



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2009 Volume II: The Modern World in Literature and the Arts

Puerto Rico: Americanization, Assimilation and Diaspora through Literature and Film

Guide for Curriculum Unit 09.02.12
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This unit was created for Honors Junior English and Advanced Placement English Language courses. It is designed to teach the students about the complex relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico and how it shapes Puerto Rican literature. The unit is broken up into three sections. Section one focuses on the Americanization of Puerto Rico. Section two examines the effects of assimilation of Puerto Ricans in the United States. Section three focuses on the effects of diaspora and how Puerto Ricans maintain or lose their identity in the United States.

For section one, students will begin by learning the historical background of the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico. Then they will read excerpts from Esmeralda Santiago's memoir *When I Was Puerto Rican* and examine her perception of Americans.

For section two, students will read short stories by Piri Thomas and analyze the effects of assimilating into mainstream American society. Students will also watch the film, "Every Child is Born a Poet," a documentary that chronicles Piri's life growing up in the 1940s and '50s.

For part three, students will read "How to Eat a Guava" by Esmeralda Santiago. Students will identify the effects of diaspora by her inability to buy a guava in the United States. Additionally, students will read Tato Laviera's poem "nuyorican" in which he reflects on feeling rejected after visiting Puerto Rico. Students will also watch the documentary "Yo Soy Boricua, Pa Que Tu Lo Sepas" and analyze how Puerto Rico and the United States influence how director Rosie Perez identifies herself.

(Recommended for English, grades 9-11)

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