

**Note: this lesson plan is one of three connected Roleplay activities in *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Sovereignty, and Justice Education***

## **Developed Roleplay Part II: Research and Advocacy**

*Essence of the lesson:* Students experience empathy with and a deeper interest in and understanding of people who leave their countries fleeing from poverty, violence, war, or other kinds of traumatic situations, focusing on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (although other countries may be substituted in the plans). This unit is designed for various disciplines and integration of subject matter and is most effective in collaboration with other teachers, disciplines, different schools, and community advisors (see Personal comments and/or suggestions). It is the second part of a long-term role-play unit (see Parts I and III), and the steps can also be used separately.

NOTE: This lesson is designed for eight sessions but can be adapted for fewer or extended for performance, display, or research.

*Materials needed:* Pre-activity and post-activity questions (questions in Role-Play I and Appendix A and B, 3-2-1 Bridge); handouts for each student (see Sample Materials section and Appendices); one computer for research for each group; a “family group” notebook for keeping a record of each session; a journal for each student

*Preparation:* Teacher should be familiar enough with the current events of the countries chosen here (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras) to select an actual crisis (Step 4) that occurred in that country (natural disaster, civil war, economic crisis, coup d'état, etc.). See Appendix C for examples.

Preparation includes finding volunteer “community advisors” (Step 7) and a volunteer judge for the court hearing (Step 13).

*Grades:* 7–12; ages 12–18; university and adult education

*Subjects:* English, ELL, heritage language classes, social studies/history, math, visual and performance arts, humanities, world languages, science

*Duration:* 45 minutes for each of the seven sessions (adaptable). Steps can be divided into multiple lessons over a longer period of time. Practical application of the subject content may be easily integrated in the steps as they are designed to enrich the curriculum (see Personal comments and/or suggestions).

*Space requirements:* Space to do warm-ups (Step 2); chairs and tables adjusted to work with small groups; library access for research (Step 8). If teachers from different classes are collaborating on this unit (Steps 7 and 13), space requirements change (for instance, a dining area, a stage, a courtroom).

*Step-by-step instruction:*

## **DAY ONE: Family Groups**

**Step 1** (5 minutes) Pre-assessment for the unit, use the 3-2-1 Bridge exercise (see Appendix A, with complete explanation in Appendix B) to ask students for their initial responses to the topic: 3 Thoughts, 2 Questions, 1 Analogy. Students may keep their “bridge” in their journals or teacher may collect them to complete at the end of the unit. These pre-assessment exercises will be valuable tools to measure changes in attitude and knowledge after completing the unit. Reminder: There are no right or wrong answers.

NOTE: Before starting, make certain students have completed the 3 statements (Role Play, Part I, Step 1), now and at the end of the unit (see Appendix A) to keep in their journals or be collected by the teacher.

**Step 2** (10 minutes) Suggested warm-up activity: Cross the Room if ... (see Warm-up Exercises)

**Step 3** (30 minutes) Roleplay in small groups: Divide into groups of four designed by the teacher to ensure that students work with people they do not know well. This group will become a “family group” (later changing to “researchers” and “advocates”) for the duration of the entire unit. Each member of the foursome should have a task (which may rotate): timekeeper, group manager, recorder, reporter. Groups will refer to a “family notebook” to report to the class and teacher. Additionally, it is recommended that individual students keep a journal and that teachers regularly give prompts for student reflections and ask them to incorporate specific subject area lessons (such as vocabulary, formulas, historical information, etc.).

Teacher assigns each “family group” its country and town; select one student in the group to be the primary wage earner; and select the earner’s occupation (one person from each foursome). Below are three sample group assignments. To focus on these three countries only (rather than other countries—see Suggested variations), repeat these countries for class size, just change the town and wage earner profession for each group.

