

Healing Toolkit

Grades 6-8

Arthur Lopez is a self-taught sculptor featured in The American Visionary Art Museum's 2020-2021 exhibition *Healing and The Art of Compassion (or lack thereof)*. He carves small wooden sculptures called *Santos* (saints), and also creates paintings called *retablo* in the traditional New Mexican style. To pay homage to the first Saint Makers of New Mexico, Lopez uses many of the same practices from the 1700s, making his own rabbit skin gesso, using marble dust for additional sheen, and mixing his own paints made with natural pigments.

Like many artists, Lopez was moved to take up his art practice after the sudden loss of his father changed his life profoundly. Making the difficult decision to place his father in hospice care after a terminal diagnosis may have been the most compassionate act of his life. In this lesson, students will explore different modalities of healing, and consider if compassion plays a role in the healing of humans.



Objectives

- Students will identify universal healing practices and tools.
- Students will analyze the work and biography of artist Arthur Lopez.
- Students will develop and illustrate a tool kit for personal healing.

Critical Questions

What is something you have healed from?

What tools or practices help you heal yourself from pain or illness?

What tools or practices can we use, besides medicines or doctors, to heal?

Does compassion help us to heal?

Activities

1. **WARM UP:** Ask students to write something that they have healed from on a slip of paper, and place it in a basket/container at the front of the classroom. After settling in, read the answers and fill in the left hand column on slide 2 of the [Healing Toolkit Google Slide Deck](#). Brainstorm other situations people heal from to fill out the list. Then brainstorm a list of ways humans heal - see slide 3 for examples to guide students' thinking.
2. **DEFINE:** Share the definition of healing on slide 4 with students, and read the synonyms together.
3. **LEARN:** Read the introduction to the artist Arthur Lopez from the AVAM show *Healing and The Art of Compassion*. Share the images of his work, or have students visit the [artist's website](#) to view his work (preview the work first to make sure your students are the right audience for self-guided exploration). Alternatively / additionally, share the 2 minute interview with Arthur sharing his work at the Santa Fe Spanish Market, available on slide 8.
4. **READ & DISCUSS:** Distribute the artist's shortened biography (found in lesson resources) and read it together as a class. After reading the biography, discuss outloud, or copy [this jamboard](#) and have students respond to using sticky notes.

- a. What did Arthur's father need to heal from?
 - b. What COULD Arthur have done to help his father heal?
 - c. Why were Arthur's family members angry with him?
 - d. Did Arthur make a compassionate choice about his father's care?
5. **BRAINSTORM:** On slide 9, brainstorm with students some alternative tools or practices we can use to heal that are non-medical. See slide 10 for examples to guide student thinking.
 6. **EXPLORE:** Share slide 11 with students, and instruct them to choose one non-medical healing art to explore. Distribute the Healing Arts Exploration handout for them to record their thoughts (found under lesson resources). Have students share out individually to the group, or pair up to share their findings.
 7. **CREATE:** Assign the final project (students choose 2D or 3D art making) using the instructions on slide 13.

Materials

- [Healing Toolkit Google Slide Deck](#)
- Computer, internet and projector
- Student devices
- Paper and pencil
- Drawing materials - Pencils, markers, colored pencils, pens, collage papers, scissors, glue.
- Sculptural materials such as masking or duct tape, cardboard, foam core, pipe cleaners, clay, collage papers, scissors, glue.

ARTHUR LOPEZ (1971-)

Arthur Lopez was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico to Cecilia and Jerry Lopez. Arthur can't remember a time he didn't love art—from just a small child through his days as a high schooler, Arthur was always sketching or doodling.

As a young adult, Arthur worked as a graphic designer. Preparing to move from Los Angeles to New York to pursue a job offer, Arthur stopped home in New Mexico to visit family. The same day he arrived, Arthur's Dad was diagnosed with very serious throat cancer. Arthur turned down the job in New York to stay in Santa Fe and help care for his Dad, who was recently divorced.

During this extremely challenging time, Arthur watched his father rapidly deteriorate from his former vibrant 54-year old self. When someone is very sick, a family member will often be given something called "medical power of attorney." The person with this power is allowed to make decisions for the very sick person, especially when they are too sick to talk or think clearly.

Arthur followed the suggestions of the doctors to begin home hospice care, placing his father on a strong medicine called to help ease his enormous pain. Arthur's father had a large family, who were upset with Arthur's decision.

"When I told them what the Doctor had said they were all upset and telling me not to do it and that the doctors are not God and that my dad could still make it. I made the hard decision to start the drip (morphine) to ease him from his pain all against my family's protests and knowing that this day would be his last. I sat with my father and whispered in his ear that I forgave him for any wrongs I felt toward him, that I loved him, and that it was okay to go. I don't know if my choice was compassion or the lack thereof, but I take comfort in knowing he is no longer in pain and in a better place."

After his father's passing, Arthur felt a calling to try and make art for the first time in 9 years. While visiting the Traditional Spanish Market in Santa Fe, Arthur fell in love with the painted wooden sculptures and decided he wanted to dedicate himself to that tradition despite having never before made any sculpture.

While Arthur creates modern works of art about contemporary themes, he uses the same ancient practices as the first Santeros (Saint Makers) in New Mexico during the 1700s. These include woodcarving, producing his own rabbit skin gesso (paint), using marble dust for additional sheen, and his own handmade paints made with natural pigments.

Out of his great respect for health care professionals who cope with life and death and suffering every day, Lopez began making COVID-related saints at the start of the current Pandemic.

Healing Arts Exploration

I chose to explore (circle one)--->

forest bathing

mindfulness meditation

reiki healing

After exploring the topic using the links in the Google Slides, record your thoughts below:

| What is it? | How does it heal/help the body? | How does it help/heal the mind? |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | |

Would you ever try this healing art? Why or why not?