

## **Latinos and Immigration through Inquiry, Short Stories, and Poetry**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Too often minority students have been left with a thirst for knowledge because of traditional schooling that has not been relevant to “at risk” students. Yet, the potential success, progress, and achievement of the students should serve ultimately as the gauge for an effective curriculum unit. Therefore, it is important for any effective curriculum unit to include a large repertoire of effective teaching methods that will provide relevant content to the experience of today’s minority students.

As an educator, I know that equally important to teaching methods, is the need for a teacher to have the depth and exposure to contemporary themes and topics that considers the unique environment of the student. That is, the objective should be to provide relevant literature that takes into consideration themes that are historically and presently in the Latino community. Presently, the Latino student makes up half of the student population in most Houston area school districts. These students should equally be served with content that takes into consideration their historical, social and cultural experience. By acknowledging diverse experiences through reading and writing in the classroom, students will benefit intellectually to become responsible citizens with the potential to become active thinkers and ultimately leaders in their communities.

One of the goals of this unit is to present the knowledge of immigration to students as a base to begin critical thinking activities. To this end, teachers will have a better tool to teach minority students to gain a deeper and more meaningful way of reading and writing. Hence, the ultimate goal is not just to assist in including relevant experience of Latinos in teaching, but to give the opportunity for all students to learn and become critical learners, so that they will have the opportunity to lead in today’s global economy and highly diverse society.

Relevant material will be gathered from different genres. The unit begins by demonstrating an “Inquiry” type lesson on the Bracero Program, then continues with poetry by Pat Mora, and concludes with short stories by Tomás Rivera. However, this order may not be the best for the classroom, as it depends in the type of students in the class. What is important is to have the students ready for information and engaged with the reading and writing exercises. For example, in some cases, poetry will tug at the students’ emotions and will be a good starting point. While in other cases, the inquiry lesson will lure the student into the context of the experience of Latino immigrants. Still, the teacher may have to find current articles in recent periodicals that will serve to ignite discussion on immigration and Latinos.

Student outcomes will include the following: reader responses to literature and poetry, creative writing pieces such as short stories and narratives. Students shall summarize and make opinions of different propaganda and newspaper articles. Students will be able listen and discuss an inquiry lesson. Within the inquiry lesson, students will make predictions and gather relevant information to draw conclusions on Latino topics and work collaboratively to produce a final product.

### **Objectives in Unit:**

The following objectives and goals are the Houston Independent School District's (1999-2000) ACCESS Scope and Sequence curriculum objectives that are based from the adopted Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for an English Language Arts course.

The student develops strategies to listen attentively, actively, and purposefully in a variety of settings for a variety of purposes. The student listens to analyze, appreciate, and evaluate oral performances and presentations. The student applies the rules of usage and grammar to communicate clearly and effectively through writing. The student interacts with writers and collaborates with other writers for particular purposes. The student writes descriptive, narrative, and expository paragraphs. The student understands and interprets visual images, messages and meanings by analyzing relationships, ideas and cultures as represented in various media.

### **HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE BRACERO PROGRAM**

During the 1880's through the 1930's, Mexican nationals were recruited to work in agricultural fields and railroads throughout the southwestern and midwestern United States (Gonzalez, J. 2000). However, after the experiencing the Great Depression in the 1930's, an estimated 1 million Mexicans were deported. According to Gilbert P. Carrasco (1993), in The Hispanic American Almanac about 400,000 persons were repatriated to Mexico without having any formal court hearings. Because of the belief that Mexicans were a possible reason for the slow economy, thousands of U.S. citizens were illegally deported through trains and buses.

