

# Latin American Literature: Borders and Identity

Coursebook



**Oak Meadow**

Oak Meadow, Inc.

Post Office Box 615

Putney, Vermont 05346

[oakmeadow.com](http://oakmeadow.com)



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# Introduction

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Welcome to *Latin American Literature: Borders and Identity*! This course was born out of a desire to honor and celebrate the voice of the Latino community. It is an exploration of history, geography, immigration, and the stories of the people whose lives and identities have been influenced by borders.

In each lesson, you will have the opportunity to hear voices that have often been marginalized (literally pushed to the margins of mainstream discourse) and experience them via literature, film documentaries, podcasts, art, music, and other media. The course is also a journey in self-discovery because it asks you to consider your perspective and experiences, and apply the ideas and themes in the literature to your own life and your understanding of the world.

Here are some of the many questions we will explore:

- What are borders?
- What is your identity?
- How do borders shape identity?
- How do competing narratives shape and shift understandings of history and identity?
- What does *Latin American* mean?
- What does it mean to cross a border?
- Why do people cross borders?
- What role does immigration play in individual and collective identities?
- How do we find our voices and make them heard?

In this course, you will examine borders of all types—physical, cultural, and psychological—in terms of their purposes and consequences, intended and not. You will analyze how borders make an impact on individuals and groups, and their identification or misidentification. The texts offer literary contexts and complex character development that focus on both the history and the present in relation to the Latin American population.

The main goal of this course is to allow you to explore these complex topics and to understand that borders and identities are complicated and interconnected. They are fluid and shifting, and they can change depending on our place, who we are with, our experiences, and the narratives we hear, tell, and question.

You will interact with a variety of materials, write reflective and creative pieces, have the opportunity to create art in different media, and consider the factors that have influenced your own identities. The course offers both a look inward and a look outward to a world with which you may or may not be familiar. You will find elements of traditional English courses, which encourage you to look at history through the lenses of storytelling and perspective, as well as elements of traditional social studies courses, which encourage you to deepen your understanding of history, current events, and geography.

This course is designed for independent learning, so hopefully you will find it easy to navigate. However, it is assumed you will have an adult (such as a parent, tutor, or school-based teacher) supervising your work and providing support and feedback. We will refer to this person as “your teacher” in this course. If you have a question about your work, ask them for help.

## Course Materials

The following materials are used in this single-semester course:

- *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende
- *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros
- *The Other Side* by Juan Pablo Villalobos

This course also uses numerous online resources, which can easily be accessed at [oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links](https://oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links). Visit this page to familiarize yourself with how to locate the online resources for this course, and bookmark the page for future reference.

## Course Themes

The course is divided into four thematic units, with anchor texts and materials.

Unit 1: What Are Borders?

Unit 2: Exploring the Self: Identity

- *The Poet X*

Unit 3: Exploring Self and Other: Crossing Borders

- *City of the Beasts*

Unit 4: Exploring Self and World: Perspectives in Storytelling

- *The House on Mango Street*
- *The Other Side*

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you work through this course:

- Border stories aren't always happy stories, and this course does not shy away from troubling, controversial, and upsetting events in history and current events. We will explore questions of violence, prejudice, and discrimination, and you will encounter disturbing material. As with all material in this course, please approach the topic with sensitivity and kindness, both to the people you are studying and to yourself. This is a skill, and like all skills it takes practice to do well. How we respond to hard topics is one of the big questions of being human, and it is fine—and appropriate—if this is difficult at first. Be clear with your teacher about how you are doing with these topics, and reach out any time to discuss what you are experiencing. One advantage of practicing these skills in a course context is having teacher support as you develop your capacity to address hard topics with maturity and compassion.
- This course touches on politics, as borders and immigration are political issues. While it was difficult to find politically neutral content, the course takes as balanced an approach as possible; however, we recognize that not all the content is neutral. Our goal is to share stories and facts so that you can draw your own conclusions.
- Identities carry many different labels, and the Latin American community uses a variety of terms. Choosing the terminology to use in this course presented many challenges. The course uses the term *Latino*. While this is currently the most commonly accepted term by those in the community, there are many who do not identify with this term, and it is likely that the terminology will change with time.
- You will find Spanish words in some of the reading material because the Spanish language is a major part of identity for some Latinos. However, it's important to note that there are Latinos who are not Spanish speakers. In fact, in 2018, 30 percent of self-identifying Latinos in the United States reported English as their predominant language.

## What to Expect in This Course

This course is divided into 18 lessons, and each lesson is designed to take about one week to complete. In the lessons, you will find the following sections:

An **Assignment Checklist** is included at the beginning of each lesson. Assignments are fully explained in the lesson.

**Learning Objectives** outline the main goals of the lesson and give you an idea of what to expect.

**Lesson Introductions** provide background information or questions to guide your learning.

**Exploring What You Know** activates your prior knowledge of a topic and helps you make connections to previous learning.

**Read, View, and Respond** selections share the voices and views of many different people and give you the opportunity to share your own thoughts and questions.

**Reflection** assignments help you deeply explore the concepts, issues, and connecting themes.

**Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking** assignments highlight key concepts and analytical thought.

**Activities** provide creative ways to explore the material.

**Extend Your Learning** is an optional section that includes additional activities for those who want an added challenge.

**Share Your Work** provides reminders for students who are submitting work to a teacher.

When you begin each lesson, look over the entire lesson first so you have an idea of what you will be doing. Take a quick look at the number of assignments and amount of reading. Having a sense of the whole lesson before you begin will help you manage your time effectively. Use the assignment checklist to keep track of your progress. Check off tasks as you complete them so you can see at a glance what you still need to do. Follow this process for each lesson.

## Learning Tips

**This course has a lot of content.** Think of each lesson as a menu of options. You will have many opportunities to engage with the content, reflect on the topics, and write about them in meaningful ways. You can complete the entire course as written, or with your teacher's help, you can adapt the course to suit your needs.

