



**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: Forgotten Voices: The Bracero Program**

**Prepared by**  
**Kaye Mullins** and **Gordon Hultberg**  
**The University of Texas at El Paso**      **Sego Lily School of Salt Lake City, UT**

**Kaye Mullins** is the Education Curator for the Centennial Museum at the University of Texas at El Paso. She is a member of the Texas Native Plant Society and the Chihuahuan Desert Environmental Coalition. She creates workshops for adults to include UTEP students, and community members from El Paso and the surrounding area. Subjects have included gardening in the desert, creative writing, and Pueblo weaving among others. Her latest research activity includes storytelling and how to teach it. She will be gathering community stories enabling community members to explore their ability to write as well as discovering where they came from and who they are.

Kaye is currently working to create a better understanding of sustainability in the desert. Our food and water should be protected. When not researching the next project she enjoys white water rafting, photography, and discovering new places.

**Gordon Hultberg** is a veteran teacher of English, Drama, and the Humanities with an interest in Arts and Letters, Christianity, and democratic and student-directed learning. A California native, he teaches in Salt Lake City, which has a significant immigrant and refugee population. He hopes to use new strategies among binational students in Utah and California and in web-based instruction, and to continue conversations with a community of critical educators.

Gordon enjoys biking, parakeets, jazz piano, Charles Dickens, and James Lee Burke. He is an independent scholar the Dickens Universe 2017, and leader of his local St. John's College Alumni chapter.

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

**Keywords:** Bracero, Migrant, Migration, Discrimination

**Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup>

**Time Required to Complete:** 50 minutes

### **Introduction – 10 Minutes**

Most Americans know very little about the Bracero Program, the nation's largest experiment with guest workers. Indeed, until very recently, this important story has been inadequately documented and studied, even by scholars. The bracero program grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of Mexican men to come to the United States to work on, short-term, primarily agricultural labor contracts. From 1942 to 1964, 4.6 million contracts were signed, with many individuals returning several times on different contracts, making it the largest U.S. contract labor program.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. What were the provisions of the bill that congress passed in regards to living conditions for migrants?
2. What can you learn about a typical Bracero program migrant from the contract? Do you think they were treated fairly? Why or why not?
3. How did these migrant workers affect the US economy? Do you think they gained something as well?
4. After looking at the images of migrant living conditions, do you think the bill passed by congress was enforced? Why or why not?
5. Why did the United States start the Bracero Program? Do you think it was a benefit? Do you think it benefitted Mexico as well? Why or why not?
6. Compare and contrast the immigration of the 1950s with immigration nowadays? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? Do you think immigrants nowadays are working the same types of jobs?
7. Do you think agricultural workers live in the same conditions nowadays? Why or why not?

### **Instructional Objectives and Student Learning**

Students will be able to analyze the role of the Bracero Program. Students will compare and contrast the immigration of agricultural workers to modern day immigration as demonstrated verbally and in writing.

## **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[.]

### **Materials and Resources**

Media clips from two or three different news reports or segments

Map of West Texas and the Chihuahua Desert regions

Internet Access

Projector

Laptop

Pens

Paper

## **Instructional and Lesson Activities (Engage, Explore, Explain)**

Historical research starts with a question about the past. However, piecing together an accurate answer to these questions is not always easy. Sources can complement one another or contradict one another. The historian's job is to explore and evaluate all kinds of sources to construct an answer or interpretation of the past.

Use the primary sources provided to answer the primary question: *Was the bracero program an exploitation of or an opportunity for Mexican laborers? Justify your answer with the primary sources and your analysis of them.*

### Step 1:

Carefully read each document—as you read, explore and evaluate the sources. Think critically about each source separately, writing your thoughts in the margins as you read. Use the guiding questions above each primary source to help you analyze it. Make sure you identify each source to the extent you are able at the bottom of the page.

