

## **Cultural Perspectives on the Environment in Selected 20th Century Poems**

*Beth H. Stewart*

### **Academic Setting**

#### School Setting and Students

The unit is geared for a forty-five minute eighth grade language arts class at an Albuquerque middle school with a diverse population of students. The student ethnic distribution is 75% Hispanic, 17% Anglo, 5% Native American, 4% African American, and 1% Pacific Islander. Literature has to be carefully selected in order to represent most of the students attending the school. This will aid in familiarity and inclusiveness which is important in as diverse a group of students as these percentages represents. Obviously, the school is strongly influenced by the Hispanic culture, and school decisions are often made based upon addressing Hispanic issues. The Native American students mostly travel from the Canoncito area. Many of the students have never been east of the Mississippi River or north of the state of Colorado. There are a significant number of students who have family living in Mexico and often visit. Students are not familiar with cultures outside of the Southwest.

Between 50% and 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. As often happens in a school which is socio-economically below average, the students standardized test scores are also below average. In 1999, the Composite Total on the New Mexico Achievement Assessment ranked at the 44 percentile. Although the reading score on the state test ranked at 50 percentile, the Gates-MacGinitie scores revealed that a third of our eighth graders scored in the lowest quartile. Fifteen percent of the students are special education students. About two-thirds of those students are in full inclusion classes. The language arts curriculum is coordinated with both the eighth grade science and U. S. history classes, and teachers are organized in teams, sharing the same preparation periods and students. More than half of the students are raised in single-parent homes, and some of these students travel between parents frequently. Many live with a relative other than the natural parent. The school has a higher than average transiency rate. There are many personal issues with which the students have to contend, and the disruptions in their home life often affect their performance in school. These are students at risk.

#### Goals

Poetry is a genre often neglected in the classroom. Through the study of poetry elements, form, and language in this unit, the students may grow to appreciate poetry, visualize images, and verbalize their reactions. Another intent of the unit is to give both the students and the teachers the opportunity to explore poetry

thematically. Students have difficulty seeing the relevance of poetry in their own lives. The poetry selections will also show how the environment and a "sense of place" is used to reflect, reveal, and draw a relationship to the "human experience." At risk students need to find a "sense of place" in their lives so in turn they may find a cultural and environmental identity. In studying different twentieth-century American poets from diverse backgrounds, this unit compares and contrasts different perspectives on the "sense of place." Experiencing the world of these poets may give the students a better understanding of environmental and societal issues debated in our country today, and the various and often controversial views that result. The concepts discussed in this four to five week unit can easily spill over into the social studies and science classrooms.

I have selected five authors of twentieth-century American poetry based upon diverse cultural, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. The class will read three poems written by each poet. Leslie Marmon Silko's poems "How to Write a Poem about the Sky," "Hawk and Snake," and "Slim Man Canyon" will be the first studied. Pat Mora and her poems "Sonrisas," "La Buena Pastora: The Good Shepherdess," and "Mango Juice" will follow. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Harlem Night Song," and "Stars" by Langston Hughes will be read next. Robert Frost and Mary Oliver will be the last poets studied in the unit. Frost's works will include "The Road Not Taken," "Tree at My Window," and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Mary Oliver's poems "The Hawk," "The Sun," and "The Turtle" will complete the readings for this unit. These poems not only exemplify each poet's individual style, but also distinctly illustrate a relationship between the poet and his/her "place" or environment. These poets and the themes they reveal are part of a full year study of multi-cultural literature covered in the eighth grade language arts class.

## **Narrative**

In endnotes to his book *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell quotes E. V. Walter's *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment*: "People do not experience abstract space; they experience places. A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed, or avoided" (508). A "place" is not just a geographical location. It is all that the senses can comprehend, but needs also to include the memories, history, stories, and legends of that place (Berry 68). Young people, especially, often feel displaced even in familiar surroundings. Students need to discover their "sense of place" in order to find their cultural and environmental identity. "Without a sense that they belong, that they are important to a group, young people have no reason to act responsibly, no reason to learn, and will not realize their potential" (Mellin 81). To find this "sense of place," Buell says we need to "recalibrate familiar landscape" (Buell 261). To rediscover his/her "place" a person must first be disoriented to become oriented. To find a culturally familiar environment, one must first surround oneself with the unfamiliar. For example, a person living in the city becomes so accustomed to the sounds of traffic and sirens that he/she is able to sleep in spite of them. This has become the familiar. It is not until he/she removes himself to a cabin in the woods, which is the

unfamiliar, that he/she notices the absence of city sounds. All seems too quiet. By studying "place" through poetry, a genre which is unfamiliar to most students, the students may be able to find their "place." By looking at their "place" through the lens of poetry, students will have to identify the elements of their "place" all over again. This will help the student to associate "where I am to who I am."

A human's perceived relationship to the environment or "place" may vary based on his cultural and ethnic background and geographical location. That "place" can be anywhere, and the poets chosen for the unit depict and characterize various environmental experiences throughout the United States. Students often have difficulty understanding other cultures' different perspectives, and hopefully the students will acquire a better understanding through their study of the diversified literature presented to them. "All living writers and readers, regardless of gender and ethnicity, are more or less constrained by it: by the ethnocentricity of the human estate" (Buell 20). Nature cannot speak for itself. It relies on a human connection when put into language. There are always going to be cultural influences. Some of these cultural perspectives on the environment will be discussed in the rest of the narrative.

