

# **De Nina a Mujer: RITES OF PASSAGE**

## **A Young Girl's Ceremony**

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### **Academic Setting**

Middle school students are in that precarious phase of their lives between childhood and adulthood. They become participants in a society that expects both child and adult behavior simultaneously. They are assigned elementary nouns and verbs to diagram in a sentence in school and yet go home to become quasi-parents, responsible for a myriad of chores from laundry to sounding boards in family disputes. Girls' attitudes in particular begin to change regarding school. Studies corroborate the fact that a once-enthusiastic young lady of 11 years will suddenly lose interest in shining as a scholar at age 12. Coupled with a newly-arrived interest in the opposite sex and the inevitable relentless pursuit of that ever-elusive illusion known as popularity, school becomes secondary to their self-perceived other, more imminent, needs. In modern American society, the notion that "it takes a village to raise a child" seems lost. Our nuclear parent/child model insulates us from allowing extended family and community to assist in the effort, as was the norm in previous cultures. Some, tenaciously, have tirelessly persevered in the preservation of traditions they hold in high esteem, by passing on the wisdom of the older ones to the younger ones.

My interest in rites of passage sparked as a result of part of an oral history assignment to my eighth grade students' bilingual class. The ethnic composition of our school is 72.9% Hispanic, 13.9% Anglo, 4.7% Black, 0.9% Asian, and 0.7% other. As students spoke of their backgrounds, it became apparent that certain traditions remain a constant in their lives. Among the most fascinating of the reports were done by young girls who mentioned their own upcoming rites of passage: one, a Quinceañera, and the other, a Kinaalda. As the young ladies described with great enthusiasm the preparations for the event, I sensed it was much more than what we would consider a birthday party. These were events of monumental proportions, metaphorically, spiritually, and physically, involving many facets of each child's culture. I decided it was time to delve into the historic longevity of these traditions and how they seem to contradict our notions of "acculturation" and "melting pot" theories.

### **Background**

Traditions are events without change. But change is inevitable. Given the tumultuous and often turbulent history of New Mexico in regard to conflicts between the indigenous people and Spaniards, including forced religious conversion and well-documented brutality, it is nothing short of miraculous that the cultures have achieved some semblance of "structural and symbolic

equilibrium" (LaMadrid 1990) via our celebrations. The traditions that have transcended the phenomenon known as "cultural resistance" occur only through the dedication, devotion, and affection of the community, oftentimes in spite of and despite internal and external obstacles. José Limon states "folk traditions strengthen the values and internal cohesion of a group and thereby maximize its solidarity and survival against a dominant social order." Young Jewish girls become "daughters of (divine) law" and assume religious responsibilities, a passage celebrated as *bas mitzvah*. Cultures borrow, adapt and avoid practices that no longer hold meaning for their members. They are in constant change, a situation which causes stress among the more conservative members who feel that important values are being lost. What is of importance for a culture is to recognize and adhere to its important values while undergoing change (Bustamante 2000).

In the words of one of this state's most illustrious writers, once described as "un hijo del pueblo" (a pueblo son), Rudolfo Anaya is passionate in his philosophy that "it's more than just preserving tradition, it's about educating Hispanics and all New Mexicans about the rich culture I feel is in danger of extinction." In his recent play, "Matachines," a contemporary tragic love story set against the centuries old Hispanic traditional dance/drama, he explores coming of age issues in the context of this annual celebration performed throughout New Mexico (Persson-Reeves July 2000). Rites of passage have helped people move from one stage of their lives to the next while contributing to the community. Through time, sometimes the original meanings and purposes have been lost, and they become simply customs. If one were to ask why certain rituals are performed, the simple answer may be "porque asi se hacen las cosas" (because that is the way things are done). But there is also the sense that there is a proper way to do them. In trying to teach a tradition in the classroom, will hopefully provide an opportunity to gain appreciation, respect and tolerance for a way of doing things that's rich and rewarding.

## **Curriculum Objectives**

By staging reenactments of traditional rites of passage ceremonies, students will have an opportunity to enhance and be enhanced by the significance of such ceremonies. In speaking of the *Kinaalda* ceremony, John Annerino writes, "against all odds, Native American spiritual life still survives on a continent dominated by the religious practices of European and Latin American cultures." Similarly, the same argument could be said of the Spanish language in the Southwest. Cultures that have strived to maintain some semblance of what they consider important have met with the obstacles of modernization, changing mores and a society that places minimal importance on such behaviors. Students will be exposed to multifaceted units dealing with stories, songs, dances, food, and art to explain the meaning behind each of the traditions. By using a hands-on approach, the tradition will, hopefully, become more meaningful and comprehensible for evaluative purposes.

