

# Latin American Literature: Borders and Identity

Teacher Edition



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# Table of Contents

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## **Teacher Edition Introduction ..... v**

About This Course

Supporting Your Student

## **Course Introduction ..... vii**

Course Materials

Course Themes

What to Expect in This Course

Learning Tips

Academic Expectations

A Note About the Workload

## **Unit 1: What Are Borders?**

---

### **Lesson 1 Different Kinds of Borders..... 3**

### **Lesson 2 Latin American Borders and Identity ..... 11**

### **Lesson 3 The Push and Pull of Immigration, Part 1 ..... 23**

### **Lesson 4 The Push and Pull of Immigration, Part 2 ..... 31**

## **Unit 2: Exploring the Self: Identity**

---

### **Lesson 5 Narrative Poetry ..... 41**

### **Lesson 6 Searching for Self ..... 49**

<b>Lesson 7 Claiming Agency .....</b>	<b>57</b>
---------------------------------------	-----------

<b>Lesson 8 Unit 2 Project.....</b>	<b>63</b>
-------------------------------------	-----------

## **Unit 3: Exploring Self and Other: Crossing Borders**

---

<b>Lesson 9 Our Stories .....</b>	<b>69</b>
-----------------------------------	-----------

<b>Lesson 10 Border Resistance .....</b>	<b>75</b>
--	-----------

<b>Lesson 11 Undefinable Borders and Assumptions.....</b>	<b>79</b>
---	-----------

<b>Lesson 12 Unit 3 Project.....</b>	<b>87</b>
--------------------------------------	-----------

## **Unit 4: Exploring Self and World: Perspectives in Storytelling**

---

<b>Lesson 13 Vignettes and Story Elements .....</b>	<b>95</b>
---	-----------

<b>Lesson 14 Exploring Motivations and Borderlands.....</b>	<b>103</b>
---	------------

<b>Lesson 15 Considering Perspectives .....</b>	<b>111</b>
---	------------

<b>Lesson 16 Unit 4 Project.....</b>	<b>119</b>
--------------------------------------	------------

<b>Lesson 17 Roots of Identity and Bridging Borders .....</b>	<b>121</b>
---	------------

<b>Lesson 18 Final Project .....</b>	<b>129</b>
--------------------------------------	------------

## **Appendix**

---

Academic Expectations .....	136
-----------------------------	-----

Original Work Guidelines.....	136
-------------------------------	-----

Finding Reputable Sources.....	137
--------------------------------	-----

Citing Your Sources .....	138
---------------------------	-----

Elements of Good Writing.....	141
-------------------------------	-----

The Writing Process .....	144
---------------------------	-----

Works Cited .....	149
-------------------	-----



# Teacher Edition

## Introduction

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Welcome to *Latin American Literature: Borders and Identity*. This teacher edition offers information, suggestions, and strategies to help you support your student throughout this single-semester literature course.

### About This Course

This teacher edition provides information on what to look for when evaluating student work as well as tips on how to assess student responses to creative assignments.

In this course, there are many open-ended and critical-thinking questions. This is not a “right or wrong answer” type of course. Students will often be asked to write a paragraph or two in response to a reading or viewing. For many of these, students will have a choice of options for how to respond. Lesson 2 provides a list of “Reflect and Respond” ideas, and students are encouraged to use a variety of them throughout the course.

All writing in this course is informal unless otherwise noted. Students should follow general conventions of grammar and punctuation but not worry about formality. The goal is for students to think deeply about these topics and process the information they’re being exposed to. Look for answers that reference the big ideas of the course (borders, identity, Latino experience, push/pull factors of migration, etc.), show effort and thought, and make relevant connections. Encourage students to discuss, debate, reflect, and reconsider. If you take an active interest in the lesson topics, it can help create a more meaningful experience for your student.

This course touches on social issues, politics, and other difficult topics, which can be complicated to navigate. Use your best judgment to adjust the material as needed to best serve your student.

