



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2009 Volume II: The Modern World in Literature and the Arts

Observing the Modern World: What Do Writers See? What Do I See About Myself?

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Part I: Teaching Latin American Literature to 7th Graders!

My 6th grade students (7th graders next year) are often bored and cynical. It is a rare student who is interested in the assigned reading or who really wants to write a five-paragraph essay on any topic. I teach English to Speakers of Other Languages at Truman School in New Haven. All of my English Language Learners (ELLs) are Hispanic; most spoke Spanish as a first language and many still speak Spanish at home. It is a struggle to persuade these students that they need to expand their knowledge of English vocabulary. When I introduce "words to know" at the beginning of a reading unit, many will not use those words in oral descriptions of plot/action/story problems/character analysis/story summary/problem solutions, or in their writing responses to issues/ideas expressed in the text. It is my hope that by helping students identify with Latin American writers from a variety of countries and cultures they will be intrigued by the way these authors use language and make an effort to understand and possibly empathize with the author's observations.

What do authors "see" as they "observe" the modern world? Sometimes these authors see (and describe) an actual child picking a mango or a village school teacher (Allende). Sometimes they see a more metaphorical object such as an artichoke which has become a vegetable in armor (Neruda). And sometimes they write exotic stories about food, or relationships between people that are both realistic events as well as extended metaphors (Esquivel). I think it is important for my students to understand what the authors I have chosen are seeing and what they are saying about their observations; the students also need to learn how to see the world around them and observe how they think and feel about their role in that world.

There are many modern writers who have written poetry and short stories that would be appealing to this age group. What is culturally appropriate about Latin American authors, and, can a non-Hispanic teach this literature? The answer to this two-part question lies within the need for multiculturalism within the urban school Language Arts curriculum. "Reading multiculturally enhances our multicultural awareness and helps us see multicultural issues which were not previously apparent." (Cai, p.14) I am interested in looking at what a group of Latin American authors can see because my students should have an opportunity to see things about their Latin culture which they might not know about; they may have no knowledge of the contemporary literature of their home country and they may not have heard the folktales which are an integral part of their heritage.

Can a non-Hispanic teach this literature? Cai discusses this topic in a slightly different way (although it is important to note that he does not mention any of the authors in this curriculum unit and he rarely discusses a Latino multicultural issue). He asks: can someone from outside the culture write (italics mine) about a given culture? (Cai, p.37 and following). He frames this debate in terms of "outsiders" (those outside the culture) and "insiders" (those within the culture). He adds the dimension of cultural authenticity and asserts that "ethnic literature is culturally specific" (p. 38) and that the outsider needs "imagination" (p, 40 and elsewhere) to take on the "group's perspective" (p. 40) in order to avoid "cultural arrogance" (p.42). I respect his warnings. I am an outsider: while I have been a visitor to Chile (several times) and have a daughter, granddaughter, and Chilean son-in-law who live there, it is not possible for me to truly enter Chilean culture, much less that of Mexico or other South or Central American countries. However, I aspire to the insider's imagination and believe I have the pedagogical tools to help my students observe what these authors observe and see as much as they can see about themselves (Cai discusses pedagogical purposes of multicultural literature as well, p. xvi and following). I am learning about the literature of Latin America as well; I believe that the process of learning together is intrinsic to the best classroom experience I can offer my students.

Part II: An Overview of Latin American Literature

Since World War II, the communications revolution and an increased flow of translations have helped create a wide audience for the rich and diverse literature of Latin America. In the United States this literature has had an increasing popularity since the early 1960s. In colleges and universities, and non-academic circles as well, the achievements of Latin American authors have been acknowledged and acclaimed partially in response to a swell of Latinos/as in the general population, but also because the literature has achieved a level of accessibility and readability for the average American reader, Hispanic and otherwise. English translations of the works of Latin American writers and reviews and articles in publications such as the New York Times have exposed the general reader to an increasing array of talented writers. Alma Guillermoprieto's journalistic musings for *The New Yorker*, while no doubt very subjective, are still fascinating to read; when I heard her speak at a national Latin American symposium in Austin, Texas several years ago I was transfixed by her fiery presence and reformist message. The fact that the seventh grade text book includes the writings of Sandra Cisneros (Mexico), Julia Alvarez (Dominican Republic), Marta Salinas (Mexico) and Pablo Neruda (Chile) among others is a good indication that Latin American literature has entered the mainstream.

