



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Other Voices -- Latino and Chicano Literature and Identity in America**

Curriculum Unit 98.05.10  
by George Peterman

This unit is concerned with the cultural and personal identity of Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly those in New York, and the role of language in the individual's quest for self-definition. It incorporates various forms and will analyze the individual writers' choice of vocabulary, imagery, syntax, and diction to determine the rhetorical purpose in the individual's artistic expression of self. The unit is titled *Other Voices* to reflect the fact that, while there may be similar views and realizations among the writers, each individual's experience and expression is unique.

This unit is intended for use in a twelfth grade English course and should take around five to six weeks to complete. It provides the opportunity to investigate the role of a particular ethnic group in the great gumbo called America, the nature of language and the individual's relationship with the language(s) with which they communicate. The elements of poetry and prose only have meaning in context, and this unit provides a different set of voices and cultural context in which to analyze them. The unit can be used in an honors-level twelfth grade or Advanced Placement course, but may also be suitable for eleventh graders who are mature and curious. The unit could be adapted for use in a sociology course, as well, since language is a cultural artifact.

The term "voice" has been chosen for a very specific reason: its dual importance as a literary term and a political force. All writers look to find their own "voice" as they develop; it is the tangible qualities (i.e. rhetorical, use of figurative language, syntax, diction, etc.) and intangible qualities (the personality and philosophy that comes through in a body of work) that distinguish a writer from others. "Voice" is what makes an artist's expression personal and real; it makes the lover of literature and writing want to carry on a dialogue with a text. It is the artist's expression of his or her humanity. In addition, to use one's voice is to assert a personal philosophy and relationship with society through the depiction of and reflection on personal experience. To use that voice is a political act in the purest sense. Puerto Rican writers, like other ethnic groups in the United States, have used their position as outsiders as one of the key elements of their artistic expression. Their experiences as people on the fringe of the mainstream culture has provided them with a great deal to mull over in the search to define self and culture.

Puerto Ricans are in a unique position as residents of the United States. As citizens of a commonwealth of the United States, they are considered Americans and immigrants at the same time. They have a dual identity as Puerto Ricans and Americans. Spanish is widely spoken and used in the U.S., yet it is an English speaking

society in which they live. In fact, a debate has raged as to whether Congress should designate English as the official language of The United States and eliminate Spanish from government publications and public signs. This has given special significance to language as an element of personal and cultural identity. Many writers go back and forth between the languages, engaging in a practice known as "code-shifting," and have devised a hybrid sometimes derisively referred to as "Spanglish." What is the significance of this language use? Is it the degradation of two languages, as some would argue, or is it in fact a living artifact of a culture in evolution? Is it part of the political statement that these marginalized people are making? This unit will address these issues and view the writings as pieces of literary merit.

## **UNIT INDUCTION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AMERICAN?**

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The unit will begin with students reflecting upon the significant question of what it means to be American. Students will meet in small groups to discuss and catalogue the elements that they identify as being distinctively American. They will then personally reflect on and write either a poem or essay in which they will define themselves as American and discuss the parts of America that they cherish and reject. The products will be published in the classroom and put on display.

Supplementary materials may be introduced to help the students in writing an extended definition. Two texts currently in use in my classroom are *Writing With a Thesis* and *Strategies for Successful Writing* (more suitable for the advanced student as it is a college level rhetoric handbook). Both texts have chapters that explain the elements of an extended definition (such as classifying, comparing/contrasting, use of examples, narration) and offer student and professional examples.

## **"MI PUERTO RICO"**

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The next segment of the unit will revolve around the film "Mi Puerto Rico," written and narrated by Raquel Ortiz. It is a Latina's analysis of the Puerto Rican identity and political struggle since the transfer of political control of Puerto Rico from Spain to The United States. Ortiz discusses the ongoing struggle within the Puerto Rican community to decide whether to seek statehood, maintain commonwealth status, or move toward complete independence. It underscores the people's intense desire to maintain identity as Latinos while being members of the great political/cultural entity of the United States. Discussion will focus on the Puerto Ricans' efforts to keep their political voice (the Young Lords of the 1960's, the FALN, Nationalist politics on the island, etc.) and to keep their cultural voice, especially in the barrios of New York (particularly East Harlem).