## **Activities – Examination of two traditions**

Part one: The *Quinceañera*

The origin of this tradition is unclear. Some credit Carlota, the Austrian empress of Mexico, and the Duchess of Alba with cultivating rites of social passage to signal to everyone a more mature phase in a girl's life. Some trace its history to the ancient Native American culture of Central and Latin America and particularly Mexico the Toins, Arawaks, Quechua, Toltecs, Aztecs and Mayans (Landford 1996). In Mexico's Native American Aztec civilization girls of 12 or 13 attended two types of schools, the Calmarcas or the Telpucucali. The first type was for young ladies desiring religious service, the second was geared toward marriage and family. The initiation rites for the religious service stresses chastity, truthfulness, and obedience. After 1520, the Catholic religion meshed with the Aztec rites to form the Quince Años – 15 years. This affirmed religious faith and celebrated womanhood. Some could be as simple as reaffirming baptismal vows in church and a party in the backyard or as elaborate as a large wedding. In recent time, the Quinceañera is celebrated on a day other than the actual fifteenth birthday of the honoree, sometimes to accommodate out of town participants.

Arrangements begin many months in advance. Parents and relatives assist in planning each detail. Close friends and relatives are invited to participate in the corte de honor (honor court). Fourteen boys and girls will meet frequently to discuss clothing, learn intricate dance steps, and help with the setup of the location. Padrinos (godparents) are named to assist the young lady on her special day. In some cultures, godparents help defray some of the costs involved, possibly by paying for the ballroom or the photographer. The church is usually the starting point for the preparations, as they have been intricately involved in the young lady's life from the beginning. A special ceremony resembling a wedding is held. The young lady is escorted by her parents. She leaves a special bouquet of flowers at the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, symbolic of giving thanks for the generosity she has received in her life in the form of good parents, close friends, and loving community. She receives gifts of a rosary and prayerbook from her parents, reflecting the continuity between church and family.

The reception begins with songs. "Las Mañanitas" is a favorite. The young lady is welcomed by an arch formed by her corte de honor. A special prayer or entriega is sometimes given by a parent or abuela (grandmother). This prayer, usually sung in verse form, mentions many aspects of the young lady's life, happy and sad. Her corte de honor forms a circle around her, and they light fifteen candles. She walks around and blows out the candles as each couple says a wish. At this time she is presented with her tiara, symbolic of her being honored on her special day as a queen and to remind her that she is now entering another phase of her life. An abanico (fan) is presented by her honor escort. Her mother presents her with a doll, the last child's toy she will receive. The doll is dressed identically to the young lady. Her mother speaks of her life with her daughter and her wishes for a long and happy life. After the young lady receives the doll, all the girls in her corte de honor stand, and she throws it behind her, much as a bride would throw her bouquet. It is said that the girl who catches the doll will be the next one to have her Quinceañera.

Her father is the next person to speak of his daughter. He also mentions his life with her and the expectations he has for her. It is now time for her to change from the *zapatos bajos* (low-heeled) child's shoes to the *tacones altos* (high-heeled) young lady's shoes. Her father helps in this endeavor as the one who will now allow his daughter to be presented to the young gentlemen of the community. She will now be allowed to dance with young men. Her father has the first dance with his daughter, and halfway through the dance her escort taps the father on the shoulder as his way of asking to be allowed to dance with the daughter. Once this is done, the entire *corte de honor* begins the traditional *vals* (waltz) in order for all the young men to dance with the honoree. The final dance is the *marcha*. A prominent member of the community usually leads this traditional dance forming circles and arches for all to follow until a large circle is formed for the honored couple to dance in the center. She will then address the community and thank them for their support, their love, and continued support. There are many different forms of this ceremony dependent on location, status in the community, financial ability, and the girl's own preference. She may decide to forego the ceremony altogether in favor of a vacation trip or money.

#### Part two: A *Kinaalda*

A *Kinaalda*, or *Na ih es*, in the Native American tradition presents a young lady to the community, but it is not so much for social purposes as it is concerned with adequate food supply and presentation of gifts to clan relatives in return for which the latter promise to contribute spiritual and physical support. The ceremony takes place during puberty about eleven to sixteen years of age. It consists of eight parts or phases and varies between different Native American societies (Whitaker 1966).