**You must feel comfortable reading and writing a lot.** While the writing is intensive, it's less formal than a traditional English or social studies course because it's more reflective in nature. The direction to "write two or three paragraphs" does not mean to write a formal essay, but rather, to write a thoughtful response. Your job is to engage with all the material in this course, think critically about it, ask questions, and draw independent conclusions.

**Look ahead to the unit and final projects to plan your work.** There are many project options to choose from. At the beginning of each unit, look ahead to the project at the end of the unit to start thinking about what you'd like to do, and make preparations, if you choose to. At the beginning of the course, look at the final project so you can keep it in mind as you progress through the course. You might find that knowing what your final project will be ahead of time lets you develop something that is more meaningful to you. The more you learn, the more you can refine or expand on your project idea.

**Keep an eye on how much time you are spending on each lesson.** To help you and your teacher gauge and adjust the difficulty of the curriculum, note how many hours you spend on each lesson, especially at the beginning of the course. If you are regularly completing lessons in substantially less than five hours, you may want to increase the length and detail of your research and responses or the number of assignments you're completing. If you regularly need substantially more than seven hours to complete

each lesson, talk to your teacher about tips on working more efficiently and/or adjusting the requirements of each lesson to better balance your time between your various courses, and between school-work and the rest of your life.

## Academic Expectations

The more you put into your education, the more you get out of it. You are expected to produce original work, engage with the material thoughtfully, and give your best effort.

The appendix contains important material that you will need to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the resources in the appendix. You will find information about original work guidelines, tips on how to avoid accidental plagiarism, and details on citing sources and images.

## A Note About the Workload

Students vary greatly in terms of reading speed, reading comprehension, and writing ability. Some may find the reading in this course takes less time than expected; others may find the writing assignments take a great deal of time. In general, you can expect to spend about five to seven hours on each weekly lesson.

Keep an eye on the workload as you progress through the course. If you find you are struggling to complete the work, contact your teacher to discuss your options. Your teacher might modify lessons depending on particular learning goals or challenges you are facing.



# UNIT 1

## What Are Borders?

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*When you build walls between nations  
and people, you make every life smaller.*

**Gregory Scott Katsoulis, *Access Restricted***



**U.S.-Mexico border fence, San Diego, California (Image credit: Amyfory)**

In unit 1, you'll deepen your understanding of maps and borders, particularly in relation to Latin America and the people of the region. You'll look at why people immigrate to the United States. These lessons require you to think deeply about place, perspective, labels, and identity. In order to examine *voces latinas* (Latino voices), we need to learn about the related locations, people, and the borders that surround them and help shape their identities.

You will explore these essential questions:

- What are borders (physical, social, and emotional)? Why do they exist? What do they do?
- How do the visible and invisible borders people encounter shape their lives?

- What do borders keep in? What do they keep out?
- Why do people cross borders?

There are many project options at the ends of units and at the end of the course. Unit 1 ends with a learning reflection. Before you begin lesson 1, you are encouraged to look ahead to familiarize yourself with the reflection in lesson 4 as well as the final project options in lesson 18. Keeping these projects in mind as you complete the lessons can help you plan and prepare early for these larger projects, if you choose.

## Lesson

# 1

# Different Kinds of Borders

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Explore the definition of borders and how they're used.
- Examine the impact of culture on identities.
- Examine how borders and maps are influenced by the creator's perspective.

## Lesson Introduction

In this first lesson, you'll be examining the definitions and role of maps and borders, including the perspectives of those who make them. You'll think about the borders in your life, the purposes they serve, and how they shape your identity.

In each lesson, glance through everything first to get an idea of what to expect and plan your time accordingly. Read each assignment in full before you begin working on it; many assignments have multiple parts for you to do or respond to. If you read through the assignments before you begin reading the texts and viewing the videos, you will be better prepared to get the most out of them and take meaningful notes. You can easily access all the online resources in this course at [oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links](https://oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links). Bookmark the page for future reference.

Choose a selection of assignments from the various categories each week. Remember, you are not expected to complete every assignment. Discuss expectations with your teacher so you know what to do in each lesson.

Let's dive in!

## Exploring What You Know

This section is designed to tap into your prior knowledge and experiences. You don't have to do anything to prepare for these assignments—just explore what you know!

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Complete the assignments in Exploring What You Know.
- Complete the Read, View, and Respond assignments.
- Write a reflection on the reading and viewing.
- Activity: Mind Maps

**Do this before you do any of the Read, View, and Respond assignments.**

1. Your first assignment for this course is a 15-minute freewriting exercise exploring the concept of borders. Write from the heart: what you know, what you think, what you feel, and what you wonder.

You can write freely on the topic of borders or use the questions below as a guide. If you get stuck, just return to the questions to refocus your thoughts.

- Coming into this course, what is your understanding of the term *border*? (Don't look it up in the dictionary; the goal of this assignment is to think about what you already know.)
- How do borders work?
- Who makes them?
- What do borders keep in? What do they keep out?
- How do borders affect your life? How do they affect your community and the wider world?

When doing a freewrite, don't worry about grammar, complete sentences, or punctuation, and don't go back to correct or edit it. This freewrite is a way to capture all the associations you have with the concept of borders. Set a timer for 15 minutes, and begin writing.

2. Take a moment to look at the covers of the four books you'll be reading for this course. Imagine the covers were pieces of art grouped together in a gallery. Arrange them in a way that's meaningful for you. What would you title this grouping, and why? Why did you create that particular grouping? Write one or two sentences. Take a picture of your grouping to include with your response.

## Read, View, and Respond

In this course, you'll share your thoughts and things you wonder about as you respond to what you read and view. These responses serve as the backbone of this course and a place for you to capture ideas, reflections, questions, and content that sparks your interest. Your responses can also bring your awareness to topics you'd like to explore further. Throughout this course, consider your assignment responses to be part of the brainstorming for your final project.

1. Maps are one way to represent continents, countries, and the borders between them. However, maps can give us a skewed, and even biased, perspective. Watch the following video clip from the TV series, *The West Wing*:

“Why Are We Changing Maps?”

