. Code: SU1.

**APPROX. RUNNING TIME:** 50 MINUTES

**CAST:** 6 ROLES (3F, 1M, 2 EITHER) THAT MAY BE PLAYED BY AS FEW AS 4. ROLES MAY BE DISTRIBUTED FURTHER TO INCREASE CAST TO 9. A MUSICIAN IS SUGGESTED (WHO CAN BE DOUBLED FROM THE CAST) TO UNDERSCORE THE SCENES.

**SETTING:** ELABORATE OR SIMPLE, SUITABLE FOR TOURING. PUPPETS MAY BE USED.

**COSTUMES:** CONTEMPORARY OR STYLIZED

**PLAYWRIGHT:** Roxanne Schroeder-Arce currently serves as Assistant Professor at Emerson College in Boston. She came to Emerson from California State University at Fresno where she served as Assistant Professor for three years. Before Fresno, she was Artistic and Education Director of Teatro Humanidad in Austin, Texas. She also taught high school theatre in Laredo and Austin for six years. Roxanne earned her MFA from the University of Texas at Austin, and her Bachelor's degree and teaching credential from Emerson College. One of Roxanne's primary artistic and research interests is that of bilingual theatre with and for youth. Her bilingual plays have been produced throughout the nation. She has taught courses for educators focused on Drama and Diversity at institutions such as the Tennessee Arts Academy and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Roxanne has served on the Board of Directors for TYA/USA and is an active member of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. She lives in Newtonville, Massachusetts with her husband Carlos and their baby Genevieve.

# Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170

Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

[www.FamilyPlays.com](http://www.FamilyPlays.com)

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Señora Tortuga

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## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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“Produced by special arrangement with  
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## ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDIT

**SEÑORA TORTUGA** was commissioned and first produced by the Plano Repertory Theatre, Plano, Texas in 1999. The play was directed by Patti Neff.

Cast:

Matthew Vela	Pedro, Juan Bobo
Ruth Osuna	Letitia, Mama
Carmen Alaniz	Beatriz (Señora Tortuga)
Jessenia She	Claudia

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Actor 1 – Pedro, Juan Bobo, 10 years old  
Actor 2 – Letitia, Mama, in her 30s  
Actor 3 – Beatriz (Señora Tortuga), ageless  
Actor 4 – Claudia, 7 years old  
Actor 5 – River, Serpent, Cucuy  
Actor 6 – River, Serpent, Cucuy

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The action takes place in the humble Ortiz home—a barn which Señor Garza has converted into a living space in which he has allowed the family to stay; the river outside; and in another world into which the characters enter through Pedro’s dreams.

Although the setting can be portrayed in various ways, it is described in the script using props and set pieces that are representational. The Ortiz home is defined by a platform. Flowing fabric is used for water. “Dream” boxes and a “dream” pail (painted “like water”) are props that are animated by the actors when the dreams begin.

There are 6 roles which can be performed by as few as 4 or as many as 9. A live musician is suggested to provide impromptu underscoring, and may also be one of the River characters, or may serve as the voice for one or more of the characters. Puppets are suggested for the Serpent.

Some of the dialogue is written in Spanglish, a kind of speech especially used on the US borders of Mexico. In this speech, speakers slide in and out of Spanish and English and often create their own words, which have come to be understood by many.

**Glossary of selected Spanish/Spanglish words:**

*Tortuga mi tortuga, muy despacio, ya no te encuentro en tu espacio, quiero creer, quiero creer, pero como puedo cuando no te puedo ver.*—My Turtle, very slow, I can't find you. I want to believe, but how can I when I can't see you?

*Sí mami, allí voy*—Yes, Mommy, I am going now.

*¿Qué hora es, Pedro?*—What time is it, Pedro?

*No sé.*—I don't know.

*¿Por qué no?*—Why not?

*Más que otros.*—More than others.

*Pedro, ¿en dónde conseguistes esa gallina?*—Pedro, where did you get that chicken?

*¿Por qué piensas que soy so skinny?*—Why do you think I am so skinny?

*arroz con pollo*—Chicken with rice

*¿Tu hermana, Claudia?*—Your sister Claudia?

*Claro que sí.*—Clearly, yes.

*¡Y el agua!*—And the water!

*Tortuga mi tortuga, muy despacio, ahora te encuentro en tu espacio, puedo creer, puedo creer, ya entiendo porque ya te puedo ver.*—My Turtle, very slow, now I have found you. I can really believe, and now I understand as I can fully see you.



This play is dedicated to María Rocha,  
my Señora Tortuga.

