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Epic Poetry in Spanish Lessons: Cantar de Mio Cid

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Introduction

Living in a world where our lives revolve around gadgets, it is always challenging to select texts and excerpts for units to successfully engage high school students. It is even harder to make students engage with classic literature. What is more, the language of instruction might not even be their dominant language in the case of bilingual students. As teachers we constantly face some, if not all of these challenges when devising curricular planning. Thus, this unit is aimed at making epic poems known, understood and appealing to high school students as well as showing the didactic possibilities epic poems have to offer in the Spanish language classes to contribute to the development of linguistic structures while the students enjoy the reading of these stories.

In this line, the students for whom this unit is designed (high school or native and heritage Spanish speakers or given the case, high school level IV non-native students). They will be working with a didactic strategy that involves the development of thinking and improves their writing, reading and oral communication skills by using a poem from the Middle Ages as well as its adapted version (El Poema de Mio Cid) and learning vocabulary that makes them increase their knowledge in this field.

Rationale

The core of this unit will be centered on the epic poem *El Cantar de Mio Cid*. In this line, students will get to know more about Spanish literature - specifically about epic poetry or *Cantar de Gesta* "song of heroic deeds" -. This unit will focus on the deeds of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid Campeador, a famous warrior who lived in the 11th century and whose accomplishments led to a number of historical accounts, legends, and myths that were passed down orally. El Cid is the medieval character with the greatest cultural relevance nowadays (Peña Pérez, 2018). Still, it is important to highlight the lack of historical consistency in the story, as the Poem of Mio Cid is fictional, even though there was in fact a Mio Cid who became a legend after his death.

Additionally, students will be able to relate to the story as El Cid unfolds in a territory where two different

cultures coexist, which is pertinent in the current multicultural society in the United States. Not to mention how this coexistence mirrors their own experiences, as they or their ancestors came from a Hispanic background to the United States and encountered a new life surrounded by different cultures.

Classroom Context

Students participating in this unit are 10th, 11th and 12th graders enrolled in Spanish NHS-2, that is, Spanish for native and heritage students at James Hillhouse High School, in New Haven, Connecticut. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), more than 50 % of the students attending this school are Black, Latino and/or Native American, and more than 50% come from low-income households. As a result of students coming from a variety of backgrounds, in the classroom there is a mixture of ethnicities, economic strata, different levels of background knowledge and experiences. This unit has been devised according to the features of this student population, as every unit should cater for the specific needs of the students it is aimed at.

In this school, Spanish lessons and events play an important role, as they are widely offered in the curriculum so that students can continue learning the language throughout their high school years as well as to be part of the Spanish Honor Society and to obtain the Seal of Biliteracy upon Graduation with the language combination English Spanish (CSDE, 2024)

[1] . Also, the Hispanic Heritage Month is widely recognized and celebrated by New Haven Public Schools[2] , highlighting the student voices and allowing students to participate in the celebrations.

Most of the students enrolled in NHS-2 were born in a Spanish-speaking country and moved to the United States either recently or a few years ago. In addition, there are the students who were either born in the US or moved here at an early age, the heritage learners, which could be divided into two categories: the students who speak Spanish at home and with some members of the community, would be considered bilingual speakers. On the other hand, there is a minority of students who have been less exposed to the language and usually only understand Spanish but do not speak it as fluently as they speak English, so they feel more comfortable with English. All in all, we will be working with students who have knowledge of both Spanish and English at different levels. Therefore, given the homogeneity of the group, different resources and scaffolding will be provided to cater for diversity.

Prior to this unit, the students will either have some knowledge of Hispanic literature if they have attended Elementary and Middle School in either their origin countries or in a school with a bilingual curriculum. Otherwise, it is expected that most of the students do not have any prior knowledge of Hispanic literature. To better assess the students' background knowledge, they will be given a survey at the beginning of the unit. Therefore, to cater for diversity, students will be working in groups where the members have different skills that complement each other's learning styles.

