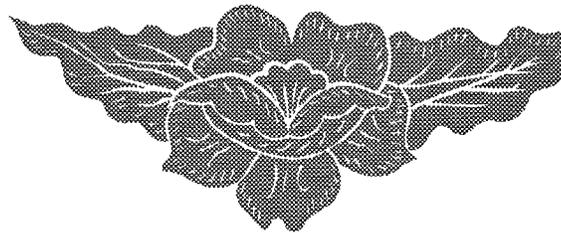


*Introduction:*

**WHAT DOES  
BORDERS AND  
IDENTITY MEAN?**



*Introducción:*

**¿QUÉ SIGNIFICA  
IDENTIDAD Y  
FRONTERAS?**

# TEACHER INTRODUCTION

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What is a border? Why is it important to explore the U.S.-Mexico border? How do borders affect identities? These are questions to discuss with your students. There are many possible answers.

A border can be a geopolitical line between

- neighborhoods
- cities
- regions
- states
- countries

A border can also be a social divider between

- families
- ethnic groups
- religions
- classes
- genders
- occupations

The border between the United States and Mexico is many different things: a line on a map; a 2,000-mile stretch of changing landscape; a river; a barbed-wire fence; a border-crossing station. It is also a complex cultural region which is home to a wide spectrum of people. Some have lived in the region for centuries; others have arrived recently. Some were drawn by economic opportunities; others have stayed despite poverty and hardship, because it is the land of their ancestors.

The border divides two countries, but it also fosters a culture of its own. Some traditions persist in spite of the border. Some traditions are transformed by the border. And the border creates new traditions as well. The border separates communities, but it also brings people together, through confrontation as well as cooperation.

This section of the *Borders and Identity* materials introduces students to the geography of the U.S.-Mexico border, and encourages students to draw maps of their own communities. Questions include: What separates your community, your neighborhood, your school from others? How do people cooperate or compete across these divisions? How can a border be both beneficial and harmful?

Students then move to the subject of identity. Discussion questions include: How do the borders in students' lives affect their own identities? These questions are followed by exercises in which students analyze their own identities, using nicknames and identification cards.

Suggestions to prepare for exercises in this section:

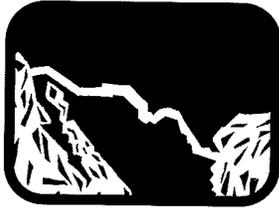
*Map Exercise:* Obtain several types of maps of the U.S.-Mexico border, for instance, a road map, a topographical map, and a population map, to remind students that maps present different points of view.

*Statement of Identity:* For definitions of terms like "Hispanic," "Chicano," "Latino," see the glossary in the Appendix. You may wish to discuss with students the uses of these or parallel terms in your own experience, as well as their own.

*Designing Your Own Identity Card:* Show students your own identification cards such as a driver's license, credit cards, insurance cards, etc. Discuss the different uses of each card. Provide each student with two 3" x 5" blank file cards and art supplies such as colored pencils, and markers, or materials for collage.

By the end of this section, students will:

- *understand the basic geography of the U.S.-Mexico border.*
- *learn that people from many cultural backgrounds live on the border.*
- *examine photographs as clues to people's identities.*
- *analyze the statements of two border residents.*
- *identify borders in their own communities.*
- *explore how their own identities are shaped by the borders in their lives.*



# Map Exercises

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## 1. WHAT IS A BORDER?

Draw a map of the neighborhood around your school or home. Examine the borders or boundaries of the map you drew. How did you decide where to stop drawing? What marks these borders (fences, roads, rivers, parking lots)? What lies beyond these borders? How is the area beyond different from what is inside your mapped area? How is it the same? Do you need to cross these borders? What happens when you cross them?

## 2. READING MAPS

The following materials introduce the peoples and cultures of the U.S.-Mexico border region. The map (page 29) offers a closer look at the geographical region of the border.

- Name the states on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border.
- How many “twin cities,” like El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, can you find?
- What geographic features help to define the border?
- Look at another map of the border region and study the differences in the information provided. How does a road map differ from a topographical map?
- If you are not from the border region, obtain a map of your home city, county, or state. Discuss the borders of your own region.

The border is a geographic region. It also defines a cultural region which is home to many different people. In 1993, border residents from many different cultural backgrounds traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Smithsonian Institution’s Festival of American Folklife. They came to talk about the U.S.-Mexico border, and how it affects their lives.

