



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume II: Latinx Histories, Cultures, and Communities

Mi Tierra, Mi Historia, Mi Amor: Sharing Stories and Music

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by Lauren Elizabeth Hughes

Introduction

While one may have been a part of staff or faculty at a school district for many years, it is rare to find a teacher that has one school year that is the same as the other. Granted, curriculum and administration may change. Hardworking colleagues may remain tried and true, but in the end, it is our students that make the difference! Because of their similarities and differences – their level of engagement and sheer individuality, students bring the best out of teachers and we strive to be a part of bringing the best out of them. This curriculum unit will delve into the domain of migration, migratory patterns and immigration from Latin American nations and countries along with the unpacking of cultures through stories, poetry, music, and an examination of history. Additionally, students will investigate local history by focusing the lens on Pittsburgh’s part in this topic.

For nearly 30 years, I have worked in the city of Pittsburgh teaching mostly elementary school. Finding a niche as an English and Language Arts instructor, I love seeing students succeed in writing and reading. I’ve been delivering lessons to students in multiple grade levels and am currently working with two sections of ELA. The first section is fourth grade for a three-period block and the second section is fifth grade for the same time period. During these blocks, I teach reading, spelling, English and writing along with handwriting (cursive) and one section of social studies. A unique setup, indeed! Having previously taught third grade for nine consecutive years, it was my sheer pleasure to have that particular group again as I transitioned to the fourth and fifth grade “split.” The familiarity allowed us to grow and thrive. One of the many highlights of my school and student body is that the bulk of the students have been together since pre-k and have subsequently traveled through their elementary experiences concurrently. Not only do they play together, they learn together and can spark mindful conversations accompanied with deep queries that drive instruction.

Students

My students are bright eyed, energetic scholars. A great multitude of them are ravenous readers who easily blow through our district-wide reading goal of 25 books. My building, one of many elementary schools within the district, bumped the goal to 50 and in recent years “100 books or more!” Each day, at our “morning meeting,” the students shout and cheer this goal before they even get to their lockers to prepare for first period. Several students in my fourth-grade homeroom have not only met the building goal of 100 but have

surpassed that! A number of them have over 300, and one had 647. It is important to note that these totals are inclusive of every story from the curriculum we read in class, every passage, news article and more. We want our young students to realize how important it is to not only “read a book,” but to read everything in the world around them. From cereal boxes to books, and street signs to step-by-step instructions, the objective is to strengthen foundational reading skills as well as refine vocabulary and comprehension. These facts combined with the focused involvement of stakeholders in and around the school (teachers, administration, parents, students and community) help to strengthen the students’ efforts and endeavors.

The children attending the school in which I work, come from a wide assortment of demographics inclusive of race and ethnic background, religion, and socio-economic status. Out of the nearly 18,000 students currently enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, ours come from varying areas in the city and include a diverse racial community. US News and World Report shares that the student body consists of white students (28.3%), black students (55.5%), Latino students (3.2%), Asians and Asian Pacific Islanders (1%), Native American and Alaska Native students (1.2%) and Multi-race students (10.8%).¹ Reading and Math scores consistently exceed the district and state levels of proficiency. However, as with educational structures, pedagogy and objectives around the world, weaknesses do exist. Writing, per se, is a subject that can always be thoroughly developed and fine-tuned in my view. Due to the many facets of the subject, along with alarmingly observable changes in even the physical aspect of writing in young students, there is cause for concern in a multitude of educational settings. From my perspective, areas of creative and expressive writing have been stifled and even overlooked. With focus having shifted to district and state assessments, students have been engrossed in writings such as the summary, response and text-dependent analysis. For years, I have observed the transition from writing stories, narratives, poetry and beyond to the aforementioned genres. Not to be downplayed, students’ ability to deliver within those genres is highly important, however, in my opinion, no genre should be ostracized in order to exalt the other. With that said, my students certainly demonstrate strength in reading, comprehending, synthesizing information and possessing a healthy desire to learn and show growth in additional areas of ELA but their writing amongst an array of genres is in need of balance if they are to be thoroughly developed in this hearty discipline.

Rationale

Pondering the observation of my students’ strengths and weaknesses over the years, I am planning to remedy the writing scenario with the genres of expressive and creative writing through a cross curricular experience combined with our magnet school focus of arts and humanities. The intention is to engage students with an authentic integration of several disciplines. Using the arts, ELA and social studies, students will partake in several lessons based on a topic that is lacking in coverage within these subjects. Throughout the years, the district’s reading curriculum as well as that of social studies, has focused on migration, migratory patterns and immigration in bite-sized portions. Most of the discussion around immigration (at the elementary level) has examined the subject as it applies to World War II, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. While historic and valid, I feel that lessons don’t stop there. Is it not equally important to study the growth, change and patterns of not only our cities and country but the rest of the world? In an effort to continue the subject of immigration along with the history and culture of other groups outside of those during and immediately following WWII, I will develop a unit based off of and inclusive of content derived from the YNI seminar Latinx Histories, Cultures and Communities. Students will explore immigration patterns, focusing on North America/Mexico, Puerto Rico,

and Cuba. The content offered in the seminar connects to the goal of strengthening students' writing skills in the genre of *expressive* and *creative writing*. In addition to the writing, students will show growth in their knowledge of social studies skills such as *history*, *geography*, and *world cultures*. In the area of ELA, students will hone *vocabulary*, *language and writing skills*, and the use of *discussion to analyze and show comprehension*. By way of the themes of love, longing and struggle, students will connect to characters and actual individuals through stories, poems, excerpts and music. A carefully curated mixture of books, poems and songs on the topic of not only immigration but also the deep love and longing for one's home country will be analyzed and shared with the children in a developmentally appropriate manner. In the end, the intended purpose for this unit is to enhance student learning and exploration of cultures that many of them have never examined. It is also the intention for pupils to explore, examine and construct a system of questions that will require them to read a bit more, research cultures and communities and connect through the human experience. Moreover, it is my hope that the content of this seminar will be the catalyst of this moment of discovery and experience for the students. Specifically, the children will learn a more in depth and authentic sharing of the ***story of immigration, how lived experiences can be shared through music, poetry and storytelling, and how to express themselves through writing.***

