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An Analysis of “The Oxcart” by René Marqués, Puerto Rican Playwright

Curriculum Unit 82.05.04
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The purpose of this unit will be to introduce teachers and students to the English translation (by Charles Pilditch) of “La Carreta” “The Oxcart” an outstanding example of the literary genius of René Marqués, one of Puerto Rico’s foremost contemporary playwrights. A Puerto Rican family’s transition from a small, rural area to a San Juan slum and eventually to a barrio of New York City and the inherent conflicts of such a shift is portrayed in a straightforward manner and in simple language suitable for both on-grade-level students grades 6-12 and below-average readers. The theme is uniquely Puerto Rican, but has universal appeal and is therefore suggested for both English-speaking/reading Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican students alike.

Biographical data and theatre techniques for staging, coupled with the historical, sociological, psychological, economic, and political background of the play will be developed in this unit. It can therefore be utilized not only by sixth grade self-contained and middle and high school literature classes but by drama, social studies, and history classes as well. Certainly the original Spanish text can be used for Spanish-language and bilingual Spanish-English classes and this unit translated accordingly. My direct experience has been with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Puerto Rican E.S.O.L. (English to Speakers of Other Languages) pull-out classes whose reading level is usually far below grade. A preliminary reading this year of selections from “The Oxcart” with some of my classes has inspired me to choose this play above others for an in-depth analysis in the future. It was very readable for my students and therefore well-received and stimulating for them. The episodic, serial quality of the writing served to kindle their curiosity as to the eventual outcome of the characters, some of whom draw close parallels to their own lives.

There are many possible approaches to the logistics of the readings; two suggestions follow. The first would divide the play over a ten-week span in which 2 out of 5, 45-minute periods per week, are dedicated to preparation and production of the play. The second would permit a daily reading of one period a day. Thus the play would be completed in 20 consecutive days, or 4 full weeks of classes. Whichever the teacher decides, I feel that continuity is very important to maintain the students’ interest and that the work-in-progress should be relatively short-term in order to keep the momentum going.

Technically, it can be a staged reading in which the student actors (who have previewed the entire play for homework) use their scripts on stage for reading their assigned roles and will walk through the action. The play is in 3 acts and covers approximately 150 pages; therefore, for my particular students, a fully-staged, memorized version before a live audience is not feasible, although a drama class would certainly be able to

perform the entire play. For my purposes, selected scenes could be produced in front of a group with a narrator intervening to fill in the synopsis of the other scenes.

The technical language used in the stage directions is advanced for my students, and therefore I would take on the role of director/ narrator. An advanced English or drama class could have a student in this capacity. I feel that all other technical aspects of the play can be handled by the students with sufficient teacher support and supervision. In my classes, which are relatively small due to the nature of E.S.O.L. instruction, students would perform the dual role of actor and technician. Larger classes can have a technical component separate from the dramatic one, thus insuring a shared experience among all members of the class.

Through the entire process, from the initial background information and stage preparation to the final “curtain”, I feel that a professional attitude can be stressed by the teacher so that the experience for students is both enjoyable and serious in its implications for language development. The cultural data and the preparatory technical aspects are as important as the actual play itself and help set the stage. Students can be made aware of the fact that this advance preparation is part of the professional training of their favorite movie and television stars as they get into their roles. Once the play is in production, students often become impatient with repeating scenes which need polishing and must be informed that this too is a part of the process of all professional performances. Students will begin to see the development of the action as a response to the printed page. There is a built-in incentive to read once they realize that their movie idols start out in much the same manner and that the simple fact is that actors must be able to read well. I have seen many otherwise bored students come alive once I have explained this professional process and they begin to read their parts. They eventually understand that the beginning of any acting career is the printed page and that the infusion of the written word with emotion and meaning is the basis of dramatic communication.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

René Marqués was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico (on the north coast of the island) on October 4, 1919. Both sides of his family were from small, agricultural societies and Marqués grew up with a strong love of the land a theme which appears frequently in his writings. “The Oxcart” itself pleads for a return to the “land which gives life” ¹ as opposed to the false values of a mechanized society which can only degrade and destroy an individual and rob him/her of dignity. Thus he joins his fellow Latin American contemporary writers by reflecting the “Beatus Ille” theme, as, for example, in Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps* .

