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The Scene of the Crime, Mexico City: Performing History in the Language Classroom

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Introduction

A history lesson—my own history, not History with a capital "H": twenty seven years later I remember being a cow. Our Spanish teacher had given us a short story to turn into a skit—in this case, a Spanish folk tale about a man who sells his soul to the devil and then tricks the devil to get out of the bargain. When we divided up roles, Mike took the role of the devil but said he didn't have time to make horns, so I made them. I thought they were pretty good horns, but Mike wouldn't wear them, so we had to switch roles so that I would be the devil, and Mike couldn't remember his lines. When we were done, the senior girl who sat one seat ahead the row next to me and who didn't own a single dress that had a back to it—my other chief memory of Spanish class—told the teacher, when called upon to summarize the skit, that it was about a really mean cow. A boy cow, of course, she added. I was ecstatic; Backless Dress Girl *noticed me,* and all it took was a skit and some horns. Somewhere I picked up the future and conditional tenses, but that's most of what I remember about Spanish that year.

From elementary school, I remember being a Minuteman to commemorate the American Revolution. I had a three cornered hat made out of construction paper and my tube socks pulled up and my corduroys rolled up to just below my knees to make knee breeches. It was the Bicentennial. We boys spent a lot of time with our corduroys rolled up and out socks pulled up all the way that year. Betsy Ross wanted to touch my hair, but I didn't want to get in trouble for being out of uniform.

What all these history lessons had in common was performance. The lessons we performed in were frequently corny and formulaic, with uncertain links to content objectives, and they were simply magnificent. I will never forget them. If we have content we do want students to remember, we would do well to integrate it into these unforgettable experiences.

Content Objectives: Investigating Two Massacres, 448 Years Apart

We will use Mexico City as a proving ground for a performance based approach to history, culture and geography in the world language classroom. Elements of the unit are adaptable to any level, but it is designed with the intermediate and advanced Spanish classroom in mind. We wish to preserve the emotional engagement and immediacy by evoking modes of work, play, and performance familiar to the students. At the same time we wish to increase intellectual rigor and development of collaborative skills beyond what is normally encountered in "culture" lessons. Students must read, write, reflect, perform, and critically discuss the texts in question. Lessons will, to the extent appropriate, incorporate technology and digital literacy skills. Above all, we will engage students with the idea of "deep time," [1] the past that is not forgotten, as Faulkner would say, because it is not past [2] .

We'll take the role of detectives and examine two mass killings within blocks of each other 448 years apart: the 1968 massacre of mostly university students at the Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlaltelolco, and the Massacre of the Main Temple, or Toxcatl Massacre, a Spanish-led slaughter of Aztec priests and nobles in 1520. Were these mass murders calculated, rational actions, or did the cascading violence come from a breakdown of discipline, command and control? Were the events inevitable?

If we choose to view these incidents as scripted public performance, or as inevitable cyclical patterns of death, the parallels are chilling. At the Massacre of the Great Temple, the Spanish closed the off the exits to the courtyard of the Great Temple cut down the cream of the Aztec nobility and priesthood as they danced in the courtyard of the temple of Huitzilopochtli, turning a religious ceremony that normally entailed a handful of human sacrifices into a slaughter of thousands.

In 1968, government forces closed off the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, scene of the last stand of the Aztec Empire, where five to six thousand Mexicans had gathered to protest against the government. Troops attacked the demonstrators with tanks, machine gun fire, and helicopter-borne sharpshooters, but, according to a coroner's report the majority of victims died of bayonet wounds [3] — by the blade, like the Aztecs felled by the Spanish in 1520 and 1521. Octavio Paz linked the Tlatelolco massacre not to the Spanish *conquistadores* but to the bloody rites practiced at the site in prehispanic times, calling the killings a "ritual sacrifice," saying, "They tried to terrorize the population using the same methods of human sacrifice as the Aztecs." [4] If we approach history like the "walls and floors" approach to archaeology prevalent in parts of South Europe, digging straight down to the floors and following them to the outlines of the building, [5] it's easy to see inexorable patterns of history, if we so wish. Careful historical detective work, carefully sifting through strata, may reveal something altogether different.

Students will present their summative interpretations of each unit as performances of primary source materials in Spanish. Through the course of their investigation of the Tlatelolco massacre they'll see one performance based on the work of investigators and will perform their own individual performances, dramatizing testimony collected by Elena Poniatowska. At the end of their investigation of the Massacre at the Main Temple and the Night of Sorrows segment students will select excerpts of testimonies and compose an ensemble performance piece to show their understanding and interpretation of the historical record. The ensemble pieces will reflect different emphases to illustrate for students the ways that historians derive different meanings from interpretations of the same source.

