



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume I: The Autobiographical Mode in Latin American Literature

Latin America “Speaks”

Curriculum Unit 90.01.04
by Ruth M. Wilson

This unit is recommended for eighth grade remedial reading students. These students are mainly Hispanic and African American and many have poor academic skills and are low achievers. These students are aware of their ranking in school which may contribute to negative behavior and low self esteem. However, this negative feeling can be turned around with particular lessons and positive attitudes from teacher and student.

Dr. Iva Carruthers, Professor of Sociology at Northwestern, Illinois, states that building self esteem in Hispanic and African-Americans can reroute them from a path of poor academic achievement and underemployment. Therefore, this unit will aid the student in his or her quest to respect and to understand his or her past culture. Sheila Tobias, author of *They're Not Dumb, They're Different*, feels that teachers can get rid of these feelings and labels and help students come closer to using their skills by understanding their past. Just as a tree must have healthy roots to flourish and grow so must a student.

Why do these students show little interest in the academics? One reason could be that they are aware of their expected limited horizons. They know they are poor testers and the test scores labels them “the can’t do kids.” Enter the action plan called *Quality Education for Minorities (QEM)*. *This project has a single purpose which is to improve the education of minority students. This action plan is based on the belief that every child has a right to a quality education. One important goal of QEM is to insure that minority students come to school prepared to learn. This is a skill which is taught in early childhood and is nurtured through the school years. Unfortunately, this skill was never nurtured in some students.*

In 1988, a study reported that two out of five Hispanic-American children lived in poverty, and nearly half of all African-American children were among the working poor. These two factors, I think, are ones which effects a student’s performance the most. Low income, poor access to adequate health care, poor nutrition are other variables which play a negative role in the learning process.

Latin America Speaks will be beneficial for both minority groups to understand that slavery, whether in the Caribbean or the United States, was inhuman. A slave was a slave regardless of color...black as coal or light as cream, speaking English or Spanish. Hopefully this unit will bring both groups to the understanding that poverty and bigotry are just minor inconveniences which can be circumvented...as Juan Manzano so cleverly did. He had fortitude, stamina, the love of self, and the will to survive, and that is what the students must try to achieve.

The unit will begin with the definition and discussion of the word “autobiography.” How does it differ from the

word “biography?” What are some of the circumstances that make people write autobiographies? Are they usually accurate? Also, this section will introduce the author Juan Francisco Manzano to the students. His short biography will tell of his trials and tribulations and how he triumphed.

Since I teach Remedial Reading, I need to make sure that my students understand what I’m teaching. Fortunately, there are ways that I can check whether my students are comprehending the lessons which I am presenting. This may include: checking the previous day’s lesson and recapping events; asking questions frequently and giving students a chance to respond and receive feedback; checking for understanding by evaluating responses, and having a good success rate during their initial learning.

While doing the above, it is important that inferential and critical thinking skills be used to enable the students to make valid judgments and sensible evaluations. When students have the necessary tools and feel challenged, even the most difficult or unpleasant task may be tackled.

Next the students will be reading excerpts taken from narratives written by Juan Manzano and Richard Madden, his translator. These selected portions will focus around a specific theme: the brutality and hypocrisy of the slave system. During the presentation of each lesson, students will draw conclusions, make comparisons, use inferential thinking to see similarities and cause and effect between American and Caribbean Slavery.

The primary objective of this unit is to build self-esteem in both groups of students, Hispanic and African-American. Questions to think about and to ask are: What made this human being so different from the other slaves? What forces allowed this individual to survive under horrendous conditions? Was color a help or a hindrance in slave life? Why were slaves kept ignorant? Who benefitted from the ignorance? Why was religion an important part of the day to day existence? And lastly, why did slavery last so long?

This unit may be used during the month of February which is designated as Brotherhood Month. This would be an opportune time to expose both groups to ethnic diversity and similarities. Perhaps Manzano’s work will help both groups of students become more tolerant of each others heritage.

Background Material

The Caribbean Slave trade was like the spokes in a wheel which were constantly reaching into Africa for cargo. The spokes reached out from Le Cap to Barbados and Trinidad in one direction, to the Guianas and Central America in another, and to Jamaica and Mexico in another, and to Cuba and the United States in still another. In all directions there was trading in slaves, and the number of African captives increased rapidly throughout the new world. In the West Indies as in other parts of South and Central America, the Blacks outnumbered the European colonist.

