



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1991 Volume IV: Recent American Poetry: Expanding the Canon

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## Spanish-American Voices in American Poetry

Curriculum Unit 91.04.02  
by Silvia D. Ducach

### **Objectives**

The objective of this unit is to expose a Spanish for Spanish Speakers eighth grade class to poetry written by Spanish and Hispanic writers in Spanish and English. My purpose is to develop discussion and inspire creative poetry writing in both languages. This unit will have two phases: The first will introduce the Hispanic students to poetry in Spanish, and the second will introduce the students to the poetry of writers who like themselves are second generation Puerto Ricans. Although my students are fluent in spoken Spanish, they all have varying degrees of difficulty writing the language, but they are all fluent in English. This unit will be appropriate for use in language classes as well as bilingual classes in the Middle Schools. The poetry that I have selected will promote discussion, develop vocabulary and inspire writing. It can be taught in translation, in English, and can therefore, be used by an English teacher who wishes to expose his or her students to a sampling of Hispanic poetry.

My objective is twofold: in the first phase of this unit it is to motivate students and elicit their enthusiasm about poetic language in Spanish, allowing them to recognize how the sounds of the language that they hear at home are part of a very rich cultural literary heritage, thus affirming their pride in their cultural identity.

The main objective of the second phase of this unit is to present to the students poems written by Puerto Rican writers living in the United States who write primarily in English, also in Spanish and sometimes in "Spanglish." Should the students identify with any of the themes presented in the poetry of the "Nuyorican" writers, it is my hope that this recognition would solidify their Puerto Rican identity, and affirm their uniqueness, as a part of this national minority in the United States.

### **Strategies:**

The procedure that we will follow weekly will be to have a student volunteer read the poem of the week for its rhythms and musicality. The teacher will then read the poem to the class. The class will look for any vocabulary which might present difficulty in any or both languages. We will study the content and structure of the poems as well as any other linguistic characteristic of the poems, such as rhymes, metaphors or images. Definitions of these poetic terms will be given and discussed, examples of each will be provided, (whenever appropriate in the course of a lesson. After the study of the poems has been completed; the students will be asked to write their own poems in the language in which they feel more comfortable writing. We will discuss

any difficulties found in the poems either in the content or in the structure. The procedure for analyzing individual poems will be further explained in the section of this unit devoted to lesson plans.

### **Background on Spanish American Poetry**

It is not my intention to give a summary of the history of literature in Spanish America in this unit, it is rather, to highlight important moments or ideas within literary movements, in order for us to have a clearer idea of the development of poetry in Spanish America. For teachers who wish to have more detailed information about the poetry of Spanish America, I refer to very useful literary and historical sources in the Teacher's Bibliography of this unit.

Poetry has existed in Latin America since the earliest pre-Colombian civilizations existed. The most advanced pre-Colombian cultures were the Maya who occupied today's Honduras and Guatemala up to the Yucatan; the Incas of the Andes lived where we find Peru, Chile and Ecuador today; the Aztecs lived in Central and Southern Mexico. There were many languages throughout the continent, the most well known are "Quechua" spoken by the Incas; "Quiche" spoken by the Mayas; and the Aztec's "Nahuatl." We know that these civilizations were very artistic and advanced in many areas. However, they did not have a writing system. Their poetry was oral. The Spanish missionaries were the first to hear the artistic value of this oral poetry of the indigenous populations of America. We must then, rely on their translations to Latin, for the earliest examples of poetry in this continent.

In the anthology *The Yellow Canary Whose Eye is so Black , Poems of Spanish America*, Durán says about the Aztec kings, ". . . they maintained "houses of songs" to train young poets and sponsored poetry contests . . . The Aztecs did not use rhyme but relied on a delicate balance between accented and unaccented syllables and elaborate symbolism. Their poetry of "flowers and songs," was always sung or declaimed to music." (Durán, Cheli 3)

The coming together of Indigenous and Spanish cultures produced a unique and extraordinary body of literature in Spanish America. Since the arrival of Columbus the mixture of races and cultures created a new way of seeing the world which was reflected in literature. In his book *Reflections on Spanish-American Poetry* , Jorge Carrera-Andrade says "The Spaniard "changed" upon contact with America and, although he did not yet become a Spanish-American, he gradually acquired the coloration of New World attitudes . . . the inner transformation induced by the American environment and way of life produced a whole literature: the narratives of the Cronistas de Indias, the first observers and interpreters of the New World's beauty." (Carrera-Andrade 3) During the period of Conquest and Colonization many Hispanic Americans were educated in Spain. The poets of this historical period followed the European trends in literature but their subjects were always distinctly American. An example from 1569 would be *La Araucana* by the conquistador Alonso de Ercilla who praised the Araucan chiefs.

