

Routes to Culture

Classroom at a Glance

Teacher:	Pablo Muirhead
Language:	Spanish II
Grades:	9–10
School:	Shorewood High School, Shorewood, Wisconsin
Lesson Date:	November 14
Class Size:	19
Schedule:	49 minutes daily

Video Summary

In this lesson, students explore some historical and cultural aspects of the African presence in Latin America. After a warm-up activity of charades, students participate in pairs discussions of stories about an African woman enslaved in Latin America. Next, the whole class creates a web (concept map) for the cultural elements of the stories. Students then work in groups to add these cultural elements to the original stories they created for homework. Finally, student groups narrate their stories while their classmates act them out. The lesson concludes with Mr. Muirhead and the students playing *los cajones* (the big boxes). This video also shows a field trip to the local Latino community.

Standards Addressed

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

Read about these standards at the end of this lesson.

Key Terms

- negotiation of meaning
- thematic units

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

Class Profile

“It’s one thing to be fluent in another language, but I don’t think anyone can achieve full fluency unless they have a good grasp of the culture and feel comfortable in that culture.” —Pablo Muirhead

School Profile

Pablo Muirhead teaches Spanish II, IV, and V at Shorewood High School in Shorewood, Wisconsin, a suburb just outside of Milwaukee. The majority of Shorewood’s 16,000 residents are professionals. Shorewood’s 750-student high school has two strong integration programs that draw students from Milwaukee and includes a 20 percent minority population. Starting in elementary school, most students participate in the college preparatory foreign language program, which offers Spanish, French, and German classes.

Lesson Design

When designing his lessons, Mr. Muirhead refers to the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards (see Resources) and plans each thematic unit with the end result in mind. For each unit, he determines what he wants students to be able to do, then designs lessons to meet that goal. To keep students motivated and help lower their anxiety levels, he includes four to five activities per lesson in which students progress from working in pairs to working in small groups to full-class participation.

Having grown up in both the Milwaukee area and Peru, Mr. Muirhead has personal connections to Shorewood and the nearby Latino community. He takes advantage of his familiarity with the area to help students experience Spanish language and culture firsthand. His classes regularly visit the local Latino community and interact with its Spanish-speaking residents. Some of the activities students have done when visiting this community include eating at local restaurants, learning salsa dancing, and even playing dominos at a senior home with senior citizens originally from Puerto Rico and Cuba.

The Lesson

In this lesson, students discussed the African presence in Latin America through the perspective of Onama, an African woman enslaved in Peru. Onama is the main character in a three-part original narrative written by Mr. Muirhead and modeled after Alex Haley’s *Roots*. In previous lessons, Mr. Muirhead taught the first two parts of the narrative through Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS). In addition to the cultural references that he embedded in these stories, Mr. Muirhead introduced students to the African influence through readings, discussions, and short lectures that used many cognates and a lot of visual support. Following this lesson, Mr. Muirhead shared the third story of Onama, which takes place several generations later and focuses on her descendants. This unit concluded with multiple assessments, including letters written by students to a character from one of the stories.

This Spanish II class was comprised of ninth-graders who had begun studying Spanish in the fifth grade, and tenth-graders who had begun studying it in the ninth grade. Although Mr. Muirhead taught the same curriculum to both groups in his class, he took into account that some students had been exposed to the language longer than others.

Year at a Glance

Identity

- Who are you? Where are you from?

African Presence in Latin America

- **History; Contributions of people of African descent**

Trips

- Aspects of traveling and different types of trips
- Tourism vs. living abroad (What kind of traveler do you want to be?)

Daily Life

- Routines; Free time; Curfews

School

- Grading systems in different countries
- Students’ preferences and strengths
- What is a good teacher? What is a good student?

Health

- Physical and mental health
- Are you a healthy person? What should you do? (commands)

Cuba

- History: Pre-Castro, during Castro, and recent events
- Literacy campaign; Government; Freedoms
- Miami Cubans

Coming of Age

- *Quinceañera* (a girl’s coming of age at 15)

Class Profile, cont'd.

Key Teaching Strategies

- **Creating Cultural Experiences:** The teacher designs activities in which students can see, hear, or touch a cultural artifact, create their own cultural artifact, and/or observe or engage in cultural practices in or beyond the classroom. These direct or simulated experiences lead students to discover the perspectives of the culture being studied.
- **Discovering Cultural Understanding From Texts:** The teacher has students derive knowledge of cultural products, practices, and perspectives from written or oral documents.
- **Reading to Write:** The teacher has students interpret a text that can then be used as a model for their written work.
- **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:

- What kinds of warm-up routines do you use to motivate students and get them thinking in the target language?
- What strategies can encourage students to communicate beyond the sentence level?
- What strategies can help integrate learning about cultural products and practices with the language task of the lesson?
- How can reading work as a model for creating written texts?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Routes to Culture,” take notes on Mr. Muirhead’s instructional strategies, particularly how he groups students and how he encourages them to make cultural observations. 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:

- Which activities help students move beyond sentence-level responses?
- What cultural observations are students confident in making about the African presence in Latin America? What perspectives are they beginning to understand?
- What evidence do you see of students moving toward independent practice with language?
- How does the excursion into the local Latino community seem to impact student learning?

