

## The Traditions, Culture and Family of New Mexico

*Frank Matthew Angel*

*¿Quién eres?*

*By Sabine Ulibarri*

Si olvidas de donde vienes, ¿Sabes, tú, a donde vas? Si has perdido tu pasado, ¿Dónde está tu porvenir?	Have you forgotten from where you come Do you know where you are going? Do you know where you are going? Then where is your future?
Si eres hombre sin historia, Serás hombre sin futuro. Si reniegas de tus padres, ¿Que esperarás de tus hijos?	If you are a person without a past You will be a person without a future. If you deny your parents What do your children have to hope for?
Si no tienes parentesco Con tu familia y tu pueblo Cuando ríes, ríes solo. Cuando lloras, lloras solo.	If you have no relationship With your family or your people When you laugh, you laugh alone, When you cry, you cry alone.
Un present solitario, Sin ayer y sin mañana, Sin parientes, sin compadres Sin amigos, sin hermanos.	A lonely present, Without yesterday or tomorrow, Without relatives, without comrades, Without friends, without brothers.
Qué solo estás en el mundo Perdido en la niebla blanca. Solo con tu culpa a cuestras Y tu soledad a solas.	You are alone in the world, Lost in the haze. Alone you carry your guilt, And alone you remain.

The importance of being connected to your family, culture and history as the basis of your identity is sometimes hard to explain and understand. In this poem the author, Sabine Ulibarri, explores these issues. It is a powerful poem in which the author explains the importance of making and maintaining connections with your history, family, and community. Through the course of this unit, it is my intention that the students in my classroom make these connections to their families, communities, and histories.

To first understand the unit that I am creating, you must first look at the population that I teach. I teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish Bilingual at Garfield Middle School. Garfield Middle School is an inner city school situated in the heart of Albuquerque's North Valley. The boundaries of Garfield incorporate the old traditional farming communities of Los Griegos and Los Duranes. The population of Garfield is 78% Hispanic. Of the 78%, close to 12% are classified as LEP (limited English proficient). Furthermore, with such a large Hispanic population, Garfield is a Bilingual School with courses designed to develop home language, Spanish, and English language skills. The Social studies classes also function in the Bilingual program to meet the requirements of a cultural class for these students.

Garfield is located in one of the lower income areas of Albuquerque. Seventy percent of our students qualify for free lunch and breakfast programs. Literacy is also an important issue at Garfield; two-thirds of our students qualify for the Title I program, a federally funded reading program. Across the board, Garfield's scores are lower than the district average, and efforts are being made to improve scores in math and reading. With a high drop out rate in this community, success in school and graduation are critical issues that we address at the Middle School level.

This unit is designed to be used in my 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish Bilingual class. It could also be utilized by 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies teachers during the semester that they teach New Mexico History. This unit will specifically target standards 3 and 4 of the New Mexico Content Standards for Modern, Classical and Native Languages. Standard 3 states, "Students will understand the relationship between language and culture." Standard 4 states, "Students will develop an understanding of other cultures, including such elements as: their value systems, languages, traditions, and individual perspectives."

This unit will explore the history and culture of New Mexico. The students will engage in various activities to bring a greater

understanding of the history and culture of New Mexico. Included in this unit will be a section that deals with the land grants in New Mexico. This section will incorporate videos, lectures, and guest speakers to share their perspectives of the land grant issues.

The making of connections to native communities and traditions is the objective of this unit. The majority of our students are the direct descendants of the Indo-Hispano settlers who came up from Mexico over 400 years ago to establish settlements on the fringes of the Spanish Empire. This unit will allow them to make connections to their history and will help them see that their history is part of who they are as individuals and as members of a community.

Additionally, this unit will present a curriculum that is relevant to the students. Including material that is relevant to them and the community will hopefully create a positive experience for them. It is my belief that this positive experience will lead to further success in school. It is proven that students do better in school when they make connections to the curriculum. Too often these students are never presented information related to their customs, traditions, and history in school. This is quite ironic in a state like New Mexico that has such a high percentage of Hispanics.

The rationale for this unit is related to my experiences in the public schools and my experiences at the University. These experiences have had a great effect on me and have contributed to my decision to become a teacher. I was born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I attended school in a community very similar to the one I teach in. During my schooling, I was never taught about Chicano history, nor was I exposed to New Mexico history, my history. Physical reminders of this history surrounded me. Every fall the people of Santa Fe would celebrate Las Fiestas de Santa Fe. Local people were elected to represent historical figures and dress in costumes to play the parts. These people would come to our school gym to sing, dance, and have a good time. It was a big deal in my town but neither my fellow students nor I had a clue what it was about. It was like historical amnesia had taken over a whole generation.

