



**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:** 90 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. How did the tools they used impact their health? Do you think the small hoe was a good idea? Why or why not?
2. How do you think this program will be remembered?
3. What would the responsibilities of the Narrator be? What would the responsibilities of the Recorder be?

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

Students will be able to analyze the role of the Bracero Program. Students will experience some of the uncomfortable working conditions and record their impressions in writing and a recorded presentation on podcast.

### **National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: [Chapter 2, The Themes of Social Studies](#)**

- (1) Culture
- (3) People, Places, and Environments
- (4) Individual Development
- (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 Chihuahuan Desert regions

Copy of the contracts for Braceros (see Resources)

Internet access

Projector

Laptop

Pens

Paper

Garden Hoe with 24” handle (24)

Or plastic shovels (for children) (24)

Sand or dirt on empty lot

Devices for recording voice

### **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 as straightforward as it may seem. Primary sources can—and often do—conflict with one another, as do secondary sources. That said, sources can also complement one another in a way that allows for a deeper level of historical understanding. The historian’s job is to explore and evaluate all kinds of sources to construct an answer—their interpretation of the past.

Create an Podcast recording for broadcast. Add to the organization’s social media as a lesson in history.

**ACTIVITY 1: You Are There (25 minutes)**

**Step 1:**

Assign each student to a team of two people. One team member will be the worker and the other the scribe.

Distribute a cortito (short hoe) (or a plastic shovel) and a hat to each participant. Instruct them to work for 30 seconds moving blue dirt/sand in the blue area into a pile in the red area.

Team Member A uses the hoe and Team Member B conducts an Interview with Team Member A.

Following the first 30 seconds of work and the interview, Stop after 30 seconds. Students pick up the pen and paper, and answer the following questions "how do your hands feel? How is your breathing changing? are you cool or warm?"

Next return to work for 2 and ½ minutes.

TEACHER asks: "how do your hands feel? How is your breathing changing? are you cool or warm? How does your back feel?"

Student write their responses on paper.

**ACTIVITY 2: Memoir and perspective (20 mins)**

Instructions: "We're going to create a memory for one of the farm workers. Using your imagination, create a diary entry for your character." Allow 7 minutes.

Teacher speaks:

**PROMPTS FOR MEMORY WRITING**

- who is he?
- how does he feel about his work?
- who is he thinking about?
- what parts of his body hurt the most?
- how does the weather affect his work?
- are his tools suitable?

**Modifications/Accommodations**

1. For senior adults with mobility issues, limit the strenuousness and duration of the physical activity--instead emphasize visualization and interview.
2. Supply information and writing prompts in multiple languages with visual icons.

Activity 3: Producing the Podcast: (45 minutes)

Using your interview and memoir, write a script for a 45-60 second podcast

### **Pulling it all together**

Students will be given time to reflect and write about personal connections they have made with the activities, experiences, and materials of the Bracero Program.

Examples include:

- remembering stories of the Bible, such as enslavement to Egypt or valuing a poor worker more than a beast of burden.
- relate a true life story you learned about to a fiction story you have read (John Steinbeck, Sandra Cisneros, Zora Neal Hurston).
- think about your family and friends and the jobs they do. What kind of work might you be doing next? what is a good work environment today?
- are there people in your neighborhood who need your help?
- what subjects interest you right now that you want to make a podcast for?
- what museums will you visit next? why?

**OUTCOME:** record a sound file for your podcast with background music, sounds of desert breeze or animals like birds, and dialogue or narration or memory.

Example: "I am a Bracero..."

### **STANDARDS:**

- **Speaking & Listening - Comprehension and Collaboration**
  1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. Acknowledge new information expressed by others...
- **Writing - Production and Distribution of Writing**
  6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

**Corresponding College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standard**

6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

**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.

---

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

---

Primary Documents ( Bracero Worker Tools, Images of Working and Transportation Conditions), Youtube video for video clip.

#### **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 newscasts. They are watching at home, shaking their heads and saying “this is not who we are”.