

Cross-Cultural Learning and Virtual Travel in the English Classroom

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Overview

This curriculum unit focuses on the reading and analysis of literary works by Costa Rican writers, and culminates in a virtual trip to Costa Rica. As an anticipatory set, the students read about and discuss the cultural learning process, with special emphasis on the definition of culture, the distinction between tourist and traveler, subtypes of culture, culture shock, and attitudes/character traits that promote culture learning. As newly aware cross-cultural learners, the students read and discuss the itinerary of the trip, *El Viaje Tropical*, and research various aspects of Costa Rican culture, creating a travel brochure. After reading the literary works, the students write their own short stories, which include a touch of magical realism.

Rationale

It began long before I first saw the transparent, azure water of the Caribbean Sea, or gazed at the indescribable illumination of a coral and violet Bahamian sunset, followed by an ebony sky filled with a bright light show of stars that seemed to be close enough to touch. It was present even before I first looked out upon Paris from the majestic, vertigo-inducing heights of the Eiffel Tower. The first time I can recall an awareness of the desire to visit unknown territory occurred long ago in my distant childhood. On that fateful day, unbeknownst to my mother, I decided to walk as far as I could in a certain direction – to explore the vast unknown of Deutchtown (the old North Side), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Somewhere in the subterranean reaches of my young subconscious there lay the seeds of a desire to explore. I went just far enough to satisfy my curiosity, but after awhile I felt uncomfortable, and headed for home. However, that precocious excursion represented an epiphany for me. I had to explore the vast unknown; travel was in my blood. Indeed, it still remains my passion.

However, travel is a passion connected to a high price tag. Nevertheless, I have found ways to indulge in this passion which don't necessarily require much money. In the early 1970's, I had a propitious opportunity to teach Spanish and English at D.W. Davis Middle School in Nassau, Bahamas. The daily exposure to another culture was enlightening, enriching, and life-changing. Additionally, I have been travelling to Europe once or twice a year for the past five years. I took the initial trip to Northern France with a group of colleagues, students, and related adults from my home school, Schenley High School. The sojourn was educational in nature, but also fun. As a result, I vowed to take an international trip every summer. On subsequent trips I have been to Spain, England, Italy, and most recently, Nice, France. This summer I will be embarking on a cruise of the Greek islands, with two landlocked days in Athens. These sojourns have enriched my life in ways nothing else could. The above experiences have made me a cultural learner.

Similarly, I would like my students to become cultural learners. "Cultural learner" is a term defined by J. Daniel Hess in *Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad*. According to Hess, "Culture learning can be seen as part of the process of cross-cultural adaptation that people experience when they go abroad to live." These learners are able to adapt in a foreign country. Hess cites the U-curve theory, originally identified by Sverre Lysgaard(1955), and John Taylor and Jeanne E. Gullahorn (1963), which observes the transition stages people experience when they spend a significant period of time abroad. Hess states, "They start out in a state of excitement and interest (often called euphoria), begin to experience difficulties in functioning in the culture, reach a nadir of dissatisfaction and discontent, and then begin to pull out of it, until they finally reestablish a stable emotional stage of being." He also refers to reentry adjustment stress long-term sojourners encounter, commonly known as culture shock. A traveler may recover from culture shock once he/she learns the host culture. When I first read about the above U-curve, I found it uncanny, for I indeed experienced those stages when I lived abroad in the Bahamas in the 1970's. I also experienced culture and weather shock when I returned to Pittsburgh.

Additionally, Hess refers to a culture-learning continuum, proposed by Milton J. Bennett, entitled *A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*"(1993). I will list the stages of the continuum, followed by my own illustrative experiences.

1. Ethnocentrism – denial that cultural differences exist.

I first moved to the Bahamas during the early 1970's, and considered myself a "citizen of the world" who could easily fit into any culture.

2. Defensiveness – perception that the differences one encounters are threatening.

I felt uncomfortable and threatened when certain behaviors of mine were rejected by the host culture, especially wearing beach attire while strolling along downtown Bay Street.

3. Minimization of the perceived differences

I recognized the differences were minimal and was willing to compromise, and thus fit in more comfortably.

4. Acceptance – the recognition that the differences exist.

5. Adaptation – the willingness to make accommodations to the host culture.

Consequently, I wore more conservative clothing when visiting the downtown area.

6. Adoption and integration – the merging of selected aspects of another culture into one's own cultural identity.

I integrated aspects of my host culture into my own sense of style and began wearing gold island bangle bracelets, which I continued to wear for many years after returning to the United States (Hess 5-6).

Those who are successful at adapting in a foreign country follow the stages of the above continuum.

Hess also refers to the distinction, proposed by Burkholder, between a tourist and a traveler. The traveler makes a sincere attempt to immerse him/herself into the host culture, making friends, trying the local cuisine, and believing the host culture has something to offer. On the other hand, the tourist takes a "standardized trip," observing the culture from the point of view of an outsider, collecting souvenirs and snapping pictures (Hess 14).