Objectives

In the completion of this curriculum unit, the students will be able to use the content to write expressively, using ***poetry, memoir and narrative pieces***. They will be able to respond to the stories shared during lessons through ***discussion, analysis and reflection***. Additionally, the students will be able to ***identify the specific theme*** of love, longing and struggle through written response as well as oral presentation in small groups. These themes are a core component throughout the unit. They will highlight connections to content delivered in lessons based on material from the seminar as well as the stories and musical selections shared in class. Within the area of social studies, the students will be able to ***identify*** the continents of North America (Canada, The United States and Mexico) and South America in addition to Central America, Puerto Rico and Cuba on a map. They will be able to ***discuss*** patterns of migration within those areas and ***explain*** why. Finally, the students will be able to ***use vocabulary*** learned throughout the unit and incorporate it into writings and small group conversations/collaborations in oral and written forms. These goals and objectives connect to the overall goal of the curriculum unit in that they are the framework through which the children will show understanding and growth garnered from the delivery of content from the seminar, the stories to be shared and the music to which they will listen. More importantly, these objectives will assist the students as they engage with the characters in the stories and focal point of the poems and music. The instances of reflection and analysis will create a connection, which will lead to the natural occurrence of empathy and expression, each of which is a necessary ingredient in a thorough internalization of the topic.

It is my hope that in the participation and completion of this unit the students take away a lifelong understanding of the human experience and the importance of being able to express themselves through varying forms of communication in order to create a continuity of life and learning.

Content

To properly examine migratory patterns of Hispanics/Latinos to the United States as well as historical events and cultural aspects is a vast undertaking to say the least. Making connections as to why the Latin diaspora is situated as it stands in the United States of America today would take a lifetime to unravel accurately, respectfully and appropriately. In addition, attempting to hone information to an exact locality adds layers of research and precise information gathering. Due, in large part, to this endeavor, the proposed curriculum unit will center on a very specific set of countries and territory. Moreover, the unit is targeted for the intermediate elementary grades (third, fourth and fifth levels) and will need to provide developmentally appropriate material for student success and achievement. Therefore, the areas highlighted here consist of our North American neighboring country of Mexico, the Republic of Cuba and the United States Territory of Puerto Rico. Students will learn about general reasons for migration as well as patterns for those specific groups while also touching on musical genres and the importance of storytelling. During the implementation of this unit, children will work together and independently to discover the theme of love, longing and struggle in the readings, excerpts and music. Through a carefully maneuvered line of inquiry and use of the Socratic method of teaching, students will connect with the lessons, and material to build understanding, form their own connections, and produce thoughtful and creative material to be shared with peers, family and their community.

Mexico

With numbers constantly growing in the continental United States, representation from Latin countries, nations and territories vary largely. However, the largest Latin population in America is of Mexican descent. The Pew Research Center states that in 2021, there were 37.2 million Mexicans in this country². Therefore, it (the Mexican diaspora) is at the core of America's heritage. Two out of every three Latinos in this country are from Mexico.³ Many Americans do not realize the impact Mexican migrants have had on the U.S.. The federal government here, in America began their record keeping of immigrants around 1820. Since then, Mexico has been in the forefront of the number of individuals migrating here than any other country.⁴ About a century later, in 1920, many parcels of land, ranches and larger estates were in the hands of Anglo Americans.⁵ Moreover, in the Rio Grande Valley, Mexicans made up approximately 90 percent of the population, however, most of the political power and control of those lands were in the hands of the minority population of that region which was white.⁶ When considering the reasons that drew individuals to the United States, there are many. In fact, there tends to be a pattern within many stories of migration, that is indicative of three categories. In the examination of migration, immigration and emigration, motive for the drastic step of moving, immigrating and assimilating to a country not of one's origin leans toward money/economics, politics and strife. These factors appear consistently, regardless of nationality. Timothy J. Henderson shares that "Illegal – and very much legal – immigration from Mexico is a creature of American Capitalism."⁷ Whether for better employment opportunities, receipt of better education or much needed medical attention, the "fighting chance" that more money offered to those that migrated was worth the risk.

The part of politics plays out as a pattern in migration. One can observe this when looking at changes in immigration as well as immigration policy throughout various political goings on in the United States. From the early 1800s through to the twentieth century, there are ebbs and flows. The Great Depression, World Wars I and II, The Bracero Program, The IRCA act and more are a reflection of this. After U.S. escalation in the war by the events of Pearl Harbor, our government changed course, abruptly. Instead of deporting immigrant

workers from Mexico, America pushed to “recruit” them.⁸

Other forms of strife like war and gang violence are also a part of the three-category pattern of migration and immigration. The Pew Research Center, in their report, *Mexicans and Salvadorans Have a Positive Picture of Life in the U.S.*, stated that Mexicans as well as Salvadorans look at the safety situation in their homes as “dire,” and show measurable concern regarding crime. Overwhelmingly, the people of these nations would prefer that their government focus on the maintenance of “law and order.”⁹

Puerto Rico

In 2006, a report showed the 2000 Census Bureau recorded the population of Puerto Ricans in America had reached 3.4 million. At the time, Puerto Rico’s population was about 3.8 million. The sentiment was that to predict the number of Puerto Ricans in America would easily surpass that of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico itself was not too far off for what the 2010 census would share out.¹⁰ Fast forward to the present and you will find that the population of Puerto Rico now stands at approximately 3.2 million inhabitants while the continental United States, inclusive of Washington D.C. reports an estimated 6.1 million citizens of Puerto Rican origin.¹¹

Looking back on patterns of migration to the United States, mostly Mexican farmworkers accounted for the Latin American immigrants here, but by 1946, over 40,000 Puerto Ricans had immigrated to the U.S., mostly in New York City. Even though there had been a minute “colonia” in the area since World War I, it had grown to about 135,000 people after World War II and by 1960, there were over a million Puerto Ricans in this country.¹² Because the airline Pan American had begun regular flights to the United States out of San Juan, one sociologist called this the “greatest airborne migration in history.”¹³ More recent events such as Hurricane Maria, which was the worst hurricane in recorded Puerto Rican History, bringing financial and social consequence, are direct cause for migration as well.

