

A Letter from Miami: A Telenovela

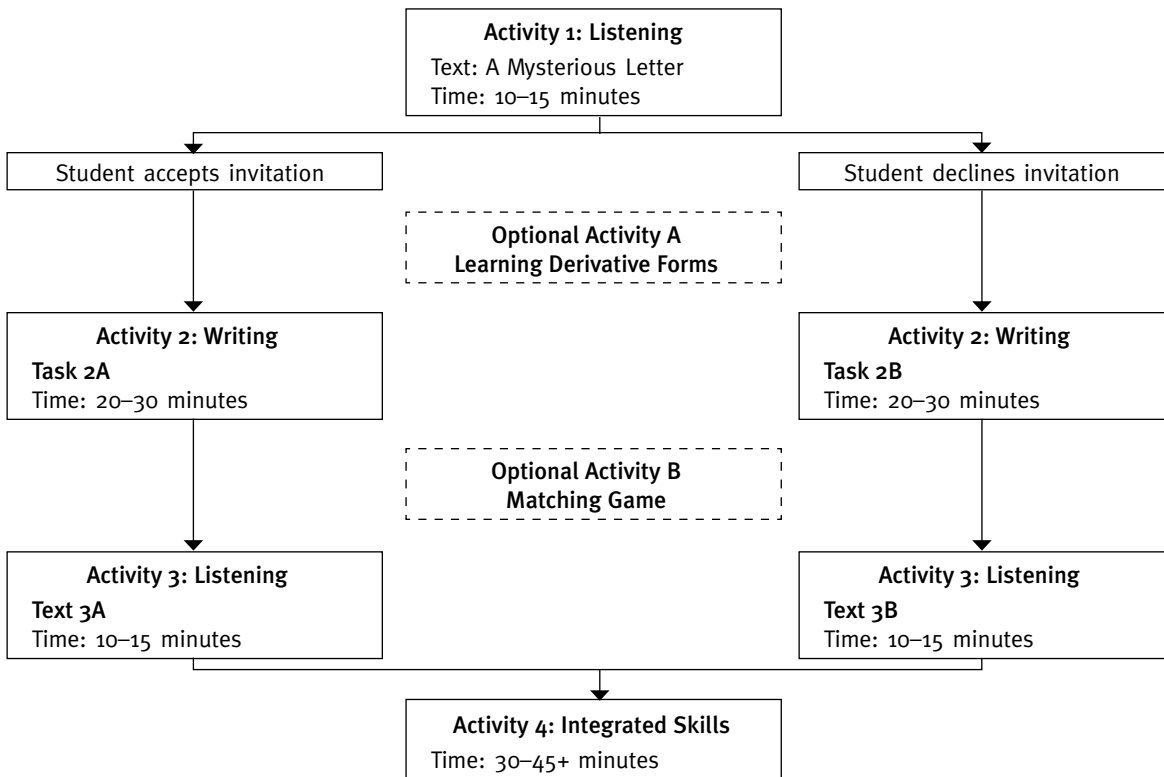
Telenovela is a Spanish word that is sometimes used as a loanword in English. A telenovela is a television drama that is shown over a short period of time—usually a few weeks or months. Many popular telenovelas are filmed in Miami.

In this lesson, students will create their own telenovelas. If you don't have access to a television studio or video camera, don't worry. Students can also present their telenovelas as plays.

The story begins with the arrival of a surprise invitation to visit a cousin who lives in Miami, Florida. Students must first decide whether to accept or decline the invitation to visit Miami. Each student should be allowed to make his/her own decision, and groups can be formed based on the students' decisions. (If the class is large, you may wish to have students form several smaller sub-groups.) The activities assigned to each group differ slightly.

Unless you have a classroom assistant who can work with one group of students while you work with the other, you will probably want to assign additional tasks that students can do while you are working with another group. Two additional activities are provided at the end of the lesson. As you present the instructions for one group's task, students in other groups can work on one or both of these optional activities. Figure 1 provides a graphic overview of how the lesson is structured.