Unit Objectives

This unit will address several Standards for Foreign Language Learning, specifically American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL World Readiness Standards 1.2 "Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics" and 2.2 that states that "Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied" which could be in terms of products of the target culture like a piece of literature, an oral tale. Whatever the form of the product, it will be presented and studied in the context of the perspectives, values and beliefs of the target culture (ACTFL World Readiness Standards). In addition, this unit follows the standards of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) and native and heritage students are expected to reach level 4 (Intermediate High) and some students even level 5 (Advanced Low). In case of non-native speakers, the expected level to reach would be level 3 (Intermediate Mid)[3] .

The main objective of this unit is to provide students with some foundational knowledge of Hispanic literature, focusing on epic poetry and some in-depth knowledge of one of the historical canons in Spanish literature, El Poema de mio Cid or El Cantar de mio Cid (The Poem of the Cid) in addition to some historical background while working with El Cantar del Cerco de Zamora. El Cid can be worked in terms of historical context, legend and linguistics. First, there is the relevance of the coexistence of different cultures in a specific time in the past, being the historical and geographical context of this poem Al-Andalus, the Muslim-ruled area of the Iberian Peninsula between 711 and 1492. Also, geography will be relevant due to the Muslim influence on some parts of Spain -in terms of the language, Moorish architecture (like the UNESCO World Heritage Site Alhambra) and remnant traditions.

These objectives will be achieved through the methodology explained below and the resources provided at the end of this unit. They are classified into three categories: readings for teachers, material list for students and the resources used in class.

Teaching Strategies

In order for students to work successfully with the story, we will focus on the adapted version for teenagers and young adults *Cantar de Mio Cid. Versión modernizada by* Buque de letras (2022). In addition, some previous context will be provided by studying El Cantar del Cerco de Zamora, which provides the historical background of the events that led up to the exile of our hero.

This unit will start with an individual survey to assess previous knowledge, followed by a whole-class activity with some introductory questions for the students to assess their previous knowledge about Hispanic literature. The results of the survey will determine the depth of the contents to be taught throughout the unit. Some examples of these questions are the following:

- ¿Qué es la epopeya? (What is an epic poem?)
- ¿Qué relatos épicos conoces? (What epic poems do you know?)
- ¿Qué representan? (What do they represent?)

- ¿Conoces Don Quijote? (Do you know Don Quixote?)
- ¿Conoces El Cid? (Do you know El Cid?)

The brainstorming will be supported by the display of images on a PowerPoint presentation. We will then move on to work with the adapted version of the book.

Once students are familiarized with the context of the poem, we can start comparing some excerpts of the adaptation to the original work which will be followed by reflecting on the difference between both versions and how the language, the story and the characters might change depending on how the adaptation is done. In addition, the reading of the poem will open some debate, like the meaning of honor, so that students can be given the opportunity to relate to their own experiences.

Considering the structure of the curriculum, this unit will take place in the fourth quarter of the school year, devoted to unit 4 "Literature of the Culture" and it will require the entire quarter. The number of sessions devised for this unit will be 13, but it might require some more depending on the students' learning paces. In our school there is a block schedule, so lessons last for 80 minutes. By the end of this unit, students will have gained a better understanding of Hispanic literature, cultures, values, beliefs and behaviors; they will have learnt how to read, understand and analyze epic poems which will broaden their horizons and will, hopefully, make them keener on reading literary classics in the future. To achieve this, for this unit development and assessment strategies Gardner's multiple intelligences theory will be considered, so that students will be presented with learning materials in multiple formats in order to compensate for their weaknesses and reinforce their strengths in the different intelligences. This will help educators facilitate students' learning to reinforce their mastery of the content (Gardner, 2011)[4] . In this line, students will be presented with a range of meaningful methods, activities and assessments, such as videos, pictures, audiobooks, comic design, dramatization, debates, essay writing, questions on an individual, pair and whole class level[5] . In this line, the lessons will include as far as possible the M.A.G.I.C. strategies to engage students (M meaning the inclusion of movement, music and manipulatives; A meaning the authentic materials; G meaning gaming and guessing; I meaning interactions in pairs or groups; C meaning chunking and challenges) (NHPS World Languages)[6] .

