

## **Let the Plays Begin: Three Plays for Young Spanish-Speaking Students**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The target population of this endeavor are middle school and high school students, ranging in age from 11 to 18, whose primary language is Spanish. The working language for the unit shall be Spanish, with occasional-to-frequent use of English.

The most recent projections place the number of Hispanic students in Houston public schools by the year 2005 at 120,000, followed by African-Americans at some 70,000, while “Whites” will number about 20,000 and Asian-Americans at around 4,000.

As may be expected, the children who arrive from outside U.S. borders and enter American schools with little or no knowledge of English hear and perceive only gibberish the first time they walk into a classroom. Accordingly, most U.S. school districts provide them from the outset instruction in core subjects in special ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. Upon being certified as adequately proficient in English, they are transferred (“mainstreamed”) into regular classes where all instruction is in English.

Within the Houston Independent School District, Spanish-speaking children are fortunate in that they have the opportunity to receive, along with ESL and regular courses, instruction in classes conducted entirely in their own native Spanish. Within these Spanish-for-Native-Speakers classes, they may learn the grammar and culture of the Spanish-speaking world, the aspects ranging from spelling and punctuation conventions to history, politics, art, geography, entertainment, music and unique tradition, all conducted in their native tongue. The District has gone far in trying to accommodate the needs of students whose native tongue is Spanish. The current textbook series, chosen by the teachers themselves, used in HISD for Native Speakers of Spanish, is *Tu Mundo*, which contains a comprehensive program for teaching grammar and culture. Within the literature component, students are introduced to writings from throughout the spectrum: Spain, such as selections from *Platero y yo*; Argentina (poems by Alfonsina Storni); Chile (poems by Pablo Neruda); excerpts from short stories by the Cuban-American Roberto G. Fernandez; legends, folk tales and on and on, including journalistic reportage. And in keeping with the technological tastes of the era, an array of other resources are available: computer materials, tapes and videos.

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

After having taught Spanish to Native Speakers at the middle-school level for over four years, I am pleased to report, with surety: All Spanish-speaking children love literature.

Read a story aloud to them, they become quiet and mesmerized; try to teach them grammar, and they sneakily read some story in the text I'm teaching from which is irrelevant to the task at hand; assign a story to them and they shout that they've already read it. So—why do English teachers suffer with students who can't read, who refuse to read, who fail reading tests, who proudly proclaim that they don't like reading, who drop out of school?

I submit that the answer lies in the language of the text preferred by the student. Give her or him a reading assignment, say, in Science or English or Reading, and we teachers lose that child. But give the same children a story presented in Spanish, and they lose themselves, engrossed in reading. Something visceral not present in the ordinary curriculum captivates their attention, and that something is the language they have heard since their infancy. They are being addressed in voices familiar to them, voices that intone familiar sounds, smells, joys, pains and other experiences they themselves have lived. And even if the same child were proficient in English, the same tale told in English can not provoke the kind of empathy and emotion generated when he or she is enveloped in the sounds and tones and undertones of those sounds which only happen in one's Spanish.

It was out of these observations that I decided to design a lesson unit in Spanish language literature for native speakers within HISD. For personal and other reasons, I will direct their focus onto the specific genre of drama. The unit will be taught over a period of two cycles, assuming a block schedule of nine weeks per cycle. Herewith the overall plan:

In the first nine-week cycle, a literature component consisting of readings in Spanish-language dramas will be integrated into the regular curriculum, i.e., alongside the regular activities of grammar, writing and speaking. The goal of these reading activities is simply to acquaint my students with a variety of dramatic works by recognized writers who come from all parts of the Spanish-speaking world, from Spain to California, U.S.A. My intent is that students will, firstly, learn what has been written and is appreciated world-wide—to learn “what's out there”—and secondly, that they will obtain a feel for drama. This *feel* for the ingredients of a stage presentation—appearance of the stage, lighting, everything down to the coughing among the spectators—constitutes a new, no—a wonderful—phenomenon for recent learners of U.S. culture.

My objective is to present three plays to the school community. Accordingly, in the next nine weeks the literature component will consist of preparing the students for the stage production of three works, two completely in Spanish and one in both Spanish and English. Three selected classes will participate in this activity, each class to prepare a distinct play.

