



Introduction

New Haven teachers often find themselves in the position of having to teach Hispanic students about their culture to promote a feeling of self-worth. Since not many teachers are themselves Hispanic or trained Spanish teachers, the task is not an easy one. This seminar was conceived with the aim of using the Latin American short story as a vehicle to teach both literature and culture. The advantages of the short story for such an enterprise are obvious: they are short, hence do not intimidate students, and they are often more plot-centered than novels, which makes them attractive to readers whose interest in literature has not been cultivated. In addition, many of the stories chosen contained significant cultural and historical information, or raised important issues about social behavior through the interaction of the characters. I believe that the enthusiasm for the Latin American short story demonstrated by the teachers in the course of the seminar is contagious, and that students will acquire a liking for reading stories and discussing them.

But even before the question of literature enters the classroom of the teachers involved in this seminar, the issue of language will loom large. This is, I believe, the reason why several units are devoted to fostering language skills. In the particular case of one teacher who is in charge of learning disabled Hispanic students, this need for basic language instruction is obvious. But others, too, have emphasized language, even if they themselves do not know Spanish well. One unit chose the language of art as its starting point, and from elementary work with clay moves to the narrative paintings of Siqueiros, to show, among other things, that short stories are not all cast in language. Another unit deals in minute detail with a story by Alejo Carpentier, one so rich in historical background that the students will acquire a substantial amount of information about Spanish culture in the colonial period.

All in all these units reflect the growing concern of teachers with the native culture of students who are not mainstream Americans, and their desire to incorporate that culture into the curriculum of their schools.

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