

“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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- 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?

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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 bilingual poem text 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.