

PIER Summer Institute 2014 Lesson Plan (American Upheavals)

**Title of Lesson:** Upsetting the Apple Cart: Thinking Critically About Oppositional Discourse

**Author:** Charles Scruggs; **School:** Genesee Community College, **Subject Areas:** World History and World Regional Geography; **Grade Level:** College Freshmen and Sophomores; **Time Frame:** 90 Minute Class Period. (This lesson has been designed for use in an open-enrollment, post-secondary setting. It is hoped it will also be of interest to high school teachers and their students).

**Introduction:** Drawing its inspiration from a body of literature known as post-colonial theory, this lesson provides students with an opportunity to examine critically the anti-imperialist poetry of Ruben Dario and Pablo Neruda. Through collaboration in small groups, students will consider audience, tone, and point of view—as well as the ways in which the two poets conceptualize the complex nature of the colonial relationship through the use of metaphor and other techniques. As a summative assessment, students will be asked to compose their own poem which explores the theme of colonialism in a context beyond Latin America (for example, Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia).

**Geographic Connections:** (1) Place—How do these poets describe their homeland? What memories and associations are evoked in their poetry? (2) Human-Environmental Interaction—How has Latin America’s landscape been transformed by the colonizers? (3) Economic geography—Does Latin America still consist essentially of “banana republics” exploited by the global core? (4) The conceptualization of geopolitical space—Does the United States view Latin America as its “backyard”? Is “Latin America” even an appropriate label given that it masks a much more complex cultural mosaic consisting of indigenous, African and non-Iberian influences?

**D2.Geo.5.9-12.** Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

**D2.Geo.7.9-12.** Analyze the reciprocal nature of how historical events and the spatial diffusion of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices have influenced migration patterns and the distribution of human population.

**Vocabulary:** Metaphor, Toponym (Place-Name), Anti-Imperialism, Theodore Roosevelt, United Fruit Company, Banana Republics, Jamaica Kincaid, Ruben Dario, Pablo Neruda

**Content Standards:** CCSS.ELA-Literacy. RH. 11-12/1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

**Essential Question:** Is the pen mightier than the sword (or the dollar)? (The goal here is for students to begin to see that there are forms of power more subtle than naked aggression and that sometimes writers revolt with their pens by seeking to challenge the hegemony of colonial powers.)

**Literacy through the Content Area:** This lesson involves the close reading of two short poems. As a literacy strategy, the technique known as a “think aloud” will be demonstrated. At the beginning of the lesson, several passages from Jamaica’ Kincaid’s *A Small Place* will be read. Students will not only have a chance to hear fluent reading, but also to see a critical and creative mind at work—questioning, pondering and challenging out loud. In this way, the teacher’s thinking becomes visible and serves as a model for the students for their subsequent exploration of the poems.

**Placement of the Lesson within Broader Curriculum/Context:** The intent is to include this lesson in the context of a world history survey course covering the period from 1500 C.E. to the present. The students will have completed units on state building and social change in the Americas (1830-1895), and the New Imperialism in Africa and Southeast Asia (1830-1914). The outcomes of this lesson will provide a strong foundation for a subsequent unit on The Cold War and Decolonization (1949-1975) which highlights the revolutionary strategies of Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

**Learner Background:** Students in the class are typically non-majors and many will be at least ten years removed from any formal social studies instruction. Students may take the course without having satisfied the college’s reading proficiency requirement. As stated in the previous section, students will have completed several units which should provide the proper historical background for them to read and discuss the four selected poems profitably.

**Objectives for the Lesson:** Students will be able to: (1) identify at least two significant anti-imperialist writers from the Americas; (2) define *banana republic*; (3) discuss anti-imperialist themes as well as the use of metaphor and binary oppositions in the poetry of Ruben Dario and Pablo Neruda; 4) compose an original poem dealing with the theme of imperialism beyond the Latin American context (Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, etc.).

**Integration of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills:** For most of the 90 minute class period, students will be discussing the work of Ruben Dario and Pablo Neruda in groups of four. The use of short poems rich in historical allusions and binary opposites provides an opportunity for students to think critically and share their interpretations drawing on their knowledge of Latin American history. Ideally, students will see the pen as a potentially powerful political weapon through which perceived injustices can be addressed.

