Curanderismo: Holistic Healing

Goals 2000 - Partnerships for Educating Colorado Students

In Partnership with the Denver Public Schools
and the Metropolitan State College of Denver
Curanderismo: Holistic Healing

By Lu Liñana

Grades 9-12

Implementation Time for Unit of Study: 6 weeks
Curanderismo: Holistic Healing

Unit Concepts

- History of curanderismo
- Function of curanderos and curanderas in the community
- Curanderismo and modern medicine
- Curanderismo, religion, and belief

Standards Addressed by This Unit

Reading and Writing

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)
Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)
Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)
Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)
Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)
Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. (RW6)
Introduction

Curanderismo has been influenced by Greek humoral medicine and was revived during the Spanish Renaissance by consulting Latin translations of Galen and Hippocrates on the art of healing. Other beliefs and practices that have influenced curanderismo have been medieval and European witchcraft, early Arabic medicine and health practices, Judeo-Christian religious beliefs (symbols and rituals), Native American herbal lore and health practices, modern beliefs about spiritualism and psychic phenomena, scientific medicine, and the Bible.

The verb curar means to heal. Curanderismo can be called “holistic” or “folk” healing and is executed by a curandero (male healer) or a curandera (female healer). There are three levels of curanderismo: the material, the spiritual, and the mental. The material emphasizes objects such as candles, oils, and herbs. The spiritual embraces a medium through which the healing takes place. The mental focuses on psychic healing. All three levels require rituals that are formulaic or patterned in different ways to treat various illnesses.

Part of curanderismo is the belief that the curandero(a) has been bestowed as a gift (don) to heal others. However, most healers learn through apprenticeship to an older curandero and must go through a developmental period known as a desarrollo. There are several types of curandero(a)s, such as the Yerbera (herbalist), who works with herbs alone and treats patients with natural remedies (remedios). A Sobador/Sobadora (folk chiropractor) specializes in muscle and bone manipulation, acupressure, and massage therapy, healing with hands and supplementing the treatment with herbal medications when appropriate. A Partera is a midwife who utilizes herbs during the course of prenatal care and during delivery. For most curandero(a)s, healing is their livelihood; however, many do not charge but accept donations.

Instructional Materials and Resources

The following books and articles are required for implementing this unit as written.

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya
Hispanic American Literature by Ishmael Reed
Witches and Other Things by Marjorie Agosin
“Healing Spirits” by Mary Jane Garza, Hispanic Magazine, June 1998
The Folk Healer by Eliseo Torres
Curanderismo by Robert T. Trotter II and Juan Antonio Chavira
Mexican-American Folklore by John O. West
Many Mexicos by Lesley Byrd Simpson

guest speaker: curandero(a)

Internet Access
Library Access
## Contents of Unit

**Lesson 1**  The Concept of Curanderismo  
Awareness of the Hispanic folk healing tradition of curanderismo practiced in communities throughout the Southwest and Mexico.

**Lesson 2**  The History and Function of Curandero(a)s in the Community  
Understanding of the role of the holistic healer within the Hispanic community and culture.

**Lesson 3**  Curanderismo and Modern Medicine  
Researching the relationship between curanderismo and modern medicine, including the use of plants in modern-day medical prescriptions.

**Lesson 4**  Religion and Belief in Curanderismo  
Researching the role that religion and belief play in curanderismo. Creating a collage about curanderismo and a chart organizing information.

**Lesson 5**  Curandero(a)s  
Evaluating what has been learned about curandero(a)s. Taking a written quiz on *Bless Me, Ultima*. Inviting a curandero(a) to speak to the class.
Lesson 1: The Concept of Curanderismo

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)
Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)
Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

BENCHMARK(S)
Students use comprehension strategies.
Students make connections between prior knowledge and what they need to know about a topic before reading about it.
Students demonstrate correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

OBJECTIVE(S)
Students will develop an awareness of the Hispanic folk healing tradition of curanderismo practiced throughout the Southwest and Mexico.
Students will develop and implement a questionnaire.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
Questioning
KWL chart
Reading for comprehension
Literature log

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION
Teacher should read “Curandera” by Pat Mora and “The Curing Woman” by Alejandro Morales in Hispanic and American Literature and “Witch They Call Me” in Witches and Other Things by Marjorie Agosin.

ACTIVITIES
Fill in the “K” section of the KWL chart, indicating what you already know about curanderismo. Share your knowledge with the class. Next, fill out the “W” section, indicating what you would like to know. As a class, develop a questionnaire on curanderismo and other holistic medicinal approaches. Use the questionnaire with your parents, grandparents, relatives, and other community members. Share results with the class and fill out the “L” section of the KWL chart.

