

Cross-Border Vignettes: A Common Neuroscience

by **Jean Guerrero**

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OVERVIEW

Quick Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade Level Appropriateness	* Ages 16+ * Grades 11+
Genre/s	* Fiction * Vignette (episodic literature)
Length	3,500 words
Content Advisories	Brief cursing.
One Sentence Summary	Smoking, some cursing, discussion of mental illness (at times from the judgemental perspective of a child), mention of sexuality including masturbation, menstruating, mention of cocaine use, an unstable father whose behavior may be unpredictable.

Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	Topics * Family * Mental illness * Children dealing with unstable parents * Fear
Topics & Key Themes Overview	Themes * Trying to be a family despite difficulties * Understanding different perspectives * How we change * Love
Historic Events / Time Periods for Study	The history of schizophrenia and the contemporary understanding of the disease.

Lesson Planning	
Complementary Classic and Historic Texts	<p>* “A Brief History of Schizophrenia” in <i>Psychology Today</i> by Neel Burton, MD (https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/201209/brief-history-schizophrenia)</p> <p>* <i>Made You Up</i> by Francesca Zappia (YA novel)</p> <p>* “Artist with Schizophrenia Illustrates What It’s Like to Experience Hallucinations” Huffington Post article http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/artist-with-schizophrenia-illustrates-what-its-like-to-experience-hallucinations_uk_58f88424e4b0cbo86d7e3bf4 (http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/artist-with-schizophrenia-illustrates-what-its-like-to-experience-hallucinations_uk_58f88424e4b0cbo86d7e3bf4)</p>
Author and Artists Information	<p>Jean Guerrero is a journalist, author and novelist living in San Diego, CA.</p> <p>Rosalind Helfand was the Managing Editor for Literature for Life (now Locavore Lit LA) and a photographer.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2</p>

Author Biography

Jean Guerrero is a journalist and novelist, and is author of *Crux: A Cross-Border Memoir*, winner of the PEN/FUSION Emerging Writers Prize and *Hatemonger: Stephen Miller, Donald Trump, and the White Nationalist Agenda* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2020). She is the Fronteras reporter at KPBS, San Diego’s NPR and PBS NewsHour affiliate. She started her career at the *Wall Street Journal* and Dow Jones News-

wires as a foreign correspondent. Her reporting has taken her into the sewers of Tijuana, opium poppy plantations and some of the deadliest desert smuggling routes along the U.S. - Mexico border.

Artist Biography

Rosalind Helfand was the Managing Editor of Literature for Life (renamed Locavore Lit LA). In her spare time, she does photography with the natural world being her her favorite subject.

SYNOPSIS

“Cross-Border Vignettes” features two short stories, the first where a father, Carlos, who is suffering from schizophrenia comes to his ex-wife’s home to request that he be allowed to take his teen daughters on a trip to Mexico. He is delusional and believes he must rescue them. The second vignette takes place during the trip to Mexico, and is from the perspective of Carlos’s daughter, Jean. Jean is dealing with her own problems and the stress of her changing body while trying to relate to her unpredictable father. Although the pieces seem uncertain and frightening at times, they often beg the sympathy of the reader and, at the core, are about family.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic and Main Ideas

What are some of the difficult aspects of being a teenager and going through puberty? What can make relating to one’s parents more difficult than when one was a child? Ask students to reflect on these questions in their journals in a five minute exercise.

Then, hold a class discussion where students share some of their responses.

Passage-Specific Themes

Read the opening paragraph from “Cross-Border Vignettes”:

“The Marlboro pack trembles in his hands. Carlos sits behind the wheel of his truck parked in front of his ex-wife’s house and he’s trying to pluck a cigarette out of his pack. His fingers are bulky and quiver-

ing and the cigarette is slender and elusive and his armor of aluminum foil is crinkle-cracking distractingly.”

From this paragraph alone, what can you surmise about Carlos and his mental state? How does literature allow us to sympathize with people who we wouldn't normally trust or relate to in our day to day lives?

Do you think literature can make us more sympathetic to others? Why or why not?

Discuss these questions in a 5-10 minute journaling exercise and then debate them in class.

Universal Themes

How do we as a society define and differentiate between mental health and mental illness? What prejudices do people often hold about mental illness? When is it appropriate to be concerned about a family member or friend and when is it appropriate to simply be understanding?

Write a research paper that explores these issues in depth including incorrect assumptions often made about mental illness, the prevalence of certain conditions in the population (such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia) and social and political issues with how mental health and treating illnesses is regarded and funded in the United States.

Before turning in your papers, discuss these issues as a class.

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are very context-dependent. Make sure that any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
inaudible	quivering	vignette
protrude	elusive	neuroscience
wailed	haywire	dopamine
comprehend	endeavoring	schizophrenia
ajar	envisions	remission
emphasis	ambiguously	antioxidant

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
disentangling	unsettled	pesadillas (nightmares)
prickly	meticulously	ogling
transformed	conveying	sternum
unconsciousness	indifferent	hyperventilating
abrupt	hallucinations	
concentrated	frantic	
concentrate	cross-border	
determined	pursed lips	
	knit eyebrows	
	horrendous	
	glistening	
	pathetic	
	with resolve	
	groggy	
	textured	
	collarbone (clavicle)	
	irises (eyes)	
	clove	
	heart flutter	

Vocabulary Activity Options

- Schizophrenia is often a misunderstood mental health disorder. Research the the disorder and how it's both defined and treated. Also research some of the misconceptions about schizophrenia. Write a report on your findings.
- Identify phrases in “Cross-Border Vignettes” that describe facial expressions and list them. What expressions and emotions do the each of the phrases indicate? After exploring the meanings of the phrases, create a drawing or painting depicting each of them.
- What words in “Cross-Border Vignettes” illustrate internal thoughts and feelings of the characters that they may not display outwardly? List these words, then discuss with your class how people may be feeling things that we are not aware of and why it's important to be sensitive to this.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. How does Carlos see himself compared to how others see him? How do his ex-wife and his children view him differently?
2. How do teens sometimes have complicated relationships with their parents? How is Jean's relationship with her father complicated?
3. How does Carlos seek to cope with his mental health disorder? What might keep him from getting additional help? Does society always make it easy to deal with such disorders? Is there more we could do?

