

Healing Wounds through Children's Books

Alicia Oria-Iriarte
Piney Point Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Children in our modern society experience uncertainty, stress, fear, and loss derived from several life experiences that they may have gone through. As adults, educators and caregivers, our first tendency is to protect them from those “encounters” with pain and loss, but unfortunately sometimes we cannot prevent them from suffering and grieving. It is in our hands to provide them with resources and ways to cope with difficult experiences which can empower them and boost their self-esteem. Healing children's wounds can occur in several ways: through a significant relationship with a caring being, through counseling and professional help, through relaxation and emotional bonds with somebody they trust, and so on.

When I first arrived at the school district in which I teach, I soon realized that this teaching experience was going to be very different to the one I had previously in my native Spain. My students were all new immigrants in the United States or first generation Americans. With time, I learned that their experiences were not so different from the ones of immigrant children in Spain, most of who are from North Africa, China, the Philippines, and South American countries. All these children face similar conflicts, such as the traumatic “encounter” with a different culture (or cultures), the feeling of “being different”, and the progressive loss of their own cultural roots.

Children also face other traumas. Some of them are recognized by adults as real traumas – such as the loss of a loved one, their parents' divorce, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and sexual molestation. Adults give a great deal of importance to these experiences but pay little attention to other experiences that are just as traumatic. For a child, economic difficulties at home can mean a considerable amount of stress; children having their siblings or grandparents far away, in another country, and not being able to go and visit them, can also be a traumatic experience in childhood. And finally, children do not easily understand some situations that can happen in our world, and they sometimes believe they have done something wrong or that they can be blamed for these situations.

Teaching in an urban or suburban public school in a big American city is a challenging task. But it is also an experience that can be healing and can offer an understanding of all the similarities among people who live in our society. My experience with Kindergartners started a few years ago. My class of lively five- and six-year-olds is 100% Hispanic and is made up of immigrant children from several Central American countries and children who were born in the United States but whose parents came from Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador or Guatemala. The neighborhood is basically

Hispanic, although there are also families from different African and Asian backgrounds. Some of my students reflect already at their young age an identity conflict between their Hispanic traditions and cultures, and the “American way of life.” I observed that some of them not only know very little about their rich cultural background, but that they also feel ashamed of their own roots, and want to become “mainstreamed American.” As Cassie Premo Steele states in her review of Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands*:

Anzaldua’s works explores the literal USA-Mexico border as a wound, as a site of historical trauma that continues to affect the present experiences of individuals and communities. Further, Anzaldua’s work presents a vision of the figural *Borderlands*, sites where arise positive possibilities for healing from the effects of traumatic events, both individual and collective, both separate and shared. (41)

With this in perspective, I began to research how I, as a reading teacher, could help them to become proud of both cultures. How could our classroom become a healing space where some of my students’ fears, worries, and traumas could be communicated, shared, and overcome?

Our Kindergarten classroom is a space where conflicts appear on a daily basis; some of them are easy to solve, but others require more time and effort from me or my students: developmental changes, single-parent families, loss of a loved one, gangs’ presence in the neighborhood, abuses at home, stepfamilies, and so on. But, as an African proverb from the Zaire recalls, “Children are the reward of life,” and they have an enormous power to overcome those struggles that they face so often. This unit intends to explore the positive influences of multicultural children’s books in healing the wounds and fears that some of my students may have. I truly believe that getting acquainted with some brave and courageous literary characters will help my students to make sense of what is happening to them and to know more about their world as a place in which they can exercise some kind of control. Besides this fact, they will learn about positive ways to cope with traumatic experiences they might have gone through in their young lives.

LITERATURE AS A HEALING TOOL

Preschoolers and lower elementary grade students face a period in their lives of extraordinary developmental changes. These changes can be encountered in the physical, social, motor, and emotional areas. The four- to seven-year-old child experiments a wide range of developmental needs and is faced with the task of coping with different emotions that can go from intense joy to extreme jealousy or pure anger. Other important issues at these ages are attitudes, moral values, behavioral patterns, peer and family relationships, self-image, and sex roles.

Some of these developmental issues and others, related to different situations and problems some children may face, are explored in modern children’s literature. Authors of books for children are increasingly responding to the needs of young students by using

developmental tasks as themes for their books. They are also exploring other situations that can help young children to feel reassured about new experiences in their lives, such as their parents' divorce, immigration to a new land or adoption of a new sibling. Literature can be used in all these cases as an effective medium to assist children in dealing with changes and some of the above-mentioned issues.

The use of literature as a helping tool is known as bibliotherapy – therapy through books. It involves helping people to solve their problems through the guidance of literature. Although the uses of literature in helping people deal with problems or obstacles have been known for centuries, it wasn't until the twentieth century that bibliotherapy was considered a recognized treatment technique. Numerous studies and a great deal of research has been conducted since then, and researchers, psychologists, and other practitioners have written extensively about it in articles and books.

Bibliotherapy can be implemented through fiction and non-fiction. When working with young children, it is very important to match an appropriate book with the problem(s) the child is or may be experiencing. He or she may be able to see similarities between his/her situation and the one presented in the book. In the bibliotherapy process, this is what is considered the stage of identification and projection (Pardeck 12). Children at a young age don't have enough tools to verbalize all the experiences they encounter on a daily basis; besides this, their vocabularies are still small, their attention spans short, and their ways of coping with problems very different from those of adults. This is the point where the bond with the teacher, parent, counselor, social worker, or whomever is working with the child becomes critical in helping him/her deal with the issues that affect his/her development. Jean A. Pardeck and John T. Pardeck advise educators and bibliotherapists that:

By focusing on the bibliotherapeutic process at the identification and projection stage, many useful outcomes can occur. Most of these are outcomes that positively impact children who are having problems with developmental needs. These are 1) the child can become psychologically and emotionally involved with characters read about; 2) a child can be taught constructive and positive thinking; 3) reading can encourage free expression concerning the problem; 4) the child can be helped to analyze attitudes and behaviors through reading; 5) reading can help a child to find solutions to a problem; 6) through reading, the child can see similarities between one's own problem and those of others and, finally, 7) literature can help a person accept a problem and offer new and creative ways of dealing with it. (3)

Certain factors should be considered before using books as healing tools for young children. The child's readiness is crucial when a story is introduced; a child cannot identify himself with a character if he has never experienced what the literary character is going through. Some preschoolers and young children are able to read by themselves, but in general, they are still in the process of learning reading and writing skills.

