YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE
to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2007 Volume IV: Latino Cultures and Communities

I Know You Are, but What Am I? A Latino Literature Unit

Curriculum Unit 07.04.04, published September 2007
by Raymond F. Theilacker

Introduction and Rationale

Increasing enrollment of Spanish-speaking students in my workplace, an urban vocational high school, has created a need for deeper knowledge of Latino culture. To quantify this increase, and to guide me in making choices for this literature unit, I asked school officials for a student demographic breakdown. Results bore out my own intuition, that indeed our Latin population is on the increase. Additionally, as a result of informal talks with small groups of students, I concluded, since the school does not have records of specific group origins, that the largest two Latino subgroups in our school by far are those with Puerto Rican and Mexican heritage. In the last 3 years, my high school has seen a 41% increase in Hispanic student enrollment, which has increased the percentage of the whole student population from 8% to over 14%—almost double in that short period of time! If this trend continues, radical reshaping in school operations, particularly in arenas heavily reliant on language, is inevitable.

With a focus on the Mexican and Puerto Rican groups, this unit begins for students with summaries of the political and immigration histories of both Puerto Rico and Mexico, focusing on the broad patterns and important events since 1900 that provide at least a general context within which to read the literature of these people. Knowing that discrete Latino groups are not so much featured in high school literary anthologies, I thought I would flesh out a well-rounded unit including short and long fiction, drama, poetry, non-fiction, and a fair variety of non-print media relevant to each of the two groups in focus. Research and reading helped me to make choices for teaching in these genres that are fresh, and that I think provide some unusual literary experiences for twelfth grade students poised to enter a multi-cultural workforce. My idea from the beginning was to employ material that both inspired immediate recognition among the Latino population, and also provided insight into some of the traditions and cultures of the two groups, thereby creating a kind of *featured* status for members of the two Latino groups, while at the same time providing a path to understanding for the Anglo and African American students.

The intended participants for this teaching unit are twelfth grade English and Honors English students at Howard High School of Technology, a vocational technical high school in Wilmington, Delaware. Howard is an urban high school of approximately 800 students, focusing on career preparation; but students must also complete studies in the standard curriculum of a comprehensive high school. They must study English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and three years of Science. Spanish is the only second language offered, and there are

no arts electives. In the absence of fine arts study, teachers continually attempt to incorporate music, art, and drama into their courses. In this unit, I make some attempts to expose students to fine arts, music, and drama, as well as long and short literary forms.

Multiculturalism is a fact today in public school. Few teachers, at least in urban settings, work among groups of kids with homogeneous ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds. The war in Iraq has brought Middle Eastern language and culture into focus. Immigration is a front-burner political issue, partly thanks to the wider concerns about "homeland security." My personal rationale for devoting study time to Latino groups has a lot to do with helping students break out of their cultural insularity, especially in the environment of a vocational school, out of which most students will secure employment in highly diverse workplaces. And awareness of cultural differences is simply healthy for people, when you think about how much a varied perspective and appreciation for others helps a person to define him or herself.

Objectives

This unit is designed to meet established English Language Arts standards in the State of Delaware for eleventh or twelfth grade students. The first standard calls for the construction, examination, and extension of the meaning of literary texts. This last standard refers specifically to a student's ability to relate one text to another thematically; to make connections between widely differing texts and their historical and cultural contexts; and to draw from the studied text common human values, motives, and conflicts. I feel that the study of the ethnic literature of Latinos has application which not only meets the standard in a world literature sequence, but given the fact that the bulk of the selections in this unit are written in English, by U.S. writers, it is appropriate in American literature as well. As I write that, I am made aware once again, as I was while reading selections for possible inclusion in the unit, of the duality and elusiveness of identity for many Latinos in this country. Another objective is to guide students in their "extending the meaning of text" to other cultural matters—that is, because texts draw from life, students should be able to articulate what it is in the real world that appears in the fiction, drama or poetry which they read.

The second state standard expects students to make connections between themselves and society and culture. This standard, applied through the reading, discussion, and analysis of literature from "across the border," forces those connections to take on a more universally human character, which is anticipated in the school district standards.

This unit also meets additional state standards. It enables students to identify literary elements and techniques such as irony, parody, and satire in the selected fiction, drama, poetry and film. It provides them the opportunity to characterize the diction in various selections. It helps students to identify figures of language, particularly metaphor, simile, and literary symbols. It encourages them to analyze imagery for possible cultural and narrative significance in the selections, and it guides them toward identifying literary tone and recognizing language for its emotional denotation and connotation. In addition to these standards, this unit persuades students to make inferences about the audiences and purposes the writers of the selections intended, and it helps students understand how to examine internal and external conflicts developed in the plot, for personal as well as cultural relevance. Finally, *I Know You Are, but What Am I?* gives my twelfth graders the opportunity to infer the cultural values reflected in these selections, and allows them to view films portraying key issues and relate them to relevant literary selections.

Strategies

Identity

I gave special thought to the unifying theme of identity in this unit. The word is one of those terms that we throw around in English classes with some flair, assuming a common understanding of its features, when we ask students to make statements about it. In approaching this unit with Cuban and Puerto Rican people specifically in mind, it occurred to me that I should be very careful in formulating an operational definition. I found a useful elaboration online at a site called *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature* (Nelson 2005), that helped me organize my planning toward having students formulate a meaningful understanding and articulation of their own identities.

Three different terms that relate to migrant identities struck me as especially useful for kids as we work through the literary selections. If students are encouraged to think categorically about Mexicans and Puerto Ricans against these explicit profiles, they gain a clearer understanding of the identity issues explored in the literature. The first is *diaspora*. This term describes people who are widely dispersed from a common homeland, and who feel a sense of "alienation and prejudice" stemming from a belief that the host country will never accept them. The second term is *exile.* A person who is exiled has either been expelled from, or feels he has been banished from his home country. An exile often feels more intense alienation, since there is no community of displaced persons, and it is by definition a solitary rejection. This feeling includes a sense that he or she cannot return to the homeland because of conditions there. And the third category is what the authors call *immigrant*. In its most extreme form, this might define people who have no particular allegiance to their homeland, but who choose instead to re-orient themselves in a new place. The rejection the immigrant may feel comes almost entirely from the host country, in the form of xenophobia. So, I ask students to think about how family life, educational milieus and experiences, and people and places that are sources of conflict, seem in the selected literature to shape Mexican and Puerto Rican identities.

