

“La Catrina” vocabulary proves more treacherous than Don Silvestre

By Cain Azar

Many Spanish speaking students have been introduced to a series of educational videos entitled *La Catrina*. The sequel, *La Catrina: El Ultimo Secreto*, although less publicized, still causes commotion in the hallways with frustration. Although not as low on the totem pole as *Pobre Ana*, many students can agree that *La Catrina* does not live up to other teaching methods.

The video series is split into several mini-chapters, with each new chapter advancing the plot. The acting in these videos, for starters, falls under par. Reminiscent of *Saturday Night Live* gone Spanish, the acting proves both comical and unrealistic. Regardless, the story is a bit too confusing for a student struggling to grasp the Spanish language. Faced with a large list of unfamiliar vocabulary, each student is expected to comprehend the storyline by merely listening and piecing together the movie’s dialogue. Happening quickly and with little explanation, the events unfold and leave the student

wondering what was occurring. It appeared as if the plot was too complex for itself. There were too many characters, each with a motive that differed from one another. To this day, Paco probably continues to remain a mystery to the majority of the Spanish classes’ students. In addition, many students are still being thrown for a loop, attempting to understand the difference between Doña Josefa and La Catrina, simply forgetting that they are the same person. Whatever the misunderstanding, the idea of *La Catrina* appears better on paper.

Having been used as a teaching tool for years, the series has proven successful in

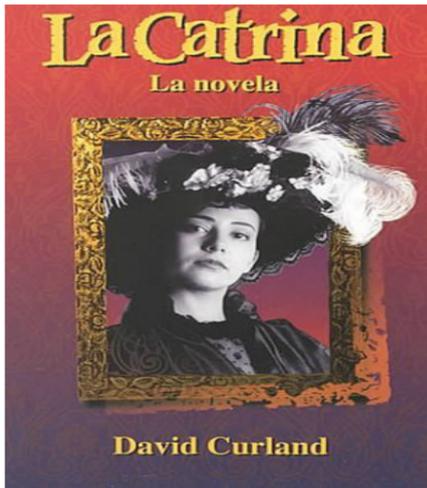


Photo courtesy of Jacketflap.com

La Catrina is a series of videos that many Spanish classes incorporate.

maintaining its position embedded within the school’s foreign language curriculum. The series may have taught Spanish more successfully if more time was spent on the chapter reviews following each video. The brief reviews given, which are found completely in Spanish, attempt to quickly rehash the video’s plot using the same vocabulary as in the chapter. This proves frustrating, for repeating the same thing twice does not necessarily help comprehension.

The final and largest flaw is the physical reading of the chapter book. The text contains many unfamiliar verbs and un-reviewed vocabulary words. Students may find themselves struggling to comprehend an entire page. This causes students to re-read the same sentence

multiple times, skip sections or, the most popular solution, look at the pictures. The students are failing to grasp the concept expressed. The Spanish teachers prepare each student well for the next level. Each portion of the language is well taught and thoroughly reviewed. More time could be spent skipping over the *La Catrina* series and used to explore a new concept within the Spanish language.

To conclude, the *La Catrina* series is incapable of advancing a student’s Spanish knowledge. By taking itself too seriously, holding onto a complex plot and introducing confusing vocabulary, the teaching tool needs revision. Filled with wedding mimes, illegal artifacts and a weird guy with a unibrow at the library, *La Catrina* evolves into a tool that is merely confusing and strange. The series did score brownie points, however, during the (spoiler alert) shocking scene of the murder of Dona Josefa in *La Catrina: El Ultimo Secreto*. That was too realistic. Regardless, the confusing script paired with numerous dialect troubles cripples students down a difficult path in Spanish.

College causes stress for all

By Michelle Moore

High School is a time to prepare for college. Through all of seems as though the pressure of college admissions is stressing out students earlier than is normal. Activities that used to be common for students such as going to the movies and spending time with friends are becoming less common.

Instead, life for high school students is filled with activities to impress admission representatives. Students are taking harder classes in school not because they want a challenge but because they want to be ahead of their classmates. These classes are causing hours of homework and studying every night.

Researching colleges seem like a normal

task for high school students. However, the normal “waiting for junior year to research” does not apply anymore. Today’s students have already been looking at colleges by the freshman year of high school. Instead of worrying about who to hang out with over the weekend, students are more preoccupied with where they are going to college and if they will get into their top choice. This dangerous and unhealthy habit can even reach younger brothers and sisters, causing them to stress over college as well.

SAT’s are one of the most worrying things changing a student’s life. It used to be normal for a student to study for the SAT, take the test once and be satisfied. Now, with high school students striving for perfect scores to impress universities, times have indeed changed. Students and their parents are spending money on prep courses which can cost several hundred dollars. Time is eaten up studying for these tests and students are anxious to take the tests until their scores are as close as they can get to perfect. This is causing students to become increasingly stressed out and fatigued.

