

Curriculum Project
For
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“Exploring Myth, Magical Realism, and Mysticism
in Literature and Art”

Introduction:
Exploring Myth, Magical Realism, and Mysticism in Literature and Art

Mexico is a culture with a rich past and enduring tradition. These qualities are reflected in the literature and art of its people. The goal of this unit is to synthesize four significant genres of this culture and examine how the influences of the past endure, transcending medium.

To begin, students will read an ancient Mayan creation myth that attempts to explain the creation of man and all the Earth's inhabitants. This selection represents literature in antiquity. Students will examine elements of this myth, then compare and contrast it to elements found in Greek mythology.

Next, students will examine a short fiction selection from a contemporary Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, entitled "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." As students move from examining a myth, they will recognize similar characteristics in contemporary Latin American fiction that employs the element of magical realism and how it works to reveal the values of society.

However, there are other genres that retain many of the same qualities found in literature of the past. Sandra Cisneros's vignette, "The Three Sisters" contains elements of the mystic as well as trappings of Catholic religion, a faith whose influence is pervasive through the entire Mexican culture, even as it crosses the border and becomes Mexican-American.

Interestingly enough, the elements that endure in classic and contemporary literature alike are also represented in visual art. Students will examine a painting by Frida Kahlo for elements of the mythic, magical, and surreal. This example of artwork acts as a culminating activity that will draw together all the elements found in the literature and how they visually work to tell a story. It is fitting that Kahlo would be included in this study, as she was greatly schooled in the traditions and myths of her beloved Mexico and her work, often depicting Mexico's past, is among the most famous to emerge from her country.

It is my hope that this unit will offer a unique insight into the study of Mexican culture. As students work on academic skills such as reading comprehension, annotation, and the study of literary elements, I also hope that other cultural perspectives emerge that will endure after the unit has concluded.

Lesson One

Myths: a reading from the “Popol Vuh”

Description

Students will use a passage from the “Popol Vuh” to study an example of a Mayan creation myth.

TEKS Objectives

7A Students will establish a purpose for reading such as to discover, interpret, and enjoy.

7G Students will draw inferences such as conclusions, generalizations, and predictions and support them with text evidence and experience.

8C Read world literature, including classic and contemporary works.

9A Recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading.

10B Students will use elements of text to defend his/her own responses and interpretation.

Teacher to Teacher Notes

A myth is a traditional story that explains some aspect of human society or the natural world, often reflecting the religious beliefs of a particular people. The main characters in myths depict gods and heroes. Creation myths, such as the “Popol Vuh” attempt to explain the origin of the world and how man and all creatures came into existence.

The following selection, from the “Popol Vuh,” is an ancient Mayan myth that explains how the gods created humans. Before reading this selection, have students share what they remember about Greek creation myths and key figures such as the Titans. (Additional resource: Edith Hamilton’s Mythology, “How the World and Mankind Were Created.”)

After discussion, begin reading this selection, annotating the passage for key literary elements such as personification and imagery, as well as the mythological elements.

To begin, make sure students have a basic understanding of literary terms such as *imagery*, *inference*, *metaphor*, *personification*, and *symbolism* before the reading so that they can identify these elements in the text.

Each student will need a printed copy of the passage as well as a highlighter and a pen or pencil with which to make marginal notes.

Make a transparency of the passage to demonstrate this skill for students so they can see how to properly highlight and how to annotate. Prompt students to ask questions, make comments, and connect these elements with Greek mythology, as marginal notes/comments.

Monitor students as they highlight, making sure they highlight only key words and phrases and that they make detailed notes in the margin that include not only the identification of the word, but also an interpretation or the significance of the highlighted text.

Materials

- Printed copies of the passage entitled “Popol Vuh”
- A transparency of “Popol Vuh”
- Pens, pencils, highlighters
- Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

Resources & Technology

- http://jc-schools.net/ce/reading-strategies_files/frame.htm

(A presentation on active reading strategies)

- <http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/active.htm>

(Active reading strategies)

- http://www.hrs.pvt.k12.ca.us/us/learning_skills/lessons/sample_annotation.htm

(Sample annotated text)

- <http://www.greekmyth.org/>

(A comprehensive web site for links to Greek mythology)

Procedures/Activities

MODELED/SHARED

As a class, read the first two paragraphs of the passage entitled "Popol Vuh." At the overhead, demonstrate for students how to highlight key words and phrases and to make detailed marginal notes that include the identification of various literary devices as well as an interpretation of what they mean within the context of the story.

For example, you may want to point out that "Creation" and "Calm" are examples of personification. Prompt the students to question: "Why are Creation and Calm capitalized?" Students may want to note that these words are capitalized because they represent two great kings that ruled the earth before man.

GUIDED PRACTICE

As a class, read the next two paragraphs together, identifying the various literary devices and noting how they work to explain how and why man was created including key words and phrases and making detailed notes in margin that offer not only the identification of a literary term, but also an interpretation of the term.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students will read the rest of the passage on their own, annotating the passage for various literary devices and the similarities to Greek mythology.