The *Kinaalda* is a four day process which involves a great deal of preparation, not only in terms of food but also on the grounds where the ceremony will be performed. It is said that the spirits do not look favorably on a haphazard ceremony which is not done to perfection. The elders begin with a cleansing ceremony. The medicine man (*nded guhyaneh*) begins singing 32 or more songs during the four day and night ceremony – songs called *goh jon sinh*, "full of happiness songs." The young lady is joined by her sponsor (*niztah*) "one who prepares her." She sits, palms facing up towards the rising sun, and sways back and forth, honoring Changing Woman. As she stands in the sun, feet together, hands at her side, she waits to be molded by Changing Woman. This is followed by a ritual massage by her sponsor. The cane she is presented with is formed from spruce trees, bent and held by buckskin ties. It is an ocher color and is adorned with eagle feathers. It will protect her from illness. Colored ribbons that represent the 4 cardinal directions and the Apache sacred ceremonial number are included. The cane will remain with her into old age. Songs of the creation are often sung during this part of the ceremony.

The young woman runs around the cane four times to each direction to ensure long life. Each turn represents the stages of childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, and

old age. The next day before dawn, the community dances around the bonfire to demonstrate her courage and to welcome her family to join the social dances. The first appearance of the Fun Makers and four Ga'an who impersonate the sacred Mountain Spirits of the Apache rids the ceremonial grounds of evil spirits. The young lady dances with her close friend in the sacred teepee, which represents the house White Shell Woman dwells in throughout her life. Throughout the ceremony and days that follow, she must not let water touch her lips or it will rain. A friend helps her to drink from a cattail in the form of a drinking straw. Throughout the day, the Mountain Spirit dancers ward off evil spirits. They paint the young lady with white cattail pollen to ward off illness and insure a long life.

It is said that she can now perform miracles and heal. She blesses those in attendance and is blessed by her people. Her sponsor wipes the pollen from her eyes. For the next four days, she will remain in a holy state and cannot wash off the pollen without sacrificing her benevolent powers (Kett 1996). The blessing ceremony continues throughout the afternoon. The Wise Man advises her to maintain her sacred traditions from Changing Woman to this day.

## **Implementation**

### Lesson Plan – The Quinceañera Ceremony

This will be an entire class project for the duration of a nine-week period. Students will be involved in each step of the research, planning and implementation of each of the ceremonies. Selection of the participants can be a voting process or any other method deemed suitable by the teacher. For the Quinceañera ceremony, you will need one young lady who will be the honoree, her male escort, fourteen girls and fourteen boys who will form the corte de honor, someone to be the mother, the father, padrinos and a small child to be the pillow-bearer.

1. Students will begin by researching the history of traditions in New Mexico, including the Matachines Dance. Some suggested reading is provided, but students may use the school library or public libraries, or Internet to gather all the information they can. They will form approximately four groups in the class. Each will be involved in a particular aspect of the ceremony: music, food, decorations and set-up. As students learn more about the history of these events, they will better understand and appreciate their importance and longevity. Discuss why these traditions have endured. How have they changed? Has anyone observed one first hand or had their own celebration? Do relatives or friends know about these ceremonies? Are there any family pictures that show people participating in these ceremonies? Compile all this data into a journal. These will be later used for evaluative purposes in a quiz or final exam.
2. Study the musical history of these events. Present some of this music to the class. Do the students know other songs that are special to these ceremonies? "Las Mananitas" is a particular favorite. When is this song used? Which occasions? Have students study and learn the words. There are many

different versions, but one includes a verse dedicated to a Quinceanera. Many popular artists have recorded music for such a celebration. In the case of the Kinaalda, most Native American songs primarily consist of drums and chanting. There are numerous songs (up to 30) that are sung over the course of four days. Keeping to the beat of the drums is important to the young lady being honored. The entire community may join in during the dance around the fire. Its movement is slow as they intricately move methodically until everyone has passed before the honoree. Professor Enrique LaMadrid has compiled a unique collection *Tesoros del Espiritu* which chronicles distinctly New Mexican songs preserved for posterity by those dedicated to their endurance.

