

Through Their Eyes: Mexican Immigration in the 20th Century

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INTRODUCTION

Social studies was always an exciting subject for me when I was a young child. As an elementary student, I couldn't wait for the end of the day for our social studies lesson. We always had social studies just before dismissal, after recess, and after all of the other subjects (which I guess were deemed more important at the time). Even though it was crammed in at the end of the day, it was still my favorite subject.

In middle school, I joined the Junior Historian's Club and was able to go on many field trips throughout Texas. One of my most memorable trips was to the Texas Renaissance Festival in the eighth grade. The colorful costumes, knights in shining armor, ladies in beautiful dresses, and the pageantry of the medieval games dazzled me. I didn't stop talking about that field trip for weeks. When middle school came to an end, I looked forward to high school with anticipation and excitement, and couldn't wait to begin studying world history where I would learn more about the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Soon after high school started, however, my high hopes began to fade. My world history teacher was, well, boring with a capital B. His monotone lectures and blackboard exercises were fast killing my fascination with social studies. By the time American history rolled around in eleventh grade, my interest level had dropped dramatically. I couldn't relate to a bunch of dead guys. Why were we studying this anyway? What happened to the magic that I experienced in the earlier grades? Where were the interesting people, cultures, and traditions that I saw first-hand in middle school?

By college, I dreaded taking the required American history courses and for good reason. Both semesters I sat through more dull lectures and read more factual, but uninteresting history texts that I couldn't identify with at all. My once favorite subject was now my most hated subject. But that all changed with one undergraduate history course.

I decided to give history one more shot and signed up for an upper-level course covering the early colonial period of United States history. I went in to this class expecting more of what I encountered with the other history classes. During the second week of class, our professor assigned a reading that would bring back my early enthusiasm and interest in social studies. We were assigned to read the slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano. Wow, what a powerful story!

Equiano described his capture into slavery and the long, grueling ride on a slave ship to the Americas, and I was there. He recounted the times he learned how to read in secret with the help of the slave master's son, and I was there. He spoke of his dreams of one day buying his freedom, and I felt those dreams too. When the day finally came, and Equiano made his fortune on the high seas and procured his freedom, I was there.

Fascinated, I went on to read Frederick Douglass' narrative and Harriet Jacobs' personal story, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." These readings touched me in a way all the history textbooks and dry lectures could not. I felt like I was transported back in time and was actually there with the person. These weren't just a bunch of dead people that lived in the "old days."

These were vibrant men and women who lived through struggle and hardship and overcame great difficulties. I could relate to these people not only as a reader, but as a fellow human being. History literally came to life when I read these narratives. Since that time, I have been enraptured with the autobiography genre.

I truly believe that the key to bringing social studies to life is through making the stories come alive off the pages. And no other genre does that better than autobiography. Informational text is, of course, needed to set up background knowledge, but the way to a student's heart is through autobiography. Through this unit, I hope to enable my students to have the same experience I did and grow to love history through autobiography. They will see that social studies is about more than just dates and events. It is about the people who have come before us: their hardships, their determination, and their humanity.

UNIT BACKGROUND

I teach fifth grade in a part of Houston that is mostly Hispanic. Our Title I school is 96% Hispanic with over 90% low income, at-risk children. Most of my students are reading two to three grades below level, and more than half of them are English Language Learners. The majority of these fifth graders have never read a full-length novel all the way through. Because they read so poorly and because of second language acquisition difficulties, reading is a chore to them and something to be dreaded and feared. My challenge, then, has been to find a topic that will gain their interest and get them excited about learning.

Because the overwhelming majority of my students are from Mexico or have family from Mexico, I plan to have modern Mexican immigration as my theme. This is a high interest topic for them that hits close to home and with which they have first hand experience. Several of my students have just emigrated from Mexico themselves. One student told of being turned away at the border twice, but each day trying again and making it the third day. She is only ten years old, but she knows how it is to walk for miles in the hot weather and to feel the fear of coming up against the border patrol.

