

Unit Title: "Border-Crossings: Engaging and Connecting Across Differences through Oral History"

Grade Level: 12th

Subject Areas: English Language Arts

Time Required: 5 weeks; Assumes 50-minute class periods meeting 5 days/week

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Introduction: Schools are a nexus of various contact zones where people of different races, socio-economic classes, genders, ethnicities, and religions--just to name a few--interact. While these various social identifiers can sometimes create divisions, they also fundamentally enrich our communities by providing different lenses through which we see and understand the world around us. For example, in many of our schools, our students come from different socio-economic backgrounds that contribute to visible and invisible divisions that, unfortunately, can lead to misconceptions and stereotypes that undermine a sense of community. Borders are visible and even palpable when a specific group of students decide sit in a particular area in a cafeteria. When students are tracked in various classes (e.g., honors/advanced, etc), a figurative border--access to specific types of academic programming--also emerges. Extracurricular participation in athletics or the arts delineates crossing-zones in which students find themselves on the "inside" or "outside" of a social space.

The following lesson plan encourages exiting 12th graders to explore and reflect on literal and figurative borders and divisions in their lives. Teachers should adapt/modify this plan in ways that best fit the needs of their students and schools, particularly as they look at what social identifiers they would like to address.

N.B. Whenever issues of identity politics come up, adolescents and adults alike may feel nervous and vulnerable--and naturally so. At the same time, the need to address points of tension is vital in modeling effective public discourse. The success of this unit depends on the level of trust, comfort, and vulnerability that students have with each other. The following lessons require a serious trust in the teacher and among the students.

Guiding Questions

Theory-Driven Questions for Educators:

- How is a school a nexus of various contact zones in which different identities converge and meet--in some cases, for the first time?

- What are the benefits that emerge from these points of contact? What are the challenges that emerge from these points of contact? What do these results reveal about your school community and culture?
- How can you learn to read and understand (in)visible power dynamics?

Questions for Students:

- What is oral history and its purpose?
- How does oral history inform your identities and sense of self and place?
- In what way does the process of collecting oral histories impact the interviewee and the interviewer?

Instructional Objectives and Student Learning List

These [learning objectives](#) are adapted from the standards published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

Hard Skills:

- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students will learn that a “text” is anything that can be read and interpreted. This also encompasses non-written forms/mediums such as visual art and body language, for example, to better understand themselves and the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to a dynamic and diverse world; and for personal fulfillment.
- Students will learn how to manage their time and create a work plan whereby they initiate the interview, make the necessary arrangements to facilitate the interview, and conduct follow-ups as necessary.
- Students will learn how to create open-ended questions that sustain a conversation.
- Students will learn how to listen actively and respond respectfully.
- Students will learn and implement the process of transcription.
- Students will utilize various media to present their project.

Soft Skills:

- By interacting with others, particularly those who might be different in a variety of ways (e.g., sex, gender, socio-economic class, race, etc.), students develop greater empathy and appreciation for diversity in all senses of the word (e.g., identities, experiences, histories, etc.).

Materials and Resources

- Projector and internet access for “[The Danger of a Single Story](#)” by Chimamanda Adichie
- Copies of poems: “[Fences](#)” and “[Mending Wall](#)”
- Use of [Slack](#) messaging app
- Projector and internet access for video from [Voice from the Border](#)
- Conceptual model of oral history project and completed projects: [UTEP Oral History Institute](#) and [UTEP Digital Commons](#)
- *Enrique’s Journey: The True Story of a Boy Determined to Reunite with His Mother* by Sonia Nazario
- [Voice of Witness Project](#)’s “[National Tiered Curriculum](#)”
- StoryCorps’ interview question [models](#)
- Recording device (e.g., digital voice recorders, cell phone, tablet)
- Earbuds
- Transcription instruction: [University of Leicester Oral History](#) & [Baylor University Institute for Oral History](#)
- [Discussion questions](#) for *Enrique’s Journey*
- “[How to Grade Participation](#)” from the University of Virginia’s Center for Teaching Excellence.

Instructional and Lesson Activities

ENGAGE/EXPLORE/EXPLAIN

Week 1: Origin Stories

Learning Goals & Elements of Literacy: Viewing, Listening, Writing, and Questioning

Day 1: Discussion of Chimamanda Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story”

Watch Chimamanda Adichie’s *TED Talk*, “[The Danger of a Single Story](#)”, and discuss why we develop single stories about others.

