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"Got Llorona?": Reflections on the Potential to Develop Learners' Symbolic Competence in the Language and Culture Classroom

How do we recognize La Llorona?

Focus: Relationality

Goal: Learners become aware of 1) how constructions of La Llorona are interrelated, considering both differences and similarities across texts and modalities; and 2) how they position themselves in relationship to the texts.

Texts: These activities are based on multiple textual and visual representations of the legend. Possibilities include: the colonial text from the *Pasajes* textbook; the children's book; the mural painting by Juana Alicia in the Mission of San Francisco; a poem by Chicana author Naomi Quiñonez; the folk song sung by Chavela Vargas; and the "Got milk?" television advertisement.

Procedure:

a. Learners are divided into groups of 4 or 5 and each is assigned a different textual or visual representation of La Llorona. This is an exploratory and warm-up activity, each group describes their representation and what they consider to be its noteworthy features.

b. Using the features they identified, learners organize and elaborate on them based on a list provided by the instructor. Possibilities include: 1) physical attributes of La Llorona; 2) secondary characters and their relationships to La Llorona; 3) plot sequence and events; 4) languages used in the telling and how and when each is used; 5) geographical features and setting; 6) intended audience. Learners represent these characteristics in visual or textual form on a poster board.

c. The instructor hangs the poster boards around the classroom. Learners review each one, noting on a piece of paper features that are interesting, similar or different, or unclear ideas.

d. Each group presents their poster board after which class members ask clarifying questions or request additional information. Throughout the presentation and discussion learners are instructed to add additional items to their notes. Once finished, the whole class identifies the similarities between the representations and the distinct or variable characteristics (e.g. Llorona kills her children or does not; there are different reasons for killing her children; the story takes place in one specific location or multiple locations; the text employs multiple languages for differing audiences, etc.). As a concluding question the class considers any contradictions that emerge between the features.

e. Learners return to their groups and describe the emotions they associate with or that are provoked by each of the representations discussed. They identify specific passages in the texts or features of the images that embody, express, or provoke these emotions.

f. As a whole group follow-up, learners explain how these emotions are related (or not) to the features identified on the poster boards for each of the texts.

g. Individually, learners select one of the representations that speaks to them or that they most identify with (either for aesthetic, emotional, political, or other reasons) and write a brief statement that explains why (using as support the features described on the poster boards and the emotions identified with them).

h. In pairs (ideally based on the texts selected in part g), learners discuss the text they selected and share their statements. Using this information, they consider what they think La Llorona represents in the text and what she represents for them personally.

i. As a whole class students share their interpretations. As a final consideration, the class considers what is left unresolved or unspoken in the text or in their relationship to the text.

Where do we find La Llorona?

Focus: Transgression

Goal: Learners interpret the positionality of La Llorona in relationship to larger power structures represented in the texts considering both how these power structures operate in specific spaces / places and the potentialities and limitations of transgressing them. Learners analyze other representations of crying ghost women across linguistic and cultural borders while considering their historical contexts of production.

Texts: The first part of this activity is based on the same texts as the preceding project. The second part employs texts (understood as songs, movies, visual representations, stories, etc.) that learners select from the U.S. or around the world. All of these texts represent crying or weeping ghost women. Learners can be given a list of possibilities or do this research on their own. Possibilities include: Dolly Parton's song *Mountain Angel*; La Llorona de Los Ángeles, as portrayed in the movie *Mulholland Drive*; *Medea*; the Japanese play *Izutsu*; the Korean story *Janghwa Hongryeon jeon*, other Chicano representations which include La Llorona, such as Ana Castillos' novel *So Far from God*.

