



## Lesson Plan: Crossing the U.S./Mexican Border

**FILM:** This lesson plan is designed for use with the film *Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side)*. This 60-minute film provides a window into issues along the border between the United States and Mexico. A young Mexican man named Magdiel faces an economic crisis in his fishing town. He is unable to make it as a fisherman, so he considers whether to immigrate to the U.S. illegally or to traffic drugs like many of his friends.

**Note:** The film contains a significant amount of subtitles.

P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

### OBJECTIVES:

In this lesson, students will:

- Watch video clips showing the perspective of a young Mexican man with limited opportunities who wants to illegally cross the U.S./Mexican border.
- Discuss what forces influence human migration, particularly along the U.S./Mexican border.
- Write a paper from the young Mexican man's point of view, explaining what happened to him after crossing the U.S./Mexican border.

**GRADE LEVEL:** 6-12

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Social Studies, Global Studies, Economics, And Current Events.

### MATERIALS:

- Map of Mexico that shows the western coastal town of Sinaloa.
- Method (varies by school) of showing the class video clips (see clips at right) from the P.O.V. Web site for *Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side)*, or have a copy of the film and a VHS/DVD player and monitor.

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED:** 1-2 class periods

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In 2004, a record 460 migrants died trying to cross the U.S./Mexican border (source: U.S. Census Bureau). Despite the risks, Mexicans continue to leave their homes to come to the U.S. as illegal immigrants in search of greater economic opportunity. This lesson plan shows the perspective of a young man in Mexico who is at a crossroads in his life. Unable to sustain a living as a fisherman and seeking a better life, he decides to leave his home and cross illegally into the U.S. His story provides insight into forces that influence human migration, particularly along the U.S./Mexican border. This lesson can be a powerful starting point for studies on U.S. immigration and economic policy, as well as domestic issues influenced by undocumented immigrants.

To prepare for the class discussion in this lesson, read about the coastal town of Sinaloa ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/alotrolado/special\\_sinaloa.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/alotrolado/special_sinaloa.html)), the hometown of the young man featured in this lesson. An interview with the filmmaker, Natalia Almada, also provides some helpful background information. For additional statistics and analysis on immigration along the U.S./Mexican border, please see the Resources section of this lesson.

## ACTIVITY

1. Ask students to write for a few minutes about their dreams for the future. Where do they see themselves in ten years? In 20 years?
2. Tell students that you are going to introduce them to a young man in Mexico named Magdiel, who lives in a fishing town called Sinaloa on the west coast of Mexico. Show students where Sinaloa is on a map. Explain that Magdiel likes to write and sing *corridos*, or Mexican ballads that use music to tell stories. Ask students to pay careful attention to the words of Magdiel's music as they watch an approximately four-minute video clip. (Begins at 3:57 with the close-up of the guitar and Magdiel singing, "The poverty that runs in my blood..." and ends at 8:12 with "There is no work here. Everyone is leaving.")
3. Ask students what economic challenges Magdiel and his family face in Sinaloa (e.g., scarcity of resources). What two options does Magdiel believe he has for his future? (Participate in the drug trade or cross the U.S. border illegally to find work). Ask students to compare how Magdiel's options for the future compare with their own. How does socioeconomic class affect people's choices or abilities to achieve their dreams? What would students do in Magdiel's situation and why?
4. Tell students that Magdiel believes his best option is to illegally immigrate to the U.S. Then, show students a 40-second clip of Magdiel talking to his sister and ask them to watch for what attracts Magdiel to the U.S. (Begins at 29:40 with the question, "Why do you think people leave this place?" and ends at 30:57 with the man in the hat saying, "...and that's not true.")
5. Why does Magdiel want to leave his home and family? Do students think his expectations about life in the U.S. are realistic? Why or why not? If students could talk with Magdiel, what would they tell him and why? Discuss what economic, political, cultural, historical and geographical forces are influencing the choices that Magdiel is making about his future. Ask students to draw from their observations in the film, prior studies, current events and/or personal experiences to support points that they make.
6. Explain that Magdiel found someone who would help him illegally cross the border to the U.S. Then show students an approximately seven-minute video clip that shows him beginning his journey. Ask students to imagine themselves in Magdiel's situation, preparing for a dangerous journey and leaving home, perhaps for the last time, but with the hope of a better future. (The clip begins at 46:07 with Magdiel singing, "Many people have gone and not returned..." and ends at 52:36 with "God willing and the Virgin, we'll make it.")

