



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2008 Volume III: Pride of Place: New Haven Material and Visual Culture

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## **Tools and Art in the Hispanic Homes of New Haven**

Curriculum Unit 08.03.06  
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### **Introduction**

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I teach Spanish language courses at Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School in New Haven, CT. I instruct all four grade levels mixed into classes that range from Spanish I to Advanced Placement Spanish Language. Since Coop is an inter-district magnet school, 65 percent of the 418 students come from New Haven and 35 percent come from surrounding, mostly suburban, districts. There is a lottery process for New Haven residents and others alike. There is an arts focus at Coop, so every entering ninth grader chooses a major, including such things as drawing, photography, sculpture, dance, theater, chorus, and band. Students are often attracted from out-of-district by the comprehensive arts program.

Due to this mixed population, the classrooms at Coop include students from a variety of backgrounds and socioeconomic groups. About 40 percent of the school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The Coop population can be further broken down by race. Nearly 50 percent of the student population is Black, almost 25 percent is Hispanic, almost 30 percent White and one percent is Asian American.

All students are required to take a World Language in order to graduate. Spanish and French are both offered at the present time. Beginning next year, Coop will be one of two high schools in the district to offer Chinese as a world language. Even though French and Chinese will be offered, Spanish is immensely popular with the students and therefore, the majority takes Spanish to fulfill the graduation requirement.

With urging from the guidance department and university requirements as a motivating factor, many students choose to take a third year of Spanish. Due to demand, Coop will offer two Spanish III classes during the 2008-2009 school year. There will be one slower-paced class titled *Topics in Hispanic Culture* and one regular (faster paced) class.

The *Topics* class is intended for students who might struggle in Spanish and need to delve deeper into selected topics. Students who take this class most likely need three consecutive years of a language but are not yet ready to move on to the complicated grammar and vocabulary of Spanish III. The *Topics* class is the one in which I propose to teach my unit.

As with other World Language classes, this unit will be taught with many different learners in mind. I will be

writing other units this summer for the class and intend to incorporate a mix of power point, videos, articles, books, maps, realia, etc. While students will be learning through hands-on activities, their knowledge of the language will also be reinforced by the recycling of many Spanish words and grammar points.

## Rationale

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There are billions of people in the world and many of them have homes. In fact, “home” is most likely the most important place in a person’s life as Csikszentmihalyi points out, “Few English words are filled with the emotional meaning of the word ‘home.’ It brings to mind one’s childhood, the roots of one’s being, the security of a private enclave where one can be free and in control of one’s life (Csikszentmihalyi 121, 1981).”

In these sacred spaces, many people have objects that are inextricably intertwined with their own being. These objects in many ways reflect the inhabitants of the dwelling, they “embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identities of their users” (Csikszentmihalyi 1, 1981). They also may “reaffirm the identity of the owner” (Csikszentmihalyi 187, 1981). I am interested in these objects (including art) in my students’ homes. We will also be interested in how these objects are similar or different to objects/art in the Hispanic home.

In the student resource part of this unit, there are some pictures that the students will look at to get an idea of what some Hispanic students classified as objects common to their homes. Csikszentmihalyi classifies some common objects considered important by people he interviewed as chairs, sofas, and tables. However, the author also notes that the “comfort” in a home depends on the culture. For example, a “Japanese or Hindu home, which is practically devoid of furniture” is just as comfortable to those who live there as an American house with an abundance of furniture (Csikszentmihalyi 58-59, 1968).

This unit will focus on the home as a space in which all people can potentially express themselves. The reason that this is so interesting to me is that homes can come in so many shapes and sizes, yet they can be defined in the same way, “...the three basic realms of home: the private and necessary sanctuary, the place of nourishment and community, the one where things get made. So long as the places we live can accommodate these three very different human activities, it might be called home (Busch 1999, 24).” In other words, the home may come in many different forms but each culture will have those three functions served in the home.

My students will be interested in the fact that they can find similarities between their homes and Hispanic homes even though “there is no longer a single pattern or cultural definition for comfort (Busch 1999, 17).” While there may be no set pattern, there are certainly commonalities within cultures and cross-culturally when it comes to the home.

As a class, we will be focusing on the connections we can find between our own families’/cultures’ use of space within the home and the Hispanic home. We will look at how these spaces may form a cultural identity for people of many cultures, including Hispanics, within the larger “American” culture or as put by Henry Glassie when talking about folk society, “a homogeneous, sacred, self-perpetuating, largely self-sufficient group isolated by any of many means, such as language or topography, from the larger society with which it moderately interacts (Glassie 3, 1968).”

I’m hoping that the students will notice differences or similarities between the Hispanic home and their own and also that they will see no matter what culture you come from, the “home space” is sacred.

