

Activity One: Mexico _____

CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO

Suffering the risks, the injustices, and the loneliness of *el norte* (the north) has become the quest, the rite of passage to manhood for young men throughout the villages of Mexico.

—Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican Voices, American Dreams*, p. 38.



In the process of answering the question, Why do people move?, the history of the economic and political relationships between sending and receiving communities is important to examine.¹ None is so tied as the relationship between Mexico and the United States.

Migration from Mexico to the United States receives a great deal of attention—the “alien invasion” and the loss of control of the border dominates the newspapers and television. Theories to explain increasing numbers of undocumented workers are too many to list. Sorting out the multitude of terms—undocumented workers, illegals, aliens, legal workers, special agricultural workers—may help to make sense and place this issue in a larger context.

Most Mexicans come into the United States legally and have become residents or citizens through a family reunification component of immigration law. The number of undocumented workers, those people who arrive in the United States without official documents, is increasing each year. Undocumented workers are often thought to be all Mexicans, but Caribbean and Central Americans also make up a significant portion of the undocumented workers.

Mexican migration to the United States more than any other group follows a pattern of ebb and flow.² Labor migration initiated by the planned recruitment efforts of the railroad companies, and later by the U.S. government in the *Bracero* Programs, contributed to setting the stage for this pattern. The need for workers during the World War II brought about the *Bracero* Programs, which lasted from 1942 to 1964. When the war ended, forced repatriation of workers in what was called “Operation Wetback” slowed down the flow. The term “wetback” (*Mojado*) is a derogatory term dating back to this period that was used to describe those who crossed the Rio Grande River to enter the United States, thereby arriving wet.

Today movement between the two countries continues and the strain of the relationship takes on new forms. The possibility of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) generates new issues about the movement of Mexicans to the United States. Today the offspring of those *Braceros* are the new generation entering the United States, either by crossing without documents, or by claiming citizenship through family reunification.

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The informal social networks created by immigrant communities are influential in sustaining the flow of migration by passing the word about job possibilities and by assisting new arrivals. Information and perceptions of the United States are passed from one family member to another, and from one village to another. *Corridos*, folk ballads, are one of the informal ways that information about *el norte* (the United States) and about work and life there has been passed from one generation to another, from one group of people to another, and from one region to another.

Outline of Activity

Students listen to a *corrido* and read the words of another *corrido* and some quotes. The *corrido* that the students will listen to dates back to the early 1900s, making references to the Revolution in the second verse. The second *corrido* is a humorous one as well as a recent one. The quotes by three men of different ages add to the complexity of reasons that people leave Mexico. Students discuss the reasons people leave Mexico and the attractions of the United States. As a group they write a song telling the class why they would leave Mexico.

Extension Questions

1. What did your group learn about the people leaving Mexico?
2. How do people here in this country learn about life in Mexico? What do you know about Mexico? What have you heard?
3. How do people make the decision to leave their home, their family, and their friends? How do people keep in touch with relatives?
4. People have always migrated, moving to another place for survival, for better opportunities, or for adventure. What would make you move from your community or country?
5. How is migration from Mexico today similar to or different from other forms of migration you have studied?

Related Issues

- Control of borders: entry and exit
- Benefits for the citizens of a country and for noncitizens
- Requirements for obtaining citizenship
- Differences in terms used to describe people who migrate: undocumented workers, illegal workers, and "wetbacks"
- NAFTA and migration from Mexico

Reference Materials

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Endnotes

¹Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 230.

²Portes, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 79.

CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO ACTIVITY CARD

The border between Mexico and the United States is 2,000 miles long. It runs along four states on the United States side: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. On the Mexican side, five states share the border: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. In some areas there are cities on the border and in some areas only desert. People have been crossing the border to work in the United States for many years. One program between the United States and Mexican governments was called the *Bracero* (from the Spanish word *brazos* which means arms) Program. Workers were hired from Mexico and brought to work on the farms in California, Arizona, and other states in the Southwest.

Corridos are folk songs or folk ballads. The word *corrido* comes from the Spanish word *correr*, which means to run. A *corrido*, then, is a running account of a particular event from the point of view of a witness. *Corridos* have been written about many topics—the Mexican Revolution, heroes, love, and immigration. The *corrido* is composed by ordinary people without pen or pencil and it is said that they are written *de puro corazón* (of pure heart). Many *corridos* are simply performed and are never written down. *Corridos* are popular in Mexico and throughout the United States.