Begin reading Bless Me, Ultima and start a literature log. (A literature log is a spiral notebook kept in class in which students write entries as they read the novel.) Continue reading throughout the unit.
Lesson 1 (cont.)

**Vocabulary**
curandero, curandera Folk healer (male or female)
curanderismo Art of folk healing
holistic healing Treatment of the whole organism
don A gift from God
rituals Traditional methods of conducting and performing an act of healing or worship
herbal medicine Use of plants for medicinal purposes e.g.; mint, oregano, wild celery root, etc.

**Resource/Materials**
Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya
Hispanic American Literature by Ishmael Reed
Witches and Other Things by Marjorie Agosin
Curanderismo KWL Chart

**Assessment**
Assess literature logs for correct grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, etc. Assess KWL charts.
Curanderismo KWL Chart

(K) What do we know about curanderismo?

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(W) What do we want to know about curanderismo?

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Curanderismo KWL Chart (cont.)

(L) What have we learned about curanderismo?

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Lesson 2: History and Function of Curandero(a)s in the Community

What will students be learning?

**STANDARD(S)**
Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)
Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

**BENCHMARK(S)**
Students write and speak to peers, teachers, and the community.
Students demonstrate correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

**OBJECTIVE(S)**
Students will synthesize reading, write summaries, and share information with class.
Students will select and define meaningful vocabulary relating to curanderismo.
Students will develop a chronology of the history of curanderismo.

**SPECIFICS**
Folk medicine and folk remedies have been a viable part of Mexican-American culture throughout many centuries. Curanderismo and the knowledge of using herbs and natural medicine derives from traditional fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European medicinal practices.

What will be done to help students learn this?

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**
Jigsaw reading
Summarizing
Expository writing
Gathering information

**PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION**
Select a written piece on the history of curanderismo, such as “Healing Spirits,” by Mary Jane Garza, in *Hispanic Magazine* (June, 1988).

**ACTIVITIES**
Divide students into groups of four or five. Assign each group to read a section of the selected text. Each group will appoint a recorder and a reporter—one student to write a synopsis of reading and another to report to the entire class their summation. After this activity, the groups will complete the Curanderismo Vocabulary and Curanderismo Chronology worksheets.
Lesson 2 (cont.)

RESOURCES/MATERIALS
Selected reading on the history of curanderismo, such as “Healing Spirits” by Mary Jane Garza, *Hispanic Magazine*, June 1998
History of Curanderismo worksheet
Curanderismo Vocabulary worksheet
Curanderismo Chronology worksheet

ASSESSMENT
Assess cooperative learning group dynamics and worksheets. Evaluation of worksheets will be based on grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Also assess accuracy of information.
History of Curanderismo

Members of Group __________________________________________________

Date ____________________________________________________________

Read the two paragraphs assigned to your group. Select a recorder, who will write a short synopsis of the reading, and a reporter, who will report on your assigned reading to the entire class. (Remember to tell us what paragraphs your group read.)
### Curanderismo Vocabulary

Members of Group __________________________________________________

Date _________________________________________

Utilizing the reading and the dictionary, make a list of vocabulary words relating to curanderismo. Using a dictionary or information supplied in the reading, define each word.

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<th>Vocabulary Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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Curanderismo Chronology

Members of Group __________________________________________________

Date _________________________________________

Using the reading, create a chronology of the history of curanderismo and the curanderos(as) who have been significant in this practice. Include the future outlook for curanderismo.
Lessons 3: Curanderismo and Modern Medicine

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)
Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)
Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

BENCHMARK(S)
Students use reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing to gather data, define the problem, and apply problem-solving skills.
Students paraphrase, summarize, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information.

OBJECTIVE(S)
The students will apply critical thinking skills in researching the relationship between curanderismo and modern medicine.
Students will write an informative report following a standard procedure.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
Investigate and evaluate
Summarize
Writing reports

ACTIVITIES
Work in pairs to research through books, articles, and the Internet the relationship between curanderismo and modern medicine. Include a discussion of the use of plants in modern-day medical prescriptions. Analyze the information obtained and prepare an informative report to share with the class. Use the following procedure:

1. Select a specific topic.
2. Make an outline of your report.
3. Write a thesis statement.
4. Complete a first draft.
5. Conference with another pair of students.
6. Conference with the teacher.
7. Edit and print final paper.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS
Internet access
Library access

ASSESSMENT
Peer or teacher evaluation of research reports with regard to content and presentation.
Lesson 4: Religion and Belief in Curanderismo

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)
Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)
Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience. (RW6)

 Bench mark(s)
Students paraphrase, summarize, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information.
Students read literature that reflects the uniqueness, diversity, and integrity of the American experience.