I do have to be careful, however, and keep in mind that some students may not have homes at the time when the unit is taught. To avoid any embarrassment or hurt, I will give the students the choice of using any space (an aunt's home, a grandparent's home, a friend's home). Also, there is a difference between the words "house" and "home." Most students have a "home" but may not have a "house." Many of my students live in condos, apartments, etc. This is an important distinction.

A few of the essential questions that the students will be asked in the unit are as follows: How is a Hispanic home different or similar to your space at home? What home objects does your culture (not) have in common with the Hispanic culture? What objects do you use at home that define who you are?

It will be a matter of looking at the use of space in the home and also the objects and their "form, construction, and use" (Glassie, 8, 1968). Something, like ceramic tiles, which may not be widely used in an assimilated family's home, would be used in a Hispanic home because of carry over from the country of origin. Even though it is not advantageous as far as insulation in the winter (when compared to carpet) it is still used by Hispanics in New England.

I hope that through the study of the information, the students will acknowledge their own culture, compare it to Hispanic cultures and also take pride in their own culture while noticing the great pride of the current Hispanic population. This may be contrary to the previous generations of immigrants. For example, my great grandmother was Italian and moved here when she was 16. There was no Italian flag hanging outside of her house. Her children did not speak Italian outside of the home. Hispanics today may assimilate but they still keep their pride in their homeland.

This unit will be taught to a lower-level class and therefore a variety of materials will be used including but not limited to, documentaries, newspaper articles, first-person accounts, realia, pictures, video clips, etc. Many of these students might be seeing the inside of a Hispanic house and its contents for the first time so presenting the genuine objects to them will be important.

I feel that the topic of *Tools and Art in the Hispanic Home* is important to students because in the city of New Haven they are exposed to various Hispanic cultures on a daily basis. In learning about the content of this unit, the students will need to recognize and process the Spanish language and Hispanic culture that they see in their region, city or town. Students need the skill set that will help them sift through and recognize stereotypes, differences within the Hispanic populations, culturally relevant dress, customs, etc. Through the use of realia and different activities, I hope to engage all learners, and especially those students who are simply taking level III Spanish in order to graduate, move on to college, and forget they ever had to take a language.

## Objectives

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The objective in any of my Spanish Language classes is always for the students to gain an understanding and appreciation of various Hispanic cultures. At the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

1. Identify why it is important to study the Hispanic home.

2. Identify some specific objects that might be found in a Hispanic home.
3. Describe the object they bring, in the target language.
4. Brainstorm uses for realia brought in from the Hispanic home.
5. Create connections between the objects found in their culture and ones in the Hispanic culture.

## Strategies

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Reading, writing, speaking and listening are always used in language classes. The 5 Cs are also kept in mind (Communication, Culture, Connections, Community, Comparisons). The students will learn through the use of methods that keep the multiple intelligences in mind.

## Classroom Activities

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This unit within the Spanish III lower level class will be taught right before Winter break. By the time this unit is taught, the students will have studied the geography of Spanish-speaking countries, Hispanic arrival in the United States, and stereotypes of Hispanics perpetuated in the United States. This fourth unit in the class will give students a chance to recognize items that might appear in the Hispanic home in the U.S. and to compare and contrast the home of Hispanics to their own domicile.

My intent is to start by discussing the students' definition of the word "home." We will also be looking at some realia that one might find in a Hispanic home (la negrita, un pilón) and see if the kids can guess what each item might be used for. They will also be completing CAPT RFI-style activities based on the Hispanic home. The culmination of the unit will be for each student to bring in something specific to their culture or family and describe it in oral presentation format to the class.

## Sample Lesson #1: What Is Home?

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Duration: 3-4 class periods

*Objectives:* The students will be able to,

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the term “home” (concrete and abstract) by brainstorming in groups and completing a vocabulary sheet and house project.
2. Demonstrate understanding of “home” by describing what a structure must have in it, at the very least, to be considered “home.”

Materials:

Ser and estar chart, preterite verb chart, dictionaries, graphic organizer, crayons, markers, pencils, pens, and paper.

Activities:

Day One -- Students will complete a personal dictionary (vocabulary sheet) on “home” terms that will be commonly used during the unit. They will then start to map out their version of an ideal home or their own home with labels. They will also include a list of the 10 most important objects in their home.

Day Two -- The students will use most of today’s class to finish up their homes. They will submit the rendition along with their labels and list of objects in the target language. Upon exiting today, they will name two objects that they cannot live without in their home or their ideal home.

Day Three -- In groups, the students will give an informal summation of their project during the first 10 minutes of class. They will then stay in these groups to formulate a definition they can all agree on for the word “home.” We will then brainstorm on the board and come up with one final, working definition for the class. Upon exiting, they will fill out an exit slip concerning the home.

