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Cuéntame Una Historia, Por Favor! (Tell Me A Story, Please!)

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Introduction

I am a transitional 4th grade ESL teacher in one of Houston's oldest and largest inner city barrios. Pugh Elementary is part of the Houston Independent School District, the 7th largest school district in the country. With 202,000 students and 306 campuses, it is the largest school district in the state. Our district student population is two thirds Hispanic and nearly one third African American; 78% are economically disadvantaged. Denver Harbor, where Pugh Elementary is located, is in northeast Houston, just a few miles from downtown. This community is an amazing mixture of Mexican multi-generational established households and newly arrived immigrants. Nearly everyone is related; Spanish is the dominant language and the one most frequently heard in the hallways of our school. Our population is 100% Title 1, which means that all students receive two free meals daily.

Rationale

Over the past 6 years in which I have taught at Pugh, I have received a crash course in poverty and in Tex/Mex barrio culture. The inspiration for this unit came quite unexpectedly one day as I was introducing an Argentine exchange student to my class. Lucas Romanini, a native of Buenos Aires, was living with me during his summer vacation; he was in the U.S. to improve his English. After introductions, a short Q. and A. session followed. One of my students asked Lucas how he came to learn Spanish! While I expected that my kids would be titillated to meet someone from the Southern Hemisphere, it did not occur to me that they would be surprised to learn that Lucas was Hispanic. But in their insular barrio culture, all Spanish speakers are Mexican. My students had virtually no information about the broad spectrum of Hispanic culture with whom they shared a mother tongue. I knew then and there that I needed to develop a unit that would broaden my students' perspectives of Latino Culture.

Just as immigrants come in all shapes and sizes, so do the language levels and abilities of my English language learners. It is my task as a self-contained ESL teacher to deliver the mandated curriculum in the content areas, while supporting and growing their English language learning in the four language arts strands

of reading, writing, speaking and listening. My 4th grade ESL students are transitioning to instruction that is completely in English for the very first time. Many are recent arrivals, others have been taught through our school's bilingual education program. Because the Texas Education Code strongly supports bilingual education, most of my students have come through a bilingual education program through grade 3. (Some schools have dual language programs, which promote total biliteracy, but ours is a transitional program designed to exit students at grade 4.) At grade 4, all instruction is in English and this makes the testing demands daunting; by February my students must take and pass a Writing test that requires a working knowledge of English grammar and composition

As a means of lowering the affective filter that transitioning creates, and in hoping to make the English language appear as friendly as possible, I teach ESL students from a literature based curricular perspective. It is my belief that the very best teachers are great storytellers; in my own academic experience the teachers who had the most profound influence on me were the ones who told the best stories. My recipe for success demands a high level of student interaction: the more students use and manipulate language, the easier second language acquisition is for them. For this reason, I try to choose high interest material that will immediately engage them; using well written, multi-cultural children's literature has always proven to be the most pleasurable way to achieve the language goals. Because the students love the stories, they find the skills embedded in the tasks to be fun and exciting. Using children's literature allows me to do my best "sneaky teaching" — in which students are learning and don't even know it!

For this unit, I plan to introduce my students to 3 Caribbean, Spanish speaking islands: Cuba, The Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. I chose these islands because together they represent the largest (after Mexico) number of Spanish speaking migrants in the United States.

Unit Overview

The Islands

At this writing, I envision a 3 week unit, with one week spent exploring each island. However, because the islands have much in common, I plan to introduce students to the topic first with a general overview of the Caribbean. Viewing a video from www.unitedstreaming.com entitled, *Geography of the Caribbean*, students will gain general information about the geographic location of the islands, their climates, cultures and customs. Having thus been presented with a backdrop, my students will then be ready for more in depth exploration of each country. In cooperative groups, they will be asked to research more specific information about each island. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* is a wonderful, kid-friendly resource that would be perfect for this student activity; here students will search for answers to teacher directed questions regarding the climate, topography, population, currency, and language of each country. And, since these islands are in the middle of the Caribbean Ocean, a natural extension of this activity is a lesson in latitude and longitude. Because of Houston's geographic location, our city is vulnerable to hurricanes. Storms that reach the Gulf of Mexico are often generated in the warm waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. And interestingly enough, our word hurricane comes from the name of the Taíno storm god, Huracán. I would like my students to make this connection between the islands and their city; www.unitedstreaming.com has a wonderful resource video entitled, *Understanding Maps and Globes*. There are black line masters provided that contain printable maps for students to practice plotting latitude and longitude of specific locations. The three islands are relatively