Multi-ethnic readings should be taught in the classroom. By introducing students to literature of other cultures, students will broaden their own sense of ethnicity as well as gain an understanding, appreciation and tolerance of other cultures. A writer of a less familiar culture may be able to give "voice to what otherwise might have gone unvoiced" (Buell 19) within his or her own culture. People tend not to see the perspectives of others if the perspective is not accepted or common in their own culture. By reading poetry written by a culturally diverse group, students will hear different voices which will stimulate thinking beyond the boundaries of their own culture.

The poets in this unit have been carefully chosen to move the students beyond their cultural boundaries. Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko and her poems will hopefully give all students in the school a better appreciation for the Native American perspective, especially of the environment. Many non-Native American readers may not readily understand the concept that all aspects of nature intertwine and form one force. The Southwest is very real to these students, and beginning with Silko gives them a tangible reference from which to start. Because of their proximity to Laguna Pueblo, the students in Albuquerque would be more likely to visualize her poetic descriptions of the environment. Since the largest percentage of the student population is Chicano or Hispanic, it is appropriate to include Pat Mora in this unit. Her vocabulary and reading level is more accessible to the students than other poetry and for this reason and the themes of conflict between Anglo and Chicano cultures she articulates so well, the students would be able to relate to her style and concepts. Although only a small number of students are African American, Langston Hughes and his selections are aimed to give all students an interesting look at the plight, indignities, and humiliation of the black in the urban environment. They are rarely exposed to this perspective, which may

be so different from their own. Robert Frost's poems depict a prominent environmental perspective of Caucasian America often studied in school. Nature as a symbol for mankind commonly appears. It is important to expose students to one of the most famous American poets of the twentieth century. Finally, Mary Oliver is a modern poet who relates a perspective no other poet is able to state. She depicts nature as perfection in and of itself. All students can grasp the message of her poetry.

Leslie Marmon Silko and her poems "How to Write a Poem about the Sky," "Hawk and Snake," and "Slim Man Canyon" will be the first to be studied in this unit. Although, she has also written many stories and novels, this unit will concentrate on three of her poems. Born in 1948, Silko was raised in Laguna, New Mexico, which is part of the Laguna Pueblo. Although she is from a mixed heritage of white, Mexican, and Laguna, she always considered the Native American culture the most influential in her life. " 'I am of mixed breed culture, but what I know is Laguna'" (Foote 429). Marie Anaya, Silko's great-grandmother with whom she spent a great deal of time, instilled the traditions, legends, and storytelling of the Laguna into her great-granddaughter. It is on these stories that Leslie Silko has based so much of her writing. The Marmon house in which she lived was located on the edge of the Laguna Pueblo, and she never quite felt entirely included nor excluded from the pueblo.

This Pueblo perspective on the environment is based upon the belief that humankind is not separate from nature, but an integral part of nature. Two major themes which appear in Silko's work "are the centrality of environmental integrity and the pacifism that is its necessary partner" (Allen 96). Much of her poetry deals with the environment as the key figure. Nature is not to be conquered but rather nature is to be seen as an a respected friend.

Several discussions on Silko's *Ceremony* also apply to her poetry. In "The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*" Paula Gunn Allen writes, "We are the land, and the land is a mother to us" (Allen 119). The land is seen as female, nurturing and protective. "We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same" (Allen 119). Allen, in summarizing a pueblo worldview, states that the earth is not a separate entity, the earth is part of the people. One could not survive without the other. The earth is not a dead thing, but the belief of the people is that it is alive and breathing, just as people are alive and breathing. When one part is broken, it disrupts all of nature; when a person is ill, droughts occur, plants won't grow, animals starve. Everything becomes ill (Allen 123). The dead are always "within and part of the earth" (Allen 124). Rain is recycled and the body is recycled from the dead ancestors. Harmony exists. The world may change but it is all part of the natural cycle. In "How to Write a Poem about the Sky" a poem written for the students of a middle school in Alaska, not only are all things on earth seen as one entity, but the sky and the earth become one. As the poem states, "It is all in a single breath" (Silko 177). In "Hawk

and Snake" the author is all of nature at once. She is the person, the earth, the hawk, and the snake, and sees the world through all points of view. They become one. "Slim Man Canyon" tells of a place where Silko's ancestors once lived, and the beauty of it has lasted centuries. She feels her connection to the canyon and the people who passed through it "700 years ago" (Rosen 21). In the canyon time does not pass, and she is there in the presence of her ancestors long dead.

Silko provides just one perspective on the environment. She and other Native Americans reveal many different themes in their poetry. One of these themes is alienation from mainstream American society. Pat Mora, a Chicano poet, includes the theme of alienation quite emphatically in her poetry.