The period of struggle for independence of the Spanish Colonies saw a literature of defiance of authority and a sense of social injustice that never left the Spanish American writer. Jose Mart' is an example of a poet-martyr who literally died fighting for the freedom of his Island. The poet Ruben Dar'ó began the movement of Modernismo which was to influence even the poets of Spain. After 1880 when most of the countries were independent from Spain, Spanish American literature was to be unique and innovative. Dar'ó experimented with new meters and introduced many new ideas, Duran notes the influence of Poe and Whitman on Spanish American poets from Dar'ó to Neruda.

After Modernismo and the First World War there were many new currents which influenced the poets of

Spanish America namely Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism. In Spain Ultraism appears and the Argentinian poet Borges brings it to this continent. Creacionismo is introduced by the Chilean poet Huidobro. All this activity occurs between 1910 and 1940. Many more movements and groups continue to write the history of Spanish American literature until the present.

The images found in Aztec poetry will appear again in poets like César Vallejo from Peru, Pablo Neruda from Chile, Octavio Paz from Mexico and many others from this continent. They are images of the tropics, and of ancient Machu Pichu, of hunger and injustice, of freedom, of life and death. Poets like Nicolás Guillén from Cuba and Luis Palés-Matos from Puerto Rico incorporate the African roots in the rhythm of their poetry, making their song unique. This Afro-Caribbean trend will reappear in the poetry of Nuyorican poets such as Tato Laviera. It is also interesting to note how contemporary Nuyorican poets gather the urban speech of their people and transfer it to their poetry, so that, like the Aztec poets, they continue the tradition of poetry as song. Their drum is played to also awaken their people but also to preserve this new speech, this so called “Spanglish” which defines who they are.

Carrera-Andrade sums up the uniqueness and value of Spanish American poetry as follows “ . . . an attitude exists in Spanish-American man which is his own; this attitude concerns not only the physical world but also the great concepts such as time, love, religion, politics. In contrast to the European, who feels historical emotion, the Spanish-American is a creature of the future and lives with passion in the present, which seems to him the only thing truly ‘perpetual’. There is a ‘Spanish-American time’ which is not the same as time in other geographic regions. Similarly the poetry of Latin America is different from Spanish and European poetry in general, since it is the fruit of America’s sociological evolution and constitutes a stage in the development of its thought.” (Acarrera-Andrade 20).

## **Strategies**

### *Phase I*

As I stated in my objectives the first part of this unit will be devoted to the study of poems by Spanish or Spanish-American poets. To initiate the student’s glimpse into the roots of poetry in Latin America I have selected a poem from Duran’s anthology already mentioned. This poem is “Yo, el Poeta” (I, The Poet)(C. Durán 2) from Nahuatl. Discussion of this poem will give us a chance to find out how important an art form poetry was in pre-Colombian America.

In “Yo, el poeta” the poet says he is singer and he plays a drum which he hopes will awaken the souls of the dead. We will discuss how the poem shows the function of the poet in Aztec society. Why does he play a drum? Who does he want to awaken and why? In the second part of this unit I will show how the contemporary poets see their function in today’s society and we will try to tie the two together to realize how far back our poetic roots go.

Next I have selected three poems by Feder’co Garc’a-Lorca, (1898-1936) perhaps the best loved and most universally known poet of Spain. His poetry is full of mystery and music and he has a profound understanding of nature. I selected a poet from Spain to tie the two continents together and to show the cultural continuity between Spain and its descendants. Two of the poems are from the book *The Cricket Sings* which was written for children and its language will not present great difficulties to the students. I also selected these poems because I think the subject matter will elicit good discussions. In the poem “Canción de Jinete ” (The Rider’s Song) (Blackburn [17]) the poem describes a place, Córdoba, in Spain to which the rider will never arrive. Our discussion will include the mystery that surrounds the rider. Why is he never to arrive at his destination? Is

there a reason? Why are the words “distant and alone” repeated? Why does the poet repeat the exclamation “Ay”? Is there a rhyme?

