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# Mexican American and Latina/o Literature

Santa Maria Joint Union High School District

## **Basic Course Information**

School(s) Offering This Course:

School Name	Course Learning Environment	Transcript Code(s)	
Santa Maria High School (053305)	Classroom Based	Abbreviation Course Code	
		Mex Am/Lat Lit	EN4038
		Mex Am/Lat Lit	EN4039

Title:	Mexican American and Latina/o Literature
Length of course:	Full Year
Subject area:	English ("b") / English
UC honors designation?	Νο
Prerequisites:	None
Co-requisites:	None
Integrated (Academics / CTE)?	No
Grade levels:	12th

## **Course Description**

#### Course overview:

This course surveys the history, identity, and oral traditions of Mexican American and other Latina/o cultures through the lens of literature. It is a representative overview of Mexican American and Latina/o literature covering poetry, drama, novels, short stories, critical essays and other non-fiction texts. The course will include literary techniques, modes of expression, trends in Mexican American and Latina/o creativity, and will expose students to the richness and diversity that Mexican American and other Latina/o cultures have to offer.

The first semester of the course will focus on literature/texts authored by Mexican American, and Chicana/o writers. The second semester focuses on Latin America as a whole and how the influences of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America have shaped American and Latina/o identity in the U.S. and provide a well-rounded understanding of the cultural elements that contribute to U.S. Latina/o Literature.

Students will be exposed to extensive reading of classic and modern Mexican American and Latina/o American literature and nonfiction texts that emphasize their historical and cultural roots in the United States and examine the contested meanings of identity; the relationship between social/political activism and literary expression and movements; the politics of immigration and the border; and the intersectionality of these with gender relations and sexuality within the Mexican American and Latina/o community. Students will engage in a variety of short-term and long-term writing assignments that will enhance their scholarly writing; including argumentative, informative, and narrative compositions. Students will improve their skills in close reading, academic research, and expository writing. By the end of the course, students will have developed and written approximately 10 essays in a variety of discursive modes as well as created independent projects that develop their critical speaking and listening skills.

### Course content:

Unit 1: Pre-Columbian Civilization and the Conquest (The Rise of Mestizo Culture)

Unit Description: This unit will focus on the historical significance of Pre-Columbian cultures in the Americas, the conquest period and three centuries of Spanish colonial rule that saw the rise of the new "mestizo" as an identity that is in constant transformation. An emphasis will be given to Spanish hierarchies of social class as determined by ethnicity and the impact they have on Mexican American identity today. Through close

reading and discussion of Pre-Columbian texts like *The Popol Vuh* and primary accounts of the conquest, the unit will cover questions concerning labels, nationalism, labor, migration, and memory. Through journal entries, participation in think-pair-share discussions, and short informative and narrative writing assignments, students will trace the construction and transformation of ethnic and national identities and the issue of assimilation among Mexican Americans up to the 1960's.

#### Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: "Columbus: Hero or Criminal?" Students will read fiction and non-fiction texts about the arrival of Columbus to the Americas, including the 2 poems below. They will work-shop a 3-paragraph response comparing and contrasting the tone and themes of each poem and respond to the following: Whose point of view does each poem reflect and what is the message they each convey? Explain the literary elements of the poems help convey the message. Use evidence from the poems and/or the additional readings to support analysis. Do you agree with one or more than the other? Do you believe Columbus is a criminal or a hero?

"Columbus" By Annette Wynne An Italian boy that like to play In Genoa about the ships all day, With curly head and dark, dark eyes, That gazed at earth in child surprise; And dreamed of distant stranger skies.

He watched the ships that came crowding in With cargo of riches; he loved the din Of the glad rush out and the spreading sails And the echo of far-off windy gales.

He studied the books of the olden day; He studied but knew far more than they; He talked to the learned men of the school --So wise he was they thought him a fool, A fool with the dark, dark dreamful eyes, A child he was -- grown wonder-wise.

Youth and dreams are over, past

And out, far out he is sailing fast

Toward the seas he dreamed; -- strange lands arise -- The world is made rich by his great emprise --

And the wisest know he was more than wise.