close to one another, and having students plot their geographic locations will give them a better sense of global interdependence and interconnectedness. Just as storms that form in the Caribbean impact our weather patterns, our environment and economics influence the islands. Not only will this activity give my students a better understanding of the Caribbean, but it will also give them a different immigrant journey perspective. As part of North America, Mexico is accessible by land. My Houston students easily travel to Mexico for long weekends or special holidays. These Caribbean islands require a journey by or over water, and migrants from these places face different hazards than those who arrive by land.

The People

According to Alma Flor Ada, in *Tales Our Abuelita Told*, the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the islands were the Taínos, the indigenous people we will read about in *The Golden Flower*, by Nina Jaffe. When the Spanish explorers settled, they enslaved the Taínos, and many died from diseases unintentionally brought by the Spaniards. Although reported numbers vary concerning how many Taínos inhabited the islands in the pre-conquest era, it is generally agreed that they numbered in the hundred thousands. By 1507, just 15 years after Columbus first claimed Hispaniola, Taíno numbers had shrunken to 60,000. By 1531, only 10% (600) of those 60,000 remained (www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/precolumbian/tainoover.htm). Those natives strong enough to withstand exposure to diseases for which they had no natural immunity, worked in the mines (gold and silver) or in the fields for cash crops (tobacco and sugar). As the Taíno slave population dwindled, Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, in an attempt to protect the indigenous people, suggested that slaves be "imported" from a stronger group of people. This suggestion prompted the beginning of an African slave trade to the islands. Unlike other European colonizers, the Spaniards intermarried with both the indigenous Taínos and those of African descent. Consequently, a mixed race and a new people were born from this "fusion" (Flor Ada, 5). All of these influences contributed and converged to become the island people of the Caribbean, now known by the general term of "Latino."

After the Spanish- American War, Spain ceded rights over Puerto Rico and Cuba to the U.S. The U.S. granted independence to Cuba, but retained Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory. Puerto Rico remains a U.S. territory today. The Dominion Republic, after a series of occupations by Spain, France, Haiti, and the U.S, established a constitutional government under an elected official in 1924. Cuba has been under Communist rule since Fidel Castro became dictator in 1959.

Why They Came and Where They Settled

Cuba

Unlike the other two islands we will study, Cuba's immigration to the U.S. has happened in a series of several major waves, with the first wave beginning in 1885, following the Cuban independence wars. Small numbers of Cubans followed in the early 20th century, but the 1959 revolution brought more than 500,000 refugees to Miami in the two decades from 1960-1980. The U.S. government extended many of these refugees a great deal of assistance, providing them with a decided economic advantage over other immigrant groups. Because the U.S sympathized with victims of the Cold War, government assistance programs, provided for by The Cuban Adjustment Act, gave Cuban refugees a leg up, so to speak, in establishing themselves in Miami(only 90 miles off the coast of Cuba). It also gave them a higher standard of living well beyond the immigrant

groups who came before them. Not as warmly welcomed were the Marielitos, who were a far cry from the island's elite who preceded them, and a new fear and resentment marked the American attitude toward Cuban immigrants during the Reagan years. By 1994, when the *balsero* (makeshift boat) people headed toward Florida, President Clinton denied special treatment to these refugees. (Juan Gonzales, *Harvest of Empire*, 81) He ordered that Cubans trying to reach the U.S. illegally would be treated like any other immigrant; they would be denied automatic entry. However, an unwritten policy, known as "wet - feet /dry-feet," which affects only Cubans, put a new spin on the migratory flow between Havana and Miami. Any Cuban stopped by the U.S. Coast Guard before reaching U.S. soil—those who still had "wet feet", would be immediately returned to Cuba. Any Cuban who made it to U.S. soil -"dry feet", gained the right to apply for political asylum. In the context of great economic and political hardship in Cuba during the 1990's, thousands of rafters subsequently risked their lives in the hopes of making landfall in the U.S.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, over 1.5 million Cubans now live in the U.S., mainly in Miami, nicknamed Little Havana. (<http://pewhispanic.org/files/other/middecade/Table-4.pdf>>.)