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. From what points of view is “Cross Border Vignettes” narrated? What is the author’s attitude towards Carlos? Discuss your answer using examples from the text.
2. How do you feel about Carlos when the story is told from young Jean’s perspective? Did your feelings change or stay the same? Explain your answer.
3. What personal physical situation does Jean deal with in “Cross-Border Vignettes”? Was she prepared to deal with this?
4. What is Michelle hiding from Carlos? Is she right to do this? What are her motivations? Explain your answer citing examples from the text.
5. What does it mean to humor someone? How does Jean’s family humor her when she has a crush?
6. How does the author develop a sense of tension in the first vignette to enhance the mood of the story?
7. What scene in “Cross-Border Vignettes” is the illustration taken from? How does Carlos’s imaginings about the sunflower set the tone and mood for the rest of the story?

Writing Exercise Options

Narrative

Option One: Discuss the concept of a vignette in literature with your class. Then, ask students to write a three vignette short story, each from a different character’s perspective.

Option Two: Write a short story that is predicated on a misunderstanding between two characters — where each character believes the other is acting or speaking the way they are for a reason that is incorrect. See how far you can take the misunderstanding. Have fun with it!

Descriptive

Tell a story from either the first or third person perspective that gets into the head of an unreliable protagonist — a character who we cannot trust. Decide in advance why we can't trust the protagonist, but make sure your character is interesting and relatable to your readers. Include vivid descriptions that helps your reader to clearly visualize how your protagonist thinks and views the world outside their head.

Analysis

What does it mean when people say that “there is no black and white, only shades of gray”?

Consider how this quote applies to each of the key characters in “Cross-Border Vignettes”: Carlos, Michelle, and Jean and how the quote applies to considering their complicated relationships with one another and the decisions they make. Was it right for Michelle to allow Carlos to take their daughters to Mexico? Is Carlos a good or bad person? Should Jean accept her father or is it right for her to seek love? Are there times when it's absolutely right to judge — are there times when we should hold back from judging others?

Write an essay analyzing the characters and their choices in light of the quote and discussing the complexities of the human experience.

Complementary Reading Text Option

Read the novel *Made You Up* by Francesca Zappia.

Writing Exercise

How are the mental health disorders and experiences of Carlos and the protagonist of *Made You Up* similar and different? Explain in a short essay that includes examples from both texts.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

Read the following *Huffington Post* article about a teen artist who seeks to educate others about her condition and creates illustrations of her hallucinations.

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/artist-with-schizophrenia-illustrates-what-its-like-to-experience-hallucinations_uk_58f88424e4b0cb086d7e3bf4 (http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/artist-with-schizophrenia-illustrates-what-its-like-to-experience-hallucinations_uk_58f88424e4b0cb086d7e3bf4)

After reading the article, create an artwork that either illustrates one of Carlos's hallucinations or create an artwork depicting a dream that you've had.

Classroom Activity Two

Read the following TeensHealth.org article about talking to parents and other adults:

<http://teenshealth.org/en/teens/talk-to-parents.html?WT.ac=ctg#> (<http://teenshealth.org/en/teens/talk-to-parents.html?WT.ac=ctg#>)

How might this article have helped (and not helped) Jean in her particular situation?

In pairs, discuss what seem to you to be the valuable ways to effectively communicate with adults. On large pieces of construction paper, write phrases or words that you feel are most important to communicating with adults and post these around the classroom. Walk around the room and look at what your fellow students have written.

Home Activity

Interview family or friends about their attitudes regarding mental health and mental illness. What are they concerned about? What services do they think people with mental health disorders should have access to?

Create a list of questions and who you will interview and workshop them in class prior to conducting your interviews. Be sensitive in your questions and keep them neutral and general.

Write a follow up report discussing what you learned about friend and family attitudes and discuss what you feel are the most important and interesting findings in class.

Guest Speaker

1. Invite the author and / or illustrate to come and speak with your class.

2. Invite a psychologist or psychiatrist to come and speak with the class about schizophrenia and other mental health disorders, services available to teens who have concerns, and healthy attitudes when talking about mental health.

Field Trip

Visit the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Services. Meet the different department heads and learn about their work and the types of services they provide. Also learn about some of the challenges each faces. What would make their work easier and how can citizens help out?

Writing Exercise:

Write in your journal about what you learned on your trip and what you would do to improve available mental health services in Los Angeles County.

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Writing Exercise

Assess the importance of the last moment in Guerrero's story when Carlos consoles Jean as she panics from a nightmare. How does she react to this unfamiliar moment with her father? Please cite the text in a one-page response.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C: Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6: Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.A: Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.A: Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Complementary Reading Text Writing Exercise

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.A: Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.