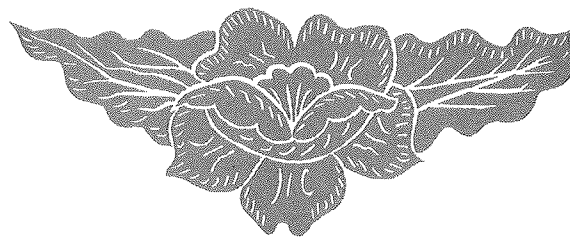


*Part 4:*

# **OCCUPATIONS AND IDENTITY**



*Parte 4:*

# **TRABAJO E IDENTIDAD**

# TEACHER INTRODUCTION

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Along the border, geography and history, as well as political and social conditions, have affected where and how people work. In some cases, jobs have been created because of the border. Occupations along the border range from cowboy to craft vendor, from Border Patrol agent to factory worker. The different ways people make a living are often important identity markers.

In Part 4 of the video, students will learn from the stories and experiences of people working in many different occupations along the border. Cowboys in the Rio Grande region talk about the changes in their work over the years; a Border Patrol agent and a blacksmith tell how growing up among ranchers helps them in their present jobs. The *maquiladora* industry is examined briefly. Mixteco women from Tijuana explain how tourism has created opportunities that they have taken advantage of as souvenir vendors.

One exercise examines how tourism affects the border. Another exercise considers occupations like blacksmithing, which use recycled materials. A third encourages students to think about the occupations that are important in their own communities. Students read about factory workers in the *maquiladora* industry of the border region.

The excerpted article from *American Cowboy* provides an example of the relationship between two occupations — the Border Patrol and ranching. The article also offers students an opportunity to examine critically the predicaments and attitudes that a border creates. The article uses analogies between skills required to track cattle if they leave a pasture and those for tracking a person traveling across the border. In the article, “potentially diseased, stray livestock” are compared to “drug smugglers and illegal aliens.” However, the analogies raise questions about comparing people with disease-carrying animals, a practice that may lead

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to rationalizing human rights abuses and infringements. Students are also asked to think about the romanticized notion of the “Old West,” which is seen as an empty wilderness waiting to be settled by pioneers, but in reality was a territory inhabited by indigenous people and later by Mexicans, before Anglo settlers came from the United States. (For more information on this subject, consult the *Legacy of Conquest* by Patricia N. Limerick and *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* by Richard White, cited in the Bibliography.)

Suggestions to prepare for exercises in this section:

*Tourism:* Obtain brochures from a tourist agency depicting places to visit to give students ideas about techniques to attract tourists.

*Professions in the Community:* Brainstorm with students about different occupations so that the class covers a broad range of occupations.

*Using What's Around:* Identify several examples of the reuse of materials in your community, for example, historic factory buildings remodeled into condominiums or a shopping area; a recycling plant; scrap metal sculptures; rubber tire planters in yards.

If you live near an international border, try to arrange a visit to your classroom by a Border Patrol agent or former agent.

By the end of this section, students will learn:

- *how occupations can be specific to a region geographically, historically, or through political or social circumstances.*
- *how traditional occupations along the border have evolved over time, while certain of their characteristics remain the same.*



## Discussion Quotation

Read the following quotation, and discuss the questions that follow:

*When some aspect of the tradition doesn't hold up with what else is going on, then you make changes to keep the tradition alive. For example, there is not a boot maker in Texas, on the border or elsewhere, who still stitches by hand. The machine is an important part of carrying on the tradition.*

Pat Jasper, folklorist, Austin, Texas

What does Pat Jasper mean by “what else is going on”? What are some of the forces that impact on traditions today?

Think of an example of an occupation in which the workers have adapted new methods to stay alive and productive.



## Video Viewing

Watch **Occupations and Identity**, Part 4 of the video. Discuss the following:

- How long has ranching existed on the border?
- How has ranching influenced other occupations on the border, like blacksmithing and the Border Patrol?
- What kinds of occupations have been established due to the creation of the international border?