The next poem from the same book is “De casa en casa” (From House to House) (Blackburn [30]). This poem suggests the idea of going from place to place as in “The Rider’s Song” discussed above, but in a different way, here the poet searches for an ideal place and finds that childhood is that ideal. It is a graphic poem, the children will be able to draw pictures of what the poet describes: houses, the seahorse, the sky, the earth, clouds, slings and stones, and a boy. There is a wish in the final verse of the poem: “I want to be a boy, a boy!” (Blackburn[17]) This last verse will elicit the students’ own poems. They will be asked to write their own poems imitating Lorca’s; either beginning or ending them with “I want to be a . . . ”

The last of Lorca’s poems we will study will be from the book *Poems of Federico Garc’a Lorca* it is the poem “Surprise.” We will study the vocabulary of this poem, its use of the verbs in the preterite and the imperfect and its rhyme pattern but the content of this poem will be more important than the structure. It is a poem about a man who is mysteriously stabbed in the street. It will elicit discussion about the senseless cycle of violence that the children witness everyday in the inner city. In this poem death takes place without a reason and by surprise. Could students write about such an event in their city, either because they have seen it happen or because they learned it through the media? Children will be asked to write about an event they thought was violent. This might be a vehicle to exorcise the pain and anger often displayed by the students in school.

From Spain we will move to South America and study three poems by the Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) considered by some critics the greatest poet of Spanish America. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. He echoed the voice of the Inca ancestors when he wrote his poem to Machu Pichu. He captured the sufferings of his people living in constant political turmoil, poverty, and oppression in Spanish America. He started writing poems of love and desperation but later on in his career, he stripped his poems of any literary pretensions and wrote the “Elemental Odes.” In this period of his poetry he wanted to be understood by the people, the masses. Thus, he wrote about concrete aspects of life and found joy in the simplest objects, and in nature: an onion, a pair of socks, the color green, the air, a seagull. We will adhere to the following definition of an ode in order to study Pablo Neruda’s odes: “A lyric poem typically addressed to some person or thing and characterized by lofty feeling and dignified style.” (Guralnik 519)

We will explain this definition to the students and look for these characteristics in Neruda’s odes. The odes I selected are rather long but light in content and I think the students will enjoy reading them. Before we begin the reading of “Oda al color verde” (Ode to the color green,) (Neruda 93) the students will be asked to make a list of “green” objects they know (grass, leaves, eyes, etc.). They will be asked to contrast their lists with the many definitions of green given in the poem. Are there any metaphors for the color green? Is there a rhyme? Students will be asked to write their own “Ode to the color . . . ”

The “Oda a una estrella”, (Ode to a star) (Neruda 113) is a fantasy about a man who steals a star and takes it home. The light of the star creates many problems for the man. He encounters many difficulties and must dispose of the star. We will discuss the story within the ode, and how the poet creates this fantasy. The students will be asked to respond to the following questions: What metaphors represent the star? How does the man steal the star? Where does he keep the star? What problems does he encounter? How and why does he return the star? Is there a rhyme in this ode? What vocabulary needs explanation? The students will be asked to think about something they have or had that they were asked to give up. They will be asked to write an ode to something they consider to be very precious but must be given up.

In his odes, Neruda tries to find what is universal to all mankind in the minute description of everyday objects; and in some odes humor is a main ingredient. Such an ode is the third one we will study, “Oda a los calcetines” (Ode to a pair of socks) (Neruda 127). The study of this ode will give us the chance to compare the many words used in Spanish for “socks” What is the word in Chile, in Puerto Rico, in Argentina, etc.? What does the poet compare his socks to? Why are socks so important to him? What are some metaphors for feet? We will review what is the “moral” of a story and answer what is the “moral” in this ode, according to the poet. Is there a rhyme? At this point, for our written practice we will make a class list of the objects we would like to praise, and we will write a class collaborative ode. For example, “Ode to gloves, hats, coats, . . . ”etc.