Dominican Republic

Between 1961 and 1986, more than 400,000 people legally immigrated to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic. Dominican Republic immigration began as a refugee flight in the mid -1960's, following an uprising in April 1965 that began as an effort to restore power to the country's first democratically elected president, Juan Bosch. The U.S., fearing an uprising, dispatched troops to quell the uprising. This allowed Joaquin Balaguer to win power during the election of 1966. But the violence continued, now against the Bosch supporters. The U.S. intervened, permitting a huge exodus of Dominican left wing revolutionaries to enter the U.S. However, the U.S. did not give refugee status to the entering Dominicans. Most settled in New York City, where according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, an estimated 1.1 million now live.

(<http://pewhispanic.org/files/other/middecade/Table-4.pdf>>.)

Puerto Rico

Puerto Ricans, unlike Cubans and Dominicans, are not immigrants. The island became part of the United States with the conclusion of the Spanish-American War, and Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship by the Jones Act in 1917. Because Puerto Rico remains a U.S. territory, migrants arrive on American shores as citizens, without need for visas or passports. Residents of the island began moving to the mainland in considerable numbers during the 1920s, but far more arrived from the 1940s on. Unlike Cuba and the Dominican Republic, inexpensive airfare encouraged massive Puerto Rican migration. With the promise of more economic opportunity on the mainland, the migrants came. While most settled in and around New York City, sizable Puerto Rican communities cropped up in Chicago, Philadelphia, and selections of Ohio. The New York community spread to surrounding suburbs of the nearby states of Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Today, 3.8 million Puerto Ricans live in the fifty states. (<http://pewhispanic.org/files/other/middecade/Table-4.pdf>>.)

The Literature

Spanish- language folktales often include stock phrases that signal the beginning and end of a tale. This allows the listener to prepare to enter or leave behind the world of story. In that tradition, I have included them in this segment of the unit.

Puerto Rico

Juan Bobo

"Había una vez. . ."(Once upon a time. . .)

Juan Bobo is a well known folk hero on the island of Puerto Rico. In English his name means Foolish John and he is the silly fellow who just can't seem to get things right. Literal minded, he is a simple soul with a good heart. Despite his limitations, difficult tasks generally turn out just fine, and in some cases he manages to solve his problems in a manner that can best be described as downright clever. The reader is often left wondering if Juan Bobo is really as foolish as he seems, or if it is just a case of God taking care of simple folk such as he. While his blunders are often outrageously funny, he is the personification of the expression, "ignorance is bliss". He is never aware of how silly his actions are, and so his character remains buoyantly optimistic and cheerful. So popular a character is he that there are many Juan Bobo stories from which to choose. Some of the more well known selections are: *Juan Bobo Goes to Work*; *The Best Way to Carry Water*; *A Dime a Jug*; *Do Not Sneeze, Do Not Scratch. . .Do Not Eat*; *Juan Bobo and the Pig*; *Juan Bobo and the Horse of Seven Colors*; *Juan Bobo and The Queen's Necklace*.

As I read Juan Bobo in preparation for this unit, I was struck by how similar he is to the Amelia Bedelia character that all native English speakers come to love as they advance from beginning readers to easy chapter books. Parents of primary school children know that when their children are given an Amelia Bedelia book, they have reached a reading rite of passage. No longer constrained by phonetically based, no plot, word-calling primers, readers of the Amelia Bedelia series enjoy a more sophisticated text coupled with highly entertaining content. To be sure, the parent rejoices because the child is truly reading! Because I intend to focus this section on beginning readers of English, these two books, introduced as paired readings, seem an obvious choice for this segment of the unit.

I plan to use a Juan Bobo picture book entitled, *Juan Bobo Goes to Work*, by Marisa Montes. In this story, silly Juan Bobo tries hard to earn a living, but he misinterprets the simplest directions. He ties up (legs tied together) the cow for milking, shells the beans (discarding the beans and keeping the shells), and attempts to tote milk in a straw sack. His mother explains that he must use a proper container, and if it proves to be too heavy he must carry it on his head. But when Juan Bobo tries to carry a huge hunk of cheese on his head, it melts all over him by the time he reaches home. His mother, exasperated, tells him to take string to the butcher and tie up the meat before he sets off for home. Juan Bobo remembers his mistakes and does exactly as his mother has told him. The ham he has been given is heavy; he cannot put it on his head and fears putting it in his sack. He ties it up and drags it behind him, "feeding" all of the stray animals in the process. There is very little meat on the hambone when he reaches his mother's house and they must eat frijoles (again!) for dinner. But Juan Bobo's silly ways work a magic all of their own; he has made a little sick girl laugh! As she watches his hijinks from her bedroom window, her doting father takes note. Juan Bobo and his mother enjoy fresh ham every Sunday after that- a gift of gratitude from the little girl's father.

