

**Tales from the Chihuahuan Desert:
Borderlands Narratives about Identity and Binationalism**
National Endowment for the Humanities and The University of Texas at El Paso
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Borders: Understanding and Overcoming Differences

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Kelly Mullen teaches high school Spanish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Kelly is passionate about teaching her students about the world around them and encourages them to learn more about the issues facing our local and global communities. Kelly is excited that she has had the opportunity to learn firsthand about the cultures and peoples of El Paso and the issues surrounding the borderlands. She hopes that her newfound knowledge of the Chihuahuan Desert histories will broaden the perspectives of her students. She enjoys a variety of activities including camping, kayaking, and traveling. Kelly can be reached at kmullen@olsh.org.

Subject Area: Spanish and Social Studies

Keywords: Belonging, Borders, Chihuahuan Desert, Citizenship, Identity, Immigration, U.S.-Mexico Border

Grade Level: 8th – 10th

Time Required to Complete: 7-8 class periods

Pennsylvania State Standards, Social Studies

Standard - 7.3.C.A

Analyze the human characteristics of **places** and **regions** using the following criteria:

- **Population**
- **Culture**
- **Settlement**
- **Economic activities**
- **Political activities**

PA State Standards, Social Studies [Link](#)

CC.8.6.9-10.E.

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.

PA State Standards, English [Link](#)

CC.1.3.6.H

Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics as well as their use of additional literary elements.

Guiding Questions

1. What makes a border?
2. What borders do you experience in your own life and how do they affect who you are and what your story is?
3. How do borders affect the lives of people living on the border? What are their stories?

Materials and Resources

1. Copies of "Elena" [Here](#) and "Fences," [Here](#) by Pat Mora
2. Copy of "To Live in the Border Means You" [Here](#) by Gloria Anzaldúa
3. Laptop with projector
4. Audio speakers
5. Internet access
6. Access to YouTube and Padlet
7. Map of school districts in Allegheny County [Map Here](#)
8. Prezi [What is a Border?](#)
9. Device for each student with access to internet (computer, tablet, phone)
10. Headphones for each student
11. Paper and pen

Introduction

Although most students do not live on the literal, physical border of their country, all students are forced to navigate figurative borderlands in their day-to-day interactions. Borders can be based on culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, neighborhood, and a myriad of other factors. In schools, students have to decide with whom to sit at lunch, which levels of classes to take, and how to dress and comport themselves. These decisions, among others, determine the social group(s), with which they associate, and the collective decision-making of the group define the figurative borders within which the group operates.

In the book *Border People*, Oscar J. Martínez notes, “The essential functions of a border are to keep people in their own space and to prevent, control, or regulate interactions among them.” Unfortunately, the visible and invisible borders that students are compelled to define, understand and navigate have the power to prevent and control interactions and lead to misconceptions. These borders dull the sense of compassion and empathy that we should be instilling in our students. The concept of the broader community, and compassion for all of its members, gets left behind.

In the lessons that follow, students will examine the concept of borders, both literal and figurative. They will explore the idea of what a border is and how it is created. They will use this knowledge as they learn about the U.S.-Mexico border and will delve deeper into the idea of borders as they examine their own lives. Ultimately, students will develop a greater idea of who they are and how their identity is formed by real and imagined borders.

Instructional and Lesson Activities (ENGAGE, EXPLORE, EXPLAIN)

Lesson 1: What makes a border?

ENGAGE

Have students brainstorm answers to the question “What makes a border?” Students will share out using Padlet (example: [Kelly's Padlet](#)). After students have had the opportunity to discuss and add their thoughts to Padlet, students can volunteer to explain why they agree or disagree with any of the answers given.

Students will watch video “How Borders Came to Be.” ([Link to video HERE](#)) Show until about minute 4. Pause periodically to check for understanding. Students should understand main ways in which borders are created.

EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

To answer the question “What makes a border?” students can be asked to search for articles, videos, or songs that they feel answers this question and post them to the Padlet.

In the above description, the video “How Borders Came to Be” will only be shown to the 4:00 mark. For additional learning, teachers can show the last two minutes of the video. Extra detail on borders is provided.

EVALUATE: Assessment

Most assessment will be formative. Students will volunteer to answer questions during the video clip to show understanding.

Lesson 2: How is the border defined between the U.S. and Mexico and who lives there?

ENGAGE

Invite students to volunteer information that they remember about borders and how they are made from the previous class.

Direct students to navigate to the Prezi that was shared with them about the U.S.-Mexico border. They will look at the maps and pictures, watch the video, and read the short paragraphs. They will jot down responses to the questions posed on the Prezi.

EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

Additional links are provided on the Prezi with the heading “If you finish early...” Students know that they should explore the items under this link if they are quick to finish or if they would like additional information at home. One link is to a piece from NPR entitled “Borderland.” The other is a youtube video of two girls from Ciudad Juarez talking about coming to El Paso for high school each day.

EVALUATE: Assessment

Students will turn in their answers to the questions from the Prezi. Responses will inform discussions in following classes.

Lesson 3: What borders do we see in our own lives?

ENGAGE

Explain to students that now that we have an understanding of how borders between countries are delineated, we are going to talk about borders closer to home.

Tell students that borders are not always visible and that we all have borders in our lives. As an example, show “Map of Allegheny County School Districts.” Talk to students about how their lives have been shaped and defined by the borders-- school districts-- that surround them. Ask students if they have any beliefs about students or schools from a district that they don’t belong to.

