



Nuestra Isla Our Island: Puerto Rico

Curriculum Unit 00.01.04
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Introduction

This unit has two goals. The first is to acquaint students, including those of Puerto Rican descent, with three of the dominant aspects of Puerto Rican culture today: love of the island of *la isla* to which Puerto Ricans refer over and over again; strong ties with family and community; and accommodations to the diaspora, the dispersal of Puerto Ricans to the United States mainland, escalating in the 1950s, as Puerto Ricans attempted to escape overpopulation and poverty at home.

The second goal is to use the information, excitement, and questions generated by this unit to provide daily writing topics. As students work on them, and particularly on description and exploration of feelings, they will better understand what their teachers mean by “elaboration.” My hope is that, through this daily reading and writing, students will begin to compare and contrast aspects of their own lives to those of the characters about whom they are reading. They can stretch their imaginations, not only for their own lives but for the lives of others, and, in this way, they may begin to appreciate commonality and difference.

But the students will not only read, listen, converse, and write. They will edit, peer-edit, publish and share what they have written. They will tape works in progress so that their own words become part of their experience of oral language. The unit will culminate with a Travelers’ Tea, to which families will be invited, so that students can have the experience of presenting finished work.

In this unit, I hope students will pique their curiosity (through what is sometimes a very unwilling suspension of disbelief), enrich their frame of reference, build vocabulary and syntactical expertise. They will thus strengthen their own voices and their sense of self.

Our written sources will be picture books and then young adult fiction, written for the most part by Hispanic authors, a number of whom are Puerto Rican. Some of the texts have been published both in English and in Spanish editions; some are printed in a bilingual format. I intend to make students aware of the Spanish, even if they cannot read it. (In fact, they will notice it and try to read it on their own.) I want them to understand that Puerto Ricans often speak both languages. If they grew up on the Island, they probably learned Spanish first; if they grew up in the Continental United States, they probably spoke some English, at least in school. Puerto Ricans often create their own dialect, Spanish, which is a mixture of both.

There will be some hands-on activities as well, notably the construction of a topographical map of Puerto Rico; mask-making for the dramatic recreation of the popular folktale, Juan Bobo, and for a fuller understanding of the vejigante masqueraders, and of course some opportunities for food as students explore the mercados or marquetas that lie at the heart of community life.

In choosing the three aspects of Puerto Rican culture listed in my opening paragraph, I am not trying to oversimplify or minimize questions of identity or politics that have been for some decades of vital concern to Puerto Ricans and to some non-Puerto Rican Americans as well. Puerto Ricans have been caught for generations between the two worlds of the Caribbean and the mainland United States and between issues of independence vs. statehood. The books cited in the Teacher's Bibliography by Harry Pariser and Jose Luis Gonzalez give a full and sobering picture.

But this unit is for young children. It is intended to lay a foundation of sufficient information and respect so they they will later be able to move to a fuller understanding. It is for this reason that I have not used Jane Yolen's superb picture book *Encounter* as an introductory text for a study of slavery, oppression, and national cultural identity as I would for older students. Yolen's story of a Taino Indian boy who first dreams of great white birds and then identifies the Spanish sailing ships as agents of destruction balances traditional presentations of Columbus Day and extends discussions of slavery.

This unit, designed for third graders, can be scaled up or down for second or fourth or even fifth. It is appropriate for Hispanic Awareness month in the fall. For second graders, I would use it during the second half of the year, once literacy-enhancing techniques and student-teacher bonding is well established. I would describe the unit and forthcoming Tea to parents during fall or mid-winter conferences.

This unit emerged from Professor Sandra H. Ferdman-Comas' course on Women Writers in Latin America and from the home-truth that there are many women writersJudithe Shakespeares to use Virginia Woolf's comparisonwho, for various reasons, have turned to short forms such as poems or novella or children's literature or young people's fiction. One such is Carmen T. Bernier-Grand. Her novel *In the Shade of the Nispero Tree* describes the maturing of Tere, a young girl whose mother thinks that she can make it into *la sociedad* or high (white) society in Ponce.

