



Tales from the Chihuahuan Desert: Borderlands Narratives about Identity and Binationalism

National Endowment for the Humanities and The University of Texas at El Paso
2017 Summer Institute for Secondary School Teachers (Grades 6th–12th)

Lesson Plan: Border Policy, Race, Culture, and Binationalism

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Subject Area: World History, (AP) U.S. History, (AP) Government, English

Keywords: Social Construction, Race, Heritage, Ethnicity, Alien, Belonging, Borderlands Region (USA), Citizenship, Identity, Immigration, Media, Migrant, Migration

Grade Level: 6th – 12th

Time Required to Complete: 150 minutes (Three class periods)

Instructions.

Read the following lesson plan. You can also have the students read it as it contains important content and explanations for the content. I based the ideas on my experiences, and they are important for this lesson. I placed direct instructions and discussion questions in bullet points.

Materials

Lesson Plan

A copy of the poems “Immigrants” and “Elena” by Pat Mora

Two Powerpoints “Immigration and Border Policy” and “Department of Homeland Security”

Border Video

Pen and Paper

Computer and Internet Connectivity (optional)

ENGAGE Introduction

As Humans we like to share our experiences. Some people argue that this is part of our human nature. I strongly believe that when we share our stories, we create a community and at the same time, strengthen ties to other people. By telling our stories and listening to those of others, we become more empathetic and can broaden our worldview. I hope you explore the ideas of race and labels, border public policy, and the pains of experiencing assimilation with an open mind. This is the way to combat this pain with hope.



- State 3 things you notice from the picture above.
- Where could this picture have taken place?
- What is the purpose of the structure?
- What is a border?
- What makes a border?
- Read the poem below. Write a 3 sentence response on the point the author is trying to convey.
- What are some of the feelings you have after reading this poem?
- Watch the “Border Video” and ask the students to write a 3 sentence response explaining what they notice from the video.

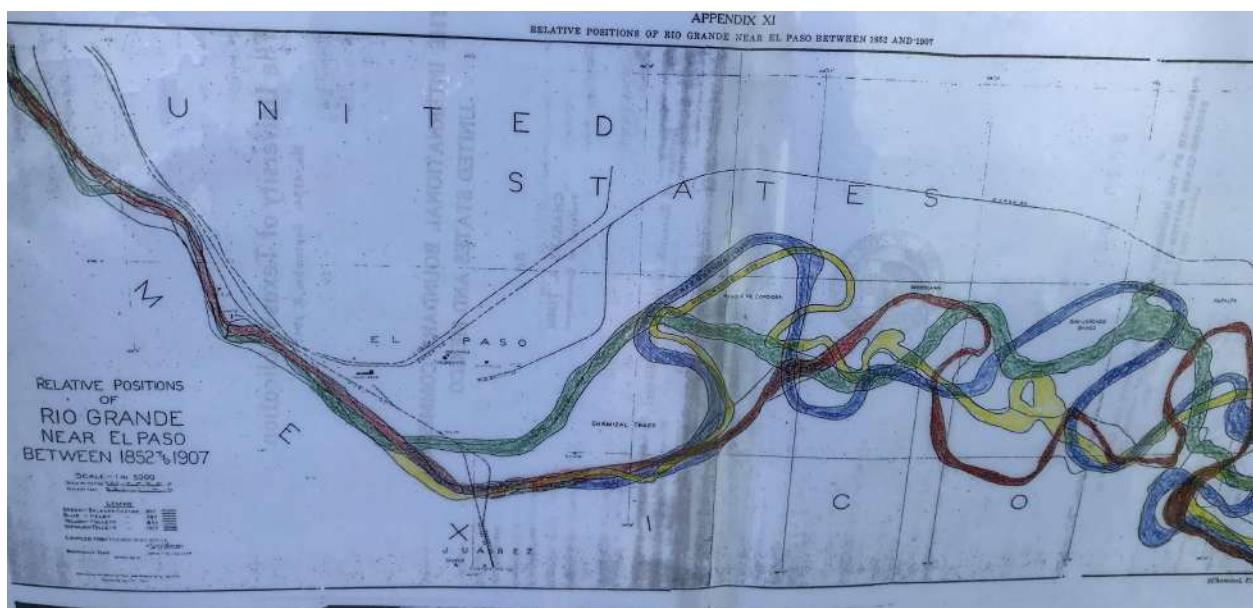
Immigrants by Pat Mora

wrap their babies in the American flag,
feed them mashed hot dogs and apple pie,
name them Bill and Daisy,
buy them blonde dolls that blink blue
eyes or a football and tiny cleats
before the baby can even walk,
speak to them in thick English,
hallo, babee, hallo,
whisper in Spanish or Polish
when the babies sleep, whisper
in a dark parent bed, that dark
parent fear, “Will they like
our boy, our girl, our fine American
boy, our fine American girl?”

