

Books and Curricula

There are many wonderful books on Mexico, and border and immigration issues — more than can be included here. I've found the following books useful in clarifying the relationship between the United States and Mexico and creating curriculum. Some can be excerpted for use with high school or middle school students.

A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America

Ronald Takaki. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993.

Takaki includes two chapters, "Foreigners in Their Own Land: Manifest Destiny in the Southwest" and "El Norte: The Borderland of Chicano America," that are fine introductions to the unequal relationship between the United States and Mexico. Takaki's writing does not shy away from the exploitative realities of this history, but it has a warmth and an appreciation of human struggle that makes for engaging reading.

The Annexation of Mexico: From the Aztecs to the I.M.F.

John Ross. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1998.

A writer in the Mexican daily *La Jornada* called Ross "the new John Reed covering a new Mexican revolution." Ross offers an entertaining, irreverent history of Mexico, focusing especially on U.S. domination. It's a good introduction to U.S.-Mexico relations. For Ross, NAFTA and free trade are just the latest iterations of U.S. designs on its southern neighbor.

Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas

George A. Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello. Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 1999.

I found this book indispensable in helping grasp some of the roots of the Zapatista uprising and in writing the Chiapas farmer role in the NAFTA role play. It's intricate but clear.

Border Studies Curriculum

Center for Latin American and Border Studies, New Mexico State University, 2004. (www.nmsu.edu/~bsc)

This curriculum includes 20 lesson plans focusing on border life. The lessons here would be of particular interest to students who live in or near border areas. Themes include bilingualism and "Spanglish," borders as metaphors, myths and folklore, poetry, music, and Hollywood depictions.

Bound for the Rio Grande: The Mexican Struggle, 1845-1850

Milton Meltzer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

This is the best student-friendly book about the U.S.-Mexico War. Meltzer weaves story, song, and poetry into a highly readable and accurate account of the U.S.-initiated war that led to the Mexican surrender of half its territory. Several chapters could be used in their entirety with high school or middle school students.

BRIDGE, Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue in the Global Economy

Eunice Hyunhye Cho, Francisco Argüelles Paz y Puente, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, and Sasha Khokha. Oakland, CA: National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 2004.

Although aimed at educators working with adults, rather than at classroom teachers, this is an imaginative and critical resource for teaching about immigration. One of the guide's strengths is to ground immigration in the context of race and globalization. The book also has a substantial and helpful section on immigration throughout U.S. history.

The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border

David Bacon. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

David Bacon is a prolific and astute writer about labor on the border. This is one of the most valuable books I read when preparing my curriculum. Bacon observes

that “the border symbolizes the nature of the new economic reality. Production and jobs can move across it easily, but the people who perform those jobs cannot. The border, an imaginary line in the sand for most of its 2000-mile length, enforces vast differences in both standards of living and social and political rights.” But this is not a political tract. Bacon fills his book with story and concrete example that brings his analysis to life.

The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child

Francisco Jiménez. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.

These short stories — connected, but able to be read and appreciated independently — follow a migrant family through its “circuit” of farmwork: cotton, strawberries, carrots, etc. It’s a book that Jan Goodman, a Berkeley middle school teacher and traveler on our first Rethinking Schools–Global Exchange border tour, alerted me to and uses as the core of an eighth-grade unit on migrant issues with her students. It’s one that could be read in full or in parts at either the middle or high school level. The story that gives its name to the book, “The Circuit,” tenderly captures the tension between work and school for the child at the center of these stories. The book is also available on tape and CD.

The Devil’s Highway

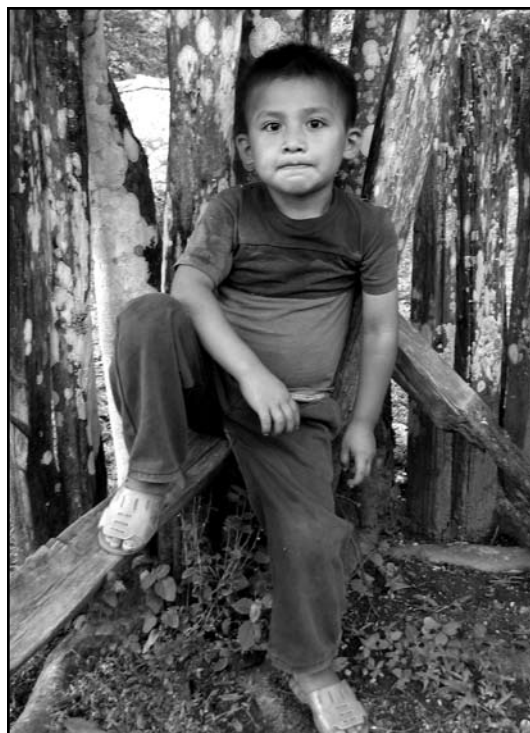
Luis Alberto Urrea. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2004.