Consequently, the majority of children at these ages can most benefit from read-alouds by the teacher or other adult. The adult reader needs to become familiar with the book prior to the reading to the child or group of children; this will allow him or her to emphasize important words, use different tones of voice and levels of pitch, and repeat words or sentences that the students like. While listening to and enjoying the reading, some children will express their emotions with their comments and facial expressions, but others will listen attentively and will wait until later to respond to the story, perhaps using some art or creative activities.

Another important factor that needs to be addressed is the one related to the story characters, their behaviors, problems, values, and the various ways they cope with obstacles. If the child identifies herself with the book's character, then this one can act as a positive role model for the young student. The child can ponder the decisions that the story character makes and can judge how (s)he behaves. According to the psychologist Peller, animal characters are especially useful because the factors of sex, age, and race are not involved in the book. Through books, we can learn how to live in a social group, sharing, taking turns, leading. Literary characters can help the child to internalize positive attitudes and values. In this unit, we'll work with multicultural characters and with stories that take place in different cultures and countries. It is crucial for our children to learn about our differences and similarities, and to teach them to value what is genuine in them and also our human diversity.

Illustrations affect children powerfully. Children's books nowadays show beautiful pictures or photographs that can move the child from his classroom to another world in seconds. A book will be more interesting to a child if it contains appealing illustrations, colorful images, characters that look real or very similar to him or her, and a story or plot that is interesting.

CURRICULUM UNIT BACKGROUND

This unit will be implemented for at least two months (probably the months of February and March), as part of our language arts, arts and social studies content areas. We will examine a wide variety of children's books—not only picture books but also storybooks—in which the characters encounter obstacles and are able to deal with and overcome them. Literature will allow us to illuminate our lives and extend our life experiences; also, it will give us more understanding of the others' concerns and feelings, facilitating common bridges among us. I intend to use literature as our main tool in the unit, our primary source, but I will also use other expressions of human creativity as subcategories to explore—such as music, painting, and drama. Basically, what I intend to do is integrate the cognitive and the affective in the students' learning; this will allow them to find what is meaningful to them.

The curriculum and TEKS for kindergarten in Language Arts focus on listening skills, oral language development, and writing to share information, among many others.

All of these goals can be easily achieved through a comprehensive study of multicultural children's stories. In addition, this also complements the kindergarten TEKS strands of Geography and Culture for the Social Studies, especially those related to the exploration and identification of cross-cultural similarities and differences between certain language and oral traditions. Contemporary picture books and storybooks provide wonderful opportunities for young readers to encounter literary characters who can serve as role models in a variety of times, places, and roles. Nowadays, many books for children portray positive multicultural images of childhood, and some of them even assist us in the process of celebrating the power of certain characters in a more gender-neutral way. I expect this unit to develop a higher thinking process in my young students, as well as reinforce the academic learning of their reading and writing skills.

One objective I pursue is that my students obtain an ability to start judging what they think about gender issues. I also want to open this analysis to different cultures and to male characters. This is one of the reasons why we will also explore stories that take place in different countries, racial backgrounds, and cultures.

We will explore healing in three fields: one is related to the perception my students have of their immigrant experience and the various ways this situation has affected them and their families. The second field aims to work on books that use powerful images of girls and women, and at the same time promote self-esteem and cultural awareness. (My female students carry with them many cultural gender prejudices, and with this unit I would like to provide them with the feeling that they can become whatever they may choose.) Lastly, we will work on some art-oriented activities: painting, drama, and music, using biographies of people who healed themselves through these expressions of creativity.

HEALING IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Border in Children's Literature

In the chapter titled "Immigrant Contributions" of the photo documentary book *Americanos*, Julia E. Curry Rodriguez writes:

To go North, *ir al norte*, continues to be a beacon of hope for many who dare to explore immigrant life and its opportunities. The United States, land of pioneering spirit and opportunity for economic and social rewards, remains the goal for many of the earth's people. (70)

Teaching in a bilingual classroom made up of immigrant children and first-generation Americans requires the educator to take into account the immigration experiences of the students. The border between Mexico and the United States is part of their past and also part of their present. Cassie P. Steele reminds us, in her review of Gloria Anzaldúa's literary works, that the border acts as a wound that is not only individual but also

collective, physical, literal and figural (39). The border experienced by children makes them switch from Spanish to English, and vice versa; it also permits them to enjoy *mole poblano* as well as hamburgers and hotdogs. The wound can also be healing when that border helps one recognize that positive and creative potentials can be derived from it. This is one of the main objectives we pursue in the bilingual models of education: to help students realize the amazing richness that lies in the fact that they are bilingual.

Some of the books that we will use at this point include: *Liliana's Grandmothers/Las abuelas de Liliana*; *Un mundo nuevo*; and *Home at Last*. These are storybooks with powerful illustrations that represent young children who face new experiences when they move from one country to another or live the richness of belonging to two different cultures and backgrounds.

Let's start with *Liliana's Grandmothers/Las abuelas de Liliana*, by Leyla Torres. In this book, Liliana, a smart young girl, tells the readers about her visits to her two grandmothers: one who lives in Lilian's own village in the United States, and the other one who lives in the South American country of Colombia. When she visits her grandmother in a Northern village in the United States, Liliana eats peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch, does crosswords when she cannot play outside because it's snowing, and helps her Grandma make quilts. Things are quite different when she is with her Colombian grandma during her summer vacations: she eats fresh avocado salads for dinner, dances *cumbias* with the old lady, and takes naps with her when it's too hot to go outside and play.

This story will allow the children to talk about their experiences when they are sent to visit their relatives in Mexico or other countries. For the children who are recent immigrants, it may facilitate a conversation in which they can tell their classmates about their lives before coming to the United States, and any similar or different experiences they had when they were living in their native countries. Words can be healing, and expressing their memories and experiences can contribute to healing the wound of having loved ones far away.