# SEÑORA TORTUGA

By Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

## SCENE ONE

*(Scene: The River. The Musician, visible to the audience, plays a slow, steady echoing beat. Blue-green fabric, representing flowing water/agua, is manipulated by The River actors and flows through the space. Beatriz enters to the beat and moves around the outside of the barn/home, represented by a platform. Pedro enters the space surrounding the platform. The Musician changes the rhythm to a fast, inconstant beat - Pedro's rhythm. Pedro pantomimes picking up objects from the ground and throwing them toward the blue-green flowing material downstage. He passes Beatriz, not noticing her. She turns and begins to follow him, not picking up speed at all. Leticia's voice is heard, echoed by other characters.)*

**LETICIA:** *Tortuga, mi tortuga, muy despacio, ya no te encuentro en tu espacio, quiero creer, quiero creer, pero como puedo cuando no te puedo ver.*

*(This is repeated four times, each time with a different rhythm. The last time it trails off as Leticia's image is seen on platform.)*

**LETICIA:** *(Yelling out door, almost singing) ¿Pedro?! ¿Pedro?!*

**PEDRO:** *(Off) Sí, mami, allí voy. (Runs on, around the platform and "into" barn) Bueno, mamá.*

**LETICIA:** *¿Bueno, mamá? That's all you have to say? ¿Qué hora es, Pedro?*

**PEDRO:** *(Looks at wrist, no watch) No sé.*

**LETICIA:** *It's past five, that's what time it is. It's almost time for dinner, and I haven't even begun.*

**PEDRO:** *¿Por qué no?*

**LETICIA:** *You know that it is your job to get the water, and I can't start without water, so I can't start without you.*

**PEDRO:** *Pos*, what about *Claudia*?

**LETICIA:** *Yá*, you worry about *Pedro*. *Claudia* already came home, did her chores, and went outside.

**PEDRO:** Well, why is what time we eat so important? Before there were watches, it didn't matter, I bet. They didn't even know what time it was, and nobody starved.

**LETICIA:** *Sí*, they did know. They used the sun to tell the time. Maybe you should try that.

**PEDRO:** I'd rather try a watch. If I had a watch, I'd know what time it was, and you wouldn't have to yell at me for being so late.

**LETICIA:** *¿Por qué, Pedro?* Why do you always have to cry about what you don't have? Can't you ever just be happy for what you do have?

**PEDRO:** *Pos*, what do I have?

**LETICIA:** You have a family, a place to live, and you eat three meals a day, that's what.

**PEDRO:** A barn, and beans and rice.

**LETICIA:** *Más que otros*. What's that under your arm?

**PEDRO:** A chicken.

**LETICIA:** *Pedro, ¿en dónde conseguistes esa gallina?*

**PEDRO:** From the coop, of course.

**LETICIA:** *¡Qué malo, Pedro!* You take that back.

**PEDRO:** *Pero, mamá*, I'm sick of beans and rice. I want something real. *¿Por qué piensas que soy so skinny?*

**LETICIA:** Because you run around all day taking things that do not belong to you. Now, take it back.

**PEDRO:** He'll never miss it, *Mamá*.

**LETICIA:** That is not the point. I will not have a thief in my

house.

**PEDRO:** Your barn, you mean. *'Ama*, he has like seven billion chickens.

**LETICIA:** *Pedro*, ¿qué dije?

**PEDRO:** *Allí voy.* (Goes to leave, turns) You know, the chicken even said that he'd rather we eat him than mean old (Mocking) *Señor Garza*.

**LETICIA:** The chicken doesn't really have a choice, now does he? If it were not for *Señor Garza* we would be sleeping in a box somewhere, *Pedro*, *recuerdate*.

(*Pedro exits as she continues working.*)

## SCENE TWO

(*Pedro sees Señora Tortuga, an ageless woman, dressed in flowing green and brown material.*)