Cuba

A nation that truly shows the three categorical breakdowns of politics, money/economics and strife (wars and other violence), is The Republic of Cuba. In the late 1900s, with the desire to flee due to the independence wars, over one hundred thousand people, which was more than 10 percent of the Cuban population, immigrated to the United States.¹⁴ However, unique opportunities were the cause of movement to America. Vincente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya were able to purchase about forty acres of swamp in Tampa, Florida in the late 1800s. They ended up draining that area and set forth with the goal of the construction of a “company town.” Later, as the town grew, known as Ybor City, access to steamship liners that traveled to and from Havana, Key West and Tampa became a consistent pathway for more and more workers. In the 1900s Ybor City became known as the “cigar capital of the country,” with 129 cigar. Factories and around fifteen thousand residents.¹⁵ With examples of war and economics as drivers of Cuban immigration, politics comes into play again. Through the years, immigration policy here also ebbed and flowed. By the 1960s, many Cubans entering the United States were able to do so legally due to refugee status. The “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” policy of the time made it ok for any Cuban who reached U.S. soil, even without a visa, to stay in America in order to obtain legal status.¹⁶ Later, in 2017, President Barack Obama would end this policy. Approximately fifty to one hundred thousand people have traveled annually between Havana, Key West, and Tampa. Now, Cubans are known to be the third largest group of Hispanic origin here, in the United States. Ahead of Cuba are Mexicans, which is number one and Puerto Ricans at number two.¹⁷

Pittsburgh and Latino Communities

In the city of Pittsburgh located in Southwest Pennsylvania, an intriguing scenario has played out for decades. If you ask a native Pittsburgher where to find Latino residents and communities, the answer is most likely one of bewilderment, void of a concrete response. A look comes over their face that equates to being stunned. I have asked this question time and time again and have come up with no true answer. However, in the city located Northwest of us (Cleveland, Ohio) the answer is quite different. Answers are readily provided and it is clear that there is an established and noted presence of the Latinx community. Statistically, the city of Pittsburgh currently has a Latino population of approximately 4.5%, which is a bit higher than the 3% listed not long ago. Contrasting numbers in Cleveland show about three times that of the current population in Pittsburgh at 13.2%.¹⁸



PLANNING FOR PRESERVATION IN PENNSYLVANIA, 2024 – 2034
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Regional Profile: Focus Area 2

Race and Ethnicity

- The region's population is predominantly White/Caucasian, with White Alone (Non-Hispanic or Latino) representing 85% of the region's total. This is above the state average of 75% White Alone (Non-Hispanic or Latino).
- Allegheny County is the most racially and ethnically diverse in the region, with Black Alone making up 13% of the population, and Hispanic or Latino (Any Race) making up 8% of the population. This is likely due to Pittsburgh, as large cities are typically more diverse.
- More rural counties are typically less diverse, such as Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, and Washington counties. The counties are all rural (as defined by the US census) and have lower Black and Hispanic populations than the urban counties.
- While the region overall is 85% White Alone (Non-Hispanic or Latino), within the region's cities this population only makes up 68% of the total, below the statewide average of 75%. Townships are the most homogenous, with 91% of the population White Alone (Non-Hispanic or Latino).

	Focus Area 2	Allegheny	Armstrong	Beaver	Butler	Fayette	Greene	Indiana	Lawrence	Washington	Westmoreland
White, Non-Hispanic Or Latino	85%	77%	97%	88%	94%	91%	92%	93%	91%	91%	93%
Black	8%	13%	1%	6%	1%	4%	3%	2%	4%	3%	2%
Hispanic Or Latino	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Asian, Other Race, or Two or More	6%	8%	2%	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
TOTAL	2,576,200	1,250,578	65,558	168,215	193,763	128,804	35,954	83,246	86,070	209,349	354,663

Figure 1-Reference to percentage of Hispanic/Latino population in PA. Photo credit: Planning for Preservation in America

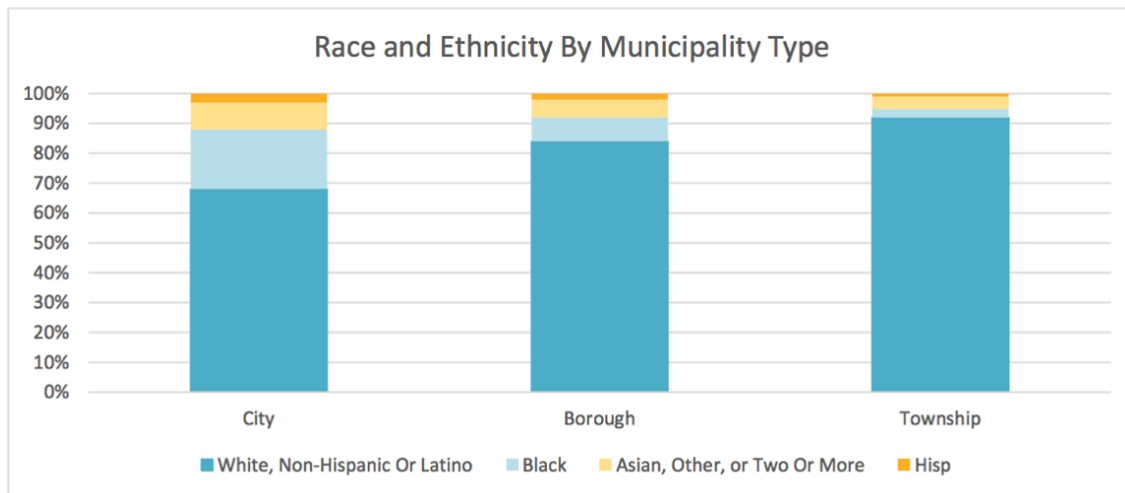


Figure 2-Comparison of White, Black, Hispanic and Asian Race and ethnicity by PA Municipality Types. Photo credit: Planning for Preservation in Pennsylvania

