

Hearing Authentic Voices

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Davita Alston
Language:	Spanish
Grade:	8
School:	Shue-Medill Middle School, Newark, Delaware
Lesson Date:	December 10
Class Size:	26
Schedule:	50 minutes, six times in a seven-day schedule

Video Summary

In this lesson, students talk about what they like to do when they are not in school. They begin by using new leisure-time vocabulary to make plans with a partner. In groups, they brainstorm a list of what young Americans like to do in their free time, and then prepare questions to ask native speakers about how they spend their time. Next, two young native speakers visit the class and describe typical out-of-school activities in Mexico. The class concludes with a comparison of Mexican and American activities, using a Venn diagram.

Standards Addressed

- Communication: Interpersonal
- Cultures: Practices
- Comparisons: Cultural
- Communities: School and Community

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- information gap
- Venn diagram

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary located in the Appendix.

Class Profile

“Part of what I do as a foreign language teacher is try to open students up to what goes on in other parts of the world. To some students, it’s inconceivable that there is no NFL, inconceivable that there is no Michael Jordan.” —Davita Alston

School Profile

Davita Alston teaches grades 7–8 Spanish at Shue-Medill Middle School in Newark, Delaware. The 1,200 students in grades 7–8 reflect the diversity of the school’s surrounding communities, which include both urban and suburban settings. Students from across the state can also apply to attend Shue-Medill through Delaware’s School Choice program. At the end of sixth grade, students elect to take French or Spanish in seventh and eighth grade.

Lesson Design

When designing her lessons, Ms. Alston refers to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, the Christina School District Curriculum, and her textbook, then adjusts the content to the needs and abilities of her students. She also includes in each lesson opportunities for reading, writing, listening, speaking, and cultural understanding. Ms. Alston likes to begin lessons with individual practice, then move to information gap and pairs activities that give students multiple opportunities to practice the language. As students grow more comfortable with new words and structures, they are able to use their language skills in original, less structured dialogues. These original dialogues become culminating activities that Ms. Alston can assess.

The Lesson

In this lesson, students reviewed language structures and vocabulary while making plans for activities to do in their spare time. Students also had the opportunity to talk with fellow students who are native Spanish speakers about how they spent their free time in Mexico, and compare the typical activities of young Mexicans to those of young Americans. Although the lesson was mainly a review of familiar grammar structures, students also came away with new cultural knowledge. Ms. Alston regularly makes contact with native speakers in her community to try to arrange interactions with her students. On other occasions, she has taken students to a restaurant that has Spanish-speaking staff, visited a museum display of colonial Mexico, and brought in native speakers to talk about the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead.

This class included several students who had taken Spanish in elementary school. Although Ms. Alston taught the same curriculum to all students in her class, she took into account that some students had been exposed to the language longer than others and encouraged them to move ahead during certain activities.

Key Teaching Strategies

- **Providing Interactions With Native Speakers:** The teacher designs opportunities for students to use the target language with native speakers, either in person, over the phone, or via email.
- **Scaffolding:** The teacher plans a sequence of tasks that builds student competencies step by step toward a final performance.
- **Student Grouping:** The teacher designs activities that allow students to engage in multiple types of interactions, including working with partners, in small groups, and as a whole class.

Year at a Glance

Describe Weather
Describe Family and What a Family Does Together
Extend, Accept, and Decline Invitations
Make Plans With Someone
Talk About Getting Ready To Get Together With Someone
Restaurants

- Talk about restaurant meals
- Order food
- Ask for and pay a bill

Ask for and Give Directions Downtown
Comment on Clothes
Make Comparisons
Express Personal Preferences
Talk About What People Are Doing Right Now (*-ing* form of verbs)

Analyze the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- What is the role of a textbook in your teaching? How do you decide when to supplement or replace textbook activities or content?
- What opportunities do you give students to practice the target language with native speakers?
- How do you design exercises that begin with a focus on grammar and build toward interpersonal communication?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Hearing Authentic Voices,” take notes on Ms. Alston’s instructional strategies, particularly how she encourages students to extend their language and how she organizes the native speakers’ visit to the classroom. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflect on the Video

Review your notes, and then respond to the following questions:

- How does Ms. Alston encourage students to extend their answers beyond single words and short phrases?
- What do you observe about students’ energy level and degree of participation in the activities?
- How does Ms. Alston design group and pairs activities to assure success?
- How does Ms. Alston prepare the native speakers for the classroom visit? What is her role during their visit?

