



Exploring Literary Genre Through Latin American Literature

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students

In Partnership with the **Denver Public Schools**
and the **Metropolitan State College of Denver**

El Alma de la Raza Project



Exploring Literary Genre Through Latin American Literature

By Flor Amaro

Grades 3-5

Implementation Time
for Unit of Study: 3 weeks

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students
El Alma de la Raza Curriculum
and Teacher Training Project

Loyola A. Martinez, Project Director

El Alma de la Raza Series

Exploring Literary Genre Through Latin American Literature

Unit Concepts

- Develop vocabulary through poems, narratives and expository literature (including chants, songs, rhymes, stories and plays).
- Enhance verbal and written communication through exploration of different literary genre.
- Promote reading through literature.
- Use linguistic and other techniques and resources to increase language skills.

Standards Addressed by This Unit

Reading and Writing:

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. Students will read classic and contemporary literature, representing various cultural and ethnic traditions from throughout the world. (RW6)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

Introduction

This unit about different literary genre is based on poetry by Alma Flor Ada and other Latin American writers.

The methods and strategies used in these lessons are geared toward three factors that affect reading comprehension: vocabulary development, background knowledge, and interest.

Narrative texts are the dominant genre used for reading instruction in the classroom; students are less exposed to other types of text. In this unit, students will read and compare poetry, narrative text, and expository texts, with the goal of eliciting students' interest in different genre and developing their skills in reading various kinds of text. It is important that they develop strategies, such as questioning, that will help them apply their background knowledge to the reading and understand new vocabulary through context. Having access to different genre will spark *interest in reading*.

Implementation Guidelines

The literature selected for each of the lessons in this unit is available in English and Spanish and is highly recommended. The poems and books are culture- and language-rich. They are embedded in the Spanish/Latin American traditions. The pieces are optimal for primary grades, can be adapted for intermediate grades, and are even appropriate for adult instruction in language teaching, teaching English to Spanish speakers, and Spanish to English speakers. Suggested narrative and expository titles will complement the poetry selections.

Instructional Materials and Resources

The essential resource for this unit is the anthology of poetry and folklore *Días y Días de Poesía* by Alma Flor Ada.

- El Colibrí* by Octavio Paz, p. 30
- La Ardilla* by Amado Nervo, p. 32
- Casa* by Clemencia Laborda, p. 67
- Día Feliz* by Alma Flor Ada, p. 71
- Mi aeroplano* by Isabel Freire de Matos, p. 88
- Caballo de Palo* by Oscar de León Palacios, p. 95

Suggested themes and books to match topics in Alma Flor Ada's anthology:

- Ranger Rick*, May 1991, National Wildlife Federation, pp. 26–27
- Ranger Rick*, April 1993, National Wildlife Federation, pp. 4–8
- Feathers and Flight* by Fred and Jeanne Biddulph, pp. 19, 24
- Animal on the Move*, The Wright Group, p. 8
- Zoo Books about hummingbirds, squirrels
- Thanksgiving books, both factual and fiction
- Books about airplanes, horses; both factual and fiction
- Horses, Horses* by Allan Fowler
- El Caballo Blanco* by Mary Cappenilli
- Pegasita* by Stephen Cosgrove
- La Cabalgata de Paul Revere* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and others

Lesson Summary

- Lesson 1 Poetry
The vocabulary in poetry is so descriptive and carefully chosen that it is crucial for students to explore the meaning of words used in a poem.
- Lesson 2 Narrative Text
Vocabulary used in narrative (stories) is often more immediately accessible to students, using words found in everyday speech.
- Lesson 3 Expository Text
Vocabulary difficulty increases in expository text. Students need to understand specialized vocabulary, such as used in science for daily academic success.
- Lesson 4 Types of Text
Students will apply what they have learned by selecting a text, reading it, and deciding in small groups what type of text they have read.
- Lesson 5 Responses to Literature
Writing reflects the essence of an author including his/her heritage.
- Lesson 6 Literary Writing
The uniqueness of each student's experience will be reflected on his/her writing.
- Lesson 7 Expository Writing
Conducting research, organizing, and presenting information about an author in formal writing.

Extended Lessons

Extended lessons can be developed by the teacher to include other genre and/or to teach linguistics. Besides serving as a wonderful instructional tool, the literature in *Días y Días de Poesía* will help some children make connections between the values and traditions of their home and those of formal schooling and will give other children the opportunity to discover something new. There are limitless possibilities for extending this unit. For example, interweaving Ada's collection of poetry with music, movement, and drama will appeal to many students' styles of learning. This unit was developed with Denver Public Schools' Goal 1 in mind—to develop literate elementary students—and specifically for the Alma de la Raza Project, with the goal of reaching to all students.