OBJECTIVE(S)
Students will demonstrate an understanding of the religion and beliefs involved in curanderismo through a collage.
Students will condense information from various sources into a chart.

What will be done to help students learn this?

Instructional Strategies
Guided reading
Cause and effect
Analytical strategies
Use of the LMC and/or Public Library for research purposes

Activities
Research, through books, articles, and the Internet, the role that religion and belief play in curanderismo. The teacher will read excerpts from Mexican-American Folklore, Many Mexicos, Curanderismo, and articles such as “Healing Spirits.” As a class, discuss unfamiliar words and their meanings and summarize the information found in the readings. Create a collage about curanderismo and religious beliefs and develop a chart containing the information you have compiled on this topic.
Lesson 4 (cont.)

RESOURCES/MATERIALS
Mexican-American Folklore by John O. West
Many Mexicans by Lesley Byrd Simpson
Curanderismo by Robert Trotter II and Juan Antonio Chavira
magazines for cutting
construction paper
glue
scissors
Religious Beliefs Associated with Curanderismo chart
Internet Access
Library Access

ASSESSMENT
Quiz students on vocabulary words found in readings. Assess collages with regard to completeness and relevance. Assess chart on religious beliefs for completeness and understanding.
## Religious Beliefs Associated with Curanderismo

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<th>Religious Belief</th>
<th>Role in Curanderismo</th>
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Lesson 5: Curandero(a)s

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)
Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, listening, and viewing.

BENCHMARK(S)
Students make predictions, analyze, draw conclusions, and discriminate between fact and opinion in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.
Students use reading, speaking, listening, and viewing to gather data, define the problem, and apply problem-solving skills.

OBJECTIVE(S)
Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the literary text, Bless Me, Ultima.
Students will develop a questionnaire to expand their knowledge of curanderismo.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES
Discussion
Questionnaires
Written quiz

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION
Invite a curandero(a) to speak to the class about their role in the community and the practice and value of curanderismo/holistic healing.

ACTIVITIES
Discuss what you have learned about curanderismo. Is there more you want to know? In small groups, develop questions to ask a curandero(a) during their presentation to your class. Finish your literature logs and take a quiz on Bless Me, Ultima.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS
quiz on Bless Me, Ultima
guest speaker

ASSESSMENT
Assess literature logs and quiz.
Quiz on Bless Me, Ultima

Name ________________________________________ Date _____________

1. Ultima is a holistic healer who is traditionally known as _______________.
   a) a bruja    b) a doctor       c) a curandera

2. Antonio’s father was named _______________.
   a) Leandro   b) Gabriel         c) Narciso

3. Sheriff Chavez was killed by _______________.
   a) Reynaldo  b) Lupito          c) Lucas

4. Antonio’s mother wanted him to become a _______________.
   a) farmer    b) priest           c) professor

5. What is Purgatory? _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

6. Name one of the chores Antonio had to do every day. ________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

7. The name of the boy who could outrun any of his friends is _______________.
   a) Cico       b) Bones           c) Vitamin Kid

8. The kid who had bad breath was _______________.
   a) Florence  b) Bones            c) Horse

9. What could the yerba del manso cure? _______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

10. What is the origin of the name “Marez”??

11. What is the origin of the name “Luna”? _____________________________

12. Describe the presence of the river. _______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

13. What did Antonio’s family do every autumn? _______________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

14. Antonio’s favorite uncle was _______________.
   a) Lucas       b) Ricardo        c) Pedro
Quiz on Bless Me, Ultima (cont.)

15. Antonio was baptized at _______________.
   a) Guadalupe      b) El Puerto      c) Las Pasturas

16. Antonio’s grandfather’s name is _______________.
   a) Prudencio     b) Patricio       c) Presciliano

17. Name two products that were harvested at El Puerto:
    ____________________ and _____________________.

18. What was the name of Antonio’s first teacher? ____________________________

19. What are the names of the two brothers that left for the big city?
    ____________________ and _____________________.

20. What was Rosie’s place? ________________________________________________


22. The three evil witches who put a curse on Lucas were _______________.
   a) The Temptations  b) The Tamaulipas  c) The Trementinas

23. Antonio had to go with Ultima to cure Lucas because he was _______________.
   a) an Angel        b) a Juan         c) a Luna

24. How much money did Antonio’s grandfather give Ultima for curing Lucas? ______
    _____________________________________________________________________

25. What did Ultima have to do before she could begin to take the curse off Lucas?
    _____________________________________________________________________
    _____________________________________________________________________

Use a separate sheet of paper to answer the following essay questions.

