

XII. Traditions in Waterbury

Subject(s):

Time Needed: two 50 minute class sessions

Objectives:

- ✓ understand the importance of tradition in the practice of culture and community
- ✓ gain a sense of the cultural practices of other races and ethnicities
- ✓ use the resources of “Brass City Life” website
- ✓ create community dialogue within the class on culture
- ✓ recognize the influence of other countries on American practices of family, etc.

Areas/Disciplines Covered:

Anthropology (socio-cultural)
Cultural Studies (cultural practices, tradition)
Ethnic Studies (ethnicity, culture)
History (US, local, international)

Materials:

- chalk and chalkboard or markers and chart paper
- vocabulary sheet
- picture and quote from “Town Plot” on *Brass City Life* website in a handout or overhead (DAY ONE) and handout/overhead of quinceanera (DAY TWO)
- if possible, bring in a post-quinceanera Latina to share her experience with the class (STRONGLY ENCOURAGED)

Procedure:

DAY ONE:

1. Begin by asking the students, “What is a tradition?” Take answers from the class and list them on the board. Add your own answers to the board based on the appropriate definition of “tradition”.
2. Ask the students, “Does your family have any traditions?” Take some comments and situations. Again, add your own traditions that would highlight the definition and move the conversation forward.
3. Describe to the students the context in which you will discuss tradition today--specifically, tradition in Waterbury and how it relates to community. Formally define tradition. Introduce the first example of tradition, “Town Plot” from *Brass City Life*.
4. “Town Plot” gives a very good example of the multilayered-ness of tradition and culture. Describe to the students the many different ways in which this has meaning and for which communities.
 - It is associated not only with a particular ethnic community (Italians) but also a regional (Town Plot) and religious (Catholic) community.
 - It incorporates imagery *from Italy* (which shows the international perspective and community ties).

- It is an event hosted by Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church and School, which is a Catholic organization constructed in the 1940s and 50s.
- The parade of the Madonna has been happening for over 60 years (as the testimonial accounts).

5. Read the testimonial aloud and view the picture. What do the students see in the picture? Can they guess when the picture may have been taken? How can they tell that it's an old picture? (it's black and white, the car, the clothing) Do they know anything about that church or area? Does it still exist? Who attends church there now (race/ethnicity)? What other traditions (or rituals) are practiced by religious groups?

6. Discuss now the significance of this specific event and tradition in the lived experiences of Waterbury. Why are traditions important?

DAY TWO:

Preparation: Invite a Latina colleague, friend, or family member to speak to the class about her quinceanera.

1. Begin by asking the students, "Who can define tradition for the class?" Make sure that you start the lesson with a concrete definition. Bring back the example from the previous lesson to get them going.

2. Announce that following on the previous discussion, today's discussion will focus around the importance of tradition in cultural identification. Ask the class, "What are some of the cultural traditions that your family or other families practice?" (Some answers may include Kwanzaa, family reunions, foods or naming the first son after the grandfather.)

3. Tell the students that today you are going to learn about a Latino (Hispanic) tradition called the *quinceanera*. Ask for a volunteer to explain what a quinceanera is. Make sure that the students get a good sense, include:

- Many Latino cultures participate in the quinceanera from Mexico and Central America to Puerto Rico and South America.
- Said to be a practice begun by the ancient Maya Civilization.
- The practice as it is now understood was made popular in the 1930s.
- It is an event in which a 15 year-old Latina enters into womanhood. She dresses up and is attended by friends and family on a day dedicated only to her.
- Sometimes in the United States, Latina young women combine the quinceanera (which is their "sweet fifteen") with the American tradition of the "sweet sixteen".

4. Announce the guest visitor: To help us better understand the quinceanera, we have _____, who will tell us about her day." [Encourage your speaker to give very specific details about her day but also her background: where she/her family is from originally, which Waterbury neighborhood she grew-up in, etc.] Make sure that there are visuals for the class.

5. Allow a Q & A.

6. End by passing around the assignment worksheet, "Ethnic Holiday Celebrations and Customs" and announcing the due date.

HOMEWORK: “Ethnic Holiday Celebrations and Customs” worksheet.

Related Resources:

more information on quinceaneras can be found at:

<http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic28-3-4/onair.html>