



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2006 Volume II: Latino Cultures and Communities

What is Latino? Using Latino Writers to Define an Emerging American Identity

Curriculum Unit 06.02.02

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Through this curriculum, juniors and seniors in an elective English course in an urban high school form their own theories about the meaning and usefulness of the term "Latino" using selections from notable writers of the past who could be called Latino. The curriculum covers ten such selections over five weeks and requires a one-page paper from each student in response to each selection, with help from class discussion and larger concepts introduced by the teacher. Lesson plans are designed for an eighty-minute block period in which the typical class is divided into thirds, with 25 minutes for reading and note taking, 25 minutes for class discussion, and 25 minutes for completing the writing assignment.

The readings are all taken from one anthology, *The Latino Reader*, edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos, and comprise a selection of mostly Puerto Rican writers who portray four kinds of experience found in Latino literature-- immigrants making a new life in the United States, adults and children wrestling with the continuum of languages between English and Spanish, Latino adolescents discovering American social boundaries for the first time, and writers using poetry to assert individual identities in the face of the resistance or neglect of the majority.

Objectives

But First Some Questions

I teach a semester-long elective course at my high school entitled, "Multicultural Literature I." A title like this could mean anything and, at worst, could lead to sorting writers of all different eras and contexts into an unexamined set of ethnic groupings and leaving it at that. The goal of the course as it was given to me was to show students that writers came from all different backgrounds and to try to use that fact to positively reinforce (celebrate?) the students own ethnic identities.

This approach offered a couple of problems for me as a teacher. First, by the time the students reach their senior year in high school (as most of the students who sign up for this course have), many have seen this approach over and over again and have begun to take it for granted. Second, I find it hard to find worthwhile

stories for a literature course that "celebrate" ethnicity. For me, the most interesting stories have always been ones that undermine a reader's preconceptions and force him or her to ask questions, rather than reinforcing or celebrating anything.

So, I try to organize my curriculum around stories and writers that force readers to ask questions about the idea of culture in general and the origins and usefulness of specific cultural groupings in the United States. The curriculum for the course overall has settled into an examination of writers placed into three rough groupings--American Indian writers, African-American writers, and Latino writers-- that pushes students towards specific definitions of what culture is and is not.

The goal is not to reach conclusions about what it means to be a member of one of these groups, but to ask whether grouping writers this way could help us understand how ideas about culture really work in our society. Through the American Indian writers, we look at the general inaccuracies of most cultural labels and the need for these writers to be true to their own experience. Then we read a chronological selection of African-American writers to find common and developing themes that occur when writers confront the realities of the concept of race in America. And then we conclude with Latino writers. However, in past years, upon reaching the Latino writers, my organizing principles always fell apart. The stories, people, and experiences that could be called Latino seemed far too diverse to cover in a few weeks and I did not know enough to make a select group of writers fit neatly into my scheme.

As I have learned more about the cultures and communities that can be placed in the category Latino, the reasons for this breakdown have become much clearer. Looking beyond generalities about language, religion, race, and social class, one finds the very specific histories of over twenty different countries and territories, the unique set of relationships between the United States and each of these countries and territories that have led individuals and families to establish lives in the United States in the last two hundred years, and the even more specific life stories of each of those individuals and families.

I have stated a preference for stories that raise questions about our understanding of the world, but the sheer range of questions that can be asked when considering what is or is not Latino quickly becomes intimidating-- At what point in history, if any, does Latino become a genuinely useful term? How can we justify applying the label to historical figures who would not recognize its meaning? How does the Mexican-American whose family has lived in California since 1850 fit under the same label as the Dominican in New York City who has just achieved citizenship? Does a migrant laborer share any interests with a Cuban expatriate? What about the Puerto Rican child and Guatemalan child living in the same American city and going to same school? Do they have more in common with each other than they do with their own grandparents? If one looks white and the other looks black, will they have substantially different experiences in the United States today? Does calling them both Latino undermine traditional notions of race and ethnicity in the United States or does it simply add another arbitrary category to the old ones? Does it matter if any of these folks actually speak Spanish?