By World War II, however, the United States was experiencing labor shortages and needed workers, so immigration was conveniently and necessarily encouraged. In 1942, the *bracero program* was initiated between Mexico and the United States. In Spanish, the term comes from "brazo" referring to arm. So, workers that would be using their "arms" became branded as *braceros* once they went through the program. The program was set up to import laborers for agricultural and railroad businesses. Historian, Rodolfo "Rudy" Acuña (1988), explains that the contract between the two governments guaranteed workers' rights. Rodolfo Acuña notes that the contract stated that "Mexicans would not displace domestic workers" and "discrimination would not be tolerated." During 1942 to 1947, approximately 220,000 *Braceros* were imported to the United

States (Acuña, 1988). Just in the year 1950, 450,000 Mexicans were processed through recruitment centers (Gonzalez, 2000). The *bracero* program continued until 1964. It is the process and implications of the *bracero program* that becomes a focus of this unit.

### **Becoming A Bracero**

In many cases, people may go out and buy grapes and other fruits from local grocery stands, but not know what efforts were made to get the grapes to the grocery store. So, people may be surprised to realize all that was involved in the recruitment of labor. The following photographs will demonstrate a visual image of the process of recruiting Mexicans to the U.S. These photographs come from a web site that is currently not available at the time of publication; however, more visual photographs can be seen on the process of “hooking” Mexicans to the United States in Mraz and Storey (1996).

The photograph (see Photo 1) was taken at the beginning of the process in Mexico City, outside a soccer stadium. Mexican citizens are waiting for contract work in the U.S. farms. The men had learned through newspapers and word of mouth about the opportunity to work in the U.S. Many had been standing for over five days and nights when the photo was taken. (Interestingly, the hats the men wore conveyed their regional origin. Individuals from rural areas wore the larger style hats, whereas individuals from urban areas, as many above are shown, wore the smaller hats.)

The second photograph (see photo 2) demonstrates the long process of aspiring laborers to become *braceros*. The first step was the line-up for smallpox vaccinations administered by nurses. (see photo 3 and 4) However, not just anybody could walk in and be served. Every person in line obtained a document from the Mexican government, indicating proof that they had met the first requirement of being a Mexican citizen (Mraz & Storey, 1996). Because of high demand for *braceros* in 1943, the medical exam was not necessary. The Mexican Department of Public Health still had to give a certificate of eligibility that was recognized by the Public Health Service of the U.S.

Once being identified as Mexican citizens, an inspector from the “Secretariat of Labor, as well as three U.S. agents,” interviewed the candidates. The “Interview process took into account the candidate’s experience in the rural medium” (Mraz & Story, 1996). It was so important to the United States, that there was a preliminary examination to check for calluses on their hands and other indications of agricultural work.

After the interview, candidates underwent a series of medical examinations. For instance, physical and chest X-ray examinations were required. Medical staff came from both the United States and Mexican health departments. Examinations were from head to toe. Vaccination was also used against smallpox and typhoid fever.

Once the physical exam was completed, men assembled onto bleachers to hear the terms of their work conditions and contracts. An employee from the “Labor Secretariat”

explained the work contract, paragraph by paragraph in Spanish. (See Photo 5) They were usually formed into groups of 25-30.

### **The Contract**

The contracts were signed by both the representatives of the Farm Security Administration (the “employer”) and the *braceros*; nonetheless, once the *braceros* were in the U.S., the government of that country reserved the right to offer the *braceros* to sub-employers, that is, to growers and their contracting companies.

### **Salary and Benefits**

Braceros received the “salary that was in effect in the area to which they were sent, but their remuneration’s were not to be less than the minimum wage of \$ .30 cents an hour” (Mraz and Story, 1996). Braceros’ salaries were not subjected to any deductions, and they had “medical benefits, insurance for accidents, and work-related illnesses, the right to organize, and the assistance of the Mexican consulate.” New contracted workers received ration books that they or their employers would need to purchase food and other life necessities in the U.S. (See Photos 6, 7, and 8)

Once all the requirements were met, the waiting, the examinations, the explanations, and the paper work complete, workers reached a final table and then waited to get on a train.

### **Transportation**

Trains headed for the northern border left twice a week with an average of 700 Braceros on each train. Contracts stated that the “employer” would pay all expenses related to transporting the Braceros from Mexico to their work places in the United States. The “employer” was to provide food and housing without any cost to the Braceros.