Historically, there are major factors that venture to explain possible reasons for the low account of a community that seems to thrive elsewhere. The first is the breakdown of the steel industry. This led to low numbers of immigrants relocating to any emerging Latino community. Additionally, Pittsburgh doesn't offer larger fruit and vegetable farming, other agricultural work or ranching that might provide opportunities for migrant workers. Along with the downfall of the steel industry after the Great Depression, foreign immigration to the region slowed. Not even immigration waves during the 1960s and 1970s that populated other cities of the United States change this trend. This explains the little similarity that the population mix in Pittsburgh has with other cities in the country.¹⁹

Locals often refer to Pittsburgh as a city of neighborhoods because of the geographical dispersal of its residents. Built around the intersection of three rivers – the Allegheny, the Monongahela, and the Ohio – led the city's residential areas to develop haphazardly, often designed to connect residents with the nearest river but not necessarily to adjacent neighborhoods.²⁰ Neighborhoods are still separated along ethnic, racial and economic lines with little interaction between groups...Pittsburgh groups have tended to stay put, leaving little in the way of a cohesive area for Latinos to claim as their own. As a result, the Latino population are scattered in different pockets around the city, such as the neighborhoods of South Oakland and Beechview.²¹

Although the Latino population in the city of Pittsburgh, namely Allegheny County, is considered to be on the rise, numbers overall remain low. [Pittsburgh] is a region with a traditionally low concentration of Latinos that has experienced a population increase in the last decade, which in some literature has been called a "new growth era."²² ... The most predominant perception in the area remains that there are few, if any, Latinos in the region. This lack of awareness, coupled with how recent the arrivals of many new Latino immigrants are, results in higher levels of social and cultural isolation.²³

It is widely known throughout the city and other areas that there is a low number of Latinos in comparison not only to other groups but to that of other cities near and far. Despite the little evidence that can be found about the Latino migration to the Greater Pittsburgh area before the 1990s, Latino migrants have arrived at the region for well over a century. However, with World War I slowing the amount of European workers coming to the US, there were several job openings that were seemingly unfillable. Many of these positions soon became filled by blacks in the area.²⁴

Others were filled by Mexican immigrants, who came not only to the Southwest and West in greater numbers, but reached such places as Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. This flow continued during the 1920s, when some five hundred-thousand Mexicans were counted as immigrating to the United States, there being no quota for Western Hemisphere immigrants.²⁵

There has been recent growth of the Latino population in Pittsburgh that spans over the last decade, however, numbers remain in the single digits when examined as a part of the whole of Allegheny County. Marcia-Vergara, 2012 states that even as the population that can be called Latino in the Pittsburgh area has increased, it does not necessarily speak to the existence of a community as such.²⁶

Because the city of Pittsburgh's Latino population is still growing along with the fact that larger numbers of the existing population are centered in one area, this unit will be beneficial for the students in the Pittsburgh Public School District. The expanse of student growth and knowledge in studying Latinx history will be an invaluable experience. Paired with the inquisitive and investigative nature of the children, along with specific teaching strategies chosen to enhance the learning, students will be able to question, discuss, write and share material with their classmates, peers and family. With little to no exposure, authentic activities or interaction with the Latino community or its history at this point in their education, finding a developmentally appropriate, and fulfilling approach to the content taught is an intricate pedagogical process.

Music

The music of Latin America is a major part of the vast array of cultural aspects in Latinx communities. There is a plethora of genres, dance styles and instrumentation that bring each branch to life. Students can explore a sampling of these genres and styles in continuance of the identification of themes of love, longing and struggle. Each child should be able to articulate genres, instruments and rhythms of importance (such as the clave 2-3 and 3-2 rhythms), as well as the geography of the genre. Shown below are definitions surrounding genres of music that correlate with the focus areas of Puerto Rico, Mexico and Cuba, as well as a few others that are important to reference.

Plena



Figure 3 – Image showing percussion components of panderetas in a Plena ensemble. Photo credit: VaPix Photography

After slowly distancing from Spain, the Plena music style grew among Afro Puerto Rican urban workers on the island, mostly from coastal regions like Ponce and Mayaguez. Plena follows what is known as a “call and response” format and has sometimes been referred to as “el periodico contado” – the sung newspaper. It can be inclusive of the main singer’s feelings, perspectives, beliefs and hopes.²⁷ Instruments include lots of percussion like the pandero (seguidor and Segundo).

Corridos

Emerging from Mexico in the 1800s, corridos are considered narrative ballads. Like other Latin music genres, the corrido shares stories of history, love, bravery and tragedy. Recently, however, the ascent of narcocorridos, that touch on the lives of outlaws, have become popular as well.²⁸

Mariachi

A traditional musical style and genre from Mexico, Mariachi is a rich and lively form of music and storytelling. Used in celebrations and patriotic showings it is a “symbol of Mexican national pride.” This genre can be heard at weddings and several festivals and consists of a specific set of instruments.²⁹ You will usually find several trumpets, multiple violins and guitars, a guitarron (which is a very large guitar with deeper voicing), and a harp. An exciting feature is the “grito” which is a call, yell or laugh that is powerful and high-pitched.