3. Begin the process of the reenactment. Chronicle the step-by-step process that will be involved in staging such an endeavor. Will it be in the classroom or a larger venue, such as the gym or the cafeteria? Everyone needs to be aware of their input in the process. Students may assign each group a task. Invitations may be printed (bilingually) and given out. Administrators and others may want to attend, as well as parents and special guests. Specially choreographed dances will be learned. One group may want to study these by watching videos of such a ceremony or invite someone who may be able to teach it. I was fortunate that one of my students had been involved in her own Quinceañera and was able to teach the dance to the class.
4. Written wishes are delivered to the honoree as they are presented with a flower. These can be written by the students with the help of the teacher. Historically they are in both English and Spanish. Padrinos (godparents) may add special wishes of their own. The entriega (delivery) is a story/song about the young lady's life. There are many occasions in New Mexico when entriegas are used. Which are some of these occasions?
5. When all the preparations have been made, rehearse each student's role in the event. Every student should be responsible for some phase!!! We lip-synced to many songs but the students understood what they were singing and why.
6. After the ceremony has taken place, just as in a theatre performance which has just completed, there is something called a "post mortem" in which each performer recants their experience in the production. This allows students to reveal their own personal philosophy of their participation and how it affected them. What did they take away from this experience? What is positive or negative or both? Why? Would they do it again? Will they have this ceremony when they turn fifteen in their own homes? Why? Why not? All these questions afford a springboard of opportunities to continue on to other similar units. Students may want to compile their own set of questions for a quiz or final exam. Reexamine what went right and what went wrong. How could things be done differently? Be sure to include parents and community members as resources. They can provide an invaluable wealth of information!

## Lesson Plan – The Kinaalda Ceremony

For the Kinaalda ceremony, decisions on the honoree may be made much the same as for the Quinceañera. You will not need as many participants for the actual ceremony, but the entire "community" is always included. The young lady will need a special cane. Discuss the material that will be needed for this and its significance. Rocks can be painted blue to represent turquoise. Feathers can be made of paper or any other material. These will be used throughout the event.

1. Music is one of the most important parts of the ceremony. Several students will be selected to chant and play the drum. Since there are few words to learn in these songs, recorded music may be used and have students try to chant along to the beat.
2. Corn is intrinsically important to the ceremony. Students will learn about the process of making the corn cake. There are many similarities between this and the Hispanic tradition of a "matanza" where a pit is dug and food is cooked in the ground. The young lady is covered with this type of corn pollen for several days. She is not allowed to take it off. There are many tests of endurance and physical strength. The person who agrees to be the honoree should be aware of all that will be expected of her.
3. Someone is selected to be her honored attendee. She is with the Kinaalda girl throughout the ceremony, attending to all her needs. She makes sure the girl's lips do not touch water throughout the ceremony and creates a type of "straw" with plant reeds. During the ceremony, it is said that the young lady receives special powers of healing. Study the Native American beliefs about the environment and its importance in their culture.
4. The young lady must run each of the four days. Each day longer and further. Each day more people join her in her test of endurance.
5. At the end of the fourth day, after singing and dancing continuously, the young lady presents her guests with the cake. Blankets are given to her by community members. Special gifts have been prepared for her. Study the significance of each of these gifts. What has the young lady learned about herself from this ceremony? How has her life changed? How is she now viewed by the community?

Other possible activities:

There are many ways of presenting this material. Videotapes and audiotapes are available to provide discussions as to its history. After our presentations, the students came away with a new appreciation of themselves, their culture, and the culture surrounding them in this State. They thoroughly enjoyed the festivities, especially the food, which is one of the most important aspects of a culture. It presents yet another opportunity to become more knowledgeable of their surroundings.

## Assessment

Students will be actively involved in creating assessment devices to measure comprehension and appreciation. Lists of questions using Bloom's Taxonomy may be used for weekly quizzes as students gain a better understanding of the history of these ceremonies. Questions can be created with the help of parents, family and community as a means to measure items they feel are important to remember. Videotape the ceremony and have students watch the chronology of events and be aware of others' reactions to what has transpired. What have others gained from their participation in this event? Daily writing journals and results of pairing students to formulating ideas to increase their understanding can be compiled to form the basis for quiz questions. I have included a list of Standards and Benchmarks which will be addressed in implementing this curriculum.

## Documentation

The students will be responsible for completion of the Standards and Benchmarks listed below.

**Standard:** The student demonstrates the ability to read, applying a wide range of critical thinking strategies to printed texts and electronic media, using English and the primary or home language.

**Benchmark A:** Students will be given a variety of printed material and use resources to find their own material related to the topic of celebrations or festivities in this State.

**Objectives – The students will:**

1. select developmentally appropriate materials and determine the purpose of selection.
2. read a variety of material independently for a sustained period of time.
3. read complex material for information, inference, discussion, main idea, detail, and pleasure.
4. read and discuss various types of printed texts (e.g. newspaper articles, magazines, electronic media, books.)
5. read, listen to, and respond to a variety of literary genre (e.g. mystery, poetry, fiction, nonfiction) including culturally diverse literature.
6. build vocabulary through reading a wide range of appropriate material

**Benchmark B:** The student synthesizes, and evaluates a wide variety of printed texts and electronic media, and applies knowledge for multiple purposes.

