

Evocando y Paso a Paso Avanzando

Creative Writing Project to Advance Spanish Proficiency

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Project Description: In this creative writing project, the instructor and students will build a safe environment in which creative writing in Spanish will be extensively practiced. As a class, we will evoke and reflect on lived experiences while traveling, studying, and/or working in Spanish-speaking environments. Students will be encouraged to use their experiences and/or reflections as inspiration to create short stories, poetry, and other art forms.

In small writing groups, the Spanish learners will support each other's writing while sharing their experiences, research about political, social, and historical contexts, and critique and edit drafts. As individuals, the Spanish learners will negotiate plots, create fictional characters, and produce texts.

Each week, the instructor will present specific fiction writing concepts and techniques to build the students' confidence in their writing. The instructor will also direct Spanish learners to information sources and assist them with editing.

At the end of this creative writing project, Spanish learners are expected to gain great awareness of different language styles, work with less commonly used grammar forms, and further advance their written Spanish proficiency. Furthermore, students will also improve their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and listening/oral Spanish skills.

The Learners: This guide is designed for advanced Spanish learners—in college writing intensive courses—but could be adapted for grades 7-12.

The most important element for the learner in this project is to be willing to take risks in Spanish. It will require commitment from both the students and instructor, as moments will arise when resources may be difficult to find and writer's blocks will appear. Designing small writing tasks will give students the necessary confidence to overcome these difficulties.

Language Abilities Developed through this Project:

- Improve Spanish writing
- Expand content-specific vocabulary
- Learn creative writing concepts and techniques
- Awareness of different Spanish variations
- Exercise peer review, editing and critique
- Improve reading comprehension and listening/oral skills in Spanish

Project Outline:

- **Week One:** Searching for an idea that will become a story and learn basic creative writing tools.
- **Week Two:** Fictional Characters and Children's books.
- **Weeks Three and Four:** Plot, Time Line, and Poetry. The goal for these two weeks is to create the "times" for the story and produce poetry or a second picture book with that goal in mind.
- **Week Five:** The Context, "the landscape of our story" — The goal for this week is to create a context, a landscape where the story being told happens. First draft of the short story (approx. 500 words).
- **Weeks Six and Seven:** Coherence, it holds the story together and creates the fictional world. The logic of that world is up to the writer, its creator. Second draft of the story (approx. 750 words).
- **Week Eight:** Writing workshops – Revise, edit and finalize short stories, picture books and poetry.

Resources:

- Instructors are resources as well as students' peers in writing groups
- Seminal and bilingual editions of Spanish literary works
- Young Adult and Children's Fiction Books
- Spanish newspapers and magazines
- Internet documents
- Spanish pop culture

Class Format: There will be more than one class format; they will run parallel but will converge at the writing workshops and projects.

- Short lectures
- Class work
- Writing workshops
- Individual projects

Assessment: This project needs a comprehensive assessment in which the process as well as the final product should be graded and rewarded. Regardless of the completeness of the final product, students will be continuously exposed to new language and advanced their Spanish proficiency through their bibliographic research, popular culture, surfing the internet, enjoying a magazine, browsing a newspaper, or reading a picture-book.

- Class participation 25%
- Children's Book: A first effort to create fictional characters 25%
- Poems: Plot and time are added to the fictional characters 25%
- Short Story: Coherence is added to plot, time, and characters 25%

Week One: Searching for an idea that will become a story and learning basic creative writing tools.

This first week is key for building trust.
Creative writing is always challenging, and doing it in a second language is even more difficult.
Look for support in your writing group.

Class Format: Introduction, short lectures, large and small groups.

- Introduction: The instructor presents the project to the class, shares his/her willingness to be a Spanish language resource, and provides his/her best advice on how to find information regarding chosen topics.
- In short lectures: The instructor highlights the importance of creating vivid images, brings the sensory imagination into play, and reviews sensory metaphors, symbols and similes.
- As a large group: The instructor and students evoke and reflect on lived experiences while traveling, studying, and/or working in Spanish-speaking environments.
- In small groups: For the second class, students bring to the second class, an item (picture, music, book, etc.) that remind them of an experience they want to share and are thinking of writing about.
- In small groups: The students use their items as a prop to share moments from their experiences in Spanish-speaking settings. Students exchange individual experiences to create opportunities for building vocabulary, generate semantic maps, and receive/provide specific cultural and linguistic information.

Por ejemplo: *En el grupo A: John estuvo en Guinea Ecuatorial y sus experiencias están relacionadas íntimamente con el color de su piel. Betty estuvo en Bolivia y sus experiencias están relacionadas con su género. Charles vivió 10 meses en Colombia y sus experiencias están relacionadas con derechos humanos. Susan estuvo en Colombia también y sus experiencias están relacionadas con la violencia. En el grupo se conversó mucho pero al final de la semana se dieron cuenta que sus experiencias no eran compartidas por el grupo y se dieron cuenta que para escribir sus historias necesitaban tener mas información. Casi todos decidieron ir al internet y revistas populares.*

Week One: Assessment: Small group participation. Use of props, creation and submission of a semantic map of student's individual ideas/experiences.

