

Ni de aquí, ni de allá: Between Worlds, Latinx Cultural Narratives

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Abstract:

This curriculum unit, *Ni de aquí, ni de allá: Between Worlds, Latinx Cultural Narratives*, is based on Rudine Sims Bishop's "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" framework and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's reflection on the danger of a single story. Through a selection of powerful Latinx memoirs, including *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, *Solito* by Javier Zamora, *My Broken Language* by Quiara Alegría Hudes, and the poetry of Elizabeth Acevedo, the unit invites students to see their own experiences reflected, develop empathy for others lived realities, and engage thoughtfully with the complexities of Latinx cultural narratives. These texts challenge dominant stereotypes by revealing the richness and diversity within Latinx identities, including Afro-Latinidad, and by addressing the historical and ongoing legacies of colonialism and racialization. The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of Spanish as a central element of Latinx identity and advocates for linguistic equity in education. Through critical thinking, students are encouraged to build cultural awareness, affirm their sense of belonging, and explore their own "between worlds" identities, while developing their voices in both Spanish and English.

Keywords: Latinx literature, immigration and border narratives, bicultural identity, representation in literature, Afro-Latinidad, language acquisition, student voice

Unit Content

Problem Statement:

Swenson Arts and Technology High School is in the far Northeast section of Philadelphia. Swenson, as we call it, is differentiated as a unique high school because career and technology education (CTE) is fundamental to its curriculum. This structure enables Swenson students to earn two diplomas upon graduation: one, a traditional high school diploma, and the other in their specific CTE field of study, commonly referred to as their 'shop.' With a wide variety of CTE classes such as Health-Related Technologies, Culinary Arts, Baking, Auto Body, Auto Tech, Carpentry, Electric, Computer Networking, and Digital Media/Video Production, Swenson provides students with strong pathways to internships, scholarships, and future employment. This explains why Swenson students come from all over the city of Philadelphia, and year after year, the waiting list is always full of interested students hoping for a letter of acceptance. Given the significant Latinx student population within the School District of Philadelphia, and particularly at Swenson High School, where a large majority also experience economic disadvantage, it becomes crucial to consider the diverse learning needs within this group. Two key categories that often intersect with students' cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds are Special Education and English Language Learners

(ELL). Understanding the supports and services available within these areas is vital when exploring the experiences highlighted in our “Ni de aquí, ni de allá: Between Worlds, Latinx Cultural Narratives” unit.

According to the most recent data (2024-2025), the School District of Philadelphia has an approximately 25% Latinx student population. At Swenson, the Latinx student population is slightly higher, at 27.5%. Notably, 100% of the student population at Swenson has been identified as economically disadvantaged, which makes it eligible to receive Title I funds. Swenson students have two meals a day, breakfast and lunch.

It is important to acknowledge that data is often categorized across single identities and does not reflect the intersectionality of students who identify with multiple groups.

- **Special Education:** 22.7% of Swenson's students have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The specific areas of special education include:
 - Specific Learning Disability
 - Other Health Impairment
 - Autism
 - Intellectual Disability
 - Emotional Disturbance
- **English Language Learners (ELL):** 16.9% of the student body is classified as ELL. The primary home languages spoken by these students, in order of prevalence, are:
 - Spanish (43 students)
 - Portuguese (22 students)
 - Russian (18 students)
 - Chinese (Mandarin) (10 students)
 - Uzbek (10 students)
 - Arabic (9 students)

The atmosphere in our classrooms has shifted. Perera (2025) discusses the potential direction of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights under Trump’s renewed administration. Since the 2023-2024 school year, and particularly with the recent news of potential federal policy changes, including potential dramatic changes to the Department of Education's focus/role and funding, and increased immigration enforcement, a palpable sense of anxiety has settled among our Latinx students. These aren't abstract concerns; they're grounded in the lived experiences of our students and their families. We've heard their fears, witnessed their uncertainty, and recognized the burden they carry. Stories of racial profiling, fear of deportation, and concerns about access to education are no longer distant possibilities; they're becoming a harsh reality for many.

These anxieties are particularly intense in Philadelphia, a city with a vibrant and growing Latinx community. The potential loss of federal support for crucial programs

like bilingual education, special education, and DEI initiatives threatens to widen existing disparities. We've seen the impact firsthand: students bringing their fears into the classroom, their focus disrupted by the weight of uncertainty. Recognizing this, we initiated Spanish for Heritage Speakers, a space where students can explore their identities, find a sense of belonging, and continue their Spanish learning. We are now building on that foundation with the continuation of that class, and I'm honored to develop the curriculum.

We, as educators, are called to do more than simply acknowledge these challenges. We must actively create a safe and supportive learning environment. As the School District of Philadelphia has emphasized through the "Safe and Welcoming Schools" PD, understanding and addressing the trauma experienced by immigrant students and their families is paramount. We must recognize their invisible backpacks, the weight of fear, uncertainty, and potential family separation.

The concept of 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors' (Style, 1988) offers a powerful framework for understanding the importance of representation in literature, particularly for young adult readers. During the seminar 'Diverse Children's Literature: Literary Art, Cultural Artifact, and Contested Terrain,' Dr. Brooks connected this idea to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's concept of 'the danger of a single story,' emphasizing its relevance in our classrooms. Adichie's warning against reducing individuals or cultures to single narratives underscores how limited perspectives can lead to harmful stereotypes and misunderstandings. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as teachers, to actively work to change the status quo and promote social justice through the literature we choose and how we teach it. This understanding of representation in young adult literature is enhanced by the concepts of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors.

In the context of representation, "mirrors" are vital for Latinx students and all marginalized groups, as they allow them to see their own lives and experiences reflected in literature. This reflection validates their identities, fostering belonging and strengthening self-esteem. Quiroa (2024) emphasizes that to create an equitable classroom environment, teachers must utilize authentic, high-quality Latinx literature to expand and enrich the diversity of texts. Authentic Latinx literature is about narratives written and illustrated by Latinx authors and illustrators. Our students' stories are valuable resources and deserve a place in the curriculum. One such powerful mirror for many of our students is *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago. This memoir allows students, particularly those with Puerto Rican or other Latinx backgrounds, to see their own families, communities, traditions, values, and challenges reflected in its pages. Santiago's narrative of moving from Puerto Rico to New York City and navigating two distinct cultures resonates deeply with the experiences of many of our students who live in the space between worlds. Furthermore, the book connects personal experiences with broader Latinx history, including the history of Puerto Rico and migration to the United

States, offering a valuable opportunity to discuss themes of colonialism, citizenship, and identity.

Building on the importance of providing mirrors, it is equally crucial to offer "sliding doors" that allow students to step into the experiences of others. Javier Zamora's memoir, *Solito*, serves as such a door, inviting all students to engage with a reality that may be unfamiliar. In *Solito*, Zamora bravely recounts his childhood journey of crossing the border alone as a young boy from El Salvador. This nonfiction account provides a powerful and personal lens through which students can understand the realities and trauma faced by unaccompanied minors during migration. Zamora's poignant narrative underscores the resilience and vulnerability inherent in the immigrant experience, allowing students to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the complex reasons behind migration. The availability of this book in both English and Spanish further enhances its accessibility for our diverse learners.

Adding another vital layer to the exploration of identity and belonging is Quiara Alegria Hudes' *My Broken Language*. Excerpts from this memoir will serve as clear examples of a bilingual mind and a bicultural heart for our students. The author, a born and raised Philadelphian with a Puerto Rican mother and Jewish father, offers a particularly relevant perspective. The author's complex racial and ethnic background is a crucial aspect of this selection, promising bright and clear reflections for many of our students.

Indeed, *My Broken Language* was chosen as authentic Latinx literature precisely because it vividly portrays Hudes' inner struggles with identity, race, and language. The memoir delves into the challenges of navigating her parents' divorce alongside the personal dilemma of her own identity: "Am I white or Puerto Rican?" This exploration will particularly resonate with the diverse backgrounds of our students, including first and second-generation learners in our Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes, as well as the varied races and ethnicities represented in our Spanish 2 classes. For our non-Latinx students, the book will offer valuable windows and doors into these experiences.