After students have read this story, I will remind them of the Amelia Bedelia series that all bilingual children in our school read in the first grade. Students will already be familiar with these stories, but their experiences will have been limited to the Spanish translations. We will then read one Amelia Bedelia selection in English entitled *Good Work, Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish. In this story, Amelia Bedelia makes sponge cakes out of sponges, pots flowers in kitchen cookware, sews fabric patches on holes in the screen and serves feed as a "chicken dinner." Despite how badly she botches her list of chores, she is very good at surprises, and she charms her boss with an item not on her list—his favorite butterscotch dessert! All is forgiven and Amelia Bedelia is none the worse for her mistakes.

In a character analysis lesson, we will note the similarities in both characters, and we will discuss how and why these characters take a wrong turn to end up in such ridiculous situations. Each character has a unique (though limited) perspective on life events and it is that perspective, or point of view, that shapes the turn of events in the stories. It should be fairly obvious that both of these characters interpret speech literally. Though my students may not be aware of the exact terminology, they will be able to note that their misunderstandings come from the multiple meanings of words. Once this fact has been established, I will use the opportunity to introduce my students to the concept of literal and figurative language. Since idioms and figures of speech are often very confusing to the beginning English language learner, the reading of these two entertaining stories will provide concrete and practical examples of this dimension of the English language. There are many excellent teacher resources that would serve to expand this discussion: *Scholastic Book of Idioms* and *Why We Say It*, by Webb Garrison are two good places to start.

The second selection I've chosen to read from Puerto Rico is a creation myth entitled *The Golden Flower* by Nina Jaffe. What I particularly liked about this piece is that it is a story of the Taínos, the indigenous people who inhabited the island before the Spanish conquest. The Taínos had a rich oral tradition with tales told at an "arieto" (celebration). Young and old gathered in a communal circle and listened to the storyteller weave oral histories of great deeds, wonder and creation. The stories we have today are especially precious because nearly all of the Taínos died soon after the arrival of the Spanish.

Before I read this story aloud to my children, I will explain that ancient civilizations recorded stories to survive, inform, instruct and entertain through an oral tradition of storytelling. Long before people wrote them down, stories survived because they were entrusted to a designated keeper of the tale, the storyteller. These individuals were chosen not just for their excellent memories, but also for their dramatic abilities to recreate the story in a manner most entertaining for the listeners. Often the joy was in the telling and in the hearing, for the stories were usually well known to the listeners.

The Golden Flower

"En los tiempos de la abuela. . ." (In Grandmother's time)

This story begins with an empty world, void of water. Only a tall mountain stood in a wide expanse of plain, and the people lived at the top of the mountain. One day, as a Taíno child was hunting for food, the wind blew a small seed past him, which he caught and put in his pouch. Daily the child collected seeds in this manner. When his pouch was full, he planted the seeds at the top of the mountain. From his seeds grew a verdant garden, full of leaves and brightly colored flowers. One flower drew the special attention of the people. It was a large yellow flower, more beautiful than the rest. From it grew an orange ball, small at first, but growing larger every day. The larger it grew, the more it intrigued and awed the villagers, until it became something which they believed had great powers. Two ambitious men, on opposite sides of the mountain, saw the enormous yellow globe as a treasure that would secure great powers for them. They did not know it was really

a giant calabaza (pumpkin). Each ran to claim it, and they began a great tug of war that ended in the pumpkin breaking free of the vine and crashing open. Out of the pumpkin tumbled waves of water; the sea itself had been hidden inside! As the water level rose, the villagers scrambled up the mountain to safety. They feared the sea would swallow their mountain, but mysteriously the water stopped right at the edge of the magic forest the little boy had planted with his seeds. With the sea and all of its wonderful creatures surrounding the magical forest, the people rejoiced. They had everything they needed to live and beautiful surroundings in which to do it. And this is how the Taíno say Borinquen, their island home, came to be.