APPLICATION

In a class discussion, the teacher will ask guiding questions to make sure the students understand certain aspects of Mayan and Greek mythology:

1. What could be the Greek equivalent to the Mayan "Maker, Tepeu, and Gucumatz, the Forefathers? (Students may connect the Forefathers to the Titans)
2. What is different about how the Mayan Forefathers and the Greeks create life? (The Mayans created life from nothing. However, each of the Greek gods were born or created from either an individual or some aspect of nature.)
3. What does the "clay" material seem to symbolize in the Forefather's first attempt to create Man?
4. What attributes of "wood" make it a better suited for creating Man than "clay"?
5. What is it about the "wooden figures," though better than "clay," that is still not the ideal material for Man?
6. Based on the possible interpretations for "clay" and "wood," what seems to be the desired traits for Man that neither of these materials provided?

Assessment(s)

The students will respond to four open-ended questions covering various aspects of the passage. The instructor should look for a correctly identified example of personification, lines from the text using personification for support, and an interpretation of how personification is used to reveal various aspects of human nature or traits of man's character.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Have students view a movie clip from "The Odyssey" to look for shared elements of Greek and Mayan mythology. What traits do these gods share? How are they different?

from the
Popol Vuh
Creation Hymn

Translated by Ralph Nelson ~

BEFORE THE WORLD WAS CREATED, Calm and Silence were the great kings that ruled. Nothing existed, there was nothing. Things had not yet been drawn together, the face of the earth was unseen. There was only motionless sea, and a great emptiness of sky. There were no men anywhere, or animals, no birds or fish, no crabs. Trees, stones, caves, grass, forests, none of these existed yet. There was nothing that could roar or run, nothing that could tremble or cry in the air. Flatness and emptiness, only the sea, alone and breathless. It was night; silence stood in the dark.

In this darkness the Creators waited, the Maker, Tepeu, Gucumatz, the Forefathers.¹ They were there in this emptiness, hidden under green and blue feathers, alone and surrounded with light. They are the same as wisdom. They are the ones who can conceive and bring forth a child from nothingness. And the time had come. The Creators were bent deep around talk in the darkness. They argued, worried, sighed over what was to be. They planned the growth of the thickets, how things would crawl and jump, the birth of man. They planned the whole creation,

arguing each point until their words and thoughts crystallized and became the same thing. Heart of Heaven was there, and in the darkness the creation was planned.

Then let the emptiness fill! they said. Let the water weave its way downward so the earth can show its face! Let the light break on the ridges, let the sky fill up with the yellow light of dawn! Let our glory be a man walking on a path through the trees. "Earth!" the Creators called. They called only once, and it was there, from a mist from a cloud of dust, the mountains appeared instantly. At this single word the groves of cypresses and pines sent out shoots, rivulets ran freely between the round hills. The Creators were struck by the beauty and exclaimed, "It will be a creation that will mount the darkness!"

The Creators then asked, "Will this silence reign under the trees forever?" Suddenly there were the Guardians of the Woods, the small animals, the little mensprites² of the mountains, deer, birds, jaguars, snakes, Guardians of the Thickets. Then the Creators gave these creatures homes: "You, deer, you will walk on all fours among greenness, and sleep in the

1. The reference to the *Maker . . . Forefathers*, in Maya mythology, concerns the deities who created life on Earth.

2. *Mensprites* (men' sprits') are small, often mischievous, supernatural beings similar to elves.

Vocabulary

conceive (kan sēv') *v.* to cause to begin; to originate

from the **Popol Vuh**

fields on the shoulders of the rivers, or in the cover of ravines. Keep company with the thicket and the pasture, but go to the woods to mate. You, birds, take the air. Go live in the trees and vines, make nests there and mate there, fill the air with your children. They spoke to each creature in turn, assigning each a place, and the birds and animals, snakes and jaguars, went looking for their nests and homes.

With their places established, the Forefathers asked them to speak. "Cry, warble, call!" the Creators told them. "Each of you in your own language. Speak to us!" But a great din arose from their throats. "No!" cried the Creators, "Call our names, raise our names with your voices, Huracan, Chipi-Caculha, Raxa-Caculha, Heart of Heaven, Heart of Earth, Creator, Maker, Forefathers,³ let your praise fall like rain!" But the birds and animals could not speak like men. The noise only rose in pitch. They could only scream and hiss and cackle. The birds and animals were deaf to each other's words, they were mute in the name of the Creators. When the Creators saw this, they knew that something must be done. They spoke to the jaguar and the turkey and the others, and said, "We have changed our minds. Because you cannot talk, you shall be destroyed. You may keep your places, your nests in the trees, your homes by the rivers, but since you cannot call our names, we will create more obedient creatures who will. Your destiny has been changed: your flesh will be torn." The animals of the earth were sacrificed, condemned to be killed and eaten.

"We need to try again! Dawn draws near!" And the Creators tried again, using clay to make man's flesh. But instantly they saw that it would come to nothing. It was a soft thing,



Young Maize God. c. A.D. 775, Maya culture. Copan Temple 22, Honduras. Stone. British Museum, London.

it melted away. Immobile, without strength, it could not even turn its head to look behind. Its vision was runny, it spoke with a mind of mud. It melted into the water. The Creators knew that these creatures would never have sons, and their destruction was as quick as their creation.