The literary works proposed in this unit are intentionally selected to counterattack stereotypes and misrepresentations prevalent in broader narratives. By featuring authentic Latinx voices, we aim to dismantle the harmful perceptions, such as Oboler's (2007) observation that Puerto Ricans are often perceived as "eternal" foreigners due to their "non-white physical appearance marks." *My Broken Language* (Hudes, 2021) also has a significant connection to our local context, as it takes place in Philadelphia, specifically in North and West Philadelphia. This setting is particularly relevant because our school, Swenson Arts and Technology, is also located within Philadelphia. Furthermore, the author/narrator, a Puerto Rican woman from a family of humble origins who achieves success as a writer and attends the prestigious Yale University, directly challenges negative stereotypes. Her story breaks the damaging portrayals of Latinx individuals as uneducated, low-class, lazy, unemployed, or involved in illicit activities, often seen in other books, movies, and series like Netflix's *Narcos*.

Through her narrative, Quiara Alegría Hudes shares her experience of existing within two worlds and cultures, exploring her different identities and intersectionality, her languages, thoughts, and feelings. The memoir also touches upon spirituality, religion, and culture through references to Santería and its role in the Caribbean and her own life. Ultimately, *My Broken Language* (Hudes, 2021) provides a positive representation of Latinx culture, specifically Puerto Rican identity, and offers crucial visibility to our students. It underscores the significant roles of both English and Spanish and highlights the inseparable connection between language and culture. As Osorio (2018) indicates, Latinx children's literature plays a vital role in elevating Spanish by recognizing its importance within the USA.

Just as these memoirs offer powerful mirrors and sliding doors, it is also vital to showcase the diversity within Latinx identities. Given that the ELA curriculum at the high school level includes *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, this unit purposefully incorporates another work by this talented Afro-Latina author, the poems *Hair* and *Afro-Latina*. Selecting excerpts, poems, or the entire book provides crucial visibility and voice to a marginalized group that is a fundamental part of Latinx culture. This unit is designed with the idea to be covered in a school year. It is up to the teacher to decide which books are ideal for their students and the time available to teach them. This unit is flexible. The use of memoirs written by Latinx authors provides authenticity in language, values, and experiences lived. Jiménez-García (2019) rightly points out that the dominant narrative often presents a "single story about 'Latinx as light-skinned Spanish speakers'," and Acevedo's work actively challenges this limited perspective by offering an authentic and positive representation of identity and Afro-Latinidad in her poems.

The concept of "Windows" is as essential as "Mirrors". Windows provide non-Latinx students with vital glimpses into different cultures and realities. By looking through these windows, students can cultivate empathy, broaden their perspectives, and develop a deeper understanding of the world beyond their own experiences. These literary windows help to break down stereotypes and promote a more inclusive worldview.

In the context of representation, "mirrors" are vital for Latinx students and all marginalized groups, as they allow them to see their own lives and experiences reflected in literature. This reflection validates their identities, fostering belonging and strengthening self-esteem. Quiroa (2024) emphasizes that to create an equitable classroom environment, teachers must utilize authentic, high-quality Latinx literature to expand and enrich the diversity of texts. Authentic Latinx literature is about narratives written and illustrated by Latinx authors and illustrators. Our students' stories are valuable resources and deserve a place in the curriculum.

Finally, "Sliding Doors" represents the opportunity for all students to step into someone else's shoes, to actively engage with and experience a reality that might be

unfamiliar. "Walking in another's shoes" builds connections across cultures, dismantles barriers, and fosters a shared sense of humanity. Through sliding doors, literature becomes a vehicle for building bridges and creating a more interconnected and understanding community.

Cultural knowledge, values, history, and traditions are often first transmitted through familial storytelling, particularly by parents and grandparents, using lullabies and family narratives. This practice holds significant cultural weight in both Latinx and African American communities, where oral tradition has historically served as a vital means of preserving and passing down cultural heritage, especially in contexts where written records were limited or suppressed. The transmission of this cultural knowledge, alongside the development of children's identity, is deeply affected by both storytelling and the nature of parent-child conversations, particularly those discussing sensitive topics such as racial-ethnic discrimination. Research consistently points to the importance of both. For example, studies have shown that storytelling significantly contributes to the development of cultural identity and self-esteem in children. Stone-Campbell (2009) indicates that children who engage in regular storytelling exhibit stronger cultural awareness and self-esteem.

Furthermore, effective parent-child and teacher-student communication characterized by active listening and empathetic responses plays a crucial role in children's emotional well-being. Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) affirm that such communication reduces children's anxiety and promotes healthy coping mechanisms, especially when navigating difficult topics. Umaña-Taylor (2004) also highlights the connection between open positive parental communication and Latinx adolescents' ethnic identity, resilience, and self-esteem, especially when they encounter discrimination.

In addition to the quality of conversation, research emphasizes the effectiveness of frequent, brief, quality conversations over singular, lengthy 'talks.' Studies suggest that consistent, shorter interactions can lead to better information retention and emotional processing in children. Therefore, teachers and parents are encouraged to prepare for these meaningful conversations by actively listening to their children's perspectives, understanding the specific context of their questions, and addressing their individual needs.

At the high school level, teachers should take on the role of facilitator, guiding and supporting students through difficult but courageous conversations. Brooks (2012) indicates that students may not always feel ready to engage deeply with complex or sensitive issues. Brooks (2012) also suggests that instead of directing the discussion entirely, teachers should allow students to take the lead by encouraging them to pose their own questions or bring their perspectives into the conversation. To support meaningful dialogue, it's essential to create space for student voices. Understanding our students'

background knowledge and experiences can help us approach these conversations in a way that is respectful, accessible, and appropriate.

In the seminar “Diverse Children’s Literature: Literary Art, Cultural Artifact, and Contested Terrain”, Dr. Brooks emphasized that we, as teachers, must be intentional in our literature selection. Multicultural literature should include books that reflect a balanced representation of cultural communities, not just through stories of hardship or mistreatment, but also through narratives of resilience, triumph, and everyday joy. This holistic view allows students to engage with literature that affirms identity while encouraging critical thought.

Another valuable memoir is *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago, which serves as a mirror as it reflects our students’ lives. Many students from Puerto Rican or other Latinx backgrounds can see reflections of their own families, communities, traditions, values, and challenges in Esmeralda Santiago’s story. Esmeralda’s move from Puerto Rico to New York City shows her struggles as she navigates two worlds, two cultures. Santiago’s memoir also ties Latinx history (Puerto Rican history) and migration to the US. It provides a great opportunity to discuss colonialism, citizenship, and identity among other themes.

Latinx identity is complex and varied across countries and regions. It encompasses multiple intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, class, immigration status, (dis)ability, religion, and culture. By teaching students to analyze the elements of complex identities, they can better understand the intersectionality in both the characters they read and discuss and their own lives. The use of authentic and diverse Latinx children’s literature, analyzed through an intersectional perspective to examine the various aspects of our identities, creates inclusive and safe classrooms where students are valued and supported. A central objective of this unit is to empower students, so they are ready to find and develop their own voices. Race and ethnicity are two concepts. It is important to understand the difference, which will help us recognize the complexity of people’s identities, especially within diverse communities like Latinx communities. Race is typically associated with physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture, or facial features. It is a social construct, meaning it’s created and defined by society. Some examples of racial categories include African American, White, Asian, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander.

The term ethnicity relates more to cultural identity, including shared language, ancestry, customs, traditions, or country of origin. Some examples of ethnic identities include Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran, etc. In the case of Latinx cultures, their shared history of invasion by an empire, colonization, and maximum oppression is the root, the painful link that ties Latinx cultures. This explains why Puerto Ricans, US citizens since 1917 with the Jones Act, are seen as second-class citizens, not part of the United States.

