

500 Years of Spanish Exploration and Settlement: Children's Literature

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The nation's classrooms have become more diverse, and children of Hispanic heritage represent a large and an important part of this multicultural mosaic. Events such as the commemoration of Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León's historic voyage offer teachers the opportunity to reflect on important events of the past and connect them to students' lives today. These teachable moments have the potential to be some of the most lasting and meaningful lessons students learn. An examination of the Spanish influence which has existed in the Americas since the late fifteenth century can help students understand how important events in the past can continue to have a significant impact on today's culture, language, and society. Using the vehicle of children's literature, this article proposes various teaching strategies and suggested children's books which can be used as resources for teachers to help create a rich narrative that goes beyond the facts and academic accounts found in most social studies textbooks.

Children's Literature and Picture Books in the Secondary Classroom

While many secondary educators feel that children's literature is more appropriate for elementary-aged students, others have found that these books are also effective in secondary classrooms.¹ In fact, these books oftentimes address complex issues which may be more appropriate for middle and high school students.² When used correctly, children's literature can help students come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the world around them. Social studies incorporates history, culture, politics, and other concepts that students may have difficulty relating to in a textbook; children's literature contains images and more accessible reading passages that students may need to engage with the content material.³ The notion of readability is important, in that children's literature and picture books can engage struggling or reluctant

readers, thus motivating them to tackle reading/writing assignments and giving them much-needed reading practice.⁴ The simplified text found in children's books can also be a language support for English language learners.⁵

In addition to simplified text, visual images found in many of these books help students make meaning of the content being read. Rather than requiring students to read a textbook with complicated text and few pictures, the characters and the setting of picture books become accessible to the student through visual representation.⁶ Images in these books can have a strong affective reaction and engage the students who might otherwise not engage with information presented in traditional textbooks. An additional benefit is that while textbooks are often written from the dominant or Eurocentric perspective, many picture books reflect social history, often including stories

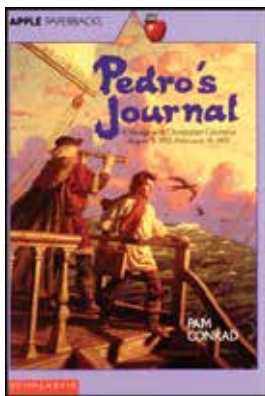
of everyday people and everyday lives. Many picture books often represent the perspective of children or young adults, thus providing a personal connection for the reader. By presenting content through a young person's perspective, content becomes more relevant to the student and oftentimes results in higher levels of intrinsic motivation.⁷ Text Box 1 on page 30 contains suggestions for how teachers can use the story *Tomás and the Library Lady* to incorporate several literary structures which have been identified by researchers to aid in reading comprehension.⁸

Because many students in an average classroom will have difficulty reading grade-level material independently (especially textbooks), children's literature can provide an important tool not only to scaffold comprehension, but also to develop analytical thinking. Rather than offering passive entertainment, picture books and trade books can be used to cultivate students' critical thinking skills by asking questions such as: Who is telling this story? Why did the author write this story? Which voices might be left out of this perspective? In addition, teachers and students may examine moral and ethical issues raised in the book and the book's relevance to current events.⁹ Another strategy to increase critical thinking skills is to compare how multiple texts portray the same topic. Text Box 2 shows how multiple texts can be

used to provide explicit instruction in text structure through visual representations of the text.

Below are several examples of exemplary children's books, organized by topics, which can be used as supplemental resources for teachers to teach about a wide variety of topics pertaining to the influence of the Spanish presence in the Americas in the past 500 years. These fiction and non-fiction books are organized using the themes of Early Spanish Exploration, Spanish Settlement, Latino Culture in the U.S., and Notable Latina/o Biographies. While the list is not exhaustive, it does offer an eclectic range of literature that can help students see the varied and important impact of Spanish influence across time and place. Before reading a story to the class, the teacher should introduce it, note that the text requires both words and illustrations to create meaning, and provide the context in which the story takes place.¹⁰ These walk-throughs can create a rich context for the content which will be taught in subsequent lessons.