Racism in America has been especially difficult for African-Americans primarily because of skin color; Latinos with dark skin (Mexicans and Puerto Ricans especially) have also had a difficult time assimilating into the American dream. Some Latinos have gone so far as to deny their racial heritage and of course affirmative action has had ups and downs depending on the pervasive political climate of the moment. Cockcroft devotes an entire chapter, and more, to the civil rights issues that have impacted African Americans and Latinos; he mentions particularly that the "impact of civil rights legislation on Latinos' job opportunities was also severely weakened" (Cockcroft, p. 133) when Presidents Reagan and Bush were appointing Supreme Court justices. The wave of Latino students who entered American universities in the 1960s and thereafter helped fan the fires of civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protests; at the same time, they provided Latin American authors with an audience - many of those authors were writing about equality, civil rights and opportunity in their own countries.

But even as significant a Supreme Court case as *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954) has yet to eradicate

"separate but equal" from some school systems. New Haven's efforts to comply with the Connecticut Sheff v. O'Neill decision by increasing district wide magnet school opportunities has had some positive results but have also severely affected New Haven's neighborhood schools, and not always in a positive manner. While some had predicted that the African Americans and Latin Americans would naturally join forces to press for equal educational and economic rights, that joint effort has not been successful, perhaps because members of both groups are fighting for the same entry level jobs and economic security. Culturally, they may also have different educational aspirations.

The landmark Supreme Court case, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), is often cited as the entry point for what has become "educational equality" for ELL students. In this case, Chinese public school students sued the San Francisco Board of Education for the right to have classes taught in their native language. Equality of instruction, i.e. native language instruction, has also had ups and downs: in California English is now a mandated language of instruction as it is in Massachusetts. (This is not to imply that "English Only" has been successful - it has probably been a terrible change for teachers and students - but that legally, teachers are not permitted to "cater" to the native language of their students in those states). In New Haven, there are several bilingual schools in which students can learn in both languages in the elementary grades, and students in higher grades can learn content subjects in Spanish if they are newcomers. At Truman School, students in K, 1st and 2nd grades learn English in a "Transitional English" model which is all Spanish in Kindergarten (for those whose 1st language is Spanish), 50-50 English/Spanish in grade 1 and at least 75-25 English in grade 2. The State of Connecticut's Department of Education believes that after 30 months of instruction, ELL students should be able to function academically with their age group in regular classrooms. (As a teacher, I am certain that this is one of the most ill-advised and arbitrary decisions made by the Connecticut Department of Education but it defines the way I teach emerging English language learners in the lower grades).

What is the relationship between racism and Latin American literature? During the last several decades, the Meistersingers of American culture in general, and literature in particular, have recognized and accepted the value of diversity; however, it is difficult to assign one particular role to Latin American literature (the term "Hispanic" became official during the 1980 Census). Its poetry and fiction are filled with unusual metaphors (Neruda), graphic sexuality (Allende), emphasis on primitive myths (Allende and Neruda), and of course, harrowing tales of immigration and the difficulties of learning English while assimilating into American cultural norms (Cisneros, Alvarez, Mu-oz Ryan, Martinez, and many others). Several writers stand out as being particularly influential in bringing Latin American literature to a wide international audience: Jorge Luis Borges (fiction, especially); Gabriel Garcia Marquez (a member of the so-called "boom" period); Laura Esquivel (her story which became the movie *Like Water for Chocolate* is a good example of "magical realism" - her subsequent writing, *Between Two Fires* is autobiographical and not nearly as powerful); Isabel Allende (related to the former President of Chile, Salvador Allende) - her writings are too long for this unit or too graphic with the exception of one story from *The Stories of Eva Luna*); Pablo Neruda (various genre, some possible for a junior high audience, some less so). When Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 Chileans went wild. His various houses in Santiago, Valparaiso and elsewhere are shrine-like museums, and his international and marital "extra curricular" activities have been forgiven, at least by the Chilean intelligentsia, if not by snobby American academics. He and Mexican's hero-poet, Octavio Paz, are both Nobel Prize winners and have other biographical details in common.

Part III: Literature 7th Graders Will Read in This Unit

In choosing authors and readings for this unit I chose to focus on both men and women, internationally famous and less well known, poetry, short fiction and a full length novel.

The length and difficulty of the text defined the order of the writers: I need to keep the reading fairly uncomplicated but not juvenile; I want some new vocabulary every class session but not an overwhelming number of unfamiliar words. I also want to introduce students to writers who "stayed home", that is, writers who are identified by the country where they were born and lived, as well as writers who think of themselves as North Americans, yet with strong cultural ties to a home country in Latin America. In keeping with the theme of this unit, "observing others and observing myself", and also following the Language Arts Department guidelines, I chose to focus on texts that would encourage students to write. They will be writing in writing notebooks and making journal entries throughout this unit. Along the way the students will also examine metaphor, simile, learn new vocabulary and do several character studies.

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) was an obvious choice for this unit. He appears in the Language Arts textbook and he is an internationally famous Chilean who won a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. He is a man of three-quarters of the 20th century who did not just stay at home, but traveled extensively, and had a good deal to say about the social issues of his time. He loved nature and he loved words, metaphors and similes. I hope he meant us to smile when we read about the artichoke and the flea; I want the students to observe the care he takes in describing a vegetable and a small bug. Of course Neruda also wrote about big ideas in esoteric language but it's the everyday objects that count here.

