



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2000 Volume I: Women Writers in Latin America

Understanding Ethnic Labels and Puerto Rican Identity

Guide for Curriculum Unit 00.01.05
by Diana Pe-a-Pérez

The lessons in this unit engage students in learning experiences that will help them better understand the diversity of cultures within Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. The unit is appropriate for students in middle school and high school who are studying social studies, language arts or Spanish as a Foreign Language.

Students will become familiar with the labels currently being used in society to refer to the different Spanish-speaking groups in the U.S. The activities afford students opportunities to hone their critical thinking skills as they analyze, compare and contrast the terms Hispanic, Latino, and others that identify Spanish-speaking immigrants.

The unit also traces the origins of those names and students learn that they were created in the United States, as opposed to being ethnic classifications used in any Latin American country. Participants will analyze literary works that deal with the complexity of Puerto Rican identity. Students read a selection of poetry by prominent Puerto Rican American writers and learn through them about the history and rich racial makeup of this Latin American island.

As students discuss issues of label classifications and self-identification, they also are exposed to the concepts of culture and race from an anthropological perspective. They make connections between one's identity and one's culture, while other activities require them to draw from their own backgrounds to participate in group and whole class discussions. Finally, students will be asked to reflect on some of these issues in writing and will be assigned projects that exhibit their understanding of the topics.

These matters are to be presented to the students according to subject and grade level. The younger the students, the more abstract this topic will be for them. From my experience, the best way to approach cultural and racial issues is by drawing from the students' own background.

(Recommended for Social Studies, Spanish, and Language Arts, grades 7-8.)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>