## **I. INQUIRY LESSON, “WOULD THERE BE ANOTHER BRACERO PROGRAM?”**

The inquiry experience is intended to give students opportunities to relive historical contexts. That is, by giving the student questions and data, the teacher attempts to recreate the decision making process by individuals of that time period. An inquiry lesson aims to put students in situations that will encourage them to seek out and discover more about a topic in an interactive setting between teacher and student. This inquiry experience is an attempt to have students understand the direct involvement of the U. S. government in the “hooking” of cheap labor (Mraz and Story 1996). The inquiry lesson will show how “hooking” actually contributes to an underdevelopment of a targeted community and consequently effects the larger global economy. Another major objective

is to demonstrate to students that human experience reveals patterns that modern society can reflect upon for societal reform.

### **Introduction to begin inquiry**

Read “Thirty-two years ago, Marcelino Ramos crossed the Mexican border concealed in the trunk of a car.” This should be read from a newspaper to give students the perception that it is a title of an article written recently. It is the sub-headline of an article by Tad Szulc (1999) that was written in the Houston Chronicle’s Parade Magazine titled, “An American Experience: A Report For The Millennium” (pp. 1-3).

Now, ask the students to write down on a sheet of paper the answer to “Where is Marcelino Ramos today?” Answers will vary from “dead” to “drug dealing” or “in jail” but the purpose is to begin asking students to question their hypothesis? By gathering more information, individuals can make a stronger hypothesis.

Then, allow the students to ask questions (to gather information) that the teacher can answer “yes” or “no” to. Students will begin asking questions and some will ask relevant and not so relevant questions. Here, pause and state the significance of asking certain broad or specific questions? Students must realize the importance of asking critical questions. For example, the student can ask, “Is he alive?” This is a relevant question for the teacher because now the student can begin to ask more questions about the livelihood of Marcelino Ramos.

Now explain what evidence is given from the sentence to suggest or hint to where he could be today? Answer will stem from “crossing” the Mexican “border” concealed in the trunk of car. Ask students why Marcelino Ramos is concealed in the trunk? Students may or may not know but at this time can continue the yes/no strategy, where they ask questions the teacher can respond yes or no.

Students will then hypothesize that he was crossing to enter the U.S. illegally, possibly for better a living. Teacher should ask, “Well, how do we know? What do we need to know about 35-50 years ago to assure us that this is a possible reason? What involvement did the U.S. and Mexico, for that matter, have in this that would lead him to be in the trunk of a car?”

Have students write down on a sheet a paper a straight line like this:

A great involvement by government \_\_\_\_\_ Almost no involvement by government

Ask the students to make a decision about their position if the government had a great deal to do with leading individuals to cross the border in the trunk of a car or if individual acted simply by free will? (Because students may not have heard of the

Bracero Program, they will not think the U.S. government had any involvement in bringing immigrants. Also, allow for students to come up with other reasons why he may be crossing the border illegally.)

Once they have made their decisions, then ask students to get into groups of five (roles of members should be given i.e. chair, time keeper, etc.) to discuss their evidence and formulate possible questions to where they stand as a group. Offer time for groups to collaborate. Be prepared to post possible reasons, since students may now want to know how close they were in their reasoning. Then, post the following reasons:

Some possible reasons:

- Was the Mexican economy experiencing a recession?
- Had the U.S. strengthened Border patrol, which forced Mexicans to “conceal” themselves?
- Had the U.S. declared that it did not want to allow any legal immigrants through its borders?
- Illegal drug trafficking was high during this time period.
- There were growing opportunities for the illegal immigrants to enter and exploit the welfare program.
- There was a great demand for labor in agriculture.

After the teacher reads these reasons aloud, students will then be ready for more information that will help them draw conclusions. The *teacher* can have the following “Data” sources on index cards that can be read by students individually or collectively.

### **Data Source #1**

In a letter collected by Mraz & Storey (1996) from San Jose, California, dated July 28, 1942, a Mexican citizen wrote to his President, General Manuel Avila Camacho, to express the “supposed need of California farmers to import many thousands of agricultural workers from Mexico” (p. 31). His name was Miguel N. Benítez, and he had worked for twenty-nine years as an agricultural laborer.

