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The Influence of Musical Folk Traditions in the Poetry of Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén

Curriculum Unit 97.01.05
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I am writing this unit plan in response to a sense of alienation I perceive on the part of African American students towards learning Spanish as a foreign language. Many of these students do not feel motivated by their classes and do not continue past the beginning level or simply do not engage in the study of Spanish at all. By creating a unit that addresses the African influence in Latin American writing and culture, I hope to convince more students of African descent that the study of Spanish is pertinent to their lives. To this end, my unit will focus on Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, two African-American poets, one familiar and one foreign, who forged a friendship across languages, cultures and countries.

This unit is designed for Spanish students in eighth through twelfth grades that are either learning Spanish as a foreign language or are native speakers of the language. It can be adapted to any level of language acquisition, but would probably be better for the student who has had at least a year of Spanish previously. I envision this as an African History month unit that could culminate in student performances at a school-wide assembly or for other classes or grades. There are innumerable performance-oriented ways students could show what they have learned in this unit, from reciting their own poetry to demonstrating music with the instruments they have made.

I have divided this unit into six sections that each contain a narrative so that the teacher has enough background to teach the concepts without having to do any extra research. Each section also includes student objectives. You will find three sample lesson plans at the end of the narrative with suggestions of extension activities that could involve teachers from other subject areas, especially Music and History, or Social Studies.

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS UNIT AND STUDENT OBJECTIVES:

Most students at the middle or high school level know of Langston Hughes and can identify with him as an African-American who writes about the experience of being African-American. The students' familiarity with him will create a bridge towards an understanding of the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. In my unit I will explain how these two poets had much in common before they met and even more so after they became friends and influenced each other's writing. They were both young men of African descent born in 1902 who wrote poetry concerned with racial and class issues. One was raised in Cuba, the other in the United States, one in Spanish,

the other in English and both had parents of mixed racial descent. After meeting, they eventually shared a pattern of using musical influence in their poetry as well as the experience of traveling through and living in Spain together during its civil war.

I am specifically interested in showing students how Langston Hughes, through his love of music, persuaded Nicolás Guillén to explore the rhythms and themes of Cuban *son* when writing poetry. Langston Hughes was known for incorporating aspects of the blues tradition in his poetry. His deep interest in this music naturally led him to seek out the music of the *soneros* during his travels in Cuba. The *son*, like the blues, is a musical folk tradition that traces its roots to traditional African call-and-response music. Nicolás Guillén set immediately to writing poetry that incorporated elements of the *son* tradition after meeting the American poet and listening to the *soneros* with him. It is to the African roots of these two American musical traditions that I would like to take my students.

In the *first section* of this unit, I will present brief biographies of the two poets before they met each other, as well as an account of their meeting and its results. The teacher can then adapt these to the linguistic ability of the students. Objective: Students will be able to list in Spanish similarities and differences between the lives of Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén until 1930 in the form of a Venn Diagram.

In order to truly understand this poetry, apart from studying Spanish, they will also need to understand the literary movement within which it was born. While Langston Hughes is famously known as a member of the black cultural/ artistic movement called the Harlem Renaissance, the writings of these two poets are included in a literary movement that took place in *all* of the Americas where the African Diaspora reached. From the sixteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century the movement painfully and slowly gained momentum to reach a brief peak during the time between the two world wars. In the *second section* of this unit I will give an overview of this movement that is known by various names including “afroamericanismo”, “negrismo” or “négritude.” I will concentrate on its development in Cuba and will call it the “Afro-Cubanist movement.” Objectives: Students will be able to explain what the Afro-Cubanist movement is as well as why and how it came about. They will be able to identify common aspects of the poetry within this movement.

In the *third section* of this unit I will present a history of Africans in Cuba. Because the first people of African descent that arrived in the Caribbean were from Spain, rather than from Africa, I will begin with the first contacts that were made between Sub-Saharan Africans and Europeans of the Iberian Peninsula. I will carry this history chronologically through to the beginning of the twentieth century when Hughes and Guillén meet and the Afro-Cubanist movement is at its apogee. This will be necessary in order to understand the history and evolution of the blues and *son* as well as the motivations behind the Afro-Cubanist movement. Objectives: The students will demonstrate their understanding of the history of Africans in Cuba by creating a timeline in Spanish of key events in the Africa to Cuba Migration. Students will additionally create a map showing where these events took place.

In the *fourth section* of this unit I will present a brief explanation of why and how Langston Hughes based his poetry on the blues. Objective: After listening to blues music and poetry by Langston Hughes, students will make observations about how the music and poetry are linked through rhythm, structure and theme. Though Langston Hughes spoke Spanish well and included Spanish words and phrases deftly into his poetry, Spanish speakers read his poetry in translation.

In the *fifth section* of this unit I will include an explanation of the evolution of the *son*. A glossary describing the traditional *son* instruments is here as well. Objectives: Students will be able to match names and pictures of musical instruments used to create *son* after reading a description of the instruments in Spanish. They will

listen to *son* music and identify the sound of each instrument as well as the *largo* , *montuno* and *soneo* sections. They will make folk instruments themselves or try a hand at creating *son* rhythms with loaned instruments. The students will be able to explain briefly what the *son* is and how it came to be.

In the *sixth section* of this unit that I will present the poetry of Nicolás Guillén that has been based on the *son* . Objectives: After listening to *son* and poetry by Nicolás Guillén, students will make observations about how the poetry and music are linked through rhythm, structure and theme. They will make connections between the poetry of Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes. They will memorize, recite and give a brief oral explanation in Spanish of the poem “using the poetic language of *simbolismo* , *metáfora* , *s’mil* , *rimo* , *ritmo* , *onomatopeya* , *jintanjáfora* ,” *aliteración* and *anáfora* .(1) Finally, the students will write their own examples of *onomatopeya* and *jintanjáfora* which they will then incorporate into a poem about themes in their own lives having to do with ethnic descent. (Students will be encouraged to link their poems with music that is important to them).

Students of all ethnic and racial descents will not be able to help but find the poetry of these two adventurous authors fascinating. By focusing on the musical traditions that motivated Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, I hope to further engage students’ interest and to create an opening for interdisciplinary collaboration with an arts teacher. I envision students creating culminating projects that include writing their own poetry or *son* lyrics in Spanish and performing them set to music. Finally, I hope that students will understand through the study of these poets, that being American does not only mean living in the United States, speaking English and eating hamburgers. The friendship of these two literary figures is both a symbol of the interconnectedness of the English and Spanish speaking worlds and the importance of race to human experience.

SECTION ONE: Biographies of Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén and an Account of Their Meeting

LANGSTON HUGHES (b. 1902, d. 1967)

James Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri on February 1, 1902. For most of the first thirteen years of his life however, he lived in Lawrence, Kansas with his maternal grandmother. She was almost 70 when he was born and had many stories to tell. Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston was of Indian, French and some African ancestry and in 1855 she had managed to avoid an attempt to enslave her in North Carolina. She fled from the South shortly thereafter and did not return. Her first husband was also of Indian, French and African blood and together they worked as conductors on the underground railroad in Oberlin, Ohio. Lewis Sheridan Leary died fighting in John Brown’s party at Harper’s Ferry after they had only been married a short while.

Many years later she married Charles Howard Langston who was the son of a white Virginia planter and a former slave of Indian and African ancestry. They had risked everything to live together as man and wife against all the social rules of the time that did not tolerate mixed race unions. Mary and her second husband, Charles Howard Langston who had been an extreme abolitionist, had two children.

Their daughter, Carrie Langston, had always wanted to become an actress, but was unable to overcome the racial barriers in her way. She moved to Guthrie, Oklahoma where she met and married in 1899 the ambitious James Nathaniel Hughes in, a stenographer for a mining company. James Nathaniel Hughes had two white grandfathers who had been important men in Kentucky, but his own father was born a slave. Just after their son James Langston Hughes was born, James Hughes abandoned his small family and moved to Mexico City to work for the Pullman Company. Carrie moved around a lot with her young son staying with different relatives, but most often Langston stayed with his grandmother.