Defining this seemingly straightforward term requires several tenuous connections across history, geography, language, family generations, and social class. Its ability or inability to make these connections makes the difference between a word that is powerful and rich in connotations and one that is completely meaningless. However, at this point in the American cultural dialogue, the term Latino has become stuck in our language and, if we are to make it a rich term rather than a thin one, choosing the right stories becomes an important task.

The Students

Hill Regional Career High School (Career, for short) is a magnet school for students in the New Haven area interested in health and business careers. There are about 700 students total. The ethnic composition in traditional terms is approximately half African-American, one quarter Hispanic, and one quarter white and other ethnicities. After freshman year, students must choose either the health or the business track and this choice determines most of the electives they will take for the next three years.

The traditional high school requirements of English, history, math, and science still apply, but electives within the English department are not a high priority in the overall curriculum. They provide a rest for the teacher from the workload of the regular English courses and a necessary credit towards graduation for the senior with a hole in his or her schedule. There are significant exceptions to this of course, but this is the general situation. Students arrive at the course with vague expectations of ethnic affirmation and light work. They are not necessarily interested in addressing the heavy questions of our times.

Also, for the contemporary adolescent in a mixed urban high school, ideas about other people's ethnicities tend to be roughly hewn. An individual student can be pressed quietly for proud details of his or her family or cultural background, but most interactions between students can be represented by the frequently asked question "What are you?" And the acceptable answers to this question come only from a few very broad categories-- white, black, Puerto Rican, Italian, Jamaican. Students who have immigrated to the U.S. are allowed to name the country they came from, but calling yourself "Latino" in response to the question "What are you?" would seem too academic. Once the question is answered with the appropriate label, no other information is necessary. The obvious stereotypes are joked about with no offense intended and everyone rests comfortably knowing that everyone has a label.

The role the course plays in Career's curriculum, the students' expectations about the difficulty of the course, the students' history with multicultural curriculums of all sorts in their previous schooling, the students' regular habits in talking about each other's ethnicities, and my own identity as a young-looking mild-mannered white male teacher-- all of these things provide significant challenges when thinking about what stories and poems I might choose and the kind of lessons that might lead the students towards serious consideration of the questions inherent in the subject matter.

Initial Thoughts about the Literature

When I was assigned to teach this course last year, I turned to the resources the school already had. Of the assorted anthologies and textbooks that the school owned in sufficient number for classroom use, *The Latino Reader* edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernández Olmos had the most interesting and comprehensive selection of writers. After doing the work to prepare this curriculum, I realized that *The Latino Reader* was, in fact, an excellent resource. Thanks to the thoughtful efforts of an anonymous predecessor, I had stumbled upon the ideal text for this curriculum. The selections cover most of the recognized important writers while still being short enough to be considered in one or two class periods.

As I mentioned before, however, even with this text, I did not know how difficult it would be to find a unified set of stories and poems that could lead students to questions and concepts that followed naturally from the previous two units on American Indian and African-American literature. Given the limited time frame of this curriculum, I needed to find the middle ground between a fruitless attempt to cover the full diversity of Latino cultures (and their tangled roots in Indian, African, and European traditions) and the too narrow shortcut of choosing Puerto Rican writers for students who already feel that Puerto Rican and Latino mean the same

thing.

At this point, it is probably wise to temper both my initial skepticism about ethnic empowerment and my hand-waving about the irreducible complexity of Latino-ness. It is true, and not a bad thing, that the students do perk up (if only ever-so-slightly) when reading the work of writers that they feel share their background. And it is not a tragedy to simplify a complex subject matter in order to introduce the students to writers that I now know are more than just random selections in an anthology.

So, with appropriate self-awareness, the middle ground I have chosen is a selection of mostly Puerto Rican writers who address or portray variations of four kinds of experience found in Latino literature-- immigrants making a new life in the United States, adults and children wrestling with the continuum of languages between English and Spanish, Latino youths discovering American social boundaries for the first time, and writers using poetry to assert individual identities in the face of the resistance or neglect of the majority.

Strategies

Overall, my Multicultural Literature course is arranged around a series of short readings and accompanying questions meant to spark critical response from the students. Career High School has a block schedule arranged so that each class meets for an 82 minute period every other day. This schedule provides plenty of time for students to read a selection, discuss their questions and impressions, and write an extended response to the questions posed in class (with some leeway to complete unfinished reading or writing assignments as homework). Continuity between classes is provided by keeping a running set of notes (on large white post-it paper) at the front of the class, which allows the students and me to continually refer back to previous questions and concepts discussed in class.

