



Credit: Lynn Pelham, Getty Images

# The Underground Chamizal National Memorial Lesson Plan

Teaching Texas History  
Semester/Year Curriculum for Middle & High School Classrooms  
at Guillen Middle School & Bowie High School in El Paso, Texas  
Instructor Guide & Student Handouts Included

Summer 2023

### **Note to the Instructor:**

This lesson plan is written specifically for El Paso students at Guillen Middle School and Bowie High School. It provides historical context and synchronous/asynchronous lesson plans and activities for educators interested in two main objectives: (1) contextualizing the Chamizal Land Dispute with the history of El Paso and this city's historic neighborhood "Segundo Barrio," and (2) developing student' abilities to work collaboratively in teams on a digital final project.

This lesson plan is designed as a semester or year-long project. The first half (Lessons 1-7) begins with synchronous lessons and activities that introduce the subject material, overarching questions, and key primary sources. Together, these lessons prepare students for a field trip to the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso. This first half is designed to be taught to Guillen and Bowie classrooms independently. Next, the lesson plan transition to the class fieldtrip to the Chamizal National Memorial. Following this field trip, middle and high school students are paired into teams who will work asynchronous on a digital final project. This final project should demonstrate this lesson's learning objectives.

Please Note: I am working to expand the scope of this lesson plan to include El Paso students more broadly and to make this lesson plan more accessible for classrooms across the country. In the meantime, I hope that instructors can adapt this curriculum to best serve the needs of their classrooms. I welcome your feedback.

### **Lesson Plan Statement of Purpose:**

The Chamizal Land Dispute was an international land and boundary conflict between the U.S. and Mexico. This conflict was caused by the meanderings of the Río Grande, which delineates the U.S.-Mexico boundary. Since time immemorial and well after its establishment as the U.S.-Mexico boundary, this river has repeatedly moved the border between El Paso, Texas, and Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua—with one meander in 1864 "moving" Mexican territory known as "El Chamizal" north of the river and

seemingly into the U.S. territory. One hundred years later, the landmark Chamizal Treaty of 1964 returned this land to Cd. Juárez—making it the first and only time in U.S. has ever returned territory to Mexico.

Returning El Chamizal to Mexico was only possible, however, by first fixing the Río Grande "int its proper place" along a redrawn boundary and concrete canal between the two border cities. Secondly, the settlement was only possible by displacing 5,500 South El Paso residents from their homes within El Chamizal. This history recalls the Chicano Movement's refrain, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." Although the Chamizal Dispute is typically left out of Texas middle and high school curriculum, the goal of this lesson plan is to demonstrate not only why this history is essential in the teaching of Texas history, but also how "contextualized local history" is crucial to developing students' historical thinking.

The purpose of this lesson plan is fourfold: (1) develop students' understanding of the shifting and contested nature of borders, (2) encourage the discussion and remembrance of this dispute and its role in shaping the El Paso-Cd. Juarez borderlands, specifically El Paso's Segundo Barrio; (3) develop students' historical thinking skills at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas by engaging the memorial as a contested site of memory, and (4) guide teams of middle and high school students in creating digital "authentic projects" that contribute to the remembrance of this history. The end-products of this lesson plan will ultimately be showcased as a virtual exhibit on [The Underground Chamizal National Memorial](#) webpage.

### **Key Questions:**

- What was the Chamizal Land Dispute and how did this territorial conflict shape the history and landscape of El Paso?
- How do contemporary maps of El Paso and Segundo Barrio reflect the history of this land dispute and the Chamizal Treaty of 1964? How do they obscure this history?

- What is the mission of the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas? Whose perspectives, needs, and desires are reflected at the memorial? What is left out and why?
- What should the Chamizal Land Dispute be remembered for, and how can we remember this significance of this conflict and the lessons this history has to offer us?
- How might we translate critical thinking around borders into pedagogy?

### **Lesson Learning Objectives:**

- Embrace the ambiguity and complexity of primary sources, particularly maps.
- Elaborate on the significance of the Chamizal Land Dispute to the study of U.S. statehood and the making of borders, specifically the U.S.-Mexico boundary.
- Explain the significance of the Chamizal Dispute and Treaty to El Paso history, particularly the history of Segundo Barrio.
- Expand students' understanding of a primary source to include buildings, landscapes, and places.
- Develop confidence and proficiency in working independently and with others as a team, including building management skills, communication skills, and problem solving and conflict resolution skills.
- Collaborate and co-produce a digital product for the Underground Chamizal National Memorial that contributes to the remembrance of the Chamizal Dispute.
- Identify how the Chamizal Dispute continues to shape contemporary issues in El Paso.

### **Relevant Texas Standards and Skill-Based Learning Objectives—Middle School**

- **History:** The student understands that historical events influence contemporary events.
- **Geography:** The student uses geographic tools to answer geographic questions.
- **Social Studies Skills:** The student applies critical thinking to organize and use

information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources.

- **Social Studies Skills:** The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms, including incorporating main and supporting ideas in verbal and written communication based on research.

### **Relevant Texas Standards and Skill-Based Learning Objectives—High School**

- **Geography:** The student understands the impact of geographic factors on major events, including identifying and explaining reasons for changes in political boundaries such as those resulting from statehood and international conflicts
- **Culture:** The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. This includes:
  - Explaining actions taken by people to expand economic opportunities and political rights, including those for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as women in American society.
  - Identifying the political, social, and economic contributions of women to American society.
- **Social Studies Skills:** The student applies critical thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology, to analyze and answer historical questions. This includes:
  - Use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence.
  - Identify bias in written, oral, and visual material.
  - Identify and support with historical evidence a point of view on a social studies issue or event.
- **Social Studies Skills:** The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms, including using different forms of media to convey information.

**Supplies needed: white/chalkboard, dry erase markers or chalk, handouts of “The Border: A Double Sonnet” by Alberto Rios.**

### **PART 1: What are borders?**

In this opening activity, the goal is to get students thinking about borders. This may include examples of borders (such the U.S.-Mexico border, borders between towns and cities) as well as their social, economic, political, and material consequences and connotations.

Begin with a group brainstorming activity. Standing at the front of the classroom by a white/chalkboard, ask the students: *What do you think of when you think of the word “border”?* Encourage students to raise their hands or shout out responses. (To help a timid group of students, it may be helpful for the instructor to offer up examples and content onto the board to get the conversation started.) Write student responses on the board. Next, ask: *What assumptions or understandings do we have about borders?* Generate a list new. Afterwards, ask the students to take a moment to quietly read all the responses on the board.

*Transition:* Next, pass out handouts of [“The Border: A Double Sonnet”](#) by Alberto Rios. See pages 4-5.

Have students read this poem in small groups. In in those groups have them jot down additional responses inspired by the poem to the opening question, *What do you think of when you think of the word “border”?* As a class, discuss the poem and ask students to share their additional responses. Write those response on the board.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What line in this poem most strikes you?
2. What is the border from Alberto Rios’ perspective?
3. What does Rios mean when he says, “The border is a real crack in an imaginary line?”

### **PART 2: Making & Shifting Borders**

Building off the poem’s line “The border is a real crack in an imaginary line,” the next goal in this lesson is to get students thinking about borders as social constructions. That is, not “real” or innate or immutable things, but rather socially produced and shifting, contested in nature.

*Transition:* The instructor should explain that the U.S.-Mexico border has changed numerous times over the last 150 years. For instance, did anyone here know that site of Pope Francis’ visit to Cd. Juarez in 2016 used to be part of the United States? That Bowe High School stands on land that used to be part of Mexico? Or that the Rio Grande used to run along Paisano Drive?

Project [GIF of the shifting Rio Grande](#). Explain that this river became the U.S.-Mexico border in 1848. This border was not supposed to move. But it did move—many times.

*Transition:* Listen to *All Things Considered* 9-minute story, [“50 Years Ago, A Fluid Border Marder the U.S. 1 Square Mile Smaller.”](#) Discuss the lists generated in Part 1 with this story.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does this moving river reveal about borders?
2. What do we mean when we say “the river has its own ideas”?
3. What does Maria Eugenia Trillo mean when she says that, “There’s only so much control a man can do on a river. Sooner or later, I personally think that the river is going to do what Mother Nature has taught it to do—to move.”
4. Is the U.S.-Mexico border real?

*Homework:* Write your own poem using Alberto Rios’ “The Border: A Double Sonnet” as inspiration. Use the same structure, “The border is \_\_\_\_\_” for every line in your poem. Write at least 10 lines.