It is obvious to affirm that Puerto Rico's history is also American history. I tie this reasoning to "Black History is American History" and "Black Lives Matter" because when groups of people are oppressed and marginalized for so long, somebody at some point will speak up, unite people, and claim equity. This is how the civil rights movement started. In the 1960s and 70s, different marginalized communities came together to fight for equality. The first group to peacefully fight against injustice was the African Americans. Then other groups became part of the civil rights movement, such as Latinx, LGBTQIA,+ with Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican trans woman advocate for LGBTQIA+ women of color, among others.

The term "Latinx" refers to an ethnic and cultural category. It is not a race. Latinx people can be of any race. Some examples are Afro-Latinx people might be Afro-Dominican, Afro-Cuban, or Afro-Puerto Rican, combining Latinx cultural identity with African ancestry and racial identity. Some other examples include Latinx-Asian people who may have ancestry from Peru and China (Peruvian Japanese), reflecting both Latin American cultural roots and Asian racial heritage, or Latinx-Indigenous people who may identify as Peruvian and as Quechua, an Indigenous group with its own language, traditions, and history, etc. Quechua has the same official status as Spanish in Peru.

A clear example in children's literature of how stereotypes harm and lead to racism is the series *Skippy Jon Jones* by Judy Schachner. In the article, *The Representation of Latinos and the Use of Spanish: A Critical Content Analysis of Skippy Jon Jones*, Martínez-Roldán (2013) examines how Latino culture and Spanish language are represented in children's books, focusing specifically on the popular *Skippy Jon Jones* series. Her analysis reveals several important concerns. It is important to note that the author of this book series is not Latinx; Judy Schachner is Caucasian. She writes as an outsider, which in this case, presents non-authentic, racist children's literature. Teachers, librarians, and parents have also raised specific concerns about the *Skippy Jon Jones* series. Critics note that the book series misuses Spanish in ways that are grammatically incorrect and nonsensical. The main character's stereotypical behavior and exaggerated accent are also seen as disrespectful representations of Mexican culture. These concerns have led to calls for more critical evaluation of children's literature.

Martínez-Roldán (2013) identifies the use of Mock Spanish in English-language picture books. Mock Spanish is when Spanish words, or made-up Spanish-sounding words, are used incorrectly, maliciously, or for "humor". Martinez-Roldán argues that this kind of language use misrepresents Latinx people and disrespects Latinx cultural and linguistic heritage. Instead of promoting understanding, Mock Spanish reinforces negative stereotypes and leads to confusion about the true nature of Latino identities and cultures.

Her study shows that many books featuring Latino characters, especially those written by non-Latino authors, often portray Latinx culture inaccurately. These representations may rely on clichés or oversimplifications, which can mislead readers and

distort their understanding of Latino communities. This kind of representation does not support cultural learning and reinforces harmful biases and stereotypes.

Martínez-Roldán's paper highlights the serious underrepresentation of Latino authors in children's publishing and draws attention to the ongoing lack of Latinx voices in children's literature. According to data from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), in 2011, only 52 out of approximately 3,400 books received were by or about Latinx people, just 1.5% of the total. Although there has been progress, disparities persist. In 2024, the CCBC received 3,622 books, of which only 404 were by Latinx authors or illustrators, accounting for 11.2%. While this is a notable improvement, Latinx cultures remain significantly underrepresented, especially given the size and diversity of the U.S. Latinx population. Ramirez (2025) indicates that Latinx make up 19.5% of the US population, with a total of 65 million Latinx people.

This lack of representation makes it more difficult for Latinx children to see themselves reflected in the literature they read. It is important to note that just because more Latinx books are being published doesn't guarantee they will be available in classroom libraries. Intentional diverse book selection and access remain key to ensuring authentic representation in students' reading experiences. Multicultural literature, especially Latinx, should be inclusive, authentic, and accurate. This will help all students develop empathy and respect for diversity. Martínez-Roldán emphasizes the need for clear guidelines to help educators and readers assess children's books critically. Teachers must advocate for selecting stories that provide authentic, respectful, and accurate portrayals of Latinx cultures and languages.

This unit will foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging, empowering students to connect with their heritage and navigate the challenges they face & reinforce their Spanish and English language skills. I have selected culturally authentic books to address the lack of representation and accuracy in young adult literature. The Spanish language is a cornerstone of Latinx identity, a vital thread weaving together cultural heritage, community cohesion, and intergenerational connection. For many Latinx people, Spanish is an essential, even emotional link to their ancestral roots, a linguistic bridge that carries their heritage, family traditions, and cultural values across generations. Storytelling has been a powerful resource that goes beyond entertainment; it fosters the preservation of culture. It has been a foundational part of many cultures throughout history. Storytelling is the bridge that connects people to their history. This is also another point that needs to be considered when selecting children's literature. It fosters a sense of unity, creating shared spaces where authentic expression and cultural belonging thrive. Moreover, it serves as a crucial pathway for artistic and literary expression, enriching the Latinx cultural production.

In the U.S., the language's economic and social significance is undeniable, driving demand for Spanish-language services and contributing to the nation's diverse cultural landscape. However, the designation of English as the official language by executive order poses significant challenges to the educational and cultural development of children from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This designation by Trump reinforces educational disparities, particularly for English language learners (ELLs), who may be denied access to effective bilingual education programs. Even the term ELL is debatable as it denotes a lesser status in a political environment that promotes English-only and views other languages as a deficit. Some scholars (Flores, 2019) have determined that a better alternative is the term Bilingual Learners, which provides a sense of value to the language and culture brought in by the students and their parents.

Furthermore, the English-only executive order can contribute to the erosion of children's native languages and cultural identities. The pressure to abandon heritage languages in favor of English can lead to a profound sense of cultural loss and disconnection, creating feelings of shame and alienation. This suppression of native languages can also have a detrimental psychological impact, leading to isolation, anxiety, and identity confusion. Additionally, it limits children's exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives, obstructing the development of cultural competency and empathy, crucial skills in our increasingly interconnected world. The resulting academic setbacks, including lower test scores and higher dropout rates, can limit access to higher education and perpetuate systemic inequalities.

In essence, while the importance of English in the United States is undeniable, policies that diminish the value of other languages, particularly Spanish, create a significant disservice to children's education and cultural well-being. This perpetuates systemic racism and discrimination. According to Coard et al. (2024), when children are forced to assimilate into the dominant culture, courageous conversations about race and ethnicity may be restricted in their homes and schools as well. Coard et al. (2024) state that families from minority/marginalized groups benefit from facilitated conversations about bias and discrimination. The rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity represented by the Spanish language deserve recognition and respect, not suppression.

The ability to speak multiple languages is prevalent worldwide, notably in Europe, where many individuals are polyglots. The research of Al-Jarf (2005) indicates that the same happens in the Middle East region, where English is taught from elementary school. This exemplifies the importance of learning other languages around the world. In this sense, the United States is falling behind as non-English languages have less status. Non-English languages are not valued or appreciated, at least that is the message of the current administration.

A society that values and nurtures linguistic diversity creates a more equitable and inclusive environment for all children, allowing them to thrive academically, culturally,

and emotionally. When Spanish is used in schools, it inspires students to contribute to positive change, breaking down barriers and rejecting harmful stereotypes that hold us all back. The acquisition of any second or third language is not only an asset in all aspects. Communicating in two or three languages expands your world and your opportunities. Spanish is used as an example, as this unit is designed for Spanish 2 and Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes. It is important to note that this unit is flexible, providing activities that could be adapted to elementary, middle, and high school. Authentic Latinx books and artifacts used should be carefully chosen to make sure they are real examples of Latinx experiences.