Your resource cards contain some examples of *corridos* that deal with the theme of migration from Mexico to the United States. The *corrido* that is recorded was written in the early 1900s. Listen to it and follow along with the words. The other *corrido* provided on Resource Card 2 is a version of the "*La Cucaracha, La Cucaracha.*" Resource Card 3 contains some quotes from different people who have migrated. Discuss the following questions with your group:

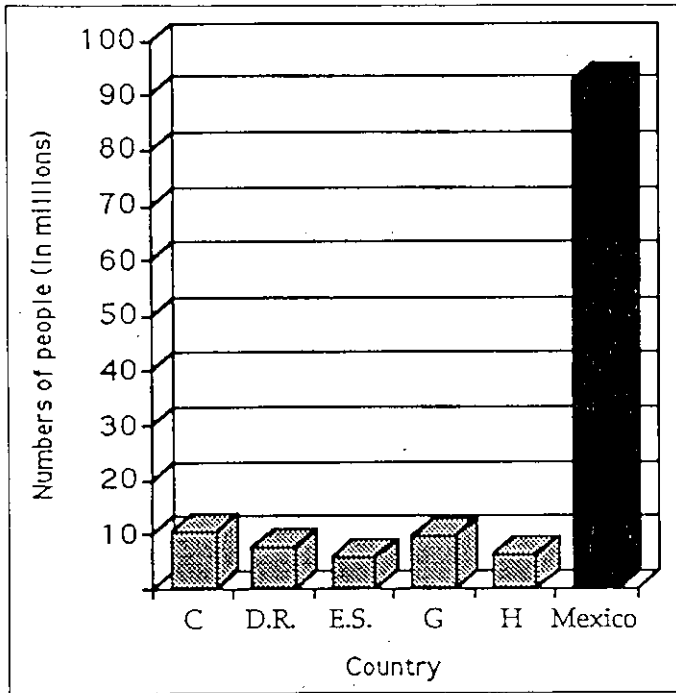
1. In the *corrido* "The Dishwasher/El Lavaplatos," why did this person leave Mexico? How does he describe his experience?
2. What attracts some people from Mexico to come to the United States?
3. What are the reasons people leave Mexico?
4. A sending community is the place people are leaving. A receiving community is the place they are going. How does migration affect both the sending and receiving communities?

GROUP TASK

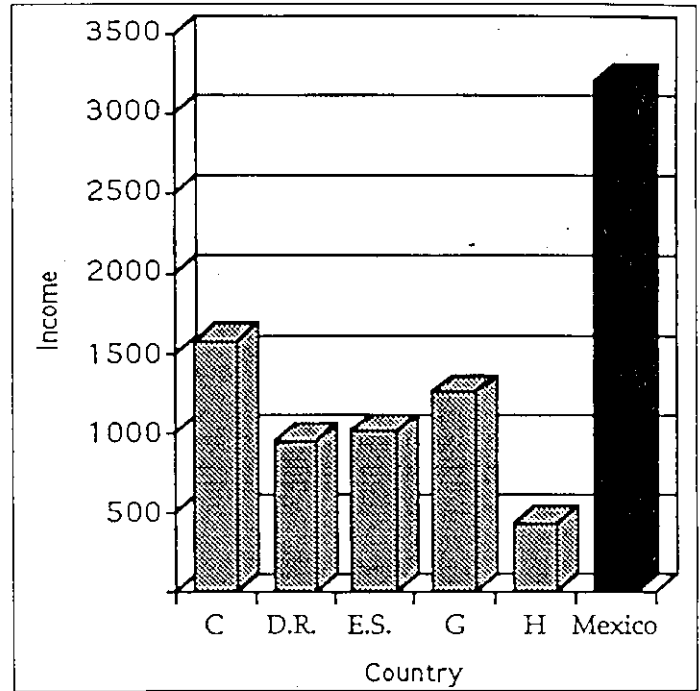
Your task as a group is to write a song expressing the reasons why some Mexican immigrants leave their homeland to come to the United States. Be ready to perform this for the class.

CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO
DATA AND MAP CARD

POPULATION



PER CAPITA INCOME



MAP OF MEXICO



CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO
 RESOURCE CARD 1
 (THIS ONE IS RECORDED)

The Dishwasher

I dreamed in my youth of being a movie star,
 And one fine day I came to visit Hollywood.

One day, desperate from all the revolutions,
 I crossed to the USA without paying the
 immigration.

What a joke, what joke!
 I crossed without paying a cent!

Upon reaching the station, I came upon a
 brother
 And he invited me to work for *El Traque*.

I thought *El Traque* was a fancy department
 store,
 But it was fixing the rails where the trains run.

What a brother! What a brother!
 How you took me to the railroad tracks!

When I got tired of *El Traque* he invited me
 again
 To pick tomatoes and to hoe beets.

There I earned indulgences crawling on my
 knees,
 Bowing down for three, four, and five miles.

What poorly paid work
 For working on one's knees.

My friend, who was no dummy, he stuck to it,
 And when he had his fare he returned home
 to Mexico.

I worked for almost nothing and left for
 Sacramento.
 When I had nothing left I had to work on the
 cement.

El Lavaplatos

Soñé yo en mi juventud ser una estrella de cine
 y un día de tantos me viene a visitar Jolibud.

Un día, muy desesperado de tanta revolución
 me pasé para este lado sin pagar la
 inmigración.

¡Qué vacilada! ¡Qué vacilada!
 Me pasé sin pagar nada.

Al llegar a la estación me tropecé con un cuate
 y me hizo la invitación de trabajar en *El
 Traque*.