### **Background on “Nuyorican” Poetry**

The term “Nuyorican” originally was coined by Puerto Ricans on the island to denote emigrants who settled mostly in New York. It was a term which had negative connotations. In his article “Teaching Puerto Rican Authors: identity and Modernization in Nuyorican Texts” Mr. Cruz-Malavé explains: “In the 1960s Puerto Rican authors began to reclaim this term. In so doing, they were affirming the immigrant community’s specific experiences, history and social practices, particularly code switching.” (Cruz-Malavé 51) This last characteristic, “code switching,” that is moving from one language to another, is what sets these writers apart from Insular, Spanish-American, Anglo, and African-American poets. Their language shows that they are indeed part of two cultures as the term Nuyorican implies.

This language dichotomy, at times, shows a feeling of ambivalence, of belonging neither here nor there, as expressed in the first two lines of Tato Laviera’s poem, “my graduation day ” “i think in spanish/i write in english.” (Laviera 7) There is much controversy among critics surrounding the language of the Nuyorican poets. Some believe that the use of English in a Spanish text interspersed within a Spanish text, somehow diminishes its “Puertoricanness.” Others like Miguel Algar’n state: “The power of Nuyorican talk is that it is street rooted. It is the way people talk in the raw before the spirit is molded into “standards” . . . It is a language full of short pulsating rhythms that manifest the unrelenting strain that the Nuyorican experiences.” (Algar’n 16)

This is a new language which requires the passage of time to become “legitimate” and “standardized.” If time shows that it does not survive because English overpowers Spanish or vice versa, at least the poetry will give testimony to its existence. Algar’n believes that “The poet is responsible for inventing newness. The newness needs words, words never heard before or used before. The poet has to invent a new language, a new tradition of communication.” (Algar’n 16)

The force that propels this poetry is a sense of social injustice encircled by a feeling of outrage at the conditions in which the Puerto Rican immigrants find themselves in most large urban centers like New York. It is bearing witness to the endless cycle of poverty and discrimination that drives the denunciation of this poetry. There is also anger at what the poet perceives to be the submissiveness of a people who come to the big city in search the “American dream.” This poetry wants to awaken its people and shock them into action as in Pedro Pietri’s “Puerto Rican Obituary,” where he shows that the dream does not exist. In this poem there is also a mythification of Puerto Rico as a vision of paradise another characteristic present in much of this poetry.

There is another type of poetry written by female Puerto Rican writers either born or raised in the United States, who write primarily in English, although Spanish is an ever present force in their work. They are concerned with the disenfranchised of the “barrio” but their poetry begins to move away from pure denunciation into other areas. They are concerned with international issues, feminist issues, and they show a

preoccupation with cultural identity. Their protest takes a more intimate and subtle approach than that of their male counterparts mentioned above. Rosario Morales, Aurora Levins-Morales and Judith Ort'z-Cofer are representative of this poetic trend which can be aligned with the poetry of contemporary Chicana writers.

### *Phase II*

As stated in the objectives, the second part of this unit will be devoted to the poetry of Puerto Rican writers. This part of the unit will be taught beginning in February until the end of the school year and it will be introduced once a week as in phase I of this unit.

The majority of the students in my target class are second generation Puerto Ricans much like the writers mentioned in Edna Acosta-Belén's article "The Literature of the Puerto Rican National Minority in the United States." They are "those Puerto Ricans who were born or raised in the United States and who are part of a national minority." (Acosta-Belén 107) They struggle with their sense of identity in a society that will often reject or isolate them. These students are not exposed to the writings of second generation Puerto Ricans in their traditional English classes. Many times these students express their frustration because the schools they attend do not recognize people in their national minority, a fact that furthers their ostracism and sense of isolation.

