

Eva Castellanoz

NEA National Heritage Fellow, 1987 Master Corona Maker and Healer



Wonderful people introduced me to art. Now I know that my parents were artists all through their bones. My dad would go to the river and get tree limbs and start to forge a chair with his machete. Then he'd make his own paint from plants he collected. While he was doing that, my mother would go out and get reeds to weave the seat for the chair. One was working in one corner and the other one was in the other corner, and they would start singing corridos (Mexican ballads) to each other, just out of their hearts, you know. Nothing was written down. So I grew up around that.

-Eva Castellanoz

Eva Castellanoz has been making paper and wax flower bouquets and coronas, or crowns, for more than 50 years. Eva is also well known as a community curandera, or healer. She has a lot to share about self-discovery, courage, and living a meaningful life.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Meet the Artist Eva Castellanoz | 2 |
| Eva Castellanoz's Regional Background | 4 |
| Eva's Studio | 6 |
| Classroom Connections | 8 |
| Resources | 11 |



Meet the Artist Eva Castellanoz

Eva was born in 1939 in the small town of Valle de Santiago in the Mexican state of Guanajuato. In the native language of her father, Nahuatl, her name means magical child. She says that her parents, Fidel and Conchita Silva, were also magical. Eva's Aztec father and Otomí mother "could make beautiful things out of nothing," she says. "They would go outside and collect plants to make paint or reeds to weave chairs.... I thought they were just, like, wow!"

What have you learned to make or do from someone in your family? Is there anyone in your family you'd like to learn something from? What have you taught someone else?



Corona made by Eva
Traditionally, all Mexican coronas were composed of orange blossoms—small, closed, white buds that symbolize purity and chastity. Now, however, brides request a wide variety of flowers.

Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society

As the family grew, life in Valle de Santiago became more difficult because jobs were scarce. Eva's father had to look for work in El Norte, the United States. He took a job as a farm worker in Texas and left his wife and children at home. He often made less than one dollar a day, but he sent money home regularly and visited as often as he could. When Eva was three, he brought the family to Pharr, Texas. Everyone in the family worked. Eva's job, as soon as she was old enough, was picking cucumbers and bag radishes before and after school.

It was hard for the family to move to a new country, but Eva's parents made it easier. She says, "My father told us that although he was taking us out of Mexico, no one could ever take Mexico and our culture out of us." Her parents often sang corridos to each other. A corrido is a Mexican ballad. Ballads are songs that tell stories. They also composed and recited poems, made clothing and furniture from scratch, and celebrated Mexican festivals with all the colorful splendor they could create with very little money. This early, ongoing experience with Mexican art and culture influenced Eva to become a traditional artist.

Although Eva's family spent most of the day working the land, they always made time for art, poetry, music, and stories. For them, art was both beautiful and healing. It was also instructive, teaching how to live as a respectable person.

What do you and your family all do together? Are there traditions, stories and songs that your parents or grandparents have passed on to you?

Eva's parents not only nourished Eva's soul with art, but they also nourished her body with healing plants and herbs. They were curanderos, or healers. Once a month, Eva's mother made a special stew to help protect the family from colds and stomach problems. Eva still uses family recipes and remedies to help heal her family and people in her community.

What remedies does your family use? For example, how do you cure hiccups? What do you do for an upset stomach or a sore throat?

When Eva was 15 years old, she and her family became migrant farm workers. After the harvesting season ended in Texas, they traveled, with many other workers, on a truck operated by the Amalgamated Sugar Company. The company drove them to its processing plant in Nyssa, Oregon, to work on its large sugar beet farms, processing sugar beets.

For three years, Eva's family made the 2,000-mile trip between Pharr, Texas and Nyssa, Oregon. In 1957, the family decided to stay in Nyssa year round and make it their home. Soon after, Eva married Teodoro Castellanoz and began a family.

What are some important events in your community? What milestones have you marked in your life?

