

**Latin American Literature Inclusion
in the High School English Classroom**
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Overview

Pittsburgh might be termed insular, only in that we have so small a Latin American or Latino population. Pittsburgh is one of the few cities in the United States where it is uncommon to have Spanish spoken on the streets or in public places. Because the greatest number of my teaching years have been in Pittsburgh, I have had few Latino students. Even though I have taught at Allderdice High School since 1983, a school known for its unusual mix of students from various backgrounds, I have had few Latino students over the years and presently have only 4-5 such students. In 1969-1970 I did have some Portuguese students at Hope High School in Providence, Rhode Island. I have some acquaintances from South America, and our church has been involved in a number of missions to South and Central America, but in truth, I have not had much exposure to Latin American culture. The chance to take this PTI course has come at a crucial time in my teaching career as we all have become more globally aware and feel the necessity to be more knowledgeable about all cultures. Through Karen Goldman's PTI course, "Contemporary Latin America: Culture and Civilization," and through the reading and discussion, particularly of the Peter Winn book, Americas, I am gaining more knowledge in Latin American History and culture which I feel is necessary for the inclusion of Latin American literature in my classes. An understanding of Latin American History and culture is paramount if my students and I are to discuss and understand the nuances within the selection of Latin American Literature we study.

This will be a new venue for us, both for teacher and students. In a sense, we will be exploring new territory together. Hopefully, that exploration will be developed through teacher lectures, judicious use of the Internet, the viewing of films by or about Latin Americans, reading and discussion of literature, especially fiction and poetry, possibly some novels, and exposure to Latin American music and artwork analogous to the themes studied in literature. After thorough viewing, listening, reading, and discussion we will move on to writing exercises based on our studies. Assignments will be literature based and may include a chance for students to write original works based on themes studied in the literature or in the manner of one of the Latin writers studied. In addition, all the viewing, listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities will be correlated to the multi-subject portfolio each student must complete in English class, grades 6-12, by directive of the Pittsburgh Board of Education.

Rationale

In writing my prospectus, I had initially thought of writing curriculum only for my seniors. Many of my senior students will be studying soon in other cities and other parts of the country. Thus, it is important that they have an awareness of and an appreciation for as many cultures as possible. However, after attending a series of classes in "Contemporary Latin America: Culture and Civilization," I came to the conclusion that all my students needed the chance to expand their horizons. Also impinging my decision was the fact that one of the books read in this course, Biography of a Runaway Slave, by Miguel Barnet became a focal point for discussion in my 9th grade English Scholars Class. We had just completed the reading, discussion, oral presentations, and writings on Frederick Douglass' Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Having just completed the reading and discussion of Runaway Slave in my class, I took it to my 9th grade English class and orally related the story of Esteban Montejo, a Cimarron or runaway slave. Miguel Barnet had been interviewing Esteban Montejo since he was 103 years old. Using Esteban's prodigious memories as a guide, Barnet told Esteban's life story in the first person, making a notable contribution to testimonial literature. My 9th grade students were fascinated with the story, asked many relative questions, and were inexplicably thrilled to find out that Esteban Montejo had been a "successful runaway slave" and lived to the age of 117, having

died in 1973. In answer to an interesting student question, "Is there slavery anywhere in the world today?" the current news of the suspected slave trading ship plying the waters near Benin, Africa further intrigued them and continues to do so as news is released via internet, newspapers and television. But I digress. It is very exciting to see and hear students making interconnections through studies of different cultures and time periods and thus becoming more understanding of the literary concept of universality.

Strategies

In addition to introducing and discussing Biography of a Runaway Slave with my 9th graders, I plan on having them read some articles and poetry out of Latino Voices to give them an idea of the value system of the Latino culture. To that end, they will read and discuss the following: Pat Mora's "Los Ancianos;" Martin Espada's "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School;" Lorna Dee Cervantes' "Refugee Ship;" an excerpt from Richard Rodriguez's book, Hunger of Memory, on the importance of language and love; and a powerful prose/poetry piece by Luis J. Rodriguez "The Best of Us." All of these pieces can easily be integrated into the present curriculum and will serve to add more interest and more depth to the curriculum.

