

“I Will Place a Boat”: Transition Literature as a Healing Balm

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NECHUNG ORACLE: Where there is no crossing a big river, no fords, no shallows, where the only hope is a boat, and there is no boat . . . I will place a boat, Kundun. The wish-fulfilling Jewel will shine from the West.

Screenplay for *Kundun*
(Melissa Mathison, October, 1992)

INTRODUCTION

The title for my curriculum unit is “I Will Place a Boat.” This semester-long unit will be a study of the wounds and the healing that are a result of mass and personal human migrations in contemporary times. This unit will be part of an English for the Speakers of Other Languages (ESL) curriculum for a high school population of recent immigrant ESL students, most of whom are from Latin American countries, with a few from countries in Asia and Africa. Having dealt firsthand with the emotional upheavals of moving from one country to a new one where they do not speak the language, these students have feelings about their predicament that run the gamut. Some are very happy to be here, enamored with the various seductions of our pop music, clothes, and consumer culture. Others are ambivalent, and some sorely miss their home countries, deeply resentful of having been uprooted from everything they knew and resentful of having to negotiate life in a different and seemingly uncaring North American culture. Many go back and forth between embracing, rejecting, and ambivalence. Emotionally, they are in a state of limbo, a state of passage; their experiences are raw and visceral; how they get through this experience will influence in countless ways their entire future. Thus, it is these students who are in a unique and firsthand position to learn from this experience and to come up with creative and personal ways to heal these wounds.

The common denominator among all of my students, besides being recent immigrants, is having a very low level of skill in English reading, writing, and conversation. Because of this, the unit will combine low-vocabulary/high-interest level material as well as adaptations, visual and musical activities, and primary materials in the language of their country of origin. This unit should begin when the students know enough of the basic English grammar and vocabulary to be able to start transferring their knowledge from their native languages into English, and when they are able to read simple, low-vocabulary literature written in the English language.

This unit will incorporate the rationale as well as current relevant psychological and pedagogical information which pertains to the healing process among immigrants as it exists in late twentieth century and early twenty-first century America. It will discuss the

primary materials used in forming the unit and the materials to be used by the students themselves—in particular, literature, films, and student products themselves, which will include personal narratives of coming to the U.S., fictional narratives, dream journaling, and mandalas.

General Overview of the Unit

If you are coming to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you are coming because your liberation is bound with mine, then let us work together.

—An Aborigine Woman (Lorenz and Watkins)

I believe distinctly and fervently in the healing quality of literature, both in that which is read and that which is self-produced. I also believe that the distinction between consumer and provider of literature must in essence, as in the case of traditional cultures, be an artificial one. I believe (and see) that when one engages in a written and continued dialogue with oneself and all that one has read, seen, heard, felt, and encountered, a catharsis occurs. And that process of catharsis, if gently acknowledged, cared for, and respected, can lead to a wider and deeper view of oneself and one's place in the world and in the community of living creatures.

America has been a land of many definitions, perhaps as many as there are people who inhabit it (and perhaps the very idea of “America” is no more than an illusion - a fantasy cooked up by myth makers and ad agencies to sell us a version of ourselves which has little or no basis in reality). Of all the definitions of America, it is those among the most marginalized communities that are the most telling. No community is more marginalized and in some cases more traumatized than a newly arrived community of people who immigrate to the U.S. and instantly find themselves in a land of different customs, values, and languages. The traditions that these people leave behind and sometimes re-invent—especially those which address the wounds of the psyche inflicted by wars, extreme poverty, personal struggles, displacement, and hopelessness—are the focus of this unit. However, in this context, there also arises an enormous wellspring from within that can be used for a sense of personal healing and for a deeper connection with the community of humankind as a whole. In *Crossing Avalon*, Jean Shinoda Bolen notes that:

During times of passage, we may also find ourselves in a liminal psychological state . . . that place of poetic sensibility where glimpses of the eternal and ordinary perceptions overlap. Here the invisible spiritual world and visible reality come together: here intuitive possibility is on the threshold of tangible manifestation (8).

She continues, “Periods of darkness, times in the forest and the underworld, are times when we are in a cauldron, more aware than during ordinary times of the necessity and the possibility of regeneration and healing, in the place of surrender and choice” (272).

In this unit I will try to help my students think deeply, critically, and creatively about the forces which cause people to leave one country and move to another, and about the forces which, in others and in themselves, can lead to introspection and self-knowledge. The United States is surrounded by water—if not literally, then at least practically. The two oceans and the Rio Grande River constitute a symbolic leap on the part of those who come here, whether they be Vietnamese who fled their country after the war and arrived in the U.S. after numerous refugee camps; Filipinos, Indians, Nigerians or Russians here to find a job, hope and a career; Mexicans hoping to escape grinding poverty and social injustice; or Somalis, Palestinians, El Salvadorans, and Guatemalans so narrowly escaping death in the midst of civil wars. The focus of this unit will be on the recognition of social ills, addressing the over-masculinization of our culture and the need to validate the feminine nature of healing and the feminine aspect of spirituality as expressed by mostly women writers from all different ethnic communities in America providing a “healing balm” in literature. It should not be inferred, however, that the “healing” must be implied by the literature itself. Sometimes a story is a story, and there is no sense of healing. There are some necessary stories that exist as raw wounds, just as with some immigrant students and some people in general, which have not healed and may never heal. Such is the nature of life on this planet. Literature in itself does not need to have a “message” of healing or anything else. Sometimes a work of art must stand apart from the smoke and act simply as a mirror, without blinking and without comment. The act of healing, if there is to be one, must of necessity come from the relationship between the reader and the smoke and mirrors. Healing is not in the words on the page, but within the reader her/himself. As Gloria Naylor writes in *Mama Day*, “the only voice is your own” (10).