**BEATRIZ:** (Almost scaring Pedro) ¡*Buenas tardes!*

**PEDRO:** Oh, hi.

**BEATRIZ:** Where are you going?

**PEDRO:** Nowheres.

**BEATRIZ:** Where's nowheres?

**PEDRO:** The coop. I gotta put this chicken back.

**BEATRIZ:** Taking it for a walk, were you?

**PEDRO:** You ask a lot of questions, for a stranger.

**BEATRIZ:** Hmm... I ask a lot of questions for anybody, I guess. So, you gonna tell me, were you taking it for a walk?

**PEDRO:** Sort of. I planned to make *arroz con pollo*, *pero mamá* says *no*.

**BEATRIZ:** I see. Is she home? I'd like to talk to her.

**PEDRO:** Go ahead.

**BEATRIZ:** Would you tell her that I am here?

**PEDRO:** *Bueno.* But I know what she's gonna say.  
(Returns to platform)

**LETICIA:** I said "put that chicken back"...

**PEDRO:** I'm putting the chicken back, but some woman is outside, what should I tell her?

**LETICIA:** Well, what does she want?

**PEDRO:** I don't know. She's kind of weird looking though.

**LETICIA:** Well, find out.

**PEDRO:** (*Exits to floor level*) She said, "What do you want?"

**BEATRIZ:** I'd like to share your dinner with you, if you'll have me.

**PEDRO:** Good luck. (*Returning to Leticia*) She wants food. Should I tell her we don't have any?

**LETICIA:** *Claro que no.* You will learn eventually, *Pedro.* I'll teach you a lesson and make sure she gets full.

**PEDRO:** *¿Qué?* You never make sure I get full. *¡No lo creo!* How can you give food away when we don't even have enough for ourselves?

**LETICIA:** Whatever you give out, *Pedro,* will come back to you. You must learn to care for others as much as you do for yourself. Tell her I'll be right out.

**PEDRO:** (*Walks outside, steps off platform, to Señora Tortuga*) My Mom said we don't have any food today, maybe tomorrow.

**LETICIA:** (*Stepping out, not hearing Pedro*) *Buenas tardes, señora.*

**BEATRIZ:** *Buenas.*

**LETICIA:** *Mucho gusto.* My son says you are asking for food.

**BEATRIZ:** *Pues,* I'd like to eat with your family, to sit and talk as we...

**LETICIA:** Pardon, my son did not get my water for me, so I am getting dinner later than usual tonight. You want to come back in an hour, and I can have a bag of food ready?

**BEATRIZ:** But I thought he said... (*Looks to Pedro*)

**LETICIA:** *¿Si?*

**BEATRIZ:** (*Aware that Pedro lied*) *Nada.* No, I can wait. *No hay problema.*

(*Pedro walks to water.*)

**LETICIA:** *Pues,* I'm sure you have other things to do.

**BEATRIZ:** It's no problem, really. Oh, I see time a little differently than most people do.

(*Leticia walks into barn. Beatriz follows.*)

**LETICIA:** I'm trying to teach *Pedro* about time. He doesn't seem to get it.

**BEATRIZ:** Your son is quite special.

**LETICIA:** Oh, he's special, all right. He doesn't appreciate anything, doesn't listen, takes things without asking, and he lies.

**PEDRO:** (*Returning*) *Mamá...* I just saw your little angel, stealing flowers from *Señor Garza's* garden.

**LETICIA:** *¿Tu hermana, Claudia?* She's not stealing, *Pedro.* She's doing what I told her to do, pick a few flowers for the table.

**PEDRO:** (*Contesting*) *Mamá,* how are flowers different from a chicken?

**BEATRIZ:** Ah, *niño*, you have a lot to learn.

**LETICIA:** *(To Beatriz)* That's not what he means. *(To Pedro)* It's different because *Señor Garza* said we could take as many flowers as we wanted.

**PEDRO:** But what good are flowers to us?

**BEATRIZ:** Ah, *niño*, imagine the world without flowers.

**PEDRO:** I wouldn't care. *(An idea)* Hey, *mamá*, did *Señor Garza* say we could take whatever we want?

**LETICIA:** *Claro que sí.*

**PEDRO:** He has corn in his garden, right?

**LETICIA:** *Sí, Pedro.* You may pick a little, but come right back. *(As he is leaving)* ¡Y el agua! *(He exits.)*

**BEATRIZ:** So, you have another child?

**LETICIA:** *Sí, una niña, Claudia,* nothing like her brother, thank goodness.

**BEATRIZ:** How quickly you humans grow up.

**LETICIA:** Huh?

**BEATRIZ:** I asked about your husband? Surely you have a husband.

**LETICIA:** He is still in *México*, *pero* he'll come over later.

**BEATRIZ:** Hmm... *¿cuándo es* later?

**LETICIA:** I'm not too sure; when he is able. *Por favor*, let's change the subject. The children will come back any moment. I don't want to upset them.