This unit will explore the sociolinguistic implications of language variation within the Latinx community. Given that students may be unfamiliar with some of the terminology, and may even have questions or differing opinions, the introduction and discussion of key terms are essential, especially as new terminology emerges over time. For this reason, I address this background information and facilitate a discussion of these terms before we read the memoirs. It's important to recognize the vast diversity encompassed by the term 'Latinx.' While there are 21 Spanish-speaking countries globally—19 in Latin America, one in Europe (Spain), and one in Africa (Equatorial Guinea)—it's a common misconception to assume all Latinx individuals are of Mexican origin. Latinx cultures are incredibly varied, underscoring the need to clarify specific terminology. For instance, the US Census initially used 'Hispanic' to group all Spanish-speaking people and later introduced 'Latino/Spanish' in 2000.

Many people use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings. The term Hispanic refers to people from Spanish-speaking countries, including Spain and most of Latin America, except for Brazil, where Portuguese is spoken & French Guiana, where French is spoken. The term Latino, on the other hand, refers to people from Latin America, which includes countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. This means that while most Latin Americans are both Hispanic and Latino, there are some important exceptions.

For example, a person from Spain is Hispanic but not Latino because Spain is not in Latin America. Meanwhile, a person from Brazil is Latino but not Hispanic because Brazil is in Latin America but speaks Portuguese, not Spanish. A more complex example comes from Equatorial Guinea, the only African country where Spanish is an official language. Since Equatorial Guinea is not in Latin America but does have Spanish as an official language, its people are Hispanic but not Latino. This example highlights how these terms are based on language and geography rather than race or ethnicity.

Another point to take into consideration is the evolution of terms. After the transition between the terms Hispanic and Latino in the US Census, the Latino term has changed in its attempt to be more inclusive. The terms Latino/a/@/é/x are being used all at the same time. Historically, the terms "Latino" and "Latina" refer to individuals of

Latin American origin, with "Latino" being masculine and "Latina" feminine. These terms are clear and easily understood, but their use excludes those who identify as non-binary. In response, "Latinx" has emerged as a gender-neutral option, gaining traction primarily in English-speaking contexts. However, its reception within Latin American communities has been varied, with some native Spanish speakers perceiving it as unnatural, grammatically discordant, and an imposed term, while others value its inclusive intent.

Villanueva Alarcón et al. (2022) indicate that some Latino/a/é/x/@ groups use one or another term because there are cultural and societal implications, such as remnants of colonialism, imperialism, or gender identification, among others. Concerns have also been raised regarding the pronunciation of the "x" in Spanish. More recently, "Latiné" has appeared as another gender-neutral alternative, finding increasing acceptance within Spanish-speaking circles. Utilizing the gender-neutral "-é" ending, which is native to Spanish, this option often feels more linguistically organic and easier to pronounce. "Latiné" also reinforces Spanish as the primary language of Latin American identity.

In her article, Benavides (2020) explains that important sectors of the Latinx population reject the term Latinx, such as the RAE (Real Academia Española or Royal Spanish Academy). The RAE was founded in 1713 to preserve the Spanish language and unite Spanish-speaking countries. An important non-profit organization like LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the nation's oldest and largest Latino civil rights organization, stopped using the term Latinx. The reason is that, according to Pew Research Center's bilingual National Survey of Latinos, conducted Nov. 6-19, 2023, found that 65% of adults familiar with the term rejected it. In other words, awareness of the word Latinx went up, but its use by U.S. Latinos has gone down. Meaningful dialogues about these evolving terms are essential for clarification, broadening our understanding, and enriching our knowledge. It is imperative to recognize that the adoption of one term does not mean the abandonment of others. All the terms are valid and justifiable. Language, including Spanish, is a dynamic entity, constantly adapting to reflect our evolving identities and needs for self-expression and communication.

The misconception that all Latinx individuals are Mexican and Spanish-speaking leads to the underrepresentation or exclusion of many Latinx cultures, including Indigenous peoples' languages, in children's literature. This 'single story' and generalization can negatively impact Latinx students who do not see their own stories told, especially as Mexican culture often holds a dominant position within the broader Latinx narrative. For this reason, I have intentionally selected authentic Latinx literature that highlights a range of voices and representations across Latinx cultures.

The dominance of a "single story" centered on Mexican culture has contributed to widespread generalizations that negatively affect Latinx students who do not see their diverse experiences represented. This limited narrative also reinforces harmful

stereotypes, especially among non-Latinx people who may only encounter Latinx culture through narrow portrayals. These stereotypes are often repeated in mainstream media, films, and Spanish-language television. National channels like Univision and Telemundo, available for free across the country, are primary sources of entertainment and news for many Latinx households. While these networks provide valuable content in Spanish, they often highlight Mexican perspectives and cultural norms, leaving out the richness and diversity of other Latinx communities.

In addition, streaming platforms like Netflix and Prime Video have produced several popular series focused on drug trafficking, often portraying Mexican and Colombian characters as violent criminals in corrupt, lawless settings. Trump has said on multiple occasions the same; "We have people coming into the country or trying to come in, we're stopping a lot of them, but we're taking people out of the country, you wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals." He has also referred to undocumented Latinx people as "drug dealers, gang members, and violent predators". (Nelson, 2018) These portrayals reduce complex communities to negative images and shape how others perceive Latinx people. Over time, this contributes to the spread of stereotypes, fuels racism, and reinforces systems of discrimination.

Some readings will be conducted in English. Others will be conducted in Spanish, and many will have a mixture of both languages, following the authors' line of thought, writing style, and approach. Even though we will analyze some literature in English. Spanish will be encouraged as my classes are "Spanish for Heritage Speakers 1, Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2, and Spanish 2. It is for this reason that Spanish will be used more than English throughout my unit.

Excerpts from *My Broken Language* (Hudes, 2021), which focus on language and identity, will be used as clear examples of a bilingual mind and bicultural heart. The author, Quiara Alegría Hudes, is a born and raised Philadelphian, of Puerto Rican mother and Jewish father. The author's race and ethnicity are relevant aspects, as my students will see their reflections bright and loud. I selected *My Broken Language* as authentic Latinx literature because it shows the author's inner struggles with identity, race, and language. The author deals with the difficulty of dealing with her parents' divorce and the dilemma of asking herself; Am I white or Puerto Rican? I have first and second-generation students in my Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes, and diverse races and ethnicities in my Spanish 2 classes. Non-Latinx students will see windows and doors. The literary works proposed in this unit counterattack stereotypes and misrepresentations with authentic Latinx books, dismantling what Oboler (2007) states that Puerto Ricans are perceived as "eternal" foreigners due to their "non-white physical appearance marks".

My Broken Language (Hudes, 2021) is a memoir that takes place in Philadelphia (North and West Philadelphia). This setting is relevant because my school, Swenson Arts

and Technology, is in Philadelphia. The author/narrator is a Puerto Rican female with a family of humble origins who ends up being a successful writer, attending one of the few elite universities, Yale. This book breaks the negative stereotypes of Latinx being portrayed as uneducated, low-class, lazy, and unemployed, drug traffickers, as seen in many other books and movies, and the Netflix series *Narcos*, among others. Quiara Alegria Hudes narrates her story, being part of two worlds/cultures, her different identities, and intersectionalities, her languages, her thoughts, and feelings. Alegria Hudes also touches spirituality, religion, and culture by referencing Santería and its role in the Caribbean and her life.

This memoir provides a positive representation of Latinx culture (Puerto Ricans), and it also gives visibility to my students. It shows the significant roles of English and Spanish and how language and culture are inseparable. As Osorio (2018) indicates, Latinx children's literature elevates Spanish by recognizing its importance in the USA. This will be more than a unit; it's a commitment to supporting Latinx students in Philadelphia, PA, validating their experiences, and empowering them to thrive in an uncertain world. It is my hope and mission to promote TIP seminars as valuable resources that present what is essential to teachers: passion, dedication, and the desire to make a difference in our classrooms one student at a time.

Teaching Strategies

With this unit, my students and I will begin a year-long journey of reflection and empathy. We will embark on emotional, sometimes tempestuous travel that will take us into complex lives, lives that have endured experiences across borders, faced challenges, and ultimately, persevered. We will study memoirs that center on the Latinx immigration experience, and the hardships intertwined in those journeys.