## **RATIONALE**

For many Americans, it is already common knowledge that Spanish-language drama is exceedingly rich. The authors are numerous, the styles shift within and across historical periods, and the modes range from the naïve to the phantasmagorical. The problem lies in the fact that only “many” Americans know this, while very few Latino students in U. S. schools do. While the primary goal of teaching literature in any American curriculum is rightfully to teach English-language literature, no educator would want to lead students to believe that there is no other, comparable body of literature worthy of recognition. And while many curricula include courses in World Literature, a great deal of learning is missed by students who have yet to know enough English to appreciate the works being presented.

Young Latino learners, the target population of my teaching, have demonstrated that they relate best to works written in their own idiom. This idiom encompasses more than language; rather, it addresses the problems, aspirations, experiences and all those issues unique to their own lives as members of American society. These issues bond Latinos along the commonly-shared properties of language, skin hues, cultural tastes and even philosophical preferences. The literary expression of these themes in their own language, in Spanish, lend legitimacy to their experiences of entering and growing up in a culture where their language, their looks, their tastes and indeed their very presence in this country are questioned, often in askance.

And why drama? We are told that sometime at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mark Twain attended a play performed by children and was so excited that he opined (very profoundly, in my judgement) that children’s theatre was “the greatest invention of the century.” Acting before an audience, receiving applause, provoking an intended reaction among the spectators, being seen outside the performance event and admired and spoken of—children love it. Reading a work, even among others, remains a private event. Performing a story becomes a social happening, much like a party, where people watch what can do.

## **SOME ISSUES IN LATINO WRITINGS**

A prevalent theme encountered in most Latino writings is that of language, specifically, Spanish. Latino children speaking happily away, only to evoke hostility among their peers and elders, frequently revert to denial of Spanish, while others reject English and often social norms as well. But even when they do replace English for Spanish, they soon learn that this isn’t enough, that there remains a divide as a consequence of other baggage.

Speaking English but nevertheless looking different, at times acting in ways different from the ambient culture’s perception of the universe (foods, music) leads to a

consciousness that one can't quite fit in, that one is a citizen of both worlds and of neither. Double-consciousness appears as another major theme in this literature.

Racial bias comprises a recurring theme in the writings by and about Americans of color, and assumes unique forms in the literature by and about Latinos. Thus, Chicanos describe bigotry in the form of economic exploitation of Mexican laborers. In early Chicano literature, particularly in drama, his laborer appears in the *bracero*, the migrant worker; today and since the 1980s, he or she has become the "illegal alien," the "undocumented worker" who has "invaded our borders" and is "taking away jobs from American citizens."

Gender bias was never a major issue until Latina writers did something about it. Much of the blame lies on Hispanic culture itself, which long nurtured the tradition of expecting women to be paragons of virtue, to be good mothers and housewives, and to be ready to satisfy the lust of the male. Since the 1970s, a growing number of Latinas have exposed the sham of *machista* attitudes, especially through satire.

## **WORKS TO BE DRAMATIZED: THE PRIMARY SOURCES**

From the many works which would appeal to young Latino students, I have selected three: a play and two prose works, to be adapted into plays. These primary sources are *Beautiful Senioritas: A Play with Music*, by the Cuban-American Dolores Prida; "Cajas de carton," a short story originally written in English as "The Circuit," by the Chicano Francisco Jimenez, and selected stories from the novel by the Chicana Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, translated into Spanish by Elena Poniatowska.

### ***Beautiful Senioritas*: Summary**

This is basically a musical but is presented in a non-conventional Expressionistic, fragmentary manner which nonetheless has a linear structure. Only seven actors make up the entire cast, each of whom metamorphoses several times into different characters. The piece opens at the beginning, yes: birth. An Expectant Father paces, smoking a Big Cigar (very "Hispanic"), and is very quickly raging because his Woman ("wife") has failed in delivering him a Son! The Woman, now the Midwife, announces the theme of the work: Another woman, another object, another human being to suffer the expectations of a male-dominated world, has been born. As this Girl grows, she observes and at times becomes part of the lives of the four Beautiful Senioritas, who first appear as entrants in a beauty pageant (also a very "Hispanic" institution, to the point of fetishism, and which provides the name of the work), and who emerge in the closing moments of the play as individuals, Woman 1, Woman 2, Woman 3 and Woman 4, no longer a collective and diminutive group of "Little Ladies," literally "*senoritas*."