In this phase of my unit I intend to expose the students to the second generation of Puerto Rican writers who have expressed a sense of outrage at the isolation of their people, and who have shown through their poems the injustices caused by discrimination and poverty among other social problems. We will study and discuss the attitude of the poets towards the United States and their feelings about Puerto Rico. The students will be introduced to Ms. Naomi Ayala, a young Puerto Rican writer born in Puerto Rico but emigrated with her parents to New Haven in 1968. Ms. Ayala teaches creative writing in New Haven and gives workshops for adults and children. She will be discussing her poetry with my class in a workshop she is planning to conduct for us during this phase of the unit. It is important for my students to identify with people who, like themselves, feel the isolation and injustices I mentioned above. In an issue of the magazine *Hispanic* Ms. Ayala says; "There is a feeling of displacement, because for me my home is still Puerto Rico. The richness of that culture is part of my make-up as a person and as a poet. I often feel like a fish out of water." (Rodriguez 28) After the workshop, students will then attempt to write their own poems expressing their feelings about being Puerto Rican in the United States, and will discuss each other's poems.

We will continue this phase of the unit with a poem in Spanish by Julio Marzán. This poet was born in Puerto Rico in 1946 and teaches Spanish-American literature in this country. The poem entitled "Sustancia" (Nutshell) (Barradas 94) is about a doorman in a New York City building. We will focus on the relationship between the doorman and Sra. Mathews for whom he sometimes has to get a taxi. We will need to explain the significance of the Park Avenue address to the students. Once the importance of the address is established, the social class differences will be evident, and the students will be able to analyze the tone of the poem and its meaning. Is the tone angry or matter of fact? Does the poet use a rhyme scheme? What is the irony in this poem? What is the relationship between Sr. Rodriguez and Sra. Mathews? The students will be asked to discuss this relationship as well as the irony at the end of the poem. How is social injustice shown in this poem? The students will be asked to imitate the style of this poem and write a poem that begins with "El se-or . . . es . . ."

We will next study fragments of Pedro Pietri's poem (in English) "Puerto Rican Obituary." Pedro Pietri was born in Puerto Rico in 1944 but grew up in this country. His poems appear in several anthologies and he is also a playwright. "Puerto Rican Obituary" (Lauter 2510) is a long mock epic of the Puerto Rican experience in the

United States. It is sarcastic in its anger. I have selected verses 94 to 125 and 291 to 313 because of the age level of the students. An analysis of the entire poem may be too difficult at this stage. In the first fragment we will focus on the idea of the American dream. What is this dream according to the poet? Who promotes this dream in society? How are Puerto Ricans and African-Americans portrayed on T.V.? Why did all the people mentioned in the poem die? What is an Obituary? What is the empty dream? The second fragment is the end of the poem and Pietri's idealization of Puerto Rico as a vision of paradise. What does the poet think about Puerto Rico? What is Puerto Rico like in this vision? The students will be asked to write about an aspect of being Puerto Rican in their city. They will be asked to imitate the style of this poet by repeating a certain phrase for emphasis.

The next poet we will discuss is Tato Laviera who was born in Puerto Rico in 1951 and has lived in New York City since 1960. He is best known for his book *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* in which he, like Pietri denounces the injustices that the poor immigrants from Puerto Rico are faced with in the city. From this book we will study the poem "Frio"(Cold). This poem is about spending a cold night in a building without heat; it is also about poverty and alienation. The students will be asked to look at the vocabulary and find the Spanish words in the poem, what do they mean: why did the poet choose to write them in Spanish. How does the poem make you feel? What do the last three lines of the poem mean and why are they apart from the rest of the poem? Students will be asked to think about a time they felt cold, hungry, tired, upset, etc., and write a poem about this experience. They can write their poems in English but they must use three words in Spanish, this procedure may also be reversed for students who are more fluent in Spanish.

We will continue our study with two poems from the book *Getting Home Alive* co-authored in 1986 by Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins-Morales who are mother and daughter respectively. Rosario was born in Puerto Rico. She married a Jewish-American political activist and in 1954 gave birth to Aurora, who moved with her parents from Puerto Rico to different parts of the United States. The poems I have selected are not about protest or denunciation of social conditions but rather about themes that celebrate life or that show how cultural diversity is a positive aspect of our multicultural society.

