

Centro Teaching Guide

Clemente Soto Vélez: A Revolt through Letters is a 48 minute documentary that 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. Six critical moments in his life are brought to life through words, images and music. We learn about Clemente through his own words and from testimonials offered by those who were closest to Soto Vélez: Clemente's granddaughter, poets Tato Laviera, Mari-Thelma Costa and Louis Reyes Rivera, and composer and musician Roy Brown.

The DVD is available at the Centro store at

Two essential questions guide this teaching guide:

- 1) Does studying about the life and work of Clemente Soto Vélez inspire new appreciation for the value of the written and spoken word and for education in the struggle for social and economic justice and self-determination?
- 2) Does studying about the life and work of Clemente Soto Vélez change how we view our responsibilities as members of our school community and the communities where we live?

This guide contains:

- Discussion Questions
- Centro Teaching Resources
- Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Social Studies
- Biographical Information on Clemente Soto-Vélez
- A Curriculum Map for Middle and Secondary Schools
- A Bibliography

Discussion Questions

Grades 6 - 12 and College:

Before Viewing *Clemente Soto Vélez: A Revolt through Letters*

1) Explain that the documentary introduces us to Clemente Soto Vélez through the eyes of those who knew him best, among them his granddaughter Ana Soto Canino, poets Louis Reyes Rivera, Roy Brown, Tato Laviera, Mari-Thelma Costa, Pedro López-Adorno and historians Gerald Meyer and Orlando Hernández.

2) Prepare a semantic web with Soto Vélez in the center and four spokes to write a few words describing who these individuals are and their relationship to Soto Vélez. Ask if anyone has heard about or read the writings of Clemente Soto Vélez, charting students' contributions including both conceptions and misconceptions. Call attention to some of the words used to describe Clemente:

patriot

community organizer

mentor

wordsmith

performance-poet

teacher

3) Ask students to write a brief explanation of the title of the film.

4) Conclude by probing students' expectations by charting a few responses. Return to students' explanations and this chart during each session, checking off, correcting or adding further details before and after viewing the documentary.

While Viewing *Clemente Soto Vélez: A Revolt through Letters*

T-Charts

1) Students will complete a T chart for each viewing session, recording events they find interesting on the left column and leaving the right column blank.

2) First students will compare the events they find interesting with those of a partner. Then, each pair will share with the class those events they found in common.

3) Record “*Events*” and “New Understandings” on a new chart. Encourage students to comment on any new insight about Soto Vélez’s life after their discussions.

The film is comprised of six episodes: ***A Revolt is Born, Jail Time-Learning Process; Clemente and the Big Apple; Battling the Letters, The Muse*** and ***Twilight***. It is recommended that this 45-minute bilingual documentary be viewed in 4-6 sessions.

Segment 1: *A Revolt is Born* (5 minutes)

Clemente acknowledges that it was his experience of having to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, and not the flag of Puerto Rico as a five-year old attending school for the first time that marked his journey through life. The Atalayismo Literary Movement was born in Puerto Rico in 1928 and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party was formed in 1931. The young poets who co-founded the movement formed a pact with Pedro Albizu Campos, founder of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, to use poetry as a vehicle to do revolutionary work.

- What does Soto Vélez’s statement that being a poet means “stripping ignorance of its power” *mean*?
- How can the Atalayismo Literary Movement be described?

Segment 2: *Jail Time-Learning Process* (7 minutes)

Soto Vélez and other Nationalist poets were found guilty of conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States in Puerto Rico. In a high security prison in Atlanta, Georgia, Soto Vélez shared a jail cell with Albizu Campos and they became close friends. After four years in jail, Soto Vélez was released and returned to Puerto Rico and continued his political activity. In violation of his parole, he was rearrested and tried again.

- How can Soto Vélez’s statement that *walls crumble when a man or woman thinks freely* be understood?

Segment 3: *Clemente and the Big Apple* (11 minutes)

This segment sheds light on Clemente Soto Vélez's work as a community-organizer in East Harlem (El Barrio). Clemente was brought to his new home in New York accompanied by federal agents. They warned Soto Vélez that if he ever returned to Puerto Rico he would be killed. Soto Vélez used this opportunity to do important organize through community education at a time when the largest U.S. Puerto Rican community was in El Barrio.

- What is the Great Migration?
- Why was building alliances, which meant working with other ethnic groups, unions, community-based organizations and political leaders, essential?
- How was developing community education programs key to cultivating and nurturing local leadership?