In present day census figures for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region do not always reveal the African Origin of their people. Argentina, for example, received many slaves, and the African population of her capital city was large as late as 1850, but all these Africans have now been absorbed, and Argentina is thought of as a country without Blacks.

In countries like Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico, the dark mixture blended Indian with African and European strain which was the result of a new people, a product of all three races. A new creation for a new world.

During that time, Great Britain and Spain were dangerous enemies. The hostilities arose with Great Britain’s

abuse of the *asiento*, the license to import slaves into the Spanish Empire and Britain's pressure to break Spain's commercial monopoly. Due to Spain's pressure, the Caribbean became a danger zone from 1739 to 1748. Spain survived many dangers and became the "Key to the New World", and the fortress of the Indies.

Then came the Seven Year War which Charles III of Spain foolishly entered. The war was in its last stages when Charles entered and Spain was defeated. Under Great Britain, the victor, religious toleration, free trade, and many civil liberties were implemented. British occupation of Cuba brought numerous changes that some Cubans claim that the history of their island really begins in 1762. John Fagg author of *Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic* mentions the above in his book

Cuba became a booming commercial activity center, Slaves and Europeans goods poured into Havana's ports. Eventually, Havana was restored to Spain by a peace treaty in exchange for Florida and the Bahamas Islands. Cuba's population increased rapidly, reaching 171,000 by the census 1774, with whites numbering 96,000, African Slaves 44,000 and mixed persons 31,000. The mixed blooded persons, I presume could include the family of Juan Manzano. Yet his family were slaves and were treated as such.

It was tobacco, sugar, and cotton which made the Caribbean Islands desirable for slave traffic. There was not much excitement with the first settlement of slaves, until the planters began to produce tobacco in large quantities, to be exported and marketed in England and Spain. The rationale for the European nations in acquiring slave colonies was to increase the wealth of their countries by means of another man's labor. It was rationalized that the cost of defending the plantation would fully be repaid by the wealth that the possession of them would bring. Absentee ownership never came to mind because the merchants of greed had "tunnel vision," focusing only on profit and not on human misery. Absentee ownership is still being practiced today in large urban areas in this country...especially in housing.

While slavery was flourishing in the Caribbean Islands, in England there were many men who opposed it. Men such as: John Wesley, Samuel Johnson, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, Charles Fox, and young William Pitt. Each man stressed the economic or moral wrong of the system. Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson fought valiantly for years for slavery's abolishment. These men with their friends and supporters won the fight in Great Britain and eventually in the dominions. Therefore, Britain has the dubious honor of abolishing her slave trade many, many years before America and other European Slave Trading Countries.

Cuban and American Slavery were quite similar in there treatment of Africans. Both brought families from Africa to be sold at the market, or auctioned off to the highest bidder. Families were inhumanely separated. Strong muscular men, commonly referred to as bucks, and fathers brought a good sum. Women and children, considered the weaker ones, brought a smaller amount and were usually sent in other directions...to work in the fields, the master's house, or become cooks or wet nurses. Many women had no say in how their body was to be used by the master or the master's family. Consequently, numerous slave women were molested and gave birth to mulatto children. Some masters favored these children because they were usually lighter in color than the other slaves. Some masters did not make any distinctions and treated them all poorly. Because of this favoritism, some lighter slaves did think they were better than their Black brethren. As was the case of Juan Francisco Manzano, a light skinned Cuban slave.

When the French, Spanish and Portuguese landed in the Caribbean, they were largely on military missions, and staffed by men as opposed to North America which was settled by families. These men took mistresses and sometimes wives among the Indians and Africans they ruled. In time the children they fathered, were referred to as "criollos" or "creoles." The term Creole which meant mixed blood and native born became acceptable when the colonies grew rich and certain creole families became prominent. The others: octoroons

and mulattoes were assimilated into the Spanish life style. They rose in their profession and soon forgot their background while living and writing like a Spaniard. Many of the great figures in Latin American literature were known to have black blood. When it became unpopular or unpleasant to mention one's heritage, sayings such as: Yesterday they called me "nigger" so I should get mad; but he who called me was as black as I am. You pretend to be so white, but I know your grandfather. This was said by the slaves to someone was "passing."