The letter states the following:

The Chambers of Commerce and the ‘Growers’ Association’ utilize the simplest of systems to satisfy their inhuman ambitions: Do you need 100 workers here? Well, let’s bring 300 or 500 from where ever we can get them by promising high wages. Once they’re here, they can compete among themselves and we won’t have to pay them more than a third of what we were promising, or even less, because the same hunger that brought them here will oblige them to leave their last cent to businesses

here. They will feel fortunate to be able to work for whatever they are paid, even if it's only for two days a week or two days a month. This is the truth of the need to import Mexican field hands. (p. 31)

## **Discussion**

After reading this letter by a Mexican citizen who witnessed the developments of the Growers Association, students can then be asked, "What can we deduce from this letter?" and "Which reasons can we still keep as tentative reasons to draw possible conclusions?" Teacher should ask, "Do you need more information about this person?" and continue with next source.

## **Data Source #2**

Felipe Benítez, a distinguished combatant against the French Intervention, emigrated to the U.S. in 1909. Of the thirty-three years he lived in the United States, he spent twenty-nine as an agricultural laborer. He was a veteran in 1942 and was mortally ill at fifty-five, since he had contracted tuberculosis in the unhealthy shacks where the agricultural laborers were housed in California. Distressed because his eldest son was in a public hospital suffering from the same disease, Benítez (Mraz & Storey, 1996) described his situation as such:

. . . I have seen my little children seek sleep's refuge in order to quiet their hungry stomachs. I have heard them talk in their sleep and their words make it clear that they are dreaming of bread. I have been driven crazy by a desperation that has made me inputs, cruel, and coarse to my self-sacrificing companion. I have cheated, tricked and deceived the shopkeepers; I have tried to find the solution to my problem in gambling, with counter-productive results, and I have sought befuddlement in liquor.

I have felt the temptation of suicide, murder, and theft; and I have dreamed of money, of lots of money-money to buy bread, housing, health, and education for my family.

The life of field workers in the U.S. is disgraceful! When they work, they live in agony, and when they don't work they agonize and die, or watch their families die without knowing how to avoid it! (p. 32)

Now the teacher directs students into collaborative groups to see how they would handle the situation as Congress members.

## **Directions for grouping (Recited by Teacher)**

Constituents, the time period is 1942 and you and your group members are U.S. Congress members. Presently, your neighboring country, Mexico, is suffering economically from high levels of unemployment. Furthermore, you are aware of Mexican workers being treated inhumanly and have been writing to the Mexican government. In the United States, the agriculture sector is going through labor shortages and the “Grower’s Association” is seeking some type of relief. In a group of five members, with students acting as equal committee members, what legislative course should you take, if any? Make sure two members from the committee gather information on the current events of this time period that may have influence on your governmental involvement.

After allowing students to present data and opinions on whether to intervene or not, continue with inquiry.

### **Discussion**

Teacher: Well, what happened once the letter reached the President of Mexico? (Students will be interested to see which group was correct.)

According to Mraz and Story (1996), the above letter (Data Source #2) reached President Camacho’s office on August 5, 1942. Only forty-eight hours before, the government of Mexico and the U.S. had put into effect, according to diplomatic agreements, the “Mexican-United States Program of the Loan of Laborers”. Teacher should ask students, “How many students decided that some type of labor agreement should be made between the two countries? Did your group consider how Mr. Benítez, an agricultural worker, called ‘life of field workers in the U.S. disgraceful’?”

What do you think was included in this agreement? Instruct students to write down what would be included in the process or agreement? (Allow students to make a decision in their collaborative grouping.) Teacher: The information on the diplomatic agreement follows.

### **Data Source #3**

According to Chris García (Garcia, 1988), professor of political science at the University of New Mexico, the U.S. would underwrite “Mexicans’ travel costs, insure a minimum wage, and guaranteed their just and equitable treatment” (p. 48).