## *The Border: A Double Sonnet*

The border is a line that birds cannot see.  
The border is a beautiful piece of paper folded carelessly in half.  
The border is where flint first met steel, starting a century of fires.  
The border is a belt that is too tight, holding things up but making it hard to breathe.  
The border is a rusted hinge that does not bend.  
The border is the blood clot in the river's vein.  
The border says *stop* to the wind, but the wind speaks another language, and keeps going.  
The border is a brand, the "Double-X" of barbed wire scarred into the skin of so many.  
The border has always been a welcome stopping place but is now a stop sign, always red.  
The border is a jump rope still there even after the game is finished.  
The border is a real crack in an imaginary dam.  
The border used to be an actual place, but now, it is the act of a thousand imaginations.  
The border, the word *border*, sounds like *order*, but in this place they do not rhyme.  
The border is a handshake that becomes a squeezing contest.

The border smells like cars at noon and wood smoke in the evening.  
The border is the place between the two pages in a book where the spine is bent too far.  
The border is two men in love with the same woman.  
The border is an equation in search of an equals sign.  
The border is the location of the factory where lightning and thunder are made.  
The border is "NoNo" The Clown, who can't make anyone laugh.  
The border is a locked door that has been promoted.  
The border is a moat but without a castle on either side.  
The border has become Checkpoint *Chale*.  
The border is a place of plans constantly broken and repaired and broken.  
The border is mighty, but even the parting of the seas created a path, not a barrier.  
The border is a big, neat, clean, clear black line on a map that does not exist.  
The border is the line in new bifocals: below, small things get bigger; above, nothing changes.  
The border is a skunk with a white line down its back.

### **Credit**

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### **Author**

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## Alberto Ríos



Photo credit: Arizona State University

Born in 1952, Alberto Ríos is the inaugural state poet laureate of Arizona and the author of many poetry collections, including *A Small Story about the Sky* (Copper Canyon Press, 2015). In 1981, he received the Walt Whitman Award for his collection *Whispering to Fool the Wind* (Sheep Meadow Press, 1982). He served as a [Chancellor](#) of the Academy of American Poets from 2014 to 2020.

### Date Published

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05/04/2016

Source URL: <https://poets.org/poem/border-double-sonnet>

**Supplies needed: Pens, paper, student handouts of Chamizal maps and KWHL Chart, and projector.**

**PART 1: Opening Activity**

Pair students up into teams of two. Project onto wall in the front of the classroom and handout copies to the two maps of South El Paso shown below. For the first 20 minutes of this activity, ask students to analyze the two maps and compare them to one another quietly and individually. Explain that they will discuss their observations with their partners next. Until then, instruct them to direct and write down their individual observations onto a sheet of paper. There, students will individually note similarities and differences between the two maps as well as what stands out to them and questions/guesses they may have about the maps. For instance, when were these maps made? Who made the maps? What seems to be the primary focus of each map? What about this map looks familiar to you? What looks different, unfamiliar, or strange? After the 20 minutes have expired, direct the students to discuss their observations with their partner. Encourage each partner group to add additional observations to their list.

Have students share their observations with class or in small groups.

After the students complete this activity, (re)direct their attention to the maps’ distinct locations for Bowie High School. Ask the class: Why do these maps have different locations for Bowie High School? Where is Guillen Middle School on the first map? Follow with class discussion.

**PART 2: Contextualizing “The Two Bowies” and the Chamizal Treaty of 1964**

Before 1968, Guillen Middle School was known as Bowie High School. Like today, the “old Bowie” served El Paso’s Segundo Barrio and Southside students. In 1964, however, the United

States and Mexico settled the century-long Chamizal Land Dispute by redrawing the U.S.-Mexico boundary between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. That redrawn boundary (shown in blue on Map no. 2) cut through Segundo Barrio, including part of Bowie High School’s campus. Consequently, a new Bowie High School was built where Bowie High School along Paisano Drive stands today. This “new Bowie” was also built on Mexican territory called “Cordova Island” (shown on Map no. 1) that was ceded to the United States as part of the Chamizal Treaty. The “old Bowie” was significantly reduced in size and converted into Guillen Middle School.

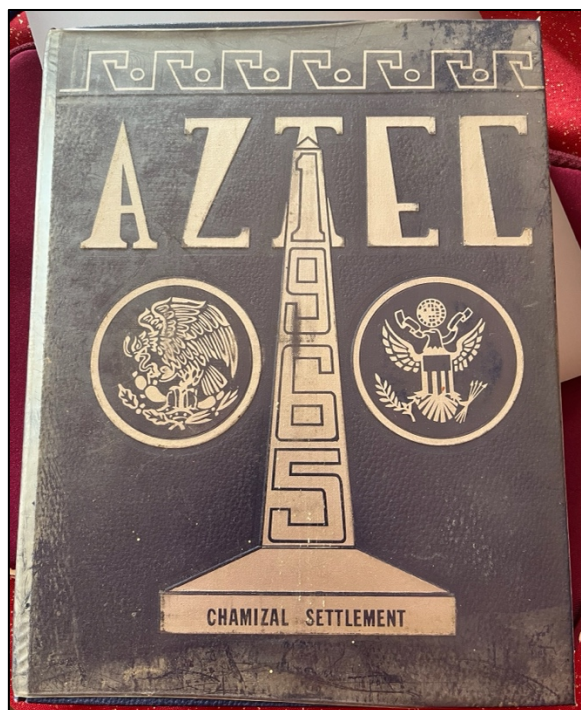


Photography of “Old Bowie” and today’s Guillen Middle School. Source: El Paso Independent School District.

In 1964, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos met on the school grounds of the “Old Bowie” to celebrate the settlement of the Chamizal Dispute (See image below).



Ceremony of Chamizal Treaty on “Old Bowie” campus. Source: 1965 Bowie High School Aztec Yearbook. Credit: Ester Ramirez Sang.



1965 Bowie High School Aztec Yearbook.

Bowie High School's 1965 Yearbook (shown above) dedicated several pages to the Chamizal Treaty. At the ceremony on Old Bowie campus grounds, in attendance were many Bowie High School students whose families had been displaced from their homes by the Chamizal Treaty were. Later, a commemorative medal (shown below) to memorialize the Chamizal Treaty was gifted to the principal of Bowie High School, Frank H. Pollit. The medal remains on New Bowie campus grounds as one of school's most cherished possessions.



Commemorative Medal gifted to Bowie Principal Frank H. Pollit. Source: 1965 Aztec Yearbook.

### PART 3: KWHL Chart

After this contextualization of “the two Bowies,” ask the students what they wonder or would like to learn about the Chamizal Dispute and Chamizal Treaty in KWHL [Know-Wonder-How-Learned] Chart. (See page 8 for KWHL Chart Handout.)

Have students fill out the KWHL Chart as best they can and let them know that they will return to the chart at various points in time to add, revise, and reflect.