This unit begins with an activity that forces a consideration of what the word *identity* means to students. Students will be given cards which are one of four colors. One color will represent those who have come to the fictional country of Estabula, as a result of their having been dispersed throughout the world, in groups, for any number of reasons. Their dispersion did not happen willingly. (They are part of a diaspora.) A second color will pertain to those who have been ejected *as individuals* from their countries, again for any variety of reasons, ranging from the political to the economic; but they have been forced into a solitary exile. A third color represents individuals who have voluntarily left their countries to find "a better life." The fourth color represents Estabulans—residents and citizens of the host country, who came from other countries many generations back, but who now consider themselves to be "natives," with only distant roots in other places. They are long *established* in their homeland. The design of this activity is intended to distinguish for students, in a role-play setting, the difference between the Mexican diaspora, and the unique migratory experience of Puerto Ricans.

After students are assigned to their groups, they *create* histories, customs, geographic locations, conditions and names for their imaginary homelands. The results of these descriptions are recorded on poster board paper so that the characteristics of all of the groups are visible to the whole class for the duration of the unit. The roles students in these groups are encouraged to play are sustained throughout the unit, both in their written responses and in class discussions. In addition, students create profiles of their groups, which are applied to each literary work as it comes up for consideration (see Appendix A). Individuals are encouraged to

maintain their personae as members of the group to which they are belong, so that in discussions and writing tasks, they bring their unique perspective—walk a mile in another's shoes.

Puerto Rican Historical Context

To provide a context for the literature and other content, and to convey an historical perspective for its own sake, students will receive a timeline of Puerto Rican history since the turn of the last century. Starting in 1900, when Puerto Rico became the first unincorporated territory of the United States, under the Foraker Law, students encounter information about major events throughout the twentieth century. The timeline includes, for example, independence efforts by the Unionist Party of Puerto Rico (Partido Unionista de Puerto Rico), a nationalist movement, during the first decade of the last century; it will also call attention to the simultaneous affiliation of island unions with the American Federation of Labor in order to represent the ambivalence about American cultural involvement on the island that characterized the whole century (González 62-63). The timeline will continue with entries for the Jones Act (1917), by which Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship, and many brought into the U.S. military during the World War. The graphic shows students that English was declared the island's official language during that same decade. Students will be asked to consider what effects these events might have had on family life and education, as well as what conflicts they can imagine Puerto Ricans experiencing—personal and otherwise. The decades of the 1940's and 1950's in particular, with the huge influx of Puerto Ricans into New York City, provide important background for students before they read the literature and dissect the work for themes unique to this group.

Mexican Historical Context

Similarly, students follow a timeline of Mexican history. This time, rather than a traditional teacher-led reconstruction of history with class discussion, students work a website that is fairly interactive. After a very general description of the presence and dominance of Native Americans on the continent, and the Spanish conquest and domination up to the twentieth century, they are directed to explore this century and to pay special attention to the Mexican Revolution, President Wilson's invasion of Veracruz, General Pershing's incursion into Mexico with U.S. troops in pursuit of Pancho Villa, and the peak immigration year 1924, when almost 100,000 Mexicans—largely agricultural workers—were admitted. The Great Depression, however, reversed the somewhat laissez-faire immigration politics, and the 1930's saw large deportations, some of whom were U.S. citizens (González 103). The formation and activities of the *League of United Latin American Citizens* (LULAC), especially in the middle of this decade, is highlighted for its goal of complete assimilation of Mexicans into American society, and its key role in legal actions before the Supreme Court that set in motion what would culminate in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Students are directed to see, especially in the bracero program's implementation and repeal, how Mexican migrants were alternately imported and exported to work American farms. The 1950's in the shadow of the McCarthy era, witnessed mass deportation of Mexicans, but the 1960's saw immigration restrictions once again with the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 ("The Border—Interactive Timeline).

This vacillation of the U.S. in its liberalizing and restricting Mexican immigration throughout the century, whether for economic or social reasons, is the pattern that students are asked to recognize. Students will be asked, as a result of looking at this series of major events, to characterize the relationship between Mexico, a country whose succession of governments has not been especially successful at providing a high standard of living for its people, and the United States, just to the north—a geographic bedfellow so to speak—which has successfully designed a society with a very high standard of living.

In this part of the unit that looks briefly at history, students can easily see the difference between what the

expectations of the Puerto Rican community might be, a group armed with *a priori* citizenship, a somewhat amicable relationship with the mainland, and an official encouragement to consider themselves a part of the mainstream; versus the Mexican community, whose relationship with the U.S. has been characterized by border disputes, war, a side-by-side contrast of economic feast and famine, and the bait and switch routine of invitations followed quickly by deportations. The initial groups students formed are reflections of the psychological profiles of the immigrant (Puerto Rican), and the diaspora (Mexican)

Latino Literature and Identity

The stage is now set for delving into the literature and media of the two groups. Armed with an understanding of the profile of each group, and with terms that describe migration (including diaspora. exile, and immigrant), students are encouraged throughout the study of this literature to relate the experiences, conflicts, language, lyrics, portrayals, images, hopes and dreams of the characters, to what they already understand to be predictable in the formation of a person's identity. As detailed earlier, the thematic focus for students is on how a person's identity is shaped by family, by education, and by experiences that are alienating. Students develop a profile, on paper, that defines identity based on the initial group work, and which, prior to reading, listening, or viewing, asks of them to look for those elements of identity that resonate in the particular short story, poem, image, or song (see Appendix A).