Cities, as Shanks and Pearson note, are multitemporal. [6] Cities that survive to maturity do so as a palimpsest, a parchment scraped off and rewritten over and over, leaving behind traces legible to the careful reader. The taxis of contemporary London, for example, run in places twenty feet above the old Roman roads. [7] Good archaeologists are detectives with trowels, carefully interrogating strata, layer by layer. [8]

The historical record is layered as well. Students will excavate the layers of the historical record approach the testimonies in reverse historical order, like archaeologist/detectives. They will discover that, as in archaeology, layers of strata may be disturbed. Ruins may be bisected by entrenching work, subsequent road construction, or the site may be bulldozed outright. [9] In our textual evidence, some work that takes precedence chronologically in terms of production entered late into the historic record, and so was seen and understood in light of later accounts published earlier.

History, Intangible Culture, and Pains That Don't Go Away

When we talk of the intangible heritage of place, we like to talk about festivals and recipes, about dialects and patterns of life. Not all intangible heritage is pleasant, though. The patterns of interaction between social groups of unequal position are part of intangible heritage, too. Of all kinds of culture, this kind of culture is wholly the product of history but remains entrenched whether we recall the history or not, like—as I get older—the old injuries that I have forgotten but my back still remembers.

It's here a sense of deep time is especially important. When we look at the ferocity of the events of the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, I think it's naïve to look at the makeup of the two groups in the crowd and think that the events of 1520 had nothing to do with them at all. The protestors were urban, Spanish speaking, and, in relative terms, advantaged; the Olympic Battalion were largely recently recruited from the ranks of rural indigenous youth. [10] Some of the protestors carried placards comparing the troopers to farm animals: "Veterinarian! Vaccinate your grenadier!" [11] I don't believe in catharsis, payback, or chickens that come home to roost. I do believe in pains that just don't go away.

Watershed events like these present unique opportunities to study culture in the language classroom. I will issue a plea to teachers to handle the details with some sensitivity. Some of the details in the primary sources are graphic and may upset some students. We want the students to engage emotionally; we don't want to harm them.

The Tlatelolco Massacre, 1968: Ten Days to the Olympics

The market square at Tlatelolco was the heart of an Aztec city state eventually absorbed by the larger city of Tenochtitlán. The square and surrounding temple complex was the site of the emperor Cuatemoc's last stand against the Spanish, the site where Aztec rule was finally crushed on August 13, 1521 after an eighty four day siege. A stela in the former market square of Tlatelolco reads: "August 13, 1521/Heroically defended by Cuahtémoc/Tlaltelolco fell in the power of Hernán Cortés/Neither a triumph nor a defeat/it was the painful birth of the mestizo people/that is the Mexico of today." Today it is the Plaza of the three Cultures, flanked by Aztec temple ruins, a colonial church, high rise housing projects and the former offices of Mexico's Foreign Ministry, a building which now houses a museum commemorating the events of 1968.

The wave of youth unrest of 1968 came to Mexico City. A series of July street clashes between police and young protestors chafing under the authoritarian rule of the PRI escalated from rocks to Molotov cocktails to the burning of city buses. Hundreds of high school students barricaded themselves inside a secondary school

affiliated with UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico. [12] President Díaz Ordaz took the unprecedented step of ordering the military to intervene.

After the army blasted its way into the school with a bazooka on July 29, 1968, popular support swelled. [13] Subsequent marches saw up to half a million demonstrators. On September 1, Díaz Ordaz issued a threat to use the armed forces to suppress the marchers, [14] but September 13 saw a silent march of 200,000 to 400,000 demonstrators. [15]

Mexico City was not the only city facing youth protest that summer, but it was the only city about to host the first Olympics in the developing world and the first Olympics in a Spanish speaking country. There was a real concern the protests could disrupt the Olympics. U.S. officials met with the Mexican president. The Olympic chief informed Díaz Ordaz the Olympics could be cancelled if the protests continued. Olympic Battalion swept university campuses for dissidents. By the end of September, the bulk of the student leadership of the protest movement was in custody. [16]

On October 2, ten days before the Olympics were to begin, the last holdouts of the student movement rallied in the Plaza of the Three Cultures at Tlatelolco. The protest only attracted 5,000 to 6,000 protestors, outmatched by 8,000 troops and police. According to Sergio Aguayo, author of a book on the events, Díaz Ordaz had a proven strategy for suppressing protest: instigate violence, but only enough violence to justify a decisive crackdown. He stationed sharpshooters from the presidential bodyguard to fire on and provoke the Olympic Battalion, who were under orders not to shoot. He would accept injuries or a few deaths, but hadn't placed an order for a slaughter. [17]

Violence is unpredictable. At 6:10 PM, a helicopter circling overhead dropped two flares—the signal for the snipers. One of the first wounded was the general of a paratrooper battalion. Pandemonium broke loose. Counting the exact number of dead is difficult; most of the bodies were incinerated at the camp where thousands of demonstrators were detained. According to Ross, the best count is 325 dead. [18]

The Toxcatl Massacre, 1520: In Cold Blood, or "Out of His Head"?

