



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1998 Volume V: Reading Across the Cultures

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## **Multicultural Discovery When Reading Poetry and Stories for the Elementary Grades**

Curriculum Unit 98.05.02  
by Yolanda U. Trapp

Dedicated to Ronaldo Ramirez and my Grandchildren Emma, Dominique, Benjamin and Celeste

### **INTRODUCTION**

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The purpose of this curriculum project is to encourage and foster creativity, sensitivity, and originality in the elementary students when reading poems and stories of different cultures that inhabit the United States.

#### **Proposed Audience and Time Frame for the Unit**

This curriculum unit has been developed for kindergarten to fourth grade students. I am a Special Education teacher and work with a multigrade classroom. I teach an average of 12 students ranging in grades K to fourth. It seems to be the most demanding position in the profession, but is also the most rewarding. Routines are clearly understood and followed. Students learn to help others and serve as positive role models. There is a vast variability in students' needs. More advanced students learn together in mixed-age groups and less developed students are given the time they need to master skills at their own pace. At other times, children are put into groups of differing levels of ability to learn from each other. I have faced the challenge of balancing the teacher's further preparation and student's learning. The activities and experiences I am offering in this unit are based on "Developmental Appropriateness" giving emphasis to the particular needs and interest of each child.

#### **Time Frame for the Lessons**

At first, the time to read to the students may be short, and when they know to read, with practice, children can sit and read for up to thirty minutes each day. The aim is to establish regular reading habits. When the activity demands that the teacher reads first, the activity could be extended with discussions - variety of responses, monitoring, etc. Time must be flexible according to the interest of the children.

Teachers who would be interested in this unit probably will ask a fundamental question: Why is she explaining all the topics written in the unit? And my response would be: "Because this unit plan is intended to help teachers and prospective teachers to receive more specific information about cultures I chose, when reading selected books to the students." I wish also that after reading all this information, the teachers might become

more comfortable in sharing ideas with their class like concrete and detailed discussions about the topics. When children start asking questions, what kind of responses would they expect? What kind of difficulties will the teacher find in her/himself? With this information I intend that the teacher would be able to diagnose where the child's logic was off, and be better able to help him or her.

This Unit will embrace the reality of multiculturalism in American Society by providing a balance between learning the common core of dominant cultural knowledge (English language, democratic values) and knowledge of minority cultures. Respectfully, we will expose children to poetry and stories connecting learning to the child's individual world. With the design of this Unit using the multicultural literature of different authors, our children will become the competent readers, writers, speakers and listeners they need to be, stimulating their imagination, and challenging youthful energy in a new direction. This program is an ambitious one, rich in introducing people, places, events, ideas, concepts, and artistic productions that have shaped the country in terms of racial/ethnic composition. General information of some cultures of a region will be given briefly in a separate section. These cultures include Africa, Native American, Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, and European. The United States enjoys the folklore of all cultures and has been influenced in many ways, but in this Unit the emphasis will be given in trying to extract the differences and also the similarities of the themes I have selected for the elementary grades. There are many other common threads like celebrations, arts and crafts, games, food, songs and dance. This Unit will give us the opportunity of comparing stories - when we bring all these themes together.

This Unit intends to be an adventure, creating interest in cultural understanding rather than memorization of detailed facts. It is not designed to melt the cultures together; on the contrary, it is designed with the purpose that each culture will be studied and valued for its unique and individual characteristics while sharing some common threads. Allowing children to appreciate the uniqueness of various cultures, opens the possibilities for future understandings. It will help them to see and appreciate the richness of the increasing diversity within their communities, their nation, and their world.

This Unit will be divided into two sections:

### **Part I:**

1. Sharing some common threads.
2. Multicultural discovery. (The variety of cultures)
3. History of reading. (Reading to children)

### **Part II:**

1. Goals and objectives for the Unit.
2. Lesson plans.
3. Teachers' and students' bibliography.
4. Teachers' and Students' reading list.

## PART I

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### 1. Sharing some Common threads

I was raised in a Spanish-speaking country, but in my family group we spoke only in German, and one of the most important celebrations was "Weinachten" (Christmas) with Christmas tree, candles, presents, and dinner. Another celebration was "Oster" (Easter) with chocolate eggs, painted eggs, all kinds of eggs, the "Osterhase" (Easter bunny) had hidden in specific places, so I, as a kid, could be able to find them. What a joy it was when I had my basket full! Later, the family went to church all dressed up. I also used a special dress and hat and, of course, new shoes. We were celebrating the new life, the new beginning.

We celebrated many other holidays but these were always my favorites, and when my own children were big enough, they inherited these old German traditions. My husband was from Basque origin, but also lived in a South American culture. He loved the Basque food I prepared, and it was not a surprise to find out that in Chile are many Basques and that they incorporated to Chilean culture into their own culture. We also learned several songs in the Basque language very different from the Spanish ("Castellano" spoken in Chile). Our Christmas became a traditional German one, with a real pine and candles and toys my children found the next day under the tree. Today, my French son-in-law, and my two French grandchildren celebrate "Oster" and "Weinachten" like I did, and they also hang at their door a banner proclaiming "Joyeux Noel" ("Feliz Navidad" - Happy Christmas). Also my North American son-in-law and grandchildren celebrate the same traditional German holidays. They hang stockings on Christmas Eve, a tradition that comes to us from Greece. A Greek legend says that St. Nicholas, a Bishop, dropped gold down a man's chimney where it landed in his oldest daughter's stocking. My family decorates the house with poinsettias, the pretty traditional red, pink, and white flowers we all use at Christmas time. The poinsettia came to the United States from Mexico. Dr. Joel Poinsett brought one to South Carolina in 1828 and it quickly became a holiday favorite. Aren't they some common threads? I think that the whole country (U.S.A.) observes today these traditions brought to the United States and Canada by the immigrants who settled there.

### 2. Multicultural Discovery (The variety of cultures).

#### *Africa*

To many Americans Africa means cartoons of Tarzan swinging from the trees, photographs of misery and starving children, lions on landscapes or a place of mystery and "darkness".

