

## **TITLE: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE**

**Grade Levels** 7 through 12

**Subject Areas** Social Studies, Language Arts

**California State Standards** <http://www.cde.ca.gov/board/>

History 11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

History 12.8 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media American political life.

Grade 7 Reading Comprehension (focus on informational materials) 2.4 Students identify and trace the development in text of an author's argument, point of view or perspective.

2.6 Students assess the adequacy, accuracy and appropriateness of the author's evidence in support of claims and assertions, noting instances of bias and stereotyping.

Grade 8 Reading Comprehension (focus on informational materials) 2.3 Students find similarities and differences between texts in the treatment, scope and organization of ideas.

Grades 9 and 10 Writing 1.0 Students write coherent and focused essays that convey a well-defined perspective and a tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students' awareness of the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.

### **Overview**

This lesson uses filmmaker Aaron Matthews' film *My American Girls: A Dominican Story* as a springboard to discuss contemporary immigrant life in the United States. In this lesson, students will reflect on the individual Dominican-American experiences of the Ortiz sisters, create a talk show that addresses the themes and issues of the film, and conduct research on how Latinos are portrayed in the media.

### **Learning Objectives**

To enable students to:

- explore and understand contemporary immigrant life in the United States.
- understand the issues facing immigrants from the Dominican Republic.
- analyze how Latinos are often portrayed in the media.

### **Time**

Two to five 50-minute class periods

### **Materials**

Videotape - *MY AMERICAN GIRLS: A DOMINICAN STORY* by Aaron Matthews

Internet access

Chart paper

Butcher-block paper

Drawing materials

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

### Activity One

**The purpose of this activity is to help students develop background knowledge about the Dominican Republic before they view the film.**

1. Divide the class into small groups to conduct research on the Dominican Republic. Ask each group to collect 20 to 25 facts. As a class, compile the information into categories.
2. Have the students create a class exhibit on the Dominican Republic. Ask each small group to choose one category and work on a presentation for the class exhibit. Provide large pieces of chart paper and drawing and writing materials for each group. Some possible categories include geography, culture, transportation, tourism and so forth. Some possible presentation ideas include drawings, maps, brochures, dioramas, music and so forth.
3. Invite an audience to view the class exhibit.

Some good Web sites to begin research include

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/dr.html>  
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/dr.html#Govt>  
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/dr.html#People>  
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/dr.html#Econ>  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/dotoc.html>  
<http://caribbeanbeansupersite.com/domrep/history.htm>  
music <http://www.mindspring.com/~adiascar/musica/>  
<http://www.hg.org/guide-domrep.html> (On the site, scroll down to the section entitled "The Dominican Republic From Columbus to the 1990s: A Brief History")  
<http://www.amcham.org.do/chamber/history.html>

### Activity Two

**The purpose of this activity is for students to learn about the filmmaker's reasons for creating the film.**

1. Prior to viewing the film, read, as a class, an interview with the filmmaker at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/myamericangirls/thefilm.html>. Choose different students to read the questions and answers aloud. Ask the students to briefly write in their journals their responses to these questions
  - What do you think the film will focus on?
  - What do you think will be the most interesting aspect of the story?
  - Which character do you think will be most compelling?

## VIEWING ACTIVITIES

### Activity One

**The purpose of this activity is for students to reflect on the differences and similarities of the Ortiz sisters' Dominican-American experiences.**

1. Divide the class into three groups. Each group will focus on one of the three daughters (Aida, Mayra, or Monica).

#### Focus for Viewing

Ask students to pay particular attention to the three daughters during the viewing of the film and to record their information and impressions of the Ortiz children.

These are suggested areas for students' focus.

- Assimilation
- Parental expectations
- Education issues
- Employment
- Language barriers
- Cultural clashes
- Desire to return to the Dominican Republic
- Sibling conflict
- Parent/child communication

2. While they are viewing the program, have students record impressions and information about their assigned person.
3. Pass out large pieces of butcher-block paper to each group and ask them to create a picture of their assigned person. Using their notes from the program, students should add statements and/or visual representations to form an identity picture of their person.
4. As a class, share the pictures and discuss the similarities and differences between the three sisters.
5. Ask each student to take on the persona of the sister of his or her choice and write letter describing life in America to a friend in the Dominican Republic.

### Activity Two

**The purpose of this activity is for students to research how Latinos are portrayed in the media.**

1. As a class, conduct a mini-research project on Latinos in the media. Ask the students to begin their research by collecting examples of how Latinos are portrayed in the media. They can find examples in magazines, newspaper articles, television programs, commercials, books and Internet sites. Some good places to begin research include

<http://latinoculture.about.com/culture/latinoculture/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.Latina.com/>  
<http://www.latinousa.org/>  
<http://www.latnn.com/>  
<http://www.latinobeat.net/>  
<http://www.latinousa.org/learning/chuy.html>  
<http://www.latinobeat.net/html/010425bimmi.html>

Ask students to record their examples in a journal for one week. After a week of collecting information, tell students to chart the number of portrayals of Latinos they saw and what those portrayals were like.

2. Use the students' charts to discuss these questions.

- What characteristics do you see?
- What is the context for the image?
- What is your reaction to the image?

3. Use the charts as a basis for further investigation. Focus on the underlying attitudes and perspectives that are suggested by the portrayals of Latinos. Focus on these questions

- What does this portrayal suggest about Latino culture?
  - Does this portrayal appear realistic?
  - Was it difficult or easy to find examples of Latinos in the media?
- What does this suggest?

Divide the students into groups and have them choose one aspect that interests them to investigate further.

4. Have the students create presentations to share with the class based on their research.

5. Share the following quote by the filmmaker with the class: "Dominicans and Latinos are a huge part of what this country is and will be in the future. As a result, there's a real need just to create general awareness about Latino issues."

Ask the students to share their opinions about how he has portrayed Latinos in this film. Compare and discuss this film's portrayals of Latinos to portrayals of Latinos that the students found in media.

## POSTVIEWING ACTIVITIES

### Activity One

**The purpose of this activity is for students to reflect on the issues and themes of the film as they relate to the Ortiz family.**

1. Tell the students that they are going to create a talk show based on the film.

2. Reassemble the students into the groups from activity 1. Provide the students with the following list of issues to discuss. Ask groups to focus on what they think each daughter would say about these issues.

- Assimilation
- Parental expectations
- Education issues
- Employment
- Language barriers
- Cultural clashes
- Desire to return to the Dominican Republic
- Sibling conflict
- Parent/child communication

3. Ask the students to create and stage a talk show based on the issues discussed in the film. They should do the following:

- Generate a list of questions that highlight important themes and issues from the film. The questions should be designed to portray the range of different opinions that the sisters have on varied issues. Some possible questions include
  - How do you maintain your cultural heritage as you live in the United States?
  - What are the main differences between your and your sisters' view of the world?
  - How have your parents' expectations shaped who you are?
- Choose cast members, including a host. Have the students include other characters who they feel would add different voices to the conversation, such as parents, teachers, politicians, legal advocates and so forth.

4. Have the students stage a performance, with an audience, if possible.

## **Activity Two**

1. Have the students create a children's book based on the experiences of one of the sisters. Ask the students to choose the theme they think is the most important issue regarding immigration. Students may work individually or in groups. Have students illustrate and publish their books. Host a booksharing party with a class of younger students.