Four attitudes that help ensure success during one's cross-cultural travels are: (1) A high regard for culture, (2) an eagerness to learn, (3) a desire to make connections, and (4) a readiness to give as well as receive (Hess 14). Hess's research tends to indicate, "The most effective and efficient cultural learning takes place not in the classroom, but on site." Hence, the ideal way to expose the students to another culture would be to literally travel there. Because that takes a significant amount of money many of my students do not have, we will take a virtual trip. Teaching Costa Rican literature and planning a virtual trip there is an attempt to broaden the students' horizons.

To effectively become a cultural learner, one must understand the definition of the word "culture." An appropriate definition is as follows:

Culture is the sum total of ways of living, including values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication

a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment. Culture and the people who are part of it interact so that culture is not static. Culture is the response of a group of human beings to the valid and particular needs of its members. It, therefore, has thinking an inherent logic and an essential balance between positive and negative dimensions (Hoopes 3).

In order to understand this definition, one must check for understanding regarding the following terms: values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication. Additionally, one must be able to define pertinent vocabulary words, such as inherent and valid. Once one comes to an understanding of the above definition, it needs to be related to one's own culture before he/she can apply it to the culture of another. Therefore, we will apply the various components of this definition to our own lives in an attempt to arrive at some sort of insight regarding the word culture, however difficult this task may be. According to Hess, "On a continuum ranging from fluff stuff to killers (students know how to rank their courses), the content of culture learning places among the more demanding of the disciplines . . . because the material is elusive." We seem to live in our culture without about t on a conscious or academic level.

After tackling the elusive butterfly of our own culture, we will begin to study the country of Costa Rica. I have chosen Costa Rican culture and literature for a number of reasons. First, it relates to the Teacher's Institute seminar I am participating in entitled *Popular Culture in the U.S. and Latin America*. Second, it fits in quite nicely with today's academic focus on global education. Third, many educational travel organizations provide student trips to Costa Rica.

According to the *Encarta World English Dictionary*, "Costa Rica is a republic in southern Central America between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Languages: Spanish. Currency: colón. Capital: San José . . ." Known as the "Switzerland of Central America," Costa Rica forbids the formation of a national army, and has been without one for the last 49 years. Costa Ricans (*Ticos*) maintain a high level of education, with a literacy rate of more than 94% (ACIS). When I think of Costa Rica, the term that immediately comes to mind is paradise. As I view pictures of the country, my senses are bombarded with lush tropical images that are quite different from the day to day scenery I am exposed to in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I also think of the Spanish language and a culture that is relatively unknown to me and my students. Researching this culture will provide us with a cursory knowledge that would be much richer if we could visit the country. The American Council for International Studies (ACIS), offers homestay/language classes, which are "held in the morning from Monday to Friday at the Centro Linguistico Conversa, a well-established educational organization, which promotes the learning of the Spanish language and Costa Rican culture" (www.acis.com).

The virtual trip the students and I plan to take is called El Viaje Tropical, and is offered by ACIS. The itinerary for this trip includes two days in San José, with a sightseeing tour of the National Museum, a tour of the University of Costa Rica, and the Teatro Nacional. A folklore dinner will be provided on the second night. On day three the group will travel to Poas Volcano-Monteverde to view "one of the most accessible active volcanoes in the world." Day four includes a full day to explore the "beautiful cloud forest of Monteverde, founded in the 1950's by a group of Quakers from Alabama, and home to more than 400 species of birds, 100 species of mammals, and 2500 species of plants." Day five provides a journey to the Carara Biological Reserve, the meeting point of the dry tropical forest and the greener, northern forest. Day six includes a full day excursion to Manuel Antonio National Park "to enjoy the beautiful beaches and tropical vegetation." Day seven begins with a free morning of the "black sand beach of Jaco," with an afternoon drive to San Jose for the last night of the sojourn. (ACIS Brochure).

A seasoned traveler does his/her research before embarking on parts unknown. My English class will therefore need to research the following elements of Costa Rican culture before we take our

virtual trip: food, clothing, currency, music, art, literature, traditions, indigenous people, religion, history, etc. The students will be divided into groups, with each group assigned to a different category. Of course, we may only come to a cursory understanding by such limited research, however it is a step forward on the cultural understanding continuum. After the legwork and reading stages of this research, each group will create a separate section of the travel brochure.

I have selected three literary works for this curriculum unit. The first work is a collection of short stories by Costa Rican writer Carmen Naranjo and translated by Linda Britt entitled *There Never Was A Once Upon A Time*.

There Never Was A Once Upon A Time is a collection of brief, beautifully written, lyrical stories. Naranjo creates children who are also creators: the child who invents an imaginary girlfriend, the one who imagines an older brother. These child protagonists open hidden worlds to their readers through first person narrative voices as they face the cruel reality of an exterior world in sharp conflict with their most intimate beliefs (Naranjo).