**Content warning:** The books in this course were carefully chosen to reflect the themes of the course and present an accurate, realistic portrayal of life. Some of the books contain adult language, violence, sexual situations, and other mature topics. You are encouraged to read these books ahead of time so you are prepared to support your student. Most high school students are able to process this material successfully and find the practice of discussing, analyzing, and working through challenging topics to be good preparation for adult life. If you feel your student might find the material more disturbing than is constructive, you are encouraged to find alternative literature.

## Supporting Your Student

In this teacher edition, you will find all the course content contained in the student coursebook as well as answers—shown in **orange**—and tips for guiding your student and assessing their work. You may want to look over the assignments and teacher edition answers for each lesson ahead of time. Some of the information may be useful in supporting your student before or during the assignments. In addition, the appendix contains information regarding academic expectations, citing sources, plagiarism, and more. Students are expected to apply this knowledge to all their work.

It is best not to share this teacher edition with your student—they are expected to produce original work. Any indication of plagiarism needs to be taken seriously. Make sure your student is familiar with when and how to attribute sources. These conventions are explained fully in the appendix. Although high school students should be fully aware of the importance of academic integrity, you are encouraged to review its significance with your student at the start of the course.

Students vary greatly in terms of their ability to absorb information and express themselves. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the written or creative assignments take a great deal of time. In general, students can expect to spend about 5–7 hours on each weekly lesson. If your student needs more time to complete the work, you can modify lessons to focus on fewer assignments or allow your student to complete some of the written assignments orally. Modifications like these can allow students to produce work that is of a higher quality than if they have to rush to get everything done. Each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your student's needs. Use your judgment in culling, substituting, and adjusting as needed so that the students can meet the course's main objectives while devoting an appropriate amount of time. Keep an eye on the workload as your student progresses through the course and make adjustments so they have time for meaningful learning experiences.

We encourage you to join your student in reading and discussing the assigned literature in this course. We hope this course helps your student gain insight about how borders and identities influence every culture and individual.



# Course 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: Amyyfor)**

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.

**There will be multiple freewriting exercises throughout the course. Freewriting can be broad strokes about multiple topics related to the**

**Students are asked to write whatever comes to mind; they do not need to be concerned about grammar, punctuation, form, etc. The idea is to write continually for the time given, recording their thoughts on the topic of borders. Students can use the prompts given as a starting point and place to come back to if they are stuck when 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.

**This assignment offers students a visual way to familiarize themselves with the four texts in this course. Note how the student explains the way they displayed the books as this could provide information about their prior knowledge of the texts or the themes they represent.**

## **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?

**Students should be able to cite at least one or two details from the video that caught their attention and explain why. For instance, students might mention that the cartographers want to replace the Mercator projection map in schools because it distorts the relative sizes of continents, which promotes Eurocentric imperialism and “created an ethnic bias against the Third World.” They might note the statement by CJ, “Are you saying the map is wrong?”—this could be surprising to them or something they already knew. Students should also describe their own reaction to seeing the map.**

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?

**Answers will vary as students summarize the pros and cons of the Peters and Mercator projections and choose their preferred alternative projection. Students may note that maps that accurately show the relative sizes of continents and countries avoid giving exaggerated size (and implied importance) to Europe and North America, and maps that have a south-up orientation (“upside down”) bring an awareness to the significance of the countries that lie south of the equator.**

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 . . .”



**Look for students to articulate what they liked about one of the poems. Their own original poetic line (beginning with “The border is . . .”) can be used as a conversation starter about the topic of borders.**

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.

**This assignment is aimed at helping students expand their definition of *borders* and examine different facets of their identity. If students have not explored the concepts previously, look for them to recognize that an individual’s sense of self is formed from many different identities. Students who are ready for a deeper engagement with the material may discuss how identities are shaped, recognized, or ignored by the limitations (borders) put on them by others or by society in general and the effect this can have on an individual’s sense of self.**

## 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 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.

**The goal of reflection assignments is for students to have the opportunity to think freely and carefully about lesson topics and to express their own interpretation of the material. As reflection and personal responses to information will be a substantial part of student work in this course, you can use this first reflection as an indication of their current understanding of the course topics. As the course progresses, note how this understanding deepens.**

## 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.

**The goal of this activity is for students to understand that making maps isn’t always an objective process and that a place can be seen in many different ways depending on the experience and perspective of the viewer. Look for engagement in the assignment in the form of the student’s map and reflection of the comparison between 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.

