

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

National Endowment for the Humanities and The University of Texas at El Paso  
2019 Summer Institute for Secondary School Teachers (Grades 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>)

**Lesson Plan: *Immigration, A Never-Ending Journey***

Prepared by

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**Daniel Jaramillo** is a native of El Paso, Texas. After moving to Austin in 2012 to study history, he got a teaching position at Del Valle High School. He currently teaches U.S. government to seniors, and has previously taught World History and Economics. Daniel is the Assistant Tennis Coach at Del Valle High School. He enjoys reading non-fiction, hanging with friends, creating, producing, and playing music. Daniel plans to learn about binationalism and identities in the Summer Institute and gain a better understanding about the issues and obstacles communities face. He seeks a greater understanding about who his students are and their identities.

**Subject Area:** Language Arts and Social Studies/History

**Keywords:** Immigrant, Migration, Assimilation, Language, Deportation, Border, Policy

**Grade Level:** 9th - 12th

**Time Required to Complete:** 200 Minutes

**Instructional Objectives and Student Learning**

**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.

**[Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills \(TEKS\), Social Studies, Subchapter C. High School](#)**

§113.41. 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[.]

**Guiding Questions**

1. What is the opposite of a wall?
2. Who will save the United States from current US border policies? Do we need saving?
3. Does the border end at the defined border of the United States?
4. Do you think the United States is winning when it comes to border policy? Who is defining winning?
5. Are there laws that protect immigrants or minorities against mob violence?
6. Is the United States the Land of Blood? Why?
7. What does it mean to assimilate?
8. Have you ever felt like you had to assimilate to something?
9. When you assimilate do you lose a bit of your identity and replace it, or does assimilation only add to your identity?
10. Has anyone asked you what you are and you had a hard time answering?
11. What are you/Who are you?

**Materials and Resources**

1. Google Classroom / Google Doc with lyrics
2. Paper, Pen, Pencil, highlighters
3. Printout of lyrics if needed
4. Album "No Otro Lado" by Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela w/ Josh Hey  
<https://nootrolado.bandcamp.com/>
5. Youtube
6. Figurative Language Guide
7. Google Translate

## Introduction

The United States is often referred to as “A Nation Built by Immigrants”. In fact, the United States has a love/hate relationship with immigrants, dependent on the narrative trying to be expressed. History books tell stories of immigrants coming to this land in search of a better life, and even engrave on our monuments, words of affirmation for immigrant communities. The statue of liberty as an example states “Give us your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...” While the United States likes to romanticize and exaggerate itself as an inclusive and accepting society, the current and past government administrations offer a counter narrative. A narrative driven by hate and a law and order mentality, that does not pay attention to the circumstances, or push and pull factors that bring these immigrants to the United States.

In the album *No Otro Lado*, Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela, through music and poetry, explores the struggle of immigrants trying to assimilate in a country that constantly oppresses them. A country that has tried to keep them out with a border wall and border security policies, justified out of fear and hatred. Johnson-Valenzuela states,

“No Otro Lado posits that the United States and Mexico are essentially one country with a so-called border that is used as justification for a caste system; as justification for oppression. No Otro Lado is a “conceptual reggaeton” album that exists at an intersection of hip hop, poetry, Latin music more generally, and politics.”

Almost everyone in United States is living here because someone in their family immigrated at one point or another. As generations pass they often times forget that their family came to this country in search of a better life, or to escape some form of oppression.

Students in the United States are dealing with an internal conflict of having to understand government policies that claim to be in place for protection, and their sense of compassion and empathy for humanity.

## LESSON 1

### ENGAGE:



*Journey to the Golden Cage* (2019) by Daniel Jaramillo. Multimedia art created with photoshop.

The image above is titled *Journey to the Golden Cage* it conveys the journey of an immigrant through the desert, traveling to the United States.

- How does this image make you feel?
- Why does the immigrant look the way they do?
- What does the Gold Cage Represent?
- What is immigration and why do people immigrate?
- Why might someone want to come to the United States?

Have students to write in their journals. Let students share their responses with a partner, then have them share as a class.

The immigrant has endured and struggled so much that the journey has changed who they are on a physical level. The desert has overcome them. The outcome, of a better life, is seen as a golden cage (United States), luxurious

and fruitful, but confining. Once immigrants are in the United States, they will most likely not be able to return to their home, they have to assimilate and form a new identity that is in constant conflict with their former self.