# EXERCISES

## 1. LOOKING AT OCCUPATIONS

- Make a list of the occupations portrayed in the video. Under each occupation, list what conditions make this occupation attractive, or what makes it difficult. How does geography affect each occupation? How does tourism?
- Do you think Reynaldo Hernández thinks of himself first as a Border Patrol agent, or first as a rancher? Think about other people you know and their occupations. How can occupation characterize identity?

## 2. TOURISM: OCCUPATIONS AND ECONOMY

The border draws tourists, and tourists spend money, creating jobs. Make a list of some of the things tourists do when they are visiting a new place. What types of occupations respond to these needs and interests? Do you know anyone working in any of these occupations?

- Doña Ofelia and her fellow Mixteco vendors sell crafts and souvenirs to tourists in Tijuana. They have formed a union. What is a union, and what can it do to help workers? Why do you think the Mixteco women decided to form one? **Clue:** Read about unions at your school or local library. Consult the Bibliography in the Appendix.
- Doña Ofelia's years of experience as a vendor have paid off. Olivia Cadaval, a folklorist, describes Doña Ofelia as a "master in knowing her clientele and the different venues in which she sells." A basket may sell for \$10 in Tijuana, but at the Festival in Washington on the National Mall, Doña Ofelia priced the same basket at \$20. Why did she do this?
- Imagine you are a tourist buying something from Doña Ofelia. You speak no Spanish. Doña Ofelia knows very little English. Negotiate a price for a doll or a basket. Create a short skit using this scenario.

## 3. INTERVIEW: PROFESSIONS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Choose a profession that interests you, perhaps one you are considering as a career. Locate someone who is currently working in this profession, and interview him/her. How is his/her occupation related to the region the person lives in? Has the person's occupation been affected by changes in materials and

technologies? How has the person adapted to new methods to stay in business?

#### 4. USING WHAT'S AROUND

In the video, Armando Flores, a blacksmith from Laredo, Texas, discusses the materials he finds to create traditional and contemporary metal work. Armando uses railroad spikes, scrap metal, anything he can find.

- Study the other examples of recycling along the border on the cultural map. Can you think of an example of the reuse of materials in your own family or neighborhood?
- Write a short essay about the importance of reusing materials, using the examples in the cultural map or from your own experience.



*Armando Flores, from Laredo, Texas, demonstrates his blacksmithing skills at the Festival in Washington. © Armando Flores de Laredo, Texas, demuestra sus habilidades de herrero en el Festival en Washington. Photo by/foto de Burt Miller, cortesía/cortesía Smithsonian Institution*



*This table shows the range of items Armando Flores makes. © Esta es una muestra de las diferentes cosas que Armando Flores hace. Photo by/foto de Rick Vargas, cortesía/cortesía Smithsonian Institution*

# READING

## INDUSTRY: CHEAP LABOR AND ASSEMBLY PLANTS

BY OLIVIA CADAVAL

The Mexican government initiated the National Border Economic Development Program in 1961 in an effort to develop industry and create jobs in the northern border region of the country. This program was followed by the Industrialization Program in 1965, which granted large companies special dispensations in taxes, tariffs, and various forms of regulation when they established assembly plants in Mexico. Along the Mexican side of the border, American-based companies like General Electric, RCA, and Kenworth have built assembly plants, called *maquiladoras*, which employ Mexican workers. Other



A *maquiladora* employee works on parts at an assembly plant in Ciudad Juárez. © Una trabajadora en una *maquiladora* en Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, ensambla piezas. Photo by/foto de Olivia Cadaval

countries, including Japan and Canada, have also taken advantage of the Industrialization Program to establish assembly plants in this border region.

The *maquiladoras* have industrialized the border and created thousands of jobs, which have spurred migration from other regions of Mexico. These plants have also increased the pollution of the region, which has led to legal disputes and environmental investigations.