After seeing the “upside down” map, CJ says, “It’s freaking me out!” How do you feel when you look at the “upside down” map?

Jot down any observations you have. What details or aspects of this video stand out for you? Why?

2. Read the following article about map perspectives:

“Five Maps That Will Change How You See the World”

Describe the difference between the Peters and Mercator projections. What are the pros and cons of each? Your answer can be in the form of a T-chart (two columns with the question or topic at the top) or bullet points.

Of the south-up, Pacific-centered, and Azimuthal polar projections shown in the article, which do you prefer and why?

3. Read the two poems below by Alberto Ríos:

“The Border: A Double Sonnet”

“Border Lines”

Afterward, respond to the following prompts.

- a. Which poem do you like most, and why?
  - b. What line from this poem most strikes you, and why?
  - c. Imitating the style of Alberto Ríos, write one line that represents something you believe about the border. Begin your line with “The border is . . .”
4. Watch the following video, which begins, “It’s easy to put people in boxes. There’s us, and there’s them.” Think about this theme as you watch the video.

“All That We Share”

What “boxes” (aspects of your identity or experience) would you fit in? What else about your identity, which may not appear on the surface, could be a point of connection with others? How does this video relate to borders?

Write a short paragraph or create a visual in response to these questions. Alternatively, you can discuss these questions with a friend or trusted adult.

## Reflection

1. Write a reflection (one or two paragraphs) on the reading and viewing in this lesson. A reflection is a personal response to what you’ve experienced. Your response might be emotional, intellectual, analytical, creative, introspective, questioning, or a combination of the above. The idea is to include your feelings, thoughts, and reactions to the material. Note what you learned, how it made you feel, how it relates to your life, and how this might impact the way you see things or act in the future. Refer to specific aspects of what you read and viewed in your response. Feel free to use the following prompts to help get you started:

- What stands out to you?

- What intrigues you?
- What concerns you?
- Which quotes stand out for you?
- What did you think about afterward that you hadn't thought about before?
- How do does this material affirm, negate, or make you question any previous ideas you had about borders?
- How do you think this material introduces or prepares you for what is to come in this course?
- What new ideas did you find about perspectives and power?

You may like to write your reflections in a notebook rather than typing them. Writing by hand can encourage a free flow of ideas. Taking your notebook to a quiet spot away from screens and other distractions can help you focus your thoughts and explore your ideas in creative ways.

## Activities

Complete the following activity to explore the subjectivity of maps.

### Activity: Mind Maps

In our minds, we all carry our own versions of the important places in our lives. These “mind maps” help us make sense of what’s around us and help us navigate within those spaces.

1. Bring to mind a place that is important to you. This could be your local park, hockey rink, place of worship, grandmother’s house, etc. What would visitors to this place need to know? What would you want them to notice? What would help them understand the significance of it in your life? On paper, visually recreate your own mind map, labeling areas of interest and importance.
2. Ask someone who is familiar with the place to create their own mind map of it. It doesn't need to be fancy or complex. Ask them to draw and label aspects of the place that they find most interesting or important.
3. Compare the two maps. What similarities and differences do you notice?  
Discuss the two maps with the other mapmaker. Why did they choose to include what they did? What did they leave out, and why?
4. Write a paragraph reflecting on the mapmaking process and the comparison of the two maps.

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. Your teacher will let you know the best way to submit your work and whether they prefer an alternative submission schedule.

The checklist below lists all the work that may be submitted for this lesson. Consult with your teacher so you know what is required for each lesson.

- Exploring What You Know:
  - freewrite about borders
  - image, title, and explanation for artistic arrangement of book covers
- Read, View, and Respond:
  - observations about “upside down” map video clip
  - comparison of map projections
  - response to poems by Alberto Ríos
  - response about identity “boxes”
- Reflection:
  - one-page reflection on the lesson material
- Activity: Mind Maps

At any time in the course, if you are unable to complete the assignments or activities as written, please connect with your teacher to arrange a different option.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, let your teacher know.

## Lesson

# 2

# Latin American Borders and Identity

## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Become familiar with the history and current status of the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Learn about the geographic region of Latin America.
- Differentiate between and recognize commonalities between identity groups.
- Examine the purpose, impact, benefits, and drawbacks of identity labels.

## Lesson Introduction

Latin America is a vast region, with many different borders, identities, and characteristics, whose people have distinct cultures, languages, and customs that fall under the broad umbrella of *Latin America*. The history of this region is rich, diverse, and tumultuous, with shifting borders and many events impacting the identities of the individuals, regional and ethnic groups, and collective larger communities. Similarly, the people of Latin American descent and with Latin American roots who also have connections to the United States are diverse and their experiences prompt them to identify in a range of ways.

The U.S.-Mexico border is oftentimes one of the first things to come to mind for those living in the United States or Mexico when they hear the word *border*. As noted in the Border Wall exhibit at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C.:

The U.S. and Mexico riveted a mutual border at the end of a violent, two-year war. As part of the treaty process in 1848, the U.S. took land from the enemy (Mexico) and also from local indigenous populations who were not part of the war. This treaty created an almost 2,000 mile long border region out of wildly different ecosystems, cultures, and economies. Our border looks like it does because we built it that way. Developing our border infrastructure was not

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Complete the assignments in Exploring What You Know.
- Complete the Read, View, and Respond assignments.
- Answer comprehension questions and critical thinking prompts.
- Write a reflection on identity.
- Activity: Mapping Latin America

a one-time decision by one president or one Congress. To the contrary: the border we know today is the result of policy decisions made over the course of many decades, involving voters and leaders in both political parties, from local to national.

When officials from the U.S. and Mexico surveyed the border in the 19th century, they traced a line through Native American homelands. Today, about 60 miles of international border slices through the Tohono O'odham lands. Several thousand Tohono O'odham people live south of the border, where there are also sacred sites and burial grounds.

