



***Big and Small: Bodily Difference and Disability in the Work of Velázquez and Botero***

by Matthew Kelly, 2013 CTI Fellow  
Independence High School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:  
High School Spanish III  
High School Spanish IV

**Keywords:** Art History, Disability in Art, Diego Velázquez, Fernando Botero, Dwarfism, Obesity

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

**Synopsis:** This unit addresses bodily differences across languages and cultures through the lens of art history. Through the work of Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) and contemporary Colombian painter Fernando Botero (born 1932) we will leverage the power of portrayals of unique and differentiated bodies—bodies that conform neither to statistical norms nor an artistic ideal—to engage students with art, language, culture and history. In doing so, we will meet curricular objectives for studying art history and culture in the context of the World Languages classroom. We will also explore the cultural context and construction of bodily differences and disability. We will use the target language, Spanish, to address questions relevant across the curriculum: when does bodily difference constitute disability? What defines a bodily difference as a disability—physical function or social definition? How are bodily differences construed differently across cultures? Finally, how can we make art, along with World Languages, something students use, as opposed to something students merely study?

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 70 students in High School Spanish III.*

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## **Big and Small: Bodily Difference and Disability in the Work of Velázquez and Botero**

*Matthew Kelly*

### **Difference Captivates: The Power of Extraordinary Bodies**

I have been exposed to so many images of expensively clad men posed with nude or scantily clad women since my earliest childhood that very few stick in my mind. Think of James Bond movie posters, advertisements and photo spreads. Jo Weldon calls this the Harem Trope, an expression of male power.<sup>1</sup> The trope raised eyebrows when it raised its head in Edouard Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* in 1863, but it's hardly groundbreaking now.<sup>2</sup> Except, that is, for one picture from GQ magazine, December 2011. A man in an expensive suit sits in an expensive chair with a svelte nude draped across his lap.<sup>3</sup> The man doesn't smile. He frowns a little, glowering a bit, not looking at the woman, but at the camera. The image is well composed and well lit—as are countless other images of the same trope. What makes this image mesmerizing, unforgettable, is that the man is actor Peter Dinklage, and Peter Dinklage, a man with achondroplastic dwarfism, is four feet five inches tall. Difference captivates.

The impulse to stare at the novel or unfamiliar is an involuntary physiological urge; the act of staring provokes a physiological response, a rush of dopamine in the brain.<sup>4</sup> Your brain always likes novelty, as neuroscientist Gregory Berns says, even when you don't.<sup>5</sup> Staring is something we try to train children not to do. In this case, the pull of novel bodies is something we can use to draw students into the exploration of language, art and culture.

Another portrait of a dwarf: in this one, to me, he looks mad as hell. Sebastián de Morra clearly has something on his mind. It's in the dark, expressive eyes, and in the eyebrows: he glowers; he smolders. In truth, it's hard to tell if he's melancholy, pensive, or angry. He may merely be annoyed at having to sit so long for Diego Velázquez' portrait, *Buñón Don Sebastián de Morra* (*The Jester Don Sebastián de Morra*) painted around 1644 for his and Don Sebastian's mutual patron, King Philip IV of Spain.<sup>6</sup> Don Sebastián is a man with achondroplastic dwarfism, giving him a somewhat larger than average head, an average sized torso and shorter than average thigh and upper arm bones. He's dressed in brocade, like a doll; posed like a doll, with his legs sticking out straight, revealing the unscuffed soles of his fine buff boots--the boot of a doll, or a baby. His face is the face of a man: bearded, mustachioed, with heavy eyebrows and a penetrating gaze. We may be projecting twenty-first century cultural biases in assuming Sebastián de Morra is seething at his station in life and the indignities inflicted on him because of his stature. He could be worried about his health (he would die in 1649) or romantic

troubles.<sup>7</sup> I like to think that he's mad as hell. To borrow a phrase from Ann Fox, there is agency in anger.<sup>8</sup> While Velázquez' portrait of Pope Innocent X is considered his most profound character study, his portraits featuring court dwarfs are among his most beloved.<sup>9</sup> Velázquez' most treasured work in the popular imagination, *Las meninas* (1656) also features court dwarfs. In art, Velázquez uses the uniqueness or difference of these subjects to say something universal about the human condition.<sup>10</sup>

