

Politics of Art

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Lori Langer de Ramirez
Language:	Spanish V
Grade:	12
School:	Herricks High School, New Hyde Park, New York
Lesson Date:	February 26
Class Size:	22
Schedule:	43 minutes daily

Video Summary

In this lesson, students read a letter written by prominent Colombian artists and intellectuals to Spain's prime minister. The letter is in protest of a new Spanish policy requiring Colombians to obtain a visa in order to enter Spain. Role-playing Latin American artists, students formally debate the pros and cons of accepting an invitation to exhibit their work in Spain. After a vote, they prepare to write a letter in response based on majority opinion.

Standards Addressed

- Communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational
- Cultures: Practices, Products
- Connections: Making Connections, Acquiring Information

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- authentic materials
- fossilization
- native speaker
- role-playing
- thematic units

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

Class Profile

"I think using authentic materials is essential. My students were very excited at the idea that this was a real letter sent by real people and viewed by people around the world. If you talk to any Colombian on the street and ask about the letter, every single Colombian knows. Actually, every Latino has heard of it and has a very strong opinion on it."—Lori Langer de Ramirez

School Profile

Lori Langer de Ramirez teaches 12th-grade Spanish at Herricks High School in New Hyde Park, New York. Located on Long Island about 20 miles from Manhattan, New Hyde Park's 25,000 residents are mostly professionals. The town is culturally diverse and includes a large Asian immigrant population. Approximately 53 percent of the school's 1,270 students speak languages other than English at home, and over 40 languages are spoken in the district. The curriculum emphasizes college preparation.

Lesson Design

The Herricks Spanish department takes a thematic approach to Spanish IV and V. The department selects two semester-long thematic units for each course. The teachers then choose the topics within these units based on their interests, their students' interests, and the availability of materials.

When designing her lessons, Ms. Langer de Ramirez refers to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. During the first semester, Ms. Langer de Ramirez's class studied a unit on the politics of Latin America. To prepare, Ms. Langer de Ramirez watched Spanish-language news broadcasts and read Spanish-language newspapers to keep up-to-date on current events and to be able to provide a historical context for her students' lessons. For the second-semester unit on film and art of the Spanish-speaking world, Ms. Langer de Ramirez drew on works that have inspired her.

The Lesson

This videotaped lesson was a bridge between the Politics of Latin America unit and the Film and Art of the Spanish-Speaking World unit. Ms. Langer de Ramirez wanted students to work on their oral and written communication skills while focusing on culture. "Students at this age are fascinated by issues of identity," she says. "This topic speaks to that question: Who are Latinos in the world in terms of being cultural beings, and what is this idea of the split identity?" The goals of this lesson were to have students understand the visa issue under debate and to produce appropriate language for a formal written response. Ms. Langer de Ramirez used a rubric to assess students on their performance during the debate and their contributions to the final class letter.

Key Teaching Strategies

- **Acquiring Knowledge of Current Events:** The teacher helps students research print and Web sources to gain a knowledge base for classroom discussion on recent events.
- **Content-Based Instruction:** The teacher promotes language acquisition and/or cultural knowledge through subject matter from a range of disciplines.
- **Cultural Role-Playing:** The teacher designs an activity in which students learn about a culture by studying and then portraying a member of that culture.
- **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.

Year at a Glance

Politics of Latin America

- South American governments: Argentina, Colombia
- Central American governments: El Salvador
- Immigration to the U.S.

Film and Art of the Spanish-Speaking World

- **Art and politics in Latin America**
- Film: *La Ciudad*; Immigration to New York
- Artist: Fernando Botero
- Spanish films

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 kinds of real events can inspire classroom debate?
- What are some steps to prepare students for a debate?
- How can students gain background knowledge on a particular subject in order to have a meaningful debate?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Politics of Art,” take notes on Ms. Langer de Ramirez’s instructional strategies, particularly how she organizes the activities around the debate and how she assesses student work. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

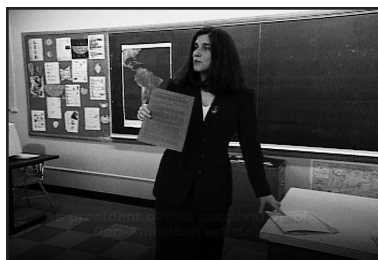
Reflect on the Video

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

- What prior knowledge do Ms. Langer de Ramirez’s students bring to this lesson?
- How does Ms. Langer de Ramirez structure the activities within this lesson?
- How does Ms. Langer de Ramirez use a real artifact—the protest letter from prominent artists and intellectuals—as a stimulus for the lesson? What other real events does she incorporate into the lesson?
- What are the benefits of having students research living Latin American artists? What are the benefits of having students communicate by email with the artists?
- What do you observe about the quality and quantity of student language during 1) interpersonal exchanges, 2) argument presentations, and 3) counterarguments in the debate?

Look Closer

Take a second look at Ms. Langer de Ramirez’s class to focus on specific teaching strategies and on the kind of language that students are producing. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.



Video Segment: Role-Playing a Real Artist

You’ll find this segment approximately 7 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 2 minutes.

Students share their opinions on the visa issue from the perspective of their chosen artist.