It was not until I started taking classes at UNM that I was able to find out what my history was all about. At UNM I was able to take classes that focused on New Mexico and Chicano history and culture. It was fascinating, exhilarating, and liberating, yet it was depressing at the same time. I came to the realization that for twelve years of my life I was denied access to my history. I was living in a city rich with history, yet nowhere in my education was I taught about the importance of my culture. I was living in a state that actively promoted the multi-cultural and natural resources of New Mexico to the whole world in order to bring in the tourist dollars. Yet, the native born sons and daughters of New Mexico were not being taught their history and were slowly losing their language and culture.

It was these experiences that made me decide to become a teacher. I had the opportunity to attend college and gain access to this information and knowledge. I feel that it is my duty, as a teacher and member of the community, to give back to the community this information and knowledge. To help stop the historical amnesia in our youth and to reverse the trend of language and cultural loss.

As I attended classes at UNM to become a teacher, the big push was for multicultural education. People realized that the old curriculum left out many populations that are part of the American experience, specifically, women and minorities. I feel that there are many good textbooks that are making an effort to incorporate women, Native Americans, and African Americans. However, they are still overlooking Chicanos. A large part of the American population is still being left out of the picture. This curriculum will provide relative information for the targeted community.

This unit will be used to supplement the curriculum in my Spanish Bilingual classes. This unit will be broken into four activities that will be spread throughout the year. The students will participate in one activity per 9-week grading period. The daily lesson plans are not included here. They will vary based on the classroom size, make up and ability level. Teachers wishing to use this unit or its parts will make adaptations according to their classroom situations.

The first activity will utilize the book *Tesoros del espíritu* by Enrique Lamadrid. This book presents the history of New Mexico and its people using historical texts, folk traditions, and personal narratives.

For the next activity the students will conduct an interview with a family member. The interview will focus on the individual's experiences while growing up, the place of origin and the family's traditions and customs.

The third activity will be a short research paper and presentation about a tradition or custom from New Mexico. Information for this activity will be gathered from the *La herencia del norte* CD-ROM. *La herencia del norte* is a publication out of Santa Fe that focuses on the history, traditions, and customs of New Mexico.

The last activity will be a series of videos and guest speakers that will deal with the land grant issue in New Mexico. There are several films that present information about the land grants in New Mexico: *Tierra o muerte*, *Una lucha por mi pueblo*, and episode one of the Chicano series, *Quest for a Homeland*. The students will be asked to write reaction papers about their thoughts and feelings related to the information presented in the videos.

Important resources for this project are community members that would be guest speakers for the class. These speakers would be members of the land grant communities who would come in and talk about the land grants. There are several active land grant communities in New Mexico and there is a great deal of activism centered around the Land Grant Forum. The goal here would be to draw from the community a base of knowledge that is never represented in the books.

By using a variety of activities, I hope to assist in developing skills that will be useful to the students throughout their school careers. First, the students will be developing their research skills. Also, the students will be working with computers to improve their skills in working with technology. And last, these activities will provide the students with opportunities to develop their interviewing and public speaking skills.

The development of skills and the content of the unit are very important in bringing a greater understanding of the history and culture of New Mexico. However, the main objective of this unit is to present Chicano students with a history that is relative to them as people in order for them to make connections with their past. The students that fall into this particular age group are at a difficult age. They are entering the difficult process of changing from a child to becoming a young adult. They are changing physically, emotionally, and socially. Additionally, it is a time when they are asking themselves who they are? Where do they come from? How do they fit into their families, culture, and society? They are in the process of constructing their identities.

This unit will assist the students in making connections to their past. In doing this, hopefully they will gain a greater sense of time and place. It will also help make affirmations of who they are and develop their self-esteem. In addition, it will create a greater sense of self and help the students related to their community and history. Hopefully all this will lead to further success in school and life.

## Activities

### Part one: *Tesoros del espíritu*

The first activity will use the book *Tesoros del espíritu* by Enrique Lamadrid and the accompanying tapes. This book is a narrative history of New Mexico. *Tesoros del espíritu* is a "unique anthology of folk music, poetry, history and drama in a wide variety of verbal art genres from both oral traditional and literary sources including interpretive commentary." (p.VIII) It takes the reader on a spiritual journey through New Mexico to bring a greater understanding of their history, people, and culture. This activity will last 3 to 4 days and the student evaluation will be based on the project they will produce at the end of the section.

For this activity each student will have a copy of the text to follow along with the tapes. The narration is in English. However, the majority of the documents used are in Spanish. Translations are to be provided to insure those who do not speak Spanish have an understanding as to what is going on. The book is divided into six thematic sections. Due to the fact that listening and following along with the whole book may be a difficult, time consuming task, I will focus on three of the sections: *Conquista y reconquista*, *el mestizaje*, and *frutas de la tierra*.

