



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

Introduction

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Her hands, now old, move across the piano's black and white keys with the same grace and ease that characterize the words telling the narrative of her life. She is Mama Blanca in *Mama Blanca's Memoirs*. And she is Sor Juana speaking of silence and joyful learning in *The Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea de la Cruz*. She is Esmeralda Santiago, returning to her life as a child in *When I Was Puerto Rican*. Alfonsina Storni asks sweet earth to make her a bed so she may die in it in *I'm Going to Sleep* and Gabriela Mistral, in *Close to Me*, aches with love for a child sleeping beside her. Macabea's life of ordinary misery perplexes and torments the narrator in *The Hour of the Star*, and he describes her death with distant irony. These are some of the stories told in poetry and prose in the women's writing in Latin America. In our seminar we read these and other texts to understand more intimately the lives of women in Latin America and to see how we read a literary work. The Fellows have written curriculum units related to the topic of our seminar, and their work is available for use in the classroom.

Christine Calvanese presents a close reading of Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Chris first presents a brief history of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, then gives a biographical sketch of the two authors, and then chooses specific moments of the texts for analysis in her class.

Christine Elmore presents the lives of Frida Kahlo, Rigoberta Menchu and Gabriela Mistral. She studies biography in order to bring history alive for students and to show how persons face and overcome difficulty. With the examples presented by these figures, Chris creates classes focusing on the power of the paintbrush, the spoken word, and the pen.

Lisa Galullo writes a curriculum unit designed for an Advanced Placement English course. She studies autobiography and Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*, showing how to identify and analyze point of view, literary device, and narrative style and technique. Lisa discusses rhetoric, authority, voice, and cultural identity in this autobiographical text, and she includes numerous mini-lessons for use in the classroom.

Dora Odarenko focuses on certain features of Puerto Rican cultural life: the love of the island of Puerto Rico, or person of Puerto Rican descent, living on the mainland of the United States. Dora's reading and writing events draw from numerous picture books and young adult fiction, including Jane Yolen's *Encounter* and Nicholas Mohr's *Nilda*.

Diana Pena-Perez analyzes the use of the terms Hispanic and Latino in relation to Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States and the history of these and other ethnic categories. Diana studies race,

ethnicity, and identity through the writings of the Puerto Rican community, and she offers a variety of activities for use in the classroom.

Michelle Sepulveda teaches drama at West Hills Middle School. Her unit presents a picture gallery of women whose lives join the Caribbean and the United States. The gallery focuses on women born to the traditions of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, and shows the experiences of these women through images of immigration, religion, daily life, and dual cultural identity.

Yolanda Trapp affirms the power and importance of poetry. She proposes a methodology for teaching poetry to children, and she presents lesson plans focusing on the texts of Gabriela Mistral, Alfonsina Storni, Delmira Agustini, Juana de Ibarbourou, Violeta Parra, Julia de Burgos, and María Elena Walsh. Yolanda includes original translations, composed by her, of poetic texts by each of these writers.

We invite you to participate in this seminar through the reading and use of these curriculum units. The student and teacher bibliographies found at the conclusion of each are valuable resources for further study.

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