One of the main objectives in the Kindergarten language arts content area for reading is to develop vocabulary by listening to and discussing both familiar and conceptually challenging selections read aloud. Since we are reading different multicultural children's books, the range of new vocabulary the students will become familiar with will be extremely varied. Some of the tools used to engage students with meaning and to help them develop vocabulary are graphic organizers. At this early age, children can start using Venn Diagrams, semantic webs, T-graphs, and storyboards. What is behind the construction of graphic organizers is the use and implementation of critical thinking skills and, consequently, an analytical response to the text read aloud. In an early childhood classroom, information cannot be presented only orally and abstractly. Children at this age learn by observing, listening, touching, and playing; in a word, by doing and by using their five senses. Graphic organizers help them to lock down abstract ideas in a concrete

and visual manner. Furthermore, they allow students to sort and categorize the different aspects of the text they are reading.

One of the graphic organizers that we can use to work on the reading of *Liliana's Grandmothers/Las abuelas de Liliana* is the Venn Diagram. Venn Diagrams are helpful tools for use in comparing and contrasting characters and discussing different solutions those characters come up with to overcome their obstacles. *Las abuelas de Liliana/Liliana's Grandmothers* is a good text to use to work on comparing and contrasting the different things that Liliana does when she is with her two grandmothers. Children can establish differences and similarities between the lives of the two women, and this can encourage them to talk about how differently some people act in different situations. As a whole group, the teacher and the students can create a Venn diagram in which they can write down the differences among foods, leisure activities, weather, pets, and routines in the lives of the young girl and her two grandmothers. The innate observation skills that children possess will stimulate them to look for details in the illustrations to support their observations.

Un mundo nuevo, by D. H. Figueredo, introduces the students to the experience of leaving one's own country and arriving at a different and new environment. This is the story of a young boy who leaves his native Caribbean island with both his parents, to go to the United States and join his uncle, who is already living there. As soon as they arrive to the new country, Pablo realizes that everything looks and is different. The contrasts lie not only in the different language, but also in the weather, clothes, food, and way of life. It had been hot on his island; it's going to snow in the big city where they live now. He didn't need many clothes over there, but here he needs sweaters, jackets, a scarf, gloves, and a hat. They don't speak his native language in his new school. However, when he goes outside to the hill next to his new home and plays with his Dad, he soon realizes that his new life can also bring him new and joyful experiences.

One of the graphic organizers that helps my students "digest" a reading is "The Hand." We draw a big hand with its five fingers: the thumb is the "who" (main characters in the story); the index stands up for the "where" (the setting of the story); the heart finger is the "when" (time when the story happens); the ring finger is for the "what" (what is the problem in the reading); and finally, the pinky finger is the "how" (the solution to the problem the characters deals with, and how they eventually solve it). This is one of the most basic graphic organizers that can help children understand the text, and it can be used as a reading strategy with the story *Un mundo nuevo*. There are variations to this basic graphic organizer; one of them is the so-called "Five Point Outline," which helps students to generate and summarize basic information by asking a few questions. The teacher or a student draws lines coming from a "sun" center and writes a question word on each ray: Who, What, When, Where, Why (the five Ws). Then (s)he writes a phrase or two about each one of the questions. This is a graphic organizer that can also help older students organize and sort the information from a reading in order to write or do a good summary.

Home at Last, by Susan Middleton Elya and illustrated by Felipe Dávalos, tells the story of Ana, an eight-year-old girl who moves to the United States from Mexico with her parents and siblings. While she and her Papa enjoy practicing English together, her Mama is busy taking care of her siblings, twin baby boys. The mother misses her home, family, and friends in Mexico, and thinks English is impossible. It's not until one of the twins is sick that Mama is persuaded to go to school and learn English along with her supportive family.

This book can be a good tool of school-home connection, since many of my students live a similar experience within their families, where one or both of the parents cannot speak English, and the child is the one who eventually ends up translating for his/her parents from one language to another. A teaching strategy that can be used with this story is the construction of a survey, following the scheme Q.A.D. (Questions – Answers - Details). The child will ask her/his parents some questions about their experience and problems with the new language when they arrived to this country; then the mother or father will give concise answers; finally, (s)he will have to give more details that support and complement those answers. This activity can be a healing tool for both parents and child, since it allows them to talk about an experience that is never easy—the “encounter” between two different cultures and ways of living.

Power Girls (and Boys, too)

Traditionally children's books used to represent exclusively male models, but in contemporary education, one of the aims is to reclaim the legacy of women in history, literature, and all human achievements. Publishers of children's books have been aware of this dramatic change in the writing and reading fields, and have responded with the publication of books in which brave, young female characters are the new heroines.

Besides this fact, I also observed that some of my young female students are extremely influenced by the experience of being female and belonging to an ethnic minority group. The Latino/Hispanic communities are patriarchal; women are often silenced and muted. But it's also true that contestatory voices are raised inside that patriarchal model, and this allows women to resist oppression and become fearless of authority.

Many Latina and Chicana writers and artists seek to empower women through their art, poetry, prose, and other creative expressions. The female power was extremely important in the pre-Columbian cultures, where the goddesses could bring life, death, happiness, and sorrow. After the Spanish Conquest, these cultures were forced to abandon the cult to those gods and goddesses. Consequently, a new society was formed, where the male power was structured and recognized as the only valid power. Women were alienated, denied, and, as a result, had no voice in political, social, or economic

matters. It was only with the advent of new times that both men and women have acknowledged the necessity of creating another society, a more gender-neutral society, where all humans can develop themselves and accomplish whatever they may want in their lives, regardless of being male or female.

I have observed many young Hispanic girls who cannot visualize rich lives for themselves, lives that can have twists and turns, lives in which they can have personal freedom and fantasies, lives with a future. I often wonder how many of them truly believe they can break cycles of poor education and low socio-economic class; how many think they are just going to perpetuate the lives of their mothers and grandmothers. Poverty and low family expectations crush the dreams of many of these girls. As teachers, parents, and educators, we can help them become more proud of what they are, and more confident in what they can become in their future lives. I want my young students to believe that they can accomplish whatever they want, that the fact that they are girls or boys will not close professional doors to them, and that it's possible to integrate feminine and masculine aspects in one person's life.

