

**Mexican and Latin American  
Children's Literature**

**Paradise Valley Community College  
Phoenix, Arizona**

I. Increase language development.

## II. Define Multicultural Literature.

- A. "Multicultural literature is literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature" (Norton, Through 560).
- B. According to Bernice E. Cullinan and Lee Galda, authors of *Literature and the Child*, "the term culturally diverse differs in emphasis from both cross cultural and multicultural. Cross cultural means an international exchange from one country to country. Culturally diverse literature accurately portrays both unique and universal qualities" (344).

## I V. Identify the values of Multicultural Literature for Children.

- A. To recognize and celebrate both the similarities and differences among cultures.
- B. To increase the self-esteem of children from other cultures.
- C. To create an understanding by learning about other cultures, their language, their traditions, their customs, their religions, and their contributions.
- D. To increase the sensitivity of all children for other cultures.

## III. Identify the criteria for selecting and evaluating Multicultural Children's Literature.

- A. Are the characters portrayed as individuals instead of as representatives of a group?
- B. Does the book transcend stereotypes?
- C. Does the book portray physical diversity?
- D. Will children be able to recognize the characters in the text and illustrations?
- E. Is the culture accurately portrayed?
- F. Are social issues and problems depicted frankly, accurately, and without oversimplification?
- G. Do nonwhite characters solve their problems without intervention by whites?
- H. Are nonwhite characters shown as equals of white characters?
- I. Does the author avoid glamorizing or glorifying nonwhite characters?
- J. Is the setting authentic?
- K. Are the factual and historical details accurate?
- L. Does the author accurately describe contemporary settings?

- IV. Chose a Mexican/Latin American picture book to evaluate as a class. (See Appendix A.)
- V. Use a cooperative learning activity to involve students in the evaluation of Mexican/Latin American picture books. (See Appendix B.)
- VI. Discuss the Issue: Who Should Write Multicultural Literature? (See Appendix C; discussion questions are included in the article.)
- VII. Evaluation
  - A. Students will be required to analyze three Mexican/Latin American picture books for the Picture Books Cards (see Appendix D.)
  - B. One of the following questions designed by Donna E. Norton will be on the Picture Book Unit Test:
    - 1. Define multicultural literature . . . and develop a list of criteria that would be valid for evaluating literature portraying [the Mexican/Latin American culture].
    - 2. Compare and contrast common themes of multicultural literature with Anglo-Saxon literature. Refer to specific books in your response.
    - 3. List the values that children will gain from reading multicultural literature. Discuss at least one book that you believe exemplifies each value and explain why.  
(Instructor's 185)

Delacre, Lulu. Arroz con Leche: *Popular Songs and Rhymes from Latin America*. Scholastic, 1989.

Dorros, Authur. *Abuela*. Illustrated by Elisa Kleven. Dutton, 1991.

Ehlert, Lois. *Moon Rope*. Harcourt Brace, 1992.

Ets, Marie Hall, and Aurora Labastida. *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico*. Illustrated by Marie Hall Ets. Viking, 1959.

Garcia, Richard. *My Aunt Otilia's Spirits*. Illustrated by Robin Cherin and Roger Reyes. Children's Press, 1987.

Hiojosa, Francisco, adapted by. *The Old Lady Who Ate People*. Illustrated by Leonel Maciel. Little, 1984.

Lattimore, Deborah. *The Flame of Peace: A Tale of the Aztecs*. Harper: 1987.

Politi, Leo. *Song of the Swallows*. Schribner's, 1949.

Rohmer, Harriet, adapter. *Uncle Nacho's Hat*. Illustrated by Veg Reisberg. Children's Book, 1989. (Bilingual, English-Spanish).

Soto, Gary. *The Skirt*. Illustrated by Eric Velasquez. Delacore, 1992.

B. reporter  
C. reader

3. The **reader** of each group selects a picture book from the ones provided by the instructor.
4. The **reader** reads the picture book to the group so that each member can hear the story and see the illustrations.
5. The **reporter** guides the group through an evaluation of the picture book using the handout Criteria for Selecting and Evaluating Multicultural Children's Literature.
6. The **recorder** records the comments and conclusions on the attached handout.
7. At the end of the allotted time, the **reporter** will summarize the groups' evaluation of the picture book.
8. The attached sheet is handed into the instructor.  
Evaluation of a Multicultural Picture Book

- B. *Evaluation of Plot:* (see # 6 and 7)
- C. *Evaluation of Setting:* (see # 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 16)
- D. *Evaluation of Style:* (see # 12, 14, and 15)
- E. *Evaluation of Illustrations:* (see # 16)
- F. *List what your group learned about this culture from reading the picture book.*
- G. *Recommendation*

- E Is the culture accurately portrayed?
- F Are social issues and problems depicted frankly, accurately, and without oversimplification?
- G Do nonwhite characters solve their problems without intervention by whites?
- H Are nonwhite characters shown as equals of white characters?
- I Does the author avoid glamorizing or glorifying nonwhite characters?
- J Is the setting authentic?
- K Are the factual and historical details accurate?
- L Does the author accurately describe contemporary settings?
- M Does the book rectify historical distortions or omissions?
- N Does dialect have a legitimate purpose and does it ring true?
- Q Does the author avoid offensive or degrading vocabulary?
- P Are the illustrations authentic and nonstereotypical?