Segment 4: *Battling the Letters* (11 minutes)

For Soto Vélez the written word words needed to be brought to life through the spoken word. This style of reciting poetry, as a performance poet, is now referred to as Spoken Word, and is popular among young poets. The segment has two interpretive readings of Soto Vélez's writing from *La Tierra Prometida (The Promised Land)* 1979 and *Caballo de Palo (Wooden Horse)* in Spanish with English subtitles.

- What does it mean to be a wordsmith?
- How did Soto Vélez also “battled language” ?

Segment 5: *The Muse* (10 minutes)

Amanda Soto Vélez, his muse and life partner, came to New York from Buenos Aires in the 1960s and sought out the literary world. She was the force that kept Soto Vélez alive. They were both wordsmiths.

- How did Amanda help Clemente Soto Vélez?
- What was their apartment on East 92nd Street like?

Segment 6: *Twilight* (5 minutes)

Soto Vélez returned to Puerto Rico in frail health, in the 1980s. He died in San Juan in 1993, buried in Bayamón first and finally in Lares where his life began.

- What did Clemente Soto Vélez want to do at the age of 84?

After Viewing *Clemente Soto Vélez: A Revolt through Letters*

1) What evidence do you have from viewing this film that Clemente Soto Vélez was a “revolutionary poet”?

2) How has the film on Clemente Soto Vélez affected you and what you would like to accomplish in your life’s journey?

3) Does Clemente Soto Vélez’s story remind you of someone you know or have read about? Explain similarities and differences you find between them.

Activities

Grades 6 - 12:

Timeline

1) Use clothespins on a string affixed to the ends of a movable chalkboard and clip on index cards of events to organize the events mentioned in the documentary into a timeline. This makes it easy to add, remove or reorder events that students suggest over (six) viewing episodes.

2) Have students research to add missing information because, at times, people in the documentary were not always explicit as to the precise dates when particular events occurred.

Grades 9 - 12 and College:

Write an Essay

Have the students will a 2 page final essay. Use one of these writing prompts:

- How learning about the life and writings of Clemente Soto Vélez made you think differently about your Puerto Rican heritage or the Puerto Rican community.
- Explaining how learning about Clemente Soto Vélez has changed how you see and think about the value and purpose of education.

Extend and Promote Deep Understanding of the Content

1) Offer students choices to learn more about the life and accomplishments of Clemente Soto Vélez through exposure to a variety of print and visual texts that form part of the Clemente Soto Vélez and Amanda Soto Vélez papers. The Finding Aid to their papers can be found online

at:<http://www.centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/faids/Vélezf.html>.

2) Organize the opportunities for students to interview Centro historians, researchers and Centro's Senior Archivist, Pedro Juan Hernández, (or view his online video) to understand how researchers and educators may work with the Clemente Soto Vélez collection.

Centro Teaching Resources

Clemente Soto Vélez (1905- 1993), was a Puerto Rican revolutionary poet, journalist, and activist in New York and Puerto Rico. He made great contributions to the Puerto Rican community, to literacy and to cultural identity through his political activism and his undying support for the arts.

The Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series

<http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/research-education/education/puerto-rican-heritage-poster-series>

Timeline of Puerto Rican History Booklet

The Centro Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series documents the history of Puerto Rican migration and the experiences and contributions of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society.

centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events_2015/ChronologicBrochure_2015.pdf

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

For K-12 teachers, this teaching guide responds to the following Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

Grades K-5 English Language Arts:

-Recount stories, including fables, folktales and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

-Analyze how and why individuals, events and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text

-Analyze how a particular chapter, scene or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting or plot.

Reading Standards for Literature, Grades 11-12:

-Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

-Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another

Reading Standards for Informational Texts Grades 11-12

-Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

High School ELA/History-Social Studies:

-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address questions or solve a problem.

Biographical Information on Clemente Soto-Vélez

- Clemente Soto-Vélez was born in Lares, Puerto Rico in 1905 and attended school at a time when Puerto Rican children were required to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States.
- Clemente co-founded El Atalaya de los Dioses, which transformed into a revolutionary literary movement known as *el Atalayismo* connecting the literary world to political action and the written word to social change
- Life experiences inspired Clemente to “strip ignorance of its power,” using the power of the word to awaken critical consciousness.
- Clemente became a leader in the Nationalist Movement led by Pedro Albizu Campos, and in 1936 he along with Albizu and other militants in Puerto Rico was sentenced to prison time; he was sentenced twice. On his second release federal agents took him to New York and warned him never to return to the island under threat of death.
- Clemente established residence in New York in 1942, where he worked as a community organizer. He secured the support of Congressman Vito Marcantonio to create spaces where people could gather, learn and plan community activism.
- Clemente took Puerto Rican artists, educators, and writers like Pedro Pietri, Tato Laviera, Sandra Maria Esteves under his wings in their formative years mentoring and nurturing them.