James Nathaniel Hughes sent some money to his family, but it was rarely enough. Langston grew up quite poor, but was infused with a very rich sense of racial pride. Though he lived in a white neighborhood, he attended a racially segregated school through the fourth grade. Later, he was in an integrated school. He encountered racial prejudice in his neighborhood and at school, but was very level-headed in his approach to it.

When in 1915 his grandmother died, Langston's life would change completely. He moved to Lincoln, Illinois to live with his mother and her new husband. He showed a talent for writing poetry even in the eighth grade when he was named class poet. During high school he published poetry in the *Central High Monthly Magazine* where he began to show the influence of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg.

Hughes's connection to the Spanish-speaking world was first forged through visits to his father in México, where he had become a successful, though ruthless in Langston's eyes, businessman and landowner. Where his father was disdainful towards the Mexican peasants, Langston embraced them and wrote about them lovingly. Langston spent a very long year with his father there upon his graduation from high school. It was a year marked by conflict between father and son over what Langston's profession would be. His father hoped to have a son that would follow in his businessman's footsteps, but Langston found bookkeeping a miserable chore and only wanted to write. The two would never reconcile their differences and would always feel animosity towards each other.

Upon leaving México, Langston spent years drifting about, first completing a year at Columbia University, then going on to board a steamship which travelled up and down the coast of West Africa. Later he worked as a seaman on a ship going to Europe and then decided to live in Paris for awhile. He returned to the United States to live with his mother for a year in Washington D.C. It is in 1925 during his year in D.C. performing odd jobs that his poetry career got off the ground; he met several key players in the Harlem Renaissance movement as well as won a poetry contest with "The Weary Blues." By 1927 he had published two books of poetry, *The Weary Blues* and *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. It is after this that he travelled through the South with Zora Neale Hurston to learn about African-American folklore. In 1929 he graduated from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and then travelled to Cuba where he met Nicolás Guillén.

NICOLAS GUILLEN (b.1902, d. 1989)

Nicolás Guillén was born on July 10, 1902 in Camagüey, Cuba. His parents, Nicolás Guillén y Urra and Argelia Batista y Arrieta were both of mixed African and European (white) ancestry. His father had fought as a lieutenant with the troops that gained independence for Cuba from Spain and at the time of his son's birth was a journalist for the first local newspaper of the new free Cuban era. Though he was spent time as a senator, he returned to being a journalist and throughout his life was always a champion for the causes of the *Partido Libertad*, creating a daily paper "La Libertad" which voiced the opinions of his party.

The printing press in the Guillén household was the source of Nicolás's first memories of block letters, the smell of fresh ink, and printed paper. The household press provided a living for the family but it was not a rich one. Nicolás was the oldest of six children, three boys and three girls. After school, Nicolás and his younger brother ran the press.

Because of the family's financial situation none was able to go to a good school, however at an early age Nicolás showed an unusual desire to read and understand books. He had a very close relationship with his father who shared his personal library and love of books with his son. His father was everything to him, his best friend, teacher, spiritual anchor and financial support. All was lost suddenly in 1917 when government

troops assassinated Nicolás Guillén y Urrea for having been outspoken against electoral frauds committed by the conservative regime. They also destroyed the printing press upon which “La Libertad” was printed and where Nicolás and Francisco worked.

At the age of 15, Nicolás had to go out with his brother to find work to maintain the family. They soon found a job at “El Nacional,” another liberal paper. The family was thrown into financial dire straits, but Nicolás’s mother was determined to see fulfilled the wish of her late husband that all their children complete degrees. While Nicolás worked full-time at the press, he received independent lessons for free from a family friend and managed to complete his secondary education in only two years. Already in 1919 he was known among literary types in Camagüey for poems he had published in *Camagüey Gráfico*. The next year he moved to Havana to matriculate in Law School and fulfill his father’s wishes. This was short-lived however because he found that he did not like either law school or Havana. He returned to Camagüey having decided not to pursue a degree in Law and began to write for various literary magazines. It was at this time that he began to write about his preoccupations with the black community, but for five years wrote no poetry at all.

When in 1925 the Partido Libertad comes to power with Gerardo Machado as its leader, Nicolás Guillén accepts a job as Interior Minister offered to him by a friend of his father and returns to Havana. During this transitional period in his life he began to publish poems in the Havana journal “Orto” that could be classified as *vanguardista*, meaning they fit into the avant garde style popular at the time. It could be characterized as a break from conventional verse and traditional rhetoric. According to his biographer Angel Augier, Nicolás Guillén was searching for a way in which a newly technological society could express itself poetically (Augier 60). He wonders about an uncertain future during a present dominated by looming nuclear war and irresponsible imperialist governments. The theme of US. imperialism would become central to his poetry. The situation of Cuban blacks began to appear as an important theme in his poetry towards the end of the 1920’s, just before meeting Langston Hughes. During this time he began to publish in the Sunday supplement “Ideales de una Raza” in the paper “Diario de la Marina.”(2) It is in this periodical that Guillén would soon publish the famous and controversial poems “Motivos de Son” that are the central subject of this unit.

THE MEETING OF LANGSTON HUGHES AND NICOLAS GUILLEN

José Antonio Fernández de Castro, the publisher of the Havana, Cuba daily “Diario de la Marina” and the first to translate Langston Hughes’s poetry to Spanish, was responsible for the meeting of the two poets. Fernández de Castro was a white Cuban from an aristocratic family who loved black Cuba. He was a newspaperman, a diplomat and a friend to Cuba’s artists.

In February of 1930, Langston Hughes traveled to Cuba for the second time. He was on a two-week mission to find a black composer to collaborate with him on a folk opera and was armed with a letter of introduction to José Antonio Fernández de Castro, his door to Cuba’s artistic world. By this time Langston Hughes’s poetry was better known to Cubans than that of Nicolás Guillén, so the American’s arrival created quite a stir in the artistic community. On March 9, 1930, the Cuban poet published an article in the “Diario de la Marina” titled “Conversación con Langston Hughes” in which he describes the surprise upon meeting Langston Hughes at his arrival in Havana. Apparently the Cuban welcoming contingent expected a practically white, tall and heavysset man in his forties with thin lips and an even thinner English style mustache. Instead they saw a twenty seven year old slight brown man without a mustache. Nicolás Guillén wrote that Mr. Hughes “parece justamente un ‘mulatico’ cubano,” looks just like a Cuban mulatto.(3)

Nicolás Guillén was especially taken with Langston’s warm personality and enthusiasm for the *son* music that he heard on the nightly forays into Cuba’s Marinao district that Fernández de Castro organized. Apparently,

Langston was a hit with the *soneros* who made the district famous for dance and music. This enthusiasm for Cuban music was to have a profound effect on Nicolás Guillén. Langston Hughes immediately saw the similarities between *son* and the blues as folk music traditions whose form was based on the call-and-response structure of African music. Additionally, he “saw its possibilities as an organic base for formal poetry” (Rampersad *The Life* 178). According to Arnold Rampersad, it was Hughes who recommended to Guillén that he should make the rhythms of the *son* central to his poetry as he himself had done with blues and jazz (179).

These folk musical traditions did not only have rhythmic import to Langston Hughes, they were also a vehicle for protest against racial inequality. Both poets shared anger against racism, but Langston Hughes impressed Nicolás Guillén with his particular kind of racial consciousness. “Although Guillén had previously shown a strong sense of outrage against racism and economic imperialism, he had not yet done so in language inspired by native, Afro-Cuban speech, song, and dance; and he had been far more concerned with protesting racism than with affirming the power and beauty of Cuban blackness” (Rampersad *The Life of* 181).