The students will complete discussion of this component of the unit by writing an essay, one-half to one page in length, explaining the title of the film: "Mi Puerto Rico." In doing so, they will consider the following questions. Why does Ortiz call it "my Puerto Rico"? Can someone speak for themselves and for a larger group at the same time? Is she speaking only of Puerto Rican identity on the island? Students will peer-edit and share their responses to the writing topic (or prompt).

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

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Next we will move to a more formal investigation of language as a source of identity in contemporary poetry. We will define and discuss the literary term "voice." Voice refers to a writer's unique use of language that allows a reader to sense a person in his or her own writing. Elements of style that determine a writer's style include syntax, diction, and tone. While poetry does not necessarily need to adhere to the rules of grammar, the intentional arrangement of words and phrases is the poet's syntax. The types of images and the level of diction also function as elements of style. Is the vocabulary basic or advanced? Does it include technical jargon? These are important considerations. Many of the poems use a vocabulary that establishes this as art by and for people of the working class; this does not by any means lessen the artistic merit of the pieces, but makes it a more democratic communication. (See Dieter Herms's essay in *European Perspectives on Hispanic Literature of the United States* for a discussion of Nuyorican poetry as an element of a democratic and socialist culture, based on ideas first proposed by V.I. Lenin). We need especially to focus on the use of English, Spanish, and the switching between the two codes.

We will read and discuss several poems in *Latino Caribbean Literature*, edited by Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernandez Olmos, that specifically deal with the topic of language. "Child of the Americas," by Aurora Levins Morales, "Dedication," by Gustavo Perez Firmat, and "You Call Me by Old Names," by Rhina Espaillat will be the first selections. Students will conduct double journal entries to systematically build the meaning of the text as they proceed.

In performing a double journal entry, students vertically divide a page in their notebook (or on a separate sheet) by drawing a line down the center. On the left side of the divide, they will copy down a piece of text that they feel is worth commenting on; it may be an image, a phrase, or an entire line. The students then write personal commentary on the right hand side of the divide. Responses can be declarative or interrogative, but they should be probing and analytical. The teacher can select the length of intervals at which the students will pull quotations - either verse by verse or every several lines. There should not be a large gap between quotes and reflections.

### Lesson Plan 1

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Objectives:

- a. Students will analyze "Dedication" using a double-journal format
- b. Students will analyze "Child of the Americas" using a double-journal format

Procedure:

1. Whole group: Read p. 102, Latino Caribbean Literature, "Introduction, Section 1: Identity"
2. Read "Dedication," Gustavo Perez Firmat, p. 104, together, aloud
3. Make chart for double-journal exercise on board and reread the poem
4. Line by line, perform a double-journal entry together as a group; have students select images and guide them through drawing inferences based on word choice
5. Students write a brief response, minimum of four lines: "What role does language play in the way the speaker sees himself? What has caused his confusion?"
6. Read "Child of the Americas," Aurora Levins Morales, p. 105, aloud
7. Students vertically divide a sheet of paper in their notebooks, drawing a line down the center
8. Students perform a double-journal exercise on their own

Homework: Finish double-journal for "Child..."

## Lesson Plan 2

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Objectives:

- a. Students will compare responses and infer meaning from the connotations of select images in the poems
- b. Students will infer the meaning of the term "crossroads" in the poem "Child of the Americas"
- c. Students will write a paragraph describing the importance of language in the poets self-identity

Procedure:

1. Students will meet in groups of 3-4 and compare journal responses as they compile a group response to the following items:
  - a. List the denotation of the following words from the poem: diaspora, consciousness, ghetto, crossroads
  - b. Discuss what connotations these images and words may have in this poem (If the students are not clear on the concept of connotation, then take time here to define and discuss a few common examples)

- c. What cultures are mentioned in this poem and how do they apply to the concept of a "crossroads"?
2. Have groups report their ideas to the whole group and discuss; come to some consensus on her identity as a "mestiza"
3. Individual work: Write a paragraph describing the importance of language in the poet's self-identity. Why is the poem written in English and not "Spanglish" (line 24)?

Homework: Read "You Call Me by Old Names," Rhina Espaillat, and write a paragraph, explaining what role spoken language has in her identity.

