



## About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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*"Buenos días."*

### Hispanic American Heritage Month September 15 – October 15, 2007

During Hispanic Heritage Month, the U.S. honors the Hispanic community and pays tribute to the contributions that Hispanic-Americans have made throughout the history of the United States. The 44.3 million Hispanic-Americans make up the fastest growing group in the U.S. Hispanic contributions to American culture are plainly evident in music, film, food, and other cultural mediums. Economically, culturally, and politically, Latinos are a vital part of the nation. The observation was initiated in 1968 as National Hispanic Heritage Week but was expanded in 1988 to include the entire 31-day period. Read the Proclamation by President Bush for [National Hispanic Heritage Month, 2007](#).

**Links** USinfo: [Cultural Influence of Hispanics](#)  
Library of Congress: [Hispanic Reading Room](#)  
Smithsonian [Latino Center](#)[Latino Center](#)  
Gale Thomson: [Hispanic Heritage](#)  
Gale Thomson: [Events in Hispanic American History](#)  
Infoplease: [Notable Hispanic Americans](#)  
[Hispanic Online](#) & [National Hispanic Cultural Center](#)

### Teaching Resources

- **Smithsonian Education:** [Hispanic Heritage Teaching Resources](#)  
Collection of classroom materials, covering topics such as Latino voices in American art, Mexico's indigenous people, lowriders, baseball player Roberto Clemente, and carnival traditions of Puerto Rico.
- **Scholastic: Celebrate Hispanic heritage! Latinos in History** - The teachers' resource section of the Scholastic web site includes the "Celebrate Hispanic Heritage" area where brief biographical information can be found on about 25 people.
- **PBS Lesson Plans: Latinos in America** - The United States is the hub for a large Latino community, with an increasing number of Latino immigrants arriving each year. A closer look at immigration rates and data that reflect Latino immigrant status in America gives broader perspective on this growing population.
- **PBS Video: Realidades: Who is a Chicano?**  [Watch the Video](#)

### Resources on Politics and Hispanic Americans

- Library of Congress: [Hispanic Americans in Congress](#)
- Pew Hispanic Center: [The Latina Electorate](#)
- [Pew Hispanic Center](#), a non-partisan research organization. The center is to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact within the U.S. The Center prepares [reports and surveys](#) that explore Latino attitudes on a variety of public policy issues, as well as their beliefs, values and experiences.

### Spanglish

Spanish and English have mixed with each other in the United States to create a hybrid language, increasingly used not only in spoken but also in written form. Spanglish, especially popular among young people, is one of the most striking ways two of the world's most widely used languages are evolving in response to immigration and globalization.

**Links** USinfo: [Spanglish Offers Stepping-Stone to English](#)  
Dynamic English eJournal: [Spanglish – Speaking la Lengua Loca](#)



Tashia Cruz dances in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month in Lincoln, Nebraska. (© AP/WWP/Lincoln Journal Star/Michael Paulsen)

**The term Hispanic**, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, refers to Spanish-speaking people in the United States of any race.

### Facts for Features

**44.3 million** - The estimated Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2006, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority. Hispanics constituted 15 percent of the nation's total population. This estimate does not include the 3.9 million residents of Puerto Rico. [Hispanic Heritage Month 2007](#)



© Library of Congress

[Parallel Histories: Spain, the United States, and the American Frontier](#)

### Article

**Verdichteter kultureller Austausch in Kontaktzonen: Die "Lateinamerikanisierung" der Vereinigten Staaten.** Yvette Sánchez, Arcadia, 2005, #2, [\\*Download article](#)  
"Contact involves assembly and intersection. The Latin American population of the U.S. is growing rapidly, becomes increasingly active in the dominant culture, and overcomes its subcultural status. The hybrid and transcultural Latino identity is also related to a geographical proximity to the former home countries."



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## THE FREEDOM LIST

The American Booksellers Ass. and ABFFE have collaborated to produce "[The Freedom List](#)," a selection of titles for children and adults that have been frequently challenged or banned.



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## UsingEnglish.com

"A Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing"  
– [UsingEnglish.com](#) includes an [Idioms Book](#).



TeachingLiterature: [Lesson plans/Course Syllabi](#)



eNotes offers study guides on authors and books introduced in our section on Hispanic American Literature on page three; Julia Alvarez's [How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents](#); Sandra Cisneros' [House on Mango Street](#); information on [Denise Chavez](#) and [Esmeralda Santiago](#).

## Banned Books Week

The week of September 29 through October 6 marks the 26th anniversary of **Banned Books Week** the American Library Association's celebration to read. Banned Books Weeks directs attention to the plight of individuals who are persecuted because of the writings that they produce, circulate or read. The theme of Banned Books Week 2007 is "Ahoy! Treasure Your Freedom to Read and Get Hooked on a Banned Book."

**Books [Challenged or Banned in 2006/07](#)** – This bibliography represents books challenged, restricted, removed, or banned in 2006-2007 as reported in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from May 2006 through May 2007. You will find books by Kurt Vonnegut, Toni Morrison, J.K. Rowling, and Dan Brown on this list.