**In the coursebook, students are advised to share their work at the end of each lesson so they can receive timely feedback. If the submission schedule needs to be adjusted due to travel, family commitments, or other factors, make sure your student understands when and how to submit work and when to expect feedback.**

**Students are not expected to complete all the assignments in each lesson. They are encouraged to choose a selection of assignments. You may want to keep an eye on their selections to make sure they are experiencing a wide range of options and not choosing the same type of assignment each week.**

**Although much of the writing in this course is informal, students will be developing writing skills such as mechanics, technique, and expressiveness. The following checklist can be used at any time to assess student work, monitor progress, and identify areas that need additional support. Not every piece of writing will display skills on the checklist. Feel free to use the writing rubric below in whatever way you feel will best support your student.**

**WRITING MECHANICS**

✓	SKILL
	Uses complete sentences
	Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types
	Demonstrates correct use of punctuation
	Shows awareness of grammar rules
	Shows awareness of spelling conventions
	Strengthens writing by planning, revising, editing, and proofreading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS**

✓	SKILL
	Identifies a story's central theme or goal
	Summarizes a story's plot
	Recognizes how story events build on one another
	Identifies how setting details influence the plot and characters and help tell the story
	Identifies the narrative perspective and its influence on how the story is told
	Analyzes how a character develops over the course of a story
	Recognizes how conflict develops and is resolved through the story
	Analyzes how the narrative arc (plot) and character arc intersect

**EXPRESSIVENESS**

✓	SKILL
	Writes with originality
	Uses precise language
	Shows intentional, careful word choice
	Uses language appropriate to the audience and writing purpose
	Demonstrates relevant and effective use of figurative language (such as similes, metaphors, analogies, imagery, etc.) and other literary devices (such as repetition, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, etc.)
	Uses descriptive language to connect the reader to the content

## 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.

**Exploring What You Know assignments are designed to activate the student's prior knowledge and experience while identifying their starting point for information related to the lesson's topics. Their responses can help you meet your student where they are and extend their learning and understanding in appropriately challenging ways. Identifying the student's base knowledge can help you accurately track their progress and deepen their engagement with the material.**

## 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.

**There are a wide variety of assignments in each lesson. This provides many opportunities for students to explore the course content and demonstrate their knowledge. You can choose which assignments you want students to focus on each week, or you can allow them to choose a variety of assignments based on their interests. If there are certain assignments that you want completed, let students know at the beginning of each lesson. For instance, you might require two or three specific assignments, and then ask students to select one or two of their own choosing.**

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.)

***Asylum* refers to a safe haven or place or condition of shelter or protection, particularly from ethnic, religious, or political persecution or violence, poverty, and corruption.**

**Students will choose a “Reflect and Respond” option from the list in the box to respond to the assignment prompts. Since response formats will vary, look for engagement with the content (directly addressing the prompt) and clarity and expressiveness in how students communicate their ideas.**

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.)

**The idea that the border (political boundaries) moved and not the people is one that may be new to some students. Their response should include their thoughts as well as specific references to the material.**

**While the “Reflect and Respond” options can be fairly brief, the student’s thought processes and understanding (or questions they have) should be in evidence.**

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.

**Student responses should focus on new information they learned. This can give you a better understanding of the breadth of their prior historical knowledge. Students might contrast the perspective of the Aztec with that of the Spanish, or they might observe the attitude of both the Spanish and the Aztec toward each other initially as well as in response to various actions.**

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.

**Answers will vary. For instance, students might point to the Latin American identity being shaped by the rich Indigenous histories of the Maya, Aztec, Inca, and other groups. They might see colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese as both a strong influence on identity and a border being crossed (by the Europeans) and being created (by the ways in which colonization limited the movements and opportunities for the Indigenous people).**

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.)

