

Interpreting Literature

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Barbara Pope Bennett
Language:	Spanish III (IB)
Grade:	11
School:	Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, Washington, D.C.
Lesson Date:	December 12
Class Size:	23
Schedule:	45–90 minutes; alternate week block schedule*

*The class meets for 45–55 minutes daily every other week. On the alternate week, the class meets three days for 55 minutes each and one day for 90 minutes.

Video Summary

In this lesson, students discuss *Dos caras* (Two faces), by New Mexico author Sabine Ulibarri. Having read the story in previous classes, the students begin by summarizing and interpreting the story and its moral message. To show they understood what they have read, students dramatize scenes from *Dos caras*, then work in groups to create alternate endings. The class also listens to a student's oral presentation about a local artist.

Standards Addressed

- Communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational
- Cultures: Products
- Connections: Making Connections, Acquiring Information
- Communities: School and Community

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- heritage speaker
- negotiation of meaning
- proficiency level

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

Class Profile

“One of the things I just love about teaching languages is that we can deal with math, science, geography, social studies, and that also captures the student who might say, ‘Why am I in this class after all?’ If they can relate it to what they’re thinking about majoring in in college or some of their own individual interests, it gives them ownership and the incentive to go on and learn.” —Barbara Pope Bennett

School Profile

Barbara Pope Bennett teaches Spanish I–IV at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, a magnet school in Washington, D.C., that offers a highly structured four-year program leading to college entrance. The majority of Banneker’s 400 students are from the Washington, D.C., area. All students must apply to the school, and admission is limited primarily to ninth-graders.

In addition to its four-year curriculum, the high school offers the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB) to qualified students in grades 11 and 12. IB is a comprehensive two-year international curriculum across six academic subjects, presented by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) in Switzerland. Student performance is assessed by classroom teachers and through examinations set by the IBO. Students in the Banneker IB program study French or Spanish as their second language (see Resources).

Lesson Design

Ms. Pope Bennett designs the lessons for her IB Spanish classes within the course structure prescribed by the IB program. The school year is divided into four marking periods, called advisories, during which students explore multiple readings from textbooks, magazines, literary texts, and Web sites. Each student must also participate in a debate on a topic of his or her choice and give five oral presentations (one for each advisory and one as part of the final examination). For each oral presentation, students develop written or visual materials and answer questions posed by Ms. Pope Bennett and other students.

Ms. Pope Bennett designs each lesson to focus on one text. She refers to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning and stages the lesson in a seven-step process in which culture, language, and literature are taught simultaneously. This process is outlined below.

1. teacher introduces the topic; students discuss how it relates to their own lives
2. teacher summarizes the story
3. teacher introduces new vocabulary
4. teacher introduces the author and shares why he/she wrote this story
5. students read the story
6. students summarize the story in their own words
7. students write their own endings to the story

Year at a Glance

First Advisory

- Country focus: Argentina
- Oral: Select, analyze, and present an article from the Web site *CNN en Español*

Second Advisory

- Country focus: Spain
- Oral: Analyze and present information about the life and work of one of the selected authors

Third Advisory

- **Country focus: Central America**
- **Oral: Create and present an original work related to culture**

Fourth Advisory

- Country focus: Caribbean, Equatorial Guinea
- Oral: In groups, prepare a video that dramatizes a story read during the year

Each advisory period includes readings from textbooks, articles from the Web site *CNN en Español* and the magazine *Hoy Día*, and excerpts from works by the following authors:

- **Sabine Ulibarri**
- Federico García Lorca
- Miguel de Unamuno
- Gabriel García-Márquez
- Jorge Luis Borges
- Ana María Matute
- Rigoberta Menchú
- Nicolás Guillén
- Isabel Allende
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz
- Carmen Martín Gaité
- Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

Class Profile, cont'd.

The Lesson

In this lesson, students analyzed *Dos caras* and then wrote new endings for the story. Revising the ending allowed students to personalize the story and show Ms. Pope Bennett that they understood it. In the next lesson, students further analyzed the characters and related *Dos caras* to other stories they had read. This served to prepare them for the IB evaluation, in which they are asked to compare how different authors treat similar topics. Ms. Pope Bennett assessed students on this unit through a written evaluation and a one-on-one oral evaluation in which they summarized and defended their interpretations of the story.

Key Teaching Strategies

- Integrating the Communicative Modes: The teacher plans a series of tasks that involve all three Communication standards. Students often begin with an interpretive task that provides new content and new language for interpersonal discussion. The new content and language are then combined in an oral or written presentation.
- Interpreting Literature: The teacher facilitates the interpretation of literary pieces by having students preview, read, and discuss a literary work in the target language. This includes having students acquire cultural background knowledge, analyze the text, and respond personally to themes and issues raised by the author.
- 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.

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:

- How does focusing on the interpretive communication standard change traditional reading or listening comprehension activities?
- What is the role of literature in the courses that you teach? In the curriculum in your school?
- What is the value of having students give oral presentations?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Interpreting Literature,” take notes on Ms. Pope Bennett’s instructional strategies, particularly how she leads students to interpret the story and how she integrates interpersonal and presentational communication into the activities. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Analyze the Video, cont'd.