In my English 4 classes which include English CAS (Centers for Advanced Studies) and English 4AP, we will incorporate short stories, poetry and perhaps a novel or two, as our Latin American inclusion.

Many Latino stories have inherent universal themes analogous to themes studied in the literature for these two courses. Such themes include: the dichotomous nature of humankind; estrangement and isolation of the individual; the active search for meaning in life; the relatedness or interconnection of all human beings; the conflict between tradition and modernity; the search for reconciliation and affirmation; and humanity's greatness in achievement and accomplishment.

Short stories and poems to be considered for this 12th grade unit include:

Short Stories

Jorge Luis Borges	"The Aleph"
Joao Guimaraes Rosa	"The Third Bank of the River"
Clarice Lispector	"Love"
Julio Cortozar	"Blowup"
Maria Luisa Puga	"Naturally"
Julio Ramon Ribeyro	"The Wardrobe, the Old Man and Death"
Moacyr Scliar	"Van Gogh's Ear"
Gabriel Garcia Marquez	"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World"
Jorge Luis Borges	"The Circular Ruins"
Rosa Maria Britton	"The Wreck of the Enid Rose"

Poetry

Gabriela Mistral	"The Little Girl That Lost a Finger"
Jorge Luis Borges	"Sepulchral Inscription"
	"To Rafael Casinos Assens"
	"The Night They Kept Vigil in the South"
Octavio Paz	"Oblivion"
Manuel Bandiera	"The Highway"
Oho D'Sola	"Before the Coming of the Planes that Burn the City"
Pablo Neruda	"Walking Around"
	"November 7: Ode to a Day of Victories"

Pablo DeRokha
Genero Estrada
Yolanda Bedregal DeConitzes
Raul Otero Reiche
Cesar Vallejo
Frederico Garcia Lorca

"Death Alone"
"Allegory of Torment"
"Little Song in the Air"
"Facing My Portrait"
"The Night was Going"
"The Spider"
"Guitar"

Classroom Activities

Grade 9

Objectives:

The student will be able to:

- Listen attentively to the retelling of Esteban Montejo's life story
- Analyze Esteban's desire to seek freedom
- Distinguish between Montejo's life as a slave and his life as a freeman
- Determine what is analogous between the lives of the American, Frederick Douglas and the Cuban, Esteban Montejo
- Read and examine current Latino literature
- Examine and understand current Latino value systems as explicated through literature
- Utilize reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing activities for the Board required portfolio

Pittsburgh Content Standards:

- The fulfillment of these objectives will serve to satisfy many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards, including Communications (1-9), Arts and Humanities (1-4), Citizenship (7,8,9), and Career Education and Work (2).

Reading, Discussion, and Activities

A. Biography of a Runaway Slave

Present an oral history summation of the book (or parts thereof) to the class after they have read, discussed, and written about Frederick Douglass' Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, and open the class for discussion and questions. After a discussion period, the students will write a paper in which they discuss the drive for freedom which led each of these men to seek freedom. In the same paper they will also relate the progression of each man's life after attaining freedom.

B. Contemporary Latino Prose and Poetry

Assign the readings about two weeks in advance of class discussion. With 9th graders it would be advisable to divide the work into a daily homework assignment. In addition to the reading, have the students maintain a journal wherein they record their reflections on each piece read so they will have a basis on which to begin their discussions.

Assign readings from Latino Voices.

Day 1 "Los Ancianos"

Day 2 "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School"

Day 3 "Refugee Ship"

Day 4 "Excerpt from Hunger of Memory"

Day 5 "First half of the "The Best of Us""

Day 6 "Second half of the "The Best of Us""

On Day 7, randomly divide the class into six groups. Have each group analyze its assigned reading for meaning, cultural awareness, new knowledge, and value systems. Each member of the group might read his or her journal for the group, so that some ideas are generated. After a sharing of ideas, have the group decide what information and ideas should be shared with the class.