Look Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Alston’s class to focus on specific teaching strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.



Video Segment: Brainstorming

You’ll find this segment approximately 8 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 5 minutes.

In groups of four, students list what they like to do in their spare time, then share their lists with the class.

- What roles are assigned to students in the group activity? What is the purpose of assigning these roles?
- What is Ms. Alston’s role during the group work?
- What kinds of interactions occur among the students?
- How is the group work wrapped up?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Interacting With Native Speakers

You'll find this segment approximately 16 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

Students who are native Spanish speakers visit the class to talk about what they do with their spare time.

- How does Ms. Alston put the native speakers at ease?
- How does Ms. Alston facilitate understanding between the native speakers and the students in her class? How do the native speakers show that they understand the students?
- What cultural information do the students learn?
- What value does the interaction with native speakers have beyond this lesson?

Connect to Your Teaching

Reflect on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- How do you incorporate interpersonal communication into lessons whose theme and language content are derived from a textbook?
- How do you lead beginning students toward elaboration in the target language?
- How do you create a welcoming atmosphere for native speaker guests?
- How do you shift the focus from grammar to communication in beginning levels of instruction?
- How do you judge which errors to correct and which to let go?

Watch Other Videos

Watch other videos in the *Teaching Foreign Languages K-12* library for more examples of teaching methodologies like those you've just seen. Note: All videos in this series are subtitled in English.

"Fruits of the Americas" (Spanish) shows beginning students expressing personal preferences and interacting with the products of a culture, and "Family and Home" (French) shows beginning students moving toward interpersonal communication.

Connect to Your Teaching, cont'd.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- To encourage students to learn how to talk about their world, design lessons with interpersonal communication as the end goal. This will help motivate students to learn new information and will make that information more memorable. Plan your lessons so that students move deliberately and sequentially from working with language structures and vocabulary to talking about their own leisure activities, such as going to the mall, watching movies, or playing certain sports. The students can then focus their practice on personal information and continue to elaborate on it during oral and written tasks.
- When planning an interaction between students and native speakers, work with both groups to prepare them for the exchange. Students can write questions in advance or listen to authentic speech on audio- or videotape. For native speakers, outline the topics your students have been working on and alert them that you may need to mediate the discussion. For example, if the native speakers are fellow students—rather than adults who are used to working with learners—you may need to remind them to slow down their delivery or use simpler terms. However, as native speakers begin to make regular appearances in your classroom, your role as mediator can lessen. Students at all levels enjoy interacting with native speakers to test their language competency and to learn about other cultures; the key is preparing both groups for a positive experience.

Resources

Curriculum References

Delaware Foreign Languages Curriculum Framework
http://www.doe.state.de.us/Standards/Foreign_Language/toc.htm

Davita Alston's Recommendations

Web Resources:

Day of the Dead
<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/>
Information about the Mexican holiday, including its history, crafts, foods, and more

Hispanic Heritage Month
<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/socialstd/Hispanic.html>
Web links to sites with information about Hispanic cultures, organizations, research information, and more

Print Resources:

Garza, Carmen Lomas. *Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press, 2000.

Standards

National Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century defines what students should know and be able to do in foreign language education. This lesson correlates to the following standards:

Communication: Communicate in Languages Other Than English

Standard 1.1: Interpersonal Communication

Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Cultures: Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Practices of Culture

Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Comparisons: Develop Insight Into the Nature of Language and Culture

Standard 4.2: Cultural Comparisons

Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Communities: Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1: School and Community

Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.