

The New Life of Esperanza Due to Her Perseverance

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INTRODUCTION

Many people believe that space, meaning the place where a person lives, plays an important role in the achievement that an individual is going to have in the future. A child that is born into a family that is prosperous and lives in a good neighborhood is destined to have many more opportunities than a person who lives in a poor area because of the living conditions in both scenarios. For example, in a wealthy environment the child receives a better education, more opportunities to use advanced technology, and can play many sports because the parents can afford the equipment. In addition, the young person has many educational resources available and has a better opportunity to study art and to learn how to use it to express his or her emotions. On the other hand, the youngster surrounded by poverty is not able to obtain the same privileges, and his fate could be failure in life according to some studies done on the role that economics plays in one's childhood in America. For instance, poverty in a child's life has been associated with delinquent behavior, unemployment, dropping out of school, low academic achievement, and teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, poverty has an effect on how children develop intellectually.

The research mentioned above focuses on how poverty affects the life of a youngster in his neighborhood and his academics. An example is a study done by Guang Guo and Kathleen Mullan Harris, "The Mechanisms Mediating the Effects of Poverty on Children's Intellectual Development." The results of this study demonstrate that multiple mechanisms affect a child's intellectual development. The three mechanisms the study observed were parenting style, cognitive stimulation, and physical environment. The explanation they give for physical environment is as follows: "...financial resources would seem to have the greatest influence on physical environment at home. Poor children's homes are much more likely than others to have open cracks in the wall and ceiling, holes in the floor, a leaky roof, signs of rats, and exposed wires, or to be overcrowded" (432). This physical environment according to these researchers has an important effect on later cognitive development. This conclusion is very important in my understanding of my students' cognitive development because physical environment is one of the factors that affect most of my learners. The results of the research also imply the following: "According to the baseline models, living in poverty has a consistent and significant negative effect on all four measures of intellectual development" (439). This is a disadvantage for the students at my school; however, I do not agree that this means that they are destined to failure due to the negative effects on their intellectual development.

As a third grade bilingual teacher in a Title I school, which means that most of the students come from homes that are low income, I work with students that deal with an environment of distress that causes a negative effect on their intellectual development due to the lack of money as mentioned in the research above. The percentage at Bonham Elementary for low income for the 2006 year was 95.60 %, which means that almost all of the learners receive free lunch. This implies that I have the opportunity to work with a population of students that live in an atmosphere of deprivation and therefore are destined to failure in life. They have to deal with gangs, drugs, poverty, and violence everyday. One of their main priorities is to survive. This

interferes with their schooling because they have other things to worry about besides studying and trying to make it in school. In addition, they do not get the same opportunities as other students do that live in wealthier neighborhoods. Title I schools differ significantly from affluent schools. In these types of schools, there are not a lot of technology, art, and sports resources available. This causes a significant dissimilarity between learners from wealthy and poor communities. I truly feel that this playwriting curriculum unit will have a positive effect on the lives of my students as they learn that there is always a way out of life's shortcomings.

OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this curriculum unit is to teach my students how playwriting can be a tool for them to express their feelings and overcome poverty. The focus of the unit is for the scholars to be able to write dramatic scenes of their favorite novels that deal with poverty, for example *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, or panoramas of their daily lives. Throughout this unit, there will be many objectives covered that are in alignment with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English/Spanish Language Arts and Reading (TEKS).

TEKS Objectives 110.5. English Language Arts and Reading, Third Grade

TEKS 110.5.(a).(1) - In grade 3, students read and write more independently than in any previous grade and spend significant blocks of time engaged in reading and writing on their own as well as in assigned tasks and projects.

TEKS 110.5.(a).(6) - It is the goal of the state that all children read on grade level by the end of Grade 3 and continue to read on grade level or higher through their schooling.

TEKS 110.5. (b). (2) - Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to:

(B) - compare language and oral traditions (family stories) that reflect custom, regions and cultures (K-3).

TEKS 110.5 (b) (3) - Listening/speaking/audiences/oral grammar. The student speaks appropriately to different audiences for different purposes and occasions. The student is expected to:

(D) - present dramatic interpretations for experiences, stories, poems, or plays (K-3).

TEKS 110.5 (b) (7) - Reading/variety of texts. The student reads widely for different purposes in varied resources. The student is expected to:

(A) - read classic and contemporary works (2-8);

(B) - read from a variety of genres for pleasure and to acquire information from both print and electronic sources (2-3); and

(C) - read to accomplish various purposes, both assigned and self- selected (2-3).

TEKS 110.5. (b) (9) - Reading/comprehension. The student uses a variety of strategies to comprehend selections read aloud and selections read independently. The student is expected to:

(F) - make and explain inferences from texts such as determining important ideas, causes and effects, making predictions, and drawing conclusions (1-3).