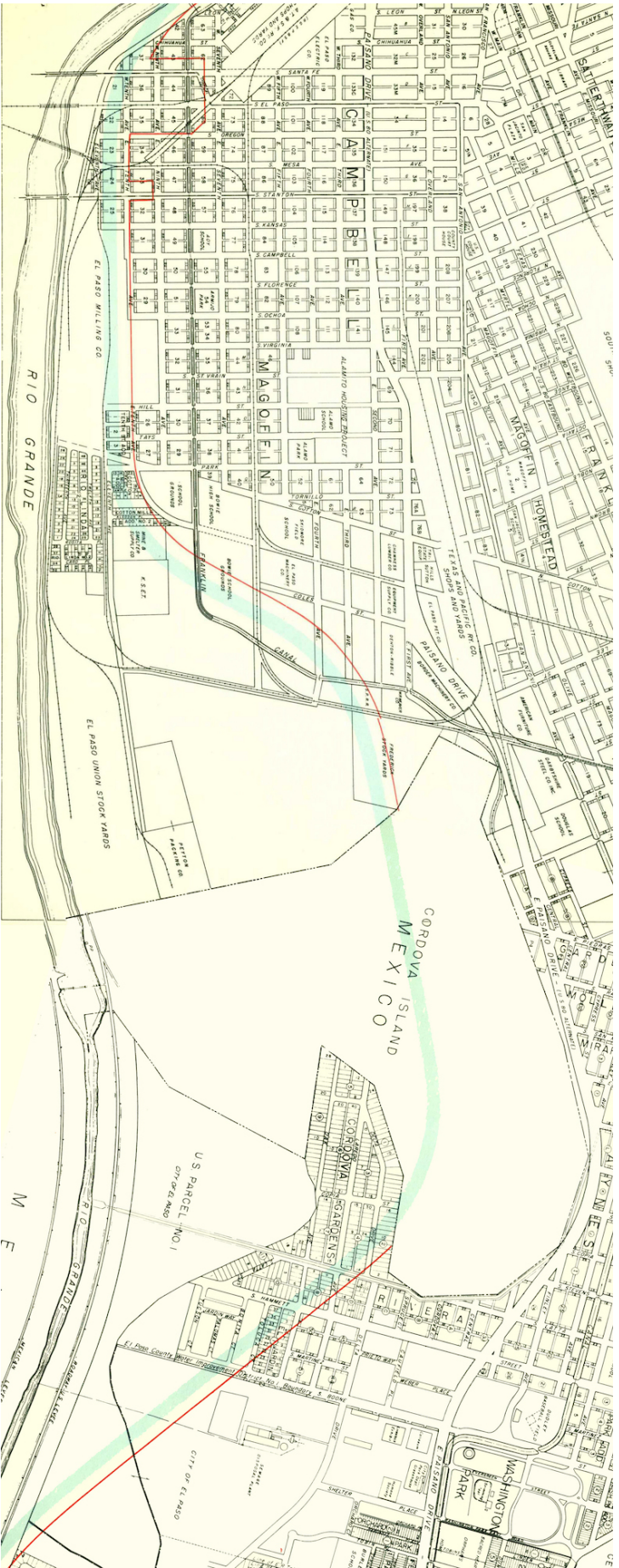
#### Further Questions

- What questions do you have about this time period?
- About the Chamizal Dispute?
- Where is your home on the two maps we are looking at?
- What does this story tell us about borders? About maps? About El Paso?
- Are borders real? Why or why not? How so?
- What surprises you about this story?
- Where is the commemorative medal given to Bowie High School now?

#### TODAY'S LEARNING OBJECTIVES

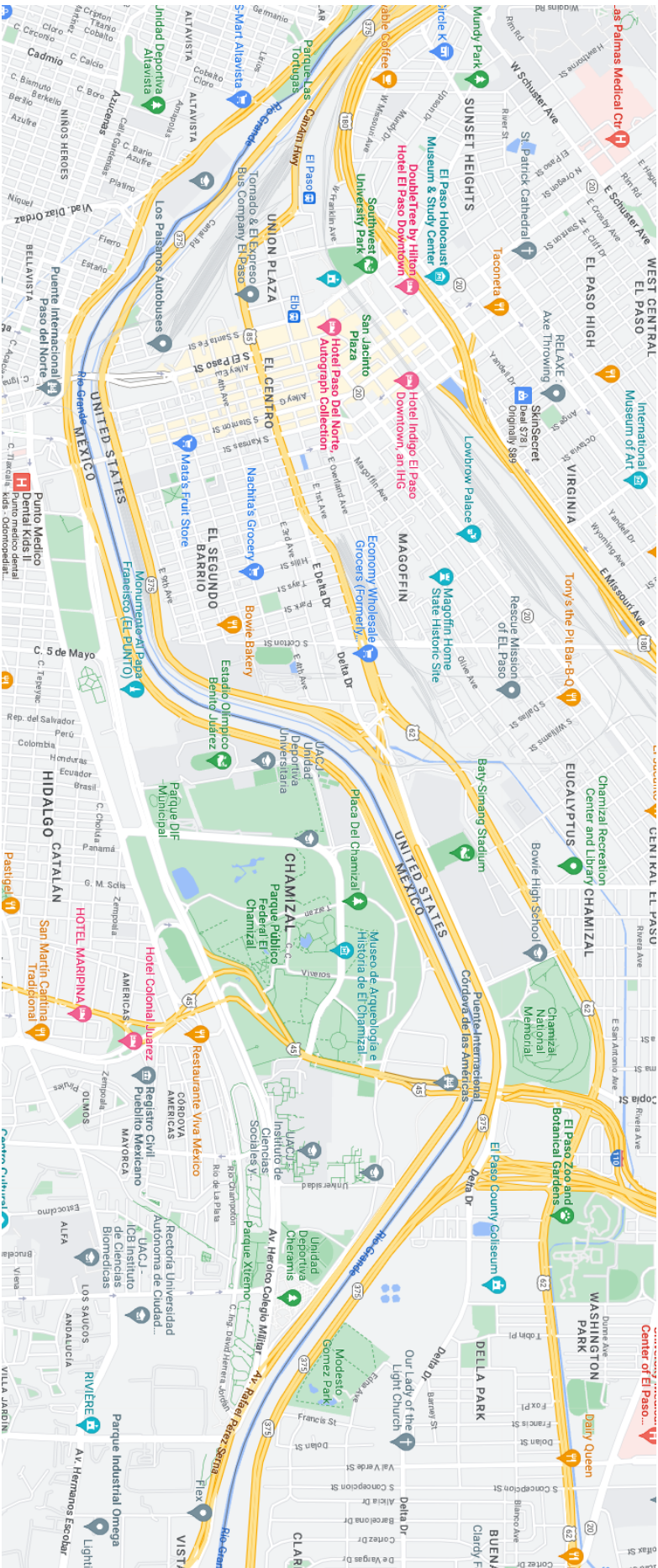
- Embrace the ambiguity, subjectivity, and complexity of working with maps
- Begin to identify the fluidity of borders—their fiction or “social construction” alongside their material consequence
- Begin to identify how the present configuration of El Paso and Segundo Barrio are not “natural” but have been produced over time and as a result of the meandering Rio Grande and the Chamizal Dispute





Map No. 1 (1965)

Source: C.I. Sonnichsen Special Collections, UTTP



Map No. 2 (2023)  
Source: Google Maps

# KWHL Chart

<b>K</b> <i>What do I already know?</i>  (Make a list of facts and observations about the Chamizal Dispute that you know from looking at the two maps and from our discussion so far today)	<b>W</b> <i>What do I want to know?</i>  (What else do you want to know about this land dispute?)	<b>H</b> <i>How will I find out?</i>  (Where do I need to look? Who do I need to ask? What kinds of questions should I be asking?)	<b>L</b> <i>What have I learned?</i>  (What is your biggest takeaway from this lesson and our conversations so far? We will continue to come back to this.)

### PART 1: What is a map?

A map is representation of space or place, or of geographical features, spatial features, or a “geography.” Maps are rich historical sources. Like narrative documents, both the form and substance of historical maps tell a story. The “form” of an historical map—its artwork, its style and presentation, in itself provides an insight into past eras and cultures. The “substance” of a map (what is shown, literally) provides a record of past landscapes and features that may no longer exist. It also reflects the priorities, sensibilities, fears, and the state of knowledge of the mapmaker and his or her cultural context. A couple things to keep in mind:

1. A single map is not very effective at showing “process” as a map tends to be static and to show a single place at a single moment. However, when multiple maps are “read” alongside one another, we can gain a glimpse into geographic processes and how landscapes and urbanscapes change over time.
2. We must always be aware that the view a map offers is partial and particular. Although readers often assume that maps are inherently “objective,” maps are never divorced from interpretation and subjective manipulation. Maps don’t just reflect “reality,” they help create it.

\* Language for this section comes from Work History Commons’ [“Analyzing Maps”](#) by Joni Seager

### PART 2: Opening Activity

Direct students to pull out a sheet of paper. On this sheet of paper each student will have 20 minutes to draw a map of El Paso. On that map, direct students to include prominent landmarks (such as streets, highways, and natural geographic features like rivers) and locations significant to

them (such as their home, church, favorite park, etc.). Label these landmarks and features.

Once students have finished their maps, have them do a “pair and share” where they will show their map to a partner and explain why they made the map they way they did.

After students have finished sharing with their partner, direct the class to come together to reflect on the meaning of map-making.

#### Guiding Questions

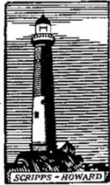
- Everyone here was told to make a map of El Paso. Is everyone’s map the same? Why or why not? How so?
- What choices did the mapmaker make?
- What does each map reflect (or suggest) about who is the mapmaker?
- What is the purpose of the map?
- Who is the map’s audience? How do you know?
- What do we learn about El Paso when we “read” multiple students maps together?

### PART 3: Analyzing Chamizal Maps

Break up students into groups of 4. In each group, hand out a map of El Chamizal. Have each group analyze their assigned map by answering the following questions: (1) What does your map tell us about El Chamizal—its history, location, boundaries, and eventual settlement? (2) What does your map suggest about the mapmaker?

