

“Curanderismo” Lesson Plan Designed by Ariana Brown, Jesús Valles, and Saba Khan Vlach 1
High School

Poem used: “Curanderismo” by Ariana Brown

Designed for high school students of color in English I

One-day unit (90 minute class) or Two-day unit (45 minute class)

TEKS Grade 9 ELA: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110c.html>

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Curanderismo

By Ariana Brown

Curanderismo means healing.
Once, a few white men invaded
my grandfather’s country. Their horses’ jaws flooded
with war & the thick skin of brown people,
they spent three years killing & bargaining
their way to power. The Spaniards captured
the Aztec capital in 1521—but they couldn’t kill
everyone. Every dark person is taught to recognize
the soft wrists of cowards, to observe & lie
in shadows, marking a return,
or at least a survival.

So here we begin—
curanderismo: a folk healing indigenous to Mexico
which arose after the conquest; the union
of indigenous, Spaniard, & African traditions blended
to cure *susto*. What medicine do you know
that can lift the wounds of the dead,
return the living their souls?
What language besides this can name
historical terror in one word, vaporize it in the light?

& let them make their egg jokes, whisper
about witchcraft. They know nothing
of touching the world without an impulse to own.
& they call us dirty—as if being covered in the earth
is wrong, as if the dirt has ever held our throats
& threatened to kill our mothers.

The point is it takes love to name the damage
on one’s own body, to say, *I deserve freedom, here*.

ii.

I am a woman who is afraid to say depression.
I am learning the uses of rosemary oil. I am trying
not to be embarrassed about my Spanish. Divided country girl.
Girl who washes herself with poems & finally gets to the therapist.
Lucky, that out of 50 counselors I am assigned the one
who is also a curandera. Who tells me, Ariana,
it is okay to not know the names of your ancestors—
to have lost the specifics. The Western world would have
you believe that only what is written is true.

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“Curanderismo” Lesson Plan Designed by Ariana Brown, Jesús Valles, and Saba Khan Vlach 3
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We never really lose our heritage. Do you feel them
in the room with you now? Do you feel your feet, still
on the ground? I will teach you a song & you may sing it
however you please. The melody is not important. The feeling is.
It’s how you’ve known all along, that you are connected,
that you know what you need, that you have never been alone.

iii.

The Mexica prayer of the four directions
began in the temples of Tenochtitlán.
After Cortés and his men burned the temples,
they built Spanish churches in their place.
I read in a book my curandera gave me that energy is preserved—
that to this day, curanderos return to the temple,
face the east, & continue to pray. The lesson—
if you are alive, you are descended from a people
who refused to die. Nothing is more sacred than you.

For a Spanish translation of this poem, please visit www.arianabrown.com/resources.html. Video
of this poem’s performance in English is available on YouTube.

To purchase Ariana’s book of poetry, *Sana Sana*, please visit
<https://www.gameoverbooks.com/product-page/sana-sana>. For bulk orders, please visit
<https://www.spdbooks.org/Products/9781732498686/sana-sana.aspx>.

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- The day before implementing this lesson plan, ask students to bring to class one item that represents healing for them, to contribute to a non-religious classroom altar. Spend time brainstorming if students have trouble coming up with ideas. Possible items can include copies of photos, stones, herbs, writing on a piece of paper, etc.

1. Warm Up (10 minutes)

1. Think about the item you brought for our class altar. Write in your notebook:
How do most people see this item? How do you see this item?

Discussion

2. Describe the item you brought for our class altar. What is it, and what does it look like? (3 minutes)
3. Why does this item represent healing to you? (3 minutes)
4. Whom do you associate with this item? A member of your family, a friend? Why? (3 minutes)

2. Circle check-in (10 minutes)

- I. Round I. Circle formation: Students check in. “Tell us your name, and then, on a scale of 1-10, tell us how you’re doing today” (1 being not too great and 10 being awesome)
- II. Round II. Brainstorm with students: “What are some examples of religious or spiritual rituals?” (If no one suggests anything, suggest praying, attending service, preparing for holidays, rolling an egg over the body, etc.) (Make a Chart)
- III. Round III. Students respond: “Can you think of any sayings in your family that people say when someone gets hurt or when someone feels bad?” (If no one suggests anything, suggest the Latinx dicho “Sana sana, colita de rana...” or prayers that someone might recite, like a rosary.)
 - a. What do these sayings mean?

3. Lecture (30 minutes)

Guiding questions: “How can we create healing for ourselves by inventing our own rituals or replicating familial/cultural practices? How can we use objects, altars, sayings, poems, and nature to create our own healing? Why is it important to create healing for ourselves?”

Vocabulary terms to know and explain: [intersectionality](#), [self-care](#)

- a. Read Aloud and Discuss: [“How Audre Lorde Taught Me to Love My Queer Black Identity”](#) by Dr. Jonathan P. Higgins
 - Discussion Question: What do you think “self-care” means?
- b. Watch and Discuss: Video Clip: [Free organic medicine from your yard: Aloe Vera](#)
 - Discussion Question: Do you know of any other plants/herbs that have medicinal properties?
- c. Generative round: In your groups, reflect on and respond to the question: *What is the difference between physical pain and emotional pain?*

(If teaching 45 minute classes, end here for Day 1. If teaching 90 minute classes, continue.)

4. If teaching 45 minute classes, begin Day 2 by having students share their thoughts on the difference between physical pain and emotional pain, as well as the definition of self-care. Teacher shares what teacher noticed about the conversation on Day 1.

5. Watch/Read “Curanderismo” by Ariana Brown (10-15 minutes)

Have students respond to the following pre-assessment questions in their notebooks.

1. What are some foods, herbs, or other objects that make you feel better when you are sick or feeling down? (Example: tea, soup, Vicks VapoRub, etc)
2. What are some rituals that you do to make yourself feel better? Why do these things make you feel better? (Examples: lighting candles, deep breathing, going for a walk, etc)

Discussion: Ask students to share their responses in small groups, then with the whole class.

Introduce Ariana Brown. Share: <http://www.arianabrown.com/>

Say: *Ariana will become a member of our community of readers, writers, poets, and activists.*

Before watching and reading *Curanderismo*, remind class that there are many different ancient healing/medicinal practices. Curanderismo is a folk healing tradition from Mexico. A curandero/curandera is a healer who has been trained in this practice.

Watch: [Click here to watch “Curanderismo.”](#)

(Provide a hard copy of “Curanderismo” for each student in English and Spanish. The Spanish version of “Curanderismo” is available for download in the Teacher Poems PDF at <http://www.arianabrown.com/resources.html> for \$1 USD.)

6. Group Discussion (10-15 minutes)
 - a. What is the poem about?
 - b. What do you think made the author want to write this poem?
 - c. How does the author connect the history of curanderismo to her own healing?
 - d. What does the author say about her ancestors?

7. Written Response (15-25 minutes):

- I. Create your own poem or short story in response to the question: What is your medicine for your own mental/emotional pain? How do you heal yourself? You can think of medicine as anything that helps you heal. This can include food, people you love, things that make you laugh, activities you enjoy, etc. Start simple first. If you want, start with a story about why you need healing, then tell us how you are healing. Feel free to incorporate your thoughts on the object you brought for our class altar and/or your thoughts from our group discussions.

You may consider adding one more day to the unit for further composition and/or art. I encourage all teachers to make time for students to share their work in some manner with each other.