Days 8 and 9, have each group member in each group present his/her findings to the class. After each presentation, have students follow up with questions and commentary on the presentations.

Day 10, allow the students to use their notes to write a multiparagraph paper on what they learned from their reading and from the group presentations. If students need more structure in order to write their papers, follow this or a like plan.

I. Introduction to Latino Literature

II. Cultural awareness gained from the reading, discussion, and presentations

III. Important Latino value systems

IV. A discussion on the piece of literature found to be most meaningful

V. Conclusion of paper

Grade and return the essays to the students with appropriate comments. Complete this 9th grade unit by sharing comments gleaned from the student papers to reiterate the learning that has taken place.

Classroom Activities

Grade 12

Objectives:

The student will be able to:

- Read and analyze each short story and poem
- Keep a journal on reflections and ideas gleaned from each story and poem
- Become aware of magical realism and its importance in Latin American literature
- Discern themes previously studied which are inherent in the literature
- Point out literary devices used in story development and poetry
- Determine cultural values explicit in the literature
- Discuss, in seminar fashion, critical and analytical elements
- Work on writing exercises on ideas generated in the literature and use textual evidence for support
- Utilize reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing activities for use in the Board mandated portfolio

Pittsburgh Content Standards:

- The fulfillment of these objectives will serve to satisfy many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards, including Communication (1-9), and Arts and Humanities (1-4), and Citizenship (7,8,9).

A. Short Stories

This unit would best be presented toward the conclusion of the semester after students have been introduced to and studied surrealism, existentialism, literary devices, and critical and analytical analysis of literature. By this time students will have read and discussed Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis and Albert Camus' The Stranger. They will also have read and discussed short stories and essays such as "The Wall," "The Guest," and Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus." Thus, they will be quite familiar with both surrealism and existentialism and therefore quite able to address these concepts in Latin American literature. A further concept to be discussed and analyzed is that of "magical realism" an important element in much Latino literature. A teacher-based presentation on this idea should be presented to the students before the reading is assigned.

Assign the reading of the short stories to be concluded by a specific date. Have the students keep journals and make at least one entry for each of the stories. These journal entries should be reflective of critical and analytical analysis and include perception of themes, author's use of literary devices and cultural values inherent in the story. On a given date divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of the stories. Have the students share their reflections on the story based on their journal entries and have each person in each group give an oral presentation on their findings to the class. Good planning by the group will result in a wealth of material to be presented with each person in the group responsible for a facet of the material to be shared. Class members will take notes on the presentations to add to their own perspectives and thoughts on the stories.

Writing Assignments for Students:

1. Incorporating a theme in one of the stories read in this unit, write an original story. Be prepared to read your story to the class. Also prepare a number of relative questions on your story in order to facilitate a class discussion on the story. Questions for discussion may relate to theme, characterization, literary devices used, style of writing and/or point of view and cultural values exemplified in the writings.
2. Develop a thesis on one of the stories read in the unit. In an essay prove your thesis through an analysis of the chosen story. Be sure to state your thesis, clearly explain it, and use support and textual references only from the story for support. Proofread final copy before turning in for a grade.
3. Divide the class into small groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a beginning sentence with which to start a short story which will present elements of a surrealistic and/or existential nature. Have each student in each group spend 15 minutes of homework time in continuing the story. The next day the first student will pass the story to the second person in the group and that person, too, will spend 15 minutes that evening, adding to the story. The third day repeat the process with the third person in each group. If there is a fourth person in the group, continue in the same manner. On the fourth or fifth day, as it may be, have each group read their story aloud to the class. Have the student listeners write a critical paragraph on each group's story. Have each group of students read and address class comments on the story.

Sample sentences with which to commence the stories (excluding of course, "It was a dark and stormy night...")

- A. He looked through his thick glasses like a hesitant turtle.
- B. The bees swarmed and then remained silent.
- C. He bit his inner cheek and then swore.
- D. Then he looked back at her and sighed.
- E. He felt a sudden urge to fly into the approaching storm.
- F. Twice she turned, and twice she faltered.
- G. Suddenly, she noticed the advancing front and stared at it.
- H. Her eyeteeth appeared fanlike and her eyes bulged with disbelief.