Figure 4 – Image showing components of Mariachi ensemble with guitarron, guitars, trumpets and violins.
Photo credit: Getty Images

Salsa

The 1960s and 70s New York scene brought about the rise of Salsa. Even though this genre is deeply rooted to Cuba and Afro-Caribbean rhythms, the style spread quickly in popularity within the Puerto Rican community.³⁰ With large percussion ensembles and horn sections, salsa is a dynamic, uplifting sound and dance that brings out an inner drive with individuals. Instrumentation is inclusive of conga and bongos, timbales, horns (trumpets, trombone and more), and the piano (montuno rhythms/techniques). Musicians like Tito Puente, Celia Cruz and groups such as the Fania All Stars³² made the genre a noted powerhouse.



Figure 5 - Image of Tito Puente and His Orchestra performing Salsa. Photo credit: Getty Images and Jon Sievert.

Reggaeton

A notable, fast rising and popular genre, Reggaeton rose from Panama during the late 1980s, grew in popularity in Puerto Rico in the 90s,³³ and is a current phenomenon. With so many exciting aspects of the genre, like bold, urban-themed lyrics, the Dembow rhythmic beats are the driving factor of this specific sound. Instrumentation can include electronics layered on top of the rhythm and vocals. Individuals like Daddy Yankee, Bad Bunny and Ivy Queen continue to make this genre extremely popular.³⁴

Samba

Related to the Afro-Brazilian community with notoriety specifically tied to Brazil and Carnival, Samba continues with the tenet of syncopated rhythms of African descent. Known for that syncopated rhythm as well as lively instrumentation, “Samba is as much about dance as it is about music.”³⁵

Bossa Nova

Even though this genre of Latin music is outside of the focal points of this unit, it is important to include as a reference for different rhythms and origins/connections to the aforementioned genres. Bossa Nova, music with history in Brazil, is inclusive of syncopated rhythms and jazz stylings.³⁶ With instruments similar to those used in Samba and Salsa, such as the guiro and light percussion, in addition to some that are most identifiable to the genre, like the Cuica, it is extremely popular. Notable musicians of the genre include Joao Gilberto, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Sergio Mendes, who debuted at Carnegie Music Hall in November of 1962. This was widely regarded as the “first Bossa Nova concert in the United States.”³⁷

Teaching Strategies

Student Centered/Student Led instruction

It is important to allow students to be in the forefront of their learning. With engagement constantly challenged by technology and other attractions, the children should be allowed to have input, time for thoughtful analysis and discussion during learning sessions. By fostering students' autonomy, they naturally become more engaged and motivated in their learning because it is interesting to them.³⁸ As a best practice, teachers should be attentive to the learning styles of all of their students as well as what makes them successful when material is presented to them. Student-centered learning puts students at the center of their learning experiences by engaging them in decisions about what they learn and how they learn it.³⁹

Socratic

Being a longtime follower of the Freirean philosophy and teaching style, it is my firm opinion that liberating my students and their choices in thinking, what they learn and where they'll take it is important in education today. The Socratic method is a fantastic accompaniment to this philosophy. "It is a dialogue between teacher and student instigated by the continual probing questions of the teacher, in a concerted effort to explore the underlying beliefs that shape the students' views and opinions."⁴⁰ Pushing students to think critically and exposing them to just a bit of developmentally appropriate "wondering" or experiencing a new and different train of thought helps build pathways that are valuable throughout their lives.

Accountable Talk

In the Pittsburgh Public School District, students are encouraged to use "Accountable Talk" which was derived from the work of Dr. Lauren Resnick through research at the Institute for Learning, University of Pittsburgh. Students lead their own thought-driven discussion on topics. They use language such as "I agree with your comment and I'd like to add to it..." or "I disagree because..." The children often become highly interested in their conversations and responses. They can even forget the teacher is there! In my experience, it is not uncommon to toss a drop of thought based upon what we are reading and step back to marvel how the students take hold and lead each other respectfully and in a manner that is fully engaging. Everyone can participate because everyone has ideas, including students who are not fluent in the language used in the classroom.⁴¹

Visualization and Technology

While we don't want to overexpose students to screens, enhancing students' visualization of what is being learned is imperative to their overall success, especially when venturing into areas of the unknown or material in which students have had little exposure. In an effort to create a well-rounded experience for the children in this particular curriculum unit, several tools to help with visualization will be helpful. Using a ClearTouch Smartboard for students' examination of maps, sources with specific imagery, video and literary excerpts will intensify their intake of information without creating overload. The appropriate amount of video and even audio exposure will reinforce the themes they should be identifying. Furthermore, some assignments in class and at home will involve the use of websites and videos in order to assist in student retention of material. Being able to return to a website to view footage or other elements of learning in addition to reading from the assigned pages, books, articles, etc. will also elevate the experience while aiding in preparation for discussion,

written responses or assessments.

Inquiry-Based

While quite similar to Socratic teaching methods, Inquiry-Based Instruction focuses on questioning and deep thought on the part of the learner. The instructor simply sets the tone with queries that will draw both verbal and written response. Students are not simply subjected to the lecture as a single component to what they're learning at the moment but become more open to exploring the topic as a whole, which drives them to formulate organic questioning of their own. This is a preferred method when it comes to digging into touchy territory and the introduction of topics that revolve around the problems of life and the real world. For this particular curriculum unit, these students can benefit from the use of this strategy due not only to the material being presented, but also the environment immediately surrounding them. By using Inquiry-Based Instruction combined with strategies mentioned previously, all aspects of the unit can be satisfied, creating an all-around meshing of material, teaching, learning and outcomes. Inquiry-based learning prioritizes problems that require critical thinking so. Students can develop their abilities to ask questions, design investigations, interpret evidence, form explanations and arguments and communicate findings.⁴²

Cooperative Learning

When students get out of their seats and circle the classroom, they experience an increase in not only the pleasure of learning but also the amount of the presented material that is retained. In addition to the physical repositioning, students are able to learn cooperatively by working in smaller groups. They can stir up their thinking through discussion and discover ideas that they may not have come up with had it not been through the educational communication with their classmates. Moreover, Cooperative Learning helps to build confidence when the children find out that thoughts and ideas they have constructed individually are matched by their peers. When other students reveal their thinking along with building upon those thoughts collaboratively, they are more willing to share out those revelations when the group comes back together. Popular activities using this strategy are tried and true in my own classroom on the intermediate elementary level. Activities in this context include small groups of choice, Think, Pair, Share; Round Robin, Jigsaw, Roles, and more.