Figure 1: Suggested Lesson Outline



Activity 1: Listening (10–15 minutes)

A Mysterious Letter

Before reading the text, “A Mysterious Letter,” to your students, write the words who, what, when, where, why, and how on the board. Tell your students that as you read the text to them, they should listen for information that will answer questions that begin with the six question words that you have written on the board. (If you believe that your students will need more support to understand the listening text, you can write the complete discussion questions on the board before you read the text.)

While reading the text aloud, substitute the name of your country or city where it says [your country] or [your city].

A Mysterious Letter

Something unusual happened yesterday. When you got home from school, there was a letter waiting for you. The return address on the envelope showed that it had come from Miami, in the United States. That was strange because you don't know anyone who lives in Miami. When you opened the letter, the situation got even more unusual. Here's what the letter said:

Dear Cousin,

We've never met, and I'm not sure if you even know that you have a cousin in the United States. I just found out last week that I have family in [your country]. Just in case you're as clueless as I was, here's the story my parents told me:

Many years ago, just before my father left [your country] to come to the United States, he had a big argument with your father—who is his brother. They haven't spoken since then.

My father never told me anything about his life back in [your country]. He always just said that after he left [your country], he started a new life here. And that was all my father ever told me—until last week.

That is when he told me what I have just shared with you. He also admitted that he has kept in touch with some of his old friends from [your city], and those friends have kept him informed about family news all these years.

Now that I know that I have a cousin in [your country], I would really like to meet you. I asked my parents if we could arrange a visit, and they agreed to invite you to stay with us here in Miami. They have also offered to pay for your airplane ticket. So if you want to visit your family in the United States, all you need to do is get permission from your parents. If they say it's okay, just let us know when you'd like to come and what you'd like to do here. I really, really hope that you can come and visit. I'm hopeful that we will be great friends some day.

Looking forward to meeting you,

Your Cousin Sam

Note: Sam can be a nickname for a male or female. Allow your students to decide whether their cousin is a boy or a girl.

After you have finished reading the text, ask your students the questions below to check their listening comprehension. If students have difficulty with any of the questions, reread the relevant portions of the letter for them.

1. Who?
 - a. Who wrote the letter?
 - b. Who were the two brothers?
2. When?
 - a. When did the letter arrive?
 - b. When did your cousin learn about you?
3. What?
 - a. What happened between your father and his brother?
 - b. What does your cousin want you to do now?
4. Where?
 - a. Where is your cousin's father from?
 - b. Where is your cousin's father now?
5. Why?
 - a. Why did your cousin write to you?
 - b. Why was your cousin clueless about you?
6. How?
 - a. How did your cousin's father get news about you and your family?
 - b. How does your cousin hope you will respond?

Activity 2: Writing (20–30 minutes) Responding to Your Cousin

Ask your students to decide whether they want to accept or decline the invitation from their cousin. After your students have made their decisions, tell them that they will write a letter in response to the cousin's invitation. Students can work individually or in pairs to complete this activity. Before you read the instructions for the activity, have all the students who decided to accept the invitation go to one side of the classroom and all the students who decline the invitation go to the other side of the room.

Note: Before you present the tasks to the two groups, you may wish to present one of the optional activities to the whole class. Tell students that they should work on the optional activity while you are talking to the other group.

- Read Task 2A to students who decided to ACCEPT the invitation.
- Read Task 2B to students who decided to DECLINE the invitation.

Task 2A

You've decided to accept Sam's invitation to visit Miami, and your parents have given you permission to make the trip. Now it's time to write to Sam to accept the invitation.

1. To start your letter, thank Sam for the invitation and say that you have accepted.
2. You can also tell Sam about yourself. (Before you write, make a list of characteristics to include in your description. For example, you may want to include information about your age, your family members, your hobbies, etc.)
3. Tell Sam what you would like to do in Miami when you visit.*

*If your students are not familiar with Miami, you can give them a copy of the Miami Fact Sheet at the end of this lesson to help them find information about things to do in the city.