The activities in this unit are meant to reinforce and guide the students from awareness of the issues in the world surrounding emigration and immigration to an awareness of their own personal immigration issues. And from this awareness will come their own mirror, in which to see themselves and their own issues with a clarity that will enable them to heal their own wounds. After relating and examining their own stories of immigration, they will read, think about, and discuss selected films and low-vocabulary written literature that examine these same issues. Students will collect dreams and write dream journals to intensify their awareness and to collectively move towards that inner place where this awareness can process itself and hopefully germinate into a richness, a readiness to transform itself into healing and sense of self-realization. The mandala project will further this journey into the psyche of the student and consummate a flowering of the student’s own voice—a voice of healing and wisdom, a voice beyond concept, beyond time, and beyond words.

THE UNIT

First Stage: Literature of Passage in Various Media

The first stage will contain three separate sections. The first will be an examination of the students' own stories of coming to the United States. Using the circular form of the mandala as an outline, students will draw pictures of their home countries as they exist in their minds. These drawings can either be literal, symbolic, or fantastic representations. I think the process and results of this artistic activity will be very much a watershed in their involvement in this project, transforming it from the general and somewhat academic to the extremely personal. When filmmaker David Riker began auditioning non-actors to play characters of day laborers for his film, *La Ciudad*, he had them draw pictures of their homeland and noticed that it transformed his view of the cast from nameless immigrants to people with deeply felt emotions and vivid stories regarding their exodus from their countries of birth. He noted, "I asked the men to draw a picture of what their home looked like. As each man described what his picture meant to him, he ceased being a day laborer, a foreigner. They all simply became who they are" (*La Ciudad*).

Following the drawing of pictures, students will write their own personal stories in their native language and then translate them to English. This will be followed by a showing of selected films, a playing (and perhaps singing) of songs, and recitation of poetry dealing with the issues of exile, emigration, immigration, and healing. Four films that will be used will be *El Norte*, *La Ciudad*, *Heaven and Earth*, and *Kundun*.

Film Literature

El Norte will be shown first. It is a three-hour story of an indigenous brother and sister who are forced to leave their home in Guatemala when the army comes to their village and massacres all the indigenous women it can find. After a long and harrowing journey, the brother and sister make it to the U.S. border only to be caught and deported to Mexico. Then a retired "coyote" shows them a route across the border by means of an old sewer tunnel filled with rats. After they arrive in the U.S., they find that, although there is prosperity, the reality of the "American Dream" is much different from the one they had imagined back home in Guatemala, and they are forced to make difficult decisions in order to survive in the United States.

La Ciudad, shot with nonprofessional Latin-American immigrant actors, is a compelling, though somewhat bleak, film based around four stories of hopelessness and desperation due to poverty, cultural differences, and language problems. A Honduran man working day labor collecting bricks is killed when the brick building he is working near collapses on him. A young man who just arrived in New York from Mexico meets a young woman from his same village and falls in love. He goes to buy groceries and becomes hopelessly lost in the maze of housing project buildings which all look the

same. A puppeteer who has tuberculosis refrains from enrolling his daughter in public schools because since they are living in a car, they cannot show proof of residence, and a woman working in a sweatshop tries to get paid from her Korean employers so that she can send the money to her sick daughter in El Salvador.

Heaven and Earth, an often-overlooked gem by Oliver Stone, is based on the autobiography *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, by Vietnamese-American writer and social activist Le Ly Hayslip. Hayslip grew up in Vietnam, worked for the Viet Cong, went to prison, was cast out from her village, fell in love with and married a U.S. Marine, bore two children, and moved to the United States. This movie also deals with themes of desperation, overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles, coming to the United States, and surviving. The gamut of human emotional experience is expressed in this film, from the horrors of her torture at the hands of the South Vietnamese government, to living in a junkyard and begging for food, to selling alcohol and cigarettes on the black market, to facing her husband's violent temper, to humorous scenes of cultural bewilderment such as when she is in an American supermarket comparing different brands of rice. She decides to purchase Uncle Ben's. "An uncle . . . is a trusted man." The story concludes with a reconciliation of her past—her family and her village—and her present as, though an immigrant, an American.

Kundun is the biographical story of the Dalai Lama, from his birth to his enthronement as ruler of Tibet to his exile in India. In this story, the Dalai Lama's beliefs in compassion and nonviolence are put to test by palace intrigue, injustice, and, most importantly, the invasion of his country by the Chinese. What I believe will be most telling in this story for immigrant students will be the dawning and subtle realization by the young Dalai Lama (who was a teenager when he had to leave Tibet) that nothing will nor can ever be the same as it was, that he must rediscover his humanity in leaving his country and in living a life of exile.

The students will research and read to discover the stories of other recent immigrants to the United States of all ages, their tribulations, the skills they access to face these challenges, their triumphs, and their defeats. In addition to research, the students will read the low-vocabulary/high-interest primary literature listed in the annotated bibliography. Specific subjects to be addressed will include the experiences of immigrants and teenage refugees from Mexico, Central America, Tibet, and Vietnam as well as other nationalities. Students will be encouraged to find a commonality in these stories—a commonality of cultures, experiences, backgrounds, and emotions. To avoid stereotypes, it should also be noted that one cannot assume that certain characteristics personify an individual just because he/she comes from a certain culture. Humans, though social, are by nature individuals before they are collective entities.

High-Interest/ Low-Vocabulary Literature

For teenage students with very limited abilities in English, there is not a wealth of authentic literature dealing with the issues of immigration, emigration, pain, and healing. However, certain high-interest/low-vocabulary literature does exist in a format that can be understood by beginning English language learners. These texts, free of complex sentence structures, and with a minimum of slang and idiomatic expressions, exhibit a surprising sense of depth, are not free of real-life ambiguities, and contain messages of healing each related to the particular circumstances of different groups of immigrants.

The *Hopes and Dreams* series, with each book authored by Tana Reiff, is particularly suited to recently arrived immigrant high school students. *Who is My Neighbor* chronicles the immigration experience of the family of Ramon and Pilar Samoya, *campesinos* who immigrated to the United States to escape the civil war in El Salvador. The book opens with a description of the last sermon in San Salvador, El Salvador by Archbishop Oscar Romero immediately before he was assassinated in mid-sentence by a right wing death squad:

I speak to the members of the army and the police. Each one of you is one of us. We are all the same people, The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. Remember instead the voice of God: 'Thou shalt not kill.' God's law must win. In the name of God, I beg you, stop the war (Reiff 1-2).

