

**TALES FROM THE
CHIHUAHUAN DESERT:**
A NEH Summer Institute

July 28, 2019

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 6th–12th)



Lesson Plan: ***Using the Written Works of José Antonio Burciaga to Explore Bilingualism, Binationalism, and Biliteracy.***

Prepared by **Ricardo A. Valenzuela**

Ricardo A. Valenzuela lives and works in Roswell, New Mexico. He teaches Spanish One and Spanish Three (Honors) at Goddard High School. His hobbies include fishing, reading, bicycling, hiking, swimming, and playing the flute. He serves as the representative for Goddard High School with the New Mexico Teachers' Liaison Network. Ricardo is a United States Army veteran with ten years of service, active and reserve. He also holds the position as the Director of the Roswell Flute Ensemble. Ricardo will incorporate the knowledge gained from the Summer Institute in his teaching about the cultural, linguistic, and literary richness of borderlands communities. He is available at ricardoavalenzuela@yahoo.com or RValenzuela@risd.k12.nm.us.

Subject Area: Spanish Language Arts, English Language Arts, Social Studies

Keywords: bilingualism, binationalism, biliteracy, nicknaming, identity, Mexican, Chicano(a), Latino(a), Spanish, English, Anglo-American, literature, fluency, mistranslation, *caló*, tradition, stereotyping, immigrate, border, accent, misspellings, mispronunciations, monolingual, gringos, dialect, emigrate, vernacular, evolution, syncretism, fusion, resemanticization, cross-cultural, assimilate, transculturate, adapt, anglicization, hispanization, pejorative, exploitation, connotation, ambiguity, propaganda.

Grade Level: 9th – 12th

Time Required to Complete: 450 minutes



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July 28, 2019

Introduction: There has been a marked increase in the number and quality of Chicano/Chicana and Latino/Latina writings in English and Spanish in the United States of America and abroad within the last thirty years. No topic or area of interest has been left untouched by these writers. Their interests range from history (J. Hernández), social action (García), linguistics (Andalucía), fiction (Cisneros), comedy (F. Hernández), poetry (Aragón), reportage (Zamora), young adult (Sánchez), and children (Herrera).

One of the most remarkable, timely, erudite, and funny of these writers is José Antonio Burciaga (1940-1996). Born and raised in El Paso, Texas along the border between the United States and México, Burciaga lived and wrote about his trials and triumphs of being a bilingual, binational, and biliterate literary figure of the southwestern borderlands.

In his many works, Burciaga – “ . . . *seeks the roots of his Chicano heritage in Mexico and Texas, telling today’s Mexican Americans how the Chicano movement has changed their lives for the better. His personal anecdotes of growing up a stranger to both of his native lands speak to today’s immigrants, especially the second and third generations.*”—*Library Journal*

Burciaga’s written works include books, poems, essays, novels, and short stories. His most widely published and available titles are –

- a. WeeDee Peepo. Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University Press, 1988.
- b. Drink Cultura: Chicanismo. Santa Bárbara, CA: Joshua Odell Editions/Capa Press, 1992.
- c. Undocumented Love/Amor indocumentado. San José, CA: Chusma House Publications, 1992.
- d. Spilling the Beans: Lotería Chicana. Santa Bárbara, CA: Joshua Odell Editions, 1995.
- e. In Few Words/En pocas palabras: A Compendium of Latino Folk Art and Wisdom – A Bilingual Edition. San Francisco, CA: Mercury House, 1997.

Burciaga’s works are easily incorporated into the curricula of high school Spanish language arts, English language arts, or social studies. His writings are profound yet easily accessible to all students because of his simple and witty writing. When using his works, it is recommended that these questions guide their use –

Guiding Questions

1. How do we identify ourselves in a border area?
2. How do we identify ourselves in a global community?
3. What is a border?
4. Are borders internal, external, self-imposed, or super-imposed?



July 28, 2019

Guiding Questions (continued)

5. Are there borders in our classroom? Our school? Our community?
6. Are there borders in our hearts and minds?
7. What advantages do we get from being bilingual, binational, and biliterate?