Marqués spent his early years in the home of his maternal grandparents where a relative, his aunt, Do-a Padrina Padilla de Sanz, fostered in René another supreme value—love of liberty. She was a poetess, writer, and pianist, and most importantly, an ardent defender of Puerto Rico’s independence and of women’s rights, producing many articles on political and feminist issues. Marqués studied agronomy at the College of Agriculture in Mayaguez, earning a degree in 1942 and worked for 2 years in the Department of Agriculture. He became increasingly interested in literature, a career which he pursued in Spain, where in 1946 he studied classical and contemporary Spanish theatre at the University of Madrid.

His year in Madrid produced his “Chronicles from Spain” and his first two dramas, “Man and His Dreams” in 1946 and “The Sun and the MacDonalds” the following year. He returned to Puerto Rico where he founded “Pro Arte de Arecibo” and wrote literary criticism and reviews for the journal “Asomante” and for “El Diario de Puerto Rico”. Marqués was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1949 to study playwriting at

Columbia University, where he observed first hand the consequences of the Puerto Rican migration to New York City. He then returned to Puerto Rico, where he plunged into a period of intense literary involvement. His output of dramas, short stories, and novels at this stage was prolific and it was during this time that he wrote “The Oxcart” in 1951, having lived for 3 months with the family upon which he based the play.

His works were staged in Puerto Rico, New York City, Chicago and Madrid. In 1957, “The Oxcart” became the first modern Puerto Rican play to be presented in Europe when it was produced by a Spanish theatre company at the Mar’a Guerrero National Theatre Company in Madrid. In May, 1961, it was seen as part of the fourth annual Puerto Rican Theatre Festival at the Tapia Theatre in San Juan and was successfully revived at that theatre in 1967.

“The Oxcart” received its New York exposure at the Greenwich Mews Theatre where it opened on December 19, 1966 and became the fifth longest running play of those which opened off-Broadway during that season. In August, 1967, under the auspices of Mayor John Lindsay’s Summer Task Force, “The Oxcart” was revived by the newly created Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. Free outdoor performances were given at various parks and playgrounds throughout New York City. His work received recognition in his receipt of four Ateneo prizes for achievement in the genres of short story, drama, novel, and essay the only Puerto Rican author to win simultaneously four first prizes.

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The above areas provide the setting for “The Oxcart” and an understanding of these forces is necessary for a deeper insight into the play. The four centuries of Spanish colonial rule which dominated Puerto Rico, although never specifically mentioned in the play, form the background upon which it is structured. Spain’s stronghold was broken when the United States stepped in as a result of the War of 1898. Although the Jones Act of 1917 granted U.S. citizenship to the islanders, the first local government based on a popular election of their chief executive was not in effect until 1947.

This colonialist mentality is believed by Marqués to be the most pervasive characteristic of the Puerto Rican population, leading to the docility and submissiveness experienced by the majority of the characters in “The Oxcart”. The playwright believes that colonialization has led to a gradual erosion of Puerto Rican culture and a slow but persistent destruction of their sense of identity. According to Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of Puerto Rico’s Nationalist Party, the essential goal of any colonial regime is the cultural assimilation of the colonized people. ² And Franz Fanon follows this reasoning by stating that colonialism creates in the minds of the colonized people a sense of inferiority, a feeling of impotence and self-destruction, and a desire to negate themselves by becoming more like the colonialist. Thus aggressiveness takes the form of internal aggressiveness against one’s own group and leads to the typical responses of colonialization—submission, not liberation, assimilation, not the struggle for identity. ³

The reasons for the family’s migration in “The Oxcart” are economic and historical. One time landowners and coffee growers, the family was reduced to poverty by the decline of interest in coffee cultivation and the imposition of the sugar cane monoculture. By 1940, even the sugar cane producers could not cope with mechanized beet and sugar cane from other areas (continental states and duty-free offshore areas like Hawaii and the Phillipines) and the relatively high production costs. Do-a Gabriela’s husband could not get used to

the new crop: “He never understood sugar cane. He didn’t like it”.⁴ The Commonwealth government fostered the mass migration of unemployed farm workers as an “escape valve” to help ease the pressures of population growth. The current migration is among those age groups whose economic productivity is greatest—15 to 19 years old—in order to ease the acute unemployment problem in Puerto Rico.

