



## Voces Latinas: Cultural Identity through Poetry and Lyrics

Curriculum Unit 07.01.11

by María Cardalliaguet Gómez-Málaga

i think in Spanish

i write in English

tengo las venas aculturadas

escribo en spanglish

-Tato Laviera, (1)

This is the reality for many Latinos in the United States. They are straddling two cultures, two worlds, and are uncertain they fit in one or the other. Lots of them speak *Spanglish*, a hybrid language made up from Spanish by introducing English terms, syntax or even phonetic translations. They are trying to fit in a society that does not completely accept them because they are somehow different. They are trying to decide who they are.

The present unit, *Voces Latinas: Cultural Identity through Poetry and Lyrics*, is going to deal with abstract notions right from the very beginning. The title itself may present certain difficulties. Terms like "voice" or "cultural identity" have to be scrutinized in order to be understood properly.

The term "voice" is used everywhere and yet it is not easy to describe accurately. This is because it carries many different connotations. Voice is related to the experience of the artist, and also to the way this artist wants to convey a message, point of view, or ideology. Since this unit is dealing with literature, let's be more specific and talk about literary voice. Literary voice allows these authors to use a particular style, tone and a specific language. These abstract and concrete elements define the writer and make his/her voice personal, distinctive and unique. Using voice to express convictions and one's personal ideology in society makes artists (Latino and other minority artists in the United States) to a new dimension: they become political figures and the custodians of the cultural identity they fight to preserve.

This unit seeks to focus on voices, oral experience and listening skills. I want my students to reflect on the importance of expressing one's opinion. I have found that sometimes, when dealing with certain topics, they are not so used to articulate a personal judgment, they rather repeat someone else's words. One of the key goals to look for is to encourage students to voice their own points of view, something that will improve their critical thinking skills as well as their fluency in Spanish.

As a high school Spanish teacher, I always work on including aspects of diverse cultural groups in my lessons about peoples from around the world, because I believe my students should be raised to understand and appreciate the highly diverse society that we all live in. I tend to emphasize cultural components of countries of the Hispanic world so students reach a better understanding of the second language they are studying.

I intend to implement in this unit the "5Cs" of the National Standards of Foreign Language Learning-Cultures, Connections (among disciplines), Comparisons (between cultures), Communication, and Communities.

The unit will be used in Hill Regional Career High School (Career for short). Career is an urban magnet school for students interested in health sciences, business, and technology. Finding new ways to motivate my students while learning a foreign language is a challenge I come across on a daily basis.

The unit *Voces Latinas: Cultural Identity through Poetry and Lyrics* will allow me to achieve a variety of different goals. It will give me the opportunity to introduce literature, and the concept of cultural identity in the classroom. My students have not been exposed to many different cultures and sometimes it is difficult for them to interpret and even understand other perspectives, points of view, or behaviors. Most of them do not enjoy reading and some refuse to do so when asked. By teaching the students to analyze, interpret and understand poems (and songs), I will provide them with the tools to value and enjoy poetry; to acknowledge the relevance of the Latinos in the United States and also the opportunity to learn Spanish while they take in the importance of history and cultural connections.

I would also like to teach my students to be able to identify many of the false stereotypes about different Latino groups in this country. These circulate and spread easily and students tend to believe them without questioning them. Students are not used to thinking critically and therefore many times they tend to believe some pieces of information that are not necessarily truth. As teenagers they are used to label everything and I would like to help them to understand there are things that do not fall in only one category.

This unit is designed to be taught in my Spanish I classes, which are "novice level," according to the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL.) Although the unit has been planned with my students in mind, it could be used on upper level courses with proper modifications. Students at this level demonstrate some accuracy in oral and written presentations when reproducing memorized words, phrases and sentences in the target language; formulate oral and written presentations using a limited range of simple phrases and expressions based in very familiar topics; show inaccuracies and/or interference from the native language when attempting to communicate information which goes beyond the memorized or pre-fabricated. (2)

The classes and the majority of the activities will be held in Spanish whenever possible, although English will also be used. Spanish speaking students in the classroom will get more advanced, modified material and will be asked to read poems more deeply.

The material is designed to be covered within a period of 15-20 sessions, which are eighty two minutes in length. The average class size will be between 15 and 20 students, which is a perfect number for some of the "group classroom" activities I want the students to work on. The unit will be taught during the third and fourth marking periods.

Since *Voces Latinas: Cultural Identity through Poetry and Lyrics*' main goal is to teach voice and identity through Latino poetry and music, the first step is to help students recognize how Latino and Latina writers depict tradition, beliefs and heritage in their writings as part of their identity, how they reflect on their cultural identity and how they express their feelings about living in two cultures. We will begin by defining these

concepts, as well as the one of literary voice, and identifying all these in poetry.

## Latino Poetry

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There is always controversy when using the terms Spanish, Hispanic and Latino. A person is "Spanish" who was born in Spain, and a person is "Hispanic" who descends from one of the other Spanish-speaking countries apart from Spain. The term "Latino" comprises all those countries or territories and nations, apart from Spain, where the predominant language is of a Latin origin, including Portuguese (Brazil) and French (Haiti, Martinique and French Guiana,) as well as Spanish (3).

