



lost words



Recovering Analog Experiences
in Our Classrooms

July 20-24, 2026

Welcome to the 18th Annual Habla Teacher Institute! In this program, you'll find an overview of our workshops, meals, excursions, and presenters throughout the week. The institute is conducted in both Spanish and English, with materials available in both languages. Please note that all times listed are in Mexico time.

Monday, July 20

8:15-8:45 AM

BREAKFAST

Enjoy a light breakfast with fresh *pan dulce* and local fruit

8:45-9:15 AM

WELCOME

9:15-11:45 AM

MORNING SESSION: SEEK, FIND, AND SPEAK

A building community, literacy, and performance workshop with only pencil and paper by Kurt Wootton

"Once upon a time, words began to vanish from the language of children."

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words*

11:45 AM-12:30 PM

LUNCH

A midday reset over a shared meal with local flavors

12:30-2:45 PM

AFTERNOON SESSION: THINGS MISSING AND HIDDEN

An analog visual arts workshop with Tommaso Iskra De Silvestri and Cynthia Weiss

2:45-2:55 PM

CLOSING WORDS

"It deals in things that are missing and things that are hidden, in absences and in appearances."

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words*

Tuesday, July 21

7:45-8:00 AM	ARRIVE AT HABLA AND BREAKFAST
8:00-8:45 AM	TRAVEL TO <i>EL PLAYÓN DE CHUBURNÁ</i>
8:45-9:45 AM	MORNING SESSION: SONGS IN PAINT AND WORD Beach observations with Tommaso Iskra De Silvestri and Cynthia Weiss Soundscapes and deep listening with Darío Bernal Villegas
10:15-11:00 AM	PROJECT EXPLORATION
11:00-11:15 AM	TRANSITION TO RESTAURANT
11:15 AM-12:15 PM	LUNCH
1:15-2:45 PM	RETURN TO HABLA
12:30-2:45 PM	AFTERNOON SESSION: OBSERVATION THROUGH ART AND TEXT Visual arts studio time and project completion with Tommaso Iskra De Silvestri and Cynthia Weiss
2:45-2:55 PM	CLOSING WORDS

“But there has always been singing in dark times — and wonder is needed now more than ever.”

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Spells*

Wednesday, July 22

8:30-9:00 AM	ARRIVE AT HABLA AND BREAKFAST
9:00-9:30 AM	MORNING ARTFUL REFLECTION
9:30 AM-12:00 PM	MORNING SESSION: THE WILD WORLD An Arts, Culture, and Literacy workshop with María del Mar Patrón Vázquez and Kurt Wootton

“Speak their words and seek their art, let the wild world into your eyes, your voice, your heart.”

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Spells*

12:00-12:45 PM	LUNCH
12:45-2:45 PM	AFTERNOON SESSION: THE POWER OF A ROOM Presentations and conversations from institute participants

Thursday, July 23

8:15-8:45 AM

ARRIVE AT HABLA AND BREAKFAST

8:45-9:15 AM

MORNING ARTFUL REFLECTION

9:30 AM-12:00 PM

MORNING SESSION: DREAMS AND SONGS

A sound, improvisation, and storytelling workshop with rock and wood by Darío Bernal Villegas

“Unfold dreams and songs, and summon lost words back into the mouth and the mind’s eye.”

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words*

12:00-12:45 PM

LUNCH

12:45-2:45 PM

AFTERNOON SESSION: THE EYES OF AN OAK

A close observation, mural, and visual arts workshop with Tommaso Iskra De Silvestri and Cynthia Weiss

“Here you can listen with owl ears and watch with the eyes of an oak.”

- Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Spells*

Friday, July 24

8:15-8:45 AM

ARRIVE AT HABLA AND BREAKFAST

8:45-9:15 AM

INSTITUTE-WIDE REFLECTION

9:15-10:00 AM

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN: THE RESEARCH, THEORY, AND THE HOW AND WHY OF THE TEACHER INSTITUTE

A talk by Kurt Wootton

10:00 AM-12:00 PM

EXHIBITION REHEARSAL AND PREPARATION

Led by Kurt Wootton and Darío Bernal Villegas

12:00-12:45 PM

LUNCH

12:45-2:00 PM

LOST WORDS: A CULMINATING EXHIBITION

Presentation of the week’s collective work

2:00-2:45 PM

INSTITUTE CLOSING

6:15 PM

18TH ANNUAL HABLA TEACHER INSTITUTE CLOSING CELEBRATION AND FIESTA

Meet at Habla for transportation to a spacious *quinta* just outside of Mérida. Spend the evening enjoying traditional Yucatecan food, drinks, Latin American music, and dancing.

