



## **Lesson Plan for *Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood* by Richard Rodriguez By Becs Richert**

**Course** | English Language Arts 9–12

**Context** | This lesson is designed to be used in a unit on immigrant experiences or integration of peoples, but it can easily be adapted for general discussions on characterization and character changes in a story.

**Length** | This lesson is designed for three 50-minute class periods. Extension activities are included at the end of the lesson. Any of these discussion questions and/or handouts may be used in a shorter lesson according to teacher discretion.

**Learning Objectives** | Students will be able to:

- Identify an author’s argument and how he supports it.
- Analyze character changes, discussing in general terms and with reference to specific details in the text.
- Infer an author’s characterization of a subject from what he says about it.
- Draw conclusions about the significance of various moments with regards to greater themes in a story.
- Make an argument using ideas gleaned from the text.

**Common Core State Standards Addressed** | Reading: Literature, Grades 9–10

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1](#) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2](#) Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3](#) Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Reading: Literature, Grades 11–12

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2](#) Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3](#) Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

**Materials Included** | Each student should have a copy of Richard Rodriguez’s “Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood,” the Spanish/English Activity, the Quote Significance Activity, and the Phases Chart. If students are unfamiliar with the concept of integration, you may give them the Integration Definition Handout.

**Teacher Background Information** | The son of Mexican immigrants, Richard Rodriguez was born in the United States and grew up in a mixed-race neighborhood in Sacramento, California. In this opening chapter of his autobiography, *Hunger for Memory*, Rodriguez describes the tensions of navigating the Spanish-speaking world of his home life and the English-speaking world of school and public identity. Not a straightforward, chronological story of his childhood, Rodriguez describes what he gains and loses as he moves between these two realms of language. The story offers some personal insight into the role of language in integration: Rodriguez’s parents, in some ways, remain on the margins of society, not because they cannot function in English, but because they lack the comfort in English to claim a public identity. At the same time, the family’s home identity consists of an embrace of linguistic isolation. But identity becomes a matter of distress to Rodriguez as he claims his English-speaking public identity only to find that his connections with his family and his culture are strained. Is this inevitable? Is it permanent? Does this problem change our evaluation of his Rodriguez’s argument against bilingual education? And what distinction is Rodriguez drawing between sounds and words?

**Student Preparation** | Students should read and annotate the text before the lesson. The teacher might direct students to mark any of the following as part of his/her annotations:

- changes the author undergoes;
- general conclusions that can be made about the author’s attitude toward English and Spanish; and
- the author’s ultimate argument against bilingual education.

## Class Activities

**Day 1:**

*Note: Prior to meeting, students should have read and annotated the text. Students should be familiar with a basic definition of integration. (If not discussed in previous lessons, you may use the Integration Definition Handout.)*

**Warm-Up** (15 minutes) | Allowing them to work in small groups, direct students to complete the Spanish/English Activity. The purpose here is two-fold: students who have not read will get exposure to hinge moments in the text, and students who have done the reading will revisit those moments in preparation for discussion. (*Teacher note: I often call the activity a reading quiz and assign an “all or nothing” grade; this encourages students to take a closer look at the text.*)

**Discussion** (15 minutes) | Introduce students to the objectives and essential questions of the story:

- What is the role of language in integration?
- How do language and a change in language affect family dynamics and one’s sense of belonging to a culture?

Calling on students at random, have students explain each quotation and what language the author is describing. As you review the answers, lead students in a discussion of the following:

- What are the author’s overall feelings and associations with English and Spanish? (*You might make a list on the board.*)
- Why is it telling that his family calls “the others” by the term “*los americanos*”?
- Why is it significant that his siblings don’t talk about school when they get home each day?

**Integration Review** (15 minutes) | Review the Integration Definition Handout. You might have students brainstorm different ways in which people are or are not integrated in American society, specifically thinking about obstacles that must be overcome before people can be integrated. Then ask students to go back over the text with a partner and mark places in which the author suggests that his family may not be fully integrated. Also have them mark areas in which the author suggests his family *is* integrated.