**Assessment:** Formative assessment of the first three learning objectives will take place informally by visiting each of the groups of four and interacting with them briefly. In addition, each student will also complete in class a set of guided questions connected to the poems based

on the small group discussions. In addition, a short set of three questions could be distributed to the students during the last five minutes of class to determine whether the first three learning objectives have been met. The requirement to compose a poem on the theme of imperialism in a context beyond Latin America will serve as a summative assessment.

**Materials/Resources:** Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988)  
"To Roosevelt" by Ruben Dario (widely available in translation)  
"United Fruit Company" by Pablo Neruda (widely available in translation)

### **Lesson Development:**

#### 1. Teacher demonstration of a think aloud (15 minutes)

Provide a brief biographical sketch of Jamaica Kincaid and some of the anti-imperialist themes she explores in her short work *A Small Place*. Explain the idea of a "think aloud" and provide a demonstration using short passages from Kincaid's book. Below are two sample excerpts which should prove fruitful:

"[A]nd so you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday." (From Section 1)

"[I]f you could hear the sound of [the old library's] quietness . . . , the smell of the sea . . . , the heat of the sun . . . , the beauty of us sitting there like communicants at an altar . . . , the fairy tale of how we met you, your right to do the things you did . . . you would see why my heart would break at the dung heap that now passes for a library in Antigua." (From Section 3)

#### 2. Organize the class into groups of four and have them discuss the two poems: "To Roosevelt" and "United Fruit Company." (40 minutes—20 minutes for each poem).

Students should be given copies of the two poems at the end of the previous class so that they can read through them ahead of time. Students will receive a set of guided questions to help focus their discussions.

Sample Questions for "To Roosevelt": What examples of opposition or contrast can you find in the poem? What do you think Dario meant by the line: "You are a professor of energy"? According to Dario, what cultural contributions has Latin America made to the world? What do you think Dario's main point is and how does he use allusions to support his claim?

Sample Questions for "United Fruit Company": What do you think the United Fruit Company symbolizes for Neruda? How does Neruda use metaphor to suggest the vulnerability of Central America? What similarities and differences do you see between Dario's poem and Neruda's in terms of tone, metaphors, culprits, and themes?

Circulate among the groups to encourage them if they get stuck. The focus, however, should be on allowing the students to develop and defend their own interpretations.

### 3. Whole class discussion (15minutes)

Have the groups share their responses to the various questions with each other and make note of points of agreement and disagreement. Then offer a few additional questions for the class to consider as a whole. For example: Do you think a poet can mount an effective challenge to the power of a president or corporation? Do the works of any of these three authors (Kincaid, Dario and Neruda) suggest anything positive about the history of imperialism? If you were update Neruda's poem what corporation would you select as your subject?

### 4. Class brainstorming session (15 minutes):

Introduce the poetry writing assignment in which each student will be asked to compose a short poem on the theme of imperialism in the non-Western world (outside of Latin America). The goal is to encourage student creativity by drawing on the three authors discussed in class for inspiration. Write the following headings on the board: (1) Other Geographic Contexts; (2) Attitudes toward Imperialism; (3) Audience; (4) Point of View; and (5) Literary Techniques. Then have students brainstorm possibilities for each of the headings. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia would be examples of other regional contexts in which one might explore the theme of imperialism. Attitudes toward imperialism might be negative, positive or mixed. At the end of the twenty minutes, students should have a matrix with a range of options to help them structure an original poem. Examples could be generated from the matrix (a poem from the point of view of an African forced to collect rubber to satisfy the insatiable greed of King Leopold).

### 5. Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Address questions students may have about the poems or the poetry assignment.

### **Students Needing Differentiated Instruction:**

There are a number of ways in which this lesson may be modified and enriched. The grouping of students in fours could be deliberately heterogeneous so that struggling students have the benefit of guidance from stronger students. One possible modification of the lesson would be to make the poems available in Spanish for students who are both native Spanish speakers and weaker in English. Similarly, native English speakers who are studying Spanish could be challenged to read the poems in the original Spanish. Another option for gifted and talented students would be to assign them Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*.