". . . . y se acabó lo que se daba." (...and that is the end of all that has been told.)

This story could easily prompt a discussion of world mythologies. While it is not my intent to pursue this topic in any depth, I will allow the interest of my students to guide me here. Using part of a World Mythology unit the I wrote for The Houston Teachers Institute, I can direct my students' attention to the mythology of the Aztecs and the Mayans, whose roots are embedded in Mexican folklore. (For more information see www.uh.edu/hti/cu.php?year=2007)

Cuba

The Bossy Gallito

"Érase que se era. . . ." (and so it was)

This is the first of the two Cuban folktales I have chosen for this segment of the unit. *The Bossy Gallito*, by Lucía González, is a delightful story of a "cocky rooster" on his way to his uncle's wedding. Although he is dressed elegantly he spies two kernels of corn in the mud, and he cannot resist eating them. This makes his beak dirty and he must clean it before he can attend the wedding. He orders the grass to do it, but because he does not ask politely, the grass refuses. He continues to encounter a series of characters that all refuse to help. Finally, el sol (the sun), with whom he has a very close relationship, obliges, because his friend sings to him every morning and announces his arrival to the world. The sun threatens the other characters, who all have a certain dependency on one another. Each pressures the other to honor the rooster's request. In the end, El Gallito's beak gets cleaned and he is able to attend the wedding of his uncle.

". . . y vivieron felices y comieron perdices y a mí dieron porque no quisieron."

(. . . and they lived well, while eating quail; they didn't have many so they didn't give any.)

My reasons for choosing this particular story are twofold: first, because it is a very well known tale to most children on the island of Cuba, and second, as a cumulative folktale told in predictable refrains, it is the perfect choice for helping my students to improve their fluency reading rate in English. Because each page of González's beautifully illustrated picture book has text in both English and Spanish, students can chant first in Spanish and then chant again in English. I think they will really enjoy mixing up the texts and combining them into a "Spanglish" version that we can chant together. ("**Fire**, quema the **stick**, que no quiere pegarle al **goat**.) It is my hope that this lesson will provide a lively and engaging activity to encourage my reluctant English language readers and speakers.

Martina the Cockroach

The story of Martina the Cockroach is one that is well known to the children of Cuba. According to Alma Flor Ada (*Tales Our Abuelita Told*), the story of Martina the Cockroach is one of the best known of all Hispanic

folktales. Like most stories that originated in the oral tradition, it has multiple variations. Not only do endings of the tale vary, but so do the main characters. It has been told featuring an ant, butterfly, rat or cockroach as the female protagonist (Flor Ada, 17). While Flor Ada maintains that it is a particular favorite in Puerto Rico, Lucía González (*Senor Cat's Romance*) lists it as a Cuban childhood favorite. I think it is safe to assume the since it originated in Spain, it is probably well known throughout that country as well as in Latin America.

"Hace mucho tiempo. . ." (A long time ago. . .)

The story begins with Martina the cockroach busily involved in spring cleaning. While dusting, she happens upon a shiny silver coin. Since "found money" must be spent on something special, Martina ponders what to buy. She knows it must be something of lasting value, and pretty. While she is shopping, a beautiful red ribbon catches her eye. She decides it is just what she needs to attract a mate. Dressed in her prettiest dress and her new red ribbon, she sits on her front porch to watch the passers-by. A series of animals come and go, all of whom remark on her loveliness and propose marriage. She turns them all down because they make scary or disagreeable sounds that would frighten their babies. One suitor, Ratoncito Pérez, (Pérez the Little Rat) wins her heart because he has such a soothing voice. Soon after they marry, they decide to entertain their friends with a huge party. Martina sets about to cooking the couple's favorite onion soup. She lacks salt, and must run to the store leaving Pérez in charge. He cannot resist the smell of the golden onions simmering in the pot, and leans over the rim to enjoy the aroma. He falls in the soup with a great splash! When Martina gets home she cannot find her husband, and finally discovers him floating in the pot. As she sits on her doorstep sobbing brokenheartedly, some animal friends inquire about her distress. As she explains about the lost Sr. Perez, each animal offers comfort and support in order to share in her sorrow. Finally, Doña Pepa is wise enough to ask them all, "And WHO is helping Ratón Pérez?" She races to the Pérez house and fishes Pérez out by the tail. After tending to him until he spits out all the soup he swallowed, she puts him to bed. Because Pérez is recovered and there is still plenty of soup, the party is still on for that night.

