

1. Title and Author of Lesson Plan

Community, Identity and Belonging in "Tell Me How It Ends"
Carlynn Houghton, The Chapin School, New York, NY

Carlynn Houghton is from Brooklyn, New York. She teaches Upper School English at the Chapin School in New York City. In her free time, she loves to read, work in the garden, and cook. Carlynn hopes to apply her knowledge of Chihuahuan Desert narratives to an upper-level course on the literature of migration and binationalism. She can be reached at choughton@chapin.edu.

2. Content or Subject Areas with Keywords

English/Language Arts, Social Studies. *Migrants, refugees, immigration, bilingual, interview, asylum, activism*

3. Grade Levels and Time Required

Grade levels 11-12, four 40-60 minute class periods, plus time to work on an assessment

4. Instructional Objectives and Student Learning

Key Ideas and Details:

[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.RI.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more 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 provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3](#)

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Craft and Structure:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5](#)

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6](#)

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.10

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

5. Guiding Questions

1. What does it mean to live out of sync with borders—to identify as transnational, binational, immigrant, or exile?
2. What are the difficulties or challenges of living *nepantla*, or in-between? What unique knowledges are generated by this way of living? How can we learn from people who experience this “double consciousness” or *nepantla*? How can we act as allies to them?
3. How do individuals and families who are dislocated or isolated from their culture maintain a connection to their identity and folkways while living within another culture?
4. How do border individuals and communities maintain connections and folkways across borders? What is unique about transnational and binational identity formation and maintenance?
5. How do migrants create and maintain communities in liminal or contested spaces?
6. How can we engage with *testimonios*, oral histories, and the collective “I” to understand the nuances of human experience?
7. What are the responsibilities of citizens towards immigrants, or of those who belong towards those who wish to belong?
8. How can art and literature capture the experiences of transnational or displaced people?

6. Materials and Resources

Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends*

Handout: “El Barrio: The Transnational Roots of MS-13”

Handout: “Push and Pull Factors in Migration from Mexico and the Northern Triangle”

Handout: “The Migrant’s Prayer”

7. Introduction

This unit is envisioned as part of a larger course on migration, binationalism, refuge, and exile. Texts for the course would include *Salt Houses* (Alyan), *The Book of Unknown Americans* (Henríquez), *House Built on Ashes* (Rodriguez), *The Jungle* (Robertson and Murphy), and *Tell Me How It Ends* (Luiselli). This unit takes *Tell Me How It Ends* as its central text about the refugee experience. In particular, it seeks to consider questions of identity, power, belonging, culture, and community, and asks how historical and political events and experiences continue to shape these fundamental human concerns.

8. Instructional and Lesson Activities (ENGAGE, EXPLORE, EXPLAIN)

The book is divided into four readings; lesson plans for each reading are below.

Day 1: *Tell Me How It Ends*, 7-33

Writing Prompt

Choose a euphemism, idiom, legal term, weasel word, or example of jargon that Luiselli chooses in the book and reflect on how this use of language works both literally and figuratively. Compare the denotation and connotation of the words. How do you feel about this use of language?

Discussion Questions

1. What terminology did you choose for the writing prompt? What struck you about this use of language?

2. Look at the title of the book. What are its implications? How does it address the reader? The original Spanish title of the essay is “Los Niños Perdidos”, “The Lost Children”. Why might she have changed the title for an English-speaking audience?
3. What are Luiselli’s shifting roles in the drama of American immigration? How do her identities—race, class, citizenship, residency, education level—place her at different times in different positions relative to power?
4. What did you learn about the process of migration from this text? How does a person request asylum in the United States?

Day 2: *Tell Me How It Ends*, 35-53

Discussion Questions

1. What are the roots of the gang violence that the children are fleeing?
2. Luiselli describes the historical interactions between the United States, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala as “an absurd, circular nightmare”. What other absurd, circular nightmares are depicted in this book?
3. How does Luiselli use verbal, situational, and dramatic irony to illustrate her points?
4. What is the significance of the “piece of paper” that the refugee boy carries? Why does he show it to Luiselli? Why is it important?

Handout (See “Materials and Resources” Section)

“Push and Pull Factors in Migration from Mexico and the Northern Triangle Countries”

Mapping Activity

Use Google maps to look at a map of the area, have students identify countries and map migrant routes

Day 3: *Tell Me How It Ends*, 55-69

Writing Prompt

What does it mean to belong in a place or in a group? Think of a place where you feel like you belong, and write about why you belong there. What makes you fit in? Are there ways that you don’t fit in, even in this place where you belong?

Activity

Have students put their places of belonging up on the board. Categorize them into types of belonging—familial, social, economic, national, cultural, common interest, etc.

Follow-up Writing Prompt

What would you do if you lost this place of belonging? Where would you go to belong?

Discussion Questions

1. Which stories stood out to you in last night’s reading? How does Luiselli characterize the children she interviews?
2. What is the difference between asylum and SIJ status? Which is preferable, according to Luiselli? Why?
3. Is there a moral difference between fleeing extreme violence and fleeing extreme poverty? Is there a moral imperative for children to live with adults who care for them? To live with their parents?

Handout (See “Materials and Resources” Section)

“The Migrant’s Prayer”

Day 4: *Tell Me How It Ends*, 69-99

Writing Prompt

What does it mean to belong in a place where many other people wish to belong? What responsibilities accompany this privilege? If you are a U.S. citizen, consider that identity in particular.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Manu's story. What stood out to you about his experiences?
2. What is the "shared hemispheric history" between North and South America? How does Programa Frontera Sur play into that history? How has this history driven population movements around the hemisphere? How does the story of MS-13 fit into that narrative?
3. What is Luiselli talking about when she describes "the great theater of belonging"? What is your role in this theater? What role do you wish you played? What role do Luiselli's students decide to play?