Africa is so much more, rich in historical and cultural traditions, and filled with people who, often in the face of extraordinary adversity, are making an incredible effort in educating their children, fulfilling their obligations, seeking out the best of the modern world while holding to their long time traditions.

We as teachers have to be very careful not to reinforce the stereotypes children already have.

The way we should introduce students to the continent depends, of course, on their grade level. For kindergarten to second year, it would be wise to introduce and meet African kids, to get a sense of their lives and their physical environment. We shall learn about geography, like the African mountains or rainfall patterns by comparing them to American ones. To other levels, third and fourth, it would be interesting to introduce the social world that Africans inhabit. There's been a burst of multicultural writing (books) for all levels written by African American authors. (See resource and bibliography). Literature gives students a sense of African life as

experienced by Africans.

For young students, the oral tradition of many African people could enrich them with proverbs, folktales, and "why" stories. Many have been transcribed and gorgeously illustrated in picture books appropriate for all elementary grades. Proverbs can be an effective device for gaining the interest of younger students. An excellent resource is *African Proverbs*, by Carlotte Leslau.

The Anansi tales of Ghana feature a spider whose cleverness sometimes leads to his own undoing. There is a lesson to be learned from Anansi. The spider tales have traveled from Africa to the Caribbean Islands.

African history is full of extraordinary surprises. Africa is a mosaic of different countries, and cultures. Ancient Egypt is an example of the oldest and greatest civilization in the world. We could explore the mysterious 9th Century Igbo-Ukwu tombs in Easter Nigerian or the stone churches of Ethiopia that give us evidence of cultural and political systems long before the arrivals of Europeans. Even long before Columbus sailed to the Atlantic, people from Zanzibar to Arabia and India were part of a cosmopolitan, multiracial trading zone and had mastered the ocean.

The continent is so vast with 53 or more countries, speaking nearly 1,000 languages, a land of 800 million people who today live in high-rise city apartments and traditional thatch-roof houses, that we have to start with the students focusing on a single country, such as Nigeria or Kenya. A good way to start without the stereotyped books and photos of Africa is *Africa Beyond the Myths*, an audiovisual guide to the diversity and richness of African cultures and people. (Society for Visual Education, Inc., 6677 N. Northwest Hwy., Chicago, IL 60631 (1-800-829-1900).)

Let's work in the spirit of "Harambe", which means "let us work together". (Kenya).

*Native Americans (North Americans).*

We have to say that Native Americans is a vast name given to natives from North, Central and South America, and traditionally they were known as American Indians based on Columbus's mistake. Recently, it has been changed to Native in general, meaning that they were people who belonged to this land. But they also came from other places before arriving to America.

According to archaeologists, people came crossing the Bering Strait searching for food following the tracks of animals like woolly mammoths, walking fifty-five miles from Siberia to Alaska and became the very first North Americans. Many Native Americans still do not believe that their people came here in this way. They believe, instead, the arrival stories of their old songs and myths.

The Eskimo-Aleuts were the last to come over from Asia, in about 3000 B.C. The land bridge did not exist anymore so they had to cross the Bering Strait in wooden skin boats, or rode in on floating ice. By the time Christopher Columbus arrived at this continent these were hundreds of thousands of Native Americans living in different areas. When the Spanish came they found more than 60 languages (and over 300 dialects) being spoken in the area what is now California. And the societies that developed over so many centuries were as different from one another as the habitats of the forest-dwelling Eastern Woodlands tribes were from those of the hunter-gatherers of the South-Western deserts and plains. The European exploration and settlement of North American brought the destruction of the unique cultures that had developed over many thousands of years. Had it not been for the determination of the European conquerors to destroy them and occupy their lands, the fascinating world of the Native North Americans might still exist today in its original colorful cultural

diversity.

One of the few authentic voices for Native Americans is the writer and poet for children Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, born in 1944 in Rosebud, South Dakota. She is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe identified as today's leading Native American writer and poet. She said that she "attempts to interpret history from the viewpoint of the American Indian", and in so doing, she hopes "to correct the many misconceptions and untruths which have been too long perpetuated by non-Indian authors who have written about us." Her book *Dancing Teepees* is her contribution to literature about Native American life and culture. The poems are written in a way that students of third and fourth grade could easily pantomime the actions or make up a ceremonial dance to go with the poem "I rise, I rise".

For other great authors I have selected for the Unit, (please see Lesson Plans and Bibliography).

### Asia

Asia is a huge continent, and consists of many countries in Central, North, East, West, South and Southeast Asia. In addition, the Archipelago of Indonesia is considered to be a part of the Asian culture. Celebrations and festivals take place almost every day and can last as long as a week. Art has also played a major role. The first organized civilizations we know through history are situated around 2500 B.C. The first cities in India were remarkable constructed, planned, and also the first in using drain pipes. The Yellow River in China and the Indo in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in India, were the most important resources for the people in helping to organize a civilization. From China we only know about the Shang Dynasty around 1750 B.C. but it's absolutely sure, according to the history, that civilization began long before these years.