The Commonwealth status, according to Marqués, creates a cultural schizophrenia in which neither statehood nor independence is enjoyed and the characters of “The Oxcart” are therefore alienated and insecure. The islanders, although citizens, cannot vote in Presidential elections and the resident commissioner, who represents Puerto Rico in the U.S. Congress, has a voice, but no vote. On the other hand, Puerto Ricans are subject to obligatory military service in the U.S. armed forces.

The increasing industrialization of the island by the U.S. since the 1940’s is seen as a negative influence by Marqués, an ardent believer in the independence movement. He is vehemently opposed to the transformation by U.S. dollars of Puerto Rico into a complex industrial system. Marqués sees the islanders’ willingness to accept the increased material gains that ensue as a result of this productivity as a loss of their human values. Many Puerto Ricans, now dependent on the U.S. for their physical well-being, are hesitant to cut the umbilical cord. Marqués feels that a feeling of impotence is produced. He sees this fostering of material, egotistical needs over more spiritual ones as a “sellout” of a national identity for economic gain, and it is this return to the source of Puerto Rican identity—the land—which provides the element of conflict in “The Oxcart”. The assimilation and dissolution into American society in which greed for power and money dominates the scene is used by Marqués as the point of departure from which to show the dangers of an almost Chaplinesque “Modern Times”.

A socio/psychological understanding of Puerto Rican culture is imperative to a deeper look into the play. The shift in the role of the Puerto Rican child from the customary responses on the island to the example set by their American peers is one example of cultural differences and is seen in the play particularly in the character of Luis. The American child, encouraged to ask “why”, to be self-reliant, aggressive, competitive and independent, is not the ideal fostered by Puerto Rican parents, in whose culture the family as a strong interdependent unit is the norm. The delinquency of Luis in the play can be seen as a rebellion against the excessive confinement imposed upon him in an effort to protect him from these forces.

The role of the Puerto Rican girl idealized in her culture as a virgin until marriage is confronted in the play in the character of Juanita. She rebels against this image, turning to the street and prostitution, thus undermining the family’s traditional esteem and prestige in the community. This tension between parents and daughters is one of the most difficult for Puerto Rican families to manage once they settle on the mainland, since the freedom encouraged by the American system of child rearing is considered immoral by Puerto Rican standards.

Three kinds of adjustment are seen by sociologists as a response by the new group in the context of a larger society and each of these reactions is personified in the play through specific characters. The first adjustment is escape from the parent group in which a person becomes as much like members of the established community as possible in the shortest amount of time. The role of Luis illustrates this response in “The Oxcart” as he encourages the family to uproot from the land and disassociate itself from the past. He thus changes his reference group and puts himself in the position of being marginal, with no assurances that he will be accepted by the larger community. He finds himself in a no-man’s land of culture where he and his family are vulnerable to the dangers of personal frustration. His grandfather, Don Chago, on the other hand, characterizes the second type of adjustment cited by sociologists, that of complete withdrawal into the old

culture, and an uncompromising resistance to the new. He will not go along with the family's decision to seek a "better" life in the city and chooses to retain his old identity. The third response—that of building a cultural "bridge"—is seen in the character of the disc jockey, Paco, who has made it in New York. He is confident and secure in his Puerto Rican culture and seeks to establish himself in the dominant society, continuing to identify himself with his forebears.

CHARACTERS IN "THE OXCART"

The following is a list of characters in order of appearance and a description of their backgrounds and personalities. I would like to cite the Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute 1980 collection of Drama Units (available, along with all other units, free of charge to New Haven teachers, at the Institute office at 53 Wall St.) as an invaluable source at this point in the development of the play. The theatre games, role plays, and improvisations used in these units (p. 3, 8, 16, 19, 20, 35, 38, 40, 43, 48, 88, 104, 120, 128-140, 151-161) are excellent warm-up activities to use at the beginning of each reading.