"Columbus Day" By Jimmie Durham In school I was taught the names Columbus, Cortez, and Pizzaro and A dozen other filthy murderers. A bloodline all the way to General Miles, Daniel Boone and General Eisenhower.

No one mentioned the names Of even a few of the victims. But don't you remember Chaske, whose spine Was crushed so quickly by Mr. Pizzaro's boot? What words did he cry into the dust?

What was the familiar name Of that young girl who danced so gracefully That everyone in the village sang with her-- Before Cortez' sword hacked off her arms As she protested the burning of her sweetheart?

That young man's name was Many Deeds, And he had been a leader of a band of fighters Called the Redstick Hummingbirds, who slowed The march of Cortez' army with only a few Spears and stones which now lay still In the mountains and remember.

Greenrock Woman was the name Of that old lady who walked right up And spat in Columbus' face. We Must remember that, and remember Laughing Otter the Taino who tried to stop Columbus and who was taken away as a slave. We never saw him again.

In school I learned of heroic discoveries Made by liars and crooks. The courage Of millions of sweet and true people Was not commemorated.

Let us then declare a holiday For ourselves, and make a parade that begins With Columbus' victims and continues Even to our grandchildren who will be named In their honor.

Because isn't it true that even the summer Grass here in this land whispers those names, And every creek has accepted the responsibility Of singing those names? And nothing can stop The wind from howling those names around The corners of the school.

Why else would the birds sing So much sweeter here than in other lands?

Unit 2: Westward Expansion and "Manifest Destiny"

Unit Description: This unit will present literature that traces the social and cultural outcomes western expansion and "Manifest Destiny" had on Mexico and Mexicans in the U.S. Iconic Mexican American pieces of writing like *Yo Soy Joaquin* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and historical documents like *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* will be used to focus on the geographical and political shifts between the U.S. and Mexico that led to the present.

□ Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: CORRIDOS

Can you imagine becoming an immigrant without ever moving? It happened here, in America, in 1848. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought an end to border warfare between the United States and Mexico. How? Mexico ceded a huge area of land - California, Nevada, Utah, part of Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico - to the U. S. The terms of the treaty stipulated that Mexican citizens could either stay where they were or return to Mexico.

Imagine! Suddenly, your country changes though you haven't moved an inch. Though many of the Mexicans in this situation elected to become American citizens, they did not by some stroke of magic suddenly fit. Their transition and assimilation into American culture was no smoother than other immigrant groups from abroad.

During this turbulent time, Mexican-American literary voices began to be heard, but they were still very distinct from the larger American culture. The evolving literature of this community was spoken, sung, or written in Spanish. Much of the literature was in the oral tradition - it had not ever been written down but had been shared from generation to generation. At its center was personal or historical subject matter. From these traditional literatures a unique form of poetry began to flourish.

Songs and Stories: A style of ballad, called a corrido, (from the Spanish verb corer which means "to run") was a literary result of the cultural conflict between Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans in the American Southwest. In terms of the stimulus for their development, corridos might be compared to the blues songs and poetry that were the achievements of 1920s African American culture. Corridos provided an outlet for resentment and frustration caused by discrimination and oppression, and since they were composed in Spanish, corridos could be private from the predominant "Anglo" culture. They poured out the history of the Southwest from the point-of view of the Mexican-American common man. They celebrated cultural clashes, social events, ethnic pride, violence, heroism, villainy, and adventure.

One famous corrido, "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez," told of a Mexican rancher who killed a white sheriff who was unjustly trying to arrest him. Cortez was subsequently chased by lawmen, captured and then convicted by an Anglo jury. In the ballad Cortez was described like a vaquero - expert horseman and marksman - whose adventures on the lam make for an exciting chase and confrontation with the Texas Rangers. The corrido tells how Cortez uses cunning to elude his captors, while the latter, who think only in stereotypes, are bungling and inept. The lawmen who are persecuting Cortez are described very negatively: They are "whiter than a poppy from the fear they had of Cortez and his pistol." The pejorative tone of these lyrics illustrates the tension in the Southwest.

