

*International Education: The Hedgehog Awoke: Two Writers breathe life back into Euskera (the Basque language)*

The Idaho State Department of Education is dedicated to increasing the technical capability, social readiness, and global perspective of high school graduates in order that they will complete school with the character, skills, and knowledge to become responsible and productive citizens in their community, state, nation and world. The following lesson on the Basque Country integrates one of Clifton Taulbert's *Eight Habits of the Heart* "to incite your memory and passion so that you can employ your imagination in the building of good communities for the twenty-first century."

Taulbert, Clifton. (1997). *Eight Habits of the Heart*. New York, New York: Penguin Books.

*Within the community, hope is believing in tomorrow – because you have learned to see with your heart. Talbert, p. 89*

Two class periods (approximately 90 minutes) will be required to complete the reading and related activities.

**I. Content:**

I want my students to be able to:

- A. Understand the uniqueness of the Basque culture and language
- B. Recognize influences of political struggle in Basque literature
- C. Appreciate the heritage, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of two Basque writers: Bernardo Atxaga and Joe Eiguren
- E. Analyze the writer's use of figurative language (simile and metaphor) to reveal the theme of hope

**II. Prerequisites:**

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student should be familiar with:

- A. Repression of Basque culture under Franco (**Teacher Handout #3**)
- B. Location (map) of the Basque Country (Euzkadi) within Spain (**Teacher Handout #4**)
- C. The literary terms figurative language, simile, metaphor, extended metaphor and theme (**Teacher Handout #5**)

**III. Instructional Objectives:**

The student will

- A. Understand the literary terms: figurative language, simile, metaphor, extended metaphor, and theme

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- B. Read actively (**Teacher Handouts #1 and #2**)
- C. Recognize details that reflect the author’s Basque heritage, traditions, attitudes and beliefs
- D. Locate examples of figurative language in the text
- E. *Consider how similes, metaphors and extended metaphors are used to reveal the writer’s theme of hope*

**IV. Materials and Equipment**

**Teacher:**

- Teacher Handout #1:** Excerpt from Joe Eiguren’s autobiography Kashpar (Chapter 3: “Life in the Basque Country”).
- Teacher Handout #2:** Bernardo Atxaga’s “Prologue” from his novel Obabakoak and his poem “The Hedgehog”
- Teacher Handout #3:** Overview of Franco regime and repression of Basque culture
- Teacher Handout #4:** A map of the Basque Country (Euzkadi) of Spain
- Teacher Handout #5:** Definitions of Literary Terms
- Teacher Handout #6:** Book Reviews and Related Articles

**Students:**

- Teacher Handout #1:** Excerpt from Joe Eiguren’s autobiography Kashpar (Chapter 3: “Life in the Basque Country”).
- Teacher Handout #2:** Bernardo Atxaga’s “Prologue” from his novel Obabakoak and his poem “The Hedgehog”
- Reader’s Journals** in which students write their reflections and responses to literature. (If Reader’s Journals are not used regularly, students may complete the assignments on notebook paper.)

**V. Instructional Procedure**

**Day One:**

Present an overview of the events of the Franco regime and repression of the Basque language and culture (**Teacher Handout #3**). Show the map of the Basque Country as it relates to the rest of Spain (**Teacher Handout #4**). Briefly review the literary terms: **figurative language, simile, metaphor, and theme (Teacher Handout #5)**.

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- Understand that writers use **figurative language** to communicate meanings beyond the range of ordinary language. Such language allows them to create fresh descriptions and to provide readers with new insights.
- Know that **similes** and **metaphors** are two kinds of **figurative language**. Both are comparisons between two things that are unlike but have something in common.
- In a **simile** the comparison is expressed by means of the word *like* or *as*
- A **metaphor** is a direct comparison without the use of *like* or *as*
- Remember that the meaning, moral, or message about life or human nature that is communicated by the literary work is called the **theme**.

Read actively the excerpt from Joe Eiguren’s autobiography Kashpar and identify important details about the writer’s Basque heritage. As you read, jot down interesting details in your Reader’s Journal about Kashpar’s childhood in the Basque Country. What were his family’s and community’s traditions, attitudes, and beliefs?

Look over the details that you listed. What do these details tell you about Kashpar and his experiences growing up in the Basque Country? Based on this reading what do you think the Basque people value most about their culture? What **theme** or message do you think Eiguren is trying to communicate to us readers? Consider the central conflict between Kashpar (Basque freedom movement) and the Spanish Civil Guards.

On page 22, Uncle Pasko says, “You know, Kashpar, the Basques are like cameras.” What kind of figurative language is this? (**simile**) Locate and re-read the passage on page 22 where Uncle Pasko explains this figurative comparison. (“... *the camera captures everything you snap or take a picture of. It could be that it captures a parental love for their children or vice versa, a panorama, scenery, anything, but if these pictures are not developed nothing would come out. The same with the Basques, they have just as much as anybody else in their minds, but it has never been developed because of the cruel oppression of unjust governments.*”)

**Reader’s Journal Activity:** Copy Uncle Pasko’s comparison “The Basques are like cameras” and write your responses to the meaning of this **simile**. Though not directly stated, what message or theme is suggested by the simile?

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What do you think the Basque people might hope for in the future? Support your ideas with other interesting details from the excerpt.

**Day Two:**

Review the literary terms **theme** and **metaphor**. Introduce students to **extended metaphor (Teacher Handout #5)**.

- A **metaphor** is a comparison of two things that have something in common—a comparison in which one thing is said to be another thing. Writers use metaphors to express abstract, difficult ideas through easily visualized images. When a writer compares two people, places, or things at some length and in several ways it is called an **extended metaphor**.
- Remember that the meaning, moral, or message about life or human nature that is communicated by the literary work is called the **theme**.

Bernardo Atxaga’s “Prologue (The author speaks of his language, Euskara)” is excerpted from his novel Obabakoak, which was written in Basque then translated into English and numerous other languages. Read actively and notice important details that point to the writer’s Basque heritage. As you read, jot down these details in your **Reader’s Journal**.

Look over the details you listed. What do you think is unique about the Basque language (Euskera)? What does Atxaga say about it in the first stanza? (“*I write in a strange language...*”). What are some strange characteristics of the Basque language?

In what genre (kind) of writing would you classify “Prologue”? (**free verse**) Atxaga creates a comparison in the second stanza,

*“Born, they say, in the megalithic age,  
it survived, this stubborn language, by withdrawing,  
by hiding away like a hedgehog in a place  
which, thanks to the traces it left behind there,  
the world named the Basque Country or Euskal Herria.”*

What two things are being compared? (The Basque language and a hiding hedgehog) What kind of figurative language is this? (**simile**)

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**Reader’s Journal Activity:** In the poem “Prologue” Atxaga compares the Basque language to a hedgehog in hiding. How is the Basque language like a hedgehog? He then extends the comparison by introducing a series of images of the hedgehog. This is called an **extended metaphor**. Re-read the poem carefully, locating all the hedgehog comparisons and copy them into your Reader’s Journal. How does the extended metaphor comparing the Basque language to a hedgehog help us to understand what has happened historically to the use and development of the Basque language. What happened for a long period to writing and publishing of Basque language literary works? Where dose Atxaga say his novel Obabakoak is being published? Write a journal entry explaining your understanding of Atxaga’s extended metaphor. How important do you think Atxaga’s work is to Basques living in Euszkadi and speaking their native language Euskera?

*Its sleep was long, its bibliography brief  
(but in the twentieth century the hedgehog awoke).*

Though not directly stated, what message or **theme** is suggested by this metaphor? What do you think the Basque people hope for in the future?

**VI. Assessment/Evaluation:**

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to recognize the effectiveness of figurative language in further readings. Students should be able to use this understanding to use figurative language to add layers of meaning to their own writing, to reflect on how they have been shaped by their own heritage and traditions, and to consider their hopes for the future.

**VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:**

Standard 1: Reading Process

**Goal 1.2: Acquire Concepts About Text**

8.LA.1.2.2 Analyze specific features of text, including the preface and appendix, to understand a selection

Standard 2: Comprehension/Interpretation

**Goal 2.1: Acquire Strategies and Skills for Comprehending Text**

8.LA.2.1.3 Make inferences, draw conclusions, and form opinions based on information gathered from text and cite evidence to support

**Goal 2.2: Acquire Skills to Comprehend Expository Text**

8.LA.2.2.3 Apply central ideas (literal or inferential) and critical details to summarize information from expository text.

**Goal 2.3: Acquire Skills for Comprehending Literary Text**

**Course of Study: Language Arts**

**Grade Level: 8**

**Instructional Block/Theme: Exploring the World through Reading Historic Fiction and Nonfiction**

**Author: Deb Straiton**

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- 8.LA.2.3.2 Interpret how situations, actions, and other characters influence a character's personality and development.
- 8.LA.2.3.6 Analyze the themes across various genres.