In this lesson, you'll continue your exploration of borders and identity by becoming familiar with the basic history of Latin America, including the presence of Indigenous communities long before the arrival of the Spanish. It's important to recognize that the present-day identity of Latinos is greatly influenced by the history of Latin America. It's also important to understand the history of the border between the United States and Mexico because this border is arguably the most important one for the Latino community. The concepts of belonging and identity are entwined with the movement of the U.S. border line and the longtime presence of Mexicans in what is now U.S. territory but was part of Mexico for far longer.

As you work through this course, it may be useful to refer back to the idea of Latin America being a singular unit made up of many different geographic regions, nations, cultures, and people. While we often refer to the identity group as *Latinos*, combining people from these different countries under one umbrella, it's important to keep in mind that while they do share many characteristics and aspects of their history, there are unique identities and experiences under this umbrella.

## Exploring What You Know

1. What are your connections to the U.S.-Mexico border? Depending on your geographic location, these connections may not be as direct as they are for those living in these two countries. Be creative in your thinking. Respond in a few sentences.
2. Based on your current knowledge, what is the area considered Latin America? Why is it called this? It's fine if you don't know! Write one or two sentences (or "I don't know").

Then, do a quick internet search for "What is Latin America?" Scan one or two articles from reputable sources. Was your answer accurate? What new information did you learn? Write one or two sentences. Remember to cite your sources.

## Read, View, and Respond

Read through the assignments before you begin so you can have them in mind as you read. Check with your teacher to clarify which assignments are required each week. (Remember, all online resources can be accessed at [oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links](http://oakmeadow.com/curriculum-links).)

Throughout this course, you will frequently have the opportunity to choose how to respond to assignment prompts. See the “Reflect and Respond” box at the end of this lesson to familiarize yourself with your options. Bookmark the page or use a paperclip to make it easy to return to.

1. In 2014, NPR published a photo essay of a road trip along the U.S.-Mexico border, which can be found at the link below.

“Borderland”

The essay has multiple stories. Start at the beginning and read the following stories:

- “Story 1: Just Getting There”
- “Story 2: Why the Border Is Where It Is”

Pay careful attention to the maps in Story 2.

In your own words, write down the definition of *asylum*. (Don’t look it up in a dictionary—just write what your understanding of the word is. It’s fine if you don’t know what it means. Just take your best guess.)

Next, describe your reaction to these two stories. What strikes you? What do you find particularly interesting? What did you learn that you didn’t know before?

Choose a “Reflect and Respond” option from the box at the end of this lesson to share your ideas. (Options 2 and 4 might work particularly well for this assignment.)

2. Read this article:

“Why Mexican Americans Say ‘The Border Crossed Us’”

Afterward, watch the following video about the history of the relationship and border between Mexico and the United States.

“What Was the Mexican-American War?”

Afterward, give your thoughts on this phrase that exists within some Mexican and Chicano communities: “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”

Choose a “Reflect and Respond” option to share your ideas. (Options 3 and 10 work well with this content.)

3. Read the following article on the history of Mexico and the U.S. border.

“The New World” (Read the Introduction and Part IV: Spanish Exploration and Conquest.)

Next, read this primary source account of Spanish arrival from the Aztecs:

“An Aztec Account of the Spanish Attack”

What new information did you learn? Respond in a few sentences.

4. Read this article for a bit of history about Latin America.

“A Brief Yet Captivating History of Latin America”

How does this information relate to the ideas of identity and borders? Share your ideas in one paragraph.

5. Read the article below.

“How the U.S. Patrols Its Borders”

What did you learn? Did anything surprise you? Choose a “Reflect and Respond” option to share your ideas. Choose one you haven’t done yet. (Options 3, 4, or 10 might work well.)

### Key Terms

Language is fluid, and terminology changes over time, and there may be changes or additions to the list below in the future. Particularly considering the strong connection between language and identity, we need to work hard to be using the most accurate terminology we can. People make individual choices about the terminology they prefer to use, and not everyone within a group will use the same terms.

**Chicana/o/x:** people who identify as Mexican Americans in the United States; this term came into use during the Chicano Movement, a political and cultural empowerment movement in the 1960s.

**Hispanic:** people with Spanish-speaking ancestry, including Spain and excluding Brazil. This label was developed for the purpose of the U.S. census and is often avoided in favor of the term Latina/o/x in recognition of the violence of Spanish colonialism.

**Latina/o:** people with Latin American ancestry, excluding Spain and including Brazil.

**Latinx:** gender-neutral term for people with Latin American ancestry, excluding Spain and including Brazil.

**Latinidad:** term that seeks to include people who identify as Latina/o/x in the United States and to signal a connection between people with Latin American ancestry. The term has been criticized for its exclusion of Afro and Indigenous peoples.

**Afro-Latino:** Latino/a/x with African ancestry.

## Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking

1. Use the U.S. census site below to research demographics related to Latin Americans.

“Quick Facts: United States”

Enter your location in the search box in the upper left, and then click on the “Select a Fact” drop-down menu and select “Hispanic or Latino.” You’ll see the percentage of Latinos in your area compared to the United States displayed on the top line of the chart. You might like to enter cities in various locations around the country to compare data.

What are the Latino/Hispanic demographics in your area? How do those compare to national demographics? How do the demographics of your region impact your life? What are some of the impacts of varying demographics?

2. Choose one of the assignments below.
  - a. Read the following article on terminology:

“Hispanic vs. Latino vs. Latinx: A Brief History of How These Words Originated”

Consider this quote from Cristina Mora, author of *Making Hispanics, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American*:

Some would argue that groups are powerful because they can organize by an identity. With that, labels are important. This does not mean they are perfect, but it does mean that labels matter.

Give your opinion on the statement “labels matter.” Do you agree? Why or why not? In your response, reference the concept of identity, and give specific examples from your own experiences as well as from what you have read and viewed in this lesson. What purpose do labels serve? Are there both benefits and drawbacks to embracing an identity label? Write one or two paragraphs.

