

La Llorona – Analyzing images of motherhood

Context and rationale

This lesson can be taught in a beginner, intermediate, or multi-level ESL class. An important reading skill is being able to identify and critically examine images and stereotypes that are embedded in texts. This lesson was designed specifically for students from Central America with little formal education and supports them in applying this critical reading skill as they read 2 different texts about La Llorona. Many Mexican students and even other Central American students will already be familiar with the story of La Llorona (or a similar story) which will help them in constructing the story as told by the authors and also in examining the different images of motherhood that appear in each text. The grammar objective of the past tense supports students in talking about what happened in the texts and asking questions.

Overview of the lesson

This lesson is developed around two different texts about La Llorona, a Mexican folktale with many variations that mostly tell the story of a Mexican woman who kills her children. The first text (see materials for full text) was written by Joe Hayes, an Anglo-American, and is based on the stories of La Llorona he grew up hearing as a child growing up in New Mexico. The second text was written by Gloria Anzaldua, a Chicana writer and literary critic. In contrast to usual depiction of La Llorona as a jealous, vengeful and then repented mother, Anzaldua's Llorona is a misunderstood but compassionate woman who helps a young girl find an herb to cure her mother. The 2 texts are meant to be read on different days with the following grammar and comprehension activities designed to be integrated around these readings. The readings of the texts are designed to be group readings and are facilitated according to the students' level.

- High beginner-advanced students take turns reading the text out loud in a group reading with the teacher posing questions and queries designed to help students construct the story as told by the author.
- Beginner students read the story as a group with the teacher showing the pictures from a published copy of the book and posing questions about what they see in the pictures and what they know about the story in order to support them in constructing the story as told by the author.

The final outcome of the lesson will be a discussion and/or short composition where students will explore these images of motherhood.

Lesson objective

Students will compare and contrast the ways motherhood is depicted in 2 different texts on the Mexican folktale La Llorona (The Weeping Woman)

Language objectives

- Students will be able to ask yes/no and wh-questions about the past (using auxiliary verb *did*) both orally and in writing.
- Students will be able to make statements in the negative about the past (using auxiliary verb *did*) both orally and in writing

Texts (The texts for the high-beg/advanced students are also included in the materials)

- Anzuldúa, Gloria (1996). *Prietita and the ghost woman*. San Francisco. Children's Book Press.
- Hayes, Joe (2004). *La Llorona: The weeping Woman*. El Paso. Cinco Juntos Press

Activity 1 - Introducing the story of La Llorona

1. Review/elicite from the students the characteristics of a folktale, or traditional story
2. Put students in groups to discuss what they know about story of La Llorona
 - *Who was she?*
 - *When did she live?*
 - *Where did she live?*
 - *What happened (one sentence)*
 - *Why?*
3. Go over group answers as whole class

Objective: Students will see that there exist many different versions of La Llorona

Activity 2 (high beginners-advanced students) – Reading the Hayes text

1. Write the following vocabulary from the text on the board and support students in learning it. Then as students read the story, refer to the vocabulary list and add to it as needed to help students engage with the text.
proud, rancher, village, engaged, wild life, pay attention, ignore, turn against, realize, save, better, grew, seemed, buried, saved, threw
- Facilitate an out loud reading of the text with students taking turns reading the text out loud in a group reading and the teacher posing questions and queries designed to help students construct the story as told by the author. (see materials for both *Student text Hayes* and *Teacher text Hayes*)

Activity 2 (beginners) – Reading the Hayes text

1. Write the following vocabulary from the text on the board and support students in learning it. Then as students read the story, refer to the vocabulary list and add to it as needed to help students engage with the text.
Maria, beautiful, proud, rancher, rich, married, happy, jealous, ignore, river, threw, crazy
2. Facilitate a collective reading of the text with the teacher showing the pictures from a published copy of the book and posing questions about what they see in the pictures and what they know about the story in order to support them in constructing the story as told by the author. (see materials for *Beg text Hayes*)

Objective: Students will construct the story as told by the authors as they read the text. Unlike comprehension questions that allow students to simply retrieve information from the text, the teacher initiated questions and queries are intended to support the students in engaging with the text, exploring character motivation, and taking a critical stance towards the text.

Activity 3 - Analyzing the text

Put students into group to discuss the questions and then review them as a whole class.

- *What kind of woman is Maria?*

- *Is she a positive character or negative character (image)?*
- *Do you agree with this image of a Mexican mother?*
- *Is this a good text for your children? Why?*

Objective: Students will compare and contrast the ways motherhood is depicted in 2 different texts on the Mexican folktale La Llorona

Grammar and story comprehension activities

- Inductive presentation of question formation and negative formation in the past
- Mingle around asking students about what they did last weekend
- Handout on ordering the events of the text and posing question about these events
- Pair work with students asking their partner the questions from the ordering activity and recording their response
- Pair work with students generating 3 questions of their own about the texts.