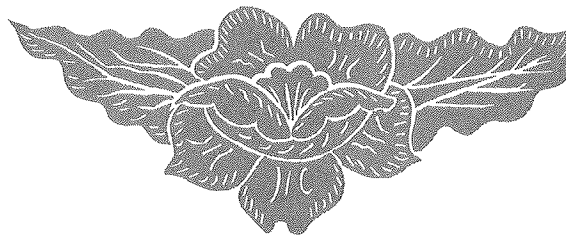


Part 5:

**BORDERS AND
IDENTITY IN YOUR
OWN COMMUNITY**



Parte 5:

**FRONTERAS E
IDENTIDAD
EN TU COMUNIDAD**

T **EACHER** *I* **NTRODUCTION**

You are now ready to guide your students through a documentation project on your own community! This section provides practical advice for such a project. The section begins with an exercise in which students create their own version of the cultural map included in the kit. This exercise should help students generate ideas for their own project.

Make sure you know the hours of local libraries and/or archives and the accessibility of their collections to students. You may want to do some preliminary research to identify sites such as family-run businesses, ethnic bakeries or grocery stores, murals, and events such as local celebrations. You may know some folk artists for students to interview. Do not overlook your school as a rich source of information: fellow teachers, administrators, janitors, cafeteria workers may be resource people themselves or may know people whom students could interview.

Remember that students will look to you as a model. Be sure to “place yourself” on their cultural map. You may also wish to conduct an interview of a family member yourself and share this with your students, or have them interview you. Bring in some family photos or an artifact and explain why they are important to you, or tell students a funny story from your childhood. If you do not know how to use a 35-mm camera or a video camera, invite a person with knowledge of such equipment into the classroom to give a mini-workshop before your students go into the community. Practice gathering visual information with them. If you are an accomplished photographer or videographer, share some of your work with students.

The following guidelines provide only a sketch of the information your students may need to carry out a full-blown project. There are a number of excellent oral history and folklore guides available; see the Bibliography for suggestions.

By the end of this section, students will learn:

- *the history of their own families and/or communities.*
- *how to carry out a documentation project of their own choosing.*

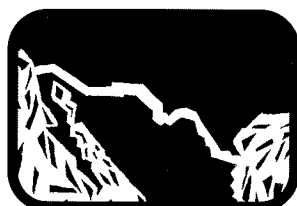


Student Project

The four-part video has introduced you to the rich culture of the U.S.-Mexico border region. Now you are ready to explore the borders in your own lives and communities in a large-scale project. Here is a framework for such a project.

The following guidelines will help you:

- Pick a theme.
- Plan your background research.
- Prepare for interviews and other forms of documentation.
- Carry out interviews.
- Create a final project.
- Develop plans to share your project with a wider audience.



Your Own Map

As a class, create your own cultural map, and place yourselves on it. The map may be of your town or city, county, or state. Research the local history of your area, and include some brief information.

Note geographic and other physical features that have had an impact on your area. **Clue:** for example, mountains, rivers, oceans, railroad tracks, housing projects, industrial complexes as well as any significant political events that helped form the area (disputes over territory, changes in administration, etc.).

- What familiar images are associated with the region you are mapping?
Street signs, commercial logos, art forms, foods?
- Where are the borders on the map? **Clue:** Remember that borders are not only between two countries. What's different about life on each side? What's the same?

Each member of the class should write a paragraph about him/herself similar to those included on the border cultural map. Include information about why and when your family came to your area. Bring in family photographs or take photographs in class. If you are bilingual, include a translation of your paragraph in your other language.

EXERCISES

I. DESIGNING YOUR PROJECT

Now it is time to design your own project.

Your project should include a combination of:

- interviews
- visual documentation through drawings, still photographs, or video
- library or archival research

Your research and documentation should lead to a final product that can be displayed, performed, or written and illustrated. Your class cultural map may help you choose a topic, or you may already have some ideas from carrying out the exercises related to the videos. Here are some more possibilities.

- Compile a photo essay on a local celebration or community event. Interviews with participants, organizers, and audience members might produce some interesting quotations to use as text to accompany photographs. How does the celebration serve as an identity marker for those involved (including yourself)?
- Make a short (5-minute) video on a local folk artist (such as a wood carver, instrument maker, quilter, basket maker, musician). Be sure to include information about the artist's family history, why he/she lives in your area, and/or why his/her art is an important part of his/her identity. Does this craft or this person have a special meaning for you as well?
- Invent a "Borders" game based on a popular game, like "Monopoly." Your game can be about your community or the U.S.-Mexico border. If you don't want to buy houses or hotels, what might you invest in along the border? What about *maquiladoras* or shrimping boats? How can you incorporate the consequences of crossing the border into your game?
- Create a 12-month calendar with a different illustration for each month, including an illustration (photo or drawing) of your family or community or group of friends. A caption can explain why the picture is an important identity marker. Important local events should be noted for each month. Possibilities include: birthdays of local heroes, commemorations of battles fought, dates of

significant landmarks, anniversaries of local natural disasters (floods, earthquakes) or industrial disasters (mine cave-ins, building fires).