All these issues of a gender-fair literature are present in this unit. Some of the books in the unit have Hispanic and Chicano characters, which can help my students gain pride in their own culture. Some of the other books used in the unit represent different aspects from the African American, Asian American, Eastern, and African cultures. This will offer students a broader understanding of the similar issues faced by all culture groups, that they are not alone, and that their difficulties are not entirely unique.

An important objective in our Social Studies TEKS is to read or listen to stories that increase knowledge of personal culture, culture of others, and their common elements. Reading books from different backgrounds offers a wonderful opportunity to learn more about different ways people live in other countries or other cultures in the same country. In spite of the fact that the majority of my students have rich cultural traditions and costumes, they sometimes don't know much about them or they feel in some way embarrassed by their own culture, and therefore try to be assimilated into mainstream society. In brief, reading books from other cultures allows children to learn more about common aspects in other peoples and countries. These activities will help them to realize that no matter where one is from or the color of his/her skin is, humans are still very similar in the way they survive and come up with solutions to overcome problems or obstacles.

In exploring powerful images of girls and women, we will use books such as *Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman; *Beatrice's Goat*, by Page McBrier; and *Abuela's Weave/El tapiz de abuela*, by Carlos Castañeda. All of them present young female characters from different countries and backgrounds who help themselves or their families with their constancy, self-confidence and courage. We will also read books with young boys as main characters to learn that both men and women can accomplish human achievements equally. Everything depends ultimately on attitude and moral character.

Amazing Grace, by Mary Hoffman (also available in Spanish, under the title of *Asombrosa Graciela*), introduces us to Grace, a young African American girl whose imagination leads her into multiple adventures, where she can either be a pirate, a doctor, or a fierce animal. She is a joyful and determined girl who finds the source of her self-esteem not only in herself, but also in the women of her little family: her Mom and her Grandma. When her teacher tells the class that they are going to participate in the “Peter Pan” play, Grace’s self-confidence is not as strong as it had been in previous situations; she believes she cannot do the Peter Pan role in the play because she is a black girl and, consequently, they may choose a different person for the role. Her grandmother takes her to a ballet in the city, and tells her that she can do whatever she may want, if only she believes that she has the power and the ability within herself to do it. With this advice, Grace prepares herself by dancing and reading, and is eventually chosen to play the role of Peter Pan in the school play.

After reading this story, we will discuss it and talk about the way Grace was able to overcome her fears. It may be interesting to question the students about what they think a boy’s or a girl’s role is, to see if they really believe that girls cannot play boys’ roles or vice versa. The teaching strategy that we will work on after the initial discussion will be a dramatization of the book. Since part of the story happens in a classroom, the children will play the different characters: Grace, her Mom, her Grandma, the teacher, and the other classmates. We will represent the read-aloud, and after the students are familiar with the plot, we will play some variations of the story (for example, what would have happened if Grace had chosen not to fight for the main role in the play).

Another story that exhibits the courage of a young girl is *Beatrice’s Goat*, by Page McBrier. This is an inspiring (and true) story that takes place in a little village in the African country of Uganda. Beatrice is a nine-year-old girl whose life is split between her desire to attend school and her duties at home, where she is in charge of many domestic chores. One day, her family receives a goat from a charitable organization called Heifer Project International. Although at the beginning this gift seems a little peculiar to the young girl, it later proves to be a source of income for Beatrice’s family; the girl is placed in charge of taking care of the animal and selling the goat’s milk later on. With that milk, the family and the village’s children are better nourished, and the sale of the extra milk gives Beatrice’s family enough money to send her to school.

Beatrice, in spite of her young age, is determined to help her mother and siblings, yet she also wants to attend school and learn as much as she can. The care of the goat and the sale of its milk mean for her and her family the realization of her dreams. She is brave and courageous and able to foresee all the implications of her actions. Which other ways could she have come up with to help her loved ones? This question can serve as a prompt for an activity of creative writing. The students will be asked to write about or draw different ways Beatrice could have helped her family. This will allow the children

to become more aware of the relationship between causes and effects—an important skill they will need to master in upper grade levels.

The last book related to female healing will be *Abuela's Weave/El tapiz de abuela*, by Carlos Castañeda. This is the story of Esperanza, a young girl who lives with her parents, siblings, and grandmother in a rural area of Guatemala. Through colorful and beautiful illustrations, readers learn about the special relationship between the girl and her Grandma. Esperanza's work consists of helping the old lady to weave a tapestry with all the rainbow colors. The two spend hours doing it in order to have it ready to be sold at a city market. When they finish the gorgeous tapestry, they take a bus to go to the nearest town. But there is something that worries the grandmother: she has a big birthmark on her face, and she believes it's going to scare future buyers. She asks Esperanza to be the one who tries to sell the tapestry at the market. The girl feels scared to do it by herself, without the help of her grandmother, but the old lady, covered with a black cape, stays close by the little girl and observes all her actions. Soon Esperanza has a circle of tourists around her who want to buy the tapestry and even want to know where and when they can buy more. At the end of the day, both of them return to their ranch in the mountains, proud and happy: the little girl has learned to overcome her initial fears and concerns; and the grandmother has realized that no matter how her physical appearance is, the art created with her own hands was able to restore her self-esteem and pride.

The self-concepts of physical appearance and self-image start developing in children at a young age. They become more aware of their height, weight, hair, and clothes when they start school, since they are able to compare themselves and see other children who are shorter, taller, thinner, or have different hairstyles. Teasing and calling names based on physical features starts in lower grades and usually crescendos through the schooling years. This can present a source of extreme suffering and emotional pain for some children. For a child whose self-esteem is not too strong, acceptance by his/her peers becomes even more important than acceptance by the family. The story of Esperanza (which means hope) and her grandmother can be an excellent opportunity for healing in the classroom. It can help children and the teacher have a discussion of what characteristics make them feel less worthy or less attractive in others' eyes. It is extremely important to sow at an early age the seed of self-acceptance, and to help children realize that it is not the outside which is the most important, but the inside, with all the moral and character values a person has.