The Latino literature portion of this semester-long course is meant to last five weeks. With the block schedule, the class meets approximately twelve times over those five weeks and, taking into account introductory and review classes, that leaves about ten short class sets of reading (e.g. a short story, a set of short poems, pairs of prose excerpts) to cover the concepts mentioned above. The typical class would be divided into thirds, with 25 minutes for reading and note-taking, 25 minutes for class discussion, and 25 minutes to complete the writing assignment.

The writing assignments are the primary means of assessing how the students are processing the ideas in class and have proven, in the past, to be a reliable measure, though special attention needs to be paid to asking questions that require students to make connections to ideas discussed in previous classes, and holding them responsible for making those connections, so that they are not simply viewing each assignment in isolation.

Classroom Logistics

Reading Habits

For this portion of the curriculum, all students are using one anthology, *The Latino Reader*. The title, author, page numbers, and questions for discussion for the daily reading are posted at the front of the room before class begins and students should begin reading immediately.

Discussion tactics

Discussions should be freewheeling to take advantage of particular strengths of each group of students, but important ideas generated by the class should be closely documented in class notes, and the teacher should periodically return attention to the overarching concepts

Writing Requirements

I use one consistent set of writing requirements throughout the entire semester, asking for a 150-word minimum (slightly less than one notebook page of reasonable-sized handwriting), logical organization, a clearly expressed central idea or conflict, and a handful of specific supporting details (either short direct quotes or unique facts) from the reading.

Introductory ideas

What is Latino? This is the title of my curriculum and, in fact, the first question that I ask the students when we begin the unit. The initial responses, even after the two previous units, tend to be an airing of stereotypes or generalizations. In order to focus their thinking, I point out that the term "Latino" only really makes sense within the United States and I provide the following data from the 2000 U.S. Census ¹:

35 million Latinos

- 59% Mexican
- 10% Puerto Rican
- 4% Cuban
- 2% Dominican
- 5% Central American
- 4% South American
- 17% Other Latino

For students who are mostly familiar with Puerto Rican culture, this chart helps shift their thinking away from their immediate experience towards an effort to make sense of the larger label at the top. When asked specifically what all these sub-groups living in the United States might have in common with each other and what it means for Mexican-Americans to be such a large majority, the students will begin to bring up the kinds of ideas, experiences, and themes that we will find in the literature.

Readings and Concepts

To review, the readings I list below are grouped according to a theme. For each theme I have chosen a couple of short pieces from *The Latino Reader*. I will name each of the experiences, give the author and page numbers for the selections, and a brief overview of what these selections are and how they might be discussed.

Immigrants making a new life in the United States

"New York from Within" by Pachín Marín, pp. 108-111

Excerpt from *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* by Bernardo Vega, pp. 165-173

These two men, both born in Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century (though twenty-two years apart) do not fit the image of the struggling family that we normally conjure when thinking of immigrant arrival in the United States, but the stories they tell are a very useful way to start a unit that asks the students to go beyond narrow views of ethnicity. Though both men were Puerto Ricans who spent significant time in New York City, their worldview extended far beyond these two specific locations to encompass an international, class-conscious sense of identity.

In "New York from Within," published in the New York Spanish-language newspaper *La Gaceta del Pueblo* in 1892, ² Marín starts, "If you present yourself in this metropolis... suitcases stuffed with Mexican *soles* or shimmering gold doubloons, things will naturally go very well for you," but then slyly makes the case for the many charms the city holds for the man who arrives with nothing, speaking the wrong language. Marín addresses this hypothetical visitor directly and ultimately guides him to what he declares is New York's greatest institution, the Lager Beer Hall, where two men can drink beer, eat sausage, beef, ham, and "succulent" soup for only five cents.