When Manzano was asked to write his memoirs, he had no guide to follow. He had only the incidents which happened in his life and he wrote them down. Davis and Gates, authors of *The Slave's Narrative*, noticed a particular pattern when a slave wrote his or her narrative. This same pattern was used in the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Linda Brent. The pattern Davis and Gates revealed was:

- A. An engraved portrait, signed by the narrator.
- B. A title page that includes a claim written by himself, or statement of facts made by himself.
- C. Many testimonials and/or a preface or introduction written by a white abolitionist friend.
- D. A poetic epigraph by preference from William Cowper.
- E. The Actual Narrative:

I Was Born

1. at first sentence beginning, I was born, giving date, and place;
2. vague account of parentage, often involving a white father, observing cruelty;
3. description of cruel master, mistress, or overseer, details of first whipping with women frequently the victims;
4. an account of one extraordinary strong, hardworking slave who refuses to be whipped;
5. record of barriers raised against slave literacy and difficulties encountered in learning to read and write;
6. description of a "Christian" slaveholder, and the claim that "Christian" slaveholders were worse than those professing no religion;
7. description of amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves, the work required of them, the pattern of a day, a week, a year;
8. account of slave auction, of families being separated and destroyed, mothers and children distraught as they are taken from each other;
9. description of patrols, of failed attempts to escape, of pursuit by men and dogs;
description of successful attempts to escape, lying during the day, traveling by night...by the
10. North Star, reception in a free state by Quakers with lavish breakfast and much conversation;
taking a new last name (frequently one suggested by a white abolitionist) to accord with new
11. social identity as a freeman, but retain first name as a mark of continuity of individual identity;
12. reflections on slavery, an appendix composed of documentary material (bill of sale, details of purchase from slavery, and newspaper items).

The above outline, although used during American Slavery, has similarities to outlines of Caribbean Slave Narratives. The theme of Manzano's autobiography has techniques that are similar to the African American Tradition and his writings clearly belongs to that category.

Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano

Juan Manzano was born a slave in Havana, Cuba in 1797. His parents being native born were considered creoles. Juan's complexion was light cream colored which played a large part in his personal treatment and his thoughts of other Blacks. During Juan's early years, until the age of thirteen, he lived a happy unorthodox childhood. He had very little contact with his mother or brothers, however, his mother did manage to see him a few times. Juan had less memories of his mother and brothers because he had been separated from them at an early age.

Fortunate to be treated gently in his early years, Nanzano developed thoughts and attitudes to aspire to be white rather than Black. He was not allowed to associate with other Black slaves which led him to believe he was better than his Black brethren.

Juan remembers his early years with fond memories...being well dressed, eating well, and having the privileges of a white child. His mistress, dressed him in fine ruffles and silks and took him everywhere. She displayed him as a plaything...a Barbie Doll, for his appearance was a reflection of her wealth and standing in the community.

The hardship in Manzano's life begins at thirteen when he is sent to live with a sadistic mistress, the Marquesa. His new living conditions were totally opposite from the luxurious conditions he had left. No longer did he wear frilly silk clothes for now he was outfitted with coarse brown sugar sack garments which were uncomfortable to the skin. The sugar sack garments was the standard slave attire.

Juan suffered physical and mental abuse from this mistress. Such as: falling asleep while holding a lantern during a carriage ride, or being whipped for having exchanged a coin given to him by his mistress for a new shiny coin, or for a crushed flower. Beatings and cuffs were everyday occurrence for this slave.

Although badly abused, Juan managed to educate himself by looking, listening, and observing his surroundings. Writing was forbidden so he learned to write by tracing over letters. A practice that is still used today in primary grades. Tracing combined with an excellent memory allowed him to memorize things which interested him. With thoughts of freedom always in his head, Juan learned many useful things, so that when freedom came he could earn an honest livelihood.

Juan used his imagination by taking sheets of paper and turning them into various shapes: flowers, pineapples, shells, fans, and other objects. These shapes brought praise not only to him but to his unstable mistress, the Marquessa. Unfortunately, one day Juan was caught tracing letters instead of doing a chore, his new master became agitated and ordered him to return to sewing and never trace again. By giving this directive, the Master tried to silence his gifts...writing, drawing and reciting. Because Manzano had one purpose in mind, his freedom, this directive did not hamper him, for he would do the forbidden things at night when all were asleep.

Juan Manzano finally managed to escape with help of a group of Cuban writers. Through his writings, he managed to accumulate eight hundred dollars which these writers used to buy his freedom. After his freedom, Juan devoted his life to writing about the injustices of slavery. As in the poem *My Thirty Year*, he reflects upon his life as a slave from cradle to freedom. He speaks of thirty years in a world of pain and cruel oppression the slave system put him through...singling out his mistress and others who abused him. For all the torment that he had endured it was not in vain, for it is nothing to what one day is in store for the wicked ones who brought this torment to him. Juan Francisco Manzano died in 1854 and left a legacy of poetry for all to enjoy.