The debate is always pending about whether the term "Hispanic" is somehow offensive or whether it is correct. I am originally from Spain, and I personally think it is correct and respectful, but I have come across different people and authors who consider it to be offensive because it directly refers to the Spanish heritage and reminds them of the violent and barbaric ways the Spanish imposed their culture on the natives that were in the Americas when they arrived. From now on, and as an act of respect to people who feel so strongly against the term Hispanic, I will use the terms Latino/Latina.

Since Latino poetry is a quite broad topic to cover, I have decided I will narrow it by briefly introducing Puerto Rican poetry and its recurrent main themes. This overview of Puerto Rican poetry is necessary in order to understand Nuyorican poetry and some of its most important authors as well as its founders, such as Miguel Pi-ero, Miguel Algarín and Pedro Pietri.

Puerto Ricans are in a unique position: as citizens of a commonwealth of the United States, they are considered both American and immigrant. They have a dual identity that marks their language, customs and life. Even though Spanish is widely spoken and used, the United States is an English speaking society. This fact has given special significance to language as an element of personal and cultural identity. Many writers go back and forth between Spanish and English, engaging in a practice known as "code-shifting," "code switching," or "amalgam" and have devised a hybrid sometimes referred to as "spanglish." The theories about the use of "spanglish" are numerous and diverse. Some think this code switching is the product of a living artifact of a culture in evolution, others want to see a degradation of the two languages, and a third explanation of this linguistic shifting would be that authors are seeking to make a political statement about their social status: they are American citizens and yet they are treated differently. Victor Henández Cruz is one of the poets who explores Spanish and English playing with grammatical and syntactic conventions of both languages in order to create his own bilingual idiom--his own "spanglish."

Although dealing next with Mexican and Chicano poetry, Cuban and Dominican poetry, would be the logical thing to do; I have decided not to do so in great depth, so students do not feel overwhelmed. We will work with a couple of poems written by Cuban or Dominican authors: Sandra Maria Esteves or Rhina Espaillat (Dominican) and Gustavo Perez Firmat (Cuban.)

We will then move to the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda since he is one of the most important Latino poets of all times. He is one of the few Latin American poets to win the Nobel Prize for literature. His poetry is not too complicated in structure, so I do not think my students will have many problems understanding it. Neruda will be the last author we are going to be working with. By then, all the students will have a certain level of

understanding of Spanish, and therefore it should not be too difficult to work with the author in his mother language.

## **Puerto Rican Poetry**

Puerto Rico is a self-governing territory associated with the United States with the status of a Commonwealth ("estado libre asociado" in Spanish.) This unique position is the result of a complicated history of invasions and cessions. After the Spanish-American war, Spain had to cede Puerto Rico to the United States, and entered the twentieth century under its rule. In 1917, the Jones-Shafroth Act granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship. A status they still hold today. In the late 1940's, many Puerto Ricans started to move to the mainland to seek better economic conditions. New York and other Northeast cities were the destination for thousands of Puerto Ricans who were hired in farms and factories. This transition was not easy. These United States citizens experienced racial discrimination, linguistic barriers and other problems. These episodes and difficulties are the main themes documented in their writings.

Themes such as identity, social background, cultural heritage and racial, ethnic or linguistic barriers are common or even recurrent in Puerto Rican literature. Some authors also include themes of life in the island and life on the mainland and the conflict of being a part of the same culture. This is because, as mentioned before, *"they struggle to define their identity: they are caught between their Caribbean heritage and the culture of the United States, the poets reveal their uncertainty about who they are."* (4) *The question of identity and the fact that these authors live "across cultures" are important in most Puerto Rican writers.*

Those writers who came to the United States are still considered Puerto Rican, and most of the times they share many of the themes and influences of those who live and write in the island and of those who go back and forth. For the sake of structure in the unit, and in order to keep it simple for my students, I am going to separate Puerto Rican and Nuyorican poets in two different groups.

Some of the movements and themes that have influenced both poets in the island and in the mainland are Spanish and African influences, the nationalist and the modern movements. Some of these themes are: romance, "here and there" (or "aquí y allá," in Spanish)--the *"love and yearning for an island homeland while being forced to remain somewhere else,"* self identity and countryside and nature (5.)

Even though they share many of the main features, themes and styles, I am going to separate the Puerto Rican writers from the Nuyorican ones, as a simple way of organizing the authors in a logical way for students to understand the few differences between them. Some of the most important and influential of the Puerto Rican poets are:

### *Julia (Judith) Ortiz Cofer*

Poet and novelist born in the island. She moved at the age of two to New Jersey with her father when he -a military officer-was transferred there. Ortiz Cofer has lived in both the island and the United States for extended periods of time. As a writer, she describes reactions and feelings of character searching for identity.

The daily life and characters of a Puerto Rican barrio in the 1960's and the 1970's are the main themes she explores in *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1991) and in *The Latin Deli* (1993,) two collections of her best poems, stories and essays. The voices of some of the marginal characters she introduces in her writings, are among the best literary depictions of daily life in the Hispanic barrios (6).