A story can be told—or retold—in many different ways. The story of the old lady embarrassed because of her birthmark could have been very different if another author had written it. This can be the starting point from which to do what we can call a “story relay.” Students can come up with several ways to tell the story of the book. Using a prompt, such as “Once upon a time, there was a lady who had a birth mark that . . .,” and sitting in a circle, one student begins telling the story. The only rules in this teaching strategy are to use the imagination and to speak properly, using complete sentences and avoiding repetitions. Once the first student finishes his/her sentence, another student

picks up the story where the previous student let off, and is then followed by another child until the end of the story. This is a wonderful activity to improve children's oral language and listening skills.

Healing Through Arts: Painting, Art, and Music

Art is the expression of the human soul. We can communicate and let others know what is important to us and what makes us joyful or unhappy using different types of art. This is even truer in the case of children's art. Young children are learning to communicate in the adult world, and sometimes they cannot find the correct words to do so or they don't have the mastery of language. Their paintings, songs, and dances often express their fears, joys, wounds, and hopes.

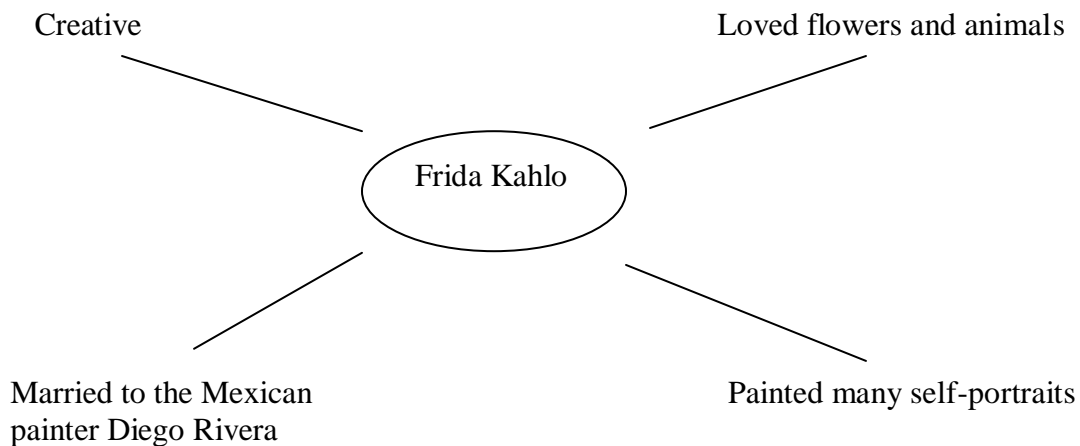
Children discover at a very early age the art of painting. But unlike adults' painting, children are more interested in the process than in the result. We could say that preschoolers are more process-oriented than product-oriented. The art process allows children to explore, feel, discover, and manipulate their worlds. Young children like to experiment, and they do art for this reason. Their final product is only a result of that art process, but not their primary reason for doing the art.

When children paint, they are learning and discovering creativity. They find mystery (for instance, when primary colors blend and form other new colors), joy, and, at other times, frustration. These are all feelings and emotions that the child encounters in the artistic process. Therapists, counselors, and teachers often use art to understand in a more comprehensive way what the child is trying to communicate about himself and his world. Art can be a healing experience because nothing is done well or wrong. It is just done, and that gives the child a feeling of being accepted and valued for what (s)he has done, no matter how and what. Mistakes are seen as steppingstones instead of as roadblocks.

Adults should not provide samples for children to copy since this limits their creativity and possibilities. Instead, they can just observe and ask a child questions to understand what a young boy or girl is trying to tell the others with his/her painting. It is also important to encourage the students to evaluate the work that they have created with questions such as: What do you like the best about your painting? How did you feel when you were painting it? And, last but not least, adults need to provide a rich environment for the children to develop their art. Children need to explore a variety of media: colored pencils, crayons, markers, finger paint, chalk, clay, etc., and different utensils in order to experiment with several ways of painting: painting on different kinds of paper, easel painting, painting with brushes, sponges, and so on.

We will devote part of our unit to artistic expressions to illustrate the ways in which these can help in the process of healing. I'm planning to introduce my students to the art of Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter of the 20th century, whose life was completely

influenced by her many health problems. She used her paintings to express her suffering, her hopes and her experiences. Frida Kahlo spent a long time of her life lying in her bed, from where she managed to paint expressive and colorful self-portraits. Using her biography for children, *Una niña llamada Frida Kahlo*, and the book *Frida*, by Jonah Winter, children will be able to discuss aspects of her life and her paintings that caught their attention. We will work on the creation of a semantic map as a teaching strategy to be used with these books. This strategy helps students to demonstrate prior knowledge and add new information. It is basically a graphic display of information within categories related to a central concept. A semantic map can show relationships among terms and concepts and help children to develop new vocabulary, improve their understanding of the reading, and prepare to write about it (or draw, in case they are still too young to write). It will be something like the semantic map or web shown below:



Music is present in several of the human experiences in childhood, including coming of age celebrations, marriages, parties, and funerals. The music we listen to is different depending on our feelings. Children love music. They enjoy moving and dancing to music and listening to it. When my students are in the listening center, I have realized their musical choices differ according to when they feel sad, mad, worried, or happy. The same thing happens with adults: the music we listen to depends on our moods, memories, and emotions.

If we believe music is a combination of rhythms and silences, then music is everywhere. Preschool children know this very well: they find music in read-alouds, words, and poetry, as well as in patterning and counting mathematical experiences. Music helps children with learning, spatial awareness, and mathematical connections. The latest research demonstrates that many neuronal connections are formed in the brain when children are listening to music. This happens because the areas for music and creative learning are closely aligned in the brain.