The corrido continued to enjoy popularity and remains a vital literary and musical form of expression. During the 1960s a corrido immortalized the courage and determination of Cesar Chavez and the plight of migrant workers. A famous memorial ballad "Recordando El Presidente" was written to memorialize the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Other corridos have been composed about everything from bandoleros to bullfighting, riding cars to running drugs, heroes to villains and, of course, love.

Write a two page critique on the film, "Corridos: Tales of Passion and Revolution" that addresses the following questions:

1. How do the stories in the film illustrate the cultural mores of the time? Use details examples from the various scenes to illustrate your point of view.

2. Is the art of writing corridos still relevant today? Why or why not?

3. How do corridos reflect the Mexican spirit or ethnic pride? Is it shown in the film? Is it shown in the corridos we have studies? Provide clear evidence from both the film and the lyrics.

#### Unit 3: Creating a New Identity (Chicano Movement)

Unit Description: The impact the Mexican American experience through World War I/II and the Zoot Suit Riots had on the Chicano Movement generation will be examined to explore issues of citizenship, assimilation, and cultural identity. The Chicano Movement and the rise of Chicano activists and writers who gave voice to the movement. What is generally referred to as Chicano literature is the relatively recent phenomenon which grew out of the Chicano Movement, the socio-political civil rights movement of the mid-1960s. Yet, this body of literature did not emerge from a cultural or literary vacuum, but was rather a proliferation of continuous literary activities among Mexican-Americans living in the United States.

#### □ Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: What is the significance of *I am Joaquin* to the Chicano Movement of the 60's and 70's? Is the poem still relevant today? Why or why not?

This lesson will broadly explore the relationship between identity and movement within the Chicano Rights Movement of the 1970s and the larger historical framework that stretches back over 500 years ago. It will center on a primary source, Corky Gonzales' *I Am Joaquín*, and its descriptions of the distinct Chicano character and the history lesson that is embedded within the text. The lesson will be broken into four parts — each exploring a different aspect of the relationship between identity and the Chicano Movement and the Movement's relationship to historical events. Further, each activity will require students to practice different essential skills expected of high school humanities students. For example, students will be asked to read and compare two primary sources — *I Am Joaquín* and *Demands Made by East Side High School Students Listed* as well as *El Popol Vuh*. Through this activity, students will not only explore accounts describing the Chicano identity and the objectives of the Chicano Movement, but also critically engage with primary texts, exploring their basic meanings and implications. Also, students will be given a broad lecture dealing with significant figures, organizations, and events within Mexican American history This unit, which is designed to give historical context to the primary sources source going all the way back to pre-Columbian cultures.

Unit Project: Students will be assigned a topic on Mexican-American history and culture referenced in *Yo Soy Joaquin* and conduct extensive research on the internet and the library to write a multi-paragraph essay that summarizes and synthesizes the importance of the topic in context. Students will also create a PowerPoint, Keynote presentation or a collage to present to the class as the "expert" on the topic. Students will take notes on each other's "lectures" and have an opportunity to ask questions of each other. The presentation should be least 10 slides and cite sources according to MLA format.

Unit Essay: *I am Joaquin* has long been touted as the beginning of Chicano literature. It has also promoted Mexican American socio and political equality, doing much to promote the Mexican American people as equals in American society, but it has also managed to largely ignore Chicanas. Explain both the shortcomings and positives of this epic piece of Chicano literature. Use two of the texts we read by Chicanas (Gloria Anzaldua, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Dagoberta Gilb, Cherrie Moraga, Ana Nieto Gomez) to include the Chicana perspective of the movement and to critique the shortcomings of *Yo Soy Joaquin*.