Reiff describes the assassination with an effective lack of ornamentation: "Then, all of a sudden, from the back of the church, someone fired a gun at Archbishop Romero. He fell to the floor, shot in the heart. His blood turned his white robes red. He died on the spot" (2).

Romero was a popular (and, to some, a dangerous) religious leader in El Salvador. Though the story of Archbishop Romero is dim in the memories of today's immigrant high school students from El Salvador, it was vivid among students I taught in the early 1990s. Students would tell me of having been baptized by Romero, and having wept with their families when he was murdered.

The story continues with an account of nighttime visits to their village by paramilitary death squads, and threats to leave or be killed. When the army comes for Ramon, he escapes, and after a perilous journey and repeated attempts to enter the U.S. (including a one-way bus ride to an Arizona desert which resulted in numerous deaths from the heat, the cold, and lack of water), Ramon is aided by a group of Catholic nuns who escort him to a "safe house." Eventually he reunites with his wife and family in Houston, Texas—temporarily safe from the Salvadoran death squads, but always wary of the inadvertent dangers of deportation. They keep their children out of school for fear that they will be reported. After the nuns explain that the law forbids asking children the immigration status of their parents, they enroll them in school. The children are harassed by other

students and called “wetbacks.” Eventually, the Samoyas attain “temporary protected status” by the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization. Through their trials, members of the Samoya family expand their circle of concern from their own family and friends to the community of refugees at large.

Using the same terse and descriptive language that is more easily understood by beginning English language learners, *The Boat People*, also by Reiff, tells the story of a boat-owning fishing family, the Nguyens, who are forced to leave Vietnam, threatened by “dangerous men” who are coming to take their boat and burn their house (Reiff 3). Even though their boat has a leak, they feel their only hope is to escape Vietnam by sea. When night begins to fall, the Nguyen family, along with their neighbors, sets sail in their leaky boat into the open South China Sea, heading south and knowing nothing more than that this is the safest direction. After floating for days and days, they finally spot a ship that comes near to them. The men on the other ship tell the men on Nguyen’s boat to get onto their boat; then they rape the women and steal all the provisions. The men are returned to the boat, and the Nguyens and their friends are turned out again, drifting into the open sea. They survive by eating floating seaweed churned to the surface by storms. People on the boat start dying from lack of water and exposure to the sun. Finally they are picked up by a boat and taken to Malaysia. In Malaysia they are given provisions and time to repair their boat, then again towed out into international waters and set adrift. After a certain amount of time, they are picked up by another boat and taken to a refugee camp in Indonesia. Eventually they wind up in Texas and begin to rebuild their lives fishing in the Gulf of Mexico; but, in a scenario reminiscent to *Mosquito Coast*, cultural differences and misunderstandings lead to conflict with American fishermen. Cooler heads prevail on each side, and the Nguyen family begins to feel at home in the community.

In *The Family from Vietnam*, Tana Reiff puts a much-needed feminine perspective into the literature of the refugee immigrant experience. In the confusion surrounding Saigon in the last days of the Vietnam War, Mai, with her son Bao and daughter Thi, becomes separated from her husband Set and their other son Vinh. Mai boards an American airplane destined for Guam, but loses Set in the commotion. Eventually, Mai and her children make it to the United States under the auspices of a sponsor family who agrees to take care of them until they are able to support themselves. She studies English, learning enough to fill out a job application, learns how to use the bus system, and finds a job at a chicken farm gutting chickens. She keeps up her hope of finding Set by putting notices in Vietnamese-language newspapers. Years later she receives a letter from him saying that he had seen her ad in a California Vietnamese-language newspaper. In his letter he tells her that he and Vinh were placed on the next plane, which took them to a refugee camp in the Philippines. At the refugee camp, disease was rampant and claimed the life of their son Vinh. He writes, “My heart /was never so sad/ as the day I saw /your plane fly away./ I never stop thinking/about you” (48). He closes the letter with these words,

We must/be together again soon./California is beautiful. /But you are /more beautiful./I will come to you /as soon as I can./We will be /together again. /We must be /together again soon!/There is no need /for you to write./I will be with you/ before a letter /can get here./Wait for me./My love,/ Set” (49, 50).

Another book in the Reiff’s *Hopes and Dreams* series, which is removed in time from the contemporary accounts of Central American, Asian, Bosnian, Somali, Middle Eastern refugee experience, but is no less compelling, is the small book, *Nobody Knows*. It chronicles the experience of America’s only unwilling group of immigrants—those of the African Diaspora—and the story of the “Great Migration” of Black Americans from the South to the North. Of all immigrant stories, the story of the African Diaspora is one which must be told and discussed among immigrants so that they may understand the subtle and often pernicious dynamics of contemporary life in the United States and the strains and tensions among its different ethnicities. *Nobody Knows* tells the story of Mattie, who, along with her sharecropper mother, shells peas and then rides the wagon into town for a soda, only to be met by disapproving white people. At the store, they are served only after all the whites have been served. When Mattie remarks, “I don’t think that man likes us, Mama,” her mother replies:

Be glad you’re here child. I remember when I was your age. I was a slave. My family was owned by white people. They forced us to stay on their land. My parents worked almost all the time. We couldn’t just take off into town. You’re lucky, child. You’re free to come and go (4).

The story continues, following Mattie from her childhood in the rural American South to her adulthood and marriage to a man named Nate, and eventually to the realization that, no matter what, they would never be able to make a decent living off of their land. Then, Nate is offered a job in Chicago. The author subtly ties in the stories of the original slave ships with the offer that Nate receives: “Mattie wasn’t so sure about the man from Chicago. How could they trust him? He sounded to her like the sea captains Mama had told her about” (13).