Carmen Naranjo has been referred to as “not only one of the best women writers of Costa Rica and Central America, but in all of Spanish America”(Britt). Her literary works have won many distinguished awards. Born in Cartago, Costa Rica in 1931, she has written novels, short stories, and volumes of poetry. *There Never Was A Once Upon A Time* contains short stories written from the perspective of child and adolescent narrators. It is quite different from anything my students are used to reading or analyzing. According to the translator, Linda Britt,

“The narrations themselves are characterized by a seemingly disorganized childlike discourse . . . Often the sentences are long and complicated . . . The syntax and verb tenses, like the stories, are unpredictable. Thus Naranjo reproduces a sense of time that relies only on the present, the here and now in which these children dwell (Naranjo 10).

Exposure to literature such as this forces the reader to create a new paradigm, which is good. Hence, the student will have to approach his/her literary analysis from “outside of the box.”

Although I will assign the entire collection of short stories from *There Never Was A Once Upon A Time* as required reading, I will focus on three short stories from the work in this paper. *Eighteen Ways to Make a Square* is about a contest created by a bored, inventive young man named Pepe. The youngest of eleven boys, Pepe is doted on by his parents who “worship him like a little devil.” This story is set during the rainy season when Pepe and his friends are convalescing with the flu. Consequently, Pepe creates a contest requiring the participants to think up as many ways as they can to make a square. Carlos, the story’s narrator, at first creates linear figures, some simple, others quite elaborate, which are drawn on the pages of the story intermittently with the text. These initial drawings represent Carlos’s literal translation of the contest. Carlos next requests clarification from Pepe as to whether he is to construct a geometrical square or a mental square. Pepe sends Carlos the following message through his dogs, Power and State: “You idiot, of course it’s a mental square, geometric ones are totally unimportant . . .” This part of the novel takes Carlos and the reader to another level. One is then encouraged to ponder on the exact definition of a mental square. According to Carlos, “The essential ingredient in a mental square is the initial intention, which is so flawed that the error will eventually be discovered and leave us in the uncomfortable position of being fools, liars, useless, or helpless.” This is indeed a deep, divergent statement to analyze. Carlos lists eighteen examples of mental squares, some of which are:

- When you make yourself out to be an expert about something you really don’t understand at all.
- When you fawn over something you don’t like and then they give it to you.
- When they talk you into participating in a contest that’s over before it begins (Naranjo 27-29).

Carlos works diligently to arrive at eighteen examples of mental squares, some of which are quite complex, only to receive an honorable mention. His mother adds her own wisdom at the end by telling Carlos he should be his own person, and not aspire to be like Pepe. Anecdotally, Carlos adds number nineteen to his list, “When you believe you are somebody for wanting to be like someone else.” Mental squares seem to involve life dilemmas that we all encounter which raise our coping skills once they are better understood.

The above story is effective because it facilitates literary analysis on a number of levels. First, the reader must immerse him/herself into Carlos's way of looking at the world as a Costa Rican youngster. Second, the reader must explore the concept of a mental square and analyze the ones listed. Third, the reader is encouraged to create his/her own examples of mental squares, thus facilitating critical thinking.

The Game That Is Only Played Once is narrated by a boy who has to write a story for a school assignment, thus creating a narration within a narration. This young narrator makes the reader aware of his family and related perceptions thereof. He thinks his family considers him a "zero" no one cares about or notices. All of the familial attention seems to be focused on his infirm brother, Alberto. When asked what he's thinking, Alberto responds, "I'm concentrating on the game that is played just one time." The identity of this game proves most baffling for our young narrator, who considers it "a new game of wits." When he relays this information to his parents, they both break into uncontrollable sobs. The writer interprets these parental lamentations as collusion with his brother who is out to humiliate him. However, the reader may easily infer that Alberto is aware that he is dying, and turns the experience into a battle of the minds with his brother. At the end of the story, a funeral party is inferred, and we realize Alberto has sadly won the game. The narrator's essay is praised by his teacher, who comments that the "parents should be congratulated for the imagination of this child."

The above short story relates an example from everyday life many of us have experienced, or will experience, the death of a close family member. This information is relayed to the reader quite creatively as veiled prose, with each hint coming closer to the actual sad realization of Alberto's impending death and funeral. The idea that a young child is astute enough to see a game as a metaphor for life and death is quite profound. Hence the concepts explored in this story may be analyzed on a complex level.

The narrator of *Olo* nostalgically recalls a utopian society in flashback. Olo is a place where one does not have to do meaningless or unfulfilling work. "Having to go to work, which has a nice patriotic ring to it and sounds fine in philosophical treatises or in economics books, but wears thin as a daily reality looked at honestly, rather than with that illusion of remuneration that paints our paydays with shopping sprees." As a result, there is more leisure time where one may "think freely, or maybe love . . ." Instead of a necessary evil, work is defined as a calling where "every task has meaning." The town is an aesthetically pleasing pastoral paradise, where it "rains musically, and little paths of grass and flowers lead to the houses." Everyone in Olo seems to be dwelling in peace and harmony. Because such domestic tranquility cannot exist forever, an intruder stumbles upon Olo who attempts to impose his standards on the Oloans. "Thus the problems began." He taught them "faster ways of doing their jobs," which changed their whole perception of work from purposeful to drudgery. He created "laws, statutes, and regulations, and tried to impose these new restrictions on the Oloans. With the intention of luring outsiders to Olo, he created advertisements. This outsider even changed the name to Holhoh, convinced this spelling was more "stupendous, strange, exotic, distinguished, and sophisticated." For all of these efforts he was politely exiled from Olo for life.

