

Nuevo Mexico Profundo

by **Rebecca Gonzales**

Illustration by **Joey Feldman**

Curriculum developed by **Tiffany Owens**

Supplementary Curriculum and Copy Editing by **Léna Garcia**



OVERVIEW

Quick Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade Level Appropriateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 16 and up • Grades 11 and up
Genre/s	This challenging, poetic piece is a stream-of-consciousness narrative.
Length	626 words
Content Advisories	References to drug and alcohol use; drunk driving; death and loss; strong language/cursing; depression/self-harm.
One Sentence Summary	Tortured with grief over loss and impending further loss, the narrator describes a frantic cross-country trek to escape pain and seek solace in the company of others who can relate to her experiences.

Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death and dying • Self-destructive behavior • Grief <p>Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape • Women’s empowerment/feminism • Grief and solace • Strength in times of crisis
Historic Events / Time Periods for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary East LA • History of the American Southwest • Native American communities • Bureau of Indian Affairs; in literature, see Modernism and stream-of-consciousness writing technique—exemplar authors include Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Karl Ove Knausgaard.
Complementary Classic and Historic Texts	<p><i>Orlando</i> by Virginia Woolf</p> <p><i>The Jilting of Granny Weatherall</i> by Katherine Anne Porter</p>

Lesson Planning	
Author and Artists Information	<p>Rebecca Gonzales is a writer living in Los Angeles.</p> <p>Joey Feldman is an artist living in Los Angeles.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Author Biography

Cultivated by the sun and moon peeking past the shoes dangling from the phone lines, **Rebecca Gonzales** was raised and resides “one block East of El Pino” in East LA. Rebecca’s work has been published in various literary anthologies and journals such as Issue 1 of *Drylandlit*, *Brooklyn & Boyle*, *Hinchas de Poesia*, *The Más Tequila Review*, Cipatli Issues 3 and 5 of San Antonio’s *St. Sucia*, *Literature for Life*, and others. She was the March 2014 winner of “The Poets of New York” series at the Bowery in New York City. She has performed all over LA and the Inland Empire. She has three self-published books of poetry and is currently working on a book of short stories, poetry, and prose. As a mother she is humbled, as a poet she is obedient, and as a woman she is unapologetic.

Artist Biography

Mixed-media artist **Joey Feldman** works in Los Angeles. Feldman’s works are figurative with a frenetic, cartoonish style at their core. With line art applied to its fullest extent, Feldman’s initial, fast-sketched lines play a role in the final piece. Then, with paint and ink splatters, Feldman finishes each with a visceral urgency that captivates upon first glance. An only child who kept mostly to himself, Feldman first fell in love with art and illustrations through comic books and with Marvel pages he taught himself to draw by tracing panels. Known for his constant sketching in grade school, Feldman would receive a special award at his grade school graduation entitled “Classroom Cartoonist,” which was created specifically to commend his budding talents as an artist. Feldman’s first professional assignment came in 1994, when commissioned to draw a portrait of O.J. Simpson upon the verdict of O.J.’s infamous trial. Since then, Feldman has provided artwork for advertising agencies, design firms, motion pictures, beverage companies, record labels, and magazines. Including a not-so-flattering illustration of noted rapper Eminem for XXL Magazine, which sparked the biggest feud in XXL history. The illustration earned a shout-out from the artist himself on The Marshall Mathers LP. As well, private collectors, such as Josh Brolin (*No Country for Old Men*), Jere Burns (*Justified*, *Bates Motel*),

Kaley Cuoco (*The Big Bang Theory*), Steve Jones (*the Sex Pistols*), Joe Manganiello (*Magic Mike, True Blood*), and Tony Denison (*Major Crimes*), among many others, feature Feldman's singular work in their collections.

SYNOPSIS

This piece is a stream-of-consciousness exploration of heartbreak. It includes grappling with the raw sorrow of a failed relationship and a dying parent. The narrator relates her snapshot impressions of the American Southwest landscape as she rushes across multiple states on the highway to meet other female friends, who she hopes will provide a salve for, or at least a distraction from, her emotional pain. This is a highly complex and challenging text that asks the reader to set aside judgement and tap into empathy while reading.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

When you are faced with challenges, where do you go? Do you have a go-to escape place? It is a physical place or is it an activity you do in order to escape? In your journal, describe it, and then discuss why it is important to you.

