

# ED438150 1999-12-00 Promoting Reading among Mexican American Children. ERIC Digest.

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## Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <a href="#">Promoting Reading among Mexican American Children. ERIC Digest...</a> | 1 |
| <a href="#">MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.....</a>                       | 2 |
| <a href="#">CLASSROOM STRATEGIES.....</a>   | 2 |
| <a href="#">REVIEWING LITERATURE AND SELECTING THE BEST.....</a>                  | 4 |
| <a href="#">SUGGESTED SELECTIONS BY GRADE LEVELS.....</a>                         | 5 |
| <a href="#">REFERENCES.....</a>   | 8 |



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## Promoting Reading among Mexican American Children. ERIC Digest.

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Literature addresses the universal need for stories. Stories are most meaningful and best able to promote literacy when they speak to a student's world. Good books can

help children develop pride in their ethnic identity, provide positive role models, develop knowledge about cultural history, and build self-esteem. However, Mexican American students in the United States often do not experience literature in this way. This Digest identifies key challenges, recommends classroom strategies, provides literature selection guidelines, and suggests reading lists for various grade levels.

## MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Literary works written for or by Mexican Americans were not represented in mainstream children's publications in the United States until the 1940s. Beginning in the 1940s, Mexican American literary characters were developed largely by European American writers who were removed from the cultural experience of the Mexican American minority. Consequently, portrayals of Mexican Americans reflected a rural existence and stereotypical images (Harris, 1993).

Between 1940 and 1973 there were only four or five books a year published on Mexican American themes by the major publishers of children's literature. Analyses from the late 1980s and early 1990s showed even fewer—only one to three books a year (Schon, 1988; Cortes, 1992). Of the approximately 5,000 children's books published annually by major publishers in the United States, books about or by Mexican Americans made up one tenth of 1%. These statistics reveal the persistent dearth of children's literature by Mexican American authors through the early 1990s. The literary genres were limited, too. Most were folklore, legends, and protest pieces (Barrera, Liguori, & Salas, 1993; Harris, 1993; Tatum, 1990; Schon, 1988).

In the early 1990s awareness of these issues resulted in the publication of growing numbers of books with Mexican American themes and authors. Small publishing houses such as Arte Publico, Pinata Books, and Bilingual Review Press have increased dissemination of minority literature and helped launch writers such as Tomas Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, and Sandra Cisneros to national recognition (Barrera, Liguori, & Salas, 1993).

## CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Using effective classroom strategies and selecting the best literature for particular groups of students are the two pivots for promoting reading among Mexican American children. The following strategies can help Mexican-origin and other teachers improve both their methods for promoting reading in the classroom and their students' cultural understanding (Murray, 1998a; Barrera, Liguori, & Salas, 1993; Escamilla, 1992; Galda, 1991; Diaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1986):



- \* Explore Mexican American culture, history, and contemporary society through texts

such as *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 1836-1986* (Montejano, 1987), *The Hispanic Americans* (Meltzer, 1982), or *The Mexicans in America* (Pinchot, 1989).



\* Consult book reviews, such as those in *Our Family, Our Friends, Our World: An Annotated Guide to Significant Multicultural Books for Children and Teenagers* (Miller-Lachmann, 1992).



\* Take an ethnic literature course. From the 1960s to the present, a growing body of literature written by or for Mexican Americans has emerged.



\* Include multicultural readers in the secondary level curriculum, such as *Mexican American Literature* (Tatum, 1990) or *Arrivals: Cross-cultural Experience in Literature* (Huizenga, 1995).



\* Incorporate trade books whenever possible, using selection criteria (see *Reviewing Literature and Selecting The Best*, below).



\* When possible, invite local Mexican American authors to talk with or read to classes. Correspond with one or more authors located through Web sites.



\* Participate in school district committees that select curriculum materials. Make a case for including various U.S. minority group histories and literatures to be studied as serious literary works.



\* Request in-service seminars by university and school district experts on the use of Mexican American literature and interdisciplinary instruction.



\* Organize a committee of volunteer parents to suggest or review selections of readings

for the class.



\* Invite minority parents or grandparents to present oral traditions by sharing family histories or experiences. Written collections of their stories could be included in the school library.

## REVIEWING LITERATURE AND SELECTING THE BEST

The following checklist provides a few important guidelines for selecting appropriate classroom literature (Murray, 1998b; Escamilla, 1992; Diaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1986):



\* Does the selection present specific and accurate information about the culture?



\* Do the illustrations and/or text reflect the diversity of the people or do they reflect stereotypes?



\* Are Mexican-origin characters depicted in active (not passive or submissive) roles?



\* Does the story line and/or character development lend itself to a universal interpretation?



\* Does the narrative voice in the selection come from a perspective within the culture?



\* If the cultural elements were removed, would there be a developed plot structure?



\* Is the culture presented in a positive way? Do the characters come to a constructive resolution of conflicts? Are the characters multidimensional?