TEKS 110.5 (b) (10) - Reading/literary response. The student responds to various texts. The student is expected to:

(A) - respond to stories and poems in ways that reflect understanding and interpretation in discussion (speculating, questioning), writing, and through movement, music, art, and drama (2-3).

- TEKS 110.5 (b) (11) - Reading/text structures/literary concepts. The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of text. The student is expected to:
- (C) - recognize the distinguishing features of familiar genres, including stories, poems, and information texts (1-3); and
 - (D) - understand and identify literary terms such as title, author, illustrator, playwright, theater, stage, act, dialogue, and scene across a variety of literary forms (texts) (3-5).
- TEKS 110.5 (b) (13) – Reading/Culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of culture. The student is expected to:
- (A) - connect his/her own experiences with the life experiences, language, customs, and culture of other (k-3), and
 - (B) - compare experiences of characters across cultures (K-3).
- TEKS 110.5 (b) (18) – Writing/writing processes. The student selects and uses writing processes for self-initiated and assigned writing. The student is expected to:
- (A) - generate ideas for writing by using prewriting techniques such as drawing and listing key thoughts (2-3), and
 - (F) - demonstrate understanding of language use and spelling by bringing selected pieces frequently to final form “publishing” them for audiences (2-3) .

RATIONALE

The aim of this unit is to help students, especially those that live in economically challenged neighborhoods, to realize that the physical surroundings does not have to be an obstacle for them to succeed in life. On the contrary, it can have the opposite effect. By this I mean that throughout this unit, 3rd grade students in a bilingual classroom that come from a Hispanic background, for example México, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, etc., will learn about writing dramatic scenes based on issues that they deal with every day due to poverty.

In 2006, the demographics for Bonham were as follows: Anglo 1.40 %, African-American 47.60 %, Hispanic 48.70 %, Native American 0.00%, and Asian 2.30 %. Almost half of the students come from a Hispanic background, as the demographic proves. In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, 95.60 % of the students come from low income. This implies that they live in deprived conditions due to poverty. This factor, as proved in many studies, has a very negative effect on their education. In a study entitled “Parental Work, Family Structure, and Poverty among Latino Children,” Daniel T. Lichter and Nancy S. Landale suggest that one of the main factors affecting the Latino children is poverty. “Latino children experience higher rates of poverty than their non-Latino White counterparts, regardless of whether they live with two parents or one, or whether their parents are employed or not. They suffer from limited human capital (e.g., low education and language proficiency), racial discrimination in job opportunities and pay, and continuing gender wage inequality, which diminishes the ability of single mothers to support their children” (353). Lichter and Lindale’s research proves Latino children need help with the issue of poverty in their communities because it is affecting their education and language proficiency. My unit’s main objective is to help them cope with this issue by learning about playwriting.

I went through the same issues that my students are now confronting. I came to the United States at a very young age. My parents were immigrants who did not have the resources or knowledge to succeed in this country. They did not have other options but to settle in one of the poor areas of the city. I went to a school similar to the one at which I teach. However, this

adversity was not a limitation for me. On the contrary, it was a big motivation, and it gave me the courage to try very hard to move away from that space of poverty. I am an example of a person whose life was not limited by space to reach her goals in life. I would like my students to do the same, to achieve their goals and to become a role model just like me. Together we can achieve this as I help them through this unit.

The students will have the opportunity to become familiar with characters in popular plays and novels that they can relate to because they live in similar environmental conditions. In addition, these characters come from the same cultural background. These individuals, instead of giving up in life because of poverty, used scarcity as a tool that persuaded them to succeed. They accomplished all their dreams with effort and perseverance. My students will realize that they can do the same if they forget about their physical environment limitations and focus on their priority objectives in life, their dreams and their goals.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Perseverance

Perseverance means to persist or never to give up. Perseverance is a much needed quality that we all need to possess. Every one of us is faced with many challenges in life, and learning how to keep putting forth our best effort to accomplish our goals despite these challenges is the best remedy to overcome the multitude of challenges that life hands out to us. The plays we have read and/or have acted out all have characters that are being bombarded by setbacks and people that did not believe in them. The problem was not just being a minority; it was being a minority and living in a life of poverty that had each character learning the importance of believing in oneself and never giving up.

As mentioned in the rationale, this unit will allow the students to become familiar with characters in popular novels and plays that they can relate to because they come from the same cultural background and live in similar environmental conditions of poverty. These characters never gave up, and it was because of their hardships that they learned how to weather the storm. They learned to use scarcity as a tool that persuaded them to succeed. They never gave up and accomplished all their dreams with a lot of effort and persistence.