## Teacher Handout 1

Excerpt from *KASHPAR* by Joe Eiguren

### Chapter 3: LIFE IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The next six years were difficult for me. The working hours were long and the wages were very low, equivalent to the American 5¢ per day, six days a week, from 8:00 a.m. until dark.

Primitive working methods were used due to the lack of mechanical devices and the lack of electricity in our jobs. Often the whole crew would go out to the mountains to cut timber: oak, eucalyptus, pine, cypress, and other trees used in the building of fishing boats. Everything had to be sawed by hand, often right in the mountains, as there were no adequate means to transport the large trees to the shop. I was one of many who engaged in this type of work in the Basque Country before coming to America. Others were Baserriterrak, that is, farmers. They were dedicated to farming, but upon coming to America began herding sheep for want of something better.

Others (who for generations dedicated themselves to fishing until coming to America) became shepherders, in contrast to their previous occupations. The fisherman's life was colorful, but rugged and dangerous. Not very profitable. A crew of fishermen consisted of a "patroia," that is the skipper; an engineer, who mans the engine; the fireman, who keeps the boiler going and keeps the steam up; about eight other regular fishermen; and a young boy who did the cleanup and kept the boat in shape.

Each crew had a "Dei Egitekua," literally a caller. These are the women whose function was to raise the crew in the morning, if and when the weather permitted the fishermen to go to sea. Each crew had a place, the headquarters, where they transacted all their business. Invariably, this place was a tavern, and the distribution of their earnings took place there. On a typical day the town weatherman (usually a seasoned, experienced, older fisherman, assigned to this position by certain local authorities), went out to the most salient spot in the village about 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. and scanned the horizon. He would forecast the weather and determine if the fishermen should go out or not. If he predicted good weather, then he notified the women (callers) who were waiting for his forecast. If he said go, the women went out to wake up their respective crews. There was something fascinating about this waking of the men. These women had magnificent voices, although perhaps uncultivated, but really something worth hearing. They called "Koxe Inaxio" (Spanish-Jose Ignacio), "In the name of God, arise!" In the dark, misty, rainy morning, their powerful shrill voices sounded so unreal that one shivered, getting goose bumps. After her job was done, the caller went home to her children or to church with the rest of the fishermen. Her husband was one of the fishermen. The men would rise quickly, pick up their fishing gear, and go to the church, except for the fireman and the boy. These two go straight to their boat--the fireman to raise the steam of the boat and the youngster to do little chores before departure.

Every morning around 4:00 a.m., on the days when fishermen went out to sea, a special Mass was celebrated for their safe return. The departure was spectacular; literally hundreds of men came out of the Basilica in absolute silence, without a word to one another, their wooden shoes pounding on the cobblestone streets on their way to the waiting boats, compounding with the sound of the scores of boilers building up the steam prior to their departure, vibrating the otherwise quiet, sleepy village. The men took their positions on the boats, and one by one the

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boats started out to the open sea in an orderly manner, one boat after the other, separated by only a few yards. A mile or so out to sea, they would disperse in all directions and within a few minutes would disappear in the distant horizon. Their eyes are fixed on the land. On top of the highest mountain that surrounds the village was the “talayero,” the observer. His job was to spot schools of fish (mostly sardines, anchovies, or tuna), and notify the fishermen out in the sea of his findings. As strange as it may sound, this was accomplished by using the primitive method of smoke signals. In this way, he informed the fishermen of the location of a school of fish, the latitude, the longitude, the approximate distance from the land, and the direction it was traveling.

Once the skipper of the fishing boat gets the signal from the talayero or observer, he goes full speed ahead, chasing the school of fish. Five or six boats or more may go after the same school of fish. The first boat that reaches the school lays the nets and catches the fish, but any other boat that comes near it and the catch is not completely aboard, the skippers of the arriving boats yell “partners” and they all share in the catch. It was an unwritten law that they abide by.

At the end of the season it takes them several days to settle their accounts because” of large numbers of partnerships, not only between the fishermen of the same town, but also with the fishermen of the neighboring villages as well.

The farmers’ lifestyle was different from that of fishermen. My maternal grandparents were farmers and lived in Zubieta which was the name of the farm, and there they raised thirteen children of which my mother was the oldest. I spent a lot of time with them in my youth in this ancestral home and remember well the kind of life they led which will depict the life of an average Basque farmer.

Their house was a two-story, stucco structure. The ground floor consisted of an entry way, a kitchen in the front half of the house and the barn in the second half, or the back end of the house. The second story was the living quarters such as the living room and the bedrooms. A stairway in the entry way led the way to the second floor. The kitchen with a dirt floor was equipped with a sink (no running water); a fireplace where Amuma, that is grandmother in Basque, did all the cooking—no stove!--for her large family; a cupboard full of dishes; a long table with a bench against the wall on one side and some chairs on the other side. Considering the conditions, the house was kept immaculately clean.

Atxitxa got up each morning at 5 a.m. and attended the daily, first mass. After returning from church, he would have his light breakfast and then would go to the field to cut some fresh grass for the cows (2 of them), feed the hay to them and milk them. While he performed his tasks, the rest of the family would get up and in a sort of “everybody for himself’ fashion each took care of themselves. The girls stayed home and the boys went to their jobs. All of them were working in the three local shipyards.

The noon meal was impressive. At the time, I rather took it for granted, but now looking back in retrospect I appreciate how beautiful and meaningful it was. Each member of the family had their own place to sit around the big, long table. Arxitxa would come in, open the two windows in the wall that separated the kitchen from the barn where the cows were lowing in anticipation of the food they were about to receive from Atxitxa who, with incredible dexterity, sliced the beets with a sickle and fed the cows. Then he would wash his hands and sit down at the head of the table, remove his txapela (beret), as did everybody else, and say the grace which began with the sign of the cross, give the blessing, and ended with the first half of the Lord’s prayer: Aita gurea,

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our Father, etc., and the second half: Emonegizu gaur geure eguneroko ogia (give us our daily bread, etc.) by the rest of the members of the family. Then Atxitxa would take a big loaf of bread, perhaps a foot in circumference, in his left arm and with a butcher knife in his right hand would carve a cross in the bread. He then proceeded to slice it and pass it to each member of the family. Amuma would then bring big platters of succulent food that she had prepared in an open fireplace during the morning. To me, this scenario was the closest thing resembling the Last Supper—the shape of the table, the seating arrangement--everything looked so much like it. I often think of Atxitxa and the family when in church even today when I hear the words of the Communion Service, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Without me you can do nothing.” These words remind me of Atxitxa and Amuma too, Atxitxa slicing or breaking the bread and distributing it among the members of the family in a true sense of absolute communion.

After the noon meal, Atxitxa read the newspaper, took a short nap and then went back to work in his fields. Amuma went after the dishes. She did not read the newspaper, not because she did not have the time, but because she couldn't read it. She did not know how to speak, read or write Spanish. She knew only Basque, but even in Basque she could only speak it. She could not read nor write Basque because of the brutal suppression by the Spanish government's absolute monarchy. Since the use of Basque language was prohibited and was not taught in the schools, Amuma learned to speak it from her parents.

Atxitxa was an imposing figure, not only physically for he was six feet plus tall and weighed about 200 lbs., but he was a symbol of strength of character and a very compassionate man. Amuma was a very beautiful and intelligent lady, although illiterate. Of the thirteen children she bore, six emigrated to America.

Among these six was Pascual, better known as Pasko who came to this country at the age of thirteen and developed a livestock empire in Jordan Valley. Perhaps Uncle Pasko's way of thinking or philosophy would best describe Amuma's intellect. One day while I was visiting him on his ranch, we were discussing various subjects including the plight of the Basques in Euzkadi (Basque country), and suddenly almost like changing the subject in the middle of the conversation he said, “You know, Kashpar, the Basques are like cameras.” I couldn't figure out the parallel, so I asked him what was the similarity between the Basques and the camera. “Kashpar,” he said, “the camera captures everything you snap or take a picture of. It could be that it captures a parental love for their children or vice versa, a panorama, scenery, anything, but if these pictures are not developed nothing would come out. The same with the Basques, they have just as much as anybody else in their minds, but it has never been developed because of the cruel oppression of unjust “governments.” What he said reminded me of Amuma and her intelligence that had never been developed. She was a beautiful, intelligent and compassionate lady. I loved her!

Whether a farmer or a fisherman, all got together on festive occasions and would participate with no distinction. All occasions started with a solemn Mass in the morning, usually at 10 o'clock. After the church services, a dance called Aurrisku is performed in the village square and it is always presided over by the city mayor and the parish priest. This authentic and genuinely Basque ceremonial dance was described by Strabo, Hannibal's scribe. It is as old as the Basque race itself.

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In the afternoon, there were always some big events: weight lifting, wood chopping, and jai alai game. Toward the latter part of the afternoon, the festivities culminated with a dance in the open in the village square. At sunset the church bells sounded the Angelus and everybody dispersed. The women and the girls would usually retire to their homes. Men and older boys would go to the taverns to discuss the day's events and perhaps play some cards.