Octavio Paz (1914-1998) has biographical details in common with Neruda: winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1990; devoted to his native country, Mexico, but widely traveled; interested in and outspoken about social issues in both Mexico and abroad. Paz "towers over the entire continent, north and south, as the premier poet of the moment" (González Echevarria and Pupo-Walker, p.5). While internationally famous, Paz's poetry is not included in the 7th grade Language Arts textbook, perhaps because he did not write about artichokes and fleas. Paz has been called "the Latin American Pope of Surrealism" (Castro-Klaren, p. 431). Students (Mexicans and others) should know this poet: in awarding the Prize, the Nobel Committee said that he had "'sensuous intelligence and humanistic integrity'", and that he "has shaped and defined the role of the intellectual in contemporary Spanish America" (González Echevarria and Pupo-Walker, p. 356). Like Neruda, he loves words and for him, poetry is a "critical act of language" (Ibid, p. 361). The two Paz poems I have chosen are both quite short and have wonderful images beyond the obvious.

The only authored folk tale the students will read in this unit is by the Mexican writer and dramatist, Jorge Ibarguengoitia (1928-1983). After reading many folktales, I chose this one because it is clear that the author understands American culture: the gangsters are from Chicago! While known for his use of satire and interest in dramatizing political corruption in Mexico, it is clear that Ibarguengoitia is also a wonderful story-teller. I think the students will enjoy this story of a millionaire (Paletón) who wanted to buy a musical elephant and what happened when his wishes bore no relationship to reality.

Laura Esquivel (1950-) is a puzzle. Her first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), was made into a movie (1992) which received many awards - it is a sensuous, beautiful movie and based on a very sad story from the early part of the 20th century. The novel has 12 chapters, one for each month, and each prefaced by a recipe.

While cooking and eating food plays a part in the movie, it is the relationship between the family members that is captivating; I couldn't help but dislike the mother who made life so difficult for her youngest daughter - a situation that had historical roots in Mexican custom. Esquivel's autobiographical writing, *Between Two Fires* (1998) is much weaker prose without a compelling drama pushing the story forward. I chose the essay she wrote about her mother and grandmother because among all the chapters in this book, this one has clear observations about these important women in her life. Many of the 7th grade students are in single parent households and no doubt many of the girls in this class will find themselves in this role as well. When given an assignment this past year to describe a person they admired, many chose their mother. During the second week of the unit the students will read this essay and write a journal entry about their mother or another family member they admire, and give specific details about that person.

And finally, Sandra Cisneros (1954 -) is, like Neruda, an obvious choice for this unit.

The House on Mango Street won her an immediate reputation as an astute observer of the Chicago barrio - "a poetic rendering of social aspects previously almost unheard of in Chicano letters" (González Echevarria and Pupo-Walker, p. 580). Cisneros writes about a young girl with "no opportunity or permission to fulfill [her] own aspirations" (Caulfield and Davis, p. 27). While the girl in this novel, Esperanza, had less opportunity than my female students, they too may feel enclosed by rules and regulations especially if there are strong male family members pushing them aside. I sense that many of them are not sure they want to excel academically although many of them have the ability to do so. The vignettes in Cisneros's novel do not talk about school but rather focus on everyday happenings, family members, how to belong and have friends in the neighborhood. Until they resolve these same issues for themselves, the 7th grade girls at Truman will not direct their attention to learning vocabulary, preparing for the CMT or reading outside of class. Esperanza ("hope") doesn't want to be like her great-grandmother and spend her life looking out the window; I'd like to think our students have higher aspirations as well.

The unit will open with two examples of poetic observation. In Neruda's "Ode to an Artichoke" (both in Spanish and in the translation by Cheli Durán) the poet is "seeing" more than an artichoke. Neruda also wrote an ode to a tomato which students can read on their own as an outside assignment - both these odes are a wonderful description of a common vegetable taking on extraordinary characteristics. The artichoke becomes a member of the armed forces, dressed in armor, yet with a soft heart.

The unit will continue with Octavio Paz's "Vision" and "Water Night" (translation Muriel Rukeyser; in English and Spanish). The short Paz poem is an invitation to the reader to "see" even with his eyes closed, where he is. Both poems emphasize observations and students should begin to see what an author can see. We will examine the writer's craft in metaphor, simile and other descriptive details. In-class and homework assignments during this week will include writing about a simple object of the student's choice. Students will be asked to use as many details as possible in their writing. We will share and post examples of student writing that have caught the essence of making observations and using details to describe what can be seen.

