

**Poem: “Curanderismo” by Ariana Brown**

- Designed for upper elementary students (grades 4 through 6) (African American students, Latinx students, Students of Color, and White students)
- One Week Unit (7-8 days of instruction)
- TEKS Grade 5 ELA: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110a.html> - 110.7

### TEKS Objectives (5<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA)

1) Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, discussion, and thinking--oral language. The student develops oral language through listening, speaking, and discussion. The student is expected to:

**(A) listen actively to interpret verbal and non-verbal messages, ask relevant questions, and make pertinent comments;**

(B) follow, restate, and give oral instructions that include multiple action steps;

**(C) give an organized presentation employing eye contact, speaking rate, volume, enunciation, natural gestures, and conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively;** and

(D) work collaboratively with others to develop a plan of shared responsibilities.

(4) Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking--fluency. The student reads grade-level text with fluency and comprehension. The student is expected to use appropriate fluency (rate, accuracy, and prosody) when reading grade-level text.

(5) Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking--self-sustained reading. The student reads grade-appropriate texts independently. The student is expected to self-select text and read independently for a sustained period of time.

(6) Comprehension skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts. The student uses metacognitive skills to both develop and deepen comprehension of increasingly complex texts. The student is expected to:

(A) establish purpose for reading assigned and self-selected texts;

(B) generate questions about text before, during, and after reading to deepen understanding and gain information;

(C) make, correct, or confirm predictions using text features, characteristics of genre, and structures;

(D) create mental images to deepen understanding;

(E) make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society;

(F) make inferences and use evidence to support understanding;

(G) evaluate details read to determine key ideas;

(H) synthesize information to create new understanding; and

(I) monitor comprehension and make adjustments such as re-reading, using background knowledge, asking questions, and annotating when understanding breaks down.

(8) Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--literary elements. The student recognizes and analyzes literary elements within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse literary texts. The student is expected to:

(A) infer multiple themes within a text using text evidence;

(B) analyze the relationships of and conflicts among the characters;

(C) analyze plot elements, including rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution; and

(D) analyze the influence of the setting, including historical and cultural settings, on the plot.

(9) Multiple genres: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student recognizes and analyzes genre-specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts. The student is expected to:

- (A) demonstrate knowledge of distinguishing characteristics of well-known children’s literature such as folktales, fables, legends, myths, and tall tales;
- (B) explain the use of sound devices and figurative language and distinguish between the poet and the speaker in poems across a variety of poetic forms;
- (C) explain structure in drama such as character tags, acts, scenes, and stage directions;
- (D) recognize characteristics and structures of informational text, including:
  - (i) the central idea with supporting evidence;
  - (ii) features such as insets, timelines, and sidebars to support understanding; and
  - (iii) organizational patterns such as logical order and order of importance;
- (E) recognize characteristics and structures of argumentative text by:
  - (i) identifying the claim;
  - (ii) explaining how the author has used facts for or against an argument; and
  - (iii) identifying the intended audience or reader; and
- (F) recognize characteristics of multimodal and digital texts.

(10) Author's purpose and craft: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts. The student uses critical inquiry to analyze the authors' choices and how they influence and communicate meaning within a variety of texts. The student analyzes and applies author's craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances. The student is expected to:

- (A) explain the author's purpose and message within a text;
- (B) analyze how the use of text structure contributes to the author's purpose;
- (C) analyze the author's use of print and graphic features to achieve specific purposes;
- (D) describe how the author's use of imagery, literal and figurative language such as simile and metaphor, and sound devices achieves specific purposes;
- (E) identify and understand the use of literary devices, including first- or third-person point of view;
- (F) examine how the author's use of language contributes to voice; and
- (G) explain the purpose of hyperbole, stereotyping, and anecdote.

