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## Bringing Bilingual Books to Life & the Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program

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### Abstract:

*Anthropologist, storyteller, educator, and children's book author Dr. Raquel M. Ortiz brings her knowledge and expertise in sharing multimedia teaching materials and community outreach to a discussion about how to use bilingual literature and materials to create engaging cultural programming that connects with our diverse communities.*

*First, Dr. Ortiz will provide general information about the **Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program (CA)**, founded by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) at Hunter College. The CA enables effective classroom learning and community teaching about Puerto Rican history and culture through distance, contextual, group, and project-based learning by using CENTRO's' collection of texts, posters, videos, and documentaries. Through competency-based projects designed to promote learning and teaching, the CA celebrates Puerto Rican heritage as it promotes historical recovery and civic engagement.*

*Dr. Ortiz will then share CA materials created for her book, **SOFI AND THE MAGIC, MUSICAL MURAL / SOFI Y EL MÁGICO MURAL MUSICAL**, that facilitate teaching Latino bilingual children's literature. She will also speak about a CENTRO / Cleveland Public Library (CPL) Collaboration, the **Cultural Ambassadors Learning Circle**, that was launched this past spring. Dr. Ortiz will end her presentation by describing the steps the CPL is taking to launch the **Cleveland Public Library Puppet Initiative** by adapting her SOFI picture book into a bilingual, musical puppet performance. She will share the creative process used to translate her story into puppets, a set, music, and a dynamic script and production.*

**Keywords:** multimedia teaching materials; bilingual literature

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The Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program (CA), founded in 2016 by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) at Hunter College enables effective classroom

learning and community teaching about Puerto Rican history and culture through distance, contextual, group, and project-based learning by using CENTRO's online collection of texts, posters, videos, and documentaries. Through competency-based projects designed to promote learning and teaching, the CA celebrates Puerto Rican heritage as it promotes historical recovery and civic engagement.

The CA is also a national network of cultural and educational institutions, and community and academic leaders dedicated to promoting knowledge about Puerto Rican culture and history. Therefore, the program engages a broad range of partners in competency based projects designed to promote learning and teaching through the celebration of heritage, historical recovery and preservation activities.

One main goal of the CA is to promote the use of primary sources related to the Puerto Rican experience in the United States in K-16 classes. Using web-based archival resources on Latinos in the US has been a difficult task for educators as the vast majority of digitized classroom resources currently available on the web refer to the histories of Americans of European descent. Very little material exists on the web about Latinos in the US of any descent. Using primary sources in classes encourages students to see how interpretations of are built. Primary documents also invite them to learn about the construction of social and cultural historical narratives. By bringing primary documents into the classroom CENTRO makes history real, live, tangible, and dynamic sharing with students the value, the importance, and the joy of learning about Puerto Rican histories, stories, and culture.

Because the CA is envisioned as a national partnership with youth, cultural, and educational institutions the program has three key components to enable effective classroom and community teaching and learning. One component is a structured program for the broad adoption of teaching and learning about Puerto Rican culture and history. This includes the development and dissemination of pedagogies (distance learning, contextual learning, group and project-based learning) that support competency-based learning. The development and dissemination of free classroom and community support materials for K-16 (curriculum and guides, readings, multi-media materials, short videos, study guides, and trainings) that is downloadable and able to print that enables teaching and discovery. Offering instructional support and trainings. And, the development of an online platform to coordinate and support the ambassadors program. A second key components is developing a national partnership of youth, cultural and educational institutions and community leaders that contribute to the development and dissemination of products and support educational programs for schools and community based organizations. Lastly, CENTRO is currently working on creating a national campaign for dissemination and engagement of the Cultural Ambassadors Program to be adopted by schools and teachers, youth organizations and community based organizations and the general public.

Founding partners of the Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program are:

- ASPIRA Association ([aspira.org](http://aspira.org)) created in 1962, is the only national Hispanic organization dedicated exclusively to developing the educational and leadership capacity of Hispanic youth. It currently serves over 85,000 students each year through their clubs in schools and after-school programs in eight different states.
- El Puente ([elpuente.us](http://elpuente.us)) founded in 1982 is a community human rights institution that promotes leadership for peace and justice through the engagement of members (youth and adult) in the arts, education, scientific research, wellness and environmental action. It's A-rated academy (founded in 1993) was the first community based

organization in New York State to create a public school recognized as a model for culturally competent, values-based, community driven education. Average enrollment is 246 students per year.