Prida's play outrightly presents not only "many," but almost all of the themes which characterize Latino writing: *machismo*, *sexismo*, female subservience, language, "La causa," i.e., the uprising of the 1960s among Hispano youths, double-consciousness, racial biases—in short, she thrusts a satirical mirror to Latinos to reflect their foibles and fetishes which many have yet to understand. One of the most subtle of these messages occurs in the scene where one of the *Senoritas* talks about her grand dreams, which include appearing on the cover of *People Magazine*, earning great wealth, perhaps as much as "five hundred" or even "a thousand" dollars someday. Young Latinos will instantly relate to their own elders' limited expectations imposed on themselves and their children. More obvious is the good Man's answers to the survey questions of a female Researcher, "No, his wife doesn't work, she stays home all day, getting up at four in the morning to gather water and wood, walking back home to prepare his breakfast, doing the laundry, taking care of their children, preparing his lunch to take to him in the fields some three kilometers away, getting his supper ready for as soon as he returns home, and doing other home chores before she goes to bed at around ten at night; no, he already told her, she doesn't work, she just stays home." As the Researcher turns to leave, he invites her to a little soiree after his wife goes to bed...No comment; the message speaks for itself.

Will Latinos like this kind of self-representation? Excellent question, and consider this one: The Son who vows to kill the boy who has impregnated his Sister, and by the way, Mom, can my girl friend move in with us, since I don't have a job yet and she's going to have my baby. I can expect a little defensiveness here.

### ***Cajas de Carton: Summary***

I first read Francisco Jimenez's short story, "The Circuit," with my seventh-graders in an English reader. Sometime around 1998, I was pleasantly surprised to meet it again, this time in translation in an anthology of Spanish-language literature, *Sendas Literarias*. In either language, this story about the early experiences of a twelve-somewhat-year-old migrant boy generally provokes empathy among young Latinos, who also know about anticipation and disappointment.

The story opens with a scene which will return at the end: A twelve-year-old Francisco returns from working in the California fields with his father and younger brother to see all the family's belongings packed in cardboard boxes, signaling the end of this harvest and the need to move out again to wherever they might find more temporary employment. He is heartbroken to leave this place he had come to consider "home." The family sets out in their used but trustworthy '38 Plymouth in search of a farmer who just might need crop pickers. After a few bad starts, they eventually do find work picking grapes. Their new home will be a dilapidated garage which they spruce up as nicely as they can, such as sticking newspapers into wall cracks.

Work in the vineyards is hot, grueling and monotonous. Towards the end of the season, it is time for Francisco to return to school, to enter the sixth grade. His little brother, Roberto, won't be eligible to enter school until the end of the next crop-picking season, in February, and so must continue toiling alongside his father in the hot fields.

Once enrolled, Francisco soon meets his English teacher, Mr. Lema, who makes allowances for the boy's fear and uncertainty in the all-"white" class. When the boy goes to him for help in learning English, the teacher gladly obliges and becomes his tutor and friend, giving him extra help during the lunch period. After a month has gone by, Mr. Lema shows him the music room and demonstrates the sounds of a trumpet, a staple instrument in Mexican *mariachi* music. When the teacher notices the boy's keen interest in Mexican music, especially the *corridos* (Mexican narrative ballads), he offers to teach him how to play the instrument. Life couldn't get better, and Francisco looks forward eagerly to the next school day. When he gets off the school bus that evening and walks home, he is greeted enthusiastically by his brothers and sisters, but not because of his bright prospects. It is because they're ready to move out again, and as he opens the door to the garage, he sees everything packed in cardboard boxes.

Thwarted dreams of a people in search of a better life in a country not their own are a familiar theme throughout literature of all cultures. It was first in song, in the *corrido*, that Mexican braceros poeticized their struggles toward such a life in this country in the first half of the twentieth century. Sometime during the 60's, the theme assumed yet another form of poetic expression, in drama. Not surprisingly, the tone of these dramas is that of anger. In the *Actos* of Luis Valdez, one of the better-known proponents of the genre, the heroes are, for example, "Chicano # 1," "Chicano #2," and so on, while the recognizable villain is the "*gabacho*," which is the Chicano derogatory term for "white person," analogous to the N-word. (N. B.: Valdez spells it "*gavacho*.") These defiant dramas and mini-dramas became the collective and new genre of *Teatro campesino*, literally, "Farmworker's Theatre." This was American agitprop theatre, the theatre of political agitation propaganda, a form already well known in European drama.