The outstanding author Nicholasa Mohr is another example. Writing in English, her first language, she records and dramatizes in a number of novels her own struggles to understand who she is in a New York City that is hostile to the customs and the poverty of her newly-arrived family. Interestingly, Mohr has been greatly praised within the Hispanic literary community but is not generally known or studied beyond it. Most third graders will find Mohr and Bernier-Grand too difficult to read in their entirety, but many passages from their books are so evocative that they can serve as points of departureas promptsfor student writing.

I was pleased to find two such excellent Puerto Rican writers for this unit, one born in Puerto Rico and one born in the barrio, the ghetto neighborhood of New York City. Although I use Hispanic writers from other countries for some of the lessons below, I do so only when they draw upon common cultural traits or customs or when a contrast is useful. Elementary as it may sound, it is crucial that studentsand teachersunderstand that Hispanic cultures, inside as well as outside of the United States, are distinct and wish to be understood as distinct for any number of historical reasons.

Overview

I prepare the classroom with as many globes as I can get my hands on and a large wall map. One that shows biomes (e.g., rainforests, deserts, temperate areas) is more useful than a political map. I decorate the walls with colorful maps of Puerto Rico that can be purchased at Barnes and Noble and with the wonderful posters that the Puerto Rican Tourism Company will be glad to send posthaste (508) 759-1238. (The number in San Juan is 1-800-866-7827.)

I also set up an introductory library, to which I will add the books that we read together. Try to borrow books by Hispanic authors and bilingual books from a public library or your Media Center or from bilingual programs in your building. I include some current titles in the Student Bibliography below. These are not books that specifically develop the themes of this unit, but they introduce students to relevant vocabulary and culture.

There are a number of bilingual books that children always love to pore over. Spot's Big Book of Words/El libro de las palabras de Spot is about as elementary and delightful a dual-language dictionary as one can imagine. Then there is Barron's clear and colorful Bilingual First Books series that includes Animals/Los animales, Colors/Los colores, Numbers/Los numeros, Opposites/Los contrarios. Finally, my favorites: Albertina anda arriba, el abecedario/Albertina Goes Up, an Alphabet Book and Cincuenta en la cebra, contando con los animales/Fifty on the Zebra, Counting with the Animals, by Nancy Maria Grande Tabor, who grew up in Mexico and has taught in elementary schools there. All of these are inexpensive and readily available. To use them effectively, of course, someone in the classroom needs to be able to pronounce elementary Spanish.

Part One: *La isla*

I start with *Isla*, a picture book with a substantial text by Arthur Dorros, since each of the three themes that I wish to present in this unit can be found within it: love of the diverse and lush tropical island of Puerto Rico; continuing ties with family and community, no matter where they are, and the need to move back and forth between the Caribbean and the Mainland; and, finally, the ways in which the life of Puerto Rico is carried on far away from the island, in a city like New York. As such, *Isla* can serve not only as an introduction but as a link from one section of this unit to another. After a shared reading of the book and an activity, students will make their first journal entry. Lesson One is described in more detail below under Lesson Plans. Its pattern of a reading followed by written reflection upon that reading will be the usual model for this Unit.

Having learned about *la isla* through a piece of fiction, students will next construct their own three-dimensional map of the island, labeling its six geographical zones and the bodies of water that surround it. As children scrunch up newspaper to form mountains and paste down felt or sandpaper to simulate various landscapes, geographical concepts and vocabulary will be much easier to remember. As part of Lesson Two, students can learn and write about all kinds of curious fauna and flora--both land and marine, indigenous and introduced. There are not only a number of excellent science books on the rainforest and its inhabitants but folktales with animals as heroes. Here is an opportunity to pinpoint those areas such as the rainforest, coastal dry forest, and coral reefs that are seriously endangered. Discussion and journal entries can probe the passionate nationalistic feelings behind the protests over the U.S. Naval Reservation on the island of Vieques.