Scaffolding

For most of my career in education, I have found that balancing the responsibilities of teaching and learning is a key element to student success and achievement. At the intermediate grade levels, students are emerging from their primary years and foundational learning. Many teachers instructing students at the third-grade level may see students asking questions that are strictly based on one answer that the student is hoping the teacher will provide. As the students continue, a pattern of growth should occur that lessons that habit leading to a higher level of independent processing. Scaffolding is a great way to assist students. It is the act of putting processes in place that can eventually be removed (like training wheels) as the children begin to understand the materials being taught. There are several descriptions of this practice such as Gradual Release or "I Do," "We Do," "You Do." Providing information and examples, completing assignments or tasks together and then giving students time to show their comprehension and thought processes is the desired outcome for students and their instructors. My fourth and fifth grade students have small tent-like indicators on their desks that allow them to send a "silent signal" to the teacher. A green card states "I'm working comfortably," while a simple flip reveals a yellow card that says "I have questions but can keep working," and a final flip shows a red card that alerts the teacher that a student "can't continue without assistance."

Robust Vocabulary

Dr. Isabel Beck and Dr. Margaret McKeown of the University of Pittsburgh have implemented a system for teaching vocabulary to students. One of the five components of reading, vocabulary has a major influence in the development and expansion of each of the other parts when learning foundational skills that lead to teaching children to read. Vocabulary plays an important role in students' comprehension of complex text and language development while also impacting students' writing.⁴³ Using activities such as word association, example/non-example, explanations and others it is an approach to learning that encompasses all reading components. There are systematic reasons outside of school that contribute to students of different SES having different levels of vocabulary, so it is critical that we make time for vocabulary instruction that provides all students' experiences to be exposed to and interact with rich vocabulary.⁴⁴

Reading List

The following is a reading list to draw upon for the implementation of lessons in the unit as well as to scaffold opportunities to show understanding and the ability to analyze text by the students. While some of the items will be shared as excerpts, the vast majority will be read as a whole during class as well as at home with family members for homework and reflection. Each book, poem and excerpt is pertinent to the students' learning as a part of this curriculum unit. The lessons will encompass several PA/Common Core standards across multiple subjects adding to the cross-curricular nature of the unit as well. Students will use these items to synthesize, identify themes, discuss content and respond for the purpose of demonstrating comprehension.

1. Lupe Wong Won't Dance Donna Barbara Higuera
2. Mango Moon Diane DeAnda
3. Sofia Acosta Makes a Scene Emma Otheguy
4. Dreamers Yuyi Morales
5. Undocumented: A Worker's Fight Duncan Tonatiah
6. Solito (excerpts) Javier Zamora
7. The Poet X (excerpts) Elizabeth Acevedo
8. My Shoes and I: Crossing Three Borders. Rene' Colato Lainez
9. The Only Road Alexandra Diaz
10. Someone Like Me Julissa Arce
11. From the Fields to the Fight Angela Quezada Padron
12. My Diary From Here to There Amara Irma Perez
13. A Movie in My Pillow Jorge Argueta
14. Under the Feet of Jesus (excerpts) Helena Maria Viramontes
15. Mi Casa is My Home Laurene Sala
16. Fiona's Lace Patricia Polacco
17. Thundercake Patricia Polacco
18. Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909 Michelle Markel
19. Their Great Gift: Courage, Sacrifice and Hope in a New Land John Coy
20. Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale Duncan Tonatiah
21. They Call Me Guero: A Border Kid's Poems David Bowles
22. Call Me Roberto: Roberto Clemente Goes to Bat for Latinos Nathalie Alonzo and Rudy Gutierrez

Music List

The following list highlights selections that will be used in order to teach a multitude of Latin music genres

such as salsa, samba, mariachi, plena, reggaeton and more. Each piece will highlight musical history, traditional instrumentation, as well as various cultural aspects that are specific to the country of origin. Moreover, listening sessions will connect with the ongoing themes of love, longing and struggle. Students will show growth by listening, identifying, questioning and applying the pieces to geographical location as they satisfy social studies standards making this particular curriculum unit experiential and integrative.

Bad Bunny

“Debi Tirar Mas Fotos”

“Baile Inolvidable”

“Nuevo Yol”

Marc Anthony

“Vivir Mi Vida”

Celia Cruz

“Cuando Sali de Cuba”

“Guantanamera”

Gloria Estefan

“Mi Tierra”

Puerto Rico

“Lamento Borincano” (Rafael Hernandez Marin)

“La Adelita”

Puerto Rico Plena

“Que Bonita Bandera”

“Temporal”

“Rayo De Sol”

Mariachi

“Cielito Lindo”

Samba and Bossa Nova

“Mas Que Nada” (Jose Ben covered by Sergio Mendes) Salsa

“The Girl From Ipanema” (Antonio Carlos Jobim and Venicius de Moraes)

Classroom Activities

For the implementation of this curriculum unit, a structured delivery of lessons would work well with students at the fourth and fifth grade or intermediate grade level. There are four areas in which lessons will be carried out. They are as follows:

Day One: “Teacher” (teacher delivers lessons, examples, stories and music)

1. Reading of stories and excerpts
2. Content mini-lessons
3. Musical excerpts

Day Two: “Social Studies” (lessons and review of specific historical aspects, maps, deep dive into musical selections and cultural studies such as genre, instrumentation, dance, etc.)