As mentioned previously, I have included poems by Richard Madden translator of Juan Francisco Manzano's

autobiography. Mr. Madden was an avid foe of slavery and wrote poems depicting its cruelty and inhumanity toward man. These poems are included in the lesson plans section of the unit

The sample lesson plans which follow will vary depending upon interest in subject area, reading level, interruptions, and allotted class time. Clustering may be used to facilitate lessons and as a visual aid. An example of clustering is presented in the *Lesson Plan Section of unit*.

The Life and Poem of a Cuban Slave, by Edward Mullen can be located at the Cross Campus Library, Yale University. This is the text which has the narratives of Juan Manzano and Richard Madden.

LESSON PLAN I:

OBJECTIVE: Students will familiarize themselves with the vocabulary of the lesson being presented. Students will develop vocabulary awareness in subject area.

PROCEDURE: Students will listen for the pronunciation of each word from teacher, words will be used in context. These vocabulary words will be grouped under the title "Latin America Speaks" on a chart. Teacher will have prepared worksheet with copies of the vocabulary to be used in today's lesson.

ASSIGNMENT: Students are to follow directions on their worksheet. Students will look up the definitions of each word using a dictionary. Students are to make sure to write the pronunciation of each word.

LESSON PLAN II:

OBJECTIVE: Students will read a short autobiography of Juan Francisco Manzano. Students will be cognizant of the fact that Caribbean Slavery was as brutal as American Slavery.

PROCEDURE: Teacher will discuss with students the evils and economics of slavery. Using a world map, teacher will point out various countries which were leaders in the slave trade and where they dropped their human cargo.

ASSIGNMENT: Teacher will pass out worksheets on the life of Juan Manzano. Students are to silently skim the material to prepare for oral reading. After class discussion, teacher will then pass out the worksheet, *Explore Your Own Words* students may work individually or in pairs to complete this assignment.

LESSON PLAN III:

OBJECTIVE: Students will recognize that Spain colonized parts of the Caribbean and brought slavery to the islands. Students will read selections from Manzano and Richard Madden, his translator, and understand the term "narrative."

PROCEDURE: *Teacher will pass out a selection of Manzano's work using xeroxed copies. After reading selection (orally or silently), students will do a worksheet pertaining to the selected lesson.*

ASSIGNMENT: Teacher will first discuss with the class the word "narrative" and why it is presented in this lesson. Teacher will write the definition on the board, or have it on a chart to be copied into student's notebook. Then students will begin their class assignment working independently or with a partner.

DEFINITION: Narrative poems tell a story. Sometimes the story is about a brief incident or a long incident in a

person's life. Sometimes it is a long complicated tale of adventure.

LESSON PLAN IV:

OBJECTIVE: Students will be knowledgeable of the slave trade in the Caribbean. Students will be aware of the similarities and differences between the two forms of slavery.

PROCEDURE: Teacher will have short discussion to recap earlier lesson stressing the likes and differences between Caribbean and American Slavery. In this lesson or other lessons, teacher may use clustering for brainstorming. This method helps to stimulate participation and does liven up the class.

ASSIGNMENT: Pass out worksheet *Similarities and Differences* to class. Students are to read the directions and complete the work. At teacher's discretion, students may work individually or in pairs to complete this task. Students may skim over previous material for this lesson.

(figure available in print form)

This brainstorming method enables students to expand their thoughts with less pressure of right or wrong answers. Also, it helps students toward the conceptual relationship among words. Brainstorming can be used with any lesson in this unit.

Classroom discussion in which all students participate helps to relieve tension and actively involves students that share common points of views. Helping students learn from each other is a valuable asset.

At teacher's discretion, Clustering may be used prior to reading or could be used as a postreading activity. This lively activity may reinforce student's learning and liven up the class!

WORKSHEET FOR LESSON PLAN I

The vocabulary words below are associated with oppression. You are to look up each word in a dictionary, write down a short definition, the pronunciation and origin of the word if it is stated. When you find a particularly offensive or oppressive word circle it in RED.

