

**Poem 3. Ode to La Tortilla**  
**by Gary Soto**

They are flutes  
When rolled, butter  
Dripping down my elbow  
As I stand on the  
5 Front lawn, just eating,  
Just watching a sparrow  
Hop on the lawn,  
His breakfast of worms  
Beneath the green, green lawn,  
10 worms and a rip of  
Tortilla I throw  
At his thorny feet.  
I eat my tortilla,  
Breathe in, breathe out,  
15 And return inside,  
wiping my oily hands  
On my knee-scrubbed jeans.  
The tortillas are still warm  
In a dish towel,  
20 Warm as gloves just Taken off, finger by finger.  
Mamá is rolling  
Them out. The radio  
On the window sings,  
*El cielo es azul . . .*  
25 I look in the black pan:  
The face of the tortilla  
With a bubble of air  
Rising. Mamá  
Tells me to turn  
30 It over, and when  
I do, carefully,  
It's blistered brown.  
I count to ten,  
*Uno, dos, tres . . .*  
35 And then snap it out  
Of the pan. the tortilla  
Dances in my hands  
As I carry it  
To the drainboard,  
40 Where I smear it

With butter,  
The yellow ribbon of butter  
That will drip  
Slowly down my arm  
45 When I eat on the front lawn.  
The sparrow will drop  
Like fruit  
From the tree  
To stare at me  
50 With his glassy eyes.  
I will rip a piece  
For him. He will jump  
On his food  
And gargle it down,  
55 Chirp once and fly  
Back into the wintry tree

Soto, Gary. *Neighborhood Odes*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2005.

1. The tone set by the poem is one of—
  - a. urgency
  - b. seriousness
  - c. sincerity
  - d. lively

2. Read line 1 from the poem.

They are flutes

- The author uses this metaphor to explain—
- a. the sound a tortilla makes.
  - b. the way to eat a tortilla.
  - c. the shape of the tortilla.
  - d. why tortillas are so popular.

3. Read lines 2-3 and lines 42-44 of the poem.

When rolled, butter  
Dripping down my elbow  
  
The yellow ribbon of butter  
That will drip  
Slowly down my arm

Gary Soto uses this sensory language in order to let the reader —

- a. know how messy tortillas can be with butter on them.
- b. know the only way a tortilla can be eaten.
- c. experience the sensation of eating a tortilla with butter.
- d. Think about how to clean his/her arm after eating a tortilla.

4. Read lines 46-50 from the poem.

The sparrow will drop  
Like fruit  
From the tree  
To stare at me  
With his glassy eyes.

The author, Gary Soto, uses this simile to compare the sparrow to fruit dropping from a tree because the sparrow will--

- a. land with a thud and split open.
- b. land after a bounce.
- c. float softly to the ground.
- d. fly quickly to the ground.

5. Read lines 37-38 from the poem "Ode to La Tortilla."

. . . The tortilla Dances in my hands  
As I carry it

Which sentence best explains what is happening in these lines?

- a. The tortilla is too large to fit in the narrator's hands.
- b. The narrator is bouncing the tortilla in his hands because it is hot.
- c. The tortilla is sliding out of the narrator's hands because of the butter.
- d. The narrator is running to the dish towel with the hot tortilla in his hands.

6. Read lines 24 and 34 from the poem.

*El cielo es azul . . .  
Uno, dos, tres . . .*

Why does the author use Spanish in the poem?

- a. It is the only way the author knows how to say those phrases.
- b. To make the poem more authentic.
- c. To confuse the reader.
- d. To show that he is bilingual.

7. What is the author's purpose in writing this ode?

- a. to persuade the reader to eat tortillas with butter dripping down their arms.
- b. to explain how to eat a tortilla.
- c. to share the joys of eating homemade food.
- d. to tell how to make tortillas in a skillet.