Perseverance has an important effect on the student's school performance, as concluded by some investigations done in the field of education. In his study, "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation," John U. Ogbu argues that the reason why minority students in school differ from each other in school performance is due to the perseverance some put into their studying. According to this researcher, the minority students that come from other countries have many barriers such as language, poverty, and culture to overcome if they want to succeed in this country, and the only way they can do it is through perseverance. When they are given responsibilities, they work hard to see that the job is done correctly. They learn very quickly that when they face obstacles, they have to learn how to get around them. Perseverance is the key that will get them there. These students tend not to take their education for granted. They tend to seize opportunity and make it work for them. When faced with obstacles, students need to be taught how to discuss the issues. The students I work with at Bonham Elementary come from minority backgrounds similar to the ones studied in the research by Ogbu. I concluded that perseverance is also a key element in their education, and for this reason, one of the focuses of the unit will be to develop the students' perseverance. In order to do this I will be giving them examples of characters in the plays that we will read that forgot about the physical environment limitations that poverty brought to them and with a lot of perseverance accomplished their dreams and goals, such as Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*.

Elements of a Play

I will begin this unit with a discussion about the elements of a play. In order for the students to understand playwriting, they need to be familiar with the characteristics of a play. I will give a list of all the vocabulary terms related to a play. The students will receive the following words: title, author, illustrator, playwright, theater stage, act, dialogue, actress, actor, sets, costumes, and properties. In a whole class discussion, with the help of examples of these key terms in Sossaman's book, *Writing Your First Play*, I will give the students the meaning of the words. Then, I will give them a copy of a dramatic piece by a Hispanic, Joe Rosenberg, author of "El gato sin amigos" ("The Cat Who Had No Friends") that they will act out. This performance will be very helpful to accomplish one of the objectives of my unit, for the learners to distinguish the characteristics of a familiar genre such as a play. I believe that this will improve their literary knowledge and their reading comprehension.

After that the students will form groups of five to read and discuss the characteristics they see in this play that are new or different from the other types of texts, such as poems, novels, narratives, signs, etc., that they have encountered during their reading lessons. They need to come up with at least five characteristics that are different from the other genres. Then we will have a whole group discussion to define each one and find them in the play. For example, the setting is mentioned at the beginning of the play and the students will look in the rest of it to find examples that demonstrate the scenery.

In addition, they will discover the characters. With this exercise, the objective is for the students to distinguish the differences and the similarities that these characters have with the characters from other types of genres, like a novel. I will point to the principle differences such as performing the actions and the dialogues. In third grade, students take the Reading Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and one of the objectives it covers is to compare and contrast characters. The activity mentioned above is fun to do, and it focuses specifically on covering this objective. This section of the unit is intended for the students not only to gain a better comprehension of the elements of a play, but also to improve their reading skills and fluency.

Learning about Culture

In order to maintain or, in some cases, obtain, the awareness and engagement of my students during the previous lesson and the ones that follow in the unit, I will work with drama that is specifically chosen because of the cultural background examined. For example, all the plays are going to be by Hispanic authors or deal with Hispanic culture. The reason for this is because I feel that the learners will be more motivated if they can identify with the setting, theme, culture, beliefs, families, clothes, and characters.

In addition, this will help my students learn more about their culture and the civilizations in Latin American. I expect my students to listen, write, and speak to gain knowledge about their own culture, the culture of others, and the elements of culture as part of the TEKS objectives for Third Grade. The introduction of this lesson will include reading a play by a Latino author in the collection, *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children's Theater*, edited by Jose Rosenberg. The play is "The Legend the Golden Coffee Bean," by Manuel Martín Jr. The reason why I chose this specific play from this collection is that the characters are Hispanic and the setting has elements of the Hispanic culture, something that I think all my students and others in similar schools will find very familiar because the students all come from Hispanic backgrounds. It will also teach them about the culture of the Mayas and Central America.

In addition, this play is going to teach them about the life of an Indian girl who is a descendant of the Mayas and has lost everything in an earthquake. The girl is alone, sad, and

poor. However, she finds the strength to survive in her culture because her ancestors were strong people who survived the Spaniards' conquest. This will teach my students the theme of my unit, that poverty is not an obstacle to succeed in life. Chomiha, the main character in the play, does not let all the disasters she is confronted with (the loss of her home and family) become barriers in stopping her on her search for a better life. She decides to look for a way to become wealthy and to have an easier life. This takes her on a journey all over Central America, where she learns many things about her culture that help her become a very strong person full of knowledge. I want my students to learn this lesson and use their culture as a tool to survive in life. However, first they need to learn about culture, and below I will explain how I am going to teach culture in this unit.

First, I will show a PowerPoint presentation about culture and its characteristics. Then there will be a whole group discussion about the elements of culture. After this discussion, I will introduce the play and ask the students to identify the components of culture in it and see if they can relate to them. The purpose of the theatrical production is to help them identify with their own customs, beliefs, food, and clothes, and even to appreciate them more. The learners will come to understand that culture is a vital element of their lives that they cannot change. However, they can use all the elements of their culture to make them stronger and obtain survival skills to endure a society where the things that they see everyday are violence, gangs, drugs, and people who only care about themselves.