As for other literary concerns, school district curriculum in twelfth grade language arts identifies parody, satire, figurative language devices, imagery, writer's tone, purpose and intended audience in film as instructional "power targets," or content that needs special attention. The literature in the selections I have chosen for this unit lends itself well to teaching these concepts. With non-Latino students in mind, I provide a list of Spanish words and phrases that appear again and again throughout these selections, taken from a book by Gary Soto (1997), called *Buried Onions*.

Short Fiction

Students will read two short stories by Puerto Rican American writers. The first, *First Communion* by Edward Rivera, is a longer piece about the preparation of the main character, Santos Malanguez, for his First Communion in a New York neighborhood. His church and school are run by Irish priests and nuns. A nun who is his teacher buys him a shirt and an arm bow for the ceremony. Santos' parents are embarrassed by the gift, especially by the teacher's assumption that they are too poor to afford their own clothes. Santos's father buys the boy a suit and a pair of shoes, declining the gift. The First Communion day arrives and Santos is so nervous and frightened by the nun that he miscues, the priest drops the host, considered sacred, and Santos urinates in his clothes and is refused first communion.

Students should see in this story very powerful themes of alienation, relative to the school's demands of Santos that he use English only, and the clergy's patronizing attitudes toward him and his Puerto Rican classmates. In the first part of the story, Santos warmly recalls his Puerto Rican pre-school teacher for her non-judgmental attitudes and for her close communication with and respect for her students' families. The theme of alienation is further emphasized in the condescension toward public school kids encouraged by the Anglo religious staff of the school.

This particular story focuses students on many of the concepts developed throughout the unit. For example, the original groups in the class, armed with their immigrant profiles, must apply those profiles to the characters in the story and determine if they best fit that of the immigrant, the diasporic immigrant, or the exile. After that is done, they must talk about, or describe in writing, how Santos, in this case, fits one of those

profiles and how that rings true or not when the reader considers how the character perceives himself, i.e. what his *identity* is. Additionally, literary symbolism is a natural focus in this story, when students can see the First Communion ritual as an acceptance rite, not only into a church community, but into the mainstream culture.

Identity as a function of family traditions, constellations, and relationships; as an issue shaped by education; and as an individual's self-perception affected by situations of conflict or alienation, are subjects easily approached in this story. Santos's understanding of himself can be explored through his school experiences as a Spanish speaker whose family has been told by the school to speak English at home, for the sake of their son. It is a literal invasion by the school into the privacy and intimacy of the home. Also, his Catholic school's expectation that Santos and his classmates are different and more competent, (because they are private school educated), than his public school neighbors, plays an important part in his perception of who he is now, and who he will be as an adult. The interaction between Santos and his father, especially in the scenes where he expresses his resentment for the patronizing clothing purchases of the nuns, reveals how Santos is likely to see himself as a father and provider himself—proud, self-sufficient, and resourceful. And because this is not the dominant culture's perception of either Santos or his dad, they experience enormous conflict.

This story illustrates how all of the selected literature is approached in the unit. Situations producing internal and external conflicts for the characters and the resultant feelings of alienation, and how they shape identity in the dominant culture, are the final aspects students consider in analyzing this short story. Needless to say, the school environment is rigid, teachers hold very high expectations, they demand that Puerto Rican kids use an unfamiliar language, and they suggest that their own authority comes not only from God, (by virtue of the nun's religious function), but more importantly from the standards espoused by the dominant culture in New York City. Students will see that Santos, his family, and his Puerto Rican friends struggle to exist in these alienating circumstances. I expect members of the class to explore reasons for this struggle that are directly related to Santos' being a Puerto Rican living in the Bronx.

Poetry

"The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez" is a *corrido*, a Mexican ballad form. Set in southern Texas, it is believed to be a version of a true story shared some time around the turn of the last century. In the song's narrative, Román, the main character's brother, outsmarts a white horse trader who is trying to cheat him. When the horse trader comes to the Cortez ranch, accompanied by the sheriff, poor language translation results in the sheriff's shooting Román. In retaliation, Gregorio shoots and kills the sheriff. Texas law enforcement officers pursue Gregorio, who alternately eludes and confronts them successfully. Finally, confident that he is justified in his cause, and clever enough to evade them indefinitely; but ultimately concerned about his family's safety, he surrenders (Augenbraum & Olmos 132-135).

The corrido compares well to the English ballad in that it retells the exploits of a heroic figure, standing up for lofty ideals—in this case the character's right to justice. When they encounter this literary piece, students compare its poetic form to the ballad. One interesting technical feature to handle in this poem is the quatrain form. Many English ballads adopt the same technique for telling a story. On the level of figurative language, there is ample material in this poem to stimulate discussions about the symbolic nature of the heroic character. Further, it would almost be wasteful not to explore the author's purpose and intended effect. After all, this is the story of a cultural hero, who embodies the strength of the Mexican man of principle and plays out a metaphor of oppression which all readers can enjoy vicariously. There is a film called *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1984), directed by Robert M. Young, which can also be shown in conjunction with this poem.

It could replace *Alambrista* as a film choice in the unit.

Students are expected to keep track of the literary concerns, in much the same way as they keep track of the identity issues (see Appendix B). Armed with this literary piece-by-piece note-taking device, they will be able to engage in the discussion of identity that must precede the final assessment when work on the unit ends.

Drama/Film

Choosing *West Side Story* as a drama piece representing the Puerto Rican perspective is a decision that took some time to make. The level of offense some Puerto Ricans take to it belies the popularity of the piece. The portrayal of the Latino characters is off-putting in a number of ways. Both the scripted and musical texts are written by non-Latinos. In terms of plot and theme, the strife between the Anglo and Puerto Rican gangs, and the ensuing bloodshed, can be read as text that lays blame on the Puerto Ricans, since they spilled the first blood. The critic Alberto Sandoval Sanchez (1994), for example, suggests that a not-so-subtle assumption in the film is that the relationship between María and Tony could never have been successful anyway. The lyrics of the thematic song "Somewhere," according to this critic, suggest that the very idea was utopian, even childishly simplistic, given María's membership in such a violent, murderous tribe! This is not a take on the action that most viewers would consider.