Instructional Objectives and Student Learning

- For **Spanish Language Arts** as shown in the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages – interact with cultural competence and understanding (<https://www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages/standards-summary>)
- For **English Language Arts** taken from the National Council of Teachers of English -- Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles. (<http://www2.ncte.org/>)
- For **Social Studies** taken from the National Council for Social Studies – people, places, and environments because in today’s social, cultural, economic and civic issues demand that students apply knowledge, skills, and understandings as they address questions such as: Why do people decide to live where they do or move to other places? Why is location important? How do people interact with the environment and what are some of the consequences of those interactions? What physical and other characteristics lead to the creation of regions? How do maps, globes, geographic tools and geospatial technologies contribute to the understanding of people, places, and environments? (<https://www.socialstudies.org/>)

Materials and Resources (N.B. class sets of the books that are cited are preferred however many of Burciaga’s works are out of circulation and consequently expensive to acquire)

1. Copy of *Chicano Terms of Endearment* (pages 28-32, in English and Spanish) from WeeDee Peepo.
2. Copy of *Bilingual Cognates* (pages 170-173, English only) from Spilling the Beans.
3. Copy of *What’s in a Spanish Name?* (pages 97-101, English only) from Spilling the Beans.



July 28, 2019

Materials and Resources (continued)

4. Copy of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Form I-485 – *Application to Register for Permanent Residence or Adjust Status* (aka the **Green Card** application) available at this link -- <https://www.uscis.gov/i-485>.

Instructional and Lesson Activities (Engage, Explore, Explain)

Lesson One for English Language Arts (grades 9-12) –

- a. Have students read *Chicano Terms of Endearment*.
- b. Task students to state their nicknames (if they have one) or give one to themselves if they do not have one.
- c. Ask students to either explain their given nickname or explain why they chose the one that they did.
- d. What does one's God-given name tell us about a person?
- e. What does one's nickname tell us about a person?
- f. Task students to write out and explain five new words from the reading.

Lesson Two for Spanish Language Arts (level 3 or higher) –

- a. Have students read *Chicano Terms of Endearment* in English and Spanish.
- b. Task students to state their nicknames (if they have one) or give one to themselves if they do not have one.
- c. Ask students to either explain their given nickname or explain why they chose the one that they did.
- d. What does one's God-given name tell us about a person?
- e. What does one's nickname tell us about a person?
- f. Task student to write out and explain five new words from the reading in English and Spanish.

Lesson Three for Spanish Language Arts (all levels)

- a. Students read *Bilingual Cognates*.
- b. Students create a list from the reading of the mistranslations and misspellings from the reading, they explain them, and they correct them. They can also discuss any personal instances of misspellings or mispronunciations in English or Spanish.



July 28, 2019

Lesson Three for Spanish Language Arts (all levels – continued)

- c. Task students to create as a class a Word Wall of all of the cognates that they can identify from their daily life.
- d. From the Word Wall, task students to create the 1) longest, coherent sentence that they can from the words, or; 2) create the funniest sentence that they can from the words.
- e. Task students to compare slang in Spanish with slang in English.
- f. What is the purpose of slang in language?

Lesson Four for Social Studies (grades 9-12) –

- a. Students read *What's in a Spanish Name?*
- b. Present students with a list of geographical place names from their state or region. Have students attempt to identify the origin of the place names.
- c. Task students to expand on the list and decipher the origin of the names (i.e. what does it describe or recall or reverence or refer to?)
- d. A similar activity can be done for topographical features and how they describe the land (i.e. butte, mesa, tableland, plateau) or the use of the prefix *trans-* to describe land features (i.e. transmontane, Transylvania).



July 28, 2019

Additional Learning (Extend/Elaborate)

Lesson for Spanish Language Arts, English Language Arts, or Social Studies (grades 9-12) --

- a. Task students to examine this photograph of the US-México border between San Diego and Tijuana –



- b. Task students to describe the picture.
- c. Task students to create a definition of a *border*.
- d. Ask students to identify and explain the borders that they see.
- e. Ask students to identify and explain the borders that they do not see.

Lesson for Spanish Language Arts (level 3 or higher) –

- a. Show students the National Parks Service historical video about the Chamizal available at this link -- <https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=272AE886-155D-451F-678780D818B70B6A>.



TALES FROM THE CHIHUAHUA DESERT:

A NEH Summer Institute

July 28, 2019

Lesson for Spanish Language Arts (level 3 or higher – continued)

- b. Task students to read *Bienvenido Chamizal* (available at this link -- <https://www.cancioneros.com/ca/106/B/cancionero-de-maria-dolores-pradera>) and *Chamizal Blues* (available at this link -- https://www.newspapers.com/image/?clipping_id=3812334&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVILXZpZXctaWQiOiY3Mjk4NjgxLCJpYXQiOiE1NjM5OTUzNDcslmV4cCI6MTU2NDA4MTc0N30.Nbm2pb8QPsFjdKoxtlEzaeryX4ygID95P_SDvTQJstl).
- c. Have students contrast the lyrics of each song.
- d. Task students to make an argument to support one author's lyrics over the author's lyrics.