B. Poetry

Students will have studied poetry earlier in the semester. Therefore, they will have a handle on reading and understanding poetry. Have the students read the poetry and keep a journal to record their reflections and understanding of each poem. On a given day after the assigned poetry reading is completed, divide the students into small groups of two or three students per group. Assign one poem to each group and have each student in each group prepare part of an oral presentation to be given in class with a specific charge or prompt. Prompts may vary. The following are some suggestions.

1. In Octavio Paz's "The Wall" discuss estrangement and isolation of the individual and the active search for meaning in life as evident themes.
2. Discuss the symbolism inherent in "The Spider" by Cesar Vallejo.
3. Discuss the interconnection of all human beings as a theme in Jorge Luis Borges' "The Night They Kept Vigil in the South".
4. Discuss the dichotomous nature of humankind as evidenced in Yolanda Bedregal DeConitzer's "Facing my Portrait".
5. Discuss humanity's greatness in achievement and accomplishment as evidenced in "Sepulchral Inscription" by Jorge Luis Borges.
6. Define and discuss the surrealist elements in Pablo Neruda's "Death Alone."
7. Define and discuss the elements of existentialism in Federico Garcia's "Guitar."

Should time be available, other Latino poetry can be chosen for student analysis and critical review. To complete the poetry unit, a class discussion on the universality of themes in the Latino poetry would solidify the interconnectedness of all humankind.

C. Play – Blood Wedding

As a class activity for the seniors, we will read Federico Garcia Lorca's Blood Wedding. It is an ideal way to continue this unit as it reads as prose and poetry and is certainly inclusive of universal elements.

1. Assign reading parts to students and read the play in class.
2. Have the students keep daily journals as the class reading proceeds. Encourage students to be aware of and comment on universality's within the play.
3. After the reading is completed, divide the class into small groups and assign a charge to each group. Guide the groups' class time to discuss the charge and to determine the manner in which each group will present their findings. Each person in each group is required to actively present orally to the class. Have students keep notes on the presentations and elicit comments from the class at the conclusion of each presentation.

Suggestions for group charges or prompts:

A. Discuss the symbolic value and use of each of the following symbols in the play:

knife

song about horse

cave

wreath of orange blossoms

the wasteland

skein of red wool

B. Woodcutters as chorus:

Discuss how the woodcutters act as a chorus and advance the action of the play through their conversation.

C. Focus on Act III and discuss the elements Lorca uses as a departure from real life. Determine why he uses such elements of fantasy.

D. Identify and discuss the elemental passions inherent to the play. Determine how these passions conflict with custom, society's expectations, and the lives of the main characters.

E. Discuss the customs and way of life in rural Spain as exemplified in the play, pointing out the differences between Spain's society of the times and our contemporary society.

F. Identify and discuss the universal elements in the play which transcend place and time.

D. Novels

In working on this section on Latin American novels, I found a particular frustration in that some of the material, especially in Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude and in Love, in the Time of Cholera may not be deemed appropriate for high school students. Therefore, I would use either of these two novels only for AP or gifted seniors. The third novel, Bless Me, Ultima, by Rudolpho Anaya, is age appropriate and may be used for all levels of 12th grade classes. Because of time limitations and because this is an inclusion unit, I would suggest using only one novel. The following are suggested activities for the inclusion of each of the three novels. The availability of a book or books within a particular school and a study of each book's content may be helpful in deciding which of the novels to use. Also, it would be helpful to discuss the concept of "magical realism" so evident in each of the three works before the students begin their reading.

One Hundred Years of Solitude

Assign the reading of Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude. Have the students keep journals on their reading reflective of their own critical and analytical analysis. On the due date, briefly review with the class, the story of the Buendias family in the mythical Columbian town of Macondo. Discuss the importance of the narrator in telling this story of suffering juxtaposed with the celebration of life. Then divide the class into small groups of three or four. Give each group a charge or prompt related to the novel, which they will discuss among themselves using textual evidence. Each group will prepare for an oral presentation on their charge or prompt with each student in each group expected to present a part of the presentation. It is important that student groups' work together to present individual oral reports which act as an integrated whole and relate to the groups original charge or prompt.

