

Lesson # 1: Playwriting activity with “Searching for Peter Z” by Alvaro Saar Rios

Sources:

Kelin, Daniel A. II. (2006). Integrating Drama into the ESLL Classroom. *MultiCultural Review* 15 (3): 29-35.

Rios, Alvaro Saar. (2003). Searching for Peter Z. In Lyn Miller-Lachmann (Ed.) *Once Upon a Cuento*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press.

Objectives:

In teaching middle school history, I have found that stories often convey more about a time period and way of life than textbooks can. As the Editor-in-Chief of *MultiCultural Review* for 14 years and editor of *Once Upon a Cuento* (2003), a collection of 17 short stories for young adult readers by Latino authors, I have identified stories that portray diverse cultures in an authentic and compelling manner.

Drama and playwriting are tools for enhancing the reading of multicultural literature. Typically, in my middle school class, I divide students into groups that correspond to acts or scenes, which the students then write in their groups. In this cooperative learning experience, students often take on the personas of the characters, and as part of the discussion afterward, we examine the experience of acting as someone from a different time, a different culture, or a different gender.

Activities:

Read aloud “Searching for Peter Z”

Block out scenes: How do we define a scene?

Who are the characters in each scene? What are they like?

How does the dialogue of the story fit into the scene?

How can we expand the story through a play? How can we expand this particular story?

Divide participants/students into groups, each assigned to write one scene.

When the groups are finished, they present their scenes in order, via Readers’ Theater

Additional activities:

Revise scenes to create a play: How can we make this series of scenes more consistent?

More entertaining? Easier to perform?

Type up scripts for students.

Present the play through Tableaux (acting without words), Readers’ Theater (reading without movement), or as a full performance (reading from scripts or memorized).

I am available to work with groups, middle school and up, to create plays based on “Searching for Peter Z.” Please contact Lyn Miller-Lachmann, via e-mail, mcreview@aol.com; phone, 518.729.3976, or by mail, 194 Lenox Ave., Albany, NY 12208.

Lesson #2: Story writing activity with “Learning Buddies” by Lorraine López

Sources:

López, Lorraine. (2006). *Call Me Henri*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press

López, Lorraine. (2003). Learning Buddies. In Lyn Miller-Lachmann (Ed.) *Once Upon a Cuento*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press.

Odeaneal, Jamie. (2005). Parting Words: Good News, Bad News. *MultiCultural Review* 14 (3): 124-126.

Objectives:

Reading about young people with lives similar to their own is a good way to get students to share their experiences and views. Characters and their creators can serve as role models, and the situations encountered in the stories pose dilemmas for which young people can propose solutions. Reading about others is a means of building a young person’s capacity for empathy.

Fiction has long served as a “second life,” allowing access to other worlds without the need for a computer and high-speed access to an elaborate web site. This is true for all young people, but for English Language Learners at the secondary level, reading about the trials of teens just like themselves can help to break down resistance to speaking and writing in English. When Flor announces in “Learning Buddies” that “TV is the world!” she touches on an important aspect of most people’s lives and especially for ELL students for whom TV serves as an entry point into a new environment.

Activities:

Read aloud “Learning Buddies” (short story or excerpt from the novel *Call Me Henri*). [Depending on the class, you might want to elicit a summary of the plot to check comprehension.]

Why does Flor believe that “TV is the world”? Do you believe TV is the world? In what ways does TV show us the world?

List types of TV shows—reality shows, sports, news, telenovelas, comedy, drama, etc.

Think about an episode from your life that you believe would make a good TV show.

Write about this episode any way you want: as a story, a play, or an outline of things that happened, in the order that they happened.

Students can work individually or in pairs.

Students can tell the truth or make things up—for instance, that their team won rather than lost.

Free writing [allow 30 minutes or more]

Share stories on “our class’s TV station”

I am available to work with ELL classes, middle school and up, to write stories using “Learning Buddies” as a prompt. Please contact Lyn Miller-Lachmann, via e-mail, mcreview@aol.com; phone, 518.729.3976, or by mail, 194 Lenox Ave., Albany, NY 12208. The author, Lorraine López, is also available; contact Jantje Tielken at Curbstone Press, jantje@curbstone.org; phone 860.423.5110.