The unit will then turn to folktales for the insights brought to this genre by a contemporary writer, and authorless stories. We will read "Paletón and The Musical Elephant", by Jorge Ibargüengoitia (Mexico), and several unauthored folktales; each is a magical story with a special message running underneath the text. Students will be guided to see special details in the text and to think about the question, "what does the author want me to see and learn from this story?" Each of these stories also has one or two special characters faced with a problem. Each solves the problem in a singular way: we will create story maps for these tales and consider what the characters learn to see along with the "big story" the author wants us to understand.

The unauthored folktales are "The Turquoise Ring" (Chile), "Five Eggs" (Ecuador) and "Juan Bobo" (Puerto Rico). These stories focus on relationships between people and again, the characters are solving one or more problems within the story. As we read these stories students may recognize common elements from other fairy tales ("Three Little Pigs", "Three Billy Goats Gruff", "Jack and the Beanstalk") which they have read before (4th graders at Truman School do a unit on fairy tales and discuss "good" characters - heroes, and "bad" characters - villains). Each student will be keeping a journal about the readings and writings during this unit; at this point in the unit students will be asked to think about what things they see about themselves - are they seeing the same or different details than those they have seen so far in the writings of others? Can they develop similes about themselves? Metaphors? Could they write a folktale about their role within their own family or a family they know? In-class and outside assignments will include an outline of what such a "family folktale" might include in terms of details, and what it might include in terms of a character's feelings and thinking.

The final part of this unit will focus on Sandra Cisneros's novel, *The House on Mango Street*. (Mr. DeLucia and I will need to decide how much of the novel we have time for and possibly skip some sections - perhaps students will be interested enough in the story to read these parts on their own). Written 25 years ago, this story by a Mexican-American living in Chicago tells many short stories (vignettes) and touches on some themes encountered throughout this unit. The story of Esperanza, her frequent moves, her growing maturity, her relationships with family and others in a large urban community and her many observations (as well as those we can assume are those of Cisneros) will be the focus of this part of the unit. We will concentrate on several new vocabulary words every day along with a class handout asking specific questions about each section of the story. When we finish the story we will spend part of a class summing up and tying together various key threads that have been an integral part of this unit.

Part IV: Three Lesson Plans

Outline of 4-Week Unit, Two Classes Each Week

[Note: During the other class days of each week, Mr. DeLucia has the option of referring to these works and/or adding some additional readings in each category which I will make available to him. See "notes" under Bibliography. He will probably continue reading *The House on Mango Street* periodically through the next few weeks.]

Week One: Introduction to Unit

Observing Ordinary Objects: Artichoke, Water, Night

Class A: Poems of Pablo Neruda

"Ode to an Artichoke"

Class B: Poems of Octavio Paz

"Vision"

"Water Night"

Week Two: Observing Others: Family Members and Fictitious Characters

Class A: Between Two Fires, Laura Esquivel

"At the Hearth"

Class B: Folktale from Chile, no author

"The Turquoise Ring"

Week Three: Observing the World: Fictitious Characters in Realistic Scenes

Class A: Folktale - "Paletón and the Musical Elephant"

By Jorge Ibarguengoitia, Mexico

Class B: Folktale from Ecuador, no author

"Five Eggs"

Folktale from Puerto Rico, no author

"Juan Bobo"

Week Four: Observing Realistic Life: The Latino Section of Chicago

Class A: The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

Chapters 1 - 4 (or more)

Class B: The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

Chapters 5 - 8 (or more)

Mr. DeLucia and I will introduce this unit the day before my first regular meeting with the class. We will discuss what this unit is about, distribute a syllabus, and discuss the expectations for in-class work, homework and journal writing. We will also show students where we have assembled some "outside reading material" that they can peruse during the unit. These outside readings will include folktales from *The Emerald Lizard* and *Where Angels Glide at Dawn*, poems and short stories from *The Tree is Older Than You Are*, and selected poems - "Ode to a Tomato" and "Fleas Interest Me So Much" by Neruda and "Reliefs" and "Objects" by Paz. We will supplement this "outside reading" collection with additional material depending on student interests. Mr. DeLucia and I will mention that there will be a final writing project based on journal entries, and give some details at this time.

To introduce the topic in this initial class, we will look at a world map and identify Chile, noting that its geographical placement gives it the opposite climate from our own. We'll point out Santiago to pinpoint Neruda's home base. We'll identify other countries on the world map as we read further. As a reading introduction to the unit, we will hand out and share Neruda's wonderful musing "The Word" in which he stirs

words, admires their texture, watches them swallow everything, and in the end, is a winner because he owns some words.

Every student will have a writing notebook to use during class sessions. One objective of this unit is to increase student vocabulary with word definitions given at the beginning of class from a Word Bank, and by encouraging students to develop vocabulary through "context clues". Every class will have some new vocabulary; every class will include an in-class writing exercise and at the end of Class B each week there will be a homework assignment related to observations made during that week.