Yo, *El Traque*, me suponía que sería algún
 almacén;
 y era componer la vía por donde camina el
 tren.

¡Ay, qué mi cuate! ¡Ay, qué mi cuate!
 ¡Cómo me llevas pa' *El Traque*!

Cuando me enfadé de *El Traque* me volvió a
 invitar aquel
 a la pizca del tomate y a desahijar betabel.

Allí gané indulgencias caminando de rodillas,
 haciéndoles reverencias tres o cuatro y cinco
 millas.

¡Ay, qué trabajo tan mal pagado
 Por andar arrodillado!

Mi cuate, que no era maje, él siguió dándole
 guerra
 y al completar su pasaje se regresó pa' su
 tierra.

Y yo hice cualquier bicoca y me fui pa'
 Sacramento;
 cuando no quedó ni zoca, tuve que entrarle al
 cemento.

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What a horrible torment! What a horrible
torment!
That so-called cement.

¡Ay, qué tormento! ¡Ay, qué tormento!
es el mentado cemento.

Pour some dirt and sand into the cement
mixer.
Fifty cents an hour all day 'til the whistle
blows.

Echéle tierra y arena a la máquina batidora a
cincuenta centavos hora hasta que el pito no
suena.

I traveled through towns and cities, and all is
such beauty.
I went through St. Louis, Missouri, and ar-
rived at New York.

Recorrí pueblos y villas, todo aquello es un
primor:
pasé por San Luis Misuri y llegué a Nueva
York.

I went to Detroit, Michigan, the city of the
automobile.
I visited the assembly lines, how beautiful it
was!

A Ditroi, Michiga fui, ciudad de los
automóviles:
visité sus maquinarias, ¡ay, qué bonito,
señores!

I went on to the North Pole; I saw all its great
fisheries.
I saw all the seals and swallows, which I have
never seen.

Me pasé al Polo Norte, vi sus grandes
pesquerías:
vi las focas y gaviotas que yo no las conocía.

I traveled on to California and saw all its
orange groves
And all the huge tomato farms.

Me pasé a California vi sus grandes naranjales,
y vi sus grandes plantíos de grandes
jitomatales.

The beautiful state of Texas with its huge
agricultural farms
Has many crops; all is very beautiful.

Bonito estado de Texas por su grande
agricultura
pues tiene mucho plantíos. Todo es una
hermosura.

The *gringuitos* would ask me "Do you like
what you see?"
It used to belong to the Mexicans, now it is all
ours.

Los gringuitos me decían:—Te gusta lo que
aquí ves
Era de los mexicanos y ahora de nosotros es.

Good-bye, American men, good-bye American
girls.
I take my leave, good-bye, I am going to see
my Mexican girls.

Adiós, los americanos, también las americanas
quédense, adiós, ya me voy; voy a ver mis
mexicanas.

The United States is beautiful, there is no
doubt about that.
I had to return home, because of my love for
Julia.

¡Bonito Estados Unidos, que no me quedó ni
duda!
Me vine de por allá por el amor de mi Julia.

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CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO
RESOURCE CARD 2

The Wetback Cockroach

The cockroach, the cockroach
Does not want to walk.
Because it doesn't have, because it lacks
Coca-Cola to drink.

The cockroach, the cockroach
Also wants to cross the border
To get a contract, to get a contract
And a few dollars to earn.

All are leaving the motherland,
The cockroach is leaving too,
Some are leaving through the desert
Others are crossing by train.

Some are crossing through Tijuana
And through El Paso also.
We are crossing like cockroaches
'Cause there's nothing to eat.

La Cucaracha Mojada

La cucaracha, la cucaracha
ya no quiere caminar,
porque no tiene, porque le falta
Coca-Cola que tomar.

La cucaracha, la cucaracha
también se quiere pasar,
para engancharse, para engancharse
y unos pesos así ganar.

Todos se van de la patria
la cucaracha también,
unos van por el desierto
y otros cruzan con el tren.

Atravesando en Tijuana
y por El Paso también
vamos como cucarachas,
porque no hay que comer.

from Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song

CORRIDOS FROM MEXICO
RESOURCE CARD 3

I'm very unhappy to have to leave my family again, especially now because I have two sons who are graduating from high school and they are going to enter the university. I would like to be with them on their graduation, but they need the money I can make here so that they can get a good education. They deserve it; they are good boys and have worked and studied very hard.

ENRIQUE

Yes, of course, I want to work and make some money, but the real reason is to know more about the world.

ROBERTO

I could see that even with all her talent and skill, with this husband she will never get ahead. I grew to care for her very much, and wished I could find an answer to the situation. I searched for a solution. I went to the Señor Cura [priest] and talked to him. I even went to a psychiatrist. They both told me that I didn't have a chance in this relationship. Well, what could I do? I couldn't stay there and work side by side knowing there is no hope.

So here I am, on my way to the United States. I have friends in Chicago who will help me find work. Perhaps there, I will be able to forget her and let God resolve this problem.

JORGE