The double-journal entry is a formalization of the type of interaction good readers have with a text and is intended to help students construct meaning as they proceed through a text. This is a good exercise to use in getting students accustomed to consciously reflecting on a text as they read, an activity that is useful as preparation for the Connecticut Academic Proficiency Test (note the border intended for comments and questions on the Response to Literature section of the test). For a more comprehensive treatment of the double journal, refer to Toby Fulwiler's *The Journal Book* (see Bibliography). Refer to Appendix A for an example of a sample double-journal entry for Aurora Levins Morales's "Child of the Americas."

Small groups will then compare journal responses and discuss the question: "What role does language play in the identity of these poets?" Responses will then be brought into a whole-group discussion.

## Linguistic Analysis

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After discussing the issue of language as a mode of communication, we will look more analytically at diction, syntax, imagery, and connotation as elements of language that establish a writer's style (artistic voice) and the rhetorical purpose (political voice). Diction is important, as the choice of words (for all writers in general, but poets in particular) is deliberate; precise words are chosen because of the meanings they convey. The patterns of images that are used are critical as they contribute to thematic development and character development (particularly in the case of fiction and non-fiction). Similarly the connotations of the words and images, the socio-cultural and personal associations, needs to be considered. While there may be numerous words that have similar denotations, the individual words may convey very different attitudes or emotional resonance. In addition, syntax must be examined as an element of the argument. The structure of phrases, clauses, and sentences is part of a writer's overall strategy in building meaning. What words are given prominence? Is parallelism used to reinforce any ideas? Is there a pattern of complex and simple sentences orchestrated to achieve a specific effect? All these elements must be looked at.

At this point we will discuss the issue of "code-switching," the use of what appears to be an indiscriminate and uncontrolled alternation between Spanish and English. This is a crucial issue, as it addresses what Juan Flores calls "an inscrutable paradox": is bilingual poetry American or Puerto Rican?(1) We will find that it is neither

and both, that the use of both intermittently is instinctual as a mode of social communication and deliberate as an element of artistic communication.

Since the Puerto Rican dialect has traditionally "been viewed as inferior and associated with deviance and ignorance," it has been looked down upon as a technique of artistic discourse.(2) We also need to consider that the acquired form of English may also be an "inferior" variant, "sharing much with Black dialects."(3) The blending of the two has come to be known derogatorily as "Spanglish," which is seen as the collapse of the integrity of both languages. However, as Flores points out, "sentences that used both Spanish and English were found to be grammatical in both languages; switching only occurs where the structures of both are congruent."(4) Thus, not only does the language have integrity, it also allows for a wider range of potential for discourse and expression - it adds depth and breadth to the artist's voice.

As Rosaura Sanchez notes, "code-switching is ... characteristic of bilingual populations in the midst of social change."(5) And while this overlapping of linguistic functions is usually a transition that leads one into adoption of the dominant language, Puerto Ricans have a different experience than other ethnic groups. Puerto Ricans have traditionally resisted being "mainstreamed" into the dominant U.S. culture and completely losing their native tongue; unlike other ethnic groups that have migrated to the United States, they have managed to maintain their birth language. Part of the nature of this difference is the fact that they have migrated from a neighboring island and move back and forth freely from the island to the mainland United States unlike other "immigrant" groups. As such, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are never far removed from a significant number of speakers of the Puerto Rican variant of Spanish. The barrios have not only kept the Spanish alive, but, as language is a living, growing entity, the language of mainland Puerto Ricans has evolved along with the community. So, for most social conversation in which code-switching takes place, it is a function of their status as a subordinate group in an English-dominant society, developing their own identity.

The conscious use of code-switching is in itself a political act. As Flores pointed out in *Divided Borders*, the history of Puerto Rico is one of colonialism and subordination. The native people of the island were first subjugated by the Spanish, then at the turn of the twentieth century by the United States. Flores contends that the use of code-switching by modern writers is a direct result of historical subordination by another culture. The subordination of Spanish is to be seen as a part of the domination of Puerto Rico by U.S. culture and politics; preserving the Spanish dialect is only secondarily a linguistic issue - the primary concern is one of justice. It is a conscious attempt to keep from being swallowed up by the Anglo culture that sees total assimilation as necessary to belonging to American society and reaping the economic benefits to be gained from "joining the club."

