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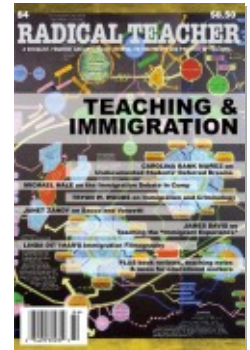
Raising Victor Vargas in an Urban High School Classroom

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person narratives and some are told to a third party).

But *Underground Undergrads'* appeal transcends its use value. Everybody should read this book: students, educators, legislators, commentators. Anyone who has ever called the undocumented lazy or criminal, or felt that the immigrant's struggle was irrelevant to their own, will be hard-pressed to defend those claims against these testimonies of hope and perseverance.

Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out is in *paperback* for \$10 and available only from CLRE at <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/books/underground.html>.

Works Cited

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Teaching Notes

Raising Victor Vargas in an Urban High School Classroom

By Philip Cartelli

The criticisms that have been leveled at the 2002 film *Raising Victor Vargas* are mainly fair, that is to say logical, when they note that the subject matter of working-class Dominican families in New York City's Lower East Side is expertly manipulated by the director, Peter Solett, a white middle-class NYU graduate. The

critics also generally agree that the film is quite good and I believe it is a relevant teaching tool in different settings.

I used *Raising Victor Vargas* as part of my curriculum at an after school enrichment program at a family-oriented homeless shelter in the South Bronx last fall. The film has also been used to great success by a colleague of mine at a Manhattan public high school.

What initially caught the attention of my high school students—and kept them from talking or text-messaging throughout the film's 90-minute duration—was the language and appearance of the people on screen: Latino/a men and women in an urban setting (the common New York location meant little to many of them, who had rarely left their borough) talking and acting like them. Since these teenagers had rarely viewed dramatized versions of their lives that bore any resemblance to both harsh *and* pleasant realities, I would argue that *Victor Vargas* provided from the opening a recognizable context within which they felt comfortable discussing and criticizing its content.

Over the period of no more than a week, the film's protagonist Victor, along with his surprisingly poetic sidekick Harold, tramps around the Lower East Side from local swimming pools to public housing yards to the tenement he shares with his younger siblings and domineering yet sentimental grandmother, all of whom represented real-life family members and acquaintances for my students, the majority of whom had immigrant parents. The central narrative focuses on Victor's involvement with another teenager, Julie, who initially enters into a relationship with Victor to defend herself from frequent and unwanted advances from other—older—neighborhood men. When Victor

appears hurt upon learning of the more functional and less romantic nature of her relationship needs, both Julie and we are exposed to a side of Victor distinct from his overbearingly macho performances during their first few interactions.

This larger context of gender relations provided most of the topics for spontaneous classroom discussion following the film with my female students generally banding together to criticize what they saw as typically chauvinist courtship methods and the several young men attempting to explain rather than defend similar behavior. The film turned out to be a powerful means for many of my female students to express their opinions on what they consider to be an ever present practice, while the entire class related to some of Victor's other problems, including his relationship with his siblings and with his grandmother, who struggles with her dual needs to understand and control the growing young man in her care. Perhaps one of the film's most important themes, one that is rarely articulated or discussed in a classroom setting, is the simultaneous senses of acceptance and loneliness experienced by members of a tight-knit urban minority community.

Teaching the Body in Composition Class

By Kim Socha

In an effort to begin teaching my own interests in a recent freshman composition class at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, I decided to use issues of embodiment as a catalyst for exploring rhetoric and composition. Gregory T. Lyons's *Body and Culture*, a Pearson Longman reader that considers the body

as a "cultural matrix" for exploring societal issues, has served as a helpful accompaniment to a variety of successful classroom exercises and activities. For example, I began our semester by having my students "read" the bodies of John McCain and Barack Obama, thereby allowing them to form their initial definitions of body politics. My students identified the ways in which, along with their political ideologies, McCain and Obama were also being critiqued for their color, age, height, nationality, and overall aesthetic appeal.

Students become more engaged in their work when it involves experience, as opposed to mere theory. Therefore, as an accessory to Lyon's chapter on "Body Modification," I used a guest speaker who is pierced, tattooed, and otherwise modified. After providing an historical and multicultural overview of body modification rituals, the speaker showed off his own marked body. Rather than just hypothesize on the subculture of modification, students were given a real body to investigate *and* interrogate. They started out hesitantly, but soon developed the courage to ask questions such as, "Your goal is to be tattooed head to toe? That's crazy! How will you get a job? What will your children think?" My use of a speaker who was unafraid to put his body on display helped emphasize difference and how differences are accepted or rejected by so-called "normal" society.

Theodore Dalrymple's "Marks of Shame: Tattoos and What to Do About Them," a scathing critique of the tattooed, is an example of society's rejection of difference. His essay is filled with some of the worst argumentative strategies: lack of research in support of statistical contentions, personal attacks on whole groups of people, and a surfeit of unsupported