Chaguito: a mischievous adolescent, very street wise, who hates school and is extremely aggressive and disrespectful—he ends up in reform school

Do-a Gabriela: a widow and mother of Chaguito and Juanita and stepmother of Luis; she has a strong character which is undermined during the transition to the city; she is bound by her role as mother and is very protective of the insecure Luis by supporting his decision to move the family, thereby stifling her true feelings

Juanita: the character who experiences the most development in her transition from a docile personality to a strong, politicized one; she challenges the traditional concept of honor and the double standard that obligates women, not men, to maintain the family honor, which she defies by becoming a prostitute; her political development comes as a result of witnessing the oppression of minority groups in New York City, especially through judicial inequalities

Don Chago: Do-a Gabriela's widowed father who is stubborn in his refusal to follow the family when it leaves the farm for the city; he symbolizes the strength of traditional values through his idealistic love of the land and his nostalgic treatment of the "old days"; he is very sensitive and intelligent with definite anti-government, anti-capitalistic, and anti-clerical tendencies; he stays behind to spend his remaining days in a cave and dies

Luis: Do-a Gabriela's oldest "son" (he is actually the son of her husband and another woman) who assumes leadership of the family; his idealism takes the form of love of progress exemplified in machines and industry; he is completely assimilated into the mechanized world and is insensitive to his surroundings; he dies, ironically, from a freak accident at the factory

Germana: a nosey neighbor on the farm who tries to marry her daughter off to Luis, to no avail

Lito: a lively, happy-go-lucky boy who lives in the family's neighborhood in San Juan

Matilde: described as a plump 35 year old who encourages Juanita to enter into the life of prostitution in "La Perla", San Juan

Do-a Isabel: 44 year old former teacher who now helps her husband, Don Severo, at the saloon; she is described as tall and slender, well-spoken and well-dressed; has a brief affair with Luis, who is really interested in her niece, Martita

Paco: 30 year old Puerto Rican writer and radio announcer who meets Juanita in New York and

proposes marriage

Lidia: 26 year old friend of Juanita in New York; slender and tall with long hair and bangs

Mr. Parkinton: 40 year old American preacher, described as tall and thin, with a patronizing attitude towards the Puerto Ricans he is trying to convert

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Act I takes place in an unidentified mountainous region outside of San Juan. The family—Do-a Gabriela, Luis, Juanita, and Chaguito, are packing for their move to San Juan. There is a great deal of tension in this scene as the family remembers nostalgically its traditions as they break away from them. Don Chago, the grandfather, refuses to move, and unbeknownst to the family, intends to live out his days in the solitude of a cave. He is Marqués personified in his love of the land and his attitude against industrial development. He blames his deceased son-in-law for the family's inability to keep up with the mortgage payments and the subsequent loss of the farm. Luis, technically the head of the family now that his father has died, decides for them that a move to the city will bring prosperity, and they unquestioningly follow out his wishes. In reality, Luis is the son of his father and another woman, but is accepted totally by Do-a Gabriela, who cautiously guards this "secret" from him, not realizing that he indeed knows. Luis' strong determination to secure a better life for his family in a mechanized world can be seen almost as overcompensation for the gratitude he feels as an undeserving stepchild who enjoys the rights and privileges of a blood-relative. Juanita is ambivalent about the move as a local farmer, Miguel, is now courting her. Her mother worries about the sexual implications of this relationship and is relieved to know that it will be severed by their move. Ironically, her attempt to preserve the family honor fails when Juanita falls into prostitution in the city. There is a touching farewell scene as the oxcart approaches to carry them away and their nosey neighbor, Germana, provides comic relief.

Act II finds the family in a San Juan slum, ironically called "The Pearl". They live alongside a noisy bar and Lito is introduced as a liason between the family and this establishment. He infers that Luis is involved in gambling and in an illicit love affair with the owner's wife. By the end of this act, Luis has been unsuccessful in 5 factory jobs and ironically ends up as a gardener for a wealthy family, thus returning to the land he had hoped to flee. Chaguito has taken on all the influences of the street and his thievery results in incarceration. The first threads of Juanita's prostitution appear, encouraged by her friend, Matilde. She is torn between her traditional

upbringing and the lure of the streets and unsuccessfully attempts suicide after an abortion. Doña Gabriela is distraught with grief and accepts Luis' suggestion of yet another move—this time to New York City as a solution to their problems.