While Jimenez's story does not express the migrant's experience in militant tones, it nevertheless contains the same, recognizable features: The constant uprooting of the family, the dependency on the needs of the farm owner, the physical suffering to earn a minimal degree of comfort, the difficulties with the English language, and, in a manner at the same time glaring and subtle, the theme of limited expectations, propagated by that very Hispanic tradition of family coherence: The child's schooling is not as important as immediate work opportunity, and children are there to work with and for the family. Even in contemporary times, this notion remains a creed among most Latinos, including the youth. School is boring and irrelevant, "work"—i.e., physical toil, for whatever wages, is real. So when a Latino child envisions a brighter alternative, the Latino tradition is quick to turn it off, in the name of family and necessity. Latino students are only too well familiar with this school of thought.

### ***La Casa en Mango Street: Summary***

When the Cordero family has grown to six members: Mom, Dad, Carlos, Kiki, her little sister Nenny and herself, Esperanza—the young protagonist and narrator of the 44 vignettes constituting the novel, they move from a rented apartment into a real house. In those rentals, they had always had problems with one thing or another: neighbors who annoyed or claimed that *they* were annoyed; fixtures which never worked, landlords who never cared. The house into which they move does indeed contain the features they had wanted: Two stories, a porch, trees, a yard, even a garage. The house is a scrawny, unkempt building with walls of brick whose paint is falling off; tiny, narrow windows on both floors; a tiny ugly porch, and yes, trees: Four depressing little elms planted by the Chicago authorities alongside the curb. (The garage is there for the car they don't have yet.) From the day when a nun passing by made her feel ashamed for admitting that Yes, she indeed lived “there—there?!?”—Esperanza nurtures a desire to move into a home, a real home, a home which she can be proud of. Her parents always speak optimistically of a brighter future. Someday they'll win the lottery, things will get better, Just you wait, they tell her. But even as a very young girl, Esperanza already knows “how those things go.” No other words could better summarize the unending treadmill of the Chicano's mindless existence in a world limited to expectations of daily work and little else.

Thus does the opening sketch of this novel set the tone for the 43 which follow, describing from a young girl's perspective urban Chicano life in East End Chicago. Early on, she learns that males have more privileges than females. So, in “Little Boys and Little Girls,” the facts are that her brothers can make friends with anyone outside the home that they choose and when they choose, while she may be friends only with her baby sister.—In another vignette, she awakens one day to find that something has appeared overnight, there they were: her hips. Their purpose makes Hispanic sense: Her friends tell her that they're good for balancing the baby she'll have while she goes about doing her wifely chores; also, they're good for dancing. But the elders, especially Hispanic fathers of girls, see physical attractiveness in a daughter as something dangerous, prone to sinfulness, here: A threat to their own manhood. She learns this in the case of her friend Sally, beautiful Sally, who is not allowed to leave the house unescorted. When her father catches her one day talking small talk with—a BOY—he beats her. And continues to beat her regularly. When she comes to school every day with cuts and bruises, she explains that she keeps falling. Sally marries before she finishes middle school. “Out of pure love,” she says; “To escape,” Esperanza—knows.

The theme of male hysteria to dominate women resonates in ways particularly familiar to Latinos, especially to those trapped in poverty such as the people living in the kind of neighborhood where Esperanza Cordero lives. Houston has such neighborhoods, which for sensitive reasons shall go unnamed here, but the reader may fill in the blanks. What Latino wants to be told that his treatment of his wife and daughters leaves something to be desired?

Alongside self-inflicted wounds, Latinos must contend with pressures brought to bear by the “Anglo” world which looks with askance on “these people.” Whites chancing upon Esperanza’s neighborhood panic, fearful of so many brown faces and certain that they will be robbed at any moment. “Whites” also make her think about whether Spanish is such a neat language after all, because her name firstly connotes depression, deprivation, missing something: “Esperanza” means “Hope,” which means that she always lacks something; on the other hand, “Esperanza”—soft and comforting and reassuring when spoken by her family—sounds harsh, tiny and ugly when English speakers say it. The issue of language ambivalence interconnects with that of double-consciousness.