"But what can we do?" they cried. "Who will worship and sustain us?" Again they bent their heads together. At last they decided to go to the soothsayers, the Grandparents of the Day and the Dawn. The old man was the one who could tell the future by throwing beans. The old woman was divine, a priestess and sorceress. They talked also with the Master of Emeralds, the sculptor who carves beautiful jewelry and gourds. The Creators asked them about making men out of wood. "What do you think?" they asked, "will men of wood worship us? Throw your red beans,

3. *Huracan . . . Forefathers* are all Maya deities.

Vocabulary

warble (wôr' bəl) *v.* to sing with rapid variations, or changes, in pitch

immobile (i mō' bil) *adj.* incapable of movement, motionless

sustain (sə stān') *v.* to perform actions that keep something in existence

decide if we should make men by carving their eyes and mouth on a stick of wood."

The soothsayers squatted down and threw the beans and grains of corn. "Fate! Creature!" the old man and woman called, "Get together, beans, lock each other in your arms, speak to us! Tell us if the Creators should carve the wood. Tell us if men carved of sticks will worship and sustain us when the light comes. Beans, fate, creature! Come together, take each other! Heart of Heaven, let the truth be spoken!" Everything then stopped. The corn lay quiet with their message, the soothsayers squatted unmoving. Then the old ones spoke: "The voices of the wooden men shall echo across the earth!"

Instantly, the wooden figures were made. They were slender and looked like men. They cooked and washed in the river, they hunted in the forest with their dogs, they brought down the trees to plant corn. They had sons and daughters, and soon were everywhere on the earth. But the men of wood did not have souls or minds, and they wandered aimlessly. When they spoke, their faces were blank, their hands and feet were weak. They were without blood's flower, no moisture, no flesh, dry and yellow, and they no longer remembered Heart of Heaven. And since those who had made them and cared for them did not enter their thoughts, they were reduced to splinters. First, a flood was loosed on the wooden men by Heart of Heaven, a heavy resin⁴ fell from the sky. The eagle flashed down out of the heavens to gouge out their eyes, the vampire bat winged in to claim their heads, the tapir⁵ came

to break and mangle their bones, and the jaguar, always waiting, took his chance. Heart of Heaven was not remembered, and the face of the earth was darkened; black rain fell day and night.

Then everything began to rise up against the wooden men. Sticks, pots and pans, large and small animals, everything. "You have eaten us, and now we shall eat you," said the birds and the dogs that were kept to be eaten.

The grinding stones spoke in rage: "What torture you caused us! Crush, crush, dawn and dusk our faces went crush, crush, crush! Now you are not men, it's our turn to grind you."

The hunting dogs spoke: "We hunted for you and guarded your house, but did you feed us? Did you think that we liked staying out in the rain? You were too busy for us, and kept a stick ready in case we came near your food. Why didn't you think about your future? But it's too late now, because the sticks are going to be between our teeth!" The dogs leaped on the stick men knocking them down, tearing their faces.

The griddles and pots attacked them: "O! the pain and suffering you have caused us! O mouths blackened with soot, our faces blackened. Every day you threw us on the fire as if we felt no pain! Now you shall feel the same burning!"

The wooden men were trapped. The fire-stones hurled themselves at the wooden men that ran past them, crashing into their heads. Splintering and burning, shrinking from blows, scurrying and falling, they ran looking for safety. Some climbed to the tops of the houses, but the houses tossed them from their backs. Some tried to climb trees; the trees threw them down. The caverns closed their mouths to those who tried to enter, and the wooden men were destroyed. Only a few, with mouths and faces mangled, escaped the spears of water and the splintering blows. Most of them became monkeys.

4. *Resin* (rez' in) is the yellow or brown sticky substance secreted by certain trees.

5. The *tapir* (tā' pār) is a hoofed, plant-eating mammal. Tapirs are native to the tropics of southeastern Asia and the Americas. Though pig-like in appearance, tapirs are related to horses.



Open-ended items for “Popol Vuh”

Using your annotated reading, answer each of the following questions supporting responses with evidence from the text.

1. Why do the Creators need human beings?

2. In what ways are the wooden men superior to the clay humans? In what ways are they inferior?

3. Identify and discuss an example of personification and the human trait it is meant to represent.

4. What might this selection reveal about the moral values of the Maya?

Modified version of open-ended items

For students who need more support with responding to open-ended questions, a basic template is provided below. A scoring rubric follows.

1. Why do the Creators need human beings?

Response to question:

Textual evidence “

”

Elaboration/interpretation:

2. In what ways are the wooden men superior to the clay humans? In what ways are they inferior?

Response to question:

Textual evidence “

”

Elaboration/interpretation:

3. Identify and discuss an example of personification and the human trait it is meant to represent.

Response to question:

Textual evidence “

”

Elaboration/interpretation:

4. What might this selection reveal about the moral values of the Maya?

Response to question:

Textual evidence “

”

Elaboration/interpretation:

General Grading Rubric for Open Ended Responses

Place the number of the error next to the error found in the student response and then highlight the corresponding error on the rubric to give student feedback on their writing.