Within weeks of meeting the poet from the United States, Nicolás Guillén, quickly wrote eight poems that were different from all of his previous work. Much controversy in the Cuban art world followed, as well as the lasting fame of Nicolás Guillén as one of the premier poets of the Négritude movement. On April 21, 1930, Nicolás Guillén would send to Langston Hughes a copy of the fruit of his inspiration, his book of poetry *Motivos de Son*. The author wrote on the inside cover of this tiny 12 page book, “Al Poeta Langston Hughes, querido amigo m’o. Afectuosamente, Nicolás Guillén.”(4) Langston Hughes, though failing in his task of finding a composer, succeeded in creating a lasting friendship with Nicolás Guillén based on a mutual respect for each other’s poetry and convictions about racial inequality.

SECTION TWO: The Négritude and Afro-Cubanist movements

The Négritude movement was named and begun as a literary, political movement by Aimé Césaire, a writer from Martinique, Léopold Senghor, a Senegalese poet-statesman, and Léon Damas, a Guianan poet.(5) Having met in Paris, they were angered by colonialist and racist attitudes they encountered there in 1934. These writers denounced European domination and the process of assimilation that implied the inherent superiority of European culture over others. They spoke for the importance of African culture, values and customs (Fletcher 177). The members of the Négritude movement believed that the “nature oriented spiritualism of African life was superior to the materialism of Western Society” (Fletcher 179).

Long before the term Négritude was coined however, the movement had already existed in principle in the Americas including the United States, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico and Brazil (Fernández de la Vega 87). This movement came to embrace not only literary works, but other artistic forms as well such as painting, sculpture, music, radio and film. The poetic arm of this movement has been called by various names in Spanish, all of which are controversial, including *poes’a negra*, *poes’a negroide*, *poes’a afroantillana*, *poes’a afrocubana*, *poes’a afropuertorrique-a*, *poes’a negrista*, and *poes’a mulata*. The Harlem Renaissance, of which Langston Hughes was a key member, was in full swing in New York by the early 1920’s and was the heart of the Négritude movement in the United States. Though some critics would classify Négritude, the Harlem Renaissance and the Afro-Cuban movement separately as having completely different characteristics, my intention here is to underscore the fact that in the Western Hemisphere at this time the African legacy became a matter of political, social and especially cultural debate.

In Cuba, the movement for independence from Spain fueled the Afro-Cubanist movement. In 1895, a leaflet was published by Manuel de la Cruz titled *La Revolución Cubana y la Raza de Color*. Its purpose was to gain

the black population's support for the cause of independence to ensure the success of the revolution. And in the battles leading up to independence blacks fought side by side with whites on the battlefields (Olchyk 123). Though the revolution was won against Spain in 1898, the republic of Cuba cannot be said to have been born until 1902 when it was finally free of the US military intervention that was meant to stabilize the new country. However this was not to be the last time the United States would interfere in Cuban affairs. On the contrary, the United States began to dominate Cuba politically and economically more vigorously as the new century progressed. The US simply replaced Spain as a cause against which many Cuban people would unify. This nationalism also served to fuel the Afro-Cubanist movement.

The new independent status of Cuba after 1902 brought about the island's introspection and a desire to create an understanding among the different races that had lived together for so long. The famous Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ort'z, born in 1881, began to systematically study the multicultural nature of Cuba. Because slavery and the slave trade had not been abolished until 1886 and more than a dozen *cabildos* (African heritage societies that were typically grouped by ethnic background, such as Yoruba or Congo) were operating, African culture was strong in Cuba (Fletcher 179). African themes began to be introduced into Cuban poetry. Writers against racial discrimination had plenty to write about.

One rebellion that served as a catalyst to those writers because it was violently suppressed occurred in 1912 when many colonels of African descent who had fought in the war of independence rebelled against the government of José Miguel Gómez. Many of the themes of Cuban writers immediately after independence dealt with criticizing the capitalistic interests of the United States and its resulting economic oppression. Poems dedicated to the sugarcane harvest, or *zafra*, as a symbol of opposition to their powerful neighbor to the north highlighted Afro-Cuban culture and included Afro-Cubans in the strong sense of nationalism that was forming (Olchyk 125-127).

The new freedom of Cuba encouraged many foreign artists to visit the island. They were inspired by the "idiosyncrasies" of Afro-Cubans. The Spanish writer Federico Garc'a Lorca who visited Cuba in 1930, the same year as Langston Hughes, was one of them. He wrote the poem "Son de los negros en Cuba" which can be placed within *poes'a negra*. His use of the moon as a symbol of malevolent forces or tragedy was an inspiration to many of the négritude poets. This international artistic influence served to spread the Négritude movement further and more deeply throughout the western hemisphere. It is important to note that unlike "black poetry," which from the point of view of those who anthologized the Harlem Renaissance was written by blacks, *poes'a negra* was written by poets of both African and European heritage (Kutzinski 155). Other important poets of the Afro-Cuban movement were Ramón Guirao, José Zacar'as Tallet, Vicente Gómez Kemp, Alejo Carpentier, Emilio Ballagas, Regino Pedroso and Marcelino Arozarena.

The *poes'a negra* in Cuba and other countries in the Americas concerned itself with liberation, justice, freedom for the oppressed and rehabilitation for society. It endeavored to gain the same privileges for blacks as whites had had. Other commonly recurring themes in the poetry of this movement include: the drama of slavery, discrimination, the conflict of being of mixed African and European blood or *mulato*, the beauty or exoticism of the mulata woman, witchcraft, superstitions and the fear of certain animals, especially snakes.

There is a typically Afro-Antillian folkloric element called *el choteo* that is evident in much of this poetry. It is a joking attitude used equally toward some of the most trivial events as well as those most grave and somber (Wilson 72). There is satire, humor, irony and mockery, but underneath the smile or laugh is always anguish and protest. A wonderful way to illustrate this would be to show a portion of the film "Sugar Cane Alley" which is in French with English subtitles and depicts the hard lives of sugar cane cutters in Martinique. There is a

scene in which the old man dies and the villagers gather around to poke fun at death. It seems to be a mechanism used to help people deal with the most harsh aspects of life as well as to protest under the pretense of fun.

The language that is used in this poetry distinguishes it as well. Nouns or similes that refer to dances or instruments are frequent as well as references to geographical place names in Africa and America, *nombres toponímicos*. Names of certain African gods are used interchangeably with specific Catholic saints and members of the holy family. Colloquialisms used by people of African descent as well as their dialectical speech patterns, such as dropping the end of a word, appear.

Poesía negra typically uses some stylistic resources such as employing words that end in stressed vowels like “bongó” because they are or sound African. The use of Onomatopoeia, or *onomatopeya*, often tries to reproduce the sound of percussion instruments used in Afro-Cuban music with nonsense words. The *jintanjáfora* as used by the Afro-Cubanist writers is an onomatopoeic word that sounds African or is somewhat derived from an African word but really has no meaning by itself. In combination with other *jintanjáforas*, a rhythm and an African flavor is produced. Nicolás Guillén is known for his mastery at using the *jintanjáfora*.

SECTION THREE: History of Africans in Cuba

The history of most Cubans of some or all African descent is inextricably linked to the success of the sugar plants that the Spaniards brought there and the failure of the native islanders to survive the diseases and enslavement imposed upon them by the Spaniards. Within 10 years of Columbus’s arrival, the Ciboney and Ta’no Arawak Indians were practically rendered extinct leaving the Spaniards without a labor force. The African legacy in Cuba is one of 400 centuries of enslavement.

Columbus claimed Cuba for Spain during his first voyage to the New World in 1492, but it was Diego Velásquez who established the first European settlement in Baracoa, Cuba in 1511. It is probable but not certain that Velásquez and his *conquistadores* arrived with black African slaves from Spain. If not, they arrived soon after. Spain had traded in slaves from Sub-Saharan Africa for approximately two centuries before encountering the Americas. The number of black African slaves in Spain was relatively small as most of those who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula came by way of the extremely treacherous over-land route through the desert.