Each student will also have a journal that they have been using since the beginning of the school year. During this unit, the students will write about observations they are making about themselves and the world around them. These entries will not be graded. Each student will do a final Latin American Literature project and will have several options for that project. They can make a poster about an author they liked which shows details about the author and his/her writings; they can write a short story or poem in the style of one of the authors studied which shows evidence of personal observation; or they can read additional works by one of the authors in this unit (or check with the teachers if they want to read works by a contemporary writer) and write an essay describing what they have learned about that author and his/her observations from this "outside" literature.

For this final project, students will be encouraged to make personal connections between their own experience with observing the world around them, and that of the unit authors. Mr. DeLucia and I will create a rubric for this project and make it available to each student at the beginning of the unit.

Detailed Lesson Plan 1: Week One, Class A

Objective: to introduce students to the astute observation powers of a renowned poet and to have the students discuss what kinds of things we can "see" both in reality, and in metaphors within poetry. The reading is Neruda's "Ode To An Artichoke".

Activity and Discussion: The class will open with a discussion about an actual, fresh artichoke with all its outer leaves intact. I will pass it around and everyone will take off a leaf (and eat it if they wish, although without melted butter the leaves are fairly bitter). I will also show several artichoke hearts. We'll discuss the difference between the fresh artichoke and the residual, soft heart. After reading Neruda's Ode aloud, I'll ask for volunteers to mention any metaphor in the poem. We'll think back to the fresh artichoke and think about what Neruda wants us to notice about the vegetable. I will introduce the question, "what does the author see and what does he want us to see?" And, "why would someone want to write an Ode to an artichoke?" Students will be encouraged to start writing in their unit journals about what they have learned so far.

Differentiated Instruction: Lower level readers can participate in the discussion to the extent of being able to describe the physical characteristics of an artichoke. All students will be reminded of the definition of a metaphor, and the difference between a metaphor and a simile. More advanced readers will be asked to comment on the style of the poem, how it is laid out, what they think Neruda intended by his "shopping list" style of writing. I will post vocabulary words in advance on word bank charts and we will discuss their meanings:

In Class Exercise: each student will write in his/her writing notebook about an ordinary food item which they can choose from the following: an orange, a banana, a raw or hard boiled egg, or a popsicle. Each of these items needs to be unwrapped before it can be eaten, and each has a soft heart. Students may write prose or

try poetry for this assignment.

Assessment: Mr. DeLucia and I will read these notebook entries and score at 0, 1, or 2, a rubric the students are familiar with as it is used for CMT writing. We will be looking for descriptive details, sentence structure, and metaphors or other imitations of Neruda's writing style. With the student's permission, we will post good examples on in-class bulletin board.

Detailed Lesson Plan Two: Week 2, Class B

Objective: to introduce students to a group of characters who have unique reactions to the same situation - the need to leave home and make some money. The characters seek their fortunes in different ways, and react to each other's findings with a variety of emotions. The youngest brother finds only shells, one of which turns out to have a magic ring inside. There are elements of the familiar in this story (Three Little Pigs, Jack and the Beanstalk, among others) and also the addition of magic in the form of a Turquoise Ring. We will expand vocabulary by using descriptive adjectives for the brothers and their adventures. The reading is "The Turquoise Ring", a Chilean folktale of unknown authorship from the folktale collection, The Emerald Lizard.

Activities and Discussion: After reading the tale aloud, I will ask for a synopsis of the story - what happened and in what order? What did each brother do? How did the brothers react to each other's fortune? What is special about the youngest brother, the "dreamer"? What additional adventures does he have? What would have happened if he hadn't found the ring? Should this be considered "earning a living"? What did the other brothers do with their money? What do the older brothers observe? The younger brother? What do we see in the story that could be considered positive? Negative? Together, we will make a chart for this synopsis and brainstorm about the qualities and characteristics of each brother.

In Class Exercise: Students will be given a handout and will be asked to fill in boxes about each brother and his qualities. They will also have a list of story events and be asked to order the main events in the story.

Differentiated Instruction: Adding to the work bank, we will consider several words from the text: turquoise, shimmering, invisible, escorted. Lower level readers will pair with more advanced readers to put the story pieces in the correct order. In circulating around the room during the in class exercise, we will ask students if their story pieces could be considered "main events" or less significant events.

Assessment: We will collect these handouts and assess on the 0, 1, 2 scale. For homework, students will be asked to write a paragraph describing a task they were given which was the same task that a sibling was given. In the paragraph they will be asked to describe which of them completed the task satisfactorily and why.