As time went by, I became aware of many things. I realized the seriousness of the Basques' plight. I remember how the older men used to meet occasionally and clandestinely. They were known as the Bizkaitarrak, meaning literally the Biscayans, but the term was actually synonymous with the Basque Nationalism. I witnessed the closing of the Basque centers, the raiding of the Bizkaitarraks' meeting places, the confiscation of the Basque history and cultural books, the burning of them in public by the Spanish Civil Guards, and the jailing of some of the Bizkaitarrak. In view of all of this, it was not hard for me to decide to join them and actively and diligently work for the cause. I admired these men's quiet, serene courage--and the tenacity with which they fought their oppressors. I learned to love everything pertaining to Basque; the language spoken in spite of the fact that Basques were not allowed to speak it, their history, fables, songs, dances, music, everything. The Bizkaitarraks' efforts to regain their freedom paid off.

In 1931 the tyrannical dictator of Spain fell, and by the abdication of the king, Spain and all the peninsula became a republic. With the advent of the republic, many changes took place in the Basque country; not only culturally, but socially, and in other aspects as well.

The Spanish new democratic government allowed the Basques to speak their native language, reopen their cultural centers, perform their ancient dances which they were not allowed to perform, display their flag, and to do whatever they wished to do to maintain and preserve their culture which they were not allowed to do so since 1839.

Among those activities were the opening of the Basque centers in the different towns. Almost every Sunday there was an inauguration or opening of a Basque center in some Basque town. On these occasions we, the boys and girls, would gather about 5:00 a.m. in the main church of our town to hear Mass, receive Communion, assemble in the city "plaza" and move on foot to whichever town the inauguration may be, waving our flags and singing our patriotic songs. Thousands of people gathered on these occasions from different towns.

About 3:00 p.m. we always met in the city's handball park or "Frontoya" to hear the leaders of the Basque freedom movement, i.e. Jose Antonio Aguirre, Monzon, Esteban Urkiaga, and many others. Urkiaga was better known by his pseudonym "Lauaxeta." He was a writer and a poet. He became a very close friend of the Spanish all-time great poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. Ironically both of them were assassinated by Franco. History books say "executed" as if they were criminals, but they were assassinated because of their fierce love for freedom.

In 1972 I wrote a little book and dedicated it to Urkiaga because I admired him so much when I was a youngster in Euzkadi. In 1974 I learned that his father and my paternal grandmother were brother and sister!

For the first time (1931) in the history of the Basques the "Biskaitarrak" founded the first labor organization which in Basque was known as the "Euzko Langille Batza" or

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The Solidarity of Basque Workers” and through it our working conditions, as well as salaries, improved.

“The solidarity of Basques workers” was exclusively a Basque labor union with no connection to the powerful Spanish “Union General de Trabajadores” - “General Union of Workers,” of socialist inclinations, nor with the “Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo” - “National Confederation of Workers,” also leaning strongly to the left. On the contrary, it was blessed and endorsed by the Catholic Church. Among the many reforms brought about by this organization were the legal determination of hourly rate and salaries, and ending the shameful feudalistic system of working from daylight to dark, six days a week for the equivalent of 5¢ American money. The workers were classified as helpers, apprentices, first and second class workers (in our case marine carpenters), and set the wages accordingly. The hours were set at eight hours a day, following the pattern of England, the U.S.A., and other more advanced nations. Another measure was to prohibit the employment of children under 14 years of age and making it compulsory to attend school for those children.

When the time came to formally organize the union locally in Lekeitio, a meeting was convoked with the participation of hundreds of workers attending it to elect the officers. The election was held, but it was declared invalid. Although I was not a candidate for any office, I received scores of write-in votes for president of the local union. Since I was only 16 years old in 1931, the election was declared invalid as I couldn't vote or receive votes until I was 18! After the second round of elections, my uncle, the one that slapped me, was elected president.

To illustrate how life was for us under the tyrannical Spanish dictators, I would like to relate a little incident that occurred on one Christmas Eve during the Spanish oppression of the Basques. In the Basque country, Christmas is the biggest day of the year. On this day, nobody works; even the bakers are off. However, the biggest and most important celebration in commemoration of the birth of Jesus is on Christmas Eve. On this day, all members of the family gather for the evening meal. Even those members of a family who might be away from home in colleges or working in other towns of the peninsula get together for this occasion that is celebrated with a special meal consisting of many delicacies; sea bream, snails, and other items that people may not usually eat during the year. It is what could be considered an annual family reunion. After dinner, everybody goes out visiting local taverns and singing Christmas carols in the streets until church services start at midnight. On this particular occasion, I was separated from my friends. We came out of a tavern, and I stopped in a public rest room between the tavern and the main plaza of the town. As I came out of the rest room singing Christmas carols in Basque, I was stopped by two Civil Guards. One of them put his rifle about a foot from my chest and told me, “Don't you know that you are not supposed to sing in Basque?” I tried to tell them something, and the one aiming his rifle at me said, “One word out of you, and I will let you have it.” I did not know what he meant, whether he was going to shoot me, or hit me with the butt of his rifle, so I didn't say anything. After I joined my friends, they wanted to know what happened. There were a couple of other groups of young guys interested in knowing what happened. I explained to them, and we all decided to work the Civil Guards over. We dispersed in different directions, and first one group started to sing Christmas songs in Basque, and the Civil Guards started chasing them; then another group started to sing, and the guards chased them. We let the Guards

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come as close to us as we dared, and then ran as fast as we could while another group started to sing. For about two hours we had the Civil Guards running in circles all over the town until midnight, which was the time for us to go to Mass.

## Teacher Handout 2

This text was written as a prologue to the book *Obabakoak* (Vintage, 1994) by **Bernardo Atxaga**. Translated by **Margaret Jull Costa**.

# PROLOGUE

(The author speaks of his language, Euskera)

I write in a strange language. Its verbs, the structure of its relative clauses, the words it uses to designate ancient things--rivers, plants, birds--have no sisters anywhere on Earth.

A house is *etxe*, a bee *erle*, death *heriotz*. The sun of the long winters we call *eguzki* or *eki*; the sun of the sweet, rainy springs is also--as you'd expect--called *eguzki* or *eki*. (it's a strange language, but not that strange).

Born, they say, in the megalithic age, it survived, this stubborn language, by withdrawing, by hiding away like a hedgehog in a place, which, thanks to the traces it left behind there, the world named the Basque Country or *Euskal Herria*. Yet its isolation could never have been absolute--cat is *katu*, pipe is *pipa*, logic is *lojika*--rather, as the prince of detectives would have said, the hedgehog, my dear Watson, crept out of its hiding place (to visit, above all, Rome and all its progeny).

The language of a tiny nation, so small you cannot even find it on the map, it never strolled in the gardens of the Court or past the marble statues of government buildings; in four centuries it produced only a hundred books . . . the first in 1545; the most important in 1643; the Calvinist New Testament in 1571; the complete Catholic Bible around 1860. Its sleep was long, its bibliography brief (but in the twentieth century, the hedgehog awoke).

*Obabakoak*, this book published now in this city, the city of Dickens, of Wilkie Collins and of so many others, is one of the latest books to join the Basque bibliography. It was written in several houses and in several countries, and its subject is simply life in general.

And *Obaba* is just Obaba: a place, a setting; *ko* means 'of'; *a* is a determiner; *k* the plural. The literal translation: *The People or Things of*

## **Teacher Handout 2**

*Obaba*; a less literal translation: *Stories from Obaba* (and with that I conclude this prologue).

## Genetics helps scientists determine Basque origins

Source: *SFGate.com* (9 July 2003)

Reproduced From: [www.stonepages.com/news/archives/000244.html](http://www.stonepages.com/news/archives/000244.html)

Genetics is helping researchers trace the migration of the Basque people, a culture that originated in East Africa tens of thousands of years ago. By first tracking the female gene back 150,000 years to East Africa, scientists then followed the male Y chromosome to determine human whereabouts.

As Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, adjunct professor for the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno (USA), explained at a recent presentation at Northeastern Nevada Museum as part of the National Basque Festival in Elko, "The Basque came out of East Africa 50,000 or so years ago and passed through the Middle East."

This explains why some Middle Eastern cities have names that could be Basque in origin, like Ur, Uruk, and Mari, which is the name of a Basque goddess.

According to Mallea-Olaetxe, linguists have long suspected such an idea since an old—now dead—language from Central Asia, Burushaski, "looks suspiciously like Basque". Genetic research is proving the linguists right.

After inhabiting Central Asia for about 10,000 years, Basque ancestors migrated to both the Americas and Western Europe, where they settled—and still live—in France and Spain. The cave paintings in southern France and northern Spain were likely painted by Basque ancestors 10,000 to 30,000 years ago, says Mallea-Olaetxe, which "fits perfectly" the timeline of their migration.

