



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume III: Family Ties in Latin American Fiction

Creative Reading

Curriculum Unit 89.03.05
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As a Special Education Resource Teacher, my primary function is to teach children reading skills. My most difficult task is making the lesson interesting enough to arouse student interest. Our present texts fail to stimulate or motivate children in elementary grades. The readers used are designed to teach necessary skills, irrespective of meaning; they are shallow in substance and very little is gained from them.

In order to hold the child's attention, a story must entertain as well as arouse curiosity. The stories should at the same time relate to all aspects of his personality, thus promoting confidence in himself/herself.

This unit will attempt to accomplish the above by using the following stories: (1) *The Spanish Fairy Book* by Gertrudis Segovia and *The Three Wishes—A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales* by Ricardo E. Alegr'a. However, teachers may use traditional fairy tales as well as stories from other countries.

The reason I chose Hispanic tales is because my students are seventy-five percent Hispanic. This will have a dual purpose: The children will have an introduction to Spanish literature and it will also serve as a way to give meaning to their culture.

This unit can be utilized by reading specialists, classroom teachers, bilingual teachers, special education teachers, and teachers teaching English as a second language. It can provide each teacher with a supplement to their present reading program.

The tales can be used as a story telling session, reading a different tale everyday or as an assigned reading lesson to be completed at home and discussed in class. It can also provide an additional reading in class by the students in groups depending on availability of materials and time.

For the purpose of this unit, the grades I have chosen are third and fourth. However, if you choose traditional fairy tales, you can utilize this unit for lower grades as well.

A discussion of where the tales came from will provide the student with interesting information. This can be used as the first step to introducing the literature. For example, some stories are very old and have reached the Latin American countries from the Orient. Each tale will be discussed in detail. The family structure will be explored, especially the relationships between adult and child. The families in the stories will be compared with modern families.

The readings can also be used to provide the student with a moral education. By implication only, the tales will convey to him/her the advantages of moral behavior, not through complicated explanations but through story predicaments that are meaningful to him/her.

In addition to fairy tales, this unit is designed to encourage teachers to use folktales, fables, myths, and stories from other countries. A bibliography will be included with this unit which will be helpful in selecting these tales for your students. I have also included a bibliography of books for children written in Spanish for the bilingual teachers who can use this unit for their students who are not English proficient.

Background Information

The stories will serve not only to entertain, but would also instruct children in proper behavior and values. The tales can relate to industriousness, kindness, and perseverance. The old-fashioned quality of these stories make them refreshing for both the young and the young at heart.

Fairy tales, folktales and fables are a fascinating type of literature, unlike much of the literature intended to develop the child's mind and personality that fails to stimulate and nurture those resources he/she needs most in order to cope with his/her difficult inner problems. Many books used to teach the children reading cheat the child of what he/she ought to gain from the experience of literature access to deeper meaning, and that which is meaningful to him/her at his stage of development. The tales from Spanish speaking countries can transmit their cultural heritage in a favorable manner as well.

It is my intention that the traditional tales, for example from Puerto Rico, will instill in the students the desire to become familiar with the literature from Latin American countries.

Fairy Tales have been described by scholars as "models for human behavior, [that], by that very fact, give meaning and value to life." ¹ Since fairy tales took shape as such, men, both primitive and civilized alike, have listened to them with a pleasure susceptible of indefinite repetition. They answer a deep need in the human being. We all want to experience certain perilous situations, to confront exceptional ordeals, to make our way to success, and we can experience all this on the level of our imagination by hearing or reading Fairy Tales. Events in fairy tales are often unusual and most improbable, but are always presented as ordinary, something that could happen to me or you or the person next door. The most remarkable encounters are related in casual, everyday ways. The ending is always happy in Fairy Tales.

Since most of my students are Hispanic, stories written originally in Spanish by Latin American authors will allow the Spanish-speaking children to recognize themselves and their own experiences in them. For example, the collection of Puerto Rican folktales I have chosen contains twenty-three folktales that reflect the colorful mingling of cultures—Taino Indian, Spanish, and African.

I hope this unit will inspire the teachers using it to expand their literary knowledge by reading novels by Latin American authors such as Juan Rulfo, Jorge Luis Borges, and Gabriel Garc'a Márquez. Doing so can only enhance your ability to work with Hispanic children.