Even though this curriculum unit is designed for native and heritage students, it could be adapted for non-native speakers in Spanish IV (students who have been learning Spanish for at least 4 years), as this level shares the same curriculum as NHS-2. However, some changes should be made, instead of contrasting the adapted version with the original poem, the comparison could be done with literature and a film adaptation in order to analyze fidelity and accuracy depending on the channel of communication. The film we will analyze is El Cid: La Leyenda (El Cid: The Leyend), version of 2003 directed by the Spanish filmmaker José Pozo. Another possible combination would be contrasting the adapted version with the graphic novel Cantar de mio Cid, Novela gráfica from the year 2014.

Finally, the final group project of this unit will be the design of a comic of different fragments of *Cantar de Mio Cid* and its dramatization in class. As for the individual work, this unit prioritizes the knowledge about the poem in the final paper as well as the assignments to be completed throughout the whole unit.

Classroom Activities and Lesson Plans

Session 1

The unit will start with a pre-assessment using the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) strategy which allows students to think first for themselves, discuss their thoughts with a partner and share and discuss with the whole class[7] . Thanks to this strategy students have time to ponder on the answers, allowing a learning environment that fosters high-quality answers[8] . With the TPS strategy students work cooperatively towards a common goal while they increase their understanding in an environment where it is safe to make mistakes[9] .

First, students will take an individual survey to assess their previous knowledge about literature. This activity will be a Gimkit[10] questionnaire with multiple-choice questions about literature: authors, tales, literary genres, titles of books, poems, pictures of literary characters, monuments that will be relevant for this unit and famous quotes. Gimkit creates a report with the students' results as well as with the percentages of the questions that were answered correctly. This will allow the teacher to find out which contents students are more familiar with, and which contents need to be further explored in class.

Secondly, after the individual approach to the content, students will have acquired some knowledge and concepts about highlights of Hispanic literature of the 15th and 16th centuries, and they will then pair up with a classmate to answer some open-ended questions that appeared in the Gimkit:

- ¿Qué es la epopeya? (What is an epic?)
- ¿Qué es un juglar? (What is a jungleur/minstrel/troubadour?)
- ¿Qué es un cantar de gesta? (What is a song of heroic deeds?)
- ¿Qué relatos épicos conoces? (What epic poems do you know?)
- ¿Qué representan? (What do they represent?)
- ¿Conoces Don Quijote? (Do you know Don Quixote?)
- ¿Quién escribió 'Don Quijote de la Mancha'? (Who wrote 'Don Quixote'?)
- ¿Quién fue El Cid? (Who was El Cid?)
- ¿Quién escribió El Poema de mio Cid? (Who wrote the Poem of mio Cid?)
- ¿Qué sabes de La Celestina? (What do you know about La Celestina?)
- ¿Quién fue Francisco de Quevedo? (Who was Francisco de Quevedo?)
- ¿Quién fue Luis de Góngora? (Who was Luis de Góngora?)
- ¿Quién escribió "La Coronación del Marqués de Santillana"? (Who wrote "La Coronación del Marqués de Santillana"?)

After the pair work, students will share their answers with the whole class by using the interactive presentation software Mentimeter[11] , so that their answers can appear anonymously on the screen and students can participate actively without fearing making mistakes. This will provide feedback for the teacher, and it is an entertaining way of checking what they have learnt during the lesson.

Session 2

This session will give some insight into the historical context that led to the characteristics of medieval Spain. The first video[12] shows how the Muslims came to rule most of the Iberian Peninsula and how they defeated the Visigoths. The second video[13] focuses on the Reconquista or the reconquest of Al-Andalus, the series of

campaigns led by Christian states to recover the territories from the Muslims (Moors), who had occupied most of medieval Spain and Portugal since the early 8th century[14] .

Students will be given some maps[15] dating different periods of the Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula between the 8th and 15th centuries. While watching the video, they will have to locate some important names of cities that are relevant in the poem as well as to identify the correct dates to each map. In this session the students will be assessed on their knowledge of Al-Andalus in terms of geographical limits, timelines, historical facts, etc.

Session 3

This session will be focused on the architecture relevant to the time period studied in the previous class. Students will be shown pictures of Muslim monuments and constructions that still can be found in Spain[16] . As this is a research activity, they will need their Chromebooks and they will be given some websites to find the information about the monuments and constructions. They will need to identify the name of the construction, its function at the time and the dates when it was built. This exercise will help them reinforce the contents from previous lessons and will trigger curiosity about traveling to Spain and visit these monuments.