Born in 1948 and raised in the border town of El Paso, Pat Mora felt herself often caught between the world of her traditional Chicano culture of her family and the culture of Texas. Her grandparents settled in El Paso during the Mexican Revolution. She emphasizes conservation of her culture and uses many natural and environmental metaphors to depict the intrusion of Anglo influences into the culture. I have often seen this conflict between Hispanic traditions and the Anglo culture among the students in my classroom. Mora, who began writing around 1980 (Murphy 59), captures this conflict between Anglo and Chicano culture and reveals it in her poetry beautifully. The poems that the students will study are "Sonrisas," "La Buena Pastora: The Good Shepherdess," and "Mango Juice."

Mora does not believe that the United States can exist as one culture, and she believes "that place is not determined by national boundaries" (Murphy 64). There must be a preservation of the culture, and in order to preserve the culture, there must be a conservation of nature and the environment (Murphy 59). This includes the urban environment as developed by the Chicano population. The land and environment have always been such an integral part of the culture that they can't survive independently. As Tey Diana Rebellodo states in *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicano Literature*, the change in the landscape over the past 100 years because of the Anglo misuse of land, has become a symbol of the "loss of Hispanic control of the land (and the culture) to Anglo domination" (46-47). Mora emphatically feels that cultural pride and traditions are necessary to the survival of humanity (Murphy 60). Because of the split between the two cultures, many Chicano writers feel stuck "in the middle." Rebellodo also says that there is a loss of the self and the desire to find that missing part to fill the emptiness brings them back to traditional Hispanic culture (*Women* 146).

"Sonrisas" reveals this dichotomy in the world of the author. The speaker is between two rooms, an image which shows the author as "caught in the middle." One room is full of Anglo women, their clothes and conversation. The other room is full of Hispanic women their clothes and conversation. All three aspects of the rooms or cultures contrast. Mora also includes Spanish words in her dominantly English poem. Conservation of the Spanish language is as necessary as conservation of the land (*Women* 47). "La Buena Pastora: The Good Shepherdess"

shows the interrelationship between the culture and the land. The poem spirals, connecting land to landscape, to animals to spirit to woman to prayer and back eventually to the "thirsty land" (Milligan 164), revealing a cycle of interdependence among the culture, land, and people. In "Mango Juice" Mora emphasizes the importance of the Hispanic culture to the people and the environment which surrounds them. The piñatas, cactus, warm sand and especially the mangoes represent the spirit and festivity that exist among the people in this region. If the environment changes, the people have to change. Mora convinces the reader that preservation of both is crucial.

She is known for her children's poetry and is still writing today, but Mora is not the only Hispanic author who gives this perspective on the environment. She is also not the only poet who sees the culture of the environment as an integral part of people's lives. Langston Hughes, although he wrote his poetry 2,000 miles away, reveals this relationship as well.

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. Although Hughes is considered a black poet, he was also of Indian and Mexican descent. At the age of seven he moved in with his grandmother who told him stories of history-making black people, such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. During the one year he attended Columbia University, he lived in Harlem. Hughes wrote poems that were not in the strict English literary tradition as was known at the time. He wrote poems in the style of jazz, spirituals, and blues. The subject matter of his poems often consisted of the tensions and prejudices toward black people but also the distinctiveness of the black lifestyle and roots. His initial poems "told of joys and sorrows, the trials and triumphs of ordinary black people" (Rampersad 4). In the 1930's, he wrote about the plight of the black person, but after 1940 he returned to his original themes. Hughes will present a different perspective, that has not been addressed as of yet, of the environment in his poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Harlem Night Song," and Stars."

His unique style, which makes Langston Hughes so popular today, prevented him from becoming a renowned author in the 1920's. His poetry was considered folk art by the critics and was not taken seriously outside of Harlem. He was accepted more readily in Europe and often traveled there giving speeches, and he has actually become more popular since his death in 1967. Hughes was a major part of the Harlem Renaissance, and the city that surrounds him is his "nature." He presents a Harlem that is more than a geographical location. The reader feels his "sense of place." Every aspect of the city functions as a symbol, and every member of his race is part of the environment which is "Harlem." By describing Harlem, he described the condition of his people (Mullen 4-5). He taught his readers that "to respect his work, one must respect African American people and their culture, as well as the American people in general and their national culture" (Rampersad 5).

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is the first poem published by Langston Hughes, appropriately, in W.E.B. Du Bois's magazine, *Crisis*. Although it isn't set in

Harlem, it reveals a profoundly deep understanding of the black race (Rampersad 45). The rivers are the environmental and spiritual past of the black people. The poem begins 3,000 years ago and ends on the fringe of the Harlem Renaissance. The speaker feels the roots of his African ancestors and is able to gain strength from that (Myers and Wojoahn 166). That spiritual strength came through during the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem night life was real. The clubs were full, and the jazz and blues bands could be heard into the streets and into the early morning hours. The streets were filled with dancing and festivity. This was the Harlem Hughes wrote about in his poem "Harlem Night Song." The atmosphere of Harlem with the bands playing and the stars over the buildings shows a Harlem often depicted in his poems written in the 1920's. "Stars" reveals a sense of hope. Harlem had its problems, and an underlying theme, even in Hughes's earlier poems, was the sense that the people in Harlem, in spite of all the difficulties, made the best out of their lives. The "stars" in the poem give a sense of escape (Mullen 139) and of hope.