The students will build writing and comprehension skills as they read and discuss this dramatic piece, because I will be asking comprehension questions as they read with a partner. Then they need to write a summary about the play and make a Venn diagram to compare all the differences and similarities between the elements of culture in the play and in their own culture. Finally, the students need to explain in writing what is the most important thing they enjoy about their culture and how it helps them to be strong. These are very important skills because one of the TEKS objectives in Third Grade is for the students to be able to read and write more independently.

Poverty

Following the introduction to the plays and their characteristics and the theme of culture as an engagement tool, the students will be introduced in more detail to the theme of poverty by reading a vignette of a very popular novel by Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*. The vignette I chose represents the theme of poverty. It comes from the anthology by Robert Coles, Randy Testa, and Michael Coles, entitled *Growing Up Poor: A Literary Anthology*. In this compilation of short scenes from very famous novels, the main objective is to discuss poverty and to show the effects it has on the characters. In the case of the vignette by Sandra Cisneros, it is entitled, "The House on Mango Street," the same as the title of the novel. The main character of this vignette, Esperanza, narrates about her house on Mango Street in order to explain about the poverty of her family. Also, she discusses the effects it has on her living in that place because she is mistreated by other people. An example is the conversation she has with a nun from the Catholic School she attends and how it makes her feel when she has to explain to the sister where she lives.

Sandra Cisneros, the author, was born in 1954 in Chicago to a family of immigrants. In addition, the note at the end of book about the author says that her parents were Mexican, and she was the sister to six brothers. The main character in her novel, Esperanza, is also the daughter of immigrant parents, and I feel that this will help my students identify not only with the character but also with the author because they all come from the same Hispanic background and have similar lives. Hopefully, this will motivate them to learn more about the vignette, and it will help me implement my teaching objectives about poverty.

The students will get a copy of the vignette, and we will read it together. Then they will write a response in their journal about their feelings after the reading. They will share their feelings in a whole group discussion to get a deeper understanding of poverty. I will explain Esperanza and her surroundings in order for them to realize that her living conditions are very similar to their own. We will also talk about the dialogue she has with the nun and how it makes Esperanza feel. The purpose is for the students to realize that the sister is making Esperanza feel very bad because she lives in a poor neighborhood and feels that she is never going to be able to succeed in life. After the conversation, I will give them a copy of the last vignette in the novel, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes." It is important for them to read the following in the vignette: "One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, 'What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away?' They will know I have gone away to come back. For the Ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (Cisneros 110). The students will realize that she went away to college to succeed and that poverty did not stop her dreams. In fact, it motivates her to become someone in life because that was the only way she was able to leave the house on Mango Street.

Dramatic Scenes

After discussing the vignettes, I will introduce my students to the dramatic scene I adapted from the vignette, "The House on Mango Street," discussed when I elaborated upon the theme of poverty. I want them to realize that they can do the same with vignettes from their favorite novels or with scenes from their daily life situations. In order to do this, we will discuss sections of the book, *Writing Your First Play*, by Stephen Sossaman, where the students with my support can gain knowledge about transforming the scenes from the vignettes into dramatic scenes. The segment from the book that I will give to my students is "The Playwright's Toolbox" because I feel that it gives them all the information they need to begin their dramatic scenes. For example, it talks in detail about the characters and how to come up with their own. Also, in this section it discusses the play structure.

Additionally, we will read segments of the book, *Playwriting: The First Workshop*, by Kathleen E. George, where the students will get step-by-step directions on how to write the scene. It begins with a discussion of settings, characters, and dialogues, and it gives dramatic devices that will support their understanding of a dramatic scene and its components. The purpose of writing this dramatic scene is for the students to learn to express their feelings, but also to learn about the writing processes for self-initiated and assigned writing.

These dramatic scenes can be adapted to represent their own issues. This will give them the power to dramatize all the conflicts and tensions that they have to confront at school, at home, and in the neighborhood. As the students work on preparing their scenes, they will gain knowledge of communication, critical thinking, analyzing, and working in teams that will have an important impact on their future. I want my students to be able to acquire all the necessary skills that they will need later in order to succeed, instead of being a failure because they live in a poor area without the resources and advantages of children that are more privileged.