They do, however, move to Chicago. Maggie’s remarks about the differences between Chicago and her old home echo the feelings of many immigrants newly arrived to the U.S.:

Back home, Mattie saw green fields out her window. Here in Chicago, she saw gray walls. Back home the air was fresh. Here in the big city, the air was dirty and it often had a bad smell. Cars raced by all night long. The noise kept Mattie awake (17).

This connection is repeated in a conversation between Mattie and Nate. Mattie says, “Now I know how the slaves felt . . . I feel like we were brought to a strange land. This place is nothing like home. And the work you do—it’s no better than slave work” (18).

As the story unfolds, the couple encounters the fierce racism that has characterized many white Northerners. Nate is beat up in a race riot, and then later killed in an accident at the meat plant where he works. Mattie, now a mother of five children, gets a job cleaning at a steel mill. When the Great Depression comes, she loses her job and has to clean white people's homes. When World War Two comes, two of her sons go off to fight. During the war, Mattie returns to the steel mill, but this time doing the same work as the men do. When her sons return, they are denied the same basic civil rights that the white veterans get. When Mama, Mattie's mother, passes away, she returns to her old home to bury her. Mattie walks into the same soda shop she went to as a girl and asks the owner (the old owner's son) why they still have separate areas for whites and Blacks. The owner replies that that's the way things have always been, and that if he changed it, some of his white customers would become angry. Mattie replies, "Don't you think the Black people get angry?" Mattie then rallies the Black community, saying, "Black people work and die in the fields and the factories just like white people do. My boy's in the war fighting for his country. I'm sick and tired of 'White Only' doors. Now, who is hungry for a sweet?" (73)

Mattie and a group of people go into the white section of the store, and Mattie begins singing, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." After a short pause, the owner comes over and asks, "What can I get you?" (75)

Another series of books is *In Our Own Voices*, in which the teenage refugees who have come to the United States from various countries have written their own stories. This series of firsthand accounts stringently avoids the use of stereotypes, letting the teenagers show what makes them unique as individuals from their widely varied backgrounds. In *Teenage Refugees from Mexico Speak Out*, by Gerry Hadden, Diego from Guadalajara is in the United States because of personal problems with his family at home—problems he can't talk about. Patricia, from a small village that's not even on the map, is 20 years old and a senior in high school without enough credits to graduate (in U.S. public school system, you cannot attend a public secondary school if you are over the age of twenty-one). Arturo loves to dance and belongs to a group that plays Latin music—"meringue, salsa, banda, everything" (35). Jorge, a Tarascan Indian who is proud of his indigenous heritage, recounts his attempts to cross the border from Mexico into the United States:

I was really scared. From the American side I looked back, and you could see people waiting in the Mexican hills. After dark, the Mexicans all try to run across the border, and the guards try to catch them. If they catch you, they send you to jail, then deport you. If they catch you twice you can go to jail for a long time. For a while when I was in L.A., I felt afraid every time I saw a cop (40).

Dulce, a 16-year-old from Mexico City who wants to be a sculptor, misses her friends and wants to return to Mexico when she graduates. Ana, age 17 and pregnant, lives with

her boyfriend. Her parents and siblings have moved back to Mexico, but Ana wants to stay in the U.S., as is evident in her comment, “Once I’m done with my education and I’m a wife and mother, I’d like to go back to visit my family in Mexico. But I won’t stay there. The main thing is to get my papers first. That will happen when I marry Mario. We’ll stay here, but I’ll always carry Mexico inside me” (53).

In *Palestinian Teenage Refugees and Immigrants Speak Out*, by Nabil Marhood, the teenagers face a different sort of alienation. Sixteen-year-old Lina, who emigrated with her family from Jerusalem, writes, “My third-grade sister cried so much when her teacher told her there was no such thing as Palestine.” Majis, a Christian from Ramallah, explains Israeli occupation:

...every book, pamphlet, map, or any piece of written information that had the word Palestine written on it was banned and confiscated...Israeli soldiers used to go into our homes to search for books. To Israel, educating Palestinians was a criminal act...At times during the Intifada, the Israeli police would fire on us (Marhood 25-26).

Nadia, a 20-year-old student of American literature, had actually taken part in the Intifada, the uprising against Israeli occupation—a rebellion that was begun by teenagers:

We would go out and demonstrate. I was a little hurt once when a bomb fell near me. It could have killed me. I threw one rock. I was too afraid. I was tear-gassed many times. Once two canisters fell right at my feet and exploded in my face. It was horrible. At the time, though, it didn’t seem to be a bad experience. This is the reality of being young. You become resilient (37).

Hanna, a 20-year-old dentistry student from Jerusalem, is tired of the violence and wishes people could live in peace. Mohammed, an 18-year-old born in exile in Saudi Arabia, has never seen Palestine, but considers himself an unhyphenated Palestinian. When he finishes his education, he plans to return to Saudi Arabia, but is not optimistic about ever seeing his homeland: “I do not think I will live long enough to see Palestine the way it used to be” (52). Rana, a 16-year-old, has also never been to Palestine and lives in a Jewish community in the United States, but, like the others, she is consumed with the issues surrounding her homeland. She writes, “At times I consider myself a refugee. All Palestinians are refugees...I feel there is not much hope. Whatever happens, happens. I don’t think it will be good. A part of me is missing. Until the dream comes true it will remain missing” (57).

The *In Their Voices* series contains eleven other equally compelling short collections from Bosnia-Herzegovina, China, Eastern Europe, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Nicaragua, Russia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Vietnam. Through the readings, students will be encouraged to discuss both common and divergent themes in the stories. Possible subjects for discussion might include commonalities and differences of experience

between different cultures, different age groups, and alienation. Among the students, discussion could also answer questions such as, “If you could, would you go back to your homeland? Can you (in the sense of Tom Wolfe) ever ‘go home’? How does the feminine experience of immigration differ from the male experience? What are differences and commonalities in themes between the female immigrant experience and that of males?” Also, the question could arise: “What are the wounds that can be healed, and what wounds may never heal? What have you learned about yourself, about others, and about the world?”