The majority of *maquiladora* workers are women. Most of the work is tedious and boring. Workers are responsible for individual components and rarely see the final product. Nevertheless, the friendships that develop and the enticements offered by the companies contribute to the work culture found in the border *maquiladoras* and to the social

life that the work creates.

Most *maquiladoras* organize activities and competitive events to boost the interest and enthusiasm of their workers. These include sports and pageants with elected queens and kings. Workers spend a large part of their free time in the

plant's recreational facilities, where they can meet their friends and bring their family to events organized by the company. Norma Iglesias, a sociologist who has done research among factory workers, finds that this may be the only social life available to many workers.

Many workers seek out "good" companies with better working conditions, easier schedules, and better transportation benefits. In addition, many workers may also look for *maquiladoras* that offer T-shirts, caps, and other clothing items as incentives. Many workers have friends or relatives in other plants, and networks among the workers help new employees to select the best plant.

Here are some stories told by workers in *maquiladoras*, recorded by sociologist María

Eugenia de la O, researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte:

- *The woman who recommended me was a neighbor when I lived with my aunt in Otay. When I arrived, I told my aunt that I wanted to work. She said she knew somebody that worked at a maquila and that there might be a possibility of working there. So then we talked to that woman and she said that there were jobs but only at night, from 5 p.m. to 2 in the morning. That's how I knew that there was work there.*
- *I have to take two buses, really four — two going and two coming.... We have to be there at six so I have to get up very early.... The work is very hard, very dirty. You work with metals, and all the time you are shaking off shavings and picking out splinters....*
- *When we achieve good production or rejection ratios, perhaps 100 percent or even only 70 percent, we go [to eat in Tenampa] with the supervisor, the boss of the work group, and all the operators....*
- *They tell us that this is our place, but I don't think so. For example, there is this person that hires us. He tells us that we are pure garbage, and that is why we are here. We have told this to the bosses, but they do nothing.*
- *It's not that there was no other work — it's where one ends up, the last place you go. If you don't get something in one place... this leaves going to a maquila.... I always said, I am never going to work in a maquila, but yet here I am.*

## QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the reasons why *maquiladoras* developed in the border region?
2. What are some of the benefits of working in a *maquiladora*? The disadvantages?
3. Why might a *maquiladora* sponsor social events for its workers? What benefits might this practice bring to the factory?
4. What do you think “work culture” means?

## EXERCISES

### 1. *Maquila* Skit

Create a skit about working in a *maquiladora* factory, based on what you have read. Possible plot ideas include:

- a discussion between a worker and her boss

- a new employee gaining tips from a long-time *maquiladora* worker
- a *maquila* worker explaining her work to one of her children.

### 2. Occupational Interview

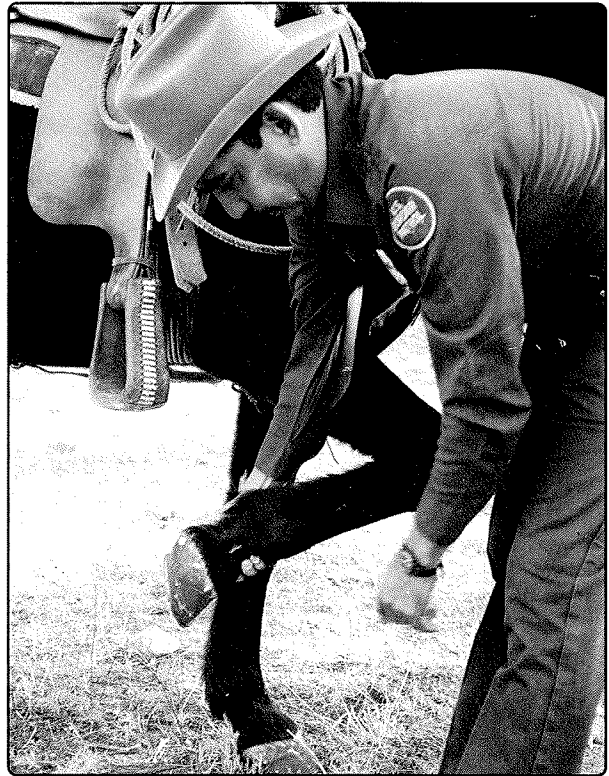
Interview someone who works outside his/her home. Find out how this person's work affects his/her life outside of work. For instance, a factory worker could also be a mother, a champion bowler, and a Girl Scout leader. What does the person like about work life versus the other parts of his/her life? Where do the different parts of his/her life intersect? **Clue:** Are work friends also social acquaintances? Are social and sport events sponsored by the factory? Who takes care of children while the parents work? Write a short profile of the person and the different spheres of his/her life. Explain how the different spheres intersect in the person's life. Illustrate the profile with a graphic to show how work, home, and social life are related, if at all.







