**Tales from the Chihuahuan Desert:**

**Borderlands Narratives about Identity and Binationalism**

National Endowment for the Humanities and The University of Texas at El Paso

2021 Summer Virtual Institute for Secondary School Teachers (Grades 6th–12th)

**Lesson Plan: Cultura? Cultura!**

1. **Title and Author of Lesson Plan**

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1. **Subject Areas:** Ethnic/Multicultural Studies
2. **Keywords:** Borderlands, Binationalism, Identity, 1st generation, 2nd generation, Transnationalism, Latinx
3. **Grade Levels:** 9-12th grade
4. **Time Required to Complete:** 120 minutes (1 120 minute block or two 60 minute blocks)
5. **Instructional Objectives and Student Learning**

**Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Literacy.**[**RH.9-10.4**](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/)

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**](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/9-10/)

Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

**[Common core state standards, English language arts-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/9-10/1/a/)**  
Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

**[common core state standards, English Language Arts-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/3/d/)**  
Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

1. **Guiding Questions**

What is binationalism? What is transnationalism? What is a bordertown? How does LA embody the spirit of a bordertown? .

1. **Materials and Resources**

Copies of David Bowles “My Two Towns”

Copies of David Bowles “They Call me Guero”

Map of Border “Twin Cities”

Media Clip about the border (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFkRZzK8aHQ>)

Graphic Organizer (hyperlink guiding document here)

Laptop with projector

Audio speakers

Internet Access

Paper and pen

1. **Introduction**

Los Angeles is one of the largest (if not the largest) urban city that has a majority Latino population. Even though it has a huge Latinx population, LAUSD (the 2nd largest school district in the nation) has not made it mandatory that the majority of their students learn about their culture. Growing up in Los Angeles and not having the advantage of learning about my culture has pushed me now as a teacher to incorporate more literature about the communities I serve.

In the book They Call me Guero, David Bowles explores the complexities of a border child in the 7th grade. Through the lens of a binational child, he is able to explore the everyday nuances of being a middle schooler while at the same time bringing special attention to the very real issues that the Latino community and, more importantly, border people face every day.

My hope is that by reading a book written by someone who looks and sounds like them, my students will be encouraged to continue exploring and embracing their culture. Even without the school districts making the study of their culture a requirement, the hope is that students will become intellectually curious enough to continue to push for academic reform and they can be the ones that, as David Bowles mentions in They Call Me Guero, “hold the door open for the rest of us”.

1. **Instructional and Lesson Activities (ENGAGE, EXPLORE, EXPLAIN)**

Below is the flow to the lesson. I have included a document that students will follow as the lesson occurs. This living document allows them to document each step and show proficiency in the end:

1. Activating Prior Knowledge
   1. Whiteboard students the following questions: What is a border? What words come to mind when you think of the border?
   2. Think-Pair-Share in small groups before writing the words on the whiteboard (at least one word per student)
   3. Reflect on words that were written down by peers and form an overarching theme. (will depend on the prior knowledge of each class.
2. Extending Prior Knowledge
   1. Introduce essential questions and how students are expected to show proficiency in this assignment.
   2. Project “Dangers of A Single Story” TED Talk (hyperlink here) and hold discussion. Thoughts questions written down in document
   3. Project video clip (hyperlink here) on the children from Central America coming to the US. (Students are expected to write 5 notes, questions or wonders while the video is being played)
   4. Project map of border cities (hyperlink to map provided in works cited here)along with their border twin city. Provide narratives of by binationalism, Bordertown, and transnationalism. Students receive graphic organizer containing 3 vocabulary words. Students think-pair-share the vocabulary words after discussion.
   5. Extend knowledge of new vocabulary with a whole class reading of “My Two Towns”. Reflect on the themes of the book.
3. Exploring New Concepts
   1. Assign 3 poems of “They Call me Guero”.
   2. Encourage students to read the poems together and discuss themes/guiding questions that come with the poems.
   3. Guiding questions revolve around essential questions for the day with each of the poems answering a part of the essential questions.
4. Reflecting on New Concepts
   1. More on this below on the evaluate, assessment and feedback portion.
5. **EXTEND/ELABORATE: Additional Learning**