Handout (See "Materials and Resources" Section)

"A brief history of MS-13 in Los Angeles, Central America, and the United States"

Consider the role of community and place in the language and practice of this organization.

9. EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

How will students apply new learning, create new knowledge, and demonstrate conceptual understanding? If teachers had more time, what else could they do to expand the learning of concepts through your lesson plan?

1. *Interdisciplinary unit (Spanish language)*: Have students choose one story from the bracero archive or the migrant archive at the UTEP Institute of Oral History, listen to the story, translate one paragraph or anecdote, and present the anecdote to the class.
2. Read Luiselli's book with *The Jungle* by Joe Robertson and Joe Murphy. How do these texts ask you to think about how communities are formed, supported, and destroyed. What factors allow communities to form? What is required for them to flourish? How are communities crippled or destroyed?
3. Students choose, analyze, and present one podcast from NPR's "Borderlands" series.
4. Read Jose Emilio Pacheco's "High Treason". What does it mean to be a patriot?
5. Team up with a local refugee organization to assess the needs of migrant populations in your area and provide appropriate services.

10. EVALUATE: Assessment

Possible assessments include:

1. Choose an excerpt from the book. Use Microsoft Sway to animate the text with songs, photographs, and primary sources; analyze Luiselli's text and your found texts to illuminate how the artists use literary devices, visual devices, musical choices, and lyrical choices to think about the experience of migration and community formation.
2. Choose one of the stories described in the book. Imagine that you are a lawyer preparing the child for her or his day in immigration court. What would you emphasize or deemphasize about his or her story?
3. Choose a character from the book and make an illustrated map of her or his journey. Consider how you will mark time, distance, physical geography, and emotional geography in your map. How will you use visual media to illustrate challenges, dangers, fears, and successes?
4. Do you have a family member or friend who was a migrant or a refugee? Interview her or him about his or her journey to the United States and make a short film about her or his story. Scaffold the narrative with ideas, terminology, or examples drawn from your reading of *Tell Me How It Ends*.

11. Accommodations and Modifications

1. Students who are more fluent in Spanish may prefer to read the Spanish edition of the book (*Los Niños Perdidos*)

2. The teacher may adjust the content and presentation of the materials as appropriate.
3. The teacher may break the readings into shorter chunks.
4. The teacher may consider using graphic novels such as *Migrant* to illustrate the complex politics of the Americas.

12. College and Career Readiness (optional)

n/a

13. Additional Resources

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

Immigrant Legal Resource Center. "Asylum." <https://www.ilrc.org/asylum>

International Justice Resource Center. Asylum and the Rights of Refugees. <https://ijrcenter.org/refugee-law/>

Migrant. Hope Border Institute and Kino Border Institute. <https://www.hopeborder.org/migrant>

Mora, Pat. *Nepantla*. University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

NPR, "Borderland" Series: <http://apps.npr.org/borderland/>

Pacheco, José Emilio. "High Treason." Quoted in the Los Angeles Review of Books.

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/seven-poems-jose-emilio-pacheco/#!>

Regan, Margaret. *The Death of Josseline*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.

Robertson, Joe, and Joe Murphy. *The Jungle*. Faber and Faber, 2019.

UTEP Institute of Oral History, Bracero Archive: <https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/bracero/>

14. References (or Works Cited)

Bejarano, Cynthia. Lecture. July 19, 2019. NEH Summer Institute: "Borderlands Stories." The University of Texas at El Paso.

Luiselli, Valeria. *Tell Me How It Ends*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017.

McBride, James and Mohamed Alie Sergie. "NAFTA's Economic Impact." *The Council on Foreign Relations*. October 1, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/background/naftas-economic-impact>. Accessed July 27, 2019.

Meyer, Peter J. and Maureen Taft-Morales. "Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy." The Congressional Research Service. June 13, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF11151.pdf> Accessed July 27, 2019.

"The Migrant's Prayer." World Prayers Archive.

https://www.worldprayers.org/archive/prayers/adorations/the_journey_towards_you_lord_is_life.html Accessed July 23, 2019.

MS-13 in the Americas: How the World's Most Notorious Gang Defies Logic, Resists Destruction. InSight Crime and the Center for Latin American Studies at American University.

<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1043576/download> Accessed July 24, 2019.

15. Reflection

The most difficult part of my unit development process was to stop researching and start planning! The materials I encountered every day in the course were so interesting, and my classmates kept bringing new creative and critical texts to my attention, and I kept coming up with more ideas of ways that I could incorporate them into my curriculum. In the end, I limited myself to one four-day unit that could be embedded within a broader course.

In the eyes of many Americans, the image of the migrant is a figure of deracination constructed largely by the fear of obsolescence and vulnerability. I hope that this unit helps students to recognize migrants as complex, diverse people who, like most of us, make decisions under the constraints of circumstances that they largely do not control; to understand how the social, cultural, political, and economic interrelation of the American continents has created those circumstances; and to see themselves as active, principled, and self-aware participants in what Luiselli calls “the great theater of belonging” that is the United States.

As a teacher, I often think of Toni Morrison’s exhortation: “Your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.” Luiselli is an inspiring example of this principle, and I hope I have helped to make her text and its historical and political context more accessible to other teachers.