Teachers can provide the classroom with a music and listening center, where children can find a cassette recorder or CD player with headphones. In that center, the teacher can

display a collection of cassettes or CDs with a broad spectrum of cultural music: from classical music to opera, choral groups, lullabies, blues, jazz, regional music, and different kinds of ethnic music. This will allow students to expand their learning and listening experiences and will give them several choices of what to listen to, depending on their likes or dislikes.

In our classroom, music is used every day. Songs are used to introduce a new day, classmate, book or concept; songs are sung when we do motor skills practice; we even have a song to let us know when it's time to pick up and get ready to go home. When I read aloud, I try to catch and maintain a beat, because I know this will get the attention of my students. Sometimes, they remember the music of the story more than the characters or the plot.

Movement is intrinsically related to music. Pantomimes and dramatizations can be used as teaching strategies when a song is introduced. For instance, the song "If You're Happy and You Know It" can be a good opportunity to sing about different feelings and emotions children may experience, and also about ways to express themselves whenever they are feeling sad, joyful, nervous, or scared.

In order to work in the healing aspect of music, we will listen to a song by Lila Downs in her latest CD, *Border/La Línea*. It is a song entitled *La niña (The Girl)*, and in it, the Mexican-American singer tells the story of a young girl who wakes up at dawn to work in the fields and hopes to have a different life when she grows up. Students will be asked to represent with their movements, in a mute pantomime, the jobs they would like to have when they are adults. The other children will be seated in a circle and will look at their classmate when (s)he is representing his/her "future job." Once all of the children have shown their representations to the rest of the class, then we all move to the tunes of the song *La niña* as background music. In the annotated discography, other samples of multicultural music are presented to teachers; these can be used as music and dance healing tools.

In conclusion, this unit provides us—teachers, educators, parents and caregivers—with the possibility of comforting and reassuring our children of the hope for a better future. Our ability to protect them is questioned every day, in a world where no one is safe anymore. The strength of a society is measured in terms of the protection it can give to its weakest or youngest members. Unfortunately, some of them have already experienced the so-called "end of innocence." Why not give back to teaching professionals the empowering role of helping, healing, saving, and reaching souls? At the close of his unit, I hope that my students will feel stronger and wiser, not only academically, but also as human beings. I also hope that our classroom will turn into a healing space where they feel safe, motivated, protected, and empowered.

LESSON PLANS

The three lesson plans that follow are intended for the Kindergarten through second grade.

Lesson Plan 1: Border Encounters in our Classroom

Subjects: Social studies, language arts.

Duration: One week, one hour every day.

Goal: Students will become more aware of their rich culture while building self-esteem and pride in their diverse heritages.

Objectives:

- To become aware of own culture and heritage.
- To learn about similarities and differences between traditions and other cultural aspects from different countries.
- To learn that belonging to two cultures can be an enriching experience that gives children the best from both cultures.

Materials Needed:

- Items that students are willing to share about their own culture, traditions, and customs (clothes, pictures, handcrafts).
- Foods from Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Spain, and the United States.

Procedure:

After having read stories about children who have immigrated to this country and talked about living at home sharing two cultures, this lesson will crown this part of the unit with a celebration of the richness of all the cultures present in the classroom. Parents will be an important part of the lesson, making this an excellent home-school connection activity.

We will distribute tables around the classroom, and each one will be decorated as one country stand. Children will bring items from their homes that are representative of their or their parents' native country such as, flags, books, handcrafts, folkloric clothes, and photographs. These will be displayed for a week, and the students will be allowed to go to these "countries" during their center time and learn more about them.

At the end of the week, parents will be invited to join us for our "luncheon from all sides of the border." Each country represented in the students' population will be depicted in a dish that is original from that country.

Evaluation:

This activity will be assessed through the children's writing in their journals about what they have learned of other countries and traditions. A survey will be sent home to evaluate the impact of the lesson on the students and to find out other ways parents might like to become part of our classroom.

Lesson Plan 2: Our Own Story

Subject: Language arts/Storytelling/Drama.

Duration: One hour every day, for one week.

Goal: Students will engage in building characters in a story created by them.

Objectives:

- To identify characters and their actions in a story.
- To compare and contrast characters.
- To describe features and characteristics of each character.
- To build new characters for a new story.

Materials Needed:

- Construction paper.
- Markers and colored pencils.
- Storyboard paper.
- Popsicle sticks.

Procedure:

In this lesson plan, we will use the book of *Liliana's Grandmothers/Las abuelas de Liliana*. The teacher will present the book to students; they will observe the cover and learn that the names of the author and the illustrator are displayed there. They will also try to predict the subject of the story by looking at the illustration. After this pre-reading phase, the teacher will read aloud the story of the girl and her two grandmothers. As a post-reading activity, questions about the characters and the plot will be addressed to the students.

Once the class has become familiar with the story, the children and the teacher will make a T-table with columns on storyboard paper. Students will analyze the different characteristics of the three characters of this book and try to describe their features with descriptive adjectives that will be written on the T-table. Once the descriptions have been recorded, it will be easier for the students to compare and contrast the characters and examine how they are similar, what they do differently, and what is unique to each of them.

After the group activity, children will work independently on creating new characters which could represent themselves or someone they have visited, such as their grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. The representations of these characters will be made on white construction paper, colored, and then cut with scissors. Children can glue them to Popsicle sticks; this will facilitate the next storytelling activity, since children can give some kind of movement to the characters, as if they were puppets. The closure of this activity will take place when every child tells a new story to their classmates using the new characters that (s)he has created.

Evaluation:

Informal teacher observations will be used to assess this activity. Some children will be able to use more descriptors and richer expressions to describe their characters; this will allow the teacher to evaluate the oral language skills of her/his students, and also their ability to speak in front of an audience. Another aspect that needs to be assessed is the correct identification of the story elements (setting, characters, plot, and time).

Lesson Plan 3: Healing Self-Portraits

Subject: Art, Language Arts, Social Studies.

Duration: One hour.

Goal: Students will paint self-portraits in different situations that they may experience: at home, when they are sick, at school, when they feel happy, and when they feel sad or worried.