When Eva was 25, she returned to Mexico with her husband. On the trip, she was inspired when she saw a street vendor making coronas de azahares (crowns made from paper and wax orange blossom buds). Her parents had described these to her all her life, so she decided to learn this art form. She returned to Nyssa and began what would become a lifelong, creative calling. Eva won national recognition in 1987 when she was named a National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellow for her extraordinary artistry.

To Eva, making wax flowers is a spiritual act as well as a physical task. While she is forming her flowers, she prays for the new couple, the young woman entering adult life, or the newborn baby. She feels honored to participate in these rites of passage, and she believes that the person carrying her bouquet or wearing her corona will transform the inanimate flowers, giving them life and making them beautiful.

Each year Eva makes flowers for about a dozen events such as baptisms, quinceañeras, and weddings. Friends have encouraged her to market her work outside Nyssa, but she insists on working with people she knows personally, and she believes in charging people what they can afford. Here is what Eva says about her art:

Coronas de azahares are very important in our culture. They are symbolic of purity, chastity, and innocence. It starts in baptism and goes onto Holy Communion, quinceañera, and marriage. This art has a voice. Children have lots of fun doing this art. I have worked in many schools doing this with children and all of them make beautiful flowers and have a very good time doing it. All of my children know how to do this art and they help me share it with others. I have done an apprenticeship with one of my granddaughters. Another granddaughter did all her quinceañera things herself with just a little help from me.

Eva has lived and worked in Nyssa for more than 50 years. In addition to farming and working in factories, she has continued making flowers for friends and family on special occasions. She also shares her wisdom and skill with young people in the community. Now that she has retired, Eva spends her days playing with her grandchildren, sharing her art in workshops, and recommending healing practices to family and community members.

Eva Castellanoz's Regional Background

Eva Castellanoz has spent most of her life in Nyssa, Oregon, a town near the Idaho border. Yet she called two other places home before Nyssa. The first was Valle de Santiago in the Mexican state of Guanajuato. The other was a small town in Texas called Pharr. Each place shaped Eva into the wonderful person and artist she is today.

Have you ever moved to another house? Another community or country? How have the places where you have lived influenced you?

Guanajuato, Mexico

Eva spent the first three years of her life in the town of Valle de Santiago in the state of Guanajuato, in central Mexico. The village is known for the healing thermal lakes that lie in its extinguished volcanoes. It is also the site of pre-Hispanic ruins.

When the Spanish arrived in Guanajuato, they found rich veins of silver and enslaved local Indians to mine the ore. In the 18th century, one mine alone accounted for two-thirds of European silver production. The Spanish sold the silver to build a charming city. Today the state's capital city of Guanajuato is just as

beautiful and charming as the Spanish intended.

When Eva left Valle de Santiago, she was too young to have memories of her own. But she vividly recalls her parents' memories of the town. She especially remembers their art, music, and beliefs.

"You know, what my parents shared with me about Mexican culture and values really helped me while I was growing up. Sometimes I didn't like being who I was because of the prejudices of people, but I could always reach in and remember that I was valuable."

How have you dealt with a difficult time or someone's prejudice? How would you help someone else?

Pharr, Texas

Pharr is a small Texas town in the Rio Grande Valley just north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Established in 1909, it was named for a Louisiana planter who expanded his plantations to southern Texas.

As the Pharr plantations were thriving, workers in Valle de Santiago, Mexico, were struggling. Many Mexican men, including Eva's father, had to go north to the U.S. to support their families. Eva's father took a job on the Pharr farms.

The more time that passed, the more he missed his wife and children. He was determined to reunite the family. Eva was three years old when she, her baby sister, and her mother left Valle de Santiago for Pharr. As soon as she was old enough, Eva started working to support her family. Says Eva:

We lived on a cotton and vegetable farm that grew tomatoes, radishes, onions, and cucumbers—all the stuff that stores used, you know. From the age of seven, I worked out in the fields. Children did that—or at least that's what I know about my sister and myself. Before we went to school in the mornings, we had to work.