- b. In *Our Migrant Souls: A Meditation on Race and the Meanings and Myths of “Latino,”* author Héctor Tobar writes about the term *Latino*:
  - “Those of us who can call ourselves ‘Latino’ feel ridiculous half the time we use the term.”
  - “Latino is the most open-ended and loosely defined of the ‘nonwhite’ categories in the United States.”
  - “One of the qualities of being ‘Latino’ is that you eventually come to feel the tortured and strange history of the ‘Latino’ past at work inside you, shaping your understanding of the world.”

What do you think are some of the constraints of the label *Latino*?

## Reflection

In this lesson, we've been exploring the concepts of identity and labels. A person's identity is the essence of who they are. But what identity do the people in Latin America (or those with Latin American heritage) consider themselves to be? The terms and labels used within communities of people who are Spanish speaking and have Spanish and Latin American heritage are complex, evolving, and evoke strong emotions regarding identity.

As noted by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino:

Even with overlapping traditions and interconnected histories, Latinas/os have never used a single label to describe themselves. Latina/o is a flexible term that refers to diverse U.S. communities with Latin American and Caribbean roots. It covers a variety of ethnic and cultural identities informed by African, Asian, European, and Indigenous ancestry. Generation and location also affect how people identify themselves. For example, in the 1960s, many young Mexican Americans, especially in California and the Southwest, adopted the label Chicana/o. Many people also prefer country-based identities. They might identify as Bolivian, Boricua (another term for Puerto Rican), or Peruvian. Some use Hispanic, which signals a connection to Spain. Others opt for Latinx, a gender-neutral form of Latino.

What does it mean to be Latino? To be Hispanic? To be Latinx? What does it mean to be American? Identity, or how we understand and express ourselves, is very complex. The Latino community is incredibly diverse, with many Latinos and Latinas having layered identities. As activist Jonathan Jayes Green has said "I am not willing to compartmentalize my identities. I am all that I am all the time."

Latino identities are unique and shaped by factors such as geography, heritage, race, gender, and more.

Consider the idea that personal identity is a combination of different facets (such as race, gender, class, etc.), all of which are important in different ways and to different degrees depending on context. With that in mind, complete the following assignments.

1. Complete a ten-minute freewrite on the concept of identity. What does the term mean to you? What does it encompass? How do you define your identity?
2. Familiarize yourself with these terms (see the "Key Terms" box): Chicano/a/x, Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Latinidad, and Afro-Latino.

Then, watch the four videos below:

"A Conversation with Latinos on Race"

"Defining Latino: Young People Talk Identity, Belonging"

"'Because I'm Latino, I Can't Have Money?' Kids on Race"

"Somos"

Is there a phrase from the videos that resonated with you? What ideas of identity are discussed? Which of the examples discussed in the videos have you lived or witnessed?

Respond to these questions or choose a “Reflect and Respond” option to share your thoughts.

### About Puerto Rico

It is important to note that Puerto Rico is not a separate country but is a territory of the United States. People born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens.

You can learn more about Puerto Rico by reading the following article:

“Why Is Puerto Rico’s Political Status So Complicated?”

The video below has more information.

Why Puerto Rico Is Not a U.S. State

## Activities

Complete the following activity to become familiar with the geographic region of Latin America.

### Activity: Mapping Latin America

1. Find a blank map of Latin America online to print, or trace the outline of Latin American countries from an atlas. Try not to look at the names of the countries, only the shapes.
2. How many countries can you label without looking anything up?
3. After labeling your blank map without help, check your answers with a map or atlas. Add country names to your map, and correct any countries that were mislabeled. Color each one a different color to emphasize their shapes, relative sizes, and locations.

## Extend Your Learning

If you are interested in exploring the key terms and other terminology more closely, you might like to start with the resources below.

(Note: All “Extend Your Learning” assignments are optional.)

### Chicana/o/x

“Gripe: ‘We’re Chicanos—Not Latinos or Hispanics’”

### Hispanic

“Hispanic vs. Latino vs. Latinx: A Brief History of How These Words Originated”

**Latinx**

“What’s with the X in Latinx?”

“Many Latinos Say ‘Latinx’ Offends or Bothers Them. Here’s Why.”

**Latinidad**

“The Problem with Latinidad”

**Afro-Latino**

“About 6 Million U.S. Adults Identify as Afro-Latino”

**SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. You can use the following checklist when you are organizing your work submission. Remember to consult with your teacher to clarify which assignments you should do each week.

- Exploring What You Know:
  - connection to U.S.-Mexico border
  - knowledge of Latin America
- Read, View, and Respond:
  - response to photo essay and stories about the border
  - thoughts on the “the border crossed us”
  - response to history of Mexico and the U.S. border
  - connection between identity, borders, and the history of Latin America
  - response to article about border patrols
- Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking:
  - demographics info for your area
  - analysis of the impact of labels
  - constraints of the term Latino
- Reflection:
  - freewrite on identity
  - reaction to videos about identity
- Activity: Mapping Latin America

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, let your teacher know.

## Reflect and Respond Options

In this course, you'll write a lot of reflections, thoughts, and things you wonder about as you read, see, do, and learn. These responses are a way for you to share what sparks your interest and help capture ideas you might explore further.

You will write some form of response in just about every lesson, but you have many options for how to approach your responses. These options are shown below. Throughout the course, try to use a variety of options in your responses.

### **Option 1: Quote a passage and explain its significance.**

Select a phrase, sentence, or longer passage from the reading or viewing that stands out or resonates with you. Copy the line, and cite the source, author, and page number. Write one or two lines to explain the context of the quote, and then write one paragraph (or more) explaining why it caught your attention.

### **Option 2: Write a summary and ask questions.**

Write a short summary of the reading and then pose five to ten questions that it brought up for you. The questions can be related to the story or article, the author's choices, your reaction to it, or any related topic. Aim to have a mix of questions, some of which can be answered with a simple response (for example, "What connection or experience does the author have with the topic of the article?") and some that require more complex analysis (for example, "How does the information in this article relate to recent events regarding border issues and immigration in other countries?"). You don't have to answer your questions—asking relevant questions is an important skill in itself.

### **Option 3: Track the development of your ideas.**

Begin by completing these two sentences:

- I used to think . . .
- Now I think . . .

