

Latino Literature & Life

Child's Multicultural Lit.

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April 14, 2006

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Literature from the Mesoamerica is so very rich and full of the traditions of the people there that it is a welcome challenge to add this flavoring into the classroom. From a historical view Latin literature can be very effective in showing how a culture is influenced over time by another. The Spanish influence on Mesoamerica is still to this day incredibly prevalent; much like the English fingerprint is on North America. The terms should almost be B.S., *before Spain*, and A.S., *after Spain*. Norton makes the point in fact that “[m]any of the folktales from Mexico, South and Central America, and southwestern part of the United States reflect a blending of cultures” (Norton et al, 2001, p. 146).

Who could not write of the clash of civilizations represented in the men of Cortez and Montezuma? Unfortunately, much of this historical fiction is more fictionalized than history. An exemplary text used to illustrate this in the classroom would be *Montezuma's Daughter* by Rider Haggard (1980), originally written in 1894. The myth had already started that the Spaniards were merely there for gold and killed for it exclusively. While there is a place for literature to express cultural mores and values, even going so far as comforting people away from their homeland, it should still apply to history somewhat. Norton mentions that the “choices of materials to be read and discussed may reflect... moral messages” (Norton, p. 3). Some in the teaching profession can use Latino literature to paint history with broad strokes, thus passing moral messages on to the classroom, guiding, influencing them.

Rarely does one hear in the social studies class, literature class, or history class that Cortez's small band of men (even with horses) couldn't have defeated Montezuma's large army, unless that is, there were defectors. Why would people want to defect from the Aztec culture and join with foreigners? Montezuma had this peculiar habit of taking areas over, grabbing the young

Latino Literature & Life

men from said area, bringing them back to a temple and while still alive cut their hearts out and throw their bodies down the altar steps (rotten.com, used 4-14-06). This caused many to join the forces of Cortez, making him a more formidable force resulting in forcefully bringing to a halt Aztec pagan sacrifice and setting up Christian icons instead. Incan and Mayan cultures sacrificed humans as well, sometimes 200 children at once.

A lot of this history is bypassed with much of the Mesoamerica literature in the search for national pride and identity. Pride and prejudice are a great conversation to have unfolded by Latino literature, or any of the multicultural writings. Tribal conflicts, territorial rights, or wanting to become a “doctor instead of a bullfighter” are all topics that Western children can relate to, learn essential values from, or see history from a different perspective.

Contemporary literature again seems to be the most powerful in its socio-economic form. Stories like *Taking Sides* (Norton, p. 158) is a great way to express to teens how changing friendships or even schools can be a learning experience as well as making life or circumstances work for you instead of having them work against you. This is the minor goal of any educator.

Latino Literature & Life

References

Books

Haggard, H. Rider (1980). *Montezuma's Daughter*. Mattituck, NY: Amereon House.

Norton, Donna E. (2001). *Multicultural Children's Literature: Through the Eyes of many Children*. Upper Sadle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice-Hall.

Web-Site Articles

Montezuma: aka Moctezuma. <http://www.rotten.com/library/bio/historical/montezuma/>