Before I begin the actual lesson, let me leave you with this thought by the German poet Schiller: "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life." ²

The following fairy tale has been taken from THE SPANISH FAIRY BOOK by Gertrudis Segovia, translated by Elisabeth Quinn.

The Fairy and The Prince

This story tells us about a King and Queen who had power, wealth, and were loved by all their subjects. However, they lacked only one thing to make them supremely happy. That was the birth of a little son, whose baby laughter would fill the halls of the palace.

One afternoon, the Queen had helped a stork from a clump of briars. Instead of flying off, it bowed before the Queen and said, "To show my gratitude for your kindness to me, I promise that within a few months you shall have what you so strongly desire." ³

Every night the Queen went to bed hoping that the next morning she would find her baby prince. One morning she heard a noise that sounded like a soft flapping of wings; she ran to the room she had prepared for the baby . . . there laid a smiling pink baby in the cradle. She grabbed him up with joy and ran to show the King. The rejoicing soon engulfed the castle; for the people loved their King and Queen and they wanted to celebrate their good fortune.

The Prince was named Prince Deseado (Desired). To celebrate his birth, the King ordered that a great feast be prepared in which the poor people of the Kingdom might join with the rich, so that all might rejoice together.

The King and Queen begged the Fairy of Kindness to be the godmother of their little son and she consented, giving the baby many lovely gifts. She said, "I have bestowed upon your son the gifts of valor, intelligence, and kindness; but it is *you*, his mother and father, who must develop these in him. Bad training can kill even the best natural inclinations. I shall return sometime when you least expect me; and if, with too much indulgence, you have destroyed the gifts which I now give him, I shall punish you as you deserve!" ⁴ With this the fairy godmother disappeared.

As time went on, the baby grew more beautiful and more intelligent. Because of this, he heard nothing but praise, and it began to awaken in the Prince vanity and pride.

The King and Queen were blind to these developing traits because they loved him so much. They never thought of scolding him or contradicting him in any way. It wasn't long before this good and lovable child turned into a horrid creature that no one could go near. He was nicknamed Prince Irascible.

The Prince grew and as time went on he became more and more unendurable because of his violent character. He would beat his animal friends, his servants, his tutor, and anyone that would not let him have his way immediately. Not even the people he liked were free from his cruelty.

Each day his fiery temper got worse; and each day the petting and indulgence of his parents was increased. They remained blind to his faults.

One afternoon the King and Queen were holding court in the throne room. Suddenly they saw their son approaching with the Fairy of Kindness, whom they recognized instantly.

The Fairy of Kindness wanted to know if this was the way the King and Queen had fulfilled their promise. She continued to say that out of a noble, good, and generous son, they had turned him into an insufferable being who would disgrace them as well as the kingdom. The King and Queen had failed as parents and were to lose their son until he could show repent and change his conduct.

The third chapter entitled “The Punishment” tells of his suffering the same way he had made others suffer. He was to suffer until he learned the truth of those divine maxims which say: Do not do to another that which you would not wish done to you. It will be measured unto you with the same measure that you have measured unto others. The only thing that could save him was real repentance and good actions on his part. And so it was.

The fourth chapter continues to describe his suffering and his good deeds to others. The chapter ends with the appearance of Fairy of Kindness who informs him that he has corrected his conduct and she would return him to his castle.

Chapter five is the triumphant return after eight years. The astonished court watched this marvelous scene in silence, until they saw approaching the Fairy of Kindness, with her at her side a handsome Prince, whom they recognized at once. The happiness of the good Queen and King knew no bounds. They never tired of embracing and admiring their son.

The fairy godmother left them with one thought in the end....This great change that has taken place in him because he has learned to think of others before thinking of himself. And may his lesson serve to show you that to bring happiness to your children and to yourselves you should train them with firmness, never with weakness.

And once again, Prince Deseado, completely corrected was the joy of his parents and of all their subjects.

The following folktale has been taken from *The Three Wishes—A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales* by Ricardo E. Alegria and translated by Elizabeth Culbert. The story I chose is called “The Three Wishes”.

This short Puerto Rican folktale takes place in the days the saints walked on earth. There was a woodsman and his wife who were very poor but very happy in their little house in the forest. Poor as they were they were always willing to share their food with anyone who was hungry. Their love for each other was enough to keep them content. Each evening before eating, they gave thanks to God for their happiness.