El Salvador—La Libertad, owner of tiny grocery store Guatemala—Huehuetenango, doctor in women’s clinic Honduras—San Pedro Sula, teacher

### STUDENTS WILL:

- (1) Decide other group members family relationship to the “bread winner” (see Related Resources for longer assignments related to developing family member characters).
- (2) Create a short description of characters and their relationships to each other.
- (3) Research how much money the bread winner makes, the cost of living.
- (4) Describe the town and neighborhoods where they live (use computers).
- (5) Investigate the living conditions for their families (use computers).
- (6) Find their homes on Google Earth and describe them (use computers).
- (7) Select a family member to record their findings in their notebooks (record keepers may alternate).
- (8) Select a family member to make a brief report to the whole class (reporters will alternate).

## **DAY TWO: Crisis in Towns**

**Step 4** (10 minutes) *Crisis*—Teacher hands out a crisis card to each family group (see Sample A) with a notice of a crisis that has occurred in their assigned country. Note that the following samples are actual natural disasters, or political disasters that happened in the country at different times in history (see Timeline: US, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in Appendix C for more ideas).

STUDENTS WILL:

- (1) Determine how the crisis affects their families.
  - (2) Determine how the crisis affects their neighborhoods, friends, people they work with, etc. Students try to imagine that they know people who have been directly affected.
  - (3) Record their family reactions in the family notebook, to share with whole class later.
- Step 5** (10 minutes) *US relative sends money*—Teacher announces to the family groups that a money order for \$100 has arrived from a relative in the US.

STUDENTS WILL:

- (1) Calculate how much \$100 in local currency can buy in their country (computer).
- (2) Discuss how having a relative living in the US could affect their family.
- (3) Create the character in the US, including what relationship this person has to the family, how long they have been in the US, and why they left the country.
- (4) Brainstorm how others in the town might react if they find out the family has a relative in the US.
- (5) Record the family reaction in the notebook to be shared later.
- (6) **Step 6** (10 minutes) *Letter of invitation*—Teacher gives each group a letter inviting the family to come to the US (see Sample E in Spanish and English).

STUDENTS WILL:

- (1) Discuss how the family reacts to this invitation.
- (2) Discuss what it would mean for one, some, or all of them to leave the country and how they would go about doing that if it were an option.
- (3) Record the different reactions of each family member.
- (4) Record any questions and concerns the family comes up with to investigate before making any decisions.
- (5) Report these reactions to the whole class.

**Step 5** (5 minutes) *Conclusion of Steps 1 to 4*—Teacher allows time for all students to silently process and write in their own journals first as their character (2 minutes), and then as themselves (3 minutes).

**Step 6** (10 minutes) *Questions for further investigation*—Class creates a list of questions. Students write an invitation to “community advisors.” The next step will be to present all the findings of the groups during a visit from community advisors, which will lead to deeper investigation. As an assignment, students create more questions.

**DAY THREE: Community Advisors**

**Step 7** (45 minutes) Sharing information—“Community advisors” (people from the countries studied or familiar with the countries) have been invited to be guest speakers to give feedback to the students. If teachers are collaborating in this unit, the participating classes come together in a larger space. First, students meet with the community advisor in their family group (or groups, if classes are combined) to briefly present notes, conclusions, and questions, and get feedback about the specific country. Next, community advisors form a panel to address questions from the whole class.

Possible follow-up assignments: (1) Insights from the gathering are recorded in the personal journals and later collected in the family notebook; (2) Community advisors may be interviewed (see Oral History Interview) and/ or invited to return to observe the Courtroom Hearing (Step 15); (3) In the voice of their family character, each student writes a letter to a friend explaining the family’s situation and consequent decisions; (4) Later, share these with their family groups.

NOTE: Beforehand, students can prepare presentations with their family group including food from the country and replicas of artwork to present to the community advisor guests.

#### **DAY FOUR: Research Investigation**

**Step 8** (30 minutes) Family groups become research teams to investigate the history of the country they represented as a family and its relationship to the US from 1930 to the present.

(1) Students create a graphic timeline from 1930 to the present of important events in their specific country’s history and of US relations with the country (see a sample timeline in Appendix C).

(2) The research team comments on how the history may affect the way the family lives, their neighborhood, town environment, the crisis, the relative in the US, making notes in the family notebook to adjust previous conclusions.