Half a century before the Atlantic slave trade began, however, some slaves got to the Peninsula by way of the ocean. In 1444, the Portuguese sailor Diniz D’az was the first Iberian to reach around the western coast of Africa beyond the muslim enclaves. He returned to Portugal in 1445 with some Africans to train them in Christianity and prove to Henry the Navigator where he had gone. The result was that merchants seized upon the idea of enriching themselves by selling Africans to Europeans who lived in the newly conquered Christian lands of the Iberian Peninsula (Page 51). There are numerous references to the black Africans in Spain in the literature of the *Siglo de Oro* writers including Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Góngora and Quevedo.

Once the Atlantic slave trade which allowed for the mass transportation of slaves began, Spain was denied direct access to the west coast of Africa. This was due to the Papal Bull of 1493 and the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 which divided Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence. Spain was therefore dependent upon other countries to supply her with African slaves. The Flemish, Portuguese, Dutch and then the English after 1713 controlled Spain’s legal access to slavery, so as can be expected, a clandestine slave trade thrived along with the legal one.

Spain set up the *asiento* system to ensure legal profit from the slave trade. Under this system, a company would buy a license from Spain to purchase slaves from another country that had purchased slaves in Africa. The company not only paid the foreign country for each slave, it also paid Spain for each one. The cost of an African slave was exorbitant for the Cuban growers who depended upon them to produce the tobacco, coffee and especially the sugar crops.

As the amount of African slaves that entered the island increased, the amount of sugar that left it increased as well. A fierce “Creole sugar slavocracy” flourished as the world sugar consumption grew; it made demands on the Spanish crown to ease the trade barriers that were causing the small influx of African slaves in comparison with the volumes British, French and Dutch islands were importing. Apart from the Afro-Cubans, the rest of Cuban society divided up into an uneasy alliance to preserve the institution of slavery. The *peninsulares* were Spaniards living on the island, the *criollos*, or Creoles were of Spanish descent but had been born on the island and made up the greatest portion of landowners, and the *negreros* were the slave traders of many descents.

The sugar industry grew especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and sugar became king overshadowing all other industry. By 1860 Cuba produced nearly one third of the world’s sugar. Before this time slave trade barriers kept the industry in check, and even before that, Cuba had floundered as a forgotten outpost while Spain used her only as a launching platform for the invasions of Mexico and South America. It was a British invasion of Havana, Cuba in 1762 that jump-started the sugar industry.

Though Britain controlled the island for only eleven months before returning it to Spain, during that time alone, more than 4,000 slaves were brought to Havana to work on the sugar plantations. After this Spain lifted many trade barriers and gave permission for the free and unlimited importation of slaves. Furthermore, the 1791 slave rebellion on the island of St. Domingue (later Haiti) decimated the French plantations and caused the French to direct their attention to Cuba where they could sell slaves clandestinely. By this time the African population on Cuba had surpassed the European. The numbers for 1791 state that there were 138,700 blacks and 133,500 whites on Cuba (Suchlicki 43). The eighteenth century saw the largest influx of African slaves in the history of Cuba.

Due to the restrictions on importing slaves, the slaves on Spanish Caribbean colonies never outnumbered the owners to the extent they did in the French and British colonies which is probably one of the reasons that a large scale slave rebellion never took place in Cuba. Cuba was not kind to its slaves, however. From the very beginning African slaves ran away to the mountains to escape their plight. These were called maroons or *cimarrones*. The incredible death rate and extremely low birth rate of African slaves meant that the cruel Creole planters had to continuously purchase more slaves to keep production steady. Because all the land was devoted to sugar, food staples that were fed to the slave like beans, corn and oil were imported and often practically inedible. Their housing was crude and the little clothing they were given was not enough to protect the nutritionally weak and work worn slaves from cold mornings and evenings. Their intense work schedules, the rigors of the Middle Passage and disease caused many to die during their first three years on the island. Only the slaves on the French colonies fared worse.

Though Cuban slaves lived a bleak existence, they had possibilities that slaves of the British colonies did not. The courts allowed slaves to own personal property, make contracts, work for earnings and buy manumission with their own savings. Some were freed after having performed certain services for a set period of time. Rented slaves could keep tips above the contract price. Once emancipation was proclaimed, many former slaves drew upon their saved money to purchase land from failed planters. There was much more integration between Africans and Europeans than one might expect. For example, marriage was permitted between white

men and freed female slaves. Free blacks and mulattos often lived alongside whites.

Rumblings about emancipation began in the early 1800's. The British empire had declared the end of the slave trade in 1808 and finally abolished slavery in 1833. Uprisings began to occur in Cuba. In the late 1840's and the 1850's Chinese and Indians from the Yucatán Peninsula of México arrived to work as laborers on the sugar plantations and railroads. It turned out that the maintenance of this group of laborers was less problematic than that of the African slave population. By 1865 Spain stopped the slave trade, but freedom was still another issue. Slaves began to feel that their only chance at freedom was in Cuba's independence from Spain. Many slaves joined the wars for independence that were fought between 1868 and 1898. Finally, in 1886 Spain completely abolished slavery.

When the liberal president José Miguel Gómez took office in 1909, his administration began a pattern of corruption and social injustice toward Afro-Cubans that later presidencies and the Batista dictatorship followed. It was in this climate of social injustice that Nicolás Guillén, a person of Spanish and African descent, came of age. He bears the psychological scars of the Cuban legacy of slavery and brings a voice to the silenced. As was customary in the American slave culture, a Cuban slave took the last name of his or her master, silencing the links to Africa. Nicolás Guillén wonders about what his name would have been had this not happened in the poem "El apellido, elegía familiar" published in his 1958 volume of poetry entitled *La paloma de vuelo popular*.

For a first hand account of slavery in Cuba it is essential to read the one Cuban slave narrative that is known to exist. There is a 1996 bilingual publication of the autobiography of Juan Francisco Manzano who was born in approximately 1797 to an urban slave mother and died a free man in 1854. His original Spanish prose contained so many spelling and grammar mistakes and was written in a Spanish that would be considered archaic today that it would be very cumbersome to read, however this 1996 version is written in a corrected and modernized Spanish that makes it accessible to even a high school audience.

SECTION FOUR: The Blues Poetry of Langston Hughes

It is suggested that the blues emerged in the United States after slavery had been abolished, when African-Americans finally had a chance at individualism and self expression while struggling with being educationally and economically unprepared for freedom in an oppressive society. Though no one can pinpoint when the first blues songs were sung, we do know that it was in the 1890's that they were first collected and printed. Edison's first phonograph records came out in 1877, but it was not until 1920 that the blues were recorded for commercial sale. These recordings were immediate successes and became part of the fuel that got the Harlem Renaissance swinging.

From its roots in the rural South, the blues moved to the city and took Langston Hughes right with it. He remembers hearing the blues performed for the first time when he was about six years old in Kansas City with his grandmother. Besides having both a love of this music and the common black folk it was created by and for, one of the reasons that Hughes began to draw on the blues tradition for writing his poetry is that he hoped to capitalize on the blues craze. Though the markets for music and poetry were quite different, he thought he could somehow merge the two.

Another reason for employing blues music in his poetry is because the "New Poetry" movement that was going on at the time shared philosophical similarities with the Harlem Renaissance poets and a group of poets called the Imagists which included Ezra Pound and F.S. Flint. The "New Poetry" movement sought to humanize poetry by using fresher and more original language, while the Imagists in particular "sought to compose in the

sequence of the musical phrase, not the metronome” (Tracy 219). Hence, Langston Hughes had been influenced by this movement that included music in its writing format. Additionally, Vachel Lindsay, a poet of the Chicago Renaissance, was very important in setting a poetic precedent for Hughes. He used music and dramatic performance to revive poetry within a Chicago movement that drew from Walt Whitman, a poet who sought to unshackle poetry from the iambic pentameter and who showed an interest in the common man in his poetry. The times were ripe for him to use the blues.