My first step will be to build a foundation of understanding. I will bring in maps that trace the routes many have taken, timelines that lay out the historical context of immigration policies, and short, powerful documentaries and authors' interviews that offer glimpses into the realities faced. We will talk about the history, analyze the layers of assumptions and misinformation that can often cloud this topic. Then, together, I will guide my students to create our classroom agreements. It will be a collaborative process, a commitment where we will listen deeply, speak respectfully, and understand that within the broad term "Latinx," there's a universe of individual stories and perspectives. I will emphasize the importance of avoiding generalizations, reminding them that each memoir is a unique window into one person's truth.

The memoirs I have selected are powerful, full of emotions, and perhaps even touch on personal histories within my students' families. I will make sure they know that it's okay to feel, and that there are ways to process those feelings, privately if they choose. I want

them to feel safe enough to engage authentically. These memoirs present different voices, different journeys, a collage of experiences. This unit will help my students explore their identities and cultural heritage, feel valued and safe, and at the same time, learn Spanish language skills and vocabulary and foster critical thinking by researching and discussing social problems like immigration, culture shock, and language acquisition, among others. As my students read, I will guide them in the art of close reading. We will examine the use of language, the imagery, and the authors' use of descriptions to paint their experiences. I will guide my students to annotate text, mark the moments that resonate, the questions that arise, and the themes that begin to surface.

The questions that I will use are deep, fostering critical thinking. *What specific hardships did they face? How did they find strength in the face of adversity? How did crossing borders shape their sense of who they are? What cultural bridges did they have to build, and what did they leave behind?* We will use graphic organizers to map out these complex narratives and see the threads connecting events and emotions. I will display powerful passages & quotes, and we will examine them together. What do these words reveal? What's the tone? What unspoken truths lie beneath the surface? Then, I will divide the class into small groups and facilitate discussion circles where students will express their own interpretations, supporting each other's understanding. I will model a Socratic Seminar, to have students lead the discussion, actively listen to each other, and answer open-ended questions the memoirs raise. We will read unique stories. My students will also listen to interviews with the authors of the memoirs.

I also believe in the power of personal response. I will encourage them to connect with the memoirs in ways that feel meaningful to them. We will read three powerful poems. Poetry will allow my students to process and express their understanding on a deeper level. Throughout this journey, I will constantly encourage empathy. We might do activities where they imagine themselves in the authors' situations, trying to understand the weight of their decisions and the emotional toll of their experiences. Because we will read multiple memoirs, we will compare and examine common themes and the unique distinctions of each story.

Assessment will include evaluating how deeply they have connected with the material. Their reading journals will be an important part where the students reflect, use critical thinking, and practice written language. I will listen closely to their contributions in discussions and use a class participation rubric to assess them. The graphic organizers will provide a clear view of how they form and analyze their ideas and thoughts. Their analytical essays in English and/or Spanish will allow them to articulate their insights, and their creative projects (paper or digital posters) will present their levels of empathy and comprehension. Sometimes, I will ask them to reflect on how these stories have shifted their perspectives and how they now see the world.

Teaching these memoirs will not be easy. It will require sensitivity, passion, energy, and a willingness to engage with difficult topics. We will know that we have accomplished our objectives when we see our students connecting with these stories, when we witness their empathy growing and their understanding deepening. We will not just read about history; we will learn about the human heart, about resilience, and the complex collages of the American experience.

This unit is designed with the idea to be covered in a school year. It is up to the teacher to decide which books are ideal for their students and the time available to teach them. This unit is also flexible. The use of memoirs written by Latinx authors provides authenticity in language, values, and experiences lived. All the lessons in this unit have links to reference materials (articles, videos, teacher-created student slides and worksheets), and grading guides (rubrics). This unit can be used in English, Spanish for Heritage Speakers, Spanish 2, and U.S. History/Social Science classes.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

High/Upper Middle School Level- Analyze how young adult Latinx literature shows power, privilege, and being treated unfairly, paying close attention to the different parts that make up Latinx identity. This study should look at how authors show the connections between things like coming to a new country, language. (including translanguage and using different ways of speaking), and the many different cultural backgrounds that shape what it means to be Latinx. Also, consider how these authors use language and storytelling methods to honestly show cultural experiences and go against common stories about power and groups that are often pushed to the side.

Student Assessment Strategies-

Formative Assessments:

- Class Discussions and Participation: Observation of students' participation in class discussions. Are they actively listening? Contributing thoughtful questions and insights? Demonstrating respect during the class discussions? Use the Class Participation Rubric
- Exit Tickets: Use short writing prompts at the end of class to assess student comprehension. These prompts can ask students to summarize key points, analyze primary sources, or reflect on their learning.
- Journals: Have students write their reflections and critical analysis.
- Graphic Organizers: Have students complete graphic organizers throughout the unit to visually represent information, such as compare, Character Analysis, or the Venn diagram.

Summative Assessments:

- **Short Reflection Writing:** Assign writing prompts and questions that require students to analyze terms, authors' and characters' experiences, and their significance. Students should be able to identify key figures and events, explain their impact, and demonstrate their understanding of intersectionality. Use the PA Writing Rubric.
- **Projects:** Students can create individual projects and presentations to demonstrate their learning. These projects allow students to demonstrate creativity and critical thinking.
- **Scenarios:** Present students with a "What If?" Scenario and ask them to develop solutions.
- **Research Project:** Students can research specific topics like immigration, the power of language, Latinx identity, and Social Issues, such as historical context like Puerto Rican history involving citizenship and language.

Students Self-Assessment:

- **Reflective Journals:** Encourage students to keep reflective journals where they can record their thoughts, questions, and reactions throughout the unit. This allows students to monitor their own learning and identify areas where they need further clarification.
- **Student-Survey:** This will be used to provide feedback on the unit, its activities and books.

Additional Considerations:

- **Differentiation:** Adapt assessments to address different learning styles and abilities. Offer students choices in how they demonstrate their understanding. Allow the use of Spanish and English, promoting the idea that both languages are equally important.
- **Rubrics:** Develop clear rubrics for assessments, outlining the criteria for success. Rubrics help students understand what is expected of them and ensure fair grading.

Various assessment tools provide a complete picture of student learning and verify that the unit meets its objectives.

Classroom Activities

Before we begin the unit, we must establish guidelines for safe, respectful conversations. The teacher and their students will create ground rules for the classroom that prioritize respect for all and understanding different experiences. Together, we will create a safe space for open and respectful discussion on sensitive topics related to immigration, race/ethnicity, diversity, family separation, and Latinx experiences in general, like

learning a new language, culture shock, and family dynamics. This involves building trust and making sure everyone feels comfortable and valued when sharing and learning.

Note for teachers: This unit includes 10 comprehensive lesson plans, each with clear instructions and all the materials you'll need for implementation. I've developed the student worksheets and accompanying slides to support these lessons. These plans are designed to be a flexible framework, providing a structure you can use to develop additional lessons and activities. For flexibility, teachers can choose to read the excerpts of the books or the entire memoirs, which is the perfect complement for a 90-minute class. As this unit will unfold over the course of the year with ongoing book readings, and as I implement it next year, your adjustments and insights are highly encouraged and will help shape its continued development!

Lesson Plans:

Lesson Plan 1- “What’s in a Story?”

Grade: 9th

Materials:

- 1- Slides (Gallery Walk [Slideshow](#))
- 2- [Worksheet for Gallery Walk](#)
- 3- [Class Participation Rubric](#)
- 4- [Wheel of Names](#)
- 5- [PA Writing Rubric](#)

Length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

Understand the diversity of Latinx immigrant experiences and the cultural contributions of the Latino community in the U.S. through visual analysis and discussion.

Procedure:

Introduction (15–20 min)

Step 1: Gallery Walk – “[Faces & Stories of Latino America](#)”

Set Up- Present the [slideshow](#). It shows a range of Latinx immigration stories and cultural contributions.

