

*Conversando con literatura* is a text that serves several purposes. It can be used as a literary reader or a conversation textbook. It is intended for university-level Spanish language students of third year. *Conversando con literatura* includes poetry, songs, and short stories from a vast and emblematic selection of Hispanic writers. *Conversando con Literatura*, used as a conversation text, is unique in its innovative approach to topics that engage students in exciting and dynamic conversations and discussions. Rather than emphasizing typical conversational topics such as scenes in a hotel, airport, or restaurant, or focusing solely on common unit themes such as the family, student life, travel, and hobbies, I have chosen literary texts as a primary point of departure for conversation in Spanish. These texts lend themselves well to discussions of a wide range of topics and universal themes that are intriguing and familiar to students. Among the topics covered are “Beauty and Youth,” “Immigration,” “Euthanasia,” “Love, Marriage, and Betrayal,” and “Memories of Childhood Days.” The central philosophy behind this approach is that students will first make a strong, personal connection to the discussion topics prior to improving upon their conversational skills in Spanish. Therefore, they will move from a personal awareness towards a more holistic understanding of Hispanic cultural experiences through comparing and contrasting their own experiences with those presented in the literary selections. Literature is an excellent vehicle to spark such conversation since it encourages recall of personal experiences, stimulates self-reflection, and opens up possibilities for cross-cultural comparisons.

*Conversando con literatura* is divided into 14 units. Each unit is organized as follows:

- *Fotografía o dibujo* – Photograph or image. This page is an introduction to the chapter that connects the picture with the theme covered in the chapter followed by questions.

- *Impresiones personales sobre la fotografía* – Personal impressions about the photo or drawing which includes simple questions about the photograph or drawing that connects both the photo with the material of the chapter.

- *Antes de leer* – Before reading. This section is composed by difficult vocabulary or words that are commonly used in Spanish and are important to know. One word may appear in more than one lesson because it is a commonly used word in Spanish. If the Spanish word is a false cognate in English, then the correct word in Spanish will be given; when needed the false cognate in English will be translated in Spanish. The student needs to pay attention to this section before reading the introduction to the topic.

- *Introducción al tema* – Introduction to the topic. This section starts with difficult vocabulary and features a general overview of the topic to guide the student. This introduction contextualizes the selected literary work so the student becomes familiar with social, historic, and literary forces that shaped a particular writer’s literary production and how these forces relate to the topic in question.

- *Preguntas* – Questions. This section includes general questions about the introduction to the topic.

- *Sobre el autor* - About the author. This section offers basic background information concerning the author and provides a general overview of his or her literary style, influences, and themes.

- *Guía de lectura* - Reading guide. This section provides the student with a brief summary of the literary work and helpful hints as to the best way to approach understanding the literary work. The purpose of this section is to guide the student in his or her literary analysis by highlighting the main ideas to be discussed further after the reading.

- *Obra literaria y vocabulario* - Literary work and vocabulary. This section consists of the literary work (or works) I have chosen from various writers from different literary periods, movements, genres, and countries.

The vocabulary accompanying the literary work as footnotes is intended to help the student understand the text. Spanish is used when a Spanish synonym is a common word that should be familiar to the student. When necessary, the explanatory notes for both vocabulary and idiomatic expressions are in English. If the vocabulary word is a verb, the infinitive form of the verb is given followed by the definition in Spanish. If the definition is in English, it is given in the tense that appears in the literary work. English words are italicized. This section is not intended to replace the role of a dictionary, but rather to offer broad definitions that capture the meanings of the terms in context of the literary work. For example, a word could have several meanings, but the definition provided will portray the meaning expressed in the literary work.

- *Preguntas de comprensión* – Questions of the text. This section will assess the student’s basic understanding of the literary work. By answering questions the student demonstrates his or her general comprehension of the text after a first reading. The questions in this section assess basic understanding of content, outstanding themes, characters, pivotal actions, and primary motivations.

- *Más allá del texto* – Beyond the text. This segment of the textbook includes questions beyond the content of the literary text. The questions are about analysis and interpretation of the text just read. Discussion may follow for more in depth critical analysis of the literary work.

- *Ejercicios de vocabulario* – Vocabulary exercises. This section will expand the scope and breadth of student’s vocabulary through various activities such as identifying synonyms and antonyms, forming word associations through matching exercises, and composing sentences and definitions. These activities will also provide an additional look at the vocabulary, main themes, and ideas in the context of the reading and of course, provide opportunities for oral practice.

- *Actividad oral* - Oral activity. This section will vary from unit to unit and provide a variety of activities that lend itself to oral practice. These activities range from the review of advanced grammatical concepts, sentence structures, or vocabulary words appearing in the literary works of the unit, as well as improvisation and dialogues. Structures such as verb tenses will only be reviewed in an appendix, as the student should already have studied them. Students will apply what they have learned through a variety of oral exercises that vary in form and style.

- *Para discutir* – For discussion. This section consists of two activities for oral practice. The first activity, entitled *Realidad y literatura* - Reality and literature, takes on a conversational approach to learning. It consists of questions that prompt the student to compare the literary work to real life situations or relate it to their own personal life experiences. Here the primary goal is to allow the student to connect the work to the world in which they live and his or her own life. Those connections will spark conversations about familiar experiences, foster understanding of new situations and topics, and encourage forming connections to Hispanic culture. The second activity, *Mesa redonda* - Round table discussion, invites the student to converse in an informal environment and share their opinions or impressions with their classmates in a small group setting. In an attempt to stimulate fruitful debate and discussion, I have purposely selected questions for this section that are controversial as well as thought provoking. I recommend the professor first controls and guides small group discussions, making sure all students participate and do not deviate from the questions or topics suggested. At the end of the small group discussion, a group moderator is able to share comments with the rest of

the class. Afterwards, the whole class may enter into a discussion by agreeing or disagreeing with the comments presented by each group.

- *Refranes y citas* - Proverbs and quotes. This section will encourage the student to discuss and comment on common expressions, proverbs, and quotes related to the subject matter of the unit. The selected quotes come from historians, politicians, and philosophers from different countries and periods of time.

- *Investigar* - Search the net. This section presents suggestions for written homework assignments in connection with the topic of the unit and is intended as a research activity. The professor can choose either assignment or both given that the homework assignments can be completed and then expanded into an oral presentation. The professor may include additional topics and stipulate the length and scope of the research conducted by his or her students. This activity incorporates the topic being discussed with current and historical events that have impacted our society and the world.

- *Fotografía* – Photograph. This section presents a photograph that is connected to the unit's theme for the student to describe. As we all know, photographs can have a very powerful impact. The photographs selected may be controversial, may convey powerful messages, or may simply be aesthetically pleasing. The students will answer questions pertaining to the photographs as well as describe the emotions or feelings it provokes in them.

- *A escribir* – Composition. This section provides a selection of written assignments for students. As conversation and composition go hand in hand, I have included this section so the professor may assign a written composition to complement the topic presented and discussed through the literary works. This section appears at the end of the unit in order to reinforce understanding of material presented throughout the entire unit through writing.

- *Apéndices* – Appendixes. At the end of the book the student can find an appendix explaining in general terms and briefly the use of some grammatical structures that the student has already studied. There will be a reference in the chapter to the appendix that covers that particular grammatical point.