Explain how you learned what you now know. Be specific!

### **Option 4: Capture your reactions.**

Answer the following questions:

- What surprised you? Why?
- What inspired you? Why?
- What disturbed you? Why?

**Option 5: Make a prediction.**

Write a prediction of what will happen next based on what you know. Use specific details from the text to explain why you made that prediction.

**Option 6: Analyze a scene.**

Describe a scene that especially caught your attention. (Remember to include a citation with page numbers.) Write about how the scene impacted you or defied your expectations.

**Option 7: Connect to the text.**

Make a connection to what you have read or viewed. Here are three main ways to do this:

- Text-to-text: How does what you read relate to something else you've read, seen, or heard of?
- Text-to-self: How does what you read relate to you, your experiences, and your life?
- Text-to-world: How does what you read relate to something happening (or something that has happened) in the world?

**Option 8: Experiment with your imagination.**

Do an imagination experiment by writing a paragraph that begins with, "If I were in this situation, I would . . ."

**Option 9: Compare elements using a T-chart.**

Create a T-chart (two columns with a question or topic at the top) to compare two elements of a book or compare two books, articles, films, etc. For instance, you might compare two characters, scenes, or settings in a book; compare characters, settings, or themes in two books (or between a book and a film), or compare perspective and information in two articles.

**Option 10: Write a 3-2-1 reflection.**

There are many ways to use a 3-2-1 reflection. Choose one prompt from each column to help you reflect on the reading, viewing, or topic of the assignment.

3	2	1
Three things you learned	Two questions you have	One thing you found particularly interesting
Three important details	Two emotions you experienced while reading	One description of something significant or interesting
Three things you remember	Two connections or insights ("aha!" moments)	One question you have

3	2	1
Three words that stood out for you	Two examples of what you learned	One thing that confused you
Three things you liked or enjoyed about it	Two questions you have	One meaningful connection you made
Three reasons the information is important	Two things that were new to you	One thing you would change if you could

You will be using these options frequently throughout the course. You are encouraged to try a variety of options and to come up with new options of your own. Feel free to mix and match these ideas!

Bookmark this page so you can easily find the list in the future.

## Lesson

# 6

# Searching for Self

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze literary themes of borders and identity.
- Identify and use literary devices in text and song.
- Analyze the purpose and impact of a historical reference in a song.

## Exploring What You Know

1. Another literary device often used by poets is allusion, which is making references to a historical or fictional person or event. Many things are alluded to in this book, including the biblical figure of Eve. Regardless of your religion, Eve or the idea of Adam and Eve are prominent cultural symbols. What do you know about Eve and what she represents?

If you are not familiar with the biblical story of Eve, ask someone you know or look it up to get a general idea. (There are many open-source bibles online where you can read the text directly from the primary source.)

2. Sexism refers to prejudice based on gender. In your view, can the story of Eve be seen as a sexist story? Explain your thoughts using examples from the story.

## Read, View, and Respond

1. Read part II of *The Poet X* (93–220).
2. Choose one passage or scene that stands out for you. Use any of the “Reflect and Respond” options to share your ideas about the passage. (Options 1, 6, and 7 might work well.)

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Complete the assignments in Exploring What You Know.
- Complete the Read, View, and Respond assignments.
- Answer comprehension questions and critical thinking prompts.
- Write a reflection based on one of the prompts.
- Activity: Cultural Messages in Music

## Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking

1. Choose three of the comprehension questions below and write a few sentences in response to each.
  - a. In music, Xiomara says she finds “what I’ve always searched for: a way away” (96). What serves as an escape or a “way away” for you?
  - b. In October, Xiomara and Aman’s relationship grows. How is he a support to her?
  - c. How do Caridad and Twin support Xiomara’s evolving identity?
  - d. Beginning on page 152, Xiomara’s concept of Father Sean begins to shift. Why do you think she is starting to see him differently?
  - e. On page 172, Xiomara talks about her friendship with Caridad. Reread the page. Do you agree with her ideas? Explain your answer.
  - f. When Xiomara finds out about Twin’s sexuality, she wonders if she’s done enough to support him. What do you think she could or should do to be more supportive of him moving forward?
  - g. After ice skating, Xiomara reflects, “I think about all the things we could be/if we were never told our bodies were not built for them.” Why do you think society puts so much emphasis on gender and what people are “allowed to do” or what is “appropriate”?
  - h. Xiomara receives a physical punishment after Mami hears reports of her kissing Aman. What do you think of this punishment? How might Mami have handled the situation differently?
  - i. A recurring situation in this book is that no one protects Xiomara. Why do you think that is the case?
2. Refer to the literary devices in the previous lesson. Select three and provide an example of each from this week’s reading. (Be sure to include page numbers.) How do these examples help develop key themes or ideas in the book?

## Reflection

1. Select one of the following prompts and write a response of two or three paragraphs.

**Option 1:** Select a main character from *The Poet X*, and discuss the borders—physical and otherwise—that they confront. What borders do they cross? What borders do they encounter? How do they react? Include specific text references that illustrate your ideas.

**Option 2:** Respond to one or more of the writing prompts that Xiomara is given:

  - The most impactful day of your life (38)
  - Last paragraphs of your biography (126)
  - Describe someone you consider misunderstood by society (179)

**Option 3:** A person's name and early history can bring both power and pressure. Write about the history of your name and/or the history of your birth. How have they impacted your identity?

## Activities

Complete the following activity to explore how the arts can convey important cultural and political messages.

### Activity: Cultural Messages in Music

Song lyrics are a form of poetry and often use many literary devices. In this activity, you will explore the song “LatinoAmérica” by Calle 13, a group of two stepbrothers from Puerto Rico, nicknamed Residente and Visitante. The band name and nicknames came from the place one of them lived, Calle 13. It was a gated community, and when arriving at the entrance, one had to state whether they were a *residente* (resident) or *visitante* (visitor).

1. Listen to and watch the music video once without the subtitles.

“Calle 13–Latinoamérica”

What emotions and values do the images and music evoke? Respond by listing a few words that come to mind.