In this harrowing narrative, Urrea recounts the ordeal of 26 Mexican migrants who entered the scorching “Devil’s Highway” in Arizona, simply attempting to find better-paying jobs than were available at home in Vera Cruz. Of the 26, only 12 survived. Although Urrea fails to ask about the broader economic policies that led to this tragedy — the book contains not a single mention of NAFTA — it is a compelling and sympathetic account.

500 Años del Pueblo Chicano/500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures

Edited by Elizabeth Martínez. Albuquerque, NM: Southwest Organizing Project, 1991.

This is a rich and startling bilingual overview of Chicano struggle. Because it covers such a sweep of history, the book doesn’t provide great detail about any one episode, but its strength is in its portrait of collective defiance of injustice. I know teachers who have used this book as a course outline to frame units on Chicano history. Also see the video that accompanies the book, described on p. 136.



BOB PETERSON

A young boy from Chiapas, Mexico.

Genders in Production, Making Workers in Mexico’s Global Factories

Leslie Salzinger. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

Most accounts of maquiladora work in Mexico begin from the premise that factories go looking for workers who are “cheap, docile, and dextrous” — specimens of “natural femininity.” Salzinger focuses instead on how maquiladoras set out to *create* these characteristics in their workers. This is a fascinating ethnography that analyzes the maquiladora phenomenon through a gender lens. It’s not a book that could be used with most high school students, but it’s full of surprising insights and helpful background.

Hard Line: Life and Death on the U.S.-Mexico Border

Ken Ellingwood. New York: Vintage, 2004.

Ellingwood, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, is a skillful writer with the sensibility of a principled reporter. He has put together a solid overview of life at the border, culminating in two chapters, “The Deadly Season” and “Burying John Doe,” that detail the ongoing deaths of hundreds of Mexican migrants every year. Ellingwood also includes an early chapter on the history of the border and the U.S. Border Patrol.

Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico

Bill Weinberg. London: Verso, 2000.

This is a long but engaging book that begins with Chiapas's earliest history and moves through the Zapatista rebellion to the movements inspired by that rebellion. Sometimes a history book, sometimes a personal narrative, it's always interesting and worthwhile.

The Late Great Mexican Border: Reports from a Disappearing Line

Edited by Bobby Byrd and Susannah Mississippi Byrd.

El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 1996.

A collection of short readings about life on the border. It includes the excellent and classroom-friendly story "Exile, El Paso, Texas," by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, about a Chicano man's encounters with the U.S. Border Patrol and his response.

ELEMENTARY BOOKS WITH A CONSCIENCE

I have used the following books in my fourth-grade classroom to help students explore common themes in immigrant children's lives. I find that students who have immigrated to the United States benefit from seeing some of their experiences reflected in books. These stories help all students learn about immigrants' experiences and about xenophobia.

América Is Her Name

Luis Rodríguez; illustrated by Carlos Vázquez. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1997. (Spanish title: *La llaman América*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1998.)

América is a girl from Oaxaca, Mexico, who has moved to Chicago and is floundering in school. She hears her teacher tell another teacher she's "illegal," and gets the idea that she doesn't belong in the United States. After a guest poet visits América's class, she begins to find her voice by writing about her experiences back home; but her father ridicules this work, telling her it's no use since she'll spend her life cleaning, working, and raising kids. América continues to write anyway, and eventually achieves academic success and a sense of belonging. I find this story useful for helping students question immigrant stereotypes and encouraging children to think broadly about their possibilities in life.

My Name Is Jorge on Both Sides of the River

Jane Medina, illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1999.

This bilingual poetry book shares common themes in immigrant children's lives through the experiences of the narrator, Jorge. Jorge makes friends with English- and Spanish-speaking kids at his new school, tries new foods offered to him by his Anglo peers, and feels proud when he recites poetry to his class. He also wonders why his grades are worse in the United States than in

Mexico, feels insulted when a classmate calls his English as a second language class "Mexican dummy time," and leaves the public library without a library card after the librarian insults his mom for being illiterate. A funny, moving, and engaging book that helps students explore the joys and difficulties in the lives of immigrant children.

Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado

Gloria Anzaldúa, illustrated by Consuelo Méndez. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1993.

In this bilingual book, a Mexican-American girl named Prietita befriends a recent Mexican immigrant named Joaquín. She stands up to her cousin and his friends when they tell Joaquín to, "Go back where you came from." When the Border Patrol comes looking for "illegals," she hides Joaquín and his mom so they won't get caught. I use this book to help students learn what xenophobia is and how to be an ally.

The Magic Shell

Nicholasa Mohr; illustrated by Rudy Gutierrez. New York: Scholastic, 1995. (Spanish title: *El regalo mágico*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.)

When Jaime's family decides to move to New York from the Dominican Republic, his uncle gives him a magic shell that he can use to remember his home. At first Jaime uses the shell often. He is bored in his apartment building and reluctant to make friends with English speakers. Eventually he makes friends at school and in his neighborhood, and starts to enjoy life in New York. In the end of the book he visits the Dominican Republic and uses the shell to recall New York. Although I find this book to be a bit slow-paced, the themes hold students' interest.

—Kelley Dawson Salas, *La Escuela Fratney, Milwaukee*

Lives on the Line: Dispatches from the U.S.-Mexico Border

Miriam Davidson. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2000.

Davidson offers a fine, readable survey of life on both sides of the border in Nogales, Ariz., and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. It's filled with fascinating, sympathetic vignettes about border life. The entire book could be read by most high school students.

Many Faces of Mexico

Octavio Madigan Ruiz, Amy Sanders, and Meredith Sommers. Minneapolis: Resource Center of the Americas, 1995.

This comprehensive curriculum on Mexico begins with life before the Spanish invasion and includes lessons up to the passage of NAFTA. It offers a range of teaching strategies and a framework for approaching Mexican history.

Mexican Lives

Judith Adler Hellman. New York: The New Press, 1994.

I found this book very helpful in writing the NAFTA role play. *Mexican Lives* offers a portrait of Mexicans from different social groups on the eve of NAFTA ratification. The stories are honest and engaging. Several can be used with high school students. "Adelita Sandoval," pp. 159-171, is one of the readings that we provide travelers on the Rethinking Schools-Global Exchange trips to the border.

The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics

Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

This is an enormous book that you're not likely to sit down and read start to finish, but it is a lively compendium of documents, articles, stories, and poems, many of which could be excerpted for classroom use.

Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation

Rodolfo Acuña. San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972.

This is a classic history and a book I've returned to over the years as a source for background information and ideas for lessons. Well over 30 years since its publication, the stories and analysis here have still not made it into most U.S. history classes.

Puro Border: Dispatches, Snapshots and Graffiti from La Frontera

Edited by Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, John William Byrd, and Bobby Byrd. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2003.

A playful and at times poignant collection of border miscellany — as the title suggests.

True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Calino, and the Bronx

Sam Quinones. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001.

I approached this quirky book looking for excerpts that I could use with students and came up empty-handed. But I did find a number of these journalistic excursions into Mexican culture to be fascinating and at times enlightening. One of my favorite chapters was on the telenovela, the wildly popular Mexican soap opera phenomenon, whose lessons for women, according to the most powerful television impresario, included: "suffering was purifying and to be borne privately, life is nothing without a man, marriage was required for happiness," etc.

¡Sí, Se Puede!/Yes, We Can!

Diana Cohn. Illustrated by Francisco Delgado. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2002.

In this excellent children's book, we learn about the 2000 Justice for Janitors strike, involving 8,000 mostly immigrant workers, through the experiences of Carlito's mamá. See Linda Christensen's *Rethinking Schools* article "Justice for Janitors: Making the Invisible Visible" (www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/17_02/Read172.shtml) for ways of working with this story across grade levels. Great for high school students, too.

Voices of a People's History of the United States

Edited by Anthony Arnove and Howard Zinn. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004.

In his book *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn includes a chapter on the U.S. war with Mexico, "We Take Nothing by Conquest, Thank God," excerpted here on p. 53. *Voices of a People's History of the United States* offers source documents that amplify the themes in *A People's History*, including diary excerpts of U.S. Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, a speech and editorial by abolitionist Frederick Douglass, and a handbill from deserting U.S. soldiers.

Women Working the NAFTA Food Chain: Women, Food, and Globalization

Edited by Deborah Barndt. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1999.

In this imaginative book, contributors follow the production of food in North America, examining fast food workers in Canada, supermarket workers, migrant workers, and how globalization is remaking our relationship with food and with each other.