Another student shared how his father was to be deported soon and he couldn't decide whether to go back to Mexico with his Dad or stay in the United States with his Mom. Some of these students have experienced hardships in their ten years that most of us couldn't even imagine. Mexico and Mexican immigration is a topic near and dear to their hearts.

In social studies, we cover such topics as Native Americans, the American Revolution, and the Civil War. But rarely do teachers have enough time in the year to cover 20th century history or modern immigration. My students hunger for topics that are interesting and relevant to their lives. With this curriculum unit, I hope to peek the interest of even most my most reluctant learners and show them that social studies is about people: our families, our cultures, our histories, our stories.

Overview of 20th Century Mexican Immigration

Mexican immigration in the twentieth century is divided into three great waves: 1) during the Mexican Revolution of 1910; 2) during World War II and the Bracero Program; and 3) after the Immigration Act of 1965. The largest numbers of immigrants to the United States are from Mexico. Legal immigrants from Mexico make up 1/5 of all legal immigrants in the United States, and Mexico is the largest source of undocumented immigrants with an estimated total of 5.3 million undocumented immigrants as of March 2002 (Passel 1). Let's take a closer look at the three waves of immigration.

The first great wave of Mexican immigration began in 1910 during the Mexican Revolution. Mexican dictator, Porfirio Díaz, wanted to build and modernize the Mexican economy to keep up

with Industrialization. His policies included land reforms which took land away from poor peasant farmers and gave it to large landowners. As a result, many peasant farmers were forced to work as sharecroppers for these large landowners making as little as ten to twenty-five cents a day. Díaz's land reforms hurt the poor of Mexico and benefited the wealthy. As a result, a revolt was organized against Díaz and many peasants were "caught in the middle" (González 19). This revolt was known as the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Because of the increased fighting in rural areas of Mexico, the rural lands were unable to be farmed, and many Mexicans "facing physical danger as well as an inability to feed their families" fled north to the United States (González 19).

Also of significance at this time was the expansion of railroad, mining, and agriculture in the Southwestern United States which led to an increased demand for labor. Just as things were getting worse in Mexico, things were getting better in the United States. Therefore, the stage was set for the first large wave of Mexican immigration into the United States. In 1910, there were 17,760 Mexican immigrants admitted into the United States. By 1923, that number swelled to 62,709 ("Immigration" 1). After 1930, the number of immigrants in the U.S. dropped dramatically due to the Great Depression and would not rise again until World War II.

The second great wave of Mexican immigration began during World War II as a result of the Bracero Program. When the United States entered World War II, the demand for labor increased dramatically. Because of government funding for the war, unemployed American citizens and workers in low-paying jobs were able to find better employment in manufacturing industries leaving a huge shortage in agricultural work. In 1942, the United States and Mexican governments created a temporary worker program called the Bracero Accord. This program allowed for workers to be recruited from Mexico for temporary, seasonal agricultural work under contracts that usually lasted around eight months or less. Intended as a wartime measure only, the Bracero Program did not end until 1964.

The Bracero program was extended into the postwar period because it benefited all sides. American companies always had a steady supply of workers who were willing to work for low wages which meant that American consumers paid less for the products, and the Braceros were able to earn enough money to support their families. This program reached a peak in the late 1950s when more than 400,000 workers per year came to the United States (González 22)

In the 1960s, the Bracero program came under fire because of the horrible working and housing conditions of the migrant workers and for issues of racism and discrimination. Additionally, Mexican American workers complained that the Braceros were used by American employers to restrict employment opportunities for Mexican American citizens. Because of all the negative publicity, the Bracero program came to an end in 1964.

Shortly after the Bracero program ended, a major change took place in immigration policy in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1965 replaced the National Origins Quota Act of 1924. Under the previous act, visas were allocated based on the national make-up of the United States. This resulted in most of the visas going to western and northern Europeans because the national origin of most Americans was western and northern European. The Immigration Act of 1965 established instead family connections and work skills as the primary criteria for receiving visas. This piece of legislation had a major impact on American society. With the national origins rule gone, the new law opened "the doors to increased numbers of immigrants – 'New Americans' – who would shape the American landscape from 1965 to the present" (Garcia 37).