We will study "Happiness Is A Coqui" (Morales 131) by Rosario Morales. The poet prefaces her poem with the following explanation: "A coqui is a small Caribbean tree frog named after the sound it makes. Coquis fill the Caribbean night with music. The one I write about is a species that lives in El Yunque, the national rain forest of Puerto Rico." (Levins-Morales 131) The poet writes with admiration of the sound the coqui makes in the still of the night. She describes how the sound enters her body, fills her heart, and how it makes her feel. She marvels at how such a small "instrument" can make such loud music. Students will be asked, how many notes does a coqui make? What are the sounds like? What is the sound of the coqui compared to? How does the sound of the coqui enter the body of the poet? Where does it lodge? Why the heart? What color is the coqui and where does it live? What does the repetition of "coqui" and "qui" do for the poem? We could continue asking questions about this poem which is so rich in images and joyful in its evocation of this minuscule but unique and endearing symbol of Puerto Rico. The students will be asked to write a poem beginning with "Happiness is . . ."

Aurora Levins-Morales is a product of two very distinct national ethnic minorities in the United States she is as she states in her poem "Child of the Americas" ". . . a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew." (Levins-Morales 50) I have chosen this poem because it expresses the multicultural aspect of American society. Some of my students have Hispanic surnames, but are also products of either multiethnic or multiracial marriages. In "Child of the Americas" the poet recognizes her Hispanic, European, Taino and African roots, that is, her multicultural background. She does not limit herself to two ethnic minorities, she wants to be accepted as a child of many

cultures. She says English is in her consciousness and it is her craft. Spanish is in her flesh because she also speaks with her body, thus recognizing the importance of body language as a tool of communication in the Hispanic world. The discussion of this poem will be centered on the theme of multiculturalism. We will discuss who were the Tainos, when did they live in Puerto Rico, why did they disappear, when did Africans come to the Americas and why, what is a mestiza, what is a diaspora, what are crossroads, why is English a “tool”? The student will be asked to imagine a world at peace, without racial conflict; and write a poem about a future, ideal world, where peace and understanding among all people triumphs over discrimination.

The last poet we will analyze is Judith Ort’z-Cofer. She was born in Puerto Rico 1952. Her father was in the Navy and her family often moved from the island to different parts of the United States. She had to make constant adjustments moving back and forth between two cultures. She is an English professor and has published poetry since 1981. From her book *Terms of Survival* I have chosen three poems: “La Envidia” (Envy), “The Angel of the Trash Collectors,” and “So Much for Ma-ana.” These three poems were written in English.

In “La Envidia” (Ort’z-Cofer 11) the poet envisions envy as a green snake. Through the use of several metaphors we see envy in its different forms. It is a necklace, it is someone else’s strong muscles, it is a place you will never visit. Envy is insidious, and it starts as early as wishing for your mother’s milk when she gives it to another child. We will discuss first why the poet chooses to entitle the poem in Spanish. We will review metaphors and look for metaphors of envy within the poem. We will look for rhyme. We will discuss how does the poem makes us feel. Is envy a good feeling? What does the expression “The grass is always greener mean”? Do we have an equivalent expression in Spanish? The students will be asked to write a poem about a negative feeling such as envy, jealousy or hate, imitating the style of this author.

“The Angel of the Trash Collectors” (Ort’z-Cofer 53) is a fantasy. The poet tells us about an angel of grey wings who travels in the cities’ trash collecting trucks protecting the men who must leave their homes at “dangerous” hours to perform the task of collecting garbage. There are several vocabulary words which will need explanation. They are: laden, refuse, exhaust, dispelling, vehicle and oblivious. We will make use of dictionaries to find meanings for these words. We will then discuss when do the men leave their homes? Why are their dreams unfinished? What are the “oblivious jaws” of the vehicle? Who is the angel? Why is the angel with the men? What do you think about the work the men do? What feeling does this poem evoke in the reader? Students will be asked to write a poem entitled “The angel of the . . .”

The poem “So Much for Ma-ana” (Ort’z-Cofer 37) is about several things. It is about so many unfinished things that we leave for “ma-ana,” (tomorrow) but it is about going back to Puerto Rico. It is the story of a mother who goes back to the island after twenty years and then corresponds with the daughter who has stayed behind in the United States. It is about a “mamá” asking her “ni-a” (child) to come back too. It is poem full of humor and emotion contrasting the many differences that exist between “here” and “there.” Students will be asked to look for the Spanish words in the text for their poetic value, such as in the rhyme “ni-a” “pi-a.” They will be asked to find out what is Mother’s life like since her return to the island? What does she write in her letters? What is the daughter’s life like? Is she happy? What is the daughter’s promise at the end of this poem? How does the poet convey humor and emotion? The student will be asked to think about the times they have been to Puerto Rico, who is left behind, perhaps grandparents, an aunt, an uncle, cousins? What is it like to go for a visit and then come back? How does this event make them feel? They will be asked to write a poem using Spanish and English, expressing some of the feelings that emerged during the discussion of this poem.