Hughes communicates a powerful sense of "place" in one part of urban America. Robert Frost, in contrast, takes us to New England to show us a far different landscape in his poetry. His environment differs greatly from Hughes's and reveals another distinct American perspective on "place."

Robert Frost has always been included among the great twentieth century poets. Born in San Francisco in 1874, Frost believed that poetry was "made of metaphor" (Marcus 13). His poetry painted the landscape of New England to which he moved at the age of eleven, after his father died. He attended Dartmouth College briefly and was going to attend Harvard, but decided against it. Life was never easy, even after he married, and much of the nature metaphors reveal his depression and anger. Frost often reveals through his symbols and metaphors a struggle for survival for people facing their existence alone (Marcus19). He was an outsider, looking out at nature with the hope that he could eventually become a part of nature. Frost's themes and his perspective are shown through the selected poems "The Road Not Taken," "Tree at My Window," and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

Emerson states, "Every appearance in nature corresponds to the state of the mind . . ." (Marcus 49). Frost has adopted this philosophy and many consider him Emersonian, because of his particular use of metaphor and symbolism. He agreed with Emerson's philosophy that "every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact" (Marcus 49), and he used this tool in his poetry. Frost realized the powerful effect this use of metaphor and symbolism had on the reader. He revealed individual and societal triumphs, trials, moral values, and human spirit. This doesn't mean that Frost didn't want his audience to enjoy the author's "sense of place," the scenes of nature described in his poetry. The meanings of his poetry are manifold. He admitted having difficulties expressing himself and used his poetry as a way to discuss these issues by using metaphor (Ellmann and O'Clair 193). Frost wrote in a lyrical style with strong meter and often rhyme. He believed these

added to the "emotion" of the poetry and thus emphasized the metaphor. He attempted to make every poem he wrote sound different, for he believed poems are meant to be read aloud.

Robert Frost's poems give a tremendous opportunity for teachers to reinforce the poetic elements and devices, as well as discuss his perspective on environment. "The Road Not Taken" is the first of Frost's poems to be studied in this part of the unit. An extended metaphor of the road symbolizes life's choices. One road is less traveled, meaning it wasn't the path, the choice, taken by most people. The speaker makes the less popular choice. He will have to imagine consequences the other choice would have brought. No motivation exists, and the choice is arbitrary (Nitchie17). "Tree at My Window" expresses the differences between the world of a tree and the world of the speaker. The speaker can never become a part of the world of the tree and vice versa. He tries to draw the connection as he peers out of his window but can't. Although he personifies the tree by saying that the leaves are "tongues" and "she put our heads together," it doesn't work (Bagby 6). The symbolism can be interpreted in different ways in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The speaker is enjoying the solitude, the beauty, and the simplicity. The fact that he has a long way to go before he sleeps represents the persistence that a job has to be completed before the speaker gets to rest. Other critics have suggested that this line, which is repeated, refers to death. Frost has denied this.

Robert Frost's symbolism and metaphors are one way of seeing the environment. Mary Oliver, also Anglo, gives another and final perspective of the unit. Mary Oliver is a wonderful poet to close the unit because of her ability to draw a picture of nature universally understood. Her perspective of nature transcends that of the other poets in this unit.

Very little can be found on Mary's Oliver's life. She lives in Massachusetts. Her first poems were published in the late 1950's, and she is still writing today. Her poems "The Hawk," "The Sun," and "The Turtle" will be studied in this unit. What makes her poems so different from those of the other poets in this unit is that she has found a way to show respect for nature's "otherness" (Burton-Christie 82). She tries hard not to symbolize nature, but she allows her reader to imagine the experience of being part of the natural world. Emerson believed that elements in nature should be used as a symbol. Thoreau felt nature should be respected for being simply nature and struggled to do so in his writing. Oliver is able to integrate both and give the reader "an original vision of spirit and nature that is both utterly concrete and transcendent" (Burton-Christie79). No other writer has seemed to be able to accomplish this to such a degree.

Mary Oliver illustrates that nature is set apart from human beings. Nature does not need people in order to be nature. "It has its own integrity, proceeds on its way with or without us" (Burton-Christie 81). When Oliver depicts nature as ugly or cruel, she shows us beauty and acceptance. The poet takes us a step further. She

allows us to know what the creature knows and understands, and she considers it a gift. For a short time the reader can become the hawk or become the squirrel but does so unobtrusively. She accomplishes this all through "simplicity, clarity, directness, and sincerity" (Hosmer 15). There is a relinquishment of the self, a giving up of the ego in order to experience what nature can experience (Buell 178). She never denies nor seems to degrade humanity, but teaches through her poetry.

