

A Common Core Curriculum Guide to
Ada's Violin:
The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay

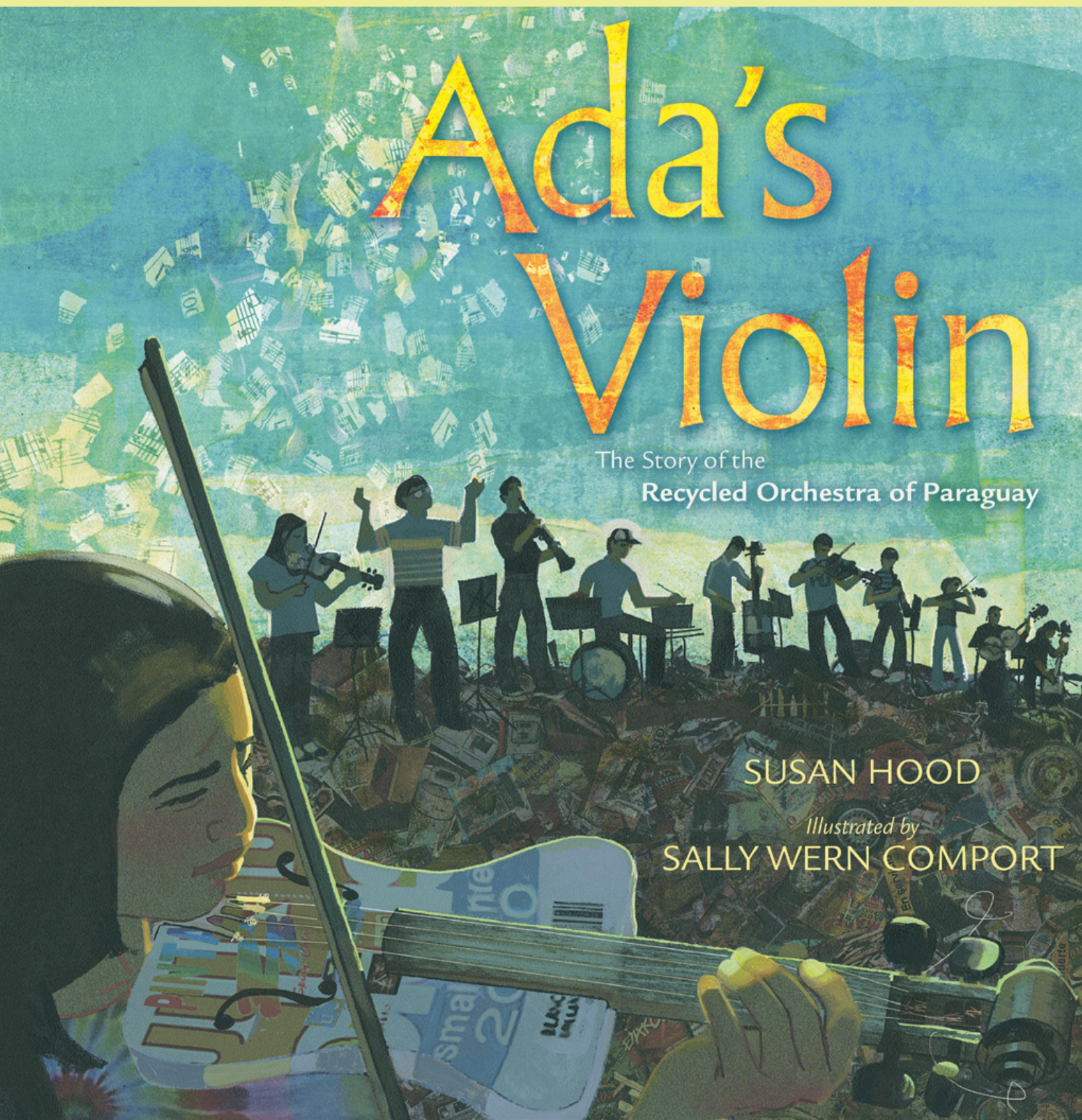
Written by Susan Hood • Illustrated by Sally Wern Comport

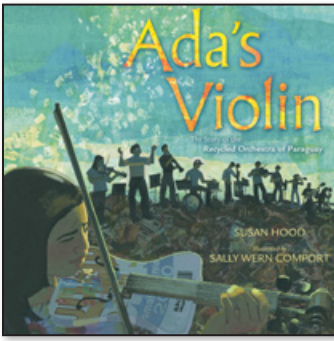
Ada's Violin

The Story of the
Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay

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Illustrated by
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BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

