

My Culture Is...: A Zine Exercise based on Tato Laviera's "Spanglish"

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Education level: Junior High and/or High School

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: 60 minutes

Objective: Discuss how culture is reflected in language. Discuss how cultures often blend. Expose students to multilingual poets. Teach students zine folds and how they can make a zine with just a piece of paper and a pencil!

Required materials: Print-out of the literary model or project on the board, blank sheet of paper, and a pencil.

Literary model: "Spanglish" by Tato Laviera

FREWRITE OR WARM-UP DISCUSSION *5 minutes*

- Ask the class for two cultures they experience in a day (culture among friends, culture at home with their family, in an after-school sports team or club). Draw two big concentric circles on the board. In each circle write the name of that culture.
- Ask the class for images of each culture and write responses into the corresponding circle.
- Ask the class for language spoken in those cultures and put words and phrases into the corresponding circle.
- As you and the class generate ideas, steer the class toward specifics.

LITERARY MODEL *5 minutes*

["Spanglish"](#) by Tato Laviera

I asked students to read this poem in their head, and then I asked the classroom teacher I was working with at the time to read and translate words as she read. She was bilingual and happy to help. If you don't have the same resource, consider asking the students if anyone speaks Spanish, and if they'd be willing to read the poem and help translate a few of the lines. If all else fails, I think part of this poem's power is that English speakers can't understand all of it, so it might be worth leaning into that inaccessibility as it were and discussing such in class.

DISCUSSION *15 minutes*

- Why blend two languages in one poem?
- How does this poet feel about Spanglish?
- How many languages do you think this poet speaks?
- What specific images do you see in this poem?
- Where do you see the blending of cultures?

ZINE FOLD

This lesson can be adapted to a poetry writing prompt or a zine prompt. I was teaching a hybrid poetry and zine class, so I folded this prompt into a zine lesson.

I used a simple, no scissors required, one-sheet fold. Below are directions for what's known as a "water book". (A diagram can also be found on page 16 of [Booklyn's education manual.](#))

Step 1. Fold an 8.5 x 11" blank sheet of paper in half lengthwise

Step 2. Fold lengthwise again

Step 3. Fold each end in toward the center.

Step 4. Push the center out so the two sides fold back.

Done! You should have eight squares total.

PROMPT *15 minutes*

Below are possible prompts based on Laviera's poem. I gave students the freedom to choose their own prompt. No matter the prompt students choose, I asked the class to fill up their zine with as many words as possible. Think of this exercise as essentially a list poem spread across eight zine pages.

- My language is...
- My culture is...
- Things I hear my culture say
- Images/scenes of my culture

SHARE *5 minutes*

Ask students to share!