- How do students’ role-playing performances reflect the research they have done?
- As you listen to students, what subject pronouns do you notice them using? Does *I* predominate or do they move beyond “self”?
- Are students speaking primarily in short or incomplete sentences, or are they linking sentences and ideas?
- Do students respond with personal opinions or with facts?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.

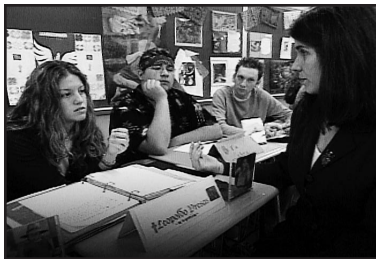


Video Segment: Presenting an Argument

You'll find this segment approximately 12 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

Students begin the debate by presenting their arguments for or against traveling to Spain.

- What are the rules of the debate outlined by Ms. Langer de Ramirez?
- What subject pronouns dominate student talk? Does the discourse consist of a series of unrelated sentences, or are sentences connected meaningfully?
- Do students respond with personal opinions or with facts?
- Compare and contrast the performance level of students in the role-playing segment with that of students in the debate segment.
- As students debate, what are their team members doing? What are the members of the opposing team doing?



Video Segment: Writing a Formal Response

You'll find this segment approximately 24 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 2 minutes.

Ms. Langer de Ramirez helps students write letters of response to the Spanish prime minister.

- What kinds of assistance (for example, with structure, vocabulary, content, or style) does Ms. Langer de Ramirez give each group as they draft their letter?
- What kind of "recycling" occurs with the last group of students?

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 keep abreast of current cultural issues and present new perspectives in your teaching?
- How do you use current events and issues in your classes? Does your use of current events vary according to the level of your students?
- How do you plan for students to assume more control over the amount of language they use?
- How do you help your students develop critical-thinking skills?
- How do you promote an understanding of other cultural perspectives?
- In what ways could you incorporate the arts into your classroom content and connect it to larger global issues?

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.

“Performing With Confidence” (French) explores student presentations based on research of political topics, and “Exploring New Directions” (Chinese) illustrates student interpretation and presentation of dissident poetry.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- Plan for activities that encourage use of both formal and informal discussions within the communicative modes. With advanced students, plan activities that vary in genre, style, and quality and quantity of language and that promote student expression independent of teacher prompting. For example, during the debate on visas, students in Ms. Langer de Ramirez’s class performed at different levels of oral discourse within the interpersonal and presentational modes. In the warm-up discussion, Ms. Langer de Ramirez questioned, clarified, and expanded on student responses, many of which were short and elliptical. Then, as students exchanged information and opinions regarding the visa issue, their sentences became longer and more spontaneous. In the debates, they spoke more formally and expressed their thoughts in strong connected discourse. They had less time to prepare their counterarguments, but their presentations still retained a degree of formality. You can capitalize on any burning issue in the target culture and use this format with it: Introduce the topic with a prompt (for example, a letter, article, or news broadcast), establish opposing viewpoints via informal student interactions, and then have a formal debate.
- Help your students develop a critical understanding of other cultural perspectives by linking historical and current events. For example, Ms. Langer de Ramirez’s students had previously studied colonialism in Latin America and applied what they learned to a present-day issue: the visa requirement. Students used terms such as *mother country* and *common heritage* during the debate in ways that reflected the positive or negative feelings that today’s artists might have about the visa issue.
- Provide opportunities for students to test their communication skills with a real audience. For example, Ms. Langer de Ramirez organized her lesson so that students could address questions to artists currently living in Latin America. This exchange gave students useful information for the debate as well as practice communicating by email. The exchange also allowed them to use their language skills and cultural knowledge in the community beyond the classroom. To ensure that students did not become a nuisance or violate cultural norms, Ms. Langer de Ramirez collected and reviewed the emails created by the students and managed the sending and receiving of all electronic correspondence. Situations such as this international political protest provide unique opportunities for students to communicate with native speakers. But you can also find correspondents in your own community who will participate in short exchanges. Look for retired teachers, native speakers residing nearby who would be willing to correspond via email on specific topics, teachers you have met at conferences, and the like.

Resources

Lesson Materials

Rules for Debate*

Debate procedure followed by students (includes English translation)

Debate Worksheet: Student Work*

Worksheet completed by a student, which lists classmates' arguments and counterarguments during the debate

Class Project Web Site

<http://herricks.org/hhs/2ndlanguage/protesta/protestintro.htm>

Site about the class project, including the original protest letter, information about selected artists, and students' final letter on behalf of the group they formed called the Panamerican Artists' Cooperative (available in English and Spanish)

* These lesson materials can be found in the Appendix.

Curriculum References

New York State Education Department: Standards and Information About Learning Languages Other Than English

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/lote.html>

Lori Langer de Ramirez's Recommendations

Web Resources:

Background on Colombian Protest Letter

http://www.rebellion.org/cultura/colom_novolveran220301.htm

Article detailing the events that led Colombian artists and intellectuals to write a letter in protest of Spain's visa requirements (available in Spanish only)

Print Resources:

Krashen, Stephen D., and Tracy D. Terrell. *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Hayward, CA: Alemany Press, 1983.

Omaggio, Alice C. *Language Teaching in Context*. 2d ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1993.

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 2.1: Practices of Culture

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

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.

Notes