There is a reason Velázquez' paintings featuring subjects with marked physical differences are among his most beloved: these subjects are compelling and capture the imagination. They offer a point of access to the world of art for people without formal training in the appreciation of fine art. This unit addresses bodily differences across languages and cultures through the lens of art history. Through the work of Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) and contemporary Colombian painter Fernando Botero (born 1932) we will leverage the power of portrayals of unique and differentiated bodies—bodies that conform neither to statistical norms nor an artistic ideal—to engage students with art, language, culture and history. In doing so, we will meet curricular objectives for studying art history and culture in the context of the World Languages classroom. We will also explore the cultural context and construction of bodily differences and disability. We will use the target language, Spanish, to address questions relevant across the curriculum: when does bodily difference constitute disability? What defines a bodily difference as a disability—physical function or social definition? How are bodily differences construed differently across cultures? Finally, how can we make art, along with World Languages, something students use, as opposed to something students merely study?

## **Background**

I teach Spanish at Independence High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is an interesting and historically relevant school district to teach in with regards to racial segregation. The practice of federally mandated race-based busing as a remedy for segregation was born here in 1970 with the court case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. In the 1968-1969 school year, 14,000 of the district's 24,000 African-American students attended 21 schools with student bodies 99% or more African-American.<sup>11</sup> The court-mandated end to race-based busing in Charlotte came in 1999.<sup>12</sup>

I currently teach grades nine through twelve in a magnet program housed at Independence High School, the Academy of International Studies. The Academy of International Studies is a global studies magnet originally established with a grant from the Asia Society under the auspices of the International Studies Schools network. The Academy of International Studies was established with a mandate to offer students from largely minority backgrounds and inner city or rural environments the benefits of a rigorous, globally focused education.

Student demographics for the magnet program are 70% white, 13% black, 7% Latino, and 4% Asian. The small remainder declined to report or reported as mixed race. The program has roughly 400 students. The overall enrollment at Independence High School is a little over 2000 students. Overall enrollment is majority-minority: 40% black, 34% white, 18% Latino, 5% Asian, and 3% mixed race. About 55% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Independence High School exceeds the state average on leading academic indicators but also has an atypically high rate of violent incidents.<sup>13</sup>

### **Rationale: “I don't like those people” – Overcoming Resistance in the World Languages Classroom**

This unit is designed to engage and address resistance to learning on two fronts. It will address student's resistance to art history in the world languages classroom. It will also address students' resistance to phenotypic difference, which includes racism but extends to antipathy towards people who are visibly different—a major affective challenge to language acquisition.

In teaching art history and art appreciation outside the art classroom, we have a responsibility to make a rational case for what we are doing. Many researchers have tried to prove or disprove the relationship between education in the arts and performance in other disciplines. In the end, we teach art not to make students test better on standardized tests in “core” academic subjects, but to teach them the things that only art can teach: vision, imagination, and creativity. Will the study of art increase students' language skills? Done correctly, in the target language, yes, of course it will. We must be clear that we are not aiming at discrete language functions like the specific conjugations of verbs.<sup>14</sup> We are aiming to engage imaginations and open the doors to free, fluid and creative expression in the target language.

The arts teach empathy.<sup>15</sup> Empathy is critical for overcoming affective resistance to language learning. I remember one particular exchange with a student in a mixed class of advanced and intermediate students. This student was a high performer in most subjects but struggled with the most elementary Spanish language production. One day I was showing students photographs to illustrate the cultural setting of a short story they had read; the photos featured nineteenth-century indigenous peoples in traditional non-European garb. The young man exclaimed, “I don't like those people. Their clothes are different from ours.”

That's when the light came on for me: many students have a difficulty in processing and producing Spanish that is not cognitive but emotional. Students who experience discomfort on encountering cultural differences experience emotional interference with their second language acquisition. This is one manifestation of what linguist Stephen D. Krashen calls the “affective filter.”

Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis seeks to explain why students who receive significant amounts of comprehensible input—the key to language acquisition, in Krashen's view—sometimes fail to achieve proficiency. Three factors play into the affective filter for Krashen: motivation (highly motivated students tend to do better), self-confidence (students with favorable self-image tend to have greater success at language acquisition) and anxiety (low anxiety correlates with success at language acquisition.) What is interesting is that personal anxiety and classroom anxiety are indistinguishable in their effects.<sup>16</sup>

Mark Goldin suggests that one component of the anxiety element in the affective filter may be xenophobic attitudes.<sup>17</sup> Research suggests that low openness to new stimuli has a high correlation with more conservative social views and is a robust and deeply ingrained personality trait.<sup>18</sup> However, research from Britain suggests that regular personal contact with individuals from other countries does appear to reduce xenophobic attitudes.<sup>19</sup> It's doubtful that mere contact with immigrants alters people's underlying novelty-seeking or novelty-averse temperament. More likely, I would surmise, regular contact with immigrants renders them familiar and no longer novel. This hypothesis would hold that the underlying drive behind xenophobic attitudes and behaviors is not that the xenophobic person is averse specifically to persons different from herself, but rather that she is averse to phenotypically unfamiliar people.

I found that putting such students in work groups where they would have regular warm and constructive interactions with native speakers improved language production and overall demeanor even when students' vocalized attitudes about immigrants and immigration did not change. We don't always have a ready pool of native speakers with whom to confront culturally resistant students. Exposure through works of art is one way to provide meaningful exposure to people of other cultures.<sup>20</sup> We must remember that the core issue probably isn't specific resistance to different from oneself. Resistance, that is to say, aversion or prejudice, is probably rooted at the most basic level in an aversion to the unfamiliar.

### **Fear and Divergence: Addressing the Roots of Aversion to Extraordinary Bodies**

Fear of the disabled and people with bodies that vary from the statistical mean is rooted in our mechanism for pathogen avoidance. Indeed, one recent study suggests that *all* stigmatization may at root be a function of our desire to avoid illness or contagious disease. The problem is that while disease is a physical condition, the outward signs and signifiers of disease and their interpretation are subject to cultural definition.<sup>21</sup> In other words, people may be afraid of a person with Down syndrome, for example, because they fear on some level the disability may be caused or accompanied by contagion. On the other hand, an injured war veteran may suffer a much greater degree of disability and loss of function than a healthy individual with Down syndrome, but may not experience the

same stigma or aversion because her disability is assigned a different meaning in its cultural context.

One study suggests that aversion to obese people is related to this same pathogen avoidance mechanism; aversion to the obese was found to be much higher in individuals who rated higher in overall disease avoidance.<sup>22</sup> The key to reduction of the stigmatization of obese people may lie in redefining obese people as people who are, or can be, healthy and robust. I cannot imagine a more pertinent artist to spearhead the vanguard of this initiative than Fernando Botero, regardless of whether the voluminous, robust people he paints are intended to be obese (a point open to dispute, as we shall see later.)

Use of art history in the Spanish classroom to address issues of bodily difference tackles a root source of failure in second language acquisition: aversion to difference, whether linguistic, cultural, or physical. Using a relevant theme such as physical difference and disability as an access point for exploring art history can lower student, parent and administrative resistance to material that may otherwise be viewed as elitist or irrelevant. Instead of forcing students to study art objects they neither know of nor care about as self-contained subjects of study, we can use art objects to illustrate, elucidate and interrogate themes that affect all of us. Such an approach to art will, I believe, provide a more satisfying introduction to art and art history for novice students and will whet appetites for further study.

## **Dwarfism in the Works of Diego Velázquez and Today**

### Diego Velázquez: Biography and Work

It has been said that a biography of the greatest European painter in history would amount to little more than a *curriculum vitae*, owing to the scarcity of personal papers and documents he left behind. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez was born in Seville in 1599, the eldest son of João Rodrigues da Silva, a Portuguese lawyer, and Jerónima de Velásquez.<sup>23</sup> His father was of Jewish descent; Portuguese Jews were forced to undergo at least nominal conversion in 1497 and, like Spanish “New Christians” or *conversos* maintained a distinct social identity and endured social, economic and civic disabilities.<sup>24</sup> Diego Velázquez' official genealogy asserts a maternal lineage in the *hidalgo* class, the lowest level of Spanish aristocracy, but this is known to be a fabrication. His mother's family was firmly situated in the garment trade, an occupation virtually synonymous with *converso* heritage.<sup>25</sup>