Early Spanish Exploration



Pedro's Journal: A Voyage with Christopher Columbus, August 3, 1492–February 14, 1493. Pam Conrad (Author) and Peter Koeppen (Illustrator). (Scholastic, 1991; 80 pages; Ages 8 and up). This fictional chapter book is written in the style of diary entries from the point of view of Pedro de Salcedo, a boy who has been hired onto the Santa Maria for his abilities to read and write. The story describes life on the three ships that

comprise Columbus's expedition, traces the voyage to Columbus's landing in the New World, and ends in the middle of the return journey.

Around the World in a Hundred Years: From Henry the Navigator to Magellan. Jean Fritz (Author) and Anthony Venti (Illustrator). (Puffin, 1998; 128 pages; Ages 7 and up). This non-fiction text recounts the voyages of some of the world's best-known explorers with witty and sometimes irreverent writing. The illustrations also add humor to further enhance an already engaging text.

Hernando Cortes: Spanish Invader of Mexico. John Zronik (Author). (Crabtree Publishing, 2007; 32 pages; Ages 10 and up). This non-fiction picture book contains text, illustrations, photographs, and reproductions of period artwork depicting many aspects of Cortés's expedition into Mexico. Among the many topics covered are a background to the Age of Exploration, Cortés's early life, Aztec life and religion, Cortés's campaign, and the impact of European weapons and diseases on the native peoples.

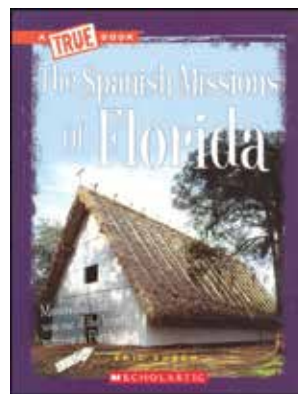
The World Made New: How the Age of Exploration Happened and How It Changed the World. Marc Aronson and John W. Glen (Authors). (National Geographic, 2007; 64 pages; Ages 10 and up). This picture book contains text, illustrations, and photographs which help explain not only some of the major events of the Age of Exploration, but also some of the global consequences of the meeting of the "old" and "new" worlds.

Spanish Settlement

Jose's Buffalo Hunt: A Story from History. Marc Simmons (Author) and Ronald Kil (Illustrator). (University of New Mexico Press, 2003; 64 pages; ages 9 and up). This picture book relates a historically-based coming-of-age tale through an account of a boy's first Buffalo hunt. The book provides details of early life in nineteenth-century New Mexico, and describes the various hunting activities in

which families engaged to survive.

Remember the Alamo: Texans, Tejanos, and Mexicans Tell Their Stories. Paul Robert Walker (author). (National Geographic Children's Books, 2007; 64 pages; ages 10 and up). This book contains text illustrations, photographs, reproductions of period art work, and historical evidence that serve to provide a much more balanced account of the battle of the Alamo than is usually provided in standard textbooks.



The Spanish Missions of Florida. Eric Suben (author). (Scholastic, 2010; 48 pages; ages 8 & up).

With pictures and illustrations, this text depicts mission life in early Florida. The author takes the reader from the start of the mission system in Florida to its eventual decline.

Explorers and Settlers of Spanish Texas: Men and Women of Spanish Texas. Donald Eugene Chipman and Harriet Denise Joseph (authors); (University of Texas Press, 2001; 272 pages; ages 12 and up). This non-fiction text describes the lives of famous Spanish Texans who made a unique contribution to the state's history. The book chronicles the contributions of Texans over more than three centuries from some of the early explorers to important nineteenth-century figures.

Latino Culture in the U.S.

Bless Me, Ultima. Rudolfo Anaya (author). (Warner Books, 1999; 290 pages; ages 12 and up). This book details

how the main character must navigate between Hispanic and American cultures under the guidance of his aunt Ultima. Winner of the Premio Quinto Sol national Chicano award, this book discusses many of the tribulations that children of mixed parentage encounter as they discover and construct their identities.