The last poem that I am including in this unit need not be the last poem to be discussed in the school year.



There are so many wonderful poets that I have discovered in the course of preparing this unit that I hope to be able to incorporate more in my teaching if the busy school calendar allows it.

The poems chosen for this unit are a small sampling of the wide thematic and stylistic range of Spanish-American and Nuyorican poetry. Depriving the second generation Puerto Rican students of contact with these writers, will continue their social isolation and promote lack of self-esteem. They must not be deprived of their identity. Spanish-American voices should be integrated into the regular English curriculum. The canon must be also expanded in the middle grades.

Copies of all the poems presented in this unit will be available at the Institute's office.

**Lesson Plan 1 Poem: "Fr'o" (The Cold) by Tato Laviera.**

Poem will be read aloud by a student volunteer first, then by the teacher.

*Vocabulary:* In English: mph, penetrated, pores, mr. steam, embryo. In Spanish: asustos, (explain to the students that they will not find this word in the dictionary as it is spelled in this poem. It is probably a colloquial form of the verb "asustar" which means to frighten). Explain "personification."

*Questions/Discussion:* This is a poem about poverty and alienation. What is the importance of the three Spanish words used in this poem? What does the verse "second birth called nothingness" refer to? What is the effect of the last three lines of the poem on the reader? Why are these lines set apart from the rest of the poem? Why is the heat called "mr. steam"? Should these two words have a capital letter? What unfair aspect of society does this poem talk about? Is there any humor at all?

*Writing :* Think about a time you were cold or hungry or upset, was it fair? Write a poem about this experience. If you write in English, use three key words in Spanish. Follow the structure of the poem "Frio."

**Lesson Plan 2 Poem "Sustancia"(Nutshell) by Julio Marzán.**

Poem will be read aloud by a student volunteer first, then by the teacher.

*Vocabulary :* portero, calle 85 y Park Avenue, dama, tiene razón.

*Materials :* Map of New York City.

*Questions/Discussion :* What is this poem about? What does Sr. Rodriguez do for a living? Who is Sra. Mathews? What is the relationship between Sr. Rodriguez and Sra. Mathews? What is the tone of the poem? What is irony? Is there irony in this poem? How is social injustice shown in this poem? Is there a rhyme in this poem? How many lines does this poem have? How many words in each line?

*Writing :* Sometimes things are not what they appear to be. People are not aware that something is wrong in their life. Was Sr. Rodriguez really happy as a doorman? Write a poem imitating the style of "Sustancia." Begin with "El se-or . . . es . . ."

**Lesson Plan 3 Poem: "So much for Ma-ana" by Judith Ort'zCofer.**

In this poem the author creates an episode in the life of a mother and daughter separated by the return, after twenty years, of the mother to the Island. The poem relates their correspondence which contains their impressions and feelings about each other.

Poem will be read by a student volunteer first, then by the teacher.

*Vocabulary:* The vocabulary of this poem written in English, should not present any difficulties to the eight grade students.

*Materials:* Pictures, posters, postcards and books about Puerto Rico.

*Questions/Discussion :* What does the title of the poem mean? Why is the word “ma-ana” expressed in Spanish? Why did the Mother go back to the Island? Why do you think that the daughter stayed behind? What does mother do in the Island? What is Mother worried about? Find the Spanish words in the poem and explain their importance? Are there any metaphors? Is there a rhyme? What is the effect of the rhyme in this poem? What does the daughter promise at the end of the poem? Is there humor or sadness in this poem?

*Writing :* Think about a time you have been to Puerto Rico or to another place; what is it like to leave someone behind? Write a poem expressing your feelings about this event.

