



Three Examples of Pre-Columbian and Early Colonial Drama

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.04.01
by Norine Polio

The “Rabinal Achi” (Guatemala), “Apu Ollantay” (Peru), and “Gueguence or Macho Raton” (Nicaragua) are three of the few recorded indigenous dramas of the New World which survive today. They are relatively brief works with high interest/low vocabulary and are amazingly contemporary in plot line with universal themes portrayed by easily recognizable characters.

The “Rabinal Achi” develops along the lines of an interchange between two competing warriors who, although enemies, respect each other’s courage and inner drive. The “Apu Ollantay” has at its core an almost “Romeo and Juliet” theme of forbidden young love: Ollantay and Cusi-Coyllur are in love but marriage is impossible because he is not of royal blood. They maintain a secret relationship when the king refuses to grant Ollantay’s wish for his daughter’s hand in marriage. The Gueguence or Macho Raton is a light comedy in which the protagonist’s dialogue is a constant play on words as he feigns deafness when it suits his purposes.

Contained in this unit are the historical background of each play, plot summaries, structural analyses, technical notes on costumes and music, and lesson plans incorporating language arts skills. The teacher therefore can use the unit either in its entirety to produce a staged version of each play, or in part for simple readings.

(Recommended for Drama, Literature, and Intermediate ESOL classes, grades 6 through 12)

Horacio Quiroga: The Poe of Latin America, by Patricia A. Niece

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