Procedure:
a. In groups of 4, each group is assigned a version of La Llorona. Learners identify all of the references they can find to specific places mentioned as well as the spaces where the events occur (i.e. colonial streets, beautiful house, churches, a middle-class home, rural villages around the world, bodies of water, a ranch, the US – Mexico border, etc.).

b. As homework learners find visual representations of the places / spaces they identified. These do not have to necessarily be historically accurate as they may reflect how learners themselves imagine these places / spaces. For example, for the colonial text learners might find an image of colonial streets (which would exemplify their narrowness and sense of confinement) or a colonial house (to capture its opulence). For the mural in the Mission learners might find actual newspaper images of the women in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and their protests (many of these media images show the unarmed indigenous women in the streets being confronted by armed military men).

c. In the following class, learners present their lists of places / spaces and their images, describing them and highlighting what is represented and what is happening in each. A complete list is compiled on the board.

d. (Prior to beginning this group activity, the instructor can take one example from the list of places / spaces and moderate an analysis based on the discussion questions. This discussion would then model the types of analysis learners would complete in their groups. An alternative to personalize this analysis would be to select a local campus space – such as Sproul Plaza- and discuss the same questions, who can be there?; what can you do?; what can you not do?, etc.) Learners return to their groups and for each of the identified places / spaces answer the following discussion questions: Who acts or speaks in these places / spaces? What is the relationship between these actors? Who has power in these relationships? How is this power relationship represented in the places / spaces? Does this power relationship change in the different places / spaces where the characters interact? Do these spaces or places give the characters power? In what ways?

e. As a follow-up, each group presents one of the spaces / places and their analysis to the class for further discussion. Afterwards, learners consider how these power relations reflect larger constructions of class, gender, race, amongst others and the implications for La Llorona when she attempts to cross them.

f. The second part of this project-based activity requires outside class time. Learners, either individually or in pairs or groups, select a representation of a crying ghost woman from a cultural group in the United States or from another country. Learners research and analyze their representations, focusing on the significance of the crying ghost woman and using the following guiding questions:
    1. How is the crying ghost woman depicted? Why does she cry? How is she similar to or different from La Llorona?
    2. What is the specific setting? What other historical, political, or economic information about this context is included or might be important to understand the plot?
    3. What is the main conflict? Who has power in the story and who doesn't? How is this power demonstrated? On what is this power based? How do these power relations contribute to the conflict in the text and the learners' interpretations of it?
    4. What does this crying ghost woman represent for them?

g. Learners present their analysis to the class. Afterwards, the whole class considers whether or not these varied crying ghost women represent similar things or if they critique similar power structures. Finally, they consider what the alternatives are to crying.

How can we reframe La Llorona and what new meanings emerge?

Focus: Potentiality

Goal: Learners create their own representation of La Llorona and interpret their own framing, the meanings that they have constructed, and how they have constructed them.

Texts: For this project learners construct their own texts.

Procedure:
a. Outside of class learners construct their own version of the legend of La Llorona. There are no restrictions on what learners can or should do, for example:

1. *modality and text*: students can produce a written text, visual representation, song, poem, dramatic representation, etc.
2. *setting*: the story can be set anywhere in the world
3. *events*: the events and the plot of the story and its sequencing are open
4. *representations*: students do not need to follow any particular cultural representation of La Llorona as previously discussed in class
5. *language*: students can write in any languages(s) they want

b. Once completed, learners prepare a written reflection in Spanish of their version of La Llorona in relationship to others studied in class. Learners use the following guiding questions, when relevant, which reflect the types of analysis already completed through the previous activities:

- What do you consider to be the most noteworthy features of your representation? How are they constructed in the text through language, images, etc.? Why are these important to you?
- How are these features similar to or different from other representations of La Llorona or crying ghost women studied in class? Why have you chosen these particular features?
- Where are you? Do you see yourself in your representation or are you outside the text?
- In what spaces / places does your representation occupy? Who speaks in these spaces? What power structures operate and how do they influence the events depicted?

This written statement can be formally evaluated based on: clarity of the ideas, demonstrated comprehension of basic analytical and interpretative considerations developed in class, and students' elaboration of the framing of their version and its justification (including setting, plot, representations, power structures, etc., when relevant).

c. As an optional follow-up, learners complete a "gallery walk" in class, in which they collectively present their versions with a brief synopsis based on their analysis.

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