Second Stage: Cuentas—Personal Accounts of Immigration

The second stage will involve the collection by students of *cuentas*, or personal accounts obtained by interviewing relatives, friends, and/or neighbors. If possible, these contacts will be on both sides of the border, focusing on how emigration and immigration have affected their lives. After the material has been read, collected, discussed, and summarized in writing, the students will view photographs from various magazines, personal collections of the teacher, books, and Internet sites of people leaving their own countries. From information gleaned from personal experiences, the assigned readings and the films, students will use their imaginations to create fictionalized diary/journals of the journey from another country to Houston, Texas. The students will be encouraged, but not required, to choose a home country other than their own.

In their diary/journals, students will calculate mileage and expenses along the way and describe in detail what they see, hear, think, and feel. The diaries will also include other fictionalized people who are encountered day to day on this journey. Perhaps another element in the fictionalized daily journal can be a few sentences about a difficult decision that had to be made each day. Perhaps this can be a separate heading inside the journal. The fictionalized journals will, I believe, make more real the universality of the emotions felt in leaving one country and moving to another. Being fictional, the project will provide an avenue for the expression of emotions that are perhaps too painful, too raw, or too difficult to express in a first person narrative. Calculating mileage, expenses, and making difficult decisions will ground the experience. Stories have an important role in healing. *In Women Who Run With The Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes writes,

Stories are medicine. . . . They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, or act anything—we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories. Stories engender the excitement, sadness, questions, longings, and understandings that spontaneously bring the archetype . . . back to the surface. Stories are imbedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life. Stories enable us to understand the need for and the ways to raise a submerged archetype (15-16).

Third Stage: Dream Journals, Mandalas, and the Finished Product

Dreams

In every culture and every religion, dreams play a recurring and important role. In the Bible, important (and foreboding) dreams appear to Joseph, Moses, the Pharaoh, the Magi, Mary, Joseph, King Herod, and the apostle Paul. In Islam, the Qur'an was first revealed to Mohammed in a dream. In Buddhism, the historical Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, is purported to have had a "conception" dream in which a bodhisattva in the form of a great white elephant circumambulated her body three times, then placed a white lotus upon her right side which then entered her womb. The interpretation she was later given was that she would give birth to a son who would become either the greatest king of all time or, if he left his home to follow the spiritual path, would become the Buddha.

In traditional societies shamans give advice while in the midst of lucid dream states. In Tibetan and Ayurvedic medicine, dreams are often used to aid in diagnosis of illnesses (Young 66). Architects in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia have for millennia drawn their blueprints from visions in dreams. Writers, composers, and artists keep writing paper, cassette machines, and drawing paper at the sides of their beds in hopes of catching elusive inspirations that appear in their dreams.

Carole Ione, in her book, *This is A Dream*, describes the existence of "dream communities" where people dream together and heal together. This has been a hallmark of commonality in the spirituality of many indigenous cultures, most notably the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. An anonymous Aztec poem reads, "That we have come to this earth to live is untrue. We come but to sleep, to dream" (Ione 21). In fact, many who work in the field of dreams conclude that the world of dreams is itself no less real than the conscious world. Tenzin Wangyal writes:

One must recognize the great potential that dream holds for the spiritual journey. Normally the dream is thought to be "unreal" as opposed to the "real" waking life. But there is nothing more real than a dream. This statement only makes sense once it is understood that normal waking life is as unreal as dream and in exactly the same way (23).

In our day-to-day lives dreams are also important. If we live to be seventy-five years of age, and sleep eight hours a night (this of course excludes teachers), we spend twenty-five of those years sleeping, and a number of those years dreaming. In dreams we more often than not encounter different people, have different experiences—some of which are so embarrassing we never tell a soul, and express emotions in ways that are often diametrically opposed to our expressions in waking life. And every night we return to this strange limitless world. It is in this world that we are often able to get perspective and a sense of cleansing, allowing us to exist more fully in our day-to-day world.

Dream journals are an important tool. Recording and remembering dreams is, I believe, a very empowering experience. This process gives validity to the very subtle emotions and mental processes in one's psyche. Separated from conscious external physical stimuli and perception of time and temporality, the mind is thus able to encounter itself and sort out problems, questions, and answers in its own language. Recalling and interpreting the information is perhaps the greatest challenge. Dreams are by nature ultimately personal experiences, and we ourselves are the only ones truly able to interpret them. And in some situations, dreams are beyond the interpretation of words. In this case it is the feelings we are left with that are most important. Carole Ione suggests that when recording dreams, the writer writes in the present tense, focusing on the feelings, sensations, and emotions as well as the stories of the dreams (Ione 27).

Later in the semester, students will begin to keep a dream journal (in their native language if necessary), and will be encouraged to share the journal entries with their classmates. Attention will be given to commonalities in the students' dream experiences. The dream work involved in this project will, I think, be dependent upon the personalities and the levels of trust built up among the class members. Sometimes there are issues of a very personal and potentially embarrassing nature that come up in dreams. In this case, students can substitute the embarrassing aspects of dreams for symbols or metaphors of their choice, thereby protecting their privacy (and sense of dignity) while expressing in a language that perhaps only they know the depths of their inner lives. The dreams, written and shared, will be respected for exactly what they are, and left to be that and nothing else. I feel that attempts to analyze or rationally explain these dreams would be useless and counterproductive—It would be like using two-dimensional geometry to explain a sphere, or three-dimensional geometry to describe time. Healing in its utter essence is an internal process, and the healing process of dreams is one that needs the kind of awareness in which words are only symbols or pointers to a process that is beyond words and beyond the power of rationality.

Dream journaling opens the door to the latent processes and subtle powers of the mind, to issues we may not be aware of while actively engaging in our busy lives. In continual discussions of these dream journals and the feelings they engender, the participating students will form, on a de facto basis, a "dream community"—a veritable community (as in the not so distant past which is indigenous within us all) of dreamers sharing and discussing their dreams, codifying them into words, music, or visual art, and dreaming again to repeat the process. The use of dreams (which are very personal symbols of our inner states of mind) will, I hope, have a very powerful effect.