2026 Habla Teacher Institute Presenter Bios

María del Mar Patrón Vázquez (@marimarpv) is co-founder and director of Habla: The Center for Language and Culture in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. Her work is focused on how reading and literature can be part of the daily life of communities. At Brown she received the prestigious Presidential Teaching Award for her teaching of Spanish language classes to university students. Her unique approach to teaching involves the literature and culture of the language. Marimar has presented talks and workshops on culture, language, and pedagogy in a variety of settings including recently at the Deeper Learning conference in San Diego, the New School of Thought Institute in São Paulo, and an upcoming keynote at the STEAM conference in Barcelona. Perhaps the greatest lessons she's learned about teaching are from her children, Luis and Sandra, who are growing up bilingual.

Kurt Wootton (@kurtlwootton) is co-founder and director of Habla: The Center for Language and Culture and is one of the founding directors of the ArtsLiteracy Project in the Education Department at Brown University. He has piloted several lab schools in the United States, Brazil, and Mexico and has worked with Boston, Andover, Hartford, St. Paul, Providence, and Central Falls on multi-year, district-wide initiatives. He is the coauthor of *A Reason to Read: Linking Literacy and the Arts* published by Harvard Education Press and *ENGAGE: Creative Practices for Teaching and Learning*. The New York Times writes, "Mr. Wootton remains every bit as convinced of education's power to transform lives. He has changed his tool of choice, however, from a mirror in which students see only reflections of themselves to a window that opens onto the rest of the world."

Darío Bernal Villegas (@dario_bernal_villegas) is a drummer, composer, and improviser, originally from Mexico City, trained in Mexico and London. Improvisation is an essential part of his job as a music creator, both in his openly improvised pieces and his compositions. He seeks to create an intense and creative interaction between musicians and the score, fostering the conditions for a fruitful dialogue between performer and composer. He is known for helping students create original, modern compositions using a variety of instruments and found objects.

Cynthia Weiss (@cynthiarweiss) is an award-winning artist and educator, and a national leader in creative youth development and arts integration. She was previously the Director of Education at Marwen, a program that provides free visual arts courses and career counselors for Chicago youth from low-income communities. Cynthia helped found and direct the AIMproject (Arts Integration Mentoring Project) at Columbia College in Chicago. She is part of the arts education team that creates and directs the summer institutes at Habla: The Center for Language and Culture in Merida, Mexico. She does consultations at the local and national levels to support educating artists in their professional development of arts learning and reading and writing. Cynthia has an MFA in painting from the University of Illinois at Chicago and has directed large-scale public projects around the city and is a member of the Chicago Public Art Group. She is co-editor, with Gail Burnaford and Arnold Aprill of *Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning*, and co-editor with Amana Lichtenstein of *AIMprint: New Relations in the Arts and Learning*.

2026 Habla Teacher Institute Presenter Bios

Tommaso Iskra De Silvestri (@tommasoiskra) was born in Milan, Italy and moved to Mexico at a very young age, when his passion for art bloomed. Tommaso studied Fine Arts at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Urbino in Italy. During his undergraduate studies, Tommaso found another passion: working with children. In 2010, Tommaso moved to Merida and participated in the Habla Teacher Institute, an experience that deepened his interest in early childhood education and led him to join the Habla community as a teacher. Tommaso is part of the Habla professional development team that offers teacher institutes globally in-person and online. His creative practice includes painting, videography, photography, animation, music, yoga, and being a father to two young children.

Aketzali Chacón González (@aketgz) is from Chiapas, Mexico. She inherited her passion for teaching from her parents and from an early age she became interested in the English language. She loves reading, dancing, and traveling. She finds inspiration in helping students share their stories in a different language through creativity, fun, and purpose. The city of Merida took her in during her time as a student, which eventually opened the door to Habla, where she has found a new family. She is currently the English Program and Teacher Institute Coordinator.



Join the Habla Community

Follow us on social media and share what you're creating, exploring, and reflecting on throughout the Habla Teacher Institute.

Use the hashtags **#HablaTeacherInstitute** and **#HablaMerida**

Instagram: @hablamerida

Substack: @kurtwootton

Facebook: Habla: The Center for Language and Culture