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Education 375

Literature Presentation

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The Book:

Deedy, C., A. (2007). *Martina the beautiful cockroach: A Cuban folktale*. Atlanta: Peachtree.

Book Summary:

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach is a Cuban folk tale which was retold in a child-friendly way by Carmen Agra Deedy. Martina is a young, beautiful cockroach who is ready to choose a husband. Upon beginning this quest, Martina's grandmother advises her to spill coffee on the shoes of each of her suitors so that she can see how they act towards her while angry. Though initially opposed, Martina follows her grandmother's advice and is pleased to discover that the coffee has saved her from marrying a man with a temper. After turning down the rooster, pig, and lizard's proposals her grandmother points out a mouse who has been waiting to speak with Martina. Martina is instantly infatuated with the mouse and does not want to perform the coffee test on him. Her grandmother, however, is insistent, and with hesitation Martina attempts to pour coffee on the mouse's shoes. Before a drop could fall on his shoes, the mouse grabs the coffee cup spilling it on Martina's shoes instead. With that action, Martina realizes that she has found her husband but wonders how he knew of the coffee test. The story ends with the mouse explaining to Martina that he too has a Cuban grandmother.

This text comes in both English and Spanish. Within the English version, Spanish vocabulary words are introduced and reinforced with the English meaning.

Student Information:

Martina the Beautiful Cockroach is appropriate for a third to fifth grade reading level and appropriate for an intermediate to advanced English learner to read independently. The

format of this book and the way in which the English meaning of Spanish words are presented make it useful for English learners of all levels as well as younger children dependent on the lesson with which the text is used.

The activities for the story were created assuming the following about the class composition:

- It is a mainstream 3rd grade classroom
- There are 3 ELL students at the following language development stages:
 - 2 intermediate students
 - 1 beginner

Pre-reading activity:

The teacher will begin by introducing Martina as the beautiful cockroach, describing that she is ready to get married and trying to pick out a husband as well as the advice that her grandmother has given her. The teacher will ask students how they might feel in Martina's position and help them to begin to become invested in the story of Martina. The discussion aspect also serves as an informal test of students' listening abilities. Once the students have begun to develop an interest in the main character and her story, the teacher will introduce the following English and Spanish vocabulary words by putting them up on the board and speaking them with the students:

- Cucaracha - cockroach
- Tía – aunt
- Señora – Mrs.
- Una peineta – seashell comb
- Una mantilla – lace shawl
- Abuela – grandmother
- Consejo increíble – shocking advice
- El perico – parrot
- ¡Caramba! – my gosh
- Muchacha – woman
- señor – Mr.
- Adiós – good bye

- Si – yes
- Mi amor – my love

By introducing the character and the story, the teacher will peak the students' interest and desire to read the story and find out if Martina is able to find a husband and how she does it. Through the discussion aspect students will begin to place themselves within Martina's position and start analyzing the story based on what their actions would be. The introduction of the Spanish and English vocabulary found within the text serves a dual purpose. Spanish speaking children learning English will begin to correlate the Spanish vocabulary they know with the English meaning and native English speaking students will begin to learn Spanish words. Leaving the Spanish and English words on the board allows students a visual to refer to during the reading and post-reading stages of the lesson.

Once students are interested in the text and have a basic understanding of some of the vocabulary found within it the teacher can move the class to the reading stage of the lesson.

During:

To read the text, the teacher would have copies of the text for each student to have in front of them and follow along. The students and teacher would participate in choral reading where the teacher and students read the story aloud together. After every two or three pages, the teacher would pause the reading and as a class discuss what has happened thus far within the story. By pausing and discussing the story, the teacher is able to get a gauge on the class' reading comprehension as well as ensure that student understood the story line before continuing. It is important that the teacher stress to the students that if they are unsure of words during choral reading that they continue to follow along within the text and begin speaking again once they have passed the words which they found challenging. This allows the students struggling with reading to follow along and begin to associate the written words with the words being spoken by the students and teacher.

After the students and teacher have read the story together and checked for understanding of the storyline, the teacher would review the vocabulary words discussed within the introduction and ask students if they can remember any points within the book that the words were used. Once the reading and discussion were completed, both the Spanish and English version of the books would be made available to students to look at during free reading.

Post-Reading:

After reading *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* is completed, the teacher would introduce the idea of a reader's theater. Students would be broken into groups of three and asked to write a script based on Martina's story. After writing the script, students will rehearse it and finally present it to the class. The important aspect of the reader's theater is that students do not memorize the script, but instead read the written script throughout the process. This repetition of reading allows students to become more comfortable with the vocabulary and enables them to read the script more fluently. Students would be challenged to use at least two of the Spanish vocabulary words within the script adding familiarity for any Hispanic students as well as helping to reinforce the Spanish for native English speakers. It would also be required that each student say a line within the skit.

The use of reader's theater incorporates speaking, reading, and writing into one activity giving students practice with each aspect of language arts. The group aspect of this method allows ELL students to gain assistance from their English speaking peers in areas they have difficulty and continue to improve their conversational English. The rehearsal and the fact that students are encouraged to continue to read from their script rather than memorizing it allows struggling readers, ELL or otherwise, to gain the confidence needed to present the skit to the class.

As the students are working together to write their scripts, the teacher would take students, individually, to test their reading skills. The teacher would have each student read a page within *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* which did not contain Spanish writing down any words students had difficulty reading or pronounced incorrectly. This

short test would serve as an evaluation of student's individual capability within speaking and reading. Each student would be required to hand in their own written copy of the reader's theater skit which the teacher could then evaluate based on writing abilities.

Closing Thoughts:

Through the reading of *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* as well as the preparation and debriefing of the reading, ELL students are put into situations in which they will further develop their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills within the English language. Students will not only gain a better understanding of vocabulary within English, but non-Spanish speaking students will begin to develop vocabulary in Spanish as well. The way in which the Spanish vocabulary and English definitions occur within this text make it particularly helpful for Spanish speaking children learning English gain comfort within the text as well as correlating English vocabulary with the Spanish meaning of the word.

This text was chosen based on its integration of Spanish and because it is a Cuban folktale. Due to issues between the United States and Cuban governments, teachers will not be faced with Cuban immigrants however within a community such as Miami, it is possible that teachers would be faced with first or second generation Cuban Americans for whom Spanish is their first language. Upon further research of the folktale, I discovered that a version of this folk tale also exists within Puerto Rican culture increasing the likelihood that students may already be familiar with the folktale (Vazquez, <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1987/1/87.01.09.x.html>). If ELL students are familiar with the story within their native language, they will have an easier time comprehending the English text. Finally, this text will not only be helpful for ELL students but also help bring an understanding of another culture and language to the classroom making it an appropriate and beneficial text for each student within the class.

References:

Vazquez, D. M. (2008). Rosario Ferré: Una cuentista puertorriquena contemporánea.

Retrieved March 25, 2008, from

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1987/1/87.01.09.x.html>.