

**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 6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup>)

**Lesson Plan: *Borders Near and Far-A Global and Local  
Investigation of Borderlands***

**Prepared by**

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**Marty Frazier** hails from Cleveland, Ohio, and teaches 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade literature at Hathaway Brown School. Marty has taught in public, charter, and independent schools and has worked with elementary through high school students in a variety of educational contexts. Outside of teaching, Marty is a part-time graduate student pursuing an M.A. in English with a focus on 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature. In Cleveland, he can be found romping around the Cuyahoga Valley National Park with his Goldendoodle, Theo, and cheering on the Cavaliers. He is thrilled to bring back Borderland stories to the Midwest and hopes to infuse his curriculum with diverse narratives of the region.

**Subject Area:** High School Language Arts

**Keywords:** US-Mexico Border, Identity, Mexican-American History, Urban/Suburban borders, Yuri Herrera, Immigration Policies, Immigration Debate

**Grade Level:** 11-12

**Time Required to Complete:** 120 minutes

**Instructional Objectives and Student Learning**

[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.RI.11-12.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.b](#)

Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts,

extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

### Guiding Questions

1. What are the borders in our everyday lives?
2. How do borders join differences as much as divide differences?
3. Where does America end and begin?
4. Who belongs in America?
5. How do the characters in our reading and the subjects in reality negotiate complex and contradictory identities?
6. What does it mean to cross a border? What are the impacts of crossing?

### Lesson #1 Objectives and Outcomes:

#### Objectives:

1. Introduce major themes and questions of our border studies unit and primary text, *Signs Preceding the End of the World*.
2. Develop a cursory historical context of the US/Mexico border.
3. Explore the narratives and mythologies of the border.

#### Outcomes:

1. Expand your understanding of the definition of a border.
2. Determine borderlands in your own community based on this definition.
3. Develop questions to guide our investigation of Borderlands in Cleveland.

### Lesson #2 Objectives and Outcomes

#### Objectives:

1. Gather statistics and stories on those crossing America's border with Mexico without documentation.
2. Disrupt and counter stereotypes and assumptions about migrants from Mexico.
3. Introduce this question—What should America's policy on immigration be?

#### Outcomes:

1. By the end of the day you will be able to evaluate different positions on the immigration debate.
2. You will be able to use facts and narratives from resources to argue your opinion on a variety of immigration related topics.
3. You will determine the questions you'd like to guide further study of this topic

### Materials and Resources

1. Copies of Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World*
2. Attached PowerPoint Slides
3. Attached Graphic Organizers
4. Attached reading guide to *Signs Preceding the End of the World* by Yuri Herrera.
5. NPR Borderlands Coverage: <http://apps.npr.org/borderland/>
6. *NY Times*: "Here's the Reality about Illegal Immigrants in the United States"  
[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/06/us/politics/undocumented-illegal-immigrants.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/06/us/politics/undocumented-illegal-immigrants.html?_r=0)
7. *NY Times* "The Immigration Debate We Really Need"  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/opinion/the-immigration-debate-we-need.html>
8. Poem *Graduation Morning* by Pat Mora
9. Song: *Ice (El Hielo)* by La Santa Cecilia  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/10/ice-el-hielo-brings-immig\\_n\\_3053630.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/10/ice-el-hielo-brings-immig_n_3053630.html)

### **Introduction and Rationale**

These two lessons are meant to be a small part of a larger unit about literature on the border. Throughout the semester, we will be exploring texts that showcase characters on the edge, straddling different worlds and identities. Beginning with Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding The End of the World* and then moving on to *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *Fences* by August Wilson, *The Refugees* by Viet Nguyen, and *The Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The goals of the lessons are not to cover borders in exhaustion but rather to prime student thought on the semester to come and to get them thinking critically about the borders in their own lives, not to mention the U.S.-Mexico border and America's policy toward migrants.

The second goal is to introduce students to our larger study of Shaker Square, Cleveland. Shaker is a diverse, urban borderland space, a real microcosm of Cleveland at large, and it sits at the border with Shaker Heights, a predominantly affluent suburb. Nationally renowned restaurants sit across from vacant lots; wealthy suburbanites and low-income Cleveland residents mix at the farmer's market on Saturdays. Our longer term goal is to collect stories and perspectives about this border space, ultimately asking community members to think about "who belongs" in their own local community and the impact that borders create in Cleveland.

### **Instructional and Lesson Activities:**

Please see attached PPT and graphic organizer for step by step scripting of the lesson. This includes pacing, questions, outcomes, and products.

### **Accommodations and Modifications**

The lesson is designed to be modified easily to match a variety of needs. The visual cues of the Powerpoint and the attached graphic organizer will support students who need help with note-taking or processing.

Because it is an introductory lesson, very few skills or types of prior knowledge are required. Students can follow along with the lesson on their own computer as well as at the front of the classroom. The graphic organizer will also help students keep pace with the lesson and assure they are staying on track. All questions and material will be easily accessible for students at a later date for their reference.

### Works Cited

Bass, Randall. *Border Texts*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999. New York: Print.

Borjas, George. "The Immigration Debate We Need." *New York Times*. 27 Feb. 2017.

*NYTimes.com*. Web. Accessed July 25, 2017.

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<https://apps.npr.org/borderland/>. Accessed July 25, 2017.

Mora, Pat. *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults, 1984–1999*.

Piñata Books–Arte Público Press, 2000.

Yee, Vivan. "Here's the Reality about Illegal Immigrants in the United States." *New York*

*Times*. 6 Mar. 2017. *NYTimes.com*. Web. Accessed July 25, 2017.

### Reflection

My hope is that this lesson will initiate conversations with students about the borders and boundaries in their own lives. I want students in Cleveland to connect with stories of the U.S.-Mexico border to engender empathy and understanding with folks seemingly disconnected from themselves through distance and experience. I want students to investigate questions of belonging, identity, and geography in both a local and global context so that they can be critical citizens of the world. I hope that our investigation has an impact on our community and that students carry these perspectives into their lives in college and beyond.