We had different jobs—sometimes we made bunches of radishes or onions, other times we picked cucumbers or zucchini. Then, after school, we'd put on our grubbies and go back into the fields picking cotton, oranges, tomatoes—whatever was needed to help the family.

What are your chores and responsibilities around the house? How have you learned to do them?

I didn't mind working so hard. My daddy said that we needed to know everything that we could in life because we never knew what would come up. He always told us that the work we did was honorable. "And who knows how a person's life will turn out," he said. "We may need these skills one day."

Nyssa, Oregon

Nyssa lies near the Idaho border in the Snake River Valley of Oregon. Originally an area where local Indians found abundant food, game, and fish, it became home to European American fur traders, settlers, farmers, and ranchers during the 1800s. With the development of irrigation systems and the arrival of the railroad in the 19th century, farming and ranching prospered.

Nyssa's history also involves migrant farm workers. For decades, workers have gone to the area to harvest and process crops. Some stayed in Nyssa during the off-season to work in factories that processed the crops. For this reason, there is now a flourishing Latino community in Nyssa.

Eva and her family were part of Nyssa's migrant farm worker community. For a few years, they journeyed 2,000 miles from Pharr, Texas, to work on sugar beet farms in Nyssa. Like many Mexican American families, they followed the ripening cycle of fruits and vegetables to earn money.

In 1957, the Silvas decided not to return to Pharr. “After the harvest,” Eva says, “we just stayed in Nyssa and made it our home.” Eva’s family found year-round work at the Amalgamated Sugar Factory. They also found a large community of migrants because, in addition to Amalgamated, there was an Ore-Ida potato packing plant in nearby Ontario, Oregon. Eva’s voice rises with pride as she relates memories of life in Nyssa: the town, the crops, and something called “running potatoes.”

Nyssa was a very beautiful, very bustling little town full of stores and full of people. There were gas stations. There were lots of car dealership places. That’s all we knew, so we thought it was beautiful, just a wonderful place to be. We were really happy, plus there was more money here because there was more work. And we could stop moving in a truck from Pharr to Nyssa and then back to Nyssa from Pharr. We just stayed here through the winter and went back to work in the fields in the spring and summer.

In Nyssa, we grow lots of grain, wheat, and corn for cattle. We have lots of beautiful potatoes and onions, and there are apples, pears, and peaches, and I have participated in harvesting all of this. It’s a very, very wonderful little town, just very...fruitful! And we’re happy here. There are still lots of people who come here to work. Not as much as before, when I was a young woman, but we still have migrants come in.

What crops, products, and services provide important jobs in your community? How do the landscape, waterways and geography influence occupations in your region?

In the winter many people work in processing plants or packing sheds where they run potatoes. When you “run” potatoes, you put them on a conveyer belt. Then, as they pass, you take out all the dirt and debris that they bring in with them from the field. After they’re

run, they’re packed and brought to storage places or to Ore-Ida. The same happens to onions. First, they’re cleaned of sticks and stones. Then they’re put into trucks and stored away in storage places and onto Ore-Ida for processing or packing. And then they’re sent to Japan and other places. So there’s a lot of work

for a lot of people here!



Eva’s Studio

When Eva was growing up, she was surrounded by art. Her parents considered art a natural part of daily life, like working, cooking, playing, and relaxing. They also enjoyed the way that art connected them to their cultural traditions. Eva’s parents used Mexican art to teach cultural and moral values to their children.

Where is a place
in your home,
neighborhood
or school that is
important
to you?

For example, they used paper and wax flower buds called azahares to teach Eva and her sister about the values that they believed a young woman should have.

Azahares symbolize chastity, innocence, and strength in the bouquets and coronas (crowns) that girls and women wear to special events or that adorn them during life passages of baptism, first Holy Communion, quinceañeras (a girl's fifteenth birthday), and marriage.