The introduction of this material may be done in different fashions. One method is to use this as an occasion for individual or small group research. This would serve several purposes, including developing independent research skills. (Note: Since instruction in the effective use of technology is at the vanguard of education today, I would recommend LatinoLink as an excellent electronic resource) Another manner of introducing these ideas would be through a lecture and discussion format. While this is not generally a favored mode, it is an expeditious way of disseminating the information to the students and can be used if done judiciously. A lecture and note-taking session can be used so that more time could be spent having the students apply the ideas to their analysis of the literary pieces. Obviously, this is up to discretion of the individual teacher, but again, a lecture format should only be used sparingly.

We will then discuss the use of code-switching and "Spanglish" by the Nuyoricans poets, artists from the El Barrio section of New York's East Harlem. We will read and discuss the works of Pedro Pietri, Tato Laviera, and

Sandra Maria Esteves that are included in *The Latino Reader* (Houghton Mifflin, 1997). Students will participate in whole-group, individual, and small-group analysis of the poems as works of art and political commentary. We will identify patterns of imagery and use of figurative language; we will also examine the use of English, Spanish, and the blending of the two into "Spanglish." We will identify what parts of American culture the individual artists celebrate and criticize in their quest to define themselves as members of both cultures. While there are other poets that could be considered in this section, these have been chosen by the editors of *The Latino Reader* as representative samples and will suit our purposes well.

The students will begin with Pedro Pietri's poem "Puerto Rican Obituary (1973);" Flores considers it to be a particularly important work of the Nuyorican mode. The poem deals with the individual experiences of several Latinos and Latinas, the hopes and dreams they held, the shattering of those dreams, and the death (literal and spiritual) they suffer. Through the individuals, common elements of the Puerto Rican experience in New York City are portrayed. The tone is strident and, since tone is an important element of communication in general, we will use tone as a focus of our analysis of this poem. Also, since Pietri discusses the necessity of possessing English skills for social and economic advancement, and the cruel withholding of this advancement that is perpetuated in the U.S. by those with political and economic power, this and the switching over to Spanish in the poem's conclusion must be examined. This poem also lends itself to a discussion of grammatical parallelism; analysis of its use in "Puerto Rican Obituary" is included in the sample lesson plan. Reference to the use of parallelism in "Child of the Americas" should be made. This helps to show that it is a device used by many writers and underscores the need for readers to be aware of how writers use grammar for their own effects.

## Lesson Plan 3

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### Objectives:

- a. Students will consider the meaning of "the American Dream" and the artist's need to "counterbalance" the myth
- a. Students will identify the use of parallelism in the first 6 stanzas of "Puerto Rican Obituary" and describe the ideas stressed by the incidents of parallelism
- b. Students will list images from the poem and infer the social and economic status of the people named in the poem

### Procedure:

1. Read biographical information on Pedro Pietri, pp. 328-329, *The Latino Reader*
2. Locate Ponce, Puerto Rico, on a map and pose the question: How could he be from Ponce yet



consider himself a "native" of New York?

3. 5 minute journal writing: What is "the American Dream"? (Use some leading questions if the concept is unfamiliar to the students)

4. Take several minutes to solicit responses from the class and list elements of the "American Dream" on the board; discuss the implied promise of reward for being a "good citizen" and working hard

5. Read the first stanza of "Puerto Rican Obituary" to the class

6. Short group discussion: "What activity is repeated in the stanza? What activities are stated positively? Which are stated negatively? What grammatical structure is repeated? What might Pietri be suggesting by using this pattern?" (Students should be familiar with simple sentence structure and parallelism)

7. Read the next five stanzas aloud to the class

8. In small groups, 3-4 students, they will identify the use of parallelism in each stanza and describe the ideas they think Pietri is trying to reinforce through the use of parallelism

Homework: Write a half-page in which you identify the social and economic status of the people in this poem. Include at least 5 concrete images that lead you to make this inference.

The emphasis needs to be on the promise of the "American Dream" and unfulfillment of that promise by American society. Students should identify the competition and intra-group enmity that arise from the dehumanizing effects of this inability to attain economic and social status in the United States.

Special care needs to be taken to note the use of Spanish: When does it occur and what specific words are used? Why is the phrase "Como Está Usted" so important, according to Pietri? What is the tone of this short stanza? Is he stating that the dominant culture demands subservience of the Puerto Ricans? Other significant words and phrases that should be defined (if no one in the class can translate) are: Puertorriquenos, se hable español, and negrito. Negrito is especially significant as it will tie into later discussion of racial identity, especially in Ariano.