The narrator then recalls Oloans remembered, such as the wise old man who "hooked rugs with the virile gestures of an artist . . . and uttered the most brilliant thoughts in the grass." The storyteller also mentions two good friends who were endlessly together, and "always spoke in the generous plural of love." He/she recalls the Oloan grandmother whose lap was so enormous she could simultaneously hold eight or more children. Because "bad things also have their time and place," a group of invaders arrives by boat on the Oloan seashore. These intruders' mythical epithets are Skywalker, Earthwalker, and Windwalker. Skywalker needs to create space between himself and others by literally climbing to loftier and loftier heights. On a figurative level, Skywalker is an arrogant individual who considers himself superior to the Oloans. He refers to the narrator as a "primitive being that will evolve when incorporated into the culture." However, this "primitive being" is astute enough to realize, "Poor Skywalker, I have learned little from him, except for the tragic lesson that heights are not reached on terraces or towers." Earthwalker "coveted everything that appeared in his path . . . and was determined to trade the things he possessed for new things he saw." Earthwalker's possessions soon uncomfortably overcrowd his life; however, he remains blind to this perception, and continues to lust after objects. The narrator perspicaciously notes, "All I learned from him was that the plain was a large, absurd security blanket." Windwalker is a dreamer in denial. He carelessly indulges in games of chance while "smiling frequently, scaring off sadness, a very bad omen due to its piercing lances." He approaches life with an air of indifference. The narrator is not lured by the influences of these interlopers, who evoke in him a feeling of "great homesickness for Olo."

The above literary work encompasses many layers and may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Because the narrator is a youth, one could compare Olo to childhood, and the introduction of

intruders to loss of innocence. The epithets Skywalker, Earthwalker, and Windwalker may refer to corrupting influences of adult society. The entire piece could be considered a coming of age metaphor. The analysis of this deceptively simple, yet complicated work involves critical thinking.

The next literary work I will introduce to the students is: *Clamor of Innocence: Stories from Central America*, edited by Barbara Paschke and David Volpendesta, and translated by numerous translators. This work contains stories from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. According to the above editors, "These stories taken together are an eye on Central America, focusing on the real lives and enduring passions of today's men and women. Here are tales from quiet villages, from the urban vortex, from the field of battle . . ." I will assign any number of stories from this collection, from a few to all, depending on the level of the students, the applicable time frame, etc. This collection represents challenging reading, and analysis of some of the stories may prove difficult. Therefore, while it is an excellent collection for intrinsically motivated scholars or gifted students, it is also a first-class cerebral workout for the mainstream student.

The example I will include in this paper is a Costa Rican piece entitled *Walls*, written by Carmen Naranjo, and translated by Barbara Paschke. The narration begins, "I wonder why I was given this assignment?" This catchy, interrogative opening sets the mysterious tone for the entire story. The narrator begins an ominous quest filled with portents, such as a dark bird, a dead bird which falls near his feet, a funeral procession, strange mushrooms, a room that shakes, an approaching thunderstorm, and walls in his hotel room which close in on him. Ironically, Walls is also the name of the town, and indeed the mysterious walls of the covert narrator's lodging keep decreasing in perimeter until they ostensibly crush him to death. However, when his "swollen and foul smelling" corpse is found days later, his body is not described as crushed, and room 21 seems to be of normal size. Of arcane and suspect origin, this narrator is referred to as an "anonymous dealer . . . an undesirable who deserved to be in prison."

This story calls to mind elements of Edgar Allen Poe, Alfred Hitchcock, and *The Twilight Zone*. Naranjo continues to build suspense in this dark, brief, macabre tale, which concludes in an ironic twist. I consider this story a good one to include because it may be interpreted critically on a number of levels.

The final literary work included in this unit is *When New Flowers Bloomed*, edited by Enrique Jaramillo Levi. This work is a collection of short stories by women writers from Costa Rica and Panama. It contains a very informative prologue, which focuses on historical literary activity in Costa Rica and

Panama. According to this prologue, “Central America has been a fertile land for the short story.” Regarding the short story in Costa Rica,

The first short stories, works of local color and poetry with a regional flavor appeared in local newspapers around the year 1884, and their author was the priest Juan Garita (1859-1912). . . Since 1960 the short story has enjoyed a resurgence in Costa Rica. Several writers who were later to become important began to publish in periodicals and local newspapers. Worthwhile books of short stories and novels began to appear, with very diverse techniques and thematic orientations. And women began to take a leading role, on the same level in these two narrative genres as in poetry in the development of the literature of their country (Levi 19).