Asia is the most vast continent and its whole extension is about one-third of the total extension of the world. It is also the continent which has the highest rate of population growth. It is formed of the half Oriental part of the former Soviet Union, the Republic of China and Mongolia and by the subcontinent formed by India and Pakistan. Great literature, poetry and theater have been handed through the centuries. Plays with puppets are performed and can last from two to five hours. Illustrated manuscripts are known only from the end of the nineteenth century. Many old stories are anonymous. It is a real challenge to study the folklore and literature of Asia because of the vastness of the area, the mixture of cultures and especially the unfamiliarity with the language. There is an abundance of tales from this area of the world and children will probably love to listen and to read books of some representative authors from China, Japan, Indonesia, India. One of the many representative tales I chose for kindergarten to second grade is *Yen-Shen, a Cinderella Story from China*, by Louie Ai-Ling. Illustrated by Ed Young. New York: Philomel Books, 1982. Children will love to listen to this particular story. It is the classic Cinderella story, and it is believed to be the oldest one. The teacher might read aloud both versions, the European and the Chinese. Another story I chose for Kindergarten to second grade is: *Umbrella*, by Taro Yashima. Puffin Books: New York, 1986. It tells us about a Japanese girl, "Momo", who eagerly waits for a rainy day so she can use the red boots and umbrella she received on her third birthday. The story is placed in New York, but her parents are Japanese. Beautifully illustrated, it is more a picture book and also has some language symbols written like "Haru", (spring), "Natsu", (summer), "Ame", (rain), "Momo", (peach) and sounds the rain makes as a Japanese girl would listen in her mother's language. The art of storytelling with flat puppets behind a sheet, with the light coming behind the sheet, could be used for kindergarten as an alternative activity for emergent readers. This is a high art in Indonesia. Students can work in teams and become the characters and move in and out from behind the white sheet. When the story is played out. Also in Indonesia the movements of the hands is a very important performance when dancing. Another suggested activity could incorporate hand motions when listening to music and storytelling. A good

teacher resource of folk dancing of different areas of the world is: *Video Anthology of World Music and Dance*.

*Latin America: Divided into South America and Central America (The Caribbean)*.

In general, Latin America is an area inhabited by people who speak Spanish, but the cultural products are very diverse. Many of these products reflect multiple influences to different degrees: Indigenous American, African, European, Middle Eastern, and also they have not come together easily, rather they were historically brought together through a process of invasion and slavery. These facts have always been shaped by oppression and domination, subsequently by resistance. As Alma Flor Ada very well explains in her article *Contemporary Trends*, "If the language has been a tool of oppression, the premise is that the language and the literature can be used as a tool of liberation."

The Hispanic oral tradition is rich and diverse. Many cultures have influenced in the so named "Latino culture". Much new oral folklore was introduced, indigenous cultures from the Americas, and others originated in Africa, mainly of Yoruba, Lucumi, Mandingo, Congo, and Carabali origin. Spain itself was invaded for more than 800 years by the Muslims. A significant number of Jews lived on the peninsula before it became the Nation-state of Spain. The Spaniards invaded also many tribal cultures with rich oral traditions and highly developed civilizations transforming them and creating new cultures.

*South America (the southern cone)*.

In this part of the continent (as in many others) the first known inhabitants were of different and rich cultures. The arid coast of Peru is one of the world's great hearths of civilization. According to some anthropologists, complex societies developed in these valleys. In order to provide for their continued existence, they turned to conquest of neighboring valleys. These embryonic states developed into major civilizations like the Wari Empire of the Peruvian Central Highlands, the Tiwanaku (Tiahuanaco) culture of Highland Bolivia, the Chimu of Northern coastal Peru, and ultimately, the Inca Empire of Cuzco. All these cultures are known through archaeological remains. Tropical rainforest people did not develop the same sort of complex civilization. They also were larger than once believed. Archaeological remains are few except in sites like the Island of Marajo, at the mouth of the Amazon. In Southern South America, Incas rarely touched the area of present-day Central and Southern Chile or Northern Argentina. Pampas, Patagonia and Tierra Del Fuego were even further beyond their range. Not until the late 19th century did the descendants of Europeans establish a permanent presence, south of the Bio-Bio River (Chile).

The theme of multiple heritage is a historical reality for Hispanics (or Latins?). Many Hispanic writers have given us the most extraordinary literature, Nobel Prizes as an example. In the last century, Latin America has published more books than ever before. The number of writers producing original works in Spanish (especially for children) continues to increase substantially. In Latin America there is a conscious effort to validate the multiple heritage through fables, fiction, and poetry. Some of the Latin writers have also introduced series of books for youngsters about great explorers and their discoveries. The illustrated book *The Voyage of Magellan* (El Viaje De Magallanes) by Piero Ventura, translated by Manuel Olsagani. (Magisterio Espanol, 1980.), is a great one for third and fourth graders. Also *The Legends of the Amazon* (Leyendas Amazonicas) by Jose Luis Jordana Laguna is a collection of brief stories that portray the remote and exotic landscapes of the Amazon region and the tribal cultures that have made that region their home.

For grades two to four I selected *Aztecas, Pueblos Del Pasado*. (Aztec Villages of the Past) by Jose Garcia Sanchez, Luis and Miguel Angel Pacheco. Altea, 1984. "Soy El Sol", (I am The Sun) one of the stories, describes the nature and properties of the sun, its relation to earth, and earthly life, and its role in human history and

everyday human activity.

A great book I suggest for all grades is *Cuentos De Hispanoamerica* (Stories of Spanish America). Nebrisa, 1992. Each of the Latin American countries is represented in this collection of stories, which contains retellings of popular legends as well as original stories by the best authors of each country.

