

“Passage” Lesson Plan  
High School

Designed by Ariana Brown, Jesús Valles, and Saba Khan Vlach 1

Poem used: “Passage” by Ariana Brown

Designed for Mexican-American high school students in English I

One-day unit (90 min class) or two-day unit (45 min class)

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

### TEKS Objectives (9<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA)

#### (b) Knowledge and Skills.

(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) analyze how the genre of texts with similar themes shapes meaning;
- (B) analyze the influence of mythic, classical and traditional literature on 20th and 21st century literature; and
- (C) relate the figurative language of a literary work to its historical and cultural setting.

(8) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the controlling idea and specific purpose of an expository text and distinguish the most important from the less important details that support the author's purpose.

(9) Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to:

- (A) summarize text and distinguish between a summary that captures the main ideas and elements of a text and a critique that takes a position and expresses an opinion;
- (B) differentiate between opinions that are substantiated and unsubstantiated in the text;
- (C) make subtle inferences and draw complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns; and
- (D) synthesize and make logical connections between ideas and details in several texts selected to reflect a range of viewpoints on the same topic and support those findings with textual evidence.

(13) Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to:

- (A) plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea;
- (B) structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices used to convey meaning;

- (C) revise drafts to improve style, word choice, figurative language, sentence variety, and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed;
- (D) edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling; and
- (E) revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

(14) Writing/Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are responsible for at least two forms of literary writing. Students are expected to:

- (A) write an engaging story with a well-developed conflict and resolution, interesting and believable characters, and a range of literary strategies (e.g., dialogue, suspense) and devices to enhance the plot;
- (B) write a poem using a variety of poetic techniques (e.g., structural elements, figurative language) and a variety of poetic forms (e.g., sonnets, ballads); and
- (C) write a script with an explicit or implicit theme and details that contribute to a definite mood or tone.

(24) Listening and Speaking/Listening. Students will use comprehension skills to listen attentively to others in formal and informal settings. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to:

- (A) listen responsively to a speaker by taking notes that summarize, synthesize, or highlight the speaker's ideas for critical reflection and by asking questions related to the content for clarification and elaboration;
- (B) follow and give complex oral instructions to perform specific tasks, answer questions, solve problems, and complete processes; and
- (C) evaluate the effectiveness of a speaker's main and supporting ideas.

(26) Listening and Speaking/Teamwork. Students work productively with others in teams. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity. Students are expected to participate productively in teams, building on the ideas of others, contributing relevant information, developing a plan for consensus-building, and setting ground rules for decision-making.

## Passage

By Ariana Brown

With my hands, I make a hole in the dirt. The burial site  
is any mouth which calls me out of my name (negra, prieta, mayate),  
or doesn't name me at all. Ariana, a Greek name, meaning holy.  
say it in English, or Spanish, & my body does not disappear.

2015 was the first year in which Mexico included Afromexicans  
in the national census, despite having been a country for 500 years.  
& I don't know whether to blame white tears, or the first tree pulped  
for paper, or the ocean, or god, or gold, or the whip or holy book.  
or Las Siete Partidas, colonial laws stating  
the children of enslaved black men and free indigenous women  
would be born free.

& because most of my grandparents' country thinks  
this happened so long ago that I cannot possibly exist,  
the man at the carnicería speaks to me in English,  
even though I started the conversation in Spanish.  
& the number of times I've been asked if I'm Puerto Rican  
when I grew up in a Mexican neighborhood  
three hours from the border.

I take a good look at the census: document that mocks me,  
holder of indisputable truth. a white man & his measuring tape.  
blood counter. fraction distributor: half this, a quarter  
that—my body is not an equation. Mathematics are for colonizers.  
My body is a legacy of burying what cannot be reckoned with.

Forget that black people have been in Mexico as early as the conquest:  
the first African slave in 1519 brought by Cortés,  
Esteban, the black slave in 1520 who drew the first map of Texas,  
Vicente Guerrero, the black president of Mexico in 1829  
who issued the Emancipation Proclamation—

but I guess it's complicated  
when a country that wants to believe itself mestizo  
cannot account for each kink, ash & West African accent  
swaying near the coast. It's easier to call them liars, ghosts.

The 2015 census counted 1.4 million Afromexicans,  
mostly in the Costa Chica.  
I can't imagine a safe place to be black.  
I know my freedom is tied up in theirs.