Text 3B is for students who **DECLINED** Sam's invitation and instead invited him/her to visit your country. Again, before reading the text aloud, tell your students to listen for answers to the following questions:

1. When will Sam come?
2. How long will Sam stay?
3. When will Sam's flight arrive?

As with the previous text, quickly check that students have understood the main points before going on.

Text 3B—

Dear Cousin,

I was sorry to hear that you won't be able to come to Miami, but I'm so happy that you invited me to visit you and your family there in [your country].

I have made arrangements to come at the end of the month and will be able to stay for three weeks. I will arrive on the last Saturday of the month. My flight arrives at 6:00 in the evening. Could you please come to the airport to meet me?

I am looking forward to meeting you and visiting [your country] for the first time! It's like a dream come true!

Your cousin,

Sam

Activity 4: Integrated Skills (30–45+ minutes)—

For the final activity, the class will write and perform two telenovelas. One telenovela will be created by students who **ACCEPTED** Sam's invitation, and the other will be done by students who **DECLINED** the invitation. (If one of these groups is especially small, you may need to ask for volunteers from the other group who are willing to perform in the smaller group's telenovela.)

The students in each group will work together to write, rehearse, and perform a telenovela (or a play) that tells the story of the reunion between a student from your country and Sam, the cousin from Miami. Because each telenovela will have at least five different scenes, you may wish to divide the two main groups into smaller sub-groups. Each sub-group can then be responsible for writing one (or more) of the scenes.

Read the task instructions for "A Family Reunion" to the class. You may also wish to write a brief outline of the telenovela plot on the board for students to refer to as they work.

A Family Reunion—

The day has finally come for the cousins to meet! Work with your group to write the script for a short telenovela (or play) about that meeting and the adventures that follow.

As you write your telenovela, you will have to decide what happens in the story (the plot). Be creative—your telenovela could be a hit! You will also have to decide who is involved in the story (the characters). Besides Sam and his/her cousin (who is a student in your country), you should include enough different characters so that each person in your group has a chance to play a role in the telenovela. Finally, the place where the story happens (the setting) depends on which group you are in. The setting will be either Miami or [your country]. However, during your telenovela, the characters may go to different places in Miami or [your country]. For example, the story will probably begin at the airport, but then you can decide where each scene happens after that.

Your telenovela should include at least five scenes. Before you write each scene, you may want to think about the questions that follow.

Scene 1: Greetings between Sam and his/her cousin.

How will they recognize each other?

How will they greet each other? Will they be shy at first, or will they be emotional?

Are there any other family members at the airport?

How will the cousins leave the airport? Where will they go?

Scene 2: Make plans for the rest of the visit—

What will Sam or his/her cousin want to do while visiting?

What would you like to see if you were in Miami?

What would you want to show a visitor to your country?

Scene 3: Questions about people and languages—

a. What questions would you ask Sam about the United States, its people, or the English language? Is there anything that you think would be surprising or difficult to understand about the United States?

b. What questions would Sam want to ask you about your country or your culture? Is there anything that a visitor would find surprising or difficult to understand about your country?

Scene 4: Plot twist—

Telenovelas often include a “plot twist” (an unexpected change in the story) to shock the audience. Try to think of some dramatic change in the story that would surprise your audience. What happened? How does the plot twist affect Sam and his/her cousin?

Scene 5: Resolution and farewell—

After a plot twist, the characters usually find a way to fix any problems. (This is called the resolution.) Do Sam and his/her cousin find a way to resolve the problem created by the plot twist before they must say “farewell” (goodbye)?

Optional Activity A: Learning Derivative Forms—

In the mysterious letter from Activity 1, Sam uses the words *hopeful* and *clueless*. Your students may already know these words, or you may have to explain what they mean when you do the listening activity. Both words are formed by adding a derivational suffix to a noun stem. The suffix *-ful* means “with”—so the word *hopeful* means “with hope.” In contrast, the suffix *-less* means “without”—so the word *clueless* means “without a clue.”