Lesson 1: Poetry

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use information from their reading to increase vocabulary and to better understand language usage.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will regularly use describing as a strategy to comprehend poetry.

Students will understand and use the vocabulary and know the purpose of poetry to increase their vocabulary and enhance their knowledge.

SPECIFICS

Language development is enriched when children are exposed to oral poetry. The activity of memorizing poems is a wonderful mental exercise in itself. The purpose of this unit is to go beyond memorizing poetry to comprehension.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Semantic webbing

Teacher-directed reading

Questionnaires

PRELIMINARY ACTIVITY

The teacher will fill in the columns on a large KWL chart, asking students to tell what they know about poetry, narrative text, and expository text, and then to brainstorm what they want to learn. The students need to know that the What I Know, What I Want to Learn and What I Learned (KWL) chart will be used as an assessment as well.

ACTIVITIES

After reading, as a class or individually, “El Colibrí” by Octavio Paz, on p. 30 in *Días y Días de Poesía*, the teacher introduces a webbing activity by talking about the importance of knowing how to describe things in life, and the purpose of poetry. On the board, with class input, the teacher develops a semantic web about the poem, and leads the class in a discussion of how the poem uses vocabulary to describe an object. Then the students complete a questionnaire about the poem.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Días y Días de Poesía by Alma Flor Ada

KWL Chart (on large paper)

Questionnaire About Poem worksheet

Lesson 1 (cont.)

ASSESSMENT

Students will respond, orally or in writing, to the poem, using the Questionnaire About Poem worksheet.

Questionnaire About Poem

Read and respond to the following questions:

1. What is the object described according to the text? _____

2. What is mentioned about the object? _____

3. What did you feel, thought about and asked yourself when reading the text?

4. Did you feel sad, happy, mad, curious, indifferent? What emotions did the text inspire in you? _____

Lesson 2: Narrative Text

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use strategies to comprehend different literary genre.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use comparing and contrasting as a strategy to comprehend narrative text. Students will understand the purpose of narrative text and increase their vocabulary and knowledge of reading materials.

SPECIFICS

Narrative generally includes the basic literary elements: a setting, characters, a goal or problem, a series of events, and a resolution. Exposure to oral and written narrative text in the classroom enhances language development.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Teacher-directed reading

Compare and Contrast

Questionnaire

ACTIVITIES

The teacher talks about the importance of providing a reader with detailed information, so that he or she can give shape to a reader's mental image of an object. As a class, describe orally the subject addressed in the narrative piece and compare it to the description given in the poem read in Lesson 1. Students will complete the Questionnaire About Narrative Text worksheet.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Book or story in narrative form about concept or subject addressed in poem (hummingbirds, in this case). The book can be teacher-made.

Questionnaire About Narrative Text worksheet

ASSESSMENT

Students will respond, orally or in writing, to the questionnaire about the narrative text describing the hummingbird.

Questionnaire About Narrative Text

Read and respond to the following questions:

1. What is the text about? _____

2. What do you learn about the object from this text? _____

3. Do you feel the information provided in this narrative text is more complete than in the poem? Why? _____

Lesson 3: Expository Text

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students use strategies to comprehend different literary genre.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use categorizing as a strategy to compare and comprehend text structure.

Students will expand knowledge of the kinds of vocabulary used in expository text and understand differences between the purposes of poetry, narrative, and expository text.

SPECIFICS

Expository text varies in structure, including description, compare and contrast, and problem solution. Instruction in this genre will help students familiarize themselves with expository text construction for future reading and writing purposes.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Independent reading

Class dialogue

Text structure analysis (categorizing chart)

ACTIVITIES

Have students read expository text, such as in the Zoo Books series, about the same topic addressed in Lessons 1 and 2 (hummingbirds). Ask them to list, orally, information that this text provided that was not in the poem in Lesson 1 or the narrative in Lesson 2. As a class, make a chart which compares and contrasts specific features of the three writing styles.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Zoo Books about hummingbirds

ASSESSMENT

Students will select one type of text to read and decide what category their text falls into, based on the chart developed by the class.

Lesson 4: Types of Text

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students select relevant material for reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use research as a strategy to understand the structure of scientific and technical texts.

Students will understand the vocabulary of scientific and technical texts and increase their knowledge and vocabulary.