The next poet we will read is Tato Laviera, one of the most prominent of the Nuyorican poets and compared to Pietri by Juan Flores for his strident tone and pride in his ethnicity. The first of the two poems we will read is "My Graduation Speech," a poem that uses code-switching liberally and celebrates its use as an element of his cultural and self identity. The poem is taken from his collection *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* (1979), a response to Rene Marques's drama *La carreta* (The Oxcart, 1953) by a Puerto Rican writer raised largely in the U.S. Marques traced the journey of many Puerto Ricans from the rural areas of the island to the ghettos of San Juan and the South Bronx. The play celebrates a return of the emigrant to the pastoral island and a restoration of ancestral values. Laviera, though born in Puerto Rico and raised there until the age of 10, sees this return to the mythical island as impossible. Nonetheless, he sees these emigrants as a worthwhile part of Puerto Rican



culture and establishes this in his collection.

He begins "My Graduation Speech" by noting that the language in his thoughts, the code that he uses for his inner dialogues, is Spanish; this establishes his primary cultural identity. He then states that the language by which he communicates with the world is English. (This issue of public and private language will be a central focus of *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* .) He then comments that he desires to return to Puerto Rico but questions whether he really belongs there. This establishes the central conflict: a linguistic identity with two groups, neither of which he fully belongs to.

Students will need to translate the Spanish that is used liberally throughout the poem. They could either enlist the aid of a native speaker from the community (perhaps an interview project) or translate on their own. Another possibility is for the teacher to group non-Spanish speaking students with native speakers in the class and use this as an opportunity to work cooperatively. They could match the translated lines and phrases side-by-side with the original text and note what images and ideas are conveyed in each language. Students should also note the concrete imagery he uses to convey his ideas. A discussion should follow in which the philosophical and political ramifications of the writer's linguistic choices are analyzed.

Students will then read Laviera's "AmeRican," a poem in which he declares and defines himself as something altogether different from either of the two cultures from which he arises. Laviera uses a series of stanzas that amount to an extended definition of self and this "new america" that he envisions. Students should note the repeated use of the words defining, new, and birth. There are several questions central to the discussion of the poem: What is the meaning of the repeated use of these words? What is suggested by using the word defining in the present tense? What tense are the verbs in the first three stanzas and why does he use present tense for all of the verbs thereafter? What grammatical parallelism does Laviera use and what is being emphasized? What words are used in Spanish?

Next, we will read two poems by Sandra María Esteves, "From the Commonwealth" and "A la Mujer Borrinquena." Students will need to be familiar with the literary device apostrophe before reading "From the Commonwealth." In analyzing this poem, students will need to identify who, or what, Esteves is addressing (the United States). Discussion should revolve around the similarities and differences in tone and content from the previous poets, both males. Students should note the negative roles of women that Esteves mentions and their contrast with her own self-definition. Students should discuss the sexual metaphor and how it portrays Esteves's view of the treatment of her people by the U.S. government and society, in general. Again, the use of Spanish, though minimal, should be analyzed for its rhetorical significance.

Her poem "A la Mujer Borrinquena" ("To the Woman of Borínquen" - the native name for Puerto Rico) also deals with a woman's role in society. Like "AmeRican" it uses birth as a metaphor for revolution (or is it evolution?) and the power of self-definition. Comparisons can be made to the previous poem for its use of parallelism, discussion of the issue of dual linguistic identities, and defiant tone. Like "Puerto Rican Obituary" it states certain activities positively and others negatively; this needs to be considered in the context of the poem. Also, like "Puerto Rican Obituary," the term "negra" (Pietri uses "negrito") is used near the poem's conclusion. The significance of an affectionate term that notes skin color needs to be discussed as it shows up also in *Ariano* .

In concluding this section of the unit, students will write a poem in which they will celebrate their membership in a community (America, Connecticut, New Haven, or their neighborhood, for instance). They will incorporate the use of dialect or a vernacular particular to that group or community as part of their effort to find their own self-definition. Students should consider what roles they fill in that community and attempt to include

discussion of them in their poem. Of particular importance is the need for the student writers to include concrete images in their pieces; it is an easy pitfall to lapse into writing purely in abstractions without showing the people, places, and things that provide the ideas for expression. Another element I would stress is the use of figurative language. Many students use it naturally as a part of conversation but find it difficult to identify in a written piece. Try to make them be as natural as possible and incorporate the metaphorical references they use with each other in casual speech.