### **Discussion**

Allow for individuals to see the similarities between their responses and what happened historically. What kind of atmosphere and institutions would be needed for this new “Labor” or Bracero Program to be successful for the employers, employees, and governments?



#### **Data Source #4**

In Mexico, many problems weighed heavily. The bureaucratic plentitude was the main obstacle for many candidates. Mexicans aspiring to become braceros came from many outlying cities outside of Mexico City. Eventually, after several protests, candidates decided to forego the legal process and led an expedition to work in the U.S. as undocumented immigrants.

Well, as many as you may have heard mentioned before, the program came to be called the Bracero Program. This program was to bring just *Braceros* or “Laborers” to the U.S. farms and agricultural businesses and later on railroad companies. Now, to better understand this lengthy process, students can be shown the photographs and allowed to discuss the implications if individuals were being treated “just[ly] and equitable[ly]”. In some cases, some children may have heard their grandparents talk about the Bracero Program.

#### **Discussion**

Now, take a minute or two to gather responses from students on whether Mexicans were receiving treated “just[ly] and equitable[ly]” by both the Mexican and U.S. government.

#### **Data Source #5, Letter of information by Robert C. Jones**

The hooking process began on May 10, 1943, fifty-seven years ago. The initial agreement called for the hooking of 6,000 workers, a quota that was raised to 20,000 by June 1943. By the 1944, it rose to 50,000. “...A business that wishes to employ Mexican workers for the first time presents the corresponding request to the War Resource Board, which establishes a quota for that business, after certain conditions” (p. 40). These Mexican Nationals must be employed in the maintenance of train tracks. (Mraz & Storey, 1996) By 1944, thirty-two railroad companies in the U.S. had requested Mexican workers.

#### **Discussion**

What were the motives of the aspiring *braceros*?

Ask students to categorize the following without given the percentages:

- Search for better Education (1.6%)
- Search for Adventure (12.4%)
- Emotional (14.2%)
- Earn more money (71.8%)

Source: (Mraz & Storey, 1996)

Discuss what reasons led them to conclusions? Students should discuss and analyze the serious underemployment in Mexico.

### ***Was the Bracero Program a Success or Failure?***

For the next *twenty-two years*, the program continued and would contribute to the entry of five million Mexicans. It is uncertain how many returned although in 1954 the Immigration and Naturalization Service vigorously launched “Operation Wetback.” Undocumented workers, unstable and intractable as a labor source, were now to be removed. An astonishing 3.8 million Mexican and U.S. citizens were apprehended in the U.S. and expelled in the next five years to Mexico. Of the total number during this time, fewer than two percent left as a result of formal proceedings. According to political scientist Chris Garcia (Garcia, 1998), “looking Mexican was often sufficient reason for official scrutiny” (p. 49).

### ***Now, what went wrong?***

According to educator and researcher, Ernesto Galarza, who was also the Chief of the Office of Labor and Social Information, there were several adversities endured by the Braceros from mid-1942 to mid-1944. During this period a total of 118,000 Mexican workers had been legally contracted to work in the United States (Mraz & Storey, 1996).

### **Data Source # 6**

When asked about the success Galarza (Mraz & Storey, 1996) responded in the letter following:

“The immediate objectives of the labor recruiting program have been satisfactorily met. The sponsors of both agricultural and railroad labor have given ample testimony of the important contributions of Mexicans. According to their testimony, they have saved harvests thanks to the ‘nationals,’ as they commonly refer to the contracted Mexican workers. The railroad officials have expressed their satisfaction for the Mexican worker’s aptitude, even those who had no previous experience” (p. 40).

Galarza stated later that the Braceros’ housing was hurriedly thrown together, the camps were of very bad quality (inadequate for the weather conditions, lacking equipment, too isolated, etc.), and the lack of maintenance was notorious.

Braceros raised complaints about their living conditions such as:

1. The paper-bag lunches are prepared the evening before and are spoiled by the next day.
2. There is nothing to do on Sundays except hang around.
3. The deductions for food-usually \$1.40-are too much.
4. The agricultural salary is sometimes only \$2.00 a week.