**Look for students to highlight specific information from the article. For instance, the number of unaccompanied children crossing the border into the United States has risen in the past decade as has the number of people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Students may be surprised to learn about the rules of engagement governing border officials and military personnel or how the asylum process was changed in 2018 and 2019.**

### 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?

**Data collected will vary based on the student's geographic region. Students will make conjectures about how ethnic representations in different areas impact those living there, including their own experiences where they live. For instance, students who live in an area with a diverse population might note the benefits of diverse cultural influences (food, music, religion, etc.). Students living in less populated or less diverse areas might note the challenges of connecting with others of a similar ethnic background.**

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.

**This assignment asks students to give their own interpretation of what they've learned, developing and demonstrating a more nuanced understanding of identity and labels. Benefits of using labels can include helping people find others who share their identity, finding power in numbers, gaining a source of rich traditional knowledge, and experiencing a sense of community. Drawbacks of using labels can include limiting how people see themselves, making it harder for them to make connections with others, or creating more difficulties for those who don't fit into certain expectations.**

**Look for students to draw meaningful examples from the texts as well as relate the material to their own experiences.**

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*?

**Students will explore the ways that the term *Latino* (and perhaps labels in general) can be limiting. Refer to the drawbacks listed in the previous assignment for some examples.**

## 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?

**This assignment asks students to relate the material to their own life, drawing meaningful parallels between their own experiences and what they are learning. Some students may find it difficult to label their identity or may only stick to ethnic or cultural labels. Other aspects of identity can include gender, sexual orientation, political leanings, nationality, and personal abilities or characteristics, such as introvert, athlete, environmentalist, vegetarian, musician, etc.**

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.

**Any reader response prompt will work here, including a 3-2-1, a Surprise-Intrigue-Disturb, or a discussion on these issues. Look for engagement with the idea of identity as it relates to their own lives and the lives of those in the videos.**

**Many assignments in this course can be done as a discussion, especially if the student is working in a classroom or small-group setting. Discussions can also be offered to students working independently—they can discuss topics with a friend or family member. They might also be offered the option of a discussion with their supervising teacher.**

**Discussions allow students the benefit of an exchange of ideas and the opportunity to refine their ideas after further consideration. Discussions can take the place of written work. If you would like your student to provide evidence of a discussion, you can ask them for a list of key takeaways from the discussion, have them record a segment of the discussion, request a written or an audio summary of the discussion, or ask for a simple confirmation that the discussion took place.**

### 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.

**This activity is not a test but rather an interactive way to explore prior knowledge, maps, and the nations of Latin America.**

## 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.)

**Extend Your Learning assignments are optional, and you may like to offer extra credit to students who complete them. They can also be used as discussion prompts.**

### 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
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

## 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.)

**Students will describe their understanding of Eve and the biblical story of being tempted to sin in the Garden of Eden.**

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.

**Some students might see this story as sexist in how the female is blamed and the male is cast as the victim of her innate weakness or sensuality (she gives in to her craving for the taste of the apple). Another perspective is that Eve is prohibited from having something she wants, which is similar to how the behavior of females has often been limited by society. Some students might not view this as a sexist story because both Adam and Eve suffer the consequences equally.**

## 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



## 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.)

**Students will look closely at a passage of their choice. This type of close reading gives them an opportunity to look at themes and context, infer and make predictions, and make connections between the text and their own experiences.**

**If you find students repeatedly choosing the same “Reflect and Respond” option, you might want to assign particular ones in future assignments to challenge them to expand their engagement with the material.**

## 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?

**Answers will vary and might include outlets such as art, writing, sports, friendships, hobbies, time in nature, and other special interests.**

- b. In October, Xiomara and Aman’s relationship grows. How is he a support to her?

**As their romance blossoms, Xiomara feels that Aman understands her. He is interested in her poetry and often asks her to read it to him. He “never grows tired of my writing and always asks for one more” (135). He shares her passion for music, and they find solace in just being together.**

- c. How do Caridad and Twin support Xiomara’s evolving identity?

**Twin finds the flyer for the poetry club and encourages her to join, saying “This world’s been waiting for your genius a long time” (73). When she begins texting and meeting Aman, Twin doesn’t ask questions, and he and Caridad cover for her so she can meet Aman at a party. Caridad is worried about her getting into trouble, both with her mother and by getting pregnant, but she likes seeing Xiomara happy.**

- 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?