Act III develops in Morrisania, a Puerto Rican area of the Bronx. It is wintertime and they are suffering the bitter cold for the first time. Juanita is “working” and rents a room in another part of town. Luis is disgusted by her independence and wants her to move back so that he can support her. She refuses a marriage proposal by a Puerto Rican radio announcer who perceives her sensitivity beyond her city facade. Doña Gabriela refuses to confront Juanita by not believing in the obvious source of her income. She is overwhelmed by the changes in the family and gradually loses her fiery spirit. She silently accepts her fate, continuing to accept whatever Luis plans for them. Luis is obsessed by his job in a boiler factory as he provides the family with the trappings of a “better” life. The play ends as the tragic hero succumbs to his flaw when the machine which he idolizes causes his death. The family returns to Puerto Rico to bury him, again ironically, in the land which he fled.

TECHNICAL COMPONENT

The following list of props, sound effects, and costumes, can be reproduced collectively or partially or can be alluded to through mime or improvisation. I refer the reader to Viola Spolin's *Improvisations for the Theatre*, specifically those exercises under the heading of “Technical Effects” beginning on page 203.⁵ The technical language, used in the stage directions which follow, is advanced for my students and therefore I would take on the role of director/narrator. An advanced English or drama class could have a student in this capacity.

I feel that all other technical aspects of the play can be handled by the students with sufficient teacher support and supervision. In my classes, which are relatively small, due to the nature of E.S.O.L. instruction, students would perform dual roles of actor and technician. Larger classes can have a technical component separate from the dramatic one, thus insuring a shared experience among all members of the class.

It is important for the students to realize the significance of each of the technical items for a deeper understanding of the play. The visual and auditory effects serve to portray the family's growing alienation. Marqués is a master of handling these objects and sounds in order to concretize the emotions of the characters. They provide tangible evidence of the dramatic conflict between old and new, the secure and the unknown, thereby giving us a constant reminder of the tension between both worlds. Doña Gabriela, Juanita, and Chaguito are still attached to the land as evidenced by their nostalgic reference to the clump of mint, the rooster, and the St. Anthony statue in Act I. Those traditions, which they abandon by giving up the farm and moving to San Juan, disappear in Act II, when both the rooster and the statue are sold. The symbols which do not disappear, for example, the rocking chair, are placed in a squalid setting. Tradition survives only in the model oxcart which is sent to Juanita from her boyfriend in Puerto Rico, symbolizing the land and the family's tragic migration back to its roots.

PROPS

ACT I

P. 7 broken-down table

8 boxes, packages, bundles, religious scenes from calenders, cardboard carton with cover and holes punched on sides, small kitchen utensils, old books

12 Saint Anthony statue (traditionally believed to have powers of securing a husband for Latin women)

14 needle and thread

29 1 cup of coffee

33 2 cups of coffee

41 clump of mint

44 strainer (used traditionally in the making of Puerto Rican coffee) small, old, dirty trunk

45 empty kerosene can

48 dirty handkerchief and a half-dollar, few pieces of wood, dish made from a gourd, empty oat container

ACT II

P. 57 faded curtain, iron, folding bed with covers, broken chair, square table covered with cheap oilcloth with fruit designs, another chair and a bench, an oil-lamp, hammock, rocking chair, dirty electric cord and socket, empty shelf, black rosary, Virgin of Carmen, blessed palm

59 jukebox

60 2 sage leaves with wax (folk remedy for headaches)

62 black comb missing some teeth

69 spinning top

71 paper bag with traditional groceries (plantain, yellow yaut'as, sweet potatoes, yams, codfish); crudely wrapped package

83 oxcart

98 khaki blanket, bottle of alcohol, coins, pan of hot water

102 small package of coffee

ACT III

- 105 3 hooks for coats, framed print of Sacred Heart of Jesus, table and 3 chairs, imitation embroidered tablecloth, green pitcher, black coffee can, yellow sugar bowl
- 106 flower holder with dirty artificial flowers, studio couch, table and radio, oxcart, upholstered chair, armchair, floorlamp, kerosene heater, flowered linoleum
- 108 canned meat pies, shopping bag
- 110 radio, cigarette
- 111 food for breakfast, newspaper
- 117 cigarettes
- 119 2 glasses of beer, plate
- 120 box of dominoes
- 125 beer
- 131 bag of groceries, letter
- 135 rubbing alcohol, small jar
- 144 lunch box
- 147 leather briefcase with leaflets and folders
- 148 can of chopped ham, opener

SOUND EFFECTS

The auditory effects are highly symbolic, as, for example, the grandfather's "plena" of Act I takes a back seat to the blaring jukebox music coming from the bar in Act II. It is during this act also that the bucolic music and familiar voice of the oxcart driver are drowned out by the roar of the airplane. Act III—New York City—is dominated by American "blues" and by the roar of the subway and the noise of automatic drills coming from the street.