EXPLORE The Policy of the Border

Public policy is everything the government does for the people. The three branches of government (legislative, executive, judicial), political parties, interest groups, and the media all play a big role in determining how policy is created, what is created, and how it is implemented.

- Brainstorm 3 challenges of implementing a border and immigration policy?



The map pictured above was created by the International Boundary Commission United States and Mexico through the University of Texas. It maps the meandering of the Rio Grande near the city of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. The different colors in the map showcase the river at different times from 1852 through 1907. The Rio Grande was established as the boundary between Mexico and the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). The Rio Grande flows from the Rocky Mountains and naturally floods from time to time changing where and how it flows.

- What happens when a river is the mark of a border and the river moves? Do the boundaries change?

Review the Powerpoints “Immigration Policy” and “Department of Homeland Security” to get an overview of both the immigration policy and the executive department, which is in charge of overseeing part of this policy. Ask your students to review the immigration policy timeline provided to get an overview of the different pieces of legislation and their implementation in through the years.

EXPLAIN Race & Labels (A Social Construct)

Labels can be both inclusive and exclusive. Think of nicknames, for example; they can be endearing or they can be demeaning, depending on the usage. Why do we put labels on people? Have there ever been any names that made you feel special? Any names that made you feel bad?

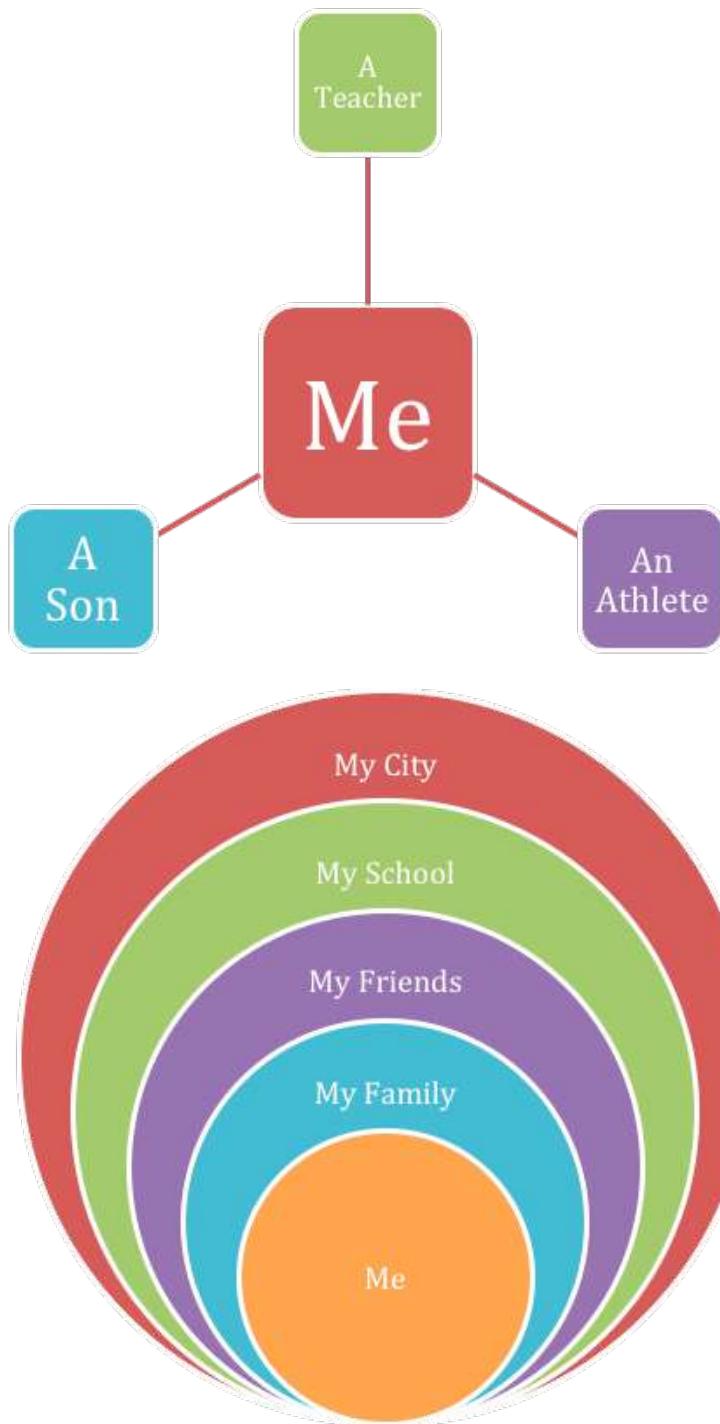
- Give each student a small piece of paper. Give them this prompt to write: I am (Name) _____, and I am _____.
- Each person will tape the paper (with only their name filled in) on their back.
- Have the students walk around and write something descriptive about each classmate, filling in the second blank.
- You may make it anonymous or set guidelines to keep it positive.