*[Maps are located on pages 10-13]*

Once students have discussed their answers to their questions, each group presents on their map to the class. Follow with group discussion.



# El Paso Herald-Post

The Newspaper That Serves Its Readers

VOL. LXXXIII, NO. 170

EL PASO, TEXAS, WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 1963

DELIVERED BY CARRIER 30¢ PER WEEK

HOME EDITION

PRICE TEN CENTS

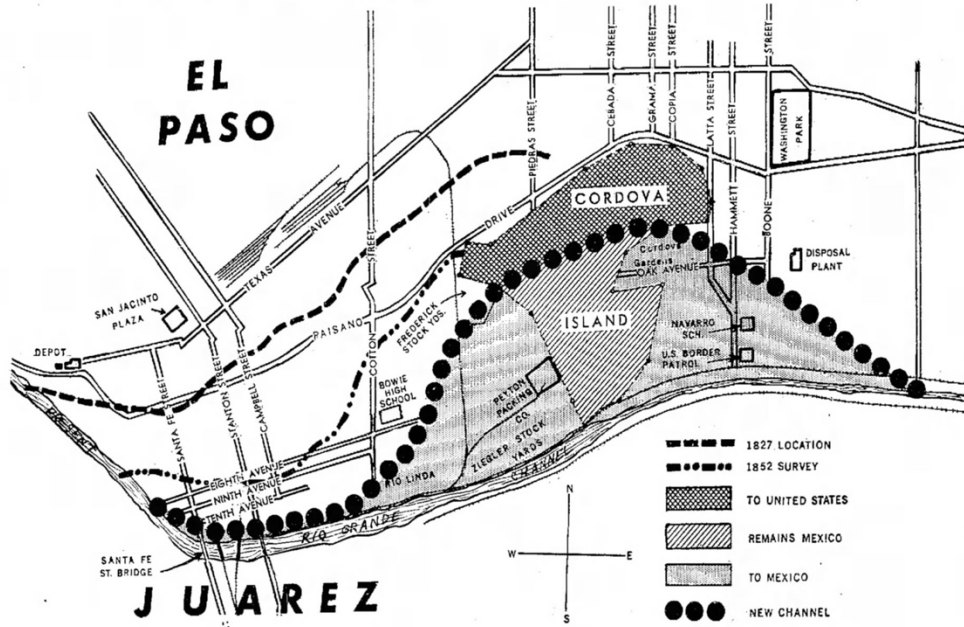
30 PAGES—TWO SECTIONS

## E. P. CHAMIZAL DISPUTE SETTLED

### Map Shows Proposed New Border Boundaries

### Two Nations To Announce Historic Pact

#### Tomorrow Is Day for Kennedy, Lopez Mateos to Reveal Accord



The historic Chamizal dispute has been settled, the United States and Mexico will announce tomorrow. This was disclosed today by unofficial but trustworthy sources both in Washington and Mexico City.

From Mexico City came word that President Lopez Mateos is to announce an agreement between the two countries in a nationwide radio and television appearance late tomorrow.

President Kennedy was expected, at a press conference in Washington today, to announce that a statement about a Chamizal agreement will be made tomorrow. It is sought to carry out its terms. The treaty will transfer to Mexico a slice of South El Paso which the agreement at the same time Mexico long has claimed in what is known as the Chamizal Zone.

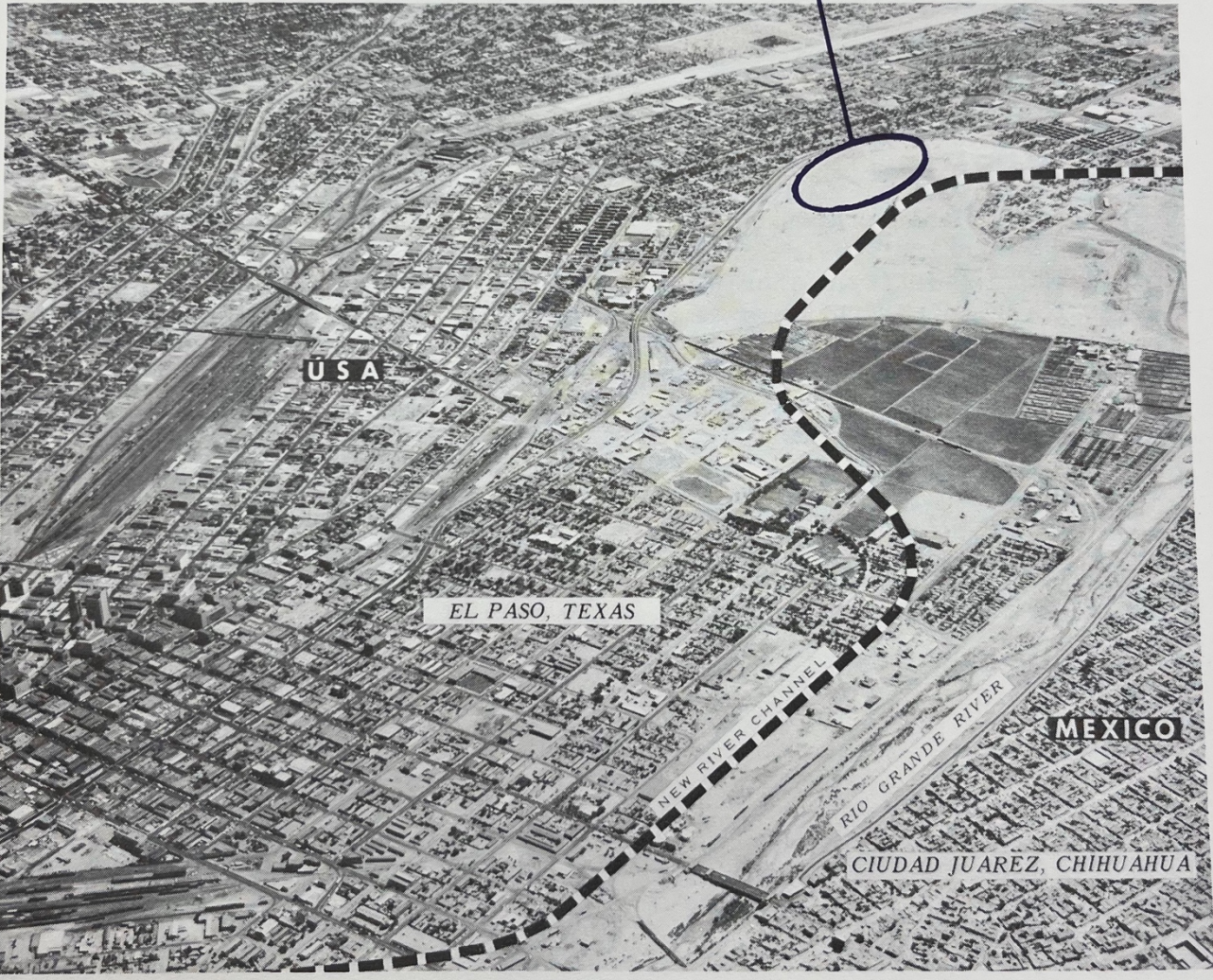
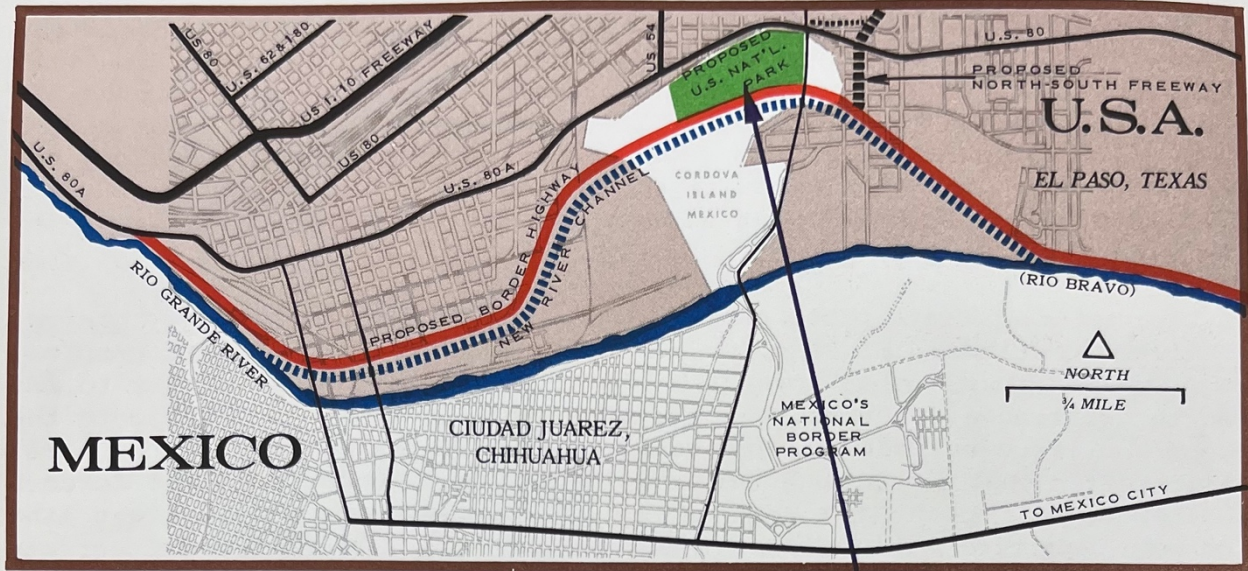
THIS SIMPLIFIED SKETCH shows probable territorial changes to be made with settlement of Chamizal Zone dispute by the U.S. and Mexico.