Main Ideas

The style of this piece is sometimes referred to as stream-of-consciousness writing, or an interior monologue, the goal of which is to get your thoughts down on paper exactly as they come up in your mind, as a continuous, uninterrupted flow, without worrying about grammar or punctuation or even about whether or not they would make sense to anyone else. In a journal, take five to 10 minutes and write all the thoughts that come into your mind just as they bubble up, without judging what you write. Your writing does not need to be correct or perfect or even "good." It only needs to capture what is running through your mind. The only rule is to keep the pen moving on the paper. If you cannot think of anything to start, or if you get stuck, just write, "I cannot think of anything" again and again until a new idea emerges in your mind. (This is sometimes a fun exercise to share and read out loud to the class).

Passage-Specific Themes

The author’s mysterious first line, “I wasn’t sure anymore if I came here to find something or lose something,” suggests that she is unsure of why she is doing what she is doing. In a journal entry, examine how the line sets the tone for the piece, what it could mean, and what it may imply about the rest of the piece. Consider also what the line would mean if applied to your own personal life? What are you looking for and what, if anything, might you like to lose?

Universal Themes

There are numerous ways that people deal with grief and loss. As a class, chart as many different ways of coping with emotional pain as you can. Perhaps separating them into productive/positive/healthy ways and damaging/unhealthy ways. Discuss which ones are the most common and why. Do you feel that as a society we cope well with adversity, grief, and loss? Why or why not? Explain.

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
mandarin	onyx	lilt
cleavage	bile	enchantment
shallow	crackling	consciousness
raspy	rebellion	properties
proclaimed	instinct	embellished
fixture	tri-state	monotony
ancestors		'merica
		homegirls
		32 oz
		nuevo
		profundo
		puro
		pinche

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Select five to seven of the vocabulary terms from the list(s) above. Look up the definitions of those words, and find examples of those words used in other contexts. Be sure that you find a variety of examples of some of the words (for example, in a poem, a newspaper article, an informational text, an advertisement, etc.). Next, take your terms and incorporate them into an original short poem that describes a specific place and clearly conveys how you personally feel about that place.
2. Look at all the Spanish and colloquial terms used in this piece. How are they essential to creating the tone and mood of the work?
3. In this piece, the narrator uses spare language, but much of what she includes is highly figurative and provides enough thoughtfully chosen detail to create vivid images in the reader's mind. Consider the phrases, "dark onyx skies," and, "rebellion in her jawline." Choose two to three such phrases of figurative language and write a short paragraph explaining what each phrase means in depth.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. The author ends the piece with the phrase, "instinct and memory." Discuss how the concepts of instinct and memory differ from or contrast with one another. Optional discussion extension: Next, speculate on why the author chose to end the piece that way. What was she saying with that phrase? Why something so short? Notice that she started the piece with the twin ideas of "finding something or losing something," and she ended with "instinct and memory." Why the two parallels? Does this suggest anything about her writing style or about the narrator's state of mind? Discuss. (Notice that she also mentions "the land of the Indians and the Indian killers," "keeping her alive by taking everything away," and "to lose or gain.")
2. Is this story hopeful or hopeless? Refer to the text to support your position.
3. Read the following excerpt from the story; "I have always read how digging leads to treasures, unexpectedly, and all these women, had dirt under their nails."

Now, consider the contrast of the images of dirt under fingernails and treasure. What kind of treasures is the narrator referring to? What is she saying about the other women?

Text-Dependent Question Options

1. How does the use of more than one language and colloquial terms enhance the mood of the piece? Explain and reference specific words and phrases from the text.