1. History
2. Music and Culture
3. Maps and Geography

Day Three: “Student Groups” (breakout groups with student discussion of lessons, analysis of stories, response to questions, stories, poetry and musical excerpts)

1. Discussion
2. Sharing Out
3. Line of Inquiry
4. Writing/Responding Cooperatively

Day Four: “Individual Students” (students work individually on responses and analysis, poetry, memoir and other writing. Formative assessments observed)

1. Writing/Responding Individually
2. Creative Writing (poetry writing and response)
3. Line of Inquiry
4. Memoir (reading and writing)

Each block of four days will equate to one week during the unit with an additional week (week five) set aside for review, editing and revising as well as the sharing and publication of student work. Stories and music will be grouped by each area of focus such as “Cuba,” “Puerto Rico,” and “Mexico,” musical genre or the overall migrant and immigrant experience.

Teacher Resources

As stated earlier, there are multiple subjects under the umbrella of English and Language Arts (ELA). With each graded subject, there are specific expectations, assessments and writing projects that students will complete during the school year. The goal is the measurement of growth in each child. In Reading, the DIBELS assessment is a tool used to measure emergent literacy such as phonemic awareness and fluency.

While showing growth in reading skills is a factor, using the data from these assessments helps to drive instruction and is a highly regarded best practice. This curriculum unit melds with best practices, the Pennsylvania state standards and eligible content as well as materials and themes that encourage students to think critically and independently. At the fourth and fifth grade level, students must read and respond through writing in order to show comprehension. Being able to synthesize information along with using evidence from text paired with the usage of robust vocabulary, students provide confirmation of growth in the varying skillsets under Reading and other areas of ELA. Carefully curating the materials used to not only show student growth but also keep in line with the standards, district and state expectations is a key factor in planning and implementing a successful curriculum unit. Procuring material that is engaging, invigorating and useful for students to complete this unit is essential to their success and retention of the information experienced. In this section, a breakdown of the reading and listening lists are provided in a format that shows how standards, will be applied as well as how each piece will connect to the content background and objectives. The reading and listening list for this unit are as follows:

Reading List

Title	Author	Focus	Standard-PA
Lupe Wong Won't Dance	Donna Barbara Higuera	Identity/Mexican/American/Chinese	CC 1.3.5 A CC 1.3.5 C
Mango Moon	Diane DeAnda	Migration/Immigration	9.3.3 D
Sofia Acosta Makes a Scene	Emma Otheguy	Cuba	7.3.3/7.3.6
Dreamers/Sonadores	Yuyi Morales	Mexico/Migration/Immigration	7.3.3/7.3.6
Undocumented: A Worker's Fight	Duncan Tonatiah	Mexico/Immigration	7.3.3/7.3.6 CC 1.4.5 S
Solito (excerpts)	Javier Zamora	El Salvador/Migration/Immigration	CC 1.4.5 S
From the Fields to the Fight	Angela Quezada Padron	Mexican-American/Migration	CC 1.4.5 S CC 1.4.5 A
Mi Casa is My Home	Laurenne Sala/Zara Hoang	Mexico/Spain/Migration/Assimilation	CC 1.3.5 C
The Poet X (excerpts)	Elizabeth Acevedo	Dominican Republic/Immigration/Assimilation	CC 1.3.5 C CC 1.3.5 F
Under the Feet of Jesus (excerpts)	Helena Maria Viramontes	Mexican-American/Migration/Immigration	CC 1.3.5 C CC 1.3.5 F
My Shoes and I: Crossing Three Borders	Rene Colato Lainez	Migration/Immigration	7.3.3 C 7.3.6 A
The Only Road	Alexandra Diaz	Guatemala/Migration	7.3.3 C 7.3.6 A
Someone Like Me	Julissa Arce	Mexico/Migration/Immigration	7.3
My Diary From Here to There	Amara Irma Perez	Mexico/Migration/Immigration	CC 1.3.4 G

Their Great Gift: Courage, Sacrifice and Hope in a New Land	John Coy	Various Latin American Countries	CC 1.3.4 G
Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale	Duncan Tonatiuh	Fiction/Migration	CC 1.3.4 G
They Call Me Guera: A Border Kid's Poems	David Bowles	Mexico/Migration	CC 1.3.5 F
Call Me Roberto: Roberto Clemente Goes to Bat for Latinos	Nathalie Alonzo/Rudy Gutierrez	Puerto Rico/Immigration/Assimilation	CC 1.3.5 F
Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers Strike of 1909	Michelle Markel	Immigration/Assimilation/Compare-Contrast	CC 1.3.5 F
Fiona's Lace	Patricia Polacco	Ireland/Immigration/Assimilation	CC 1.3.5 F
Thundercake	Patricia Polacco	Russia/Immigration/Compare-Contrast	CC 1.3.5 F