".....y colorín colorado, este cuento se ha acabado" (and, my many-colored feathered friend, now the story has found an end.)

I have chosen to use Alma Flor Ada's version of this story, mainly because it has, to my mind, a most satisfactory ending. According to Alma Flor Ada, the best known story endings are these three: Martina marries Pérez, but on their wedding night the cat gobbles him up; Pérez drowns in the soup; the mouse is in great peril, but he does not die. Someone (the king, a doctor, Doña Pepa, or in Mexico, a wise old owl) saves the mouse.

Flor Ada's ending satisfies the feminist in me. Wise Doña Pepa is a strong female, a healer who can think and act quickly!

This story just begs for dramatic reenactment, and Reader's Theatre is a valuable activity in which English Language Learners may practice oral language skills. Because the speaking parts are many, each student may participate, and because they don't say much, the parts would be non-threatening one or two line recitations. Just for fun, we will create animal masks and props to make our performance an enjoyable and memorable event.

Additionally, if student interest is high, it might be worthwhile to use a creative writing approach here. According to F. Isabel Campoy, whose version of a Juan Bobo selection appears in the Flor Ada anthology, there are some folktales that become interwoven and actually influence each other over time. Martina Cockroach is just such a story. I think my students might be very entertained by the notion that in one version

Martina marries Juan Bobo! (Campoy, 43). For an exercise in creative writing, students may write their own version of this story, starring Juan Bobo as the unfortunate husband.

Dominican Republic

A Gift of Gracias

"Una vez, érase que se era. . . (Once upon a very long time. . .)

A Gift of Gracias is Julia Alvarez's adaptation of the Dominican legend of Altagracia, or Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia, the patroness of the Dominican Republic. In this story, richly illustrated with vibrant colors and folk art pictures, a little girl fears that her family will lose a farm that is their livelihood. María's parents are immigrants from Valencia, and their efforts to grow olives, a crop from their homeland, have proven futile. It appears that olives cannot grow in the soil of this new colony, and poor harvests have left farmers penniless. Papa returns from a trip to the city with a small gift for María. He brings oranges, which María has never tasted but which are native to his beloved homeland. María loves the sweet but tangy flavor burst which makes her mouth tingle, but her pleasurable experience is interrupted by Papa's announcement that the family may need to abandon the farm. She begins to cry, and her tears fall on the orange seeds gathered in her bowl. Her father's companion, the old Indian Quisqueya, whispers words of comfort and hope to María. He assures her that he will help her find a way to keep the farm. That evening, María dreams that she is planting orange seeds with Quisqueya as her guide. As she plants, he tells her to say "Gracias." When she obeys, an orange grove full of trees laden with fruit, springs up from the barren ground. A golden skinned lady with black hair, in a beautiful garment of stars introduces herself as Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia, Our Lady of Thanks. When María awakens, she tells Papa that oranges will grow on their farm; they need only plant the seeds and say "Gracias." Encouraged by María's enthusiasm, the family plants orange seeds. To their amazement, orange trees grow and bear fruit in a matter of months. When Papa and Quisqueya are ready to take the oranges to market, Papa asks María what she would like him to bring her. María wants only a picture of Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia. Though Papa and Quisqueya search every vendor, no one has a picture for sale. Papa and Quisqueya must camp overnight on the return home. As Quisqueya meditates while gazing at the evening sky, Altagracia appears, surrounded by stars. She smiles at him and shooting stars begin to fall. Quisqueya uses his blanket to catch them before they hit the ground. When Quisqueya and Papa arrive at the farm the next evening, Quisqueya unrolls his blanket to reveal an image of Altagracia. The stars on the blanket light up the orange grove so that the quickly ripening crop may be harvested before it spoils. María now has her very own image of Altagracia and the farm prospers as never before.

". . .esto es verdad y no to como me lo contaron lo cuento."(.....this is true, I cannot lie; I told it to you as it was told to me.)