Since DNA research has also shown that the Celtic people's genes are almost identical to the Basque's, it is believed they may have migrated together to Western Europe 30,000 years ago.

Mallea-Olaetxe states that genetic research into Basque origins has been ongoing over the past decade or so; however, their conclusions have only been made public recently.

Basque nationalists see Irish nationalism as sharing with them a struggle of national liberation against big states, Spain and Great Britain. There are not religious divisions in the Basque country.

The Basques have been fighting to protect their language and culture for thousands of years. They are fiercely proud of their history.

They have been occupying their corner of Europe with its lush, green valleys and rugged coastline, since well before Roman times.

### Teacher Handout 3

No one knows where they came from. Their language, known as Euskera, has no links with any other known language and was spoken long before all of the Indo-European languages in the rest of Europe.

The protection and promotion of Euskera has always been at the heart of the Basque struggle.

Since the return of democracy in Spain following General Franco's death in 1975, Euskera has been thriving.

About 30% of the 2.5 million Basque people speak it and more than 90% of Basque children are now enrolled in Euskera schools.

Radio and television stations broadcast in the language. There are Basque newspapers and a growing number of internationally renowned writers, such as Bernardo Atxaga, whose works have been translated into Castillian Spanish, English, German and French.

Throughout history, Basques have developed a reputation as fierce defenders of their territory - against Romans, Vikings, Visigoths, Muslims and others.

Many invaders have chosen to by-pass the region. When they have managed to put down roots, the Basques have negotiated and learned from them, but have never mixed too much or risked becoming integrated.

From the Middle Ages onwards, they developed a reputation as formidable fishermen and have built boats which have taken them great distances in search of whales and cod.

There is some evidence that Basques landed in North America hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus.

It was Basque sailors who made up the bulk of Columbus's crew.

Basque men wear their large berets with pride. It is a hat which was first worn in the Basque region and then exported to France and beyond.

They are also recognized as the best cooks in Spain for their simple fish dishes and interesting cakes.

In the heart of the Basque country, there are 75 gastronomic societies in the city of San Sebastian alone.

They hold feasts and sometimes march through the streets. These occasions are so important that the mayor is expected to eat at all of them at least once a year.

There is also a rich vein of Basque music and storytelling. Public storytelling sessions are still held in many rural towns and villages.

### Teacher Handout 3

Basques have always been known as a fiercely religious people. So it is no surprise that one of the most radical and disciplined religious orders, the Jesuits, was founded by a Basque, Ignatius Loyola, in 1534.

Originally a soldier, while recovering from a serious war wound, he began reflecting on his life and reading about the saints.

He studied in Paris where he founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits.

It had originally been intended as a missionary order. Instead, it went on to spearhead the Counter-Reformation, inspiring respect for its missionary work but fear for its often ruthless defense of its disciplined beliefs.

The Basques had been some of the fiercest opponents of Franco's Nationalist troops during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

One of Franco's most hated opponents, Dolores Ibárruri - known as La Pasionaria or the Passionate One for her inspiring speeches - came from a working-class family in Bilbao.

Picasso immortalized the bombing of the Basque town, Guernika, by Franco's German allies. The painting now hangs in a museum in Madrid.

During Franco's 40-year rule, he punished the region for its opposition. He declared two provinces "traitor provinces."

Franco believed in one, unified Spain and opposed any kind of regional diversification.

He banned the speaking of Euskera in public and ensured that there was little economic investment in the region.

## ETA is born

**(ETA)Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna - means Basque fatherland and freedom.**

Franco, like many before him, had found it difficult to suppress this proud nation and the movement for an independent Basque homeland began in the late 1950s.

The separatist group, ETA, began its violent campaign 10 years later.

While support for an independent homeland remains strong, it is by no means overwhelming. Many Basques are happy with the large degree of autonomy they have been granted by the central government in Madrid.

### Teacher Handout 3

While still a long way from reaching any kind of long term political solution and establishing a permanent peace, it is clear that the Basque language and culture are enjoying a resurgence and that the Basque nation is as strong and vibrant now as it has ever been.

ETA's 30-year campaign for a sovereign Basque state, which has cost more than 800 lives:

## Franco years

Drawn from many news agencies and the writings of Daniel Schweimler in Madrid

- 1937: General Franco occupies Basque country. The Basques had enjoyed a degree of autonomy which they now were denied. Franco regime ruthlessly repressed their aspirations for independence.
- 1959: ETA is founded with the aim of creating an independent homeland in Spain's Basque region. The full name of the organization - Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna - means Basque fatherland and freedom.
- 1961: ETA's violent campaign begins with an attempt to derail train transporting politicians.
- 1968: ETA kills its first victim, Meliton Manzanos, a secret police chief in San Sebastian.
- December 1973: Basque nationalists assassinate Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in Madrid in retaliation for the government's execution of Basque militants.
- 1978: ETA's political wing Herri Batasuna is founded.
- 1980: 118 people are killed in ETA's bloodiest year so far.
- 1995: Attempt to assassinate the leader of the opposition Popular Party (now Prime Minister), Jose Maria Aznar, with a car bomb.
- March 1996: Right-wing Popular Party wins general election. There was speculation that the change of government would lead to a crackdown against ETA, which later proved wrong. But ETA apparently views the Popular Party as heir to General Franco's dictatorship.
- 1997: Start of ETA's campaign against local Popular Party politicians.

### Teacher Handout 3

- July 1997: ETA kidnaps and kills Basque councillor Miguel Angel Blanco, sparking national outrage and bringing an estimated 6 million Spaniards on the streets.
- December 1997: 23 leaders of Herri Batasuna jailed for 7 years for collaborating with ETA. The case centered on an video featuring armed and masked ETA guerrillas, which the party tried to show during general election campaign. This was the first time any members of the party have been jailed for co-operating with ETA.
- February 1998: Herri Batasuna elects new provisional leadership.
- March 1998: Spain's main political parties engage in talks to end violence in the Basque region. The government is not involved.
- April 1998: Northern Ireland peace agreement signed. ETA is understood to have been heavily influenced by the Northern Ireland peace process. ETA has traditionally had relations with the Irish republicans and the political wing Herri Batasuna has been schooled by Sinn Fein on strategy for negotiation.
- June 1998: The latest ETA death takes place, as car bomb kills Popular Party councillor Manuel Zamarreno.
- September 1998: ETA announces its first indefinite cease-fire since its 30-year campaign of violence began, effective from 18 September.
- May 1999: The first and only meeting between ETA and the Spanish government in Zurich, Switzerland.
- August 1999: Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar accuses ETA of being "scared of peace" and calls on the group to prove its commitment. ETA subsequently confirms that contact with Madrid has been severed.
- November 1999: The separatist group announces an end to its 14-month ceasefire in a Basque newspaper, blaming lack of progress in talks with the Spanish government.
- January 2000: Car bombs explode in Madrid.
- February 2000: Car bomb in Basque capital Vitoria kills leading Socialist politician and bodyguard.

## Teacher Handout 3

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# Teacher Handout 4



## Basque region



Area: 12,828 sq. mi.  
Population: 2.9 million

- Basque Country: 2.1m
- Navarra: 0.5m
- French area: 0.3m



## Teacher Handout 5

# Identifying Figurative Language

### Similes

In everyday language, we describe things by comparing them with other things.

- ⇒ She was as brave as a lion.
- ⇒ He was as silly as a headless chook.
- ⇒ His face felt like sandpaper.
- ⇒ She addressed the children like a sergeant-major.

These comparisons are straightforward and are sometimes called **open comparisons**. The words "as" or "like" tell us comparisons are being made. The technical name for these comparisons is **similes**.

- ⇒ Her gaze was like ice.

This is a simile.

### Metaphors

We can make comparisons without "as" or "like"

- ⇒ Her gaze was icy.

This is a hidden comparison, and the technical name for it is a **metaphor**

We distinguish between **literal meanings** and **metaphorical meanings**

- ⇒ The footpath was icy.(literal meaning)
- ⇒ Her gaze was icy.(metaphorical meaning)
- ⇒ He couldn't digest anything the nurse gave him to eat.(literal meaning)
- ⇒ He couldn't digest anything the nurse told him.(metaphorical meaning)

We use metaphors all the time in everyday language. Often we are probably not conscious that they are metaphors.

- ⇒ The whole enterprise had a fishy smell.
- ⇒ Your letter was buried under my papers.
- ⇒ That salesman was a shark.

Many experiences, feelings, and ideas are difficult to express in words. Therefore we try to describe them by using comparisons, such as similes and metaphors. They are frequently found in poetry:

*My love is like a red, red rose*

## Teacher Handout 5

*That's newly sprung in June:  
My love is like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.  
--Robert Burns*

They are also used in academic writing.

- ⇒ Those people were at the bottom of the social heap.
- ⇒ Plants are complex chemical factories.
- ⇒ Light is trapped by a special pigment in the leaves.
- ⇒ The xylem seems to be the main piping system for water in the plant.