Unit 4: Immigration and the Border

Unit Description: The issue of immigration and the border will be one the major themes in this unit as it relates to the socio-political, economic, and cultural reality of Mexican Americans in the U.S. The unit will focus on the territory-based rhetoric of the cultural border, boundaries and borderlands, and immigration. Critiquing the essentialist view that presumes fixed boundaries for a culture; students will explore the constructivist view that assumes an individual's choice in defining and redefining their own cultural identities in a multicultural society. This unit examines the rise of industrialism in agricultural that led to a shift in immigration policies by the U.S.; a focus will be on how migrant farmworkers and other laborers helped shape the economic reality of the Southwest. Students will take a close look at literature that speaks about the border the U.S. shares with Mexico and its constant geographical, political and cultural shifts from past to present. This unit will help students think about and discuss: What is the purpose of a border (physical and otherwise)? Who creates borders and who are they created on? How do Mexican Americans/Chicana/os resist borders and how is this reflected in the literature?

#### □ Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: Students will explore and create definitions of the word "border." Students will engage in a multi-perspective way of looking at the border.

#### Part 1--Individual Writing

Students free write their responses to the questions:

1) What is a border?

2) What words come to mind when you hear the word "border"? (no matter how irrelevant or off-the-wall the word or thought is, write it down);

3) What borders have you crossed in your life?

4) What borders do you not cross?

#### Part 2--Group Discussion

Students gather in groups of three or four, share responses, then work together to write up and illustrate their own definitions and lists of types of borders. Each group presents their ideas to the class.

#### Part 3--Class Discussion

How many different kinds of borders can we list using what the groups have written? (Also, can discuss questions #3 and #4 from Part 1.)

Examples: Border as Wall or Fence

Border as a Membrane, Skin, Porous

Border as Meeting Place, Interaction

Border as Marketplace, Goods & Services

Border Between Groups of People, Languages, Economies

Border Between Ways of Life, Cultures, ("Ecosystems")

Border as Edge, Fuzzy or Crisp, Rules, Inside/Outside, Etc.

Border as Psychological, Physical, Social, etc.

Question for discussion: Can a border function in more than one way? Why or why not?

#### Part 4--Listening & Responding

Students read quotes/passages from writings about the border. Students can either respond to the quotes or create their own statements/poems on the idea of "borders." Starter line: "The border is..."

#### Sample statements:

"For Mexico, the border is not that rigid Puritan thing, a line; straight lines are unknown in Mexico. The border, like everything else, is subject to supply and demand. The border is a revolving door." -- Richard Rodriguez

"The border is transient...the border is a word game...the border is a virtual cesspool"--Atlantic Monthly

"Tijuana has more in common with Santiago, Chilé than San Diego, California." -- Jorge Bustamante, President, El Colegio de la FronteraNorte

"This is the only place I know where you can jump from the First World to the Third World in five minutes." -- Julio Chiu, El Paso bank executive and native of Cd. Juárez

"We have people here who have never heard of the word 'environment' or 'ecosystem.' It's as if you were talking in another language." -- Naachiely Lopez, Tijuana environmentalist, 1992

"Many Mexicans think of the move from Cd. Juárez across the Rio Grande more like moving to a richer neighborhood than going to another country." -- Washington Post, 1978 Source: La Frontera/The Border: An Enigma for Two Nations. University of Southern California, 1993. Closure: Students can read aloud a favorite line or phrase from their writings and as a class revise order of lines to create a group poem/writing on the border.

Unit Essay: An essay exploring the various ways the border functions. Consider the questions: What would the region be like if there were no border? What has the border done to the region? To the people? Consider indigenous peoples of the area (particularly in Arizona) who have lived here for over 500 years and say there is no border. How can anyone say that there is no border?

Unit Research Paper: Before finishing this assignment, you will have read Anzuldúa, and Rodriguez' personal experiences of the border. For this assignment, you will be writing your own autobiography in which you address three specific ways in which your individual life connects to the national life. You will be writing your autobiography (or the story of your family) as the story of your people (however you define your people). In the end, you will explain how a few incidents from your own life made you more aware of the possibilities or limitations of connection to the national life of the mythical "America." The three essential parts of this assignment are:

Part 1: What were some of the earliest experiences you had in which you felt included as part of a larger nation? This could be the pledge of allegiance you said in school, or visiting a national monument, or reading through your American history book, or hearing your relatives tell you stories about war, labor struggles, and past American figures. Focus on a scene or two that you remember and describe what made that scene so memorable.