The creation of the dramatic scene with the students' issues will be a process that I will supervise very closely and give all the help possible using the book by Thomas J. Hatton, *Playwriting for Amateurs: How to Become a Published Playwright*. This manuscript explores deeply the creation of a scene. It gives detailed examples on the creation of characters and writing dialogue. Chapter 4, "Writing Dialogue," I think it is essential for the students' writing of the dramatic scene, because through the characters' dialogue, the students are going to represent their own issues about poverty. Hatton says this about the dialogue that I feel is very important for all amateur playwrights to realize: "Just as the characters in a play are imitations of real

human beings, the dialogue that these characters speak is an imitation of the language that real people speak. This may seem fairly obvious, but some beginning playwrights apparently forget it. They are more concerned with writing literature than language” (35). The students will be able to learn about this process and complete their dramatic scenes.

Performing a Dramatic Piece

Subsequently, I will read a book to my students about performing a play. The volume is by Cheryl Walsh Bellville, *Theater Magic: Behind the Scenes at a Children’s Theater*. The objective of this reading is for the students to become aware and prepare for the process of performing their own dramatic scenes. The book suggests that Pro Scenes are very helpful to the students. “Divide into groups. Each group selects three objects that have nothing to do with each other – such as a hanger, a basketball, and a cookie cutter – and create a scene about the three objects by coming up with a who, what, and where. Rehearse the scene until you’re ready to perform. When each group is ready, perform your scenes for each other” (136). This activity is very helpful in promoting higher-level thinking skills. It is also used to develop the students’ ability to perform for a small audience so they can be prepared for a larger one.

After the students have worked together in producing their dramatic scenes, they need to get ready to perform it on stage for the school audience. Students in third grade, as stated in the TEKS, need to learn how to speak appropriately to different audiences for different purposes and occasions. The exercises they are going to do to get ready for the performance will accomplish this purpose. But, not only that, they will also help the students gain more confidence and become aware of the power expression can have in their lives.

Furthermore, the last activity is going to be very beneficial for the learners, because as they get ready for this performance, they will obtain a lot of the communication and acting skills that will assist them in the future. I believe that in order for a person to succeed in life, she or he needs to learn the skills to act in negative as well as positive situations. Also, a person needs to be able to communicate his/her ideas clearly. There is not a better way to do it than to learn the art of acting and communication that is acquired when performing plays. How can the apprentices do this? In the classroom, we will use the book by Marsh Cassady, *Acting Step by Step*, as a guide. From this volume, the learners will obtain examples of how to act in public and how to overcome fear. In addition, there will be additional practices on acting that come from the resource, *112 Acting Games*, by Gavin Levy. This volume explains different games the students can practice before performing a play; these games can help them feel more comfortable and less panic-stricken. This is the grand finale for my unit: the students being able to perform their dramatic scenes for a class or the entire school.

LESSON PLANS – Reading, 3rd Grade Bilingual

Lesson 1-Elements of a Play

Objective

The objective of this lesson is for the students to recognize the distinguishing features of familiar genres, in this case a play. Also, for them to be able to understand and identify literary terms such as title, author, illustrator, playwright, theater, stage, act, dialogue, and scene across a variety of literary texts which comprise some of the skills they need to master for the Reading TASK. Houston ISD Language Arts and Reading (TEKS 110.5. 11.C.E.).

Key Vocabulary

title	author	illustrator	playwright	theater
stage	act	dialogue	actress	actor
properties	costumes	sets		

Introduction

The students will have the opportunity to read pages 6 – 12 from *Theater Magic: Behind the Scenes at a Children’s Theater* by Cheryl Walsh Bellville where they will learn the key vocabulary and the process of putting on a scene in a play.

Student Practice

The learners will work in groups of 4 to discuss the vocabulary and to find these key elements in the play, “El gato sin amigos” (“The Cat Who Had No Friends”) by Joe Rosenberg.

Then they will discuss how to produce this scene with the guidance of the book by Bellville and *Writing Your First Play* by Stephen Sossaman.

Assessment

The students will make a model of the way the stage will look for the play. Also, they will write an explanation of why they choose that stage and how it is related to the play.

Resources

Rosenberg, Joe. “The Cat Who Had No Friends.” *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children’s Theater*. Ed. Joe Rosenberg. Houston, Texas: Piñata Books, 1995.

Sossaman, Stephen. *Writing Your First Play*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Bellville, Cheryl Walsh. *Theater Magic: Behind the Scenes at a Children’s Theater*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1986.

Lesson 2--Elements of Culture

Objective

The students will read a play to increase their knowledge of their own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of culture. Houston ISD Reading and Language Arts (TEKS 110.5.13.a.b.)

Key Vocabulary

language customs traditions food celebrations beliefs

Introduction

I will read the play with the students, and we will identify the characters and the setting. The students would then identify what they find similar about their life and the life of the character in the play. We will have a discussion about the Hispanic culture and the elements that compose it. I will point out to the students how the cultural background of the characters in the plays and novels was not an obstacle for them to succeed in life. It was actually a motivating force, which helped them overcome all the barriers in their physical surroundings, such as poverty.