**Xiomara’s opinion of the priest begins to change when he admits to having doubts just as she does. He tells her, “We all doubt ourselves and our path sometimes” (153).**

- e. On page 172, Xiomara talks about her friendship with Caridad. Reread the page. Do you agree with her ideas? Explain your answer.

**Xiomara thinks that being someone's friend means you "help them be their best self" and "give them a home when they don't want to be in their own" (172), which is exactly what Caridad did for her. Students will share their own perspective on this stance.**

- 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?

**When Xiomara sees Twin with his boyfriend, Cody, she suddenly realizes it confirms what she's known all along. She worries because "I've always wanted to keep him safe, but this makes him a target and I can't defend against the arrows I know are coming" (176). She realizes that he must have been scared that others, and especially their parents, would find out he was gay, and that "maybe my silence. Just made him feel more alone. Maybe my silence. Condone the ugly things people think" (177).**

**Students will come up with their own ideas about how Xiomara might be more supportive of Twin in the future. For instance, students might suggest that she speak up about being openly accepting of gay people or that she ask her brother how he would like to be supported.**

- 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"?

**Students will share their own perspectives on gender roles and expectations. In the story, both Twin and Aman are limited by cultural expectations about what boys should and shouldn't do, and Xiomara experiences many gender-role expectations, such as being expected to do housework when her (male) twin is exempt.**

- 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?

**In the punishment scene (198–212), we see Mami drag her, push her to her knees, make her kneel on grains of rice to increase the pain as she prays, pulls her hair, and calls her names. Students will give their opinion on whether this punishment is abusive. They have the opportunity to envision a different reaction from Mami, perhaps one where Mami expresses her emotions without resorting to physical violence.**

- i. A recurring situation in this book is that no one protects Xiomara. Why do you think that is the case?

**When Xiomara is sexually harassed in school and on the street, no one speaks up for her. When she is being violently punished for kissing Aman, Twin and Papi witness it but do not say anything. When Aman sees a boy in school grab Xiomara from behind, he does not move to confront the boy (218–220), which enrages Xiomara.**

**Students might suggest that no one speaks up because the behavior is accepted (especially in the case of Mami's treatment of her) or they don't want to get into a fight, which Xiomara seems willing to do. Students might also point out that some incidents happen when no one else is there to witness it or that bystanders—including Twin at home—don't want to get involved and become a target themselves.**

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?

**There are many examples of literary devices, so answers will vary. A few examples from this section of the book are shown below.**

**Note how students explain their examples as this can indicate how well they understand the different literary devices. Look for students to demonstrate increasing skill in interpreting figurative language as they continue to practice this skill.**

Literary device	Example from the text	Explanation
metaphor and allusion	“my heart is one of Darwin’s finches learning to fly” (145)	This expresses how Xiomara feels a sense of newfound freedom when she kisses Aman; this quote also alludes to Darwin’s theory of natural selection, which they had been studying in school that day.
simile	“I know I’m wearing Aman’s kiss like a bright red sweater” (149)	Xiomara feels that she is so changed by her romantic encounter that everyone must be able to see it; the reference to the color red also hints at her fear of being labeled as lustful or a “scarlet woman.”
metaphor	“there is a balloon where my heart used to be and it whooshes air out at the prick of his words” (174)	By likening her heart to a popped balloon (and Twin’s words to a sharp pin), the reader understands Xiomara’s emotion on a visceral level.

## 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?

**This one- or two-page reflection should demonstrate a meaningful connection between the book and either the concept of borders, the student's experiences, or the student's identity (depending on which option they choose). While no formal writing parameters are given, look for students to express their ideas in an organized way, make relevant connections to the prompt, and communicate their ideas clearly.**

## 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.

2. 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.

**In this analysis of a popular song, students will learn about a particular cultural reference and see how history and culture can help shape modern life 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

## 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.

**Student might see “the other side” in many realms of their lives, such as conflicts with others, their public versus private personas, economic strata in their community, race-related issues, etc.**

## 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.

**Answers will vary. Look for students to connect with the story somehow, such as relating to it on a personal or emotional level, connecting it to current events, or gaining a new understanding of the factors that influence migration/immigration.**

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?