In Paraguay, there is a town named Cateura that is “made of trash.” Each day trucks dump fifteen hundred tons of trash there, and people called *gancheros* (recyclers) look through this trash for anything they can recycle or sell. It is a smelly, noisy, hot slum. The children in this town—children like Ada Ríos and her sister Noélia—had little to look forward to beyond a life of garbage, grumbling, and gangs. Yet even in such an unpromising place, change is possible. In fact, change did occur in Cateura because of the vision of one man—Favio Chávez. Favio Chávez was sent to Cateura as an environmental engineer to promote safety practices among the *gancheros*. But he is also a musician who decided to enrich the lives of the children of Cateura by teaching them how to play the violin, guitar, and cello.

To do this, he became a problem solver. When Chávez learned that there were not enough musical instruments for the children, he got help from a recycler and carpenter, Nicolás Gómez, who learned to create instruments from items found in the trash. Gómez constructed a violin from a discarded paint can, an aluminum baking tray, a fork, and pieces of wooden crates. He created cellos from oil drums and flutes from water pipes. When the children needed to learn how to play these instruments, Favio Chávez gave them lessons. Because there were no classrooms, these lessons took place in the 100-degree heat and sudden downpours outdoors. In spite of these challenges, the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay was born through persistence, hard work, and lots of care.

The results are impressive. At first the orchestra played in the town, but eventually they played in the capital city of Asunción, in other cities, and even in other countries. The children not only learned to be musicians, they learned self-respect and that they had the opportunity to have a fuller, more rewarding life through their music. This is truly an inspiring story of how a dedicated man helped to raise the spirit and self-respect of a community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to answer questions about key details in a text (RI.K–3.1), identify the main topic and key details that support it (RI.K–3.2), and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas (RI.K–3.3).

1. If you walked around the town of Cateura, what do you think you would see, hear, and smell?
2. What did Ada's grandmother Mirian teach her about music? What did her father teach her?
3. Favio Chávez changed Ada's life. How did she spend her time before he arrived? How did she spend time after he arrived? What did he teach her about music and respect?
4. **Problems and Solutions.** In order to create the Recycled Orchestra, Favio Chávez had to solve several problems. Explain how he solved the following problems:
 - Problem #1: There were not enough instruments for the children.
 - Problem #2: It wasn't safe for the children to have expensive instruments.
 - Problem #3: There were no classrooms.
 - Problem #4: The children struggled as they learned to play their instruments.
5. How did Nicolás Gómez create musical instruments? What materials did he use?
6. Explain the meaning of the following sentence: “A symphony of sound helped to lift them [the *gancheros*] beyond the heat, the stench, and their aching backs.” In what ways did the music *lift* them?
7. What did the children in the Recycled Orchestra discover at the end of their performance with a world famous rock band? How do the words and illustrations show this?
8. Favio Chávez said, “The world sends us garbage. We send back music.” What does he mean by this?

9. Why do you think the author chose *Ada's Violin* as the title of the book? How does Ada's story help you understand the story of the Recycled Orchestra?

10. If you could ask Ada some questions, what would they be? With a partner, write down four to six questions. Here are some topics you could ask about:

- Life in Cateura
- Taking music lessons with Favio Chávez
- Getting her violin
- Playing in the Recycled Orchestra
- Thinking about the future

Once you have the questions, imagine how she would answer. Prepare an interview and practice giving it. Other people you could interview are Favio Chávez, Nicolás Gómez, and Grandmother Mirian.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (RI.K-3.4), think about the features of nonfiction text (RI.K-3.5), and assess the author's point of view (RI.K-3.6). The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

11. **Ten Important Words.** Have students work in pairs to select ten important words from the book. Give the students sticky notes to record these words, one word per sticky note. Then make a bar graph by listing each word selected along the horizontal axis of the graph and then lining up the sticky notes above each word to record how many times it was selected. In this way, students will create a bar graph. After completing the graph, discuss each word selected and why it is important to the story. Then have the students summarize the book, using some of the most frequently selected words.

To read more about this strategy, see the following article by its developers:

Yopp, R. H. and Yopp, H. K. (2007). Ten Important Words Plus: A Strategy for Building Word Knowledge. *The Reading Teacher*, 61 (2), 157-160.