Big dotted line shows location of new Rio Grande channel which will become new international boundary when U.S. cedes more than 600 acres of South El Paso to Mexico, getting nearly 200 acres in return.

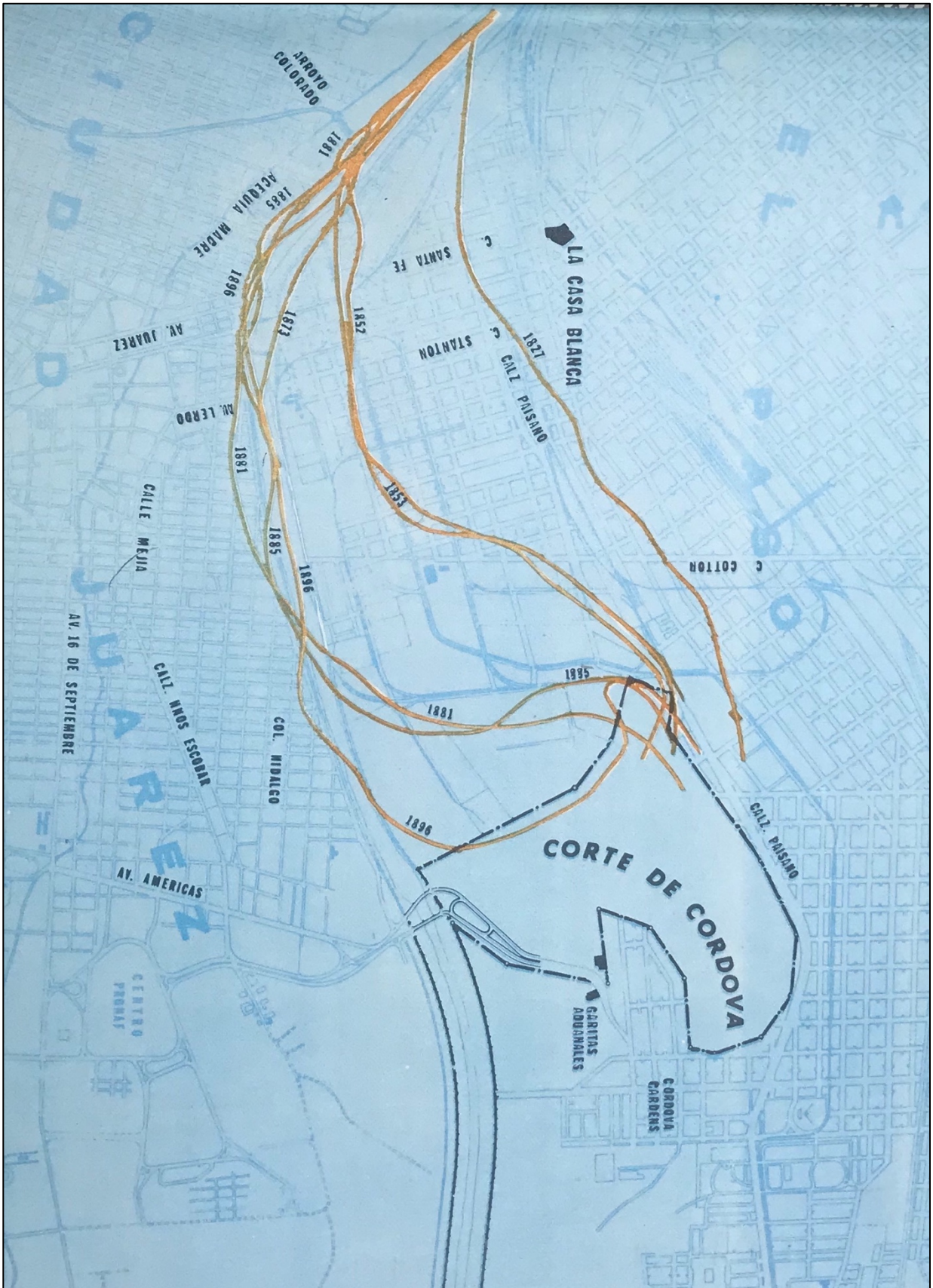
School, which it leaves on U. S. side, and continues to Monument No. 3 at Cordova Island at old Frederick stockyards.

Crossing Cordova, new border transfers nearly 200 acres of this Mexican territory to U.S. From eastern side of Cordova at Cop's street new channel curves back south to existing channel, after crossing Hammett street at Oak avenue. Net gain to Mexico: between 430 and 440 acres.