Dream journaling for me has always been a healing exercise, a form of coming to terms with issues that lie buried in the symbolic language of the dream. Through this exercise, I can have a profound effect on my waking life. Simply being aware of my dreams during the day while I am in the midst of the challenges and mundanities of daily life seems to bring about a connection to the feeling of the dream and thus a sense of perspective—calmness, clarity, centeredness, and a link to that which is beyond words

and ideas. Completing this part of the unit and thus being cognizant of dreams while awake, writing about those dreams in a journal (perhaps changing parts of it into a symbolic or metaphoric language), and sharing that journal with others, the students will be better prepared to delve into the next section of this unit, the “mandala.”

The Mandala

Though esoteric in name and connotation, the mandala is a symbol that is universal in its use. Visually, the mandala is a figure that, according to Jose and Miriam Arguelles in their landmark study, *Mandala*, contains three inherent properties: a center, symmetry, and cardinal points (13). Examples of this shape in nature are infinite and infinitesimal—the atom, the molecule, an ice crystal, a snowflake, the human eye, the earth, the moon, the solar system, the galaxy, and perhaps the human mind. The key to recognizing them is in one’s personal perspective, and it could perhaps be argued that this perspective is *solely* personal in that it is we humans and our minds who make the connections between these elements of nature and form them into shapes—always a center, a boundless end, and (our) connections between points. Thus, as an organizing principle, the mandala provides a structure for the laying out of and the investigation of symbols—a roadmap and an iconography of the individual human psyche.

This utilization of the mandala is not new. The mandala has been used by traditional and Indigenous cultures throughout history as a means to understand and visually organize complex phenomena that is difficult to relate in sequential story format. Examples of this are Navaho sand paintings used to delineate the four cardinal directions—north, east, south, and west—and use these to delineate a sense of spirituality and the relationship between an individual and the universe.

In Tibetan Buddhism, brilliantly colored, elaborate mandala sand paintings are carefully constructed to express a model of the universe and the qualities within each substructure --qualities such as wisdom, compassion, forbearance, and ultimately emptiness. Before beginning the physical work of the painting, monks memorize a blueprint for the mandala, and then meditate for weeks, concentrating constantly on visualizing the finished product. Then, as a group, they silently paint a large mandala using colored grains of sand. After weeks and weeks of careful work, a ceremony is held to consecrate the painting, then the sand is swept away and the contents dumped into a river, lake, or ocean. This is to symbolize the concept of impermanence—nothing lasts forever.

In Aboriginal Australia, the mandala is used as a method for finding one’s way back to “dream time,” which is eternity or ultimate reality. In ceremonies, a stone called the Tjuringa is placed in the center of a space containing sand, and from this, the voice of the ancestors is sought. Stories are then told with the finger of the storyteller weaving concentric circles around the stone (Arguelles 34). The mandala has also been used in the symbology of the Mayan civilization as well as that of medieval Christianity.

Chogyam Trungpa calls the process of working with the mandala “orderly chaos...It is orderly because it comes in a pattern. It is chaos because it is confusing to work with that order...This involves working with our life situation, our basic existence, our whole being” (Trungpa 3).

In other words, because we have a comprehensible and orderly place to put them in, complex and confusing issues can be explored. Because there are directions and opposites (perhaps unlike nature), both the light and the shadow (which are human concepts) can be addressed.

For this project, students will construct personal mandalas, based on a teacher modification of mandala activities suggested in Fran Claggett’s excellent *Drawing Your Own Conclusions*, which will be visual and symbolic self-portraits. The mandala will be circular in shape, accessing a feminine energy. However, if a student should have a strong desire for a different shape, that can be OK. The inside of the mandala should be divided into two halves (though not necessarily using a straight line)—the halves can be the student as s/he was before and after coming to the United States. Within each half, the students will draw visual representations of themselves as suggested by symbols—these can be symbols of their moods or states of mind, or perhaps abstract symbols such as numbers, colors, earth elements, etc. At the same time as the drawing, students will, in table or outline form, write down their symbols and use adjectives to describe each one. Sometimes there is resistance to giving qualities to abstract symbols like numbers or colors. After all, what emotion does the number four necessarily have? What color can it be as a concept? The fact that it is difficult and also required is the point. It is in this way the student will hopefully transcend direct logic and go beyond to something meaningful, a sense of healing which may be apparent only upon completion of the project.

The symbols from the mandala can then be extricated and used as characters in a presentation of a topic and medium of the student’s choice. The student can work alone or in collaboration to produce stories of their “crossing the water,” stories of healing in their community, etc., using media such as essays, poetry, plays, screenplays, artwork, songs, instrumental music, web designs, Power Point presentations, etc. In these stories/presentations they will need to include all of their symbols at least once. This can be combined with a photojournalism project where the students are given cameras and film to take pictures of things that are important to them or to their community. Then each student can write an essay, a short story, or an original poem about his/her picture.

Once these projects are completed, the mandalas themselves should be displayed together on the wall, with each mandala as close as possible to the next one. This will reinforce the appreciation of beauty of the mandala artwork, the sense of symmetry of all the circles being close together, and the sense of universality in that each of the works of art are, like the psyche inhabiting the human body, enclosed in the same shape—the many becoming one, and the one becoming all.

Copies of the mandala art and literature can be collected and published either as an anthology or perhaps as a web page or video presentation. Copies should be made for all students as a personal remembrance of their involvement in this project.