SPECIFICS

Scientific and technical texts include “how to” books, recipes, directions, manuals, and more.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Write To's

Jigsaw grouping

Expository writing using the Scientific Method

Reciprocal teaching

ACTIVITIES

Students will choose one of three different texts and be placed into one of three groups accordingly. In each group, students will accept responsibility for presenting a section or aspect of the book to the class. Together, they will determine what type of text they have read (literary, narrative, or expository text).

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

multiple copies of three different books, or of one book that can be easily divided into three sections, containing a scientific description of the subject addressed in the first three lessons (hummingbirds)

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on effort, product and performance in research and writing. Score students' writing work according to the research and writing conventions in a standard rubric.

Lesson 5: Responses to Literature

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. Students will read classic and contemporary literature, representing various cultural and ethnic traditions from throughout the world. (RW6)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will read, respond to, and discuss literature to explore ways in which stories reflect the ethnic background of the author and the culture in which they were written.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will select an item to read, analyze and respond to by organizing all facts and presenting all observations made.

Students will interpret what cultural influences, including geographical, linguistic, historical, and even personal traits, seem to be present in the author's writing, and develop a written response to such cultural characteristics. (Octavio Paz's poetry was selected for this unit, but any author from the anthology may be chosen.)

Students will formulate questions about what they read in reference to the author.

Students will recognize author's point of view.

SPECIFICS

Octavio Paz is a poet/play writer from Mexico, born in 1914.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Independent reading

Independent writing activity

ACTIVITIES

Provide multiple copies of the selected poem for students to read silently. A brief class discussion should follow silent reading so that the group can generate three questions that will help them identify some cultural characteristics of the author's style. Each student will write a composition which addresses those questions, and share their composition with the class.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

multiple copies of poems

writing paper

pencils

ASSESSMENT

Participation in class discussion, use of correct grammar and punctuation, and ability to address questions in written form.

Lesson 6: Literary Writing

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will recognize and know when it is appropriate to use dialectical, idiomatic, and colloquial language, including awareness and appreciation of cultural and dialectic variance.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use spoken and written language situationally.

SPECIFICS

In identifying a particular author's style and culture, the students have had the opportunity to explore the concept of individual style in poetry. They will now have the opportunity to write in their own style.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Write To

The writing process

ACTIVITIES

The teacher will demonstrate important features of a poem as she writes her own for the students. Students will select an object of their interest to describe or write about in a poem. They will follow standard steps in the writing/editing process, culminating in publishing their poem and presenting it to the class.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

chart paper

colored markers

students' draft/composition note books

bi-color pencils (blue and red) for editing

ASSESSMENT

Content and structure of poem will be scored by class consensus according to points (three for conventions of poem, two for creativity in reference to content). Grammar will be scored by teacher to give a maximum of five more points for each of five writing skills: capitals and punctuation, subject-verb agreement, spelling, and general presentation.

Lesson 7: Expository Writing

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization and spelling. (RW3)

Students read to locate, select, evaluate, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students apply formal usage in speaking and writing.

Students select relevant material for reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will select an item to research, collect and organize as many facts as possible, and present them in writing and orally.

SPECIFICS

Teaching expository writing as a genre is important to establish a strong foundation in students' writing. Expository writing, if consistently taught in the elementary grades along with research skills, will complement literary writing which is already frequently practiced in the classroom.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Research/investigation

Independent writing activity

ACTIVITIES

Give students the opportunity to read other selections from the anthology *Días y Días de Poesía* by Alma Flor Ada so that they can choose one author to research on three different media including the Internet. They will write a report about their chosen author.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

multiple copies of different poems from *Días y Días de Poesía* by Alma Flor Ada

Student Guides to the Scientific Method

research rubric

Internet access

ASSESSMENT

Score according to research rubric.

Unit Assessment

Suggested methods:

analysis
self-evaluation
teacher
students
vocabulary test
application
synthesis

How will students demonstrate proficiency?

PERFORMANCE TASK

As a group, students will talk about what they learned about the different genre of writing covered in this unit. The teacher will write what students learned in the KWL chart that was begun in Lesson 1. Students will write about topics of interest using poetic language, narrative or expository writing. They will be expected to complete their research for Lesson 7 through different media. They will apply terminology used in teaching this unit. They will initiate individual or group conversations about genre of literature they chose to read on a daily basis. Their reading selections should expand to other genre. They will continue to make comparisons between familiar and unfamiliar genre. In sum, the students will demonstrate a more sophisticated vocabulary, enriched background, and greater interest in reading, especially in looking at the style of writing with a critical eye.

