

Spanish Literature and Grammar

In a classification of U3A language courses, *beginner*, *intermediate* and *advanced*, this class would be considered *Intermediate*. The following should explain, and elaborates on the limited description permitted in the Newsletter.

Our group does not currently have a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish, although we would like to have one who would have a similar approach to our interests. Therefore, one cannot expect realistically to develop fluency beyond basic conversational skills.

A “core group” of about 9 or 10 people, has been together for a long time, originally with Silvia Lang as tutor until she retired many years ago. Being unsuccessful in finding a native-Spanish-speaking volunteer “teacher”, we decided to continue as self-learners, and the “tutor” is more a facilitator of the group than an authoritative teacher. Our interests are similar, and go beyond the course title above to embrace all aspects of Spanish Culture, including History, Art, Music, Landscape, Travel and so on. The group is a highly cooperative and interactive one and most seem happy with the way we operate, if the continuity of membership is any criterion. Any member may contribute to the “teaching”, and although we mostly come to agreement, we anticipate and tolerate differences of opinion. Past experience has shown us that even native speakers and textbooks sometimes differ in their opinions.

We welcome new members but recognise that they may or may not find that it is what they want. Some stay for a few years. Some leave. Some come back after a while.

Each year we choose a fiction or non-fiction book to read, translate, and discuss in class. In 2023 and 2024, we are reading “*El Arte de la Entrevista*” by Rosa Montero. This is non-fiction and apart from the language aspect, is giving us an insight into some significant Spanish and other personalities. In 2022 we chose “*Una Historia de España*” by Arturo Pérez-Reverte. This is quite sophisticated and entertaining, but proved to be somewhat challenging with its allusions to current life and events in Spain, whose significance we often missed, or found obscure. If we find a native Spanish speaker to help in this regard, we will probably come back to it. We realized that we would not finish this in one year, so adopted a novel, “*Dónde enterré a Fabiana Orquera*” by Cristian Perfumo as “light relief” in subject matter, if not in language. Over the years, in no particular order, we have read “*El Coleccionista de Flechas*” by Cristian Perfumo, “*Sin Noticias de Gurb*” by Eduardo Mendoza, “*La Aventura de Miguel Littín Clandestino en Chile*” and “*Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada*”, both by Gabriel García Márquez, “*Réquiem por un Campesino Español*” by Ramón Sender, and in adaptations, “*Los Santos Inocentes*” by Miguel Delibes, “*Pepita Jiménez*” by Juan Valera and the trilogy, “*El Oro de Los Sueños*”,

“La Tierra del Tiempo Perdido”, and *“Las Lágrimas Del Sol”* by José María Merino. Some of these are regarded as “Classics”, others, as “Popular”.

The class novel gives practice in translation and pronunciation, aids vocabulary development and understanding of grammar and uses the features of the novel, like setting, landscape, personalities, culture and the story to increase our knowledge and understanding of Hispanic culture and language. In a sense, the story is least important because if it were otherwise, it would be more sensible to read it in English translation. The novel is not treated solely as it might be in a book club. Rather it provides a closer look at grammatical points, vocabulary, idioms, differences in opinion as regards to translation and meaning, and immersion in the language and its nuances. This approach inevitably is slower than just reading and we expedite the process of translating in class by members reading and translating the scheduled chapters ahead of the class session.

It must be recognised that we are a group of mixed experience of the Spanish language, and the class reading provides an opportunity for individuals to raise questions relating to the text in the light of the points outlined in these notes.

For added variety in the class, individual members of the group often circulate, (hard copy or email) articles and short stories in the public domain, that they have come across and which they think will be of interest to the class. These usually come from online sources like *XL Semanal* or *El País* or other media. When the opportunity arises, these are augmented with audio and visual materials.

Spanish Grammar is an interest of the class, many, but not all, of whom have successfully completed year 12, and occasionally more advanced level Spanish, albeit some years ago. Thus we are interested in revising and maintaining our knowledge of grammar. As a common, basic reference, most members have a copy of *“Complete Spanish Grammar”* by Gilda Nissenburg from the Practice Makes Perfect series (McGraw Hill). It doesn't seem to matter that we don't all have the same edition. Often we may go deeper into a topic and the leader of the discussion will inevitably have a more detailed authority than Nissenburg's text. For example, frequently it seems we return to the use of the subjunctive mood and the leader of this discussion happens to have a copy of *“The Spanish Subjunctive Up Close”* by Eric Vogt, which she finds to be useful. Others possess their own favourite grammatical references.

I hope that this gives a more complete explanation of the nature of the class than is possible to give in the space of the Newsletter.