Olé! Flamenco! George Ancona (author). (Lee & Bow Books, 2010; 48 pages; ages 8 and up).



This photo essay traces the origins of Flamenco dancing from its roots in Spain to people dancing in New Mexico. It is an excellent way to introduce children to the dance and the accompanying music of Flamenco and its impact on other dance forms.

Rattling Chains and Other Stories for Children. Nasario García (author). (Piñata Books, 2009); 160 pages; ages 10 and up). This story introduces the reader to New Mexican folklore as seen through the eyes of its narrator, Junie Lopez. The stories are written in both English and Spanish and provide insight into the traditions and superstitions of the desert Southwest.

Tomás and the Library Lady. Pat Mora (author) and Raul Colon (illustrator). Random House Children's Books, 2000; 32 pages; ages 5–7). This book chronicles the experiences of Tomás, a child of migrant workers. Tomás is befriended by a librarian who opens his eyes to the wonders of reading. Students will consider the difficulties of navigating a society as an English learner as

Read-Aloud with *Tomás and the Library Lady*

Tomás and the Library Lady (see description in text) won the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Book Award. To address the literacy strategies listed, the following are suggested prompts and questions that can be used by teachers while reading the book aloud to students.

Predicting: What do you think the book will be about? What would have happened to Tomás had the library lady not been so kind and generous? What do you think happens to Tomás after he and his family go back to Texas?

Reading/thinking aloud: Why was Tomás so excited to be allowed to check out books? Why did Tomás's grandfather want Tomás to read to him in English?

Attending to text structure: There are many words written in Spanish in the story. How does the author convey the

meaning of these Spanish words to the reader?

Visually representing the text: Look at the drawings of Tomás's family's car and his clothes. Describe what these representations tell you about Tomás and his family. Draw a picture of Tomás engaging with a character from another story he may have read.

Summarizing: Describe the characteristics of each of the following characters: Tomás, the library lady, Papá Grande, and Mamá. What was the most important event in the book that led to Tomás becoming a good reader?

Questioning the text: What else would you like to know about Tomás and his family? Did the author leave out any details which you thought were important? Why do you think the author wrote this story?

Using Multiple Sources to Teach Text Structure

Although students are oftentimes familiar with the narrative text structure common to fictional works, they are often less familiar with the expository text structures frequently found in non-fiction texts: description, sequence, problem/solution, compare/contrast, and cause/effect.¹¹ Because the majority of textbooks and other content materials are written employing one or more of these expository structures, explicit instruction in these text structures can help students with comprehending and assimilating expository texts. This explicit instruction can be facilitated through the use of graphic organizers, which can provide a visual representation of these expository text structures. For example, comparison/contrast is one such text structure that can easily be depicted through the use of a graphic

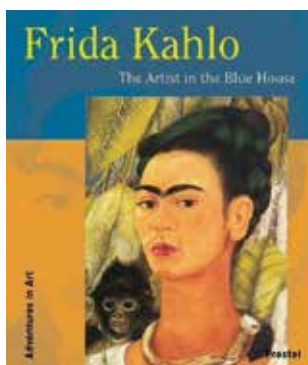
organizer such as a Venn diagram or a two-column T-Chart. Alternately, the ways in which different sources of information present facts and represent viewpoints can also afford an excellent opportunity for modeling this text structure. For example, a Venn diagram could be used to compare and contrast the worldviews of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci (see "Beyond La Niña, La Pinta, and La Santa María: The Invention and Mental Mapping of the New World" in this issue). A T-Chart can categorize information provided by two or more sources (such as the ones described by the books featured under "Early Spanish Exploration") to create a visual representation of how these sources were alike and different in their representation of an historical event.

well as the importance of kindness to all people.

Notable Latina/o Biographies

Harvesting Hope: The Story of César Chávez. Kathleen Krull and Yuyi Morales (authors). (Harcourt Children's Books, 2003; 48 pages; ages 6 and up). This book shares the story of César Chávez, whose experiences as a migrant worker caused him to become increasingly disturbed by the inhumane conditions of other migrants in California. It recounts the inspiring 340-mile protest march organized by Chávez, which resulted in improved working conditions for migrant workers.