### *Central America (The Caribbean)*

The finite boundaries of islands fool us into believing that islands are easy to understand. They are not. Especially in the Caribbean. The only certainty is that no two islands are exactly alike. Just like people, each island has its own personality. Thus, once-British Jamaica is not like Puerto Rico, with Spanish heritage, and the Latino Dominican Republic is very different from the French-affected Haiti, and Nevis is different from St. Kitts, together an independent Caribbean country with a British heritage. Another independent country since 1898 is Cuba, the largest of the Caribbean islands. A few islands are still dependent territories but with some self-government. The islands of the West Indies, so named by Christopher Columbus in his search for the East Indies, were an earlier landfall for Arawaks, Tainos, Ciboneys, and other tribes. The first tribes made their way from Venezuela's Orinoco River. Peaceful tribes were conquered, first by the Caribs, who destroyed the gentler culture with their more aggressive ways and then by the Spaniards who used Arawaks brought from Aruba for arduous field work. Although the Spanish came first, followers came after -- from Pirates to Plantocracy, Spaniards, French, English, Dutch, Danes, and especially the Africans, Chinese, and Indians brought to work the plantations. All of them carried fragments from their home countries. The languages that are spoken, then, are of a great variety. For example, many of the islanders speak English (Bahamas, Jamaica, Virgin Islands, Barbados, Trinidad), many speak Dutch (Curacao, Aruba, St. Eustatius), several speak Spanish (St. Thomas, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, Cuba), and some speak French (Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique). With the rich cultural background and the rich mixture of language, the folk tales take on a distinct flavor all their own. Anansi the spider tales came to the islands from Africa. This is a real classic book that I highly recommend for kindergarten to second grade. The Anansi trickster is one of the major trickster figures in island stories. In poetry there is recently edited *A Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Caribbean Poets* by John Agard and Grace Nichols with color art by Cathie Felstead (Candlewick). When reading this book you can see and even hear the vivid sights and sounds of the islands through the work of 13 contemporary poets; each prefaced with a photograph and commentary. I also selected *Mother Scorpion Country*, (La Tierra De La Madre Escorpion) a legend from the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua. (Central America) A Spanish/English version by Harriet Rohmer and illustrations by Virginia Stearns, 1986. This retells us the legend of a brave young Miskito Indian who follows his wife from the land of the living to the spirit world.

### *East Europe*

Why did I introduce a separate section for East Europe to the Unit? Because this area of the world represents a diversity of cultures. I will give only general information about the incredible productive role this part of the globe has played in the cultural life of all of us. The effort of this area has been felt in neighboring countries. As an example, Western Finland was influenced by Russia. Also Lithuanian tales were influenced by them, and there is evidence of the Slavic influence in Greece and Romania. Puppets have played an important role in Slavic folklore. Some Romany tribes did not record their history because they are wanderers but oral traditions kept a number of the tales alive. Celebrations, arts and crafts, food, songs, dances, rhythms are also very important aspects of each culture I have mentioned in the Unit, but my goal is discovering books children would love to read and explore. One of the books I selected for the Unit is *Beauty and the Beast* because there are Basque, Swiss, English, Italian, German, Portuguese, Lithuanian and Indian versions. In the Lithuanian

story, for example, the beast is a white wolf. Other stories also tell us about a prince who is magically transformed into a monster and can be saved only by the love and devotion of a kind and beautiful woman. This is a great story to be compared with other versions we know. For all grades (kindergarten through fourth). Two more books I would recommend for third and fourth grades: One is *The Always Prayer Shawl* , by Sheldon Oberman, illustrated by Ted Lewin which tells us the life of Adam, a Jewish boy who learns how traditions link generations. The gripping illustrations change from black and white to vivid color as Adam emigrates from Russia to America and journeys from childhood to old age. And, finally, I recommend *American Islam* . These are interviews with Muslim teens that provide a realistic view of an often misunderstood religion. The book offers a historical overview of Islam, an explanation of the basic tenets of the Koran, and a brief but notable discussion of the differences associated with the practice of Islam in the African American community.

The story of all human beings still lies in the unknown. Where do we come from? The question is not able to be answered yet, nor will it be for the next generations, or will it be . . . ?

### **3. History of Reading. (Reading to Children)**

Since reading is assumed to be the most critical of the fundamental skills children learn, the emphasis has been placed on reading instruction in recent years. Massive programs have been initiated to increase the level of reading for our society. This unit is intended to help teachers to involve elementary students in the process of reading when using selected literature of different cultures that inhabit the United States. A brief historical overview in the field of reading instruction might be especially informative. Reading instruction in America was almost identical to that in England in the earliest 1607. The alphabet method was used memorizing the names of the letters. Then, the child learned to spell and pronounce combinations of two letters and finally mono-syllabic words. Phrases, sentences, and stories were introduced next. The only book children had in most homes was the Bible. Later, in 1790, one of the most influential books used was *The American Spelling Book* by Noah Webster, containing lists of words and syllables, also rules for correct reading, speaking, and pronunciation. The book was used widely for reading and spelling instruction. In the early 1800s the first set of graded textbooks was compiled by Lyman Cobb. Then, in 1828 Worcester published the first readers in America that used a different approach to instruction. In his books, Worcester suggested the adoption of the word method for teaching reading. The child had to repeat the word over and over again until the child learned it. Later the whole-word method was accepted by experts as a general method of teaching reading. The McGuffey Readers represented books in which the child used it for each level. With the first law in education children were required to stay in school, also teachers had to do more and find other ways to teach students.

#### *Reading instruction in the Twentieth Century.*

At the beginning of the Century more emphasis was placed on meaning and thinking than on word mastery. The whole sentence was read and then some words were selected, but parents were concerned that the children were simply memorizing certain words. Sound-symbol relationships were renewed and by 1910 children were trying to master the phonics. Around 1915 again teachers began to observe that many children could not pronounce words or know their meaning. Criticism of the method followed. As a result the story method was introduced but it was a sort of expansion of the sentence method. First, the teacher read the entire reading selection; then the children would read the story and because the teacher read the unit or story before, it was expected that children would understand the meaning and read by themselves. Evaluation tests began to be used and that led reading to more scientific basis. Many new ideas were offered in the 1930, also corrective techniques. Basal Reader Series were also introduced. The programs offered a systematic and sequential instructional plan through the grades. Again, a lot of criticism was formulated when some articles



reported that in the U.S. were many poor readers. During the 1950s Rudolf Flesh published *Why Johnny Can't Read* advocating a return to the phonic approach. During the 1960s more significant research studies were conducted and concluded that combinations of approaches (phonic approach, Basal reading, language experience, programmed reading, the Montessori method) were superior to a single approach.

Today, again, there are well-designed programs with solid evidence that when fully implemented they can help. President Clinton's initiative is to have all students reading independently by the end of third grade -- known as the "America Reads Challenge". I will mention the last programs briefly, and highlighting the one which directly concerns to the unit. It could provide strategies to the teachers.

## STRATEGIES

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### A) Cooperative Integrated Reading and Comprehension.