### EXPLORE

The teacher will share a google document with the students that has the lyrics to all three songs. As a class, we will analyze the first three listed songs from the album “No Otro Lado” by Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela and answer the guiding questions. The idea is to teach students how to annotate and analyze songs lyrics. After listening to each song, go through and annotate the lyrics with them. The teacher will use the figurative language guide to help students learn and analyze figurative language within the lyrics. You do not have to show them the questions below, pose them as part of a discussion. You can change, add or exclude questions.

**\*\*\*Warning: The song Herencia depicts and recounts cases of mob violence, prep students so they understand how to process this information in a safe and respectful manner, for themselves and others. You can also choose to skip this song and use “Other Riches” instead.**

The three songs will be:

1. The Opposite of a Wall
  1. What is the song about?
  2. How does it make you feel?
  3. What is the opposite of a wall?
  4. Who will save the United States from current US border policies? Do we need saving?
  5. Does the border end at the defined boundaries of the United States?
  6. Do you think the United States is winning when it comes to border policy? Who is defining winning?
2. Herencia
  1. What is the song about?
  2. How does it make you feel?
  3. Are there laws that protect immigrants or minorities against mob violence?
  4. Are things different than the events being expressed in the lyrics?
  5. Is the United States the Land of Blood?
3. Tambores de Orgullo
  1. What is the song about?
  2. How does it make you feel?
  3. What does it mean to assimilate?
  4. Have you ever felt like you had to assimilate to something?
  5. When you assimilate do you lose a bit of your identity and replace it, or does assimilate only add to your identity?

6. Has anyone asked you what you are and you had a hard time answering?
  7. Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela poses the question “What are you”? Why might immigrants be confused about who they are?
4. Other riches
1. Did the civil rights act do enough?
  2. Is racism over? Will it ever be?
  3. What is machismo? Is it a good or bad thing?
  4. How do we amend the constitution?
  5. What are some legislative changes we can make to be more inclusive?
  6. Do we have an honest constitution?

### **EVALUATE: Assessment**

Students will be asked to write a half to full page response to one of the three songs analyzed as a class. Students should be using their figurative language guide to help them with their summary. They should reference figurative language in their writing from the lyrics.

They should focus on their annotations and the guiding questions for each song, it is important they are documenting either in their journal or computer what the class is discussing to use for their assessment.

They can write about how the song made them feel, what the song is discussing, and what they personally learned from the song, have them reference the actual sounds of the music as well.

Students should be able to understand the perspective of immigrants living in the United States, the transformation they go through, and the way the United States treats immigrants. They must understand how immigrant communities assimilate and are often times conflicted in their own binational identity.

## **Lesson 2**

### **ENGAGE:**

Have a few students share their half page summaries from the day before. You can do this by allowing students to volunteer or pick up the responses and read them aloud to the class. Keep students anonymous, only read the content, do not let them know who wrote it.

Ask students to write in their journal by answering the following as a warm-up:

1. Have you ever had to assimilate to something? A new school, city, neighborhood, country? What are some things you gained from being in your new space, what are some things you have lost?

2. Does migration end once you get to your destination? Or is it an ongoing journey?

### EXPLORE:

This will be a guided project, where students should be given two days in class to complete. Students will work individually to find other narratives of immigrants who have come to the United States. The goal is to find songs that focus on the topic of immigration, assimilation, binationalism, or identity. Students will use youtube to research songs that focus on immigration. Lyrics to songs might be in other languages, have google translate to help students understand lyrics.

Students will need to:

1. Create a google doc
2. Use YouTube to find three songs focusing on the topic
3. Create a playlist on their google doc with all three songs
4. Playlist must include:
  1. Link to to the songs
  2. Lyrics to the songs
  3. Annotations for each song (as modeled the day before)
  4. An image that represents each song
5. Students will also be asked to write a one page response for one of the three songs on their playlist. Students should use evidence from the songs lyrics. Students should be using their figurative language guide to help them with their summary. They should reference figurative language in their writing.

### EVALUATE: Assessment

After students have finished their playlist with their one page summary, they will be asked to present with the class, the song that they chosen, the image that represents the song, and their one page summary. You can have students do their presentations as a gallery walk with their devices. Have their song opened and ready to be played with headphones, and a digital or printed copy of their summary.

\*You can have students go one by one in front of the class, they can play all or a snippet of their song. They will share their image, and read their summary aloud to the class.

Teacher should create a rubric to give to students to guide them through he process.

