

## Using the Standards in the Sonrisas Spanish Curriculum

While not a methodology per se, the national Standards for Foreign Language Learning represent an important guide for the foreign language teacher. These standards were first published in 1996 in the document, “Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century.” The standards were developed out of a collaboration among the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and numerous other national associations of foreign language teaching. The document they produced is thorough, well-written, and extremely relevant to all foreign language teaching. The following is the statement of philosophy from the standards document:

*Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from no-English-speaking backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language.*

*Supporting this vision are three assumptions about language and culture, learner of language and culture, and language and culture education:*

*Competence in more than one language and culture enables people to*

- *communicate with other people in other cultures in a variety of settings,*
- *look beyond their customary borders,*
- *develop insight into their own language and culture,*
- *act with greater awareness of self, of other cultures, and their own relationship to those cultures,*
- *gain direct access to additional bodies of knowledge, and*
- *participate more fully in the global community and marketplace.*

*All students can be successful language and culture learners, and they*

- *must have access to language and culture study that is integrated into the entire school experience,*
- *benefit from the development and maintenance of proficiency in more than one language,*
- *learn in a variety of ways and settings, and*
- *acquire proficiency at varied rates.*

*Language and culture education is part of the core curriculum, and it*

- *is tied to program models that incorporate effective strategies, assessment procedures, and technologies,*
- *reflects evolving standards at the national, state, and local levels, and*
- *develops and enhances basic communication skills and higher order thinking skills.<sup>21</sup>*

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning have guided us through the development of the Sonrisas Spanish Curriculum. **So you can see at a glance the standards you are addressing in each lesson, we have listed the relevant standards after each step on each Lesson Procedure page.** The following section lists the standards and explains how we have addressed them throughout the curriculum.

## Communication

### Communicate in Languages Other than English

**Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.** This standard is the primary goal of the Sonrisas Spanish Curriculum. Circle Time is dedicated to this goal. Keeping this standard in mind for these activities brings focus to Circle Time.

**Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.** This standard is addressed primarily during Circle Time and Story Time. The curriculum's carefully selected books offer students an opportunity to read and listen to the written word. Books are important because each author provides a voice distinct from the teacher's voice. As students familiarize themselves with a variety of voices, their ability to understand Spanish in different contexts increases. Books also provide diverse vocabulary content and cultural perspectives.

**Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.** Through games, poems, songs, drama, and art projects, students gain the opportunity to share their language skills with their peers, teachers, and parents.

## Cultures

### Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Spanish is much like English in that it is spoken in many countries throughout the world. Each country or region lends its culture to the language. For example, the distinct geographies, histories, economies, and ethnicities make Spanish in Mexico distinct from Spanish in Argentina or Spain. When we raise our awareness of the distinct cultures that speak Spanish, we gain insight into the interconnectedness of different countries and their people. Shared customs can be traced back to similar roots. Unique customs in countries can be traced back to their unique geography, history, or ethnicities.

**Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.** When we integrate language learning with cultural studies that provide insight into the history, the music, the stories, the festivals, and other customs of a culture, students begin to speak the language in an authentic context. Often students identify very deeply with other cultures. This childhood experience often launches them on a path of a lifelong interest in Spanish-speaking cultures.

**Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.** The economic and cultural products of a culture reflect its geography, natural resources, and history. By comparing the products of a Spanish-speaking culture to our own, we not only gain insight into another culture, but we deepen our understanding of ourselves. Often these products help us identify with the culture being studied, and again, this gives the language an authentic context. In this curriculum, students identify with Spanish-speaking cultures by producing art that reflects the techniques or the style of the art created in those cultures.

## Connections

### Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

**Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of the other disciplines through foreign language.** Singing, dancing, reading, performing, communicating, cooperating, drawing, creating, writing—we encourage and develop these skills in every lesson. In addition, math, history, science, and geography are a part of many of the lessons in this curriculum.

**Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.** From the exquisitely beautiful musical traditions of Cuba that combine the Latin and African influences on the island, to the rich and diverse flora and fauna of Costa Rica, to the meaningful traditions of *las Posadas* and *el Día de los Muertos*, this curriculum offers distinctive viewpoints from distinctive cultures. Through students' tendency to identify with these distinct cultural viewpoints, they learn to relate to the people of these cultures as fellow human beings.

## Comparisons

### Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

**Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.** Although Spanish and English descend from two different root languages, there are an amazing number of similarities. People living in the southwestern part of the United States are particularly accustomed to the integration of Spanish into English through the names of towns, rivers, mountain ranges, people, and foods. The study of cognates, of the Spanish alphabet, and of contextually integrated grammar provides incredible insight into both English and Spanish. When we look at the similarities and differences of the two languages, we enrich our knowledge of both languages. We do feel strongly, however, that a grammar-based approach to language for young students is counter-productive. By hearing Spanish spoken correctly, young children can integrate Spanish grammar and use it properly without “officially” learning it.

**Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.** When students look at our own country's history and customs surrounding Independence Day, and compare and contrast this tradition to *el Dieciséis*, they have a context for understanding *el Dieciséis*. When they compare our Halloween customs to Mexico's *el Día de los Muertos*, the Mexican tradition comes alive. When they look at the seasonal patterns and geography of Argentina as our mirror in the southern hemisphere, they deepen their understanding of Argentina. When we compare any cultural practice or tradition to the day-to-day lives of our students, we bring that culture into sharper focus.

## Communities

### **Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World**

**Standards 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.** When students recognize that the language they are learning in Spanish class has practical applications outside of the classroom and they begin to apply this knowledge, we have succeeded as language teachers. This can take many forms: using Spanish to interact with Spanish speakers in restaurants, bakeries, hotels, and other businesses; making friends at school with students who have recently immigrated from Spanish-speaking countries; and participating in community cultural activities. In our own community we encourage our students to participate in cultural events that celebrate the Spanish language and culture, such as *el Cinco de Mayo*, *las Posadas*, and the Spanish Fiesta; these are three cultural festivals that have played an integral role in the Hispanic culture of our region.

**Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.** This is a goal we work towards in every aspect of our class. The simplest and most effective way to encourage lifelong learning is to make Spanish class fun. When Spanish class elicits positive connotations, students will be more likely to continue their study of the language throughout high school and college or to spend time studying in a Spanish-speaking country. By giving children a strong foundation in the language, they are more likely to rise to the top of their language classes in high school and college. That experience of success can encourage them to continue their study of Spanish, and their appreciation for Spanish-speaking cultures, throughout their lives.