It is an approach for grades 2-6 that emphasizes cooperative partner and group activities among students. It includes teacher-directed instruction. (Reading aloud, practicing difficult words and retelling stories from Basal readers.) Students are required to read a book of their choice each day and report it every two weeks. (CIRC) It is also available in a Spanish version.

### B) Direct Instruction.

Designed for elementary schools. Instruction given in fast pace, with rhythm and group and individual responses. Also to accelerate the learning of students at risk. They are assessed frequently in skills the teacher observes they need to master. (DI)

### C) Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction. (ECRI)

This is a program designed for all grades, and intends to implement and strengthen the curriculum, using a variety of techniques such as word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, spelling and including writing in the process. The classroom reading period is longer, around two hours. The teacher models and instructs new skills (demonstrates book and print concepts, extends concepts and vocabulary, provides shared class experiences for "Talk Around the Text.") After a period of practice, teachers hold individual conferences, and re-teach skills as necessary to small groups.

### D) Junior Great Books (JGB)

For all grades, designed to expose students to rich and challenging literature developing critical thinking skills. Selecting texts according to their age-level, they also write expressing their point of view.

### E) Multicultural Reading and Thinking.

This program intends to help students read for context and literal understanding developing critical-reasoning skills of analysis, comparison, inference, interpretation and evaluation when reading multicultural themes, and, literature in general. Each lesson involves inquiry, sustained discussion, and student's reasoning. It is a supplementary program for grades 3-8. In this unit I am including grades K, 1, 2 and 4th. (Please see Lesson Plans.)

## F) Open Court Collections for Young Scholars (OC)

This is a reading and writing program for grades K-6 and intends to use a balanced approach to reading instruction, by introducing grade-appropriate decodable texts, and a variety of classic and contemporary children's literature. It includes independent tests demonstrating its effectiveness.

## G) Success For All (SFA)

This program, supported by Title I funds, after a research-based reading curriculum includes phonics, children's literature, extended reading groups, cooperative learning, assessments to identify needs of students, one-on-one tutoring for students with reading problems. (This is one of the programs I use in my multi-age, multi-disable classroom.) The whole program is named "Seven Promising Reading and English Language Arts Programs" and is available through the AFT order department. Copies are free.

### *The Reading Process*

Why did I decide to choose levels of elementary students separately? Because learning and development are so individualized that it is not possible or desirable to establish a uniform curriculum.

Reading begins in the crib.<sup>1</sup>

"By the age of sixteen weeks, infants laugh out loud, vocalize, and babble." They start crying and sneeze and recognize sounds made by humans and hear human speech sounds. They start to recognize the message in the mother's voice of affection and love. This is the base upon which future success and attitudes toward reading are built. As children approach to school age, the family and themselves expect to learn to read and write. Readiness for reading comes from a base of the beginning experience they had with that caring voice they listened in the crib. In kindergarten, children begin to more carefully examine print, looking for patterns, detecting similarities and differences in letters, words, and sounds. Later in first and second grade, children are beginning to utilize the conventional rule systems that govern written language to function as effective readers and writers. In third and fourth grades, verbal language ability becomes more refined and elaborated when incorporating a literature-based program that includes other cultures and languages. The cycle of learning repeats itself as children's concepts and skills become more elaborate. The ability to recognize letters is one important predictor of successful reading, but adults often erroneously assume that direct instruction in letter recognition will achieve this end. Like the development of other knowledge, the ability to recognize letters begins in awareness and exploration. Three and four-year-olds should have many opportunities to become aware of letters in meaningful contexts by being read to and seeing environmental print. Some four-year-olds and most fives will explore letters in many contexts and learn to recognize those that are most meaningful first. Some five and most six-year-olds examine letters more closely, adjust their personal perceptions to the conventional uses of letters and are able to utilize the ability to recognize letters in a variety of contexts.

### **Reading Traditional Stories from Different Cultures**

I learned to read when I was around three and a half to four years old. My grandmother used to read to me in German, so German became my mother's language. Suddenly, I began to know the meaning of the words and I discovered the power of reading by myself and living all the adventures of the characters or protagonists of the stories. I lived in a wonderland. Surrounded with castles, princes and princesses, pirates, poor girls/boys, without family. I remember especially one book: "Heimathlos", (without home) where the protagonist had no

family and finally she married the man of her dreams and they lived happily ever after . . . Does it sound familiar? Isn't it like all the happy end stories of the soap operas people watch today on t.v., or like Cinderella who met her prince and became a princess? I am giving these examples because in some way they are eternal and with little variations written in all different cultures. They are universal. They could be of German origin or Chinese, or Latin. Human beings love these kinds of stories. They reflect our dreams, and human beings are equal regarding the color of their skin or the features of their eyes.

We have to introduce children to these different cultures, it will give them a sense that the more they know about other people, the more they know about themselves as human beings.

## Part II

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### Basic Goals

1. Cross-cultural understanding, for elementary schools.
2. Selection of poems, stories, for multigrade students K-fourth.
3. Selection of issues of multicultural literature for children.
4. To explore cultural diversity.
5. To learn about customs and traditions.
6. To appreciate the richness of the increasing diversity.
7. Increasing reading skills.
8. Improving communication skills.
9. Providing recognition.

10. Stimulating cognitive development.

11. To encourage creative wordplay through rhyme.

12. To teach the values of kindness and tolerance.

13. To build self-esteem.

14. To entertain.

General objectives.

Academic concepts.

(Reading, writing, speaking, listening.)

Sequenced skill plan for each lesson.

Language

Arts:

- o To lose fear when reading a poem, or a story in front of other people.

ESL/Social Studies

- o To increase vocabulary taken from selected books of cultures and ethnic groups in our world.

- o To find similarities and differences when exploring the world of diversity through the books.

Language  
o experience  
writing.

o Daily oral language.

o Flannel board stories.

o Reading aloud to the children.

o Peer tutoring. (At least one strong third or fourth grader sits at each table of six students and monitors their progress. The teacher might show the student how to tutor.)