Instructions for Students:

- 1- Rotate around the room (or watch the slideshow).
- 2- Choose two images that stand out to you. Use the [worksheet](#) for the Gallery Walk

Step 2: Think-Pair-Share (10 min)**Guiding Questions:**

- 1- What story do you think this image tells?
- 2- What might it reveal about Latinx experiences or contributions in the U.S.?
- 3- How is it similar or different from stories you've heard or lived?
 - **Note to teachers:** Use the [wheel of names](#) to share out with the whole class. The wheel of name needs to be prepared before teaching the lesson. It is free and fun.

Discussion: (Whole-Class)**Activity-** [“Behind the Images: Stories We Share”](#) (slide with the questions below)

Use the following prompts to guide a respectful, reflective, and meaningful conversation.

- 1- Which image made the biggest impression on you and why?
- 2- What do these images reveal about the diversity of Latinx identities in the U.S.?
- 3- Why do you think some stories get told more often than others? Who decides what we see in the media or learn in school?
- 4- What do these images teach us about resilience, joy, and culture in the face of struggle?
- 5- What's one way your own story or your family's story connects to the themes of culture, migration, or identity?

Conclusion: (5 minutes)

- 1- Ask students to write a quick response to this prompt:

What's one new insight you gained from today's discussion about Latinx immigrant experiences or cultural contributions?"

Homework: (Optional)

Ask students to bring in a cultural artifact, recipe, photo, song, or story from their own lives or community that they feel connects to the themes of immigration or cultural contributions.

Lesson Plan 2: Understanding Latino, Latina, Latin@, Latinx, and Latiné Terms**Grade:** 9th**Materials:**

- 1- [Handout](#)- Definitions of Terms
- 2- Slide- [Identity and Language Evolution](#)
- 3- Smartboard- [Lumio](#) (Shout It Out activity)
- 4- [Class Participation Rubric](#)

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

- 1- Understand the meaning and evolution of terms used to describe people of Latinx American descent
- 2- Develop cultural sensitivity and awareness of language inclusivity
- 3- Explore the historical and social context of identity terminology

Procedure:

Revisit before the lesson:

[“Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations”](#)

Introduction: (10 minutes)

- 1- Begin with a class discussion: "What do you know about the terms Latino, Latina, Latin@, Latinx, and Latiné?" Use [Lumio](#) for a quick Shout-It Out activity (free for SDP teachers)
- 2- Encourage students to share their current understanding and questions

Activity: Terminology Exploration: (15 minutes)**[Definitions Breakdown:](#)**

1. Latino/Latina- Traditional gendered terms. It refers to people with cultural or ancestral ties to Latin American countries. "Latino" = masculine, "Latina" = feminine
2. Latinx- Gender-neutral term created in the early 2000s. It is a way to be inclusive of all gender identities. It is pronounced as "Latin-ex" or "Latinks"

3. Latiné- It is another gender-neutral alternative. It is considered more linguistically natural in Spanish. It is easier to pronounce in the Spanish language structure

4. Latin@ is a visual way to be inclusive of all genders. It cannot be pronounced.

Discussion: (15 minutes)

Activity- Identity and Language Evolution

- 1- Divide class into small groups
- 2- Project on the Smartboard the following [discussion prompts](#):
 - a- Why might people want gender-neutral terms?
 - b- How does language reflect social changes?
 - c- What challenges might exist in changing traditional language?

Conclusion: (10 minutes)

- 1- Group sharing of activity
- 2- Emphasize respect for individual language preferences
- 3- Discuss how language evolves to be more inclusive

Assessment:

- 1- Participation in class discussions
- 2- Group activity engagement
- 3- Short written reflection on language and identity

Extension Activities (Optional)

- 1- Research the origins of these terms
- 2- Interview family members about language preferences

Lesson Plan 3: US Immigration through 1820-2024 and the Latinx Expansion

Grade: 9

Materials:

- 1- [YouTube Video](#)
- 2- [Discussion Questions](#)
- 3- [World Map](#) (for reference during discussion)
- 4- Chromebooks or Chart Paper
- 5- [Class Participation Rubric](#)

Length: 90 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the historical context of immigration to the United States
2. Recognize the significant cultural contributions of Latino immigrants

Procedure:

Revisit before the lesson:

[“Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations”](#)

Introduction (20 minutes)

- 1- Watch the [YouTube video](#) (8 minutes)
- 2- [Discussion questions](#)

The teacher can adjust this activity by presenting the questions to the whole class and having a discussion, by dividing the class in small groups (each group will then share their answers), or by using “Think, Pair and Share”.

Note for teachers: Puerto Rico (In the video, Puerto Rico is included as a country even though Puerto Rico has been a US territory since 1898, and Puerto Ricans have been US citizens since 1917. This could be a point of discussion and student research. *Adjust class time as needed or use two class periods for the entire lesson.

Activity- Latinx Cultural Contributions Research Poster (35 minutes)**Group Assignments**

- 1- Divide the class into 4-5 students per group
- 2- Each group focuses on a different area of contribution:
 - a. Arts and Literature
 - b. Music and Performance
 - c. Food and Cuisine
 - d. Science and Innovation
 - e. Sports and Athletics

Poster Creation Guidelines (digital or paper activity)

- 1- Include at least 3 specific examples
- 2- Use visual representations
- 3- Cite sources for information
- 4- Demonstrate creativity and research

Reflection and Discussion: (25 minutes)

1- Groups present posters

Closing: (10 minutes)

Written reflection questions:

1. What surprised you most about Latinx contributions?
2. How do immigrant experiences shape American culture?
3. What connections can you make to your own family history?

Assessment**Formative:**

- 1-Group poster rubric
- 2- Participation in discussions (participation rubric)

Summative:

- 1- Written reflection demonstrating:
 - a- Understanding of immigration experiences
 - b- Critical thinking
 - c- Empathy and cultural awareness
- 2- Alternative Assessment Reflection (record their voice reflection, using vocaroo.com and share the link with the teacher)
 - a. Understanding of immigration experiences
 - b. Critical thinking
 - c. Empathy and cultural awareness

Lesson Plan 4: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

Grade: 9th

Length: 90 minutes

Materials:

- 1- YouTube- [The Danger of a Single Story](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug8v8v8v8v8)
- 2- YouTube interview with [Rudine Sims Bishop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug8v8v8v8v8)

- 3- [Wheels of Names](#) (for student participation)
- 4- [Poem: Legal Alien by Pat Mora](#) (bilingual version)
- 5- [Reflection questions](#) (poem reflection/discussion)
- 6- [Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#)
- 7- Student journals or Google document

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- 1- Analyze and evaluate diverse perspectives in literature.
- 2- Understand and appreciate Latinx culture and identity.
- 3- Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively through discussion and writing.
- 4- Evaluate information critically from Latinx poems.
- 5- Engage in discussions about social justice and representation.

Procedure:

Revisit before the lesson,

“[Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#)”

Introduction: (10 minutes):

Think-Pair-Share

- 1- Prompt: What books did you read as a child? Did you see yourself in them? If not, who did you see?
- 2- Students write for 3–5 minutes, then discuss in pairs, followed by selecting some students to share aloud. Use the [Wheels of Names](#).

Teacher Note: The wheel of names needs to be prepared before the lesson. Save your spinning wheel of names for future use. You may create as many wheels of names as needed for all your classes.

Discussion:

1. Watch the YouTube video “**Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors**” (Rudine Sims Bishop)
2. Discuss the terms **Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors**
 - a- **Mirror** – books that reflect your own identity
 - b- **Window** – books that let you see into someone else's world
 - c- **Sliding Glass Door** – books that invite you to step into another’s experience
3. Show [Adichí’s video clip](#) on the power of a single story.
4. Discuss why representation in books matters (whole class)

Activity: Poem- “Legal Aliens” by Pat Mora (20 minutes)

Poem Analysis

- 1- Watch a read-aloud of “Legal Aliens.”
- 2- Follow the video with a [paper copy](#) of the poem: Legal Aliens
- 3- Divide students into small groups.
- 4- Groups share their thoughts with the class using paper or slides.

A- Whose story is being told.

