



HISTORY AND LITERARY ARTS

National Hispanic Cultural Center

UN POEMA: TANTAS VOCES/ONE POEM: MANY VOICES

You are invited to participate in “Un Poema: Tantas Voces,” a junior translator project presented by the National Hispanic Cultural Center (NHCC). The goal of the project is to encourage elementary, middle and high school students to learn a poem written in Spanish, experiment with translation, and share what they discover. The students’ families are encouraged to join the effort, collaborating and learning together at home.

It is the NHCC’s hope that this program will inspire lively, bilingual conversation about differences in interpretation and meaning as well as build students’ skills in determining the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text and understanding figurative and connotative language.

For 2021, the poem is “En el Valle de Zapata” by Veronica Volkow (b. Mexico City, 1955).

Attached are supporting materials for the project, including suggestions for teaching and Common Core and NM Dept. of Education benchmarks and standards that are served by the project. We encourage teachers to enhance lesson plans with creative assignments, e.g., asking students to create drawings, paintings, photos and/or collages inspired by the poems; record the poem in the original Spanish and English translation; record “letters” to the poet, and more—anything that will enhance students’ experience of the poem, poetry, and translation.

All educational activities will result in an English translation of parts of or the entire poem. At the conclusion of the project, the NHCC will coordinate a culminating event (in-person or virtual) that will allow participating teachers, students, and families to present their translations (and related assignments) to a general audience. Schools, teachers, and students will be awarded certificates of appreciation for their participation.

For more information about how to participate, contact Patricia Perea, HLA Educator, National Hispanic Cultural Center (NHCC): patricia.perea@state.nm.us.

UN POEMA: TANTAS VOCES/ONE POEM: MANY VOICES

CURRICULA/MATERIALS

- **Suggestions for teaching**
- **Common Core Benchmarks and Standards** (in English, en español)
- **Featured poem: “En el Valle de Zapata” by Veronica Volkow**
- **Veronica Volkow, bio** (en español, in English)
- **Links to teaching resources**
- **Poems with sample translations**

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING

The following can be undertaken by the classroom teacher, NHCC staff, or both in collaboration. NHCC staff is available for assistance throughout.

- Teacher introduces or re-introduces poetry and the poem. What is a poem? What do poems do? How do they do it? Read and discuss 2 poems.
- Teacher shares the idea that poetry exists in all countries and cultures, so poetry in different languages appears all over the world.
- Teacher introduces the idea that translation of poetry allows readers to know poems by poets who write in other languages. Teacher asks students, “How many of you sometimes translate into English the words of family members or friends who speak another language?” After students answer, teacher can follow up with, “For those that do, you are doing the work of translators.”
- Some poets who write in English like to translate their favorite poems written in other languages. These poets like the challenge of translation.
- Teacher introduces the pleasures and challenges of translating poetry—bringing a poem to life in a language other than that of the poet; the idea that straightforward language is easiest and metaphorical language more difficult. Teacher discusses metaphorical language, including symbols, metaphors, and similes.
- Learners or learner groups take a look at one example of a short poem or part of one poem translated three different ways. What do students see that is the same or different in these translations?
- Learner groups work on translating a section of a short poem, and then regroup to share and discuss similarities and differences.
- Teacher introduces the “Un Poema: Tantas Voces/One Poem: Many Voices” project, including the culminating event.
- Teacher explains that this project features a contemporary poem written in free verse. Teacher reviews some of the differences between free and fixed/formal verse.
- Teacher introduces poet Veronica Volkow (Mexico) to the students.
- Teacher introduces students to “En el valle de Zapata,” reading the poem at least twice, in Spanish.
- Teacher takes students through the poem: a) Notice how the first section is a description of the landscape. What do you notice about this landscape? b) In the next section, there is a car driving through the darkness. It is looking ahead toward the lights of houses or homes. This section ends with a word in Nahuatl, as if the language of the poem shifts from Spanish to Nahuatl as the car drives deeper into the landscape. c) Then the poems turns to the idea

of language—words added, words forgotten, a Spanish that is “paralyzed” by misery, a history also of misery. With this in mind, how might the title help us understand the poem?