Frida Kahlo: The Artist in the Blue House. Magdalena Holzey (author). (Prestel, 2003; 30 pages; ages 9 and up). This book introduces students to the artwork of Mexico's most famous female artist. Kahlo's use of symbolism can be used to teach students about both her life and the artistic process used to create her many works.



Isabel Allende. Tim McNeese (author). (Chelsea House Publications, 2006; 112 pages; ages 10 and up). Details the influences of Isabel Allende, Chilean novelist and one of the most widely read Latin American writers. This book helps readers understand how Allende's family and upbringing influenced her writing. McNeese focuses on her use of political and feminist issues as a platform from which she composes her eloquent prose.

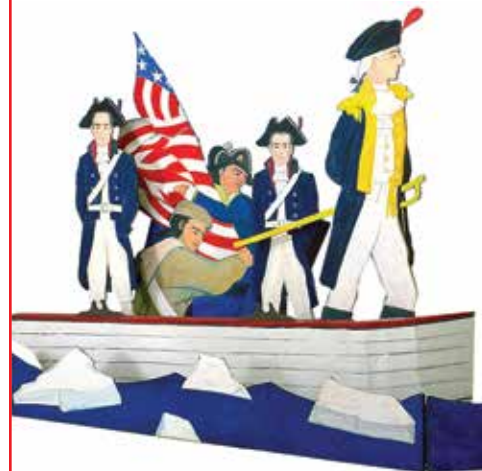
The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano. Margarita Engle (author). (Square Fish, 2011; 208 pages; ages 10 and up). Juan Manzano was born into slavery and yet he overcame these difficulties to become one of Cuba's most well known poets. This book introduces readers to both the poetry of Manzano as well as the reality of slavery in Cuba during the early 1800s. 🌐

Notes

1. Karen Wilkins, Caroline Sheffield, Martha Ford, and Bárbara Cruz, "Images of Struggle and Triumph: Using Picture Books to Teach about Civil Rights in the Secondary Classroom," *Social Education* 72 no. 3 (2008): 177–180.
2. Miriam Martinez, Nancy Roser, Susan Strecker, "Using Picture Books with Older Students," in *Promoting Literacy in Grades 4–9: A Handbook for Teachers and Administrators*, ed. Karen Wood and Thomas Dickinson (Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 241–256.
3. Cyndi Giorgis and Kimberly Hartman, "Using Picture Books to Support Middle School Curricula," *Middle School Journal* 31 (2000): 31–34.
4. Elizabeth Moje, Josephine Young, John Readence, David Moore, "Reinventing Adolescent Literacy for New Times: Perennial and Millennial Issues," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 43, (2000): 400–410.
5. Wilkins, Sheffield, Ford, and Cruz, "Images of Struggle and Triumph."
6. Linda Billman, "Aren't These Books for Little Kids?," *Reading and Writing in the Content Areas* 60, no. 3 (2002): 48–51.
7. Michael Palardy, "Some Strategies for Motivating Students," *NASSP Bulletin* 83 no. 601 (1999): 116–121.
8. Nell Duke and P. David Pearson, "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension," in *What Research has to Say about Reading Instruction* (3rd Edition), eds. Alan Farstrup and Jay Samuels. (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2002): 205–242.
9. Joyce Bainbridge and Sylvia Pantaleo, "Filling the Gaps in Text: Picture Book Reading in the Middle Years," *The New Advocate* 14 (2001): 401–411.
10. Christine Leland, Jerome Harste, Anne Ociepka, Mitzi Lewison, and Vivian Vasquez, "Exploring Critical Literacy: You Can Hear a Pin Drop," *Language Arts* 77 (1999): 70–77.
11. Bonnie Meyer and Roy Freedle, "Effects of Discourse Type on Recall," *American Educational Research Journal* 21 no. 1 (1984): 121–143.

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