I chose this story because of its striking similarity to one that all of my students know well — Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of the Americas, and the Virgin is a strong cultural image/icon for any student of Mexican extraction. I think it will be a worthwhile activity to pair *A Gift of Gracias* with the Tomie de Paola version of the story of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. In this story from 16th century Mexico, Our Lady, dressed in royal Aztec garb, appears to a poor Indian man, Juan Diego. The Virgin asks Juan Diego to build a church in the spot where she appears. Because Juan Diego could never build this church alone, he petitions the Bishop, who requires a sign to validate Juan Diego's story of the Virgin's appearance. Though it is December, roses miraculously grow in the spot where the Virgin stands. Juan Diego gathers them in his tilma (cloak) and goes to see the Bishop. When he opens his tilma to present the roses, an image of Our Lady of

Guadalupe appears on it. The Bishop grants the Virgin's request.

Using de Paola's beautifully illustrated version of *Our Lady of Guadalupe* will allow my students to make meaningful cultural connections with their experiences and understanding of the two apparition stories. In a group pre-writing activity, we will use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the two different stories. The obvious similarities should be fairly apparent: an apparition of a virgin in royal garb, a miraculous and lasting image on a woven material, a non-European depiction of the Virgin, (Guadalupe is clearly an Aztec queen and Altagracia is golden skinned like the Taínos), and an indigenous male who is the bearer of the "good news." Likewise, the differences: a request of the Virgin vs. the request of a child, roses vs. oranges, a family unit acting together vs. an individual acting alone, and a Taíno virgin vs. a pregnant virgin Aztec queen, should also be fairly easy for them to identify. Though I intend this pre-writing graphic organizer to be a stand alone activity, it can easily be adapted/ extended into a whole group compare / contrast paragraphing lesson. And, depending on student interest, it could also provide a springboard for further research in Marian patronesses of Hispanic countries throughout the world.

The Secret Footprints

"Ésta era una vez. . . ." (There once was a)

The second story I plan to use from the Dominican Republic is *The Secret Footprints*, also by Julia Alvarez. In this story we meet the legendary creatures of Dominican folklore known as the "ciguapas", a secret tribe who make their homes underwater, in caves hung with seashells and seaweed. Terrified of humans, they must wait until nightfall to hunt for food. Even their bodies are designed to protect their secret identities. With feet on backwards, they leave footprints that lead in the direction from which they came. All ciguapa children are taught to fear humans; if they are discovered they will be captured and put in cages because they are so beautiful! One especially curious ciguapa, named Guapa (beautiful one), finds the secrecy rule especially hard to obey. Lured to the surface by the brilliance of the sun, Guapa cannot bear to remain underwater. She ventures from the sea to explore land by the light of day. She discovers a family picnicking by the river and those pastelitos they are eating look delicious! Guapa's hunger compels her to snatch one while the family takes a walk, but in her haste to escape quickly she falls with a thud and this draws the attention of the human family. Mute from the guilt she feels that her curiosity has endangered her tribe, she allows the family to conclude that she is injured, so badly "twisted" are her feet. The family decides to fetch a doctor, and they leave their young son to care for Guapa. Guapa is charmed by this human boy's tenderness and attentive care. She must escape, though, and when he leaves her momentarily to fetch water, she runs away. When he returns, he sees only footprints leading **to** the area, and so he concludes that they must belong to his family. Meanwhile, Guapa returns to her people and tells of her adventure with the humans. The ciguapa queen must concede that not all humans are bad, and Guapa is permitted to "visit" her human family on nighttime food excursions. The ciguapas, in return for the kindness shown to Guapa, never steal food from this family. Guapa performs little folding chores when the family's laundry is left overnight on the clothesline. Often, she finds a pastelito in the little boy's pants pocket.

". . .se acabó el cuento, se lo llevó el viento y se fuepor el mar adentro."

(. . .this is the end of the story for me; the wind carried it off far over the sea).

My plan is to read this story aloud to my students and follow up with literature circle discussion groups. Students will be grouped in threes and asked to discuss reading comprehension questions focusing on themes dealing with strangers, trust, fear and prejudice. The emphasis for this lesson extension will be on oral

language practice and expression.

Unit Wrap-up

What better way to wrap up this unit than with a party? I think my students will have great fun preparing and participating in a Caribbean Fiesta. With food, beverages and music associated with the 3 islands, we can decorate, eat and dance our way to a satisfying ending for our unit.