## **Bibliography for Teachers**

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Contains an excellent introduction about Nuyorican poetry and Nuyorican language by Miguel Algar’n. This anthology of poetry is in Spanish and English.

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A historical anthology of Hispanic-American Literature from 1492 until 1960. Very useful for Bilingual or Foreign Language teachers. (In Spanish)

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Contains a history of Hispanic-American literature from 1492 until 1966. (In Spanish)

Bab’n, Mar’a Teresa. *La Cultura de Puerto Rico* . Instituto de Cultura Puertorrique-a: San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1970.

An overview of Puerto Rican culture. Contains several chapters on Puertorrican poetry and prose. It offers a very useful chronology of historical events in Puerto Rico from 1493 to 1968. (In Spanish) Useful for Bilingual and Spanish teachers.

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*Estados Unidos* . Ediciones Huracán: Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1980.

A collection of Nuyorican poetry with a very insightful introduction by Efrain Barradas and a very interesting note by the translator of the poetry. It also offers a good bibliography. (In Spanish).

Carrera-Andrade, Jorge. *Reflections on Spanish-American Poetry* . Translated by Don C. Bliss and Gabriela Bliss. State University of New York Press: Albany, 1973.

A collection of essays on Spanish-American poetry highlighting characteristics that make it unique. Historical and literary overview. I recommend it for Bilingual, Spanish teachers and anyone who loves poetry. (In English).

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Analyzes the search of identity in Nuyorican poetry and prose.

D'az-Plaja, Guillermo. *Feder'co Garc'a-Lorca*. Editorial Guillermo Kraft: Buenos Aires, 1948.

An in-depth look at the Spanish writer's work. (In Spanish).

Durán, Cheli, ed. and trans. *The Yellow Canary Whose Eye Is So Black* . Macmillan Publishing Co.: New York, 1977.

Offers an excellent overview of Spanish-American Poetry in Spanish and English. I recommend the introduction.

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This book offers a very good collection of essays on different aspects of Lorca's work. (In English)

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I enjoyed this book of poetry but found it too difficult for the middle grades. I recommend it for secondary school students. All the poems are in English.

———. *Rhythm, Content and Flavor* . Arte Publico Press: Houston, 1989. Same comments as above apply to this book also.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams. Teaching Children to Write Poetry* . Harper and Row: New York, 1970.

Excellent suggestions on how to teach poetry to children. Contains a section on poems using Spanish words.

Lauter, Paul. et. al. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* . Volume II D.C. Heath and Company: Lexington, Massachusetts, 1990.

This book served as our Institute's text. It contains American poetry from 1865 to the present. It contains poetry by poets of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. The biographical and literary introductions to the work of each writer are very useful to the teacher.

Laviera, Tato. *La Carret Made a U-Turn* . Arte Público Press, Houston, 1984.

This is a book of Tato Laviera's poetry. He is one of the Nuyorican poets studied in this unit. See Lesson Plan for the Poem "Fr'o"

Levins-Morales, Aurora and Rosario Morales.

*Getting Home Alive* . Firebrand Books: Ithaca, New York, 1986.

This book offers poetry and prose by a mother and daughter team of writers. See the poems "Child of the Americas" and "Happiness is a Coqu'" discussed in this unit.

Matilla, Alfredo and Iván Silén. *The Puerto Rican Poets* . Bantam Books: New York, 1972.

Contains an anthology of most important Puerto Rican poetry (according to the editors) since before 1955 to the time of publication. It offers an interesting introduction in English and the poems are also presented in translation.

Messing, Shelley. "Teaching Poetry en Dos Languages." *Teachers and Writers* , May-June 1982, Volume 13, No. 5, pp. 6-11.

Very inspirational article by a New York English teacher who taught Spanish poetry to elementary school students in the South Bronx. I like her approach and recommend this article to Bilingual and Spanish teachers alike. It offers many good suggestions for the classroom.

Ort'z-Cofer, Judith. *Terms of Survival* . Arte Público Press: Houston, 1987.

Wonderful poet. I selected three of her poems from this book for this unit.

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This article outlines the contributions of several Hispanic-Americans in the United States.

Rodríguez-Monegal, Emir. *El Viajero Inmóvil* . Monte Avila Editores: Caracas, 1977.

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