Content

1. Avoid illogical jumps in thought.
2. Awkward/irrelevant placement of text support.
3. Discuss any text offered as support for a fact.
4. Identify speakers of quotes (if quoted text is dialogue).
5. Inaccurate information given.
6. Weak/ineffective elaboration/support/development of topic.
7. Writing is disjointed/lacks clarity/continuity/focus; not cohesive.

Mechanics/Technical

8. Avoid awkward/wordy/redundant sentence structure.
9. Catch editing errors before final draft: spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, missing words, fragment sentences.
10. Discuss literature in present tense.
11. Internal documentation: page number, line number, etc.
12. Keep voice formal; avoid slang.
13. Avoid the use of "you," identifying yourself, addressing the audience.
14. Observe standard paragraph format.
15. Omit non-essential information. It weakens focus.
16. Underline book and play titles. Put quotations around "short story" and "poem" titles.

General Grading Rubric

Score Point 0-Insufficient (a grade of 50)

- Analysis too general or vague
- Incorrect analysis
- Does not address question
- Irrelevant textual evidence
- No textual evidence
- No development of topic
- Only plot summary offered

Score Point 1-Partially Sufficient (a grade of 65)

- Evidence if weakly connected to topic
- Provides no textual support
- Provides only general/incomplete/partially accurate/relevant textual support
- Provides only partial development of topic

Score Point 2-Sufficient (a grade of 70-85)

- Offers a reasonable topic supported with accurate/relevant textual support
- Provides sufficient development of topic

Score Point 3-Exemplary (a grade of 90-100)

- Offers **insight on the topic** and is **strongly** supported with accurate/relevant textual evidence

Lesson Two
Magical Realism: a reading of “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”
By Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Description

Students will study a passage from “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” to study the literary element of magical realism.

TEKS Objectives

7A Students will establish a purpose for reading such as to discover, interpret, and enjoy.
7G Students will draw inferences such as conclusions, generalizations, and predictions and support them with text evidence and experience.
8C Read world literature, including classic and contemporary works.
9A Recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading.
10B Students will use elements of text to defend his/her own responses and interpretation.

Teacher to Teacher Notes

This lesson is meant to follow the discussion of Greek mythology and the ready of the “Popol Vuh.” As creation myths seek to explain the unexplainable, stories that employ the element of magical realism seek to create an event that cannot be explained. However, both genres contain common mythic elements that strive to provide commentary on man and the values of his society.

To begin, make sure students have a basic understanding of literary terms such as *characterization, simile, metaphor, oxymoron, personification, symbolism, imagery, and inference* before the reading so that they can identify these elements in the text.

Each student will need a printed copy of the passage as well as a highlighter and a pen or pencil with which to make marginal notes.

Make a transparency of one part of the beginning of the passage to demonstrate this skill for students so they can see how to properly highlight and how to make marginal notes. Prompt students to ask questions, isolate parts of the text that show magical realism, make comments, and connect these elements with other stories they have read, such as the “Popol Vuh.”

Monitor students as they highlight, making sure they highlight only key words and phrases and that they make detailed notes in the margin that include not only the identification of the word, but also an interpretation or the significance of the highlighted text.

Materials

- Printed copies of the passage entitled “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”
- A transparency of one part of the beginning of the passage
- Pens, pencils, highlighters
- Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

Resources & Technology

- http://www.geocities.com/cyber_explorer99/garciamarquezoldman.html
(A full electronic text of the story “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”)
- <http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/Ncw/marquez.htm>
(A Web page discussing the author and defining the technique of magical realism)
- http://jc-schools.net/ce/reading-strategies_files/frame.htm
(A presentation on active reading strategies)
- <http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/active.htm>
(Active reading strategies)
- http://www.hrs.pvt.k12.ca.us/us/learning_skills/lessons/sample_annotation.htm

(Sample annotated text)

Procedures/Activities

MODELED/SHARED

As a class, read the first page of the passage entitled “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.” At the overhead, demonstrate for students how to isolate key words and phrases and to make detailed marginal notes that identify various literary devices including elements that seem unreal or magical.

For example, you may want to point out that a very old man “is impeded by his enormous wings” is an example of magical realism because, under normal circumstances, humans don’t have wings. Prompt the students to question, ““Why does the old man have wings? How did he get them?” Students may want to note that this odd story detail juxtaposed to a seemingly normal setting is a characteristic of stories employing magical realism.

GUIDED PRACTICE

As a class, read the next page together identifying various literary devices including any elements of magical realism. Monitor students as they practice highlighting only key words and phrases and making detailed notes in margin that offer not only the identification of a literary term, but also an interpretation of the term and how it works to develop the story.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students will read the remainder of the passage on their own and annotate for various literary elements including magical realism.

APPLICATION

In a class discussion, the teacher will ask guiding questions to make sure the students understand certain unique aspects of the passage:

1. At what point in the story does the reader know that it includes elements of fantasy?
2. What might be why the old man is called an “angel”?
3. Discuss the effectiveness of blending real and unreal elements to tell a story.
4. How might the tone of the passage change if there was dialogue?
5. What are some symbolic elements that emerge from the reading?
6. What insight about humanity can be gained from the angel’s treatment by the townspeople?

