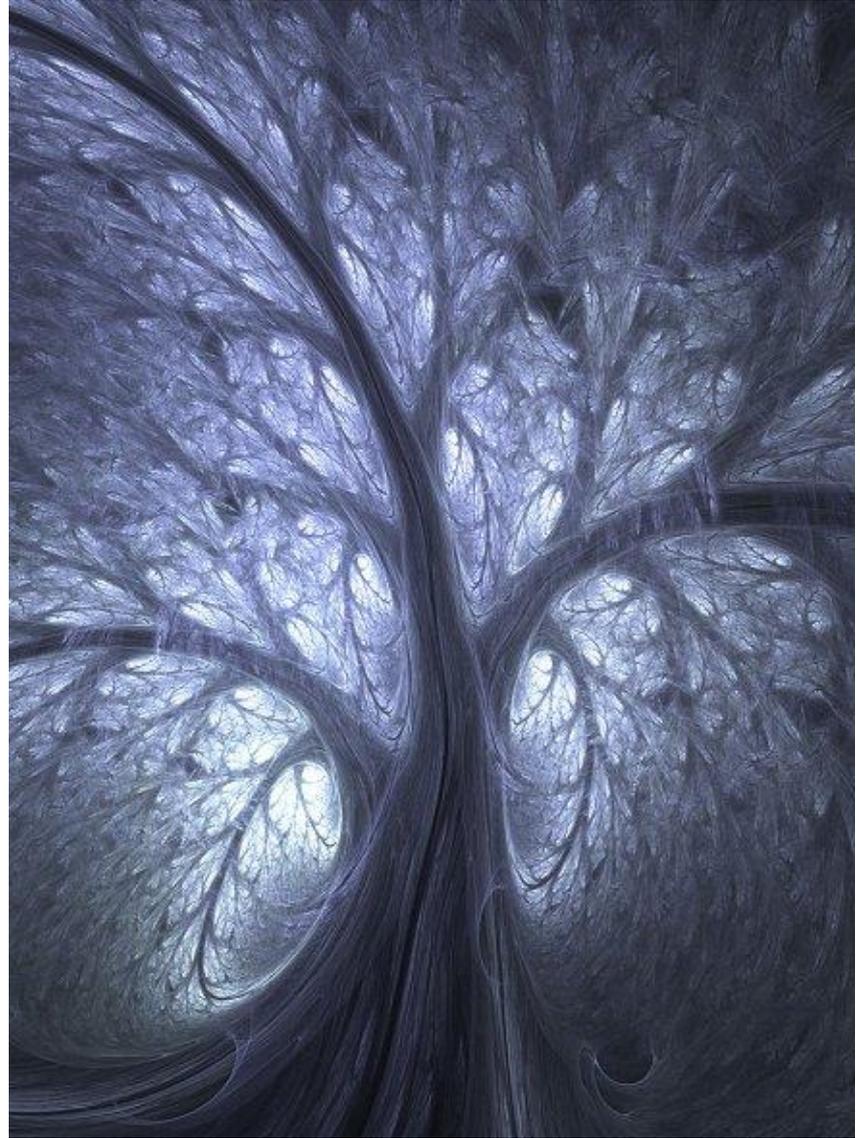


**“Got Llorona?”: Reflections on  
the potential to develop learners’  
symbolic competence in the language  
and culture classroom**

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BLC Fellows’ Project  
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# Goals

- 1) To reflect on my own process of exploring symbolic competence, its meanings and potentials
- 2) To consider its implications in the classroom as students explore meaning-making through language and cultural representations



# My first story: Symbolic competence

- “It is the capacity to recognize the historical context of utterances and their intertextualities, to question established categories like *German, American, man, woman, White, Black* and to place them in their historical and subjective contexts. But it is also the ability to resignify them, to reframe them, re- and transcontextualize them and to play with the tension between text and context” (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359)

# Struggles

- *How do we recognize symbolic competence?:* What does it look like? What are its features? How do we know when someone has it?
- *Where do we find symbolic competence?:* Does it reside in the individual as a “thing”? Is it an ability that can be possessed? Is it something we automatically possess through our first language? Or, does it exist in relationships, for example, between the text and the context, the individual and his/her environment, the first and second language?
- *What new meanings emerge for teaching and learning?:* How do we teach for the development of symbolic competence? How can we assess it?

# Thank you to...

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# My second story: La Llorona



# Colonial La Llorona



Bretz, M. L., Dvorka, T., Kirschner, C., Kihyet, C. (2009). *Pasajes: Literatura* 7<sup>th</sup> ed. McGraw-Hill

“ay, ay, ay my poor children,  
where will I find them”



Bretz, M. L., Dvorka, T., Kirschner, C., Kihyet, C. (2009). *Pasajes: Literatura* 7<sup>th</sup> ed. McGraw-Hill

Photograph from website “La Llorona, deconstructed,”  
photographer unknown



- The word symbolic refers, “not only to *representations* of people and objects in the world but to the *construction* of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, and values through the use of symbolic forms” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 7)

# Symbolic dimension

- How and why had La Llorona been constructed as a hysterical child murderess?
- From a colonial perspective what meanings were attached to her as a mestiza woman and to her lover as a Spanish man with “pure blood”?
- Was the killing of her children a symbolic act of revenge or of liberation as an agent?
- What symbolic violence had been carried out on her?
- Has her representation changed over time? If so, how?
- What do the students’ own reactions to the ‘absurdity’ of her actions reveal about their own positionality and that of a broader U.S. cultural perspective?

