

Gordon Hultberg

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Dear Colleagues,

I entered the institute with the expectation that binational narratives would easily inform and translate to my literacy instruction of trans-Pacific students on the West Coast, as well as the more obvious connection with my Latina/o students in Utah. But throughout the course of the first week I realized that this region as a borderland is quite unique because it showcases a real meeting of cultures unlike a port city.

My strongest awareness of El Paso's singular status came to me this week as I met and spoke with local people who opened up to me about their city, their lives, and their art and work. I talked with an art gallery owner who returned here to teach young people how to earn a living creating art. I met the mother of a clothing designer whose creations were being exhibited at a fashion show at the art museum. I sat with a stranger at a pub who just talked about life. I went to the Plaza to hear and see a free concert, and watched old and young dancing on the patio in front of the stage.

As a result, I am drinking in more of the specific kinds of questions Joseph and Ignacio are leading us toward, such as "How do we lead our students to test the veracity of a journalistic source?" or "What Forces are involved in determining which voices are heard?" I expected more actual exercises that would give me practice in new ways I could invite my young students into journalism, acting, and writing, such as those shared by Adriana with storytelling. As my view is shifting and I find myself asking what to do with all this new information being presented, I am surprised to see that borders themselves can be both natural, politically constructed, and also metaphorical.

Borders may be permeable or resistant, inviting or enclosing, guiding our feet or eyes as the frames in a garden or picture do, or separating opposing elements. As I engaged with this more broad understanding of borders and boundaries, I realized many of the pieces of literature I read and teach involve people and societies lingering on a border or threshold. Suddenly my eye has been drawn to even Jane Austen, who enlists border imagery to either elicit humor or critique the tyranny of oppressive enclosures that may destroy natural, indigenous, or previous trees, cultures and structures.

This leads me back to binational literacies, and to the larger questions of the humanities. "What is fair?" as filmmaker Sidney Lumet claims, is the question all his films ask. As I

return to Salt Lake I will carry back the wonderful questions that invite other voices, refrain from premature judgments, and are posed with listening to stories as their aim. Even beyond the intended outcomes of the organizers, I come away having experienced the kindness of classmates who are committed to their work, their students, their schools and colleges, and their communities.

Thank you all for your genuineness these past two weeks,

Gordon