**Step 9** (10 minutes) Each group shares findings with the whole class and discusses the importance of understanding the deeper context. Also, they share information gathered from discussions with the community advisors.

**Step 10** (5 minutes) In a circle, each student shares one word describing an insight from the research. Teacher records the words.

NOTE: For classes wishing to take more time to explore in-depth history of the countries, see Brief Bibliography for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Appendix D).

Assignment: Using the list of words from the class circle as a prompt, each student writes an entry in their journal.

#### **DAY FIVE: Advocacy Research**

**Step 11** (10 minutes) Family groups change from “research teams” to “advocacy teams”—Each team reads and reviews the handouts of Immigration Fact Sheet (courtesy of the Sanders Institute; see Appendix E), and Myths and Facts—common misconceptions about immigrants in

the US (courtesy of the American Immigration Lawyers Association; see Appendix F). Take 5 minutes to write personal reactions in journals.

**Step 12** (15 minutes) Exploring myths—Each team is assigned a different topic (myth) to research and is given handouts or information suggested in Appendix G and in the Resource Lists to facilitate the process. Topics may include (1) Taxes; (2) Health care; (3) Entrepreneurs; (4) Crime (Driver’s Licenses); (5) Welfare

**Step 13** (20 minutes) *Prepare arguments*—Each advocacy team prepares arguments backed by their notes, conclusions, and research to propose fair immigration policies. Arguments will be heard on DAY SIX in front of a “judge” or a community volunteer who acts as a judge.

NOTE: The advocacy group may use members of their original family group as witnesses to justify policy changes. Full participation from each person is expected. It is suggested that teams think of their arguments like this: IRACC – Identify, Rule (as it exists), Analyze, Change, Conclude.

Depending on the subject being taught, the teacher may include other guidelines (use of certain vocabulary, written arguments, statistical or scientific facts, historical notes, etc.)

### **DAY SIX: Courtroom Hearing**

**Step 14** (45 minutes) Presenting policy in mock or real courtroom setting—Teams present their policy ideas to a “judge.” It is an opportunity to engage in community. If one teacher and one class are working on this project, it may be conducted simply in the classroom with the teacher, a community volunteer, or another teacher acting as judge. If more than one class is involved, use a larger setting such as a stage or an actual courtroom with a volunteer judge (see Personal comments and/or suggestions and photographs). Invite community advisors and students from other classes. Send press releases to local media to invite them to observe and record the process.

NOTE: Leave time for the judge’s remarks.

### **DAY SEVEN: Conclusion Assessment**

**Step 15** (5 minutes) Students write overall impressions of the unit in personal journals.

**Step 16** (5 minutes) Groups (family/researchers/advocates) write observations and critiques of the courtroom hearing in the group notebook.

**Step 17** (15 minutes) *Notebooks*—To conclude, each member of the group will briefly share some aspect from the group notebook with the whole class.

**Step 18** (10 minutes) *Conclusion*—Standing in a circle, each student says one word or short phrase about the experience of the entire role-play unit. The teacher records all the words and may summarize by weaving them together into a “poem” to recite at the end the unit.

**Step 19** (10 minutes) If you are ending the role-play unit, have students complete the Post-Activity Statements below from Part I (anonymously, if preferred), and the second part of the 3-

2-1 Bridge sheet (New Responses to the topic—see SAMPLE A with full explanation in Appendix B).

Post-Activity Questions:

1. My favorite class activity in learning about (e.g., immigration, racism, discrimination) was: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Before this class project, when I thought of (e.g., immigration, racism, discrimination), I thought: \_\_\_\_\_ but now I think: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Now, when I think of the connection between my life and (e.g., immigration, racism, discrimination), I think: \_\_\_\_\_
4. One thing I wish other people knew about (e.g., immigration, racism, discrimination) is: \_\_\_\_\_
5. What I would like to do to help make (e.g., immigration, racism, discrimination) better is: \_\_\_\_\_

*Collaborations between other disciplines, levels, or ages:* This unit can be very effective when done in collaboration. A cross-range of disciplines can focus on different aspects that inform each other. Likewise, if more than one teacher in the same discipline participates, the dynamic has more impact on the work (see Personal comments and/or suggestions).