### *Sandra María Esteves*

Sandra María Esteves is a poet of Puerto Rican and Dominican heritage, she encourages readers to search for their true identities. She identifies herself as a "Puerto Rican-Dominicana-Borique-a-Tahino-African-American." She is the author of five volumes of poetry titled *Contrapunto in The Open Field* (1998,) *Undelivered Love Poems* (1997,) *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (1990,) *Tropical Rain: A Bilingual Downpour* (1984,) and *Yerba Buena* (1981).

### *Aurora Levins Morales*

Of Puerto Rican and Jewish descent, Aurora Levins Morales defines herself in terms of her rich and diverse ancestry. Born Puerto Rico, she moved to Chicago when she was thirteen years old. Some of the major themes in her poems and essays are identity, feminism, multicultural histories of resistance, how the systems of oppression affect the identity of an individual and the importance of languages among others.

Some of the authors who have influenced her writing are the North American feminist Alice Walker and two Latin American writers: Pablo Galeano and Pablo Neruda. She wrote a collection of essays, letters and poems called with her mother, Rosario Morales, called *Getting Home Alive*. These pieces include a number of topics including feminism, family ties and politics. Even though written in English, the collection is considered a landmark of Puerto Rican literature. My students will analyze and discuss the poem "*Child of the Americas*" (Seeley, 105) in order to write their own version of the poem to reflect on their own inheritance and cultural identities.

### *Tato Laviera*

Another Puerto Rican author born in the island. Tato Laviera is a poet and playwright who lives in New York, where he is deeply committed to the social and cultural development of Puerto Ricans. Laviera writes in English, Spanish and Spanglish since his poetry is concerned with bilingual and bicultural issues. The recurrent themes in his poetry are life in New York and African Caribbean traditions. One of the poets who inspired him the most was Luis Pales Matos, who created poems incorporating African vocabulary and rhythms, as well as African themes. His poems include refrains, idiomatic expressions, poetic declamation, and music such as salsa, rumba and mambo, etc.

Some of his collections of poems are *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* and *Loisaida (Lower East Side) Streets: Latinas Sing* and *AmeRican*. He denounces injustices and examines some of the problems affecting Latina women.

### *Julia de Burgos*

De Burgos is considered one of the greatest and most influential Puerto Rican poets of all times. She was born in Puerto Rico in 1914, and lived in the island until she moved to Cuba and New York later on. She was a strong advocate for the independence of Puerto Rico, as well as a Civil Rights activist for women and Afro-Caribbean writers. Some of the poets who influenced her early poetry were Pablo Neruda, Rafael Alberti and Clara Lair. Some of the most relevant poems for our unit are: "*Rio Grande de Loiza*", "*Poema para mi Muerte*" (My Death Poem), "*Yo Misma Fui mi Ruta*" (I Was My Own Path), "*Alba de mi Silencio*", and "*Alta Mar y Gaviota*".

## Nuyorican Poetry

The term "Nuyorican" was originally coined by Puerto Ricans on the island to refer to those who settled in New York. At first, the term had negative connotations. Some people used the term to refer to many Puerto Ricans settled in different neighborhoods of Manhattan such as El Barrio (East Harlem) or what was called Loisaida (Lower East Side). In the 1960's Puerto Rican authors began to reclaim the term to identify themselves with their own history and cultural affiliation to a common ancestry while being separated from the island, both culturally and physically. Lots of these writers were involved with the "Young Lords," a Puerto Rican Hispanic Nationalist group, and were also highly concerned with the Civil Rights of their fellow countrymen.

Jesús Colón and his work *A Puerto Rican in New York and other Sketches* (1961,) helped to set the stage for the Nuyorican movement as such. The book was a collection of stories of human interest and a social history of New York. Since this was the first book written in English by a Puerto Rican, it was able to chronicle for English-speaking audiences how Puerto Ricans shaped and were shaped by the history of New York City.

Miguel Algarín, Tato Laviera and Miguel Pi-ero established the Nuyorican Poets Café in New York's East Harlem. They met with other writers, artists and community people in order to criticize, condemn and denounce social and political injustice. Their language is quite strong and lacks any kind of lyrical qualities; it is the street language of blacks and Puerto Ricans in El Barrio. Such a stylistic choice implies a resistance to Americanization, and an expression of dignity and pride in the *puertorrique-o's* heritage. Their poetry wants to awaken its people and shock them into action as, for example, in Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary," where he shows that the dream does not exist.

Some of the best known writers responsible for the Nuyorican movement are:

### *Jesús Colón*

Jesús Colón could be considered the intellectual founding father of the Nuyorican movement. He was born in Carey, a tobacco growing area of the island. He stowed away on the S.S Carolina in 1918 and landed, like so many other Puerto Ricans, in New York. He started writing very young, influenced by the oratory of readers hired by cigar makers to entertain them while rolling the cigars. Although he never earned a living as a journalist, Jesús wrote for several newspapers in New York and Puerto Rico. He wrote articles, news commentaries, poetry and short stories. He was concerned with the social and economic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New York City and on the island, so he ran for numerous public offices.

