

Lesson Plan: The Plot and Characters of *El Retrato Vivo*
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Objectives:

1. Students will be able understand the basic plotline of Moreto's short play, *El Retrato Vivo*.
2. Students will be able to recognize and describe each of the characters in *El Retrato Vivo*.

Hook: Ask a volunteer student to go out into the hall, while you speak to the other students. Bring a chair to the front of the classroom, and tell the other students that when you invite the volunteer back into the classroom, he is to stand on the chair and they are to treat him as if he were merely a painting, not a real person. They are supposed to comment about how lifelike he is or how un-lifelike he is. When the volunteer comes back into the room, let him stand on the chair for several moments while the other students observe him and comment about what a beautiful almost lifelike painting he is. After this, invite the volunteer to sit down and ask him what he felt like, being gawked at and not being able to move off the chair.

Transition: Propose the question to the students: What if you went to sleep one night, and the next morning when you woke up, you discovered that you were trapped inside a painting! What would you do?

That is exactly what happens to the main character in *El Retrato Vivo*.

Learning Activities:

1. Tell the kids the story of *El Retrato Vivo*. Ask them to pay extra special attention to the names of the characters and who they are as you tell the story, because they will be asked to define the characters later. You may want to write the names of the main characters on the board as you mention their name in the story.

El Retrato Vivo ("The Living Portrait") is a story about a Spanish lady named Bernarda (also referred to as Doña Juana) and her extremely jealous husband, Cosme (also referred to as Juan Rana). Bernarda's husband Cosme is so jealous, that he never leaves her alone in the house, he is constantly keeping watch on her. When Cosme's behavior begins to get ridiculous to the point that Bernarda just cannot stand it anymore, she decides to play a clever joke on him to teach him a lesson.

The play begins with Bernarda telling her friend of the joke that she played on Cosme. Bernarda, with the help of a painter, convinced her husband that he is not actually himself, but rather is a portrait of himself, and that his real self is away on a hunting trip on the Zarzuela. Cosme completely believes the whole thing! He is absolutely convinced that he is really a portrait!

Things start to get more ridiculous as a number of visitors (invited by Bernarda and all aware of the joke she is playing on her husband) start arriving at the estate. First is a refined courtier who dotes upon Bernarda with a gift of lovely ribbons. Next comes a pompous valiant man, who attempts to pick a sword fight with the painting of Cosme. Then comes a mailman who brings a letter (written by Bernarda) that is supposedly from Cosme himself. Finally, in comes the painter, who riles the whole household into a sort of game where they dance around the “portrait” of Cosme, pointing out its imperfections and deviations from the “real” Cosme.

Amidst all the raucous, Cosme falls out of his picture frame. He finally realizes that he is not really a painting after all, and that his wife played this trick on him! Cosme realizes that he took his jealousy too far, and Bernarda realizes that perhaps she took her joke a little too far. The couple reconciles, and the play ends with all the characters dancing around the stage jubilantly.

2. Character Matching Game

Divide the kids up into 7 groups and give them each a slip of paper with the definition of one of the main characters (provided). Put seven main character names up on the board have the children discuss in their groups which definition they believe belongs to which character. One by one, have a representative from each group get up and tape their definition beneath the title of the appropriate character.

Assessment:

Keep kids divided into their 7 groups and distribute coloring markers, pencils or crayons as well as a white sheet of paper to each group. Ask the children to draw a picture of what they think that their previously assigned character would look like. Ask them to consider the costumes, and the colors that the characters would wear. After they are done with their drawing, have them tape the drawing on the board next to the appropriate title and description of the characters.

Materials:

Definitions of Major Characters:

1. He is a very jealous husband. His wife tricks him into thinking that he is a painting of himself, and that his real self is away on a hunting trip. Sometimes he is also called, Juan Rana.
2. She is fed up with her husband’s jealousy, and so decides to play a trick on him and make him believe that he is really a painting of himself. She invites over the other men of whom he is jealous, just to teach him a lesson. She is also referred to as Doña Juana.
3. He is a wealthy aristocrat who is invited to the house just to make the husband mad. He gives the wife some beautiful ribbons.

4. He is wild and arrogant and always carries around his sword. He thinks that he is very brave. He almost stabs the husband who is supposedly stuck in the painting.
5. She is the wife's right-hand maid, and a good friend and confidant. The wife explains to her in the very beginning of the play the trick that she has decided to play on her husband.
6. He arrives about half way through the play with a fake letter that is supposedly from the real husband who is supposedly away on a hunting trip. He is the first character who actually talks to the husband who is stuck in the painting.
7. He is the one who tricked the poor husband into believing that he is really a painting of himself. He comes in at the end and invites all the other characters to dance around in a circle, pointing out all the imperfections in the "painting."

Answer Key:

1. Cosme
2. Bernarda
3. Cortesano (the Courtier)
4. Valiente (the Brave One)
5. 2nda Mujer (Second Woman)
6. Correo (Mailman)
7. Pintor (Painter)