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Authors use metaphors and similes to create **IMAGES**. Identify whether the following are similes or metaphors. Beware--there are some trick ones in there!

1. "Juliet is the sun." (Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet.)
2. Tracy felt as sick as a parrot.
3. "..the perfect sky is torn." (Natalie Imbruglia, "Torn")
4. The traffic is murder.
5. Tom is as deaf as a post.
6. "Life's but a walking shadow." (Shakespeare, Macbeth.)
7. She ran like the wind.
8. I'm as light as a feather.
9. "The sun's a thief." (Shakespeare, Timon of Athens.)
10. Kitty is the apple of her mother's eye.
11. "Death lies upon her like an untimely frost." (Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet.)
12. My feet are as warm as toast.
13. "There's more life in a tramp's vest." (Stereophonics, "more life in a tramp's vest.")
14. Tom is deaf.

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15. "Everyday is a winding road and " (Sheryl Crow, "Everyday is a winding road.")
16. My eyes are blue.
17. "England & is a fen of stagnant waters." (Wordsworth.)
18. "Their smiles, wan as primroses." (Keats.)
19. The cucumber is cool.
20. Your beauty shines like the sun.
21. "Love is blind, as far as the eye can see." (The Spice Girls, "Too Much.")
22. She looked as pretty as a picture.
23. James was as cool as a cucumber.
24. His feet are as black as coal.
25. "It's been a hard day's night / And I've been working like a dog." (Lennon and McCartney.)

## Identifying Theme

### Theme

The meaning, moral or message about life or human nature that is communicated by the literary work is called the theme. The theme is not always directly stated. The reader infers the theme by analyzing story elements such as setting, character, and conflict.

Here are some ways to look for a theme in a literary work:

- Skim the story for key phrases and sentences that say something about life or people in general.
- Look for repeated words or ideas that emphasize important ideas or feelings.
- Review what happens to the main character in the story. What does the main character learn?
- Find the most important topic or subject in the work and ask yourself: What is the author saying about this topic?

## Teacher Handout 6

### Transcript 4

A life in writing

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## A bridge across the great divide

Michael Eaude talks to Bernardo Atxaga, Basque's strongest literary voice

**Michael Eaude Saturday October 20, 2001**

**Guardian**

Bernardo Atxaga sent no address, just a piece of paper with crosses marking the pelota court, the church, the fountain, and then his house, in relation to the three basic components of any Basque village. He might just have easily have been describing Obaba, the imaginary setting of his most famous book *Obabakoak*.

"No," he laughs, "Obaba is an interior landscape. You don't remember all the places of the past, but what sticks in the memory is this window, that stone, the bridge. Obaba is the country of my past, a mixture of the real and the emotional."

Atxaga is, as one critic has pointed out, not just a Basque novelist but the Basque novelist: a writer charged, whether he likes it or not, with exporting a threatened culture around the world. Born in 1951, Atxaga grew up in a Basque-speaking valley of scattered houses and villages near San Sebastian. Basque is a rural language, with no relation to neighbouring Spanish or French, and spoken in Atxaga's infancy by less than half a million people. Franco sought to eliminate it after the civil war: tombstones in Basque were torn up, and the language was forbidden in schools.

In evoking this Basque heritage, Atxaga avoids nostalgia, often the curse of writers recreating lost rural childhood. "The look backwards can be very deceptive, a siren song that any time past was better. You have to be very disciplined about feelings. If you let a sense of nostalgia dominate, you only write false texts," he says.

*Two Brothers*, the most recent of his works to arrive in the UK, is a short novel with a long history. It was written in the mid-1970s and published in Basque in 1985; Atxaga himself translated it into Spanish for publication in 1995. The two brothers of the title are orphaned in their adolescence. Paulo inherits the sawmill and too much responsibility, because his brother, Daniel, has a mental age of three. Like all Atxaga's characters, they have little room for manoeuvre. They are trapped in their situation, which is in turn aggravated by their neighbours. "Village life is tough. People are often disagreeable and ignorant," Atxaga says.

"*Two Brothers* was really my most important book, because it showed me that my idea of how to write about village life could work." One element of this idea was to narrate the story of the brothers through animals: squirrels, birds, a snake, impelled by their inner voices to observe the story's human characters. Though it sounds like Disney, the device

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works well, allowing us to overhear the human voices and thoughts, and adding a chorus to the tragedy.

Blue sky, rounded stones, flowing water are the images Atxaga's direct, unsentimental writing brings to mind. "I remember seeing a film of Romeo and Juliet. I've never forgotten the scene where Mercutio tells jokes while dying of a sword wound; the striking contrast. Death doesn't come accompanied by special effects. Everything is just surrounded ... by nothing."

I had been forewarned that Atxaga was tired of being asked about the long terrorist conflict that has marked his adult life, but he himself brought up the Basque situation. He was fed up with hostile "interrogations of the Basque", as he put it. "I have been forced to learn politics," he says ruefully. "You cannot just go to a literary event and read a poem when someone you know has been killed the day before. You do go and you read the poem, but first you have to say what you think."

Atxaga has compared his position to being in the middle of a river between the two entrenched nationalisms, Spanish and Basque. Up to your neck in water, you run the risk of being swept away, but you also have the chance to see both sides clearly. Nor does being in the middle mean wet indecision: for Atxaga, it means radical, practical democracy, confronting the two. "I have known so many people killed on both sides," he says. A schoolmate from his village was tortured to death by the police. He knew Lupez de Lacalle, the journalist and anti-Franco trades unionist killed last year by Eta. Atxaga doesn't share the radical nationalists' desire for independence, but he refuses to line up with the prominent Spanish artists recruited to the government and socialists' "Smash ETA" front.

"Look, these kids, like kids I went to school with, at 13 they're hunting in the woods, at 16 they're persuaded to take some papers over the frontier, at 18 they're spotted burning buses and go into hiding, and at 20 they've killed someone and they're in prison for 40 years. The struggle is to get people out of these bad situations, not just parrot 'Smash ETA'."

Atxaga does not deal in slogans. His only scathing comments were for those writers who hold forth from Madrid on the conflict without knowing the Basque country: "dangerous poets seduced by power". After the worldwide success of *Obabakoak*, Atxaga took the bold decision to change genres completely. In the early- and mid-90s he wrote *The Lone Man* and *The Lone Woman*, which explore the world of ETA.

However weary Atxaga is of being the Basque writer, he knows he will always be a standard-bearer. His sophisticated books have put Basque culture on the map, but his success is also specific and literary. His simple style has not come simply. Atxaga has fought hard to redefine an idea of "village". His Obaba, though mythical, represents a real place in a complex world.

á *Two Brothers*, *The Lone Woman* and *The Lone Man* are published by Harvill.

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*Obabakoak* is published by Vintage.  
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### Transcript 5

Transcript is a **Literature Across Frontiers** publication

#### THE BASQUE COUNTRY

Bernardo Atxaga

#### The Awakening of Basque Literature

by Mari Jose Olaziregi

No image illustrates the development of the Basque language better than the furtive hedgehog rolled into a ball bristling on the first sign of danger. As Bernardo Atxaga suggests in his poem, the hedgehog, after a long period of inactivity, finally awoke in the 20th century. It may be said that these last hundred years have been the fullest and most interesting years of our literary history. Thus they shall be the focus of this article. Earlier in our history we find little to sing and dance about. Indeed, from 1545, when *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae* appeared, an anthology of poems by B. Etxepare, the first book in the Basque language, until 1879, a mere 101 books were published, of which only four can be safely described as 'literary'. We may say then that Basque literature is a recent phenomenon whose development was not blessed by kind socio-historical conditions. Indeed, its development goes hand in hand with the changing fate of the Basque language on which it is built.

Early works in Basque were published north of the Franco-Hispanic border. Etxepare's book was soon followed by others, each a watershed: the translation of the New Testament in 1571 and of certain Calvinist writings by J. de Leizarraga; Gero, a work by Pedro de Axular which appeared in 1643, considered a jewel of ascetic writing. Translations and further works of edification continued to appear, and in the 18th century the cradle of Basque literature lay south of the Pyrenees. In 1765 the Royal Basque Society and the Royal Seminary of Bergara were founded. Influenced by ideas of the Enlightenment, contemporary authors, Javier Munibe for example, brought renewed vigour to the cultural climate of the time. The years 1794 to 1808 were a period of exceptional activity in areas concerning the language. During this time the eminent linguist G. de Humboldt came to the Basque country. Subsequently, he brought the Basque language to the attention of European society. Many others followed in his footsteps. Romanticism saw artists and eclectics drawn to the ancient language, Wordsworth from England and the French writer MŽrimŽe for example, who chose the name *Carmen* for the heroine of his famous novel.