1. By the end of the lesson the student will recognize and identify an author's style, attempt to write and respond in a variety of genres, and differentiate the cultures presented through the specific books.

2. By the end of the lesson, a student will differentiate between fiction and nonfiction texts, integrate story structure in writing, and use phonetic and visual elements in spelling.

Organizing for Instruction

General Planning

For beginning readers:

o In small groups of six or less with close monitoring, using many reading recovery techniques.

Other methods/practices includes:

- o Obtaining many books at a variety of levels.
  
- o Writing words and sentences.
  
- o Phonics instruction.
  
- o Matching individual words to words in a sentence.
  
- o Keeping word banks.
  
- o Writing group and individual books.

For more skilled readers:

- o Larger groups of ten to twelve each.

Major Methods/Practices include:

- o Author studies.
  
- o "Theme" books, (multicultural or books related to the unit).
  
- o "Character" books, (Cinderella - the Beauty and the Beast, etc.).

- o Poetry weeks.

- o Silent reading, book projects and reading together.

Whole class:

- o The teacher might use whole class activity such as big books.

## Teaching Plan

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### Introduction

This project was written with the purpose that teachers and students could explore and enjoy the diversity of cultures when reading selected books. Because the theme is so vast, I have chosen only a few exceptional books for the different grades. The reason why I decided to include all elementary grades in reading was written at the beginning of the unit. The purpose, anyway, is to share multicultural information with social acceptance and respect of the diverse cultures we will explore when reading poems and stories to the students. These books reflect a culture's uniqueness and the universality of human experiences.

### Lesson Plan 1

Subject areas: Grades K to 1

- oLanguage Arts
- oSocial Studies

The book for the

theme: Umbrella by Taro Yashima.

Theme: The story of a little American-Japanese girl and her family.

Country: Japan.

Aim: What is this book about?

Time frame: One day program.

Goal: Incorporation of a different culture.

Objectives:

General: The students will enrich their knowledge when incorporating Japanese family through listening, reading, writing and other related activities.

Specific: At the end of the lesson the student will be able to:

- o Distinguish similarities and differences within the individual classroom among the characters of the book.
  
- o Compare social environments in the story and at home and school.
  
- o Participating in activities related to the story, drawing pictures or constructing umbrellas and boots.

Materials:

Book Umbrella and white, brown and red construction paper.

Tools:



Scissors, pencils, markers.

Directions: Sample read aloud.

- a. Using 20 minutes approximately, the teacher reads part of the story and three students are assigned to reread to the class, a favorite portion of the story.
  
- b. Have students identify the characters, places and plot of the story. Have them identify what they think may or may not happen.
  
- c. After reading the whole story, ask them if they agree or disagree with the decisions made by the little girl before it rains, and why.
  
- d. Let students tell about the story in their own words and write on the blackboard using the Venn diagram or a Semantic Map to find differences or similarities with themselves.

Follow-up Activities.

Time: Same day or according to school schedule.

Activity:

1. Draw or cut umbrellas and boots for a rainy day. (use construction paper.)

2. Teacher writes on blackboard the different characters (symbols) written in Japanese, and translates them. Children may draw pictures about their meaning, and let them express their feelings about the difference in writing Japanese symbols. Leave the activity open for further ones.

Evaluating Student Understanding.

Directions:

- o Observe

- o Ask questions

- o Conference

- o Listen

Diagnose:2

- o What do they know?

- o What do you need to teach?

- o What do you need to enrich?

- o What are their interests?

- o What resources would be best?

- o What's next?

## **Lesson Plan 2**

Subject areas: Grade 2

Curriculum Unit 98.05.02

oLanguage Arts  
oSocial Studies

Approximate Time        One hour and an extended activity for the next day and others depending where  
Frame:                      the open-ended activity will lead us to future ones about different cultures.

The book for the theme: Subway Sparrow, by Leyla Torres.

Theme: A bird is trapped inside a subway and four different people try to help it escape.

Country: Multicultural understanding.

Goal:

To show how four strangers rise above the language, age, and cultural barriers that divide them.

Objectives: The student will:

- o Enrich his/her knowledge about different languages people talk.
  
- o Respect and understand cultural and ethnic differences.
  
- o Distinguish similarities and differences within the protagonists and themselves.

Directions:

Suggested grouping: The whole class.

- a. The teacher reads the book aloud from start to finish without pausing for questions or comments. Letting the voice convey the mood and the tone that the story creates.

For Character Analysis: Have the children note the situation and how they express themselves about it.

For identifying tone/mood: Share with the children the feelings that evoke to each protagonist. How do they respond? Different? Same?

For Sequence: Have students note the sequence of the event and how each person reacts to the situation.

b. Social studies:

The book uses the city as the backdrop for the story. Ask the children to describe cities to the class. Record, initial, and date these responses. Help the children find some cities on a map.  
o Then, have the children use an encyclopedia to research some information about their cities. How many people live there? Are they different? Are they alike?

Now have the students draw or write about their cities. They may use magazine photos to make portraits of their city. Let them share these with the class as they share information  
o about their cities and different people that may live there. Ask the children what kind of language they may speak. The same? Different? What would they do if they met people who don't speak the same language?

Culminating Activity: Let the children create a poster with different countries and different people. Discuss the result when finishing the poster.

### Lesson Plan 3

Subject Areas: Grades 3 and 4

- oLanguage Skills
- oESL
- oSocial Studies

Time Frame: This is a one week program.

Goal: To engage in shared verbal and written reflections about ethnic traditions.

Place: Nicaragua (Central America).

Book: Mother Scorpion Country retold by Harriet Romer. La Tierra De La Madre Escorpion.

Theme:Legend from the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua in Spanish and English versions for ESL lessons.

Objectives:

o The students will learn about legends of Central America.

o The students will describe differences and similarities of their own background, and compare it with the legend.