In the spring of 1520, a band of mostly Spanish soldiers of fortune and their Tlaxcaltec allies had been living since November in the palace of Emperor Montezuma II in Tenochtitlán. The situation was an uneasy one. Before coming to Tenochtitlán, the Spanish had gone to a neighboring city, Cholula, an Aztec ally, under a pretense of peace. Having invited the populace to assemble in the main plaza, the Spanish stationed guards at the exits and slaughtered the Chololtecs wholesale. The massacre may have been a preemptive move to intimidate possible enemies, or, as Ross Hussig argues, may have been a coup orchestrated by Cortés' Tlaxcaltec allies. [19]

The Spanish held the emperor hostage, but their tiny force was at the mercy of a city of 200,000 people in a metropolitan area that held from one to over two and a half million people. The Tlaxcaltecs had warned the Spanish that the Aztecs would sacrifice and eat them. Tlaxcala supported the Spanish against the rival Aztecs, but could withdraw their support at any time. Then, Cortés received word that the Spanish governor of Cuba had sent a vastly superior force under Pánfilo Narváez to arrest him on charges of treason.

Cortés, to save his head, had not choice but to confront the Spanish force on the coast. Taking the bulk of his troops, he left his captain Pedro de Alvarado in charge of a garrison of eighty soldiers to hold the palace. Cortés easily overthrew Narváez—again, through deceit—and appeared to be in a strong position. He even

persuaded the army sent to arrest him to join his own forces.

However, things went badly back at Tenochtitlán. The Aztecs had asked Alvarado permission to celebrate the festival of Toxcatl and he had assented. When all the nobles, priests, and elite warriors were assembled and unarmed, and the dancing and singing in the courtyard of the Main Temple neared a fever pitch, Alvarado and his men sealed off all the exits and slew the assembled celebrants, eight to ten thousand of them. Cortés and his men returned to find the Spanish garrison besieged. They ended up fleeing the city in a disastrous running battle on June 30, losing over one thousand Tlaxcaltec allies, 860 Spanish soldiers, and five Spanish women. [20] Why had Alvarado done something so rash? Some said gold; some said fear of a plot. Ross Hassig believes it was a move to preemptively liquidate the leadership of the highly professional Aztec army. [21] Cortés' secretary speculated it was a plot motivated by greed for the gold ornaments of the dancers, but noted that others say he was told the Aztecs were planning a surprise attack. He leaves open the possibility that Alvarado may have been simply "out of his head." [22]

Teaching Strategies: Engagement with Culture through Performance

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When I was a boy learning Spanish, the dominant instructional model was the formal/structural approach, with a heavy emphasis on vocabulary drill, grammar and conjugation. Language teachers had almost all studied abroad and would add an element of culture into their lessons by bringing in their photographs and souvenirs from their study abroad or their past travel with student groups. They would repeat with us the familiar rituals of showing us their photos, sometimes telling us the stories behind them, and passing around their artifacts.

These lessons were indispensible. The sharing of a family member's travel snapshots and souvenirs is as much about the person as it is about the place, a symbolic reenactment of the journey taken together. The exercise validated for us the authority of the teacher as someone who had *really been there*, even if our understanding of "there" was nebulous at best. We saw her (in my case, her) younger and in innocent but non-teacherly situations, creating a sense of mystery and interest. (She had *friends?* And who is that *boy* in half the pictures? *He's not the man in the picture on her desk.* Were they in *love? How could they not stay in love?*) These lessons were also crucial because while we did not understand the meanings and contexts of the images and artifacts we saw and handled, their places of origin became possibilities for us—*she* had been there, so *we* could go there—and so we began to chart desire maps, plotting out our own future pilgrimages.

As the focus of second language instruction crept away from the formal/structural approach, textbook editors helpfully provided textbooks with candid photos of places and photos of *realía*—authentic artifacts, or souvenirs, to help replicate the experience of "culture days". These are *simulacra*—exact reproductions of originals that never existed, [23] —souvenirs and snapshots from trips our teachers did not take. The travel photos of strangers are rarely interesting; less so the simulated travel photos of strangers. In their form, such lessons are less relevant than ever; digital natives send pictures much less than they show them. In their content, "culture" lessons on the travelogue/*realía* model were always about our relationship with the teacher and our sense of curiosity and wonder. They transmitted little useful knowledge because they weren't designed to transmit useful knowledge; they were supposed to transmit useful *emotions.*

We have an ethical responsibility as educators to teach students how the events of history shape a nation's culture, rather than abandoning students to deterministic notions of national character. The culture of a

people is formed and shaped by its historical experiences, among other factors, and newer guidelines for the teaching of world languages reflect this. [24] As M.C. Anderson points out in a piece on the portrayal of Mexico in American newspapers 1913-1915 during the height of the Mexican Revolution, the American papers highlighted three general themes: "backwardness," "racial limitations," and "moral decrepitude." All three themes reinforced a portrayal of violence as an essential Mexican trait and promoted a doctrine of Anglo-Saxon superiority. [25] Contemporary news outlets have not abandoned this theme; Mexico City's murder rate is one fourth that of Washington, D.C., but few Americans would know this. [26]

Experiencing history through performance is a widely embraced means for teaching history in the elementary years. For generations, children experienced the First Thanksgiving by dressing up as Pilgrims and Indians (when I was a child, they were still Indians; Native Americans were yet to be discovered). For those of my students who attend houses of worship, whether on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, almost invariably the core of the service is the shared reconstruction of a community's history of itself through participatory performance of primary texts. We have presentational communication goals for our students of world languages; we have an opportunity to add value to the classroom experience by giving students creative and meaningful material to present. We do not need to dress them in paper hats to engage them in the performance of history; the essential element is the acting out, the participation, the immersive experience.