At the Festival in Washington, a frequent topic of discussion was how living on the U.S.-Mexico border affects a person’s identity. This topic runs through the *Borders and Identity* materials. The following exercises help you to explore what factors make up your own identity.



## 2. A STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

Read the following statement from Carmen Cristina Moreno, a singer from Cathedral City, California, who spoke about her own background. Then discuss the statement using the questions below.

*It's very difficult for a Hispanic, a Chicano, a Mexican American child, a child of Mexicans born in this country, to find identity. I felt that strongly. I felt ambiguous — you're neither here nor there. The Mexicans do not accept you because you were born here. They're resentful because you were born in the land of plenty. And you go down to Mexico, and to them you are an American, a gringa. You are an outcast, and they discriminate against you. And, here of course, there's a cultural barrier.*



*Carmen Cristina Moreno is a singer from Cathedral City, California. © Carmen Cristina Moreno es una cantante de Cathedral City, California. Photo by photo de Jeff Tinsley, courtesy/cortesia Smithsonian Institution*

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Carmen Cristina uses different terms to describe a child who is born in the United States of Mexican parents: Hispanic, Chicano, Mexican American, American, *gringa*. How do these meanings differ?
2. Why do you think Carmen Cristina felt “ambiguous”? Have you ever felt this way?
3. Why did Carmen Cristina feel like an “outcast” when she went to Mexico? Have you, or has anyone you know, ever had an experience that made you feel like an outsider? Describe how you felt.
4. What does Carmen Cristina mean by “a cultural barrier”? What is a barrier? Is it different from or similar to a border? What other kinds of barriers exist? **Clue:** Could a barrier be a fence built around someone’s property? Does a fence keep people in or out?

## 3. ANOTHER LOOK AT IDENTITY

Read the following statement from Enrique Lamadrid, a folklorist from New Mexico.

*We continually negotiate our identity, every day of our lives, every time we open our mouths. My name is Enrique Lamadrid. I'm from New Mexico. Every time I open my mouth, I have to decide whether to talk to people in Spanish or English. When I was growing up, to some people I was Rick, to other people Enrique. It's a dual identity, but it's not cut in the middle. Both of these ends meet, and there is a unity to all of that. All of us have experienced that, I'm sure.*

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does Enrique mean when he says we “negotiate our identity”?
2. How does the way someone expresses him/herself identify him/her? If you speak more than one language, have you had an experience similar to Enrique’s? **Clue:** Different speech does not necessarily mean different languages like English and Spanish. You may speak one way to your close friends and another way to your parents or at school.
3. What is a “dual identity”? How can someone be more than one person at the same time? Have you experienced this feeling?

**4. NICKNAMES**

William Warrior is a Black Seminole from Del Rio, Texas. In the 1830s Black Seminoles migrated west from Florida to Indian Territory (to what is now Oklahoma). In both regions, they were targets of slave raids. Many Black Seminoles moved to northern Mexico, seeking refuge from repression in the United States. In Mexico, they are known as Mascogos. In 1870, some of the Black Seminoles moved back to the United States to serve as scouts for the U.S. Army.

William Warrior has many different names. William is his given name, but he is known as Dub by most members of the Del Rio community. Dub has relatives across the border, in Nacimiento de los Negros, Mexico. In Spanish, the name William becomes Guillermo. Dub has a nickname in Mexico as well; people call him Memo. And if you are really close to him, you might call him Memito. Thus, William Warrior has five different names. How many do you have?

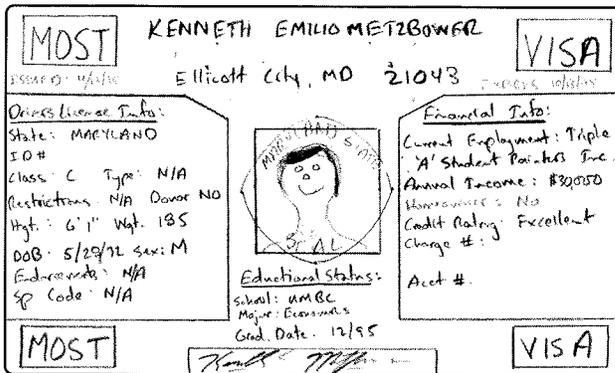
Miguel Luna Franco, born on the El Sáuz ranch in the northern state of Nuevo León, Mexico, recalls how he and his brother, Cirilo, came to be called El Palomo y El Gorrión (the Dove and the Sparrow).