"The Hawk" is an iconograph . The verses look like the wings of a hawk Students might enjoy creating their own iconograph. The poem does not describe a beautiful bird, but a bird of "death and destruction" (Oliver 34). The reader can visualize the hawk flying and diving, and even feel the wind on its wings. Mary Oliver paints a picture of the sun dawning in the poem "The Sun," referring to the wonderful feelings that the sun gives. She allows the reader to experience the exuberance that the sun would feel if it could, but then she asks a question of the reader: Could you be missing all this beauty because you've turned away or are too busy earning money or gaining power to watch? She wants her reader to treasure every body of nature, even if it is common (Burton-Christie 13). "The Turtle" precisely describes a turtle just being a turtle. The reader can see the turtle move and can feel what the turtle feels. This is all done through the watchful eye of the poet and through the reader's imagination. The poem, in its last four lines, also draws a connection between the turtle and the rest of nature. Oliver wants her reader to be awed by nature but not to judge it.

To understand poetry well, a student must be able to understand the elements of poetry. I could very easily give a list of definitions and examples, but a solid classroom anthology published by any of the major publishing companies would have this information. These textbooks would be geared more for the student age and reading level. It is important to include this as part of the unit as the individual poets and poetry are studied. A teacher may use his or her discretion as to which poems can be used to teach which elements. The sample lesson plans may also help.

## **Implementation**

### **Lesson Plans**

As a unit "hook," the concept of "place" will be explored. Students will first describe the "place" they call school considering sights, sounds, smells, textures, tastes, and stories in and around the classroom. Then students will write a description of their "places" they refer to as home using these same methods. This will enable students to meet many standard requirements set by the State Department of Education as I'll state below (see documentation). The students will be able to use active listening skills to acquire information, expand writing skills, and express facts and ideas using proper writing skills. The students will have to draw on prior knowledge and culture to explain the stories as part of their "place."

Five poets and their poems will be discussed. The poets and the themes discussed

tie in the curriculum for eighth grade American history. The poet's perspective on his/ her relationship to his/her environment will be explored. Leslie Marmon Silko and her poems "How to Write a Poem about the Sky," "Hawk and Snake," and "Slim Man Canyon" will be the first to be studied in this unit. Pat Mora's "Sonrisas," "La Buena Pastora: The Good Shepherdess," and "Mango Juice" will be the second group which will be studied. Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Harlem Night Song," and "Stars" will be the next. Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," "Tree at My Window," and "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" will be follow. Finally, Mary Oliver and her poems "The Hawk," "The Sun," and "The Turtle" will be studied. Two to three days should be allocated for the study of each poet. One day will be a sharing of poems other than the ones listed in this unit. These poems may be other poet's works or include other poems by the poets specified in this unit. The students will accomplish understanding of poems and perspectives through class discussions, group discussions, and response in writing. In group and individual analysis of the poems, the teacher can provide guide questions to help the students better understand the poems. A major State Department benchmark includes student appreciation and respect for their own and other languages, cultures, and literature, and the states emphasis on multi-cultural and diversified curriculum. The study of this poetry will hopefully accomplish this goal, as well as build an understanding of the self and others.

The students will keep a notebook of literary terms and elements. A different term or element will be listed on each page of the notebook paper along with its definition. As the students study the poetry, they will list poetry titles and lines or phrases from the poetry which will exemplify that term or element. As the state requires, this activity will help the student expand vocabulary and acquire and use knowledge of structural elements.

Throughout the unit, students will write poetry which will become part of a class anthology. The students will write a poem depicting their personal "places," somewhat like Silko or Mora. Another poem will show an aspect of nature symbolizing the authors/students in the manner of Frost. Emulating Oliver's "The Hawk," the students will create an iconograph, depicting something in nature. Finally the students will write a poem of his/her choice using a theme of nature or environment. These will be interspersed among the study of the poet and poetry where appropriate. After these student creations are shared in class, one to two poems written by each student will be selected for the anthology. The computer lab may be used to publish these poems in an anthology. These anthologies will be available at the school for the students. This not only makes use of computers for writing, but allows students to express themselves through poetry and share their work. Many of the New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks will be thereby met. These will be listed below.

The students will be assessed based on class participation during discussions. Schools and publishers provide rubrics for writing which will aid the teacher when grading the poetry. Six-Trait Writing and the Schaffer Method both provide rubrics

for evaluating and assessing student writing. The *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook* will be graded for proper form, neatness, and completeness. A formal test on terms and elements with examples can be given to the students.

### Sample Lesson Plan 1- "Sense of Place" 2 to 4 days

**Purpose and Objective:** The purpose of this lesson is to define and understand "sense of place" in order to "hook" the students and allow them future understanding of cultural perspectives. The students will define "place" and using the five senses, history, and stories establish their own "sense of place" through writing.

**Vocabulary:** place, sense of place, five senses, legend, myth.

**Skills and Concepts:** The students will develop skills in descriptive writing. Definition of and understanding of "sense of place" includes not only the geographical location but also includes the sights, sounds, smell, tastes, feelings, and stories and legends of that "place."