Reading criticism of the film, then, made sense for a number of reasons. This play is enormously popular. After all, on its entertainment merits, it is a fine staged play, and it is musically brilliant by most standards. Also, for many students who have reached the twelfth grade, it is a familiar piece; but surely not one subject to any criticism stronger than its failure to measure up to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a companion piece with which it is frequently taught. So I thought it would be a unique experience to use it as a foil for critical assessment written by a Puerto Rican critic. I figured it would serve students just as well to focus on the characters and plot as debunked, for what emerges in that process is accurate, at least through one pair of Latino eyes. If an erudite Puerto Rican sees stereotyping, prejudice, and disparaging cultural themes in this play, then, when students turn a critical eye to what is so seemingly attractive, they see through a different lens. This process is one not easily taught, and is one which is necessary for students to learn to be able to evaluate a work of fiction on sufficiently profound grounds. That is what is expected in the evaluation paper that ends the unit.

The literary concepts specifically taught in accompaniment to this piece are symbolism and tone. There are abundant opportunities to explore visual and lyrical symbols, but students focus on the symbolic meaning of the relationship between María and Tony, as reflected in the gang rivalries, and in the climactic vengeance. The consideration of this play in Sanchez' critical terms allows for various interpretations of symbols. For example, students in the exile group may focus on the murders as symbolic of the rage felt by an immigrant whose life of separation has alienated him—not from his homeland alone, but from all of humanity. He lashes out, maybe with some justification, or at least with a "probable cause" that is meatier than the fact that he must seek revenge for a friend's death. The latter interpretation will almost certainly be a point of view taken by students where I teach, but it is certainly not transcendent in explaining human behavior. I think that when students take this critical stance, it ensures that discussion and writing takes a more thoughtful turn.

The analog of this choice, for consideration of the Mexican point of view, is the film *Alambrista* (1997). Though directed by a non-Latino, Robert Young, this powerful film provides a character and story that get right to the heart of a Mexican migrant's conflict with his own sense of identity. The plot reflects the narrative framework of the corrido insofar as the chief character, Roberto, is a young Mexican with a wife and child, filled with

dreams about earning a fortune in the U.S. with his labor, and returning to Mexico to make a better life for his family. In his illicit journey north, this guileless character begins to be corrupted by the people and organizations, including government agencies, and by the shadowy influences of alcohol and the lure of a woman, in the absence of his wife. When he comes face-to-face with the death of his long-lost father, whose life has followed a similar path, Roberto rejects the lure and promise of a better life as a false promise. The film offers the same richness for identifying and discussing symbols, and exploring the director's tone, but this time one of unequivocal condemnation. There is no romanticizing this character's experiences! The imagery is often brutal and sad, offering a powerful contrast of portrayals to students.

Long Fiction

Herman and Alice, by Nicholasa Mohr (1975), is the representative Puerto Rican novelette students read, and Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984) is read by students as representative of the Mexican perspective. The Mohr story is written in very accessible language and tells a story about a Puerto Rican man who befriends a young girl, Alice, who is pregnant, and who suffers the disdain of her busy mother and the abandonment of her child's father. Her loneliness is dissipated by her friendship, and ultimate marriage-of-convenience to her neighbor, Herman, who happens to be gay. Herman also has been abandoned—by his lover—and the makeshift family he forms with Alice is satisfying for both characters for a time. After Alice gives birth, both characters' hopes for the relationship fade. Herman, of course, is incapable of providing the physical warmth that Alice craves, and Alice, just sixteen years old, wants a life as a teenager. They go their separate ways, each having failed to establish a normal life, at least in the context of a fairly grim barrio. The social issue of early pregnancy and motherhood is a topic that teens in my school seek out in the popular fiction they read independently. Consequently, this fiction is easily accessible and is sure to provide spirited class dialogue.

The novels serve as the other works of literature do, in terms of "data collection" for fleshing in the identity profiles; but the literary attention in both of these pieces goes to theme. A major theme in both works has to do with the quest for identity. In *Herman and Alice*, both characters are at different stages of their lives, and in different social circumstances. Herman, for example, is the paragon of stability, with a good job, and an orderly and relatively affluent home life. Alice, on the other hand, is insecure, and struggles both economically and emotionally with her station in life. Their identities are formed both by external social forces, and by each other. What students can derive from these stories about human life and struggle constitutes theme.

The House on Mango Street details the experiences and growth of the main character, Esperanza. Esperanza has moved to Chicago with her family, into a Latino section of the town. In chapters that read like vignettes, Cisneros helps the reader see life in the barrio through a young girl's eyes. As the novel develops, Esperanza sketches out for the reader various characters in the neighborhood, as well as family members. At the same time, her own maturation into her teen years unfolds. In a late chapter, for example, she is caught up in a kissing game in which she finds herself unable to defend her friend against what she perceives to be excessive aggression. She is muddled by her friend's acquiescence in the game, and at the same time seems unready to take the inevitable step of abandoning her child-friend to the inevitable world of sexuality. In a plea to an adult to intercede on her friend's behalf, she is dumbfounded by a response that seems to her static and complicit. Ultimately, Esperanza is forced into what could be interpreted as a rape. She is disillusioned about boys and romance, and is angry with her friend for abandoning her to the aggressor. Again, this issue is one that students are all-too-familiar with. Nevertheless, the question of how such experiences form a person's self-concept is the focus of study. In response to this fiction, students are asked to write personal notes, in journal form, to Esperanza, after each chapter. They are expected to give her specific feedback

about what they see happening to her sense of herself, her sense of family, her sense of community. Students may decide to give her feedback on how Esperanza's internal or external conflicts may affect her as she grows into adulthood. By encouraging the personal voice of students, I expect that key notions of identity will surface and become part of the dialogue when both novels come up for discussion. Students are expected to formulate statements about identity formation, after reading and holding class discussions of both novels.

