



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

Introduction

During eight weeks this past summer a group of New Haven educators and myself met to discuss texts loosely grouped under the title “Family Ties in Latin American Fiction.” The diversity of our backgrounds and of our respective fields of expertise was considerable, a fact that was eloquently borne out in our meetings and in the richly varied approaches of the units presented here. While our point of departure was literary, the seminar gradually became a cultural reflection in the broadest sense, incorporating discussions of historical, political and social issues.

All of the participants in this seminar showed an admirable desire to improve their awareness of Latin America and to integrate that awareness into their teaching, the better to reach a student population not always in touch with its roots. The originality with which that integration is envisioned in these units is effective proof of the sustained thought and genuine concern that have gone into their preparation. Two of the teachers, for example, successfully “translate” their readings of Latin American fiction into body language, proposing suggestive ways of dramatizing or dancing to literary texts. Another project, judiciously combining literature and history, works its way from everyday contact with an Hispanic heritage to a deeper awareness of cultural identity. Seeking a way to improve reading skills and motivate learning ability in a cultural context familiar to the students, another teacher cleverly draws on Hispanic fairy tales, folktales and legends in her unit. Yet another project seeks, through the study of well chosen Latin American short stories, to awaken interest in the sense of self that is reflected in those stories by reading them as cultural autobiographies.

Far from being a system closed upon itself, fiction is an excellent connector, a means of understanding and establishing links with other systems and, needless to say, with other cultures. This proved to be once more the case in our seminar which not only explored family ties as a theme but actively worked on ways of tying students into a cultural experience from which they too often feel excluded.

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