**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)

**Title and Author**

Foodways & Identity of the Texas Borderlands and Beyond

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**Content / Subject Area**

This mini-unit focuses on analyzing foodways as a way for students to explore how cultural identity is expressed, maintained, and passed down to younger generations. It asks students to look at foodways through the lenses of video clips, artwork, and poetry, followed by connecting those ideas to their homescapes by journal writing, then finally to consider their own food culture in a mini-project culminating in a narrative based creative expression (visual arts, poetry, song, video skit, etc.) of their choice, class presentation, and written reflection of their experience.

This was designed to fit into the end of an introductory unit on cultural identity for a Mexican-American Studies (MAS) social studies course. However, elements of this lesson can be easily adapted for use in language arts, ESL, sociology, world cultures, and culinary classes, among others.

**Grade Level / Time Required**

* This was created for a 10th grade course, with a wide range of learners, so it could be spiraled up/down 3 or more grade levels.
* This mini-unit was envisioned to be taught in 5 blocks (90-minute), which translates to approximately 2 weeks of classes. However, elements of the mini-unit could easily be adapted to be taught on their own.

**Instructional Objectives & Student Learning**

* **State Standards:** [**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills**](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Mexican-American%20Studies_5-18.pdf) **for Mexican American Studies.**
  + (9) Citizenship. The student understands the debates surrounding the nature of respectful expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:
    - (B) identify diverse ways Americans construct notions of citizenship and community, including formal citizenship (such as legally ascribed citizenship and the Enlightenment notion of a social contract between an individual or group and the nation-state) and cultural citizenship (such as that based on connections to nations of origin, connections to multiple nations, ethnic identity, racial identity, linguistic identity, and affinity group identity);
    - (D) identify selected contemporary Mexican American issues that have led to diverse points of view in public discourse; and
    - (E) analyze diverse points of view related to contemporary Mexican American issues.
  + (13) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:
    - (D) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.
* **Mini-Unit Goals**
  + Students will become aware of their own cultural identity.
  + Students will understand the unique aspects of Texas-Mexican culture, specifically the central importance of family.
  + Students will tell their story in a creative manner that validates their experience while simultaneously helping them to unlock meaning.
* **Expected Learning Outcomes**
  + Students will identify and examine the concept of food ways in order to better understand culture.
  + Students will explore aspects of Texas-Mexican culture by considering cultural identity as expressed through foodways along the Texas-Mexico border and beyond.
  + Students will plan and conduct primary research by interviewing an adult about their family’s foodways.
  + Students will process what they learn by creating an original artwork, poem, song, video skit, etc., as well as through journal entries.
  + Student will present their creative project to their peers, using a variety of formats.
  + Students will provide positive feedback to their peers for their presentations.
  + Students will process what they’ve learned by participating in this mini-unit by writing a reflection that documents their personal journey.
* **Activities**
  + Walking barometer, adapted from Facing History and Ourselves
  + Analysis of video clips of film documentaries/news stories
  + Small/Large group discussions
  + Journal writing
  + Poetry analysis
  + Analysis of artwork, using activities adapted from Project Zero
  + Jigsaw activities
  + Student interviews of an adult about the foodways of their culture
  + Creative expression to respond to what they discover about their foodways
  + Presentation to peers
  + Providing positive feedback to peers
  + Project reflection
* **Evaluation**
  + Students will have formative opportunities to discuss and journal to process their thoughts about how foodways showcase culture by connecting various media to their experience.
  + For their formal assessment, students will create a mini-project where they consider foodways of their home and/or local community. This project will consist of interviews, creative expression (visual artwork, poetry, music, theater, video clip, etc.) in addition to a written reflection.
  + Students will be graded holistically, and provided with opportunities to complete/revise their project as needed.

**Introduction**

Since students in my MAS course arrive with a wide range of academic ability, using the universality of food will allow them to connect with an area of familiarity in order to jumpstart them into deeper analysis. The lessons attempt to peel the layers by using narratives so that students gain a model for how to analyze the meaning of culture in their everyday lives. The components of this mini-unit can be used in the framework shown here, or can be adapted into a modular format to fit the needs of other classes.