Non-fiction

I strategically placed the consideration of non-fiction reading at the end of this unit, because I think students are then better equipped to hear authentic voices about how personal experiences shapes identity. Richard Rodriguez' essay, entitled "Aria," in *Growing Up Latino* (1993), is a deft and sensitive position paper that argues for bilingual education. The author makes an affirmative case by recounting his experiences with language instruction in a Sacramento school. The gist of his essay is that his native Spanish tongue performed a function for him in his pre-school years that can be best described as the language of feeling. In other words, when he is speaking or spoken to in Spanish, he experiences an intimacy and a sense of identification with a cherished community that he cannot experience in the language of *los gringos*. To have demanded of him the exclusive use of English, even in his home, which was a request of his school, seems to him an egregious mistake. His parents accepted the advice of the school, but the author maintains that their conformity eliminated a language of familiarity that had played like music for him.

Using this piece as a jumping-off point to reflect on some of the earlier fiction, students will undoubtedly recall characters like Santos, or Roberto, who similarly experience the otherness in the use of English, a language that can be not just alien, but alienating. At this point in the unit, students are asked to take an assignment home. The assignment requires them to interview a family member who has information about someone in their family's past who came to the United States, or who migrated from another part of the country, or who moved into a new neighborhood. Every family has such stories. Students are directed to capture vignettes, and if they wish, to provide documents, pictures, or artifacts. As part of the summary discussion of the literature and media, students will share these accounts within their small groups and assess the subject of their vignettes in the same way they have analyzed the characters in the literature.

Formative Assessment

All of the written records of the work of individual students is assessed as the unit progresses. For example, the profiles students develop based on their feelings as members of the "immigrant" groups become evidence on paper that students understand the identity issues. The chapter-by chapter journals students develop while reading *The House on Mango Street* will also be assessed. Informal visits to these groups as they discuss the specific issues of family, education, and conflicts in the characters they analyze are opportunities to assess the level of understanding students have. I sometimes keep a class roster with notations that inform me of individual student progress on tasks. The documentation of conversations with individual students, and their inevitable questions, is further evidence of understanding. Formative assessment, by definition, is designed to be a quick check conducted by the teacher to gauge progress toward lesson goals.

Summative Assessment

A personal essay, a writing portfolio requirement in my school district, serves as the summative evaluation for this unit. In this evaluative writing task, students must choose an actual event in their lives which affected them in some very significant way. They are expected to detail that event in a first-person narrative, and

reflect in the writing exactly what about that event was profound for them. The prompt for this essay in this unit expects those conventions to be followed, but in addition students are asked to dwell on how the event they have shared has impacted their own identities. Additionally, in this reflection, students are encouraged to refer to characters from the explored literature, or to their profiles and experiences in their immigrant groups. The school district provides an analytic rubric for this assignment (see Appendix C).

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1. Estabula.

Objectives

The first objective of this unit is to help students formulate 1 of 4 identity profiles, and to have them determine the important features of their immigrant groups. A second objective is to model how they should apply the features of their profiles to the literary selections. The third objective is to determine the goals of the unit as a group.

Materials

The materials needed for this unit include: 24 colored cards—6 each of four colors—for the formation of semi-randomized groups (see Procedure); four tables or desks arranged for the operation of 6 team members; 1 copy for each student of Judith Ortiz Cofer's poem "Guard Duty" in *The Latino Reader* (Augenbraum & Stavans 1997); 1 two-part *Identity Profile* handout for each student (Appendix A); and 1 copy per student of the *Literary Devices in Latino Literature* handout (Appendix B).

Procedure

Assuming a class roster consisting of 24 students, four groups of 6 students are formed. One group, which will become the host country group, or Estabulans, consists of students who are a cross-section of the student population—male, female, African American, white, Asian, if there are any in class, and Latino. Latino students are distributed through all 4 populations. Estabula, of course, is a thinly-disguised analog for the United States, and this group is to maintain the "dominant culture" perspective/bias in the host country. This group is told that Estabula is just like the United States, so students are directed to brainstorm what they consider to be typical of the American family, of American education, and the conflicts in daily life that the typical American is likely to experience. The 3 remaining groups create fictitious names for their motherlands, a description of the economic and social situations that motivated their immigration to Estabula. Then these groups brainstorm issues of education, family relationships, and conflicts they think they might be likely to confront their groups—namely "immigrants" as defined by Nelson (2005). I make suggestions both in the large group, and as I visit tables through this period. For example, I might suggest to the exile group that they their home country is enduring a dictatorship, and that their political views resulted in their expulsion from the country. Or, to the immigrant group, I might suggest that their country borders Estabula, and that climate change over the last decade has ruined their country's agricultural economy, creating insufferable famine. Groups of their countrymen see opportunities in Estabula, for work, for education, and for a better life.

All 4 groups record and post their "histories" on chart paper so that the class becomes familiar with the all

groups' pasts. Then students are directed to return to their seats to complete a personal profile (Attachment A). They give themselves fictitious names and create a persona as the unit develops. Their character combined with those of their group-mates equates to the immigrant or dominant group. Students may expand these roles as the class moves through the unit.

To end this class period, I model how the literary devices (see Attachment B) handout works. For this exercise, I use Judith Ortiz Cofer's poem "Guard Duty." The persona in this piece is a Puerto Rican child who reflects on her guardian angel's duty to protect her. As she listens from her bed to her parents talk in another room, she describes God as El Commandante, and her guardian angel as his soldier. There are conflicted feelings in the persona's voice about the function of the angel as protector, and the cruelty of adults (her parents) in the practice of sending children to bed to have these thoughts—for the persona, thoughts inspired by a painting of an angel leading people over a bridge which spans the fire of hell. After reading the poem aloud and then silently, students will be asked to focus on the tone, as exhibited in the writer's choice of specific words, and any people, places, or things that may be construed to be symbolic. In this modeling exercise, I choose the angel as a symbol of power, who, while seeming friendly on the surface, is in actuality a tool of incredible power. Likewise, I choose words like "horror," "Commandante," and "incomprehensible" to show how the writer builds the feelings of uncertainty and fear. I complete the response form for literature on an overhead transparency, and then the second part of the Identity handout (Appendix A), to show students how to use their group profiles to analyze the character in terms of education, conflict, and feelings of alienation. Students are asked to begin their note keeping with this model.

