The power of the teacher: Integrating Latino-themed literature in the K-12 classroom
October 9, 2009

Ruth E. Quiroa, Ph.D.
Reading & Language Department
RQuiroa@nl.edu

Multicultural Literature Defined: Literature by and about people of ethnic and racial diversity (includes linguistic diversity)

Role of MC Lit (Bishop, 1990):
- **Mirrors**: Beneficial effect on school achievement for children denied realistic images of themselves, their families, community, and culture
- **Windows**: A view into other cultures
- **Sliding glass doors & portals**: Points of entry

“Best Practices” are only the first step

Level I: General Literacy Practice
- Knowledge of best practices for literacy instruction
- Ability to implement
- Management skills: High expectations for respect

“Best Practices”
- Pre-reading, pre-reading, pre-reading: K-W-L, Book Boxes, Anticipation Guides, Picture Walks, Book bits (frontloading vocabulary); Visuals; Brainstorming; Predictions
- Multiple response modes: Oral, Written, Art, Drama
- Writer’s Workshop: The Author/Illustrator chair

Level II: Literary Conversations
- Questioning skills
- Inquiry listening + formative assessment
- Ability to hear difficult or different student responses to stories
- Recognition of storytelling patterns from differing cultural traditions—balancing tension

Open-ended prompts
- ¿Qué es lo que notas en la historia? [What do you notice in the story?]?
- ¿Qué piensas de la historia? [What do you think about the story?]?
- ¿Qué piensan ustedes de eso? [What do you think about this?]?

Follow-up prompts
- Based on students’ behaviors or comments during and after textual reading
- Clarifications, rationale for laughter, requests for more information
- “En este momento, ¿qué estás pensando acerca de la historia y los dibujos? [What are you thinking about the story and the pictures right now?]?
- “Ve que estás sonriendo, dime ¿por qué? [I see you’re smiling, tell me why.]

Grand Conversations
- Validation of student responses
- Safe places to talk: Free from border patrols and border walls
- Space to share new, difficult realizations and deeply personal narratives
- Chance to be known and better understood
Story acceptance
  o Uncomfortable, painful themes
  o Resistance: Polite Questioning
  o The “Wild Rumpus” (Sendak, 1983): Parallel stories, extensions and revisions to texts endings
    o References to Latin American cultural products (movies, TV shows and actors)
    o High drama!

Level II: Personal cultural investment
  • Strong knowledge base: Students’ families; students’ local and transnational communities; cultural values
  • Ability to find or build commonalities and relationships with students & families
  • Willingness to assimilate the “other,” to change one’s own cultural map: Students’ are not “foreign”
  • Potential commonalities
    o Previously untapped personal and academic understanding of Latino culture
    o Similar family values, structures, patterns of living, relationships, and terms of endearment
    o Foods we all enjoyed
    o Transmission of culture through: Games (Lotería); Spanish-language media

A POEM in many voices!
  • Commonalities shared and modeled by the teacher result in student excitement to share personal stories
  • “Wild Rumpuses” and/or stories of resistance serve to build community
  • Students’ responses through DRAMA, writing & art allow more voices to enter the poem.
  • Student and parental stories can serve as portals into students’ worlds
  • Greater insights into how children interpret/analyze illustrations and text
  • Best practices, student/family stories, TOGETHER WITH teacher knowledge and expanding cultural dispositions:

Practice + Grand Conversations + Teacher’s Personal/Cultural Investment = Cyclical process
  • Informed literacy methods and strategies (classroom-based assessment) (PRACTICE)
  • Informed prompts, and re-prompts for future lessons (CONVERSATIONS)
  • Expanding teacher knowledge and cultural dispositions
  • Open portals to students’ thinking

Resources

Professional Reading:

Websites:
NLU Library Libguides: Here you will find resources to assist you with finding books, including the Americas Collection housed at the Lisle campus of NLU, book award information and electronic resources for both multicultural and Spanish/bilingual children's and young adult literature. http://libguides.nl.edu/eslresources

NLU Book Awards Database: This database resource links to a wide-range of children's book award web sites. There is a separate tab for the Multicultural Book Awards which includes Latino awards. Downloading the files in MS Access 2007 enables you to search the database by author, illustrator and book title to discover if a book has won an award. http://libguides.nl.edu/bookawards

Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC): CCBC website through the University of Wisconsin, Madison; an invaluable resource for recommended books for children and adolescents (including a bibliography of bilingual books), author video links, etc. http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/default.asp

International Children’s Digital Library: A kid-friendly (K-7) website filled with scanned books from around the world in original languages. http://www.icdlbooks.org
Latino and Spanish Language Literature:

América’s Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature: Award through the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for U.S. works of fiction, poetry, folklore, or selected non-fiction that authentically and engagingly present the experience of individuals in Latin America or the Caribbean, or of Latinos in the United States. [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/outreach/americas.html](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CLACS/outreach/americas.html)

Pura Belpré Award: Award through the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA) and National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), an ALA Affiliate. Awarded biannually to the Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth. [www.ala.org/alsc/belpre.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/belpre.html)

Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award: Annual award that recognizes the author or illustrator of the most distinguished book for children and young adults authentically reflecting the lives and experiences of Mexican Americans in the Southwestern region of the United States. [www.education.txstate.edu/subpages/tomasrivera/information.html](http://www.education.txstate.edu/subpages/tomasrivera/information.html) and [www.education.txstate.edu/subpages/tomasrivera-archive/index.html](http://www.education.txstate.edu/subpages/tomasrivera-archive/index.html)


Award and Honor Latino Children and YA Literature (1993-2008)

K-3 Books:


Luna Rising/Rising Moon.


Soto, G. (1997). *Snapshots from the wedding*. Putnam. (K-3; picturebook)


Winter, J. (2002). *Frida*. Scholastic. (K-3; biography; picturebook)

**Grades 3-5:**


Freedman, R. (2001). *In the days of the vaqueros*. Clarion Books. (3-5+; nonfiction)

Garza, C. L. (1990). *Family pictures / cuadros de familia*. Children's Book Press. (3-5; bilingual; nonfiction autobiographical)

Garza, C. L. (1996). *In my family/ En mi familia*. Children's Book Press. (3-5; nonfiction; bilingual; autobiographical)


Grades 6+/YA:

Alvarez, J. (2002). *Before we were free*. Knopf (gr. 6+; fiction)


Cofer, J. O. (2004). *Call me María*. Orchard. (YA; fiction; written in prose, letters, poetry)


Holzwarth, W. (1999). *I'm José and I'm Okay*. Kane Miller. (YA; fiction)


▲