- Why do we tell stories?
- How do stories help us understand different people and their experiences?
- What are the dangers of a single story?
- Why is it so hard for certain stories or narratives, especially inaccurate or partial ones, to be dispelled?

HW: Write about a single story that you constructed about another person or group of people.

This might include the reputation of a rival school or your own school. This could also be about a particular neighborhood or group of people.

- What was the story?
- Describe how you came to create this story.
- If you didn’t create it, how did you hear about it?

- When you heard this story, what was your immediate reaction?
- Why do you think you believe this story?
- How do you think this story has affected how you see, interact, and feel about the person or group of people that the story is about?

Day 2: Discussion and reflection on homework from Day 1

Share with a partner (pair-share) the single story you constructed about another person or group of people.

Discuss as a class why we develop single stories about others.

- Where do these specific stories emerge from?
- Why do these stories exist?
- What are the implications of these stories for the communities that they're about?
- Why do people (such as you) perpetuate these stories?

HW: Write about a time when you felt a single story was written/told about you. Describe the context and what happened.

- How did you feel?
- Why did you feel this way?
- Was there any type of resolution? If so, what happened? If not, what would a positive resolution look like for you?

Day 3: Discussion on Homework from Day 2

In groups of 3-4, have students share the story that was constructed about them. Ask them to include in the small group discussion their responses to the following:

- If you could revise that misperception, what would be the story that you would present?
- How would you have gone about doing this?

HW: Read and annotate Pat Mora's "[Fences](#)."

Day 4: Discussion of Pat Mora's "Fences"

Some questions to consider:

- What role does the fence play in the poem?
- What figurative fences emerge in this poem? What do they each represent?
- What seems to be Mora's larger purpose in constructing this poem? In other words, what does it do?

HW: Read and annotate Robert Frost's "[Mending Wall](#)."

Day 5: Discussion of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall"

- What role does the wall play in the poem?

- What figurative walls emerge in this poem? What do they each represent?
- What seems to be Frost’s larger purpose in constructing this poem? In other words, what does it do?
- Ultimately, do “good fences make good neighbors”? Why or why not?

HW: With a phone, students should capture images of literal and figurative fences that appear and/or exist in their lives. Share them to the class [Slack](#) handle @border-crossing.

Week 2: The Histories Within Us

Learning Goals & Elements of Literacy: Viewing, Listening, and Questioning

Day 1: Visual Exercise

Share photos from homework assignment in groups of 3-4. Have students talk about their photos. Here are some questions to consider:

- What is your photo of?
- In what way is the subject of your photo a fence?
- What does the image (as a fence) seem to wall out? What does it wall in?

HW: Write a brief caption for the photo that you’ve taken. Identify the subject(s) of the photograph and what is happening/unfolding. When and where was this photo taken? (Example: This photo [\(Steve: Please insert link to JPG file “Visual Exercise Example” added to Dropbox\)](#). This space is where students return their dirty dishes, cups, and cutlery. The partition between the cleaning staff and students prevents students and employees from seeing each other’s faces.)

Day 2: Discussion of “Voices from the Border: Mr. Jesus A. Zamora”

Transition: We need to think about how borders shape spaces and the people who navigate these spaces. A great way to broach this question is to document first-hand experiences. They humanize and give an important perspective that help bring into focus important issues that might be invisible. → Consider using the Berlin Wall as an example.

Watch and discuss [“Voices from the Border: Mr. Jesus A. Zamora”](#)

Take notes on Mr. Zamora’s story. Here are some guiding questions:

- What was Mr. Zamora’s school experience?
- What was his pre- and post-military experience?

Class discussion after viewing. Here are some guiding questions:

- What did you expect to hear from Mr. Zamora? (or asked differently, What single story might you have constructed about him?)

- What in his story stood out to you? Why?
- What experience(s) do you share with Mr. Zamora? Explain.
- In what ways is your experience different from his? Why?

Introduce oral history project modeled from [Voice of Witness](#). Provide students with relevant handouts.

HW: Explore 3-5 stories from the oral history repository at UT-El Paso

- [Institute for Oral History @ UTEP](#)
- [Digital Commons for Oral History @ UTEP](#)
- Take notes on the oral histories you heard. Here are some guiding questions:
 - Why did you pick this story?
 - What did you expect to hear when you picked this story?
 - What stood out to you? Why?
 - What did you learn?