**Objectives—The students will:**

1. apply reading strategies to acquire literal and implied meaning from complex material.
2. find information using table of contents, heading, indexes, menus,

glossaries, bibliographies, and appendices.

3. identify specific questions and seek to answer them through literature.
4. form opinions with supporting evidence about what has been read.
5. understand and accept differing responses to literature.
6. understand how literature reflects time and culture in which it was written.
7. appreciate, recognize, and apply literary elements to analyze and interpret literature.
8. use reading to gain information about the world.
9. appreciate a wide variety of appropriate literature.
10. identify genres and recurrent themes in literature.

Standard: The student demonstrates the ability to write meaningfully, displays knowledge of writing processes, purposes for writing, potential audiences and conventions of writing.

Benchmark A: The student selects an audience, topic, purpose, and genre for writing.

Objectives—The students will:

1. write a research paper utilizing a minimum of three sources.
2. write a formal compare and contrast essay.
3. use the five elements of fiction in writing.
4. use dialogue to develop creative writing.
5. write a persuasive essay.
6. convey personal and reflective feelings in detail.

Benchmark B: The student plans and composes writing with awareness or audience, purpose, and form; edits for mechanics on a sophisticated level; and edits for style.

Objectives—The students will:

1. apply the steps of a writing process within a given format from pre-writing to final draft.
2. develop three paragraph essay maintaining thesis throughout.
3. begin to use parallelism.
4. compose expository and creative writing which explores a thesis or theme, and shows originality, order, support, coherence, transition, awareness of audience, purpose, and form.
5. give and receive feedback to revise, edit, and evaluate written work by adding, deleting and rearranging text.
6. utilize and edit tone, purpose, point of view and style.

7. write clearly and concisely.
8. correctly use negatives and avoid redundancies.

Benchmark C: The student uses appropriate grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, standard spelling, figures of speech, and multiple paragraph structure to enhance meaning.

Objectives—The students will:

1. use appropriate punctuation, capitalization, and standard spelling.
2. make appropriate choices of vocabulary, modifiers, and figurative language to enhance meaning and interest.
3. compose compound and complex sentences.
4. evaluate own and peer writing of proper grammar and conventions.
5. identify, describe, and correctly use the eight parts of speech.
6. differentiate and use figures of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, idiom, hyperbole.)
7. use topic, supporting, and concluding sentences with a paragraph.
8. use editing symbols.
9. apply keyboarding skills.

Standard: The student demonstrates active listening in a variety of settings, including the ability to understand and evaluate verbal and non-verbal cues.

Benchmark A: The student consistently applies active listening skills and strategies as well as the conventions of courtesy in listening and viewing.

Objectives—The students will:

1. make appropriate eye contact with the speaker, respecting cultural norms.
2. wait to respond until speaker completes a thought or pauses.
3. acknowledge a speaker's message by formulating opinions and responses based on prior knowledge and new evidence.
4. seek additional information to clarify understanding.
5. demonstrate appropriate audience behavior.
6. use recall strategies to remember information (e.g. visualization, grouping, association.)
7. derive specific information for oral messages in the form of key words, concepts, or ideas.
8. organize oral information through note-taking and/or outlining.
9. efficiently shift focus of attention to important oral messages and return to task.

Benchmark B: The student recognizes and analyzes verbal and visual messages.

Objectives—The students will:

1. consistently organize oral information and begin to critically analyze it.
2. relate spoken and visual messages to prior knowledge and experiences.
3. interpret verbal and nonverbal cues.
4. recognize various types of persuasive language and their purposes.

Benchmark C: The student applies knowledge of culture to add comprehension in listening and viewing situations.

Objectives—The students will:

1. acknowledge and respect cultural differences in a variety of situations.
2. seek clarification and supplemental information.
3. make an effort to understand unfamiliar accents and syntax.
4. ask encouraging questions and provide positive feedback.
5. listen politely to speakers, including those with unfamiliar dialects.

Standard: The student demonstrates effective oral communication for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Benchmark A: The student understands and applies effective techniques which appeal to logic, emotions, and speaker credibility, using primary and/or home language.

Objectives—The students will:

1. use feedback to clarify thoughts.
2. keep to the topic.
3. present ideas in logical sequence.
4. use vocal tone and inflection to convey emotional emphasis and credibility.
5. use persuasive techniques.

Benchmark C: The student plans, prepares, and delivers oral presentations using clear reasoning, coherent sequences of thought, and suitable vocabulary.

Objectives—The students will:

1. speak clearly and coherently to accomplish a variety of tasks.
2. evaluate the effectiveness of own communication and make appropriate revisions.
3. recognize and control non-verbal cues when speaking.

Teacher Annotated Bibliography

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