Objectives:

- To learn more about Frida Kahlo's artwork.
- To represent and communicate emotions and feelings through painting.
- To use painting as a healing tool.
- To develop an awareness of artistic expression.

Materials Needed:

- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Crayons
- Paintbrushes
- Construction Paper
- Watercolors
- Some reproductions of Frida Kahlo's paintings
- Books about Frida Kahlo and her artwork

Procedure:

Students will first become familiar with some biographies of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo and with some of her paintings. They will learn that she used her art as a way to communicate her painful life and her dreams to others. She was able to put up with her weak health thanks to the pleasure that painting gave her. Above all, she used to paint portraits of herself that show a serious-looking woman with a powerful look in her eyes and in her expression.

Children will be told that they can also make portraits of themselves when they are not happy about something; or when they are proud or joyful. This activity can also be used as a home-school connection experience. When the child is sick at home, and she cannot attend school, painting a self-portrait of herself will allow her to express if she is feeling tired, lonely, or worried. Whenever she returns to school, she can show her self-portrait to the rest of the classroom. Illness, whether it is a common cold or a more serious disease, can be very scary for a child; this activity will help her/him to talk about fears and negative emotions.

Evaluation:

Art should never be graded, at least not with the same parameters as other academic subjects. The assessment of this art activity will be a self-evaluation made by the child, and will consist of what he wanted to express with his self-portrait, what he liked the most and the least about his artwork, and how he used the materials he had available. A self-evaluation form could be developed, with little faces on it, where the child could represent the different degrees of satisfaction with his own artwork.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**Teacher Resources**

Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature. Edited by Herrera-Sobek, Maria, and Helena Maria Viramontes. New Mexico: New Mexico Press, 1996.

This book is a review of the works (prose, poetry, visual art documents, criticism) of several Chicanas. It celebrates the second major conference the University of California at Irvine hosted on Mexican American Women's Literature.

Clark Frohardt, Darcie. *Teaching Art with Books Kids Love. Art Elements, Appreciation and Design with Award-winning Books.* Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999. This resource book overviews several elements of art, some principles of design, and some of the most important artistic styles in the history of art. It also provides all of these aspects with examples of children's literature.

Day, Frances A. *Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature: A Resource for Teachers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

- This book is a teaching guide that presents the works and lives of almost forty multicultural authors and illustrators. It also provides assessment, additional activities, and lesson plans.
- Gunn, Paula A., ed. *Spider Woman's Granddaughters. Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing By Native American Women.* New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1989.
This is a collection of traditional tales, biographical writings, and contemporary short stories by Native American women. It can be used to introduce the educator or teacher to Native American literature before presenting it to students.
- Herrera-Sobek, Maria, ed. *Chicana Literary and Artistic Expressions. Culture and Society in Dialogue.* Santa Barbara, CA: Center for Chicano Studies, University of California, 2000.
This book examines some of the contemporary Chicano works in literature and art using contemporary critical theories.
- James, John W., Russell Friedman, and Dr. Leslie Landon Matthews. *When Children Grieve.* New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001.
This book explores the diverse situations that can make a child grieve: loss of a loved one, abuse, molestation, childhood traumas, home violence, war. The authors have an extensive experience as facilitators of healing traumas.
- Maitino, John R., and David R. Peck, ed. *Teaching American Ethnic Literatures. Nineteen Essays.* Albuquerque, NM: University of Mexico Press, 1996.
A series of critical essays on the four major areas of ethnic literature in the United States: Native American, Mexican American, Asian American, and African American. It also offers pedagogical strategies to help students appreciate a variety of texts.
- Monahan, Cinthya. *Children and Trauma. A Guide for Parents and Professionals.* San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass, 1993.
This book provides an analysis of issues related to trauma in childhood, such as the role of parents and professionals, regressions, responses after the trauma, etc.
- Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day.* New York, NY: Vintage, 1993.
This novel depicts the encounter between tradition and modernity, between two women from different generations of the same family, and the power of healing in their lives.
- Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women.* New York, NY: Touchstone, 1977.

- In this book, the author explores the lifestyles and roles American Indian women have played through generations. It also describes childhood, puberty, marriage and death ceremonies among several Native American cultures.
- Olmos, Edward J., Lea Ybarra, and Manuel Monterrey. *Americanos. Latino Life in the United States. La Vida Latina en los Estados Unidos*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 1999.
This book is a photo documentary that is accompanied by texts on Latino life in the United States. The Smithsonian Institution organized a traveling exhibition that supports and accompanies this book.
- Pardeck, Jean A., and John T. Pardeck, ed. *Bibliotherapy: A Clinical Approach for Helping Children*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Gordon and Breach, 1993.
This is an extensive introduction to the nature and practice of the bibliotherapy or the use of books to help children and adults deal with problems. It also contains an annotated bibliography of children's books that can help the professional in his/her intervention with the child.
- Pardeck, Jean A., and John T. Pardeck. *Books for Early Childhood. A Developmental Perspective*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.
This book explores some of the most important developmental issues in early childhood and how the needs of preschoolers can be met using some early childhood books and characters.
- Parks, John G., ed. *American Short Stories Since 1945*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.
An anthology of 79 American short stories between 1945 and the present which provides a comprehensive outlook on works by multicultural American writers.
- Peller, L. *Daydreams and children's favorite books*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1962.
This author writes on the importance of daydreams and imagination in children when they read books, and how illustrations play an important role in nurturing those daydreams.
- Pinkola Estes, Clarissa. *Mujeres que corren con los lobos (Women Who Run With the Wolves)*. Barcelona, Spain: Vintage, 1998.
A book which is an interesting study of the instinctive nature of women. Clarissa Pinkola, Jungian psychoanalyst, explores myths, tales, and stories of the "wild woman" archetype.
- Richard-Amato, Patricia A., and Marguerite Ann Show. *The Multicultural Classroom. Readings for Content-Area Teachers*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group, 1992.

A good sourcebook for teachers in multicultural classrooms. It not only provides the theoretical foundations for successful teaching, but also examines and recommends classroom strategies and practices.

Rodriguez, Gloria G. *Raising Nuestros Niños. Bringing Up Latino Children in a Bicultural World*. New York, NY: Fireside, 1999.