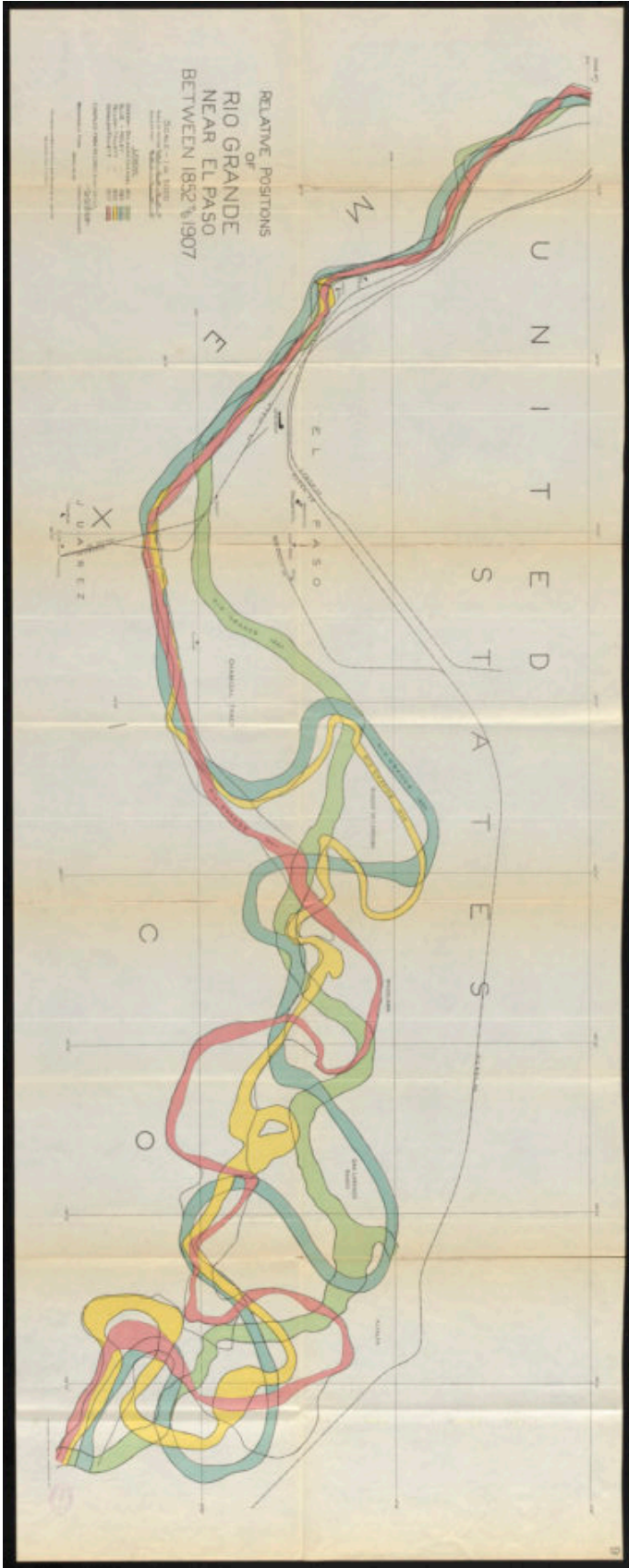
### Settlement Booms Two Border Cities



Source: Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library



Source: El Chamizal: solución completa, album gráfico by Manuel Quesada Brandi



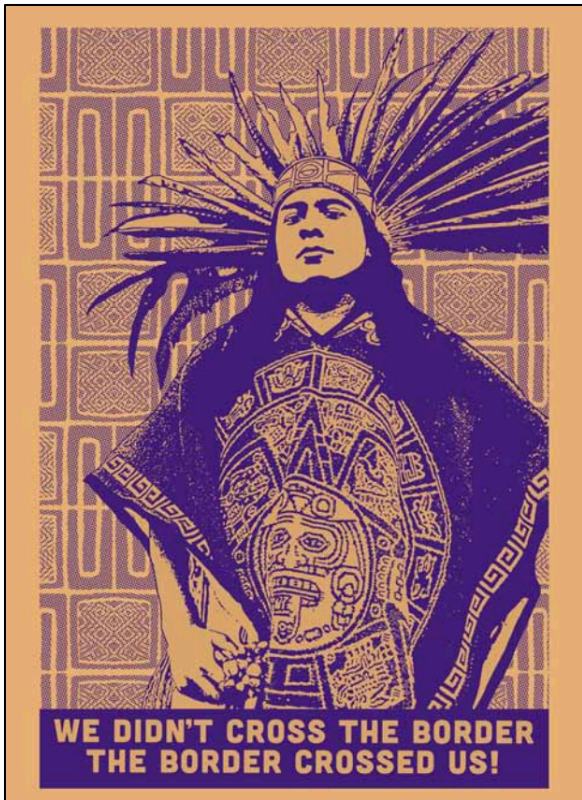
Source: Chamizal National Memorial Archives



### PART 1: Opening Activity

Project Melanie Cervantes’/Dignidad Rebelde’s, *We Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us* onto the front room of the classroom.

Ask students to spend 5 minutes observing the piece and jotting down observations. Questions to consider: Who is the figure in the piece? What do his clothes suggest about him? What does “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” at the bottom of the print mean or suggest? After time is called, facilitate class discussion by writing down student responses and observations onto a white board for everyone to see.



Melanie Cervantes/Dignidad Rebelde, *We Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us*, screen print, 18X12 inches, 2016.

### PART 2: Contextualizing “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us”

“We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” was the “dicho” or [refrain](#) of the Chicano

Movement of the 1960s and has since been the rallying cry of the Mexican/Chicanx immigrant rights movements in the U.S. The statement historicizes these movements’ claims to territory, citizenship rights, and cultural legacies that predate the 1848 imposition of the U.S.-Mexico boundary following the U.S.-Mexico War.

The figure in Cervantes’ graphic is a man dressed in Aztec dancer garb. The image underscores a connection to the symbolism of Aztlán—the Aztec’s legendary homeland in the U.S. Southwest. Both the dicho and story of Aztlán are a reminder of a homeland (Mexico/Aztlán) that predates the U.S.-Mexico border that turned Mexican nationals into foreigners in the U.S. and Indigenous peoples’ into oppressed peoples in another colonial empire.

The Chamizal Dispute and Treaty of 1964 illuminates the “border crossed us” assertion in both an historical and contemporary context. Returning El Chamizal to Cd. Juárez, for instance, was only possible by redrawing the U.S.-Mexico boundary between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. As a result of this redrawn boundary, the homes of at least 5,500 South El Paso residents (most of whom were Mexican Americans) ended up south of this redrawn boundary. Like Mexican nationals living in the former Mexican north after the U.S.-Mexico War, with the signing of a pen, the U.S.-Mexico border crossed these El Paso residents. Consequently, they were displaced from their homes in preparation for the return of this territory to Mexico.

Until recently, there was very little we knew about who these 5,500 residents were or their experiences.

#### ADDITIONAL STORIES TO CONSIDER

- [Mesilla, New Mexico](#)
- [Rio Rico, Tamaulipas](#)
- [“Cherokee Nation”](#) in Brownsville, Texas

*HOMEWORK: Oral History Mini Project [p. 15]*

## ORAL HISTORY MINI PROJECT

### What is oral history?

Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices, memories, perspectives, and knowledge of people, communities, and participants in past events. This method of collecting histories through the oral tradition of speaking and storytelling has most often been used to preserve the stories and knowledge of peoples and communities who have been typically left out of history books. It has also been a method of recording and studying how people remember and narrate the past—and how these narratives may differ or offer alternative insights on official renditions of history. In these ways, oral history can be subversive because it makes space for stories and knowledges that might not otherwise be heard, recorded, or taken seriously. It offers an avenue for individuals and communities who may feel ignored or left out of established historical narratives to speak up and share their experiences, memories, and insights.

### How will we practice oral history here?

Though many oral histories require days to complete and hours of preparation, we will instead sample this process with an elder family member or friend who has lived in Segundo Barrio or South El Paso for most of their lives. In the process, see if you learn something new or surprising about the life story of person you already know well and/or the history of South El Paso.

## ORAL HISTORY WORKSHEET

Name of person you interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time & timespan of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Record answers to the following questions:

- (1) Tell me a little bit about your personal background. Who are you and who is your family?
- (2) How did you come to live in South El Paso?
- (3) When you were my age, what was South El Paso like?
- (4) What has life in South El Paso been like over the course of your lifetime?
- (5) Tell me about your relationship with the U.S.-Mexico border.
- (6) Has the U.S.-Mexico border changed at all in your lifetime? How so and when did these changes take place?
- (7) From your perspective, what is special about life along the border in South El Paso?
- (8) Question of your choice: \_\_\_\_\_

POST INTERVIEW—REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Briefly tell us why you chose this person to interview. What is their relationship to you and what kinds of stories and insights did you expect from this person’s oral history prior to doing the interview?

How did this oral history shift your perspective on this person’s life?

How did this oral history shift your perspective on life in South El Paso and along the U.S.-MX border?

From your perspective, why is this person’s story important?

**Supplies needed: Projector for newsreel and documentary, pens, handouts.**

**PART 1: Introduction**

The South El Paso residents forcibly displaced from their homes by the Chamizal Treaty were mostly Mexican-descent, blue collar working-class families who had lived in El Paso for most, if not all, of their lives. Many were U.S. citizens either by birth or naturalization. Many had also not previously owned property prior to purchasing their homes in the areas later defined as “El Chamizal” by the 1964 settlement. Prior to this treaty, these areas included the last two southernly blocks of Segundo Barrio, the Rio Linda Addition, the Cotton Mill Addition, the Cordova Gardens Addition, and the El Jardin Addition to the City of El Paso. These streets and neighborhoods no longer exist in El Paso due to the Chamizal Treaty.

*Take a moment to ask students to cross reference these names with the maps we have used in class. Can they find these four neighborhoods on the map?*



Castañeda Family outside their Segundo Barrio home on 207 S. Oregon Street.  
Courtesy of Nena Castañeda

Despite the profound sacrifices these residents made in the “peaceful” settlement of the Chamizal Dispute, their stories have largely been



Bañales family outside their Rio Linda Home on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. This street no longer exists in El Paso.  
Courtesy of Martha Bañales

left out, trivialized, or glossed over in the official telling of this history.

Instead, the Treaty is memorialized as an extraordinary example of justice, friendship, and goodwill between the United States and Mexico.

[WATCH NEWSREEL:](#) “U.S. and Mexico Settle Border Dispute” by Texas Archive of the Moving Image



**PART 2: Elvira Villa Escajeda, Champion of Chamizal Residents**

Residents living in the area defined as El Chamizal responded to the Chamizal Treaty by organizing amongst themselves for more rights and compensations.. They were lead by one Chamizal resident, Elvira Villa Escajeda.

