

## 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE HUMANITIES



Unit: Social Justice and  
Figurative Language in Latino  
Literature

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Section: \_\_\_\_\_

### Identifying Figurative Language: Analysis and Practice

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**Directions:** As you read each excerpt below, identify examples of figurative language as you find them. Be sure to read the preceding information on the author's background before you read the poem. Record the **figurative language phrase** in the corresponding chart. An example has been done before you.



**Author's Background:** Pedro Pietri was a revolutionary writer who found a way to capture the joys and struggles of Puerto Ricans who had moved to New York City in hopes of a better life, commonly referred to as Nuyoricans. He found an amazing way through his writing to relate to the lives of Latinos and Latinas and used a unique writing style that combined English with Spanish. Soon after Pietri graduated from high school he was drafted into the Vietnam War which impacted him significantly. He had always been a free spirit but also a very political person and coming back from his experiences in Vietnam and dealing with the discrimination he had witnessed while growing up in New York added significantly to his poetry and to his personality. He became very active in Puerto Rican Civil Rights and joined the activist group, The Young Lords. A few years later, in 1969, he created his most renowned poem, "Puerto Rican Obituary", which was published in 1973. The poem was about the hardships of 5 Puerto Ricans traveling to New York in search of a better life but only finding heartbreak. The poem became a very symbolic poem to many Latinos who found themselves in similar situations.

**Photo and Information Courtesy of Latino Poetry Community**

# Puerto Rican Obituary [Excerpt]

by *Pedro Pietri*

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
passing their bill collectors  
on to the next of kin

All died  
waiting for the garden of eden  
to open up again  
under a new management

All died  
dreaming about america  
waking them up in the middle of the night  
screaming: Mira Mira

your name is on the winning lottery ticket  
for one hundred thousand dollars

All died  
hating the grocery stores  
that sold them make-believe steak  
and bullet-proof rice and beans  
All died waiting dreaming and hating...

Dead Puerto Ricans  
Who never knew they were Puerto Ricans  
Who never took a coffee break  
from the ten commandments  
to KILL KILL KILL  
the landlords of their cracked skulls  
and communicate with their latino souls

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

From the nervous breakdown streets  
where the mice live like millionaires  
and the people do not live at all  
are dead and were never alive

Juan  
died waiting for his number to hit  
Miguel  
died waiting for the welfare check  
to come and go and come again  
Milagros  
died waiting for her ten children  
to grow up and work  
so she could quit working  
Olga  
died waiting for a five dollar raise  
Manuel  
died waiting for his supervisor to drop dead  
so he could get a promotion...

They knew  
they were born to weep  
and keep the morticians employed  
as long as they pledge allegiance  
to the flag that wants them destroyed  
They saw their names listed  
in the telephone directory of destruction  
They were train to turn the other cheek by newspapers

that misspelled mispronounced  
and misunderstood their names  
and celebrated when death came  
and stole their final laundry ticket  
They were born dead  
and they died dead...

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**Author Background:** Rhina P. Espaillat was born in the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. After Espaillat's great-uncle opposed the regime, her family was exiled to the United States and settled in New York City. She began writing poetry as a young girl—in Spanish and then English—and has published in both languages.

**Photo and Information Courtesy of the Poetry Foundation**

## **Bra**

by *Rhina P. Espaillat*

What a good fit! But the label says Honduras:  
Alas, I am Union forever, yes, both breasts  
and the heart between them committed to U.S. labor.

But such a splendid fit! And the label tells me  
the woman who made it, bronze as the breasts now in it,  
speaks the language I dream in; I count in Spanish

the pesos she made stitching this breast-divider:  
will they go for her son's tuition, her daughter's wedding?  
The thought is a lovely fit, but oh, the label!

And oh, those pesos that may be pennies, and hard-earned.  
Was it son or daughter who made this, unschooled, unwedded?  
How old? Fourteen? Ten? That fear is a tight fit.

If only the heart could be worn like the breast, divided,  
nosing in two directions for news of the wide world,  
sniffing here and there for justice, for mercy.

How burdened every choice is with politics, guilt,  
expensive with duty, heavy as breasts in need of  
this perfect fit whose label says Honduras.

B. Pernell - Lesson Plan Draft