Tlatelolco, 1968: student activities

Day 1:

We will start by examining the site of Tlatelolco via Google Earth, Google Maps, and Bing Maps. Once I've guided students through an overview of the site, students will be allowed to search for photo of the area. Students will be asked to find pictures of the church where Sahagún trained Aztec nobles as seminarians and conducted his ethnographic work, pictures of the former Foreign Ministry building, now a museum, and photos of the high rise housing complex that rings the square. Students will also be asked to identify Aztec ruins, including the stone pedestals of the famous *tzompantli* or Aztec skull racks. We will give students a few moments to explore online using a classroom set of laptops. I'll ask students to compare the stonework of the Aztec ruins with the stonework of the colonial church. (It's the same stonework—the church was built with indigenous labor using stone taken from the Tlatelolco temple complex.)

Finally, students will be asked to find the stela commemorating the fall of the Aztec Empire and the stela memorializing the demonstrators killed in 1968. We will discuss these inscriptions and students will be given the readings for the next day.

I have decided to include some readings in English—the students' need for detailed and nuanced information in some areas exceeds their linguistic capacity. We will not take class time for these, however; these they will read at home. As homework for Day One students will read Chapter 9 of John Ross' *El Monstruo,* "City of Dread and Redemption," [27] which deals with the events of 1968.

Day 2

Students will discuss the readings from the previous evening and will write summaries in Spanish of what they

have read. Students will read excerpts of the 2006 government report on Mexico's dirty war dealing with the events at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. In groups, they'll compare the information contained in the official report with the information Ross conveys to ascertain how much the two reports coincide. Did John Ross' book and the 2006 report have sources in common, or did they reach their conclusions independently? Have students work in small groups. Let students use a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram to process the information.

Day 3

Students will watch and discuss *Rojo amancer,* a dramatic adaptation of the events of October 2, 1968. Students will be asked to make note of and to be ready to discuss details they have encountered in the reading that appear in the film, and will also be asked to identify any discrepancies they see.

Days 4-6

Students will be assigned a collection of excerpts of oral histories of the Tlatelolco massacre taken from Elena Poniatowska's book *La noche de Tlaltelolco.* In small groups, students will take turns practicing these live as dramatic readings, making full use of body language and facial expression. Later, students will choose a testimony to record as a digital audio performance. In Spanish, students will journal on the difference between the two performances, the live full body performance and the digital voice only performance, and will discuss the different choices they had to make to convey meaning in the two different media.

On Day 6 the group will unravel the mystery of Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus. This student leader emerges as a tragic character through Poniatowska's 1971 interviews, but the 2006 report casts him in a different light. [28] Students may be asked to craft two different readings of the Poniatowska interviews with Sócrates: one, without the assumed knowledge of the findings of the 2006 report, and another assuming full knowledge of the whole story. Students will explain how they would perform the readings differently.

The Toxcatl Massacre, 1520: Student Activities

Students will experience the readings for this section, both silently and aloud, after having visited the different sites involved through resources on the Web. As a culminating activity for this segment, students will put on a show. Using Poniatowska's work as a starting point, students will take first hand accounts of the 1520 massacre and approach them as Poniatowska approached her source material, selecting and arranging segments of testimony from the Spanish and the Aztec sides to create a narrative. Students will perform the selected narratives aloud, giving careful intention to the meaning they add to the plain text through body language, emphasis, and elocution.

I have organized the formative activities by reading, rather than by days. All blogging, journaling, or discussion is to be done in the target language.

1520 Student Activities: Formative Assessment

First Strata: Present Day—Caistor

For homework, students will be assigned to read Nick Caistor's chapter on the events of 1520 from his *Mexico City.* In class, students will retrace Caistor's geography lesson on the course of events, starting with an exploration of the Templo Mayor, the associated residential complexes, and the site of Tacuba to get a sense of the scale. We'll use Google Earth, Google Maps, and Bing Maps, all together as a class using the interactive white board. Then, students will break into small groups with laptops assigned to find images and resources on their own: reconstructed views of Tenochtitlán, maps of the old city superposed over the existing city for scale, and illustrations of the events from Aztec codices. Students will be asked to journal or blog about their reflections on the lesson.

