

# Lesson Plan: Vengar la muerte: Vengeance and the Spanish Civil War Spanish

## Lesson Plan

Title	Vengar la muerte: Vengeance and the Spanish Civil War
Subject	Spanish
Language level	IV / V / AP (Intermediate High / Advanced Low / Advanced Mid)
World Language Standards	This lesson will certainly use all communication standards (1.1, 1.2 and 1.3), both culture standards (2.1 and 2.2) and both connections standards (3.1 and 3.2). Depending on how the discussion is approached, and whether it continues outside of the classroom, it may also meet the Comparisons and Communities standards.
Keywords	C M Hardt, <i>Muerte en El Valle (Death in El Valle)</i> , Antonio Buero Vallejo, <i>El tragaluz</i> , vengeance killing
Essential questions	Is vengeance inevitable? How does one find the peace to reconcile with immense pain? How do we keep the past from paralyzing or poisoning us?
Synopsis	Students will read fragments of Antonio Buero Vallejo's <i>El tragaluz</i> and view scenes from C M Hardt's <i>Muerte en el Valle</i> in order to compare the two works, question the motives of the characters/people involved, and to evaluate the morality of their behavior.
Standard Alignment(s) used	
Recommended Teacher Background	The teacher will need to have read all of Buero Vallejo's <i>El tragaluz</i> and perhaps watched all of <i>Muerte en el Valle</i> in order to make judicious use of these source materials in class.
Connection to other disciplines	This lesson offers connections to social studies (even current events, where vengeance is often a motive), literature, philosophy and ethics.
Number of class periods	

## Standards

Objectives	Standards addressed
Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9
Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

## Primary Sources

- C M Hardt's *Muerte en El Valle*
- An edited version of *El tragaluz* with footnotes for language learners is available [online](#).

## Procedures

### Pre-Assessment, Activation of Prior Knowledge:

This lesson deals with how Spain moved on after its civil war. Students can complete this lesson without knowing specific details about the war; however, the more they know, the richer their experience of this lesson. Language in the reading and in the film clips is best tackled by having students use footnotes, context clues, reading/listening for the gist and dictionaries when absolutely necessary. If studying 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish literature and culture, this lesson can also incorporate ideas about perspectivism present in Cubism.

### Lesson Activities:

#### 1. Lead-In/Hook:

Show students this [clip](#). It was generated by a Puerto Rican high school student as a project. It shows his remake of the final scene of *El tragaluz*. Show the clip at least two or three times to aid student comprehension. The student greatly simplifies the dialogue of the scene, using repetitive language that students will be able to grasp. Those students less familiar with Puerto Rican accents will have more trouble understanding the scene. Ask them what they comprehended from what they just saw.

## 2. Step by Step:

1. **Background Knowledge** – Bring students up to date with some of the principal ideas of the play: the relationship between the two brothers and what each symbolizes; how Elvirita died (You may want to read them Mario’s explanation from the top of p. 17. See Materials, below, for the version to which these page numbers refer.); how the father’s ‘madness’ manifests itself; who the investigators (Él and Ella) are.
2. **Optional 1<sup>st</sup> Segment of *El tragaluz*** – For a longer and more thorough lesson, you may want to have students read the section of the play from Mario’s longest line on p. 22 (beginning with “Quizá no”) until Mario’s last line before El Padre intervenes on p. 24. Then have students answer the following questions: ¿Cuál es la posición de los dos hermanos frente al refrán «devora antes de que te devoren»? ¿Y a la dicotomía activo/contemplativo? ¿Cómo puede Mario decir que «la pregunta» es «tremenda»? ¿Qué es «la investigación»? ¿Cómo entra el perspectivismo (si conocen el término, el uso de múltiples perspectivas, si no) en el drama?
3. **Investigator Scene from *El tragaluz*** – You should next have students read a fragment from Él’s first line on p. 37 to the silence after Ella’s last line. Discuss with them themes like: how one should best live, the impossibility/the madness for knowing everything/all sides of an issue, «la pregunta», «la investigación», and finally, the true answer to «la pregunta», which is compassion. Students, especially at the high school level, will find the text comprehensible at its most literal level, but will need significant discussion to grasp what it means on a more fundamental level. Help them through that discussion with paired and group work.
4. **Vengeful Murder Scene of *El tragaluz*** – Return students to the video scene that began the lesson, perhaps watching it again, and then read Buero Vallejo’s original, which begins on the top of page 44 and ends with the first full stage direction on page 45. You may even wish to have students act the scene out with each other to see the unabridged text alongside the actions.
5. ***Muerte en El Valle*** – Watch the first 3’10” of *Muerte en El Valle*, so that students understand what the filmmaker is setting out to do. Watch the scenes from *Muerte en El Valle* that have C M Hardt trying to confront the man who, she discovers, killed her grandfather (35’40” – 39’09”, 47’56” – 48’39”) and the scenes where she is confronted by her uncle, who doesn’t want to know what happened to his father because then he would have to take revenge (23’15” – 24’20” and 38’45” – 40’10”). (If time is scarce, you might only show the scenes with the uncle.) You may need to show the scenes more than once, or use subtitles to aid comprehension.
6. **Comparisons** – Ask the students to draw comparisons between what is happening in the film and what happened in the play. Guide students to see that the uncle’s hesitance to needing to avenge the man who executed his grandfather is the same feeling that El Padre harbors throughout *El tragaluz*. Show the students that *El tragaluz* carries the symbolism a level deeper by having one family divided against itself, like a nation in civil war. Explore other themes they notice. Most importantly, get the students to realize that C M Hardt is playing the role of the investigator. **Second Investigator Scene from *El tragaluz*** – After they do so, and with enough other debate satisfied, have the students read the appearance that Él and Ella make immediately following the last scene they read. (Page 45, ending with “el experimento ha fracasado”.) Ask them how the distant future has judged the actions of Civil War Spain. Ask them to see how Antonio Buero Vallejo saw in 1967, still under Franco, the steps that Spain would need to take to reconcile itself with its past. Conclude the discussion with the debate below. You may want to give the students time to prepare.

### 3. Closure:

Involve the students in a debate about what motivated the main characters in *El tragaluz* – El Padre, Mario, Vicente, Él and Ella – and the principal players in *Muerte en El Valle* – C M Hardt, her uncle, the assassin –. You may also want to ask if each of these characters could or should have acted differently, and if so, how.

#### **Differentiation:**

This lesson will involve a very strong command of Spanish. A teacher who wants to expose his or her students to Spanish literature, history and film, yet does not have students at such a high level, may still teach the lesson with profit by scaffolding it for the students. For example, the video could be viewed several times, with pauses to clarify meaning, or English subtitles or audio if absolutely necessary. Students could use class time to prepare what they want to say in the final debate, having the teacher and more able students assist each other to express themselves in Spanish. English may also be used as a last resort.

#### **Post-Assessment**

Students can be graded on their participation in the debate, or be asked to generate a written work in response to or as an extension of class discussions.