Week Two: Fictional Characters and Children's books

Creative writing often uses diction (word choice) and language variations to nail down a character to place, time, gender, economic class, or emotional state.

Class format: Short lectures, small groups, and writing workshops.

- In short lectures: The instructor links the importance of language variation by carefully creating the details of the characters and their roles and voices in the story.
- In small groups: Spanish learners read and critique bilingual picture books. They concentrate on character-building. The goal for the week is to write a text (a paragraph) for a picture book in Spanish.
- In the writing workshop, students present and critique the text for a picture book in Spanish.

Resources:

Picture Books:

- Cisneros, Sandra (1994) Pelitos. Hairs. New York: Apple Soup.
Summary: "A child describes how each person in her family has hair that looks and acts differently. Papa's is like a broom, Kiki's is like fur, and Mama's with the smell of warm bread."
- Reuser, Lynn (1998) Tortillas y Cancioncitas. Tortillas and Lullabies. New York: Greenwillow Books.
Summary: "A young girl describes activities that her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother all did for their daughters, and that she now does for her doll."
- Rodriguez, Doris (1994) Diego quiere ser. Diego wants to be. Wisconsin: Highsmith Press.
Summary: "Diego can't wait to grow up and imagines being a fish, a bird, and a dog instead of a little boy."

Young Adult Fiction:

- Ada, Alma Flor (1993) Me llamo María Isabel. My name is Maria Isabel. New York: Libros Colibrí.
- Cofer, Judith Ortiz (1995) Una isla como tú. An Island like you. New York: Orchard Books.

Week Two: Assessment: Small group participation. Creation, submission, and critique of the text for a picture book in Spanish.

Weeks Three and Four: Plot, Time Line, and Poetry. The goal for these two weeks is to create the "times" for the story and produce poetry or a second picture book with that goal in mind.

The characters need a plot that works inside a time line.

Class format: Short lectures, small groups, and writing workshops.

- In short lectures: The instructor leads a discussion on how every story has its own time and variations on time to better locate the story being told. The instructor concentrates on both, plot and time line and brings back the importance of character building.
- In small groups: Spanish learners read and discuss the first two chapters of García Márquez, "[Hundred years of solitude]." They analyze the magical descriptions (character definition) in chapter one, the seemingly logical genealogical trees for the characters families (time line), and the inconsistency with "real" time (fiction's beauty).
- In small groups: Spanish learners read and discuss the following P. Neruda poems, "El Caballero Solo" (plot, time, character definition); "Explico algunas cosas" (plot); "La tortuga" (character definition); "Alturas de Machu-Picchu" (time, plot).
- In the writing workshops: Students will work on, present, and critique their poems or second text for a picture book in Spanish. They are building plot and time-line to their characters.

Resources:

- García Márquez, *Gabriel (1967) [Hundred years of solitude]*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.
- Neruda, Pablo (1974) *Five decades: Poems 1925-1970*. A Bilingual edition. New York: Grove Press.

Weeks Three and Four: Assessment: Small group participation. Writing workshops to create, submit, and critique poetry and a second text for a picture book in Spanish.

Week Five: The Context, “the landscape of our story” — The goal for this week is to create a context, a landscape where the story being told happens. First draft of the short story (approx.500 words).

The context or landscape has a crucial function, it signals the “story world” to the reader. The challenge is to give details to create a world that will be shared and understood by the reader

Class format: Short lectures, small groups, and writing workshops.

- In short lectures: The instructor highlights the importance of the context or landscape as the path used by the reader to enter into the fiction world of the story being told. The instructor makes sure that the concept of context/landscape is added to the already discussed plot, time line, and character building.
- In small groups: Spanish learners read and discuss chapters 4, 5, and 6 of I. Allende, “Cuentos de Eva Luna.” They analyze the parallel stories in each of those chapters and see how magnificent each context is built as well as the plot, time line and characters.
- In small groups: Spanish learners re-read and discuss the following P. Neruda poems, “Alturas de Machu-Picchu” (setting, time, plot), “Por boca cerrada entran las moscas” (setting).
- In the writing workshops: Students will work on their first draft of the short story in Spanish. They are building and adding landscape to plot, time line and characters.

Resources:

- Allende, Isabel, (1987) *Eva Luna*. New York: Harper Books.
- Neruda, Pablo (1974) *Five decades: Poems 1925-1970*. A Bilingual edition. New York: Grove Press.

Week Five: Assessment: Small group participation. Writing workshops to create and submit a first draft (500 words) of the short story in Spanish.

Weeks Six and Seven: Coherence, it holds the story together and creates the fictional world. The logic of that world is up to the writer, its creator. Second draft of the story (approx. 750 words).

In fiction, writers have the chance to create a coherent imaginative world. Once this world is created, the pattern of events/consequences must acknowledge it.

Class format: Short lectures, small groups, and writing workshops.