The young Diego was apprenticed at age 11 to Francisco de Herrera, then spent five years under Francisco Pacheco. In 1618 he married sixteen year old Juana Pacheco, his master's daughter. They had two daughters within three years, only one of whom survived infancy. Well established as a painter in Seville by the 1620s, Velázquez traveled to

Madrid in 1622 with letters of introduction recommending him to dignitaries. In December of that year the death of Philip IV's court painter created an opening for Velázquez, who was commissioned to paint a portrait of Philip. The portrait, which does not survive, met with favor. In 1623 Velázquez secured appointment as official court painter and in 1624 the crown paid 300 ducats (about 12,000 Euros in contemporary terms) to defray the costs of moving his family from Seville to Madrid.<sup>26</sup>

We should not be too quick to romanticize Velázquez as an outsider because of his Jewish background. At the same time, we should not presume that the meritocratic sphere of court life afforded an existence where inherited social disadvantage simply did not apply. The social and legal realities were complex and nuanced. In the court of Philip IV, the legal disabilities imposed upon New Christians were observed chiefly in the breach. The charters of orders of knighthood barred individuals of Moorish or Jewish blood or who had ever engaged in commerce; such restrictions were circumvented by overt and widespread fraud. Manuel Cortissos y Villasante, a prominent Madrid banker of patrilineal and matrilineal Jewish descent, was made a Knight of Calatrava in 1644; the banker's son would later become president of the synagogue of Amsterdam.<sup>27</sup> In the proofs of nobility and purity of blood Velázquez provided on his recommendation for knighthood, the painter engaged in egregious identity fraud, claiming a noble lineage stretching back to antiquity. Evidence suggests much of the family was connected to the rag trade. Such use of sanitized or fabricated genealogies was a commonplace practice at court. At the same time, the Inquisition was still in full swing, and actively policed descendants of Jewish converts for any sign of backsliding.<sup>28</sup>

### Velázquez' Dwarfs

There was another class of social outsiders who were insiders at the royal court. The practice of keeping dwarfs as part of royal retinues dates back to earliest recorded antiquity. In Europe, it was common in the seventeenth century for royalty and other notables to keep dwarfs and other individuals with morphological or cognitive differences as servants or buffoons. While they may have been kept in most cases for amusement, they were not mere pets; surviving records show they were maintained at great expense. Some received university education.<sup>29</sup>

Dwarfism is a condition in which adult height is 4'10" or less. The Spanish court dwarfs we know of were mostly people with achondroplastic dwarfism, like the overwhelming majority of dwarfs today. Achondroplasia affects the cartilaginous growth plates in the bones of the limbs. Arms, legs, and fingers are usually shorter than average. The head may be larger than average, displaying hydrocephalus or megaloccephaly. Intelligence is unaffected by the condition; people with achondroplasia are no more likely to have cognitive differences than the rest of the population.<sup>30</sup>

Velázquez painted numerous portraits of dwarfs in the course of his duties as court

painter. Their actual position in court life was as nuanced and probably as difficult for us to reconstruct as that of court Jews. Catherine Closet-Crane claims the portraits of court dwarfs Sebastian de Morra, Francisco Lezcano, and Don Diego de Acedo were part of a series that included Cynic philosopher Menippus and the blind moralist Aesop—another figure marked by physical difference or disability. She argues the entire series was painted to accompany Rubeens' portraits of Democritus and Heraclitus, portraying the entire company, dwarfs included, as a company of philosophers. Royal household inventory from 1701 does indicate that the entire collection was on display at the king's private hunting retreat, the Torre de la Prada.<sup>31</sup> But were they displayed as a series? I would like to think they were; small, but great, men alongside other greats.