**Guiding Questions**

* **How do foodways express, maintain, and pass along culture?**
  + **How are foodways connected to geographical location?**
  + **How do foodways define a culture, for themselves and those outside their community?**
  + **How do foodways connect multiple generations within a community?**
  + **How/why do foodways change/evolve in a culture?**
  + **How do I see my identity through the lens of foodways?**

**Materials and Resources**

* [Is It Food?](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1P5po8d8ObZSp5hYKwIOKDlPMbHhz2gzah2vDE2hqvok/edit?usp=sharing) Google Slides
  + [Barometer Teaching Strategy](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/barometer-taking-stand-controversial-issues) adapted from Facing History and Ourselves.
* [Truly Texas Mexican Documentary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JL2VrbJwkm4) selected video clips (available for rent/purchase on YouTube)
* [Graphic Organizer](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1HJMVBW_0nz9jvswsbIbQhAJ6Lpg8C42nCgdTiieEJF0/edit?usp=sharing) for observations, comments, questions from video segments and class discussion.
* Family Pictures Cuadros de Familia children’s book, by Carmen Lomas Garza
  + Art/Literature Analysis Activities adapted from [Harvard Project Zero](https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines#WithArtOrObjects) for large or small groups, and individuals.
    - [See Think Me We](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/See%20Think%20Me%20We_2.pdf)
    - [Layers](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Layers.pdf) / [Capas](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Capas%20-%20Layers.pdf)
    - [Think Feel Care](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Think%20Feel%20Care_1.pdf) / [Pensar Sentir Preocuparse](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Pensar%2C%20Sentir%2C%20Preocuparse%20-%20Think%2C%20Feel%2C%20Care.pdf)
    - [Beginning Middle End](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Beginning%20Middle%20End_1.pdf)
    - [Circle of Viewpoints](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Circle%20of%20Viewpoints_0.pdf) / [Círculo de Puntos de Vistas](https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/C%C3%ADrculo%20de%20Puntos%20de%20Vista%20-%20Circle%20of%20Viewpoints.pdf)
* Tamalada poem by David Bowles (from They Call Me Güero)
* [Tamales a Christmastime Tradition CBS Sunday Morning](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhgQL_RaPDI)
  + PBS Meaning of Food Tamalada segment *(this is a great clip, it delves deeper into cultural significance, but it’s only available on DVD)*
* [The $1 Tamale Queen of New York](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB98UsKLoGk) video clip
* [Project Directions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/12pWwFat6fyBJkOjL9uH_cHpZGQt6G_MAslChr-1JMjY/edit?usp=sharing)

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

* **Day 1:**
  + **Engage Activity:** Is It Food? Walking Barometer (adapted from Facing History and Ourselves) along with class discussion to introduce the idea of foodways.
  + **Explore Activity:** Video clip: Truly Texas Mexican, with class discussion between video clips, accompanied by a graphic organizer for notes. The focus is to introduce students to foodways and make them aware of the culture they are surrounded by in Texas.
    - Introduction (Molcajete / Tex-Mex / Chili Queens of San Antonio, TX) [1:50-8:10]
    - Celeste de Luna *[Artist-Activist]* in Harlingen, TX [22:44-37:46/53:57-57:58]
    - Coahuila [51:45-53:57]
    - Conclusion [1:22:18-1:26:00]
  + Explain Activity: Journal Entry: processing first day of looking at foodways to better understand cultural identity through foodways.
* **Day 2**
  + **Engage Activity:** Analysis of artwork from the children’s book Family Pictures by Carmen Lomas Garza, utilizing Project Zero format(s). Note that I will have students analyze the image from their prior knowledge first, then include the accompanying text (English/Spanish) provided in the book for students to adjust/confirm/expand their initial understanding of the artwork.
    - Large group: Analyze Tamalada together
    - Jigsaw additional artwork that focuses on foodways from the same book (*The Fair in Reynosa, Oranges, For Dinner, Birthday Party, Cake Walk, Picking Nopal Cactus, Rabbit, Mary and Joseph Seeking Shelter at the Inn, Watermelon, Quinceañera*), followed by reporting back to the large group.
  + **Explore Activity:** Overview of the expectations of their foodways project to allow students to get a jump start on interviewing and creative expression. Allow students time to create questions and plan out the interview portion of their project.
  + **Explain Activity:** Journal writing on what they anticipate finding from their project, along with connections to the video clips and artwork they already explored
* **Day 3:**
  + **Engage Activity:** Read the poem Tamalada by David Bowles, starting in small groups, then making connections with the whole class.
  + **Explore Activity:** Video clip Tamales a Christmastime Traditions interspersed with class discussion and graphic organizer for notes. The focus is on how foodways are passed down from generation to generation.
  + **Explore Activity:** Time to work on projects.
  + **Explain Activity:** Journal entry: processing second day of looking at foodways to better understand cultural identity, focusing on how learning foodways
* **Day 4:**
  + **Engage Activity:** Student led journal activity.
  + **Explore Activity:** Video clip $1 Tamale Queen of New York interspersed with class discussion and graphic organizer for notes. The focus is how foodways move, adapt and change.
  + **Explore Activity:** students will have time to work on their projects.
  + **Explain Activity:** students will check in with their teacher to get help with their creative response and written reflection.
* **Day 5: Culmination/Assessment**
  + **Student Presentations:** Students will share their creative expression with their peers. Time will be allocated for a gallery walk, performance, or other mode of presentations,
    - It may or may not be possible for students to bring in food for the class because of Covid restrictions and/or resources, so students will be encouraged to digitally share their family recipe with the class, although it will not be a requirement..
  + **Peer Feedback:** Students will be given time to provide oral and/or written positive feedback to their peers.
  + **Mini-Unit Reflection:** Students will write a journal entry about what they learned from their peers’ projects and make connections to their own project.
  + **Note:** Student artwork may be displayed in the hallways and/or library, and digital formatted creative expression can be share to the community via the school website.