Langston Hughes employed the structures, rhythms, themes and words of the blues that he heard in the country, the city, the field, the alley and the stage. When he used the musical and stanzaic structures of the blues to write his poetry he most often relied on the twelve-bar blues which is the predominant structure, though there are others that predate, coexist with, or derive from it. These are often called blues in the classic form and about half of his blues poems fit this structure. The twelve-bar blues is a musical composition with these basic and variable characteristics:

1. 4/4 time with 4 beats to the measure.
2. 12 measures or bars of 4 beats each which lasts for 48 beats.
3. A specific chord structure in the key of C that uses the 3 chords C, F, and G performed in a particular sequence.
4. A stanzaic pattern that could include any of the following thought patterns, with each of three thoughts lasting roughly 16 beats or 4 bars:
 - a. One thought or line repeated three times (AAA).
 - b. One thought or line sung once followed by another sung twice (ABB).
 - c. Two different thoughts or lines followed by a refrain (ABRefrain)
 - d. One thought or line sung twice with a third line resolving the thought of the first two lines (AAB). This final one is the most popular stanzaic form in the recorded blues (Tracy 224).

Though Langston Hughes most often employs this last pattern, he divided each of the three lines in half to make a six line stanza. By doing this he was aiming at two things, first, to bring out more of the oral performance on the written page and second, he found that when he sold his first poem that the magazine paid him per line. More lines, more money for a struggling artist. You can clearly see this structure in “Gal’s Crying for a Dying Lover” and “Yon Gal’s Blues,” and “Love Again Blues.” He also used the eight-bar blues and the pattern variations created by the Vaudeville composers who “polished up” the blues to make them more interesting for the stage. “The Weary Blues” in a famous poem in which both the classic and other verse forms are used.

W.C. Handy was the key Vaudeville composer and he is credited for having “legitimized” the blues by making it more palatable for a middle class audience. In fact, there is really no other poet of the time that significantly

uses the blues the way Langston Hughes did precisely because it was not thought well of in the literary community. Black intellectuals felt that spirituals were the true black folk musical tradition. The brashness of blues, the secular form of folk music, portrayed what was wrong with African-American life. It contained offensive lyrics, off-color jokes and lewd gestures clearly not fitting for polite company. Hughes saw the blues in another way. He said they were “sad funny songs—too sad to be funny and too funny to be sad . . . containing all the laughter and pain hunger and heartache, search and reality of the contemporary scene” (qtd. in “Songs Called the Blues” *The Langston Hughes Reader* 159-161).

Though some of the language and images employed in the raw blues are worse than R-rated, Langston Hughes, like W.C. Handy, did not choose to shock the public by using the blues, rather he wanted to sell his poetry to a wide audience, black, white, unsophisticated, worldly. So while he used blues themes and language, he also made them accessible to everybody. Langston Hughes not only used the rhythms of the blues, but its folk idioms and themes. In 1927 he accompanied his close friend Zora Neale Hurston on travels through the South. She introduced him to rural folk artists while she collected and recorded their folklore. While Hurston was a folklorist, Hughes was more interested in using the folk material to inform his own literary artistry. He did this very well and in so doing, melded the oral and written traditions to bring poetry to the common folk.

The following is a list of blues themes that Langston Hughes employs and the blues poems in which they appear: Suicide as a theme is contemplated but never attempted in the blues and it is usually mentioned with a river in mind. The poems that include this theme are: “A Ruined Gal,” “Lament Over Love,” “Reverie on Harlem River,” “Life is Fine,” “Lonesome Place,” and “Too Blue.” Superstition comes up as a theme in “Bad Luck Card,” “Blues on a Box,” “Gal’s Cry For a Dying Lover,” and “Bound No’t’h Blues.” The train is an important image and it is usually taking a lover away, bringing a lover back, going back home, or escaping oppression. Train poems would be “Blues Fantasy” and “Dream Boogie: Variation.” Like in the Négritude movement as a whole, the theme of stratification by skin color is important in the blues. Here the stratification is based on a middle-class conception of lighter skin being more desirable because it is closer to white. Hughes’s poems that deal with this theme are: “Misery,” “Gypsy Man,” “Argument,” “The New Girl,” “Black Gal,” and “Gal’s Cry For A Dying Lover.” The contrast between the North and the South, as well as the harshness of city life are found in “Homesick Blues” and “Red Clay Blues.” Physical violence is popular in blues songs and other black folklore. There are bad men who harm other men and women usually because the devil has taken over their behavior. However, showing badness is also a way to keep away the blues. “In a Troubled Key” and “Stony Lonesome” reflect this violence. Alcohol is the bearer of either good or bad times in the blues. Fortunately, Hughes makes no reference to other drugs in his blues poems. Poems with references to alcohol are “Ma Man,” “Listen Here Blues,” and “Morning After.” Though Hughes does not make many overt references to sex and never refers to homosexuality, sexuality is perhaps the most popular theme in the blues and is referred to using numerous nouns and verbs from pigmeat, hot dog, bananas and sugar to pressing someone’s button, fishing in somebody’s sea or becoming a biscuit roller among others.

He also relies on the blues tradition by borrowing established blues lines and filling in words that are more appropriate to his meaning. Some of these are: “I woke up this morning . . . ,” “Had a dream last night . . . ,” and “I went down to the river” About one fourth of Hughes blues poems have female speakers and deal mostly with the themes of love lost, mistreatment, revenge for mistreatment, or separation by death. A slightly greater percentage have a male speaker and deal with the themes of lack of jobs or food, being far from home with no way to get back, or lost love. The rest have no indicator of gender. Most of Hughes’s blues poetry can be found in *The Weary Blues* , *Fine Clothes to the Jew* , *Shakespeare in Harlem* and *One-Way Ticket*

SECTION FIVE: The *Son*

The *son* is dance music that has always been sung. Its name comes from the word *sonido*, or sound. The rhythmic roots of *son* come from both Spanish dance music and African slave and *criollo* dance music (Feijóo 25). Most of the linguistic elements and melody are derived from Spanish tradition while most of the rhythmic elements developed from African tradition. The Spanish music was based on ten-line *décima* verses and southern Spanish melody. The *son* is believed to have originated in the villages of Baracoa and Guantánamo in the Oriente province of Cuba towards the end of the nineteenth century. Like the blues, the emergence of *son* coincided with the end of slavery. The lyrics were always about popular opinion on social and political topics of the day, love, humor, nostalgia and patriotism. Originally the music of the eastern *campesino*, or peasant, the *son* transformed into a world renown musical form when it arrived in Havana.

The move from countryside to city was brought about by a military mission. In 1909 just after US interventionist forces had again pulled out of Cuba, the newly elected president José Miguel Gómez found himself with a rebellion on his hands in the Oriente province. He was determined to squash it immediately in order to avoid a new US intervention. A group of politically unsatisfied blacks formed a radical organization called the *Agrupación Independiente de Color*, or Independent Color Association, after the Cuban senate had passed a law prohibiting parties from forming along racial lines. The group staged an uprising led by Evaristo Estenoz who had been a soldier in the War for Independence. President Gómez quickly dispatched his own troops from Havana to the eastern end of the island who then captured and executed the rebels (Suchlicki 90-91). The soldiers of the *ejército permanente* brought the music of the region with them upon their return to Havana. It was immediately a hit and grew in popularity from that time.

Similar to the blues, the *son* had to be slightly refined before it became acceptable to a wider audience. There were two parts to a *son* as performed by *agrupaciones*, or *son* groups. The first short part called the *largo* has set lyrics. The second part called the *montuno*, includes what is called a *soneo* which is an African style interchange between a lead singer and a chorus. At one time the *soneo* lyrics were improvised and involved skillfully throwing out insulting double-entendres. These *soneo* lyrics might be about someone's lack of intelligence, a woman's fidelity, a daughter's virginity, or about a person's clothes or his attractiveness. Because a fight was sure to break out, the insults had to go if the *agrupaciones* were to have any success (Gerard 76).