(11) Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--writing process. The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and uses appropriate conventions. The student is expected to:

- (A) plan a first draft by selecting a genre for a particular topic, purpose, and audience using a range of strategies such as brainstorming, freewriting, and mapping;
- (B) develop drafts into a focused, structured, and coherent piece of writing by:
  - (i) organizing with purposeful structure, including an introduction, transitions, and a conclusion; and
  - (ii) developing an engaging idea reflecting depth of thought with specific facts and details;
- (C) revise drafts to improve sentence structure and word choice by adding, deleting, combining, and rearranging ideas for coherence and clarity;
- (D) edit drafts using standard English conventions, including:
  - (i) complete simple and compound sentences with subject-verb agreement and avoidance of splices, run-ons, and fragments;
  - (ii) past tense of irregular verbs;
  - (iii) collective nouns;
  - (iv) adjectives, including their comparative and superlative forms;

- (v) conjunctive adverbs;
- (vi) prepositions and prepositional phrases and their influence on subject-verb agreement;
- (vii) pronouns, including indefinite;
- (viii) subordinating conjunctions to form complex sentences;
- (ix) capitalization of abbreviations, initials, acronyms, and organizations;
- (x) punctuation marks, including commas in compound and complex sentences, quotation marks in dialogue, and italics and underlining for titles and emphasis; and
- (xi) correct spelling of words with grade-appropriate orthographic patterns and rules and high-frequency words; and

(E) publish written work for appropriate audiences.

(12) Composition: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts--genres. The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful. The student is expected to:

- (A) compose literary texts such as personal narratives, fiction, and poetry using genre characteristics and craft;
- (B) compose informational texts, including brief compositions that convey information about a topic, using a clear central idea and genre characteristics and craft;
- (C) compose argumentative texts, including opinion essays, using genre characteristics and craft; and
- (D) compose correspondence that requests information.

(13) Inquiry and research: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking using multiple texts. The student engages in both short-term and sustained recursive inquiry processes for a variety of purposes. The student is expected to:

- (A) generate and clarify questions on a topic for formal and informal inquiry;
- (B) develop and follow a research plan with adult assistance;
- (C) identify and gather relevant information from a variety of sources;
- (D) understand credibility of primary and secondary sources;
- (E) demonstrate understanding of information gathered;
  
- (F) differentiate between paraphrasing and plagiarism when using source materials;
- (G) develop a bibliography; and
- (H) use an appropriate mode of delivery, whether written, oral, or multimodal, to present results.

## 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.

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](http://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>.

### Online Teacher Resources for Background on *Curanderismo*

\*If the link does not work in Word, please cut and paste it in your browser.

1. Avila, E., & Parker, J. (1999). *Woman who glows in the dark: A curandera reveals traditional Aztec secrets of physical and spiritual health* (p. 190). New York, NY: JP Tarcher/Putnam. Link on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Woman-Who-Glows-Dark-Traditional/dp/B012HUGSEW>
2. “Curanderismo” from Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine, 2005, Link: <https://bit.ly/2LrjgII>  
  
(Please note that with the above reference, the culture and practice of *curanderismo* is situated in Spanish and Indigenous origins. For our purpose, we ground our understandings of *curanderismo* in these origins, **AND** in African origins.)
3. *Curanderismo: The Healing Art of Mexico*, Grace Alvarez Sesma, Link: <https://www.curanderismo.org/>
4. *Curanderismo: A Picture of Mexican-American Folk Healing* by Robert T. Trotter, Link: <https://bit.ly/2wcQvEJ>

### Materials:

1. A copy of Ariana Brown’s Poem, *Curanderismo*, for each student (Poem provided in LPs)
2. Video of Ariana performing *Curanderismo* (Link provided in LPs)
3. Chart Paper for Graffiti Boards and Anchor Charts
4. Images of Curanderos/as and Curanderismo
5. Artifacts of Curanderismo (e.g., herbs, oils, tools)
6. Individual Writer’s Notebook for each student
7. Markers/Pens/Pencils
8. Art Supplies for Artistic Response at the End of the Unit (See Day 7)

Additional resources to share with students:

1. “Curandera” (poem) by Pat Mora, link to poem in Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57665/curandera>
2. *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (A Novel)