Some noun stems, like *hope*, can be joined with either suffix to form a new word. For example, both *hopeful* and *hopeless* are possible. However, other stems, like *clue*, can be used with only one of the suffixes. In this case, *clueless* is a real word, but *clueful* is not. Unfortunately, there is no definitive rule or pattern that governs which suffix a specific noun stem can take. As a result, students need repeated, meaningful practice with the different derivations if they wish to learn each form.

Chart A (page 52) provides your students with an *initial* opportunity for such meaningful practice. To set up the activity, copy the chart on the board or prepare a photocopied handout. Students should use a student dictionary to look up the meaning of each stem if they do not know the word already. Once they have written a suitable definition, they should also check to see whether *-ful* and *-less* can be used with the noun stem.

When students have completely filled in the chart, ask them to figure out how the stems are similar to each other. This step will give them an additional opportunity for meaningful practice with the words. Eventually, they should realize that most of the noun stems refer to emotions, senses, or thoughts.

You can also encourage your students to locate examples of how these words are used in context by using their student dictionaries or the Internet. More proficient students can be asked to write their own examples to illustrate how the words are used in context.

Chart A. Learning Derivative Forms—

Stem—	Definition—	+ <i>ful</i>?—	+ <i>less</i>?—
hope—	a feeling that something you wish for can happen—	yes—	yes—
clue—	information that helps you understand a mystery or puzzle—	no—	yes—
care—			
emotion—			
faith—			
fate—			
fear—			
hate—			
heart—			
joy—			
mind—			
rest—			
sense—			
sleep—			
taste—			
thank—			
thought—			

Optional Activity B: Matching Game—

In the following sentence (from the mysterious letter from Activity 1), Sam uses the word *keep* in two different multi-word constructions:

*He also admitted that he has **kept in touch with** some of his old friends from [your city], and those friends have **kept him informed** about family news all these years.*

Your students probably already understand the meaning of *keep* when it is used in simple patterns (*keep* + direct object, meaning “to possess something”), but they may not be able to comprehend the meaning of more complex constructions such as the two examples in the above sentence. In fact, the word *keep* is frequently used in a number of ways that differ from this basic pattern. When students encounter more complex patterns for the first time, they may assume that the form and meaning match what they already know. But when the sentence that students are reading does not match the pattern that they are already familiar with, they can easily become confused.

This matching game is intended to give students controlled exposure to several different patterns that include the word *keep*. Table B1 (page 54) contains 16 different patterns with the word *keep*, and Table B2 (page 55) contains 16 examples of those patterns used in context. Before the lesson, make one copy of each table for every two students. Cut out each cell in both tables to make 32 game cards. (To save time, you can also copy the tables on the board and have each pair of students work together to make their cards.)

The game is played in pairs. To play, students should first mix all the cards together. They should then lay the cards face down on their desks, arranging them so that there are four rows of eight cards. Once the cards are arranged, one student begins by turning two cards face up. To get a match, one card must show a pattern (from Table B1) and the other card should show the corresponding contextual example (from Table B2). If the two cards match, the student gets to keep them. If the cards do not match, the student turns them face down again and the second student can try to find a match. Play continues in this way until all of the matches have been found or time runs out. The student with the most cards at the end of the game wins.

At the end of the game, you may wish to briefly ask the students what they have learned from the game. It is important to note that students should not be expected to understand and produce the different collocations of the word *keep* after just one exposure. Instead, the first time they play the matching game, a realistic goal for the activity would be for them to simply realize that *keep* can be used in different patterns. The second time they play the game, they may begin to remember some of the patterns and the way that these patterns are used in context. The third time they play the game, they will probably remember more of the patterns and contextual examples.