All things considered, the final decade of the nineteenth century may be said to have ushered in a radical change in outlook which was destined to redefine future Basque literature in every way conceivable. At this time, the preponderance of edifying and religious works meets its end and a broader spectrum of literary genres comes to light. The years following the second Carlist war (1873-1876) mark the beginning of what some critics have termed the 'renaissance' of Basque literature....

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During this time, the foundations of Basque nationalism were laid by Sabino Arana. Almost everything written in Basque during the first three decades of the 20th century bears the mark of Arana's hand. The supremacy of nationalist ideology affected literary production during the early decades of the century in two ways. First, the writing was tainted by concerns which lay beyond the field of literature. Second, the literature of the time missed the modernist boat which, in Europe, was a movement seeking to redefine language and deal in the splintered currency that were the forms of the day. This movement involved writers who subscribed to Ezra Pound's manifesto 'Make it new!' launched in 1930. This wind of change reached the Basque country much later in the century toward the 1960s. The Basque novel which took its first steps at the end of the 19th century in the works of D. Aguirre sought to paint an idealised world of fundaments, far from the industrial centres which had grown up in the Basque country. These books propounded a thesis whose three main arguments were faith, patriotism, and the Basque character of that patriotism. This model persisted until the 1950s....

After the novel, poetry is doubtless the most important genre of the first half of the 20th century. One strength of post-symbolist poetry was a literary tradition more formal than that encountered in narrative genres. This poetry finds its best exponents in Lizardi, Lauaxeta and Orixe who sought to explore resources of expression in Basque. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) dealt a terrible blow to Basque literary output. Lives were lost, many were exiled, and the victor practised severe repression. The use of Basque forenames was banned as were Basque inscriptions on tombstones in the cemeteries. All areas of culture, administration and social life fell under the shadow of the censorship imposed by Franco's regime

It has been said that the post-war generation was pivotal for Basque literature. It offered a measure of continuity, and this was sorely needed. Poet Jon Mirande wrote at this time. He exorcised the religious spirit which had haunted Basque poetry until the 1950s.... Central to their concerns was to see Basque literature rid of the political, religious and antiquarian values to which it paid homage. This achieved, the aesthetics of literature would shine through. A series of events set in motion some years later during the 1960s - industrial and economic development, the consolidation of Basque-language schools, the unification of the Basque language, political action against the ban which Franco's regime had imposed on all cultural activity through the medium of Basque, literacy campaigns in Basque - all contributed to preparing the ground for a crop of new literary principles....

During the 1970s, Bernardo Atxaga, the Basque language's greatest ambassador appears on the literary scene. (See [Transcript 4](#)).

The advent of democracy in Spain in 1975 meant that conditions favourable to fuller development of Basque literature as an independent activity could be encouraged. The statistics from this period speak for themselves: about 1500 new titles are now published each year; there are about 100 publishing houses in the Basque country; 300 writers write in Basque (of which however only 10% are women); narrative forms are predominant, especially the novel, the preferred genre of readers of Basque in the last ten years. Since

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1981, courses in Basque philology form part of the university syllabus. This in turn galvanises academic criticism and ensures the emergence of future generations of scholars. Major events such as the Durango Annual Bookfair, have become part and parcel of the calendar. The translation of the classics into Basque has enjoyed an unprecedented surge and the standard of the work continues to improve. Such is the present state of affairs that the works of many of the world's great authors - Joyce, Faulkner, Eliot, Chekhov, Celine, Kafka - now exist in Basque.

There can be no doubt that the weak link in the Basque literary machine remains the number of works translated into other languages. Of the 60 titles which have been translated into various languages, the works of Bernardo Atxaga stands out. His books have been translated into more languages than those of any other author (Obabakoak is available in 25 different languages), and have brought the author more success and recognition than any other. Despite our fine publishing industry, media and academic system, Basque literature runs the risk of giving the impression that it is not endeavouring to widen its readership

There can be no doubt that Bernardo Atxaga's (see [Transcript 4](#)) *Etiopia* (1978) redefined contemporary Basque poetry. This book has become a cornerstone of modern Basque canon. The book appeared while Basque poetry, thanks to a wealth of literary reviews which served as a springboard for many writers, was experiencing its avant-garde period. *Etiopia* records the poetic fatigue which heralded the demise of modernism. In it Axtaga has shed excess ornamentation and distanced himself from the dramatic tone of his previous book *Poems and Hybrids* (1990). Now he seeks to tap into the essence of poetry once again. To do so, he recreates the language of poetry, dashing received idiom on the rocks with the help of a little Dadaism, and an approach which is both primitive and childlike....

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### Transcript 5

Transcript is a **Literature Across Frontiers** publication

#### THE BASQUE COUNTRY

**Bernardo Atxaga**

#### **Bernardo Atxaga**

Bernardo Atxaga (1951), the pseudonym of JosŽ Irazu Garmendia, is a poet and novelist who writes both in Basque and in Spanish. Born in Asteasu (Guipuzcoa), he published his first collection of poems *Ziutateak* (The Towns) in 1976. This was followed two years later by *Etop'a* for which he was awarded the Critics' Prize. Over the last twenty years he has published over twenty books for children and young people and has written radio plays and pieces for theatre. Atxaga's work is bound up with Basque music and he has penned a number of songs in Basque. He owes his literary renown primarily to his novels which have had great success nationally and been translated into several languages. The first of them *Bi anai* (Two Brothers) was awarded the Critics' Prize in 1985 as was *Obabakoak* (People of Obaba) in 1988 which, as well as winning the prize for Basque literature, was declared the best book in Spain that year. A figurehead of Basque writing today, Atxaga has recently published two novels in Spanish, *El hombre solo* (The Lone Man) and *Esos Cielos* (These Skies). His work occupies a place between the avant-garde and fantastic realism, and the characters and environment he writes of - the Basque people, their world and struggles - are to the forefront in his writings.

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### Arts & Culture

English edition Thursday , November 17, 2005

2005-08-17

## Bernardo Atxaga feels “euphoria” on seeing ‘Obaba’

He said he had gone “right inside” the images of Montxo Armendariz’s film

Agencies – SANTANDER

The writer Bernardo Atxaga told the film director Montxo Armendariz yesterday that he had felt “euphoria” on seeing the film *Obaba* the first time and that he had gone “right inside” the film’s images. The two had a conversation in front of an audience as part of the summer courses organised by the Menendez Pelayo International University in Santander (Spain). “I felt very light and happy,” said Atxaga. “The people who saw the film with me felt as I did or even better.” Among them was one of the translators of the book.

Armendariz has filmed *Obaba* which is based on Atxaga’s book *Obabakoak* and the film will have its premiere during the International Film Festival in Donostia (San Sebastian). The festival will open on September 15 with Armendariz’s work in the official section.

Atxaga has aimed to be involved in the film as little as possible. “Montxo Armendariz is the one who knows all about cinema and I have tried to interfere as little as possible”. That is why after seeing the film it was a question of “being happy or not”. And he says he felt very happy indeed. When he saw the film he felt he was right inside the world of the film “seeing that world and feeling very comfortable”. That is why Atxaga says he is “very fortunate”

Atxaga believes that when a film is based on a book a similar thing happens as when a song is based on a poem. “There is a change of order, a change of universe.” That is why he thinks the film is “totally Armendariz’s”.

In Santander Atxaga also spoke about what he is writing at present: the book that will be entitled *Doce Casas en Francia* (Twelve Houses in France) when translated into Spanish. In this book he will be reviving “the tones and themes” of youth, particularly those of his book of poems *Etiopia*. Humour and, on occasions, black humour will have a prominent place in the book.

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### Spain's OBABA is in for Oscars

Category: [SOFTPEDIA NEWS](#) :: [Entertainment](#)

The movie directed by Montxo Armendariz enters the competition for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film

By: Entertainment News Staff

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The Spanish Film Academy has chosen OBABA, directed by Montxo Armendariz, as its entry in the competition for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

The movie won over 'Princesas' by Fernando Leon de Aranoa and Jose Luis Garcí's 'Ninette,' EFE reported Thursday. The Oscar nominees will be announced January 31, and the ceremony is scheduled for March.

Montxo Armendariz received an Oscar nomination in 1997 for his 'Secretos del Corazon' (Secrets of the Heart), but did not win.

Last year, Spanish director Alejandro Amenabar's 'Mar adentro' (The Sea Inside) won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film.

OBABA, that has recently opened the San Sebastian International Film Festival in northern Spain, is an adaptation of Bernardo Atxaga's novel 'Obabakoak'.

The movie starring Pilar Lopez de Ayala, Mercedes Sampietro and Argentine Juan Diego Botto is set in Obaba, a mythical region in northern Spain, where a young filmmaker struggles to capture the feel of the area, which in turn leads to a wealth of self-discovery.