Detailed Lesson Plan Three: Week 4, Class B

Objective: To continue our discussion of powers of observation, chapters 4-8, The House on Mango Street, in this case Esperanza's vision of the world around her Chicago home. She considers Cathy, Rachel, Lucy and Gil the junk man who are outside her family, and tells us more about her relationship with her sister. As we see other characters come swirling through the story, we not only learn something about each of them, but we are also getting to know Esperanza and her special persona. She is an outsider, and an insider - what makes her part of each? Is she a hyphenated American? A Chicana? The focus of this lesson will be on how to take notes about the people while the chapters are being read aloud.

Activities and Discussion: From the chapters we will consider vocabulary: chandelier, raggedy, sassy, swan-neck, marimba. We will review what we already know about Esperanza and her family, where she comes from and where she is now. The students will already have a character chart so they can keep track of the different people Esperanza talks to and thinks about. How does Esperanza react to Cathy and her offer of friendship? How do they handle the sharing of the bike?

In Class Exercise: Each student will write a short paragraph about someone they know, someone they like or don't like, a friend or not, but not a family member. What do they observe about this person - has the person changed over the course of the relationship? How does the person treat the writer? The students will be encouraged to use recent vocabulary, and to use a simile about this person using some suggested character adjectives. At the end of the class some time will be set aside for journal entry writing with a focus on current observations.

Differentiated Instruction: Lower level readers will be given a hand out with prompts they can fill in as they do their paragraph writing. A suggested word bank will be on the bottom of the page. In circulating around the room, the teachers will make sure that these students have an accurate, useable character chart they can copy from as they think of someone they know. We will also check the notes they took during the chapter reading.

Assessment: The paragraphs will be collected and scored 0, 1, 2. The teachers will be looking for use of vocabulary and sentence structure. For homework, each student will be asked to pick one of the characters they have met so far in *The House on Mango Street* and write several paragraphs describing whether they would like to meet him/her and why. This assignment will also be evaluated on a 0, 1, 2 basis.

Part V: The Demographics of Truman's 7th Grade, 2009-2010; The 7th Grade Reading Curriculum

There will be about 66 students in this 7th grade class, divided into three sections: the majority have some Latino/a heritage. Truman School is a renovated K-8 school situated on the edge of the Hill neighborhood in New Haven. While it is not a magnet school, it is also not a neighborhood school; many students are bussed daily to Truman from other parts of the city. Reported scores on state mandated tests show that Truman students are not making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) which is a requirement for some state and federal funds under the No Child Left Behind educational program. Staff members and outside consultants have spent considerable time grappling with this lack of progress and trying to decide how to reverse the trend. I am hopeful that a program of Latin American literature will be of sufficient interest to this group of students to not only engage them in the actual reading material but also persuade them to participate in in-class exercises and homework devoted to grammar, vocabulary and independent writing and reading.

Each section of the 7th grade has a wide ability span in language arts which includes assessable skills for reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, conventions of writing, expository writing, persuasive writing and "free" writing which can be in journals as well a personal narratives. As a group, they have proficient oral language skills in English. Slightly less than one quarter of these students are officially identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) and are entitled to academic support from a certified Teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Many have been born in the United States, but continue to be classified

as ELL because they speak Spanish at home or because their language test scores are below average or both. I have worked one-on-one and in small groups with these students for the past two years. Because my primary focus at Truman has been with younger students, this will be the only direct teaching unit I will have with these students. I am pleased to be able to share the unit with Mr. Sal DeLucia, a certified seventh/eighth grade language arts teacher, entering his third year at Truman School. We will be teaching as a collaborative team, and he will continue with reading and writing exercises for this unit during the class periods I am not in his classroom.

The 7th grade reading curriculum is designed to address various strands of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). For example, Strand C calls for Reader/Text connections (connecting or associating the text with life outside the test). Strand C includes Objective C2 which asks students to select, synthesize and/or use relevant information within a written work to write a personal response to the text. Strand B calls for developing an interpretation: interpreting and/or explaining the text, and the accompanying Objective B2 asks students to draw conclusions about the author's purpose for choosing a genre or for including or omitting specific details in a text. Within the context of this curriculum unit which focuses on observations both of the outside world and observations about oneself, all of the readings will comply with CMT strands.

During each of the four sections of this unit, the two teachers will be asking students to appreciate character, settings, themes, and consider the author's background and purpose in writing. In addition, students will be asked to write their own reader/text connections following the format: "which part of the story was most interesting or surprising? Use information and details from the story to support your answer". We will encourage students to write their own poetry, short folktales, or biographical sketches while showing us what kinds of observations they can make about the world around them and about their own lives.

Part VI: Working Bibliography: For Teachers

1. A Companion to Latin American Literature and Culture. ed. Castro-Klaren, Sara. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2008.

Note: A comprehensive guide to the major Latin American authors.

2. A Companion to US Latino Literatures. eds. Caulfield, Carlotta and Davis, Darien J. Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Boydell & Brewer Ltd. 2007.

Note: A comprehensive guide to Latin American authors, most of whom live in the US.

