

Cuba at the Crossroads

Lesson 2

Cuba: The Reality Tour



Essential Questions

- *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?*

American cartoonist Bill Griffith travelled around Cuba for two weeks in October, 1994 at the height of the Special Period. Griffith, noted for a unique “cartoon-o-journalism” style writing, chronicled his experiences in “Cuba the Reality Tour” and “Zippy” 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.

Activity 1 Cuba: The Reality Tour

In Activity 1 you will learn about Cuban culture and history by examining “Cuba: The Reality Tour”, an example of cartoon-o-journalism that portrays Cuba, 1994 from an outsider's perspective. The events in the reality tour reflect Griffith's actual experiences while on the island.

1. Study Cuba: Reality Tour for 1-2 minutes by looking only at the images. What do you see at first glance? What is familiar/unfamiliar?
2. With a partner, examine the graphics and text, then note your general observations. Who are the actors? What is happening?
3. List new vocabulary in Spanish or English, and then define the words.
4. List cultural references that you need clarified.
5. What did you learn from the comic about Cuban:
 - Art/architecture
 - Daily Life
 - Food
 - History
 - Religion
 - Politics/government
 - People
 - Towns/geography

Other

6. Reflect on the cartoon-o-journalism style. What does it represent to you? How so?
7. Do you need background knowledge to understand the artist's message? Explain your answer.
8. How do Griffith's observations reflect our culture? Give examples of how Griffith describes Cuba by using North American context. Do his observations of Cuban society reflect our culture in such a way that Cubans might not understand his humor?
9. Why do you think the 1990's were called the "Special Period"? Are there clues in "Cuba: The Reality Tour"?
10. Write concluding observations about "Cuba: The Reality Tour" in which you discuss the artist's intent. How does he use humor, sarcasm, irony and juxtapositions to express his message? What does "Cuba: Reality Show" tell you about Cuban people, religion, daily life, economics, politics, and the arts?

11. How do you think life has changed since the Special Period 20 years ago? Watch Cuba, 2016 <https://youtu.be/FIhBKRUNF70> and be prepared to share your impressions during class discussion. Are there any surprises?

12. Lagniappe- a little extra

Read about music during the Special Period in *Music of Latin America and the Caribbean* pages 142-143. How and why did music change during this period?