5. If a worker complains, he is accused of being an agitator and sent back to Mexico.
6. Some local shopkeepers will not sell to Mexicans.
7. There is no opportunity to learn anything about the U.S.
8. The administrators, interpreters, bosses, labor inspectors, and consular agents are aligned in general, against the workers.
9. The Mexican labor inspectors and consuls are rarely present and they don't always make notes of the complaints.

### **Data Source #7**

According to Jaime V. Storey, the “victorious members of a ‘productive rearguard’” were really prisoners of war, watched over by an organized team made up of U.S. camp administrators, interpreters, bosses, and contractors, as well as work inspectors and consular agents from their own country.

### **Data Source #8**

After 1948, control over the emigration of undocumented workers had been completely lost and the so-called “free-contracting” phase had begun.

So, back to the Bracero Program being a success. According to political scientist, Chris García, (1998) “Nearly five million Mexicans came to the United States as a result of this program” (p. 48). The years with the highest recruitment were from 1954 to 1962.

### **Current stories to share**

First, share a letter written by a child of a migrant family. These stories can be collected from different texts. There are several good stories that come from Beth S. Atkin (1991) author of Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories.

The letters are written from the point of view of a child who come from migrant families. The participants discuss the hardships of being an agricultural laborer and the impact it has on their education. One goes on to say, “I get headaches, so sometimes I have to leave school early or go and rest in the nurse’s office” (p. 15).

What year was this written on? Answer: This is actually 1991. Students may be surprised about the account of the child is experiencing in this day and age.

### **Concluding the Inquiry**

What about Marcelino Ramos who was concealed in the trunk of a car at the U.S. and Mexico border?

*Answer*

According to the Houston Chronicle's, Parade's Sunday issue on January 3, 1999, today Marcelino Ramos is married, and the owner of a landscaping business. Marcelino's underground life ended when his twins were born in the U.S. Today, he is the proud father of ten college-educated children, including one son who practices medicine.

In 1996, the I.N.S. estimates that there are at least 3.6 million Hispanic illegal immigrants. The population of Hispanics today is approximately 25 million (Rodriguez, 2000).

Discuss inquiry experience with students and allow them to get into collaborative teams on deciding how much involvement should the U.S. have on current immigration issues. Make sure they consider factors from inquiry experience. With the above inquiry, the teacher and the students have an opportunity to recognize misconceptions about immigrants. Students shall have an opportunity to realize how laws can have a direct impact on the conditions of immigrant families.

### **Example for Assessment Questions about Inquiry on Bracero Program**

#### ***Short Essay***

According to Jaime V. Storey, the "victorious members of a "productive rearguard" were really prisoners of war, watched over by an organized team made up of U.S. camp administrators, interpreters, bosses, and contractors, as well as work inspectors and consular agents from their own country. In an essay, decide what factors lead you to approve or disprove of the Bracero Program after the World War II and what you think could have been done differently. (Please use notes and text to support your viewpoint.)

In regard to patterns of immigration, discuss what factors have brought Mexicans to the U.S. and what factors have pushed them to Mexico? Compare and contrast the factors.

#### ***Multiple-choice***

Based on the information of the Mexican economy, which of the following had the greatest impact on a Mexican National to join the Bracero Program?

- a. To search for better education
- b. To search for adventure
- c. For emotional stability
- d. To earn more money

If there was a bracero program being reviewed today, which reason would you consider to be the most important in making sure it was "just and equitable" in the treatment of workers?

- a. Make sure the Mexican government used their nurses.

- b. Make sure agriculture businesses are accountable with an auditing procedure on how many laborers are needed.
- c. Make sure that agriculture businesses are more than willing to pay for transportation of laborers from Mexico.
- d. Make sure that agricultural businesses only recruit candidates that *really* have farming experience.