This first part of the unit will conclude with traditional tales about country folk, *los jibaros*, like Juan Bobo, and a Haitian story about the eagerness of children to get to their rural school, even though it means leaving at dawn in bare feet. I also recommend *Under the Sunday Tree*, with paintings by Mr. Amos Ferguson and poems by Eloise Greenfield. Set in the Bahamas, the poems "Tradition" and "Donkey," especially, convey the sense

of country life and the traditions behind it. This rural life is also fast disappearing, but its memory is especially precious to those who have experienced the world of gray concrete, locked doors, and the high prices of mainland cities like New York. There will be two writing assignments based on these texts: The first will be to turn one of the Juan Bobo stories into a play and the second will be to interview a family member who remembers Puerto Rico or “down South” or a very different way of life.

Part Two: *La comunidad*

Saturday Sancocho, by Leyla Tores, introduces the second theme, *la comunidad*. Just as *la isla* has the particular and proud meaning of “the island that means home,” so *comunidad* suggests a whole network that includes the importance of the family and the interdependence of community life. In this picture book, a little girl watches as her grandmother, with nothing but a dozen eggs, bargains and trades in the market until she has everything she needs for their Saturday treatchicken stew.

From a market square on a Saturday morning, we will move to the major community event of Carnival, the time of merrymaking just before Lent. *Vejigante Masquerader*, by Lulu Delacre, describes the way in which Ramon, a boy from a poor family, is able to have a full costume for the festival. The story is set in Ponce, where the celebration lasts for a solid month. Although we will not decorate cow bladders, making elaborate and terrifying masks will allow us to talk about the African influence that is especially strong in the city of Ponce and to write about the many reasons for wearing masks and costumes.

For comparison, we will also read Arthur Dorros’s *Tonight is Carnival*. Set in a farming village in the mountains of Peru, this book can be compared to what the students learned about life in the Puerto Rican countryside in Lesson One. Here it is not the African-inspired masks that characterize the abandon of Carnival but native instruments. Through the contrast, students will see the extent to which all native peoples combine their own deeply loved customs with the Christianity of the Spaniards who arrived only slightly over 500 years ago.

Our third book that contains information about Carnival is also our first piece of young adult fiction. Carmen T. Bernier-Grand’s *In the Shade of the Nispero Tree* describes how growing up can come about through experiencing racial and class prejudice. Here we see that *la comunidad* is not just a happy market square or neighborhood in which somehow everything turns out for the best and people are willing to trade and even give more than was asked for. In this more complex story, Teresa loses her best friend, who is black, when her parents scrimp and save to send her to a private school where only the whiter girls are accepted. Things become even more painful when her working-class parents are rejected for membership in the club to which the families of all the other students belong. The basic themes of this book are too complex to introduce to second and third graders without a great deal of preparation that is beyond the scope of this unit, but they provide excellent background for the teacher. Moreover, the book is useful since it describes the way in which girls of various classes celebrate Carnival.

Part Three: *La diaspora*

A diaspora is the often wide-spread scattering of a people through war, economic conditions, or persecution. The result is the terrible pain and confusion of exile or wandering. Sometimes the exiles return. Finding that things are not as they were, they may wander again, feeling that they have two homes or none. The term was once used primarily for Jews; it has come to be understood as highly appropriate for African and Hispanic peoples and could be used as well for others, such as the Irish who were forced from their homeland because of the potato famine.

This theme may seem too sophisticated for young students, and yet many children no matter what their class, color, or economic circumstances--have to learn about how difficult it is to move, to leave friends, familiar surroundings and ways of doing things. The fundamental powerlessness of children helps them empathize with the inability of others to make the choices they most wish for. Even a preliminary understanding of what is involved may help them understand that diversity can be felt both as a sadness and as a source of pride.

Most of the children's books about the Hispanic experience focus on the positive aspects of what people have created for themselves. For example, there is *The Bossy Gallito*, retold by Lucia M. Gonzalez and illustrated by Lulu Delacre who wrote and illustrate *Vejigante Masquerader*. Students may predict that this story about the cockfighting rooster is set in one of the towns of the Caribbean that they have been studying. But in fact the setting is Little Havana, the center of the Cuban community in Miami. The book is a perfect illustration of how people from other places can transport their way of life or culture when they must leave the place where they were born. The text of the book is also a fine example of comparative literature since it follows the pattern of the English poem "The Old Lady and Her Pig."