## **POLITICS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IN SHORT PROSE**

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We will then read a selection of short fiction that deals with the same issues. The class will be divided into two groups. The groups will then read either "An Awakening...Summer 1956," by Nicholas Mohr, or "American History," by Judith Ortiz Cofer. Each group will then conduct a plot analysis of the story they were assigned. The individuals in each group will reread the story and perform a double-journal response to the story. The groups will meet and compare their responses and discuss a response to the question: "What role does language play in the character's self-discovery? What is the theme?" Each student will participate in preparing a short presentation to the whole class in which they summarize the story and discuss the theme.

There are several questions for discussion or written response at the end of each selection in *Latino Caribbean Literature*, which may be used by the teacher if he or she chooses. They may be helpful in guiding the students through an examination of the story. The use of a double-journal exercise, along with a summary of the plot might be more useful in getting the students to construct their own meaning from the reading selections. Then in small groups they can compare responses and find what each individual takes away from the story. This way students will see that, while perception and understanding are flavored by individual experience, writers attempt to have some objective truth, as they see it, at the core of the literary selection.

Students will then read two pieces of personal narrative that, although written by Chicano writers, deal directly with the dominant culture's stripping of a youngster's language and, hence, connection with their world: "Aria" from *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, and "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" from *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, by Gloria Anzaldúa. Both of these excerpts are about ten pages in length and should comprise about two or three periods of work, depending on class length and depth of study.

In small groups of 3 or 4, students will do a comparison/contrast analysis of the two writers' experience, one male, one female. They will devise a thesis statement in their groups; the groups will then compare the theses that they have developed. After discussing what each group found in the pieces, students will write a short essay of comparison/contrast. Students should note the similarities between what Rodriguez calls the "private" language of the home (the language of "joyful return") and Anzaldúa calls her "secret language." Students should note the irony of Rodriguez's feelings about acquiring the dominant language, English, as means of acquiring a public identity. This seems to be in some contrast to the other writers, including Anzaldúa. Careful attention should be paid to the number of language variants that Anzaldúa claims fluency in and the consequent fragmentation of this multiple identity. She claims that it at times negates personal identity altogether, resulting in "zero" identity; at other times, this multiple selfhood brings greater inner strength. Analysis of the private and public identities of both writers is very important in the linguistic discussion.

There are other issues that the class can address in this segment of the unit. Teachers can build lessons about rhetorical devices (rhetorical questions, pattern of the argument, etc.) in studying these pieces. Rodriguez's uniqueness as an outsider who does not live in an ethnic enclave (ghetto?), but, rather, on the literal fringes of a white community should certainly be discussed. What are the implications of this? How does he say it effects him, his attitude toward language, his relationship with his parents and his attitude toward their language use?

Anzaldúa addresses gender issues in language, as well, and this could provide for a very fruitful discussion. There is a surprising note at the end of "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" about the Chicanos' general denial of their Indian blood and the Anglo myth perpetuated about the Spanish Southwest. This peculiar bit of bigotry could also make for interesting inquiry.

To make the transition from this section to the drama component of the unit, we will read a poem, "Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person, Could Believe in the War Between the Races," by Lorna Dee Cervantes. Her poem deals with the issues of language, racism, and the conflicts of the two cultures out of which she arises. This will be the thematic bridge to the play "Ariano," by Richard Irizarry. I would probably assign a short list of questions for response as a homework exercise, then use those responses as the basis of a class discussion. This poem deals with ironic contrasts between desire and reality and with the role of the poet as a political commentator. The questions assigned are:

1. Cervantes claims that she is not a revolutionary, yet she believes in revolution. Explain her self-contradiction.
2. What does she acknowledge the existence of yet claim she does not believe in? How would you explain her attitude?
3. How does this effect her role as poet? (What does she desire to do? What does she need to do?)

## ***Ariano***

Richard Irizarry's *Ariano* was first presented Off-Off-Broadway in 1984, starring Jimmy Smits. It was developed by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater and given its first major production in January, 1988. The play examines the issues of identity distortion and distortion of Puerto Rican values by the influence of the adopted culture. It deals with the simplistic categorizing of people in America as white or non-white and the social and economic advantages "white" Puerto Ricans can enjoy by assimilating into mainstream American culture. We will attempt to understand this play from the inside and outside.