Part 2: What were some of the times that you felt excluded from being part of the larger nation? What happened? Did you realize at the time that you were being excluded, or is it only in looking back that you figured it out? This event need not even be something that happened directly to you — it could be something you heard happening to someone else — but it should be an event that had some consequence in your life.

Part 3: How do you make sense of both being included and being excluded from your idea of what "America" means? Do you now claim your identity as one of many American lives? Do you continue to feel that you are cut off from the early image of "America" that you had? How do you reconcile the incidents from Part 1 and Part 2? Or, if you can't reconcile them, which of the incidents has impacted your identity the most and shaped how you see yourself today?

FORM: Your autobiography will be in the form of a personal essay. It must be between at least 3 full pages and no longer than 6 pages. You must discuss the three parts above, but you can do them in any order you wish (as long as I can see clearly that you have some sort of organization to your thoughts). One way you might want to consider organizing this essay would be based on the following structure:

I: Title (think of something creative)

II: A one-paragraph introduction that begins with something attention grabbing and ends with a thesis statement that quickly answers Part 3 above)

III: One or two paragraphs that describe the experience mentioned in Part 1.

IV: One or two paragraphs that describe of the experience mentioned in Part 2 (these paragraphs should take the form of paragraphs before them)

V: One paragraph that clearly identifies the conflict between Parts 1 and 2  $\,$ 

VI: One or two paragraphs that explains the answer to the questions in Part III

VIII: A concluding paragraph that reinforces the one sentence summary of Part III and explains why it is significant to the literature we are reading in this class.

## Unit 5: Colonization of Latin America

Unit Description: This course will put Latino and Latina literature in context to the larger literary canon. We will explore important aspects of the works through a mostly historical approach focusing on the impact of colonialism on Latin American culture but will also draw from other components including folklore, memory, social issues, and cultural identity. A broad overview will be given to Latin America as a whole and through the literature, students will examine the influence of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule on Latin America, as well as the modern day influences of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America on American and Latino identity in the U.S. The primary text is "The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories" edited by Carlos Fuentes and Julio Ortega which will be used for the rest of the semester in conjunction with other texts.

## Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: Cultural Diffusion and Latin America

A look at colonization, the Atlantic slave trade, and the Columbian Exchange, its impacts on the culture of Latin America, and the positive/negative impacts of this cultural diffusion.

Write an essay that discusses the literature, art and music that resulted from the encounters of many backgrounds on the stage of colonial Latin America.

- How did the experience of colonization affect Latin American cultures?
- How were people of all backgrounds in colonial Latin America able to express themselves?
- What flavors did their identities add to their cultural expressions?
- What does the art/literature of particular groups say about their worldview or place in society?
- Use the literature we have read as evidence in your responses.

Unit Project: Immigration has been a part of the world since humans first started walking. This phenomenon continues for a variety of reasons today. The U.S. borders Mexico and we have many immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Their reasons for immigrating are many and not always presented by the media in the best light. Students need to know the various reasons that so many Latin Americans are leaving their countries and coming to the U.S. One way to find this information is to gather it through interviews and oral history.

Students will be studying immigration from Latin American countries and the statistics that are known, using the Internet and written material. A foundation will be built around understanding the impact of immigration on the U.S. as well as on Latin-American countries. At the same time students will conduct an interview of a local immigrant(s) in order to have a personal view of the issues that surround immigration. Students will write a detailed essay (minimum 3 pages) about the person you interviewed as well as formal presentation of the information that you found and share it with the class.

Presentation Choices: This will allow students to synthesize the information gathered and respond to a critical issue in our world today. You will present your presentation to the class.

1. PowerPoint presentation. You must have at least 10 slides in your presentation and it must be thorough.

2. Create an "album" containing facts, stories, poetry, drawings, songs of the person you interviewed and the information you gathered.