Stories in this literary work represent reading on a challenging level. I will choose selected works, or the entire collection, depending on the level of the student, the time frame available, etc. These stories provide academic rigor for the mainstream student as well as the scholar.

When New Flowers Bloomed by Carmen Naranjo is the eponymous piece from the above work. This short story is set in a small village in Costa Rica, a town “with eucalyptus, orange trees . . . dusty streets . . . happy shouts from everyone . . . nonsense.” After the arrival of Eugenia Maria de los Angeles Rivera

Mancilla, the new schoolteacher, and José Luis Villacencio, a young farmer, this town is never the same. These two new young residents are immediately smitten with each other, and the sparks of passion they generate permeate the village. "The couple became the number one spectacle in the village." As a result of everyone's contemplation of this ardent display, "strange things began to happen in the village. The potatoes tasted like yams . . . the papaya like turnips . . . the coffee bean while it was still green smelled of orange blossoms . . ." Also, quite fantastically, a prodigious number of young women of all ages became pregnant, ". . . old ones, young ones, some of them almost children . . . the girlfriends of the altar boys and the priest's blessed servant." New flowers began to bloom everywhere, literally and figuratively. Ironically, the young couple who fanned the flames of desire in the village departed separately. "She left as if shutting a door, he as if opening one." After their exit, the village settles back into normalcy with the "expectations of the era" (Naranjo 63-67).

I will include the above literary work for various reasons. First, it provides a nice vicarious experience of an aesthetically pleasing, cozy Costa Rican mountain village. Additionally, one may analyze the piece literally and figuratively. The students should enjoy the "passion is catching" motif, which they could compare/contrast to the film *Like Water for Chocolate*, directed by Alfonso Arau, or the novel *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments, With Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies*, by Laura Esquivel, translated by Thomas Christensen.

One cannot appreciatively study Latin American literature without an understanding of the literary term magical realism. I have great respect for this literary mode, the study of which may be approached on a continuum that runs from the simple to the abstruse. Indeed, this complex topic may be explored on a university graduate level. Due to the paucity of Latin American literature in our curriculum, my students know

little to nothing about magical realism. For this reason, I will approach it in a very simplistic manner. Easy to understand definitions and clarifications of magical realism follow:

- The amalgamation of realism and fantasy (Faris and Zamora 112).
- In magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation (123).
- In fantastic literature the supernatural invades a world ruled by reason (123).
- Magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality (Magical Realism).
- The tone that I eventually used on *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was based on the way my grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with

complete naturalness (Marquez).

- Literature of this type is usually characterized by elements of the fantastic woven into the story with a deadpan sense of presentation (Ruch and Sellman).
- These novels violate, in various ways, standard novelistic expectations by drastic -- and sometimes highly effective -- experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic (Ruch and Sellman).

All of the Costa Rican short stories highlighted in this paper fused elements of the fantastic with the realistic. Therefore, an understanding of the genre of magical realism is needed in order to properly make sense of and analyze the short stories contained in this unit. When I first discovered the genre not too long ago, I immediately thought of the literary works of Toni Morrison, and in fact, examples of magical realism from her novel *Song of Solomon* appear in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Students familiar with and able to interpret Toni Morrison's works may have an easier time understanding the literary mode of magical realism.

The next step for the students is the creation of their own short stories. In an attempt to keep the Central American Flavor, I will encourage the students to be as creative as possible and attempt to mix elements of fantasy and reality in their pieces. A key to keep in mind is the “deadpan presentation” of the fantasy, with an implicit acceptance of it as reality.

Additionally, I will revisit the traditional elements of the short story. *The Prentice Hall Writer’s Solution Platinum Source Book* highlights the following:

Short Story

- A short story is a brief fictional narrative.
- It typically creates a single powerful impression through the use of a limited number of characters and settings and a plot less complex than that of a novel.
- In a **short story**, the main character usually faces a conflict, or problem, that is resolved by the story’s end.
- The narrator, or person telling the story, may be a character who participates in the action or an outside observer who refers to all the characters as he and she.

(Bell 38).

“We are now boarding rows ten through twenty,” is the call for boarding that has just interrupted my concentration on the paper before me. El Viaje Tropical, our long-awaited sojourn to Costa Rica, has finally become a reality. My students and I are especially anticipating this trip because we have done our homework, i.e. put many painstaking hours into its preparation. We have studied cultural learning, done research on various aspects of Costa Rican culture, put together a travel brochure, read and analyzed literary works by Costa Rican writers, written our own short stories which contain elements of magical realism, studied our itinerary, and packed our bags. We are eagerly looking forward to approaching our upcoming adventure as cross-cultural learners. ¡Buen Viaje!

Objectives

The objectives, which follow, fulfill many of the Content Standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. A list of all standards addressed will appear in the appendix.

1. The students will be able to identify the term cultural learner.
2. The students will be able to identify the attitudes and character traits that promote culture learning.
3. The students will be able to make the distinction between traveler and tourist.
4. The students will be able to identify the attitudes that help ensure success when one travels abroad.