3. Allende, Isabel. The Stories of Eva Luna. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company. 1989. Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. English edition copyright 1991.

Note: These stories are told as if Scheherazade were telling them to the King. While they are delightful, they are quite racy and I think not suitable for 7th graders.

4. Allende, Isabel. Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses. New York, NY. HarperCollins. 1998. Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden.

Note: A collection of recipes accompanied by erotic pictures. Again, I think not suitable for 7th graders.

5. Cai, Mingshui. *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 2002.

Note: While informative, this book is also very dry and says very little about Latin American literature. At the end there is a helpful appendix of websites and bibliography with primarily African and Asian listings.

6. Cockcroft, James. *Latinos in the Making of the United States: The Hispanic Experience in the Americas*. New York, NY: Franklin Watts. 1995.

Note: A good history of Hispanics in America, especially agricultural workers, union issues, and Latino Civil Rights issues. Includes pictures, extensive notes on each chapter, and a bibliography; however, it needs updating to the present.. The book was a helpful companion to *Esperanza Rising* and *Parrot in the Oven* (see Student Bibliography).

7. Gonzalez Echevarria, Roberto and Pupo-Walker, Enrique, eds. *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature, Vol. 2*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

Note: Comprehensive historical information on major authors and works of literature.

8. McDougall Littell. *The Language of Literature*. Boston, MA: The Houghton Mifflin Company. 2006.

Note: This is the current 7th grade Language Arts text for the New Haven (CT) Public Schools. While the curriculum is being changed for the 2009-2010 school year, the text book may remain in use. Works by Neruda and Cisneros are included in this text, along with many other multicultural authors. The book is densely packed with exercises and many suggestions for skill development. Seventh grade teachers that I have co-taught with are not excited about using it as a teaching tool because of this density. While this text is listed for teachers, it certainly should be accessible to students as well.

Working Bibliography: For Students

1. Alvarez, Julia. *¡Yo!*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 1997.

Note: This is the sequel to the very successful story, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, which tells the story of four daughters who move from the Dominican Republic to New York. In this book, their assimilation continues. One of the daughters, Yo, is a writer who does not hesitate to put her friends and family in her writing. Each chapter is told from the point of view of a different person who has a relationship to Yo and has an opinion about both Yo, and her writing. An appealing story, especially for those who have been uprooted from a Caribbean country and had difficulties becoming American.

2. Braun, Barbara. *A Weekend with Diego Rivera*. New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. 1994.

Note: An inspiring book for all ages about the painter, Diego Rivera. An autobiography, the book includes copies of Rivera's pictures, many in color.

3. Carlson, Lori M. and Ventura: *Where Angels Glide at Dawn: New Stories from Latin America*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Willard. 1990.

Note: A wonderful collection of stories written by authors from different countries. Some of these authors are quite prominent in the field of Latin American literature.

4. Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf. 1984.

Note: This book has 43 short chapters, each told from the viewpoint of Esperanza, a young Mexican-American who is growing up in the Latino section of Chicago. This unit will include the entire book; some parts will be chosen for this unit and the remainder will be read when Mr. DeLucia would like to schedule additional chapters. The prose is not overly complicated and would probably also be of interest to 5th and 6th graders as well. Older students could read the short chapters on their own.

5. DeSpain, Pleasant. *The Emerald Lizard: Fifteen Latin American Tales to Tell in English and Spanish*. Trans. Mario Lamo-Jiminez. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, Inc. 1999.

Note: Fifteen traditional tales (bilingual) from a variety of Latin America countries. These tales would amuse and delight all ages.

6. Esquivel, Laura. *Between Two Fires: Intimate Writings on Life, Love, Food & Flavor*. Trans. Stephen Lytle. New York, NY: Crown Publishing (Random House) 2001.

Note: Several of these musings are quite nice, though with not much depth. Esquivel's famous work, *Like Water for Chocolate* is a much denser story, but not appropriate for children or even junior high students. It was made into an award winning movie. Esquivel is not mentioned in the three literature companions listed in the Bibliography for Teachers.

7. Martinez, Victor. *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 1996.

Note: A novel told from the perspective of a young boy, Manny Hernandez, growing up in a Mexican-American household in California; each member of the family brings different problems to Manny's life and he must learn to make good choices. Good reading for adolescents, although too long for this unit.

8. McDougall Littell. *The Language of Literature*. Boston, MA: The Houghton Mifflin Company. 2006.

Note: This is the current 7th grade Language Arts text for the New Haven (CT) Public Schools. While the curriculum is being changed for the 2009-2010 school year, the text book may remain in use. Works by Neruda and Cisneros are included in this text, along with many other multicultural authors. The book is densely packed with exercises and many suggestions for skill development. Because there are many entries by Latin American writers, students could get ideas for supplemental reading. Students may also want to practice their writing and reading skills using the many exercises throughout the book.