As a result of this new law, the third wave of Mexican immigration began. Before the Immigration Act of 1965, the majority of immigrants were from Europe. From 1820-1890, 89% of all immigrants were from Europe. From 1921-1960, 58% were from Europe and after 1965, only 18% were from Europe. Before 1920, only 1% of immigrants were from Mexico. From 1921-1960, the number jumped to 10% due to the Bracero Program. After 1965, however, that

number rose to 18%. By 1998, 20% of immigrants were from Mexico (González 25-26). Today, the number of immigrants from Mexico continues to climb. And keep in mind that these are the numbers of legal immigrants with visas. This number does not account for the many undocumented immigrants who come to this country from Mexico every year.

Mexican-American Culture

In this unit, the main focus of Mexican-American culture will be the concept of assimilation. Many authors of Mexican American autobiographies discuss how hard it is to try and assimilate to United States culture while retaining their Mexican heritage and identity. Therefore, a brief discussion of assimilation must be mentioned.

In many areas with a large population of Mexican immigrants, particularly indocumentados, an underground support system exists to help newly arriving immigrants find work, churches, and places to shop. Spanish television stations from Mexico may be beamed into their American living rooms on satellite to provide a link to their home country. These new arrivals to major metropolitan areas in the United States where there is a large immigrant population have little difficulty in finding their community in the states, and, therefore, have little need to assimilate to new surroundings or have contact with groups outside of their Mexican immigrant community. As researchers Nestor Rodríguez and Rogelio T. Nuñez point out, “the vast majority (in our household sample) satisfied needs such as transportation, loans, and job information within their own groups” (Browning and De La Garza 144). However, even with this phenomenon of established Mexican immigrant communities in the United States which has the possibility of maintaining close ties to Mexico, many Mexican immigrants today still struggle with assimilation to United States culture.

Until recently, social scientists studying Mexican immigration and assimilation to United States culture focused on two views: the assimilationist perspective which views Mexican-American people as trying to conform to Anglo society in much the same way European immigrant groups did; and the colonial perspective which compares Mexican-American assimilation to the colonization of a conquered people (Murguía 1-6). Is either of these two theories valid as we enter the 21st century? In the book *The Mexican Americans*, Alma M. Garcia argues that an additional perspective must be considered.

Garcia suggests that “cultural adjustment to a new society does not necessarily erase all the traces of an immigrant’s traditional culture and identity” (Garcia 81). Although these immigrants are living in a new country and forge new identities as Americans, they still retain their cultural heritage. For example, the tradition of quinceñeras, cinco de mayo celebrations, and the use of piñatas for birthday parties are still maintained in the United States as well as traditional cuisine, music, religion, and dancing. In fact, many of these Mexican traditions have crossed over into American culture and become a way of life, particularly in states that border Mexico.

Piñatas have become so popular in the U.S. that even stores like Walmart and Target carry them in the party aisle. Colorful Cinco de Mayo celebrations take to the downtown streets of many major metropolitan cities every year complete with mariachi bands and flamenco dancing. The radio station, MEGA 101.1 in Houston, TX, declaring itself “Latino and Proud,” has soared in popularity with its interesting mix of Spanish hip-hop and Reggaeton. Mexican restaurants are popping up all over the country with delicious cuisine that nearly everyone loves.

As these examples illustrate, Mexican Americans today not only maintain close ties to their traditional culture, they change and enrich American culture as well contributing to the diversity of our society. But even with the many ways Mexican Americans retain their cultural heritage, they must still adapt to a new society, a new language, and a new culture with customs that are different from their home country.