It is up to interpretation to determine whether Marín is being at least a little bit ironic in this tribute. It is not clear whether the new arrival he has guided to beer hall will find any constructive pursuits other than passing time in the beer hall, or if Marín even wants this man to find any other pursuits. The final tribute to the beer hall in the story is uttered by a "philosopher friend" who every day returns to the beer hall "from heaven-knows-where", a phrase which connotes a life of cheerful wandering, rather than dutiful labor. Or we can take the author at his word and say that the beer hall is an important place of refuge and community for the new arrival who can then go forward with new confidence to make his contribution to the thriving industry of the city.

Vega was an active political leader in his time and his memoirs are considered an important resource for historians studying the political development of the Caribbean. ³ He places the camaraderie and support that Marín finds in the beer hall in the context of an industrious workplace in the 1910s in this excerpt from his memoirs. After several discouraging jobs working in abusive and dangerous factories, Vega finds ideal work in a cigar factory, El Morito, in New York that employs Spanish speakers from all different nations and where the men are continuing the tradition of having someone read aloud for two hours a day as they make the cigars. Vega places the origin of this tradition in Cuba in the 1860s and says that the readings began as light entertainments, but as the workers became more political, they developed a taste for heavier literature, social theory, and intense political discussion.

Vega describes in detail the deep political awareness and passionate points of view that the men share and debate during the years around World War I, writing that with "workers of this caliber, El Morito seemed like a university." As workers, the men identify strongly with the socialist theory of the time and develop an international perspective, especially in regards to the interests that Cubans and Puerto Ricans share. The factories are home to what could be called an early Latino identity that extends beyond individual countries of origin. Vega states proudly, "It is safe to say that there were no factories with Hispanic cigar workers without a reader. Things were different in English-speaking shops where, as far as I know, no such readings took place."

Though the students tend to see Vega's excerpt as a little long, both of these selections have worked well in past classes. The students have been taught about the cigar factories before, Marín's ironic tone communicates well, and both pieces introduce the idea of political unity, or at least transnational camaraderie, as useful application for the term Latino.

Between English and Spanish

Excerpt from *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez, pp. 391-405

Excerpt from *Borderlands/La frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa, pp. 444-452

These two are thoroughly argued, contrasting views of the types of negotiations with language that occur within Spanish speaking families and cultures in the English dominant United States. Rodriguez describes in careful detail his experience as a Spanish-speaking first grader in an English-speaking school and then reflects on how his experience might help us think about bilingual education. Anzaldúa intersperses personal anecdotes with a detailed analysis of all the different combinations of English and Spanish that she has encountered during her life in Texas.

Rodriguez' book *Hunger of Memory* is a collection of autobiographical essays that sparked a tremendous amount of political discussion when it was published in 1982. ⁴ His central conceit in this story is a distinction between private and public language. Before arriving at school at the age of six, he has never given much thought as to how language is used by people other than his immediate family and relatives. Hearing English at school, he comes to the conclusion that Spanish is a private language. This conclusion creates the main conflict of the excerpt when the teachers from his school arrive at his house to tell his parents that, in order to help their son learn English more quickly, they should only speak English to him in the house. And though the parents' own limited English make this difficult, the whole family begins to speak only English, and what the young Richard thought of as his family's private language slowly disappears from the house.

Surprisingly, since this shift in language is described with such heartbreaking detail, Rodriguez concludes that the whole process was to his benefit. He finds that it is essential for him to be able to participate fully in the public language of his country to be a true citizen. He writes of the first day when he feels comfortable enough to raise his hand and answer a teacher's question in English, "I spoke out in a loud voice. And I did not think it remarkable when the entire class understood... The belief, the calming assurance that I belonged in public, had at last taken hold."

In contrast to Rodriguez' story where one language completely supplants another, Anzaldúa describes a world where several different combinations of English and Spanish all exist at once and finds that each serves an important purpose. Her book *Borderlands/La frontera*, published in 1987, attempts to weave an understanding of the politics of language and identity throughout the text. ⁵ For her, Chicano Spanish sits firmly in the middle of the "American" that teachers forced her to speak at school and what she calls "Standard Spanish." She writes:

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language;
for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo;
for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor
standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? ⁶

Her list of language variations also includes slang English, Standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Tex-Mex, and *Pachuco* (which she describes as a youth slang Spanish with heavy English influence). For each of these languages, she describes a place or time when she found herself having to speak it.