It is strongly recommended that students be evaluated solely on their use of new curriculum material integrated in these lessons. By evaluating subject matter skills only, the exploratory content covered on the topic will be less threatening because it is purposely without judgment. Examples of incorporating subject material: English, ELL, and language teachers may require that certain vocabulary and verb tenses be used to describe the family members or used in journal entries; or that group discussions and presentations be conducted in target language only. History teachers may have specific requirements for creating a timeline or analyzing the role of the US in the country; or may expand the exercises to include geography, oral histories, and interviewing techniques with community advisors, referring to the narratives, poetry, and Resource Lists of this Guidebook. For the Courtroom Hearing section, Math teachers may request graphs, charts, and calculations focusing on statistics or the economy of the countries including research analyzing the impact of immigration on the US economy. Science teachers may focus on climate change migration, or analyze the impact of the natural disasters, or the impact of workplace and overall conditions of the country on nutrition and well-being. An art teacher may want to construct a mini-museum of cultures as part of the “community advisor” section or use images from the countries examined, as suggested in Imagination through Images. Remember the Resource List Teacher Guides is a source of information. The greater the focus of multiple disciplines and perspectives, the greater will be the impact on the school(s) and larger community.

*Suggested variations:* Originally, this was a seven-month unit created by three Spanish teachers in two different schools teaching second-year students of Spanish (see Personal comments and/or suggestions below).

These activities can be expanded in creative ways to incorporate specific skills of the subject material covered in the class. There are several opportunities for interaction with community (“community advisors” and Courtroom Hearing) that can be expanded to include presentations, staged readings, community luncheons serving authentic dishes from the countries represented, oral history interviews, mini-museums (suggested above), a mini-con- cert of musical treasures

from the countries in focus, song contests, poetry readings, simulated market places or scenes depicting environments being studied, newsletters reporting findings, or videos created in collaboration with community access television, etc.

Documentation of the process, in writing or by video, is an excellent way to measure student growth. Using the pre- and post-activities (statements and 3-2-1 Bridge worksheet) or any other format for observing the group progress and dynamic is a useful tool for teachers and students to evaluate the dimensions of how learning develops.

*Personal comments and/or suggestions:* In 2007, in our small island community of Martha's Vineyard, a tragic accident occurred in which a young white woman was instantly killed when her car crashed into a truck driven by an undocumented worker from Brazil. The effect was devastating in the schools and community at large, where approximately 20% of the year-round population of 18,000 is made up of Brazilian immigrants.

The role-play lesson plan was created to promote deeper community understanding and prevent hate crimes, bullying, and cultural alienation. It was a seven-month collaboration focusing on second-year Spanish students by three high school teachers of Spanish from two schools, Justine DeOliveira and Lynn Ditchfield at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and Victoria Dryfoos at the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School.

We chose five countries for our small-group focus (Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay) because we had connections with willing community volunteers from those countries to guide students as "community advisors." The five countries did not reflect the backgrounds of our participating students so that everyone could experience roleplay from another country.

As was later revealed, the young woman who was killed was driving her car at over 80 miles an hour at 2:00 a.m. and was possibly inebriated when she crashed into the truck, which was pulling out of an intersection at 9 miles per hour. Long before these details were released, our project was under way and the resulting positive changes in our classrooms, student attitudes, sensitivity, awareness, and school environment were palpable. Beyond that, bridges were built between the Spanish-speaking immigrant community from which we drew our "community advisors," the Brazilian immigrant students and their families, and the larger island community through our involvement with a very supportive bilingual judge, Liza Williamson, who advised students in the advocacy stage and hosted the final courtroom hearings in Spanish in our Dukes County Courthouse.

