

Voices
from the
Gaps*My Daughter, My Son,
The Eagle, The Dove*

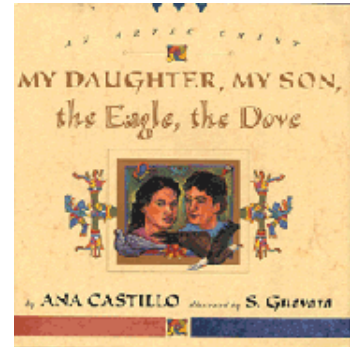
Before the Conquest of Mexico, the indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica were far from simple. The Mexica, better known as the Aztecs, lived in complex societies which utilized written symbolic language. The huehuehlatolli, teachings of the elders, were originally recorded on amate, the bark of the fig tree, by the forbears of the Aztecs.

These teachings were chanted as rites of passage to commemorate certain milestones in a person's life in order to affirm both the value system of the Aztec people and the individual's place within that culture.

Castillo, in her afterword to *My Daughter, My Son, the Eagle, the Dove*, explains: "The huehuehlatolli, metaphorically thought of as mirrors held before the disciple, were repeated over and over until the lessons were engraved in the person's heart and would serve as lifetime guides." Castillo's book contains translated excerpts of these ancient teachings, the huehuehlatolli.

While the huehuehlatolli have been chanted for centuries, the messages within are far from outdated. Castillo's selected excerpts are clearly meant to commemorate the maturation of girls to women, boys to men, and thus have a very organic, universal, and timeless message.

The ancient advice covers a broad range of topics: overcoming hard times, cleansing the body, avoiding gossip, elocution, employment, nutrition, and choosing an appropriate mate. But the message underlying each topic is that one should respect both oneself and others, that one will gain honor by living an honorable life:



Publisher: Penguin-Dutton Books, 2000
Illustrated by Susan Guevar

*Reviewed by Amy McNally,
with her daughter Grace
Chadwick, age 4*



My Daughter, My Son, The Eagle, The Dove

*Understand, my daughter,
that you are of noble
and generous blood;
you are precious
as an emerald,
precious
as sapphire. You were sculpted
of relations
cultivated like jade. Do not dishonor yourself;
do not bring yourself shame,
nor to your ancestors
who were noble and good.*

As evidenced in the above passage, Castillo's beautifully worded translation is ideal for reading aloud to one's daughter or son, student or friend. And while *My Daughter, My Son, the Eagle, the Dove* is clearly most suitable for those coming of age, the advice of the huehuehltlatolli may be useful and beautiful for younger children and for older teens and adults.