2. OUTLINE

Write a one-page outline of your topic, including whom you plan to interview, where you plan to get the illustrations from, and what libraries or archives you will use. Explain what the finished product will be, with information on length, number of images, wall space it will cover, and other details pertinent to your plans. Describe who you think the audience for the final product will be (classmates, the rest of the school, or parents). Include a short bibliography if possible. Write out a schedule for completion of the project. If you are working with a group, be sure to explain who will be responsible for which parts of the project.

Share your outline with your teacher and classmates, and adjust the outline to incorporate their comments and suggestions.

3. CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT

Now you are ready to start. The place to begin will depend on your project. You may want to gather preliminary information at the school or local library, historical society, or archives of the local newspaper office. You may need to begin with a survey of your community for likely subjects for photos or interviews.

Here are some clues to successful information gathering:

- *Interviews:* Use a cassette tape recorder if available. It is much easier to record speech than to try to write down every word. Practice runs are recommended, to make sure you are comfortable with your equipment. One of the biggest problems for a beginning interviewer is the tendency to dominate the interview. Ask one question at a time, and let the person take time in answering. A list of questions helps to begin, but don't let these questions rule the interview. If a question leads to a topic not on your list, don't hesitate to ask. You may come away with information that you had never thought to gather.
- *Library or Archives:* Consult the reference staff of the library or archives before plunging into research. Explain your project, and ask for suggestions of where to start. Be sure to respect any rules the institution has about handling materials, using equipment (such as computers or microfilm readers), and the proper way to credit photos or other materials gathered. Find out the policy for copying materials before you decide what to include in your project.

- *Visual Information:* Make sure you know how to use your equipment (still camera, video camera) before you begin! Practice before shooting the pictures for your project. If possible, get some pointers from a skilled photographer or videographer. It may help to look through photo essay books and to watch some well-made documentary videos to get ideas on what you would like to do. Make sure your equipment is in good working order and that you have enough film, videotape, and batteries with you. In some cases you may need to use a tripod to avoid blurry photos and jumpy video. Be sure to allow enough time to reshoot photos or video if a problem occurs. If you are working in a group and have enough equipment, have more than one person shoot different aspects of the same event to ensure good coverage.

4. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once your information is gathered, you are ready to edit, compose, and finalize your project.

Here are some ideas that will help guarantee a good final product:

- Choose your best work. Your project will look sloppy and will be less effective if you choose blurry photos, uninteresting quotations, scratchy recordings, or badly reproduced artwork. Consult your teacher, family members, and classmates to help you choose information if you are having a hard time deciding what to use.
- Keep it short and precise. You may be tempted to include all of the information you gathered in a final product, but your audience will remain engaged longer and understand your point better if you keep explanations as concise and clear as possible. Select only those images and quotations that best illustrate your theme.
- Know your audience. If you plan to present your final product to lower grades, parents, family members, or the community at large, you will want to adjust the information to suit the age, knowledge, and/or interests of your audience.
- Be sure to obtain permission from all sources (people you interviewed, or who participated in a performance you may have videotaped) to use the information. Properly credit all of the information you use. You do not want to anger or hurt anyone who provided information for your project.

- Plan an event around the opening or inauguration of your project. If possible, offer simple refreshments.
- Obtain some formal feedback. After you have presented your project to your audience, be sure to note their reactions and comments. You might wish to assign someone in your group to gather comments or to administer a short evaluation sheet to audience members. This information will help you improve your next project, or adjust this project if you are so inclined.



Follow-Up

You may want to take your final project further.

Here are some suggestions:

- *As a class, gather together the information from all of the projects. Make a book of the class projects.*
- *If you made a video, find out if a local cable or community access television channel would like to broadcast it.*
 - *If you created a small exhibition, ask a local organization or business (local historical society, bank, community center) if they would like to borrow it for a display.*
- *Share your project with another audience. If appropriate, take your show “on the road” to a local senior citizen center or nursing home, a daycare center, another school, your local school board, or city government. Find out if local organizations are looking for program ideas (Boy Scouts, Lion’s Club, community center), and present your project to them.*
- *Write an article for the local newspaper based on your research.*
 - *Organize all of your transcripts, notes, photos, or video footage, and create an archives for the school library. This is a good way to use information that you cannot include in the final product. Be sure to include an index for easy access by others.*

For more information on creating a project, interviewing, and other techniques, consult the Folklore Research Resources listing in the Appendix.