5. The students will be able to come to an understanding of the word culture by analyzing given definitions and creating their own working definition.
6. The students will be able to define terms related to the definition of culture, such as values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication.
7. The students will be able to peruse the itinerary of our virtual trip, *El Viaje Tropical*.
8. Divided into groups, the students will be able to do library research legwork on Costa Rica, using books, encyclopedias, Online resources, magazine articles, etc. Aspects of the culture selected will be food, clothing, currency, music, art, literature, traditions, indigenous people, sports, religion, popular culture, and entertainment.
9. Each group of students will be able to work together to write a one to two page report, double spaced with title page and works cited page.
10. Each group will be able to present the above project, which will include a visual.
11. The students will be able to work together as a class to assemble a travel brochure containing the group reports with added illustrations.

12. The students will be able to understand the literary term magical realism.
13. The students will be able to read and analyze *There Never Was A Once Upon A Time* by Carmen Naranjo, translated by Linda Britt.
14. The students will be able to read and analyze selections from *Clamor of Innocence: Stories from Central America*, edited by Barbara Paschke and David Volpendesta, and translated by numerous translators.
15. The students will be able to read and analyze selections from *When New Flowers Bloomed*, edited by Enrique Jaramillo Levi.
16. The students will be able to review the components of the short story.
17. The students will be able to write a short story, fusing the traditional conventions with magical realism.
18. The students will be able to peer review each other's short stories.
19. The students will enjoy El Viaje Tropical, their virtual trip to Costa Rica.

Strategies and Classroom Activities

This virtual trip to Costa Rica contains five components.

1. Becoming a cultural learner
 2. Researching Costa Rica
 3. Creating a travel brochure
 4. Reading and analyzing Costa Rican short stories
 5. Writing an original short story
- (6.) Taking an actual trip to Costa Rica. (Although this unit is presented as a virtual trip, a real trip is the ultimate goal. This trip could be planned a few years in advance. For example, fund raising for a senior trip could begin in the ninth or tenth grade year. Students with the trip as a goal should be intrinsically motivated to work on this unit).

I will address strategies and classroom activities chronologically by section.

Becoming a Cultural Learner

Lesson One

Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad is an excellent resource for the study of culture learning. Aimed at the college level, it is appropriate for gifted students, scholars, and motivated readers. The reading level may prove too difficult for the reluctant reader. Therefore, for students capable of mastering the text, I would assign the *Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2* (twenty-eight pages total), as homework. For classes that

find the work too challenging, I would read selections from the text orally as a directed reading assignment. The following question will be used as a journal entry, a homework assignment, or a twenty-minute writing.

1. Write about a time when you traveled to another town, city, state, or country and you found something uncomfortable, life threatening, disgusting, pathetic, or humorous.

As a pre-writing activity, the class will brainstorm possible things to consider before writing, such as:

- Time and place of destination
- Purpose of visit
- What was strange or different about the place?
- Why did it make you feel uncomfortable, etc.?
- How did you respond to this feeling?
- Were you able to settle in and adjust to the situation?
- What lesson did you learn about yourself as a result of this experience?

Lesson Two

Students will read pages 1-2 of Chapter 1, *Culture Learning*, and discuss Hoopes's definition of culture on page

2. I will give the students handouts with the definitions of pertinent terms such as: values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication. After

the whole class discussion, I will divide the class into five groups. Each group will expand upon two of the above terms. Things to consider are:

- What are my values, etc.?
- How might these values differ from those of another culture?
- How might misinterpreting another value system make me feel uncomfortable in a foreign country?
- What can I do to feel better about this?

After the students ponder the above, I will show a video entitled *The Sewing Machine*, which is an episode of the PBS series, *American Family*. This series represents the “first drama series ever to air on broadcast television featuring a Latino cast” (PBS). According to Gregory Nava, the series’ creator, executive producer, and director, “The series is about an American family living in Los Angeles that happens to be Latino . . . it chronicles the daily struggles and triumphs of a family . . .” The poignant episode called *The Sewing Machine* flashes back to a culture clash between mother and daughter regarding an ethnic homemade dress the daughter rejects. As the students view this video they will answer questions from a teacher-created viewing guide.

Lesson Three – Subtypes of Culture

Because high school students are already knowledgeable about popular culture, the next lesson will examine the subtypes of culture. The resource I am using for this lesson is *Everyday, Everywhere*, by Stuart and Terry Hirschberg. This is a comprehensive popular culture text with selections that represent global as well as

American perspectives. First, the class will brainstorm about the definition of popular culture. I will then introduce the following definition from the introduction of the above.

. . . Sometimes referred to as “common” or “mass” culture,
popular culture is probably best understood as the material
goods, activities, and forms of communication that are part
of most people’s everyday lives: music, food, movies, sports,
Web sites, ads, books, magazines, television shows, videos
sports, clothes, and so on (Hirschberg and Hirschberg).