**Materials:** Student notebook, classroom chalkboard, butcherblock paper, markers.

#### Method:

1. The students will be asked to write in their notebooks a definition of the word "place" without using a dictionary. The students will share their definitions and a choice few will be written on the board. Then the teacher will build on these definitions to finally suggest a definition that reflects one which was discussed earlier in the unit Narrative. The students will also write this definition in their notebooks.
2. Students will list the five senses in their notebooks. With notebooks in hand the students will walk around the grounds of the school, jotting down words or phrases describing the sights, smells, tastes, textures, and sounds of the various parts of the school. When the students return to the classroom, they will list the words on butcherblock paper (one for each sense) displayed on the wall.
3. The students will then share stories about the school. These may include the area before it was built, when it was built, general history, awards the school has won, school events, funny stories, etc. These will also be listed on butcherblock paper and displayed.
4. The students will discuss how the descriptions and the stories give them and the teacher a "sense of place" about a place they know as school. The teacher will help defining "legend" and "myth."
5. The teacher will share his or her descriptive words and stories with the students about his or her "place" known as home. This functions as a model for the students. For homework the students will again list the five senses in their notebooks and conduct the same kind of tour of their home as was done at school, jotting down descriptive words. Then, with the help of family members, the student will write down brief stories (at least 3) about the place and the people of that place.

6. The following day, the students will share their lists and stories in groups. The teacher will then read an essay describing his or her place using the descriptive words and stories listed from the previous day. The students will then write a descriptive essay that depicts their "place." The teacher may use his or her discretion as to the appropriate time needed to complete the writing assignment.

Evaluation: The student will be evaluated using a standard rubric of Six-Trait Writing, Schaffer Method, or school adopted method, taking into consideration the student's understanding of "place" and "sense of place."

Sample Lesson Plan 2- *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook* To be done during the course of the unit

Goals and Objective: The purpose of this lesson is to define, understand, and exemplify the terms and elements of poetry used in the poetry studied within this unit. The students will develop understanding of poetic terms and elements and be able to identify examples of these terms and elements in the poetry studied.

Vocabulary: form, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, imagery, simile, metaphor, personification, speaker, theme

Skills and Concepts: The students will be able to recognize and identify the use of these poetic elements in the poetry studied in this unit. The students will become accustomed to keeping a neat, well-organized notebook under the direction of the teacher.

Materials: Copies of poems discussed earlier in the **Narrative** of this unit, and student notebooks.

Methods:

1. The students will list each of the twelve terms and elements listed on a separate sheet of notebook paper. This section of the notebook will be labeled "*Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook*."
2. Using the classroom anthology, the students will define each term on its respective piece of notebook paper. The teacher will discuss these with the students and provide an example for each.
3. As the unit proceeds, using the method the teacher assigns, the students will list poem title and identified examples which illustrate the term or element on the appropriate pages of the notebook. (The following lesson plan will suggest a cooperative learning method for accomplishing this task.)

Evaluation: Students will need to submit the *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook* at the end of the unit. The teacher will grade the notebook based on accuracy and completeness. A rubric made available to the students when the assignment is given will make the expectations clear. A short test identifying the poetic terms and elements and requiring student generated examples will not only help reinforce these concepts, but also evaluate the students understanding.

## Sample Lesson Plan 3- Cooperative Learning Jigsaw of Terms and Elements One class period

Goals and Objective: Completing the *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook* can become tedious. This method of cooperative learning can complete the work in a fraction of the time. It also encourages involvement of all students because every student has to be responsible for the knowledge for the entire group. The objective is for the students to develop better understanding of the poetic terms and elements using the poems studied in this unit.

Vocabulary: form, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, imagery, simile, metaphor, personification, speaker, theme.

Skill and Concepts: The students will build understanding of the poetic elements and terms. The students will be responsible for keeping a neat, well-organized notebook.

Materials: Five poems from the unit previously discussed for content but not necessarily previously discussed for poetic terms and elements, student *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook*. Poems suggested are "Slim Man Canyon," "Sonrisas," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "The Hawk."

Methods:

1. Students will form groups of five students each. These are the "A" groups. The students number off from one to five. Then the groups break off, forming a new group with their respective number. This is what is referred to as the "jigsaw."
2. Each new group, group "B," will be assigned one of the five poems. The members of the group will analyze the poem and identify elements and devices used in the poem which exemplify the terms and elements already defined in the *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook*. The title of the poem and example(s) will be listed on the appropriate pages of the notebook. Each student will be responsible for the examples. The teacher will need to remind the students that the poem evaluated by the group will not necessarily exemplify all the terms and elements listed in the notebook.
3. After completing the task, the students will return to the "A" group. Every member will be an "expert" and explains the examples found for each term and element for the assigned poem that was discussed in the "B" group. The entire group of students now will be able to write the titles and examples from the other four poems in their notebooks.

Evaluation: Lesson Plan 3, "Cooperative Learning Jigsaw of Terms and Elements," can be seen as a lesson plan within Lesson Plan 2, *Poetic Terms and Elements Notebook*. The evaluation for Lesson Plan 3 would be the same as for Lesson Plan 2.

## Sample Lesson Plan 4- Group discussion of Pat Mora's "Sonrisas" One class period

**Goals and Objectives:** The students need to have the opportunity to discuss the poems in individual groups using teacher generated questions to help guide the student discussions. The students will be able to identify a major theme in Pat Mora's poem "Sonrisas."