Students who are more familiar with the Puerto Rican variation of this continuum will have to make a little leap of comprehension, but these authors have such distinct points of view that it should be easy for the students to figure out where they would place their own opinions in relation to those described in the excerpts. They should also be able to come to some easy conclusion about how this complex relation to language can help us define the term Latino.

Latino youth and American social boundaries

Excerpt from *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, pp. 279-285

Excerpt from *Nilda* by Nicholasa Mohr, pp. 317-328

Alternative reading: "American History" by Judith Ortiz Cofer, pp. 479-487

These two stories make an interesting contrast because they portray two characters who have opposite reactions to similar situations. Both stories show that even for Latinos born in the United States who primarily speak English, American culture creates significant social boundaries. In literature, this kind of truth seems to become apparent to characters in their later childhood years or early adolescence, when it becomes necessary to venture outside the comfort of an immediate family or neighborhood.

In this excerpt from Piri Thomas' autobiographical *Down These Mean Streets*, his family moves from Harlem to suburban Long Island in 1944 when he is sixteen years old. Moving to an entirely new kind of home and a new school would be traumatic for any sixteen-year-old, but the conflict Thomas finds at his new school has a very particular slant. Thomas' youth in Harlem gave him a clear set of social categories and a strong identity as Puerto Rican, but because he is dark-skinned, his classmates at his new school refuse to think of him as anything other than black and treat him with the corresponding racism of the time. When he realizes the extent of his classmates' ignorance and his isolation at this new school, he is enraged, cutting off his initial friendships, and declaring that he will never return to the school.

In this excerpt from Nicholasa Mohr's novel *Nilda*, the title character faces a similar rejection of her identity when she travels away from the city into leafier environments. In this case, she is a ten-year-old traveling to a summer camp where she is, for the most part, extremely happy and comfortable. The only conflict comes in a conversation with the only other girl in the camp who knows Spanish, Olga Rodríguez. Olga is an older camper who upon hearing Nilda's Puerto Rican accent gets angry, calls her stupid, and threatens, "Don't let me hear you calling yourself Spanish around here when you can't even talk it properly." Nilda is surprised by this, but unlike Thomas, she has no problem brushing it off. She remains blissfully unconcerned with another's personal ignorance.

The differences between these two reactions should allow the students to take stands on what factors they think are most important in allowing a person to negotiate these types of boundaries. Questions to guide this discussion might include the following: Is it more painful to be rejected in terms of race than to be rejected in terms of language? What about rejection by an individual compared with rejection by a group? Are adolescents more or less sensitive to these boundaries than younger children? Can the social boundaries of race and language be a means for Latinos of different national origin to find common experience?

If there seem to be a few too many differences between these stories, I have offered an alternative selection, Judith Ortiz Cofer's story "American History." In this story, the main character, a ninth-grade girl, develops a crush on a white classmate named Eugene whose house she can see into from her window. She especially

likes the fact that he is quiet and spends most nights reading intently at kitchen table. She arranges to study with him on a day that unfortunately ends up being the day that President Kennedy is assassinated. She persists in keeping the date and is rejected at the door by Eugene's mother for clearly racist reasons. She reacts with particularly touching kind of sadness. There is a slightly subtler set of associations and ironies here than in the other stories, but it still could be paired in an interesting way with either one.

Poetry that asserts an individual or ethnic identity

"Returning" and "Farewell in Welfare Island" by Julia de Burgos, pp. 209-210

"African Things" by Victor Hernández Cruz, pp. 285-287

"Puerto Rican Obituary" by Pedro Pietri, pp. 328-337

"AmeRícan" by Tato Laviera, pp. 378-381

"A la Mujer Borrique-a" by Sandra María Esteves, pp. 382-384

"Ending Poem" by Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, pp. 438-440

It is not necessary to ask the students to read all of these poems; half of these would be sufficient for the time allotted for this unit. I list them all in order to provide choice and flexibility in how to conclude the unit overall. All of these poets have connections to Puerto Rico. The poems range from very short, "African Things," to very long, "Puerto Rican Obituary," and from intense inward focus, "Returning," to purposeful exhortation, "AmeRícan." They are listed here in chronological order, and were published from 1947 to 1986. Though the selections start off with Julia de Burgos' evocations of sadness and isolation, the poets who follow her are mostly defiant or, at least, supremely confident in their portrayals of themselves and their culture. These are the fully developed adult responses to the boundaries the adolescent characters encounter for the first time in Nilda and *Down These Mean Streets* .