- Teacher talks about Emilio Zapata and his importance in the history of Mexico. Zapata is one of the most revered national heroes of Mexico. He fought for the goal of achieving political and economic emancipation of the peasants in southern Mexico, leading them out of severe poverty.
- Teacher assigns section(s) to be translated and encourages students to work alone, in pairs, and with their families, and sets a deadline for completing the work. Teacher also encourages everyone to respond with spontaneity and curiosity and to understand that translation can be both subjective and surprising.
- Teachers can enhance the assignments in a few ways: ask students to create drawings, paintings, photos and/or collages inspired by the poems; record the poem in the original Spanish and English translation; record “letters” to the poet (who is still alive), and more.

After students have submitted their versions in English, teacher asks them to review the process. For example, teacher can ask:

- How hard or easy was it to find the words in another language?
- Did students discover any new words, and different ways of using them, in either Spanish or English?
- How close or free were students in their translations?
- What did they learn?
- Was it fun?

UN POEMA: TANTAS VOCES/ONE POEM: MANY VOICES

COMMON CORE STANDARDS (example, grade 7)

RL.7.1	Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Citan evidencias textuales para sustentar el análisis de lo que dice explícitamente el texto, así como lo que se infiere del mismo.
RL.7.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.	Definen el significado de palabras y frases que se utilizan en un texto, incluyendo tanto el sentido figurado como el connotativo; analizan el impacto de rimas y otras repeticiones de sonidos (por ejemplo: aliteración) en un verso o estrofa específica de un poema o sección de un cuento u obra de teatro.
RL.7.5	Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.	Analizan cómo la forma o estructura de una obra de teatro o poema (por ejemplo: soliloquio, soneto) contribuye a su significado.
RI.7.1	Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Citan una variedad de evidencias textuales para sustentar el análisis de lo que dice explícitamente el texto, así como las inferencias sacadas del mismo.
RI.7.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.	Determinan el significado de palabras y frases que se utilizan en un texto, incluyendo tanto el sentido figurado, como el connotativo y técnico; analizan el impacto que tiene la selección de ciertas palabras en el significado y el tono.
RI.7.6	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.	Definen el punto de vista o propósito del autor de un texto y analizan la manera en que el autor distingue su postura de la de otros.
L.7.4a	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.	Definen o aclaran el significado de palabras y frases cuyos significados desconocen o que tienen significados múltiples, basándose en lecturas y contenido académico correspondientes al séptimo grado, seleccionando con flexibilidad entre una serie de estrategias.
L.7.5a	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.	Demuestran comprensión del lenguaje figurado, de las relaciones entre palabras y de matices en el significado de palabras.
Grade 8 RL.8.1	Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	Citan evidencias textuales para sustentar el análisis de lo que dice explícitamente el texto, así como lo que se infiere del mismo.
RL.8.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.	Determinan un tema o idea central de un texto y analizan su desarrollo a lo largo del texto, incluida su relación con los caracteres, la configuración y la gráfica; proporcionar un resumen objetivo del texto.

RL.8.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.	Definen el significado de palabras y frases que se utilizan en un texto, incluyendo tanto el sentido figurado como el connotativo; analizan el impacto de las opciones de palabras específicas en el significado y el tono, incluyendo analogías o alusiones a otros textos.
RL.8.6	Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.	Analizan cómo las diferencias en los puntos de vista de los personajes y la audiencia o el lector (por ejemplo, creado a través del uso de la ironía dramática) crean efectos como el suspenso o el humor.
RL.8.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.	A finales de año, leen y comprenden la literatura, incluyendo historias, dramas y poemas, en el extremo superior de complejidad de texto de los grados 6-8 de manera independiente y competente.
RL.8.NM.3A	Analyze how a cultural work of literature, including oral tradition, draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types, and how the differing structure of the text contributes to society, past or present.	Analizan cómo una obra cultural de la literatura, incluida la tradición oral, se basa en temas, patrones de eventos o tipos de caracteres, y cómo la diferente estructura del texto contribuye a la sociedad, pasado o presente.
RL.8.NM.11	By the end of the year, read and comprehend significant works of 18th, 19th, and 20th century literature including stories, dramas, and poems independently and proficiently.	A finales de año, leen y comprenden obras significativas de la literatura de los siglos XVIII, XIX y XX, incluyendo historias, dramas y poemas de manera independiente y competente.
L.8.4	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.	Determinan o aclaran el significado de palabras o frases desconocidas y de múltiples significados basadas en la lectura y el contenido de grado 8, eligiendo de manera flexible de una gama de estrategias.