In many Mexican American autobiographies, authors recount their struggle with finding their way in a new country. For many children of migrant workers, this struggle is made even more difficult because the families have to move often to find work. Julisa Velarde is one of those children:

When I first came to Salinas, I think I was in third grade, or maybe fourth – I don't really remember, except when I first got to the new school, I didn't have anyone to hang around with. It's always hard that way. I think it is probably hard for my sister also, always making new friends, and getting used to new teachers and material in school like I do. (Atkin 23)

For Julisa Velarde and other children of Mexican migrant families, trying to “fit in” is complicated, for as soon as they begin to feel comfortable, they must move again. For many children of immigrants, however, language is what they report as being the most difficult barrier to overcome. Mari Carmen López came to the United States from Mexico as a teenager and tells of her first days at an American high school. Her little sister that she refers to came to America years before she did:

When I first came here, it was difficult for me because I didn't understand anything. I had only learned a little English in Mexico. I was a junior then, and some of my homework was in English, so I had to ask my little sister, Ariana, for her help. She was only six then, and I'd have to ask, “How do you say this in English?” and then write it down. I was very, very nervous my first day of school. I took all my classes in Spanish, except for my class with my ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher. When I finished the first half of the year, I passed to taking my classes in English. (Atkin 88)

Most people assume that all Mexican immigrants speak Spanish and that the only language acquisition to be made is English. However, some children from Mexico have a Native Indian background and do not speak Spanish. Further, many children of Mexican immigrants have had no formal schooling at all. Andrea Martínez, who is a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, Mexico spoke only Zapoteca. Not only did she have to learn English when she came to the United States, she had to learn Spanish too. She speaks of her hardships at having to learn English and Spanish, but also of being in school for the first time in her life:

Everything here was different from where I grew up: the food, the people, the clothes. But the hardest part for me when I moved was the language. I couldn't speak Spanish, and I didn't know English. Also, no one in my community in Mexico knew how to write or even how to pick up a pencil. My mother told me that things would be better soon because here at least I could get an education. (Atkin 39)

For Martínez, every part of her life was changed. All of the migrant children in Beth Atkin's book *Voices from the Fields*, told of how their life changed. But not all of the changes were bad. Many spoke of the educational opportunities they had in the United States, and of how their parents supported their education so they could have a better life. Fifteen-year-old Victor Machuca shares how his parents want him to go to college:

My parents don't think I should work in the fields when I get older... They say it would be good to go to college. My mother always says she wants me to be a doctor. My father says that if I don't become a doctor, I should become an architect. Most of the time, I think I would like to be a doctor to save people who are sick and to try to help people who need help... My parents would like me to go to college, but they don't tell me that I have to. (Atkin 50)

Like Machuca's parents, Esmeralda Mesa's parents encouraged her to finish school:

They have always been supportive, like with my education. I need to finish school because I have a baby and I have to figure out a way to support her and give her a good life. My parents always told me finishing school was important to make our lives easier. (Atkin 81-82)

As you have read, these Mexican migrant children faced many hardships in their young lives, but they also had a sense of hope, a sense that their lives could be different from their parents. Assimilating into a new culture is never easy. It certainly presented several challenges to the Mexican immigrant children portrayed above, but with a supportive family and community, the transition is made easier.

Mexican-American Autobiography

Until *el movimiento* of the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican American culture was largely set by the middle and upper classes with the focus on Americanization. When the League of United Latin American Citizens, known as LULAC, was formed in 1929, the ideals were based on American democracy and egalitarianism (Meier and Ribera 233). Though many Mexican Americans may have had strong feelings about the discrimination they faced in an Anglo culture, before *el movimiento*, Chicano voices were silenced “by political transformation, social dispossession, cultural rupture, and linguistic alienation” (Padilla 3).

During the tumultuous 1960’s, Mexican American voices became louder about Anglo discrimination and racism and felt that now was the time to organize to fight for their rights. *El movimiento*, as this political organizing came to be called, embodied both individuals and groups with various agendas and plans for achieving their goals. *El movimiento* “ranged from traditional conservative economic and social protest to cultural nationalism and violence, from reform to revolution” (Meier and Ribera 218).

