

ESPAÑOL 201-202

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DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH SPECIAL READINGS

LA DAMA DEL ALBA

Reading Skills

When you read selections such as this, you are going to have to sharpen your reading skills. This work was written for educated native speakers of Spanish, not beginning Spanish students. The footnotes will help immensely, but you have to bring a lot to the task. You are also going to have to read much faster than what you may be used to. Each assignment will include quite a number of pages and you don't have time to read with your thumb, that is, look up all the words you don't know.

Read to the end of a line or paragraph and try to use the context before looking up a word in the dictionary. Get used to a little vagueness and use "cover words" (a general idea of what it is: a plant of some sort, some article of clothing, something to eat, etc.) until you can confirm your postulations with more information. Learn to recognize cognates (*costumbre, variar, balcón*, etc.) and word families (*frío / enfriar / friolento, cansar / cansado / cansador / cansancio / descansar*, etc.)

Since *La dama del alba* is a play intended to be seen on a stage, you should understand that **it is very important to read the instructions to the actors and descriptions of the scenes.** These are usually in italics or in parentheses. If you saw the play presented in a theater, you would see the scenery and would hear and see the actions of the actors. Since you will not see and hear anything, you must gain this information by reading it.

Advance preparation

The basic goal of working with these advanced reading selections is to develop your ability to read Spanish with direct comprehension, that is, without a laborious word-for-word decoding. The most important factor is vocabulary. If you don't understand the "function" words (*como, durante, ni, antes que, de modo que, sin embargo*, etc.), or the most frequent words (*sacar, ganar, morir, olvidar, ruido*, etc.) you will have to spend time learning them.

We will prepare you for each reading selection with a brief description of the situation and a list of key vocabulary words, which will help you understand what you are reading. We will also give you some ideas of what to look for and some cultural concepts to watch for. Go over this carefully before you read. Skim through the assignment once to get a general idea of what it is about. Then read a second time, trying to understand almost everything. Then go over it a third time to digest, ponder, and think about what you might comment on in class or parts you have questions on. We will always have a quiz at the beginning of class, so try to anticipate what questions might be asked. Whatever you do, don't go to class unprepared.

Act I

Situation. The story begins on an early winter afternoon, in a rural area of Asturias. We meet a family that lives in a small *aldea* situated at the edge of a river. The family is just finishing eating and Martin is preparing to go up into the mountains to bring down some young bulls to the fair being held the next day. Quico (a young hired hand who works for the family) has saddled the mare, but we see later that there has been a mysterious change. The day is the fourth anniversary of the disappearance of Angélica in the river. The barking of the dogs announces the arrival of a mysterious guest. Pay particular attention to the strange things she says and does. Because of her clothing and walking stick, the children assume she is a pilgrim going to Santiago, and from that point on she is referred to as *la Peregrina*. After playing with the children she is very tired and falls asleep, even though she has an appointment at 9 p.m.

Characters. Who are the family members, and what are their relationships with each other? Try to get a feeling for the characters—remember this is a play, and if we saw it represented we would build empathy or antipathy for each actor. It is said that the *abuelo* represents the men of that region of Spain—why? How does his manner of speaking indicate to us what he is like? The *mo4re* is typical of many Spanish women—in what ways? Telva is very different from the *madre*, yet she is also a typical Spanish woman—how? What is unusual about the children? Would they like to be normal? What is Quico’s personality like? How does he react to Telva’s penchant for gossip? Does Martin’s personality fit his actions the night Angélica disappeared?

Style. What a great picture Casona draws of his native Asturias! What can we learn of the region from the first act? What characters does Casona use to express humor? (Hint: pp. 2-3, p. 8) Do we see elements of *lo fantástico* in the first act. What examples can you find of *simbolismo*? (Hint: pp. 21-22) *Presagio* is the word we use in Spanish for “foreshadowing.” How many examples can you find of *presagio*? (Hints: pp. 20-21, p. 24)

Culture. Your teacher will talk to you about the region of Asturias and its location on the *Camino de Santiago*. This will help you understand the obligation the inhabitants feel toward *peregrinos* who are making the pilgrimage to the sacred city of Santiago de Compostela.

Language Objectives. Not only will you be increasing your reading vocabulary as you learn new words, you will continue building your conversational skills as you discuss the reading in class and as you participate in activities where you will recreate many of the scenes of the play. Prepare yourself for these activities and try to make the vocabulary become active in your use of the language, not just a passive recognition of words as you read them.

Key Vocabulary. As you read the first act, be aware of the meaning of key words and phrases, such as the following. You will use these words in discussing your reading.

casa de labranza - farmhouse
el horno - oven
la leña - firewood
el remanso - backwater
la balsa (barca) - boat
el molino - mill
la braña - summer pasture
la yegua - mare
el jinete - horseman, rider
la silla (de montar) - saddle
la espuela - spur
el potro - colt
el portón - (corral) gate
el (la) peregrino(a) - pilgrim
el yerno - son-in-law
el quinqué - kerosene lamp
el paso - the (mountain) pass
el relámpago - bolt of lightning
la feria - (animal) fair
el ganado - farm animals
el novillo - young bull
el granero - barn
la mina (de carbón) - coal mine
la capucha - hood

el bordón/bastón - walking stick
la boda - wedding
la mayorazga - oldest daughter (heir to family estate)
la nevadona - snow storm
campanada - chiming of a clock
el telón - curtain (in a theater)
morir - to die
muerto(a) - dead
la muerte - death
acercarse - to go near to
ahogarse - to drown
envenenar - to poison
ensillar (ensillada) - to put a saddle on (saddled)
domar - to break (a horse)
ladrar - to bark
aullar - to howl
reír(se) - to laugh
despertar - to wake someone
dar las nueve - to strike nine, to chime 9 times (clock)
rezar - to recite prayers