Student Practice

The students will work in small groups where they will make a tablet that will be used to compare their culture with the culture of the characters in the play. Then they will write a summary about the most important element of their culture that they feel more comfortable with and why. They will also be asked to describe how this element helps them be strong and overcome obstacles in life.

Assessment

The assessment will be the outcome of their written responses.

Resources

Martín, Manuel Jr. "The Legend of the Golden Coffee Bean." *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children's Theater*. Ed. Joe Rosenberg. Houston, Texas: Piñata Books, 1995.

PowerPoint presentation made by teacher with the focus of teaching about the key elements of culture.

Lesson 3---Adapting a Vignette from a Novel to a Dramatic Scene or Writing Their Own

Objective

The purpose of this lesson is for the students to be able to make their own adaptations from vignettes of their favorite novels into dramatic scenes to help them develop their comprehension and writing skills. This will improve their knowledge of the writing processes for self-initiated and assigned writing. Houston ISD Reading and Language Arts and Reading (TEKS 110.5.18.A-F).

Key Vocabulary

writing process	prewriting	exploring	organizing
drafting	revising	writing conference	proofreading
publishing	adapting	characters	setting
narrator	conflict		

Introduction

First, we will have a discussion of the vocabulary words. Then we will discuss a vignette from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and look at the dramatic scene adaptation that I made from this vignette. We will have a whole group discussion about adaptations using as a resource *Writing Your First Play* by Stephen Sossaman, who focuses on how to get ideas on creating characters, settings, and conflicts. In addition, I will read to the students segments of the book *Playwriting: the First Workshop* by Kathleen E. George, who gives ideas about the process of generating ideas and writing a first play.

Student Practice

1. The students will work in groups of 4, using the book *Playwriting for Amateurs: How to Become a Published Playwright* by Thomas J. Hatton, to adapt scenes from popular novels in the anthology *Growing Up Poor* edited by Robert Coles, Randy Testa, and Michael Coles.
2. First, they will choose one of the vignettes and change the characters and conflict during their adaptation to dramatize all the problems and tensions they have to confront at school, home, or in their neighborhood.
3. Then they will generate ideas with each other with guidance from the teacher in order to create the dramatic scene.
4. The students and I will go over the writing process during the creation of the scene.
5. When they complete the adaptation, the students will share the dramatic scenes with each other to learn about the characters, conflict and settings. They will then critique the dramatic scene.

Assessment

The student's assessment will consist of grading the student's dramatic scene based upon the characters, setting, and conflict they created. This will not only assess their knowledge of those literary terms but also of the learning and implementation of the writing process.

Resources

Coles, Robert, Randy Testa, and Michael H. Coles, eds. *Growing Up Poor: A Literary Anthology*. New Press, 2002.

George, E. Kathleen. *Playwriting: The First Workshop*. Boston: Focal Press, 1994.

Hatton, Thomas J. *Playwriting for Amateurs: How To Become a Published Playwright*. Downers Grove, IL: Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1981.

Sossaman, Stephen. *Writing Your First Play*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Lesson Plan 4---Characterization

Objective

The purpose of this lesson is for the students to be able to create the characters for their dramatic scenes. During this activity, the students are going to be able to develop vocabulary using resources and references such as beginner's dictionaries, glossaries, available technology, and context that will improve their reading comprehension. (TEKS 1110.5.8.C)

Key Vocabulary

character	major	minor	unique	active
dynamic	round	responsive	consistent	plausible
sane	protagonist	antagonist		

Introduction

We will have a discussion about characters using my dramatic scene and the book by Sossaman. Then I'll give the list of the vocabulary words to the students.

Student Practice

The students will work with a partner to look for the definition in beginner's dictionaries and the Internet. They need to write a definition and draw a picture of an action that character will be doing according to the definition.

They will then share their definition with the whole class. The teacher will make a master list of the definitions on the board for the students to see while working on characterization in their dramatic scenes.

Assessment

The students will receive a grade for characterization at the end when they complete short biographies of their characters and why they fit on their dramatic scenes.

Resources

The dramatic scene at the end of the unit, an adaptation based upon the novel *The House on Mango Street*.

Sossaman, Stephen. *Writing Your First Play*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

APPENDIX

I Can Do It! One Day I Will Live on Memorial Drive!
(An Adaptation of *The House on Mango Street*)

A Dramatic Scene

by

Domitila De La Torre

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ESPERANZA: a 13-year-old girl who studies at a Catholic school. She is the oldest daughter of Jesus and Maria, two immigrants that came from Mexico 15 years ago. She has five brothers and one sister. She loves to study, read, and play soccer with her friends and sister. She lives in a poor neighborhood on Mango Street outside of downtown Houston. Her dream is to go to college to be able to live in a better community.