We will also discuss popular culture icons, defined by Hirschberg and Hirschberg as “typically someone, some group, or something that has attracted huge audiences (or customers) and come to symbolize a historic moment, a social impulse, or a common attitude or feeling shared by a large segment of the population. Unlike trends or fads, icons endure over time.” Examples of icons are The Beatles, Madonna, Elvis Presley, Muhammad Ali, baseball caps, Selena, *Star Wars*, Mickey Mouse, Snoopy, etc.

The students will be asked to write a journal entry or homework assignment about a popular culture icon and why they consider this person or thing an icon. Questions to consider regarding this assignment are:

- Why is this person or thing an icon?
- What appeals to you or does not appeal to you about this icon?

For homework, the students should bring in popular culture artifacts, such as magazine articles, clothing, CD’s, samples of fast food, etc., which the class will discuss.

Lesson Three

In our quest to become cultural learners, we will next brainstorm regarding things in our American culture that might make foreign visitors to this country uncomfortable. Things on this list might be: sense of time, food, an obsession with cleanliness, personal space, lack of respect for teachers and others in authority, ways of dress, language, currency, or violence.

We will next discuss things that may upset us as we sojourn to another country. In *Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad*, Hess included *Guide 4*, (pages 76-79) entitled *Naming Your Cucarachas*. Because cockroaches represent an unpleasant encounter one may experience in a dwelling away from home, they symbolize “creepies and crawlies of our international environments” (Hess). This guide has listed many cucarachas, some of which are cold showers, squatter toilets, noisy buses, unclear street signs, and soccer fervor. I will divide the students into groups and assign each group several cucarachas from Hess’s list. These groups will answer questions posed by Hess on page 78 such as,

- Which of your cucarachas are frightening? Life-threatening? Disgusting? Pathetic? Humorous?
- Which of the cucarachas can be removed from your presence? Which of them will you have to put up with?

To survive in the presence of those cucarachas that won’t go away, what preparations or precautions or dispositions would help you?

Lesson Four

Students will read Chapter 2 of *Studying Abroad/Learning Abroad, Attitudes and Character Traits That Promote Culture Learning*. These attitudes are listed as,

- a high regard for culture
- an eagerness to learn
- a desire to make connections
- a readiness to give as well as receive

Hess also lists eighteen character traits such as,

- a curious rather than a passive person
- a trusting rather than a suspicious person
- a brave rather than a fearful person
- a secure rather than a guarded person

Students will be divided into groups to discuss these attitudes and traits. The above tends to indicate that a person who is open minded and willing to grow and change will be more comfortable in a foreign environment. Therefore, the groups will examine the following questions:

- Why would this trait make a person more successful in a foreign environment?
- What may a person without this trait do to be successful?

Lesson 5 – *El Viaje Tropical*

The students will read and discuss the itinerary for El Viaje Tropical. Considering traits and attitudes discussed in the previous lesson, we will have a discourse on what “cucarachas” we may encounter. Now that we have a quasi-awareness of culture and cross-cultural learner, we should discuss the itinerary objectively. Therefore, we will make a chart with two columns, one listing what we are looking forward to, and the other listing what may make us uncomfortable, and how we should plan ahead to deal with anticipated problems. Things we are eagerly awaiting could be the sun, the beach, aesthetically pleasing sights, and the excitement of a new country. Unpleasantness we may encounter might be rain, insects, and exotic food.

Researching Costa Rica and Creating a Travel Brochure

Lesson 6

This mini research project is divided into four segments: (1) gathering resources in the library, (2) writing the mini report, (3) oral presentation with visual, and (4) class collaboration on writing of the travel brochure. Since this is a report and not a full-blown research paper, I will briefly review writing the report using *Writer’s Inc., School to Work: A Student Handbook*, by Patrick Sebranek et al. Additionally, because the groups have to present orally, I will review public speaking skills using the chapter entitled *Giving a Speech* from the handbook. The above resource is an excellent, comprehensive guide for writing in school and in the workplace. To organize resources for the works cited page, students will use color-coded bibliography cards with sample citations created by the librarian.

In the library, each group of students will choose a category of Costa Rican culture to research, using the list generated in the rationale. Students will need approximately two to three days in the library to gather two to three resources on their topics, take notes, and fill out bibliography cards. I will give them

approximately three days to a week to write and type the report and create a visual (done at school or home). Students will then type reports and orally present these results to the class using a visual. This visual should be an 8 1/2 x 11-in. drawing, to be included in the travel brochure. Next, the typed reports will be sent to the printing class, where they will be consolidated into a travel brochure, including a cover and an introduction. The class could brainstorm to create the introduction, and/or interested students could submit entries for extra credit. The cover could also be assigned as an extra credit competition.

Reading and Analyzing Costa Rican Short Stories

Lesson 7

Before reading the literary works, the students will be introduced to magical realism in a simplistic manner, using the definition listed in the rationale. The main thing I want them to keep in mind is that they will encounter elements of fantasy, or things that appear to be out of the ordinary in this literature, and these things will not be considered unusual by the narrator of the story. Hence, the “deadpan” presentation mentioned in the rationale.