We will then move to books set in New York, the place to which so many Puerto Ricans immigrated. First we will read *Abuela*, the same grandma who took her granddaughter to Puerto Rico at the beginning of this unit. In this book, Abuela takes Rosalba on a tour of New York City. They go to the park and the docks where all the delicious fruit from Puerto Rico is unloaded and to the Statue of Liberty that had welcomed Abuela when she first arrived in New York. They also go to the little store owned by Rosalba's aunt and uncle, the kind that in this country is called a *bodega*. As in *Isla*, this sunny, upbeat story is filled in the most natural places with Spanish words and phrases that are deftly translated within the text. Clearly Abuela feels at home and has brought some of her first home with her.

Equally happy is Leyla Torres' *Subway Sparrow*. Born in Bogota, Columbia, Torres has a strong sense of the way in which cultures can mix and mingle. *Subway Sparrow* combines three different languages as a little girl, an Hispanic man, and a Polish woman work together, despite their different languages, to rescue a bird trapped in a train. The Spanish version of the book can be useful since there the girl's words are in Spanish and the man's words are in English!

Three final books are worth including, even if they are not about Puerto Rico, because of the way they celebrate bridging cultures. In Torres Lilitiana's *Grandmothers*, a little girl spends vacations with one grandma in New England and with one in South America. Although each visit looks very different, there are similarities because of the nurturing and sharing. Students can write about the time they spend with various relatives. Another text that shows an older relative sharing her culture is *A Birthday Basket for Tia* by the poet Pat Mora, who stresses the way in which Mexican and American cultures can blend. The book may seem slight but it uses language in a cumulative way that children love

But in *Going Home*, written by Eve Bunting and illustrated by David Diaz, a different range of feelings is explored. Bunting and Diaz have found a way to do this sensitively and appropriately. The story is that of a family going back across the Border to celebrate Christmas in the village from which the parents originally came. This is the only children's book I have found that suggests that the rural Mexican home is safe in a way that the American home is not and that the sacrifice that has been made in emigrating is because of opportunities for the children. In a gentle yet serious way, the children come to understand just how much their parents have sacrificed when they see them, looking relaxed and young, dancing cheek to cheek in the Christmas moonlight.

In Nicholasa Mohr's *Nilda*, we have a text that is parallel to *In the Shade of the Nispero Tree* but that is much

harsher. Here we see what it is like to be between two worlds. Born in New York City, Nilda has none of the memories of Rosalba's Abuela. But despite the fact that her English is good, she is not treated like an American by her teachers at school or by the social workers upon whom survival depends. Over and over again in the novel, she expresses her confusion, her loneliness, and her anger in passages that draw the reader in through their specificity and their sensory language. Images from her paragraphs can help students visualize and explore her scenes.

Methodology

My methodology will draw upon the techniques I have been using to promote literacy in second and third-grade inner-city classrooms: shared reading with predictions, reactions, and retells; interactive writing; webbing and story drafts; parent involvement through student-designed questionnaires and writing based upon them; peer editing, conferencing, publishing and book making; taping of works in progress and of published works; a public reading of finished work.

The challenge is always to find ways of drawing students into new material. We know that asking students what a story reminds them of can open discussion. Children are often eager to tell without prompting. We know about drawing upon prior knowledge and linking personal experiences to the story at hand. All of this helps the student understand, in the words of Margaret Mooney in *Reading to, with and by Children*, that "reading is the sharing of meaning. It is interaction between the given and the receiver. Reading is the creation and recreation of meaning" (2). What is trickier is the understanding and creation of images, of metaphors.

Illustrations in picture books help students access content. A recent study of comprehension theory, *Mosaic of Thought*, by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann, reminds us that pictures give students the sensory images that make the text come alive (128). It is for this reason that they want to illustrate their own stories with drawings, to expand them in ways that their language is not yet capable of.

There are techniques that help students move into a text, thereby expanding their language. Teaching students the process of how to infer and to visualize can help them make connections. It can help them to move into new material by drawing upon what they know. It can offer them the challenge of inferring from the illustrations or of imagining from the pictures made by words. *Mosaic of Thought* and another compatible study, *Strategies that Work*, by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, are filled with suggestions and reflections about how to use these techniques in the classroom.