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Table B1. Grammatical patterns—

keep (doing something)—	keep quiet—	keep (someone) company—	keep (someone) awake—
keep (someone) happy—	keep (something) down—	keep up (something)—	keep up with (someone)—
keep (something) open—	keep (something) closed—	keep at (something)—	keep an eye on (something or someone)—
keep (something) from (someone)—	keep (someone) out (of someplace)—	keep in touch with (someone)—	keep (someone) informed about (something)—

Table B2. Contextual examples—

<p>Our teacher told us to keep working until we finished.—</p>	<p>Please, keep quiet. The baby is sleeping.—</p>	<p>My friend was lonely, so I stayed to keep her company.—</p>	<p>If you drink too much coffee, it will keep you awake all night.—</p>
<p>He bought some sweets for his sister because he wanted to keep her happy.—</p>	<p>You are talking too loud. Keep the noise down! —</p>	<p>You have learned a lot this year. Keep up the good work! —</p>	<p>He is a very fast runner, so it will be difficult to keep up with him.—</p>
<p>During the holidays, they keep stores open later so that people can finish all of their shopping.—</p>	<p>If you saw your friend behaving badly, would you say something to him or just keep your mouth closed? —</p>	<p>This activity may seem difficult when you begin. But if you keep at it, you will do great.—</p>	<p>You should keep an eye on that man. I don't trust him.—</p>
<p>You should not keep secrets from your parents or teachers.—</p>	<p>There was a high wall around the factory and a sign on the gate that said "Danger! Keep out!" —</p>	<p>I use the Internet to keep in touch with friends from all over the world.—</p>	<p>If you are absent from class, ask a classmate to keep you informed about the lessons and homework.—</p>

Fact Sheet: Miami—

State: Florida—

Official Website: www.miamigov.com—

Population (2006): 404,048—

Area: 35 square miles (93 sq. km.)—

Elevation: 12 feet (4 m)—

Average temperatures—

January:—

Low 60°F (15°C)—

High 76°F (24°C)—

July:—

Low 76°F (24°C)—

High 89°F (31°C)—

Average annual rainfall: 59 inches (1488 mm)—

Nickname: The Magic City—

History—

The Tequesta Indians lived in the area that is now Miami for thousands of years before the first Europeans arrived from Spain in the 1500s. The United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1819, but it took another 77 years before the city of Miami was officially established. In slightly more than a century, Miami has grown from a small settlement of fewer than 1,000 people to the sixth largest urban area in the United States. (The population of the South Florida metropolitan area, of which Miami is the center, is roughly 5.4 million people.)

Climate—

Miami's climate is similar to the Caribbean region. Temperatures remain warm year round. Summers are rainy, and winters are dry. Although winter temperatures can occasionally reach as low as 40°F (4°C), it has only snowed one time in Miami since people started keeping records of the weather. Miami residents may not have to worry about snow and ice, but the city does experience other forms of bad weather. Several hurricanes and tropical storms have come close to Miami in recent years. And because Miami sits on the edge of the Everglades, a giant swamp that is also a National Park, area residents sometimes find alligators in their gardens and swimming pools.

Cultures—

Miami is one of the most international cities in the United States. According to 2006 estimates, 58% of the city's residents were born in another country and 76% speak a language other than English at home (compared to averages of 13% and 20%, respectively, for the rest of the United States). While Miami is home to large ethnic communities from various parts of Europe and Asia, it is mainly known as a center of Latino and Caribbean cultures. With strong ties to Latin America and the Caribbean, a large bilingual workforce, and a thriving business infrastructure, Miami is the main financial and transportation hub for trade between the United States and the southern hemisphere. Miami is also a major production center for Spanish-language media, and several of Latin America's most popular television shows are filmed there.

Activities—

Miami is a favorite destination for tourists from all over the world. Outdoor enthusiasts visit the beaches, marinas, parks, and gardens. Cultural aficionados enjoy the numerous art galleries, museums, and theaters. And for sports fans, Miami is a virtual paradise. The Miami Dolphins (football), the Florida Marlins (baseball), the Miami Heat (basketball), the Florida Panthers (hockey), and Miami FC (soccer) are professional sports teams based in Miami.