

DON QUIXOTE ANI



The academic setting

For four months out of the year, my fifth grade students live and breathe don Quixote. We meet three times a week for Spanish, but they are immersed in the Middle Ages in their social studies class, so they are already focused on knights and castles, queens and chivalry. In order to make the story of Don Quixote de la Mancha come alive to fifth graders in Spanish, I rewrote several scenes from the novel into short plays that were appropriate to their interests and to their novice-high proficiency level. I chose a combination of

scenes that offer humor, action, flirting, swordplay, culture and lots of drama. The unit culminates with a visit from don Quixote “himself”, a.k.a. a Spanish teacher from the Upper School, educated in Spain, who arrives in costume and stays in character. He “knights” some of the boys and “mistakes” some of the girls for his dear Dulcinea.

The Scenes We Use

We set the scene for the unit with an introductory reading and illustration. Alonso Quijana is at home with his books, his niece and his housekeeper. The next scene is a short play with the Innkeeper “knighting” him as don Quixote. In the third scene Quixote mistakes wine skins for monsters and attacks them. In the fourth scene two girls at the inn feign affection to play a trick on don Quixote and wind up tying his hand to their balcony. In the last scene we use, the Knight of the Moon defeats don Quixote and sends him home for a year.

Leading up to the Performance Assessment

Each scene is associated with a different assessment. To elicit interest in the scene, “*Cuelga en el aire*” (Hanging in the Air), students pull the following out of a closed bag: a rope, a lacy Spanish fan, a photo of a traditional Spanish balcony and a drawing of a forlorn Quixote hanging by his wrist. We do TPR with the props. After I have hooked them, the students see the rubrics for the performance assessment. Based on backward design, this clarifies in the beginning what the students need to do to be successful.

After examining the rubric, students read the scene silently and then aloud. We apply the vocabulary to more current topics, practice TPR Storytelling with structures from the scene, use some of the material for a little grammar practice and create original stories using the vocabulary. We use maps of Spain, make Venn diagrams to see comparisons between Quixote and other heroes, interview each other about emotions, do word games, and use the internet to look at the current nobility in the Spanish Royal Family web site.



The Performance Task

I opted for an integrated performance assessment that links the interpretive, interpersonal and presentation modes of communication to the same task. Students must understand the scene well enough to draw it, talk about it and write about it.

After several weeks, I give each of the students an inexpensive blank fan from Oriental Trading Company (www.handsonfun.com). Since students know they will be accountable for understanding the script in order to be able to draw it, they pay particular attention to the details. For the interpretive assessment the students use markers to draw on their fan what they remember from “*Cuelga en el aire*.” I assess their understanding of this scene by looking for accurate and nuanced depiction of the scene. To get a more artsy look, students can gently brush water over the finished drawing.

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For the interpersonal assessment, students ask each other questions about the drawings on their fans. Their goal is to sustain a conversation for as long as possible. I give the students some time to think of good questions before we have the exchange: *Es de noche. ¿Por qué hay un sol?* (It's nighttime. Why is there a sun?) This gives the students, who will be evaluated on their ability to sustain the conversation, a chance to anticipate what might be asked. I also ask them to take the fans home before the interpersonal assessment and, for homework, describe their fan to someone from their family or friends. This provides additional practice for the student and is a powerful public relations tool. Children impress their parents with their fluid description. Students are evaluated on their vocabulary use, strategies to maintain communication and comprehensibility.

By the time the students have discussed their fans, and have answered and asked questions, they are usually quite ready to write a paragraph describing it for the presentational assessment. I insist that they use only words they know but will let them check with a dictionary or with me for spelling. I take a picture of them with their completed fan, attach it to the description and hang all of their work on the bulletin board in the hall. From there, I have a panoramic view of the work and can easily apply the rubric. I assess the students' writing based on vocabulary use, language control and its comprehensibility.

Es la noche.
Hay las estrellas y una luna.
La rosa rosada, la corona y los
diablos cuernos simbolizan
Concha y Maritones no dicen
la verdad.
La cuerda en la rosa representa
Don Quijote cuelga en el aire.
El castillo simboliza que Don
Quijote cree que la venta es
un castillo.

Por Caterina Macleod Daigle



Conclusion

Although I have been teaching don Quixote for some years now, the unit was not originally created with backward design or performance assessment. I had to make some changes to help the students succeed in the performance environment. I have to look hard for authentic audiences for presentations and interpersonal exchanges. Sometimes I get lucky and there are competent older students, reliable pen pals, or Latino parents on hand. Other times, that is not realistic and the presentations and conversations take place within the class. I also find that some themes lend themselves better to real world applications than others do. Still, performance assessment gives me the data to show the students progress and allows me to evaluate them in the way I teach them. They can't help but feel more engaged in a process where they demonstrate what they do know rather than expose their weaknesses. In the past I often tested discrete vocabulary items or grammar because it seemed easier. Now I use tasks that measure the most important skills. Performance assessment may not be easy, but it promotes better teaching and learning. As far as I'm concerned, the genie is out of the bottle and he's not going back in.



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