*Pass out handout on Escajeda’s life. [p. 18-20]. Follow with (1) Post-Reading Reflection Worksheet [p. 21] and finally, (2) the 20-min [“Vila” documentary](#) on her life.*

**Elvira Villa Lacarra Escajeda**, community organizer, businesswoman, and seamstress, was the founder of the Chamizal Civic Association, which successfully mobilized the South El Paso barrios condemned by the 1964 Chamizal Treaty. The Chamizal Treaty settled the century-long [Chamizal Dispute](#), which was an international land and boundary conflict over an area known as “El Chamizal” between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

Escajeda was born Elvira Villa on January 14, 1920, in the El Chamizal area of El Paso, Texas. She was the daughter of Jose Torres Villa and Manuela Parra Casavante Villa—both of whom were immigrants from Chihuahua, Mexico. They arrived in El Paso in 1919. Jose Villa was a skilled carpenter and Manuela a homemaker. They had seven children together; Elvira was the first child to be born in the United States. In 1930 the family rented a home on South Florence Street in El Paso’s Segundo Barrio and were active members of Sacred Heart Catholic Church. As a girl, Elvira attended Alamo Elementary and Bowie High School. She received an eighth-grade education—of which she was very proud. At an early age she became a skilled seamstress. Known as “Vila,” a nickname given to her by her father, she credited her skill and love for making clothes to her father who taught her how to sew.

By 1940 the Villa family was renting a home on East Third Street in Segundo Barrio. By this time, Elvira Villa was working as a seamstress. The 1940 census listed her place of work as “overall factory.” This may have been referring to the [Farah Manufacturing Company](#) where she worked for a short time. During [World War II](#) her older brother, Jose Jr., served in the U.S. Army Air Forces. Later, her younger brother, Gilberto, served in the U. S. Marines during the Korean War. Their veteran status would deeply influence Elvira’s politics and organizing during the Chamizal Relocation Project, which oversaw the displacement and relocation proceedings of Chamizal residents in the aftermath of the 1964 Chamizal Treaty.

During the 1940s, as a woman in her twenties, Elvira left El Paso for Los Angeles and had plans to work, save money, and return



Elvira Villa Escajeda  
Credit and courtesy of Vantage Point  
Studies, Inc.

to El Paso to support her family. In Los Angeles she continued to work as a seamstress and was employed in a coat factory on Hollywood Boulevard. She lived in Los Angeles for six years and made good money. She recalled her time in this city fondly and said she loved making beautiful clothes for Hollywood actors and actresses.

In 1951, after returning to Texas, Elvira and her youngest brother, Gilberto, purchased land for their parents in South El Paso on the corner of Algodon Place in the then-newly-established Cotton Mill Addition to the city of El Paso. On this lot the family built a home. Elvira was especially proud to have helped her father build the house and often fondly recalled assembling the roof herself. At some point, Elvira Villa married Guillermo Lacarra, a World War II veteran. In 1956 she purchased another property in Cotton Mill where she and her husband would live. In 1959 she purchased with her own funds and for her own separate estate a third property across the train tracks in a newly-established subdivision called Rio Linda. Her brother, Jose, also owned property in Rio Linda. In 1961 Elvira Lacarra sold her Rio Linda home and purchased another home in Cotton Mill.



Elvira & husband Guillermo Lacarra outside their Cotton Mill home on Algodon Place. This street no longer exists. Credit: Lynn Phelham, Getty Images

By 1963 these properties—along with the rest of Cotton Mill, Rio Linda, and two residential subdivisions in South El Paso to the east known as Cordova Gardens and El Jardin—were condemned as part of the Chamizal Treaty. Soon the neighborhoods were flagged for demolition as part of settlement preparation to return 437 acres of formerly U.S. territory to Ciudad Juárez. Official government reports estimate a total of 5,600 residents were displaced, but historical records suggest it was likely a larger number. Like Elvira’s brothers and husband, many of those displaced were World War II or Korean War veterans and first-time property owners who had used VA loans to purchase their property. Some families had sons fighting abroad in Vietnam at the time of condemnation proceedings and returned to El Paso only to find their homes and neighborhoods demolished.

In 1963 Elvira Lacarra, who worked at that time as a line supervisor at the Hicks-Ponder Manufacturing Company, founded the Chamizal Civic Association as an advocacy group for Chamizal residents and their rights during displacement proceedings. While newspaper coverage from that time often credited the

association to the leadership of men, Elvira served multiple roles in the organization. As both vice president and corresponding secretary, she sent official association letters outlining their positions and proposals to President John F. Kennedy, Senator [John Tower](#), and others. She organized regular meetings with residents in her home, a schoolroom at Sacred Heart School, and at Liberty Hall, where she publicly demanded inclusion in the negotiations of the proposed settlement.

As a Chamizal Civic Association representative, Elvira Lacarra traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss the Chamizal Treaty with elected officials. During this time, she and the association called for transparency and brought to light the failures on the part of local, state, and federal authorities to engage the residents living in the condemned neighborhoods. Back in El Paso, when rumors circulated that condemned properties would be evaluated at their tax value and not at fair-market value, she confronted chief negotiator Thomas C. Mann, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, who was holding meetings at the Hotel Paso del Norte. When Mann refused to see her, she contacted the El Paso Herald-Post and subsequently succeeded at getting Mann to agree to meet with her.

Thereafter, Mann and other politicians met regularly with Elvira and the Chamizal Civic Association. Despite her own leadership role, news coverage on the association often reduced Elvira to the role of secretary. Other El Paso women who were active members and organizers with the association included Agustina Hernandez, Ernestine Busch, and Soledad Loys. The association initially rejected the terms of the Chamizal Treaty and argued that El Chamizal should be protected as a memorial to the many Chamizal residents who were veterans. In an early campaign, the association asked residents to fly the U.S. flag outside their homes until the settlement was ratified to emphasize residents’ civic participation and their role as “good Americans.” Later, the association revised its demands when it became apparent that relocation would move forward and called for treaty negotiation transparency, inclusion in treaty decisions, and information about the details of the redrawn boundary and its impact

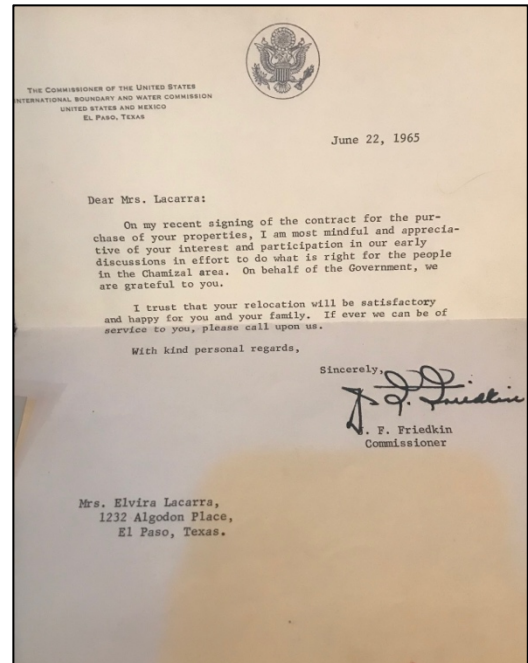
on residents. The association also continued to emphasize El Chamizal as a military community and the national sacrifice of its veterans.

Once ratification of the treaty took place, association members demanded fair-market value, that residents be given replacement of their property in an acceptable area, assurances that no one end up with more debt, and coverage of moving costs. As a result of this activism spearheaded and led by Elvira, the federal government eventually agreed to the association's terms, though some residents took their cases to court and others refused to leave their homes and were removed through eminent domain. For those who did agree to leave their homes, on moving day G.I. soldiers from the local [Fort Bliss](#) arrived in military trucks to help residents move—a gesture of goodwill that was Elvira's idea and which she had suggested to the authorities of the Chamizal Relocation Project.

Elvira Lacarra attended the bi-national ceremony commemorating the Chamizal Treaty in El Paso on September 25, 1964. She was a special guest of Mexican president Adolfo Lopez-Mateos. Later, President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) sent her a silver medal in thanks for her role in assisting the U.S. government with the Chamizal Dispute.



Silver medal gifted to Elvira Villa Escajeda by Lyndon B. Johnson in recognition for her contributions to the Chamizal Treaty.  
Courtesy of Villa family.



Letter from U.S. IWBC Commissioner, J.F. Friedkin to Elvira Lacarra.  
Courtesy of Villa family.



Elvira Escjaeda with her niece Linda Villa, and Linda's two children at the Chamizal National Memorial in 2018. Courtesy of Villa family.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### ELVIRA VILLA ESCAJEDA: POST-READING REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Summarize the article on Elvira Villa Escajeda' life and legacy:

What were Elvira's motivations for starting the Chamizal Civic Association? [1 sentence]

When Elvira decided to fight back, how did officials respond to her? Why might that be? [1 sentence]

What questions did this article leave you with?



## PART 1: Preparing to visit the Chamizal National Memorial



Chamizal National Memorial main entrance.

In preparation for students' visit to the Chamizal National Memorial, remind students of *why* we are visiting the memorial. Our goal is to ask questions about and analyze the Chamizal National Memorial's official mission, its representation of this history, and its impact or influence in determining how this history is remembered.