Both Spanish and African influences are apparent in the call-and-response nature of the *montuno* and when looking at the instruments that are used to create *son*. The importance of percussion instruments is clearly African in origin, while the use of guitar and *tres* is Spanish. The following is a description of the core instruments, not including the instruments from the brass and string families which were added later:

Claves This is the basic building block of Cuban music and was created in Havana. Also called *los palos* or *palitos*, this instrument consists of two cylindrical hardwood sticks 20-25 cm long and 2.5-3 cm in diameter. By resting one stick lightly on the fingertips of one hand with the cupped palm acting as a resonator, while the other stick acts as a striker and is held between the thumb and first two fingers, the clave produces a steady beat (Sadie 1: 415). It has a strong first part and an answering second part like the call-and-response structure in African music. It provides "a way of incorporating into European measure-patterns the basic western African rhythmic pattern of eight notes and rests, usually built up of combinations of two and three beats" (Roberts *Latin*

Tinga 4).

Botija This African-derived instrument that is also known as a *botijuela* is an earthenware jug with a narrow opening at the top. It was tuned by filling it with varying amounts of water and by the musician applying a hand to the top opening (Gerard 77). This instrument was blown through a lateral opening used as a mouthpiece to produce the bass notes in the absence of a mar'mbula. It was replaced with the string bass, or *contrabajo* , once the *son* became more sophisticated.

Bongos A pair of single-headed drums with conical or cylindrical hardwood shells originally made of hollowed tree trunks. The two drums are of the same height, but of different diameters, 7 1/4 inches and 8 1/2 inches. The heads are made of calfskin or plastic and are nailed or are screw-tensioned and usually tuned to high-sounding notes at least a 4th apart. They are played with the bare hands and are usually positioned with the large drum to the right. This instrument was created in Cuba circa 1900 (Sadie 1: 250). It is common to call the small drum *macho*, or male and the big drum, *hembra* , or female. The bongos were probably created as a homemade version of the double drums, such as the tympani, used by the traveling orchestras of the time.

Güiro Also known as a *guayo* or *ascador* , this instrument is usually made from the gourd of a climbing plant. It is elongated with raised frets or parallel grooves close together on its side. One plays it to give rhythmic emphasis to the music by scraping a stick along the side (Sadie 2: 86). This instrument was used by the indigenous people of Cuba.

Maracas A pair of gourd rattles that are usually oval. The dried seeds of the fruit are left in the gourd to produce the sound. This instrument is thought to be of pre-Colombian Araucanian origin, its name coming from the word *mbaracá* (Sadie 2: 611).

Guitar The six stringed instrument brought to Cuba from Spain.

Tres A Cuban variation of guitar with three sets of doubled or tripled strings.

Mar'mbula A large lamella phone belonging to the African mbira, or thumb piano family. In Cuba this instrument contains a wooden box that forms a resonating chamber that is usually 60 or more cm in height (Sadie 2: 616). The metal tongues on the resonating chamber are plucked while the musician actually sits on the instrument. This instrument gave the base to the early son groups, but was eventually replaced with the string bass in the 1920's (Gerard 126).

Cencerro A type of Cuban cowbell hit with a piece of wood.

SECTION SIX: The Poetry of Nicolás Guillén (6)

Nicolás Guillén would disagree with using the term *poes'a negra* to classify much of the poetry he published since 1930. At best, he would tolerate the term *poes'a mulata* because he sees in the word *mulata* the meeting of two races, whose strengths have converged to create a new people in Cuba. It seems to me that for Guillén, those people are his people, and no matter their color, they are *mulata* because they come from a

place where the mixture of these two cultures is so profound, that it would be impossible to extricate oneself from either. Guillén would most likely prefer the term *poes'a cubana*, because like the bongó, it is purely a product of what happened on this island. " *Madre Africa y padre peninsular* " (Fernández 193) with a little Ta'no thrown in. Just read his poem "La canción del bongó" and you will understand.

The poetry that Nicolás Guillén wrote previous to 1930 is published, but does not figure into this unit as it has little to do with the topics at hand. What happened to his poetic vision in 1930 was clearly a big event in the Cuban literary world. One night in April, 1930 while he was at the stage between sleeping and dreaming a voice came out of nowhere and kept repeating over and over again the two words *negro-bembón* . He spent the rest of the night trying to figure out what it meant. Early in next morning he began to write and by that afternoon he had eight or ten poems to which he quickly gave the collective title "Motivos de Son" (Guillén *Libro de los sones* 20-21).

On April 20, 1930 he published eight of them in the page "Ideales de una raza" in the newspaper "Diario de la marina" with a picture depicting a drummer. The eight poems he published here were "Negro Bembón," "Mi Chiquita," "Búcate Plata," "Sigue," "Ayé me dijeron Negro . . . ," "Tú no sabe Inglés," "Si tú supiera . . . ," and "Mulata . . ." They are dedicated to José Antonio Fernández de Castro, the man responsible for the meeting of Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén only weeks before. Soon after this publication, many members of the literary world wrote to him giving their praise for the novelty of these poems.(7)

What was so novel about these poems was his obvious use of musical rhythm and Afro-Cuban dialect and themes. I believe they are wonderful to use in the high school Spanish class because they are short, easily understood and sound wonderful. The musical rhythm of course comes from the *son* which was all the rage at the time, though he remembers hearing it for the first time when he was a child. Around 1910-12, he would go over to a *mulata* neighbor's house where he would hear her sing the *son* every night . The *sones* that influenced him the most, however, were those produced by the Sexteto Habanero at the end of the 1920's (Guillén *Libro de los sones* 19-20).

Though I have not found nearly the in-depth analysis of how Guillén's poetry is based on the *son* as I found with Hughes and the blues, perhaps it is not necessary. *Son* does not fit as regular a mold as the blues does, rather there are numerous variants due to its polyrhythmic nature. His *son* poems are structurally quite varied in the number and metric count of his verses and in the refrain combinations. The *montuno* that I mentioned in the section on the *son* can be seen in his poetry with, for example, the repetition of the word *sigue* in the poem "Sigue . . ." It's the voice of the chorus, refrain or response to the call. The similar rhythms in *son* and his *son* poetry come from alliterations, or the repetition of initial consonants in neighboring words, and anaphoras, or the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses. Rhythm comes from this repetition.

According to Fernando Ort'z, African languages rely on a structural rhythm. He goes so far as to say "La vida del negro africano es vida cantada" meaning that the life of a black African is a life spent singing (246). Here he refers to the fact that Africans seemed to have integrated song into every aspect of life so that even their spoken language is almost song-like. The term *jintanjáfora* , a sing-songy word itself, is pertinent when we unite this poetry with African speech and *son* . According to Ort'z, many African languages are tonal so that the meaning of words is not only derived from the articulation of the word, but also from the tone with which it is spoken and the rhythm of the phrase in which it is uttered (224). Sound, whether it has a preordained meaning or not, is important and meaningful within the right context. There are numerous examples within different African cultures of the use of sounds in repetitive patterns connected with ritual, song and dance

(226). Nicolás Guillén's poem "Sóngoro cosongo," which was first published as "Si tú supiera," contains one of his most famous *jintanjáforas*. The words *sóngoro cosongo* sound African, but really they have no specific meaning. They produce rhythm and an African atmosphere.

Africans transplanted to Cuba found themselves among other Africans of many different cultures who did not speak their same language. Spanish became the universal language so that communication could occur. However, as when any two or more languages meet, Cuban Spanish took on some of the words and speech patterns from Africa. A lack of formal education for all poor people in general is another factor that contributed to the changes in Cuban Spanish spoken by a certain segment of the society. In writing the "Motivos de son" poems, Nicolás Guillén was especially interested in depicting the language and lives of the urban poor in Havana, who were mostly of African descent. Though praised by many, this was particularly offensive to the Afro-Cuban bourgeoisie of Havana. His poems ". . . did not uncritically celebrate the picturesque contributions of black folklore to Cuba's national cultural landscape. Instead, *Motivos* raises questions about social inequality in what to many middle-class blacks were loathsome vernacular voices from the notorious 'Afro-Cuban underworld'" (Kutzinski 153). Just as Langston Hughes sought to unite folklore with fine art, Guillén brought to the forefront of artistic thought, the lives of the marginalized. Both created a climate of controversy that helped push the boundaries encompassing poetry one step further out to create room for the African legacy in the Americas.