1. rapine/ _____

2. shallow / _____

3. brigand / _____

4. commercial / _____

5. cargoes / _____

6. trace / _____

7. anguish / _____

8. tainted / _____
9. moral / _____
10. plaque / _____
11. shoals / _____
12. haunt / _____
13. folly / _____
14. profuse / _____
15. atmosphere / _____
16. rapacious / _____
17. indolent / _____
18. mart / _____
19. prosecutes / _____
20. prey / _____

WORKSHEET FOR LESSON PLAN I

Name: / _____

Write the word from the list below in the space next to the matching definition.

commercial

brigands

stall

anguish

shackle

saucy

prosecutes

tainted

indolent

profuse

plaque

haunt

atmosphere

rapine

shallow

scourge

shoals

folly

rapacious

moral

cargoes

eternal

exiled

qualm

- 1./ _____ bandits who steal and plunder
- 2./ _____ bountiful, extravagant
- 3./ _____ not deep, having little depth
- 4./ _____ teaching of right and wrong
- 5./ _____ everlasting
- 6./ _____ to bind, to deprive of freedom
7. / _____ to whip severely, to punish
8. / _____ shallow sandbank, less deep
- 9./ _____ to punish for a crime
- 10./ _____ a sudden attack of illness, or fear
- 11../ _____ feeling no pain, no conscience
- 12../ _____ goods and merchandise carried in a ship
- 13../ _____ trail or path one follows
- 14../ _____ living on prey, other human beings
- 15./ _____ a flat thin piece of metal used for decoration
- 16./ _____ designed for profit
- 17./ _____ to be rude or impudent
- 18./ _____ to suffer intense pain or sorrow
- 19 / _____ forced removal from one's country
- 20./ _____ something bad, contaminating influence
- 21./ _____ steal, to take by force

- 22./_____ a stable or barn to house animals
23./_____ to reappear continually
24./_____ a foolish action, act or idea
25./_____ surrounding influence or environment

WORKSHEET FOR LESSON PLAN II

Explore Your Own Word”

Please go back to the selection you have just read and choose five of the underlined words you would like to know more about. Write them in the space below. Besides each word, write its definition as best you can recall from the story.

Vocabulary Word

Pronunciation

Definition

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now write a few short paragraphs using this worksheet to write your autobiography. Don't forget to put in pertinent facts about yourself. It's the information which you put in that will make your narrative interesting to read. Remember you can use clustering to help you.

WORKSHEET FOR LESSON PLAN III

Directions: You have just read a selection by Juan Manzano entitled *The Coin*. You are to comment on this worksheet your thoughts about this selection.

What do you think of this selection?

Why do you think Juan changed the coins? Do you think the punishment fit the crime? Please explain your answer.

In the space below? Jot down anything you can remember about slavery in the United States that was similar to slavery in the Caribbean.

WORKSHEET FOR LESSON PLAN IV

Similar or Different

In the poem *My Thirty Years*, Juan Manzano writes of his turbulent life as a slave. Use what you've learned about Manzano and slavery in general to decide how similar or different his Caribbean life was as compared to any American slave. For example, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, or Linda Brent. Please jot down your answers.

CARIBBEAN

Different

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Similar

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

UNITED STATES

Different

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4.

5.

FIND OUT MORE: Write a short essay on this or another piece of paper on what you've learned and how that knowledge makes you feel. Sorry no partners this time. This sheet is to be done only by *you*.

WORKSHEET MY THIRTY YEARS

Read and Predict: With a title like this, *My ThirtyYears*, what do you think the poem will be about? Under each heading, write your reason or reasons for making the prediction. Jot down as many predictions as you can.

Predictions

Reasons

Now read the poem by Manzano.

MY THIRTY YEARS

When on my time of living I reflect
Right from my cradle to the present date,
Only with trembling can I greet my fate,
Governed much by terror than respect.
I wonder at the light I still got,
Redeeming the dark suffering and shame
Of this life, if it deserves that name,
The long endurance of a hopeless lot.
For thirty years I've known this world of pain,
For thirty years I've groaned beneath the war
Of cruel oppression, lusting to pursue me.
But all the torment I've endured in vain
Is nothing to that one day is in store,
For her oh, God! who brought this torment to me.
(translated by Oliver and Ursula Leheburger)

WORKSHEET FOR POEM RELIGION

Directions: You are to read this worksheet and circle the correct answers. You may work with a partner or by yourself. Good Luck! Remember: A narrative poem tells a story. Sometimes the story is a brief incident. Other times it's long and complicated...more like a short story.