Chapter Eight in *Strategies that Work*, is filled with specific techniques and lessons for filling in information that is missing from the illustrations or that is not made explicit in the text. For example, the teacher can make a chart with two columns: On one side is a quote from the book or a description of a picture; on the other side the children record the information that they think will help them with the meaning (107). Or one column can be labeled "What We Can See and Observe" and the other "Inferences/Interpretations" (113).

In *Mosaic of Thought*, Keene and Zimmermann describe a class in which one of them thinks out loud about images suggested by an author's text that is not accompanied by illustrations: "I tried to be as detailed as I could in my think-aloud, and tried to include sensory images from the hearing, tasting, and touching realms as well as the visual" (129). Some of the students began to do the same. "I challenged them to hear, touch,

taste, and smell, but mostly to pay attention to the emotional content of the images” (130). By using short passages from texts that do not have illustrations, image-awareness can be developed in students.

The lesson plans below will apply some of this theory to the materials presented in the unit. The pattern will be a reading followed by discussion and then writing. Sometimes there will be a hands-on activity to help activate feelings and language. By the end of *Nuestra Isla*, the students should be able to take a few sentences and expand them with sensory detail and with feelings, embroidering them as a fibre artist would do, embellishing them as would a musician, a poet or a writer of clear, evocative prose. In doing so, not only will *la isla* acquire more reality so that, like Abuela, they too may refer to it as theirs, “*nuestra isla*.” Their own language will acquire more reality as well.

Objectives

Unit Objectives

It is the purpose of this unit:

To teach my students about an important culture that exists both outside and inside the United States but that is often invisible or devalued.

To read the students picture books of excellent literary quality that they might not otherwise hear.

3. To give them the opportunity to write about their reactions to these stories so that they reinforce their understanding of them while also reinforcing reading skills.
4. To use these stories as a starting point for their own narrative. This is important preparation for the narrative they will be expected to write as part of the CMT when they begin Fourth Grade.
5. Further, to use these stories to encourage them to write about their own lives, families, and experiences of diversity, thus also making them conscious of autobiography as a genre.
6. To use short passages from more sophisticated texts to teach strategies for reading and writing. Basic to this process is the exposure the students will have to language that is not sufficiently available to them at home or in classrooms where the curriculum has been designed to improve basic skills.

Learning Objectives After finishing the unit, the student will be able to:

1. Find the Caribbean, the Antilles, and Puerto Rico on a globe or world map.
2. Serve as a tour guide to describe the various regions of the island of Puerto Rico.
3. Use at least 10 Spanish words in a context that clarifies their meaning.

4. Explain when and how you might eat at least 5 different kinds of Puerto Rican food.

5. Explain some aspect of the celebration of Carnival.

6. Define culture and give at least three examples of it from this unit.

7. Compare Puerto Rican country life and life in the city.

8. Explain the many feelings Puerto Ricans have about their two homes. Students may use the term diaspora if they are comfortable with it.

9. Explain several ways in which Puerto Rico is an important island to study and, further, explain how *la isla* might become *nuestra isla* .

10. Provide sensory information about a text without illustrations through the process of inferring and visualization.

11. Read at least one edited piece of her or his own writing about this unit in front of the class and invited guests at the Travelers' Tea.

Lesson Plans

Lesson One: La isla

Materials

Isla by Arthus Dorros

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Chart paper and pens

Blank strips of oaktag (recycled folders are terrific) or paper for writing fact cards

Strips of oaktag with Spanish words and phrases from the story; matching strips with the English translations

Lined, bound journals

Sentence strip pocket chart to place Spanish and English word strips

Bulletin board display with heading Fact Wall

Objectives

1. Students will predict the meaning of the Spanish words and phrases in the story from the context.

2. Students will record facts about Puerto Rico that they have heard from a Shared Reading of *Isla*.

3. Students will visualize a sentence from the book, orally and then in writing. One such might be “We are like big birds playing,” when Rosalba and Abuela are spinning and dipping high above the people in the city square. As a group the class will list on chart paper all the sensations, physical and emotional, they can imagine for such an experience. They will then describe the experience in their journals, as if it were happening to them.

