

# Cuban Literacy Project: *Maestra and American Experience: Fidel Castro*

## Literacy, Language and History: Cuba 1961

By Theresa Bertrand

Grades: Middle or High school

### RELATED CONTENT AREAS

Social Studies, Spanish, History

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### Overview

This lesson plan pairs the documentary *Maestra* with a clip from the film *American Experience: Fidel Castro*. It highlights the importance of literacy in post-revolutionary Cuba and teaches the literacy movement as a lens through which to study turning points in Cuban history, as major shifts in policy and history affected volunteer literacy teachers. This curriculum also draws connections between literacy more broadly and political literacy/the importance of rhetoric to Fidel Castro's regime. By incorporating clips of Fidel Castro, and of volunteer teachers, this lesson plan urges students to consider literacy's role in history, politics, and culture in Cuba and beyond.

Essential Questions: What is literacy? What are the differences between education in the United States and in Cuba? What were the roles of maestras in Cuba?

#### Standards

Tennessee World Language Standards

1.2 Understand and interpret both written and spoken forms of the target language on a variety of topics.

2.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

3.2 Acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

#### Objectives

- Students will be able to determine the importance of literacy for an individual within a society.
- Students will be able to compare their cultures to Cuban culture.
- Students will be able to extract key points about Cuban history from film and literature.

#### Materials

The film *Maestra*

#### Time

#### Vocabulary

## PROCEDURE

1. Think-pair-share: What do we already know about Cuban history? Students will share with their partners and then with the whole class. Ask one student to record the class discussion on a wall chart for later reference.
2. Background Information
  - January 3 – U.S. Broke off relations
  - Students/Young people sent out to educate the populace
  - April 17 – Bay of Pigs invasion
  - Danger to young teachers
  - October – Cuban missile crisis
  - End of 1961 – Literacy teachers' triumphant march on La Plaza de la Revolución
  - Importance of words
3. Emphasize the importance of the literacy movement
  - Ask students to write their definition of literacy on a piece of paper. They will then crumple up their piece of paper and throw it in the trash can at the front of the room. This is to keep their definitions anonymous while simultaneously allowing them to have fun.
  - Have students get into two large groups and have each student get a definition out of the trashcan. Within each group, they will read the various definitions to come up with one definition for each group. Leave those definitions on the board for the remainder of the film viewing. Do their definitions match the literacy definition in Cuba (1961)?
4. Background information on Fidel Castro and his values and ideas about serving his country.
  - Clip of Fidel Castro stating his only desire is to serve his country.
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deEoHxQp5M0>
  - Clip of narrator stating 1960 had been a good year and a man saying how he had been influenced by Castro and the revolution. Also clip states about beginning literacy movement.
  - Have a class discussion on Fidel's desires.
5. Film to introduce the literacy movement. Show clips from *Maestra* film showing: Castro stating the goal of everyone in Cuba being literate by the end of 1961; introduction of a few teachers
6. Journal Activity: Have students consider these pre-film questions in their journals:
  - What do you think a literacy campaign is?
  - Why would people volunteer to leave their families and begin teaching others?
  - What might the teachers encounter?
  - What would be some of the supplies that were needed?
  - Locate Havana, Villa Clara, the Escambray Mountains, and Manatí on a map of Cuba.
  - Do you think being from Havana and teaching in the other places would have been a problem? Why or why not?
7. Watch the film and then complete the post film questions:
  - Think about the concept of literacy. Was the Cuban literacy campaign what you thought it would be? Why is it important for an individual to be literate? Why is it important for a society?

- Think about the *maestras* in the film. Some may have been your age or even younger than you. Can you imagine undertaking that type of position? What were some of the challenges they faced? How did they grow from those challenges?
- Why were some parents in the film resistant to their children's intentions to join the Literacy Campaign? What do you think your parents would have said?
- In April of 1961, the Bay of Pigs invasion took place. How did this invasion affect the literacy campaign and its teachers? Why would the insurgents want to hurt them?
- What were the roles of women prior to the literacy campaign? How were the teachers' lives changed?
- What was the result of the campaign?
- What problem did Joaquín have?
- How old was the youngest teacher?
- "They signed with a cross or with a fingerprint – a thumbprint. That was very embarrassing for them, especially since I was just a young girl who was going to be their teacher. But this changed because they were very proud to have their own teacher. So that feeling of being ashamed transformed into excitement and discovery about how to write things." What responses does this quotation evoke in you? Before explaining the final assessment, have a class discussion on their literacy definitions and whether or not they have changed after viewing the film.
- Have students collaborate in making a rubric for the final assessment.

## EVALUATION

Final Assessment:

What is the role of words in Cuba in 1961? Create a creative portrayal of the role of words in the literacy movement. P

Possible presentation formats: -Wordle -Music video -Silent Film -Traditional Research Paper -Drawing/sculpture/etc. - Photography –additional student creative ideas.