Day 3: Oral History De-Briefing

In groups of 3-4, students should identify the oral histories that they've selected and share their notes with their peers. In a class-wide discussion, consider the following questions:

- What drew people to certain stories?
- What assumptions did you have about the storyteller you were about to hear? Why did you have these assumptions?
- What did you learn after hearing a particular story?

HW: Write a proposal for your oral history project. This proposal should contain the following information:

- 3-4 people in the school community who you'd like to interview (with names).
- Explain in a paragraph (one for each individual) why you'd like to interview these particular people.
- Write 5-7 questions that you'd like to ask your interviewee. Consider consulting the Story Corps [website](#) for some ideas.

Days 4-5: Independent Reading and Subject/Question-Vetting [Individual conferences]

Students begin independent reading of *Enrique's Journey* while teacher meets with students about their proposal.

N.B. While students are encouraged to reach out to peers, they may choose to interview an adult in the school community whom they feel a close kinship with. The ultimate goal of this project is to help individuals within the school cultivate a healthy and trusting community. In order to accomplish this, teachers should be mindful of the power dynamics that exist within the school,

particularly between students. For example, if a White male student wishes to interview a Black male student about the challenges of being a Black man in the US, it's important to remind the White student to be in a listening stance and not to feel defensive. The teacher should remind the White student that the Black student and his experiences are his and don't necessarily represent "the Black experience." Equally important, teachers should remind the White student about the dangers of "academic tourism" in which the interviewee becomes a spectacle or a source for entertainment.

Week 3: Living History

Learning Objectives: Listening, Observing, Questioning

Days 1-3: Student Interviews

Students will conduct their interviews during this time frame. If students are not interviewing a peer during the class period, they should be reading *Enrique's Journey*.

HW: If students are not conducting interviews during the class period, they need to find a time to interview their classmate after school or during a shared free period.

Days 4-5: Students will transcribe their interviews in class and for homework. Teachers should consult the following resources from the [University of Leicester](#) and [Baylor University](#) and provide a print-out of these documents to students. Students should type their questions and responses as part of the transcript.

HW: Begin transcribing the interview.

Week 4: Framing the Story

Learning Objectives: Noticing, Reading, Questioning, Thinking

Days 1-3: Editing the Transcript

Now that students have a transcription of their interview, the teacher should remind students about the elements of a good story: chronology, style, interesting characters, exciting events, and emotions. Here are some additional guidelines/suggestions:

- As students edit their transcripts, they need to remember to honor the interviewee's voice and story. They should edit the narrative so that there is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Re-order the chronology of the interviewee's recollection, if necessary.
- Take out the interviewer's questions and comments.
- Do your best to positively reflect the narrator's intelligence. A lack of fluency in English (or any other language) certainly does not reflect lack of fluency in the narrator's thought process.

HW: Continue to work on transcribing the interview at home.

Day 4: Writing Interviewee's Bio

In class, students should write a brief bio to provide context for the interview. This should include some basic information about the interviewee (e.g., name, age, etc.) and give readers a sense of what the interview will be about.

HW: Read *Enrique's Journey*.

Day 5: Writing the Postscript

Teacher should divide the class into groups of 3-4. In these groups, students should share their responses to the following the suggested questions:

- What about your interview surprised you?
- What about this experience surprised you?
- What did you learn about the interviewee?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What was the most challenging aspect of this experience?
- What would you like to know more about?

HW: Students create a postscript beginning with the statement, "This I used to believe:" They should incorporate one or more responses from above in their postscripts.

Week 6: Our Shared Experiences

Learning Objectives: Listening, Knowing, Observing, Noticing, Performing, Speaking

Day 1-2: Celebrating Our Stories

Students should confer with their respective interviewees and decide on which parts could shared with the entire class. This practice is consistent with our framework of honoring individuals and wanting to present their stories in an accurate, respectful way. In class, each student should read the following aloud:

- The interviewee's bio
- An excerpt (2-3 paragraphs) of the interview
- The postscript

HW: Finish *Enrique's Journey*

Day 3: Lit Circle

Now that students have completed the oral history project, the teacher will circle back to *Enrique's Journey*. Students will break up into small groups of 4-5 students and have a

discussion about the text. Teachers should consider using suggested [discussion questions](#) from the publisher of the text. Each group should have a designated scribe who will record the responses from various group members.