Assessment(s)

The students will respond to four open-ended questions that call upon the reader to discuss the description and treatment of the angel using inferences based on the magical elements in the story.

The instructor should monitor students as they work, helping them interpret elements of the text that might seem ambiguous.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Have students view a movie clip, or other media, to look for other stories that employ magical realism as a way of providing insight into the way humans think and behave.

(Books and films such as Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and The Chronicles of Narnia use this technique.)

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

[b. 1928]

A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

A TALE FOR CHILDREN

TRANSLATED BY GREGORY RABASSA

On the third day of rain they had killed so many crabs inside the house that Pelayo had to cross his drenched courtyard and throw them into the sea, because the newborn child had a temperature all night and they thought it was due to the stench. The world had been sad since Tuesday. Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing and the sands of the beach, which on March nights glimmered like powdered light, had become a stew of mud and rotten shellfish. The light was so weak at noon that when Pelayo was coming back to the house after throwing away the crabs, it was hard for him to see what it was that was moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard. He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings.

Frightened by that nightmare, Pelayo ran to get Elisenda, his wife, who was putting compresses on the sick child, and he took her to the rear of the courtyard. They both looked at the fallen body with mute stupor. He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather had taken away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm. And yet, they called in a neighbor woman who knew everything about life and death to see him, and all she needed was one look to show them their mistake.

"He's an angel," she told them. "He must have been coming for the child, but the poor fellow is so old that the rain knocked him down."

On the following day everyone knew that a flesh-and-blood angel was held captive in Pelayo's house. Against the judgment of the wise neighbor woman, for whom angels in those times were the fugitive survivors of a celestial conspiracy, they did not have the heart to club him to death. Pelayo watched over him all afternoon from the kitchen, armed with his bailiff's club, and before going to bed he dragged him out of the mud and locked him up with the hens in the wire chicken coop. In the middle of the night, when the rain stopped, Pelayo and Elisenda were still killing crabs. A short time afterward the child woke up without a fever and with a desire to eat. Then they

felt magnanimous and decided to put the angel on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas. But when they went out into the courtyard with the first light of dawn, they found the whole neighborhood in front of the chicken coop having fun with the angel, without the slightest reverence, tossing him things to eat through the openings in the wire as if he weren't a supernatural creature but a circus animal.

Father Gonzaga arrived before seven o'clock, alarmed at the strange news. By that time onlookers less frivolous than those at dawn had already arrived and they were making all kinds of conjectures concerning the captive's future. The simplest among them thought that he should be named mayor of the world. Others of sterner mind felt that he should be promoted to the rank of five-star general in order to win all wars. Some visionaries hoped that he could be put to stud in order to implant on earth a race of winged wise men who could take charge of the universe. But Father Gonzaga, before becoming a priest, had been a robust woodcutter. Standing by the wire, he reviewed his catechism in an instant and asked them to open the door so that he could take a close look at that pitiful man who looked more like a huge decrepit hen among the fascinated chickens. He was lying in a corner drying his open wings in the sunlight among the fruit peels and breakfast leftovers that the early risers had thrown him. Alien to the impertinences of the world, he only lifted his antiquarian eyes and murmured something in his dialect when Father Gonzaga went into the chicken coop and said good morning to him in Latin. The parish priest had his first suspicion of an imposter when he saw that he did not understand the language of God or know how to greet His ministers. Then he noticed that seen close up he was much too human: he had an unbearable smell of the outdoors, the back side of his wings was strewn with parasites and his main feathers had been mistreated by terrestrial winds, and nothing about him measured up to the proud dignity of angels. Then he came out of the chicken coop and in a brief sermon warned the curious against the risks of being ingenuous. He reminded them that the devil had the bad habit of making use of carnival tricks in order to confuse the unwary. He argued that if wings were not the essential element in determining the difference between a hawk and an airplane, they were even less so in the recognition of angels. Nevertheless, he promised to write a letter to his bishop so that the latter would write to his primate so that the latter would write to the Supreme Pontiff in order to get the final verdict from the highest courts.

His prudence fell on sterile hearts. The news of the captive angel spread with such rapidity that after a few hours the courtyard had the bustle of a marketplace and they had to call in troops with fixed bayonets to disperse the mob that was about to knock the house down. Elisenda, her spine all twisted from sweeping up so much marketplace trash, then got the idea of fencing in the yard and charging five cents admission to see the angel.

The curious came from far away. A traveling carnival arrived with a flying acrobat who buzzed over the crowd several times, but no one paid any attention to him because his wings were not those of an angel but, rather, those of a sidereal bat. The most unfortunate invalids on earth came in search of health: a poor woman who since childhood had been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him; a sleepwalker who got up at night to undo the things he had done while awake; and many others with less serious ailments. In the midst of that shipwreck disorder that made the earth tremble,

Pelayo and Elisenda were happy with fatigue, for in less than a week they had crammed their rooms with money and the line of pilgrims waiting their turn to enter still reached beyond the horizon.