Assessment

The completion of the three handouts in Appendix A serves as a formative assessment of student understanding of the concepts.

Lesson 2. Five days into the unit. The two sides of West Side Story.

Objectives

The objective of this lesson is to help students see how film and its imagery can be used to distort reality at the expense of a minority group, through stereotyping.

Materials

A copy of *West Side Story* (1962) and a copy of J. S. Sánchez's essay, "West Side Story: A Puerto Rican reading of 'America'" are the materials needed for this lesson.

Procedure

Before showing the film, there is direct review instruction about imagery. Students are reminded that imagery, though often perceived to be visual, is subtle and includes stimuli of any of the 5 senses. Students are asked to watch the film with a piece of paper divided into 5 parts, each part labeled: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. As the film proceeds, students record images that stimulate any of these senses.

When the film is finished, in a round robin, students report what images they recorded for each of the five senses. At the conclusion of this quick exercise, I ask students if they think all of these images one way or another contribute to a picture of the Anglo and the Puerto Rican as a "types," and whether they think these images are biased in any way. Responses may vary, but students will certainly have opinions. With this

warmup, students are asked to read the Sánchez essay for homework, and to isolate those images the author finds objectionable. Students are directed to determine whether or not they agree with the author's points, *as members of their immigrant group*. The opening of the sixth day of class will be a sharing of opinions, immigrant team-by-immigrant team, after students in their groups pool their responses.

Assessment

An informal person-by-person record is kept by the teacher of the discussion, to see if individuals have identified an unflattering image from the Sánchez piece, and if they have completed the profile handout (Appendix A).

Lesson 3. The end of the unit.

Objectives

Students are able to provide support for a character profile from their role-playing experiences, from the literary selections, from their analyses of characters in the films, from their journal entries to Esperanza, and from their interviews with family members.

Students are able to formulate statements that reveal an understanding of both the commonality of humans in terms of family life, struggles, and education; and of the unique conflicts, struggles and educational barriers faced by immigrants whose language, customs, ethnicity, and conditions under which they immigrate come into play.

Materials

Students need: all of the completed paperwork from the literature and film experiences; and the initial Identity profile (Appendix A).

Procedure

Each student creates an identity profile which includes references to characters from the literary experiences that "fit," their role-playing group based on:

1. redicted characteristics of family life—including relationships within the family, and family constellations
2. onflicts they would likely have encountered
3. evels of education and educational barriers

Using these profiles, students organize the personal essay in response to this writing prompt:

The person you are today is shaped by your educational experiences, your family life, and by conflicts you have experienced in your life that have either alienated you or made you feel accepted and valued.

Pick the character you think you most resemble in the literature we have read, and compare one personal educational experience, one conflict, and one anecdote involving your family that supports your thesis. Be sure to say which of the group profiles you most resemble and why.

Assessment

Students draft a response to this essay and respond to each others draft for content in a peer editing activity.

The essay is evaluated on the school district rubric (Appendix C).

Teacher's Bibliography

Alambrista: The Director's Cut (1997, 2004). [Film]. Bobwin Studios. A film about the

experiences of a young Mexican who crosses the U.S. border illegally to find fortune to help raise his family, but who finds disillusionment instead.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza (2nd Ed)*. San Francisco:Aunt Lute Books. An anthology of short fiction by Latino writers. Good resource for substitutions in the unit.

Augenbraum, H. & Stavans, I. (Eds.). (1993). *Growing up Latino: Memories and stories:*

Reflections on life in the United States. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. An anthology of short fiction by Latino writers. Good resource for substitutions in the unit.

Augenbraum, H. & Olmos, M.F. (Eds.). (1997). *The latino reader: An American literary*

tradition from 1542 to the present. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. A panoramic chronology of Latino writing dating back to the Spanish conquest. Selections in all genres—poetry, drama, fiction, letters. Sort of the Norton of Latino literature.

Augenbraum, H. & Stavans, I. (Eds.). (2006). *Lengua fresca: Latinos writing on the*

edge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. A contemporary anthology of Latino writing with a broad range of choices—everything from poetry and short fiction, to comic book selections, and even a menu!

Bohan, S.A., Macpherson, H. & Atiles, J.H. (2005). Educational barriers for new Latinos

in Georgia. *Journal of Latinos and Education, (4)*1, 43-58. Study defines six

barriers to Latino educational attainment in U.S.

"The Border—InteractiveTimeline." Downloaded 6 July 2007 from

http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/interactive-timeline.html. A website where students can scroll through Mexican history and stop to read the major events in the country's history—especially events involving the U.S.

Cisneros, S. (1984). *The house on Mango Street.* New York: Vintage. A novel about a young Chicano girl; part poetry, part coming-of-age story. Keen insights into life, identity, and relationships in the barrio.

Cofer, J. O. (1993). *The Latin deli: Prose and poetry.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co. A

collection of poetry, prose, and short autobiographical fiction depicting Puerto

Rican life and coming-of-age.

De Los Santos, N., Domínguez, A. & Racho, S. (Directors). (2002). [Film]. *The bronze*

screen: 100 years of the Latino image in Hollywood (2002). A documentary film about the evolution of Latino actors in Hollywood and the portrayal of Latinos in film.

Díaz, J. (1996). *Drown.* London: Faber and Faber. An often violent, but sensitive novel about a Guatemalan youth and how his identity is shaped by an immigrant family in turmoil. Terse, realistic language and sexual allusions dictate caution.

Fink, L. (2003). *The Maya of Morganton: Work and community in the Nuevo new south.*

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. An essay about the settlement of a large number of Guatemalan immigrants in a small North Carolina town. Details their trials, triumphs, and the establishment of a tight community.