The young Esperanza vows that she will never live in the future in some walled-in apartment or ugly house or, most importantly, in any man’s house, not even in a daddy’s house. She will have her very own furniture, her lawn, her own clothes and be answerable to no one. But she promises that she will return to visit the house on Mango Street, the place she “belongs but doesn’t belong to.” She will come back for the sake of those who stayed behind—sadly and factually—and who could not and cannot get out.

## **PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE CLASS DRAMA ACTIVITY**

Live stage productions of these three works shall be the end product of two nine-week cycles of having studied Spanish-language drama, with increasing focus on American drama written for young audiences. Assuming, then, a block-scheduling system such as that employed in many HISD schools, the first nine weeks have been devoted to familiarizing the students with the nature of drama as represented by standard works and selections of works in the Spanish-language repertory, including those from Spain and the Americas. (Where a school follows a different rhythm, the teacher may make suitable adjustments.)

So, today is the first day of Cycle (2, 3 or 4). To the students in three classes of Spanish-for-Native Speakers, the teacher will hand out a syllabus and describe the overall plan for the rest of the cycle, reminding them that they will have an active hand in designing and executing all phases of the activities.

Herewith the Overall Lesson Plan for each day and week of the cycle :

### **Week 1, Day 1**

Materials: Handouts of *Beautiful Senioritas* for students of Period (X).

Handouts of the short story “Cajas de carton” for students in Period (Y).

Copies of the novel *La casa en Mango Street* for students in Period (Z).

## Pre-reading activities

On this day, the teacher will lead each class in a discussion of the themes addressed in the work being studied. This part of the overall lesson is crucial, for the students will want to understand the issues the work treats in order that they will later be in a position to convey that message dramatically and convincingly. Accordingly, everybody will brainstorm. The teacher can pose the following leading questions to get things started:

(Addressing the issue of *language*): “What do people say when you speak Spanish around them and they don’t understand? Do you speak Spanish a lot? What’s easier for you, Spanish or English? Which do you like better? What name for yourself do you like better, the Spanish one or the English one?”

(Addressing the issue of *racial bias*): “Has anyone ever discriminated against you? How? What happened? Does discrimination bother you? How much? What do you do about it?”

(*Gender issues*): “What do they show a lot on ‘Spanish’ TV? Do they show a lot of girls? Can girls do anything that boys do? Like what? Would you mind working for a woman? For a man? Which is better? What can a girl do if a boy is jealous of everything she does, like talking with some other boy? Do men you know treat their wives nice? What are men like in your family, your neighborhood, on TV, etc.?”

(*Migrant/immigrant issues*): “Did you have trouble coming into this country? [Careful with this one; this is a perfect example of communication which is possible only if both parties are Latino and the medium is Spanish.] What’s a ‘bracero’? Where do we get our grapes, strawberries, and other things we eat? Who does all the work on the streets and highways and high-rises? WHY? What do they get paid? Why do they do it? What do “Anglos” think about the people doing those jobs?”

Throughout this unit, I have highlighted only a few of the myriad issues treated in Latino writings, knowing as an experienced teacher full well that my approach will only stimulate my students to spot other issues not observed by extant criticism. Of course, these observations will be translated into dramatic form and expression.

Forty-five to sixty minutes will have transpired. The students now read the works assigned, in whatever format the teacher prefers (silent, group or other).

## Post-reading activity

Obviously, this is the time for discussion, but with a major component added: The students will be assigned the task of writing down the purpose, intent and problems which each work addresses. Part of this exercise consists in preparing them to imagine

themselves in the roles to be interpreted.—Should time not allow for class discussion, the teacher may assign as homework the second part of the task, that of writing down their perceptions and reactions to the themes addressed in the works read. Character development for stage presentation begins here, creating the personae of the self-conscious Beauty Queen, of the boy Migrant Worker, and of the perspicacious Latina Girl, and of the other roles and ambiances involved.