This time of Chicano power held different meanings for different people. Many Mexican Americans at this time focused their energies on improving the quality of education for their people. Many schools for Mexican American children were in run-down, overcrowded buildings with poor teachers and little financing. Students, especially, joined the protest for better schools by holding walkouts and boycotts. By improving education, they asserted, Mexican Americans may rise above their current role of being cheap labor for Anglos. Education was the way to improve their lives.

Rising from this political organizing and protesting, *el movimiento* also brought with it an emphasis on literature, drama, and poetry. During this time Chicanos wrote proudly of their heritage and their struggles to fit in with American society while preserving their Mexican culture. In 1971, Ernesto Galarza, one of the first Mexican Americans to receive a Ph.D. and the most widely known Mexican American author, wrote his autobiographical account of his family’s move from Mexico to the United States in *Barrio Boy* (Meier and Ribera 237). The Chicano voice had finally been heard.

However, in Genaro M. Padilla’s book, *My History, Not Yours – The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*, he asserts that it was only at the time of *el movimiento* that Chicano autobiography had been recognized and given any attention at all leading one to believe that Mexican American autobiography is a recent phenomenon. Not so, says Padilla. Chicanos had been writing of their lives long before *el movimiento* of the 1960s and 1970s.

Padilla has been working on a project called “Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage” which “has as its objective the location, recovery, and publication of literary, folkloristic, periodical, and historical material produced during the Spanish colonial, Mexican, and Mexican American periods which has been out of print for decades (some for a century or more) or which remains in manuscript” (Padilla 7). Padilla has found Mexican American

autobiographical accounts dating back to 1848 after the United States military takeover of Northern Mexico.

These early autobiographical accounts focus on the effects of the takeover on the Mexican community in general and on the experiences of individuals. The writings were very nostalgic and often mention the past days before the takeover, “los días pasados” (Padilla 11), to try to bring sense and order to their lives that had been turned upside down by the military takeover. Because most of these early Mexican American autobiographies were not published, they are now kept in small state and regional historical society libraries or major archival repositories.

These early Chicano voices are only just now being unearthed and recovered thanks to the efforts of scholars like Padilla. And even though Padilla focuses on early autobiographical accounts, the rich Chicano literary tradition continues today with modern Chicanos stepping up to have their voices heard. The struggles between now and then may not be the same, but they do share a similar theme – trying to find identity in a strange land.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Because I teach both language arts and social studies, I plan to teach this topic thematically. The unit will begin with an overview of Mexican immigration in the 20th century. Through lecture and group discussion, the students will learn about modern Mexican immigration patterns and the impact of immigration on American culture. Using their notes from these lectures, the students will construct maps and graphs of the United States showing when and where most immigrants settle when they come to this country. They will also complete a current events project using recent newspapers and magazines.

We will also discuss assimilation and acculturation into American society and the many challenges Mexican Americans face as they try to adjust to living in a new country. Not only will I give students examples of assimilation, I will ask for their experiences and use their community to illustrate the concept. At this time, I plan to have a Think-Pair-Share activity in which the students talk to one another about the traditions in their family and see how they are alike and how they are different. The major assignment in this part of the unit will be a research project on one chosen aspect of Mexican American culture. Students should be given the opportunity to research on the internet and at the library.

Once the students have a solid background of Mexican immigration in the 20th century and Mexican American culture, we will begin reading autobiographies written by Mexican immigrants. I plan to have several children’s autobiographies available for the students to choose from ranging from a 3rd grade to a 6th grade reading level. The students will then break into literature circles based on the books that they choose. They will read together and have discussion with their peers in their literary circles. I believe that by having the students help one another with the reading, it will lower the anxiety level of many of the students who feel nervous about reading in English. The literature circles will cover such questions as: Why did they leave? What do you think they were feeling when they left? How do you think they feel being in a new country?