The angel was the only one who took no part in his own act. He spent his time trying to get comfortable in his borrowed nest, befuddled by the hellish heat of the oil lamps and sacramental candles that had been placed along the wire. At first they tried to make him eat some mothballs, which, according to the wisdom of the wise neighbor woman, were the food prescribed for angels. But he turned them down, just as he turned down the papal lunches that the penitents brought him, and they never found out whether it was because he was an angel or because he was an old man that in the end he ate nothing but eggplant mush. His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience. Especially during the first days, when the hens pecked at him, searching for the stellar parasites that proliferated in his wings, and the cripples pulled out feathers to touch their defective parts with, and even the most merciful threw stones at him, trying to get him to rise so they could see him standing. The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless for so many hours that they thought he was dead. He awoke with a start, ranting in his hermetic language and with tears in his eyes, and he flapped his wings a couple of times, which brought on a whirlwind of chicken dung and lunar dust and a gale of panic that did not seem to be of this world. Although many thought that his reaction had been one not of rage but of pain, from then on they were careful not to annoy him, because the majority understood that his passivity was not that of a hero taking his ease but that of a cataclysm in repose.

Father Gonzaga held back the crowd's frivolity with formulas of maidservant inspiration while awaiting the arrival of a final judgment on the nature of the captive. But the mail from Rome showed no sense of urgency. They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connection with Aramaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings. Those meager letters might have come and gone until the end of time if a providential event had not put an end to the priest's tribulations.

It so happened that during those days, among so many other carnival attractions, there arrived in town the traveling show of the woman who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. The admission to see her was not only less than the admission to see the angel, but people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever doubt the truth of her horror. She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden. What was most heart-rending, however, was not her outlandish shape but the sincere affliction with which she recounted the details of her misfortune. While still practically a child she had sneaked out of her parents' house to go to a dance, and while she was coming back through the woods after having danced all night without permission, a fearful thunderclap rent the sky in two and through the crack came the lightning bolt of brimstone that changed her into a spider. Her only nourishment came from the meatballs that charitable souls chose to toss into her mouth. A spectacle like that, full of so much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look at mortals. Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn't recover his sight but grew three new teeth.

or the paralytic who didn't get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already ruined the angel's reputation when the woman who had been changed into a spider finally crushed him completely. That was how Father Gonzaga was cured forever of his insomnia and Pelayo's courtyard went back to being as empty as during the time it had rained for three days and crabs walked through the bedrooms.

The owners of the house had no reason to lament. With the money they saved they built a two-story mansion with balconies and gardens and high netting so that crabs wouldn't get in during the winter, and with iron bars on the windows so that angels wouldn't get in. Pelayo also set up a rabbit warren close to town and gave up his job as bailiff for good, and Elisenda bought some satin pumps with high heels and many dresses of iridescent silk, the kind worn on Sunday by the most desirable women in those times. The chicken coop was the only thing that didn't receive any attention. If they washed it down with creolin and burned tears of myrrh inside it every so often, it was not in homage to the angel but to drive away the dungheap stench that still hung everywhere like a ghost and was turning the new house into an old one. At first, when the child learned to walk, they were careful that he not get too close to the chicken coop. But then they began to lose their fears and got used to the smell, and before the child got his second teeth he'd gone inside the chicken coop to play, where the wires were falling apart. The angel was no less standoffish with him than with other mortals, but he tolerated the most ingenious infamies with the patience of a dog who had no illusions. They both came down with chicken pox at the same time. The doctor who took care of the child couldn't resist the temptation to listen to the angel's heart, and he found so much whistling in the heart and so many sounds in his kidneys that it seemed impossible for him to be alive. What surprised him most, however, was the logic of his wings. They seemed so natural on that completely human organism that he couldn't understand why other men didn't have them too.

When the child began school it had been some time since the sun and rain had caused the collapse of the chicken coop. The angel went dragging himself about here and there like a stray dying man. They would drive him out of the bedroom with a broom and a moment later find him in the kitchen. He seemed to be in so many places at the same time that they grew to think that he'd been duplicated, that he was reproducing himself all through the house, and the exasperated and unhinged Elisenda shouted that it was awful living in that hell full of angels. He could scarcely eat and his antiquarian eyes had also become so foggy that he went about bumping into posts. All he had left were the bare cannulae of his last feathers. Pelayo threw a blanket over him and extended him the charity of letting him sleep in the shed, and only then did they notice that he had a temperature at night, and was delirious with the tongue twisters of an old Norwegian. That was one of the few times they became alarmed, for they thought he was going to die and not even the wise neighbor woman had been able to tell them what to do with dead angels.

And yet he not only survived his worst winter, but seemed improved with the first sunny days. He remained motionless for several days in the farthest corner of the courtyard, where no one would see him, and at the beginning of December some large, stiff feathers began to grow on his wings, the feathers of a scarecrow, which looked more like another misfortune of decrepitude. But he must have known the reason for those changes, for he was quite careful that no one should notice them, that no one should

hear the sea chanteys that he sometimes sang under the stars. One morning Elisenda was cutting some bunches of onions for lunch when a wind that seemed to come from the high seas blew into the kitchen. Then she went to the window and caught the angel in his first attempts at flight. They were so clumsy that his fingernails opened a furrow in the vegetable patch and he was on the point of knocking the shed down with the ungainly flapping that slipped on the light and couldn't get a grip on the air. But he did manage to gain altitude. Elisenda let out a sigh of relief, for herself and for him, when she saw him pass over the last houses, holding himself up in some way with the risky flapping of a senile vulture. She kept watching him even when she was through cutting the onions and she kept on watching until it was no longer possible for her to see him, because then he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea.