Both "Returning" and "Farewell in Welfare Island" are expressions of deep sadness. Burgos writes, "It's as if I'd like to love/ and the wind doesn't let me" in the first and, "It has to be from here,/ right this instance,/ my cry into the world" in the second. Students could be asked whether the previous readings in this unit might provide clues for the source of this sadness.

"Puerto Rican Obituary" by Pedro Pietri is an extended epitaph and tribute for all of the Puerto Ricans in America who spent their lives working and dreaming without achieving success or independence. Again, students could be asked about the root of the anger and sadness in the poem and whether the poem respects or disdains the people he is describing. Also, the poem was written in 1973, so students could be asked whether this poem could still be written today. The poem may be too long for some groups of students.

"African Things," "AmeRícan," and "A la Mujer Borrique-a" are all exhortations towards taking pride in vibrant, mixed roots. In "African Things" the speaker implores his grandmother to summon the African spirits and rhythms that he knows are deep in Puerto Rican culture. "AmeRícan" is an enthusiastic tribute to the strange glories and creativities that come with being Puerto Rican and American at the same time. And in "A la Mujer Borrique-a," the speaker is a mother who takes pride in teaching her children to be strong.

Poetry allows a lot more creativity in the kinds of written responses students can be allowed to write. I frequently ask students to write their own poems in response to ones we read in class and always get some

thoughtful, crafted results. The final poets we see here are trying to use their words to break through some boundaries. After spending a semester trying to name and define those boundaries, the students might be given some freedom here to try to break the boundaries down themselves.

Alternate Topics

Young men seeking refuge and identity in a group of their peers

"Cuco Goes to a Party" by Mario Suárez, pp. 201-207

Excerpt from *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal, pp. 236-247

Grandmothers and granddaughters in intense emotional relationships

"The Moths" by Helena María Viramontes, pp. 432-438

Excerpt from *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina Garcia, pp. 468-478

These two topics are a little more specific than the others and do not fit quite as easily into an overall progression with the other topics, but all four stories are excellent and could be used as additional reading for the students or to tailor the overall curriculum to a specific set of students.

"Cuco Goes to a Party" describes a long night of enthusiastic revelry for a man who decides at the end that he is not fit for the intense dedication to work and family that his in-laws require and that he will leave his wife and newborn child to return to Mexico. In the excerpt from the novel *Pocho*, the main character takes part in a rumble as a way to abandon the conservative assimilation of his family in favor of a much more rough and independent group of young Mexican immigrants. These stories could possibly be used to discuss the specific demands that America and/or Latino culture places on young men and whether the choices these characters make could be considered representative or exceptional.

In "The Moths," a young woman takes on the responsibility of caring for her grandmother as she dies and has a series of powerful visions. In the excerpt from *Dreaming in Cuban*, another young woman prefers her correspondence with and memories of her grandmother in Cuba to the harsh daily interactions she has with her mother. These stories could be used for a group of students with more interest in the role of women in Latino culture, or as a way to discuss how young people form a cultural identity through interactions with older generations.

Concluding Activities

This curriculum is meant to be the conclusion of an entire semester's worth of discussion about literature and culture, so appropriate concluding activities will vary widely depending on the time of year and the group of students. The entire set of class notes should be reviewed and discussed to gauge how student's views have developed or been confirmed through the semester. Student could compare and contrast their conclusions about Latino culture with the conclusions that they reached after the previous two units (American Indian literature, African-American literature) and ask whether these could be applied to any culture. For a more formal final activity, students could be asked to pick one selection from the unit as their favorite and to make a short presentation to the class explaining the reasons behind their preference. For a less formal approach, refer back to the musings at the end of the poetry section.

Classroom Activities

Outlined below are some sample objectives and a complete set of sample questions for all five weeks of the curriculum. To review, students are asked to begin the class by reading that day's selection, discussion begins with a few specific questions about the text and review of the class notes so far, and then the period concludes with a formal written response to that day's selection and discussion.

Objectives

--Students will use their own knowledge and experience to create an initial definition for Latino culture.