Session 4

This session will deal with El Cantar del Cerco de Zamora for context. Students will watch the video "Historia de León. El Cerco de Zamora"[17] to gain some insight into the context of the exile of El Cid.

Afterwards, students will be given an article that explains the reasons that lead to the exile of El Cid[18] . The article will be divided into four parts and students in groups will become the "experts" of each part of the article. Then, using the cooperative learning strategy *jigsaw*, students will be assigned a number and will become part of a different group with experts of the other parts of the article. Then, they will have to listen to their classmates explain their parts and complete the worksheet with the headings of the four parts of the article they were given at the beginning of the activity. The four parts of the article and the headings to be completed in their worksheets are:

- Fiel servidor de Sancho II (loyal servant of Sancho II)
- Vasallo del rey Alfonso (Vassal of king Alfonso)
- El primer destierro (the first exile)
- La segunda expulsión (the second expulsion)

Students will be assessed upon completion of the worksheet and their participation in the *jigsaw* activity.

Session 5

Students will read the poem "Castilla" by Andalusian poet Manuel Machado[19] . The poem focuses on the first moments when El Cid is exiled and denied help. Students will read the poem in pairs and discuss its meaning. To do so, they will be shown some questions on the Whiteboard to make them think:

- ¿Por qué nadie le ayuda a El Cid? (Why can't people help El Cid?)
- ¿Qué quiere decir el verso *¡En nuestro mal, oh Cid, no ganáis nada!*? (What does *¡En nuestro mal, oh Cid, no ganáis nada!* mean?)

After having analysed the poem with the whole group, students will start the reading of the first part of the poem, "Cantar Primero" that deals with the first moments the hero is in exile. They will be given the choice of reading it individually or with a partner.

Adaptation: for students whose reading level is not high enough, they will listen to the audiobook version[20] .

Session 6

Students will be given time to finish reading "Cantar Primero". They will be given again the choice of reading individually or with a partner. Then, they will be given fragments of the original poem and match them with the modernized translation in order to compare the evolution of the language.

Session 7

Students will read the second part of the poem, "Cantar Segundo". Once again, they will be given the choice of reading individually or with a partner.

Adaptation: for students whose reading level is not high enough, they will listen to the audiobook version[21] .

Session 8

With the cooperative strategy of think-pair-share, students will brainstorm what they remember about the poem so far, the highlights and the details. Then, the class will be divided into several groups to start a debate on some controversial questions related to the poem:

- ¿Qué ocurriría si un amigo te traicionara? ¿Le perdonarías? (What would happen if a friend betrayed you? Would you forgive them?)
- ¿Le negarías la ayuda a alguien que lo necesite incluso aunque ayudarle suponga un castigo para ti? (Would you deny help to someone who is in need even if helping them means a punishment for you?)
- Si alguien hiciera daño a un ser querido, ¿cuál sería tu reacción? (if someone hurt a loved-one, what would your reaction be like?)
- ¿Qué opinas de la coexistencia de distintas culturas en New Haven? ¿Cómo crees que era la coexistencia de diferentes culturas en la Península Ibérica entre los siglos VIII y XV? (What do you think of the coexistence of different cultures in New Haven? How do you think it used to be like in the Iberian Peninsula between the 8th and 15th centuries?)

In addition, students will be given expressions to enrich their debating skills as well as key vocabulary words they might not use on a regular basis, such as *liderazgo, agravio, promesa, conspiración, injuria, escrúpulos, traición, sospecha,* etc. (leadership, grievance, promise, conspiracy, insult, scruple, treason, suspicion, etc.)

Adaptation: some students may work on a glossary with these expressions included a sentence related to the poem for context.

Students will practice these questions in groups and will be assessed on their participation and the use of relevant vocabulary learnt throughout the lesson.

Session 9

Students will read "Cantar Tercero". They will be given the choice of reading individually or with a partner.

Adaptation: for students whose reading level is not high enough, they will listen to the audiobook version[22] .

Session 10

In this lesson, students will be asked to go on a gallery walk around the classroom. Scenes of the poem[23] will be posted around the classroom and students in groups will have to guess in which Cantar this picture could be represented and describe what scene the pictures portray.