**Vocabulary:** tenure, curriculum, seldom, sonrisas, señoras, tamales, mucho, ruido, ethnicity.

**Skills and Concepts:** The students will identify a theme common in Chicano poetry: the conflict between Anglo and Chicano culture. The students will work cooperatively with others, and be able to use a Spanish/English dictionary appropriately.

**Material:** copy of poem "Sonrisas," Spanish/English dictionary, classroom dictionary, list of questions.

**Methods:**

1. Students will form groups of four to five. The group will decide on group leader, group scribe, and group spokesperson. Each student is to receive a copy of Pat Mora's "Sonrisas" and the list of questions which follow:

A. Using a classroom dictionary, define tenure, curriculum, seldom, ethnicity.

B. Using a Spanish/English dictionary if necessary, translate sonrisas, señoras, tamales, mucho, ruido.

C. Read the first stanza of the poem. In your own words describe the women. What ethnicity are these women?

D. Read the second stanza of the poem. In your own words describe the women. What ethnicity are these women?

E. Contrast the two groups of women: their clothes, what they drink, their conversation.

F. How are their smiles different? Why are their smiles different?

G. Why are Spanish words used in the second stanza?

H. Why does the speaker "live in the doorway between two rooms"?

I. What is the theme (the point the author is trying to get across to the reader) of "Sonrisas"?

2. After answering the questions as a group, the teacher will randomly ask the groups for the answers. Once that is complete, each group will turn in the answers to the questions to the teacher.

**Evaluation:** The students will be graded on complete and correct answers. The participation within the group will also be taken into consideration.

## Sample Lesson Plan 5- Writing an Iconograph 1 class period

**Goals and Objective:** To help identify poetic form and develop creativity, the students will write an iconograph using an aspect of nature.

**Vocabulary:** iconograph, form

**Skills and Concepts:** The students will use form in poetry to show their understanding of an iconograph. An iconograph is a poem whose form resembles a concept or thing that it is about. The students will use the concepts already learned in this unit.

**Materials:** Mary Oliver's "The Hawk," and other examples of iconographs if necessary.

**Methods:**

1. After students have studied "The Hawk," the teacher will point out to the students that the poem can be seen as an iconograph. The stanzas of the poem resemble bird's wings.
2. The students will brainstorm as a class, listing on the board aspects of and animals in nature whose shapes could be used to create an iconograph in the form of and about nature.
3. The teacher will model an iconograph which addresses the assignment.
4. The students will write an iconograph of nature.

**Evaluation:** The students will be evaluated on appropriately addressing assignment, form, and creativity using a standard rubric adopted by the school.

## **Documentation**

State Performance Standards

The following New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks are met by this unit:

1. use and expand vocabulary and linguistic skills to communicate effectively.
2. use language to understand various sources of information, local traditions, and culture as resources for learning.
3. explore and expand connection among areas of Language Arts study.
4. apply critical thinking in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
5. increase and use vocabulary through listening, reading, observing and interacting with others.
6. use active listening skills to acquire information.
7. acquire and use knowledge of structural elements including rhetorical devices, figurative, descriptive, and visual language.

8. apply knowledge of culture and context to aid comprehension.
9. demonstrate comprehension of written and spoken language.
10. use study skills independently.
11. explain and appreciate elements of literature from diverse cultures.
- 12 explain differences between the forms and content of oral traditions and literature from a variety of cultures.
13. compare and contrast the use of language, voice, conventions, and format from a variety of cultures.
14. develop an understanding of diverse literature, literature and cultural experiences.
15. develop, analyze, and use social and interpersonal skills to understand and communicate effectively within their own cultures and with the cultures of others.
16. use language and literature to gain understanding of self and others.
17. find and apply information from a variety of sources.
18. use available technology to locate organize, and present information.
19. produce a variety of forms of language using technology.

### Student Bibliography

Carlson, Lori M, Ed. *Cool Salsa*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994. Includes poems of Contemporary Chicano writers and can be used for further examples and study of Chicano themes.

Ellman, Richard and Robert O'Claire, eds. *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. New York: W.W. Norton And Company, Inc., 1973.

A good source of Modern poetry for further examples and study of poets and their poetry from all cultures.

Frost, Robert. "The Road Not Taken." In Ellman and O'Clair, 196.

This poem is about a traveller in the woods who comes to a fork in the road. He decides to take the road which is obviously less traveled. This poem symbolizes the arbitrary choices that people make in life.)

Frost, Robert. "Tree at My Window." In Ellman and O'Clair, 200.

This poem shows a speaker who desperately wants to spiritually understand the tree outside his window. He attempts to become one with the tree but realizes the impossibility of this happening.

Frost, Robert. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." In Ellman and O'Clair, 204.

The speaker of this poem describes a long horseback ride home on a snowy night. He stops and contemplates the existence of the world around him. He realizes he cannot stop long because of the distance he has left to travel.

Hobson, Geary, ed.. *The Remembered Earth*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

An anthology of Contemporary Native American literature and may be helpful in providing other examples of Native American writing.

Hughes, Langston. "Harlem Night Song." In Rampersad, 94-95.