- 1 The narrator of this poem is _____.
 - a. a slaveholder
 - b. the overseer
 - c. the author
2. The story in this narrative poem is about _____.
 - a. a kind mistress
 - b. believing in God
 - c. going to a party
- 3 The story takes place _____.
 - a. the author doesn't say
 - b. in a field
 - c. in a church
- 4 This narrative poem holds our interest because of _____.
 - a. its rhyme and rhythm
 - b the landscape
 - c the peace, love and purity is in God's love
- 5 In the poem Religion, the character of God is revealed to us chiefly through his _____.
 - a. wondrous mercy and kindness
 - b. purity and peace
 - c. mysterious wonders
- 6 When God sits on high, and sees the misery and hypocrisy down below. He _____.
 - a is disappointed in people
 - b. gives the weak power
 - c. gives them their rewards in heaven...he calls them to his throne

TEACHER'S BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abdul, Raoul and Lomax, Allen. *3000 Years of Black Poetry* . New York: Mead and Company, 1970.

A book of poems written by Black Africans telling of their culture, death, happiness, sadness in the various countries they inhabited. Students may use this book as a resource

2. Barnet, Miguel (ed.). *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* . The Bodley Head: London, 1968.
An informative book which tells of the trials and tribulations of a former Black Cuban slave who writes about his human bondage and his freedom.

3. Bontemps, Arna. *The Story of the Negro* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.

An excellent book which tells the story of slavery from 1619 on. This book reads easily and has a wealth of knowledge to be absorbed. Excerpts can be taken from this book teaching lessons.

4. Comitas, Lambros and Lowenthal, David (ed.). *Slaves, Freeman, Citizens: West Indian Perspectives*. The Anchor Books, 1973.

A book of essays which depicts the lives of Caribbean slaves as seen through various eyes: white, Black, mulatto, creole.

5. Davis, Charles T. and Gates, Henry, Jr. *The Slave Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

A collection of essays by ex-slaves of African decent in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The essays address the autobiographical narrative written or dictated by exslaves with contributions from scholars of various disciplines who demonstrate their different approaches to narrative studies.

6. Dimmer, Melvin (ed.). *Black History A Reappraisal*. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1968.

A study of Black History edited with a Black point of view. The telling through historical writings the deeds which were left out of history and history books.

7. Fagg, John Edwin. *Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

This book tells of the common history of the islands beginning with the original aborigines (Arawak Indians) who migrated from South America through the Lesser Antilles, to the importation of Black slaves.

8. Mullen, Edward J. *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*. Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1981.

Interesting book on the life and poetry of a Cuban slave who used his poems to buy his freedom. Students may use this book as a resource. Book may be found at the Cross Campus Library, Yale university.

9. Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

This book deals with the African-American culture...shared myths or stories which shape the forms that comprises a race's culture. Three underlying assumptions: the pregeneric myth, how the myth assumes or doesn't assume the genre, and the African-American Literary Tradition.

APPENDIX

Religion

(excerpts taken from p. 112)

Tis thou, O God, by faith who dost reveal
Mysterious wonders to our senses weak;
When thou dost speak to hearts that deeply feel,
And humbly hear when thou dost *deign* to speak,
Oh, when the *mantle* of thy peace descends,
How the soul then *exults* in her *attire* !
The *garb* of grace of ev'ry thought extends,
And wraps reflection in *seraphic* fire.
In thee, I find all purity and peace,
All truth and goodness, wisdom far above
All worldly wisdom, might beyond increase,
And yet surpassing these, unbounded love,
Oh, that its light were shed on those whose deeds
Belie the *doctrines* of the church they claim;
Whose impious tongues *profane* their father's *creeds*,
And *sanction* wrong, e'en in religion's name.
Oh, God of mercy, throned in glory high,
O'er earth and all its miseries, look down!
Behold the *wretched*, hear the captives' cry.
And call thy *exiled* children round thy throne!
There I *fain* in *contemplation* gaze,
On thy eternal beauty, and would make
Of love one lasting *canticle* of praise,
And ev'ry *theme* but that, henceforth *forsake*.
(italized words may be used for vocabulary enrichment)

The New Coin

This narrative provides a clear example of the capricious whims of the Marquesa. Juan describes his thoughtless act of exchanging a coin, his fright and confusion and the end results for this insignificant childish act.

Don Nicolas gave me a peseta of the old coin one night; next morning there came at the door a beggar, my mistress gave me a peseta of the new coin for him, which calling my attention, and having the other in my pocket, one is as much worth as the other, muttered I to myself, and changing pesetas. I gave to the beggar the old one; after I went to my usual place in the antechamber, I sat down in the corner, and taking the new coin out of my pocket, began like a monkey turning it over and over again, when escaping through my fingers it fell down on the floor, making a rattling noise; at its sound my mistress came out of her chamber, made me pick it up; she looked at it, and her face reddened, she bid me go into her chamber, sit in a corner, and wait there; of course, my peseta remained in her possession, she recognized it as the same she gave me for the beggar two minutes before; with such proofs my fate was decided.