3. A video production for public access TV in the form of a newscast or documentary.

#### Unit 6: The Rise of Magical Realism

Unit Description: A look at the rise of Latino/a writers, artists, filmmakers, and others who have become more accepted by the mainstream of U.S. society and the world and yet still retain their cultural identity or are re-shaping that identity. This unit will put Latino and Latina literature in context to the larger literary canon. We will explore important aspects of the works through a mostly historical approach focusing on the impact of colonialism on Latin American culture but will also draw from other components including folklore, memory, social issues, and cultural identity. A focus on the rise of new cultural identity that rejects the old "colonial" styles of literature for fresh approach to writing that saw the rise of Surrealism, Magical Realism, and eventually a hybrid approach to literature in the U.S. by Latino/a writers who are simultaneously part of the mainstream American culture but also redefining what it means to be American.

### Unit Assignment(s):

Key Assignment: Theme of Isolation

"The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" explores the ways in which human beings overcome personal isolation through their collective community. In this story, common beliefs in the mythic or fantastic bring together the members of a small fishing village. The men, women, and children of this community are united by their common desire for self-improvement. Together, they imagine a better future for themselves, a future in which they are as extraordinary as the myths in which they all believe.

Questions about Isolation

1. Does the drowned man create conflict in the village, or bring the village together? (Your answer might change depending on which part of the story you're examining.)

2. How does the village's relative isolation from neighboring towns affect the way we read the story?

3. Why is it so important to the women of the village that they claim the drowned man as their own?

### **Course Final Essay**

From the following prompts, please choose ONE. For each of the writing prompts, students will incorporate critical readings that could best be applied to the arguments/stance/perspective the student is making in the essay. Students are required to use at least one critical reading.

#### □ Unit Assignment(s):

#### Writing prompts

1) "The corrido---narrative ballad---constitutes one of the richest and most resilient of genres within the Mexican oral tradition. It is a form of song that extends back into time immemorial," writes Yvonne Broyles-Gonzales in *What Pride Mainstream: Luis Valdez' Corridos on Stage and Film.* In what ways do corridos promote stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans? Can corridos also thwart stereotypes? Explain.

2) Gloria Anzaldúa's To live in the borderlands means you is a passionate and candid interpretation of living life between more than one cultural mindset. Explain her answer to easing the complications of living "in the borderlands," taking care to note any shortcomings, if any, to her solution.

3) Discuss the significance of space and place with a discussion of the Borderlands, the issue of cultural hybridity, and pragmatic assimilation. What are the complications, the consequences, and the positives of being bicultural?

## Semester 1 Texts

Primary Texts:

Bordering Fires: the Vintage Book of Contemporary Mexican and Chicano/A Literature edited by Cristina Garcia

This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua Bless Me Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya

Unit Assignment(s):

Excerpted Texts:

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldua

From Indians to Chicanos by James Diego Vigil

El Popol Vuh (Mayan text)

Yo Soy Joaquin by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez - corrido, author unknown

Rain of Gold by Victor Villasenor

Actos by Luis Valdez and El TeatroCampesino

Drink Cultura by Jose Antonio Burciaga

Bordertown by Culture Clash

## Semester 2 Texts

Primary Texts:

The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories edited by Carlos Fuentes and Julio Ortega

Stories of Eva Luna by Isabel Allende

Sudden Fiction Latino edited by Robert Shapard, James Thomas, and Ray Gonzalez

Unit Assignment(s):

Excerpted Texts:

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent by Julia Alvarez

Dreaming in Cuban by Cristina Garcia

Labyrinths by Jose Luis Borges

The Captain's Verses by Pablo Neruda

Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

## **Course Materials**

## Textbooks

Title	Author	Publisher	Edition	Website	Primary
Bordering Fires: The Vintage Book of Contemporary Mexican, Chicana and Chicano Literature	Christina Garcia	Vintage Books	1st edition	http://chicanawrite.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/bordering-fires-the- vintage-book-of-contemporary-mexican-and-chicanoa-literature/	Yes
The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories	Carlos Fuentes and Julio Ortega	Vintage Books	1st edition	http://bookpage.com/reviews/1898-carlos-fuentes-vintage-book- latin-american-stories#.U4kSgihwWSo	Yes



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