**Additional Learning (Extend, Elaborate)**

* I hope to include additional poems from They Call Me Güero either before this mini unit or in the following units. I’m most likely to use the following poems: *Wedding in Monterrey, Carne Asada, Father’s Day, Borderlands, Checkpoint, The Newcomer, Uncle Joe’s History Lessons.Cascarón War, They Call Me Güero, Playoff Game, Teresa’s Quinceaňera Waltz.* An alternative idea would be to jigsaw these additional poems after the class has read and analyzed *Tamalada*, also from the same book of poetry.
* If more time was available, I would add a choice board for students to continue to explore foodways with the sources listed below.
  + [How as Mexican Delicacy Became a Misissippi Staple](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahUrObuiqgM) is a video clip showing how tamales have been embraced and adapted in both Black and White communities in Mississippi. This could be used as a quick extra credit assignment for students who complete their work early on Day 3.
  + My Friend Lucy Who Smells Like Corn short story by by Sandra Cisneros
  + Hidden Kitchens podcasts are fairly brief radio stories that look at foodways that are unseen in dominant American culture, but which have deep meaning to the communities they originate from.
    - [Breadbasket Blues: A Central California Kitchen Story](https://www.npr.org/2009/07/10/106061080/central-valley-disconnect-rich-land-poor-nutrition)
    - [Birth of the Frito](http://www.npr.org/2007/10/18/15377830/the-birth-of-the-frito)
    - [Texas Ice Houses Melt Away](https://www.npr.org/2006/06/29/5522825/texas-icehouses-melt-away)
    - [Chili Queens of San Antonio](http://www.npr.org/templates/archives/archive.php?thingId=91851784&date=11-30-2012&p=31)
* I could also envision adding greater depth to the interview portion of the project by having students connect the food they focused on to the surrounding geography, and historical events. This could even develop into a StoryCorps recording using the [Great Thanksgiving Listen](https://storycorps.org/participate/the-great-thanksgiving-listen/) guidelines.
* I am hoping to work with the culinary teacher on campus to make some simple recipes that students share to build community and celebrate their hard work. I am currently working on funding and scheduling to allow this to happen.

**Assessment (Evaluate)**

* **Formative Assessment**
  + Class Discussions
  + Graphic Organizer
  + Journal Entries
  + Project Check-Ins
* **Formal Assessment**
  + Students will focus on a foodways tradition that they are familiar with in their home or local community to research and explore. They will interview an adult about the process of creating that foodway along with the meaning it has to them. Students will collect a recipe from that adult for that foodway (with the understanding that some foodways aren’t typically written down). Students will use that foodway as an inspiration for a creative expression of their choice (visual art, poem, short story, poem, song, etc.). Students will share their creative expression with their class, and possibly with the wider community,

**Accommodations and Modifications**

* **Accomodations**
  + Students who may get overwhelmed by the project will be provided with a checklist of what they need to do along with an approximate timeline for each step.
  + Students who need chunked instructions will get each part of the written project on a separate page, so that they can focus on each step without being overwhelmed by the steps that come before/after.
  + Students with accommodations for extra time will be given the project guidelines 2-5 days in advance of the other students so that they have adequate time to complete their project and participate fully in the class presentations.
  + Newcomer EL students will be provided with all written work in their first language alongside the English version.
  + Newcomer EL students who need translation help may utilize digital resources such as Google Translate, in addition to help from ESL and Spanish teachers on campus and Spanish-English dictionaries.
  + Depending on the number of Newcomer EL students there are in the class, additional segments of Truly Texas Mexican could be viewed that are all in Spanish, which explore the same topics.
* **Modifications**
  + Students with accommodations for shortened assignments will have the length of their journal entries, amount of interview questions and length of their written reflection reduced appropriately.