RESEARCH/WRITING RUBRIC

4. Student's writing is clear in content, correct grammar is used, type of writing is distinguishable and authentic.
3. Student's writing addresses content, uses correct grammar for the most part, and the type of writing includes one of the three reading/writing styles addressed.
2. Student's writing reflects some content, developing grammar skills, and the genre in which student is writing is not clearly defined.
1. Student did not complete assignment.

Bibliography

Ada, Alma Flor. *Días y Días de Poesía: Developing Literacy Through Poetry and Folklore*. Carmel, CA: Hampton Brown Books, 1991.

This anthology of classic and contemporary Spanish poetry and folklore is of the most complete ones available in the United States.

Ada, Alma Flor. *A Magical Encounter: Spanish-Language Children's Literature in the Classroom*. Compton, CA: Santillana Publishing Co., Inc., 1990.

Pedagogically sound resource in teaching children's literature.

Ada, Alma Flor. *The Unicorn of the West*. New York: Atheneum Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994.

Ada, Alma Flor. *El Unicornio del Oeste*. New York: Libros Colibrí. Atheneum, 1994.

The main character in this story is on a quest for self-identity. The creature discovers his most valuable characteristic, being a good friend.

Ada, Alma Flor. *Aserrín Aserrán: Children's Folklore*.

This compilation of children's songs, games, rhymes and jokes from Latin America was one of Alma Flor Ada's early works.

Ada, Alma Flor. *¿Pavo para la Cena de Gracias? -¡No, gracias!* Compton, CA: Santillana Publishing Co., Inc., 1993.

Rather than being the delight on the Thanksgiving dinner table, turkey prefers to be a guest.

Ranger Rick, May 1991. National Wildlife Federation pp. 26–27.

Ranger Rick, April 1993. National Wildlife Federation pp. 4–8.

Factual information about hummingbirds and wonderful illustrations of real hummingbirds.

Professional

Day, Frances Ann. *Latina and Latino Voices in Literature: For Children and Teenagers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

A biographical resource of a number of Latina/o writers which includes bibliographies of many of their creations.

Day, Frances Ann. *Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature: A Resource for Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Among writers of different backgrounds, Alma Flor Ada is highlighted as a renowned Latin American author.

Owens, Richard C. *Dancing with the Pen: The Learner as a Writer*. Katonah, NY: Ministry of Education, New Zealand, Richard C. Owens Publishers Inc., 1995.

A hands-on, in-the-classroom demonstration of the writing process with examples of students' work and progress.

Harris, Theodore L. and Hodges, Richard E. *The Literacy Dictionary*. Newark, DE: The International Reading Association, Inc., 1995.

An extensive resource of reading and writing terminology.

About the Author

Flor Amaro was born December 22, 1961, in Boca de Rio Chico, a rural area of Zacatecas, México. Flor attended kindergarten and first grade in Mexico City. Those years were of paramount importance in her educational foundation. They were “magical years of Cri-Cri’s songs, Amado Nervo’s poetry and of learning to read and write, add, and to discover new things,” says Flor. One of her favorite books was one her sisters read to her, *El Galano Arte de Leer*, a book about poetry of famous Latin American authors.

Flor completed elementary school in Zacatecas. Flor grew up listening to children’s programs. “I was enriched by fairy tales, folk tales and stories that I listened on the radio every morning before walking to school.” A radio series on children’s literature and folklore made up for the scarcity of books. Most of the literature she had access to was through text books in school. She learned to love the poetry of Amado Nervo, Gabriela Mistral, and Jose Martí among other Latin American and English writers, thanks to the radio program.

At age 17, Flor came to visit relatives living in the United States and stayed. Her initial schooling here was not as fulfilling as it had been in Mexico. High school was a real challenge for Flor because of different expectations, language difficulties and inappropriate grade level placement. English was a struggle for her; she gives credit to Dr. Seuss books for helping her acquire English.

Flor earned a B.A. and a teaching certificate in 1990. Eleven years after her arrival in the United States she was a bilingual teacher. In 1997, she earned a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado at Denver. Flor has educational priorities that reflect on her mission:

1. As an educator, she believes her students’ literacy in their native language takes precedence;
2. As an immigrant, she believes it is essential that her students learn English from the day they are exposed to it;
3. As an intellectual, she knows the social and cognitive values of being biliterate and therefore, she promotes biliteracy.