Flores, J. (Fall, 2004). Creolite in the 'hood: Diaspora as source and challenge. *CENTRO*

Journal, (16)3, 283-293. Essay discusses the influence of Caribbean music on

mainstream pop music.

González, J. (2001). *Harvest of empire: A history of Latinos in America*. New York:

Penguin Putnam. Succinct economic, political and social history of the various groups called Latino.

Hernández, J. (1989). *The death of Speedy*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books. A contemporary comic book set in the barrio, reads at one level as a soap opera, and at another as social commentary and exposé. Engaging illustrations and comic book style imagery.

Huber, L.P., Huidor, O., Malagon, M.C., Sanchez, G., & Solorzano, D.G. (2006). Falling

through the cracks: Critical transitions in the Latina/o educational pipeline. *CSRC Research Report, (7)*, 1-14. An assessment of the K-College landscape for Latino

groups, with recommendations for resolving performance and access problems.

Marín, C. (2002). *Chicano visions: American painters on the verge*. New York: Little,

Brown & Co. A collection of contemporary Latino art assembled by Cheech Marín of Cheech and Chong fame. Eclectic, shocking, and fascinating images.

Martínez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: Mi vida.* New York: HarperTrophy. An early adolescent novel about a young Chicano boy growing up in a dysfunctional

family and the choices he must make to overcome adversity.

Mohr, N. (1975). *El Bronx remembered*. New York: HarperTrophy. A collection of short realistic fiction and a novelette exploring life in the Puerto Rican barrio of New York City.

Montoya, Richard, et al. (1998). *Culture clash: Life, death and revolutionary comedy.*

Theatre Communications Group. A collection of sometimes self-effacing, sometimes acerbic dialogues of popular Mexican-American comedy troupe's performances.

Morales, Ed (2002). *Living in Spanglish: The search for Latino identity in America*. New

York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin. U.S. born author describes many Latino groups

and suggests there is more commonality among them than differences. Takes a "melting pot" stance.

Moll, L.C. & Ruiz, R. (2002). The schooling of Latino children. In M. Suarez-Orozco &

M. M. Paez (Eds.), *Latinos: Remaking America* (pp.362-374). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Using Los Angeles public school as a prototype,

authors promote solutions for Latino educational problems.

Nelson, E. S. (2005). *Identity* in The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American

Literature. Downloaded 4 July 2007, from Latino American Experience. http://testlae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?i=16&type=all#textml. An essay which attempts to define and distinguish among several possible identity profiles of Latin immigrants.

Olmos, E. J., Ybarra, L. & Monterrey, M. (1999). Americanos: Latino life in the United

States. New York: Little, Brown & Co. Largely photographs, some essays and

poetry of contemporary Latino life in the U.S.

Roberts, J.S. (1999*). The Latin tinge: The impact of Latin American music on the United*

States, 2nd Ed. New York: Oxford University Press. A look at American music and the way Latin rhythms, musical concepts, musicians and composers have impacted American music the classics, popular and jazz idioms.

Sánchez, A.S. (June 1994). *West Side Story*: A Puerto Rican reading of "America." *Jump*

Cut, 39, pp. 59-66. An essay in which the author explains the offensiveness of the film in its as disparaging portrayal of Puerto Rican characters and culture.

Suárez-Orozco, M. M. & Paez, M.M.(Eds.). *Latinos: Remaking America.* Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press. A collection of scholarly essays on many Latino

issues, for example essays on education, immigration, culture and language.

Tabone, F.T.(Director). (2002). [Film]. *Los ultimos Zapatistas: Heroes olvidados.*

Urban Latino TV: The culture. (2005). [Documentary film]. A documentary film

in which survivors of the Mexican Revolution recall with affection their service with Emiliano Zapata.

Valdez, L. (1994). *Luis Valdez—Early works: Actos, bernabe and pensiamento*

serpentino. Houston: Arte Publico Press.

Wise, R. (Director). (1961). [Film]. *West side story.* The American classic musical film about a failed love affair between an Anglo boy and Puerto Rican girl in the context of gang warfare.

Student's Bibliography and Resources

Anaya, R. (1972). *Bless me, Ultima*. New York: Warner Books. A novel about a young

Chicano boy's relationship with Ultima, a curandera, a midwife medicine woman of sorts, who helps the boy come to terms with his new life in the context of his Mexican roots. Challenging language.

Augenbraum, H. & Stavans, I. (Eds.). (2006). *Lengua fresca: Latinos writing on the*

edge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. A contemporary anthology of Latino writing with a broad range of choices—everything from poetry and short fiction, to comic book selections and even a menu!

"The Border—InteractiveTimeline." Downloaded 6 July 2007 from

http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/interactive-timeline.html. A website where students can scroll through Mexican history and stop to read the major events in the country's history—especially events involving the U.S.

Cisneros, S. (1984). *The house on Mango Street.* New York: Vintage. A novel about a young Chicano girl; part poetry, part coming-of-age story. Keen insights into life, identity, and relationships in the barrio.

Cisneros, S. (1991). *Woman hollering creek and other stories.* New York: Vintage. A

collection of short fiction capturing Latino life along the Mexican border.

De Los Santos, N., Domínguez, A. & Racho, S. (Directors). (2002). [Film]. *The bronze*

screen: 100 years of the Latino image in Hollywood (2002). A documentary film about the evolution of Latino actors in Hollywood and the portrayal of Latinos in film.

Díaz, J. (1996). *Drown.* London: Faber and Faber. An often violent, but sensitive novel about a Guatemalan youth and how his identity is shaped by an immigrant family in turmoil. Terse, realistic language and sexual allusions dictate caution.

Hernández, J. (1989). *The death of Speedy*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics

Books. A contemporary comic book set in the barrio, reads at one level as a soap

opera, and at another as social commentary and exposé. Engaging illustrations and comic book style imagery.

Marín, C. (2002). *Chicano visions: American painters on the verge*. New York: Little,

Brown & Co. A collection of contemporary Latino art assembled by Cheech Marín of Cheech and Chong fame. Eclectic, shocking, and fascinating images.