B- What do we learn about their world or experience?

C- Is this a mirror or a window for you? Why?

D- What is the central conflict the speaker describes?

E- How does she feel viewed by Anglos? By Mexicans?

F- What does the title Legal Alien mean in this context?

Activity: The students will research the term “Legal Aliens” in articles and online platforms to analyze its origins, use by the government, media, and videos. They will take notes, use their notes to reflect and write their findings and feelings in their reflection journal (Chromebook or paper)

Closing: (15–20 minutes)

Exit Ticket

- 1- Answer on a sticky note or digital form:
- 2- What’s one thing you learned today about the power of stories?

Assessment:

- 1- Participation in discussion and group work
- 2- Review their writing using the [PA Writing Rubric](#)

Lesson Plan 5: Language and Identity in the poems *Hair* and *Afro-Latina*
Grade: 9th

Materials:

- 1- Copies of the poem [Hair](#) by Elizabeth Acevedo
- 2- Paper
- 3- Smartboard to project the poem, [key concepts](#), and guiding questions
- 4- [Memoir Cultural Tree](#)
- 5- [PA Writing Rubric](#)

Length: 90 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the concept of language as a form of cultural identity
2. Explore the complexities of bilingualism and translanguaging
3. Appreciate linguistic diversity

Procedure:

[“Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations”](#)

Introduction: (15 minutes)

Activity- Concept Exploration

- 1- Divide students into groups of 4-5
- 2- Display [Key Concepts](#)
- 3- In small groups, the students will define:
 - A- Bilingualism
 - B- Linguistic identity
 - C- Translanguaging
- 4- Small group discussions to define these terms
- 5- Use [Lumio](#) activity- “Shout It Out” to share definitions. (whole class)
- 6- Review the definitions with the key concepts slide (whole class)

***Note-** Lumio is available and free for SDP teachers

Activity- Text Analysis (20 minutes)

- 1- Read the poem [Hair](#) by Elizabeth Acevedo. The author translated her poem.
- 2- Watch Elizabeth Acevedo reciting her poem [Afro-Latina](#)
- 3- Discuss questions: (whole class) (slide in process)
 - A- How does language connect to family and cultural identity?
 - B- Is this poem a mirror, a window, or a glass sliding door?
 - C- How are the poems *Hair* and *Afro-Latina* connected?

Closing: (15 minutes)

Personal Reflection Writing-

Choose one of the topics to write a short paragraph:

1. How language connects you to your cultural roots
2. Challenges of maintaining linguistic heritage

Assessment:

- Participation in discussions
- [Memoir Cultural Tree](#)
- Reflective writing piece
- Understanding of key linguistic concepts

Lesson Plan 6: **Language and Identity in *My Broken Language***

Grade: 9th

Length: 90 minutes

Materials:

1. Copies of *My Broken Language* excerpts
2. Smartboard
3. Audio recording device (optional)
4. Language mapping templates

Revisit before the lesson,

[“Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations”](#)

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, student will be able to-

1. Critically examine language as a multifaceted form of cultural identity

2. Analyze the dynamics of bilingualism
3. Develop deep empathy for linguistic diversity and personal language experiences
4. Synthesize personal and textual insights about language and cultural heritage

Procedure:

Introduction: (15 minutes)

Activity Language Identity Mapping

Personal Reflection Prompts:

1. List all languages you've heard in your home and school.
2. Sketch a visual representation of your linguistic landscape
3. Identify emotional connections to different languages

Opening Discussion

1. Students share one unique linguistic experience
2. Teacher models vulnerability by sharing a personal language story
3. How do you feel about being bilingual/bicultural? Do those feelings have changed? If so, how?

Discussion: (25 minutes)

Activity: Independent Reading

- 1- The students will read *My Broken Language* by Quira Alegría Hudes
- 2- The students will take notes of thoughts, feelings, or questions as they read.

Textual Analysis:

Guided Close Reading Strategies-

Annotate text for

1. Emotional language descriptions
2. Cultural references
3. Personal transformation moments

Analytical Questions-

1. How does language represent cultural memory?
2. What power dynamics emerge through linguistic experiences?
3. How do personal and familial languages intersect?

Closing: (10 minutes)

Personal Reflection Writing:

Write a short paragraph about:

1. How language connects you to your cultural roots
2. Challenges of maintaining linguistic heritage

Lesson Plan 7: *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago

Grade: 9th

Materials:

- 1- Printed excerpts from:
 - *When I Was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago (Chapter: Angels on the Ceiling)
- 2- [Activity worksheet](#)
- 3- [Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#)
- 4- Class Participation Rubric

Length: 90 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- 1- Develop empathy and appreciation for immigrant experiences
- 2- Analyze primary sources related to immigration experiences
- 3- Critically examine cultural diversity and identity

Procedure:

Revisit before the lesson,

“[Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#)”

Introduction (25 minutes)

Exploration of Literary Text

Close Reading and Analysis

- 1- Distribute carefully selected text excerpts
- 2- Reading strategies:
 - a- Silent reading (15 minutes)
 - b- Pair-share discussion (10 minutes)

Discussion: (25 minutes)

Activity- [Angels on the Ceiling](#)

- 1- Small group discussion using the guiding questions (Angels on the Ceiling worksheet).
- 2- Share each group's responses by having a representative read out loud their analysis.

Assessment:

Formative:

1-Participation in discussions (participation rubric)

Summative:

1- Written text analysis demonstrating:

- a. Understanding of immigration experiences
- b. Critical thinking
- c. Empathy and cultural awareness

2- Alternative text analysis (Students record their voice analysis, using vocaroo.com, and share the link with the teacher). Vocaroo is approved by the SDP

Assessment:**Formative:**

1-Observe student participation in class and small group discussions. Review their quick write responses. Use a class participation rubric.

Lesson Plan 8: *Solito* by Javier Zamora

Grade Level: 9

Materials:

1. Copies of *Solito* by Javier Zamora
2. [Author's Interview](#) (YouTube video)
3. Worksheet: [Exploration of Social Issues](#)
4. [Social Issues in "Solito"](#) slide (to be displayed)
5. [Reflection Journal](#)

Length: 90 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

1. Understand key social issues facing Latino immigrant communities
2. Analyze excerpts of *Solito*
3. Understand the complex factors that contribute to Latino immigration and displacement.
4. Develop empathy and critical thinking about immigration experiences
5. Connect personal narratives to broader social contexts
6. Discuss the geographical distance and potential challenges of the journey to the United States.

Procedure:

Revisit before the lesson,

[“Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations”](#)

Introduction: (15 minutes)

1. Brief background on Javier Zamora and the context of *Solito*
2. [YouTube Interview](#)

Discussion: (40 minutes)**Activity: Independent Reading (10 minutes)**

1. Provide copies of *Solito*
2. Distribute paper or guide students to open a Google Doc to take notes.
3. The students will use their document to take notes as they read silently.

Small Group Discussion Activity

1. Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students
2. Discuss [Social Issues Exploration](#) (slide)

Group presentations (15 minutes)

Guiding questions:

1. How do economic challenges affect family relationships?
2. What challenges do immigrant families face?

Closing: (10 minutes)**Individual writing activity:**[Personal Reflection](#)

1. Use the following writing prompt as a reference for your critical analysis of *Solito*.
2. What social challenges stood out to you?
3. How do personal stories help us understand broader social issues?

Assessment

1. Participation in discussions
2. Group presentation
3. Individual reflection journal
4. Comprehension of social issues

Lesson Plan 9: *Solito* by Javier Zamora

Grade: 9

Materials:

1. Copies of *Solito* by Javier Zamora
2. Google Earth [Map of Central America](#)
3. [What If?](#) (slide to display)
- 4- [Character Graphic Organizers](#)
- 5- [Class Participation Rubric](#)
- 6- [Exit Ticket](#)

Length: 90 minutes

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze the challenges and hardships faced by unaccompanied children during their journeys and upon arrival.
2. Identify the emotional and psychological impact of displacement on children and their families
3. Improve critical reading, analysis, and discussion skills.