26. Describe the school play.

27. Describe the drowning scene.

28. Describe the confrontation between Tenorio and Antonio’s uncle.

29. Describe the bond between Ultima and the Owl.

30. Describe the bond between Ultima and Antonio.
Unit Assessment

PERFORMANCE TASK
Write a book report about *Bless Me, Ultima*, including the following:

1. Title of Book
2. Author
3. Copyright Date
4. Protagonist(s)—name(s) and one paragraph description of character(s).
5. Setting—one-paragraph description
6. Summary—two-page synopsis

Edit and proofread; type final report on word processor.

SCORING RUBRIC

4. All required information is provided. The book report is accurate, complete, and writing is without grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors.
3. All required information is provided. The book report is generally accurate and complete and writing has few grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors.
2. Most of the required information is provided. The book report has significant errors and omissions. There are numerous grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors.
1. Very little of the required information is provided. The book report is not intelligible because of errors, incompleteness, and grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes.
Bibliography


   Bilingual poetry written about three women’s feelings and sentiments about a variety of topics, including life, death, happiness, neurosis, abortion. The writing communicates a universality of experience even when experienced in different cultures.


   Novel about a curandera who comes to live with the Marez family in New Mexico. She befriends a young boy named Antonio who is struggling with his spiritual self; through the friendship, he comes to understand life and nature and how these two go hand in hand.


   Excellent handbook that helps teachers and parents to monitor and improve the language learning of students through profiles and assessments in reading and writing.


   A book about writing which includes examples of students writing, sharing, revising, and publishing their work. This text speaks to the task of extending students’ writing. It also focuses on literacy techniques through writing.


   Article about the Latin American folk healing tradition known as curanderismo. The author writes about legendary curanderos who practice their skills in the Southwest and northern Mexico.


   Anthology that includes autobiographies, fiction, poetry, and drama written by several Hispanic authors. Two readings from this book that relate to the unit are “The Curing Woman” by Alejandro Morales and “Curandera” by Pat Mora.


   Book about the different aspects of curanderismo, including psychiatric and psychological topics. Addresses the therapeutic value of curanderismo and offers views of how curanderismo alleviates or enhances the medicinal practice of the holistic healer and the patient.


   This book written in Spanish explains the natural state of health and how to prevent an unnatural state of health. This book also covers medicinal practices by defining the sickness and prescribing holistic remedies to combat the illness.


   This book is a small encyclopedia-type reference about plants and herbs and how they can be utilized for medicinal purposes. It also includes the time of the month and the time of day to collect these plants.
Bibliography (cont.)

Short book about the beliefs and practices of curanderismo. Also, short synopses of famous curanderos(as) such as Don Pedrito, Nino Fidencio, Teresita, and Jewel Babb.  
Definition and treatments for some ailments that are commonly used by curanderos(as).

This book is an ethnography of the healing theories and practices of curanderos, brought about as a part of a grant given to acquaint health care professionals in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas with Mexican-Americans and the practices of curanderismo. This book discusses history, cultural context of illness, theories of healing, the different levels of curanderismo, and the future of this practice.

This book, written in Spanish, contains simple remedies gathered from many doctors to alleviate more than 130 medical problems. This book prescribes home treatment for acne, cholesterol, cuts, dandruff, bad breath, impotency, and many other common ailments.

This book covers the history and culture of Mexico from its inception to the political and economic welfare state right after the Mexican Revolution. This book contains a brief history of curanderos and their effect on the religious beliefs of the early Spaniards and the pre-Columbian population.

Excellent reference book for anyone interested in Mexican-American culture. Has many insights into the customs and traditions of the Southwest. Good information on curanderismo and curanderos(as).

A publication that provides teachers with useful study guides that are instructionally effective. Good resource book.
About the Author

Lu Liñan is a Colorado native, born and raised in the San Luis Valley. She grew up and went to school in Conejos County, graduating from Antonito High School before moving to Denver. In 1969 she founded a dance company known as The Ballet Folklorico (Fiesta Alegre) de Denver which she directed for twenty-five years.

In 1984, she realized that she wasn’t reaching enough of the student population through her cultural performances; increasingly aware of the high dropout rate of Latino students, she enrolled at Metropolitan State College and obtained her B.A. in Secondary Education in 1990. She began her career as a certified teacher at Denver’s largest inner-city school—West High School. She also taught one year at a middle school, two years at an alternative high school and is currently teaching again at West High School. She obtained a masters degree in May, 1997. She is Department Chair of the Bilingual Core at West High and sponsor for La Unidad LatinoAmericana (a group of senior students); she also directs the West High Folkloric Dancers. With her husband and daughter, she runs a Mexican eatery in Denver.