LESSON PLAN #1

Objectives:

1. Students will listen to *son* music and identify the different instruments being used, the *largo*, *montuno* and *soneo*.
2. Students will be able to write their own examples of *onomatopeya*.
3. Students will be able to explain briefly in writing what the *son* is and how it came to be.
4. Students will be able to match names and pictures of musical instruments used to create *son*.

Activities:

1. Listen to "La mujer de Antonio" briefly to create the atmosphere.
2. Listen to teacher give a five minute explanation of what the *son* is, how it came to be as well as what the terms *largo*, *montuno* and *soneo* are.
3. Listen to same music and identify *largo*, *montuno* and *soneo*.
4. Look at pictures of *son* instruments, or if possible, experiment with real instruments.

5. Listen to various *son* pieces and identify the instruments being played.
6. In groups, work with one instrument. Draw the instrument on a card, write its name underneath and write down contributions from all group members of onomatopaeic words that reproduce the sound the instrument makes.
7. Each group shares its words with the class. More words are added to the card if class members come up with other possibilities.
8. Read out loud Guillén poem “Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio.” Identify his use of onomatopeya and which instrument he is attempting to reproduce.
9. Discuss with whole class the *son* and the poem.

Homework: *Students are given a sheet with the names of the instruments and a description of each in Spanish on one side. On the other is a crossword puzzle with pictures of the instruments as clues. Or the sheet could have pictures with names of instruments on one side and descriptions of instruments in Spanish on the other so that students must match the picture with the description. Additionally, students will write a short paragraph in Spanish describing what they learned about the son.*

Materials:

Son de Cuba CD with “La mujer de Antonio”
Instruments or pictures of them
Homework sheet
Copies of Guillén poem “Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio.”
CD player

Suggestions: *This would be a great lesson for collaboration with a music teacher who could instruct students about the beats and rhythms and show them how to use the instruments.*

LESSON PLAN #2

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to briefly explain what the Afro-Cuban poetry movement, Négritude and

Harlem Renaissance are as well as why and how they came about.

2. Students will be able to identify common aspects of the poetry within especially the Afro-Cuban movement including el choteo and the theme of discrimination.
3. Students will be able to visualize the difficult work of cutting sugar cane.

Activities:

1. Listen to a brief explanation of the poetry movements.
2. Listen to and read along silently with a portion of the poem “Notes on a Return to the Native Land” and the poem “Ca-a.” Listen to an introduction to the movie.
3. Watch a portion of the movie “Sugar Cane Alley.”
4. Discuss the term el choteo in reference to the movie and the process of cutting sugar cane.
5. Listen to and read the poem “Negro Bembón.” Work with a partner to translate a portion of it into English.
6. Share translation with rest of class and discuss poem in reference to el choteo and discrimination.
7. Listen to and read poem “I, too.”

Homework: Write a sentence in Spanish with each of the following terms that shows you understand their meaning. Be as descriptive as possible.

El choteo, ca-averal, negro bembón, poes’a afrocubana.

Materials:

Copies of 4 poems:

“Ca-a” by Nicolás Guillén

“Negro bembón” by Nicolás Guillén

“Notes on a Return to the Native Land” by Aimé Césaire

“I, too” by Langston Hughes

Video of movie “Sugar Cane Alley”

Video viewing equipment

Curriculum Unit 97.01.05

Suggestions: This lesson has a lot of possibilities for collaboration with a French class. The French students could learn portions of the Césaire poem and teach it to the Spanish students. A History, Geography or Social Studies teacher could provide a lesson on the Caribbean nations, slavery, and sugar economy.

LESSON PLAN #3

Objectives:

1. After listening to son and poetry by Nicolás Guillén, students will make observations about how the poetry and music are linked through rhythm, structure and theme.
2. Students will be able to understand and use the term *jintanjáfora* as well as create their own *jintanjáforas*.
3. Students will memorize, recite and give a brief oral explanation in Spanish of a Nicolás Guillén poem for classmates “using the poetic language of *simbolismo* , *metáfora* , *s’mil* , *rimo* , *ritmo* , *jintanjáfora* ,” *aliteración* and *anáfora* .

Activities:

1. Listen to teacher recite a Guillén poem from memory and give a short explanation of it in Spanish in the same manner students will have to.
2. Listen to son and make observations about its structure, rhythm and theme with a partner. Share observations with class.
3. Listen to a recording of Nicolás Guillén recite the same poem. Make connections between poem and music with help from the teacher.
4. Listen to an explanation of the word *jintanjáfora* and read different examples of them in Guillén’s poems.
5. Reflect on cultural themes of importance in personal life, for example Laotian heritage, latino heritage, city life, etc.
6. Work with a partner or group create *jintanjáforas* that sound like the cultural theme of your choosing. Share these with class and record those you like. Could try to guess what cultural theme is reflected in other students examples.
7. Choose a poem you would like to memorize from *Motivos de son* or *Sóngoro Cosongo* .

Homework: Given a list of literary terms and their explanations, relate at least three to chosen poem in a written explanation in Spanish. Use teacher's example as a guide. Practice reading poem out loud several times. Note problem areas in pronunciation requiring help from teacher.

Materials:

Son music

Recording of recitation of Guillén's poetry

CD/Audiocassette player

Copies of appropriate poems from *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro Cosongo*

Written explanations of literary terms

Teacher's poem analysis in written form as guide to students

Suggestions: Collaboration with an English teacher using Langston Hughes's poems and the blues would be interesting.

Notes

1. Quoted from Elsa Calderón in her unit of this same seminar titled "The African Presence in the Caribbean: An Analysis of African-Antillian Poetry / La presencia africana en el Caribe: Un análisis de la poes'a afroantillana."
2. The "Diario de la Marina" is available at the Library of Congress on microfilm. You can request, view and print any issues from 1844-1960 in the Periodical Reading Room. "Ideales de una raza" was published from November 1928 to some time in 1931. Its purpose was to discuss the problems of the Afro-Cuban and support the need for national unity. Nicolás Guillén first contributed to it April 21, 1929.
3. This article is reproduced in Spanish in *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* Edited by Edward J. Mullen.
4. *Motivos de Son* from the Langston Hughes Archives at the Beineke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
5. The term Négritude was actually coined in 1938 by Aimé Césaire in his immensely important poem "Notes on a Return to the Native Land" (Conroy xix).
6. For a bilingual edition of his poetry, look for Guillén, Nicolás. *Man-making Words* . Trans. Robert Márquez and David Arthur McMurray, Massachusetts:U Massachusetts P, 1972.
7. Three of these letters are published in "Ideales de una raza" on May 11, 1930.

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Havana: Empresa Consolidada de las Artes Gráficas, 1962. A very detailed biography of Nicolás Guillén written in Spanish. Has a section of photographs, pictures and a copy of the “Ideales de una raza” page from the “Diario de la marina” where Guillén published his eight “Motivos de son” poems for the first time. Langston Hughes’ role in Guillén’s life is given only cursory attention here.

Conroy Kennedy, Ellen, ed. *The Negritude Poets* . New York: Viking, 1975. This is an anthology in English translated from the French with a very good introduction. A short biography of each author is given as well as an abridged version of Aimé Césaire’s poem “Notes on a Return to the Native Land” in which he coined the term “Négritude.”

Fage, J.D. *A History of West Africa: an Introductory Survey* . Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969.

Feijóo, Samuel. *El son cubano: poes’ a general* . Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1986. Written in Spanish, this book gives the history of the *son* and refers to Nicolás Guillén’s use of the *son* .

Fernández de la Vega, Oscar and Alberto N. Pamiés. *Iniciación a la poes’ a afro-americana* . Miami: Universal, 1973. Written in Spanish, this was a very good first book to read about the black poetry movement. Contains articles by and about the most important Spanish-speaking authors of the movement.