2. Listen to and watch the music video again while following along with the lyrics.

“Calle 13–Latinoamérica (New English Subtitles)”

Where do you see aspects of identity? What do you understand *latinoamericanos* to be like based on this song? Write a few words that come to mind.

## Extend Your Learning

If you would like to explore cultural messages in music further, here are some additional ideas. These activities are optional.

1. In the song “LatinoAmérica” by Calle 13, there are many cultural references (allusions, in poetic terms). Here are some examples:

**Fotografía de un desaparecido (photograph of a disappeared person):** a reference to the “dirty wars” of many countries, including Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

**Una fábrica de humo (a factory of smoke):** a reference to the many factories in parts of Latin America, particularly *maquiladoras* along the U.S.-Mexico border.

**Las sobras de lo que te robaron (the leftovers of what they stole from you):** a reference to Latin American history with Spain or possibly to multinational corporations and other governments that have “stolen” many natural resources from Latin America.

***La operación condor invadiendo mi nido (Operation Condor invading my nest)***: a campaign of political repression in the 1970s and 1980s by dictatorships in South America (with U.S. foreknowledge) that included kidnapping, torture, and murder of those who opposed the regimes.

***Mano de obra campesina para tu consume (farm labor for your consumption)***: a reference to the many products produced in both Latin America and the United States by Latino laborers who often endure difficult working conditions and low pay.

***Maradona contra Inglaterra anotándole dos goles (Maradona against England getting two goals)***: 1986 World Cup game between Argentina and England that came at a difficult time for Argentina and meant a lot to its people; Diego Maradona scored his famous “hand of God” goal.

***El Amor en los Tiempos de Cólera (Love in the Time of Cholera)***: novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

***Los versos escritos bajo la noche estrellada (verses written under a starlit night)***: from “Poem #20” by Pablo Neruda’s *Twenty Love Poems: And a Song of Despair*.

Choose one or more of the cultural references above to learn more about. Research it to become familiar with the context of the reference.

- Using what you’ve learned from your research related to cultural references in the song “LatinoAmérica,” write one or two paragraphs that address the questions below:
  - What are the circumstances around this reference? What country does it refer to? What time period?
  - Why do you think it was referenced in the song?
  - How do themes of identity and borders relate to the event or issue?
  - By including this allusion, what was the message you think the artists wanted to send?
  - Why might the message matter to you? Why might it matter to people around you [family, friends, a city, or a nation]? Why might it matter to the world?

Make sure your response addresses how the images and words of the song relate to borders and identities.

## **SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, using the following checklist to organize your work. If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

- Exploring What You Know:
  - thoughts about sexism and the biblical story of Eve

- Read, View, and Respond:
  - significant passage from the reading
- Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking:
  - responses to comprehension questions
  - examples of literary devices used in the story
- Reflection:
  - response to one reflection option
- Activity: Cultural Messages in Music

## Lesson

# 14

# Exploring Motivations and Borderlands

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Identify character goals and obstacles.
- Reflect on international relations between bordering nations.
- Conceptualize art that focuses on borders.

## Lesson Introduction

*The Other Side* is a series of vignettes about journeys taken by teens to and through the U.S.-Mexico border. The author's note at the beginning of the book says that the book is nonfiction, "although it employs some of the narrative techniques of fiction."

In an interview we'll read in the next lesson, author Villalobos notes:

I remember that I wrote Grace [the book's editor], "Listen I have all the testimonies, and I need you to give me some freedom to work with the material." I needed to make it the work of a writer. My suggestion was to transform each testimony into a short story, to identify in each story the most important moment of the children's journey, and to try to create from the stories a structure like a puzzle. You have one story set in Central America, another set in Mexico, and another at the border in the United States, and so instead of repeating the journey in each story, you can read the book as a puzzle completing the journey through all those stories. My idea was that I would respect that the testimonies are nonfiction. My work as a fiction writer would be to find the perfect form for each story. What is fiction in the book is the form. For example, there's a story in the book that is a diary. The kid didn't write a diary. I created the diary. But the content of the diary is true, it's the information that that kid gave. ("Refugee Tales: A Conversation with Juan Pablo Villalobos")

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Complete the assignment in Exploring What You Know.
- Complete the Read, View, and Respond assignments.
- Answer comprehension questions and critical thinking prompts.
- Reflect on borderland stories and portraits.
- Activity: Border Self-Portrait
- Activity: Border Art

Pay attention as you read to see if you can identify some of the narrative techniques the author uses, which include writing from a first-person perspective, using dialogue to tell the story, and weaving elements of background information (“backstory”) into the narrative.

## Exploring What You Know

1. Before you begin reading *The Other Side*, study the image on the cover and the title. What is a situation in your life that has “the other side”? Jot down a few notes.

## Read, View, and Respond

1. Read the following stories in *The Other Side*.
  - “Where Are Your Kids?” (Nicole and Kevin)
  - “Now I’m Going to Sleep for a Bit” (Kimberly)
  - “The Other Side Means the Other Side” (Santiago and Daniel)
  - “There Are Snakes Out There” (Alejandro)
  - “It Was Like Cotton, but When I Touched It, It Was Just Ice” (Dylan)
  - “I’d Rather Die Trying to Get Out” (Nicole and Kevin)
2. Whose story do you find most powerful or resonates with you? Why? Write a few lines.
3. Think about the elements of a story: setting, plot, characters, etc. Answer the following questions, referencing specific stories.
  - What are some of the goals of the people in the stories you’ve read so far?
  - What obstacles do they encounter?
  - How does the setting impact each of the stories?
4. For most immigrants traveling north to the United States, it is a perilous trip. We’ve considered some of the reasons that a person may make this journey, and the various factors that push them to leave their home country and go to the “the other side.” What does this trip look like?

The following resources will help you better understand the journey and the factors leading up to it. View at least two of the following resources.

The film below follows and interviews kids on their journey north, and then shows where they end up.

(Content warning: the first two minutes of the film show images of death.)