Lesson Plan 1: Understanding Maps and Globes

Objective: Students will successfully plot the latitudes and longitudes of the 3 Caribbean islands: Cuba, The Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Part 1

Students will view the unitedstreaming video entitled, *Understanding Maps and Globes*. Lesson 9 of this video, "Latitude and Longitude", provides blackline masters so that students may practice plotting coordinates. Using the information learned in a previous lesson on the geographic location of the islands, students will plot the latitude and longitude of Cuba, The Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. Additionally, they will note the distance between these islands, using the link www.indo.com/distance.

Part 2

Once the locations of the islands have been determined and plotted, students will be divided into cooperative groups of 3. In this group, they will assume interdependent roles of leader, reporter, and recorder. In these groups they will discuss the following questions:

1. How does knowing the location of the islands help you to understand Spain's conquest of the islands?
2. How is an islander's journey to the U.S. different from a Mexican's?
3. Why do you suppose these islands are so vulnerable to hurricanes?

Teacher led discussion will follow each group report

Lesson Plan 2: Secret Footprints

Objective: Students will use oral language skills to participate in a group discussion regarding themes of prejudice, trust and fear in the story, *Secret Footprints*, by Julia Alvarez.

Activity:

Part 1

The first part of this lesson will begin with the teacher introducing a new vocabulary word: xenophobia. Students will be told that this word comes from Greek roots:

Xenos= foreigner

Phobos= fear

This word means fear of strangers. There are other types of phobias, such as arachnophobia=fear of spiders; claustrophobia= fear of enclosed spaces; hydrophobia= fear of the water, etc

Part 2

The teacher will read aloud the story *Secret Footprints*. Students will be separated into cooperative groups of 3. Each member of the group is a recorder, reporter, or leader. In literature circles students will be asked to consider the following questions:

1. Is fear of strangers ever a good thing? Why or why not?
2. Is fear of strangers ever a bad thing? Why or why not?
3. Why were the ciguapas afraid of the humans?
4. Why wasn't the human afraid if the ciguapa?
5. Have you ever felt like a stranger? When? If not, how do you think it feels to be the stranger?
6. Is being a stranger ever a good thing? Ever a bad thing?
7. Define trust; fear. Who do you trust? Who do you fear?

Teacher led discussion will follow each group presentation.

Lesson Plan 3: Martina Cockroach

Objective: Students will practice reading aloud and reciting in English.

Activity: Students will create face masks of the various speaking parts in this story, using the materials listed below. With scripts of one or two lines each, student groups of 5-6 members will take turns playing each character, memorizing and reciting each character's lines.

Materials: Paper plates, markers, glue, yarn, multi-colored construction paper, and one line "scripts" for each student.

Part 2

Objective: Students will write an original version of a folktale.

Activity: Students will write their own version of Martina Cockroach, with Juan Bobo as the unfortunate husband. Keeping in mind that Juan Bobo frequently misunderstands directions and misinterprets a speaker's

message based on the multiple meanings of words, students must keep Juan Bobo "in character" as they introduce him into the Martina Cockroach plot.

Lesson Plan 4: Juan Bobo and Amelia Bedelia

Objective: Students will understand the difference between literal and figurative language.

Activity: Step 1: After a teacher read aloud session of *Juan Bobo Goes to Work*, by Marisa Montes, and *Good Work, Amelia Bedelia*, by Peggy Parish, the teacher will lead students through a group discussion of similarities and differences in the plots and settings of each book. Special attention will be given to each character and how each interprets directions.

Step 2: Students will be reminded that words have multiple meanings, and that often these secondary meanings are used in figurative language. These meanings appear often in idiomatic English, and they can be confusing for an English Language Learner. Students will be given the following definitions:

Literal language: is word for word, exactly following the order or meaning of an original word or text.

Figurative language: is an expression or use of language in a non-literal sense to achieve a particular effect.

From the *Scholastic Book of Idioms* the teacher will read aloud several examples of idioms, having students guess at their figurative meanings. (Scholastic also includes the origin of the phrase and how it came to be used in such a way.)

Step 3: Students will choose a favorite idiom and illustrate it.

Materials: Markers, construction paper, and the book, *Scholastic Book of Idioms*.

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