Barely 25 years old, Lourdes sets out on a trip for Obaba and its territories. In her luggage she carries a video camera. She intends to use it to capture the reality of Obaba, of its world, of its people. But Obaba is not the place Lourdes had imagined, and she soon discovers that the people who live there are trapped in a past they can't - or don't want to - escape from. Like the young teacher who parades her loneliness through the streets of Obaba; or Esteban, who receives love letters in cream-coloured envelopes. Lourdes uses this material to try and reconstruct the puzzle, making sense of their lives and permitting her to capture the reality with her video camera. But there's always something missing, something that escapes her, that she doesn't understand. Like the mysterious behaviour of the lizards inhabiting Obaba. A mystery that no-one, not even Lourdes' camera, can solve.

Montxo Armendariz

Olleta (Navarre), 1949. Following his first feature film, Tasio (1984), he won the Silver Shell at San Sebastian with 27 horas (27 Hours, 1986) and the Golden Shell with Las cartas de Alou (Letters from Alou, 1990). His subsequent works are Historias del Kronen (1994), Secretos del corazon (Secrets of the Heart, 1997), with which he has won the Award for Best European Film at Berlin and several Goyas, Silencio roto (Broken Silence, 2001) and Escenario mvil (Travelling Stage, 2004). He was a member of the

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Official Jury at San Sebastian in 1995 and won the National Cinematography Prize in 1998.

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## Basque writer leaps into translation

Interview by Lucia Iglesias Kuntz, *UNESCO Courier* journalist



Bernardo Atxaga

**“Euskera, ialgi adi kanpora” (“Basque language, step forward!”). Bernardo Atxaga couldn’t agree more with these words from a 16th-century Basque song.**

Among Bernardo Atxaga’s works published in English are *Lone Man* (Harvill, 1996) and *Obabakoak* (Vintage, 1993).

Language is power. . . .  
Language can be used as a means of changing reality.

Adrienne Rich,  
U.S. writer  
(1929-)

**I see translation as a physical leap. And the leap from Basque to Spanish**

Euskera—the Basque language—is spoken by some 600,000 people in the Spanish Basque country and Navarra, and another 80,000 in the Pyrénées Orientales department of south-western France. Its origins are unknown, but it has probably existed for over 4,000 years.

Euskera’s development was severely stunted during Spain’s 40-year Franco dictatorship. Then came a major recovery. Euskera became a shared literary language, won recognition in 1979 as a joint official language with Spanish, and has been promoted through teaching.

Basque literature has also been flowering in the hands of a group of dedicated writers. One of them, Bernardo Atxaga, 48, who won the Spanish National Fiction Prize in 1989 for *Obabakoak*, is the first writer in the Basque language to achieve an international reputation.

### Did the crackdown on Euskera during the Franco era really happen, or is it a myth?

It definitely happened, but it’s also true that Euskera wasn’t doing so well before the Civil War. Only a society that can afford to have doctors on call on Sundays, as it were, can afford to be concerned about saving its language. Before the war, the Basque country was confronted with terrible economic problems. Saving the language was a miracle only intellectuals and priests could have performed. My own case is typical, in a way. My grandfather and great-grandfather were carpenters.

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**is enormous**

They had plenty of other things to worry about than preserving the language. I had a different kind of education from theirs, and it led me to ask why I was losing the use of a language that I had inherited. Political repression was fierce when I was a child. My brothers and I were beaten at school if we were caught speaking Euskera, the language we spoke at home. We knew we risked punishment if we spoke Basque in public.

**With the coming of democracy, Basque autonomy and laws covering language, the situation changed totally within a few years. Today Basque is a compulsory school subject. What do you think about this?**

English is compulsory too. This is a very complex issue. How far does a state have the right to lay down the law in education? At present, all states do so. The education ministry plays a very important role in all countries, and the area of freedom in this sphere is very small. That being said, people who live in the Basque country and don't want to know anything about our language and culture aren't worthy of respect.

**Do you think Euskera is used too much as a political pawn?**

I really don't think so. I don't see how half a million people can cause much mischief for 35 million Spanish-speakers. On the contrary, I think there's been a lot of unfairness on the part of the majority group. National newspapers never print anything positive about our language. I think that's unjust.

**The unification of Euskera around an agreed version of the language continues to provoke controversy. Do you think standardization was necessary to enable Euskera to survive?**

No language in the world can develop if it is fundamentally divided. All languages spin off variants, but at the same time they seek the common basis without which no language can perform its higher functions. You can't write books about architecture in pidgin, you have to use standard English, which is better qualified to express what you want to say. Among English-speakers, each community develops its own accent, its own way of using the language. You can be for or against this but, as a language teacher I know used to tell his Chicano students: "You can speak Spanglish if you like, but if you want to study law, you'll have to write in English." All languages that develop

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tend towards simplification. The same friend told me that language is nowhere more complex than in a village. In Chicago or New York, English is a lot simpler than it is in a remote village in Ireland.

### **You're completely bilingual. Why do you always write first in Euskera?**

In literary terms, I'm used to thinking in Euskera. My stories or poems come to me in Euskera. It's my personal language, the one I use to jot down ideas in my notebooks, whether I'm in Stockholm or Madrid. I've become used to doing that. It's not much to do with ideology, it's just the way I work. Some writers need to go into a monastery and stay there for a few months without setting foot outside. My writing ritual involves writing first in Basque. I've come to the conclusion that it isn't very important. I might just as well write in some other language.

### **But you insist on translating your own work.**

Some languages are quite close to each other, they're like tracings that match when you put one on top of another. This is the case with Catalan and Spanish. I see translation as a physical leap, and the jump from Catalan to Spanish is like stepping off the pavement onto the road. With Basque, the leap is enormous. And leaving it to a translator is a risky business. My translations are usually the work of several hands. Close friends of mine produce a rough draft and I extract a final version from it. It's very hard to explain what it's like being a bilingual writer. Sitting down to translate one's own work is a mind-bending experience. Every time I do it, the gap between the two texts seems to widen.

### **Yet your books are translated into other languages from Spanish. Isn't that a bit of a cop-out?**

Not at all, because I believe that language is always part of a person's way of life, and for me Spanish is also a first language. There are two first languages in my life and luckily I can express myself just as well in both.

### **Do you consider yourself a nationalist?**

I rather like Spain. I'm not in favour of political independence. I don't think Spain's a bad society or a bad country. You can be part of it and have a critical eye.



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# BEUSKARAREN BERRIPAPER A

SECRETARIAT FOR LANGUAGE POLICY

## The novel "Obabakoak", translated into 14 languages

Never in the history of Basque literature has a novel been so well received by the most varied readers imaginable, provoked so much interest from the media and been translated into so many different languages. We're talking about the novel entitled *Obabakoak* (The people and things of Obaba - a Basque village) written by Bernardo Atxaga.

"What sustains the reading and maintains the flow, becoming the book's main source of intrigue, is the different stories themselves, each so surprisingly fresh that the reader looks forward impatiently to the next surprise."

Eugenio Suárez-Galbán  
*The NYT Book Review*

Although he had written some of the stories which make up *Obabakoak* previously, Bernardo Atxaga took a year and a half to complete the book. He wrote parts of it in the Basque Country, others in Castilean some in Scotland. *Obabakoak* was finally published in 1988. For Atxaga, Obaba is a fictional place which he uses to enable the Basque people to express their own thoughts at first hand. Thus the village of Obaba is peopled with rascals, innocents,



intellectuals, shepherds, hunters, idiots and creatures of superstition, and the interconnection of their private worlds is brilliantly evoked. Parody, riddles, texts within texts abound in a book that is playful, yet always tinged with melancholy. Its publication created commotion in the Basque literary world, which was heightened when the novel was awarded Spain's National Prize for Literature in 1989, when it became a finalist in the 1990 European Literary Award in Glasgow and when it received the 1991 "Mille Pages" prize from the French Bookseller's Association in Paris.

More recently *Obabakoak* has been translated into Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, French, Italian, German,

Polish, Rumanian, Greek, English, Swedish, Norwegian and Asturian. Specialist critics from around the world have given it splendid reviews.

"The narrator's embedded stories are themselves small masterpieces and they take the action well away from any possible accusations of parochial regionalism."

Abigail Lee Six  
*The Times Literary Supplement*

A British producer has bought the television rights to *Esteban Werfall*, one of the stories contained within *Obabakoak*.

PUBLISHERS  
● The Basque  
Country:  
Erein.  
● Spain:  
Ediciones B.  
● France:  
Christian Bourgois.  
● Great Britain:  
Hutchinson, Vintage.  
● USA:  
Pantheon, Vintage.



Photo: Mark Kohn

"Atxaga is a brilliantly inventive writer who makes news forms in an eclectic way from old forms, from Dante to Chekhov and Hemingway... He understands the nature of storytelling and is at once terribly moving and wildly funny."