One after while her husband worked in the woods, an old man appeared at their house. He told the woodsman’s wife he had not eaten for days and was very hungry. As always, she shared a generous portion of food with the stranger. After he ate everything, he informed her that he was sent by God to test her strength and as a reward for her kindness she and her husband would be granted three wishes beginning immediately. She became so overjoyed that she replied, “Oh, if my husband were only here to here what you say!”

No sooner had the last word left her lips when the woodsman appeared in the little house with the ax still in his hands. He just stood there in shock while his wife explained it all as she embraced him.

Suddenly, for the first time he became angered at his wife. He called her stupid because she had already used up the first wish. The desire for the three wishes changed his personality and shouting he yelled, “You’ve wasted one of our wishes and now we have only two left! May you grow ears of a donkey!” And she did.

When the woman put her hand up and felt them, she knew what had happened and began to cry. The woodsman was ashamed and sorry for what he had done, and hugged his wife to comfort her.

Now, the old man had been observing what was happening, and walked over to them and said, "Until now, you have known happiness together and have never quarreled with each other. Nevertheless, the mere knowledge that you could have riches and power has changed you both. Remember you have only one wish left. What do you want? Riches? Beautiful clothes? Servants? Power?"

The woodsman looked at his wife with love and understanding and said, "We want only the happiness and joy we knew before my wife grew donkey's ears." ⁵ And the donkey ears disappeared. They then asked for God's forgiveness for having acted out of covetousness and greed and they gave thanks for the happiness they possessed.

Before leaving the old man told them they had undergone this test in order to learn that there can be unhappiness in riches. As a reward for their repentance, God would bestow upon them the greatest happiness a married couple can know. And before a year passed, a son was born to them.

Needless to say, the family lived happily the rest of their lives.

Meaning is what reading is all about; and when students are aware that what they read or heard relates to their own lives, this has powerful meaning, indeed. For example, in the *Three Wishes*, the students also come from poor families just like the woodsman and his wife. The story can show us alternatives to our life... what if the woodsman had wished for riches at the expense of his wife's happiness? How would that effect their relationship?

Comprehension Skills Through Interpersonal Process using the fairy tales as a supplemental Reading Program.

Sample Activities for Discussion that can apply to the stories you choose to use for your students: (The comprehension skill being taught will appear in parentheses after the question.)

1. Name one mood each story character felt, then list the things that make you feel the same way. (Characterization)
2. Choose one event from the story. How do you think each character felt about that event? (Characterization)
3. If we were to produce a class play based on this story, which character do you think you would be best suited to play? Give reasons for your choice. (Characterization)
4. If you had a chance to spend a day with one of the characters, which one would it be? What would you want to happen that day? (Characterization)
5. Choose one of the main characters that gets into trouble. What gets him/her in trouble? (Recall)
6. Find a classmate who has read the story and ask him or her four questions about the story. Make up questions that will show whether her/he really read the story carefully. (Recall)
7. From memory, retell or rewrite a part of the story that interested you most. (Recall)
8. Cut out three pictures of people showing emotions. Think of a one-word caption that captures the main idea for each picture. (Main Idea)
9. Name as many times in the story as you can when story characters felt one way inside and showed a different feeling on the outside. (Making Inferences or Conclusions)