Today’s teens realize that colleges care about more than just grades. They know that colleges want their students to have jobs and extra-curricular activities, such as volunteer work and sports. Many students are involved in more than three activities and try to obtain leadership positions in most of them. Put community service and volunteer work, such as tutoring, on top of this, and it causes a lot

of anxiety. All of these activities can exhaust students and eventually cause them to crash.

All of this stress from college admissions can be dangerous to a student’s health. Students lose sleep from not having enough time in the day which makes them more irritable. After losing a lot of sleep, it becomes harder

for them to concentrate in class and the student’s grades drop as a result of this. They may also become physically and mentally ill from the stress. This can even lead to hospitalization. This is all too much for a teenager, or anyone in fact, and should be prevented.

To put a stop to this stress and illness, less emphasis should be put on college and grades. Colleges should also try making the admissions process easier and less stressful on prospective students. The admission representatives could be guiding the students in the admission process step by step. This would all make the process of applying to college much easier.

Between school, work and extra-curricular activities life for a high school student can be tough. Students are worried about getting into their top college, so they do everything they can to look the best to colleges. However, college admission officers should try to stop this because it is causing great levels of stress in students. There are many ways colleges and universities could help lessen the admission stress, and these options should definitely be explored.



Photo by Michelle Moore
The SAT’s are both necessary and stressful.

Healthcare must be reformed

By Aaron Spikol

By every measure imaginable, from the overall level of health to the cost of care, the American healthcare system is broken. No single institution or group involved with the healthcare system can be held fully responsible. It is a systemic failure. The problem of rising healthcare costs with little gain in overall health has been going on for years and will continue to the point where it begins to bankrupt the nation. As expenditures on healthcare make up 17.6% of our gross national product, it is a problem that only the government has the capability to resolve. President Barack Obama has made clear, especially in his speech before congress, what steps must be taken to resolve the impending crisis. .

Insurance companies must be regulated. As is, insurance companies are allowed to exploit their customers, dropping their coverage for pre-existing conditions and for minor loopholes. The presidents and the CEOs of these companies have made it clear that they will continue these practices so long as they are allowable. New legislation will make it impossible for insurance companies to continue such unfair business practices.

Health care is the national deficit crisis. Health care expenditures are the fastest growing contributor to the national deficit. If the government cannot successfully implement reform to curtail cost and to increase efficiency, the deficit will continue to grow until it reaches an unsustainable level. Money must be spent on reforms now in order to prevent rising costs in the future. The longer this country waits the less effect reform will have.

Health care is rationed right now. It needs to be understood that healthcare in this country is rationed by a very simple method: income. The wealthy who are insured receive good health care, the poor and uninsured do not. No other modern western country does this. The paradox of the current system is that those who are most unable to afford healthcare, the poor who are unable to afford insurance, pay the most for the little care they do receive. Insurance companies, because of their great size, pay enormously inflated prices for their customers’ medical care, prices that hospitals then expect the uninsured to pay themselves.

Fortunately, most of the country has health insurance and no legislation will change that. What is left to worry about is the 10-15% of the population who does not. President Obama has called for the creation of a government sponsored insurance exchange, whereby the currently uninsured would band together into a single block in order to create the leverage necessary to negotiate with insurance companies for affordable coverage. This drives prices down not just for themselves but for the country as a whole. Insurance companies need to be exposed to market forces so that the cost of healthcare will lower overall.

If there are still people who refuse to purchase insurance or are unable to do so, they must be either forced to purchase it or have it given to them. Otherwise they will be incentivized to neglect their own medical needs to the point where they are then unable to do so. This will cause them to come into an emergency room for treatment whose cost will simply be passed onto everyone else. It is cheaper to pay for the prevention of their medical problems than to pay for their catastrophic results. To this end the government must provide a public option, mandating it as the base minimum of health care. In all likelihood it would only appeal to 5% of the population or less. There are two main arguments though that stem from this proposal; namely that the US government would be able to provide healthcare so well that all insurance companies would be forced out of business. These contrary arguments are easily refutable. First of all, it seems highly circumspect that the government would ever be competitive enough to put anybody out of business, much less major insurance companies. As for the opposite side of the argument, the government would not be so inept as to be unable to provide any form of coverage. In fact, the government is already providing insurance to millions of people through Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Affairs department. If these programs were so horrible, nobody would take advantage of them.

While there are other points to be made, the four points above cover the most important and the most controversial proposals. The most compelling argument though is the simplest one: doing anything is better than doing nothing. The system in place currently is so bad it would be almost impossible to make things worse.