Think of immigration policy we discussed in the earlier lesson. During the National Origins quota days of the 1920s, Mexicans were labeled as White on immigration forms in order to allow them to fit into an acceptable category for immigration. Big agricultural interests needed temporary labor for their harvest and didn't want restrictions to their needs. If they were not labeled this way, they would not be allowed to do the work they wanted to do. For a long period of time, Americans of Chinese descent would not be recognized as citizens because of their race. The Chinese exclusion act tried to do just that, limit and exclude the Chinese from joining American society.

Now, think of different labels that you might identify with. Below, I labeled myself a teacher, a son, and an athlete. These are roles that I play in my life; these roles also vary depending on the

groups of people I am with. Next to this graphic is the circle of influence. Often times, we act differently in different groups to meet different social norms or expectations.

- Complete both graphics with your own information. Reflect on how these labels impact the roles you play within each space. With this in mind, reflect on the labels given to immigrants. The language we use is very important because it sets the tone and agenda of the conversation.
- Stress the idea that we may play different roles in different settings.
- Ask the students to examine the traits they identify with. Have the students write a 6 sentence paragraph describing their identity.



Race is something that can play a role in determining how we see ourselves and how we think society views us. It is important to understand that race is a social construct, meaning humans created race as a label or way to classify one another. There are often lots of generalizations that go into the descriptions of race. Human characteristics and traits vary greatly from person to person, so much so that it is impossible to come up with one classification that truly

encompasses everyone in a small group of people. Looking at the world through race classification will often lead to misconceptions and mistakes which can hurt our understanding of other people. To further reflect on this idea of race as a social construct explore the following website.

http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-01.htm

ELABORATE On Pain (Of Assimilation, Denying Heritage, Lack of Education)

An activist who advocated for the protection of her neighborhood, as plans to bulldoze it to make room for the construction of a major sports arena, spoke to at the NEH Seminar about her personal struggle and experience. Even though she had been through so much in her struggle to protect her community, she often started her sentences with the phrase “yo no fui a la escuela pero...” “I didn't go to school for this but...” which stuck out to me because it was a phrase I had heard often. My mother was only able to attend school as far as middle school because her small town in Mexico did not have a high school. I had heard my mom utter a similar phrase when talking about certain things. It really hurt me that these strong, intelligent, and accomplished women felt inferior because of their lack of education. Pain is a common thread when studying immigration and border policy. Sometimes the pain comes from denying one's own heritage in an attempt to fit in and further assimilate into American society.

- List two things related to your identity and heritage may have caused you pain?
- Read the following poem.
- What are the concerns of the narrator in the poem?
- How is this poem relatable to your own experience living in the United States?

Elena by Pat Mora

My Spanish isn't good enough

I remember how I`d smile
Listening my little ones
Understanding every word they'd say,
Their jokes, their songs, their plots
Vamos a pedirle dulces a mama. Vamos.
But that was in Mexico.

Now my children go to American High Schools.
They speak English. At night they sit around the
Kitchen table, laugh with one another.
I stand at the stove and feel dumb, alone.
I bought a book to learn English.
My husband frowned, drank more beer.
My oldest said, 'Mama, he doesn't want you to
Be smarter than he is' I'm forty,
Embarrassed at mispronouncing words,
Embarrassed at the laughter of my children,
The grocery, the mailman. Sometimes I take
my English book and lock myself in the bathroom,
say the thick words softly, for if I stop trying, I will be deaf
when my children need my help.