The gallery walk will be the warming-up activity for the next activity focused on writing and which will be done on Padlet. Students will have to search on the web and find some interesting facts about El Cid and the legacy of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula -in terms of language, expressions, traditions, architecture, etc-. Then, they will share it with the rest of the class on a Padlet. They will be asked to include pictures and the sources where they found the information, so as to show students the importance of quotes and bibliography. The aim of this activity is to foster curiosity and incidental learning.

Finally, students will review the contents of the poem by answering flashcards questions on Quizlet[24] . Their results will determine whether further review (and therefore extra sessions) is necessary.

Session 11

Students will be shown the graphic novel version of El Cantar del Mio Cid[25] to obtain some ideas for their next assignment: Students will choose one of the three "cantares" of El Cid and design a comic with the most interesting part of the story. In addition, they will be shown some examples of Storyboard That[26] . The assignment will be posted on Google Classroom.

Session 12

This unit will focus on dramatization. Students will represent the scenes portrayed in the comics in front of the class.

Adaptation: for those students with a different learning style, a presentation of their comic and the explanation of their work will be required instead.

Session 13

In this session there will be some personal thinking about the legend and the history around El Cid. Students will watch the statements by emeritus professor of Medieval History of the University of Burgos, Javier Peña Pérez[27] . Then, they will write a 200-word essay summarizing the professor's statements and giving their opinion on the question:

El Cid: ¿mito y leyenda o historia? (El Cid: Myth and legend or history?)

Adaptation: some students might need further scaffolding, a different question for their essay and/or a lower word count. Example of an alternative question: *"¿Qué cantar te ha gustado más? Justifica tu respuesta"* *(Which cantar did you like the most? Justify your answer).*

Students will be assessed with a rubric that will highlight the linguistic skills as well as the knowledge acquired throughout the unit on the epic poem.

Conclusion

This unit prepares students to face and understand the reading of an epic poem. Students will learn to analyze a text while interpreting images, listening to podcasts and videos and learning about history and culture. All in all, I believe that the work with this epic poem will lead to fundamental knowledge about the history of Spain and will make students enjoy reading epic poems as they will have gained insight in how to work with them throughout this unit. Hopefully, while working this didactic unit the students will feel more comfortable when reading in Spanish too and they will be more interested in finding out more about Spanish-speaking countries.

Teacher Resources

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

When teaching World Languages, the District Standards are based on the ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. These standards focus mainly on effective communication, cultural interaction, connections to other disciplines, comparing the nature of language and interaction with other communities around the world. This unit includes a little bit of all these key aspects as students will be interacting and presenting their work in Spanish, they will become more aware of the nature of the Spanish culture. Students will also learn about historical and geographical data that is relevant when reading *El Poema de Mio Cid*, they will transfer the values of the poem to their own experience with questions and debates. Finally, they will widen their vocabulary with new words that appear in the poem. All in all, students are expected to broaden their horizons when working this unit.

The standards on which this unit is based on are:

1.2 "Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics".

As far as written language is concerned, students will work with excerpts from the poem to interpret its meaning and will write an essay at the end of the unit summarizing and giving their opinion. The spoken language skills will be worked through debates and questions relating to their own experience. In addition, they will watch videos on historical and cultural background information that will require their interpretation as well.

2.2 "Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied".

Students will write a final essay giving their opinion about a fundamental question worked throughout this unit (*El Cid: Myth and legend or history?*). In this essay they will have to include all the perspectives they have been studying throughout the unit to show their understanding.

Resources to be used in class

Session 3

Identifica las siguientes construcciones andalusíes y completa la siguiente información de la tabla

[28] . Puedes usar las siguientes páginas web para ayudarte en tu búsqueda:

Mezquita de Almonaster La Real de Huelva	La Mezquita de Córdoba	La Torre del Oro de Sevilla
La Alhambra de Granada	Los Reales Alcázares de Sevilla	Baños árabes de Ronda, Málaga
Medina Azahara en Córdoba	La Giralda de Sevilla	Palacio de la Aljafería de Zaragoza
La Alcazaba de Almería	La Alcazaba de Málaga	Castillo de Gormaz en Soria

Construcción andalusí (pictures)	Nombre	¿Qué es? ¿Cuál era su función?	Fechas de su construcción

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