9. Nye, Naomi Shihab. *The Tree is Older Than You Are: A Bilingual Gathering of Poems & Stories from Mexico*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. 1995.

Note: A bilingual (names of translators are given with each entry) gathering of stories and poems (including Octavio Paz) from Mexico with many reproductions of Mexican paintings throughout. A lovely book for all ages.

10. Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc. 2000.

Note: A novel about a young girl and her mother who move to California from affluent circumstances in Mexico. The story of their newly difficult life takes place during strikes by agricultural workers in the early years of the Depression. Semi-autobiographical, the details are factual and often poignant. Somewhat too long for this curriculum unit. Would probably be enjoyed by 7th grade girls and by those students who have come to New Haven from Mexico as children.

Internet Listings Used for this Unit: For Teachers and Students

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_American_Literature. 5/4/09
2. <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/exhibits/friends/latin.html>. 5/4/09
3. http://nobelprize.org/cgi-bin/print_5/23/09
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Isabel_Allende 5/23/09
5. www.PoemHunter.com
6. http://famouspoetsand_poems.com/poets/Pablo_neruda/poems/15733
5/24/2009
7. <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/neruda.htm> 5/10/2009

[Note: Because I had a good deal of information about authors, Latin American literature and historical background from other sources, I did not feel compelled to make extensive use of internet resources. The major authors cited in this curriculum unit (Neruda, Paz, Allende, and Cisneros especially) have a wide range of internet materials available for teachers and students as well as links to the major works of literature by these authors.]

Classroom Materials

1. Students will need copies of the following works of literature for this curriculum unit:

"Ode to an Artichoke", Pablo Neruda

"Fleas Interest Me So Much", Pablo Neruda

"The Word", Pablo Neruda

"Vision", Octavio Paz

"Water Night", Octavio Paz

"At the Hearth", from *Between Two Fires*, Laura Esquivel (trans. Lytle)

"The Torquoise Ring", from *The Emerald Lizard*

"Paletón and the Musical Elephant", from *Where Angels Glide at Dawn*

"Five Eggs", from *The Emerald Lizard*

"Juan Bobo", from *The Emerald Lizard*

The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

2. A sampling of additional writings by these and other Latin American authors for students to read as they design their final project.

3. A world map so that students can learn the geographic locations of the authors in this unit.
4. Students will need a writing notebook for daily writing practice and a separate notebook of some kind to be used as a journal for this unit and others during the year.
5. Teachers will be responsible for creating daily handouts which will include assignments, practice with metaphors and similes, character analysis exercises, scoring rubrics, and final project guidelines.

Part VII: Appendix: TESOL Standards and Differentiated Instruction

The National TESOL Association has issued its own objectives for Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (New Haven has adopted the more inclusive category of ELLs for this subgroup of students). These standards are for grades PreK-12, with an overall objective of English language proficiency. With certain exceptions, all ELL students take the CMT tests and need to show progress. For grade 7, students are expected to attain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Standard 1 requires that "ELLs communicate for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes within the school setting". Standard 2 requires that "ELLs communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of Language Arts".

Teaching ELLs is part of a spectrum of teaching challenges that run from Talented and Gifted to Special Education within the heterogeneous, "mainstream", peer-related classroom. Differentiated Instruction means different things to different teachers: while I have chosen the readings for this unit, Mr. DeLucia may supplement or delete readings and assignments for various students according to his needs for differentiated instruction. This curriculum unit will probably be offered during the end of the first school quarter, before Thanksgiving, giving Mr. DeLucia time to assess his students and determine ways of grouping students appropriately for reading and writing exercises. All students will hear the poems and stories read aloud during class, and all students, except for those with special education limitations, will be assigned in-class reading and writing and additional homework. Modifications for individual students will be incorporated into various lessons, as needed. These modifications will include word banks, repetitions of key phrases, and class handouts with reinforced practice exercises. We will also have students work in predetermined groups so that stronger students have an opportunity to "teach" others in their group; in some cases the group members will be responsible for arriving at answers to questions and will receive a group grade.

Assessing student achievement is a continuous process for teachers and especially significant for Truman School because it is considered a Tier Three (low performance) school. Beginning in the fall semester, 2009, Truman teachers will be required to participate in the Common Formative Assessment program which ties academic objectives with student proficiency. Mr. DeLucia and I have already started to discuss how we would like to assess student performance within this curriculum unit. In addition to the reading and writing assignments within each section, we think the students should read on their own at least one poem or folktale written by an author or similar to those we are studying. We will also require students to keep a continuous journal that will be read by the teachers, but not by other students without the writer's permission. We will have a bulletin board showcasing student writings during this unit; if the writings show sufficient merit, we will assemble them as a unit booklet for the class as a whole to enjoy and share with administrators and other teachers.

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