Second Strata: The Florentine Codex

Working backwards chronologically once again, we find the historical strata have been disrupted. The latest of the actual eyewitness narratives in terms of publication is the *Florentine Codex,* translated from the Nahuatl and brought to light in 1955. The *Florentine Codex* is the work of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and his native collaborators. He was a Franciscan who trained and educated indigenous men for the priesthood. From 1545 to 1590, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and his students compiled a massive study of prehispanic native Mexican lore, ranging from history to religion to ethnobotany. The work was suppressed in its own time but an overlooked thirteen volume manuscript in Nahuatl was ultimately found and translated to English. [29] We will use the nineteenth through the twenty first chapter of Book 12, The Conquest of Mexico. While these were first translated from Nahuatl to English, we'll use the modernized Spanish version provided by Miguel León-Portilla in *Visión de los vencidos: relaciones indígenas de la conquista,* pages 39-43 and 75-87 of the 1961 edition. [30] Students will read a native account of the massacre at the main Temple. This indigenous account of the story pins the motive of Alvarado's men on greed for the golden ornaments the dancers were wearing.

First, students will discuss prior knowledge of the work and make predictions about what they expect to encounter in the readings. Students will read for comprehension in groups and will share observations about the reading. Small groups will identify target vocabulary that proves a challenge. We will meet as a large group to agree on an overall vocabulary list for this piece. The list will be divided up into groups and each group will be responsible for coming up with gestural representations to help recall target vocabulary—in other words, we will review this vocabulary by associating the Spanish words with performed actions, rather than associating the Spanish word with the English word. I call this "Spanish with Marcel Marceau."

The teacher will display or distribute photos of Aztec illustrations from the Florentine Codex to the students. Writing about a picture or photograph is a common language classroom activity; here we'll tie it to actual content. Students will be required to write about their pictures and describe what they represent. Students will be highly praised for completion of the activity. Students into markers and glitter glue will be encouraged to color their illustrations and post them in the classroom on the fridge at home, as appropriate.

Students will discuss the emotions conveyed in the piece. The narrative certainly has emotional content, but the tone is somewhat matter of fact. Is this because the eyewitness narrative was set down so many years after the fact? One set of students will be assigned to perform the readings aloud as is if they were eyewitnesses speaking in 1520 and another set as if they were speaking in 1545.

Students will be assigned to seek out indigenous Mexican informants regarding the public display of emotion. Are displays of emotion when talking about heavily charged memories culturally appropriate or not?

Third Strata: The Aubin Codex

Published in 1867, the *Aubin Codex* is a post-Conquest Nahuatl text, composed over the years 1576- 1607. The *Aubin Codex* contains a brief but poignant account of the massacre harmonious with that of Sahagún. We'll also read this Spanish translation from León-Portilla's collection in *Visión de los vencidos,* pages 87-89. [31]

We'll start with a vocabulary quiz, and play Spanish with Marcel Marceau, giving students the opportunity to improve their scores through successful play. Then, we'll review the results of student inquiries into culturally appropriate display of emotion. In groups, students will divide up the Aubin Codex selection to be read by a lector with choral response. Students will present their arrangements.

Fourth strata: Bernal Díaz del Castillo

A manuscript that lay dormant for many years (written 1568, published 1632) is the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* of Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Following the publication of the work of López de Gómora, Díaz wrote his account of his campaign years with Cortés to refute the history put forth by Cortés' secretary. Díaz was with the Cortés contingent that struck the Spanish army sent to arrest Cortés, and hence was not an immediate eyewitness to this massacre, though he certainly witnessed others. Of all the chroniclers, he makes the clearest case for arguing that Alvarado's actions were part of a rational and strategic course of action. We'll read Chapter 125, which gives an account based on Alvarado's testimony of the massacre. [32] We'll also read an excerpt of Chapter 128, which gives a gripping account of the flight of the Spanish and their native allies from the capital. [33]

These readings are hard. I recommend cutting down the excerpts to manageable sizes. Students will be asked what they think of Díaz del Castillo's attitude toward the Spanish treatment of the indigenous people. How would they characterize such a person in a performance? Students will be assigned different interpretations of Díaz del Castillo's character—hero, man of his times, no nonsense grizzled warrior, war criminal, psychopath—and will present readings from his testimony accordingly.

Fifth strata: López de Gómora

Francisco López de Gómora was Cortés' personal secretary and had access not only to Cortés' personal papers and letters but also to his closest associates. While López de Gómora's account of the Conquest has been called into question on his handling of the facts, his portrayal of Alvarado has had lasting influence. We will read his chapters on "Causes of the rebellion" [34] —dealing with the Toxcatl massacre—and "How Cortés fled Mexico" [35] .

Students will read the excerpts together and parse them grammatically. For homework, students will journal or blog on the following topic: López de Gómora is often accused of giving a whitewashed portrayal of his patron Cortés, shifting blame to others that actually belonged to Cortés. López de Gómora states that when Cortés found out about Alvarado's massacre he concealed his anger with his subordinate. Did Cortés really concealed his anger, or do you think he wasn't really angry?