Recently, California has passed a law, Proposition 187, which would attempt to restrict the lives of undocumented immigrants. However, sociologist Nestor Rodríguez noted that the “federal courts threw this out.” Considering that the Mexican economy is still experiencing underemployment (although many are employed, they still make wages below minimum wage) and the U.S. history of immigrant patterns, what is more than likely to occur?

- a. Illegal immigration will be deterred and returned to their native country.
- b. Illegal immigration will continue and exploitation will be lessened since laws will help the people.
- c. Illegal immigration will continue and children of immigrant families will pursue a university education.
- d. Illegal immigration will continue, and children will help parents make a living and thereby contributing to the underdevelopment of an ethnic community.

### ***Research***

Discuss with the students to, "Go back at your tentative conclusions as to whether the government played a significant role or not?" Discuss inquiry experience with students and allow them to get into collaborative teams on deciding how much involvement should the U.S. have on current immigration issues? Make sure they consider factors from inquiry experience. Students can search for current articles at the web site, [www.latino.com](http://www.latino.com). Once at Latino.com, students can choose the education option and type in “Bracero Program” at the “find it” prompt. Current articles will be listed.

## **II. POETRY LESSON**

An integral part of the Mexican American experience is the sense of belonging. In a study conducted by Niemann et al. (1999) in which social constructions were collected through focus groups, participants were asked what it meant to be Mexican or Mexican American and responded with emotional responses that in many cases brought tears and anger to respondents. The discussions revealed in-group conflict regarding the issue of language. Some respondents “discussed what a tremendous loss it would be if their children were unable to communicate [in Spanish] with relatives of their homeland” (Niemann, 1999). While this was the perception toward children not learning Spanish, respondents expressed the turmoil of their experience as parents and not being able to speak English.

Students can be guided through reader responses (See Reader Response Procedures) individually when reading poetry. The poem “Legal Alien” from the volume of poetry Chants (1994) by Pat Mora can be a good beginning to illicit thoughts and experiences about the social and cultural experience of being a migrant or an immigrant. The poem centers on the experience of not belonging to either side of the border and “sliding back and forth” between both ethnic and cultural groups. The title also can serve to ignite an interesting discussion on what is an alien. Finally, students should brainstorm on personal experiences that make a connection with the poem. The personal connections that students can associate with can be the beginning of a short narrative.

The poem “Elena” written by Pat Mora is able to bring into focus the experience of a mother who realizes that her “Spanish isn’t enough” as her children are now going to U.S. schools and learning English (p. 58). Students can reflect on associations of such feelings of isolations and ways for her to cope with her problems. The poem can have several other implications as well that are not solely exclusive to Mexican Americans. Rather, different ethnic groups can make associations and recall experiences similar to those felt by the poem’s speaker, Elena. The teacher can have students do a reader response over several readings to reveal what thoughts and experiences does the poem recall from the student’s own family. Students can also draw a picture that depicts what is going on in the poem.

### **Reader Response Procedures**

Objective: The student will be able to demonstrate and apply reading skills and strategies to relive the writing process. The first product will be the results of writing reading responses. According to Brozo (1990), reading should foster an interactive classroom experience with the reader, the text and the context of the reading situation. The reader responses will serve as a first draft of different types of writing forms (i.e. autobiographies, descriptive narratives, poetry, etc.). The process of reader responses will serve as a simple form to generate ideas and associations for a deeper and meaningful purpose when writing.

To gather ideas, the teacher can begin with a reader response with either a poem or short story. The literature pieces serve to ignite the young writer in ideas and personal associations. With careful guiding and encouragement for students to include their historical and cultural background experiences, students will fill pages with unique pieces of writing as they begin to develop a voice in their writings.

### ***Materials***

Poem or short story,

Paper

Map or colored pencils will be used by the student for each individual response period.

### ***Procedure***

First read the poem aloud to students while the reader develops an overall feeling for the text. Second, read the poem aloud again and ask the students to generate questions about the poem. Students can discuss their ideas in small group. Third, read the poem and ask students to think of associations or episodes that are similar to poem being read. Students can share in small groups or with entire class.