2. Throughout the piece, the author mentions multiple locations. What are each of the locations, and in what order does she go to each of them? How does merely naming the locations help us trace her journey and, more importantly, contribute to a sense of movement in the piece?
3. What are all of the things—both concrete and abstract—the narrator is losing? List them.
4. Although this narrator seems to be in searing emotional pain, she also demonstrates a high degree of self-reflection. List the places in the text that reveal her capacity for reflection.
5. Look around the classroom you are currently in, and try to write several phrases or sentences that describe people, events, or the environment. Attempt to capture the author's same spare, highly figurative style. Share some of your examples with the class.
6. How does the artist's style for the cover artwork and the subject in the art itself reflect the narrator's state of mind in *Nuevo Mexico Profundo*? Consider the style, the colors, the splashes of paint, the fuzzy edges, and the expression on the tequila-worm's face. (It has a face!)

Writing Exercise Options

Narrative

This stream-of-consciousness narrative does not follow the conventions of prescriptive grammar and writing; it is not strictly linear as the action unfolds. Go back and reread the piece, paying special attention to the actions that take place. Next, as a writing exercise, rewrite the piece in your own words, following all the conventions of standard written English, clarifying a linear plot, and in enough detail that the reader could discern who all the characters are, what they are doing, and why.

Descriptive

Write an essay that describes a place in the real world that provides you with the most comfort or solace, the place that has made you feel the safest or the most peaceful. It could be a place that you went to after a difficult experience or a place you go to regularly to stay happy. Create an evocative portrait of the topic for your reader by using rich details and figurative language.

Analysis

In this work, the author is dealing with emotional pain. What are all the things the author does or uses to try and escape her pain or make herself feel better? What do those choices potentially tell us about her life experiences beyond the story? Are her choices consistent? Not all of

the things she chooses are healthy. In a short, focused essay, analyze why the author makes the choices she makes. Cite the text to support any claims you make.

Complementary Reading Text Option

Orlando, by Virginia Woolf; *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*, by Katherine Anne Porter

Writing Exercise

Read the following excerpt from Virginia Woolf’s novel, *Orlando*:

“Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher’s face and the butcher a poet’s; nature, who has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence, has further complicated our task and added to our confusion by providing . . . a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us . . . [and] has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress and a capricious one at that.”

Visit <http://bit.ly/2cK2IFf> to read an excerpt from Katherine Anne Porter’s short story, *The Jilting of Granny Weatherall*.

Next, write a thoughtfully reasoned essay in which you compare the similarities of *Nuevo Mexico Profundo*, *Orlando*, and/or *Granny Weatherall*. Be sure that your paper addresses literary devices and figurative language, the genre and writing style, and the tone and mood evoked.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

Watch the independent film *Smoke Signals*, based on Sherman Alexie’s short story, “This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona.” As you watch, take notes on the characters’ experiences, responses to those experiences, and their states of mind. In a class discussion, compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the film and the text “*Nuevo Mexico Profundo*.” Pay particular attention to the various characters’ states of mind and their responses to the situations they face. What do you think contributes to the similarities in their situations?

Classroom Activity Two

Work as a class to write and photo-document a fictional blog, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media venue that the narrator might make while she is going through the experiences in this piece. Make sure that you include at least one entry about each location, person, and experience. Include photos (which you can select from the Internet), text, and the narrator's observations.

Divide the class into teams, which will work together to cover each location or section of her journey. Put it all together chronologically, and share the accounts or pages with the whole class. View it together. Afterward, discuss whether or not keeping such an account would be therapeutic for the narrator.

Home Activity

Go back and reread the entire piece at home. Create an original work of art that you think shows one of the scenes from the story. Show what the scene would look like from the narrator's point of view. Your artwork could be drawing, painting, or maybe even a diorama.

Bonus Activity: Create a storyboard for this piece as if it were to be made into a short film. Choose six scenes from the text and make pen-and-ink drawings of each one in chronological order. Examples include the open road, the liquor store, the women around the fire, the hospital room, etc.