10. How would some of the members of your family feel if you acted like some of the characters in the story? (Making Inferences or Conclusions) -
11. If you lived at the time of this story, what problems might you have? How would your life change? What would you need to know? (Making Inferences or Conclusions)
12. Why is life in the book's setting different from your own? Think of at least three good reasons. (Making Inferences or Conclusions)
13. Where in the story did the character use good judgment? Poor judgment? (Making Inferences or Conclusions)
14. List the changes that the main character goes through in the story from beginning to end? (Sequence)
15. Make a comic strip about a time you felt you accomplished something. (Sequence)
16. Choose one of the characters in the story. Tell how he/she felt at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. (Sequence)
17. Write about the important events or landmarks, both good or bad, that have happened to you in your life. (Sequence)
18. Explain or write the steps you took to solve a problem in your life. (Sequence)
19. Make up a list of words or phrases from the story that caused you to smile, laugh, chuckle, or otherwise enjoy the humor you read. (Understanding Humor)
20. Make a list of words you feel describe one character in the story. (Word Meaning)
21. If you can change one part of the story, which part would it be? (Analysis)
22. Choose a character in the book. Was this person good or bad? Why do you think so? (Analysis)
23. Think about three story characters who are your favorite? Do these characters have anything in common? Does this tell you anything about yourself? (Analysis)
24. If you had three wishes, what do you think you would wish for? Do they differ from what the character in the story wished for? (Comparing and Contrasting)
25. Has anyone every treated you the way the main character in the story was treated? (Comparing and Contrasting)
26. Look at a title of a book. Guess what the story is about from the title. Check to see if you are right. (Comparing and Contrasting)
27. Take a good look at your friends; what do they have in common? (Comparing and Contrasting)
28. Here are some key words about an incident in today's story. (Give the students three key words.) Locate the event in the story and be ready to read it to us. (Locating Details)
29. Write a story or poem or a letter to the teacher about some time when your feelings were hurt or ignored, or when you felt inadequate. (Analyzing Self)
30. Write something about a person who is important to you. (Creating Original Material)
31. Make a collage about yourself from words, pictures, and the like that you find in newspapers, comic books, magazines, or drawings. (Creating Original Material)
32. Design a puppet that you feel can speak for you. (Creating Original Material)
33. As a class project, design a bulletin board on the theme of the fairy tale. (Designing)
34. Write down six good things about yourself. (Creative Thinking—Evaluation)
35. Choose one character from the story. Write a new story about him/her. (Creative Thinking-Divergent)

Notes

1. Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* . Vintage Books, New York, 1989.
2. Ibid.
3. Segovia, Gertrudis. *The Spanish Fairy Book* . Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1918.
4. Ibid.
5. Alegr'a, Ricardo. *A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales* . Translated into English by Elizabeth Culbert. Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc. New York. 1969.

Teacher Bibliography—Divided in Three Sections:

I. Resource Books

Bettelheim, Bruno and Zelan, Karen. "Why Children

Don't Like To Read". *The Atlantic Monthly*. November 1981.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment—The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* . New York, April 1989.

The article by Bettelheim and his book "The Uses of Enchantment" can supply the teachers with reasons to support the use of fairy tales to educate, support, and liberate the emotions of children. The book is a resource of useful ideas when using fairy tales in the classroom.

Hanford, S.A. *Fables of Aesop* . Penguin Books Ltd. Middlesex, England, 1954.

This is an informative book on the background of Aesop's Fables. It also provides you with the translation of two hundred and seven fables.

Luthi, Max. *The Fairy Tale As Art Form and Portrait of Man* . (translated by John Erickson). Indiana University Press. 1987.

This paperback has good background information for teachers who want to learn the history of fairy tales.

Potter, Robert R. *Myths and Folk Tales Around The World* . Globe Book Company, Inc. New York. 1987.

This book of stories has been compiled primarily for the classroom teacher. It can aid the teacher in the teaching of reading. The collection contains some of the best tales from this type of literature.

II. Stories For Children To Be Used By Teacher (In English)

Alegria, Ricardo, E. *The Three Wishes—A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales* . Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. New York. 1969.

This is a great book to own if you work with Puerto Rican children; it has the richness and variety of the Puerto Rican culture. It contains traditional stories passed down from generation to generation. You will also find in this book several stories about “Juan Bobo” familiar to most Puerto Rican children.

Lester, Julius. *Black Folktales*. Grove Press. New York. 1969.

In addition to traditional fairy tales and Spanish tales, this book can supply you with stories told in the cities and villages of Africa and on the street corners, etcetera wherever else in America black people gather. Some stories are partly true and some imagined.

Sergie Palastrov. *Folk Tales From The Soviet Union (Central Asia and Kazakhstan)*. Raduga Publishers. Moscow, USSR. 1968.

Skinner, Ada M. *A Child's Book of Stories from Many Lands* . Children's Classics, New York, 1988.

This book contains delightful tales from around the world depicting children in domestic and outdoor activities. These stories not only entertain, but also instruct children in proper behavior and values.

Yollen, Jane. *Favorite Folktales from Around The World* . Pantheon Books. New York, 1986.

A delightful book for Teachers to use as an inexhaustible source of enchantment for students. A wonderful book for story telling.

III. Novels written by Latin American Authors For Your Enrichment and Enjoyment. (In English)

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths —Selected Stories & Other Writings*. New Dimensions Publishing Co. New York. 1962.

This book consists of short stories, Essays, and parables. Borges' stories have been recognized as fantastic stories; they have been known for their wonderful intelligence, their wealth of invention, and their tight, almost mathematical style.