7. Ask students to think about what might have happened to Magdiel. Then, have them write a paper (specify the length) from Magdiel's point of view, that will serve as the final chapter of Magdiel's story and explain what happened after he crossed the border. Have students draw from class discussion and/or research on illegal Mexican immigrants in the U.S. to shape their papers.

#### **ASSESSMENT:**

- Evaluate student papers that describe what happened to Magdiel. In addition to grading for elements of good writing, assess student understanding of class discussion and/or their research.

#### **EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS:**

- Ask students to collect news clips about immigration issues along the U.S./Mexican border. What benefits and challenges do illegal Mexican immigrants bring to the U.S.? How well do current U.S. policies address these issues? What policy elements should be preserved or changed? Have students share their analysis with their elected officials.
- Show students "Visible Border," ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/snapshots/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/snapshots/index.html)) a short by filmmaker Alex Rivera that takes an x-ray look at technologies used to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing borders illegally. Talk about the physical dangers involved with crossing the border illegally.
- Have students read an interview with Dennis Michelini, ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/talk/dialogue004\\_dm.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/talk/dialogue004_dm.html)) a U.S. border guard who flew planes over the U.S. / Mexico border in 2001 and then switched to guarding the northern border with Canada, to learn more about the law enforcement view on this issue. Is this a job that students think that they could do? Why or why not?
- To give students an overview of the effects of this issue across the country, ask students to read "Wave of Immigration" ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special\\_wave.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special_wave.html)) and spend some time on the interactive map "Hypergrowth Destinations" ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special\\_hypergrowth.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/special_hypergrowth.html)). For more about local implications of Mexican immigration across the U.S., check out the Farmingville lesson plan for a town hall look at immigrant labor and public policy ([www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/for.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/for.html)).
- Learn more about the Mexican ballad tradition of *corridos* by having students watch the entire 60-minute film and take notes on the people and issues presented in the film's music. What do *corridos* reveal about Mexican culture? Who is drawn to this type of music and why? What do *corridos* have in common with other types of music (e.g., rap music, U.S. political folk music, underground railroad songs, etc.)?

#### **RESOURCES:**

**The Pew Hispanic Center**  
[www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org)

The Pew Hispanic Center provides non-partisan research about Latinos in the U.S. In preparation for this lesson, review the survey revealing the attitudes and aspirations of Mexican immigrants (see <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=41>). Students may also find the center's demographic and economic statistics helpful as they conduct research for their papers.

### **The Center for Immigration Studies**

[www.cis.org](http://www.cis.org)

The Center for Immigration Studies is a non-partisan think tank devoted to research and policy analysis of the economic, social, demographic and fiscal impact of immigration on the U.S. Consult this site to prepare for the class discussion. Students will also find helpful information to inform their papers for this lesson.

### **STANDARDS:**

#### **Economics**

- Standard 1: Understands that scarcity of productive resources requires choices that generate opportunity costs.
  - Level III, Benchmark 1: Understands that scarcity of resources necessitates choice at both the personal and the societal levels.
- Standard 2: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions, and economic incentives.
  - Level III, Benchmark 6: Understands that economic incentives such as wanting to acquire money or goods and services and wanting to avoid loss are powerful forces affecting the way people behave.

#### **Geography**

- Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.
  - Level IV, Benchmark 3: Knows how international migrations are shaped by push and pull factors.

#### **United States History**

- Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.
  - Level III, Benchmark 1: Understands changes in the workplace and the economy in contemporary America.
  - Level IV, Benchmark 5: Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved.

Source: "Content Knowledge" (<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>) by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning)