Reflect on the Video

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

- How does Ms. Pope Bennett assess students' comprehension of the story *Dos caras*?
- How does she lead students in interpreting the story?
- Which activities provide the basis for interpersonal communication?
- Which activities provide the basis for presentational communication?
- What do you observe about the students' awareness of their learning styles?

Look Closer

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



Video Segment: Discussing the Story

You'll find this segment approximately 5 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes.

Ms. Pope Bennett and her students use visuals and text that describes *Dos caras* to stimulate a discussion about the story.

- How do the visuals promote student participation?
- How do the visuals promote language use?
- What is the role of the teacher in this activity?
- Analyze each student/teacher interaction in this segment. What linguistic or thinking (intellectual) task does Ms. Pope Bennett encourage after each initial student response?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Giving an Oral Report

You'll find this segment approximately 17 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes.

A student gives an oral report about a local artist and presents her own original painting inspired by the artist's style and the theme of *Dos caras*.

- How is the oral report, a requirement of the IB program, linked to the literary subject?
- Oral reports can build upon information gathered through interpretive and interpersonal communication. What evidence of this do you see in Tadina's report?
- Based on her formal presentation, what do you observe about Tadina's language skills/proficiency? About her knowledge of the topic?
- What additional information does Ms. Pope Bennett gain in the subsequent Q & A session?
- How does Tadina's use of the language change between the formal presentation and the interpersonal follow-up?
- What evidence do the students provide to show that they understand the presentation given by Tadina, a heritage speaker?



Video Segment: Brainstorming Alternate Story Endings

You'll find this segment approximately 21 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

Student groups create their own endings to *Dos caras*, then share them with the class.

- What purpose is served by this group activity?
- What does the creation of alternate endings show about how students interpreted the text?
- What do you observe about the student interactions? When does negotiation of meaning take place?
- How does the first group present the new ending? How does the second group do it?
- What kind of feedback does Ms. Pope Bennett provide?

Connect to Your Teaching

Reflect on Your Practice

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

- What criteria do you use in selecting literary texts for your students?
- How do you check that students comprehend the text? How do you check that they are moving beyond a basic understanding toward grasping the deeper meaning of the text? How do you differentiate between a student's lack of understanding and what could be a unique interpretation of the story?
- How do you use literary texts to further students' critical thinking skills?
- When assigning oral presentations, what guidelines do you give to students? How do you assess the presentations? How do you involve the other students during the presentations?

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.

"Exploring New Directions" (Chinese) shows students making oral presentations based on their interpretations of literary texts, and "Interpreting *La Belle et la Bête*" (French) features students interpreting a cultural product (a film) and discussing its moral message.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- When exploring literature as a cultural product, tailor the tasks to the proficiency level of your students. Begin by selecting a text that is age appropriate and interesting to students but also challenging. For younger or beginning students, contemporary poems, short stories, or children's books are appropriate. For high school students in intermediate/advanced levels, texts with "coming of age" themes or issues of right and wrong (as in *Dos caras*) are appropriate because students can relate to the content without needing extensive knowledge of history or culture. Regardless of the age group, begin by designing carefully sequenced activities that focus on the text's meaning and that use support materials—such as the visuals, dramatizations, retelling, and summarizing seen in Ms. Pope Bennett's class. Once students understand the content of the story, they can begin to interpret the text for the author's underlying message and note their own reaction to it.
- Use oral reports to assess students' skills in the three modes of communication. The following is one potential presentation sequence: First, a student gives an oral report, thus performing a presentational task. The students who are listening use interpretive communication skills to understand the report. After the presentation, students engage in interpersonal communication during a Q & A session. The session gives the presenter an opportunity to negotiate, clarify, and expand on information, while giving his or her classmates an opportunity to correct misunderstandings and to react. In terms of language outcomes, oral reports allow students to plan and deliver a set speech in which pronunciation, word choice, structure, and fluency can be practiced. Students should be made aware, however, of the different expectations for their language use in prepared speeches for different audiences. In addition to language use, oral reports demonstrate how well students conduct research, organize material, and deliver information to a group—all outcomes that are highlighted in the educational system at large.

Resources

Curriculum References

Benjamin Banneker Academic High School: IBO Program
http://www.benjaminbanneker.org/ib_program/ib_program.htm

International Baccalaureate Organization
<http://www.ibo.org>

Barbara Pope Bennett's Recommendations

Web Resources:

CNN en Español
<http://www.cnnenespanol.com>
The Spanish-language version of the popular news site

Hola.com
<http://www.hola.com>
Entertainment and news updates in Spanish

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.

Standard 1.2: Interpretive Communication

Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Presentational Communication

Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Cultures: Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.2: Products of Culture

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

Connections: Connect With Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

Standard 3.1: Making Connections

Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Acquiring Information

Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

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.