SISTER MARY: a nun and teacher at the Catholic school where Esperanza studies. Her mother was very strict with her and now she does the same with her students. She does not believe that girls should play soccer because it is not ladylike.

AT RISE: Esperanza is playing soccer with her sister and friends on the sidewalk of her house. They are screaming and trying to take the ball from each other. At the end of the street, Sister Mary, a nun that works at their school, is walking toward them with her grocery bags. She stops and observes the girls playing. Then she distinguishes Esperanza in the crowd and calls her while she moves closer to the group.

SISTER MARY

(Putting the grocery bags on the floor, she screams ESPERANZA'S name louder and louder.)
Hello, Esperanza!!!! Esperanza!!!! Esperanza!!!!

ESPERANZA

(ESPERANZA stops smiling, and the look on her face changes from happiness to fear.)
(stops playing and runs toward the nun) Good afternoon, Sister Mary. I am sorry! I did not hear you! Can I help you?

SISTER MARY

Esperanza, how many times have I told you not to play soccer as if you were a boy? That sport is only for boys!!!! You are supposed to be in the house studying how to speak English better and to improve your grades if you ever want to leave this ugly house as you always tell your friends.

(ESPERANZA is surprised, and her eyes drop to the floor.)

ESPERANZA

My house is ugly, I know that. Yesterday the Laundromat in the bottom floor was robbed and my dad told me that the landlord put wood over the windows to protect it from another robbery; that makes the place look even uglier.

SISTER MARY

(speaking loudly) I did not ask you to tell me why your house is ugly. All the houses in the poor neighborhoods are ugly. I am telling you to stop playing and go inside to study English!

ESPERANZA

But, I... I... I... know, I know English; I can speak and read it fluently. One day I will leave this house (points to the house) because I am going to the university to become a doctor. Then I will make a lot of money and buy a beautiful purple house for my family and me.

SISTER MARY

(moving her head in disagreement and putting her finger up to her mouth as a sign to make ESPERANZA be quiet) Young girl, why are you talking back to me? (She begins to get upset and raises her voice.) You people do not understand that you live in America and you need to speak good English and that you do not talk back to your superiors. Why is that so hard to understand? These are rules that need to be followed by you all, especially women!

(ESPERANZA tries to speak but the nun keeps talking faster and faster.)

I am just trying to help you, young girl, because being on the street playing soccer with your friends is not taking you anywhere out of this poor neighborhood. Don't you realize that you do not have many opportunities in life, and that being Hispanic and living in poverty does not help?

ESPERANZA

(with an angry tone) I love to play soccer. I don't feel that there is anything wrong with it. I know that I am a good student because I do all my homework and get good grades. (raises her voice a little, as she is trying to convince the nun) I know that I speak good English because I translate for my mother when she goes to the store, hospital, or when she needs to talk to the owner of the house.

SISTER MARY

(moving closer to Esperanza and staring at her) That attitude is not going to help you succeed in life! (pointing her finger at ESPERANZA) You need to be obedient!! Young girls like you need to learn that women are supposed to accept what they are told and be quiet. That is what I do with my superiors.

(ESPERANZA tries to answer, but Sister Mary keeps talking.)

My mom taught me to be obedient and respect my elders. I have been doing that all my life and I feel happy. You need to do that, and if you don't, you will always live in poverty and stay in this ugly house. (pointing to the house with her hand)

ESPERANZA

I know that you don't believe in me! You think that because I am a female, Hispanic, and I live in this poor neighborhood I don't have any chance of becoming someone in life. (Gesturing with her hands, what she is trying to say, her voice is calm, but strong, and she is having a hard time breathing.) However, I know I can do it! My family believes in me! I believe in myself! I know that if I try hard all of these obstacles are going to disappear and I am going to prove it to you, SISTER MARY!

SISTER MARY

(mouth dropping in disbelief and is shock) I... (She tries to talk but cannot articulate any words. She stares for a few seconds without moving and finally is able to speak.) Look, Esperanza, the only thing I wanted to do was to help you, but I see that you do not listen. You think you are so

smart and that you can do anything in life. Go ahead! Prove it to me! I will be here waiting to see that you become a doctor. Only when I see you with that university certificate in your hand, will I believe.

(SISTER MARY turns around and walks towards the school.)

ESPERANZA

(Not moving, looks at the house, and says) Everybody thinks that I will always live here, but they will be surprised when they see me living in one of those big houses on Memorial Drive. I promise!

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

Bellville, Cheryl Walsh. *Theater Magic: Behind the Scenes at a Children's Theater*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1986.

This book will be used to help my students learn about the process involving creating a dramatic scene.

Cassady, Marsh. *Acting: Step by Step*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc., 1984.

This book will be a guide for my students to learn how act out their dramatic scene step by step.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

This is the novel I am using to introduce the students to the theme of poverty and to show them how the main character, Esperanza, used her setbacks as a motivational factor to help her succeed in life. Also, from this novel we are going to obtain the vignettes that my students and I would use to adapt into dramatic scenes.