**BEATRIZ:** I hardly think talking about their father will upset them.

**CLAUDIA:** *(Enters)* It's okay, *'Ama*.

**BEATRIZ:** Wow! Look at all those *'fantabulosas'* flores.

**PEDRO:** (*Enters pulling long stalks of corn. He has not picked the corn, but pulled it from its roots.*) ¿*Fantabulosas?*

**LETICIA:** *Pedro*, what did you do?

**PEDRO:** I picked a little corn.

**LETICIA:** *No, Pedro*, not the whole thing.

(*Claudia laughs.*)

**PEDRO:** What?

**BEATRIZ:** (*Gently, showing him*) You usually pull the ears off, like this.

**PEDRO:** *Pos*, I didn't know.

**LETICIA:** Take that outside, *Pedro*.

**PEDRO:** *'Ta bueno.*

**LETICIA:** *Y Pedro*, ¿*el agua?*

**PEDRO:** I forgot. *Hay voy.* (*Exits*)

**BEATRIZ:** A real *Juan Bobo*, huh?

**LETICIA:** *Mandeme.*

**BEATRIZ:** *Juan Bobo.* Your son reminds me of *Juan Bobo*.

**LETICIA:** I don't know *no Juan Bobo*.

**BEATRIZ:** Of course you don't know him, but you've heard of him, I'm sure.

**LETICIA:** Is he famous?

**BEATRIZ:** He's a character, made up. (*Pedro reenters with two buckets of water.*) Son, you know about *Juan Bobo*, ¿*verdad?*

**PEDRO:** There's a *Juan Soto* at school.



**BEATRIZ:** *Juan Bobo.* Nobody ever told you stories about *Juan Bobo*? None of you?

**PEDRO:** No.

**CLAUDIA:** No.

**BEATRIZ:** *(To Leticia)* No? What about your parents? Your grandparents? That's what they're for.

**LETICIA:** *(As she works, quoting)* "Fill your head full of fantasies, and you'll never know what's real." My *mami* and *papi* never said anything that was not true. "*Si no es verdad, no es nada.*"

**BEATRIZ:** *Qué triste.* Both your parents are gone? You poor child.

**LETICIA:** I don't like to refer to myself as poor. I try to appreciate what I do have, and I am trying to teach *Pedro* and *Claudia* to do the same.

**BEATRIZ:** Well, that's alright, I guess.

**LETICIA:** *Pedro*, I need more *agua*.

**PEDRO:** More *agua*, *sí*, *yo sé.* *(Gets up to go, turns)* *Mamá*, why doesn't taking water make me a thief?

**LETICIA:** ¡*Pedro!*

**PEDRO:** *Hay voy.* *(He exits)*

**CLAUDIA:** You should see the garden, *mami*. It's so big.

**LETICIA:** Yes, I've seen it. How very gracious of *Señor Garza* to let us pick freely. Be sure you thank him when you see him.

**CLAUDIA:** *¡Ta bueno.* *(To Beatriz)* Hi. I'm *Claudia*. Who are you?

**BEATRIZ:** The name is *Tortuga*. *Beatriz Tortuga*.

**PEDRO:** *(Entering with water)* *Tortuga?* Your name is *(Moves as a turtle)* *Tortuga*.

**BEATRIZ:** It's my last name, but you can call me that if you want to.

**LETICIA:** Children, you call her *Señora Tortuga*.  
(Turns to begin working)

**PEDRO:** I have a pet turtle. He's huge, and I named him *Pancho*.

**CLAUDIA:** *Mami*, Pedro is telling fibs again.

**PEDRO:** It's true. Down by the river. I go there, and call "*Pancho*" and he comes, every time.

**CLAUDIA:** Well, if he's in the river, then he's not your turtle.

**LETICIA:** *Pedro*, apologize for lying, and tell *la señora* the truth.

**PEDRO:** I wasn't really lying.

**BEATRIZ:** *Yah, Pedro*, well I have twenty pet turtles with pink and yellow polka dots, and they all speak French.

**CLAUDIA and PEDRO:** Really?

**BEATRIZ:** Well, in my mind I do. I talk to them some times; does that make them real?

**LETICIA:** It certainly does not! Children, you know this.  
(*To Beatriz*) I think I should pack up your food and you can take it with you.

**CLAUDIA:** Isn't *Señora Tortuga* staying to eat dinner with us?

**LETICIA:** (*Quickly*) I'm sure she has other things to do.

**CLAUDIA:** We would like for you to stay and eat with us. (*Pedro pokes her.*) *Mami* is always talking about giving, and teaching us about it. Sharing is good for you, right *Mami*?

**LETICIA:** That's what I said.

**BEATRIZ:** *Ta 'bueno*. If that is okay with your *mami*.

**LETICIA:** Of course it is. (*She is uncomfortable as Claudia gets another plate. Pedro sits as Beatriz begins.*)

**BEATRIZ:** I have something to share, too.

**PEDRO:** What?