ACT I

p. 32 rooster noises
44 noise of oxcart

ACT II

59 Latin music on jukebox, water on rocks

84 oxcart driver's voice calling "Ooois, Lucero, oooiis", airplane roar
89 waves
102 jukebox music

ACT III

108 noise from train and drill

110 "blues" music from jukebox
111 "danza" music
136 gun shots

COSTUMES

The overall effect, other than the specified items of clothing, is casual street dress and therefore, the students' every day school outfits will suffice; 2 old housedresses from a mother's wardrobe would help create the roles of Do-a Gabriela and Germana, and an old, oversized shirt, that of Don Chago; the students should be encouraged to think of their characters in terms of the costume best suited to express their personalities.

ACT I

P. 10 bundle of clothes
14 old shirt
30 shoes

ACT II

- 60 petticoat
- 89 expensive dress, nylon stockings (for Do-a Isabel)

ACT III

- 105 2 woolen jackets, felt hat
- 107 purse, good woolen coat, silk kerchief, woolen gloves, leather handbag
- 108 woolen sweater
- 112 wristwatch, necklace
- 116 good man's suit, tie, shoes
- 128 nice hat
- 143 wool plaid hunting jacket
- 144 felt hat
- 147 black suit, overcoat

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Another important aspect of play production is emphasis on stage directions. Marqués has provided his readers with a wealth of descriptive gestures, attitudes and actions which give us added insight into character development. In conjunction with Viola Spolin's suggestions on "Character" (p. 253-269), ⁶ these directions can be introduced to the students before the day's reading in order to insure a richer interpretation. This also provides an expanded vocabulary for the students in the use of stage language and illustrates the non-verbal aspect of theatre. Following are the pages and corresponding directions:

ACT I

- P. 9 muttering, briskly, annoyed

10 reacting
11 pretending
12 interrupting herself, slyly
14 mending
15 twisting furiously
16 suddenly somber, dryly
17 sincerely indignant, changing her tone
18 trying not to laugh, trying to be strict
19 shrugging her shoulders
22 sharply, disturbed, alarmed
23 offended, rebelling
24 jesting
25 enthusiastically
31 undecided
32 squats, timidly, anguished
33 tears his hair with rage
34 limping, slightly ironic, gently
37 looks questioningly, absorbed
38 indignant, furious, calmly
39 withdrawing, evading, hopefully, authoritatively
42 snooping, disconcerted, evasive
44 anguished
45 shouting wildly
48 moved
49 lovingly, carressing
50 absorbed, smiling understandingly
51 signaling

ACT II

- 60 pause
- 61 sincerely, protesting, mischievously, ironically, ashamed, with vigor
- 64 dignified, with contempt
- 65 indignantly, sighing
- 66 in anguished surprise
- 67 startled
- 68 watching fearfully
- 69 in a bad mood, distracted
- 70 abashed
- 71 her voice trembles with emotion and uncertainty
- 73 offended
- 74 looking fixedly
- 75 desperately, turns sharply
- 76 animated
- 77 reproaching him
- 78 pronounced with affected correctness
- 79 with a forced laugh
- 80 startled, sarcastically
- 81 passionate supplication, somber
- 82 in a deafening voice
- 83 hysterical, aloof
- 85 pensive, with disgust, with sudden dryness
- 86 conclusively, somewhat restrained
- 87 with an air of superiority, terrified, retreating
- 88 annoyed
- 90 uneasy
- 94 defeated
- 97 reacts calmly and diligently
- 98 rushes out, like a shot
- 99 in a low, forceful voice