Procedure

On the first day, tell students that they are going on an imaginative journey and that *Isla* will describe the place they are going to. Make sure they can define “island” before you begin. *Isla* is both simple and quite rich. The first reading should allow time to look at the illustrations since they are filled with relevant details. I have found that students are totally intrigued by the Spanish, especially if they already know some words. I have discovered children of Hispanic heritage in this way, children who had not identified themselves in this way before. I use the prepared Spanish and English cards as a review after this reading. (There is a good glossary with pronunciations at the back of the book.) I also ask students, working with a partner, to record two or three facts about Puerto Rico on the blank strips so that we can begin our Fact Wall. Before the first day ends, I ask them to make their first entry in the journals, being sure to date it: What is it about Rosalba’s trip that most interests you? Why?

On the second day, after reviewing, I reread. This time I tell them that as I read I want them to use not only the illustrations but all the words to imagine, to visualize what it would be like to be there too. After the

reading, I select a sentence describing the girl and her grandmother spinning and dipping over the town square: "We are like big birds playing." I ask them to imagine how their skin, their faces, and arms would feel, whether there would be wind or bits of cloud to bump into. How would they see or hear differently from when they were on the ground? And because it never hurts to throw in a little math--how high up would they be anyway? I would also ask them to explain what their emotions would be. What kind of birds are they? And what games do birds play?

After having fun with this one, I would choose another moment in the story. The trip into the rain forest is particularly suggestive: Below the treetops, the canopy or umbrella, "it is dark and cool. ' *Como la noche* ,' like night, Abuela tells me." How does night feel? What does it smell like, look like? Or: "Forest eyes are open wide." What eyes does the forest have? Why are they wide open? What do they see when it is as dark as night? Some students will dive right in; some will wiggle. All of them will enjoy rereading these passages in a week or so.

Lesson Two: Island Making

Materials

World map for the wall, globes, and large maps of Puerto Rico.

Sheets of letter-size paper

Large sheets of heavy, textured white paper, the best quality you can afford, both because they must sustain weight but because you will want to paint in a good sea.

Sheets of sandpaper, coarse enough so that the printing on the back does not show through. You will want each student to have a square at least 3 x 5.

Enough 3 x 5 squares (more or less) of green felt, light blue or gray felt, and brown construction paper for each student.

Enough 2" red circles so that each student will have at least two.

Crayons, pencils, and markers

Several large brown paper grocery bags for each student

Bottles of glue

Scissors

Newspapers to cover tables; masking tape to secure them.

Green and blue paint, brushes, cans for water.

Objectives

Students
will be
able to
find
1. Puerto
Rico on
a world
map.

2. Students will be able to locate the Antilles, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, the Island of Vieques, and the six geographical zones in Puerto Rico.

3. Students will be able to find San Juan and Ponce.

Procedures

This lesson is in three parts. Students will first learn about the geography of Puerto Rico through studying maps. They will then sketch their own small maps. On the next day, they will each construct and paint a large three-dimensional map. The experience of constructing each geographic area should make them more interesting and easier to remember.

After reviewing the definition of an island, members of the class will locate Puerto Rico on various maps and globes. They will then identify the other large islands around it and the bodies of water. The class will then look at a large map, hopefully topographical, of Puerto Rico and its own islands and decide upon its basic geometric shape. Using a sheet of letter-sized paper, they will loosely sketch this shape. They will also add the island of Vieques. (These sheets will be taped into their journals later.) They will also be asked to identify the compass rose that is found on virtually every map and draw one on their sketch as well. Take some time to make sure that everyone can point to the four compass points on their own sketch.

Students will then be given the names of the various regions and, once they have located them on the larger maps, will sketch them on their own: 1. The spine of mountains, the Cordillera Central, runs east to west. 2. El Yunque, the Caribbean National Rain Forest, is in the east, and the Reserva Forestal Toro Negro's Clour Forest is in the center of the mountain range. 3. Along the north coast is the karst country, filled with sinkholes and caves. 4. Between these caves and the ocean, is a fairly wide coastal plain; on the southern side of the island, the plain is less than half as wide. 5. In the southwest is a coastal dry forest, a very rare desert wilderness, where caucti and rare birds can be found. 6. Finally, around San Juan and the island of Vieques, there are beautiful and delicate coral reefs. An excellent description of these areas can be found in Peffer's Lonely Planet Guide Boo, Puerto Rico.