*Which Way Home*

The video below follows the family of a Guatemalan boy named Felipe, who died in U.S. custody, looking at why and how the journey north happens.

“Felipe’s Journey: The Boy Who Risked His Life for the American Dream”

*The Invisibles* is a film series that features interviews with migrants, focusing on the dangers of the journey, expectations of what awaits in the United States, and stories of disappeared migrants.

“The Invisibles Part 1—Seaworld”

“The Invisibles Part 2—Six out of Ten”

“The Invisibles Part 3—What Remains”

“The Invisibles Part 4—‘Goal!’”

The video below chronicles a journey to figure out the identity of a migrant with the tattoo *Dayani Cristal* on his chest.

“Who Is Dayani Cristal?”

The following photo essay focuses on the journeys and circumstances of migrants on the way north.

“‘This Is for My Son’s Life, My Wife’s Life.’ The Migration Journey to the U.S. Continues Despite Complicated Border Policy”

Give a brief summary of the two resources you chose. Use the prompts below as a guide when writing your response.

- What was your emotional reaction?
- What new understanding did you gain?
- What questions do you have about it?
- Did anything about the way the documentary or photo essay was made feel particularly impactful? Did anything feel like it could have been different? Did anything about it rub you the wrong way? If so, why?
- What did you learn that relates to the stories in *The Other Side*?

Share your thoughts in a paragraph or using any “Reflect and Respond” option.

## Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking

1. Choose one of the following assignments.
  - a. Many of the stories in *The Other Side* take place along the U.S.-Mexico border. This is a unique place with an atmosphere and culture all its own.

Do an online search using the words “Mexico border.” What information comes up? What types of words or images do you see? What does this tell you about how the media represents the border?

Then, read the following article.

“Politics, Media and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands”

Note any terms or phrases mentioned in the article that also appeared in your online search. Choose a “Reflect and Respond” option to share your thoughts.

- b. Go to the PBS website ([pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org)) and search for “Mexico border.” Watch one of the videos that appear. Explain how the video relates to the themes of borders and identity as well as themes found in *The Other Side*.
2. Read the following poem by Gloria Anzaldúa, who is a vital voice for the Chicana, queer, and feminist movements.

“To Live in the Borderlands Means You”

Respond to the following prompts.

- Jot down a line that resonated with you. Why did you choose this line?
- Based on this poem, in what ways might you and the author be similar?
- In what ways might you and the author be different?
- Taking into account the poem’s message and imagery, in what ways might you and the author be *connected* as human beings?
- What would you like to ask or say to the author if you had the chance?

## Reflection

1. Return to the NPR photo essay, “Borderland,” which you first saw in lesson 2.

Read the following stories:

- Story 3: “Fence Facts”
- Story 4: “What’s It Like”

What part of each story most impacts you? Why? What are some questions you have about it? How do these stories relate to *The Other Side*? Write one paragraph or select a “Reflect and Respond” option.

2. Some people spend a great deal of time waiting at the border. See the portraits below, taken in Mexico of migrants waiting to cross.

“Photographs of Asylum-Seekers on Their Journey to Another Life”

In the article below, notice what you learn (or assume) about each person's identity based on their self-portraits.

“Migrants on U.S. Border Share Journey in Self-Portraits”

Using a few words or phrases, describe the emotions you sense from the portraits or express your own thoughts and feelings that came up while viewing these portraits. Do you notice any conflicting emotions (in you or in those who are waiting)? By keeping your response short, you can focus your intention fully on specific details and careful word choice.

## Activities

Complete the following activities to explore perspectives on borders through an artistic medium.

### Activity: Border Self-Portrait

Take a photograph of yourself on a border of any kind. Be creative! Take careful consideration of what is in your photograph, how it is framed, and the information it gives about you. What message will your self-portrait send to those who view it? Write a brief description to accompany your self-portrait.

### Activity: Border Art

1. Do an online image search for “U.S. Mexico border art,” and view the results.
2. Then, read the articles below to learn about border art projects:

“Art at the Crossroads: Artists Addressing the U.S./Mexico Border”

“The Street Art of El Paso, Texas—in Pictures”

“How Artists Can Shape Understanding of the U.S.-Mexico Border”

Think about which piece of border art is the most striking to you. What is the message being sent? Is this an effective way to send the message? (You don't have to write down anything for this.)

3. Complete one of the following options. (Remember, what you create can be used as part of your final course project.)
  - a. Brainstorm some ideas of art that could be displayed at a border (of any kind) in or around your life. Make a list of ideas. You might also like to describe them in greater detail or sketch one or more designs.
  - b. Brainstorm ideas for border art that could be displayed at the U.S.-Mexico border. Make sure it has elements that can be experienced by people on both sides of the barrier. Make a list of ideas. You might also like to describe them in greater detail or sketch one or more designs.

## Extend Your Learning

What is your sense of the relationships between the leaders of Mexico, Central American countries, and the United States? Based on what you know from the news and what you've learned in this course, discuss one or more of the following prompts with friends and/or family members.

- How would you characterize the international relations between the United States, Mexico, and Central American countries? For instance, they might be characterized as trusting, distrusting, respectful, wary, friendly, hostile, etc.
- How might the relationships between the people in power in bordering nations impact what happens at a border?
- Who do you think has power at the borders? Who do you think should have power?

During the discussion, clarify whether your ideas are based on evidence from credible news sources or assumptions formed from your own experiences and those of people you know.

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher, using the following checklist to organize your work. If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

- Exploring What You Know:
  - your experience of “the other side”
- Read, View, and Respond:
  - response to one story in the book
  - goals, obstacles, and setting in the stories
  - response to videos and articles about immigration
  - terminology related to online search and article on Mexican border
- Comprehension Questions and Critical Thinking:
  - connection between video on Mexico border and course themes
  - response to poem about the borderlands
- Reflection:
  - thoughts on “Borderland” stories
  - descriptive words for portraits of immigrants at the border
- Activity: Border Self-Portrait
- Activity: Border Art



# Appendix

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