Coles, Robert, Randy Testa, and Michael H. Coles, eds. *Growing Up Poor: A Literary Anthology*. New Press, 2002.

George, E. Kathleen. *Playwriting: The First Workshop*. Boston: Focal Press, 1994.

This book is going to help my students learn step by step the process in writing a play. Furthermore, it gives them ideas on how to develop setting, characters, dialogues, and scene.

Guo, Guang, and Kathleen Mullan Harris. "The Mechanisms Mediating the Effects of Poverty on Children's Intellectual Development." *Demography* 37.4 (Nov., 2000): 431-447.

This study shows how children living in poverty have a disadvantage when it comes to learning. I will use this study as a reference in my unit background on perseverance.

Hatton, Thomas J. *Playwriting for Amateurs: How to Become a Published Playwright*. Downers Grove, IL: Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1981.

I will read this book to gain knowledge about creating characters and writing dialogue in order to help my students do the same when they are working on their dramatic scenes.

Levy, Gavin. *112 Acting Games: A Comprehensive Workbook of Theatre Games for Developing Acting Skills*. Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Publishing LTD, 2005.

This resource will help the students perform their dramatic scene. They will learn how these games will improve their performance skills.

Litcher, Daniel T. and Nancy S. Landale. "Parental Work, Family Structure, and Poverty among Latino." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57.2 (May 1995): 346-354.

This study is essential for my unit because it proves why I am writing it. Poverty is one of the main factors affecting the Latino children development at school.

Martín, Manuel Jr. "The Legend of the Golden Coffee Bean." *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children's Theater*. Ed. Joe Rosenberg. Houston, Texas: Piñata Books, 1995: 106-133.

This is an example of a Latin play that we will read in class during the lesson about culture.

Ogbu, John U. "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 18.4 (Dec. 1987): 312-334.

This study demonstrates that perseverance is a key element in the student's school performance. I will use this investigation to demonstrate the importance of teaching about perseverance in helping my students achieve their dreams.

Rosenberg, Joe. "The Cat Who Had No Friends." *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children's Theater*. Ed. Joe Rosenberg. Houston, Texas: Piñata Books, 1995: 136-155.

This play will also be used as one of the devices to encourage the students to write, read, and adapt plays. They will identify with the characters and the setting, and it is very important for the students to feel familiar with the material they are reading.

Sossaman, Stephen. *Writing Your First Play*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

This book is essential for my students and me. It will help me to write my unit and to adapt or create dramatic scenes. It will be a good tool for them to use when they are adapting some of the scenes from the novel.

Supplemental Resources

Books

Bany-Winters, Lisa. *On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 1997.

I will use the games in this book to encourage my students to become better actors and actresses.

- Betty, Smith. From *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. *Growing Up Poor: A Literary Anthology*. Eds. Robert Coles, Randy Testa and Michael Coles.
I will read this vignette from the book to show my students how children the same age as they cope with poverty and the effects it has on them.
- Cassady, Marsh. *Playwriting: Step by Step*. San Jose, California: Resource Publications Inc., 1984.
This source gives ideas about how to write the dramatic scene step by step.
- Colón, Alvan. "La Caravana." *¡Aplauso! Hispanic Children's Theater*. Ed. Joe Rosenberg. Houston, Texas: Piñata Books, 1995: 20-31.
I would use this play in the introduction of my unit to get my students acquainted to the elements of a play and to practice reading aloud and acting out the scenes. It would be my motivation tool for them to use drama as a way of expressing emotions and feelings.
- Holtje, Adrienne and Grace A. Mayr. *Putting On the School Play: A Complete Handbook*. West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1980.
This handbook is going to help me and my students create a dramatic scene.
- Linney, Romulus. "Basic Training." *Playwrights Teach Playwriting: Revealing Essays by Contemporary Playwrights*. Eds. Joan Herrington and Crystal Brian. Vermont: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 2006: 54-68.
This essay gives ideas on how to teach playwriting from the perspectives of a playwright. It will help me develop more knowledge of the playwriting process, so I can transmit it to my students.
- Poey, Delia. *Latino American Literature in the Classroom*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002.
This book is going to provided ideas on how to implement Latino literature in the classroom. This instrument has many suggestions that are very helpful in the full and successful implementation of a variety of genres of literature in a bilingual classroom.

Websites

- United Streaming*. 2007. <<http://www.unitedstreaming.com>>.
This is a great website with many resources for teaching playwriting. In addition, it has plays being performed in videos for the students to see the performing of a dramatic piece.
- Houston Chronicle*. 2007. <<http://www.chron.com>>.
This website gave me a report of my school's demographics that helped me write my rationale.