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BRINGING LATINO IMAGES AND VOICES TO THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Librarians, teachers, and students play an important role in selecting good quality publications for their schools' book collections. Not knowing the possibilities is one obstacle to making wise choices about texts. This annotated bibliography provides examples of excellent texts that highlight Latino images and voices through personal stories, facts, and poetry

This past December, *The New York Times* published an article called: *For Young Latino Readers, an Image is Missing* (Rich, 2012, para. 2). Mario, one of the students featured in the article, tells the reporter that in many of the books that he has access to in his classroom, he sees "a lot of people that don't have a lot of color." For some reason, books from Latino authors and/or authors showcasing Latino characters are not reaching our children. Some of these authors include Alma Flor Ada, Francisco X. Alarcón, Julia Alvarez, Nicholasa Mohr, Lynn Joseph, Jane Medina, Pat Mora, and even Sandra Cisneros (the well-known author of *The House on Mango Street*). This *New York Times* article reaffirms Nilsson's (2005) findings that, even though there has been some progress made to include more Latino images and voices in children and adolescent literature, there is still work to be done. Nilsson suggests that librarians, teachers, and even students play an important role in selecting good quality publications for their schools' book collections. Selecting these books also affirms the "potential to benefit everyone; mainstream and minority children alike may learn to function more effectively in an increasingly pluralistic society" (Nilsson, 2005, p. 535). Therefore, how can teachers include quality books featuring Latino children's images and voices in their lessons to not only motivate Latino students to read, but also to encourage them to write about their experiences? Moreover, how can Latino

children share these experiences as poems and/or narratives that could be written and read aloud with their peers from non-Latino backgrounds? Here are some examples of recommended books and writing ideas to include Latino images and voices in the mainstream classroom:

Ada, A. F., & Campoy, F. I. (2010). *Rimas de animals. Animal nursery rhymes. Ill. by Vivi Escriva*. New York: HarperCollins.

Spanish folklore in rhyming text featuring animals is represented here in Spanish and English. Students could write other poems about animals, or share their own favorite nursery rhymes from when they were young, focusing on the importance of oral language in language development.

Alarcón, F. X. (2005). *Poems to dream together/Poemas para soñar juntos. Ill. by Paula Barragán*. New York: Lee and Low.

Based on the author's personal experiences this beautiful illustrated poetry book takes you through different times, places, funny and serious moments. Teachers could pose questions to students around their own dreams and encourage them to record them so they won't be forgotten. For instance, start with: Do you remember your last

dream? What did you see? How did it make you feel?

Alvaréz, J. (2002). *How Tia Lola came to visit (Stay)*. New York: Random House.

Latino families extend beyond, mom, dad, and children. This is the first of the Tia Lola series and it tells the story of how Tia Lola comes from the Dominican Republic to help the narrator's family and little by little keeps staying. This funny book will appeal to middle school students and their humor. Due to the fact that Tia Lola shares her wisdom through sayings, students could identify these sayings and their meanings. Moreover, students could compare and contrast their own families with the narrator's family. They could also write about their own family's traditions and stories.

Benavidez, M., & Del Monte, K. (2002). *A new sun/Un nuevo sol*. Ill. by José Ramírez. Los Angeles, CA.: Latino Literacy Press.

Free verse reflections on an immigrant's journey and arrival to a new land. This book is full of beautiful images and short descriptions to illustrate these experiences. Students could write and illustrate their and/or their peers' own journeys to a new home. If the children have never moved to a new home, they could imagine themselves going through this experience and how they would feel about it.

Carlson, L. M. (1994). *Cool salsa: Bilingual poems on growing Latino in the United States*. New York: Fawcett Juniper.

This is an excellent resource to describe the Latino experience in the United States not only from the perspective of those who immigrated here, but also from authors that

were born here like Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and Gary Soto. Students can select one of the themes of the book (School Days, Home and Homeland, Memories, Hard Times, Time to Party, A Promising Future) to develop their own collection of poems and/or narratives.

Carlson, L. M. (1998). *Sol a sol: Bilingual poems*. Ill. by Emily Lisker. New York: Henry Holt.