Suggestions for group charge or prompts:

- Discuss magical realism as an inherent part of the novel explicated through the narrative. Discuss the acceptance of magical imagery by the novel's characters as natural and elemental to their lives.
- Determine and discuss the dichotomy of man as exemplified through a study of Jose Arcadio Buendia, Ursula, and Colonel Ameliano Buendia.
- Discuss elements of situational exaggeration in the novel as a driving force behind the magical realism so prevalent in this novel.
- Determine and discuss the effects of civil war on the lives of the characters as a very real element of Columbian history, as portrayed in the narrative of the novel.
- Discuss elements of surrealism integrated into the novel. Give examples and discuss the relevance of each example to the story.
- Discuss loneliness and alienation as themes in the novel and determine if they are existentialist elements or merely themes reflective of the story line. Use textual evidence.
- Make a list of symbols used in the novel and determine and discuss their importance and usage in the novel.

After group presentations and discussions are complete, have the students write a multi-paragraph essay with textual evidence. Use this paper as a final assessment on the novel.

Suggested topic for essay:

In a well developed multi-paragraph or essay, follow the theme of the celebration of life throughout the novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude, and portray its importance and validity despite all the negative situations and happenings within the plot.

Love in the Time of Cholera

Assign the reading by a specific due date of Marquez's Love in the time of Cholera. Have the students keep journals on their reading reflective of their own critical and analytical analysis.

On the due date, briefly review with the class, the story of Florentino Ariza's long wait of fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights for the woman of his obsession and dreams. Then divide the class into small groups of three or four. Give each group a prompt or charge related to the novel, which they will discuss among themselves citing textual evidence. Each group will prepare for an oral presentation. It is important that student groups work together so that each group member presents an individual oral report which acts as an integrated whole when related to the original prompt.

Suggestions for group charges or prompts:

- Discuss the appropriateness and aptness of the novel's title, Love in the Time of Cholera. Be sure to use textual evidence in your discussion.
- Determine the dichotomous nature of some of the characters in the novel. Focus particularly on the characters of Florentino Ariza, Fermina Daza, and Dr. Juvenal Urbino.
- Discuss Marquez's utilization of the juxtaposition of humor and tragedy throughout the novel. Speculate on his reasons for doing so.
- Discuss the suspension of reality (magical realism) as it applies to situations in which the characters are involved.
- Make a list of symbols in the novel and discuss their importance and usage in the novel.
- Determine and discuss the importance of setting throughout the novel. Note changes in setting as related to dramatic view.

After class discussions and oral presentations are completed, have the students write a multi-paragraph essay on Love in the Time of Cholera. Use this paper as a final assessment on the novel.

Suggestions for topic of essay:

At the conclusion of Love in the Time of Cholera, the Captain "was overwhelmed by the belated suspicion that it is life, more than death, that has no limits" (348). In a multi-paragraph essay discuss this quote as a theme inherent throughout the novel. Use textual evidence for support.

Bless Me, Ultima

Assign the reading and a specific due date for, Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolpho Anaya. Have the students keep journals on their reading reflective of their own critical and analytical analysis.

On the reading due date, briefly review with the class Antonio Marez's story. Although he is only 6 when the story begins and not much older when it finishes, his is a story of coming of age through trial and tribulation

and through the guidance and example of the wise Ultima, a curandera. "Magical realism" is very much a Latin American literary phenomenon. Bless Me, Ultima is rich in "magical realism" and its portrayal of Latin American culture. After a general discussion, divide the class into small groups of three or four. Give each group a charge or prompt related to the novel, which they will discuss among themselves and support with textual evidence. Each group will prepare for an oral presentation on their charge or prompt to be presented to the class on an assigned day(s). Each student in each group will make an oral presentation. It is important that student groups work together as a unit to plan and present oral presentations, which act as an integrated whole in relating to the group's prompt or charge.