Additionally, in my many years as an educator, 24 of them teaching Spanish, I have never witnessed such a remarkable growth of proficiency in language acquisition by second-year students. We assigned related essays and cultural projects in Spanish, including deep student reflections on the unit as part of our midterm and final exams. Some of the contributing factors that explain why students became engaged and motivated to learn include collaboration among teachers and between two schools, interaction with community, and deeper connection with classmates as they worked together to first form a "family," and then to advocate for policy change directly related to a crisis situation they were experiencing. In that way, these lessons become a vehicle for empowerment and the application of learned skills that had both an immediate and a

long-term impact beyond the classroom.

In fact, the impetus to create this Guidebook came from experiencing the positive impact of this collaborative process. It informed my teaching practice and inspired me to share with others who want to make a difference, particularly during difficult times of community conflict. Another bonus for me personally was the fact that the three other colleagues working with me on this project, Victoria, Justine and Liza, had all be my former high school Spanish students.

*Related resources* (also see resources in Roleplay, Part I):

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. “[The Danger of a Single Story](#)” (2009). TEDGlobal (2009)
- [Diana Ortiz, Survivor and Witness of the Guatemalan Genocide](#) (1975-2021) 2/26/21 [Borders to Bridges: Awakening Critical Consciousness](#). *Radical Teacher*, 120, 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2021.871> by Ditchfield, L. G. (2021)
- The Immigrant Learning Center (ILC) [Quick Immigration Statistics](#): Massachusetts
- [Living on One Dollar](#) (2013), documentary about living on one dollar a day for two months in rural Guatemala
- [Out of Eden Learn](#) initiative of Project Zero at Harvard Graduate School of Education
- [Project Zero: 3-2-1 Bridge](#)
- [Pulitzer Center](#) (photos, articles, videos, lesson plans)
- [Re-imagining Migration Learning Arc](#)
- [Rosa—These Storms](#) (2015), inspiring documentary film of an adult living in poverty in Guatemala seeking education and fulfillment
- [Teach Central America](#) Teaching for Change
- Teaching Tolerance (June 2018) Lesson plans – Exploring the Histories of El Salvador and Guatemala with Literature
- Resource Lists to expand research (select topics of interest: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, trauma, economy, history, health care, laws, etc.).

***Related Guidebook lessons:* Roleplay: Part I and Part III; Interpreting Infographics; Immigration Exploration (DACA and the Dream Act); Oral History Unit; Documentary Theater interview sections; What Is a Refugee? Refugee or Migrant?; Three Layers of Culture; Personal Narrative Section; Appendices E, F, H, I, J**

*Contributing educator:* **Lynn Ditchfield**, Ph.D. candidate, C.A.G.S., Ed.M., M.A. is passionate about arts in education for social justice. She has been an educator in urban and rural schools (including international), pre-school to university. She received the Arts/Learning Award for advocacy, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award, served as a Fulbright Exchange teacher in Argentina and has appeared in three editions of *Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers*. Her first M.A. was based on the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator noted for his approach to critical and creative thinking. She received her second Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education focusing on arts-based approaches for at-risk youth. She founded Adult and Community Education of Martha’s Vineyard (ACE MV) and served as Executive Director/Program Director. She also founded the theatre group *Nightmares and Dreams/ Immigrant Voices*. Currently, she is doctoral candidate at the European Graduate School: Arts, Health and Society Division researching creative and expressive arts approaches to teaching for social justice, awakening



critical consciousness. As a recipient of the MV Vision Fellowship award, she is the creator, writer, and editor of resource materials and the book *Borders to Bridges: Creative Activities for Belonging, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Sovereignty, and Justice Education* and co-coordinator of the pilot program in schools, after-school programs, universities, and teacher training programs. Lynn works as a writer, workshop facilitator, and adjunct professor of Education at Fitchburg State University.

Other contributing educators who created and participated in the unit that inspired this plan: **Victoria Dryfoos** [Editor’s note: The original idea to work with roleplay of families was initiated by Victoria, who had developed plans during a graduate course.]

**Justine DeOliveira** [Editor’s note: This project became the focus of Justine’s master’s thesis since she was attending the Universidad de Salamanca at the time. Having a research practitioner’s lens enhanced the documentation of the process.]