12. **Making a Concept Wheel.** To help students refine their understanding of the word *recycle*, have them complete a concept wheel about the Recycled Orchestra. Have students answer the following questions on the appropriate section of the wheel, using both words and illustrations:

- What does *recycled* mean?
- Who recycled?
- Where did this recycling take place?
- What did they recycle?
- Why did they recycle?
- What were the results of the recycling?

(See the Concept Wheel Activity on page 5.)

13. **Words that Appeal to the Senses of Sight and Hearing.** To help us understand the setting of the book, the town of Cateura, the author describes the sights people would see and the sounds they would hear if they were walking around the town. Look through the book to find more words and phrases that appeal to your senses of sight and hearing. Add them to the chart. (See the Sights and Sounds Activity on page 6.)

14. **Beginning and Ending.** In the beginning of the book the author tells us: *Little did Ada know, there was a bigger surprise waiting for her in the landfill.*

At the end of the book the author reveals the surprise not only for Ada, but for all the kids in the Recycled Orchestra. The author writes:

They had discovered the surprise waiting in the landfill. Buried in the trash was music. And buried in themselves was something to be proud of.

Why do you think the author wrote about a surprise in the landfill at both the beginning and the end of the book?

15. **Author's Note.** An author's note at the end of the book provides additional information about the Recycled Orchestra. Discuss the additional information included about the following:

- The town of Cateura
- Ada's family
- Favio Chávez
- The children in the Recycled Orchestra
- The money earned by the Recycled Orchestra
- How the Recycled Orchestra has grown

16. **Back Matter.** Besides the author’s note, what other information is included in the back matter? How does this information help you understand the topic?

17. **Author’s and Illustrator’s Point of View.** What do the author and illustrator think about the Recycled Orchestra? What makes you think so? Give examples from the book. Do you agree with this point of view?

INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION

The Common Core State Standards ask students to use both the illustrations and details to describe key ideas and to show how images contribute to and clarify a text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur). (RI.1–4.7).

18. **From Imagination to Real Life: Learning from Words and Illustrations.** In several places in the book, the words and the illustrations show how Ada changed from a girl who imagined a better life to a girl who is now living a better life.

(See the Learning from Words and Illustrations Activity on page seven to study each of the two-page spreads and share your findings.)

WRITING

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (W.K–3.1), to inform (W.K–3.2), and to explain a sequence of events (W.K–3.3).

19. **Writing a Narrative Sequence.** How did Ada change from being a girl who imagined a better life to a girl who actually lives a better life? Explain four events that led to this change. Use the following list of *sequence words* to help you explain which event came first, second, and so on.

Sequence Words: at first, after, as soon as, next, soon, then, later, before long, in the end, finally

(See the Graphic Organizer Activity on page 8.)

20. **Describing a Recycled Instrument.** Google images of several of the instruments of the Recycled Orchestra and write a description of one of the instruments. Have other students guess which instrument you are describing.

21. **Giving Your Opinion.** Favio Chávez gave the children in the Recycled Orchestra this advice as they began to work together: “Be kind, always say please and thank you, say you’re sorry, be dedicated when you commit to something.”

What is your opinion of this advice? Do you agree? Explain your reasons.

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE OF READING THE BOOK

22. Learn more about the Recycled Orchestra by watching the *60 Minutes* video “The Recyclers: From Trash Comes Triumph” at [YouTube.com/Watch?v=YxUuKthY1dQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxUuKthY1dQ)

23. Learn about the film documentary about the Recycled Orchestra at LandfillHarmonicMovie.com

24. Discover how to make your own musical instruments out of recycled objects! Educators, find appropriate activities that best suit your students’ abilities and learning levels, and demonstrate how they can each make their own instrument. You can try How We Learn’s website for activity ideas: HowWeLearn.com/Spectacular-Homemade-Musical-Instruments/

25. Learn about the country of Paraguay by visiting the following websites:

- Activity Village at ActivityVillage.co.uk/Paraguay
- Easy Science for Kids at EasyScienceforKids.com/All-About-Paraguay/
- Geography for Kids: Paraguay at Ducksters.com/Geography/Country.php?country=Paraguay

26. Read *Ada’s Violin* in Spanish! Check out *El violín de Ada: La historia de la Orquesta de Instrumentos Reciclados del Paraguay*, here: Books.SimonandSchuster.net/El-violin-de-Ada-%28Adas-Violin%29/Susan-Hood/9781481466578

27. Learn more about author Susan Hood by visiting her website at SusanHoodBooks.com

28. Read another book illustrated by Sally Wern Comport, *Love Will See You Through: Martin Luther King Jr.’s Six Guiding Beliefs*, written by Angela Farris Watkins. How are the illustrations similar to those in *Ada’s Violin*? How are they different?