Suddenly I sprang and ran to the Marquis who was always very kind to me. When I arrived at his room, he said, "What have you done now?" In my confusion I related my case so confusedly, that he understanding that I stole the peseta, said in an angry tone, "You are a knave, why did you steal the peseta?"

For this, I was shut up in a dungeon four whole days, without any food, except what my brother could put through a little opening at the bottom of the door. At the fifth day I was taken out, dressed with a coarse linen dress and tied with a rope. They were sending me with the baggage of the family to another estate.

The Writing Lesson

This episode takes place when Juan is pressed into the service of Don Nicolas, son of the Marquesa. Having been treated inhumanely, Juan is now with a kind, gentle master who is the complete opposite of his old "evil" mistress.

Sometime later I was appointed to the service of young Don Nicolas, the Marquesa's son, who esteemed me not as a slave, but as a son. In his company the sadness of my soul began to disappear. As soon as day dawned, I use to get up, prepare his table, armchair and books, and I adapted myself so well to his customs, and manners that I began to give myself up to study. From his book of rhetoric I learned by heart a lesson everyday, which I use to recite like a parrot, without knowing the meaning. But being tired of it, I determined to do something more useful, and that was to learn to write. I bought ink, pens, and penknife, and some very fine paper; then taking some of the bits of written paper thrown away by my master, I put a piece of them between my fine sheets, and traced the characters underneath, in order to accustom my hand to make letters.

Extremely pleased with myself, I employed the hours from five to ten every evening, exercising my hand to write, and in daytime I use to copy the inscriptions at the bottom of pictures hung on the walls. I could imitate the best handwriting. My master was told how I spent my evenings, but he only advised me to drop that pastime, as not adapted to my situation in life, and that it would be more useful to me to employ my time in needle work. In vain was I forbidden to write, for when everybody went to bed, I use to light a candle, and in at my leisure I copied the best verses, thinking that if I could imitate these, I would become a poet. Once one of my sonnets fell into one of my friend's hands and Doctor Coronado was the first to foretell that I would be a great poet; he encouraged me, saying, that many of the great poets began in the same way.

The Lantern

This incidence takes place one evening after Juan has had an unusually hard day and is now accompanying the Marquessa back from town in her volante which is similar to a carriage. Juan's job is to hold on to the lantern outside the volante to light the way. Unfortunately from lack of rest, he falls asleep and drops the lantern. He recounts what happens for his negligence.

We were returning from town late one night, when the volante was going very fast, and I was seated as usual, with one hand holding the bar, and having the lantern in the other, I fell asleep, and it fell out of my hand; on awaking, I missed the lantern, and jumped down to get it, but such was my terror, I was unable to catch up with the carriage. I followed, well knowing what was to come, but when I came close to the house, I was seized by Don Sylvester, the young overseer. Leading me to the stocks, we met my mother, on seeing me, she attempted to inquire what I had done, but the overseer ordered her to be silent. Then raised his hand and struck my mother with the whip. I felt the blow in my own heart and became all at once like a raging lion and with all my strength I fell on him with teeth and hands, and it may be imagined how many cuffs, kicks and blows were given in the struggle that ensued.

My mother and myself were carried off and shut up in the same place. I suffered more punishment than was ordered, for my attack on the overseer. I asked them to have pity on my mother for God's sake; but at the sound of the first lash, infuriated like a tiger, I flew at the overseer, and was near losing my life in his hands.

(note: teacher may use her discretion when selecting specific vocabulary to be presented before reading each selection.)

Canto I: The Sugar Estate by Richard Madden

No more of rapine and its wasted plains,
Its stolen victims and unshallowed gains,
It's christians merchants and brigands bold
Who wage their wars and do their work for gold.
No more horrors sickening to the heart,
Commercial murders and the crowded mart;
The living cargoes and the constant trace
Of pain and anguish in each shrunken face!
Far from the city and its tainted breath,
Its moral plaque and atmosphere of death;
The grave of freedom, honesty, and truth,
The haunt of folly and its shoals for youth.
Its empty churches and its crowded jails,
Its grasping dealers and its human sales,
Its gambling nobles and its spendthrift crowd.
Profuse, rapacious, indolent, and proud.