Day Four - The students will take 15 minutes to read the article “Hispanic Community Growing in Size, Influence on Home Improvement Marketplace, National Hardware Show the Place to Be for Key Home Improvement Trends” and answer questions four multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions in complete sentences. Students will then discuss their answers and rationale as a class. As closure, the students will do a brief oral exercise.

## Sample Lesson #2: Objects In Your Home And In The Hispanic Home

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*Duration:* 3-4 days

Objectives: The students will be able to,

1. Familiarize themselves with objects and art from the Hispanic home by identifying realia.
2. Expand their use of Spanish vocabulary concerning the realia by explaining its use in the target language.
3. Draw conclusions about the links between their cultures and the Hispanic culture by presenting their own realia.

Materials:

Hispanic realia, students' realia, dictionaries, posterboard, markers, pens, and pencils.

Activities:

Day One- The students will look at some pictures of realia that were taken by the AP students. They will first guess what it would be used for (pilón, Mistolín, tres Reyes Magos, tostonera, la negrita). The students will then share their guesses and then the answers will be revealed. Upon leaving, the students will fill out the name of one object on a sticky note and hand it in.

Day Two- The students will match pictures of the realia with their definitions. They will then be assigned an item to describe fully in Spanish (What is its name? Who might use it? Where might it be used?) They will also have to think about what realia they want to present from their home/culture.

Day Three- The students will bring in a piece of realia from their own culture. They will write a description of it on a piece of paper. They will then pair read it with another classmate. The students will then prepare their oral presentation and their visual aid (poster board).

Day Four -- The students will orally present their piece of realia to the class in the target language. They will have a poster board with its name in the target language, a description of what it is used for, and an explanation of why it is important.

## Assessment

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Their summative assessment will depend entirely on what topics they choose. It will be a written test on the subject of home that includes listening, writing, RFI, and speaking. They will be tested on other students' presentations (which will require them to take notes and ask questions of their fellow classmates).

## Student Resources

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The high school in which I am presently teaching is very focused on the state standardized test CAPT. We are especially looking at the Reading for Information (RFI) section of the test which involves the students answering four multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions.

Due to this school-wide focus, I incorporate RFI-style readings in all of my units. One of the articles is "Hispanic Community Growing in Size, Influence on Home Improvement Marketplace; 2005 National Hardware Show the Place to Be for Key Home Improvement Trends" (BNET Business Network). This article will be the perfect segway into the study of the Hispanic home. It gives useful information that, "Hispanic home ownership in the U.S. rose to 48.1 percent in 2004 -- up from 46.7 percent in 2003 and 41.2 percent 10 years ago." The article also states that, "Hispanics are very attentive to their homes, focusing on décor, color and style."

A source in the article, Rob Cappiello, also adds that it is important to, "Understand that the majority of Hispanics in the U.S. are not assimilating -- they are in constant contact with their home countries and language and will often purchase imported products that cater to their specific tastes and preferences."

As a teacher, I experience on a daily basis what Cappiello said. Many of my students still, at the very least, hear Spanish from someone in their family. Usually, the students still speak Spanish in their homes or amongst themselves. I witness other non-Hispanic students hearing and questioning students who speak in Spanish in school. It throws them off. I believe that my non-Hispanic students are at a loss to comprehend what is going on around them and they absolutely need some education around the Hispanic norms.

As the unit progresses, I would also like the students to complete another RFI-style reading on the importance of the Hispanic home and the Hispanics population boom. This second article I will use is titled, "Fastest Growing Market; Across U.S., Hispanics Become Key Factor in Real Estate Industry" (AZ Housing). This article sheds light on the fact that many Americans think of the West coast when they hear the word "Hispanic." However, one of the author's sources, George Lacy, points out that Raleigh, N.C. "saw its Latino population grow by 1,200 percent between 1990 and 2000." The article also lists figures for other East Coast cities, like Philadelphia, stating a percentage breakdown of the population as follows: 47.1% Latino, 55.5% African American, 56.1% Asian, 73.6% White.

With all of these percentages and the insight into the Hispanic influence on the housing market, the students will have to sift through the information to correctly answer four multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions on the article. The multiple choice section and the open ended section are both split into two parts; Developing and Interpretation and Demonstrating a Critical Stance.

I'm hoping that after using these two written sources, students might better appreciate the influence that Hispanics have had on society in the United States. For those who are visual learners, I will try to impress the point of culturally specific home objects with pictures that were taken by my Advanced Placement Spanish Language class. All of these students were at least heritage speakers.