He wrote about his own experiences and those of others. Colón acknowledged the importance of the Puerto Rican heritage and its people. He wrote about the immigrant experience and their daily encounters with racism and other forms of discrimination.

Colón's work is reminiscent of Walt Whitman and Zora Neale Hurston. But it was Langston Hughes, also a light-skin mulatto, who had much in common with Colón. Both were active in New York's Black and Latino communities. Both portrayed the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. Both wrote about racial injustice and both wrote in English and Spanish. In his time, Colón's simple and incisive prose informed and entertained the masses. Today, they give us a sense of historic continuity, connecting our present to our past and our differences to a common humanity. (7)

### *Miguel Pi-ero*



This poet, playwright and actor was born in Guaravó, Puerto Rico. And, as many others came to the United States while he was a child. He was able to relate to the immigrant's struggle to find a position in society and, after being incarcerated, he found success with the play *Short Eyes*: a portrait of life, love and death among prison inmates he wrote while he was at Sing Sing. He was concerned with social classes and the problems of the immigrants. His revelations concerning individual identity deal with people in extreme difficulty. Other plays include: *Eulogy for a Small Time Thief*, *Midnight Moon at the Greasy Spoon*, *Straight from the Ghetto* and *The Sun Always Shines for the Cool*.

### *Miguel Algarín*

Algarín had a lot to do with the Nuyorican Movement. Poets and artists used his living room to meet and discuss about poetry, art, politics or even to recite their poems. Unlike some of the other Nuyorican and Puerto Rican writers, Algarín was raised in a culturally-minded house and received a formal education all the way through college.

### *Pedro Pietri*

Pietri was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. This poet and playwright lived most of his life in New York, where he moved when he was three years old. After graduating from high school, he left to fight in Vietnam. The main factors that influenced his poetry were the discrimination he witnessed while growing up, and his experiences in the war.

Very involved in politics -he was part of the "Young Lords;" he was a non-conformist, constantly reminding his fellow writers of the importance of tolerance, intellectual freedom and the value of humanity. His work denounces the system and invites Puerto Ricans to exhibit dignity and pride in their heritage, and also urges them to avoid complete cultural assimilation in order to keep their own identity.

His "*Puerto Rican Obituary*" is one of his finest poems in which he deals with the individual experiences of five Puerto Ricans: Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga and Manuel, their hopes and dreams, their physical and spiritual death, etc. The poem is presented as an epic of the Puerto Rican community in the United States with sarcasm and irony. The author presents the suffering of these Puerto Ricans and how their collective and individual dignity dies. They try to reach the "American Dream," but it is impossible for them, the dream becomes a nightmare.

Some other works include: *Invisible Poetry* (1979,) *The Masses are Asses* (1984,) *Lost in the Museum of Natural History* (1980,) *Rent-A-Coffin*, *Illusions of a Revolving Door: Plays* (1992) and *Traffic Violations* (1983.)

### *Victor Hernandez Cruz*

He was born in Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico and moved to New York City with his family at the age of five. He published *Snaps*, his first collection of poetry when he was only 20 years old. As a poet, he is introspective and abstract, preoccupied with form, rhythm and language. As mentioned before, he plays with English and Spanish words and their semantics, with their spellings and phonetics, suggesting at a times simultaneous readings as for example, in the title of his *By Lingual Wholes*.

Unlike his Nuyorican counterparts, Tato Laviera and Miguel Algarín, he lacks referential context to life in Puerto Rico and popular culture. His works portray Hispanic images and symbols in the urban setting. His is the language of the urban, intellectual Latino who cannot survive without transforming the past into the

present.

## Pablo Neruda

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Pablo Neruda is one of the great poets of the 20th century. Born in Chile in 1904, he was one of the few Latino writers to win the Nobel Prize of Literature, which he did in 1971. Gabriel Garcia Marquez calls him "the greatest poet of the 20th century in any language."

He could also be considered one of the universal poets of the modern era, not only because of his career as a diplomat, but also because his poems have been translated into many languages.

Born Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, he used the pseudonym Pablo Neruda, taken from the Czech writer Jan Neruda (1834-1891,) to hide his poems from his father. He was born in Parral and grew in Temuco where he met Gabriela Mistral, another Chilean poet who also won the Nobel Prize. His first poem "*Entusiasmo y perseverancia*" is published in 1917 in "*La ma-ana*," a local newspaper. Many poems appeared in different publications and magazines from then on, and he won different literary prizes and awards. In 1920 he moved to Santiago to study. Some of the poems he wrote those years were published in his first book, *Crepusculario* (1923.) Pablo Neruda's first major publication would be published one year later. *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* is one of his best known and more translated works.

Neruda then moved to represent Chile as a consul. He lived abroad from 1927 to 1943. He served in Burma, Ceylon, Java, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, Madrid, Paris and Mexico City. His poetic production during this period included *Residencia en la tierra* (1933,) a collection of esoteric surrealistic poems that marked his literary career.