To close out the unit, the students will write a two-page autobiography. To do this, I plan to take them through the five-step writing process and hold writing workshops where I will be available to work with students individually. The students will also work with their peers on proofreading and editing. Once the autobiographies are finished, those who are comfortable will read them to the class, and we will discuss how their experiences are similar and/or different from the authors’ experiences they just read about. Eventually, with permission from the students, I hope to post these autobiographies on the bulletin board in our school or compile them into a book.

This curriculum unit should take around 4 weeks to complete depending on the grade level of the students and is intended primarily for students in grades 4-8. I feel that by using a high interest topic such as Mexican immigration and culture, and easily accessible reading material, I will motivate my students to read, write, and think about their world in a new way.

LESSON PLANS

Overview

Week	Topic/Resources	Activities
Week One	<p>Modern Mexican Immigration Patterns</p> <p>Teacher notes</p> <p>World Atlas</p> <p>Internet</p> <p>Newspapers</p>	<p>Discussion of modern immigration patterns.</p> <p>Students illustrate immigration charts and graphs.</p> <p>Student exploration of the U.S. Census Bureau website</p> <p>Students complete current events project on issues affecting immigration today.</p> <p>Students design cause and effect chart on changes in American culture due to immigration.</p>
Week Two	<p>Mexican American Culture</p> <p>Teacher notes</p> <p>Internet sources, various print material</p>	<p>Discussion of Mexican American culture and assimilation.</p> <p>Class post-chart of examples of assimilation and acculturation.</p> <p>Think-Pair-Share activity in which students share experiences from their families.</p> <p>Mini-Research project</p>
Week Three	<p>Literature Circles</p> <p>Selection of Mexican American autobiographies for youth</p>	<p>Literature circles based on two-week time frame.</p> <p>Student groups lead class discussion based on readings with a question and answer session designed by students.</p>
Week Four	<p>Writing autobiographies</p> <p>Notebooks</p>	<p>Finish literature circles</p> <p>Students will write their autobiographies.</p> <p>Peer groups to help with 5-step writing process.</p> <p>Individual teacher-student consultation to guide in writing process.</p>

WEEK ONE ACTIVITIES – MODERN MEXICAN IMMIGRATION

Before the unit begins, teachers must compile notes for lecture and discussion on modern Mexican immigration patterns and current issues surrounding immigration based on the grade level of their students. The resources listed in the annotated bibliography of this curriculum unit should help greatly in preparing for instruction.

Immigration Charts and Graphs

Objective

TLW illustrate common immigration patterns of North America and Central America using various resources to create maps and graphs analyzing current immigration data.

As an activity based on the teacher-led lectures and discussions of modern immigration patterns, students will illustrate common immigration patterns of the Western Hemisphere, particularly North America and Central America, using blank maps of North America and the United States. (NOTE: You may easily find free printable blank maps of the countries and continents of the world on the Internet by using a search engine.) These maps should illustrate the students' understanding of the geographic patterns of immigration to the United States.

Students will also explore demographic patterns of immigrant settlement in the United States. For example, Mexican immigrants are more likely to settle in states that border Mexico including Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. One activity you may want to include at this time is an internet activity using the U.S. Census Bureau website where the students may explore the demographics of different regions of the United States. Besides being fun and interesting for the students, this is an invaluable activity to show students the different regional patterns of immigrant settlement in the U.S. and is particularly suitable for the middle school grades.

Once the students have explored the U.S. Census Bureau website, they will construct graphs of immigrant settlement patterns. Using their math skills, students will decide which type of graph would work best to display their findings, and then construct the graphs using graph paper. Some questions to ask might be:

- Which type of graph should you draw – pie graph, histogram, bar graph, or line graph? Why?
- How will you organize your information?
- According to your findings, what is the dominant settlement pattern of Mexican immigrants to the United States? Why?
- What do you predict might be future settlement patterns?

Now that the students have a thorough understanding of immigration patterns to the United States, it is time to address the current events and issues facing immigration today.

Current Events Project

Objective

TLW analyze current immigration issues using recent newspapers to identify problems and recommend solutions to the problems facing immigration in the United States in the 21st century.