The next step is to construct a three-dimensional version of their sketches. First students will sketch the outline of the island. They may outline it with a marker or crayon, if they like, or let the outline blur as they later add blue paint for the surrounding water. They will then crumple and glue down small sections of the brown paper bags into a mountain range to create their own Cordillera Central. They can have fun varying the

heights of their mountain range. They will use their green felt to simulate the rain forest; gray or light blue for the cloud forest; sand paper for the coast dry forest; and brown construction paper, cut into strips so that the ends can be glued down to form cave entrances, for the karst region. The coral reefs can be drawn in with crayons at the coastlines as clusters of tiny circles; the wax of the crayons will act as a resist when a thinned-out wash of blue paint is applied for the water surrounding the islands. To finish the maps, the mountain ranges should be painted green and numerous blue rivers (painted with unthinned paint) should wind their ways from the mountains to the coastal plains.

Extensions for this project will focus on one area, the rain forest, since there are so many excellent books about it: *Flashy Fantastic Fain Forest Frogs* by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent, *Chameleons Are Cool* by Martin Jenkins, and *The Great Kapok Tree*, by Lynne Cherry, are excellent. They can help students build on their visualizations of the dark forest with open eyes in Isla.

A Mexican legend, *Opossum and the Great Firemaker*, will allow them to imagine the worlds of some creatures of the rainforest. Alma Flor Ada's bilingual folktale, *The Lizard and the Sun*, which is set in the area around Mexico, celebrates the ingenuity of another inhabitant of the rain forest. Interestingly enough, both Opossum and Lizard are female. A third legend, this time from Jamaica, also gives us a heroine. This time it is a girl who outwits the terrible Mancrow, half human, half beautiful bird. Ideally, students would go on-line, or use CDs, or spend time in the Media Center to research the other geographical areas. They should certainly collect as much information as possible, even about one zone such as the rain forest, so that they can respond to the prompt: Upon entering this zone, I saw..., I felt..., I heard..., I touched. After an honest effort to create a visualization, they can watch the Eyewitness video *Jungle*, narrated by Martin Sheen. They will then have more information as they move to a full narrative that begins:

One morning, upon awakening, I discovered that I was on the edge of an area I had never seen before, hearing sounds that I had not believed possible. I decided to investigate, partly because I was curious and partly because I was growing very hungry.

Teaching Suggestion: Juan Bobo

The famous folk character from Puerto Rico, Juan Bobo is available in an easy edition edited by Carmen Bernier-Grand. Students love reading this edition and identify with this hero who is always making mistakes but who is also a lot smarter than he seems at first.

The first story in the collection, "The Best Way to Carry Water," lends itself to dramatization. Students can add additional adults in the form of Tias, Tios, and Abuelas, and they can extend the dialogue. A good way to begin developing the characters is through making very simple masks out of paper plates, with eye holes. Juan is shown in this story scaring the chickens with a *Vejigante* mask and this too can be made from a paper plate with rolled-up paper to create horns. Props can be simple: aprons, pots, metal buckets, and baskets that are loosely-woven on the bottom so that scraps of blue paper can fall through for water.

Teaching Suggestion: Saturday Sancocho

Reading this story about going to market will be a lot more fun if it is accompanied by food, and it is not necessary to make chicken stew. But ingredients such as cilantro, cumin, and onions can be brought it to smell and feel. Many cities now have Hispanic markets and the large chains carry a wide range of products in some of their branches. Thus it is possible to find cassavas and plantains and to buy plantains, at least, in a

pre-cooked and frozen form. There are also many different kinds of tropical juices available. It's simple to make delicious fruit shakes, or *bastidos*, in class out of these fruit juices, milk, ice cubes, and sugar. Hispanic custard or *tembleque* can be purchased as a mix, like jello, and is easy to make and even easier to eat.