### **III. SHORT STORY LESSON**

The educational experience of Mexican Americans is revealed through Tomás Rivera's novel ...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him. Tomás Rivera originally wrote the groundbreaking novel in Spanish and is translated by poet Evangelina Vigil-Piñón. The vignettes in the book are revealing of the obstacles faced by immigrant families. Depending on how much time is available for the lesson, the teacher can either read the entire novel or focus on the following four short stories within the text. The stories to be discussed are "The Children Couldn't Wait," "The Little Burnt Victims," "It's That it Hurts," and "The Night the Lights Went Out."

In the short story "It's That it Hurts," the protagonist is recalling an episode of being expelled from school. The protagonist remembers how his father drops him off at yet another elementary school. Knowing that he will not be well received, he asks his father to come into the school with him. However, the father, fearful of his English, orders his son to enroll himself into the school. The protagonist is then recalling the humiliating experience of getting a physical examination from the nurse. The nurse checks him for lice and goes so far as to ask him to drop his pants down, so that she may inspect into his buttocks. As if that is not enough, he is ridiculed by his teachers and peers and gets into a fight. As a result, he is expelled and is walking home not knowing how he is going to tell his father and family. The literary focus can be the author's use of double voice and how the protagonist talks back and forth on what to do. Encourage students to apply this in their journal writing.

The short story "The Night the Lights Went" is about two young lovers who are in a long distance relationship. While away, Juanita decides to talk to another smooth looking fellow, Ramiro. However, Ramón finds out when he gets into town. He meets her at a dance, and tells her that she must do what he says for as long as he says. Juanita is upset with Ramón and does not listen to him. In an attempt to get back at her, Ramón goes outside the dance hall and walks toward a power plant. The lights of the town are

completely down and Ramón's body is completely burnt holding onto a transformer. The rest of the town finds out about this love tragedy the next morning. The dialogue is very interesting. To make it more real, have students read them aloud and make note of how each paragraph represents another person's dialogue.

The short story "The Little Burnt Victims" is about a tragedy that occurs when their children are left unsupervised. The setting begins with the father encouraging his children to box by buying them boxing gloves. The family learns by watching a movie that success through boxing is possible. Since it is too hot to take the children to the fields, they are left at home. While at work, they see their home on fire and their two youngest children burn in the fire. Students can share episodes when they may have been left alone.

The short story "The Children Could Not Wait" takes place in the fields. The migrant workers are working for a boss who does not like for them to take water breaks. However, it is very hot and the children can not wait to drink water. One day, the boss realizes that a child was taking a break and decides to scare him with his shotgun. He did not regard the children as valuable, so he shoots toward the child. Surprisingly, the child is shot in the forehead. This story depicts the perception of bosses toward laborers and their families as animals.

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### **Group Activity**

Short Stories by Tomas Rivera:

- "It's That it Hurts"
- "The Night The Lights Went Out"
- "The Little Burnt Victims"
- "The Children Could Not Wait"

Objective: The student will create a visual presentation of a short story. The presentation will be displayed on a poster board containing the following elements:

- A. Summaries (3-4 sentences) that explain the plot.
- B. Quotes from the story that directly help explain the plot. (i.e. "They take you to the nurse and the first thing she does is check you for lice." (p. 92)
- C. Pictures that visually amplify what took place and information about the characters.
- D. The pictures and summaries should follow the order that they occurred.
- E. A section about the author
- F. Typed



### ***Materials***

Poster Board

Magazines

Scissors

Glue

Access to the internet (optional)

### ***Members of a Group or Team***

1. Chairperson- leads the group on writing summaries.
2. Task-Master-keeps track of time and leads the gathering of quotes
3. Artist-Draws pictures or collects photocopies from magazines, newspapers, etc.
4. Secretary-Types the information
5. Technology-Gathers information about the author and other current issues through the Internet.

Team members are all responsible for completing the finish product. Grades will be assigned individually and collectively. Most importantly, the final product must be free of errors of punctuation, capitalization and spelling. Enjoy and be creative in presenting the themes of the story!

## Photographs from Labor Management Decisions

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



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