Today Eva is a master corona maker and healer in Nyssa, Oregon, where she works in a studio that she built next to her house. There she makes wax and paper flowers and teaches many others this traditional art form. She calls her work space "Studio Genesis, Where Beautiful Things Happen."

Eva built a garden and an aviary next to Studio Genesis because she loves birds as well as flowers. She grows herbs and other plants in her garden to use in her remedies.

How to Make Paper and Wax Flowers

To make paper and wax flowers with young people, instructors should acquire the materials and review the directions below. Careful preparation and supervision are required.

Materials

- An old, deep frying pan or crock pot
- Cooking thermometer
- Old candles in light colors, such as pink, white, and yellow (Dark colors do not work well.)
- Several pieces of thin wire (available from craft stores)
- Several pieces of thick wire covered in thread (available from craft stores or florists)
- Scissors
- Floral tape (green or brown)
- Crepe paper in light colors



Directions

1. Cut the crepe paper into four-inch pieces. You will need eight to ten pieces for each flower.
2. Curl the edges of each of these pieces of paper into petals.
3. Roll two of the petals into each other for the flower's center. Make small, tight rolls for closed blossoms, and loose rolls for more open blossoms.
4. Add the other petals around the center.
5. Tie your flower at the bottom with a piece of thin wire.

6. Wrap a piece of thick wire around the thin wire. The thicker wire will allow you to form the stem and help it stand erect in a bouquet.
7. Wrap the thick wire in the floral tape to cover the wire. The floral tape creates a neat, more realistic presentation. If you like, wrap the thick wire with crepe paper instead.
8. Once your flowers are made, you're ready to begin the process of dipping them in wax- which makes them look like porcelain china! Take out your wax candles and melt them in your pan or crockpot. The temperature of the wax should be 120 to 125 degrees Fahrenheit.
9. Dip a flower into the wax, and then shake off the excess wax while holding the flower over the pot. Let cool a few minutes.
10. Dip your flower a total of three times, letting it cool after each dipping.
11. Lay out your flowers and arrange them into a bouquet or corona.
12. To make closed buds, called azahares, cut a piece of thin, thread-covered wire into three inches. One at a time, dip the wire into the wax until the wax forms a tear-shaped bud on the wire. Dip each wire into the wax separately. The result will not be as beautiful if you dip three or four at a time. Group the buds into bunches of three or four and add them to the bouquet you made earlier, or you can make a bouquet or corona of only buds.

Classroom Connections

Language Arts

Transitions (Grades 6-12) Throughout life, we constantly change and grow into new phases. Cultural groups have special ceremonies that formally mark rites of passage and help people through their transitions in status and identity, often seen as times of risk as well as growth. The flowers that Eva creates are symbols of change and protection as well as beauty. Research and present oral or written reports on one of the following topics. Be sure to include images.

- **Remember a transition in your life**, for example, starting kindergarten or high school. What was it like to go from one grade level or school to another? How did your responsibilities change? Who went through the transition with you? Was there a ceremony or celebration? If so, what were special clothes, music, narratives, or foods? What symbols were involved in your experience?
- **Compare and contrast quinceañeras with other coming-of-age ceremonies.** Some examples are christenings, Sweet Sixteen parties, and bar or bat mitzvahs. Two articles from the 2004 [CARTS Newsletter](#) will help your research: “**The Life Cycle: Folk Customs of Passage**,” by Steve Zeitlin, and “**Step on the Pedal and Go: Coming of Age in Bermuda**,” by Lisa Falk. In Louisiana Voices also see “[The Cycle of Life: Rites of Passage](#)” for activities and worksheets to aid your research.

Social Studies

Culture, Folklife Studies

(Grades 4-8) When Eva's father moved his family to Texas, he told them that although he was taking them out of Mexico, no one could ever take Mexico out of them. What do you think he meant? **If you were to leave this country for another, what cultural values and beliefs would you take with you?**

Geography, Agriculture

(Grades 4-8) The harvesting and refining of sugar beets was a considerable part of Eva's life. **Research what crops are grown, harvested, and processed near you.** In what ways are migrant farm workers involved in the regional agricultural cycle? [The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service](#) provides data and maps on its web site.