### **Week 1, Day 2**

This will be Planning-Strategy Day. The teacher discusses with the students the ultimate objective of presenting a live stage performance of the work read: roles, dates, needed materials, publicity, rehearsal specifics, length of each performance, etc. On this day, roles will be discussed and assigned on a temporary basis, allowing for possible reassignments. Each play will require unique modifications: Period (X), doing Prida's work, shall select those sections they want to perform, modifying certain sections out of considerations of time and audience sensibilities. On the other hand, the students who have read the prose works have the additional task of re-writing them into play formats. This task will require the whole class period for brainstorming activity, the ultimate outcome being a viable script for potential actors. This script will not be produced today; it shall evolve over tonight and into the next class meeting, under the strict but at the same time liberal supervision and guidance of the teacher.

Some guidelines for the invention of the scripts include: Employing uniquely Cuban or Chicano body language, inserting language usages which only Latinos can appreciate (e.g. '*orale, mi 'ijata* or *balgame Dios*, etc. ad inf., this will provide an unending source of creative fun for the students); placing recognizable objects on the set, such as the mom's altar, or the bottle of Schlitz on the plastic table, or the felt drawing of Selena—and indispensably, Latino music in the background.

### **Week 2, Days 1 and 2**

The students have had the whole weekend to prepare and return on the first day of this week with something written, their notes, outlines and other forms of individual contribution to the development of the play. After more brainstorming on Day 1, accommodating all emendations suggested, rejected and accepted, the students and teacher will produce a script for each play which finds acceptance among the majority. Final roles will be assigned. Students with non-acting roles will assume technical support roles (sets, lights, costumes, publicity, etc.). On Day 2, the students will present their brief, self-written descriptions of what they will present: "So I'm Esperanza, and I'm going to walk up to the front of the stage and look at this building..."; or, "I'm the crew manager, and I'm going to have some guys build this huge backdrop drawing of a grape vineyard..." The key element in this and in subsequent weeks is enthusiasm. If the teacher can demonstrate and maintain enthusiasm for the project, the students will ensure the success of their efforts because they were excited to do something great.

### **Week 3, Days 1 and 2**

All preliminary work has been finalized and agreed upon, so this week marks the beginning of serious practice and preparation (there are only six weeks left). The music must be obtained, costumes and sets must be designed and produced, and lines must be memorized. Gestures, intonations, in short, emotions must be fleshed out. If live music is not available, recorded music will serve just fine.

The music should direct the spectators' attention on the themes which mirror their own experiences in the respective setting of each play. Thus, in the Mango Streets of Chicago, New York, Miami or any metropolitan U.S. city, the sound of choice was and continues to be big-band music playing *boleros*, *salsa*, *mambo*, *cha-cha-cha*. On the other side of the country, in the Southwest, for the *braceros* of Jimenez's time and the laborers of today (and their families), *conjunto* and *ranchera* music is the norm. (*Conjunto* means nothing more than "set," i. e., a group of anything, here: a band of musicians, while *ranchera* means "country.") The *rancheras* are mostly sung, and sing of everything, from love to business ; in this exercise, we focus on those which sing of the many experiences of *braceros* and of migrants in general: Injustice, death, love, thwarted love, revenge, Anglo racism, Latino *machismo*, the lot of Latino women, the mother whom the boy left behind in Mexico so he could find a good job in the U. S., the prodigal child who learns that life in The North can be worse than life in the poor Mexican hamlet which he nor she had abandoned in scorn. There exist so many *rancheras* which treat of the encounter of the Mexican and Central American immigrant that students will have a difficult time of deciding which pieces to select or reject. So many perfect songs will have to be left out.

### **Weeks 4, 5, 6 and 7**

Students in each period, rehearsing their respective plays, practice gestures, movements, emotions, intonations, synchronization with the music and will begin to release themselves from dependency on their written scripts. The stage crews will be gathering and constructing props, planning lights and sound, arranging for costumes, publicity and other vital considerations.

### **Week 8: Days 1 and 2, and More If Desired**

Dress rehearsals will be practiced on stage, incorporating all elements of costume, props, music etc. The support crews continue to publicize the event, from notifying school and city media to advertising throughout the community. Invitations are sent out to appropriate parties. Dates and times will be finalized and agreed upon together with the appropriate school and district administrators.