### Day 1, Introduction “The Concept of Curanderismo” (30-45 minutes)

1. Artistic Response (Graffiti Boards) for small groups of 3-4: Provide each group a poster board size of butcher paper with the word “healing” written in the center. Ask the students to each take a corner of the paper, and begin to draw and write what healing means to them individually. Give the students 10 minutes to work on their own ideas in their corner. And then ask them to share their art with each other in their small group for a few minutes. Collaboratively they can write/draw about “healing” in the center of their graffiti board. Have each small group share out what healing looks and feels like to them.
2. Important Words to Introduce: Open the lesson with these words. Consider making a KWL chart (What do we know? What do we want to know? What did we learn?) for these words. Please consider providing images for each word in the form of a slideshow for the students as you discuss these new words. Today, you and the students should aim to add ideas to the “K” and “W” columns. You will add to the “L” column throughout the unit.

As the unit progresses – add new important words to the chart. And define and discuss these words (grow the definitions collaboratively) throughout the unit. We recommend having a class KWL chart for these important words, as well as providing individual KWL charts for the students to keep in their notebooks.

- a. Healing. (The students should have a good start for this word, and the conversation should be rich and plentiful with many different perspectives.)
  - b. Altar
  - c. Curanderos/as
  - d. Curanderismo: *Curanderismo* is the Mexican American system of folk healing. The word comes from the Spanish word *curar*, which means “to heal.” *Curanderismo* has a long history, and it is still practiced in the twenty-first century in Mexican American communities, as an alternative system of healthcare to mainstream Western medicine.
  - e. Holistic
  - f. Herbs
  - g. Culture
3. At the close of today’s lesson, ask students to bring to class one item that represents healing for them, to contribute to a non-religious classroom altar. Spend time brainstorming (make a chart) if students have trouble coming up with ideas. Possible items can include copies of photos, stones, herbs, writing on a piece of paper, etc.



**Day 2, “Our Class Altar – Symbols of Healing” (30-45 minutes)**

1. Think about the item you brought for our class altar.  
Consider these guiding questions as you write in your notebook:
  - a. Describe the item you brought for our class altar. What is it, and what does it look like?
  - b. Why does this item represent healing to you?
  - c. Whom do you associate with this item? A member of your family, a friend? Why?
  - d. How do most people see this item? How do you see this item?
2. Have students share their object and thinking about their object with a partner. Give them three minutes to share with each other and then share with a new partner – do this for a total of three rounds.
3. Have each student come up and place her/his object in the class altar.
4. Revisit the word “altar” from the KWL chart. Ask students to share what they learned about “altars” now and add to the “L” column. Quickly review the other words on the chart and add any additional questions or learning to the columns.

### Day 3, “Sharing Rituals” (30-45 minutes)

1. Check in with students. “On a scale of 1-10, tell us how you’re doing today.” (1 being not too great and 10 being awesome)
2. Return to your class altar. Open the classroom for further discussion about the precious items that are placed there. This discussion can support students as they move into today’s focus of rituals. How do these artifacts/objects in this altar give insight into our religious or spiritual rituals?
3. 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)
4. Discussion question: “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.) What do these sayings mean?
5. 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?”
6. Important words to introduce and add to KWL Chart: ***intersectionality***, ***self-care***, ***religion***, and ***rituals***. \*\*Teachers, as you work through this unit, you may want to look up these important words for yourself in order to strengthen your own definitions. Ariana’s poetry addresses both intersectionality and self care. You can read and hear more of her work on her website [arianabrown.com](http://arianabrown.com)\*\*
  - a. Resources for teachers on “intersectionality”
    - i. <http://mykidisgay.com/defining-intersectionality/>
    - ii. <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>
  - b. Resources for teachers on “self-care”
    - i. <https://myplinkit.com/?s=self+care>
    - ii. [http://actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/professionals/self-care.cfm](http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/self-care.cfm)
    - iii. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9VxIaF0TUM>