In Madrid, in what could be called the pre-Civil War years, Pablo came into contact with many politics and met some of the most important poets and intellectuals of the Spanish "*Generación del 27*": Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti or Miguel Hernandez among others. The Spanish Civil War and the murder of Garcia Lorca affected Neruda deeply and he joined the Republican Movement in Spain and then in France, where he started working in *Espa-a en el corazón* (1937.) This collection of poems is full of political and social content and had a great impact since it was printed in Spain, during the Civil War. This same year he went back to Chile.

In 1939 Neruda was appointed consul for the Spanish emigration in Paris and shortly after he moved as the consul general to Mexico, where he rewrote *Canto general de Chile*, transforming it into an epic poem about South America, its peoples, its nature and its historical destiny. The final title of these 250 poems grouped in fifteen literary cycles is *Canto General*, and it was published in Mexico in 1950.

In 1943 Pablo returned to Chile, where he was appointed senator of the Republic in 1945. He joined the Communist Party. In 1947 he had to live underground in his own country as a result of his protests against the president's repressive policy towards striking miners. He was prosecuted as subversive; he could leave in 1949, when he could fled over the Andes to Argentina. He spent three years in exile: Argentina, Europe, India, China and the Soviet Union. Most of the works written during this period were very political. A good example of this would be *Las uvas y el viento* (1954.)



In 1952 he was able to go back to Chile since the political situation had become favorable. From 1954 to 1964, he embarked on a prolific period of writing. In 1954 he published one of his major works, *Odas elementales*. This collection of poems contained descriptions of every day objects and situations. The poems were written in a new style: simple, humorous and direct.

In 1958 he published *Estravagario*, a collection that makes a noteworthy change in his poetry. He reverts to the sense of humor he showed in his first works and reencounters the avant-garde and surrealism. Neruda's poetic production during these years was marked and stimulated by his personal happiness and international recognition and fame: he published 20 more books between 1958 and his death in 1973, and 8 more appeared posthumously.

Some of his last works are *Cien sonetos de amor* (1959), with poems dedicated to Matilde Urrutia, his wife; *Memorial de Isla Negra*, a poetic work of an autobiographic character in five volumes, published on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday; *Arte de pájaros* (1966); *La Barcarola* (1967); *Las manos del día* (1968); *Fin del mundo* (1969); *Las piedras del cielo* (1970.)

In 1970 Neruda traveled to Paris. While there, serving as the Chilean ambassador to France, he became ill and returned to his country, where he died two weeks after the CIA-backed coup in 1973 that brought down the democracy.

## Music

I am introducing the musical component on the present unit in order to make connections between music and poetry. My students are not too perceptive when I talk about poetry in general. But, I am sure they will take pleasure on poems when they experience the correlation between music and poetry. Music is the perfect vehicle to explore culture and identity. The importance of music in any society is obvious, but it is especially so in the Latino world where almost every country has a traditional rhythm. By introducing music in the unit, I am focusing on voices, oral experience and listening skills in a way my students cannot resist.

The "*trova*" is a typical kind of music that has root in many regions of the world. Every region expresses popular feelings through music. The most important component in la "*trova*" is the lyrics, and therefore rhythms are very simple. The "*trova*" has its origins in the middle Ages (11th century) in France, when epic poems were the entertainment of the privileged classes. The troubadours memorized these epic poems in order to recite them and spread them throughout the land. These poems/songs dealt mainly with themes of chivalry and courtly love.

The "*juglares*" (minstrels in English,) played a similar role at the time. They were also entertainers, but in a more popular sense of the word: they sometimes performed compositions written by troubadours, but more often, they recited other genres such as *chansons de geste* (epic narratives) etc.

Similar to the Tobadours or minstrels are the "Griots." They are West African poets, praise singers, and wandering musicians, considered a repository of oral tradition.

These griots live in many parts of West Africa, including Mali, Gambia, Guinea, and Senegal. This concepts of oral culture and "voice" are crucial for my students to understand, since they are the basis of the present unit.

## La Nueva Trova Cubana

"La Nueva Trova," called New Ballad in English, is a traditional genre that condemned social and cultural

differences, promoted the revolution, and therefore, it had the government's support. The songs are nothing but poems (often political) that protest

specific situations: "*un trovador es un poeta con su guitarra*," ( "*a trovadour is a poet with his guitar*" ), Silvio Rodriguez observed.

This Cuban music movement has its roots in the second half of the 19th century, but it re-emerged in the mid 1960's. It combined traditional folk elements with heavily controversial political lyrics. The "Nueva Trova Cubana" became known as such after a concert in "*La Casa de las Américas*" (The House of the Americas) in which Silvio Rodriguez, Pablo Milanés and Noel Nicola interpreted their lyrics.

Most of these artists are still very famous in Cuba and the rest of the Spanish speaking countries. Pablo Milanés, Silvio Rodriguez, Carlos Varela y Habana Abierta, among others, still write songs criticizing the United States and the country's international policy, as well as the United States' embargo trade with the island.