De sol a sol means sunup to sundown, a day. This bilingual poetry collection focuses on people and rituals throughout the day, such as making tortillas or riding a bike, ending with the smell of the night. Students could write several poems about their day – what they do in the morning, afternoon, and evening, thus their own “de sol a sol” poems.

Cisneros, S. (1997). *Hairs/Pelitos*. Ill. By Terry Ibañez. New York: Dragonfly Books.

In this less known book written by renowned author Sandra Cisneros, the narrator describes how her family members all have different hair textures. The hair descriptions are full of images and after reading the book, children could create their own images or craft with descriptions on their own family members' hair.

Hoberman, M. A. (2001). *You read to me, I'll read to you: Very short stories to read together*. Ill. by Michael Emberley. New York: Little & Brown. (series of books – fairy tales, and others by this author also)

Written for young children, readers share the reading task. One reader reads the right side (written in purple) and the other reader reads the left side (written in red), while both readers read the text in the middle

(written in blue). After students have read some of the poems in this book, they could use the pattern from the poem "I Like" and use it as a template to write about similarities and differences. See the Mentor Text template to facilitate writing.

Johnston, T. (1996). *My Mexico/Mexico Mío*. Ill. by F. John Sierra. New York: Paperstar.

The poems in this book describe history, food, traditions, cultural practices, places, and more of Mexico. It is a wonderful alternative to history and culture books, especially for young readers. Teachers could use this book as a guide to embark their students on a literacy field trip to explore other countries and cultures.

Joseph, L. (2000). *The color of my words*. New York: HarperCollins.

Ana Rosa writes ALL the time. She writes about everything around her and her experiences. Every chapter of this book starts with a poem, some funny, some serious, but through them we listen to Ana Rosa's voice. This book is perfect to teach students the power that written words could have to find their voices and change the world they live in. Students could write poems where their voices/their experiences come out loud and clear through descriptive words.

Kostecki-Shaw, J. S. (2011). *Same, same but different*. New York: Henry Holt.

Two children who live across the world from one another (Elliot lives in America and Kailash lives in India) show that we are all alike and we are also all different. After

reading this book, students could pair up and talk about what they have in common and what differences exist between them as well. This could be in relation to: family, hobbies, living quarters, food preferences, etc. Then have them think of a creative way to share the information in writing with two voices showing differences and similarities.

Lujan, J., & Grobler, P. (2008). *Colors! Colores!* Toronto: Groundwood Books.

Bilingual poems about color abound in this vibrant collection of poetry. Students could write poems about their favorite colors after using their senses to think about what a color feels like, tastes like, sounds like, looks like, and smells like. The following book, written in English, might give students more ideas for writing about colors. Each poem begins with a question, such as: What is orange?

Lujan, J. (2004). *Rooster/Gallo*. Ill. by Manual Monroy. Toronto: Groundwood Books.

The progression of the day is described from the rooster's perspective in this simple verse written in Spanish and English. Students could do a matching activity to match animal names in English and Spanish, such as:
horse/caballo, cow/vaca, pig/puerco, chicken/pollo, rooster/gallo, duck/pato, goat/cabra, cat/gato, dog/perro, turkey/pavo

Medina, J. (1999). *My Name is Jorge*. Ill. Fabricio Vanden Broeck. Honesdale, PA.: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press.

This collection of bilingual poems has become a classic. Jorge wants to make sure he learns how to live on the other side of the river without losing his identity, especially his name. Jorge's experiences of crossing the border and coming into a

new country where he has to learn to survive, especially at a school where everyone calls him George, are unforgettable for readers. Students can work in pairs to talk about their own names, why is it important for them, and how would they feel if they were called a different name. After they talk, they could develop a two voice poem or a narrative to share with the class.

Mora, P. (2009). *Book fiesta: Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day*. Ill. by Rafael Lopez. New York: HarperCollins.

In celebration of Children's Day/Book Day, this bilingual book indeed celebrates books in its lively text and illustrations. Students could write a poem or short advertisement for their favorite books, encouraging other students to read it.

For more ideas on books for children and young adults with Latino characters please visit Pat Mora's site:

<http://www.patmora.com/sampler-latino-authors-illustrators-for-children-ya/>

In addition, The American Library Association's Pura Belpré Award is given to a "Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the

Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth" (<http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/node/4>). You can find a list of past and current winners online at: <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/belprepast>

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