We must be careful, though; we see the world through a lens colored by modernity. Each generation views the pictorial record of these individuals peering, as we do, through the veil of contemporary mores, ideals and prejudices. An 1898 travelers' guidebook entry on two of the paintings, by then hanging in the Prado, does even mention the subjects by name. The anonymous writer refers simply to “dwarfs of Philip IV, repulsive little creatures but masterpieces of painting.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Obesity in the work of Fernando Botero and in Contemporary Context**

### Fernando Botero: Biography and Work

At this writing, Fernando Botero is perhaps the most popular and influential living Latin American painter. He was born in 1932 in Medellín, Colombia to a family of deep Spanish heritage.<sup>33</sup> Fernando Botero pursued an education in the arts and was sufficiently established as an artist by the age of twenty-one to use his earnings to travel to Europe for study of the European masters in Italy, France, and Spain.<sup>34</sup> While his work is sometimes considered primitivist, his background and work is steeped in European tradition. There is nothing naïve about his work; any artlessness is wholly artful.<sup>35</sup> One wonders if his work would be considered representative of “Primitivism” or “Naive Art” at all were he not a Latin American painter.

### Botero and *boterismo*

Botero first began painting volumetrically distorted, inflated figures in 1956. Over the course of the next decade he refined the style that would be known as *boterismo*: smooth, inflated, balloon-like shapes, with no visible trace of brushstroke.<sup>36</sup> His figures are popularly thought to be fat and jolly. In the boom years of the 1990's, when Botero was firmly consolidated as a top shelf brand name in the world of newly rich art collectors, the physical excesses of his figures were taken as emblematic of the financial excesses of the era.<sup>37</sup> Fernando Botero himself insists

"Lo he dicho muchas veces, no he pintado una gorda en mi vida. He expresado el volumen, buscando darle protagonismo, como si fuera casi comida, arte comestible." ("I've said it many times, I've never painted a fat lady in my life. I have expressed volume, seeking to give presence, as if it were almost like food, edible art."<sup>38</sup>)

We may take his massive bronze 1999 *Horse* as a sign he may mean what he says. The bronze beast looks as if assembled from beach balls, but does anyone seriously take the figure to represent an obese horse? Is there even such a thing as an obese horse? An article discussing the (very lucrative) 2012 sale of *Horse* describes a nun in one of his paintings as "portly."<sup>39</sup> Yet, if the nun is "portly", and not merely volumetrically distorted as a matter of visual style, shouldn't the horse be "portly" too?

Botero is coy; he is, perhaps, as reliable a source about his own art as Velázquez was about his family tree. His bourgeois families, his prostitutes and his politicians *do* seem to be fat. His 1966 *First Lady* seems unambiguously plump. The corpulence of his *Four Women*, apparently prostitutes, seems an integral part of their tawdry sensuality. When one examines the way the flesh folds around the neck of his ballerina in *Dancers at the Bar*, the portrayal seems one of an actual dancer, corpulent and extraordinarily athletic—not a skinny dancer whose form has been distended as a matter of style.<sup>40</sup> She is the embodiment of an ethos of physical vitality for all people, regardless of body weight. One curator intimately familiar with the man and his work says that Botero detests the restrictions of externally imposed norms, whether social or artistic, and sets out to sabotage and undermine the tyrannical aesthetic of thinness in contemporary Western cultures.<sup>41</sup> We may, perhaps, have to allow him to have it both ways: Botero paints fat people who are not fat, just as Velázquez painted dwarfs imbued with greatness.

## **Strategies for Teaching and Learning**

### Learning to See: Art for Doctors (and the Rest of Us)

Why teach art history and art appreciation in a Spanish class? For many students and parents the question is, why teach art appreciation at all? Linda Friedlaender has an answer to the question that should satisfy even the most pragmatically minded along with a readily portable method for engaging students with art. Art appreciation teaches us to see. Through the study of art, students learn to observe and make judgments based on their observations—overriding our tendency to judge and make observations based on our judgments. She pioneered this technique with a target audience of students for whom the faculties of observation and judgment are most critical of all: medical students.