A reference and guide for Hispanic parents and educators of children from birth to age 12. This book reviews some Hispanic traditions, and provides ideas to encourage the children's social, emotional, and developmental skills.

Steele, Cassie P. *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldua, and the Poetry of Witness*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2000.

A review of the poetry of three female American writers—Anne Sexton, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldua—as a poetry of witness of traumatic histories.

Web Sources for Teachers – Electronic Resources

*9*11 as History*. June 2003. <[http:// www.familiesandwork.org/911ah/reading.html](http://www.familiesandwork.org/911ah/reading.html)>

In the aftermath of September 11, this web site tries to give some resources for parents and educators on how to help children cope with traumatic experiences. Recommended literature is found under the “Overcoming Obstacles” heading.

Vandergrift, Kay E. *Powerful Hispanic and Latin-American Images Revealed in Picture Books/ Vandergrift's Children's Literature Page/Dealing with Sensitive Issues Using Children's Literature*. 2003. The State University of New Jersey. June 2003. <<http://scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/ChildrenLit>>

This web page provides many links to interesting articles about Children's Literature being extremely sensitive with gender-bias, race-bias and other “-bias” issues.

Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls. Fall 2001, Volume 3, # 2. 2003. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. June 2003. <<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu>>.

This is the Early Childhood Research and Practice web page, with many interesting articles and latest research on Early Childhood.

Cynthia Leitich Smith: Children's Author. June 2003. <<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com>>.

This is a site that explores and gives an overview of Latino and Latina literature, among others.

Mele, Joe. *Multicultural Links*. June 2003. <<http://www.isomedia.com/homes/jmele/mcultlink.html>>

Basically a webpage in which children's multicultural books are suggested and listed.

Brown, David K. *Children's Literature Web Guide*. 1998. University of Calgary. June 2003. <<http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown>>

This is a children's literature web guide compiled by David K. Brown that gathers a number of Internet resources related to books for children and young adults. It also compiles book awards listings.

Readings for Students

Ada, Alma F. *Gathering The Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English*. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1997.

Beautiful poetry and powerful illustrations on a book about migrant Hispanic workers in California.

Ada, Alma F., and F. Isabel Campoy. *Voces de Luis Valdez, Judith Francisca Baca and Carlos J. Finlay*. Miami, FL: Santillana USA Publishing Company, Inc., 2000. Children's biographies of Chicano and Latin American artists. Judith F. Baca is a famous painter whose murals decorate several Californian public spaces. With her powerful murals, she aims to create peace and justice links between peoples.

Ada, Alma F., and F. Isabel Campoy. *Caminos de Jose Marti, Frida Kahlo and Cesar Chavez*. Miami, FL: Santillana USA Publishing Company, Inc., 2000.

A children's biography of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Shows some of her paintings and pictures. It also contains the biography of Cesar Chavez, telling children about his important labor as a union leader who fought for the rights of migrant workers.

Ancona, George. *Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of The Day of the Dead*. New York: Lothrop, 1993.

A book that introduces children into the ancient celebration of the Day of the Dead, and its healing powers over the families that remember their deceased loved ones.

Bang, Molly. *Cuando Sofia se enoja, se enoja de veras.../When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry ...*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1999.

When Sophie gets angry at her sister and she cannot control her anger, she needs to leave the house and climb to a tree, breathe and admire the nature that surrounds her. A book about feelings that aims to teach children positive ways of dealing with anger and other painful emotions.

Castañeda, Carlos. *Abuela's Weave*. New York: Lee and Low, 1993.

This is an inspiring book about the special relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter. It is also a wonderful multicultural book that relates how a little girl solves a family problem.

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace*. New York: Dial, 1991.

Grace is a courageous and joyful girl who always succeeds in what she wants; her secret is her self-confidence and the support from her family.

Lomas Garza, Carmen. *Family Pictures: Cuadros de Familia*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press, 1990.

This book is illustrated by the renowned Chicana artist Carmen Lomas Garza; interesting works to introduce the students into the subject of family traditions and use of art as a healing tool.

Marshall, Laura. *The Girl Who Changed Her Fate*. New York: Atheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992.

This is a retelling of a Greek folktale in which a brave young girl battles to change her lot and fate in life. Eleni will confront her fate to transform her life and the lives of her loved ones. Beautiful oil paintings accompany the text.

McBrier, Page. *Beatrice's Goat*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001.

True story of a nine-year-old Ugandan girl who received a gift – a goat – from a charitable organization, Heifer Project International, which helped her, her family and community to change their impoverished lives for the better.

Middleton Elya, Susan. *Home at Last*. New York: Lew & Low, 2002.

This is the story of Ana, a Mexican eight-year-old girl, who moves to the USA with her family, and how she and her Dad help her Mom to learn English when a difficult situation in the family arises.

Sainz, Gustavo. *Una niña llamada Frida Kahlo*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1996.

A children's biography of the painter Frida Kahlo. It contains beautiful photographs of the artist with her family and her work, and also reproductions of some of her famous paintings.

Torres, Leyla. *Las abuelas de Liliana/Liliana's Grandmother*. New York: MIRASOL/libros juveniles, 1998.

A children's book that shows how a little girl experiences two different ways of life when she visits her two grandmothers.

Winter, Jonah. *Frida*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.: 2002.

Beautiful art illustrations for a children's biography of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. This book teaches children on how the famous painter fought her physical pains with the help of her paintings.

Discography

Downs, Lila. *Border/La Línea*. Narada World Productions, 2001.

Includes “La niña”, and “Medley: Pastures of Plenty/This Land is Your Land/Land.” The border between Mexico and the USA is the main subject of this production.

Orozco, Jose-Luis. *Esta es mi tierra/This Land Is My Land*.

Bilingual English-Spanish renditions of many traditional Americana songs.

Paz, Suni, and Alma Flor Ada. *Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English*.

Collection of 28 poems (one per letter in the alphabet) by the Cuban poet Alma Flor Ada about campesino life, sung by Suni Paz. The songbook has English translations of the poems/songs.