VERONICA VOLKOW

Nació en la ciudad de México el 26 de abril de 1955. Mujer estudiosa de las letras como del arte. Estudió letras hispánicas en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Después estudió la maestría en Literatura Comparada en la Universidad de Columbia, Nueva York y realizó el doctorado en letras en la UNAM. Se convirtió en doctora en letras y pasó a ser profesora universitaria en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). En este periodo se hace becaria del Sistema Nacional de Creadores, durante tres periodos. Se convierte en maestra en Historia del Arte en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

Con una tesis sobre la Cúpula del Altar de los Reyes en la Catedral de Puebla de Cristóbal de Villalpando, su motivo particular de interés son las relaciones que pueden entablar la poesía y la pintura en un determinado período histórico. Ganó premios por sus libros como ORO DEL VIENTO, México, editorial Era, 2003, merecedor del premio Poesía Carlos Pellicer, por obra publicada en 2004; EL RETRATO DE JORGE CUESTA, México, editorial siglo XXI, recibió el premio José Revueltas de Ensayo literario; LITORAL DE TINTA Y OTROS POEMAS, Sevilla, editorial Renacimiento, 2006, uno de los mejores poemarios publicados en España en 2007.

Verónica Volkow [Fernández] was born in Mexico City in 1955. A poet, essayist and translator, she studied Hispanic Literature with the Facultad Filosofía y Letras (FFYL) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and earned a Masters in Comparative Literature at Columbia University and a Doctorate in Letters from UNAM. She has published several collections of poetry, including *La Sibila de Cumas*; *Litoral de Tinta*; *El inicio*; *Los Caminos*, *Arcanos*, *Oro del viento*, and *Litoral de tinta y otros poemas*, as well as the prose volume *Sudafrica: Diario de un Viaje*, a report on daily life in South Africa under apartheid. She is also the author of *La Mordedura de la Risa*, a study of the graphic works of Francisco Toledo, and has contributed to journals devoted to the works of Arnold Belkin, Christine Couture and Nicholas Sperakis.

Veronica Volkow holds a Masters in Comparative Literature from Columbia University, New York. She has also received awards from the University of Iowa's International Writers' Program, and from the Mexican Writers' Centre, among others. She has published a number of translations, including a substantial volume devoted to Elizabeth Bishop, as well as works by Leon Trotsky, Victor Serge, Henry Michaux, and Michael Hamburger. Her poem, *Oro del viento*, won the Carlos Pellicer National Poetry Prize (2004) and the José Revueltas National Essay Award (2005) for *The Portrait of Jorge Cuesta*.

LINKS TO TEACHING RESOURCES

Poetry resources for students and teachers:

<https://www.poetrysoup.com/poetry/resources/>

Articles, poem guides, and advice for teachers:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/educators>

Features and podcasts for teens:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/teens>

Americans Saying Poetry They Love:

<http://www.favoritepoem.org/>

Structure: "Mix it up":

<http://poetryclass.poetrysociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/National-Poetry-Day-2014-secondary-resource-The-Poetry-Society-Southbank-Centre-1.pdf>

Poetry glossary:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms>

The Art of Translation: Making New Versions of Mexican Poetry:

<http://poetryclass.poetrysociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/The-Art-of-Translation-Making-New-Versions-of-Mexican-Poems-Don-Cellini-The-Poetry-Society-1.pdf>

PEN translation resources:

<https://pen.org/translator-resources/>

Online Spanish-English dictionary:

<http://www.spanishdict.com/>