Curator of Education for the Yale Center for British Art at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Linda Friedlaender worked with nursing professionals to devise a means of using art appreciation to hone the observational acuity and diagnostic skill of

medical students. Empirical study supports the claim that her method of training measurably reduces physician errors by developing medical students' observational skills and attention to detail in patient examinations.<sup>42</sup>

There are two fascinating things about her method. First, her process for approaching art is readily accessible and relevant to anyone; it deepens appreciation of art for those interested in art for its own sake and yields pragmatic results for those of pragmatic temperament. Second, the Friedlaender Method is simple and readily mastered. Once a teacher has practiced and demonstrated the technique, he or she can easily teach student facilitators to guide other students' exploration of art.

A facilitator presents an artwork or a reproduction of an artwork with no label displayed or with the label covered. An original artwork is ideal, but high quality digital reproductions are acceptable. A group of five or six students stands before the image. (As this is a small group technique, the value of training student facilitators is readily apparent.) The facilitator gives students ten minutes to make observations about the image; students may be encouraged to take notes. Students are exhorted to observe and observe only at this stage; they are told to make no judgments nor derive conclusions until after all students have shared their observations.

When the ten minutes are up, the facilitator asks open-ended questions to solicit the students' observations. The key question is, "What do you see?" This may and should be done in the target language in a World Languages classroom. Students share their observations to compile an exhaustive description of what they see. Only then are they invited to analyze the work and make inferences about the meaning and provenance of what they see. The facilitator will insist that all analysis is supported by observational evidence, and may call attention to details that have escaped the participants.<sup>43</sup> Where differing analyses of the work are offered, the facilitator will ask students to vote on the provenance and meaning of the work. At the end of the activity, the facilitator reveals the origin and significance of the work, and students discuss their observations and analysis in light of this new information.

### **Student Activities: You Are Asking for Trouble**

Never mind that *über*-reactionary Generalissimo Francisco Franco was an avid painter of nature scenes.<sup>44</sup> Art, for better or worse, tends to be seen as subversive.<sup>45</sup> The battle against arts funding specifically, and art generally, remains at the center of our nation's culture wars.<sup>46</sup> Simply introducing students to art is potentially questionable enough; you're about to contemplate doing it *outside an arts curriculum*, and you'd better be prepared to articulate a good rationale.

Do not despair. If you think you're not teaching in an arts-friendly school zone, do think again. Emphasize the topical relevance of the subject matter, keep language skills

and cultural relevance at the fore, and above all articulate why you're doing what you're doing. Be prepared for pushback; art criticism is hard work, in any language, and there will always be someone who'd rather be making a *piñata* (or doing something more quantifiable and linear with less critical thinking involved.) Draw up your lesson plans, put on a smile, and take a rough and ready attitude. Trouble is your middle name. It's going to be worth it.

### **A Serious Work of Social Commentary is Always More Interesting With Celebrities**

Remember the photo of Peter Dinklage I mentioned earlier? The one where he's seated with a naked model on his lap? *If* you can get away with it—for example, if you're teaching a class of mature students, seniors, say—lead with that. It *is* a serious work of social commentary that has all manner of things to say out the social construction of gender, status, power and physical difference. It's tastefully shot and not explicit. Lastly, it connects the subject matter with students' current realm of interest. While many, if not most high school students are indifferent at best to fine art, they are generally aware of and have positive regard for Peter Dinklage and his *oeuvre*. They're bananas for celebrity.

That “if you can get away with it” is a big if, though. If you *can't* get away with it (you teach middle school, for example, or you know it would offend the mores of your particular community), there's another photo from the same article of Peter Dinklage standing, sleeves rolled up, arms akimbo in a custom suit, and other photos of the actor with models in less (and more) provocative poses. You'll find something that works.

I will begin by displaying the Peter Dinklage photo of choice and allowing students to explore the photo for meaning using the Friedlaender Method described above in the Strategies section. The key question is “What do you see in the picture? (*¿Qué ves en la foto?*)” Depending on the overall Spanish proficiency of the group, I may provide students with a relevant vocabulary list the week before.

Once we have explored the Dinklage photo, we will explore some readings. Students will read an article about dwarfism.<sup>47</sup> We will also read a biographical article in intermediate-level Spanish about Peter Dinklage.<sup>48</sup> Students may read an excerpt of a Spanish *Rolling Stone* magazine piece profiling the actor.<sup>49</sup> (See the appendix Resources for Teachers and Students for more detail.) Students will be given questions relevant to the reading and will be asked to journal about each of the articles. Students will make a voice blog post of one of their responses.