### Step 2:

Now think about the sources as a whole. Weigh them against one another. Do they conflict with one another? Do they corroborate each other's accounts? If a source is biased, how will that affect its role in your answer? Make notes (preferably in another color) in the margins and underline or highlight as you re-read to find the best way to fashion a fair answer. We recommend you use a piece of scratch paper to outline your points and the evidence you plan to make each point. Consider a four section format: introduction, evidence for, evidence against, conclusion.

### Step 3:

After you have thought carefully about the documents, answer the essential question, justifying your answer with the primary sources and your analysis of them.

## **Additional Ideas & Information**

### **Building Background Knowledge:**

Consider building background knowledge about the bracero program with the video or podcast at the links below. Video:

<http://www.objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/shorthandledhoe/> Podcast:

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/braceroproject.mp3>

### **Infuse Drama:**

Students could take on the perspective of the people from the activity as a whole class or in small groups. For more in depth research, assign them to listen to the entire interview, which can be found on the Bracero History Archive (link under “Add Sources”).

### **Build an Understanding of Interpretation:**

This activity can be used to help students understand that the same primary sources can be interpreted multiple ways. To do this, have students complete the historical investigation alone or in groups and then have the individuals or groups compare their narratives with each other to discover any differences in interpretation.

### **Use Real People and Real Stuff:**

Consider trying to find actual objects to go along with the activity—for instance, you can cut a normal hoe down to 24 inches to make a replica cortito. You may also be able to find men and women in your community who were a part of bracero program, had family members who were part of the bracero program, or interacted with braceros in some way. You could invite them to speak to your class.

## **Lesson Introduction**

Step 1: View a short clip on the Bracero program.

Think about Bracero Program and problems Mexican immigrants faced.  
Discuss the benefits gained by this source of labor.

## **Content Delivery**

Step 2: Revisit the vocabulary words throughout the lecture.

Ensure students have written down the correct definitions.

Ask students to form a circle of desks.

Handout documents to include:

Transcript of the Bracero Program Bill

Series of photos showing life for migrants in the Bracero Program

Close reading of a portion of the bill and a discussion of the Bracero Program. Provide another handout with a series of questions that the students will be expected to answer during the discussion.

## **Student Engagement (Critical Thinking)**

Step 3: Close read and discussion of the bill discussing the law for providing migrants with proper housing conditions

Provide a sample of a migrant's work contract.

View images that accompany the documents.

Ask an open-ended question, "What does the portion of the bill say about living conditions for the Bracero workers?"

Students will be taking notes on other student's answers.

## **Putting it All Together**

The instructor will take this time to wrap up the discussion and answer any questions students have about the topic. The instructor will then ask students to fill out an "exit slip" asking them to list the most interesting thing they learned today and one thing that they would like more clarification on. The instructor will then ask students to turn these in as the bell rings.

## **Resources (Books, Websites, Handouts, Materials)**

Primary Documents (Bracero Program Bill, Bracero Worker Contract, Images of Living Conditions), Youtube video for video clip.

<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/502>

<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2714>

<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1396>

<http://www.ccrh.org/comm/moses/primary/bracero.html>

<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1169>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL5d9CWV0Xg>

## **Additional Resources:**

The Bracero History Archive contains the original oral histories and many more. Many of the interviews are in Spanish. Some have a synopsis of the interview that you can use, or this would be a great opportunity for Spanish speaking students to translate. <http://historyexplorer.si.edu/resource/?key=2348>

*Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program 1942-1964*, an online exhibition  
<http://historyexplorer.si.edu/resource/?key=2346>

*A Nation of Immigrants*, part of the *America on the Move* Exhibit  
<http://historyexplorer.si.edu/resource/?key=165>

## **Reflection**

Each of us experiences learning through our own lens, through our own history and memories. I hope to make a difference through storytelling about the struggle of immigrant workers. Their story continues today and I strive to help everyone understand the hardworking people who are not mentioned on the news casts. They are watching at home, shaking their heads and saying “this is not who we are”.