**College and Career Readiness**

* [**Texas Career and College Readiness Standards**](http://erc.cehd.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2020/02/3_CCRS.pdf) (pg 34-36)
  + I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills
    - A. Spatial analysis of physical and cultural processes that shape the human experience
      * 3. Analyze how physical and cultural processes have shaped human communities over time.
      * 4. Evaluate the causes and effects of human migration patterns over time.
      * 5. Analyze how various cultural regions have changed over time.
    - E. Change and continuity of social groups, civic organizations, institutions, and their interaction
      * 1. Identify different social groups (e.g., clubs, religious organizations) and examine how they form and how and why they sustain themselves.
      * 2. Define and analyze the role socialization plays in human development and behavior.
    - F. Problem-solving and decision-making skills
      * 1. Use a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly.
      * 2. Analyze ethical issues in historical, cultural, and social contexts.
  + II. Diverse Human Perspectives and Experiences
    - B. Factors that influence personal and group identities
      * 6. Analyze how individual and group identities are established and change over time
  + IV. Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation of Information
    - A. Critical examination of texts, images, and other sources of information
      * 1. Identify and analyze the main idea(s) and point(s)-of-view in sources.
      * 2. Situate an informational source in its appropriate contexts (contemporary, historical, cultural).
      * 3. Evaluate sources from multiple perspectives.
      * 4. Understand the differences between a primary and secondary source and use each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments.
      * 5. Read narrative texts critically.
      * 6. Read research data critically.
    - B. Research and methods
      * 1. Use established research methodologies.
      * 2. Explain how historians and other social scientists develop new and competing views of past phenomena.
      * 3. Gather, organize, and display the results of data and research.
      * 4. Identify and collect sources.
    - C. Critical listening
      * 1. Understand and interpret presentations (e.g., speeches, lectures, informal presentations) critically.

**Additional Resources**

These resources were thoughtfully considered to be used in theis mini-unit, and only omitted for the sake of time concerns. However, any/all of them would be good places to start if one wanted to tweak/refocus/expand this mini-unit.

* [Mexican Food Revolution](https://americanhistory.si.edu/food/resetting-table/mexican-food-revolution) from the Smithsonian Museum of American History
* [Foodways Texas](https://www.foodwaystexas.org/), which has oral histories with many owners of Mexican restaurants across Texas.
* [Tacopedia](https://www.texasmonthly.com/interactive/the-ultimate-texas-tacopedia/) by Texas Monthly
* [Tacos of Texas](https://www.kut.org/station-information/2021-07-12/new-podcast-takes-a-deep-dive-into-mexican-food-culture-in-texas-through-the-lens-of-tacos) Podcast by KUT
* [Our Global Kitchen](https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/visit/exhibits/our-global-kitchen) exhibit at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum
* [America Before Columbus](https://vimeo.com/459664009) is a feature length documentary by National Geographic that explores the Americas prior to European colonization, and the impact of European colonization on the flora and fauna of the Americas, thus connecting to many of the foodways and historical/political issues thie mini-unit introduces students to.

**Works Cited**

“Barometer: Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues.” *Facing History and Ourselves*, www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/barometer-taking-stand-controversial-issues.

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Munchies. “The $1 Tamale Queen of New York | Street Food Icons.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 18 June 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB98UsKLoGk.

“Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox.” *PZ's Thinking Routines Toolbox | Project Zero*, Harvard University, www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.

“Tamalada.” *They Call Me Guero*, by David Bowles, Cinco Puntos Press,U.S, 2018.

“Truly Texas MEXICAN.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 28 Feb. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JL2VrbJwkm4.

**Reflection**

I have attempted to make this mini-unit more than an updated version of the token or disneyfied multicultural fair by having students connect to their homelife experiences, be introduced to historical/ political issues that surround Texas-Mexican culture, and respond with a creative expression that tells a story about their personal journey. Please remember that this mini-unit comes at the beginning of the school year, so it is simply intended to be a starting point, and students will discover even more complexity and nuance over the totality of the course.

In my teaching I have found that food is one of the more accessible ways for students to approach understanding culture on a deeper level because it is a universal experience that almost everyone is interested in. This creates a shortcut for students to delve deeper into cultural analysis.

This mini-unit is focused primarily on Mexican-American culture in Texas because I teach in Georgetown,Texas.

**Biographical Notes**

My mother was a Home Economics teacher before she started her family, so she introduced my siblings and me to a wide range of cultures through food. Although I am Irish-American, my husband of 16 years is Mexican-American, so although I am certainly no expert, I feel strongly connected to Mexican-American foodways.