Following discussion of modern immigration patterns to the U.S., students will collect recent newspaper articles about immigration to complete a current events project. To stimulate critical thinking and problem solving, the current events project should list the problem the article focuses on as well as possible solutions to that problem. Students may work in cooperative groups to complete this project and be prepared for critical discussion of the major problems facing immigration to the United States in the early 21st century and possible solutions to those problems. As an example I have included a current events chart to help students get started.

Once the students have completed the worksheet, the groups will present their findings and the class will then debate the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. This exercise is designed to foster advanced critical thinking skills and healthy debate in the classroom among students. Teachers should act as facilitators only and remind students of the rules of polite discussion. For teachers in the elementary grades, a guided discussion may be more appropriate, but the student ideas should still be the focus of the discussion.

Name: _____

Date: _____

MY CURRENT EVENTS PROJECT

Resource: Title:
Problem:
Possible Solutions:

WEEK TWO ACTIVITIES – MEXICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

Think-Pair-Share Activity

Objective

TLW share examples of assimilation in their community using personal experience to demonstrate understanding of the concept of assimilation.

Following teacher lecture and discussion of the process of assimilation as it relates to Mexican American culture, students will divide into pairs and share some examples they have encountered in their community or in their families. Allow each student 2-5 minutes to share. Once both students have had a chance to share their ideas, bring the class together as a whole to discuss the ideas. One fun way to do this is by having students write their examples on post-it notes and come up to place their notes on the board. The teacher will then review the post-it notes with the class.

Teacher Read-Aloud

At this time in the unit, the teacher will select a Mexican American autobiography that deals with assimilation and begin a teacher read-aloud. Some suggestions include:

- Galarza, Ernesto. *Barrio Boy*
- Hart, Elva Treviño. *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child*
- Perez, Ramon Tianguis. *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant*
- Poogie, John J. Jr. *Between Two Cultures: The Life of an American Mexican*
- Atkin, Beth S. *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories*
- Rodriguez, Art. *East Side Dreams*
- Jiménez, Francisco. *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*
- Herrera, Juan Felipe. *The Upside Down Boy – El niño de cabeza*

These books are arranged from difficult to easy. Teachers should use judgment about what their students could understand. For middle school teachers, the first several books are good choices. For teachers of elementary students, the last few choices might be more appropriate.

Mini-Research Project

Objective

TLW conduct research topics on Mexican American culture using various resources to construct a poster illustrating the customs and traditions of Mexican Americans today.

This mini-research project is intended to take only 3-4 days to complete. Two class periods should be spent with research and the remaining two class periods spent putting the poster together. The advantage of this project is that students will gain further knowledge and ability to research topics on the internet and with print material. The students will choose a topic about Mexican American culture from the list below:

- Music
- Food
- Religion
- Language
- Family
- Education
- Work
- Politics

Once the students have chosen their topic, they should conduct research on the internet and with print material from the library. If possible, take the class to visit the school library or computer learning center to assist with the research. Students should find at least three to five facts and examples of their topic.

When they have gathered all their information, they will create a poster illustrating their findings. The rubric below (made with help from www.rubistar.com) is intended as a guide for teachers on what the project should include. However, teachers may choose to create their own rubric. In that case, the website listed above is very helpful in creating rubrics and it's free!

Making a Poster: Mexican American Culture

Category	4	3	2	1
Required Elements	The poster includes all required elements as well as additional information.	All required elements are included on the poster.	All but 1 of the required elements are included on the poster.	Several required elements were missing.
Knowledge Gained	Student can accurately answer all questions related to facts in the poster.	Students can accurately answer most questions related to facts in the poster.	Student can accurately answer 75% of questions related to facts in the poster.	Student appears to have insufficient knowledge about the fact in the poster.
Attractiveness	The poster is exceptionally attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness.	The poster is attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness.	The poster is acceptable attractive though it may be a bit messy.	The poster is distractingly messy or very poorly designed.
Graphics – Originality	Several of the graphics used on the poster reflect an exceptional degree of student creativity.	One or two of the graphics used on the poster reflect student creativity.	The graphics are made by the student, but are based on the designs or ideas of others.	No graphics made by the student are included.
Use of Class Time	Used time well during each class period. Focused on getting the project done. Never distracted others.	Used time well during each class period. Usually focused on getting the project done. Never distracted others.	Used some of the class time well during each class period. There was some focus on getting the project done. Occasionally distracted others.	Did not use class time to focus on the project. Often distracted others.
TOTALS				