There are connections between the "Nueva Trova Cubana" and the "Trova Puertorrique-a." The elements of protest are common to both (this is a common pattern for all the rest of Latin American countries and Spain.) The themes are slightly different when dealing with political protest: the "trova Cubana" condemns the situation they live under the United States embargo, and the "Trova Puertorrique-a" is (and was in the past) more into local matters such as Vieques, etc. The "Nueva Trova" impacts many Hispanic and Latino American countries influencing the Chilean, Brazilian, Uruguayan or Argentinian "Nueva Canción."

It is of great importance that the trovadours work with the lyrics (or poems) much more than the music, which is of course important, but has a secondary interest. Habana was where "La Nueva Trova" had its first important realization and where the key artists met. Among them we could recognize Silvio Rodriguez, Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, Sara González, Pedro Luis Ferrer, Vicente Feliú, Mike Purcell, Amaury Pérez and vocal groups such as *Tema4* , *Manguaré* , *Moncada* , *Mayohuacan* , *Los Ca-as* , *Síntesis* , *Mezcla* , *Nuestra América* , *Dúo de Adolfo Costales* and *Margarita Mateos* .

### **Trova Puertorrique-a**

As mentioned before, the *Trova* has a strong association with Cuba. It was also big in Puerto Rico. Prose and poetry are added to popular and traditional rhythms in order to create a new way of expression accessible to everyone. The "Nueva Canción" emerges in the late 1960's as an evolution of the protests led by university students. (8)

#### *Roy Brown*

Many people think that in order to talk about the *Trova Puertorrique-a* , it is necessary to talk about Roy Brown. He was born in Orlando of an American naval officer and a Puerto Rican woman. He grew up in those days when racism, the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War were the main issues of society. These events formed part of his way of thinking and they were to shape his ideology.

My students, specially those of Puerto Rican or Hispanic descent, will recognize Roy Brown in part because of how famous he is, and in part because he comes to New Haven for concerts quite often.

Other key artists and groups in the "Trova Puertorrique-a" are: Zoraida Santiago, *Fiel a la Vega* and *Taller de cantautores* .

## Reggaeton

Reggaeton blends diverse music styles. It is a fusion of hip-hop with other music influences such as Jamaican reggae and dancehall with various Latin American rhythms such as *bomba* , *bachata* , *merengue* or *plena* . The music usually accompanies rapping in Spanish, English or both, "Spanglish."

This form of urban music became popular in the early 1990s especially to the Latino population. It is important to know that reggaeton has its own and specific rhythm and could never be considered Latino hip-hop.

When working with reggaeton in the classroom, I am sure I will be the one to learn the most. This is the reason I am not expanding the background information in this section too much. The final project I refer to in the following section (the strategies section,) will provide more details about my expectations on the topic.

## Strategies

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With the hope of giving students the opportunity to learn about Latino poetry, and to be able to analyze and decode many of the social, cultural and political references of the poems without overwhelming them, I am going to gradually present historical and literary information.

The first day I introduce the unit, I will use the "*pass the bull*" strategy I open every lesson with. I toss around a foam bull toy, while asking various questions to students. These questions are related to material already taught in class: it could be grammar, or Spanish culture, for example. It is a valuable strategy since it helps me assess my students on a daily basis. It helps to get students focused, and it also helps to start the class in a good tone, since they like it a lot.

I will be asking students general questions about poetry, to grasp what their disposition is towards it. I will give each student a graphic organizer in which they will write what is poetry, they will name/list poets they know, and what they would expect to learn throughout the unit. This will help students to reflect on poetry and in the process of learning.

Immediately after this introductory activity, I will give students a copy of the poems "*On the Question of Race*" written by the Latino poet and performer Enrique Avilés and the poem with the same title written by Michelle A. Banks, in 1991. Both poems will be juxtaposed in the same page so students can contrast them easily after reading them aloud. Since a high percentage of the students at Career are either African-American or Latino, students will be asked to get into mixed groups and discuss what are the elements "stereotypically Hispanic" in the Quique Avilés version and what are the "African American stereotypes" in the Michelle A. Banks one. This activity has a double purpose: first, students will figure out by themselves how foolish stereotypes are, and second, they will actually contrast and compare each other's cultural heritage to find out they are not too different.

Following the exercise, the whole class will engage in a discussion about the absurdity of stereotypes. My intention with this opening lesson is to call students' attention to the subject matter in an effective way so they will be motivated.

## Analyzing poems

Students will read and discuss in detail poems of Pablo Neruda, Aurora Levins Morales (" *Child of the Americas* " ), Rhina Espaillat (" *You Call me by Old Names* " ) and Nuyorican poets such as Pedro Pietri (" *Puerto Rican Obituary* " ) , Hernández Cruz, Tato Laviera, Carlos Conde (" *Así Era Yo* " ) and Sandra María Esteves ( "*Take Off Your Mask.*" )

Students will work with poems in groups, individually, or as a whole class. They will analyze the language of the poems (imaginative, political and cultural aspects) and closely examine the usage of Spanglish.