Fletcher, Valerie, et al. *Crosscurrents of Modernism Four Latin American Pioneers: Diego Rivera, Joaquín Torres-García, Wilfredo Lam, Matta* . Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1992. Has two wonderful articles about Wilfredo Lam, a very famous Afro-Cuban painter and contemporary of Nicolás Guillén. Connections are made between art and literature within the négritude movement. Contains color plates of his works and some photographs of him.

Gerard, Charley, Mary Sheller. *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music* . Indiana: White Cliffs Media Co., 1989. Explains the evolution of the Salsa including its Afro-Cuban roots. Contains descriptions of instruments, a good glossary of musical terms and a very helpful bibliography/discography.

Guillén, Nicolás. *Summa poética* . Ed. Luis I-igo Madrigal. 8th ed. Madrid: Cátedra, 1995. Madrigal sets out in his introduction to this collection of works to prove that Nicolás Guillén should not be included in the *poes’ a negra* movement. All the poems you would need for this unit are in this book, as well as helpful notes about the poems.

———. *El libro de los sones* . Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1982. Written in Spanish, this is a collection of all Nicolás Guillén’s *son* based poems with an introduction explaining what the *son* is and what it has to do with his poetry. Also it tells about the circumstances surrounding the publication of his various works.

———. *Sóngoro Cosongo* . Buenos Aires: Losada, 1992. Without an introduction, this book contains the poems from his books *Sóngoro cosongo* , *Motivos de son* , *West Indies Ltd.* , and *Espa-a: poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza* . At the end of this book is a brief, but very helpful glossary of Cuban words.

Hughes, Langston. *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* . New York: Thunder’s Mouth P, 1986.

———. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* . Ed. Arnold Rampersad. New York: Knopf, 1994. Besides containing all the poetry by Langston Hughes you would need for this unit, this collection also has a brief chronology of his life and a short, but very helpful introduction to his poetry.

Jemie, Onwuchekwa. *Langston Hughes: an Introduction to the Poetry* . New York: Columbia UP, 1976. This book contains a very good chapter on how Langston Hughes based his poetry on the blues that is concise and easy to understand.

Kutzinski, Vera M. *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* . Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993. Chapter five gives a very good history and explanation of the Afro-Cubanist movement with information about the link between Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén. Chapter six has a very interesting interpretation of the sexism inherent in this poetic movement.

Manzano, Juan Francisco. *The Autobiography of a Slave Autobiografía de un esclavo* . Biling. Ed. Modern Spanish Version Ivan A. Schulman. Trans. Evelyn Picon Garfield. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1996. This is one of the only Cuban slave autobiographies known to exist. On one side of each page is the modern Spanish version of the text, while on the other is the English so that you can see both versions at once when you have the book open. A good introduction explains the circumstances in which the original work was created.

Mullen, Edward J., ed. *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* . Hamden: Archon, 1977. Contains an introduction and description of Hughes's travels through México, Cuba and Spain. The rest is articles and other artistic works written by and about Hughes relating to these countries. Has a reprint of the article by Nicolás Guillén about his second visit to Cuba "Conversación con Langston Hughes" from "Diario de la Marina."

Murry, David R. *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* . Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980. An extremely detailed and long book about the Antillian slave trade. Contains a very good description of the *asiento* system that Spain set in place to make the slave trade profitable.

Olchyk, Marta K. *Historical Approach to Afro-Cuban Poetry* . Diss. Texas Christian U, 1972. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1972. 72-27,954. Contains many useful references to Nicolás Guillén's work within the négritude movement. She gives her personal interpretations of some of his poetry that I found helpful.

Ort'z, Fernando. *African'a de la música folklórica de Cuba* . Cuba: U Central de las Villas, 1965. Fernando Ort'z, predominantly and anthropologist, is such an important figure at this time in Cuban history, that his works cannot be ignored. His Spanish prose is very long-winded however. You will need time to read this book. He has written extensively on all aspects of African influence in Cuba.

Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume 1: 1902-1941 I, Too, Sing America* . Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986. This volume gives a very good account about Hughes's second trip to Cuba and his meeting with Nicolás Guillén.

Roberts, John Storm. *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* . Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979. Gives a small amount of information specific to Cuban music pertaining to this unit.

———. *Black Music of Two Worlds* . New York: Morrow, 1974. Gives a moderate amount of information pertaining to Cuban music.

Rogozinski, Jan. *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present* . New York: Facts on File, 1992. There is very little that is specific to Cuba in this volume, but its survey format presents important information with brevity. This would be a good book for English-speaking students who need general information.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* . 3 vols. London: Macmillan, 1984. Gives explanations of worldwide musical instruments throughout history. Contains pictures of some of the instruments I have explained in this unit.

Suchlicki, Jaime. *Cuba From Columbus to Castro* . Washington DC: Pergamon, 1986. A very good and concise history of Cuba. This would be a very readable book for English-speaking students.

Tracy, Steven Carl. *The Influence of the Blues Tradition on Langston Hughes's Blues Poems* . Diss. U of Cincinnati, 1985. Ann Arbor:

UMI, 1986. 8605510. This is a very detailed description on the subject that I have found invaluable.

Wilson, Nancy. *La poes' a afroantillana* . Miami: Universal, 1979. Written in Spanish, this book contained some helpful information on Nicolás Guillén's poetry and the movement in general.

READING LIST FOR STUDENTS

Guillén, Nicolás. *Sóngoro Cosongo* . Buenos Aires: Losada, 1992. Without an introduction, this book contains the poems from his books *Sóngoro cosongo* , *Motivos de son* , *West Indies Ltd.* , and *Espa-a: poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza* . At the end of this book is a brief, but very helpful glossary of Cuban words.

Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* . Ed. Arnold Rampersad. New York: Knopf, 1994. Besides containing all the poetry by Langston Hughes you would need for this unit, this collection also has a brief chronology of his life and a short, but very helpful introduction to his poetry.

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MATERIALS FOR CLASSROOM USE

Sexteto Habanero. *La Historia de Son Cubano. The Roots of Salsa Vol.II* . Audiocassette. Folklyric 9054. These recordings were made from 1926 to 1931 when Nicolás Guillén would have been listening to the group. You can order this audiocassette by writing to Arhoolie Productions, Inc. 10341 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530, or by calling them at (510) 525-7471. Be sure to request liner notes by John Santos which contain the lyrics in both English and Spanish, a short history of the group and a fantastic long explanation of what the *son* is.

El Son de Cuba . Milan Latino, 1995. This CD is a compilation of different *son* artists performing different songs. Included here is a very easy to understand version of "La mujer de Antonio" by the Septeto Nacional Ignacio Pi-eiro which was performing in Havana in the 1920's and 1930's. I found this CD in a music store.

Guillén, Nicolás. *A Reading in Havana* . Audiocassette. Watershed Tapes, 1979. This is a 48 min. recording of Nicolás Guillén reading his poetry. You can order it by writing to The Watershed Foundation 6925 Willow St. N.W., Studio 201, Washington D.C. 20012, or by calling them at (202)722-9105 or (800) 366-9105.

Samaniego, Fabián A., et al. *¡Dime! Pasaporte al Mundo 21: Cuaderno de actividades para hispanohablantes* . Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1996. This workbook contains a worksheet on p.193 that corresponds with the textbook Unidad 4, Lección 1. It gives a short explanation on Cuban colloquialisms and then presents the students with the poem "Búcate plata" by Nicolás Guillén. The activity is to change the colloquialisms to formal Spanish, for example búcate=búscate. The worksheet could be altered for non-native speakers by giving them a choice of three words for each colloquialism.

Sugar Cane Alley [*La Rue Cases NEgres*]. Dir. Euzhan Palcy. New Yorker Films Artwork, 1995. This is a wonderful movie to show students in its entirety (107 min.). It is about a very intelligent and poor young boy coming of age in Martinique in the early 1900's. Racism is one of the most prominent themes. The movie is in French with English subtitles. It is available at big video stores.

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