ELABORATE On Hope

I have come to the realization that there is great pain related to the Mexican-American experience. At times I have struggled with my identity and what it means to be a Mexican-American. I didn't always fit in with my Mexican cousins, and I didn't always fit in with my American friends. Assimilating to American culture was important to me, but at the same time, I had feelings that I was denying my heritage and the culture of my parents. There is also a lot of pain when I think of my parents and their story. I hate to think that they felt uncomfortable living in the United States. Speaking the language has been a challenge, but I am so proud my parents tackled the task. I hate to see my mom become embarrassed because of her accent or unsure of herself. She is one of the strongest women I know.

In a recent seminar, I asked an activist for a good way to combat this pain. Her answer was “hope and role models”. This made me feel lucky to have had great role models in my life, from my parents and sisters, to my teachers and peers. I always had the hope that life was getting better and that If I worked hard, I could achieve my goals. Obama’s hope campaign was crucial to his victory. Without hope there is no Obama presidency. He had to hope for it and believe it before it could become a reality. In an interview with writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, President Obama said the following: “[Being Black] was not something to run away from but something to embrace. Why that is, is complicated. Part of it is, I think, that my mother thought black folks were cool, and if your mother loves you and is praising you - and says you look good, are smart - as you are, then you don't think it terms of how can i avoid this? You feel pretty good about it”. It is extremely important to accept yourself and love yourself in order to help heal the pain caused by trying to fit into society.



(By Shepard Fairey - Self-made, Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32592376>)

- What makes a good role model?
- Who are your role models? Why?



(Murals by El Mac, Photos by Adrian Jurado)

These murals were painted in El Paso and Juarez by street artist El Mac. His intent was to portray the people as powerful.

- What do you notice about these two murals? What two words come to mind when you look at them?
- How can murals and visuals help portray an idea?
- What are some of the things you find important about Mexican (Latin American, or other) Culture?

EXPLORE Rights

Everyone who is in the United States is protected by the Constitution. You don't have to be a citizen to have rights; everyone has rights. The Supreme Court case *Zadvydas v. Davis* established that even immigrants have right of "due process." In *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the court decided that the 14th amendment applied to immigrants who are entitled to equal protection under the law, and in *Plyler v. Doe* it was decided that even undocumented children are entitled to attend public school. There are endless supreme court cases dealing with this issue.

The Bill of Rights are the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution, and they were added prior to the ratification of the constitution to ensure the rights of the people of the United States would be protected. The addition of the Bill of Rights was a major compromise in order to get the Constitution ratified.

The American Civil Liberties Union is an interest group who focuses on protecting the civil rights and liberties of all people in the United States. Use their website to explore the rights of citizens and noncitizens alike.

ACLU know your rights pamphlets and videos.

<https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights>

- Write down the 3 most important rights you learned about and one sentence stating the importance of each right.

EVALUATE Who am I? Who are we?

History textbooks are created by analyzing primary source documents such as letters or other government documents. But what about the stories of people who cannot read or write or are not present in some government document? Oral Histories are becoming a popular modality of historical studies. They are important because they increase the range of stories that can enter what we call history. By Promoting oral histories, we will be able to create a better, more accurate view of our communities.

- Interview a migrants/immigrant you know about their experiences crossing a border or living in the United States. It doesn't have to be an international immigrant, you could also interview someone about migrating across state or county borders. You must come up with your own questions for this interview. Try to have at least 10 questions you want to ask. Think of the concepts we have studied so far (Pain, Immigration Policy, Hope, Race and Labels).
- If your interviewee allows, record the interview and explain that you are making it part of an oral history collection.
- Create a one page typed summary of your interview.

Instructional Objectives and Student Learning

TEKS

World History (15) Citizenship. The student understands how different points of view influence the development of public policies and decision-making processes on local, state, national, and international levels. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify and give examples of different points of view that influence the development of public policies and decision-making processes on local, state, national, and international levels; and
- (B) explain how citizenship practices, public policies, and decision making may be influenced by cultural beliefs, including nationalism and patriotism.

American Government (2) History. The student understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present. The student is expected to:

- (A) give examples of the processes used by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media to affect public policy; and
- (B) analyze the impact of political changes brought about by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media, past and present.

United States History Studies Since 1877 (26) Culture. The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to:

- (A) explain actions taken by people to expand economic opportunities and political rights, including those for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as women, in American society;
- (B) discuss the Americanization movement to assimilate immigrants and American Indians into American culture;
- (C) explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture[.]

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Chapter 2, The Themes of Social Studies

- (1) Culture
- (3) People, Places, and Environments
- (4) Individual Development and Identity
- (9) Global Connections

Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Literacy.[RH.9-10.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Literacy.[RH.9-10.8](#)

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.