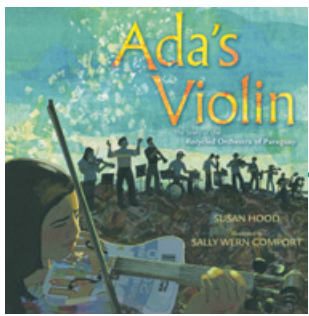
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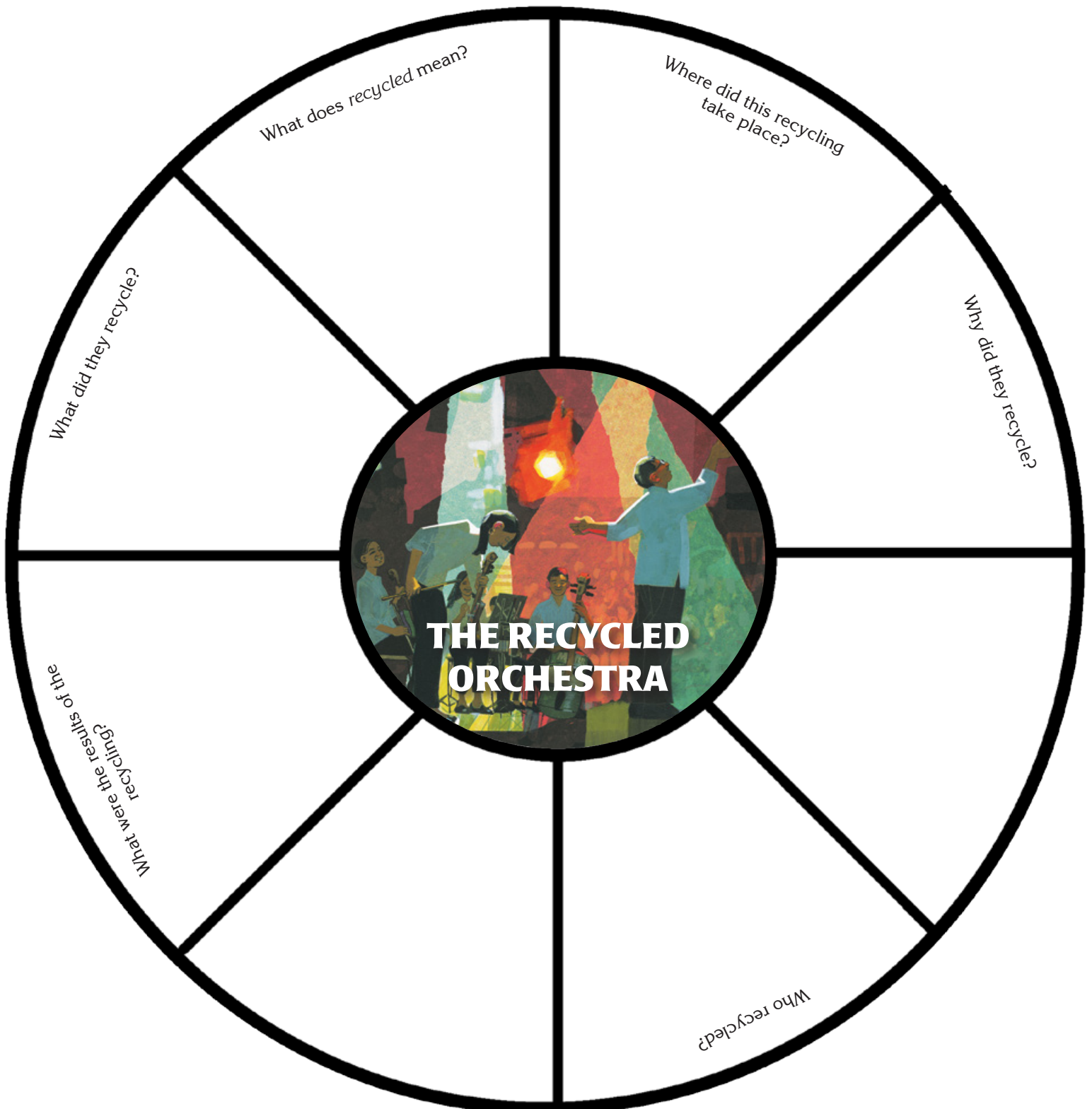
Guide written in 2016 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