- In the 1980s Clemente returned to Puerto Rico in poor health, where he died in 1993. After his passing, the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center was established in the Lower East Side, in his honor.

Created by Carmen I. Mercado, PhD

A Curriculum Map for Middle and Secondary Schools (grades 6-12)

Essential Questions

Does studying about the life and work of Clemente Soto Vélez inspire new appreciation for the value of the written and spoken word in the struggle for social and economic justice and self-determination?

Does studying about the life and work of Clemente Soto Vélez change how we view our responsibilities as members of our school community and the communities where we live?

Enduring Understanding

Understanding that studying the life of “revolutionary poet” Clemente Soto Vélez in Puerto Rico and in New York: (a) inspires new appreciations for the value of the written and spoken word in the struggle for social and economic justice and self-determination; and (b) contributes to a new sense of civic pride and responsibility.

Formative Assessments

Prompts:

Explain to your principal why you believe that the life of Clemente Soto Vélez is worthy of study. You may begin or close your statement by acknowledging that you had little, if any knowledge of this Puerto Rican poet prior to this unit.

Explain to your family what you are learning about the life and works of revolutionary Puerto Rican poet Clemente Soto Vélez and how this is changing you.

Summative Assessments Within / Across the Unit

Write a coherent 2-3 page essay that integrates knowledge and ideas from at least 3 different sources to explain:

Choice 1

How learning about the life and writings of Clemente Soto Vélez made you think differently about...

-Your Puerto Rican heritage? OR

- The Puerto Rican community
- What tools and resources will you use to learn more about Clemente Soto Vélez?

Choice 2

Write a coherent essay explaining how this unit has changed how you see and think about the value and purpose of education.

Created by Carmen I. Mercado, PhD

Bibliography

Section I: Texts by Clemente Soto Vélez

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Soto Vélez, Clemente. (1979). *La tierra prometida*. San Juan, PR: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

Soto Vélez, Clemente. (1983). *Esta urticante pasión de la pimienta*. New York: Prisma Books.

Soto Vélez, Clemente. (1989). *Obra poética*. San Juan, PR: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

Soto Vélez, Clemente. (1991). *The blood that keeps singing/La sangre que sigue cantando*. Translated by Martin Espada and Camile Perez-Bustillo. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press.

Soto Vélez, Clemente. (2005). *Mujer u ombre u ombre o mujer*. San Juan, PR: Editorial del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña

Section II: Web-based & Audiovisual Resources on Soto Vélez

Online description of archives of the Clemente Soto Vélez Center

http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/latino_survey/Vélez_center

Guide to the Clemente Soto Vélez and Amanda Vélez Papers.

http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/faids/pdf/Soto_Vélez_Clemente.pdf

Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center, New York City <http://csvcenter.org/>

Section III: Print Sources on Clemente Soto Vélez's Life and Work

Azank, Natasha. (2012). "'The Guerilla Tongue': The Politics of Resistance in Puerto Rican Poetry." *Open Access Dissertations*. Paper 512.

http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations/512

"Clemente Soto Vélez, Puerto Rican Poet, 89." *The New York Times*. Published: April 17, 1993.

Marithelma, Costa. (1990). *Kaligrafiando: Conversaciones con Clemente Soto Vélez*

Rodríguez Matos, Carlos Antonio. (1990). *Simposio Clemente Soto Vélez = Simposio KlementeSoto Beles*. (Conference publication) San Juan, PR: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

Section IV: Archival Materials on Clemente Soto Vélez

Barreno, José. (1983). "Conversación y poesía con Clemente Soto Vélez [videorecording]." Production Company: BUYENEI 4 (Held at the Hostos Community College and Center for Puerto Rican Studies libraries)

Centro Library and Archives, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. The Clemente Soto Vélez Papers.

Soto Vélez, Clemente. (1924). *Clemente Soto Vélez Papers*. (Mixed materials). Center for Puerto Rican Studies.

Teaching resources were compiled by Carmen I. Mercado, Ricardo Gabriel and Victoria Núñez.

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