A. S. Byatt



## Bernar do Atxaga, a man in his solitude

**PUBLISHERS**  
 •Catalonia: Edicions B  
 •Germany: Schönbach  
 •Portugal: Quetzal Editores  
 •The Netherlands: Nijgh & Van Ditmar  
 •Greece: Ekremess.  
 •Sweden: Bonniers  
 •Romania: Eminescu.  
 •Italy: Einaudi  
 •Poland: Ofizina Literazka  
 •Norway: Gyddendal

Bernardo Atxaga is the literary pseudonym of José Irazu, 42 years old and born in Asteasu, a small village in the Basque mountains. A real bookworm, at the age of 15 he received his first cup in a writing competition whilst still at school. At the age of 18 a newspaper in Castil published his first literary work. When he moved to Bilbao, the great Basque metropolis to study economics, he became a member of the Basque literary movement which at that time was led by the writer Gabriel Aresti. For a short time he worked in a bank, but later left. He then went to Barcelona to study Greek classics. He went through years of true economic hardship but his great love of literature and his tremendous self-discipline towards his work, "people are surprised when they find out

how disciplined I am at work", together with his creative talent have meant that he has become one of the most acclaimed



Bernardo Atxaga

young writers of the present time. He recognizes that there are advantages to being popular but he maintains his private life strictly private. He likes to be alone, because it is when he is alone that he finds the inspiration to write. He has just spent

four months locked away in a tiny village in rural

Spain writing his next novel *Gizona bere bakardadean* (a man in his solitude) which is already on the bookshelves. His head is full of ideas and the only thing he asks for is enough time to carry them out. "The next ten years are covered with my projects, some of which I have already started to put into practice".

### Otherworks by Atxaga

Atxaga is a prolific writer. He classifies his works into two main groups.

#### 1. Those works written with an experimental style.

Here he includes his poetry published in the books entitled *Ethiopia* and *Henry Bengoa, inventari um*. These have been translated into several languages.

Atxaga has promoted and collaborated in several experimental and avant-garde literary magazines.

The talks he has given at universities around the world, which are usually structured around the alphabet are also well-known and highly thought of.

#### 2. Conventional works,

such as *Obabakoak*, his scripts for television, his work for theatre or his vast amount of children's books. His work entitled *Memories of the Cow* has been translated into six languages and included on the Honour List of the IBBY.

### The critic's view

"Imaginative and refreshing... It maintains a lightness of touch without ever becoming flippant; there is humor shot through with pathos and irony that is wry rather than biting, a novel that is entertaining without ever becoming lightweight."

- Times Literary Supplement, England

"A fine, shimmering, mercurial novel."

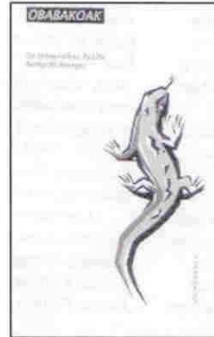
- The Observer, England

"Atxaga succeeds with a kind of enviable tenderness... The enchantment of *Obabakoak* demonstrates how, in the right hands, even a lost, ancient language many times threatened with extinction can give itself the gift of literature."

- L'Indice, Italy

"A highly original work, enormously pleasurable to read"

- L'Osservatore, Italy



"*Obabakoak* (is) a great, satisfying book, rooted in a sense of the country... the distinct landscape of the southern Basque region.

- Liberation, France

"*Obabakoak* is a colorful array of tales effortlessly and elegantly told and bursting with the sheer pleasure of storytelling.

- Tages-Anzeiger, Germany

## More than 13,000 books have been published in the Basque language this century

During this century 13,311 different books have been published in the Basque language (Euskara). Almost half of them were books for children or young people. These figures have been obtained from the XX. mendeko euskal liburuen katalogoa (1900-1992), a catalogue of all the books published in Euskara, carried out by Jan Mari Torrealdai over a 17-year period.

Jan Mari Torrealdai provides an "index card" of each book containing the author's name, book title, number of pages, size of the book and the place and year of publication, together with the publisher's name. This same index card classifies each book according to the international norms of the Unesco.

Of the 13,311 books published in Euskara this century, 26.5% are classified in the humanities and social science section, 24.5% in language and education, 22% in children's and young people's literature and 19% in adult literary

works. Of all the books published, almost 3,000 are works which have been written in other languages and translated into Euskara.

Two conclusions can be drawn from Torrealdai's study.

1. Forty years of Franco's dictatorship took their toll on the development of publishing policy.

2. Almost 80% of all the books published date from after 1976.

This catalogue of Basque books published this century is divided up into three sections. The first contains all the index cards in subject order. The second is indexed by author and the third by titles.

To produce this catalogue Torrealdai used information from the Systematic Collection of Modern Euskara set up by UZEI and compared this information with that held by Eusko Bibliographia and the Ministry of Culture.

The catalogue will enable bibliophiles and scholars to have the references of all the books published in Euskara within reach.

**John M. Ysursa,**

a Basque-American living in Chino, California is the director of Music Camps, two-week long musical summer camps organized by NABO, the North American Basque Organization. These camps are aimed at teaching children to speak Basque and learn Basque music, songs and dances.

**Helen O Murchu,**

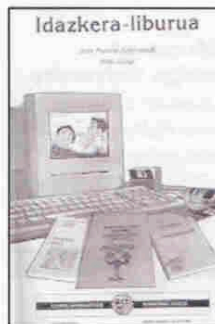
the Irish President of the European Office for Minority Languages, explained the content of the European Document on Minority Languages during the XIIth Summer Course organized by the University of the Basque Country.

**Georg Kremnitz,**

a German Professor of Romance Literature at the University of Vienna was selected President of the International Association of Occitane studies during a Congress held in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

### Two books on how to write Basque correctly

The Basque Government's Culture Department has published two books in Basque about how to use Basque correctly: *Hizkuntza zuzen erabiltzeko arau eta proposamen-bilduma*, by Eskarne Lopetegui and *Idazkera-liburua* written by Bello Esnal and Jan Ramon Zubimendi.



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Secretaría General de  
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q in Basque q in Spanish

Full name .....  
 Address .....  
 City .....  
 Post code/Zip code .....  
 Province or State .....  
 Tel. ....

### A word from the Secretary

It was around 1545 when the first ever book written in Euskara and entitled *Linguae Vasconum Primitia* was published in Bordeaux, France. Its author, a clergyman by the name of Bernart Etxepare, showed an admirable linguistic awareness in the book's prologue, when he expressed his wish for "a work written in Euskara to be published throughout the world". With the passage of time literary creation in the Basque language has gradually developed, and now, almost five centuries after Bernart Etxepare, Basque literature has discovered Bernardo Atxaga, an author who is able to offer his work to the world.

Bernardo Atxaga has probably already been awarded a place in the gallery of universal Basques. And if he has, it is because Bernardo Atxaga is like a tree which has its roots deeply embedded in the Basque language and culture, and whose leaves have been swayed by the gentle breezes and winds which come from all corners of the world.

M. Carmen Garmendia.  
Secretary General for  
Language Policy.

## The 75th Anniversary of two institutions

Two of the most traditional cultural institutions in Euskal Herria, Eusko Ikaskuntza, the Society of Basque Studies and Euskaltzaindia, the Royal Academy of the Basque Language are celebrating the 75th anniversary of their founding.

- The Society of Basque Studies is taking its 75th anniversary as a time for reorganization. The new team at the Society, which is led by Gregorio Monreal is valiently working on redirecting the work of Eusko Ikaskuntza towards the new times and needs of modern Basque society. It has organized several key events this year:

1. The celebrating of its 75th anniversary in Oñati (Gipuzkoa).
2. A roving exhibition about the SBS. This provides explanations and exhibits about the past, present and future of the SBS.

3. The holding of the XIIth Congress of Basque Studies in Vitoria-Gasteiz (Alava). It had a great deal of success.

- Apart from the 75th anniversary of its founding, the Royal Academy of the Basque Language is also celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Arantzazu meeting in Gipuzkoa, where the basis of standardized written Euskara was established. Throughout 1994, the different commissions which Euskaltzaindia has (Lexicology, Dictionary, Literature, Onomastics, etc.) will hold working-days where they will try to make progress in the unification of the language. Finally, between the 3rd and the 7th of October of the coming year Euskaltzaindia will hold its XIII Congress at the Leioa Campus of the University of the Basque Country.

## Worth bearing in mind

### The Durango Fair.

During the first week of December the XXVIIIth Basque Book and Record Fair was held attracting large numbers of the public and attaining good sales levels.

language classes for one hour a week at Cambridge University in England.

### Carver and Kafka in

**Euskara.** *The Cathedral*, by Raymond Carver and *The Trial* by Franz Kafka have been published in Euskara by Elkar. Juan Mari Mendizabal and Anton Garikano translated these works from the original version.

### Basque at Cambridge

**University.** Phillip Basterra, a Hispanic and French Philosophy student has started giving Basque

EUSKO JAURLARITZA

LEHENDAKARITZAREN IDAZKARITZA  
HIZKUNTZA POLITIKARAKO IDAZKARITZA NAGUSIA



GOBIERNO VASCO

SECRETARIA DE LA PRESIDENCIA  
SECRETARIA GENERAL DE POLITICA LINGUISTICA