## Music

Working with music will be crucial for the development of the unit. We will be using music as a tool whenever possible: Neruda´s poems interpreted by different international artists, Cuban and Puerto Rican trovadours, hip-hop and reggaeton songs. . .

I will be giving students the transcription of the poems and lyrics with numbered blank spaces (I choose in advance, depending on the grammar structures we are studying, vocabulary I want to review, etc.) Students will listen to the songs and/or poems at least a couple of times. The first time they will be asked to listen carefully and to read along to see if they understand. The second time they will fill in the blanks. The teacher will ask if a third time is necessary. If so, the teacher will write a "word bank" on the board to make it easier.

A couple of students will read the lyrics/poem as a way of correcting the exercise. We will stop in each stanza in order to analyze deeply the symbols, and images, and explain political and socio-cultural meanings. The teacher will question different students on their interpretation of different matters.

We will also be comparing different versions of poems interpreted by different artists. One example could be Pablo Neruda´s " *Poema XV*": we will first listen to Neruda read the poem (9.) After asking for impressions and interpretations from the students, we will listen to Alejandro Sanz reciting it (10) and then Adriana Varela (11) sing the poem with tango music. Students will compare them and write a short essay explaining how different voices can actually change the perception of the same poem.

## Movies

Since this is essentially a literary unit, we will work with audiovisual resources. We will view fragments of *The Nuyorican Poets Café* (USA, Ray Santisteban, 1994) and The movie *Every Child is Born a Poet* (USA, Jonathan Meyer Robinson, 2002). The purpose is to show students the foundation of the Nuyorican Movement in the case of the first movie and, the interdependence between film and literature through the film adaptation of Piri Thomas´s *Down These Mean Streets*.

### *Nuyorican Poets Café*

The *Nuyorican Poets Café* (USA, Ray Santisteban, 1994) is a 14-minute documentary that features Miguel Algarín, one of the founders of the Nuyorican Movement and other poets such as Willie Perdomo, Ed Morales, Pedro Pietri and Carmen Bardequez Morales.

The movie won 1995 New Latino Filmmaker´s Festival´s Best Documentary.

### *Every Child is Born a Poet*

The movie *Every Child is Born a Poet* (USA, Jonathan Meyer Robinson, 2002) is a movie that combines poetry, documentary and drama. The movie is based in Piri Thomas' autobiographical novel called *Down These Mean Streets*, written 1967.

The film includes different artistic products such as still photographs, rare archival footage, and dramatizations in order to explore the author's use of creativity.

There will be a whole lesson to go along with the movie and the reading of selected fragments or chapters of the novel. Students will be able to study the connections of film and literature and how the two complement each other.

## **Glossaries**

### *Poetry Terms*

Since we are in a language class, this group is going to develop a glossary with poetry terms that appear while working with the poems. Students will have to put it together and organize it thoughtfully. They will have to present it to the teacher a couple of days before their presentation of the final project to the class. Parts of the glossary will be on the final assessment or quiz.

### *Spanglish Dictionary*

Students will also collect "Spanglish" terms and expressions that appear throughout the unit. Explanations of these will be required.

## **Final Project**

I would like to culminate the unit with a final project that will have students to look for a poem or song (or even write one if they feel confident enough), analyze it and make a physical project that they will be explaining and presenting to the rest of the class. There will be an alternative to this final project consisting on teaching hip-hop to the teacher. Students will have to present a physical project and an explanation to the teacher and students. This project will need to have connections to the Hispanic world: hip-hop in Spanish, the presentation being in Spanish, etc.

Even though students will get a detailed rubric, as always, some of the choices will be open so I leave a little window for creativity. I always do so, since I consider it is important for students to think and not only to follow directions!

## **Sample Lesson Plans**

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### **Lesson One: "On the Question of Race"**

#### *Goals*

1. To introduce students to poetry by comparing and contrasting two quite similar versions of the same poem.
2. To guide students to reject stereotypes as a meaningless way of generalization.

## Learning Objectives

As a result of this lesson students will:

1. Practice their oral reading skills.
2. Practice their reading comprehension skills.
3. Learn how to deal with poetry.
4. Learn basic poetry terms such as stanza ( *estrofa* ) or verse ( *verso* ), etc.
5. Broaden vocabulary.
6. Understand the dangers of stereotypes.
7. Start thinking about the concept of identity.

## Materials

- Graphic organizer.
- Copy of Enrique Aviles´ and Michelle A. Banks´ poem "*On the Question of Race*" (juxtaposed in the same page.)

## Initiation

"Pass the bull" strategy: after introducing the curriculum unit to the students, I will toss the bull around asking them what are their expectations and what they are hoping to learn.

## Procedure

- Students will be given a graphic organizer in which they will have to write words or definitions
1. that the word poetry suggests them. (In Spanish!!) Some of the students will read their reactions aloud.  
A volunteer will go to the board and write Hispanic and Black in two different columns.
  2. Students will do the same thing in their notebooks. (Students will be reminded that RESPECT is one of the golden rules in my classroom)
  3. Students will be asked to brainstorm to fill in the two columns, giving characteristics of the two groups.
  4. The teacher will start questioning everything on the board, breaking their arguments, without giving them the "right" answer.