Directions:

Language Arts:

ESL Bilingual

Program

Day One: The teacher divides the students into small groups, giving each photocopies of a brief passage from the book selected. The members of each group read their passage in English and Spanish, discuss it among themselves, and prepare six sentences to present on the following day. (Pauker Strategies)

Day Two: The member of each group will describe their passage to the class, giving time for reactions and questions. After all the groups have reported, the teacher raises questions for general discussion.

Day Three: Check the students' comprehension by completing the sheet, in English and Spanish.

Comprehensive Questions for Mother Scorpion Country. (La Tierra De La Madre Escorpion):

1. What is the story about?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What happened to one of the protagonists?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Where does it happen?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What does he feel?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What happened at the end of the story?

6. Do you agree or disagree with the legend? and, why?

7. Write a different ending.

#### ESL Spanish

1. ¿De qué trata la historia? (o leyenda)

2. ¿Que le pasó a uno de los protagonistas?

3. ¿En qué lugar sucede?

4. ¿Cómo se siente el protagonista?

5. ¿Qué sucede al final de la historia?

6. ¿Esta de acuerdo o en desacuerdo de lo sucedido en la leyenda, y por qué?

7. ¿Escribe un final diferente de la leyenda.

Day Four: Extended activity.

Time frame: According to the interest of the students.

Direction: After reading and comparing the questionnaire initiate a discussion about the different answers and feelings of the students.

Day Five: Evaluation.

o Oral vocabulary quiz

o Comprehension.

## Notes

- Thonis, Eleanor. Reading Begins In The Crib. (P. 154.) Wheatland School District, California. The Power of
1. Two Languages, Tinajero, Flor Ada. McMillan McGraw-Hill copyright Hill School Division. New York, NY 10003. 1993.
  2. Trapp, Yolanda. Short Novels, Stories and Poetry of the Latin Americas. (P. 197) Twentieth Century Latin American Writing. Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute. Vol I 1997.

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Aronson, David and Steel, Melissa. "The African Mosaic". Teaching Tolerance, Vol. 4 No. 2. Fall 1995. Copeland, Peter F. Indian Tribes of North America Coloring Book. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications (1990). Elleman, Barbara. Creative Classroom Magazine (1997) Vol. 12 #2. Gursky, Daniel. "What Works for Reading". American Teachers, (March 1998). Vol. 82 No. 6. Nellmann, Dana. Coastal Indians: West Nyack, NY, Center for Applied Research in Education, 1996. Stull, Elizabeth Crosby. Multicultural Discovery Activities for the Elementary Grades: West Nyack, NY, The Center for Applied Research in Education. 1995. Thonis, Eleanor. Reading Begins in the Crib. The Power of Two Languages. Villamil, Josefina and Ada Flor Alma, Ed. New York: MacMillan McGraw-Hill, 1993.

## Reading List

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### Asia

Tien Nu (The Girl from Heaven) Tale From China. Amherst, New York: Creative Edge, Inc. 1989. A beautiful folktale of China about a girl who wanted to help with a little coin of gold to make a statute of Buda. For Spanish lessons the book is translated in Spanish. (For 3rd and 4th grade) Waters, Kate and Slovenz-Low, Madeline. Photographs by Marta Cooper. Lion Dancer, Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year. New York, New York: Scholastic, Inc. 1990. This is a story of the most important day of Ernie Wan's life. This Chinese New Year, he will perform his first Lion Dance on the streets of New York City! (Kindergarten to 3rd grade) Yashima, Taro and Mitsu. Umbrella. New York, New York: Puffin Books a Division of Penguin Books, U.S.A., Inc. 1977. Momo, an American Japanese girl, eagerly waits for a rainy day so she can use the red boots and umbrella she received on her third birthday. (Grades K-2nd) Africa

Gray, Nigel. A Country Far Away. Pictures by Phillippe Dupasquier. New York, New York: Orchard Books. U.S.A. 1991. Side-by-side pictures reveal the essential similarities between the lives of two boys, one in a western country, one in a rural African village. (For K to 2nd grade) Jenkins, Steve. Biggest, Strongest, Fastest. Published by Ticknor and Field Books for Young Readers. New York, New York: A Houghton Mifflin Company, Copyright 1995. A great picture book and story book about several animals children love like elephants, snakes, and also from different countries included. Cut-paper collages. "A great learning and

teaching tool and an enjoyable picture book". -- School Library Journal 9/94. Shertle, Alice. Down the Road. Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. San Diego, CA: Brown Deer Press/Harcourt Brace and Company, printed in Singapore 1995. Hetty, a little African American girl, wants to go by herself to buy some eggs at Mr. Birdie's store. She went out of the road and broke the eggs, but her loving family enjoys anyway the afternoon eating apples and their child's first steps toward independence. (For Kindergarten to 2nd grades) Verne, La C. Johnson. Kumi and Chanti Tell the Story of Harriet Tubman. Chicago, IL: Empak Publishing Company, 1992. This story is about Harriet Tubman and how she helped other slaves to escape to Philadelphia where they did not have slaves, and could be free. Latin America (South Central)

Lippert, H. Margaret. The Sea Serpent's Daughter. A Brazilian legend. Illustrated by Felipe Davalos. (Legends of the World). Troll Associates. Library of Congress Cataloging-in publication data. 1993. Relates the traditional Brazilian legend of how the sea serpent's gift of darkness to his daughter brings night to the people of the rain forest. (3rd and 4th grade) Rohmer, Harriet and Wilson, Dorminster. Mother Scorpion Country. Stories from Central America. Illustrations: Virginia Stearns. Library of Congress cataloging-in publication data. 1987. U.S.A. A brave young Miskito Indian follows his wife from the land of the living to the spirit world. English and Spanish version. (for 3rd and 4th grade) Native American

Goble, Paul. The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses. Story and illustrations by Paul Goble. Copyright 1978. Alladin Books. New York, New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1986. Though she is fond of her people, a girl prefers to live among the wild horses where she is truly happy and free. A dramatic tale of a Plains Native American girl. (For 3rd and 4th grade) De Paola, Tom, The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush. Retold and illustrated by Tomie De Paola. A Paper Star Book, published in 1996. New York, New York: Putnam and Grosset Group, U.S.A. Little Gopher follows his destiny, as revealed in a dream-vision, of becoming an artist for his people and eventually is able to bring the colors of the sunset down to the earth. Spanish and English versions. (3rd and 4th grade) Multicultural Books