**Links** Infoplease: [Books Under Fire](#)  
The First Amendment Center: [Website](#)  
American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression (ABFFE):  
[The Stories Behind This Year's Book Bans and Challenges](#)

## Banned Books & Freedom of Expression

**Amnesty International:** [Banned Books Week](#)

Among the writers portrayed by Amnesty International is Pablo Pacheco Avila, a Cuban journalist serving 20 years in prison. Believing that his detention is politically motivated, relating to his legitimate, journalistic activities and peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression & association, Amnesty International considers Pablo Pacheco to be a prisoner of conscience. [More](#)

## National Book Festival

The [National Book Festival](#), held in Washington D.C. each year since 2001, is a prominent addition to the United States' growing roster of book-themed events. Organized and sponsored by the Library of Congress, the festival allows the public to meet favorite authors, preview new titles and mingle with other book lovers.

**Links** White House: [National Book Festival](#)  
Washington Post: [National Book Festival](#)

Among the writers participating in the National Book festival is Carmen Agra Deedy. The children's book author and storyteller was born in Havana, Cuba, and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1963, during the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. She has written numerous best-selling books for children; her newest picture book, [Martina, the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale](#) (Peachtree, 2007), is being released in English and Spanish.

## Teaching Literature: Helpful Tools

[UsingEnglish.com](#) - Learning English (ESL) Online

These resources for both students and teachers of English as a second language include lesson plans and teacher handouts, ESL tests, reference tools (including a dictionary of English idioms, which is worth listing all by itself), articles on English usage, and user forums.

[TeachingLiterature](#) – This side provides extensive information on how to teach literature in class and gives advice on: Leading Classroom Discussions of Literature: How Do I Get Them to Talk about Literature? Using narratives in the classroom: What's the use of story? Teaching Media Literacy: What else is a text and how do I teach it?

[eNotes.com](#) is a comprehensive online educational resource. eNotes combines the highest-quality educational content with innovative services in order to provide an online learning environment unlike any other. The content is fact-checked, edited, and written by professionals who are experts in their field. It comes from eNotes' in-house publishing unit or from Academic Publishers, including content which is not available online anywhere else.

## Teaching Literature: Hispanic American Literature – Quinceañera

For hundreds of years young women in Latin America from Mexico to Argentina have celebrated their quinceañera — their 15th birthday — in grand tradition, beginning with a Catholic Mass and continuing on to a large and extravagant celebration. In some parts of the United States the tradition thrives, particularly among second- and third-generation Hispanic girls. Quinceañera parties are generally very lavish, with mariachi bands, a feast, and many guests celebrating the 15-year-old's transition into womanhood. (Source: Gale [Hispanic Heritage](#)) The ancient ritual which marks a girl's passage into womanhood unites the U.S. Latino community and is rapidly evolving and spreading across ethnic lines.

Read about the experiences of growing up as a Hispanic American girl:

- o **The House on Mango Street** (1984). Sandra Cisneros' story of a Mexican American girl growing up in a Chicago barrio.
- o **The Last of the Menu Girls** (1986). Denise Chavez's collection of short interrelated stories about an adolescent girl in New Mexico.
- o **How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents** (1991). Julia Alvarez's set of tales about four sisters from the Dominican Republic who move to New York City.
- o **When I Was Puerto Rican** (1993). Esmeralda Santiago's novel about a young girl's experiences growing up in Puerto Rico and then moving to New York.
- o **Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera** (1995). Norma Elia Cantu's stories of growing up in a border town in Southern Texas.

[Julia Alvarez](#) - "Rather than a straight narrative, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* is a reverse-chronological order series of 15 interwoven stories chronicling four sisters and their parents. A comparison with Alvarez's article in *American Scholar* suggests that these stories are autobiographical; like her family, the Garcia family is Dominican and displaced in America. Like Alvarez and her sisters, the Garcia girls struggle to adapt to their new environment and assimilate themselves into American culture." (Source: Gale Thompson)

According to the *Newsletter of Intellectual Freedom*, Julia Alvarez' *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* was among the challenged books in 2006. The book was retained on the high school reading list in Arlington Heights, Ill., along with eight other challenged books. A board member, elected amid promises to bring her Christian beliefs into all board decision-making, raised the controversy based on excerpts from the books she had found on the Internet.