*Here come The Birds! From childhood, that’s how we have been known in La Chona [the name of the small town near the ranch where they lived] and everywhere we have been since. Father says that he called me Gorrión [Sparrow] because I looked like those little birds that have very few feathers when they are born. I was bald at birth, and so he baptized me Gorrión. Palomo [Dove] was chubby when he was born, like a dove with a fat breast, and that’s why Father gave him that name. To this day, when we are around, people say, “Here come the Pájaros [Birds].” It makes me think of my childhood, my town’s people and the land we come from.*

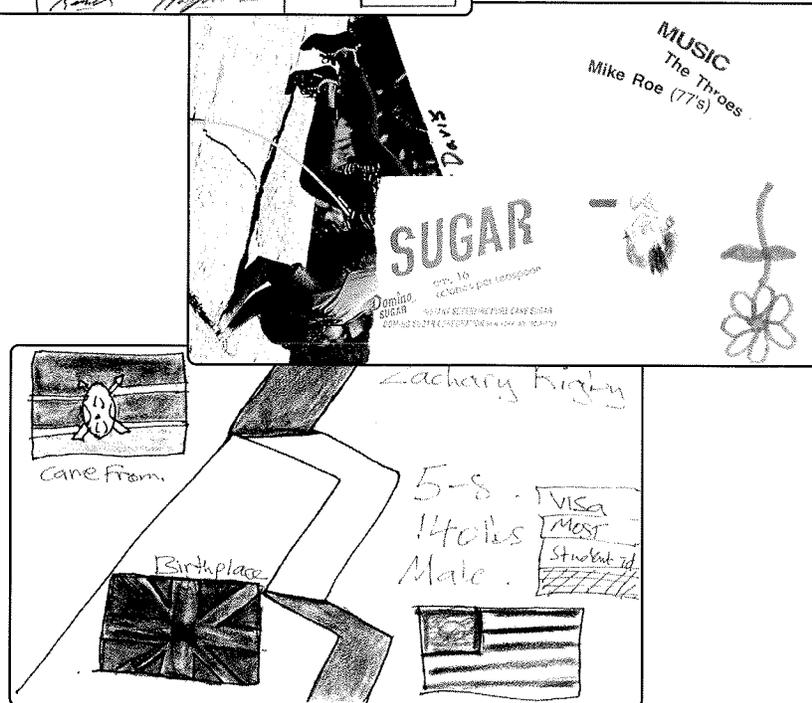
Think of two names that people use for you. One might be your real or given name, and one might be a nickname that family or friends use. Write a short essay explaining how these names came about and how each name defines your identity in a different way.

### 5. DESIGNING YOUR OWN IDENTITY CARD

1. Design your own identification card. (Possibilities include a school I.D., a club card, or simply a card that shows or tells something important about yourself.) Include any information you would like, but do not exceed the size of a 3" x 5" file card.
2. Exchange cards with someone else in the class, and interpret each other's identity cards. Does his/her reading match what you wanted to express about yourself? What does the card tell you about the person's identity? How does the information on the cards differ from what you already know about your classmate? What did you choose to include in your identity card? Did you include where you were born, where you live now? Did you include other members of your family? Do you consider such facts a part of your identity? Can identification cards include all the information about your identity?



Identity cards reveal personal traits students consider important. © Las credenciales revelan rasgos personales importantes para los estudiantes. Courtesy/ cortesía University of Maryland, Baltimore County



# *Summary of Introduction*

## **WHAT DOES *Borders and Identity* MEAN?**

Ideas in this section:

- The U.S.-Mexico border is a diverse region, in terms of people and geography.
- Borders divide and define areas.
- A person's identity is affected by how people perceive him/her as well as how he/she thinks about him/herself.

Following these exercises, think back to the questions you discussed at the opening of the section. How have your ideas and those of your students changed? How do borders define who you are? How do borders affect your identity?

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## **What's Next?**

In the next section, on **History and Identity**, students will learn:

- *how history and present-day circumstances have created the distinct cultural region of the U.S.-Mexico border.*
- *to critically view the first section of the videotape.*
- *how to use the cultural map to explore border culture in its many forms.*