Ariano is a successful Puerto Rican businessman in New York who has been tainted by the pervasive attitude that "lighter is better." He lives in the barrio of East Harlem, but desires for greater inclusion in the mainstream culture. He has a loving family, a wife, Dolores, and a son, Serafin. He loves them also, but the corruption of his Latino soul by the racial attitudes of the U.S. has soured his relationship with them, especially his son Serafin who looks to his father for acceptance and emotional well-being. The crux of Ariano's conflict is his dark skin tone. When Serafin presents a family picture he had drawn at school, Ariano flies into a rage over the black father his son has colored. He tells his son that he needs to be conscious of his colors as the rest of the world is. Ariano destroys the dark-colored crayons in the child's box and forces him to redraw the family

portrait; black is "ugly" and "scary."

Ariano's answer to his distorted self-identity is to hire Crystal, an attractive, blue-eyed blond, to bear his child. If he "lightens" the race, there might hope for full inclusion in American society. We find out that he had an earlier romance with a Caucasian woman whose father ran the "spic" off. This is a key factor in his angry world and self-view. Unknown to him, his wife, Dolores, is also carrying a child, further confusing his situation. The babies are symbols of the distorted Puerto Rican identity on the mainland. The hired woman loses the child she is carrying for Ariano, leaving the one child carried by Dolores. There is bitter irony in the truth of the child that Dolores is carrying. The self-sacrifice revealed by her forces Ariano to loath what it is he has become. In the end he is left staring into the mirror, chastising himself and commanding himself to be the "new" Puerto Rican.

A key to analyzing this play is in identifying the moments of code-switching and the terms that are spoken in Spanish. It is spontaneous, part of the unconscious identity. It is particularly important because Ariano is attempting to gain entry into the "glory" of mainstream America, and his unconscious use of Spanish is important. Students should note what terms are used and, also, when the frequency of code-switching increases (toward the end when he is confronted by both of the pregnant women). It is important to note that Dolores is the key to enlightenment for Ariano, and for the audience. She is the character who speaks most frequently in both languages, and it is she who forces Ariano to look hard at himself. Students should identify the meaning of her name ("sadness") and discuss the symbolic implications of it. When Ariano unconsciously refers to her as "negrita" - "black," a common term of affection but also a racial identifier in this play, she forces him to repeat it over and over so that he must face the truth of the outward appearance and understand the truth of her love that he disregarded in his quest for acceptance in America.

The students analyze certain scenes by filling out a list of actor's notes. (See Appendix B for an example.) In small groups, the students will read a piece of dialogue and discuss the following three elements: character intent, character behavior, and audience effect. They will fill the sections on the sheet, then present a brief scene to the class.

To conclude the analysis of "Ariano" students will have the choice of two projects: (1) an interview project in which the students will question someone (a family member if possible), who is a first-generation immigrant and report their experiences with acculturation and language acquisition; (2) take a selection of stories and/or poems from another ethnic group and analyze for use of language as an element of identity. This would offer the students the opportunity to work independently and cooperatively (research and analysis can be done in pairs). The length of the project and the time allotted can be determined by the teacher, based on the maturity of the class. I would probably allot two weeks for gathering information and beginning a draft. After final edited drafts are completed, the works can be published. The students who conduct interviews could lay out their work as if for a newspaper or magazine and publish it. I would probably reserve the second project, explication of poetry or short fiction from another ethnic group, for use with either an honors-level or Advanced Placement course, as it requires a bit more linguistic acumen to undertake.

Evaluation of the projects would be used as a determining factor in the success of the unit. Specific criteria will be outlined in advance so that students will know exactly how their performance will be measured. See Appendices C and D for evaluation rubrics for both projects.

I will also administer a test to evaluate what the students learned from the unit as a whole. The test consists of four essay questions designed to confirm the students' understanding of code-switching and its use by a variety of writers working in a variety of genres. This will be administered shortly after completing the reading of Ariano, probably before the students get too involved in their independent projects. Following are the

questions that I would include:

1. Define code-switching and explain two reasons why it is prevalent in the Puerto Rican community.
2. Choose one of the Nuyorican poems we have read and explain why and how the poet uses code-switching. Your essay should mention the theme of the poem, as you understand it, and how the language shift helps to develop that theme. You should also discuss the use of figurative language in support of your explanation.
3. Choose either Richard Rodriguez's "Aria," from *Hunger for Memory* , or Gloria Anzaldúa's "The New Mestiza," explain the author's private and public language use and the psychological effects of their bi- or multi-lingualism.
4. Explain the significance of code-switching in *Ariano* and the voice that spontaneously emerges at Ariano's "moment of truth." Consider where code-switching occurs with greatest frequency. Also, consider a term that he inadvertently uses with regards to Dolores, a term that she seizes upon and forces him to note as a key to his understanding.