- Comité Noviembre (<http://www.comitenoviembre.org/wordpress/>) is a non-for-profit organization dedicated to celebrate Puerto Rican heritage in the US every November, it is composed of 13 oldest nationwide Puerto Rican organizations in the country such as El Museo del Barrio and CUNY Hostos Community College.
- National Puerto Rican Day Parade ([nprdpinc.org](http://nprdpinc.org)) celebrates and advance art, culture and education within the Puerto Rican communities, both in the island and in the mainland US. It is the largest demonstration of cultural pride in the nation honoring the 3.5 million inhabitants of Puerto Rico and over 5 million people residing in the United States. Parade programs and events focus on prominent, historical figures and campaigns to raise awareness of important issues in the community.

#### The Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program's Structure

Currently the Cultural Ambassador Certification is envisioned as a three tier process, Apprentice, Instructor and Cultural Ambassador. An Apprentice will complete two modules, 3 documentary certifications and 1 open courseware certification. After certification an Apprentice can lead a group discussion and serve as a tutor on CA materials. An Instructor will complete 2 archival modules, the Oral History Training, and the ASPIRA Leadership Module "Building Cultural Awareness" module. After certification an Instructor can lead group discussions, assist in 2 oral history interviews, and lead group discussions on CA materials. A Cultural Ambassador will complete "Exploring Archival Collections" and the Oral History Interviewers Training, and the ASPIRA Leadership Modules (4). After certification a Cultural Ambassador can lead instructor workshops, conduct 2 oral history interviews, and lead group discussions on CA materials. In addition, Centro will certify that the Cultural Ambassador is qualified to teach Puerto Rican culture and history CA materials, has the ability conduct workshops through the Centro Library and Archives, and with partner organizations and is qualified to create new educational materials for Centro's education programs.

#### Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program's Educational Materials

The CA's educational materials are made up of CENTRO's' collection of texts, posters and videos. This includes series such as The Pioneers/Pioneros Documentary Series: Pura Belpré, Storyteller (56 minutes) explores the life and work of Pura Belpré, New York City's first Puerto Rican/Latina librarian and an ambassador for the New York Public Library's work with the Latino community. The Legacy of Frank Bonilla (53 minutes) traces the life of a pioneer in higher education from his humble roots in New York City to his days in combat in World War II to the founding of Centro. As the founding director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies he took a leading role in shaping the field of Puerto Rican studies. Clemente Soto Vélez: A Revolt through Letters (48 minutes) explores the life of Clemente Soto Vélez with an emphasis on his contributions to community, literacy and cultural identity, his political activism, and his undying support for the arts. Plena is Work, Plena is Song (29 minutes) explores this original Puerto Rican musical form of storytelling song. This documentary explores the social and cultural history of plena, and deepens our appreciation of this folk expression.

Teaching guides created for these documentaries focus on two essential questions and contain discussion questions, activities, Centro Teaching Resources, and Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Social Studies. There are also pre or post reading

essays on the person and the era being studied to help contextualize the documentary and a quiz on each documentary.

History of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. is a 7 part open courseware comprehensive overview that incorporates the most recent scholarship on Puerto Rican History. The themes are: 1. The Historical Narrative; 2. Labor Migration and U.S. Policies; 3. Puerto Rican New York during the Inter-War Years; 4. The Great Migration at Mid-Century; 5. Community and Organizations; 6. Resistance and Empowerment; and 7. Politics.

The Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series is a visual educational tool that documents Puerto Rican history of migration, experiences and contributions to U.S. society by introducing major events, themes and concepts. The posters also compliment the History of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. open courseware.

The Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series (History) are 5 posters (24" x 36") that rescue, document, and preserve the long history of Puerto Rican migration and the experiences and contributions of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society. The themes are: I. Puerto Rican Cultural Roots c. 1200 - Late 1700s; II. Pioneros(as): Migrant Pioneers to the United States (1898-1930s); III. The Great Migration Years (1940s - Mid-1960s); IV. The Puerto Rican Movement and its Outcomes (1960s - 2010s); Striving for Equality and Community Empowerment (Political Participation and Public Service); V. The Puerto Rican Movement and its Outcomes (1960s - 2010s) (Educational Struggles and Institution Building and New Traditions).

The Puerto Rican Poster Series (Maps) are three demographic and historical posters (24" x 36") that reflect different aspects of the Puerto Rican migration experience in the United States. The themes are: A Cartography, Part I, Taíno, Spanish and African Roots c. 2000 BC - 1898; A Cartography, Part II, Puerto Rican Migrations to the United States and the Caribbean, 1898 - 2012; Where do Puerto Ricans live? Population by State in 2010. Teaching guides for the posters contain discussion questions and activities and compliment the History of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. open courseware.

The Timeline of Puerto Rican History Booklet is a visual educational tool (20 page pamphlet) that documents the history of Puerto Rican migration and the experiences and contributions of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society.

[https://centrop.r.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events\\_2015/ChronologicBrochure\\_2015.pdf](https://centrop.r.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events_2015/ChronologicBrochure_2015.pdf) ]

#### Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program's Sofi Materials

Currently there are a number of Cultural Ambassadors educational materials that facilitate using multicultural literature for the bilingual picture book SOFI AND THE MAGIC, MUSICAL MURAL. Two guides were created: Sofi Teacher's Guide and Sofi's Parent's Guide. There is an eight minute episode created for Puerto Rican Voices on the public art that inspired the SOFI story, Sofi and the Magic, Musical Mural. The piece incorporates interviews of the author and the illustrator with clips of an author reading on the Highline in New York City during the summer of 2015. <https://vimeo.com/162132755>

There is an 11 minute documentary Memories on the Wall: Education and Enrichment through Community Murals that explores public art and identity through conversations with artist María Domínguez and 8th graders at Global Prep Middle School in East Harlem as together they create a mural. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdI42PZB-Wg>

There are also five short video segments that help educators to share Puerto Rican culture and history by using the SOFI AND THE MAGIC, MUSICAL MURAL picture book:

#### Teaching Sofi to Teachers, Educators, and Parents

Author and educator Raquel M. Ortiz shares pre-reading activities for her SOFI picture book with second graders from Public School 250. This includes a plena demo by Dr. Drum and a PowerPoint presentation on the mural that inspired the SOFI picture book. The presentation ends with the author and students learning and singing the three songs found in the SOFI picture book accompanied by music by Dr. Drum. (13 minutes)

#### The Art & the Artist, María Dominguez

Artist María Domínguez explains the creative process behind illustrating the SOFI picture book. Domínguez also talks about the community mural, El Pueblo Cantor (Bronx, 1996) that she designed with students from Intermediate School 193 and shows original art and marquettes she created for El Pueblo Cantor. (2 minutes)

#### Plena with Doctor Drum

New York City Department of Education teaching artist Dr. Drum explains the history of the music genre of plena, the national Puerto Rican music. He also introduces the two instruments used for the plena, the pandereta and the güiro and plays plena beats for second graders from Public School 250 and Public School 257. (7 minutes)

#### Sofi Songs

Author Raquel M. Ortiz, New York City Department of Education teaching artist Dr. Drum, and second graders from Public School 250 and Public School 257 sing the three songs found in the SOFI picture book: “Tocotoco,” “Vejigante está pintao,” and “La plena que yo conozco.” A bonus feature is the vejigante who makes a guest appearance for one of the songs. (2 minutes)

#### Vejigante Talk

New York City Department of Education elementary teacher Humberto Soto, dressed up as the vejigante from SOFI does a recap of the story with second graders from Public School 250 and Public School 257. Soto also answers questions about the story, explains what a vejigante is, and sings and dances for the students. (3 minutes)

#### Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program & NYC Partners

Currently the CA has collaborations with PS 9, the Fashion Industries High School, the National Puerto Rican Day Parade, and the twenty seven schools that make up New York City’s Department of Education District 14.

