

TITLE: LIVING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

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.

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.

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

In this lesson, students will explore issues common to all families. They will examine school, work and conflict in their lives and the lives of the family profiled in the film. They will have an opportunity to roleplay solutions to school conflicts based on a series of vignettes. Examples from literature that focus on voice and identity will also be examined.

Learning Objectives

To enable students to:

- learn about the Dominican Republic.
- understand some aspects of the immigrant experience.
- learn about the problems bilingual students face in the school system.
- explore the commonalities that exist between their own family life and life in the Ortiz family.

Time

Two to five 50-minute class periods

Materials

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

Book – *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (optional)

Internet access

Writing 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://caribbeansupersite.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

This activity looks at author Sandra Cisneros, who is known for her portrayal of Hispanic women in contemporary urban society, and the importance of multicultural literature in our society.

Teacher Note: You may choose to acquire a copy of Cisneros' *House on Mango Street* to share with your class.

1. Have students spend a few minutes writing answers in their journals to these questions:

- Of all the books you have read in your lifetime, what book do you feel you related to most on a personal level?
- What do you think it was about the book that made you respond to it in this way?
- What book have you read that was the most difficult for you to relate to on a personal level?
- Why do you think that it was difficult for you to relate to this story?

2. After students have finished, discuss their responses.

Send students to these Web sites to learn about author Sandra Cisneros

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/SandraCisneros.html>

<http://twu.edu/www/twu/library/zumwalt.html>

Ask each group to gather five pieces of information that they find interesting about Cisneros and to answer the following questions:

- What was Cisneros' childhood like?
- What authors did Cisneros try to imitate during her early years? Why do you think she did this?
- How does Cisneros' "writing about what she knows" differ from the topics of other authors you have read?
- Why does Cisneros say that she has something to write about that traditional American writers don't know about?
- What is Cisneros referring to when she talks about finding her own voice?
- Why do you think Cisneros sees literary success as changing the way someone thinks about her community, gender or class?

3. Discuss the answers to these questions and lead the class in a discussion about why it is important to have books written by a diverse population.

4. Have students write a vignette about where they live. Students may choose to write about their physical residence, the people they live with or their neighborhood.

5. Share the vignettes with the class. Discuss what the Ortiz daughters might include in a vignette about their home, family or neighborhood. Have students compare and contrast their vignettes. Also have them compare and contrast their vignette with what the Ortiz daughters might have written in their vignette.

Activity Two

The purpose of this activity is for students to think about the problems that immigrant families may face in the school system.

Divide the class into small groups and provide each with one of the following vignettes. Ask each group to brainstorm responses to the situation described in the vignette. Have each group act out its problem and solution.

Group One:

My high school daughter doesn't know how to work. I have two jobs and work very hard to give my children everything. She doesn't study. She says her teacher doesn't give her any homework. I tell her to work hard but she doesn't listen. I don't want her to drop out of school, and I don't think she will work hard enough to keep a job.

Group Two:

I don't really know how to help my son with his work at school because I don't speak English. He is in the fifth grade. The teacher sends home notes that I can't read. I brought him to school on the first day but I haven't been there since. He came home in tears and told me he was failing.

Group Three:

I don't want my parents to come to my school because they don't understand what is happening there. I do my work and my grades are good. It is hard for me to explain to them that I am handling things myself. They want to be more involved.

Activity Three

The purpose of this activity is for students to discuss the commonalities shared by their own family, the Ortiz family and families throughout the world.

1. As students view the film, ask them to note down examples of issues that are central to the Ortiz family.
2. After viewing the film, record all of the examples on the board.
Here is a list of possible examples from the film

- Parents struggle to start a life in a new place.
- Parents are torn between wanting to live in two places.
- Myra argues with mother about schoolwork.
- Mother wants daughters to have the educational opportunities that she didn't.
- Father likes to work hard.
- Mother feels that her daughter doesn't appreciate her.
- Myra's teachers and parents think she isn't living up to her potential.
- Parents are working hard to make a better life for their children.
- Parents want to work hard and move away for retirement.
- A daughter is proud of her mother, but doesn't tell her.
- There is always something going on in the house.
- A younger sister doesn't like to be compared to her older sister.
- A daughter is fighting about the rules of the house.

3. In a class discussion, have students the Ortiz family issues with their own family issues.
4. Ask students if they agree with the idea that, universally, families generally share a common set of cares and concerns. Generate a list of universal family concerns.
5. Ask each student to create a Venn diagram showing issues that relate to his or her own family, issues that relate to the Ortiz family, and issues that are common to both families.
6. Ask students to write a response using the diagram and ideas generated during the class discussion, to the following quote:
"People need to respect each other's concerns and differences. And frankly, there's far more in common than divides us."
—David Dinkins, Mayor of New York City, in a 1991 radio interview.

POST VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Activity One

Have students visit

<http://www.latinousa.org/program/HHMS.html> and listen to the interviews. Then ask them to write a short essay that captures what they have learned about Latino identity.