Ferre, Rosario. *Sweed Diamond Dust —A novel and three stories of life in Puerto Rico*. Available Press. 1988.

Excellent reading for the teacher who is not familiar with the Puerto Rican Culture and the people. . . . enjoyable for anyone.

Garc'a Márquez, Gabriel. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* . Alfred A. Knopf. New York. 1983.

A dark and profound novel about the codes that men impose on women, and women on themselves. It is a brilliant performance.

Garc'a Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* . (Winner of 1982 Nobel Prize). Published by Avon

Books. New York, New York. 1970.

You hope you find time to read books by Garc'a-Márquez. He uses elements of his own childhood for this story. The reading demands attention in order to keep track of family members and situations. This novel deals with humor, violence, hypervoly and exaggeration.

Lispector, Clarice. *Family Ties* . University of Texas Press. 1960.

These stories give us a comprehensive picture of the author's private world of psychological complexities. In her stories we have commonplace situations and fantasies meet and merge.

Palastrov. *Folk Tales From The Soviet Union* . Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Raduga Publishers. Moscow, USSR. 1968.

The children will find colorful and imaginative illustrations depicting Russian art. You will enjoy comparing these stories from Russia with tales from America. Enjoy!

Skinner, Ada M. *A Child's Book of Stories from Many Lands* . Children's Classics, New York, 1988.

This book contains delightful tales from around the world. It also contains brilliant illustrations of bygone days when treasures were discovered.

Student Bibliography—Spanish Literature (for children who have not mastered the English Language).

Kincaid, Eric. *Colección "Colorin Colorado"* Lectorum Publications, Inc. New York, N.Y.

Here are six lovely books of stories to read or listen to. Each volume is filled with a selection of tales, some set in exotic lands populated by kings and dragons, others in dreamy faraway places. Children will enjoy the entertainment in these short stories.

Kincaid, Eric. *Fábulas Clásicas* . Lectorum Publications, Inc. New York, N.Y.

This book contains twenty-nine classic fables masterfully illustrated.

Lobel, Arnold. *Fábulas* . Lectorum Publications, Inc. New York, New York.

The amusing animal characters portrayed in this book will teach valuable lessons about human strengths and weaknesses.

Riordan, James. *Cuentos maravillosos del mundo entero* . Lectorum Publications, Inc. New York, New York.

This book presents a selection of international stories, among which the reader will find familiar classics as well as exotic tales of faraway lands. It has twenty-eight tales in all, each richly illustrated in full color, to provide hours of enjoyable reading.

Student Bibliography For English Speaking Students:

Alegr'a, Ricardo E. *The Three Wishes-A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales*. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. New York. 1969.

Children will enjoy these stories with favorite themes from the world over which have been transmuted by the Puerto Rican environment into new versions. Stories will feature foolish youths who turn out to be braver than people had supposed, weaklings who outwit the strong, devils and witches who always lose to the virtuous, princesses, giants, and clever animals.

Cauchi, Joe. *A Puerto Rican Folk Tale—Maria Santa La Torre* . From a Story Told by Tomasa Perez. Published by the Connecticut Program for Migrant Children, University of Hartford. 1973.

This story has been passed down from our grandmothers and is told to us before going to bed. The story was told in Hatilo, Puerto Rico by Mrs. Tomasa Perez who first heard the story from her mother.

Lester, Julius. *Black Folktales* . Grove Press. New York. 1969.

This book will enchant you with traditional stories told in the cities and villages of Africa as well as on the street corners of America. The stories may begin as a true incident and end as fantasy.

Matos, Reinaldo and Ana Matos. *Lunaria and Solario-A Puerto Rican Folktale* . Published by The Connecticut Program for Migrant Children. University of Hartford. 1973.

Lunaria and Solario is one of the many bedtime stories told to us by our grandmothers. When you read this story, see if you can think of a story in the bible that is similar or of any other story that has been told by your grandmother. And of course, another happy ending!!

Matos, Reinaldo and Ana Matos. *Ladrillo and Tales of Juan Bobo* . The Connecticut Program For Migrant Children. University of Hartford. 1973.

These stories are typical stories told to Puerto Rican children. You may want to compare them to your traditional fairy tales told to you as you were growing up in New Haven. The stories feature Juan Bobo, a simple boy who could not do anything right; but things always turned out in his favor.

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