**Day 4, “Types of Pain and Ways for Healing” (30-45 minutes)**

1. Read and Discuss: Audre Lorde’s [A Litany for Survival](#)
  - a. Discussion Question: What do you think self-care means?
2. Watch and Discuss: Video Clip: [Free organic medicine from your yard: Aloe Vera](#)
  - a. Discussion Question: Do you know of any other plants/herbs that have medicinal properties?
3. Generative round: In your groups, reflect on and respond to the questions:
  - a. *What is the difference between physical pain and emotional pain?*
  - b. *How are you thinking about the concepts of pain and the concepts of healing – self-care? What do you want to try?*
4. Return to your KWL chart of important words. Review the words and add any additional ideas across the three columns, specifically the “L” (What did we learn?). Provide time for students to update their individual KWL chart in their notebooks

**Day 5, “Curanderismo” by Ariana Brown (30-45 minutes)**

Opening Activity (15-20 minutes)

1. Have students review the big ideas from Day 4’s readings, video, and discussion.
2. Have students respond to the following pre-assessment questions in their notebooks.
  - a. 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)
  - b. 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)
3. Discussion: Ask students to share their responses in small groups, then with the whole class.

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

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

**Watch/Read “Curanderismo”** by Ariana Brown 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. You may consider having the students come to the whole group meeting area to watch and read the poem together. They can sit in a circle or side by side.

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

Provide a hard copy for each student. The Spanish translation of the poem is available for download in the Teacher Poems PDF at [www.arianabrown.com/resources.html](http://www.arianabrown.com/resources.html) for \$1 USD.

**Whole Group Discussion (10-15 minutes):** Before engaging in whole group discussion with these questions, have the students turn and talk with a partner about these three guiding questions. After 5 minutes, bring the students back

- a. What is the poem about?
- b. How did it make you feel?
- c. What connections do you have with Ariana’s poem? (Encourage students to make a range of connections: text to self, text to text, and text to world)

**Important Words KWL Chart:** Provide students the opportunity to add to the “what they are wondering” and “what they learned” columns about these important words after reading and watching *Curanderismo* on the class KWL chart. Provide time for students to add to their charts in their notebooks.

## Day 6, “Curanderismo” by Ariana Brown (30-45 minutes)

**Watch “Curanderismo”** by Ariana Brown

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

Ask the students to pay close attention Ariana’s emotions as she performs. Ask students to listen to the way her voice sounds. Ask students to pay attention to her gestures. “What do you notice?”

**Small Group Work:** Have the students work in small groups to discuss and annotate the poem based on these guiding questions. After making notes on the poem, have the students complete a quick write in their notebooks to synthesize their thinking.

- 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?
- e. Consider: “Nothing is more sacred than you.”

**Whole Group Discussion of Guiding Questions:** Have students come together in a circle with their notebooks. Here they can share parts of what they wrote. Listen and talk to each other. Add on to each other’s ideas.

**Important Words KWL Chart:** Provide students the opportunity to add to the “what they are wondering” and “what they learned” columns about these important words after reading and watching *Curanderismo* on the class KWL chart. Ask: *Are there additional words or PHRASES from the poem you think we should add to the chart?*

### Day 7, “Artistic Response: Curanderismo in My Life”

#### **Instructions to the students**

Create your own poem or short story. Please consider these guiding questions as you compose your writing.

- a. What is your medicine for your own mental/emotional pain?
- b. 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. Also, return to our/your KWL chart of important words to support you as you write your poem or short story.

In addition to your composition, create a collage of what *curanderismo* looks like to you now through images and art.

#### ***Note to Teachers:***

**Composition:** Please consider if and how your students can publish their compositions. How will you make time and space for them to share their work?

**Collage:** If possible, provide students with magazines, scissors, glue, art supplies (e.g. paint, markers, colored pencils, etc) and butcher paper or large sheets of construction paper for their collage. You can ask parents for magazine donations before beginning the unit. This may be an opportunity for you to collaborate with your school’s art teacher.

*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.*