As a whole class, discuss the following:

- In what ways is the author’s family integrated? In what ways are they not fully integrated?
- What role does language seem to play in integration?

**Exit Slip** (5 minutes) | Students should answer the following question on a sheet of paper: Describe what Richard Rodriguez means by calling his family “foreigners.” (*If you’d like to give*

*your students more direction in their thinking, ask them to use the word “public” in their answers.)* Collect their answers to review during the next class period.

## **Day 2:**

**Warm-Up** (20 minutes) | Allowing them to work in small groups, direct students to complete the Quote Significance Activity. Like that of the previous day, this activity will prepare students who did not read to participate in class and allow students who did read to revisit hinge moments of the text in greater detail. This activity also directs students to think about areas of the text they might use in their Phases Charts. Push students to articulate the significance in their own words and to look closely at context before they consider the activity complete. The teacher may check for annotations at this time.

**Discussion** (20 minutes) | Calling on students at random, have students explain each quotation and its significance. Many of the quotations require sophisticated inferences, and students may need help explaining the significance of each event in their own words and why the author feels as he does. As you review the answers, you might discuss the following additional questions:

- Why is Rodriguez upset when his parents speak to him in English?
- Why has Rodriguez described his family as “foreigners”, and how has his understanding changed in this second part of the text?

**Phase Chart Work** (7 minutes) | Introduce the Phases Chart to students. Complete the first box together, and emphasize that students should be making generalizations about the different phases the author and his family undergo as they learn English (students should not be quoting the text in the top boxes). Have students work with a partner to complete the Phases Chart, which will be reviewed during the next class period.

**Warm Down** (3 minutes) | Allow students to share a box with a student from a different partner set. Direct students to finish the Phases Charts for homework.

## **Day 3:**

**Warm-Up** (5 minutes) | In a paragraph, have students answer the following: What does the author gain and what does he lose when he begins to achieve proficiency in English? While students write, briefly check their Phases Charts for completion and overall accuracy.

**Phase Chart Review** (20 minutes) | Calling on students at random, fill out a Phase Chart together on the board, asking students to defend their answers and describe the link between their supporting details and generalizations. While wording and interpretation may vary, the class might arrive at the following general phases:

1. His family begins to practice English, increasing a sense of family belonging in their sense of isolation.

2. The author feels that he is being pushed out of the world of Spanish.
3. The author realizes that he has a right to a public identity.
4. The author feels that he is losing his Mexican identity.
5. The author realizes that language is not what creates intimacy.

**Discussion** (20 minutes) | As a class, discuss any or all of the following questions. Direct students to hinge moments in the text as necessary, and encourage students to support their ideas with specific reference to the text.

- What does the author gain and what does he lose when he begins to achieve proficiency in English?
- Does he lose his intimacy and belonging when he speaks another language? Does he betray his culture? Does he gain a new identity?
- Does one have to lose one's belonging to a culture when one integrates?
- What is the author's argument against bilingual education? Do you agree with him?
- Discuss to what degree members of his family have achieved integration and why you think so.

Hinge Moments:

- Dad's "shyness"
- Private loss and public gain
- The reactions of his relatives—"pocho"
- His gradual realization about intimacy
- Argument against bilingual education

**Exit Slip** (5 minutes) | Have students answer the following in a brief paragraph: Using ideas from the story as part of your answer, what is the role of language in integration?

### **Alternate/Extension Activities**

1. Prove or refute the following claim, using support from the text: The author believes he has lost his connection to his family as he has adopted English.
2. Interview someone who had to learn English after going to school. Ask about his/her experiences and how it affected family life.
3. Find several articles on the pros/cons of bilingual education. Write a short essay in which you compare these ideas to the argument outlined in Rodriguez's text.
4. Write a short argumentative essay in which you discuss whether someone can truly belong to a culture if he/she does not comfortably speak the language.

**About the Author** | *Becs Richert is an English teacher at UNO Garcia Charter High School in Chicago, Illinois.*