Text Set Project

Topic

The content area topic for my text set is “Just Like Me”. The text set is composed of Hispanic-themed short stories and novels that help readers discover that children of Hispanic culture are much like themselves in that they share similar hopes, dreams, problems, relationships and interests in life. Drawing upon either their own experiences or those of friends, students will be able to identify with the characters in the readings, yet see how those issues take place in a new context.

All of the readings have children from the ages of 10 to 16 as their core characters (one ages from child to adult). Some of the readings take place in the United States, others abroad in Spanish-speaking countries. Some are historical, some contemporary. Themes include music, sports, shopping, cars, dreams, young love, loss, transition, embarrassment, bad choices and coping with challenge, all of which provide for a variety of interests consistent with those of the target audience. All the readings make use of Spanish words used in context.

The intent of this text set, in terms of Virginia Standards of Learning SI.10, is that as a result of the reading, “students will demonstrate an understanding of the significance of culture through comparisons between Spanish-speaking cultures and the cultures of the United States.” Whether used in a read-aloud format or individual reading, students will interact with the material and accompanying learning activities to process the information.
read, identifying similarities and differences between their lives and those of the characters.

Summary of text set items

The target audience for these readings is composed of seventh grade, beginning Spanish students, a group making one of the more significant transitions of all, from childhood to adolescence. Most of these readings fall into their age group reading level; however, the distribution of the works among levels has also been influenced by themes and length of the works.

Below grade level:

“The Circuit”, a short story by Francisco Jiménez, introduces students to the lifestyle issues of immigrant farm workers and their children in California. Students learn about an experience that resulted in many Hispanics coming to the United States, bringing their culture with them, an experience that continues to this day. Told from the child’s perspective, it focuses attention on the very basic things of life that most of my students take for granted. **Readability: grade 5.**

Daniel’s Ride is a picture book by Michael Perry with extraordinary illustrations that chronicles the passion of Daniel for his brother’s tricked-out Chevrolet Impala. Students see how parents, children and other family relatives interact in the Hispanic center East Los Angeles, and what Daniel is willing to do in order to receive his brother’s gift of the car. **Readability: grade 5.**

How Tía Lola Came to Visit Stay, a novel by Julia Alvarez, tells the story of a brother and sister, children of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, whose lives change dramatically upon their post-divorce relocation with their mother to Vermont. When Tía Lola comes to visit them, the main character, Miguel, who in some ways is more American than immigrant, finds himself caught in a conflict of cultures and uncertain how to deal with it. Students develop an appreciation for what a second-generation Hispanic experiences in a decidedly non-Hispanic environment. **Readability: grade 6.**

At grade level:

The Black Pearl, a novel by Scott O’Dell, is in many ways a coming of age story about a boy who learns that becoming a man is much more than taking risks and following a
dream. Students learn that taking responsibility for one’s choices is the key to growing up. **Readability: grade 6/7.**

*Esperanza Risin*, a novel by Pam Muñoz Ryan, is a story of dramatic transitions and character development as a result of accepting difficult circumstances. Esperanza, upon the death of her father, must leave a life of privilege and become a migrant farm worker. Her journey from privilege to moral strength will teach students that the measure of a person is not in having the best, but in making the best. Students will also gain a strong awareness of the role of responsibility for family that runs so deeply in Hispanic culture. **Readability: grade 6/7.**

*La Bamba*, a short story by Gary Soto, is one of several Gary Soto stories I have selected for this text set. Each relates stories of second generation Hispanic children living in Fresno, California, most of whom are middle school students like mine. *La Bamba* is a story about Miguel, who has taken a huge leap of faith by volunteering to lip-synch the song “La Bamba” in his school talent show. Since “La Bamba” is one of the songs we use in this year of Spanish, it takes us beyond just the song itself into a story to which all my kids can relate. **Readability: grade 7.**

“No Guitar Blues”, another short story by Gary Soto, shows us how the ends don’t justify the means, and that family can play an important role in realizing one’s dreams. **Readability: grade 7.**

**Above grade level:**

*Before We Were Free*, a novel by Julia Alvarez, is another story about transition, this time told through the eyes of a young girl whose family plays a key role in the 1962 overthrow of the Dominican Republic dictator Trujillo, and how it impacted her forever. Students not only learn something not often studied in middle school social studies, they also learn that change and transition, regardless of culture, often come at great price. **Readability: grade 7.**

“No Guitar Blues”, the last short story by Gary Soto in this text set, introduces us to students on their first day of school and of the impression that one boy wants to make on his intended girl friend. **Readability: grade 6/7.**

*I, Juan de Pareja*, a novel by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño is told in autobiographical form about a slave child who eventually becomes the best friend and trusted assistant to Spanish painter Diego Velasquez. It gives students insights into Spanish culture in the first half of the seventeenth century; yet it also helps students understand that one’s dreams and aspirations are precious and not to be sacrificed. **Readability: grade 8.**
Readability and how it was determined

Readability was determined using both the Fry Readability and the Flesch-Kincaid grade level assessment tools. Most assessments were consistent between the two; some were not. I found that the Fry graph tended to skew a higher grade level than the Flesch-Kincaid, which could be due to the Flesch-Kincaid being generated primarily by the Microsoft word processing application in a very precise way, whereas my use of Fry was not necessarily as concise (sentence length, use of graph, etc.).

A key factor in this that cannot really be ignored is that of sentence length. Readings that were more narrative and less conversation-based skewed higher in grade level than those more conversational in nature. I found myself trying to find a balance in the selections I used to determine readability, but it was rather arbitrary. That too could have an impact on the readability scores.

I also found that the more descriptive the work, the longer the sentence. To me, description gives depth and resonance, capturing the imagination and attention more than less descriptive passages, creating more investment in the reading itself.

You may notice that my readability grade levels fall between grades 5 and 8. As stated earlier, I also distributed readings between grade level groups by the length of work and their topics or themes. Frankly, some themes were more appropriate for higher-level readers than others, and a picture book is more appropriate to a lower level reader, although no less entertaining.
Text Set Bibliography