In May and June of 2017 Public School 9 (Brooklyn) held three Professional Development Workshops on the Cultural Ambassadors program for their Dual Language K-5th grade teachers and a 6 session Cultural Ambassadors literacy immersion program for their Dual Language 4th and 5th grade classes (60+ students). This cumulated with a presentation to the K-3rd grade Dual Language classes (150+ students). On April 25, 2018 a Cultural Ambassadors information session was given at the Polish Consul as part of the District 14 Bilingual Symposium. There were two teachers, one parent representative, and an administrator present for each of the twenty seven school in District 14 with over 120 participants. On May 19th, 2018 three 50 minute workshops on Multicultural Literature using CA materials was given at the District 14 Celebrates a Rich Mosaic of Families parent event for approximately 100 parents. The Fashion Industries High School used materials being

created for the Puerto Rican Citizenship module as curriculum for their after school Latino Culture program during spring, 2018.

On May 20th, 2017 CENTRO partnered with the National Puerto Rican Day Parade (NPRDP) offering a Cultural Ambassadors Boot Camp to NPRDP's college scholarship recipients. Sixty 17 to 22 year old students participated in workshops and hands on activities that led to 45 certified Cultural Ambassadors. On Saturday, June 2nd, CENTRO, in collaboration with the National Puerto Rican Day Parade, will hold a day long Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Boot Camp. This event is for 2018 NPRDP scholarship recipients. Tri-state area scholars are expected to attend and the 60+ scholars from 19 states and Puerto Rico that were awarded this year will be able to participate via zoom.

A focus of this year's Boot Camp will be the ongoing philanthropic work being done by Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico's recovery from the devastation caused by Hurricane María. Topics include the economic crisis, PROMESA, disaster relief, federal policy, how the post hurricane massive exodus redefines the diaspora, and the humanitarian work being done by Rich Colon, President of the Rock Steady for Life Foundation, who will be honoured by the NPRDP this year. The CA educational material will help reinforce important themes that the NPRDP celebrates this year.

#### Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program & CPL Programs

In October 2017, Cleveland Public Library introduced the Cultural Ambassador Program through a professional development workshop for young adult librarians and library staff and through community and school outreach programs for approximately 40 children. In March 2018, a Puerto Rican History & Culture Learning Circle was launched in partnership with CENTRO as part of a program created in conjunction with Peer to Peer University in which library staff play the role of facilitators who meet with a group of 5-15 adults on a weekly basis to work through an online course. The Puerto Rican History & Culture Learning Circle learning circle took participants through Level 1 of CENTRO's Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassador Program (CA).

Participants met at the South Branch Library over a five week period with an average of 7 adult participants, ages 30-60, attended each session. Feedback from the class was overwhelmingly positive with requests to continue the course in the future, to add a new Learning Circle for the next level of the CA in the Fall, and to add book discussions for some of the supplemental books provided to the class during course time. Among the participants was a Spanish teacher from Lincoln West's School for Global Studies. As a result of her experience in the program, she enrolled eleven of her students in the CA and began bringing them to South Branch once a week to work on the course materials. The teacher and students from Lincoln West's School are also planning a trip to New York to visit the CENTRO in June of 2018.

In addition to plans to repeat the CA program in the Fall of 2018, CPL is now working in collaboration with author Dr. Raquel M. Ortiz to adapt her SOFI picture book into a bilingual puppet production with a dynamic script, hand and rod style puppets, and music as part of the Library's new Puppetry and Theatre Arts Initiative that kicked off this year. Along with the goals of promoting literacy and supplementing arts education, the program will support one of the Library's strategic priorities – Cultivate a Global Perspective – by seeking to adapt culturally inclusive and bilingual children's books into puppet shows for families and children.

## Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program 2018-2019

CENTRO plans to have modules on Oral Histories, Puerto Rican Voices, Puerto Rican Citizenship, A Data Center module, and a Rebuild Puerto Rico module available online for the 2018 - 2019 academic year. All modules will have teaching guides and online quizzes.