Reynaldo Hernández spent much of his youth around horses. ● Reynaldo Hernández pasó gran parte de su juventud trabajando con caballos. Photo courtesy/foto cortesía Reynaldo Hernández



As a Border Patrolman, Hernández continues to rely on ranching skills, such as horsemanship. ● En su trabajo con la patrulla fronteriza, su conocimiento de caballos le es muy útil a Reynaldo Hernández. Photo courtesy/foto cortesía Reynaldo Hernández

quickly and surrender, but not all.

“Sometimes there’s stand-offs,” says Hernández. “They will dump their contraband and take off on horseback. I’ve seen smugglers ride horses through barbed wire fences. I’ve seen them ride their horses off cliffs.” Sure, it’s hard on the horse, says Hernández, but to a trafficker facing five to ten years in prison, the horse is the least of his worries. It is not always possible to overtake the mounted smugglers, says Hernández. “The smugglers are good cowboys, good

horsemen. I never underestimate their abilities,” he says.

Though any of the Border Patrol’s encounters could be a confrontation with smugglers or other armed criminals, more commonly they are with illegal immigrants. Curtailing illegal immigration is the Border Patrol’s main objective. Encounters with drug smugglers may be inevitable, but they are not the priority.

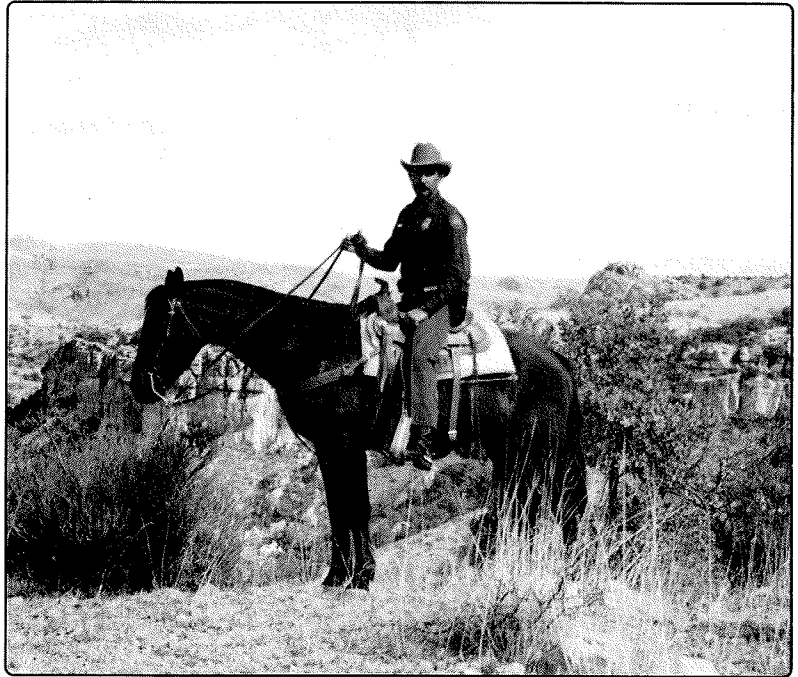
Before Hernández joined the Border Patrol, he had a similar job as a livestock inspector for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Veteri-

nary Services. In that position, he patrolled the international line for potentially diseased, stray livestock instead of the drug smugglers and illegal aliens he watches for today. The group of inspectors he worked with were nicknamed “River Riders,” because they were a horseback patrol that monitored stray livestock crossing the border through the Rio Grande River.