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\* Can mainstream works (i.e., literary canon) parallel the themes, issues, or characters of the selection? Identify them, then compare and discuss.

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\* Are the Spanish words or phrases in the text understandable within the context of the sentences? Is there a glossary?

## SUGGESTED SELECTIONS BY GRADE LEVELS

The following authors and works have been reviewed (Murray, 1998a) and represent some of the authentic within-the-culture perspectives available today.

GRADES PRE-K-3:

Abuela by Arthur Dorros (Elisa Kleven, illustrator)

A Birthday Basket for Tia by Pat Mora (Cecily Lang, illustrator)

Arroz con Leche by Lulu Delacre (author and illustrator)

Diego by Jonah Winter (Jeanette Winter, illustrator)

Family Pictures: Cuadros de familia by Carmen Lomas Garza

Hairs: Pelitos by Sandra Cisneros (Terry Ybanez, illustrator)

I Speak English for My Mom by Muriel Stanek (Judith Friedman, illustrator)

Juan Tuza and the Magic Pouch by Francisco X. Mora (author and illustrator)

Listen to the Desert: Oye al desierto by Pat Mora (Francisco X. Mora, illustrator)

Mr. Sugar Came to Town: La Vista del Sr. Azucar by Harriet Rohmer

Pablo's Tree by Pat Mora (Cecily Lang, illustrator)

Patchwork Colcha: A Children's Collection by Carmen Tafolla

Pupurupu: Cuentos de Ninos by Larry Daste (Sabine Ulibarri, illustrator)

The Wedding of Don Octavio by Patricia Zelter

The Woman Who Knew the Language of the Animals by Denise Chavez

Tomas and the Library Lady by Pat Mora (Raul Colon, illustrator)

Too Many Tamales by Gary Soto (Ed Martinez, illustrator)

#### GRADES 4-6

The Adventures of Connie and Diego by Maria Garcia (Malaquias Montoya, illustrator)

Calor by Amado Pena (illustrator) & Juanita Alba

Hector Lives in the United States Now: The Story of a Mexican-American Child by Joan Hewett

How We Came to the Fifth World: A Creation Story from Ancient Mexico (Tales of the Americas) adapted by Harriet Rohmer, Mary Anchondo (Graciela Carrillo DeLopez, illustrator)

Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead by Kathleen Krull (Enrique O. Sanchez, illustrator)

Rosita's Christmas Wish by Mary Ann Smothers Bruni

Saturday Market by Patricia Grossman (Enrique O. Sanchez, illustrator)

Sonnets to Human Beings and Other Selected Works by Carmen Tafolla

The Cat's Meow by Gary Soto (Joe Cepeda, illustrator)

The Farolitos of Christmas by Rudolfo Anaya (Edward Gonzales, illustrator)

The Maldonado Miracle by Theodore Taylor

The Pinata Maker: El Pinatero by George Ancona

The Woman Who Outshone the Sun: The Legend of Lucia Zenteno by Alejandro Cruz Martinez, Rosalma Zubizarreta (Fernando Olivera, illustrator)

#### GRADES 7-9:

Baseball in April by Gary Soto

Cool Salsa by Lori Carlson

El Mago by Ron Arias

Everybody Knows Tobie by Daniel Garza

Friends from the Other Side by Gloria Anzaldua

I Can Hear the Cowbells Ring by Lionel Garcia

Hispanic, Female and Young: An Anthology edited by Phyllis Tashlik

Latino Voices by Frances Aparicio

Mexican American Literature (anthology) edited by Charles Tatum

Neighborhood Odes by Gary Soto

Quinceanera: A Latina's Journey to Womanhood by Mary Lankford

Taking Sides by Gary Soto

The Anaya Reader by Rudolfo Anaya

The Challenge by Rudolfo Anaya

GRADES 10-12:

Barrio Boy by Ernesto Galarza

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya

Chicano by Richard Vasquez

Fair Gentlemen of Belken County by Rolando Hinojosa-Smith

Get Your Tortillas Together by Carmen Tafolla

Heart of Aztlan by Rudolfo A. Anaya

Inheritance of Strangers by Nash Candelaria

Latino Rainbow by Carlos Cumpian

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel

Mi Abuela Fumaba Puros: My Grandma Smoked Cigars by Sabine Ulibarri

New Chicana: Chicano Writing edited by Charles Tatum

Oddsplayer by Joe Rodriguez

Pieces of the Heart by Gary Soto

Pocho by Jose Antonio Villarreal

Rituals of Survival: A Woman's Portfolio by Nicholasa Mohr

Schoolland: A Novel by Max Martinez

The Day the Cisco Kid Shot John Wayne by Nash Candelaria

The Earth Did Not Devour Him by Tomas Rivera

The Heart of Aztlan by Rudolfo Anaya

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

The Iguana Killer by Alberto Rios

The Road to Tamazunchale by Ron Arias

Tortuga by Rudolfo Anaya

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