The Oral Histories module provides individuals the tools to support a professional interviewer. This includes recruiting donors, learning and explaining the archival process, helping to find information for the vetting of potential candidates, organizing materials provided by the interviewee prior to the interview, identifying individuals and events in photos provided by donors, helping with the transfer of documents and photos to the archives, and other support tasks. Concretely the module will have the following four lessons: 1. How to Conduct an Oral History Interview; 2. The Puerto Rican Experience through Oral History; 3. The Oral Histories Project; and 4. Observing Oral History Interviews.

The Puerto Rican Voices will be made up of ten short documentaries. Puerto Rican Voices, a joint venture between the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY, and WIPR-TV in Puerto Rico, highlights the contributions of Puerto Ricans across the United States, including some of the most vibrant neighbourhoods in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Hartford, Orlando, and Miami among many others. The bilingual (English and Spanish) TV show bridges the Puerto Rican community across history, culture and geography.

The Puerto Rican Citizenship module will have the following four lessons: 1. U.S. Citizenship in Puerto Rico: One Hundred Years After the Jones Act; 2. Reflects on 100 years after the Jones Act; 3. Political Status. Puerto Rico Chooses Statehood amid Low Turnout: What's Next?; 4. Plebiscite: Puerto Rico Plebiscite Ballot Creates Turmoil.

A Data Center module will focus on data sheets, research briefs, and research archives created by CENTRO. Data Sheets provide the most up-to-date demographic information about the Puerto Rican population in the United States by providing a brief narrative synopsis of conditions for Puerto Ricans in selected geographies throughout the United States based on the latest available data from the US Census Bureau. CENTRO'S Data Center Module will have the following four lessons: 1. Puerto Rican Population Grows in 2016; 2. Puerto Ricans in Florida, 2015; 3. The Puerto Rican Citizen, Voting-Age Population; 4. Post Hurricane Maria Exodus from Puerto Rico and School Enrolment in Florida; 5. The Puerto Rican Education Pipeline: New York City, New York State, and the United States; 6. Puerto Ricans in the US earn less money and pay more for housing; and 7. Housing Characteristics.

The Rebuild Puerto Rico module, addressing current problems in Puerto Rico will focus on two topics, the economic crisis and recovery effort post Hurricane María. The Rebuild Puerto Rico module has the following lessons: 1. Puerto Rico in Crisis Timeline; 1. Hurricane Maria: Immediate Impact and Response; 3. Estimates of Post-Hurricane Maria Exodus from Puerto Rico; 4. Rock Steady For Life: Hip-Hop Pioneer Crazy Legs Joins Hurricane Relief Effort.

CENTRO launched Rebuild Puerto Rico as an effort to support disaster relief and recovery efforts after the devastation of Hurricane María. Rebuild Puerto Rico is an information hub, a clearinghouse where the Puerto Rican diaspora and others interested in supporting Puerto Rico can share information about recent events, solidarity events, policy issues affecting decision makers, call to action for donations and volunteers, help assistance, and other

relevant information about the crisis. Information on Rebuild Puerto Rico is divided into nine categories: news; donate; volunteer; events; policy; need help?; directory; data hub; exchange. <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/events-news/rebuild-puerto-rico>

### **Conclusion**

The Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program makes history real, live, tangible, and dynamic by sharing the value, the importance, and the joy of learning about Puerto Rican histories, stories, and culture. Months after Hurricane María most of the United States citizens that live on the island of Puerto Rico still struggle with receiving electricity and having consistent access to clean water. CENTRO hopes that Cultural Ambassadors can join us advocating for relief and bringing the stories of men, women, and children who really are voiceless - with no representation in the House or the Senate - to institutions and lawmakers that can help.

Institutions interested in partnering with CENTRO to implement the CA program are invited to participate in discussions on how best to have their institution participation in the program. CENTRO is also interested in having these institutions share relevant educational resources, curriculum, and programs with CENTRO so that the CA program can continue to grow and evolve. And lastly, CENTRO is interested in discussing innovative ways to adopt the Puerto Rican Cultural Ambassadors' curriculum and program design.

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### **References**

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