**It should be clear to students that each character wants something slightly different but there are substantial commonalities in their desires. This assignment can be done as a discussion, either one-on-one or in a group. Below is a brief description of the stories, all of which are based on actual events.**

- **“Where Are Your Kids?”: The mother of the two children, who lives in the United States, gets a call from immigration that Nicole and Kevin have crossed the border,**



which comes as a surprise. The children were living with their aunt in Guatemala, after their grandmother and uncle were killed by gang members for not paying an extortion fee.

- **“Now I’m Going to Sleep a Bit”:** After her grandmother dies (whom she had been living with in El Salvador), Kimberly travels to the United States to find her mom; she makes a friend in the “freezer” (detention center), and they take turns standing up so the other can lie down in the overcrowded cell.
  - **“The Other Side Means the Other Side”:** The two brothers live with their grandmother and extended family in El Salvador while their mom is in the United States; Santiago is threatened by gang members and forced to hide drugs for them. When this happens, the brothers flee to the U.S. to avoid the gangs.
  - **“There Are Snakes Out There”:** Alejandro left his family to travel to the United States with a cousin after being targeted and harassed by gangs in Guatemala; after five days in the desert, they turn themselves in to immigration at the border, despite fearing for their lives if they are sent back.
  - **“It Was Like Cotton, but When I Touched It, It Was Just Ice”:** Dylan is staying in a children’s home in Chicago while hoping to join his mom, who moved to the United States when he was a baby. He had been living in El Salvador with his grandmother, but he was bullied and tortured by gangs and threatened with death if he didn’t join them.
  - **“I’d Rather Die Trying to Get Out”:** After their grandmother and uncle were killed by gangs, they lived with an aunt but left to travel on their own to the United States to join their mom; they are fleeing gang violence after Kevin’s arm is broken when he refuses to join the gang.
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.

**In these resources, policy facts and objective details are juxtaposed with the dramatic and moving personal stories of migrants, some of whom are children. At this point in the course, look for more in-depth responses and connections between the literature and the content of the resources. Students should use examples from the book and any of the resources. Whatever form their response takes, it should be cohesive and insightful.**

## 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.

**Students will share their response, which can be analytical or emotional in nature. They might notice or be surprised by particular word choices, inherent bias, or the tone of the language in the media.**

- 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*.

**Answers will vary based on what is watched. Because students have been exploring the themes of borders and identities in depth from multiple angles, look for a response that is thoughtful and nuanced. They should connect the video and the literature thematically.**

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?

**In this assignment, students will analyze the poem’s effect on them and make a connection between themselves and the author based on the poem and their experiences. The poem addresses many aspects of life, including having one’s sense of self denied, feeling voiceless, creating a life that is uniquely one’s own, and feeling at a crossroads.**

## 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.

**Students are likely to find commonalities between the book and the stories in the photo essay. In general, students may begin to feel more and more like the many immigrant stories are connected thematically by a desire for a safe future for themselves and their families and a desire to be given the chance to find it. At the same time, students may begin to recognize the unique circumstances and individuality of each person and story. Understanding this combination of shared experience and individual sense of self is an important step toward understanding the Latin American identity and experience.**

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.

**This assignment is likely to have a visceral effect on students because the images express and evoke nuanced emotions, often juxtaposing opposites such as despair and hope, fear and courage, patience and eagerness.**

## 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.

**This activity relates to the border portraits from the reflection assignment above. Borders can be physical, such as a doorway, the intersection of a field and a forest, or a bridge that crosses a river. Borders can also be emotional or cultural, such as a *quinceañera* or other rite of passage, embarking on a solo journey for the first time, or stepping outside one’s comfort zone.**

## 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.

**This assignment is meant to help students think creatively about bridging borders. In the process of brainstorming, students can list their ideas (for example, a volleyball game with players on both sides of the fence) or develop a more detailed plan or sketch. This could be a starting point for a final project if the student chooses option 8 in lesson 18.**

## 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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<b>Academic Expectations .....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Original Work Guidelines.....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>Finding Reputable Sources .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Citing Your Sources .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Elements of Good Writing.....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>The Writing Process .....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>149</b>