Sequence

With this project, I think that correct sequence of activities and sensitivity to students' needs and possible limitations of personal disclosure needs to be a constant. Different students of course have different personalities and different histories, and some subjects may be too sensitive, some experiences too raw, and some activities too painful to be approached—especially if the students are exposed to some of these activities out of sequence. The unit will need to be developed (and modified) as the teacher and students see fit. The activities must be developed in a way that will engender trust among the class as a whole, individually, and with the teacher. It is only in such a “safe” structure that these subjects can be developed. It is only in an environment where a student is able to share her/his experiences and feelings that these activities can be successful. As in life, in the classroom the student will not open up without feeling safe. S/he must be able to feel that her/his experiences can be shared without fear of embarrassment in order for these activities to have meaning. This is true with education in the general sense as well as with these particular seemingly esoteric activities. For this reason, I think the second semester is the ideal time to begin the unit, and the end of the second semester (when trust and class cohesion is at its highest) is the ideal time to bring the project to its fruition. It is also the time, in a beginning ESL classroom, when students begin to feel a nascent comfort in the use of their own language. Use of language in this safe and very personal way hastens and makes more meaningful the acquisition of a new language, while hastening and making more meaningful the power of language (an innate human process) in all of its subtleties to provide a means by which to understand, to love, and to heal.

The Indigenous

The fact that many of these activities and the feminine perspective itself have ties to an indigenous, ancient, and pre-technological spirituality is not coincidental. Without the timesaving devices of technology, material comforts, the constant barrage of information and sensual diversions, “primitive” humans had to use other means to access answers for complex questions about the universe; past, present, and future; and the individual's place in society. Whereas modern humans have turned to technology and linear rationalism to solve problems, pre-technological humans went within—developing stories filled with symbolism, constructing visual symbols using the order they found in nature, and accessing a sense of the profound in their dreams. In times predating the alphabet (and perhaps once again in the post-computer world), they accessed a logic that was more circular than direct, and because women have been more circular—more all-encompassing—in conceptualizations, more grounded in the “earth” and in the cycles of

birth, death, and rebirth, these cultures valued a wisdom that was more feminine in form and substance: the logic of intuition. It is the development of this intuition, a sense of self-validation, healing, and compassion that I hope to witness in my students.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan for Fictional Diary/Journal

Student Objectives

The students will comprehend, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate fiction, nonfiction, autobiographical works, and collected personal sources. Students will write fictional diaries/journals of someone leaving his/ her home country and immigrating to the United States.

Activities

After having read and discussed various short books on refugees and immigrants to the United States, students will discuss the varieties of the immigrant experience, noting the different reasons people leave their home countries and the different methods, legal and “illegal,” which people use to get to the United States.

Assignment Length

Three to seven class periods

Materials Needed

North American or World Maps

Rulers

Calculators

Magazine, Newspaper photographs

Spanish-English or Vietnamese-English dictionaries (depending on student nationalities)

Hand-held translators

Assignment

Students will, individually or in groups, choose photographs from a variety of sources (selected magazines, newspapers, books, Internet sources, or the teacher’s own collection) and write a fictional diary/journal of someone leaving his/ her home country and immigrating to the United States. In this journal, the student will analyze the availability and attainability of different travel options, perhaps discussing real and imagined surrounding events related to the decision to leave the home country. Students will analyze maps, costs of travel, and risks involved, and will calculate mileage and expenses. They must decide how far their character can travel each day. Also included in their diary will be people they meet during their travels, their first impressions of the United States. The diary must be at least seven days in length. They will also write a conclusion with a date six months after their arrival. Students will explain their characters and read their diaries to the class.

Assessment

A passing grade will be any assignment that has at least seven three-quarter-page entries including all the information listed. Other grades can be left to the teacher's judgement.

Lesson Plan for Dream Journal***Student Objectives***

The student will write for self-expression or self-understanding, use symbols and metaphors, and participate successfully in a group.

Activities

Dream journals, visual representation of stories, short story based on dreams

Assignment Length

Four weeks

Materials needed

Dream journal notebook

Paper

Markers, colored pencils

Assignment

Students will be given "dream journal" notebooks and instructed to write, if possible, as much as they can remember about their dreams as soon as they wake up. Correct grammar, etc., will not be a prerequisite. Things for students to pay attention to will be the stories of the dreams (written in present tense), the people, animals, and objects in the dreams, the feelings in and about the dreams, and any other observations. They can also use artwork to describe their dreams.

Once a week during class, students will break up into groups of three or four to discuss what they have written. After meeting with their groups for ten or fifteen minutes, the class will be open to discussion, and students will be free (if they wish) to discuss their dreams with the class. It should be pointed out to the students that in discussing dreams, they should avoid analysis of others' dreams. Students will then individually write about their dreams, noting the actions, characters, and feelings in the dreams, how they feel about their dreams, and what they would say to their dream. Students may substitute symbols or metaphors for characters or feelings in the dreams if they so wish. Each student will use his/her dreams to write a short story.

Assessment

A passing grade should be a minimum of three written or drawn dream journal entries; three school dream journal entries that include the actions, characters, and feelings in the

dreams, how they feel about their dreams, and what they would say to their dream; and a final story of at least one page in length based on their dream journals.

Lesson Plan for Mandala

Student Objectives

Students will use symbolism, metaphor, adjectives, synonyms and antonyms, and graphic organization for the purpose of literary self-expression.

Activities

Students will use symbolism, metaphor, adjectives, and graphic organization skills to complete a chart, construct a personal mandala, and construct a literary work.

Assignment Length

Five to seven class periods

Materials Needed

Mandala Chart

Colored pencils

Markers

Pictures of animals, plants, minerals, etc.

Mandala circle or compass for creating a circle

Spanish-English or Vietnamese-English dictionaries (depending on student nationalities)

Hand-held translators

Thesaurus

Music CDs

Assignment

The teacher will pass out a mandala chart (Figure 1). Each student will complete the chart as follows: the student will choose an animal that will signify him/her as he/she was before coming to the United States; the student will then find an adjective to describe this animal. After finding the adjective, the student will choose a synonym whose *sound* is appealing. Then the student will find an antonym for the adjective (or synonym). When this is completed, the student will choose an animal that fits that adjective. The student will then continue the same process of finding synonyms and antonyms for six more categories—plant, mineral or gem, number, color, shape, and natural force.