Suggestions for group charges or prompts:

- Discuss the immediacy and import of the first person point of view as the story is told through the voice of Antonio Marez.
- Determine and discuss cultural elements within the novel, especially family ties, which strengthen the reality of its tone and narrative.
- Focus on the elements of "magical realism" throughout the narrative and determine how such elements help to weave the plot and to emphasize the theme of nurturing the birth of Antonio's soul.
- Determine and discuss the symbols used in this novel, the manner in which they are used, and the importance of each to the narrative line.
- Discuss the dichotomy of humankind as exemplified through major characters in the novel.
- Discuss the special character traits of Antonio that make him a unique receptor of the spiritual gifts Ultima bestows on him.

After group presentations and discussion are completed, have the students write a formal essay with textual evidence on Bless Me, Ultima. This essay may be used as a final assessment to this section of the unit if desired.

Suggested topics for essay:

In a well-developed multi-paragraph essay with textual evidence write a summation of what Ultima has meant to Antonio and what she will continue to mean to him on his journey through life. In preparing your essay, reflect on the last words of Ultima to Antonio (p. 261 of Bless Me, Ultima):

"I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enter your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills. I shall be with you---"

Bibliography

Class Books

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(A fine example of testimonial literature)

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. Innocent Erendira and Other Stories. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978.
(Short stories by Marquez)

When New Flowers Bloomed. Ed. Levi, Enrique Jaramillo. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1991.
(Short stories from Costa Rica and Panama by women writers)

Verburg, Carol J. Ourselves Among Others: Cross-cultural Readings for Writers. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
(Literary pieces from many cultures including Hispanic)

General References for Teacher and Students

Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry. Ed. Dudley Fitts. Norfolk: A New Directions Book, 1947.
(Latin-American Poetry)

Flores, Juan. From Bomba to Hip-hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
(Puerto Rican identity and culture in New York City)

Kanellos, Nicolas. The Hispanic Almanac: From Columbus to Corporate America. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1994.
(A quick overall view – good for general information)

Novas, Himilee. Everything You Need to Know About Latino History. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.
(Explained by title)

Pozas, Ricardo. Juan the Chamula: An Ethnological Recreation of the Life of a Mexican Indian. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.
(Gives a portrait of the disparities between the old and the new)

Winn, Peter. Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean.
(A very readable history with attention paid to all aspects of life – historical, social, religious, political and artistic)

References

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(The Garcia sisters assimilation into life in the states)

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(A compilation of literature with a few Latino pieces included; includes Blood Wedding)

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. Love in the Time of Cholera. Trans. Edith Grossman. New York: Penguin books, 1985.
(A novel about the endurance and obsessions of love)

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. One Hundred Years of Solitude. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Avon Books, 1970.

(A novel featuring 100 years of a fictional Columbian town, Macando, and its founding family, the Buendias)

Neruda, Pablo. Extravagaria. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.

(Poetry by a master)

Neruda, Pablo. The Heights of Macchu Picchu. Trans. Nathaniel Farn. New York: Farrar, Staus, and Giroux, 1966.

(One of Neruda's masterpieces)

Appendix: Standards

This unit meets many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards. For example, the unit meets standards in Communication (1-9) by incorporating objectives and student assignments which directly relate to said content standards and the development of all the complex skills needed to communicate well. Arts and Humanities Standards (1-4) are met through the study of short stories and poetry and novels reflecting aspects of Latin American culture, yet also reflecting the universality's which bond all humankind. Citizenship criteria (7,8,9) are met through class discussion and small group work as reflected in class activities for this unit. A standard in Career Education and Work (2) is met through the students' study, awareness, and understanding of how changes in society, technology, government and the economy affect job choices as seen through the life story of Esteban Montejo in Biography of a Runaway Slave and in selected works from Latino Voices, part of the 9th grade unit. This standard also applies to the 12th grade students as they will be able to project such awareness through their study of more sophisticated Latino literature. Thus, a goodly number of the Pittsburgh Content Standards are met through the objectives, lessons, and activities in this unit.