

# Lesson Plan: Puerto Rican Obituary

Latino Identity in New York (NEH  
Seminar)

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# 1. The Basics:

- Lesson Title:
- Teacher: Jesse Neuman
- Subject: Poetry
- Level/Grade: 8th Grade Humanities
- New York State English and Language Arts Standard 2:

## *Language for Literary Response and*

## *Expression*

*Students will read and listen to oral, written, and electronically produced texts and performances from American and world literature; relate texts and performances to their own lives; and develop an understanding of the diverse social, historical, and cultural dimensions the texts and performances represent. As speakers and writers, students will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language for self-expression and artistic creation (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/nysatl/engstand.html>)*

## 2. Aim

Students will be able to

1. identify themes and symbols in Pedro Pietri's ***Puerto Rican Obituary***
2. connect the poem's message to their own lives
3. synthesize personal poems in a similar vein

# 3. Essential Questions:

1. What does Pedro Pietri have in common with me and my life in NYC?
2. Who is Pietri speaking to and who is he speaking for?
3. How can his work influence my own writing?

# 4. Teacher Preparation / Materials

- copy of [Pedro Pietri's \*Puerto Rican Obituary\*](#) (1 per student)
- video of Pietri performing poem + media projector
  - [read by author](#)
  - [read by Flaco Navaja](#)
  - [read by Piri Thomas](#)
- background information (1 page bullet points per student)---> see next slide

# Images



1

2



3



4



# Pedro Pietri

## 5. Background Information

- born in Puerto Rico (1944), lived worked and died in NYC (2004)
- fought in Vietnam war; part of the 60's cultural revolution (racial equality, freedom of expression, social progress)
- deemed an unofficial "reverend" by the Latino community of Spanish Harlem.
- co founded the New Yourican Poet's Cafe
- worked with the Young Lords (similar to Black Panthers)
- saw NO distinction between art and political activism.

# PROCEDURES:

## 6. Do Now

- List 5 adjectives that describe you / your peer group/ your community.
- List 5 objects that represent you / your peer group / your community
- List 5 people that represent you / your peer group/ your community.



## 7. Introduction:

- We all know that poetry is an extremely difficult yet liberating medium to express narrative and feelings.
- Historically, poetry has also been used to present political messages, as many artists have expressed pride, discontent, and a call for action.
- Pedro Pietri, a 20th century Latino Rights artist and activist, uses his skill to send a message both to and on behalf of his community in his poem, ***Puerto Rican Obituary***.

## 8. Direct Instruction

- Introduce the hypothesis that Pietri's poem, is a *metaphorical* obituary which speaks to the legacy he feels his Puerto Rican community is leaving behind.
- Point out several symbols (TV's, cars, 'bullet proof' rice and beans) and themes (intra-community jealousy, working without recognition, poverty, lack of resistance)
- Present video clips of various readers

## 9. Guided Practice:

- Segway into a guided discussion of Pietri's poem.
- Solicit student reactions to the tone, vocabulary, recurring symbols, and themes.
- Have students read poem (individually, in small cooperative groups, out loud, etc).
- Solicit examples from students' lists of how their own obituaries might mirror or differ from Pietri's.

# 10. Independent Practice

Write an obituary for your peer group.

Ok, if that sounds too *morbid*, consider it a tribute! The important idea is to describe you and your peers as completely as possible:

- one page
- 20 minutes
- include general themes and characteristics, goals and accomplishments (NOT just individual details)
- feel free to include both positive and negative aspects
- remember to give the reader a real feeling of exactly how your peer group represented themselves and the impact they had on the world around them!

# 11. Summary / Closure

Invite students to share:

- examples from their first drafts
- compare and contrast Pietri's work with their own
- overall reactions to the activity

# 12. Homework:

1. Finish / edit first draft (to be continued in subsequent writing/social studies classes)
2. Research and respond to another of Pietri's works, including some thoughts on how it relates to ***Puerto Rican Obituary***.

# Accommodations / Differentiated Instruction

- Students with writing ability deficits may choose to present their work in oral form.
- Students with receptive language / ELL deficits may write in their first language and/or choose to describe their pre-immigration communities
- Students may choose to illustrate/augment their work with images which represent their thinking

# 13. Vocabulary:

- theme (overarching plot which pervades a work)
- symbol (idea or object which represents meaning outside of its literal presence)
- obituary (posthumous summary of an individual's life circumstances and accomplishments.)
- community (localized social and/or cultural group)

# Works Cited

Navaja, F. (Artist). (2011). Puerto rican obituary - the flaco navaja edition. [Web]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW4OPbFfL\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW4OPbFfL_g)

Pietri, Pedro. (1973). Puerto rican obituary. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Pietri, Pedro. (Artist). (2009). "puerto rican obituary" by pedro pietri (1973). [Web]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCD0IsZ4HLI>

Thomas, P. (Artist). (2009). Piri thomas recites 'puerto rican obituary' at capicu poetry. [Web]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjgrLnC\\_LjE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjgrLnC_LjE)

Images:

1: <http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/february06-04/pedro.htm>

2: [http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5309&news\\_iv\\_ctrl=1321](http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5309&news_iv_ctrl=1321)

3 and 4: <http://trcs.wikispaces.com/Pedro+Pietri>