The first section, *conquista y reconquista*, deals with the experiences of the first contact between Spanish conquistadores and settlers with the pueblo people of the Rio Grande Valley. It contains written reports by conquistadores and missionaries. It tells the wonders of the people and the places that they had encountered. It also includes various folk songs and dramas that these colonizers brought with them.

The next section, *el mestizaje*, deals with the new hybrid culture that was born in New Mexico. Through decades of conflict, accommodation, and tolerance, a new culture evolved in this region. The narration in the book explains that, "In New Mexico, as elsewhere in the Spanish Empire, alliances and enmities eventually produced a new fusion of peoples and cultures, known collectively as *"La raza"*. (p.34) Many times the "Spanish" aspects of New Mexico culture are over emphasized. This section, in many ways, stands to expand the focus of New Mexico and how it is viewed to draw a more complete and authentic picture of its history and culture.

In this section we will take a break from listening to the narration of the text and call up a couple of volunteers to read the "*Los comanches*" folk drama in front of the class. This folk drama is based on the expedition, lead by De Anza, against the Comanche. There had been continual warfare amongst the people of New Mexico and the plain Comanche. This historical drama details the expedition and the characters involved. The volunteers will be established the day before so that they will have time to prepare for the presentation.

The last section that we will look at is *fruta de la tierra*. This section focuses on the *nuevomexicano's* relationship with his land. Working the land was the way of life for many of the *nuevomexicanos*. This concept of life installed in the *nuevomexicano* a respect for the land and its creatures. This is clearly illustrated in the poems, prayers, and accounts of the *nuevomexicano*.

Many of the students that are in my class live in the traditional farming communities of Los Duranes and Los Griegos. These

communities are swallowed by the expansion of Albuquerque. My students presently reside in the heart of the city and as a result may no longer possess a connection to this agro-pastoral life style. However, this life style may have been a reality of their grandparents and, for that matter, their parents. This activity will present the history and culture of New Mexicans to the students and furthermore, will serve as a springboard for their family interviews.

On the last day of this activity the students will create a collage to represent the themes presented in this book. The students will select one of the texts presented to them. The students will then write this down on a piece of construction paper. From there the students will create a collage using pictures from magazines or their own personal drawing to illustrate the selection that they have chosen. The students will be encouraged to use their imaginations to detail what was going on as the text was written, or to express what the text means to themselves.

### **Part two: Family interview**

As the students become more familiar with the history and the culture of New Mexico they will proceed to the next activity, the family interviews. The interview will be a way for the students to learn more about their families and the communities from which they come. And in turn, to make connections to the history, traditions and culture of New Mexico. The students will be required to interview a family member, preferably the eldest living family member. The students will be required to record this interview for their personal use, using a tape recorder or a video camera. Perhaps some of the students may not have access to a family member; in such cases a neighbor or a relative of a friend may be used. This activity will be assigned in advance so the students can prepare for the interview and make the necessary arrangements.

Prior to the interview, we will have a couple of activities to help prepare the student for the interview. I will bring in a volunteer from the community and I will interview them in front of the class. This demonstration will help give the students an idea of how to conduct an interview. The students will then be required to turn in the list of questions that they will be asking their interviewee. To begin with the students will ask basic biographical questions such as the interviewee's name, where they are from, mother and father's name, where they are from, the names of their siblings, etc. The students will then proceed to ask more specific questions relating to their childhood, their experiences in school, and the traditions of their community. They will also be encouraged to inquire about any stories or legends that they may have remembered.

Next the students will compile the information presented to the class. Each student will present their interview. Photos or other artifacts are encouraged to be used during the presentation. They will talk about the person that they interviewed and what they have learned from them. The students will also be asked to compare and contrast their own personal experiences with the experiences of their interviewee.

### **Part three: *La herencia del norte***

The third activity that the students will participate in will be a short research paper, one to one and a half pages, and presentation based on a topic or theme found in *La herencia del norte*. *La herencia del norte* is a locally published magazine that focuses on New Mexico history, culture and traditions. The students will use the CD-ROM and the web site to gather their information. The students will also use a word processing program to present their research. It will be a weeklong activity, with the first two days to do the research, the next two to compile, and the last day to present it.

They will select a topic or theme that interests them. From there the students will use the CD-ROM and the web site to look for information. The CD-ROM is the compilation of volumes 1 through 20. It is not organized according to topic or author so it may be difficult to use. To facilitate this activity the students will visit the web site in order to find articles related to their topic. At the web site the students can search for a specific topic or author and find out the volume and page number of a specific article. They will then go to the CD-ROM, look up the article and prepare it for the class. Also at this site is a list of links related to New Mexico history and culture. The students will be encouraged to explore these links for more information, photos and graphics to be used in the paper and presentation. Hopefully the previous two activities will have created an interest in the students for expanding their knowledge on certain topics or themes in New Mexico's history and its culture.