***Photos taken by AP Spanish students - Hispanic home objects***

1. Conserving cooking oil. --Photo by AP student Fiamma Solorazado



2. Platanos...and the rice gets poured in a big bucket. --Photo by AP student Fiamma Solorazado



3. Swavitel is a laundry detergent. --Photo by AP student Fiamma Solorazado



4. Hang clothes in basement on rainy days. --Photo by AP student Fiamma Solorazado



5. Clothes line in back yard. Often seen in Hispanic neighborhoods. --Photo by AP student Penelope Saldivar





Pistól:  
Used  
often in  
the  
Hispanic  
6. kitchen.  
--Photo  
by AP  
student  
Penelope  
Saldivar



7. Many plants; bringing the outdoors in. --Photo by AP student Penelope Saldivar



8. Large, rounded rice pot. Used often and “seasoned” from use. --Photo by AP student Penelope Saldivar



9. Religious iconography in the home as art. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas



10. “Recuerdos” or keepsakes. Usually given out as party favors. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas



11. Another tropical houseplant. Again, bringing the outside, in. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas.



12. More “recuerdos.” They are often used as decoration in the living room. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas.



13. Virgen de Guadalupe as art in a Hispanic home. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas.



14. “Fabuloso” the cleaner. Like Fantastic in English. --Photo by AP student Liliana Rojas.



15. Puerto Rican pride -- the flag used as wall art. --Photo by AP student Taja Hering.



16. Original art by the homeowner that showcases the Puerto Rican flag. --Photo by AP student Taja Hering.



17. This is a picture of a very special set of dominoes that my father received as a gift. They were specially made in Puerto Rico out of wood. They're only for show though-too much slamming goes on in domino games to risk chipping this special set. --Photo and caption by AP student Melissa Matos.



18. This is a picture of all the sets of dominoes in my house (minus 1). The middle 3 are plain and can be found virtually anywhere, but the top and bottom set are special. The boxes are wood and the have "Puerto Rico" and "Palo Viejo" written on the backs. -Photo and caption by AP student Melissa Matos.



19. This is a picture of my family's domino table, complete with 4 chairs and a set of dominoes. This is a very important part of Puerto Rican culture-it is second only to dancing when it comes to favorite Puerto Rican pastimes. Whenever a Puerto Rican family gets together, like for a barbecue, a domino marathon is sure to take place. Mostly the men play, but the women in my family often play alongside their husbands. --Photo and caption by AP student Melissa Matos.



20. This is another picture of a wall in my sala, this time it is a bookshelf built into the wall filled with pictures of ALL my out-of-state relatives. This would be an example of using a wall of pictures as a way to be able to see relatives everyday that we don't get to see as often as we'd like. --Photo and caption by AP student Melissa Matos.



21. This is a picture of the tiles on my kitchen floor. I also think tiles are very popular in Hispanic and Puerto Rican kitchens because it makes for a very easy cleanup for kitchen spills or just spring cleaning. My parents put these in themselves after removing the old tiles that had been there for over ten years...I wonder if renovations are a Puerto Rican thing here in the States, because I know my family and a few other Puerto Rican families that are constantly re-doing or adding something to their house. -- Photo and caption by AP student Melissa Matos.



## The Hispanic House

\*This sheet was compiled by my AP students, all of whom are Hispanic. They discussed and then listed the objects that they think are found in the quintessential Hispanic home.

### Kitchen

- |                             |                                |                         |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| -pilón                      | -sazón/adobo                   | -la negrita             |
| -alcapurría machine         | -"crusty old pots" (rice pots) | -la tostonera           |
| -caldero (olla de presión)  | - wooden spoons                | -libro "Cocina criolla" |
| -coffee pot (net, la media) | - tiles                        | -Niñito Jesús           |

### Bathroom

- Mistolín
- Fabuloso
- Lestoil

### Sala (Livingroom)

- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| -fake/real plants        | -stereo with large speakers |
| -recuerdos               | -decorative candles         |
| -whole walls of pictures |                             |

### Outside

- |                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| -Christmas lights | -roosters in the backyard |
| -clothesline      | -domino tables/dominoes   |

### Pets

- love birds and cockatiels
- fish
- rabbits

### Art

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| -pictures of El Moro    | -estatuas   |
| -Frida Kahlo            | -ceramic elephants (with money in them)                 |
| -Mexican foil paintings | -religious posters/pictures (Pope, Mary, crosses, etc.) |
| -Virgen de Guadalupe    |   |

### Miscellaneous

- |                                  |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| -loud music                      | -towels on a stick (no mop) |
| -no hot water (heat it in a pot) |                             |
| -clothes on a heater             |                             |

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This list was compiled by my AP class with help from a Coop teacher who grew up in Puerto Rico, Vandelina Esposito.

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