

Cuba at the Crossroads

Lesson 2

Cuba: The Reality Tour

Introduction

American cartoonist Bill Griffith travelled around Cuba for two weeks in October, 1994 at the height of the Special Period. Griffith, noted for “cartoon-o-journalism” style writing, chronicled his experiences in *Cuba the Reality Tour* and *Cuba Uncovered: Zippy Goes to Cuba* from March to April, 1995. Zippy, the pinhead clown, and Griffy introduce readers to Cuban culture, the realities of daily life during the Special Period, and to the unique experience of a country void of fast food restaurants and American commercialism. In this lesson students will learn about Cuban culture and the Cuban economy in the 1990’s from a foreigner’s perspective.

Essential Questions for Lessons 2 Activities 1-4

- How do artists express their most important social and political views?
- How can a comic strip be studied as a primary source document?
- What can we learn about Cuban culture and history from a foreigner’s perspective?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Cuba’s dependence on foreign powers?
- What lessons from the past can be applied to Cuba’s dependency on other countries?

Objectives

Students will:

- analyze the graphics and text of Bill Griffith’s cartoon *Cuba: The Reality Tour* and *Cuba Uncovered: Zippy Goes to Cuba*
- complete an object-based observation organizer
- watch a slide show of Cuba, 2016
- read about Cuba during the Special Period of the 1990’s

Materials

Cuba’s Special Period *BBC Witness* <http://bbc.in/1lfioJ8> (9:00).

Griffith, William. “*Cuba: The Reality Tour.*” *Zippy* May 1995. Print.

Griffith, William. “*Cuba Uncovered: Zippy Goes to Cuba.*” *Zippy* May 1995. Print.

Hunt, Nigel. *Cuba History: The Special Period and Recovery*, *Cuba History*. Retrieved:

<http://www.cubahistory.org/en/special-period-a-recovery.html>

Rodríguez, Mirta Calderón. “*Life in the Special Period.*” *North American Council on Latin America*. Retrieved:

<https://nacla.org/article/life-special-period>

Weisenbach, Elise. *Cuba, 2016*. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/FlhBKRUNF70>

Activity Sheets

Activity 1 Cuba: The Reality Tour

Activity 2 The Special Period of Cuban History-Homework

Activity 3 Cuba Uncovered: Zippy Goes to Cuba
Activity 4 Spanish Version Cuba: The Reality Tour

Suggested Readings and Multimedia

Brill, Mark. *Music of Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Prentice Hall, 2011. Discussion of the rise of Latin music in the United States and music in Cuba after the fall of the Soviet Union pages 142-143.

Chomsky, Aviva, Barry Carr, and Pamela María Smorkaloff. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Introduction to Chapter 8 “The ‘Período Especial’ and the Future of the Revolution” and overview and lyrics to 5 songs by Silvio Rodríguez, “Silvio Rodríguez Sings of the Special Period.”

Skidmore, Thomas and Peter H. Smith. *Modern Latin America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Chapter 5 Cuba: Key Colony, Socialist State sections on Policy Experimentation and The Contemporary Scene (1990-Present) pages 131-141.

Wassman, Stephan. *Going it Alone*. <https://vimeo.com/27789329> . Documentary teaser about Cuba’s Special period. (5:47)

Assessments

Activity sheet responses
Discussions

Extension Activities

- Listen to songs about the Special Period from Silvio Rodríguez’s Album “Silvio.”
- Discuss Cuban economic dependency on Venezuela
 - Leo Grande, William. “The Danger of Dependence: Cuba’s Foreign Policy After Chavez.” *World Politics Review*. 02 April 2013. Retrieved: www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12840/the-danger-of-dependence-cubas-foreign-policy-after-chavez
 - Ordonez, Silvia. Cuba Could Be Venezuela’s Biggest Loser. NBC News Venezuela Crisis 10 Mar 2014. Retrieved: www.nbcnews.com/storyline/venezuela-crisis/cuba-could-be-venezuelas-biggest-loser-n56101
 - “Venezuela crisis evokes memories of Cuba’s ‘Special Period.’” *BBC: Latin America & Caribbean* 10 June 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36487888>

Instructions for Lesson 2 Cuba: The Reality Tour

Step 1:

Activity 1- Distribute Bill Griffith ‘s cartoon-o-journalism *Cuba: The Reality Tour*, and student activity sheets. After students examine graphics and text, generate a conversation about Cuban culture and learning about that culture from a foreigner’s perspective.

Step 2:

Present the slide show *Cuba, 2016* <https://youtu.be/FlhBKRUNF70> . Initiate a discussion in which students compare what they learned in *Cuba: The Reality Tour* from 1995 and the images in *Cuba, 2016*.

Step 3:

Activity 2- Assign homework readings and then discuss the causes and effects of the Special Period on Cuba:

- *Cuba History: The Special Period and Recovery*
<http://www.cubahistory.org/en/special-period-a-recovery.html>
- *NACLA: life in the Special Period* by Mirta Rodríguez Calderón
<https://nacla.org/article/life-special-period>

Extended reading AP/ College level see:

- Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America* Chapter 5, Policy Experimentation and The Contemporary Scene pages 131-141.

Step 4:

Activity 3- Divide students into groups of 2-3. Distribute 2-3 *Cuba Uncovered: Zippy Goes to Cuba* strips and student activity sheets to each group. Draw conclusions about Cuban culture, economy and history. Discuss the pitfalls of one nation's dependency on another country such as Cuba and the Soviet Union and Cuba's relationship with Venezuela in uncertain times.