After completing the chart, the student will use the animals, plants, colors, etc., to make a circular-shaped mandala. This mandala will be divided in the middle, with the symbols of before immigration on one side, and the symbols of post-immigration on the other. The students can divide the circles in any way they see fit.

After completing the mandala, the student will use these symbols, adjectives or synonyms, antonyms, etc., to come up with a short story, poem, or piece of music. There

are no rules for grammar, etc. The only rule is that all 28 (or 35) symbols must be used. Students should be encouraged to share their literary works with others in the class. The mandalas should be displayed and then perhaps collected with the literary works and published for each participant. Music can be played to add to the mood and help them concentrate while they are working on their projects.

Assessment

A passing grade for this assignment would require the completion of the mandala chart as outlined, a mandala circle that contains each element from the chart, and a story, poem, song, or other presentation that contains each word from the chart at least once.

Figure 1

PERSONAL MANDALA

Sun symbol	Moon symbol
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	MOST LIKE	ADJECTIVE DESCRIBING COLUMN 1	ANTONYM OF ADJECTIVE	MOST LIKE ANTONYM
ANIMAL				
PLANT				
COLOR				
NUMBER				
SHAPE				
GEM OR MINERAL				
AIR or EARTH ELEMENT. FIRE WATER				

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This is the tale of what happens to tribal customs and old ways when white man comes.

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This site contains the text for Laurie Anderson's performance of *The Ugly One with the Jewels*, which describes her experiences visiting her brother, an anthropologist studying the Tzeltal Indians, a Mayan tribe. She notes the differences in perspective relating to physical beauty among women and intelligence related to necessary skills.

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This is a rather thorough look at the history and uses of the mandala among many cultures including Tibetan, Chinese, and Native American. Attention is also given to the relationship of the mandala to circular shapes in nature. The book includes color illustrations of various mandalas.

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In Farud ud-Din Attar's classic allegorical tale of Islamic mysticism, a group of birds seek the meaning of life; but after many travails, they arrive at their destination and find only a hall of mirrors.

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Tarcher/Putnam, 1999. The author, a psychiatric nurse and practicing curandera, explores the culture of curanderismo and its links to physical and emotional wellness.

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This is the story of Ann Bolen's personal quest for a feminine spirituality and a healing that comes from this.

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This collection of writings by the late composer and philosopher John Cage details a philosophy of art which incorporates chance procedures as well as a view of music composition as something that takes place inside the listener's head rather than from a composer's pen. Thus all sound (and thus experience) is a palette for musical (and other) composition.

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This book includes a fictionalized account of a curandera and her role in Mexico and in Mexican-American communities in the untied States.

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This book is a recent classic of folk tales with universal and healing themes which have in common the “wild woman” archetype—the internal, eternal essence of the feminine: instinctive, intuitive, primitive, powerful. In this collection of multicultural myths and stories, a renowned Jungian analyst and storyteller reintroduces this important archetype into the lives of modern women.

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This massive novel details the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico and the resulting sense of cultural loss, dissociation, and often madness among the Spanish royalty, the conquistadors, and the indigenous civilizations of Mexico.

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This is a novel centered largely on the experiences of young Beto, grandson to the curandera and her Yaqui husband, La Maravilla. It explores the ways in which the people of “Buckeye Road” are sustained in their passions, fears, and relationships. It also details cultural forces and identities that converge in the American West, which support the alternately mystical and material conditions at the heart of Beto’s initiation into community.

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Discography

Alcorn, Susan. *Uma*. Berlin: Ulftone, 2002.

This CD recorded in 1999 is a collection of mostly original instrumental music with melodies, harmonies, and rhythms influenced by world folk music, twentieth century classical tonalities, and jazz improvisation.

Alcorn, Susan. *Asi Es*. Unreleased, 2001.

A collection of mostly original instrumental compositions which includes a reworking of three Nueva Cancion songs popularized by the Argentinean singer, Mercedes Sosa.

Anderson, Laurie. *The Ugly One with the Jewels*. Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1995.

Humorously details the differences of perspective between “cultural anthropologists” and Mayan Indians.

Anderson, Laurie. *The Speed of Darkness*. Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1997.

In this monologue, Laurie Anderson states that our society has returned to the “hunter/gatherer” stage of evolution, only this time around, we’re hunting and gathering information.

McGowen, Shane. *A Fairy Tale of New York*. Island, 1988.

In this release by the British rock group The Pogues, an immigrant reflects on the vacuousness of his new life in Irish-American New York and ruses sentimentally about his former life in Ireland.

Filmography

El Norte. Directed by Gregory Nava. PBS, 1999. (141 minutes).

In this film by Gregory Nava, two teenage indigenous people, a brother and sister, travel from their remote Guatemalan village to the “promised land” of the north-- Los Angeles. Academy Award Nominations: Best (Original) Screenplay.

Kundun. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Buena Vista Pictures, 1997. (128 minutes).

This Martin Scorsese (screenplay by Melissa Mathison) film drama detailing the Dalai Lama's life story from the time of his birth in Eastern Tibet in 1933 until the

beginning of his exile in Dharmasala, India in 1953. This film, shot with nonprofessional actors details the effects of China's cultural and military imperialism on the traditional culture of Tibet.

La Ciudad. Directed by David Riker. North Star Films, 1998. (88 minutes).

David Riker uses non-professional actors to portray hope and hopelessness in New York's community of recent Latin American immigrants in four vignettes: a puppeteer living out of a car with his school-age daughter confronts the necessity of enrolling her in school, a group of day laborers moving bricks confront tragedy, a seamstress working in a sweat shop and facing an emergency with her daughter in El Salvador has difficulty getting paid, and a young couple from the same village in Mexico meet each other by chance only to lose each other in a maze of similar looking buildings in a housing project.

Heaven and Earth. Videocassette. Warner Brothers, 1993. (140 minutes).

This is Oliver Stone's film adaptation of Le Ly Hayslip's book, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*.