Guest Speaker

1. Invite the author, Rebecca Gonzales, to come and speak to the class about her writing process. Why did she choose to write this piece as a stream-of-consciousness narrative? Does she write this way in all or most of her work? If so, why? If she is willing to share this particular insight, you may ask her to explain more of what the piece is about. Who exactly is she talking about? What exactly has happened regarding all the people she mentions in the piece? How does she decide what to include when she takes a larger story or life experience and distills it down to a shorter work, such as "Nuevo Mexico Profundo"?
2. Invite a trained grief counselor or therapist who specializes in depression to talk with the class about the events (and the classes' interpretation of those events) in the piece. How does a therapist work with patients who experience traumatic losses? What does the therapist really hear when she reads the piece? Ask her how she might work with or treat the narrator of the piece if she were a real patient.
3. Invite visual artist Joey Feldman to come and speak to the class about his artistic career and process and how he chose what to illustrate for the cover. What about the images, events, and emotions evoked by the story inspired him to go this direction with his work?

Field Trip

Plan a visit to the Autry Museum of the American West. What, if anything, from the museum’s collections, reflects aspects of the narrator’s experience?

SUPPLEMENTARY CURRICULUM FOR TEST PREPARATION

Story

Nuevo Mexico Profundo, by Rebecca Gonzales

Timed Writing Exercise

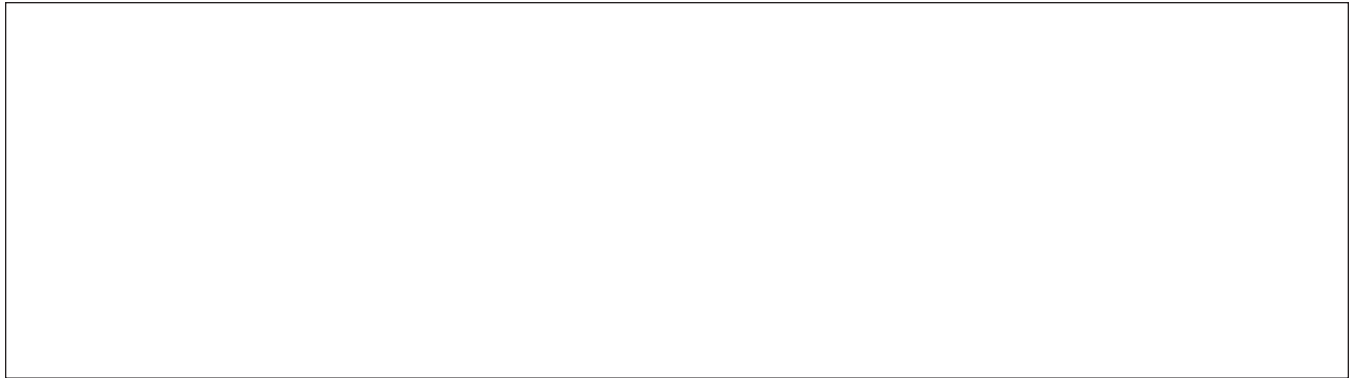
“She spoke steady, she must have known the properties of healing that happened between her tongue and her teeth, she talked of ‘homegirls’ and mothers, in a raspy tone, I could see the rebellion in her jaw line,” says the speaker in Rebecca Gonzales’s *Nuevo Mexico Profundo*.

How does the “woman in Llano del coyote” rebel? How might Gonzales’s decision to break literary and grammatical convention in this story also be an act of rebellion? In 25 minutes, write a two-paragraph response.

Online Component

Within the 25-minute deadline, ask students to post their response on the class website or turn in the assignment on Turnitin.com.

If handwriting your response, please use the box below:



Pre-Editing Activity

Students exchange digital or hard-copy responses.

Editing Activity

At your peer tutoring job, a student asks you for feedback on this two-paragraph response. Focus on the student's use of textual evidence to support their analysis. Are the evidence and analysis integrated? Are the quotes introduced and contextualized? If not, write a brief email to the student discussing areas in which the response needs revision. Be sure to address the response's overall strengths, as well as one area in which the student could improve.

Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

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.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

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.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3.A: Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte’s Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

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

Post-Reading Class Discussion 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.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Writing Exercise Options

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.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

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.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

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.

Complementary Reading Text Writing Exercise

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9.A: Apply grades 11-12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).

Activity Options

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.