In 1987, Hernández took a job with the Border Patrol station in Nogales, and established the horseback patrol. Because of a shortage of man-

power, the horse patrol has been scaled back, but Hernández says not for long. New agents from the academy are expected to join the force by May. “Once we get more people, we’ll bring it [the horse patrol] back,” says Hernández. “Outside the city limits, it’s the most effective way to patrol. You can go places on horseback when you can’t in a four-wheel vehicle.”

Hernández says that the beauty of the land he patrols often makes him feel like he’s living back in the West’s glory days. “Tracking these guys is like being in the Old West,” he adds. “I have seen Indian caves intact with drawings on the wall. I have seen mountain lions, nests of Mexican eagles, an abundance of wildlife.”



*Reynaldo Hernández spends much time surveying the dry desert expanses of southern Arizona. • Reynaldo Hernández pasa mucho tiempo de su trabajo en el desierto del sur de Arizona. Photo courtesy/foto de Reynaldo Hernández*

## QUESTIONS

1. Name some of the ranching skills Border Patrol agents use. Do you think some of the people the agents pursue possess some of these same skills? What other skills and knowledge should Border Patrol agents have? For instance, do you think they need to fill out official reports? Do they need to know rules and regulations that cowboys would not know? Do they need para-military training? If possible, interview a Border Patrol agent about his/her training and his/her day-to-day work activities. How does his/her view differ from the description in the article?

2. Michael Carman writes that Hernández’s job with the Border Patrol is “similar” to his earlier job as a “livestock inspector.” Both jobs rely on tracking techniques and require a knowledge of the land. There are also some key differences between the two jobs. List some of these differences. Can you think of any problems that might occur if Border Patrol agents think of the people they are pursuing in the same terms as a livestock inspector thinks about cattle?

3. What are some of the differences between trying to catch a smuggler and trying to catch a person crossing the border without legal documents?

# EXERCISES

1. Hernández says, “Tracking these guys is like being in the Old West.” What does Hernández mean by this statement? What is the “Old West”? Do you think it feels like the “Old West” to the “guys” he is tracking? Write a response to “Riding the International Frontier” from the perspective of a person trying to cross the border at a point other than at an official border-crossing. Why is the person crossing the border? For work? To visit relatives? To buy things? What will the person contribute to the United States? Describe what the journey is like. Then, write a counter-response from the point of view of someone who has followed the rules and crossed the border legally.

2. Many present-day jobs rely on knowledge and skills from an earlier time, just as the Bor-

der Patrol agents rely on their ranching roots. For instance, present-day farmers must know basic information about the weather, soil, and plant and animal diseases even if they use high-tech equipment to plant and harvest crops. Interview someone who has a job or hobby requiring skills that have been developed over many years. Where did this person learn the older skills? Is the person passing these skills on to a younger generation?

3. Think of an occupation in which a person has to travel outside his community, outside his city, outside his country, or across borders. **Clue:** migrant farmworkers, salesmen, diplomats. How do the different legal requirements in the places he or she has to travel to affect his or her job? Can you imagine why people may be tempted to break or at least “bend” some of these official rules to get their job done?

## *Summary of Part 4*

# OCCUPATIONS *and* IDENTITY

Ideas in this section:

- Many occupations on the U.S.-Mexico border come from traditions older than the border or have a long tradition in the region.
  - Some occupations incorporate elements of older traditions in new forms.
  - Historical and social circumstances affect occupations along the border.
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## What's Next?

In the next section, on **Borders and Identity in Your Own Community**, students will learn:

- *guidelines for carrying out a documentation project of their own communities.*
  - *ideas for topics, format, and follow-up for their projects.*