Look Closer

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



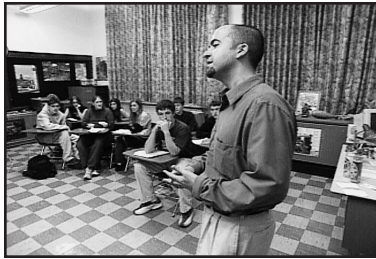
Video Segment: Semicircles

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

Students rotate through a series of pairs discussions; they speak first about their personal lives and then about the Onama stories.

- What are the benefits of a semicircle rotation activity?
- What instructional goals underlie Mr. Muirhead's choice of questions?
- Observe the student groups closely. How would you describe their interactions?
- As students begin to discuss the Onama stories, how do their interactions change?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Video Segment: Dramatizations

You'll find this segment approximately 18 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 4 minutes.

Student groups narrate stories that they created based on cultural aspects of the Onama stories while their classmates act them out.

- What role do students' drawings play as each group prepares the story?
- What guidelines does Mr. Muirhead give for the assignment?
- How is the dramatization activity designed to produce the greatest student involvement?
- How successfully do students in the first group convey the meaning of their story? How do they work together? How do you know they understand the story?
- An actor in the second group doesn't understand the word *orar* (to pray). How does she show that she does not understand? How does the narrator negotiate that meaning? How does the actor then confirm her understanding?

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 can students be challenged to move beyond identifying cultural products and practices toward understanding perspectives?
- What activities have helped your students expand and elaborate their communications?
- Mr. Muirhead worked closely with a music teacher to build the big boxes. How have you collaborated with teachers of other subjects to enrich student experiences?
- What opportunities are there for your students to use the target language outside the classroom and learn about cultures in the nearby community? For travel/study abroad?

Connect to Your Teaching, cont'd.

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.

"Russian Cities, Russian Stories" (Russian) illustrates students interpreting texts (teacher-written to simulate authentic stories) and then writing their own versions, and "Happy New Year!" (Japanese) shows students working with cultural products and practices and moving toward understanding perspectives.

Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- Infuse language-building activities with relevant aspects of the target culture. When language study is grounded in a cultural context, it becomes more meaningful to students and they are better able to internalize it. Mr. Muirhead's students first learned about the African presence in Latin America by reading stories about the fictional character Onama. They used both the historical and cultural elements of the stories to guide their own writing, which focused on the linguistic concepts of past time and third-person perspective.
- Look for opportunities to let students experience a slice of the target culture in their region of the United States. Heritage communities have their own characteristics and activities to explore. If there isn't a heritage community in your area, there may be food festivals, traveling exhibits, musical groups, or other events that you can visit with your students. Mr. Muirhead was fortunate to have a Latino community nearby, and planned several activities for the student excursion. By going into the community, students engaged with the products (foods, musical instruments, signs) and practices (salsa dancing) of this culture and experienced their importance to the neighborhood residents. Although Mr. Muirhead had to prepare extensively for this field trip, the feedback from both students and parents confirmed the value of the experience. (In addition to local trips, Mr. Muirhead has traveled outside of the United States with his students, to Cuba. During this trip, students completed self-designed projects that required contact with local people and used local resources. For example, one student group interviewed people for their study of the role of women in Cuba.)

Resources

Lesson Materials

Mini-Stories*

The Onama stories and new vocabulary, including descriptions of Mr. Muirhead's TPRS gestures (includes English translation)

Mini-Story Worksheet*

A worksheet that students did for homework based on the first Onama story; note: the vocabulary section was filled in during Mr. Muirhead's TPRS presentation in class

* These lesson materials can be found in the Appendix.

Curriculum References

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards

<http://www.lodi.k12.wi.us/standards/standards.htm#fl>

Pablo Muirhead's Recommendations

Web Resources:

The African Diaspora

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/african/>

Information about the African Diaspora to Latin America

Batanga: Latin Music Internet Radio

<http://www.batanga.com>

Information about popular Latin musicians and a selection of Latin music genres that can be streamed online (available in English and Spanish)

Cajón Drum

<http://www.tonecajon.com/>

A brief history of the *cajón* and information on how to purchase one

National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center

<http://www.educ.iastate.edu/nflrc/>

An organization that works to improve student learning of foreign languages

TPRS Publishing

<http://www.tprstorytelling.com>

An introduction to TPRS that includes free sample lessons

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.

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.