



ELECTRONIC JOURNALS ABOUT LATIN AMERICAN FOLKTALES

Level: *secondary, grades 6-12*
Course: *bilingual class of social studies, language arts, or literature; or a Spanish class*

Rationale

This lesson combines technology and research using authentic student-to-student dialog about folktales from their countries. Folklore genre provides the context through which students will learn more about Latin American countries. Using the concept that peer interaction promotes authentic learning, students tend to explore more deeply what they are studying if the process is interesting to them. Through cooperative learning, Spencer Kagan has illustrated how students' natural inquiry is aroused. In The Journal Book, by Toby Fulwiler, one recognizes how the writing process furthers inquiry and learning.

Often in social studies, geography, language arts, and science classes, students are required to research topics beyond their textbooks. Cultural values and norms found in the literature and language of a peoples cannot always be discovered in an encyclopedia. For a better appreciation and understanding of a culture, students may look to idiomatic expressions, refrains or sayings (in Spanish they are called, Dichos) - all a part of folklore. Using dialog journals with key-pals provides a fresh and exciting process for gathering this information.

by
Jiny Durán Ginn
duan_ginn@apsicc.aps.edu
Bilingual Education
Albuquerque Public Schools
Montgomery Complex
3315 Louisiana Blvd, NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
505-883-0440

Lesson Overview

As students are involved in a study of the cultures and peoples of Latin America, they will gather information from a variety of resources. For the specific area of folklore genre, their primary recourse will be an electronic key-pal in or from the country being studied. Using a medium called dialog journal writing, both students will learn folktales from each other's countries.

This lesson will focus on folktales as told by students' families, communities or any they have learned in school. For example, Navajo students are familiar with Coyote Tales wherein lessons are taught to children through the antics of a coyote and other animals or people. There is also a whole body of folklore around the sun, stars, and moon in many cultures. Students might recognize stories or similar characters from their own folktales as they read their key-pals' tales.

When the two key-pals have made contact, the initial communication will be introductions such as those made upon meeting anyone for the first time. The teacher may want to spend time on this depending upon the age and sophistication of the students. A sample format may be developed by the teacher or, preferably, by the student initiating the contact. (See Introduction Form.)

In the literature, dialog journals are most often described as communication that occurs between student and teacher. Many classrooms are beginning to create dialog journal writing among peers with a great deal of success. When done in this way, dialog journals are different from typical letter writing in that the two writers usually write to each other at the same time in a face-to-face situation. This will be modified somewhat due to distance and the technology being used. Check to see if your Internet server hook-up offers "talk" or "chat". In this case, students may have "real time" communication. Contact your districts' Instructional Technology Service for assistance with this feature.

While many outcomes may evolve as a result of the communication between the key-pals, the primary purpose of this lesson is to understand folktales common to the key-pal's culture. Thus, developing a better understanding and appreciation for the culture.

Time Needed

Typically, one semester is devoted to the study of Latin America at the 7th grade. However, this plan does not have to last an entire semester. The study of a culture's literature may be only one part of a unit on any country. In that case, after establishing communication with a key-pal, research on folktales need only last two weeks to one month. This will depend on the parameters set forth by the teacher. It may also depend upon the two key-pals and the relationship they have established.

Materials

Computers with access to the Internet.

Procedures

1. Teacher will subscribe to a Internet discussion list intended for teachers seeking classroom partners for an intercultural email project. A good one for this is the Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connection's IECC-Projects list. To subscribe, send email message to: iecc-projects-request@stolaf.edu or visit the IECC web site: URL: <http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc/>

Once successfully subscribed as a member of the list, submit the following request: Please contact me if you have students from Latin American countries who would be willing to become a key-pal with my students. The students will use "folktales" to develop an understanding of each other's cultures.

2. Students will become familiar with a variety of resources available through the Internet prior to making contact with key-pal. Gopher, List Serves and the WWW will be explored so that the student will add to his/her knowledge base about the country in which he/she will contact a key-pal.

3. It will be necessary for the students to also have a background in folklore genre. They should learn about types of tales, the purpose folktales serve within a culture, who tells them, how to understand their message, and the elements of story contained in folktales. See Bibliography for suggested readings about folktales.