(Norton, Through 566)

Americans, for example, have the experience and the perception to write authentically about the black experience. Others argued the viewpoint that anyone who writes with sensitivity and does the required research into the subject and the culture should be able to write about the culture.

Betsy Hearne provides interesting thoughts about this issue in a recent article in *School Library Journal*.<sup>2</sup> Hearne states:

What defines an authority in creating or evaluating picture-book folklore? A well read expert? Someone raised in the culture represented by the story? Can only members of an ethnic group truly represent the lore of that group? How can we tell? By the name? The skin color? Does the absence of an author or artist's photograph mean an African-American folktale has been adapted by a WASP? If so, does that mean a majority is ripping off a minority, or honoring it? Graciela Italiano has addressed this controversy in a paper delivered at the 1992 Allerton Institute.<sup>3</sup>

She underscores the importance of knowing a cultural tradition, from the standpoint of both experience and study, over the formal qualification of being a card-carrying member of the culture. At the same conference Hazel Rochman<sup>4</sup> argued eloquently against the misconception that "only Indians can really judge books about Indians, Jews about Jews . . . locking us into smaller and tighter boxes" (p. 34).

As you read Hearn's questions and concerns, ask yourself the same questions. What is your viewpoint on this important issue? What should be the qualifications of a person writing about a culture or reevaluating the books written about that culture? Who should write and evaluate the books? What criteria should you use when selecting and evaluating the books about a culture that is different from your own?

<sup>1</sup> Roundtable on Multicultural Education, New York City, May 1993.

<sup>2</sup>Hearne, Betsy. "Respect the Source: Reducing Cultural Chaos in Picture books, Part Two." *School Library Journal* 39 (August 1993): 33-37.

<sup>3</sup>Italiano, Graciela. "Reading Latin America: Issues in the Evaluation of Latino Children's Books in Spanish and English." In *Evaluating Children's Books: A Critical Look*, edited by Betsy Hearne and Roger Sutton. Champaign: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, in press.

<sup>4</sup>Rochman, Hazel. "And Yet ... Beyond Political Correctness." In *Evaluating Children's Books: A Critical Look*, edited by Betsy Hearne and Roger Sutton. Champaign: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, in press.

(Norton, Through 605)

\*Copies of these articles are attached.

Pura Belpre  
Sandra Cisneros  
Nicloe DeMessieres  
Francisco Hinojosa  
Jose Griego y Maestas  
Isabel Schon  
Gary Soto

Additional sources:

\*Allison, Alida. "What Would I Teach If I Had Only Six Months Left To Teach?" *Children's Literature in Education* 24 (December 1993): 265-275.

\*Baker, John F. "Fresh Voices: New Audiences." *Publishers Weekly* 9 Aug. 1993: 32-34.

\*Baker, John F. and Maureen O'Brien. "Building a Readership: How Booksellers Promote Multicultural Authors." *Publishers Weekly* 9 Aug. 1993: 35.

Dorris, Michael. "Trusting the Words." *Booklist* 1 & 15 June 1993: 19-20. Dorris discusses the impact of stereotypes.

\*Gregory, Lucille H. "The Puerto Rican 'Rainbow': Distortions vs. Complexities." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 18 (Spring 1993): 29-35.

Mantell, Suzanne. "Commitment to Diversity." *Publishers Weekly* 9 Aug. 1994: 36-37.

\*Moore, Opal and Donnarrae MacCann. "Cultural Pluralism." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 13 (Winter 1988): 198-200.

Reflecting Diversity: *Multicultural Guidelines for Educational Publishing Professions*. Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1993 This guide includes a demographic look at the future and multicultural education; a section on reflecting diversity in areas of sexism, racism, contextual invisibility, objectionable stereotypes, historical distortions, and content issues; additional guidelines and checklists; a bibliography and multicultural information sources; and lists of authors and illustrators from specific groups.

\*Copies of these articles are attached.

## APPENDIX D

### Literary File Cards

Purpose: To create your personal annotated bibliography of children's literature (of selections NOT read for class)

Format: On 4 x 6" cards

The first card for each of the following three categories (picture books, fiction, and non-fiction) will include your name and a description of your rating system (i.e. specific criteria you are using).

Rating Justification:

Awards:

Appropriate Age Levels and/or Child Appeal:

father about her first day in kindergarten. Margarita doesn't understand the older children's sneer. Was she born in the gravy? "No," Papa says, "You were born in Guadalajara." High humor, nice ethnic mix.

Sonneborn, Ruth. Friday Night Is Papa Night, ill. by Emily McNully. Viking, 1970. *A story that reflects the love and warmth in a Puerto Rican family.*

Soto, Gary. Too Many Tamales, ill. by Ed Martinez. Putnam, 1993. *Convinced that she's lost her diamond ring in the tamales she helped make, Maria gets her cousins to help her eat their way through the whole pile. Guilty (she tried the ring on while kneading dough), Maria is relieved to see it on Mother's finger. They and Aunt Rosa cook up another batch. It's nice to have a truly different Christmas story, and the bright paintings are a representational tribute to an extended Latin American family.*

(Sutherland 105-12)