I take every cautious eye, whispered slur, throw them in the fire  
they deserve. take every hand out of my hair,  
every ‘you don’t look Mexican’, every time I lost my accent  
and thought I lost myself too. I push it all into the earth.  
urge it to transform. & out of my mouth  
falls my stumbling Spanish. Today I don’t apologize  
for its awkwardness. It’s complicated.

So I build a righteous grave. Hold the census  
& its ancient ink, stain my fingers as black as god will let me.  
& I bury the census while singing my ancestors’ songs. No one  
should need a piece of paper to prove they belong.

For a Spanish translation of this poem, please visit [www.arianabrown.com/resources.html](http://www.arianabrown.com/resources.html). Video  
of this poem can be found on YouTube.

1. Warm Up (15-20 minutes)

1. Write down everything you know about slavery. (2 minutes)

Discussion

2. Close your eyes...Can you think of anyone in your family who is dark-skinned or has Afro-textured hair? Please share. (2 minutes)
3. How do you think society treats Black people? How do you know this? (micro or macro level examples) (Make a Chart) (5 minutes)
4. What do you think is the relationship between Black people and Mexican/Mexican American people in America? Why? (3-5 minutes) (micro or macro level examples)
5. What is racism? (3-5 minutes) (may need to give some think time before having students share ideas). Note: *Teacher should have a definition ready to share with students. The definition must address racism as a systemic reality - a macro level reality that is not about 1:1 relationships and prejudice towards one another. Racism is systemic oppression AND People of Color cannot enact racism towards White people because they are not members of the dominant group nor do they have the power of the dominant group.*

2. Circle check-in (10-15 minutes)

1. 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)”
2. Round II. Brainstorm with students: “How would you define what it means to be Mexican?” (Make a chart)
3. Round III. Students respond in circle:
  - a. *What do the words “moreno/a,” “prieto/a” and “negro/a” mean to you?*
  - b. Have you ever called anyone that, or has someone called you those things? How did it make them/you feel?
  - c. Do you feel like the words are positive or negative? Why or why not?
  - d. Can Mexican people be Black people?

3. Resources to share on Afromexicans (10-20 minutes)

- I. Guiding questions: How does racism (specifically anti-Blackness) affect the language we use to describe Black people and dark-skinned people? Why do we think it is better to be light-skinned than dark-skinned? How can history help us understand how Black people arrived in Mexico?
- II. Readings: Provide copies to read aloud to students. Before reading, plan to share/teach vocabulary from the resources as necessary. As you read and discuss, bring students’ attention back to the three guiding questions.
  - a. Read Aloud and Discuss: Colin A. Palmer’s *African Legacy in Mexico: A Legacy of Slavery*  
<http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/legacy/almleg.html>

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

- b. Read Aloud and Discuss: Arlene Gregorius’ *The black people erased from history* <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35981727>
  - c. Watch and Discuss: Video Clip: “Heroes of Color – Episode 2 / Gaspar Yanga” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp3PQ-Z9hQ>
- III. Generative round: In your groups, reflect on and respond to the question: *Now that you know how Black people ended up in Mexico, how would you describe what it means to be Mexican?* (5 minutes)

**4. Watch/Read “Passage/Pasaje” by Ariana Brown (10-15 minutes)**

Have students complete the following pre-assessment independently or in partners. Have students record their responses in notebooks. Make a list of words from Activity I on a large piece of paper that can be hung somewhere in the classroom as part of the new classroom environment.

- I. Come up with some positive words/phrases to describe Black people and dark-skinned people. These words/phrases can be in English or Spanish. You can be as creative as you want, so feel free to use metaphors and similes.
- II. Think of a personal story or experience with racism. When was the first time you saw someone being anti-Black or making fun of someone who is dark-skinned? How did you feel? How did the person experiencing racism feel?

**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 *Passage/Pasaje*, provide background on the **national census**.

Link: <https://www.census.gov/>

This is important.

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

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

5. Reflection questions/Written response (15-20 minutes):

- I. What is the poem about? Why do you think the author wanted to write this poem?
- II. This poem talks about personal experiences and shares a little bit about Mexican history. What does the author want to say about her experiences and the history of Black people in Mexico?
- III. How would you connect the readings about Black people in Mexico and Brown’s poem, “Passage/Pasaje”? How do you see the story of Gaspar Yanga fitting with these stories?
- IV. Look back at your quick-write and your pre-assessment responses. Thinking about Brown’s poem, the readings, and the video we watched, create your own poem or short story about what it means to be Mexican. Start simple first. If you want, try including the positive words you wrote down earlier to describe Black people and dark-skinned people. If you want, you can even include some of the history about Yanga and the other Afromexicans we read about. Grow your work from there.

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.