**Liza Williamson** [Editor’s note: Liza is a bilingual judge. Her enthusiasm and willingness to advise students during the process was a contributing factor in its success at bringing classroom and community together. She advised students to prepare their arguments using IRACC (see Step 15). She conducted the hearings in Spanish in the courthouse, modeling how a second language can enhance any career.]

**Sharilyn Geistfeld** [Editor’s note: Shari, an historian, teacher, and researcher on Latin America, helped gather articles for the Resource List and created the US and El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras Timeline and the Bibliography in the Appendices to be used with these and other lessons.]



Above: photos of the mock trial courtroom hearing, courtesy of photographer Jaxon White of the Vineyard Gazette. Top left: MV Regional High School student Nick Jerome “testifies” before Judge Liza Williamson; top right: Julia Sadowsky reads arguments for changing driver’s licensing laws; bottom: MV Public Charter School students prepare their arguments.

**Sample A:** Step 4, Sample Crisis Cards (in designated countries)

For additional ideas see Appendix C: Timeline

### **El Salvador**

*Natural disaster:* Thousands flee as the Santa Ana (Ilamatepec) volcano erupts. Days later, scores of people are killed as a tropical storm sweeps through.

*Political disaster:* A brutal civil war breaks out between the military-led government and a coalition of several leftist groups, forcing a third of the population to flee the country due to the violence. The beloved Archbishop Oscar Romero calls on the soldiers not to follow orders to kill Salvadoran civilians, and he is killed the following day. There are widespread human rights violations against civilians.

### **Guatemala**

*Natural disaster:* 27,000 people are killed and more than 1,000,000 rendered homeless by earthquake.

*Political disaster:* Civil war between the military government and leftist rebels supported by ethnic Maya indigenous people and Ladino (mixed, mestizo) peasants. There are widespread human rights violations against civilians.

### **Honduras**

*Natural disaster:* Tropical Storm Gamma kills more than 30 people and forces tens of thousands from their homes.

*Political disaster:* The Honduran army stages a coup d'état, forcing democratically elected leftist-leaning president Manuel Zelaya out of the country. Following the coup, there has been a sharp escalation of crime, human rights violations, government and police corruption, gang violence related to drug trafficking, and attacks on human rights defenders, LGBT activists, journalists, indigenous people, peasants, and Afro-descendants.

### ***Sample B:*** Step 6, Sample Letter (in Spanish and English)

My dear ones,

I am writing you because I have just heard about the crisis in the country. It makes me very sad. I am Enrique, the oldest son of Juan Carlos Carabajal and María Sanchez de Carabajal, so we are cousins. You don't know me well because I left the country with my parents a long time ago. Now I live in the Independent Republic of \_\_\_\_ (name of community where school is located), where I work as a carpenter. It's a wonderful country. There's lots of work here. When I heard the news, I wanted to invite you to come because we always have work and the people are kind and you can live well. I know that it's difficult to think of leaving the country. I remember well when I did. But you must survive. Here, you have family. I also send lots of love from my mother, who lives with me. We await you. Enrique Carabajal Sanchez, PO Box 1473721, \_\_\_\_\_, State

Queridos, Les escribo porque acabo de enterarme del crisis del país. Me da mucha tristeza. Yo soy Enrique, el hijo mayor de Juan Carlos Carabajal y María Sanchez de Carabajal, y somos primos. Uds. No me conocen bien porque yo salí del país con mis padres hace muchos años. Ahora vivo en La República Independiente de \_\_\_\_ (nombre del pueblo donde está la escuela) \_\_\_\_ donde trabajo como carpintero. Es un país maravilloso. Hay mucho trabajo aquí.

Cuando oí las noticias quería invitarlos a Uds. porque siempre temenos trabajo y la gente es simpática y se puede vivir bien. Yo sé que es difícil pensar en salir del país. Recuerdo bien cuando lo hice. Pero, hay que sobrevivir. Aquí tienen familia.

También mando mucho cariño de parte de mi madre que vive conmigo. Los esperamos. Enrique Carabajal Sanchez, PO Box 1473721, \_\_\_\_\_, Estado

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