Procedure:

Revisit/ review guidelines for class discussions

[Our Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#)” (displayed on Smartboard)

Introduction: (15 minutes)

Getting Ready: 1. Show the location of [Central America](#) using Google Earth

Where is Guatemala? Student exploration

Independent Reading (20 minutes)

1. Provide copies of *Solito*
2. Distribute flashcards to take notes

Discussion:

Setting the tone: Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)

1. Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students
2. The students will discuss how the story might have unfolded differently if key events had not occurred. Use the guiding question: [What If?](#)

In-Pairs Activity: Quote Analysis (15 minutes)

- 1- The students will use the excerpts of *Solito* to identify significant quotes from the book.
- 2- The students will analyze their meaning and relevance to the story's themes.

Closing: (10 minutes)

Quick write:

The students will analyze “Jaime” using the [Character Graphic Organizer](#)

Assessment:

1. Participation in discussions
2. Character Graphic Organizer
3. Individual reflection journal a character analysis

Resources**Annotated Bibliography- For Teachers and Students**

Adichie, C. N. (2009, October 7). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs24Izeg>

This TED Talk discusses the danger of knowing people or places through only a single story, emphasizing how these limited perspectives can lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudice. Adichie draws from her own experiences to illustrate how single stories are often rooted in power imbalances and can rob individuals and cultures of their complexity and dignity. Adichie encourages the audience to seek out multiple narratives to gain a more accurate understanding of the world.

Bishop, R. S. (2025, January 30). *Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAu58SNSyc>

In this video, Rudine Sims Bishop explains her "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" framework. Mirrors reflect a child's own life; windows offer views into others' experiences and sliding glass doors allow readers to step into another world. Bishop emphasizes that providing diverse children books presenting all three roles is crucial for fostering an inclusive and empathetic readership. This video is a key resource for understanding the impact of children's literature.

Democracy Now! (2023, May 10). “*Solito*”: Salvadoran writer Javier Zamora details his solo 4,000-mile journey to U.S. as a 9-year-old [Video]. YouTube.

<https://youtu.be/a7yfwyTHJX8>

In this interview, author Javier Zamora reflects on his 4,000-mile journey to the United States as a 9-year-old migrant. Zamora presents themes of displacement, identity, and resilience. The video is valuable for understanding the human side of immigration and can serve as a firsthand narrative to support classroom discussions or research on Latin American migration.

Epic Reads. (2020, April 21). “*I’m so damn Dominican*” from *Clap When You Land* – Elizabeth Acevedo live performance [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/8ipiPaAK9Lc?si=mnfK-DXQNYiTgQ1V>

In this video, Elizabeth Acevedo delivers a powerful live performance of the poem “I’m so damn Dominican”. Acevedo explores themes of cultural identity, heritage, and the complexities of the Dominican American experience.

Hudes, Q. A. (2021). *My broken language: A memoir*. Random House.

In this powerful memoir, award-winning writer Quiara Alegría Hudes shares what it was like growing up in a Puerto Rican family in Philadelphia. She mixes English and Spanish to tell stories about strong women in her family, their culture, and how she figured out who she was. This memoir shows how language can sometimes cause problems but also bring people together. It’s a great book for learning about bilingual life, Latinx identity, and the importance of sharing our own stories.

Panico, M. [Maria Panico]. (2018, February 7). *Audio~Legal Alien by Pat Mora* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/jHLEPQCDehU?si=H9tfbvRuSiEUjIf9>

This audio recording of Pat Mora's poem "Legal Alien" powerfully presents the bicultural experience of navigating life between Mexican and American cultures. The poem explores the feelings of marginalization and identity conflict, as the speaker is perceived as an "alien" by both groups. The audio format deepens the poem's emotional impact, making it a valuable tool for discussing cultural identity, assimilation, and the immigrant experience.

Santiago, E. (1993). *When I was Puerto Rican*. Vintage Books.

This memoir narrates Esmeralda Santiago's childhood in rural Puerto Rico and her eventual move to New York City at the age of thirteen. Santiago recounts her experiences of cultural displacement, the challenges of adapting to a new language and environment, and her journey of self-discovery as she navigates her identity between two distinct worlds. The book offers a moving exploration of memory, family, and the complexities of immigration and assimilation.

Seattle Public Library. (2012, June 8). *Quiara Alegría Hudes discusses "My Broken Language"* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Ar3Q3GdPYmA?si=QcM0Nf11cW49_6vv

In this video, Quiara Alegría Hudes discusses her memoir, *My Broken Language*. It is a great resource for understanding her memoir and for discussions on bilingualism, Latinx identity, and the power of narrative.

SlamFind. (2014, May 3). *Elizabeth Acevedo - "Hair"* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/0svS78Nw_yY

This video shows a live performance of Acevedo's poem: *Hair*. In her poem, Acevedo "explores themes of cultural identity, beauty standards, and the significance of natural hair within the Afro-Latina community. It focuses on culture, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Zamora, J. (2022). *Solito: A memoir*. Hogarth._

In this memoir, Javier Zamora recounts his arduous journey as a nine-year-old unaccompanied child crossing the border from El Salvador to the United States. His narrative powerfully explores themes of fear, loneliness, family separation, survival, and the profound culture shock of immigration.

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Appendix

This unit, designed for Spanish for Heritage Speakers, offers 10 comprehensive lesson plans, each with clear instructions and all necessary materials for implementation. I've developed student worksheets and accompanying slides to support these lessons. These plans provide a flexible framework that teachers can use to develop additional lessons and activities. The standards addressed are the [ACTFL](#) standards.

For added flexibility, teachers can choose to use excerpts or entire memoirs, making this unit a perfect complement for a 90-minute class. Since this is a year-long unit, I will be adjusting it based on its development in the classroom. The ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) standards, often referred to as the 5 C's: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities, are fundamental to designing effective world language units across the United States. These standards provide a robust framework that guides language teachers, ensuring students not only achieve proficiency in the target language but also develop a deep cultural understanding. This unit is unique in that it's designed for instruction in both Spanish and English, allowing it to cater to diverse student needs and varying proficiency levels.

Communication Goal

The Communication Goal emphasizes effective communication in multiple languages for various situations and purposes, encompassing speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. This goal is broken down into three key standards: Interpersonal Communication, Interpretive Communication, and Presentational Communication. This unit incorporates a variety of communication activities, such as discussions, reading, and writing exercises. By integrating these standards, students enhance their English and Spanish language abilities and gain a more profound understanding of the social issues faced by Latinx communities.

Culture Goal

The Culture Goal focuses on developing cultural competence and understanding. It comprises two standards: Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives and Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives. This unit provides students with opportunities to learn about cultural identity and heritage through memoirs, poems, critical reflection, and writing.

Connections Goal

The Connections Goal encourages students to link language learning with other disciplines, acquire diverse perspectives, and use the language in academic and career contexts. Its two standards are Making Connections and Acquiring Information, and Diverse Perspectives. This unit specifically prompts students to explore connections between Spanish and current events. By integrating these disciplines, students develop a more comprehensive understanding of the social, historical, and cultural factors that shape Latinx migrants.

Comparisons Goal

The Comparisons Goal aims to foster insight into the nature of language and culture, ultimately enhancing cultural competence. The Language Comparisons and Cultural Comparisons standards within this goal encourage students to compare languages and cultures, leveraging this knowledge to improve language acquisition. This is particularly beneficial for bilingual/bicultural individuals, especially in understanding the diverse Latinx cultures within the USA.

Communities Goal

The Communities Goal highlights the importance of communicating and interacting with cultural competence to participate in multilingual communities globally and locally. Its standards, School and Global Communities and Lifelong Learning, encourage engagement with diverse communities and the application of the target language beyond the classroom, fostering empathy and cultural awareness.

The ACTFL standards provide a comprehensive framework for impactful language education, promoting continuous language learning. This unit effectively integrates language acquisition with critical social issues, making the lessons both relevant and meaningful for all students.