- In short lectures: The instructor presents the magic of fiction, and the writer creates and defines the world of the story being told. This creation implies that fiction may defy or support our “real” world. This idea is added to plot, time line, character building and landscape.
- Fiction that defies.- In small groups: Spanish learners read and discuss the same two chapters of García Márquez, “[Hundred years of solitude].” They analyze the creation of a setting, *Macondo*; of a family with a genealogy tree that is impossible to understand but that looks logical; of a time line that has its own variations such as *Melquiades’* consequent deaths or the intersection of historical characters (i.e., Drake (pirate) in Ursula’s narrative).
- Fiction that supports.- In small groups: Spanish learners read and discuss Cisneros, “La Casa en la Calle Mango.” They analyze the landscape creation.
- In the writing workshops: There will be two options: (1) Students will work on their second draft of the short story in Spanish. They are building adding coherence to landscape, plot, time line and characters. (2) As an alternative, students may choose to keep working in their picture books adding illustrations to build coherence and landscape.

Resources:

- Cisneros, Sandra (1994) *La casa en la calle Mango*. New York: Vintage Books.
- García Márquez, Gabriel (1967) *[Hundred years of solitude]*. Buenos Aires: editorial Sudamericana.

Weeks Six and Seven: Assessment: Small group participation. Writing workshops (1) to create and submit a second draft (approx. 750 words) of the short story in Spanish; (2) to keep working on their picture books adding illustrations to build coherence and landscape.

Week Eight: Writing workshops – Revise, edit and finalize short stories, picture books and poetry.

Time for Fiction’s beauty

- Instructor is a resource for Spanish accuracy, final details, and editing.
- Writing workshops to work, edit, and finalize short stories. All the learned elements should be included. The big challenge this week is beauty added to all the creative writing elements. (approx. 1,000 words)
- Students that chose (week 6-7) to illustrate a picture book should work in a second draft of their short story where all the elements of creative writing should be included. (approx. 500-750 words).

Week Eight: Assessment: Stories are due.

Resources:

- Allende, Isabel (1992) *Cuentos de Eva Luna*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Borges, Jorge (1974) *Elogio de la sombra*. In *Praise of Darkness*. Bilingual edition. New York: Dutton.
- Cisneros, Sandra (1994) *La casa en la calle Mango*. New York: Vintage Books.
- *García Márquez, Gabriel (1967) [Hundred years of solitude]. Buenos Aires: editorial Sudamericana.*
- Neruda, Pablo (1974) *Five decades: Poems 1925-1970*. A Bilingual edition. New York: Grove Press.

Picture Books:

- Cisneros, Sandra (1994) *Pelitos. Hairs*. New York: Apple Soup.
- Reuser, Lynn (1998) *Tortillas y Canciocitas. Tortillas and Lullabies*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
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Newspapers-Online

- EL AMANTE - Argentina. Monthly film magazine from Argentina. <http://elamante.com.ar/>
- CARETAS - Peru. Weekly magazine. Political and social events are discussed. <http://www.caretas.com.pe/>
- CINCO DIAS - Spain, Web newspaper. Current events. <http://www.cincodias.com/>
- EL DIARIO DE YUCATAN - Mexico. Daily with collection on Mayan culture. <http://edicion.yucatan.com.mx/>
- EL MERCURIO ONLINE – Chile. Daily - Current events <http://www.elmercurio.cl/>
- EL NACIONAL – Venezuela . Daily – Current events. <http://www.el-nacional.com/>
- EL PAIS – Colombia. Daily – Current events. <http://elpais-cali.terra.com.co/paisonline/>
- REBELION _ ONLINE – Spain. Alternative electronic daily. <http://www.rebelion.org/>

Magazines

- COSMOPOLITAN in Spanish (USA) “La mejor revista para la mujer independiente y liberada que busca proyectarse exitosamente en el ámbito personal y profesional.”
- PEOPLE in Spanish (USA) “People in Spanish publicada diez veces al año, es la revista más fascinante y al día para los hispanos de los Estados Unidos, y se publica mensualmente.”
- ESTYLO “The bilingual magazine that features celebrities, beauty and fashion for Hispanics.”
- MIRA features exclusive interviews and all the latest news on your favorite Latin stars.
- Vida Cristiana is a magazine for Spanish-speaking devout Christians, and it is published in Spanish.

Spanish-Language Search Engines

- Grippio (Argentina). <http://www.grippio.com.ar/>
- Ozu - tu punto de encuentro (Spain). <http://www.ozu.es/>
- MSN-Latino (USA) <http://latino.msn.com/>

What is Project Work?

“Project Work” is a systematic instructional method based on the principles of project-based learning. Project Work” offers a constructivist perspective on language learning, creating opportunities for students to actively participate in their own learning and become more self-directed learners of other languages while creating a product that is both realistic and meaningful.

Where do Projects come from?

Ideas for projects can emanate from a number of different sources.

- Course curriculum
- Students/teachers raised topics
- Special events

Realistic and Meaningful Products of Project Work

- Oral presentations
- Portfolios
- Poster sessions
- Reports
- Interviews

Project Work Essential Features

- Students engage in substantial inquiry over an extended period of time
- Teachers provide guidance and direction to students
- Students become more self-directed and autonomous learners who monitor, analyze and evaluate their own learning.
- Students work collaboratively with others using their language in an integrated rather than isolated way
- Content, process, and product are essential features of project work

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