Lesson for Social Studies (grades 9-12) –

- a. Have students look over the USCIS Form I-485 (available at this link -- <https://www.uscis.gov/i-485>).
- b. Task students to identify the most important questions on the form, the least important, and those that are irrelevant.
- c. Have students explain their how they determined which questions were important, unimportant, or irrelevant.
- d. Have students think about how they get to know a new person in their lives. What do they want to know about the new person? What information is essential? Non-essential?
- e. Have students role-play an immigration official. Which questions would they ask a person who wanted to come into the United States of America?



July 28, 2019

Additional Learning (Extend/Elaborate) -- continued

- f. Students consider and write about these questions – Are borders only physical in nature? Are they psychological? Are borders imposed on us? By whom? For what reasons? Are borders imposed upon ourselves? Why?
- g. Task students to recreate or rephrase their definition of a *border*.

Assessment (Evaluate)

Assessment or evaluation of this work can be formal (i.e. with a grade) or informal (observation, display, or sharing). The latter method is preferred.

Accommodations and Modifications

Any lesson in the unit can be adopted or modified for English Language Learners or students who follow an Individual Education Plan. Specifically the assignments can be given orally and/or visually. Extra time may be given to complete the readings and assignments.

College and Career Readiness

Each of these standards are taken from the ACT Career and Readiness Standards (<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/college-and-career-readiness/standards.html>)

For English Language Arts – knowledge of language.

For Spanish Language Arts – production of writing.

For Social Studies – key ideas and details, and integration of knowledge and ideas.

Additional Resources (the complete works of José Antonio Burciaga)

- **Books:** *Restless Serpents* (1976)
- **Novels:** *Versos para Centroamérica* (1981)
- **Edited works:** *The Last Supper of Chicano Heroes: The Selected Works of José Antonio Burciaga*. Edited by Mimi Gladstein and Daniel Chacón. (2008)



July 28, 2019

Additional Resources (the complete works of José Antonio Burciaga) -- continued

- **Short stories:** *Río Grande, Río Bravo* (1978); *Romantic Nightmare* (1978); *Españolli Titlan Englishic* (1980); *El corrido de Pablo Ramírez* (1980); *Sammy y Los del Tercer Barrio* (1983); *La Sentencia* (1984).
- **Poems:** "La verdad es que me canso" (1976); "It's the Same Guy" (1977); "Smelda and Rio Grande" (1978); "Pasatiempos and There's a Vulture" (1978); "World Premiere" (1978); "Ghost Riders" (1978); "To Mexico with Love" (1978); "Letanía en Caloacutec" (1980); "Dear Max and Without Apologies" (1980); "The Care Package" (1980); "I Remember Masa" (1981); "For Emmy" (1981); "El Retefemenismo and El Juan Cuéllar de San Jo" (1984).

Works Cited (all works by José Antonio Burciaga)

- a. *WeeDee Peepo*. Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University Press, 1988.
- b. *Drink Cultura: Chicanismo*. Santa Bárbara, CA: Joshua Odell Editions/Capa Press, 1992.
- c. *Undocumented Love/Amor indocumentado*. San José, CA: Chusma House Publications, 1992.
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Reflection

Good writing has the power to transform the way students think, react, and interact with the world. José Antonio Burciaga once said – *“To the Nahuas, words were flowers, metaphors that gave birth to thoughts and actions.”*

Burciaga’s words were the seeds that started the garden of Chicano/Chicana literature in the United States. He is as applicable and as enjoyable to read now as he was then and it is hoped that the educator will see, use, and expose the writings of this preeminent author.

Photographs and credits



Clockwise –

- 1) **Photograph of author from Goddard High School archives** (Goddard High School, Roswell, New Mexico, 2019)
- 2) ***Duality* by Bryce Davidson** (<https://www.brycedavidsonart.com/duality>)

Photographs and credits (continued)

3) Chihuahuan desert, NEH Borderlands 2019 archives

(<https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fi.ytimg.com%2Fvi%2FJwlbK8ei26k%2Fhqdefault.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DJwlbK8ei26k&docid=jITQRuSQWPzjfM&tbnid=OUvKhvGfWDhbaM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwi0-eadvtdJAhUSPKOKHSrvCWUQMwhIKAcwBw..i&w=480&h=360&itg=1&bih=625&biw=1366&q=NEH%20Borderlands&ved=0ahUKEwi0-eadvtdJAhUSPKOKHSrvCWUQMwhIKAcwBw&iact=src&uact=8>)

4) San Diego-Tijuana border, This Big City (<http://thisbigcity.net/a-dose-of-social-reality-from-the-san-diego-tijuana-border/>)