5. The teacher will make groups of 3 or 4 students.
6. The teacher will give students the "On the Question of Race" poem.  
Different students will be asked to read the poem aloud. The two poems will be read together,
7. so a student will read Enrique's stanza, followed by a student reading Michelle A. Banks' same stanza (therefore, some of them will be repeated, but some others will show the difference between "Hispanic" and "Black.")
8. Students will get into their groups and discuss the poem. They will argue about stereotypes.
9. Students and teacher will go through the poem, analyzing it. The teacher will "play fool" and let students to explain the poem to her.

## Closure

The teacher will divide the class in two groups. One group will defend the use of stereotypes and the other group will be against them. The teacher will give them some time to prepare a short strategy for a debate that will take place.

## Lesson Two: Pablo Neruda

(This lesson plan is to be developed in one 82-minute period. However, it can be changed according to teachers needs)

### Goals

To introduce students to the process of reading, understanding, and appreciating poetry.

To help students look for a poem to recognize different voices.

### Learning Objectives

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Develop active reading, writing and oral language skills.
2. Develop listening comprehension skills.
3. Understand, analyze and interpret a poem.
4. Compare different interpretations of the same poem.
5. Broaden vocabulary.

## Materials

-Copies of Pablo Neruda's " Poema XV" (from *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción*)

desesperada) in Spanish and a good English translation.

- "Poema XV" (Vol. 1, song 4) in *Marinero en tierra: tributo a Neruda*. Warner Music Chile, 2004.

- "Poema XV" (song 5) in *Neruda en el corazón*. BGM Music Spain, 2004.

-Computer, speakers, internet access.

-Brief handout (biography and concise description of his main works) on Pablo Neruda.

### *Special Needs*

Students are familiar with the writer because they have previously researched and read about Neruda on the website [www.fundacionpabloneruda.cl](http://www.fundacionpabloneruda.cl).

### *Initiation*

"Pass the bull:" students will be asked brief general questions about the author and his work.

### *Procedure*

1. Different students will read aloud the brief handout on Neruda's life and work.
2. The teacher will ask students different questions: (search for information)
3. The teacher will read "Poema XV" to students in Spanish, asking them to verbally describe what it means and what its content is.
4. The teacher will provide students a copy of the poem with blank spaces (could be verbs, or adjectives...)
5. Students will listen to the poem read by Alejandro Sanz. They will listen to the poem several times in order to make sure they fill in the blanks appropriately.
6. Different students will read out loud one stanza, giving their responses to the blanks and explaining the meaning of that particular stanza.
7. Students and teacher will discuss the poem in detail: go over new vocabulary and the meanings of the different images. After this, the teacher will provide students a copy of the English translation of the poem to make sure everyone has understood it.
8. Students and teacher will listen to Adriana Varela's tango version of the poem.
9. Students and teacher will discuss and compare both versions. Teacher will ask them specific questions about their reaction to the different versions.
10. Teacher will ask students to write a 8-10 line paragraph describing personal reactions to the poem and a second 8-10 line paragraph comparing and contrasting both versions.

### *Closure*

Students will listen Pablo Neruda's reading of his own poem.

### *Assessment / homework*

Students will be asked to look for their favorite poem to bring to class to share.

### **Lesson Three: *Down These Mean Streets* , Piri Thomas**

(This lesson plan is to be developed in an 82 minute class. However, it can be changed according to teachers needs)

### Goal

To understand and analyze the connections between film and literature and how both represent and explore human experience.

### *Learning Objectives*

As a result of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Search for information in a text.
2. Develop their reading and listening comprehension skills.
3. Identify and analyze cultural aspects of the Puerto Rican world
4. Make inferences about ideas implicit in a written text in order to compare them to its adaptation on screen.
5. Understand how writers or film directors manipulate stories in order to achieve a desired effect.

### *Materials*

- Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* and its adaptation in film titled *Every Child*
- is Born a Poet: Life and Work of Piri Thomas
- DVD player, TV.
- Handout with specific questions on the chapters of the book /memoir to help students understand the film better.

## Special Needs

The teacher has already introduced students to the autobiography, its parts and main themes. Students were asked to answer the questions on the handout for homework.

Students and teacher have previously read and discussed a couple of chapters from the book.

## Initiation

"Pass the bull" strategy: ask students some questions about the main actions of the chapters we have read. How does Piri Thomas use his voice? Describe his emotion state in chapters. Is he persuasive, argumentative. . .?

## Procedure

1. Different students will read aloud the questions in the handout so they can answer them and the whole class can engage into a discussion.
2. Teacher and students will take notes while watching specific fragments of the film. Students will have to work in groups of three in order to present a task that will be given to them at the end of the movie.
3. The teacher will give different groups their tasks and some time to get ready to go through their notes.
4. Different groups will briefly present their reactions to their tasks.

## *Closure--Assessment*

Students are asked to write their 8-line reaction to the movie in an index card that the teacher will collect.

## Endnotes

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## Web Resources

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