Canto II: The Sugar Estate

We stall our Negroes as we pen our sheep,
And hold them fast as good stone walls can keep
A Negro gang, and every night you'll find
The "spell" released, in yonder square confined,
We have no doubt, our runaways at times,
And flight, you know, we count the worst crimes.
Slaves who are flogged and worked in chains by day,
Left in the stocks all night ... you think would stay
On the estate as soon as they're set free
And yet the fools again will dare to flee.
As to food you may be sure we give
Enough to let the wretched creatures live;
The diet is somewhat slender, there's no doubt,
It would not do, to let them grow to stout;
Nor is it here, nor on estates around,
That fat and saucy Negroes may be found.
'Tis not the scourge, or shackle, plaque or pest,
That wears the Negro out—but lack of rest.
Night after night in constant labor past,
Will break down nature, and its strength at last.

(excerpts from The Slave Trade p. 46 by Richard Madden)

They're only Negroes—true, they count not here,
Perhaps, their cries, and groans may count elsewhere.
How can they dare to advocate this trade,
Or call the scared scriptures to its aid.
How can they have the boldness to lay claim,
And boast their title to the christian name,
Or yet pretend to walk in reason's light,
And wage eternal war with humor right.
The pen does all the business of the sword,
On Congo's shore, the Cuban merchant's sword
Serves to send forth a thousand brigands bold,
"To make prey," and fill another hold;
To ravage distant nations at his ease,
By written order, just to please.

(excerpts from The Slave Trade p. 49)

The Cuban merchant prosecutes his trade
Without qualm, or approach being made;
Sits at his desk, and with composure sends
A formal order to his Gold-Coast friends
For some five hundred "buttos" of effect,
And bids them ship "the goods" as he directs.
That human cargo, to its fullest mount,
Is duly brought and shipped on his account;
Stowed to the best advantages in the bold,

And limb to limb in chains, as you behold;
On every beast the well-written brand, J. G.
In letters bold, engraved on flesh you see.

(The Sugar Estate p. 68)

The deaths they tell you of the slaves, are here
Some ten percent, and sometimes twelve a year.
A fair consumption to of human life,
Where wholesale slaughter shows no marital strife.
But then, perhaps, the births are in excess;
Alas! the births each year are less and less.
Three in the last twelve months, and two of these
Had died, because the mothers did not please
To rear up slaves; and they preferred to see
Their children dead before their face, ere they
Would give their young "nigritos" to the kind
Indulgent masters which they are said to find.

MANZANO'S POEM IN THE ORIGINAL SPANISH

Mis Treinta A-os

Cuando miro el espacio que he corrido
desde la cuna hasta el presente d'a,
tiemblo y saludo á la fortune mia
más de terror que de atención movida.
Sorpréndeme la lucha que he podido
sostener contra suerte tan imp'a,
si tal llamarse puede la por'a
de mi infelice sér al mal nacido.
treinta a-os ha que conoc' la tierra;
treinta a-os ha que en gemidor estado
triste infortunio por doquier me asalta;
mas nada es pare mi la crude guerra
que en vano suspirar he suportado,
si la comparo, ¡ oh Dios!, con lo que falta.

(This poem may be translated by your Hispanic students if they so choose. It would be quite interesting to have them compare this poem to the one which has been translated in the *Lesson Plan Section* of unit.)

Answer Key For Word Match

1. Brigands - bandits who steal and plunder
2. Profuse - bountiful, liberal, extravagant
3. Shallow - not deep, having little depth
4. moral - teachings of right and wrong
5. Eternal - everlasting
6. Shackle - to bind, to deprive of freedom
7. Scourge - to whip severely, to punish
8. Shoals - shallow sandbank, not deep
9. Prosecutes - to follow to the end for punishment of a crime
10. Qualm - a sudden attack of illness, or fear
11. Indolent - feeling no pain, no conscience
12. Cargoes - goods and merchandise carried in a ship
13. Trace - trail, course, or path one follows
14. Rapacious - living on prey
15. Plaque - a flat thin piece of metal used for decoration
16. Commercial - designed for profit
17. Saucy - to be rude or impudent
18. Anguish - to suffer intense pain or sorrow
19. Exiled - forced removal from one's country
20. Tainted - contaminating influence, something bad
21. Rapine - steal, to take by force
22. stall - a stable or barn to house animals
23. Haunt - reappear continually
24. Folly - a foolish action, act or idea
25. Atmosphere - surrounding influence or environment

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>