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Lesson One

FOCUS: Reading Short Fiction

Literature has a lot to offer the reader. As art made verbal, the act of reading improves vocabulary and makes readers aware of the power of language, enhancing the ability to express ourselves. Short fiction traces its roots to the ancient tradition of oral storytelling when tales were passed down from one generation to another. Short stories are more focused than novels, making them ideal for reading in a single sitting. Because of its brevity, short fiction offers teachers unique opportunities to explore various aspects of literature (plot, character development, point of view, and setting) within a manageable time.

Discussion Activities

Read Teacher's Guide Handout One: Short Fiction. Ask your students to name some of their favorite fables, fairy tales, parables, or tall tales. What aspects of these stories appeal to them? Do they remember whether they first heard the story read (or told) aloud, or if they read it themselves? Is reading a story a significantly different experience from listening to it read aloud? Which do your students prefer and why?

Read the Introduction to *Sun, Stone, and Shadows* from the Reader's Guide (p. 3) and Handout Two: Reader-Response Criticism. Use the essay and handout to talk about the ways reading Mexican literature can expand a reader's understanding of Mexican culture and history. Generate a discussion about the ways plot, action, or a particular character within a story can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Ask your students to keep a separate notebook that will serve as a reader-response journal. They will use this journal for their homework, to track their responses to stories, to note questions, and to list vocabulary words.

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write three paragraphs in their reader's journal considering a favorite fable, fairy tale, parable, or tall tale. What was the plot of the story? Did it have a moral lesson, or was the story simply entertaining? Ask students to consider why the story appealed to them at the age they first heard it, and whether or not it has the same emotional effect on them now.

Homework

Ask students to read the short biography of Rosario Castellanos from the Reader's Guide (p. 8) and "Cooking Lesson." Ask students to write a short essay in their journals comparing the woman and her kitchen to a person in their own life who may or may not like to cook.