Open-ended items for “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”

Using your annotated reading, answer each of the following questions supporting responses with evidence from the text.

1. How does the old man’s physical description contrast with the idea that he is an angel?

2. Discuss the angel’s treatment by the townspeople and Elisenda’s idea of charging admission to see him. What does this say about the values of these people?

3. What is ironic about this statement regarding the angel: “His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience”?

2. What is a possible theme for this story?

Lesson Three
Mysticism: a reading of “The Three Sisters”
By Sandra Cisneros

Description

Students will read the vignette “The Three Sisters” for traditional and mystic elements.

TEKS Objectives

7A Students will establish a purpose for reading such as to discover, interpret, and enjoy.
7G Students will draw inferences such as conclusions, generalizations, and predictions and support them with text evidence and experience.
8C Read world literature, including classic and contemporary works.
9A Recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading.
10B Students will use elements of text to defend his/her own responses and interpretation.

Teacher to Teacher Notes

This lesson will build upon Lesson One: Myths and Lesson Two: Magical Realism. In this reading, students will examine a contemporary Mexican-American author for her use of mystic and traditional Mexican elements in her literature.

To begin, make sure students have a basic understanding of literary terms such as *characterization, simile, metaphor, symbolism, imagery, figurative language* and *inference* before the reading so that they can identify these elements in the text.

Each student will need a printed copy of the passage as well as a highlighter and a pen or pencil with which to make marginal notes.

Make a transparency of the passage to demonstrate this skill for students so they can see how to properly highlight and how to make marginal notes. Prompt students to ask questions, make comments, and connect these elements with other stories they have read, as marginal notes/comments.

Monitor students as they highlight, making sure they highlight only key words and phrases and that they make detailed notes in the margin that include not only the identification of the word , but also an interpretation or the significance of the highlighted text.

Materials

- Printed copies of the passage entitled, “The Three Sisters” (from The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros)
- A transparency of “The Three Sisters”
- Pens, pencils, highlighters
- Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

Resources & Technology

- <http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780679734772&view=tg>
(A link to background on Cisneros and her work The House on Mango Street)
- http://www.princeton.edu/~howarth/557/house_bio.html
(A link to background on the author)
- <http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/active.htm>
(A presentation on active reading strategies)
- http://www.hrs.pvt.k12.ca.us/us/learning_skills/lessons/sample_annotation.htm
(Sample annotated text)

Procedures/Activities

MODELED/SHARED

As a class, read the vignette entitled “The Three Sisters.” At the overhead, demonstrate for students how to highlight key words and phrases and to make detailed marginal notes that include the identification of various literary devices as well as an interpretation of what they mean within the context of the story.

For example, you may want to point out that “They came with the wind...barely noticed” gives the reading a mystic quality, as these three sisters appear out of what seems like nowhere. Prompt the students to question, “Who are these women? From where are they? Why are they at this funeral? To whom are they related?”

Students may want to note that references to the wind, moon, and the description of these mysterious women work to create their mystic personas.

GUIDED PRACTICE

As a class, students will read the first two paragraphs together, identifying the various literary devices and noting how they work to characterize the three sisters.

Monitor students as they practice highlighting only key words and phrases and making detailed notes in margin that offer not only the identification of a literary term, but also an interpretation of the term and how it works to characterize Esperanza and the three sisters.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students finish annotating the passage entitled “The Three Sisters.”

APPLICATION

In a class discussion, the teacher will ask guiding questions to make sure the students understand emerging literary elements:

1. In the first paragraph, what is being compared to a spider web?
2. What are some examples of superstition?
3. What is revealed about the sisters by their physical description?
4. What is significant about the circle imagery?
5. What do the sisters mean when they tell Esperanza to “come back”?
6. What is it that the three sisters seem to know?

Assessment(s)

The students will respond to three open-ended questions that call upon the reader to identify elements of the story that are mysterious in nature and support their responses with evidence from the passage.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Have students view a movie clip of “Like Water for Chocolate” or “Chocolate” as these films contain the same elements as Cisneros’s vignettes.

The Three Sisters

They came with the wind that blows in August, thin as a spider web and barely noticed. Three who did not seem to be related to anything but the moon. One with laughter like tin and one with eyes of a cat and one with hands like porcelain. The aunts, the three sisters, *las comadres*, they said.

The baby died. Lucy and Rachel's sister. One night a dog cried, and the next day a yellow bird flew in through an open window. Before the week was over, the baby's fever was worse. Then Jesus came and took the baby with him far away. That's what their mother said.

Then the visitors came in and out of the little

house. It was hard to keep the floors clean. Anybody who had ever wondered what color the walls were came and came to look at that little thumb of a human in a box like candy.