Sixth strata: Hernán Cortés

Hernán Cortés, The earliest account is that of Cortés himself, in the second letter he wrote to the young emperor Charles V, October 30, 1520. Cortés' account is surprisingly brief: while his contingent went to contest Narvaez, the Spanish garrison left to hold Mocetezuma's palace came under attack by the Mexica, and

he had to return to rescue them. [36]

For homework, students will read an excerpt from the biography of Cortés by Frank McNutt, pages 34-39. [37] McNutt portrays Cortés as a noble and virtuous man of piety, integrity, and humility, once submitting to be publicly flogged for missing Mass—the same penalty levied out to the indigenous. Students will be asked to recall pages 39-43 of *Visión de los vencidos,* recounting Cortés wholly unprovoked massacre at Cholula. How do we judge someone like Cortés? Must we judge him by the standard of his times, or are there universal standards that apply in any era? Students will be asked to blog or journal on this topic.

Students will be given the assignment: perform Cortés letter in a way that lets the audience know he is concealing something grave. What are some different portrayals of Cortés that could arise?

1520 Student Activities: Summative Assessment

Students will be divided into groups of five, six or more students. Having read a contemporary history of the events of 1520, they will select excerpts of the readings on the massacre at the Templo Mayor to perform for dramatic effect. As it is not desirable to have five or six productions of the same play, student groups will be assigned different emphases and venues for their productions. In this way, students will see how historians and dramatists may reconstruct history in widely divergent ways while drawing on the same evidence. Teachers may wish to give students the option of using a reader's theater format, to allow students to focus on expression and meaning, rather than devoting hours of class time to memorization and rehearsal.

Option One: Hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1527

In 1527 the Spanish crown established an Audiencia, a form of appellate court to oversee the colony of New Spain and take the reins from Hernán Cortés. No one ever established a commission to investigate the massacre at the Templo Mayor, but we'll imagine they did. This group will select and arrange excerpts from the first hand narratives we have read to present before the Audiencia. The testimony, selected and arranged for maximum dramatic effect, should be presented as if these were hearings recorded for C-SPAN. In the interest of verisimilitude and dramatic effect the readings may be adapted, with discretion, to provide a more natural flow of speech. Students should design the production for video and record it for presentation in class.

More than one group may perform this option. Each group should have a particular angle to pursue regarding their selection and presentation of material. For example, one group could portray Cortés as bearing the ultimate responsibility. This group would wish to highlight Cortés' prior conduct in the Cholula massacre and his recurrent use of subterfuge and deceit in dealing with his enemies. Another group could shift blame to Alvarado, portraying the massacre as the product of a failure of leadership by an overwhelmed and unworthy subordinate of Cortés. This group would do well to highlight the mutually disastrous immediate consequences of the massacre, citing the losses the Spanish suffered in their frantic retreat from the city. A third group could present the massacre as an emergent catastrophe that arose from a convergence of forces, any one of which could have been sufficient to provoke the incident. Alvarado's impetuousness, Cortés' prior conduct at the Cholula massacre, the greed of the Spanish soldiers of fortune for the gold ornaments worn by the dancers: all played a role, and the interplay of influences was complex.

Students should submit a proposed script for approval, then prepare, perform and preferably record their presentation. Student groups should submit a transcript and a video for the final evaluation.

Option Two: Templo Mayor Commemorative Stela Tour

Students will imagine a major Chicano actor and collector of Chicano artwork has commissioned a stela for the plaza of the Templo Mayor in Mexico City to commemorate the massacre of May 10, 1520 like the one at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas memorializing the defeat of Cuauhtémoc. The stela will tour bilingual immersion schools throughout the United States before proceeding to tour schools in Mexico. Middle school students from each city the stela will visit will perform adapted readings from the historical record.

Imagine there is a contest to design the stela and the performance that will accompany it on its tour. First, students produce a design of a stela with an inscription as a digital image or actual mock up. Then, they select and arrange appropriate excerpts from the eyewitness testimonies and perform them.

Groups will select and arrange appropriate eyewitness testimonies and adapt or interpret them to make them suitable for a middle school audience. While taking care to cling to the historical record in terms of content, students are free to present the historical testimonies as they are or to interpret them through song, slam poetry, rap, rhythmic movement, shadow puppets, or any other means. The final production as staged should be appropriate for a small auditorium but should be recorded on video. Students will submit a script for approval before staging their performance. A video of the performance should be submitted along with a final transcript. If multiple groups stage this presentation, each should choose or be assigned a different emphasis.

Option Three: Toxcatl: Drought, a Requiem

The massacre at the Main Temple occurred at the festival of *Toxcatl,* or "Drought," also the name of the month in which it occurred. At the festival, a young war captive who had lived as the living image of the god Tezcatlipoca for a year was sacrificed and eaten and his successor was chosen, likely by putting on the flayed skin of his predecessor. [38] The massacre at the Main Temple is also referred to as the Toxcatl Massacre.