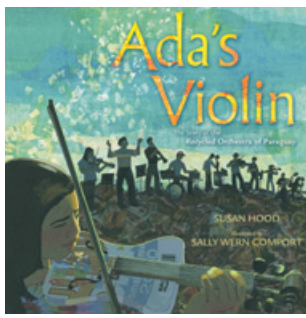
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Concept Wheel Activity

To help you refine your understanding of the word **recycle**, complete a concept wheel about the Recycled Orchestra. Answer the following questions on the appropriate section of the wheel, using both words and illustrations. Then, in the blank sections of the wheel, come up with your own questions about the Recycled Orchestra and answer them using both words and illustrations.





Sights and Sounds Activity

To help us understand the setting of the book, the town of Cateura, the author describes the sights people would see and the sounds they would hear if they were walking around the town. Look through the book to find more words and phrases that appeal to your senses of sight and hearing. Add them to the chart.

SIGHTS IN CATEURA

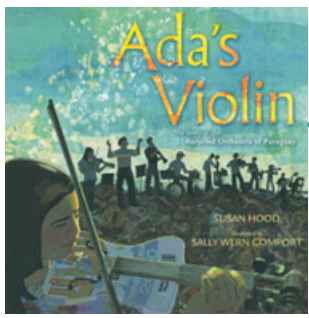
SOUNDS IN CATEURA

<i>example:</i> Trash tumbling down	CRASH!

Use your list to write a “sound” poem describing Cateura, describing learning to play an instrument, or performing in the Recycled Orchestra. If necessary, add some more of your own sounds. Here is an example of a sound poem:

Learning to Play an Instrument

Learning to play sounds like *screeches* and *twangs*.
The instruments *clang*.
On the radio the strings of a violin go *zing*,
But my violin is a *clank* of sharps and flats.

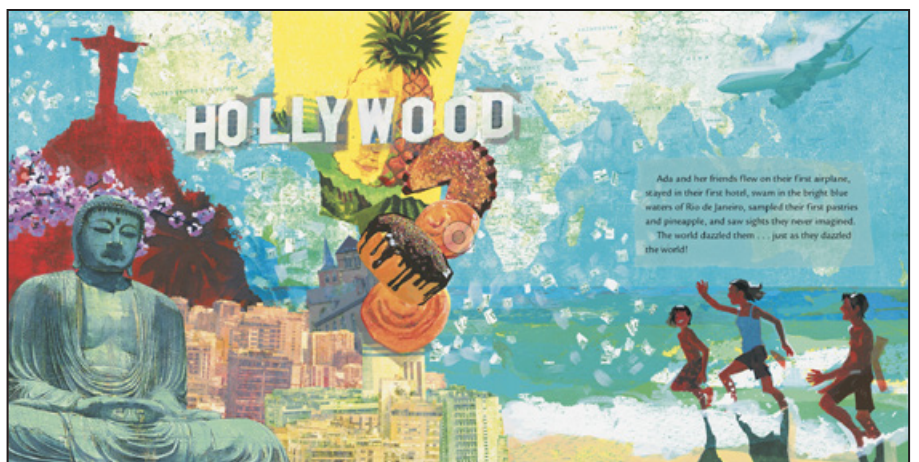


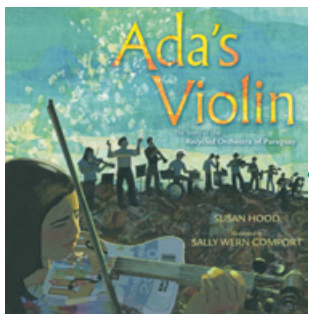
Learning from Words and Illustrations

In several places in the book, the words and the illustrations show how Ada changed from a girl who imagined a better life to a girl who is now living a better life. Look closely at the words and illustrations on each two-page spread to see how they work together to help you understand this change.

For each two-page spread, discuss the following questions:

- What information is only given in the written text?
- What information is only given in the illustration?
- How do the written text and the illustration work together to help you understand how Ada's life changed?





A Graphic Organizer

How did Ada change from being a girl who imagined a better life to a girl who actually lives a better life? Explain four events that led to this change. Use *sequence words* to help you explain which event came first, second, and so on.

At first,

Next,

Before long,

In the end,