Teaching Suggestion: Vejigante Masquerader

To extend this book, it is worthwhile making real masks. There are directions in the back of the book. Easier than making clay casts are balloons set in plastic margarine containers. Students can lay their paper strips over these just as well. I would avoid flour and water paste since it becomes moldy. The old standby, wallpaper paste, turns out to be toxic and should be avoided. But craft stores have alternatives that are safe and easy to use. There is wonderful product called Rigid Wrap, which is a roll of plaster of Paris-covered gauze much like what a surgeon would use for a cast. The technique is to lay wet pieces of it over a form and then to keep rubbing until all the little holes are filled. It's a soothing, satisfying process for students and creates a sturdy object.

Lesson Three: In the Shade of the Nispero Tree

Objectives

1. Students will compare passages in this novel to situations in two earlier books, Saturday Sancocho and Vejigante Masquerader.
2. They will use the techniques of inference and visualization to analyze the passages and to write about the situation in them more fully.

Materials

It will help students with one of the passages they will work with here if they have some real velvet to handle and if they can see the effect of adding rhinestones. Even at \$20.00 a yard, a third of a yard would give each student a small piece to decorate with rhinestones that are only \$4.00 for a big package. Aleene's All-Purpose Tacky Glue, at \$2.49, is the best for this project.

Procedure

This novel offers a number of contrasts to the books designed for younger readers and thus a number of opportunities for visualizing and inferring. Because the students have read Saturday Sancacho, it would be interesting for them to begin by inferring the point of view of the mother in the following passage, comparing it to that of the grandmother and little girl in Saturday, and then reflecting, through description, upon their own experience of shopping in different places:

La Plaza del Mercado was where the mountain people came to sell their goods. Mami didn't go there anymore because she said the place had the smell of chickens, cilantro, plantains. The new supermarkets didn't smell like that because they sold everything

wrapped in plastic (26).

From the standpoint of developing students' abilities to infer and visualize, there are some other exciting passages in this novel. Consider this one:

The night of the Ponce carnival, the sky wore a black velvet gown with rhinestones. At first I thought the crescent moon was its crown, then I changed my mind. It had to be a smile a happy smile, like mine (179)

Once the students have the sheen and feel and sparkle of this image, they can go to work inferring the mood of the narrator. They can infer the shape of the moon, even if they do not know all of the phases. It will also help them to know that there is a Queen for each Carnival, chosen for talent and beauty. After discussion, students can expand this passage in their journals, making up a narrator, giving a specific setting, and a before and after.

Finally, here are some paragraphs that allow readers to infer and visualize how a girl can participate in the mischief and misrule of Carnival:

A *vejigante*, wearing a mask with at least seven horns, turned around and shook a *vejiga*, an inflated cow bladder full of dry beans. I ran away from him, laughing.

As soon as he turned his back to me, I went behind him and pulled one of the jingle bells on his bright red-and-yellow costume. Eva and Marisol did too. He chased us to the curb and walked away.

We held hands and moved closer and closer to him. When he turned around, we screamed and ran away. This time he threw a bunch of pennies at us and ran to join the other *vejigantes* (184).

Why did he throw the pennies? How does he feel about this episode? How can you describe how the three girls feel? The story that some of the students will develop from these paragraphs shows how far their writing has come from the initial exercises in their journals. Before moving on to the many passages that it is possible to use from *Nilda*, the most complex book of the unit, students should take time to review their journal entries, make changes, read them to one another, and select one or two that they wish to edit for possible reading in public.

Tips for a Travelers' Tea

The day for the Tea has arrived, but we now feel so Caribbean that we are calling it nuestra fiesta. Student-designed invitations have gone out, followed by phone calls by teachers to ensure as much family participation as possible. Projects have been displayed around the room, along with books read, charts compiled, and writing samples. The class has chosen appropriate foods to serve, and the rules for serving families first and other party manners have been discussed and repeated.

My word of advice is practice! If students chose to perform their dramatic version of Juan Bobo, rehearsals are certainly in order. But even for the reading of stories, there cannot be too much preparation. Students may well know what they have written by heart. They still need to hold the paper they have prepared. I usually hand it to them as I call their name to read so they won't crumple it. And they also must be reminded to stand up straight and still, to hold their text so that it does not hide their face, and to speak distinctly enough so that the back wall can hear. The experience will be wonderful when they have internalized these skills.

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