The students will discuss magical realism and write a journal entry answering the following: Have you encountered this term before? If so, where? I will include excerpts from Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, and will also show excerpts from *Beloved*, the film version of Toni Morrison’s novel, produced by Oprah Winfrey. In keeping with the mode of the student as cultural learner, the students will write the following journal entry:

Tell whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable with this genre. List specific examples to support your position.

Lesson 8

The students will read *There Never Was A Once Upon A Time*, by Carmen Naranjo, and keep a reader's response journal. General questions to keep in mind while reading are:

- What could you identify with?
- What didn't you understand?
- What elements of fantasy did you identify?
- Could this story take place in the United States? Why or why not?
- How may this story be interpreted on a figurative level?

In this journal, they should also briefly describe the plot, setting, conflict, and characters encountered. In addition, we will have class discussions on the stories. These journal notes will be excellent resources for the students when they have to write their own short stories. Because this literature is different from what the students usually read, cultural learning should take place as they encounter magical realism. This learning experience may be analogous to a form of culture shock.

Lesson 9

The students will next read selected works from *Clamor of Innocence* and *When New Flowers Bloomed*. The same strategies and activities from the previous lesson apply to these works. The film *Like Water for Chocolate* may be shown with a teacher-created viewing guide to compare/contrast to the eponymous short story from *When New Flowers Bloomed*. Another literary work, which would fit in nicely, is *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories by Mexican American writer Sandra Cisneros. The

episode of *American Family* titled *La Llorona, Parts 1 and 2* may be compared/contrasted with the eponymous work from this collection. These episodes update the story of La Llorona (The Weeping Woman), “an old Mexican folktale about a mother who loses her children” (PBS).

Writing an Original Short Story

Lesson 10

I will briefly revisit writing the short story, using *Prentice Hall Writer’s Solution*, highlighting the components listed in the rationale. The class will also read the student model and literature model included. Their reader’s response notebooks should also prove excellent resources. The students will then write their own short stories, using the conventions listed as a guide and adding their own special touch of magical realism. Creativity will be strongly encouraged. The length will range from three to ten pages, depending on the writing capabilities of the students. Before the students begin writing, they will go over the *Narrative Account Rubric –Writing to Tell a Story*, from Literacy plus, a Division of Instructional Support from the Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2002.

The students will next peer review each other’s rough drafts. According to the *Writer’s Solution*, “A peer reviewer brings a fresh perspective to a piece of writing. He or she can use the following questions to give the student constructive and objective feedback”:

- Which events are the most interesting?
- Which, if any are hard to follow?
- How does the conflict build and create suspense?
- How can the sense of suspense be heightened?

- In what ways are the characters believable and interesting?
- Which characters need further development?
- Where does the dialogue sound particularly natural and realistic?
- Where does it sound stilted or unnatural?

In addition to these, I have added:

- Identify the elements of magical realism.

They will next edit these stories and hand in the final copies. The papers will be graded using the above rubric.

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This paper focuses on global education as preparation for life in a global society.

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This is a series “about an American family living in Los Angeles that happens to be Latino”(PBS).

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This textbook for student writers provides guided lessons, student models, and literature models for description, narration, exposition, persuasion, research writing, creative writing, response to literature, and practical and technical writing.

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This film version of Toni Morrison’s novel provides a powerful exploration of what slavery does to the human soul.

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“A collection of stories, whose characters give voice to the vibrant and varied life on both sides of the Mexican border. The women in these stories offer tales of pure discovery, filled with moments of infinite and intimate wisdom” (Amazon.com).

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This book is a collection of short stories by Costa Rican and Panamanian women writers.

Like Water for Chocolate. Dir. Alfonso Arau. Perf. Lumi Cavazos. Marco Leonardi. Regina Torne. Mario Ivan Martinez, and Ada Carrasco. Miramax, 1993.

This film is a Mexican fable about love and food set in 1910.

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This book is a collection of Costa Rican short stories narrated by children and adolescents.

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This provides a collection of short fiction by Central American writers from Costa Rica, Guatamala, Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

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This is a handbook that bridges the gap between the school and the workplace (Sebranek).

Appendix A

Content Standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools

The following content standards were addressed in the above curriculum unit.

Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.

2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts, and use the information and ideas to make decisions to solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies, and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure, and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform, or describe.

Arts and Humanities

1. All students describe the meanings they find in various works from the visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand important features of the works.
3. All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform, or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater, and describe the meanings their work has for them.

Citizenship

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations, and describe the patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate understanding of themes and patterns of geography, know the location of major bodies of water, land masses and nations, and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economical, and cultural development.

3. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
4. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating, and cooperating with others.
5. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.
6. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the United States and other nations.

Science and Technology

1. All students use and master materials, tools, and processes of major technologies, which are applied in economic and civic life.
2. All students demonstrate basic computer literacy, including word processing, software applications, and the ability to access the global information infrastructure, using current technology.

Environment and Ecology

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of the local, national, or international implications of environmental and ecological issues.