Geography, Agriculture

(Grades 4-8) Not so long ago, only locally produced fruits and vegetables were available in supermarkets. Now, someone in Albany, New York, can buy ripe mangoes in February—they're shipped in from Brazil! **Go to your grocery store and find out how many different countries are represented in the produce section.** Make a list of fruits and vegetables that you find and in which states or countries they were grown. Interview the cafeteria manager in your school to learn where fruits and vegetables for school breakfast and lunch come from.

Economics, Migrant Labor

(Grades 9-12) Migrant labor is a term for laborers who travel from place to place harvesting crops that must be picked as soon as they ripen. American agriculture needs migrant laborers because the demand for labor at harvest time often far exceeds the local supply where crops are not machine-harvested. Workers travel on their own or are transported by a contractor. Some live in cities and travel to farms for the harvest season, but others are permanent migrants who follow the crops from place to place. Efforts to prevent exploitation of migrants and improve their working conditions are ongoing. The U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Agriculture are among the federal agencies with oversight of this complex issue. Also research advocacy organizations such as the United Farm Workers Union. Organize a class teach-in on migrant labor and federal laws and policy governing them.

Visual Arts

Paper

(Grades 2-8) Paper is the medium that Eva chooses for her art. Paper art is very common in Mexico. In addition to paper flowers, Mexican artists also make papel picado, or cut paper, and papiêr maché. But Mexicans are not the only ones with elaborate artistic and ceremonial uses of paper. Many cultural groups use paper for traditional crafts. Here are two topics for you to consider.

- **Research and report on various paper arts traditions** are in these countries: China, Japan, Mexico, and Poland. Try one out and display it with your research.

- **What can you make out of a piece of paper?** Can you make an airplane, a hat, a snowflake? What else? Ask people of different ages what they can make out of paper. You might discover a folk artist. Hold a class demonstration.
- [Make paper and wax flowers](#) from Mexico.
- Use information about Eva Castellanoz to write an **artist's profile**.

Drawing

(Grades 2-5) Seed packets often have beautiful illustrations. What is your favorite flower? Your favorite vegetable or fruit? Find a photograph or use a flower or vegetable as a model to draw an **illustration for a seed packet**.

Vocabulary

apprentice
aviary
Aztec
azahares
ballad
corona
corrido
curandero/a
healer
inanimate
master
migrant worker
Otomí
quinceañera
remedy
rites of passage
sugar beets

Resources

Borders and Identity, Identidad y Frontera

This bilingual kit explores the complex notion of identity along the U.S.-Mexico border. In segments on history, belief, expressive arts, and occupational traditions, students learn from the stories of border residents. The kit includes a video, cultural map, and teacher/student guide, \$25, grades 6-12, [Smithsonian Folkways Recordings](#).

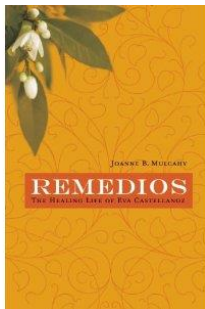
Borders/Fronteras is a bilingual web site of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, that provides a glimpse of the U.S.-Mexico border, its histories, diverse communities, local and regional identities, and music, arts, crafts, healing practices, foodways, and narratives.

Govenar, Alan. *Extraordinary Ordinary People: Five Masters of Traditional Arts*. Candlewick Press, 2006. One chapter features Eva Castellanoz.

Jimenez, Francisco. *The Circuit*. University of New Mexico Press, 1997.

Jimenez, Francisco. *Breaking Through*. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Mulcahy, Joanne. “**Know Who You Are: Regional Identity in the Teachings of Eva Castellanoz.**” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Fall 2007.



Mulcahy, Joanne. *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz*. Trinity University Press, 2010.

The Oregon Story: Agricultural Workers

This web site explores the history of agricultural workers in the state and includes a timeline.