Regarding the ABC Medicus article on dwarfism, students will be asked to think of the language the article uses to describe dwarfism: “*traumatismo*” (“wound”), “*padecimiento*” (“suffering”), “*mal de carácter congénito*” (“congenital character flaw”).<sup>50</sup> Do you think the language Spanish uses to talk about physical differences reflects cultural attitudes towards people with disabilities?

Regarding the Biografia.es article on Peter Dinklage, the article says the actor “suffers” from dwarfism. Read an excerpt of the article from Rollingstone.es. Based on what you know about Peter Dinklage and what you read in the Rolling Stone excerpt, do you think Peter Dinklage is “suffering” from being a man with dwarfism? While dwarfism is defined as adult height under 4'10", average height for Guatemalan Maya women is only 4' 6".<sup>51</sup> Can dwarfism be said to be a “disability” or “*mal de carácter*” if the majority of women in a country are “suffering” from it?

### **When a *Bufón* is Not a *Bufón*: Don Diego de Acedo, el Primo**

Don Diego de Acedo's portrait by Velázquez is commonly titled “El bufón (jester) Don Diego de Acedo, el Primo”, but Don Diego was no buffoon. In truth he was a court functionary working for the Secretary of the Royal Seal, the office responsible for validating all official royal correspondence—an office of great diplomatic importance, especially for an empire that sprawled across the entire globe.<sup>52</sup>

I will repeat the Friedlaender exercise with the students using Velázquez' portrait of Don Diego. I hope students will pick up on the significance of the book and accoutrements that point to Don Diego's position (and the fact that he was literate). If they do not, I will be sure to ask questions to prompt them to speculate. At the conclusion of the Friedlaender exercise, students will be asked to venture as to the subject's period, country, identity and significance.

When they have put forth their conclusions based on their observations, I will reveal Don Diego's name and identity. I will share with students a brief biographical profile in Spanish that accompanies the painting at ArtHistoria.com.<sup>53</sup> Don Diego was not only a notable court functionary; he was also a notorious (or celebrated) womanizer. He was embroiled in a tragic scandal when the humiliated husband of one of his lovers murdered his wife in a jealous rage.<sup>54</sup> Despite his pensive countenance, Don Diego de Acedo embodied in real life what the persona Peter Dinklage projects in the GQ photo shoot seeks to portray: power, influence, and an alpha male's sexual access to beautiful women.

Students will choose and analyze one of Velázquez' portraits of dwarfs or other *bufones*. Students will prepare a digital presentation and record an audio commentary on the painting in the target language, as for an audio tour of a museum. Students will put on a virtual gallery walk and explore the artwork. They will each have in their hands a copy of the PALS speaking rubric for scoring oral production in World Languages classes; they will not actually score their classmates' work, but will be asked to identify their classmates' strongest area on the rubric.<sup>55</sup> I will score the work according to the PALS speaking rubric for the appropriate level.

### **Increasing Students' Agency: A Public Forum on Botero and *Boterismo***

I will train peer volunteers to guide other students' observation and discussion of paintings using Linda Friedlaender's method. These peer guides will lead the exploration of Fernando Botero's work. Small groups of students will explore different paintings and sculptures and will then share their observations in a class forum. I will challenge students to answer questions about Botero's work. What does the voluminous quality of Botero's figures really mean? Is he telling the truth when he says he's never painted a fat lady? Students will compare the different works they observed to attempt to answer the question: are Botero's figures really obese, or are they dimensionally distorted? Is Botero himself entirely consistent—could the figures be sometimes fat and sometimes inflated?

Not only will I empower students to lead discussion directly; I will also encourage students to use the Web to gain direct access to subject matter experts. Students will break into small groups and will write emails in Spanish to Spanish-speaking curators, critics and art historians asking them for their opinions. Students will share the responses they receive, if any, with the class.