Have students brainstorm borders that shape their identities. They may be real or imagined and can consist of many combinations. Borders could include issues of social class, gender, ethnicity, zip code, ability, and many others which may be influenced by their families, history, and politics.

EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

Students may want to discuss with a partner borders that exist in their communities or in their own lives. Allow that to happen if they feel moved to do so.

Invite students to find a song that discusses the themes of borders or identity and have them explain to a partner what it means to them.

EVALUATE: Assessment

Students will turn in their brainstormed list via Blackboard (they should still have a copy for themselves.)

Homework: to interview someone in their lives about personal borders and identity. List of questions will be provided as a jumping off point. This should be filmed as the student will use clips of this video later on.

Lesson 4: How do borders affect the lives of others and what are their stories?**ENGAGE**

Provide students with copies of three poems: “Elena” and “Fences,” by Pat Mora and “To Live in the Border Means You,” by Gloria Anzaldua.

Read poems aloud to students and ask them if they have any feelings that they would like to share. Assign each student to pick two of the poems and identify borders that Pat Mora has described in each of those two poems. (This can be done in groups of 2-3 if desired)

Facilitate a discussion where students share the borders that they identified in the poems and why they feel that Pat Mora created those borders in her poems.

EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

Students can look at borders and identity in all three poems if time allows.

If possible, have students look for other poets who have written about borders and allow time for students to share these poems.

EVALUATE: Assessment

If students were not able to interview someone in their lives about personal borders or identity, they should do that tonight as it will be discussed during the next class.

Lesson 5: What is a border? What borders do I see in my life and the lives of others?

ENGAGE

Students should have interviewed someone in their lives about borders and identity for today's assignment.

Students will be asked to create a digital presentation about what they have learned about borders. This will be done using Prezi (all students have a Prezi account and have been taught how to use Prezi in their digital literacy class). Students will incorporate text, images, and video to convey their message.

EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning

Students are welcome to include additional information that they have learned during this mini-unit, especially if it relates to their own sense of identity or borders.

EVALUATE: Assessment

This assignment should take multiple days to complete. Students will use the assignment sheet and rubric to inform their presentations. This project should act as the summative assessment for this mini unit. If desired, the teacher can ask all students to present to the class.

Accommodations and Modifications

Multisensory

- Teach using multiple input/output strategies — visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic.
- Use several learning channels simultaneously (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mnemonic devices for memory). Research findings suggest that hearing, seeing, and saying a word (concept) simultaneously enhances memory.
- Use visual aids when appropriate.

Repetitive

- For reinforcement, provide ample time to discover, practice, and use meaningful mnemonic devices, such as songs with specified grammatical sentence structures or special rhythms; reinforce concepts by using acronyms (for example, USA = United States of America), drawings, and gestures.
- Provide additional practice as necessary.

Structured

- Create outlines or study guides for the students to fill in or follow along with as the concepts are being taught.

- Teach concepts in a logical progression and help the student categorize concepts.
- Provide structured, explicit overviews of the material covered. Examples include study guides of the day's activities, summary sheets, graphic representations, and semantic maps.

Metacognitive

- Help the student think about the concept to be learned and to explain the concept in his/her own words. Knowing why assists the student in learning to develop self-confidence in identifying and correcting his/her own errors.

Additional Resources

The following resources support teaching and learning about the borderlands:

1. <http://apps.npr.org/borderland/>
2. "Bordering 110" *A Border Reporting Project by the University of Arizona School of Journalism*. University of Arizona School of Journalism, 2016. Web.
3. Mora, Pat. *My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults, 1984-1999*. Houston, TX: Piñata, 2000. Print.
4. Rice, Andrew. "Life on the Line." *New York Times Magazine* 28 July 2011: n. pag. Print.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. (n.d.): n. pag. *To Live in the Border Means You*. Web.

Ganschow, Leonore, and Elke Schneider. "Assisting Students with Foreign Language Learning Difficulties in School." *Assisting Students with Foreign Language Learning Difficulties in School | LD Topics | LD OnLine*. LD Online, n.d. Web. 23 July 2017.

How Borders Came to Be. YouTube. Web. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBEEYRm93Zs>.

Map of Allegheny County Pennsylvania School Districts.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Allegheny_County_Pennsylvania_School_Districts.png

Martinez, Oscar J. *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. University of Arizona, 1994. Print.

Mora, Pat. My Own True Name: New and Selected Poems for Young Adults, 1984-1999.
Houston, TX: Pinata, 2000. Print.

Reflection

My experiences in the NEH seminar “Tales from the Chihuahuan Desert” were critical to my understanding of identity and borders. Although Pittsburgh, where I teach, does not sit on a politically defined border, it is imperative to acknowledge the borders that our students face each day. As I began this institute, my plan was solely to teach students about the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically as seen in the El Paso/ Ciudad Juárez region. However, I realized that I needed to make the issue of borders relevant to my students. I began to incorporate activities that would push my students to think about the visible and invisible borders in their lives and the lives of their classmates.

My hope is that these lessons will encourage students to have conversations about the borders in their own lives. In a classroom where there is a sense of safety and trust, students can learn to be more compassionate towards themselves and others and realize that we all have dignity, regardless of the borders that we must navigate and what side of those borders we might fall on.