## CONCLUSION

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This is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the literary/political statements of Latino and Chicano writers in contemporary America. However, it gives students an introduction to some writers who would otherwise languish in obscurity even in the very communities they celebrate. This unit will, hopefully, give students a deeper understanding of language as a critical component of our humanity and search for self-definition and expression.

### Appendix A: Sample Journal Response

Text

"child of the Americas" (l.1)

Personal Response

She has identified herself as belonging to a place - but where exactly? Is her identity with the larger patchwork of U.S. society?

Text

"a light-skinned mestiza" (l. 2)

Personal Response

Mixes English and Spanish - dual identity; "mestiza" - "mixed": belongs to both, but Spanish ancestry of primary importance?

Text

"a child of many diaspora" (l. 3)

Personal Resonse

She is a political and ethnic outcast? Has she been forcefully removed from her place of origin?

Text

"a U.S. Puerto Rican Jew" (l. 4)

Personal Response

She has the triple socio-political stigma of being a woman, a Puerto Rican, and a Jew - opportunity/inclusion has certainly been remote for her.

## **Appendix B - Actor's Notes**

CHARACTER: Student places here the name of the character he or she will be portraying. Each character in a given scene (or segment of a scene) will have a sheet completed by a student in the group.

TEXT: The Act, scene, and line numbers are placed here.

CHARACTER INTENT: The student(s) briefly write an analysis of what is motivating the character to say what he or she is saying at this point in the play. What does the character want from the other character(s) in the scene?

BEHAVIOR: The student(s) briefly describe what he (they) will be doing in the way of physical communication. Gestures, bodily posture, facial expressions, and

AUDIENCE EFFECT: Students should briefly describe what they think the audience is supposed to feel or understand as a result of this dialogue and action.

## **Appendix C: Rubric for Evaluation of Interview Project**

Strong Avg. Weak

1. Presents a dominant impression of subject
2. Uses fact, anecdotes, and description to draw a vivid picture of the interview subject

3. Uses realistic dialogue if appropriate
4. Uses a logical and effective pattern of organization, such as a narrative or series of the interview subject's opinions
5. Uses transitional words and phrases to show relationships among ideas
6. Contains no more than two or three minor errors in grammar and usage
7. Applies quotation marks correctly to both brief and lengthy dialogue
8. Contains no more than two or three minor errors in spelling, capitalization, and mechanics

Total

Comments:

(Teachers may assign point values as they see fit. I would give 12 points for strong performance on an individual element, 9 points for average performance, and vary the point value of a weak performance dependent upon how weak the presentation is - a judgment call. The total score would be 96; you can scale it to 100 if you like.)

#### **Appendix D: Rubric for Evaluation of Literary Explication**

Strong Avg. Weak

1. Provides enough information about the literary work to enable the reader to understand the analysis
2. Clearly states a single controlling idea
3. Presents evidence from the text to support critical and interpretive statements
4. Uses comparison and contrast, paraphrase and summary, and quotations as appropriate to show the basis for judgments
5. Uses a logical and effective pattern of organization
6. Includes a well-developed introduction, body, and conclusion
7. Uses transition words and phrases to show relationships among ideas
8. Contains no more than two or three minor errors in grammar and usage
9. Correctly integrates quotations into the text
10. Contains no more than two or three minor errors in spelling, capitalization, and mechanics

Total

Comments:

(For each element I would assign either 9 or 10 points for strong performance, 7 or 8 points for average performance, and 6 or under for weak performance. Again this is dependent upon the individual performance and the judgment of the teacher.)

Notes

1. Flores, *Divided Borders*, p. 160 2. Flores, *Divided Borders*, p. 164 3. Flores, *Divided Borders*, p. 164 4. Sanchez, *Chicano Discourse*, pg. 139 5. Flores, *Divided Borders*, p. 165 6. Morales, in *Latino Caribbean Literature*, p. 105 1-3,5 Reprinted by



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