# La Llorona and understandings of symbolic competence

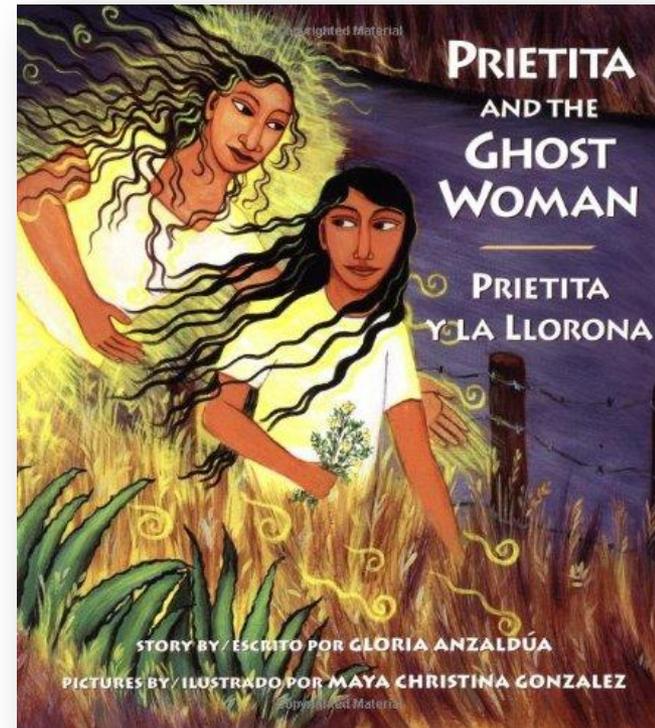


# La Llorona as...

## Horror Movie



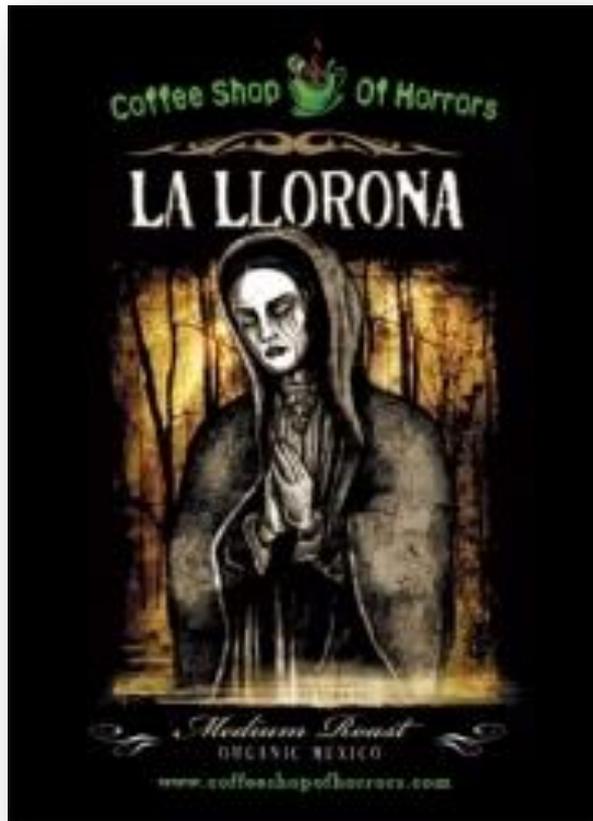
## Children's Story



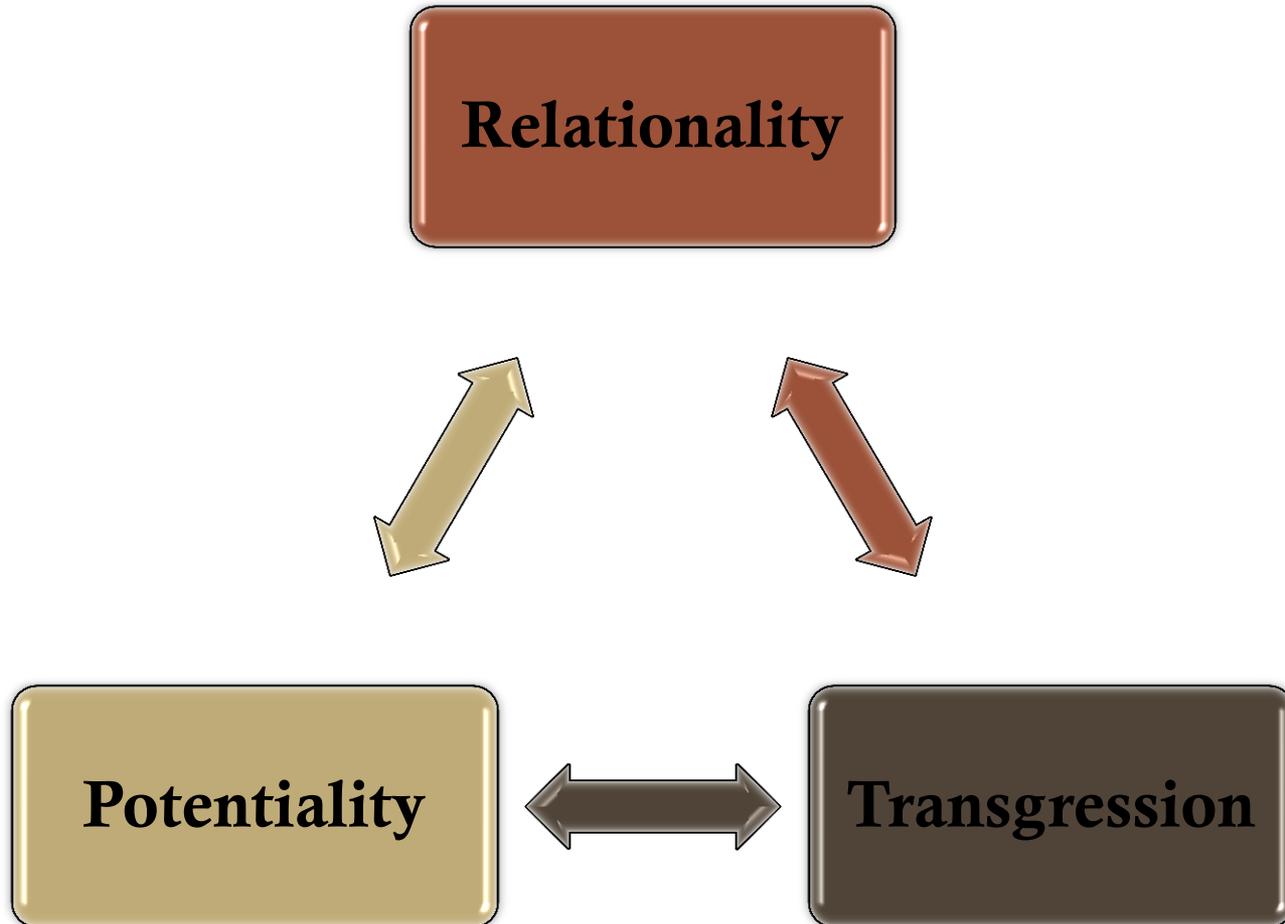
# La Llorona Project



# Commodified La Llorona



# La Llorona and symbolic competence



# Teaching for the development of symbolic competence

**GOAL: To critically reflect on La Llorona...**

... as story  
... as historical subject  
... as cultural representation

across texts  
across time and space  
across modalities  
across cultures  
across languages

in relationship to students' own cultural and historical positionality.  
  
in relationship to larger social, political, and economic realities and power structures.

# Teaching for the development of symbolic competence

**METHOD:** Through project-based activities...

<i>Focal Textual Questions</i>	<i>Self-reflective Dimension</i>	<i>Targeted Feature</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How do we recognize La Llorona?</li><li>2. Where do we find La Llorona?</li><li>3. How can we reframe La Llorona and what new meanings emerge?</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How do we recognize ourselves?</li><li>2. Where do we find ourselves?</li><li>3. How can we reposition ourselves and what new meanings emerge?</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Relationality</li><li>2. Transgression</li><li>3. Potentiality</li></ol>

# How do we recognize La Llorona?

**Focus:** Relationality

## **Texts:**

The colonial text from the *Pasajes* textbook ;children’s book; 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.

## **Goals:**

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.

# Where do we find La Llorona?

**Focus:** Transgression

**Texts:** The first part uses the same texts as the preceding project. Possibilities for the second part include: Dolly Parton's song *Mountain Angel*; La Llorona de Los Angeles, as portrayed in the movie *Mulholland Drive*; *Medea*; the Japanese play *Izutsu*; the Korean story *Janghwa Hongryeon jeon*, other Chicano/a representations, such as Ana Castillos' novel *So Far From God*.

## Goals:

1. 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.
2. Learners analyze other representations of crying ghost women across linguistic and cultural borders while considering their historical contexts of production.

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

**Focus:** Potentiality

**Texts:** For this project  
learners construct their own  
texts.

**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.

# Conclusion and Openings

## Symbolic competence is

- **the potential to become aware of and critically reflect on the crossing of multiple borders between...**
  - linguistic codes and cultural meanings,
  - the self and others,
  - various timescales and contexts,
  - the power structures that operate throughout.
- **These border crossings include**
  - translation from one code to another,
  - transfer from one modality to another,
  - transliteration from one mode to another,
  - transposition from one subject position to another.



Thank you!