### **EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning**

As a pre or post assignment, you can cover current United States policy decisions and their effect on immigrant communities. You can relate them back to the four songs covered above.

1. The opposite of a wall - Government
  1. Separation of families
  2. Border Wall and its funding
  3. Detention Centers
  
2. Herencia - Government
  1. Laws/rights that have been put in place to protect immigrant or minority communities in the United States.
  2. Have we seen an increase of mob violence in the United States?
  3. Is the government doing anything about it?
  
3. Tambores de Orgullo - Government
  1. Does the US government respect its immigrant/minority communities through its policies?
  2. How has the US policy to expand westward effected immigrant or minority communities in the United States?
  
4. Other riches - Government
  1. Laws regarding equal rights
  2. Civil Rights Act
  3. Redistribution of wealth and rights
  4. Does the Constitution has racist and masculine language
  5. Do we need to amend our constitution to reflect our future values?

### **Accommodations and Modifications**

Some accommodations and modifications to consider are as follows:

1. Have paper copies for students who do not want to annotate digitally.
2. Have google translate handy, some of the lyrics may be in Spanish or in other languages.
3. Have lyrics with annotations already prepared for students.
4. Outline the material for the student before reading a selection.
5. Create a checklist for students to help guide and complete their projects.
6. Have a pre lesson where students learn vocabulary terms and US policy decisions.
7. Provide a sheet with vocabulary terms
8. Instead of having to write one page, cut it down to half a page or one paragraph.

9. If students do not want to analyze lyrics, have them write their own song lyrics that talk about the journey of an immigrant or of their own journey.
10. Have students work in pairs or in groups to break up work amongst each other.
11. If technology access is an issue, reserve a computer lab in the school to allow students to work on assignment.

### College and Career Readiness

Using the document developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the following [College and Career Readiness Standards](#) (CCRS) complement the lesson plan in English/ language arts and social studies:

### English/Language Arts

- I. Compose a variety of texts that demonstrate clear focus, the logical development of ideas in well-organized paragraphs, and the use of appropriate language that advances the author's purpose. **(Writing)**
- II. Locate explicit textual information, draw complex inferences, and analyze and evaluate the information within and across texts of varying lengths. **(Reading)**
- III. Understand the elements of communication both in informal group discussions and formal presentations (e.g., accuracy, relevance, rhetorical features, organization of information). **(Speaking)**
- IV. Apply listening skills as an individual and as a member of a group in a variety of settings (e.g., lectures, discussions, conversations, team projects, presentations, interviews). **(Listening)**
- V. **Research**
  - a. Formulate topic and questions.
  - b. Select information from a variety of sources.
  - c. Produce and design a document.

### Social Studies

- I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills
  - A. Spatial analysis of physical and cultural processes that shape the human experience
  - B. Periodization and chronological reasoning
  - C. Change and continuity of political ideologies, constitutions, and political behavior
  - D. Change and continuity of economic systems and processes
  - E. Change and continuity of social groups, civic organizations, institutions, and their interaction

### Additional Resources

The following resources support teaching and learning about the borderlands and identity:

Erika L. Sanchez. "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter."  
PenguinRandomHouse, 2017.

Luiselli, Valeria. "Tell Me How it Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions."  
Coffee House Press, 2017.

Morales, Miguel M. "This is a Migrant Poem." In *Green Mountains Review*,  
Volume 29, Number 2, 2017.

### Works Cited

No Otro Lado. "The opposite of a wall." Bandcamp, <https://nootrolado.bandcamp.com/>. Marissa Johnson Valenzuela w/Josh Hey, 2018. Vinyl EP.

No Otro Lado. "Herencia." Bandcamp, <https://nootrolado.bandcamp.com/>. Marissa Johnson Valenzuela w/Josh Hey, 2018. Vinyl EP.

No Otro Lado. "Tambores de Orgullo." Bandcamp, <https://nootrolado.bandcamp.com/>. Marissa Johnson Valenzuela w/Josh Hey, 2018. Vinyl EP.

No Otro Lado. "Other riches." Bandcamp, <https://nootrolado.bandcamp.com/>. Marissa Johnson Valenzuela w/Josh Hey, 2018. Vinyl EP.

### Reflection:

When creating this lesson, I really wanted to focus on music and poetry. The album "No Otro Lado" is a great musical example and exploration on the topics of immigration, binationalism, identity, and assimilation. The music also gives the student a sonic way to learn and understand the message behind the concept. I believe it is important to employ all types of media within the classroom.