HW: None

Day 4: Making Connections

Sitting in a large seminar-style circle, students will engage in a class-wide discussion of the text. While teachers are encouraged to use the suggested questions (see Week 6, Day 3 lesson), they may find it helpful to allow the conversation to be organic and free form. Students should talk to each other, and the teacher, as necessary, can join in. Ultimately, students should be the ones driving the discussion.

For the second half of the class period, the teacher should draw connections between *Enrique's Journey* and the students' experiences with this oral history project. They may want to think about the role of empathy, listening, and storytelling in helping them understand themselves as individuals and their relationship with others, especially those who might be different or have different experiences than them.

EXTEND/ELABORATE

- Students can develop, share, and implement steps that will allow them to become more civically and socially responsible in their respective communities.
- Students can partner with local organizations to help document the oral histories of those who access these services.
- Students can work with organizations that support some of the issues that their interviews raised (e.g., immigration rights, worker rights, homelessness, after-school enrichment programs, etc.).

EVALUATE

- Students will be assessed in terms of their participation in daily lessons/activities. Teachers should work with students to co-develop a list of qualities and behaviors of an engaged participant. Consider using this [document](#) as a resource for thinking about how to grade participation. A rubric is also included.
- There will be a *process grade* for the oral history project. Students will be evaluated on completing nightly homework assignments as well as being prepared for meetings/one-on-one conferences with the teacher.

- The *summative or capstone assignment* is the oral history project. Students will be assessed based on their edits on the final draft as well as their postscript, the latter of which highlights their level of engagement with the overall project and experience.

Accommodations and Modifications

Access to Resources (Week 2, Days 1-2)

For students who may not have access to cell phone technology or Internet access outside of the school, teachers may choose pair students or cull together technology resources during a class period, allowing classmates to explore the school common areas, athletic fields, lunchroom, etc. and collaborate on picture-taking with a partner.

Access to Resources (Weeks 3-4)

Teachers might consider securing a small class set digital recording devices for students to check out.

Postscript Assignment (Week 4, Day 5)

- a. Teachers should tailor the page-length requirement to what their students are capable of doing.
- b. For students who do not want their stories presented aloud in class, the teacher should be sensitive to the concerns of that student. The teacher may want to facilitate a conversation between the interviewee and interviewer about what specific parts of the oral history can be shared.

College and Career Readiness

This unit plan meets the following [College and Career Readiness Standards](#) (CCRS) for English/language arts developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB):

1. Compose a variety of texts that demonstrate clear focus, the logical development of ideas in well-organized paragraphs, and the use of appropriate language that advances the author's purpose. (Writing)
2. Locate explicit textual information, draw complex inferences, and analyze and evaluate the information within and across texts of varying lengths. (Reading)
3. Understand the elements of communication both in informal group discussions and formal presentations (e.g., accuracy, relevance, rhetorical features, organization of information). (Speaking)

4. Apply listening skills as an individual and as a member of a group in a variety of settings (e.g., lectures, discussions, conversations, team projects, presentations, interviews).
(Listening)
5. Research
 - a. Formulate topic and questions.
 - b. Select information from a variety of sources.
 - c. Produce and design a document.

Additional Resources

[Borderland: NPR](#)

[Houston Oral History Project](#)

[StoryCorp](#) website

[Teenage Diaries](#) (through NPR)

[Teenage Diaries Revisited](#) (through NPR)

This American Life, [Episode 621](#): “Fear and Loathing in Homer and Rockville”

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Reflection

While neither of us teaches at a geo-political border, we recognize that everyone around us, including our students, live in a figurative borderland demarcated by social identifiers such as race, socio-economic class, religion, and ethnicity, for instance. When individuals with different backgrounds and experiences interact--either for the first time or on a daily basis--a new relationship and community forms, creating borders and a borderland. Schools are uniquely distinct spaces insofar as our children from all walks of life interact with each other every day. As educators, we have a civic and moral responsibility to help students connect across differences and to see, acknowledge, and respect each others' presence. To that end, the act of storytelling and the stories that emerge from these social spaces allow us to realize these goals. Storytelling and the role that narratives--many of which are out of our control--have the power to define us and how we see the world. The objective of this unit is to see, understand, and feel this power and its effects on one's perceptions of other individuals, neighboring communities, and our larger world. Equally important, this project encourages students to listen without judgment to others' border stories and to engage each other in a respectful way. Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate empathy within our students in an effort to help them become civically and socially engaged individuals.