The instructions to the students are as follows: you and your fellow guests at the Hostal Virreyes will create a performance commemorating the events of May 10-June 30, 1520 as the opening of Days of the Dead observances in the lobby. The Hostal Virreyes in the Centro Histórico has been described by the New York Times as "an art school dorm party without the art school;" [39] the lobby serves as a frequent and sometimes impromptu performance venue. [40] Use selections from our original documents with the addition of original song, poetry, spoken narration, choral call and response, video or rhythmic movement. Your performance should be designed and staged with a medium sized auditorium in mind. You may produce a linear narrative or may focus on creating a specific mood. Is there a theme of death and rebirth to be found here, or something else entirely? You decide.

Resources

Bibliography for Teachers

For a teacher who has not lived in Mexico City (I have not), I strongly recommend the entirety of John Ross' *El Monstruo*, a biography of Mexico City. It's a gritty, gonzoish portrayal of The Monster by a veteran journalist and activist. In a similar vein, I also recommend Pedro Ignacio Taibo II's introduction to *Mexico City Noir.* Both readings will help set an appropriate frame of mind for approaching *Chilangolandia* (the affectionate or deprecatory nickname for Mexico's capital, depending on the speaker) as a field of intensive study.

Before approaching the material relating to the events of 1520, I recommend a good overview of a history of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Ross Hessig's 1994 book *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest* is a slim volume that gives a highly readable recounting of events.

I would strongly encourage as deep a reading as one can afford on Aztec civilization generally as an antidote to tendencies to romanticize or demonize them as a people. Elizabeth Brumfiel and Gary Feinman's 2008 richly illustrated *The Aztec World*, based on the exhibit of the same name at Chicago's Field Museum, shows us everything the Aztecs were doing when they weren't dancing around in their neighbors' flayed skins, like urban planning, teaching their children a livelihood, practicing medicine, writing books, and suffering from terrible gingivitis. It's an eye opener.

Student Reading List: Tlatelolco, 1968

With the exception of our detective story involving the enigmatic figure of Sócrates, students will approach the strata of history in reverse chronological order. The list I propose is not prescriptive.

From 2010, the late John Ross' *El Monstruo* is a marvelous read, perhaps the best biography of a Mexico City since Carlos Fuentes wrote *La region más transparente.* Chapter 9, "City of Dread and Redemption," gives an effective summary of the events of 1968. [41] John Ross never conceals his political leanings; he stands out with an insider's critique of the left that only a leftist could give.

Teachers wishing to dispense with English language materials altogether may begin directly with the official government report on the government's "dirty war" against dissidents, published by the Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto in 2006, available in its entirety from the National Security Archive of the George Washington University (http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/index.htm). The grammar is simple and the narration straightforward but the piece contains a good deal of civil and military jargon; coach students to ignore most acronyms and to skip long lists of names of military personnel. I caution teachers using this material to carefully redact excerpts: the report contains graphic details.

The most relevant segments for this unit come from ***Tema 3 - Movimiento Estudiantil de 1968.***"3.2.4 Tlatelolco 2 de Octubre" on pages 118-119 of the report describes the plan of the student protestors on that day. "Operativos en distintos puntos de la Ciudad", pages 120 through the top of 123, describes the plan to trap student leaders and the posting of sharpshooters around the square. "*Lo acontecido en la Plaza de las Tres Culturas*", pages 125-127 describes the start of the violence. "El aseido a la plaza", pages 133 through 140, describes the siege of the plaza and ends with the placement of the commemorative stela with names of victims in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. It's a lot of reading, but more dynamic than most of the report, and goes quickly. Teachers should feel free to redact this last selection closely as some of the details may be extremely upsetting to some students. "Campo Militar Número Uno", page 144, deals with the detention of protestors after the march; beyond the first two paragraphs, the details once again may be highly disturbing.

Nick Caistor's 2000 entry, *Mexico City: a Cultural and Literary Companion,* [42] has a good chapter on the events. This reading may be appropriate for teachers concerned about the political slant of Ross' writings but desiring a highly readable account, albeit in English.

Having read an overview, worked through the official report, and having seen a dramatic recreation of the events, I recommend students move as quickly as possible to the oral histories collected by Elena Poniatowska in *La noche de Tlaltelolco.* Most testimonies are short, about a paragraph in everyday language. I leave it to the teacher to select readings.

There is a detective story embedded in our materials: what the 2006 report calls "The Emblematic Case of Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus." [43] Sócrates, known mainly by his first name, was a prominent leader of the student movement. Pages 119-122 of Poniatowska's book present us with the case of Eduardo Valle Espinoza,

another student leader, who is told that Sócrates has denounced him to the authorities. We hear a vehement denial from Sócrates, followed by speculation that he may have cracked under the threat of torture. Sócrates, in a seeming admission, talks about the many that did break under torture. Some speakers comment on the impossibility of judging a young person in that situation. [44] From Poniatowska's 1971 vantage point Sócrates emerges as a pitiable character.