[Denise Chavez](#) - "Chávez does not look upon *The Last of the Menu Girls* as a novel, but as a series of dramatic vignettes that explore the mysteries of womanhood. She envisions all her work as a chronicle of the changing relationships between men and women as women continue to avow their independence. This assertion has led to the creation of non-stereotypical Chicana heroines like Rocio, who has been described as "an individual who fights the traditional boundaries of identity that society has set up and expects her to follow." (Gale Thompson)

[Sandra Cisneros](#) "burst onto the publishing scene with her 1983 work, *The House on Mango Street*, the warm and human story of a young Chicana who comes of age in a Chicago barrio, fighting obstacles of racism, sexism, and classism." (Gale Thompson) *The House on Mango Street* has been described as a coming-of-age novel, a rite-of-passage novel, and a Latina *Bildungsroman* (a novel of formative education) or *Künstlerroman* (novel of an artistic apprenticeship). [Read more](#)

### Links

- Las Culturitas: [Links to resources about Latino/Hispanic writers throughout the Americas](#)
- Selecting Hispanic Books: [A Hispanic Bibliography](#). This site provides an excellent base for a librarian, teacher or parent trying to select good Hispanic books for young people.

In *Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA*, Julia Alvarez explores the experiences of the hispanic population through the traditional Quinceañera (pronounced *keen-seah-GNEER-ah*)



Alvarez focuses on the far from perfect quinceañera of Monica Ramos, a Dominican-American who lives in an apartment in Queens, N.Y. The parents arrive late, the limousine driver gets lost, Monica almost misses the church blessing, the photographer cancels ... Every chaotic moment, every misstep and catastrophe makes the event even more special to Ramos and her family, and prompts Alvarez to remember her own coming of age. [WashPost article](#)

### Article

**The Princess Buy.** Rob Walker, *New York Times Magazine*, Oct 15, 2006 - The resurgence of the quinceañera is discussed. \* [Download article](#)



© Sandra Cisneros by Angel Rodríguez-Díaz

*In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine.*

*A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.*

- Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* -

**Study Question** - Ask your students: Esperanza has a lot to say about her name - what it means, where it came from, and how it sounds. How do you feel about your name? Write a paragraph explaining your feelings about your name.





[www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org)

According to this annual public opinion report, Americans and Europeans mostly agree on common threats but sometimes differ on problem-solving strategies.



The Landing of Columbus.  
© Library of Congress

**Did you know?** Catalonia has an indirect link to the discovery of America. It was traditionally part of the crown lands of the Kingdom of Aragon, which united in 1469 with the Kingdom of Castile to form the modern Kingdom of Spain. In 1492, the King and Queen of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, commissioned Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the Americas. King Ferdinand of Aragon is generally credited with being the driving force behind the commissioning of this voyage.

## Webchat Station

As a tribute to the theme of Catalan Culture at the Frankfurt Book Fair, we have organized a webchat with Catalan American professor Gonzales Navajas, Professor of Spanish at the University of California at Irvine. Ask him anything you'd like to know about "Cultura Catalana" in America!

**Webchat: Saturday, October 13, 2007, 17:00**  
[Register](#) for live participation.

**Links** [Catalan Literature Online](#)  
[British Library: Catalan Literature](#)  
[North American Catalan Society](#)



## usa.usembassy.de

*About the USA* is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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## THIS MONTH:

### German American Day – October 6

On October 6, German Americans are recognized for their contributions to the United States. From the first German immigrants who landed in Jamestown over 300 years ago to the more than 7 million Germans who have since followed them to the U.S., Americans of German descent have played a vital role. According to the US Census Bureau, as of July 2004, nearly 43 million people in the United States identify German as their primary ancestry. [About the USA > Germans in America](#) (US Embassy)

### Columbus Day – October 8

Columbus Day, celebrated in the U.S. each year on the second Monday in October, commemorates the landing of Christopher Columbus in the New World. (Columbus landed on October 12, 1492 at San Salvador Island, also known as Waitling Island, today part of the British Bahamas.) His voyage initiated an enormous migration of peoples, flora and fauna; and brought about a transformation of America and Europe, that for better or worse affected the entire world. [More](#)

#### Links

- About the USA: [Columbus Day](#)
- The Mariner's Museum: [Age of Exploration](#)
- Library of Congress: [Today in History & 1492 – An Ongoing Voyage](#)
- Library of Congress: [Christopher Columbus - Man and Myth](#)
- Education World: [Beyond Columbus: Teaching the Lessons of 1492](#)

#### Articles

- Columbus Day. *Documents to the People, Spr 2007, v35, #1.* \*[Download article](#)
- Who Really Sailed the Ocean Blue in 1492? Historians have speculated about Christopher Columbus' heritage. Was he perhaps a Catalan nobleman? *Christian Science Monitor, Oct 17, 2006.* \*[Article](#)

**Discussion Question:** Is the term "New World" a Euro-centric view of the exploration of the Americas?" *Beyond Columbus: Teaching the Lessons of 1492.* [Education World](#)

### Catalan Literature at the Frankfurt Book Fair

Catalan Culture, one of the liveliest cultural regions in Europe will continue the program that began in 1976. As well as the region of Catalonia and its capital Barcelona, the Catalan-speaking countries also include the region of Valencia, the Balearic Islands, North Catalonia and Andorra. See: [www.frankfurt2007.cat](http://www.frankfurt2007.cat)

**Come and meet US @ the Frankfurt Book Fair**  
**October 9-14, 2007 - Booth 4.2 N448**