### **Part four: *Land Grants***

The last activity that will be part of this unit will be related to the land grants in New Mexico. The land grants were established and regulated by the Spanish crown under the Laws of the Indies to populate their imperial claims. At times they were rewards for service rendered to the crown, the private land grant. Other times, as in the community grant, a group of families were deeded individual plots for homes and gardens and were to allow equal access to the communal lands. In the communal land, all had equal access to lands for grazing, hunting and wood gathering.

History of how these land grants were established and how they functioned is very extensive. But what makes this issue even more complex is the deletion of article X to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. In 1846, the US went to war with Mexico over disputed land in Texas. By 1848, Mexico was defeated and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo forced Mexico to surrender its

northern areas. Included were New Mexico, Arizona, California and parts of Utah, Colorado and Nevada. Those Mexican people who were left in these areas were in for drastic changes. A foreign government that had a different view of land and how it functioned now ruled them. This caused some confusion, and in this confusion many New Mexicans found themselves stripped of their land. The history of the land loss is very complex. Still today, many questions go unanswered.

This land loss did not go unopposed. Many New Mexican organized to address the issue of land loss. Many used direct action to oppose and confront those they felt were taking the land illegally. The history of resistance and the struggle to keep these land grants alive is also very complex.

Initially I had planned on having the students research and present a land grant community in New Mexico. But, as you can see, the land grant issue in New Mexico is very complex. You have the history of how they were established and maintained. Also, you have the history of how many were lost. And last, you have the struggle of survival and the history of resistance. It is a complex web that you must navigate to fully understand the issue. To add to the complexity, the vast majority of the information on land grants is very academic in nature. It would be very difficult for a student to utilize these resources for research.

While much of the material related to land grants in New Mexico is very academic in nature, there are some resources out there that would be suitable for the Middle School classroom. There are a couple of videos that I plan to use for this section; *Tierra o muerte*, *Una lucha por mi pueblo*, and *Quest for a Homeland*. All these videos present the history of the land grants at a level suitable for this age group. They present all the issues related to the land grants; how they were established and functioned, how many were lost and how the people struggled to maintain them. Most of the videos highlight the activism related to the land grant issue. For the unit I would show two of the three videos over three to four days.

*Quest for a Homeland* would be one of the two that I will show. This is the first part of the *Chicano!* four part series created for PBS documenting the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement. There is a web site that would be useful for this activity. At this web site there are numerous resources for teachers to use. There is also a list of questions to go along with the videos. These questions will be used to guide the classroom discussion and to guide a reflective writing that the students will turn in.

The videos would provide background information about the land grants in New Mexico and the issues related to them. The next part of this activity would be to bring in community members who are active in today's land grant movement. These people are extremely knowledgeable about this topic. They would come to the class and present the topic and issues to the students. Most of these people represent a specific land community. They would talk about the history of their grant, the issues related to their situation and the future, or what they would like to see happen with their grant. Some ideas for presenters are Moises Gonzales, from the San Pedro Land Grant, and Juan Sanchez, of the Chilili Land Grant, both of whom are members of the New Mexico Land Grant Forum. Here is an other possible source for more guest speakers.

One thing that I would like the students to take away from this unit is that these land grants are not only part of New Mexico's history, they are part of the present and future. The land grant issue never died, it just took a different form. The land grant issue is very important to New Mexico and its people. It is crucial that the youth have an understanding of their significance.

This unit and its activities take the students on a journey exploring the history, traditions, customs, and people of New Mexico. All these components intertwine to create the New Mexico experience. It is my intention, through the course of this unit, that these students make connections to the history, traditions and people of New Mexico, so they are able to construct who they are and where they come from. To gain a sense of time and place. To give them firm ground upon which to construct their identities. An affirmation of who they are as people, where they come from and idea of where they are going. To promote a sense of self esteem that will guide them through success in school and in life. And to hopefully prevent them from being, as the poem states, "...solo...en el mundo, perdido en la niebla blanca" (alone in the world, lost in the haze).

## **Bibliography**

The first group of articles was used to familiarize myself with the land grants in New Mexico. They cover a wide range of topics related to the land grants: the origins, the history, how they functioned, post conquest and how they were lost and activism to address the issue of land loss. As stated before, the land grant issue of New Mexico is very complex. Most of these sources are very academic and should be used by teachers to familiarize themselves with the history and issues related to the land grants in New Mexico

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