4. Introductions are made by the students initiating the key-pal dialog. (See Introduction Form.)

5. Student A will write a folktale from his or her cultural heritage to Student B (from Latin America). Student A will ask Student B to do the same.

6. Upon receipt of the folktale, student A will write back with impressions, responses, questions, and other general discourse to Student B. Student A will ask Student B to do the same. (See Dialog Form.)

7. This process may continue for several folktales, or may stop with one (depending upon the timeframe of the lesson).

Follow-up Activities

- * Student may analyze the folktale for elements of story common to the folktale he/she mailed to student B.
- * Student may illustrate the folktale and present it to class.
- * Student may establish key-pals from several other countries in Latin America to compare and contrast folktales on a broader scale.
- * Student may compile anthology of folktales.
- * Student may continue dialogue with Latin American student as he/she studies other aspects of the culture beyond literature.

Introduction Form

The student initiating this dialog will relate the following to his/her key-pal:

Student's name:

Grade:

The class in which this lesson is being implemented:

Interests he/she has:

- * favorite things to do when not in school
- * favorite foods
- * languages he/she uses

Information about family or friends

Information about his/her school, city or town

What he/she has already learned about folktales

What he/she has already learned about key-pal's country and any questions he/she may have

Ask key-pal for a similar introductory message

Tell a favorite folktale from his/her culture or the dominant culture in which he/she lives if one from student's culture is not known

Dialogue Form

Upon receipt of key-pal's folktale, Student A may use some of the following suggested discourse:

What type of folktale is this?

How do you know that it is a legend vs a myth, etc.?

What lesson or moral does it teach?

Does it sound like any folktale you've heard before?

Can you name some of the other cultures from which you have heard it?

Discuss the characters.

Discuss the setting.

Discuss the plot.

Discuss the climax or anticlimax.

What do you like or not like about the folktale?

How does it help you understand the culture of the country being studied?

How is it different or like the folktale you wrote to Student B?

The above are suggestions that may be used. Depending upon the student's preparation in the area of folklore, more technical or complex ideas may be addressed in the dialogue journal.

Bibliography

Books and Articles

Adams, Jerome R. Latin American Heroes. Ballantine books. New York, 1991

- Athey, Lois. Latin America Regional Studies Series. Globe Book Co. New Jersey, 1993
- Falk, Lisa. Cultural Reporter. Smithsonian Institution/Tom Snyder Productions, Watertown, MA, 1995
- Fulwiler, Toby. The Journal Book. Heinemann Educational Books Inc. Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1987
- Hall, Edward T. and Hall, Mildred Reed. Understanding Cultural Differences. Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, Maine, 1989
- Johnson, Bruce, ed. Teaching Folklore. Documentary Research Inc. Buffalo, NY, 1984
- Johnson Newcomb, Franc. Navajo Folk Tales. University of New Mexico Press, New Mexico, 1993
- Paredes, Américo. Folktales of Mexico. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970
- Seeley, Virginia. Latino Caribbean Literature. Globe Fearon Educational Publisher. Paramus, NJ, 1994
- Yocum, Margaret R., "Family Folklore and Oral History Interviews: Strategies for Introducing a Fieldwork Project to One's Own Relatives." Western Folklore. 41:251-274, 1982

Internet--Discussion Lists

NATIVE-L Indigenous Peoples Information
Subscribe to: listserv@tamvm1.tamu.edu

Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connection (for key-pal requests)
subscribe by sending a message to: iecc-projects-request@stolaf.edu

Internet--World Wide Web

For Key-Pals: IECC: URL: <http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc/>

For Internet Class Projects: Global SchoolNet Foundation (GSN): URL: <http://gsn.org/>

For Lesson Plans: URL: gopher://ericir.syr.edu

For Info on Latin America: URL: <http://lanic.utexas.edu>

For Info on Latin America: Latin America Data Base: URL: <http://ladb.unm.edu>

For Current Information on Mexico: La Jornada URL: <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada/index.html>

For other Interesting Sites (large searchable database): URL: <http://www.yahoo.com/>

To Send an Internet Postcard: URLs:

<http://postcards.www.media.mit.edu/Postcards/> or <http://www.mtsobek.com/mts/postal>