--Student will examine and apply their definitions and the class definition of Latino culture to readings from the anthology.

Lesson One

--Read "New York from Within" by Pachín Marín, pp. 108-111 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: Describe the author's view of New York in your own words. Is the situation he describes typical of new arrivals to the United States?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Two

--Read the excerpt from *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* by Bernardo Vega, pp. 165-173 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: What was it like to work in a Spanish-speaking cigar factory in New York City before World War II? What unifies all of these men from different countries? Does this help us define Latino culture?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Three

--Read the excerpt from *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez, pp. 391-405 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: What did his early school experiences teach Rodriguez about the importance of the English language in the United States? Does he feel that Spanish could be a public language in the United States? Do you?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Four

--Read the excerpt from *Borderlands/La frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa, pp. 444-452 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: Why does the author list so many different combinations of English and Spanish from her experience? Compare and contrast her ideas about language with the ideas that Rodriguez presented in the previous excerpt.

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Five

--Read the excerpt from *Down these Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, pp. 279-285 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: How does the main character's treatment at his new school change his understanding of his place in American society? Has America changed since the period he describes? How do outsiders' misunderstandings shape Latino culture?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Six

--Read the excerpt from *Nilda* by Nicholasa Mohr, pp. 317-328 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: Why does Nilda like her summer camp so much? Why doesn't she feel like an outsider when Olga says that Puerto Ricans aren't really Spanish? Compare and contrast her reaction with Piri Thomas' reaction in the previous excerpt.

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Seven

--Read "AmeRícan" by Tato Laviera, p. 380 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: How does this poet define Puerto Rican culture? What does the author think are the most important elements of his culture? Can his definition be applied to a broader definition of Latino culture?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Eight

--Read "Puerto Rican Obituary" by Pedro Pietri, pp. 328-337 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: How does the author feel about the men he describes? Who does he hold responsible for their situation? Are the experiences he describes unique to Puerto Ricans or could they be applied to other Latinos?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Nine

--Read "A la Mujer Borrinque-a" by Sandra María Esteves, pp. 382-384 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: Esteves is describing her version of the archetypal Puerto Rican woman. What are her most important characteristics? What is her relationship with the men in her world? What about her world requires these specific qualities?

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Lesson Ten

--Read "Ending Poem" by Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, pp. 438-440 in *The Latino Reader* .

--Discussion: What is the difference between the mother's and the daughter's understanding of what it means to be Puerto Rican? Compare and contrast these Puerto Rican women with the woman described in Esteves' poem.

--Classwork: Write a page with your partner.

Bibliography

All of the excerpts I discuss are taken directly from *The Latino Reader* , but I have listed below the full citation of each of the excerpts for anyone who is interested in exploring further:

Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernández Olmos, eds. *The Latino Reader: An American Literary Tradition from 1542 to the Present* . Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston. 1997.

Pachín Marín. "New York from Within: One Phase of Its Bohemian Life," translated by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. Arte Público Press. University of Houston.

Bernardo Vega. *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* , translated by Juan Flores. Monthly Review Press. 1984.

Richard Rodriguez. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* . David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. 1982.

Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* . Aunt Lute Books. 1987.

Piri Thomas. *Down These Mean Streets* . Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York. 1967.

Nicholas Mohr. *Nilda* . Arte Público Press. University of Houston. 1986.

Judith Ortiz Cofer. *The Latin Deli: Prose and Poetry* . Universtiy of Georgia Press. 1993.

Julia de Burgos. "Returning", translated by Dwight García and Margarite Fernández Olmos. Arte Público Press. University of Houston.

Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales. *Getting Home Alive* . Firebrand Books. Ithaca, New York. 1983.

José Antonio Villareal. *Pocho* . Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. 1959.

Helena María Viramontes. *The Moths and Other Stories* . Arte Público Press. University of Houston.

Cristina Garcia. *Dreaming in Cuban* . Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York. 1992.

Notes

1 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

2 This and all other background information about the authors and the excerpts is taken from the short author biographies placed at the beginning of the excerpts in *The Latino Reader* (Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernández Olmos, eds. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston. 1997), p. 108.

3 p. 165.

4 p. 391.

5 p. 445.

6 p. 447.

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