WEEK THREE AND FOUR ACTIVITIES – LITERATURE CIRCLES/ AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Literature Circles

Objective

TLW read a Mexican American autobiography in their literature circles and create a list of book discussion questions to be used by future readers.

At this time, the students will choose a Mexican American autobiography and break into literature circles based on the books they choose. The students in the literature circles will read the book together and have discussion. Once the book is completed, the students will create a list of book discussion questions based on the reading. As a whole class, have the students create a binder to place everyone's book discussion questions. This is a great way to show future classes some student examples. After all the groups have finished their books, they should present their book to the class giving a brief summary and stating what they did and did not like about the book.

Teachers should front-load this assignment first by showing the class examples of book discussion questions, so they have an idea of what types of questions they should be constructing. Book discussion questions can be found on the internet easily by doing a general search. I have included two website sources for book discussion questions at the end of this unit.

The literature circles and book discussion questions activity should take between one to two weeks depending on the amount of time you devote to reading each day. Teachers should meet with each literature circle to check progress at least three times per week.

Student Autobiographies

Objective

TLW will write a two-page autobiography using the books from the literature circles as a model to create a class collection of student autobiographies.

For the final assignment in this unit, students will write a two-page autobiography of their lives. Teachers should use the five-step writing process to complete this assignment: 1) Prewriting; 2) Drafting; 3) Revising; 4) Proofreading; and 5) Publishing.

What grade you teach and the level of your students will determine how much time you devote to explaining the five-step writing process. For advanced students, a simple review will be sufficient. For students in the lower grades, you may want to spend one to two class periods explaining how the five-step writing process works.

Once the students are clear about what is expected of them during the writing process, begin with a few whole group prewriting exercises. Free writing and using a word web are two fun, easy ways to get students started with the writing process. When the students are ready to move on to step two, teachers should meet individually with each student to answer any questions or concerns they may have and to monitor progress.

The revising and proofreading steps of the writing process may be completed by using peer tutoring if the students are ready. Otherwise, the teacher should meet again with each student to discuss any changes that need to be made from the first draft.

The final step is publishing. Teachers may either collect the autobiographies to make a class compilation, or the students may create a bulletin board display. This activity will close out the unit on Mexican immigration. At this time, teachers should lead a whole class discussion about

the unit and have the students share what they learned and what they would like to learn in the future about immigration and autobiography.

CONCLUSION

Mexican immigration is a widely discussed issue in the early 21st century as America struggles with immigration reform. Students likely will have heard of this hot topic on the radio, TV, or with family at home and have strong feelings one way or the other. I feel that by presenting such a timely event to discuss in the classroom, social studies will come alive for these students, and they will see that they, too, are a part of history. Much of this unit involved higher order thinking skills and problem solving so that students are not passive learners, but active thinkers who will be our leaders of tomorrow.

This curriculum unit is meant to be flexible and may be adapted to encompass other cultures or time periods. Teachers may want to explore northern European immigration of the 19th century or compare early 20th century immigration to early 21st century immigration. How was the Italian and Irish immigrants' experience of coming to New York City in the late 19th century different from a Mexican migrant family trying to make ends meet in Arizona or California in 2006? The possibilities are endless. Explore other topics, expand or narrow the unit to meet the needs of your classroom. But most importantly, have a good time with this unit! I truly believe that school should be fun and engaging for both the teacher and the students, and I hope this curriculum unit brings a little joy and excitement to your classroom.

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