ACT III

- 110 a gesture of impatience, indolently
- 112 changing her tone, in a low voice, full of emotion, gets up violently
- 115 advancing menacingly
- 117 insisting, annoying pause
- 120 with comic disconcertedness
- 121 brusquely
- 123 laughing bitterly
- 125 disturbed, evading him
- 133 reading with difficulty, her voice trembling from emotion
- 134 in a serious tone
- 135 becomes absorbed by his reading
- 136 urgently, desperately, in anguish, frightened
- 137 rebelling
- 138 somber
- 141 grumbling
- 142 pretending indignation
- 143 dryly
- 145 cautiously, with tenderness
- 146 astonished, indignant, pensively, sobs
- 151 terribly upset
- 154 her voice begins to break

RELATED EXERCISES

1. Sample questions to be asked at the end of each act:

Act I:

- a. How does each family member feel about the move?
- b. Have you ever moved, and if so, which character expresses the way you felt about it?
- c. Give several examples of Don Chago's sense of humor. What are the serious issues behind his jokes?
- d. What does the statue of St. Anthony represent? The rooster? The nightengale? The oxcart?
- e. How do the family members get along with each other? What is the cause of their tension? Their respect? Their nostalgia?

Act II:

- a. By analyzing the props used in this act, can you see evidence of the family's financial gain?
- b. Are they happy with their move?
- c. What happens to the St. Anthony statue? To the rooster? What does this mean in terms of their traditions?
- d. The family encounters problems in their move to the city. List them.
- e. What does the family do to solve its problems? Do you follow the same patterns or know people who do?

Act III:

- a. Cite examples of Juanita's sensitivity, even though she has been branded as "bad". Who sees these qualities in her?

- b. What does Juanita learn in the city? What does she see happening around her and how does she interpret this?
 - c. How has Do-a Gabriela changed? Why doesn't she speak her mind to Luis?
 - d. What is Mr. Parkington's attitude toward the family?
 - e. What is Luis' personality like? Has he grown throughout the play? Once he has attained his goal, is he pleased with the results?
2. Have the students rewrite the story in prose form.
 3. Before the students read the play, relate the story to them, leaving out the ending. Have them write their own endings stating the reasons behind their choices.
 4. Ask students to find the "Spanglish" words evident in Act III (Fix: "marqueta", "lonchera", "grocer'a". Why do you think these words creep into a language?
 5. Look over the list of stage directions. See if each student can identify his/her corresponding gestures and attitudes after the play is finished.
 6. For those students who enjoy building models, have them work singly or collectively on a model stage, placing props in particular places and giving the reasons for their selections.
 7. What are the noises associated with each act? Have students close their eyes and envision the smells associated with the country, the slum in San Juan, the barrio in New York.
 8. Bring in a sample playbill from a local theatre. Have the students make one for "The Oxcart", citing characters in order of appearance, the acts and their locations and time periods, brief biographies of each student, technical staff, and imaginary business sponsors, ads.

The following is a list of intentionally misspelled words used in the play to create a realistic atmosphere of "street" language. This, of course, is translated from the Spanish in which there appears the typically Puerto Rican aspiration of the final "s" and the use of "l" instead of "r". A fun exercise could be for the students to list the words as they appear and then supply the correct spelling. Or, as in the following example, a list of mixed-up corrections could be connected to the misspellings.

whatta	come on
'em	of
whatsa	and
dunno	it figures

wanna anything
gotta what a
if he don't so as
d'you drowned
'cause being
people're let me
I kin until
somethin' catching
comin' probably
yeah a lot of
Porto Rican ought to
prob'ly better than
lemme yes
I figgered coming
c'mon about
an' had to
outta making
gimme preaching
so's I figured
makin' talking
goin' give me
'less unless
better'n nothing
bein' Puerto Rican
hadda going
talkin' something
it figgers looking
lookin' I can
nothin' got to
'till because
anythin' don't know
catchin' them
o' people are
preachin' if he doesn't
a lotta want to
'bout do you
drownded what is a

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NOTES

1. René Marqués, "The Oxcart" (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 26.
2. Joseph P. Fitzpstrick, *Puerto Rican Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 109.
3. Eleanor J. Martin, *René Margues* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), p. 88.
4. Marqués, p. 13.
5. Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 203.
6. *Ibid*, p. 253-269.

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