Baer, Edith. This Is The Way We Go To School. A book about children around the world. Illustrated by Steve Bjorkman. New York, New York: Scholastic, Inc. New York, 1990. Edith Baer takes all the teachers and students on a journey around the world, how other children go to school according to the place where they live. (For all grades) W. Nikola, Lisa. Bein' With You This Way. Illustrated by Michael Bryant. New York, New York: Lee and Low Books, Inc. Printed in Hong Kong by South China Printing Company. 1988. (LTD) Using similarities and differences of all cultures beautifully illustrated, and written with rhythm. (All ages from K to 4th grade will enjoy it.) Torres, Leyla. Subway Sparrow. Illustrated by her. Library of Congress Catalog Card number: 97-55104. Published simultaneously in Canada by Harper Collins. Canada, LTD. 1993. A sparrow is trapped in a New York subway train. Four different people will try to help it to escape. None of them speaks the same language but with the same attitude and feelings they understood and none of the cultural barriers divided them. (Great book for all grades, K-4th.)

## Teacher's and Student's Bibliography

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### Multicultural

Hoberman, Mary Ann. Selections, Variety of Cultures. Different illustrations by artists like Yoriko Ito, Langston Hughes. Simon and Schuster 1994. Children's Book Council, 568 Broadway, Suite 404, New York, NY 10012. Fourteen poems, each written in the first person, celebrate children from a variety of cultures. (For K to 4th grade) Asia

McMahon, Patricia. Six Words, Many Turtles, and Three Days in Hong Kong; with photos by Susan Drinker. Houghton Mifflin Company, 215 Park Avenue, South, New York, NY 10003, U.S.A. Tsz Yan is a Chinese girl who lives in Hong Kong with her family. Details of Tsz Yan's school life and other daily activities are played out against the background of this most international of cities. The title comes from an episode in which the Chinese girl struggles to learn six English words as an assignment for her



school over the weekend. (Grade K to 2nd) Walker, Barbara (retold). *The Most Beautiful Thing In the World*. A folktale from China. Illustrated by Jean and Mousien Tseng. *Multicultural Tales*. Scholastic. P.O. Box 10243, Des Moines, IA 50380. 1994. The story of a young Chinese prince who discovers that a caring heart is worth more than any material treasure. It's a message that helps students learn that cultures everywhere value honesty, courage, love, and friendship. (All grades) Africa

Polaco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday*. New York, Philomel Books. 1992. A powerful interracial story about a girl and two boys who spend every Sunday with the boys' grandmother. They had the tradition to go to church every Sunday and then have fried chicken for supper. The grandmother was longing for a new Easter hat and the children decided to do something so she could have it. It has beautiful illustrations. *Anansi Finds A Fool, an Ashanti Tale*. Pictures by Bryna Waldman, New York. Dial Book for Young Readers, 1992. In this old African legend, Anansi (the spider) is very lazy and wants to fish with a partner, his friend Bonsu who offers to make the fish trap, and Anansi had to cut the palm fronds. Rascka, Chris. *Yo! Yes?*. 1995. Grolier Publishing, 5440 North Cumberland Avenue, Chicago, IL 60656. *Yo! Yes?* tells of two lonely children, one African, one white, who meet on the street and become buddies. The simple text and bright drawings make this a fun book to read aloud. (Grades K-3) Middle East (Europe)

Oberman, Sheldon. *The Always Prayer Shawl*. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. 1995. Boyds Mill Press, 815 Church Street, Honesdale, PA 18431, 1(800)949-7777. The story tells us the life of Adam, a Jewish boy who learns how traditions links generations. The gripping illustrations change from black and white to vivid color as Adam emigrates from Russia to America and journeys from childhood to old age. (Grades 2 and up)

Walker and Company. *American Islam*. Interviews with Muslim teens. Walker and Company, 435 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. 1(800)289-2553. The book offers a historical overview of Islam, an explanation of the basic tenants of the Koran, and a brief but notable discussion of the differences associated with the practice of Islam in the African American community. (Grades 4 and up)

## Teacher's Bibliography

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### Multicultural

Anaya, Rudolfo and Neale, Hurston Zora, and other American lesser known writers. *Poetry and Prose*. Scott Foresman and Company, 1995. 1900 East Lake Avenue, Glenview, IL 60025. This is a multicultural collection of fiction, poetry, nonfiction and drama. Cultural notes, vocabulary, lists and various writing and language projects. A teacher's guide and software journal program are also available. *Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature*. Profiles 39 culturally diverse authors and illustrators, offering biographical information, photographs and brief reviews of selected published works. The appendices include valuable activities and resources as well as suggestions for how to use the reviewed books in the classroom. Heineman, 361 Hanover Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801. 1(800)541-2086. Asia

*Asian American Chronology* (series). To order, write to U.Y.L., 645 Griswold Street, Detroit, MI 48226 or call 1(800)877-4253. It is a comprehensive student reference book tracing the history of Asian Americans. The illustrations, photos and maps focus on people from more than 20 Asian countries or regions. (Also for students 9 to 12) Software Resources

Pierian Spring Software. *Kids Culture*. Bring world culture to your classroom. Eight cultures kids can get their hands on. Comes with a complete user manual, a guide for learning and a special "Who and How of Kids Culture" booklet, single version. Mac/Win CD. [www.pierian.com](http://www.pierian.com), 5200 SW Macadam Avenue, Suite 570, Portland, OR 97201

## Conclusion

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There are so many other places, regions, countries, people we could explore through different books for the children. Unfortunately, the access is still behind. We hope that in the very near future the world will not have any mysteries for us, and that we would be able to share our authentic roots without fear, without embarrassment, but with pride.

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Y.U.T.

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