Through this lesson, students will understand the importance of expressing themselves through the lenses of their specific cultures. Students can apply their knowledge gained in this lesson to bring awareness to the rest of the school by making poems, short stories, art (collaboration with art department would be highly encouraged) to create a gallery of student word aimed at encouraging the school population to engage and create in speaking, reading, writing like people from their culture. It can be done during “Hispanic Heritage” month, if need be, but the vision of this would be of a year long living wall of artistic renditions, poetry, short stories, book recommendations, photographs, film etc., representing and celebrating our diversity.

1. **EVALUATE: Assessment and Feedback**

After learning the concepts of the lesson along with the essential questions, students will be applying those same concepts in an attempt to develop a poem in the similar style to those of David Bowles. Students will use similar styles and the ideas of binationalism/transnationalism to embrace their cultures and create a poem that exemplifies their history and background. It will allow students to know and understand that writing on their history matters.

Teachers can evaluate the poems through the lens of the essential questions for the day. If students are applying concepts of borderlands, binationalism, transnationalism, they will have shown proficiency.

1. **Accommodations and Modifications**

For students that are bilingual or Spanish speakers, giving the choice between English and Spanish texts for the texts provided will allow access to texts across different ability levels.

Other accommodations and modifications:

1. Frontloading vocabulary
2. Glossary of definitions for students who are not Spanish speaking
3. Chunking assignments and reading for students
4. 1-1 support
5. Annotated/underlined documents
6. Additional time
7. Provide choice for reflection
8. **College and Career Readiness (optional)**

N/A

1. **Additional Resources**

List any artifacts, hyperlinks, multimedia, photographs, readings, recordings, and research that will support learning more about the concepts presented.

1. **References (or Works Cited)**

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story.,' TED Talks, July 2 0 0 9, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>

Morrison, Toni. "unspeakable Things unspoken: The Afro-American Presence American Literature ." Michigan quarter Review, vol. 2g, no. 1, 1989, pp. I-34.

Bowles, David. “My Two Border Towns” Penguin Random House, 2021.

Bowles, David. “They Call Me Guero: A Border Kid’s Poems” First Edition, El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press (2018)

<http://www.epa.gov/region9/annualreport/07/images/mexico-us-border.jpg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFkRZzK8aHQ>

1. **Reflection and Biographical Note**

When reflecting on why I wanted to create a lesson from this perspective, I thought about my own high school experience. My mother did not want me to go to my local high school in the area of Los Angeles I grew up in. So, beginning in elementary school, she would send magnet program applications to schools on the outskirts of the city. In 5th grade, I was accepted to Brentwood Science Magnet Elementary School. I was bussed to school on the more affluent side of town from 5-12th grade. Teachers at these school did not look like me. I never once had a teacher with a Latino last name or someone that claimed to be of Latino descent. The only teacher I could relate to was my World History teacher, an African-American male. Even though the history we learned in this class was mostly Euro-centric dominant culture world history, I felt inspired by him. I thought if he could do it, so could I. Because of him, I was inspired to become a teacher. I thought that similar to my experience, by seeing a male minority in front of the classroom, I’d inspire the younger generation to pursue their dreams. Through this institute learned that it is not enough to just stand there in hopes of inspiring, but taking steps to inspire love of reaching, culture, and personal histories. I have committed myself to incorporating authors who look my students, have conversations about narrative, and conclude how we can contribute to changing that narrative.

1. **Biographical Note**

Alberto Barajas is a teacher at CALS Early College High School in Los Angeles, CA. Alberto’s area of expertise at CALS include World History, US History, and ethnic/multicultural studies. He has now developed a new found passion of bringing cultural awareness to his students.

When Alberto is not teaching, he enjoys traveling, trying new craft beers, hiking, jogging, and watching the Los Angeles Clippers.