### **Botero and *Boterismo* as a Gateway to Contemporary Issues**

Obesity is a major public health issue in Latin America. The World Bank estimates that obesity in Latin America will increase 300% over the next 25 years, pushing the public health systems of many nations to the brink of collapse.<sup>56</sup> Students will read articles in Spanish on the individual and public health impact of obesity. Students will be asked to journal on issues surrounding obesity. Is obesity a "disability"? Based on what we have seen reading about Velázquez' portraits of people with dwarfism, does the concept of "disability" ("*mal de carácter*") even translate into Spanish with the same meaning as in English?

Students will combine images of Botero's paintings with Spanish-language text to create posters for a hypothetical public service announcement campaign on obesity. Students will be given three thematic areas to choose from: promoting inclusion and self-respect among the obese, promoting healthy lifestyle choices, and promoting effective public policy to combat obesity. As a concluding exercise, students may contact policy makers in Latin American nations and the Public Relations departments of major fast food producers in Latin America asking for their perspectives on appropriate community response to obesity; responses received could be included in a culminating gallery walk experience.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Fine Art and the iPhone**

For people who know art, or who are artistically inclined, all art comes with a context. A student who frequented museums as a child or who pored over coffee table books as a child has a frame of reference for what she sees when presented with an unfamiliar work

of art, however old or contemporary it may be. An artistically inclined student without any grounding in art history will have a context, too, for a new work of art—he will compare the artists’ choices in representation with those he has made or imagines he might make. These children meet each new work of art with a connection to it already in place.

For students who have not had their visual analysis skills nurtured—another, and perhaps more useful way of talking about what we call “art appreciation”—looking at great works of art is like looking at a stranger’s vacation photos. There is no context for what the student is observing. There isn’t time in a Spanish class to build the depth and breadth of students’ aesthetic schemas to allow every student to appreciate major works of art from an art historical perspective.

However, great works of art are considered great because they are powerful and compelling images. We can use them to connect students to subject matter of social and personal relevance. After all, it is in this area that students fundamentally and most viscerally appreciate art and design. A high school student is fully capable of appreciating the beauty of an iPhone, but not one in a thousand appreciates the iPhone from an industrial design perspective. For the student, the beauty of an iPhone is in the status, relevance and social connection its possession conveys. I think that is a very good analogy. If we want students to appreciate art, put it in their hands, like a cell phone, and allow them to use it to build social connections and project their presence into the world.

### **Appendix 1: Connections to the Common Core State Standards**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1c: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

The classroom discussions around works of art, including moderated discussions organized around the Linda Friedlaender’s method, will meet this standard handily.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

This unit supports and encourages heavily integrated student use of technology.

### **Appendix: Resources for Classroom Use**

Resources for Teachers

Fairfax County Public Schools. "PALS: Performance Assessment for Language Students." World Languages: PALS. <http://www.fcps.edu/is/worldlanguages/pals/> (accessed November 6, 2013). The PALS rubrics developed by Fairfax County Public Schools are well-designed and widely employed instruments for assessing language productive skills in the World Languages classroom. I strongly encourage teachers to allow students to use the PALS rubrics to score their own formative assessments of students to familiarize themselves with the rubrics in evaluating their own work will make students more conscious of the elements of clear and effective written and spoken communication in any language.

Finn, Holly. "How to End the Age of Inattention ." The Wall Street Journal. [online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303640104577436323276530002.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303640104577436323276530002.html) (accessed October 3, 2013). Discusses Linda Friedlaender's method for teaching observational skills using art.

Friedlaender, Linda, and Irwin Braverman. "Art of Medicine." YouTube.com. <http://youtu.be/oL1b1tMNI4E> (accessed November 6, 2013). This YouTube video from Yale University gives a good overview of Linda Friedlaender's method for teaching observational skills through art appreciation.

#### Resources for Students

"Museo Nacional del Prado: On-line gallery." Museo Nacional del Prado. <http://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/online-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/the-buffoon-sebastian-de-morra/> (accessed October 2, 2013). The website of the Museo del Prado has digital reproductions of paintings and information about the artists and subjects. The Prado is one of the world's leading museums, no question, and one of the first public art museums in the world. The online gallery is a treasure trove for students.

Zyter7. "Que es y como hacer un codigo QR." YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFZR8x-455s&noredirect=1> (accessed November 6, 2013). This video tutorial in Spanish shows students how to make and use QR codes.

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