

Prologue

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In his *Aristotelis libros: De sensu et sensato de memoria et reminiscentia*, Thomas Aquinas writes that “[i]f we wish to remember intelligible notions more easily, we should link them with some kind of mental image. Mankind is unable to understand without images.” This quote helps modern readers understand the multimedia nature of Spanish medieval literature in which the materiality of a manuscript, the images, the codex, the gloss, and the marginalia shape the way in which readers interact with a text’s meaning and message. These medieval modes of reading and writing texts shaped the stories and fables in the present volume of *Cuaderna Vía*. Stories in medieval Iberian literature oftentimes critically engage with the use of animal imagery as a means to instruct and to critique society.

In my Animals and Monstrosity in Medieval Literature course, students were tasked with creating an original story catered to the *amigachos de pluma* (pen pals) at a local middle school with whom they corresponded throughout the term. Akin to the medieval texts we studied, each fable had a visual component, a clear storyline, a creative approach, and a moral. For this assignment, I asked students to answer the question, “What do I wish I would have known when I was in seventh grade?” The students’ stories were personalized and each student kept in mind the content of the middle school students’ letters they received throughout the semester. Through their engagement with learning language and culture in contexts, the students featured in this volume showed the ways how language learning is not just as a task, but a means through which to connect to, and learn from, other cultures and other people in the community.

Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to connect with middle school North Texas community. You will also be honing these practical, life-enhancing skills: writing, reading and editing in Spanish, teamwork, leadership, project management, mentorship, and creative expression.

Instructions for the Project

Throughout the semester, you will be writing to middle school students at Sanger Elementary who are in beginning Spanish classes. Some of these students are frustrated with Spanish and cannot really see the point of it, others are excited to be learning a new language and culture. With this in mind, our goal is

to communicate effectively in Spanish about various themes, including family, school, pastimes, movies, music, and culture in order to enhance their experience of studying Spanish language and culture. You will also teach them about your university experiences.

At the end of the course, you will incorporate the knowledge you gain from the letters, along with knowledge you gain from studying medieval animal fables, to write a fable of your own, catered to your student. The fable should follow one of the many formats for fables we will see throughout the course, and include images (to help with memory and comprehension), a clear storyline, and a moral. The moral should answer the question: What do I wish I knew in 7th grade? It should be specifically catered to your pen pal.