The Office of the Special Prosecutor, with access to Presidential records, paints another portrait of Sócrates. The young man in 1968 was well connected to relatives in government; he was a paid spy and provocateur; he did indeed denounce scores of comrades to the authorities. In the years following his interviews with Poniatowska he moved into careers in government and the military. It's rich material, showing how the historical narrative may be critically shaped by gaps in our knowledge.

Student Reading List: The Toxcatl Massacre, 1520

Students may wish to read Nick Caistor's chapter on the massacre at the Main Temple from *Mexico City: A cultural and literary companion* [45] along with Chapters 5 and 6 from Ross Hassig's book, "The March to Tenochtitlan" and "Moteuczoma's Tenochtitlan." [46] Caistor's book ties the events to the current geography of the city.

The *Florentine Codex* is the work of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and his indigenous students from 1545 to 1590, a massive compilation of prehispanic lore. We'll use Miguel León-Portilla's translation, *Visión de los vencidos: relaciones indígenas de la conquista,* pages 75-87 of the 1961 edition. [47] From the same volume we'll read pp. 39-51, dealing with the Spanish and Tlaxcaltecs at Cholula.

We'll a translated excerpt from the Aubin Codex from León-Portilla's collection in *Visión de los vencidos,* pages 87-89. [48]

The *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* of Bernal Díaz del Castillo was written 1568 and published 1632. We'll read Chapter 125, an account based on Alvarado's testimony of the massacre, pages 380-383. [49] We'll also read an excerpt of Chapter 128, relating the flight of the Spanish and their native allies from the capital, pages 384-409. [50]

From Francisco López de Gómora we will read "Causes of the rebellion", pages 235-237 [51] and "How Cortés fled Mexico", pages 246-250. [52]

We will read an excerpt from Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de relación,* Second letter, October 30, 1520, pages 130-133. [53]

We will read pages 34-39 of Francis McNutt's biography of Cortés. [54]

Materials for Classroom Use

Audacity® is a digital audio recording and editing program created and distributed by volunteers. It offers more than adequate capability for most classroom recording and editing needs. Audacity® is available for Windows, Mac OS X, and GNU/Linux, and is available as a free download (http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/).

Students who need a visual cue to conceptualize the sequence of events of 1968 may benefit from the timeline at National Public Radio's Radio Diaries: the History Project. (http://www.radiodiaries.org/audiohistory/storypages/mexico.html). [55] The timeline may serve as a model for students to create Spanish language classroom timelines.

Rojo amanecer [56] is a 1991 film by Mexican director Luis Fons. The film won eleven national and international awards, including nine Ariel awards, Mexico's equivalent to the Academy Awards. A dramatic adaptation based on exhaustive research, the film covers the events of the night of October 2, 1968 from the vantage point of an affluent family in one of the apartments overlooking the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The film was produced in 1989 but release of the film was delayed for two years by state censorship. When the film finally reached distribution it became one of the most successful domestic films of Mexican cinema. The film is not rated by the MPAA.

Afterword

I also danced the Peppermint Twist on stage in a polyester three piece suit in an elementary history pageant. Not the Twist, but the Joey Dee and the Starliters Peppermint Twist. I didn't understand why we were dancing the Peppermint Twist and not the Twist. I'd heard of Chubby Checker, and I'd heard of the Twist, but I'd never heard of the Peppermint Twist. My teacher said she thought Chubby Checker might still be too controversial because this was the South, and that it was a miracle Betsy Ross and I were up there dancing at all. I didn't understand, but I think the real history lesson was still playing out. My dad was impressed with my dancing but was outraged that it was considered a history lesson. "History? It wasn't that long ago!" he said. I think my teacher was really young.

Appendix: implementing teaching standards

This unit will address the following standards from the North Carolina Common Core and Essential Standards for K-12 Modern Languages-Alphabetic and Logographic:

Essential Standard #1: use the language to engage in interpersonal communication.

Essential Standard # 2: understand words and concepts presented in the language. Essential Standard # 3: use the language to present information to an audience.

Essential Standard #4: compare the students' culture and the target culture.

This unit will require students to collaborate, discuss and share ideas in the target language. Students will demonstrate comprehension of language through appropriate choices in inflection, elocution, facial expression, and body language during performance. Students' choice of vocal and physical expression will also reflect their understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the people whose testimonies they perform, and hence they will have an opportunity to demonstrate awareness of cultural distinctiveness.

This unit will address the following strands across the four essential standards:

Connections to Language and Literacy

Connections to Other Disciplines

Communities

Through performance, students will change their relationship with the written word and will learn to read for shades of meaning and subtext. Students will reinforce their knowledge of geography and of key topics covered in the history curriculum. By accessing locales studied through technology, students will reinforce their 21 st century skills, part of the communities strand. By performing publicly, whether in class, in a larger school setting, or in a performance shared digitally with the wider community, students will lift their language engagement from the interpersonal to the community level.

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