Martínez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: Mi vida.* New York: HarperTrophy. An early adolescent novel about a young Chicano boy

growing up in a dysfunctional family and the choices he must make to overcome adversity.

Meyer, C. (Ed.), (1994). Rio Grande stories. New York: Gulliver Books. A novel

comprised of short fictions created by ethnic children, including Latino youth, from New Mexico.

Mohr, N. (1975). *El Bronx remembered*. New York: HarperTrophy. A collection of short realistic fiction and a novelette exploring life in the Puerto Rican barrio of New York City.

Montoya, Richard, et al. (1998). *Culture clash: Life, death and revolutionary comedy.*

Theatre Communications Group. A collection of sometimes self-effacing, sometimes acerbic dialogues of popular Mexican-American comedy troupe's performances.

Sánchez, A.S. (June 1994). *West Side Story*: A Puerto Rican reading of "America." *Jump*

Cut, 39, pp. 59-66. A Puerto Rican critic takes issue with the biased portrayal of Puerto Ricans in this well-loved musical.

Soto, G. (1997). *Buried Onions*. New York: Harper Collins. A realistic fiction set in the

L.A. barrio details the main nineteen-year-old character's struggles to define a straight path for himself.

Soto, G. (1990). *A summer life.* New York: LaurelLeaf. A collection of short,

autobiographical essays recounting the author's experiences growing up in Los Angeles.

Tabone, F.T.(Director). (2002). [Film]. *Los ultimos Zapatistas: Heroes olvidados.*

Urban Latino TV: The culture. (2005). [Documentary film]. A documentary film

in which survivors of the Mexican Revolution recall with affection their service with Emiliano Zapata.

Valdez, L. (1994). No saca nada de la escuela. In *Luis Valdez—Early works: Actos,*

bernabe and pensiamento serpentino. Houston: Arte Publico Press. A one-

act play parodying the experiences of Latinos in three levels of education.

Villareal, J.A. (1959). *Pocho*. New York: Doubleday. Novel dealing with a Mexican boy

who immigrates to the U.S. with his family in the 1930's. Conflicts of culture and identity.

Wise, R. (Director). (1961). [Film]. *West side story.* The American classic musical film about a failed love affair between an Anglo boy and Puerto Rican girl in the context of gang warfare.

Appendix A. Identity in the Context of Diaspora, Exile, and Migration - Drawn from Nelson (2005)

Profile of Group #1. You have come from your home country on account of a dispersion, or scattering, of your community. There are other similar groups of you who have ended up in countries all over the world, other than Estabula. You have a common history that goes back hundreds of years in your native country. You have a common racial and ethnic heritage, and you all speak a language other than Estabulan. You feel like you are living in two places at the same time. You and the members of your group all remember with longing your old country, its history, your customs, and the land on which you and your ancestors lived. There is little possibility of returning to your home country. You feel like an outsider in Estabula and that Estabulans do not really accept you. Nevertheless, you do your best to establish a community among your countrymen in Estabula. You feel closer to the old country, and you hope every day that you will be able to return some day. You are dedicated to staying in touch with the old country and support it in every way you can.

Profile of Group #2. You have experienced an emotionally brutal separation from your home country. You have been personally rejected and sent away from home. There is a possibility of your being physically harmed if you were to return to your country. Like Group #1, you speak a language other than Estabulan, and you are identifiable as different because of the way you look physically. You feel totally alone and abandoned in Estabula. There is no group of people from your country. You feel yourself to be an unwelcome outsider, even more than those in Group #1 because you own country has rejected you, and there is no company for you in your misery. You wish with all of your heart that you could return home. You dream about home and feel like a homeless person in Estabula.

Profile of Group #3. Like members of Groups #1 and #2, you have been forced out of your country, but you have a different outlook. You more or less accept the fact that you have a new life in Estabula. You don't have a strong desire to return home, nor do you feel overwhelming loyalty to the history or customs of your homeland. A spirit of adventure and individuality best describes your attitude. You feel that the life you build in Estabula will depend on choices you make. You tend to be optimistic. Still, Estabulans tend to be suspicious of you, and they tend to stereotype you, and lump you together with all other immigrants. This is partly because you tend to live together with your former countrymen; your native language is different from Estabula; and you still practice some customs, play music, celebrate holidays, and so forth, tracing back to your homeland.

In your new role, and relying on the history you created for your group, fill in this profile for yourself, and share it with your group.

Identity Profile(s)

NAME OF NEWCOMER: _____

What is your family life like?

_____

_____

What kind of education do you have or are you getting right now?

_____

_____

What people, places, or situations cause you the most trouble or conflict?

_____

_____

NAME OF CHARACTER: _____

TITLE AND AUTHOR OF WORK _____

What is the character's family life like?

_____

Does this character fit your profile? Why? Why not?

_____

What kind of education does the character have or is he/she getting right now?

_____

Do this character's educational experiences fit your profile? Why Why not?

_____

What people, places, or situations cause this character the most trouble or conflict?

_____

Do these conflicts make the character feel alone or alienated? Why, or why not?

_____

Appendix B. Literary Elements.

This organizer is a paper organizer for recording specific instances of literary devices, with definitions and space for line references, vocabulary words, and these instances of these devices: parody, satire, metaphor, simile, symbolism, and the author's tone, purpose and intended audience.

Literary Devices in Latino Literature Selections

Title of Work

_____

Author

_____

Circle one literary device or consideration, and complete the chart:

Irony Parody/ Satire Metaphor Symbol Simile

Tone Satire Theme Imagery Conflict

Summary of text

_____

Explanation (How it works)

_____

Author's Purpose

_____

Appendix C: Scoring Rubric For The Personal Essay*

Portfolio Assignment #6

Student's Name: _____

(table 07.04.04.01 available in print form)

Rubric Score: _____

Completion Date: _____

Quality Points: _____

M.P. Assignment Grade _____

*Modified with permission of the English Language Arts department of the New Castle County Vocational District, Wilmington, DE.