This poem show the speaker very much in love with the companion who walks through the streets with him, seeing the sights and hearing the songs of Harlem.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." In Rampersad, 21.

The speaker reveals the importance of many great rivers of the world to his African American ancestors. The rivers of great civilizations are like the souls of the people who lived near them.

Hughes, Langston. "Stars." In Rampersad, 85.

Even in a city like Harlem, there is a great deal of hope. the speaker encourages the child of that city to grasp at a star, a hope and a dream.

Milligan, Bryce, Ed, et al. *Floricanto Si*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Contains poems by various Chicano poets and may be helpful as examples of other Chicano authors.

Mora, Pat. "La Buena Pastora: The Good Shepherdess." In *Floricanto Si*, 164.

This poem shows the relationship the shepherdess, as do many Hispanic women, have with the land. The draws a connection with the land, lamb, animals, woman, and hope and eventually back to the land again.

Mora, Pat. "Mango Juice." In *Cool Salsa*, 78-79.

This poem gives the reader a "sense of place" by describing the foods, atmosphere and mood of a celebration unique to the people and the culture.

Mora, Pat. "Sonrisas." In *Floricanto Si*, 164.

The speaker exists between two rooms. The first room dexcribed is filled with Anglo women. The second room is filled with Hispanic women of the Southwest. She shows a tremendous contrast between the two cultures.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Hawk and Snake." *Voices of the Rainbow*, 28.

The speaker feels the strong relationship between nature and her/himself. He/she feels him/herself walking, becoming one with nature, the hawk and the snake.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "How to Write a Poem about the Sky." *Storyteller*. 177.

The speaker tells the reader to "see the sky" but reveals that it is just a part of

nature as a whole. It can't be just seen as a sky, a separate entity, but as a part of a whole known as nature.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Slim Man Canyon." In *The Remembered Earth*, 208. The speaker is in a canyon and feels the ancestor and the nature that had once existed there 700 years ago. The spirits are all still alive within that canyon.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Seaver Books, 1981. Contains other prose and poetry works of Leslie Marmon Silko to use as examples.

Oliver, Mary. "The Hawk." In *New and Selected Poems*, 34-35. This poem can be seen as an iconograph. Each stanza looks like a wing of a bird. The poem describes a majestic bird with all of its beauty and its destructive and hideous side.

Oliver, Mary. *New and Selected Poems*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992. Contains a large selection of Mary Oliver's poems and may be useful as other examples of her work.

Oliver, Mary. "The Sun." In *New and Selected Poems*, 50-51. The speaker asks the reader if he/she has ever really looked at the magnificence of the sun. She describes the sun. She then asks the reader if he/she is unaware because he/she is too crazy for power and material things.

Oliver, Mary. "The Turtle." In *New and Selected Poems*, 123-124. The speaker describes the movements and life of a turtle. She further reveals the relationship this creature has with the rest of nature.

Rampersad, Arnold, ed. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994. Contains all of Langston Hughes's published poems for further study of the poet and his poems.

Rosen, Kenneth, ed. *Voices of the Rainbow*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975. Contains Native American poems of poets from various Native American tribes and can be used to compare and contrast the cultures within the culture.

### Teacher Bibliography

Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Bagby, George F. *Frost and the Book of Nature*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993.

Baym, Nina, et. al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge,

Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Burton-Christie, Douglas. "Nature, Spirit, and the Imagination in the Poetry of Mary Oliver." *Cross Currents*. 46 (Spring 1996): 77-88.

Ellmann, Richard and Robert O'Clair, eds. *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. New York: W.W.Norton and Company, Inc., 1973.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Selected Essays*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Hosmer, Robert. "Meditative Gazing: On Contemporary Poetry." *The Southern Review* 30 (Summer 1994): 63-73.

Marcus, Mordecai. *The Poems of Robert Frost: An Explication*. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1991.

Mellin, Lilace A. "Helping Adolescents Make It Home." *English Journal* 86 (November 1997): 80-85.

Mullen, Edward J., ed. *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*. Boston: G.K.Hall and Co., 1986.

Murphy, Patrick D. "Conserving Natural and Cultural Diversity: The Prose and Poetry of Pat Mora." *Melus*. 21 (Spring 1996): 59-70.

Myers, Jack and David Wojahn, eds. *A Profile of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

Nitchie, George W. *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1960.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994.

Perez-Torres, Rafael. *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Perrine, Laurence and James M. Reid, eds. *100 American Poems of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966.

Rampersad, Arnold, ed. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

Rebellodo, Tey Diana. "Tradition and Mythology: Signatures of Landscape in Chicana Literature." Vera Norwood & Janice Monk, eds., *The Desert is No Lady*. U of Arizona Press, 1987. 96-124.

---. *Women Singing in the Snow: a Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995.

Rosen, Kenneth, ed. *Voices of the Rainbow: Contemporary Poetry by American Indians*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975.

Spencer, Laura Gutierrez. "The Desert Blooms: Flowered Songs by Pat Mora." *Bilingual Review*. 20 (Jan-Apr. 1995): 28+.

Wigget, Andrew. *Native American Literature*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.