## **Week 9: Presentation Days, Suggested: Friday and Saturday Evenings**

The students of (insert your school name) proudly present:

*Beautiful Señoritas: A Play with Music*, by Dolores Prida. [Program comment: “A Cuban-American look at the lives of Latinas in the U.S.,” preceded or followed by, “*Una mirada cubanaamericana en las vidas de latinas en los EE. UU.*”]

*Cajas de Carton*: An adaptation of the short story “The Circuit,” by Francisco Jimenez. [Program comment: “The coming of age of a Chicano boy of the fields, tended by braceros and recorded in song and poetry.” (*El desarrollo juvenil de un joven chicano de los campos laboreados por braceros y documentados en cancion y poesia.*)

*La casa en Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros. Adapted from the novel *The House on Mango Street*, translated into Spanish by Elena Poniatowska. [Program note: “Scenes from the life of a Chicana girl growing up in the barrios of Chicago.” (*Escenas de la vida de una joven chicana quien crece en los barrios latinos de Chicago.*)

In official education parlance, the final activity of the ending school cycle consists of “evaluation,” of “assessment”—and what better way of assessing the students’ work than to have the community express their own reactions to the performances? A nice finishing touch, as an alternative form of assessment, would be to collect whatever reviews appear in school and city media. The students receive thus immediate recognition of their academic performance. Beyond that, however, they receive the response of the community to the message they have tried to convey in the issues portrayed in the dramatic performances they have prepared. The plays have begun.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

Cisneros, Sandra, *La casa en Mango Street*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Translated by Elena Poniatowska.

Jimenez, Francisco, "Cajas de carton," in *Sendas literarias*, Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, 1994. Eds. Walqui-van Lier, Aida and Barraza, Ruth A.

Prida, Dolores, *Beautiful Senoritas: A Play with Music*, Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, 1991.

### Teacher Sources

(Note: The following is a selected list of play anthologies, whose only disadvantage is that they are all written in English. One may assume, however, that high-school students who have undergone previous instruction in ESL classes will have enough proficiency to be able to handle most of these readings.)

Franco, Cris *et al.*, *Latins Anonymous: Two Plays*, Houston, Texas, Arte Publico Press 1996.

With an introduction by the actor Edward James Olmos, this is a pair of satires of the modern Latino "yuppie," otherwise known as the "Yupsican."

Garza, Roberto J. (ed.), *Contemporary Chicano Theatre*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1976.

An eclectic collection of eight plays written by recognized Chicano playwrights, including Luis Valdez and Ysidro R. Macias.

Gonzalez-Cruz, Luis F. et al. (eds.), *Cuban Theater in the United States: A Critical Anthology*, Tempe, Arizona, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, 1992.

A collection of nine plays, each preceded by a biographical note on the author, written by Cuban-Americans.

Huerta, Jorge (ed.), *Necessary Theatre: Six Plays About the Chicano Experience*, Houston, Texas, Arte Publico Press, 1989.

A valuable anthology, in that each is preceded by an explanatory introduction which includes a discussion of background, themes and critical history.

Valdez, Luis, *Actos y el teatro campesino*, San Juan Bautista, California: La Cucaracha Press, 1971.

A compendium of plays written in the spirit which started it all: Very confron-

tational presentations of the struggle of oppressed Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to obtain basic amenities, such as the chance to get something to eat.

## Secondary Literature

Jimenez, Francisco (ed.), *The Identification and Analysis of Chicano Literature*, New York, Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, 1979.

Contains a collection of essays by prominent authors and critics of the subject, plus a valuable bibliography.

Kafka, Phillipa, *(Out)classed Women: Contemporary Chicana Writers on Inequitable Gender-Powered Relations*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 2000.

Contains a detailed examination of Sandra Cisneros' works.

Knippling, Alpana Sharma (ed.), *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literacy*, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1996.

Gives arguably one of the best explanations of such nomenclatures as "Mexican," "Chicano" etc. The contribution of the essay in pages 341-65 to this tome gives a concise and dispassionate history of the evolution of Chicano literature.

Leal, Luis, *No Longer Voiceless*, San Diego, California, Marin Publications, 1995.

Among his detailed and scrutinizing essays on practically everything Mexican-American, Leal includes a detailed critique of Cisneros' works.

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A useful guide in the many ways the Spanish language is treated in Mexican-American writings.

Shirley, Carl R. and Shirley, Paula W., *Understanding Chicano Literature*, Columbia, South Carolina, University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Valuable for its comprehensive bibliography (over 32 pages), but also for its unassuming intent to "present a primer, principally for Anglo students embarking on the study of a growing body of fine writing that constitutes quite a few threads in the intricate tapestry of American literature" (Preface).