I had never seen the dead before, not for real, not in somebody's living room for people to kiss and bless themselves and light a candle for. Not in a house. It seemed strange.

They must've known, the sisters. They had the power and could sense what was what. They said, Come here, and gave me a stick of gum. They smelled like Kleenex or the inside of a satin handbag, and then I didn't feel afraid.

What's your name, the cat-eyed one asked.

Esperanza, I said.

Esperanza, the old blue-veined one repeated in a high thin voice. Esperanza . . . a good good name.

My knees hurt, the one with the funny laugh complained.

Tomorrow it will rain.

Yes, tomorrow, they said.

How do you know? I asked.

We know.

Look at her hands, cat-eyed said.

And they turned them over and over as if they were looking for something.

She's special.

Yes, she'll go very far.

Yes, yes, hmmm.

Make a wish.

A wish?

Yes, make a wish. What do you want?

Anything? I said.

Well, why not?

I closed my eyes

Did you wish already?

Yes, I said.

Well, that's all there is to it. It'll come true.

How do you know? I asked.

We know, we know.

Esperanza. The one with marble hands called me aside. Esperanza. She held my face with her blue-veined hands and looked and looked at me. A long silence. When you leave you must remember always to come back, she said.

What?

When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are.

Then I didn't know what to say. It was as if she could read my mind, as if she knew what I had wished for, and I felt ashamed for having made such a selfish wish.

You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. You will remember? She asked as if she was telling me. Yes, yes, I said a little confused.

Good, she said, rubbing my hands. Good. That's all. You can go.

I got up to join Lucy and Rachel who were already outside waiting by the door, wondering what I was doing talking to three old ladies who smelled like cinnamon. I didn't understand everything they had told me. I turned around. They smiled and waved in their smoky way.

Then I didn't see them. Not once, or twice, or ever again.

Open-ended items for “The Three Sisters”

Answer each of the following questions supporting your responses with evidence from the text. Use your annotated reading.

1. Discuss the imagery used to describe the three sisters. What does this description reveal about them?

2. Discuss the relevance of the use of the circle in this passage. To what does the circle refer?

3. What is it that the three sisters seem to “know”?

Lesson Four

Surrealism: viewing art by Frida Kahlo

Description

Students will study a piece of surreal art by Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, entitled “Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States.”

TEKS Objectives

19A The student understands and interprets visual representations to describe how meanings are communicated through elements of design such as shape, line, color, and texture.

19B Analyze relationships, ideas, and cultures as represented in various media.

20A Investigate the source of a media presentation or production such as who made it and why it was made.

20B Deconstruct media to get the main idea of the message’s content.

9A Recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading.

Teacher to Teacher Notes

This lesson is meant to follow the discussion of the “Popol Vuh,” “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” and “The Three Sisters.”

The literature leading up to this point has sought to express the origins of man, provide a commentary on the values of his society as well as to express the curious. The texts range from those of the ancient Maya to contemporary authors who incorporate different elements of his or her culture and tradition into their writing. As with these authors, Kahlo does this with her art. She blends modern elements with traditional and magical elements to create her images and to express how she feels about certain events in her life, such as being a traditional Mexican citizen living in the industrialized United States.

Each student will need access to an expanded color image of this painting in order to examine the fine details Kahlo has included.

Materials

- A color copy, transparency, or digital image of the painting.
- Notes about the artist (see links below).

Resources & Technology

- <http://www.pbs.org/weta/fridakahlo/today/index.html>

(A useful PBS Web site covering various aspects of the artist's work and life)

- http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html_pages/kahlo5.html

(A site that has a color photo and a deconstruction of this particular artwork.)

- <http://www.discovery.mala.bc.ca/web/hernandele/surreal/surreal.htm>

(A site that explains surrealism and how it relates to Kahlo’s work.)

Procedures/Activities**MODELED/SHARED**

As a class, discuss the background of the artist and look at other appropriate samples of her work.

GUIDED PRACTICE

As a class, study and discuss Kahlo's painting. What elements draw the viewer's attention?

APPLICATION

In a class discussion, the teacher will ask guiding questions to make sure the students understand certain unique aspects of the painting:

1. What elements of Kahlo's traditional Mexico are depicted in the painting?
2. What elements of modern America are depicted in the painting?
3. What elements seem "unreal"?
4. What is significant about where Kahlo has placed herself in the painting?
5. Is there any symbolic use of color?
6. Notice the letters that are painted on the smoke stacks in the background. What is the literal and symbolic meaning of these letters?
7. Notice that both the US and the Mexican flags are depicted in the painting. Is there anything significant about the placement of each?
8. What seems to be Kahlo's attitude toward her subject? What might she be trying to say?

Assessment(s)

The students will orally respond to questions that call upon them to identify and interpret specific elements depicted in the painting.

The instructor should ask students guiding questions to help them interpret elements of the painting that might seem ambiguous.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Have students view a clip of the movie "Frida," read a poem by a contemporary Mexican poet, or view a performance by a Mexican artist to look for both traditional and modern elements in the work.



28. *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States, 1932.*

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