List for Listening

Title	Artist	Social Studies Focus	Standard
"Debi Tirar Mas Fotos"	Bad Bunny	Puerto Rico	CC 1.5.4 F 7.3 CC 7.3.3 C
"Baile Inolvidable"	Bad Bunny	Puerto Rico/Salsa	CC 1.5.4 F 7.3
"NuevaYol"	Bad Bunny	Puerto Rico/Salsa/Reggaeton	CC 1.5.4 F 7.3
Vivir Mi Vida	Marc Anthony	Puerto Rico/America/Salsa	CC 7.3.3 C
"Cuando Sali de Cuba"	Celia Cruz	Cuba/Latin/Bolero	CC 7.3.3 C
"Guantanamo"	Cruz/Fernandez/Marti	Cuba/Latin Folk/Salsa	CC 7.3.3 C
"Mi Tierra"	Gloria Estefan	Cuba/Latin/Afro-Cuban	CC 7.3.3 C CC 1.5.4 F 7.3
"Lamento Borincano"	Rafael Hernandez Marin	Bolero/Puerto Rico	9.3.3 E 9.3.3 D
"La Adelita"	Traditional Corrido	Bolero/Puerto Rico	9.3.3 E 9.3.3 D
"Que Bonita Bandera"	Ramos	Puerto Rico/Plena	9.3.3 E 9.3.3 D CC 7.3.3 C CC 1.5.4 F
"Temporal"	Saez/Ortiz	Puerto Rico/Plena/Afro-Puerto Rican Folk	9.3.3 E 9.3.3 D CC 7.3.3 C CC 1.5.4 F
"Rayo Del Sol"	Los Pleneros de La Cresta	Puerto Rico/Plena/Latin Soul	9.3.3 E 9.3.3 D CC 7.3.3 C CC 1.5.4 F

“Cielito Lindo”	Mendoza/Cortez	Mexico/Mariachi	9.3.3 E
			9.3.3 D
			CC 7.3.3 C
			CC 1.5.4 F
“Mas Que Nada”	Jose Ben/Sergio Mendes	Brazil/Samba	9.3.3 E
			9.3.3 D
			CC 7.3.3 C
			CC 1.5.4 F
“The Girl from Ipanema”	Jobim/Moraes	Brazil/Bossa Nova	9.3.3 E
			9.3.3 D
			CC 7.3.3 C
			CC 1.5.4 F

Appendix on Implementation of Standards

Overview

In my teaching context I have the unique position of leading a fourth and fifth grade “split.” Currently, the schedule consists of a three-period block with fourth grade followed by a three-period block with the fifth graders. ELA (English and Language Arts) consists of four subjects for which each student will receive a separate grade. Subjects include Reading, English/Writing/Grammar, Spelling and Handwriting. Furthermore, the fifth grade Social Studies instruction occurs within their three-period block on two days out of their 6-day schedule. The sampling of standards in this section consists of three to five of the foremost items for each grade in three subjects (Reading, Writing and Social Studies). The standards reflected here touch on each aspect of what is to be taught in the four-week implementation. Students are to be able to identify themes of love, longing and struggle throughout the unit. Examples of more items the standards touch on in particular are inferencing, character description with comparison and contrast, summarizing, responding and discussion of materials in small and whole group settings.

Fifth Grade Standards

1.3-Reading Literature:

Students read and respond to works of literature-With emphasis on comprehension vocabulary acquisition and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.A-Key Ideas and Details; Theme

Including how details in a story or drama respond to challenges or how a speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic, summarize the text.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.B-Key Ideas and Details; Text Analysis

Cite textual evidence by quoting accurately from the text to explain what the text says explicitly and make inferences.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.C-Key Ideas and Details Literary Elements

Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.F-Craft Structure and Vocabulary

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade level text including interpretation of figurative language.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.G-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas; Sources of Information

Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, or poem).

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.K-Range of Reading

Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.

1.4-Writing:

Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused texts to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

Grade 5 CC 1.4.5.S-Responding to Literature

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.

1.5 Speaking and Listening:

Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Grade 5 CC 1.5.5.A-Comprehension and Collaboration-Collaborative Discussion

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 5 CC 1.5.5.F-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas-Multimedia

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.³⁰

Fourth Grade Standards

1.3-Reading Literature:

Students read and respond to works of literature-With emphasis on comprehension vocabulary acquisition and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.A-Key Ideas and Details; Theme

Determine a theme of a text from details in a text; summarize the text.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.B-Key Ideas and Details; Text Analysis

Cite relevant details from text to support what the text says explicitly and make inferences.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.F-Craft and Structure Vocabulary

determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level text, including figurative language.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.G-Integration of knowledge and Ideas; Sources of Information

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

1.5-Speaking and Listening:

Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Grade 4 CC 1.5.4.A-Comprehension and Collaboration-Collaborative Discussion

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 4 CC 1.5.4.F-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas-Multi-media

Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or theme.

Specific Standards in Social Studies (Geography & Arts and Humanities)-Grades 3 through 6

7.3-Geography-The Human Characteristics of Places and Regions

Grade 3 7.3.3 A-Identify the human characteristics of places and regions by their population characteristics.

-The number and distribution of people in the local community.

-Human movement in the local community.

Grade 3 7.3.3 C-Identify the human characteristics of places and regions by their settlement characteristics.

-Types of settlements

-Factors that affect where people settle.

Grade 6 7.3.6 A-Describe the human characteristics of places and regions by their population characteristics.

-Spatial distribution, size, density and demographic characteristics of population at the country and state level.

-Causes of human movement, mobility and migration models.

Grade 6 7.3.6 C-Describe the human characteristics of places and regions by their settlement characteristics.

-Current and past settlement patterns in the local area.

-Factors that affect the growth and decline of settlements.

9.3-Arts and Humanities-Critical Response

Grade 3 9.3.3 A-Recognize Critical processes used in the examination of works in the arts and humanities (compare and contrast, analyze, interpret, form and test hypotheses and evaluate/form judgements).

Grade 3 9.3.3 D-Explain. Meanings in the arts and humanities through individual works and the works of others using a fundamental vocabulary of critical response.

Grade 3 9.3.3 E-Recognize and identify types of critical analysis in the arts and humanities (contextual criticism, formal criticism and intuitive criticism).

Grade 5 9.3.5 A-Identify critical processes in the examination of works in the arts and humanities (compare and contrast, analyze, interpret, form and test hypotheses and evaluate/form judgements).

Grade 5 9.3.5 D-Compare similar and contrasting important aspects of works in the arts and humanities based on a set of guidelines using a comprehensive vocabulary of critical response.

Grade 5 9.3.5 E-Describe and use types of critical analysis in the arts and humanities (contextual criticism, formal criticism and intuitive criticism).

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