### Guiding Questions

- What is the official mission of the Chamizal National Memorial?
- Whose perspective, voices, and stories are represented at the Chamizal Memorial?
- What is left out in the memorial's telling of this story?
- What is the "feeling" that the memorial wants its visitors to walk away with?

As students walk through the memorial's visitor center, instruct them to take notes on these questions using the worksheet on pages 26-27.

### FIELD TRIP LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. First, to encourage students to engage the Chamizal National Memorial (and museums more broadly) as a primary source itself.

2. Secondly, to develop students historical thinking regarding museums. That is, to get students thinking critically about who designed the Chamizal National Memorial, according to what needs and motivations, and what primary sources were used or left out in the making of this museum.

## PART 2: Arguments & Erasures



Chamizal National Memorial exhibit entrance.

*Note: To access the virtual exhibit of the Chamizal National Memorial, [click here](#).*

To begin, ask students to gather at the front of the exhibit entrance (shown above). In their notebooks, instruct students to make a list of observations about this entrance. What images do they see? What message or feeling do these images convey? What words do you read? What initial argument does this entrance intend to leave you with?

Next, tell the students that our goal now is to identify the argument of this exhibit and the erasures that are needed to make that argument.

Instruct the students to begin walking through the exhibit from beginning to end. Instruct them to fill out the reflection worksheet with their responses as they move through the exhibit.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAMIZAL NATIONAL MEMORIAL: REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Begin at the entrance to the memorial exhibit. Make a list of observations about this entrance. What images do you see? What text do you read? What impression does this entrance leave you with?

The first section in the exhibit showcases the Tigua / Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. What do the Tigua people have to say about the Rio Grande? What is their relationship with this river?

The shifting Río Grande is described as a troublesome thing once it becomes the U.S.-Mexico border in 1848. Why is the river represented in this way? [1 sentence]

Whose perspective, voices, and stories are represented at the Chamizal Memorial?

Why is this place called a memorial? Who or what is being memorialized?

What is the “feeling” that the memorial wants its visitors to walk away with? [1 sentence]

Given what you’ve seen, what is the official mission of the Chamizal National Memorial? [1 sentence]

**Supplies needed: KWHL Chart from Lesson 2, pencils, white/chalkboard.**

### **PART 1: KWHL Chart**

In preparation for a group discussion on the major observations and takeaways from the fieldtrip at the Chamizal National Memorial, instruct students to find the KWHL Chart they worked on in Lesson 2. In this opening activity, students will add content to their KWHL Chart based on their experience at the memorial and their responses to the reflection worksheet.

First, instruct students to add content to the “Know” and “Learn” columns of the KWHL Chart. Give students (at least) 10-12 minutes to complete this activity. Next, instruct students to add to the “What” and “How” columns. Give students (at least) 10-12 minutes to complete this activity.

Next, pair students up into groups of two and instruct them to share with their partners what they each added to the “What” and “How” columns. Give students 10 minutes to pair and share.

### **PART 2: Group KWHL Chart**

In this next activity, students will collectively build a shared KWHL Chart on the Chamizal Dispute and Chamizal National Memorial.

Following the completion of Part 1, direct students toward to the front of the room where a large KWHL Chart will be on the white/chalk board. Instruct students to exchange their KWHL Chart with their partner. Each student will then review their partner’s chart and chose two items (from two different columns) to add to the group KWHL Chart at the front of the room. Students will walk up to the group chart and write in this content.

Allow for (at least) 20 minutes for students to complete this step. Follow with group discussion. Encourage students to draw on their responses to the fieldtrip reflection worksheet during discussion.

### **PART 3: Next steps**

Explain to students that the last several lessons and fieldtrip have all prepared them to embark on a group project that responds to the “What” and “How” of their KWHL Charts.

First: Pass out individual surveys for each student to complete. Explain that this survey is an opportunity for students to share what interests them most about the Chamizal Dispute, what research and digital skillsets they already bring with them, and what kind of digital product they would prefer to work on in a team. Explain that their responses will be used to assemble teams of middle and high school students based on their shared interests and diverse skill sets.

*See survey on pages 26-28.*

Next, share instructions for group project.

### FINAL PROJECT PREVIEW

- Working in assigned teams, students will propose, develop, and create a digital project that contributes to the remembering of the Chamizal Dispute and/or South El Paso border history.
- Each student will have an assigned role in their group project: leader, communication director, timekeeper/schedule planner, note-taker, artist, writer/poet, digital manager, or speaker/presenter.
- Students are encouraged to identify and pursue the digital medium/platform of their choice in this final project.

# Underground Chamizal National Memorial Lesson Plan

Student survey

\* Indicates required question

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1. What interests you most about the Chamizal story? \*

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2. What changes would you make to the Chamizal National Memorial if you could? \*

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3. Each of you will serve particular a role in your team/group project. From the options below, which role would you prefer? (Choose 3)

*Check all that apply.*

- Digital Manager (responsible for project management and overseeing project progress)
- Communication Director (responsible for facilitating communication across your team)
- Planner (responsible for scheduling meetings, determining timeline, and keeping time)
- Secretary (responsible for note-taking during meetings and saving notes for later)
- Artist/Designer (responsible for creative aspects of the final project)
- Writer/Poet (responsible for writing any official language or text in the final project)
- Tech (responsible for facilitating any technological/digital aspects of project)
- Speaker (responsible for presenting final project)

4. What kinds of technological/digital skills do you have? (Choose all the apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- Photographer / Photoshop
- Videographer / Video Editing
- Audio Editing (Music, Podcasts)
- Social Media (TikTok)
- Graphic Design (InDesign, Illustrator, Canva, Digital Design)
- Programing (Coding, Web and App Development)
- Digital Illustrator (creating art digitally)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What kind of digital project would you ideally like to work on for this assignment?  
(Choose up to 3)

*Check all that apply.*

- Recorded Interview/Oral History
- Video / Documentary
- Photo Essay
- Music
- Digital Map
- Digital Graphic / Art
- Website
- Digital Presentation / Lesson

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This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

**Google Forms**

**Note to Instructor:** Now that you have arrived at the second, asynchronous portion of this lesson plan, the task at hand is guiding students on the proposal, development, and completion of their final digital projects.

### **PART 1: Composing Teams**

The first step is composing teams. Drawing on student responses to the survey, Guillen and Bowie instructors are encouraged to work together to build teams. Team members should have a general shared interest in an aspect of the Chamizal Dispute and/or South El Paso history. Teams should also be built according to the skillsets that each student brings. If possible, it is ideal for teams to have diverse skillsets. Consider and identify the role each student will serve in their assigned team. Students can choose to change/exchange their role with the consent of their teammates later if each role is still present in the team. The goal here is to build teams where (1) each student has something valuable and meaningful to offer to the team and essential to building the final digital project, and (2) team members have a general shared interest in this history and/or the digital medium used to develop their final projects.

### **PART 2: Team Building**

Once teams are built, instructors are encouraged to facilitate time for teams to meet synchronously during school hours. In the beginning, this designated time is meant for icebreaker and team-building activities amongst team members. Next, instructors are encouraged to build in time for teams to build to brainstorm project ideas. How much time is needed for these activities and milestone is up to the discretion of the instructor. Once students have identified the content and medium of their final project, have student submit a written proposal for their project. This should include and timeline for completion and schedule for team meetings outside class.

Consider this a written contract with your students.

### **PART 3: Identifying Digital Medium**

This lesson plan is convinced that the best way to use digital media to teach students history and historical thinking is to create learning opportunities that make it possible for student to do history and make history using their own creative impulses. Students are therefore encouraged to identify the primary sources they are interested in pursuing as well as the digital medium they are interested in using to investigate/present those primary sources.

Digital platforms for instructors to consider:

- StoryMaps (Free Digital Map Storytelling)
- Tiki Toki (Free Digital Timeline)
- Powtoon / Animoto (Video Creation)
- Canva (Free Graphic Design)
- Twine (An open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories)
- TikTok (Free Social Media)
- Wordpress (Free Website Building)
- Audacity (Free Audio Editing Software)

### **PART 3: Tracking Team Progress**

Once teams have proposed their final projects, the goal is to keep track of their progress. Ask teams to submit biweekly progress reports. Consider opportunities for individual team members to also submit monthly progress reports where they can evaluate their individual progress and share any questions or concerns with their instructor.



Because this portion of the lesson plan is nearly entirely asynchronous, instructors are encouraged to allow for time in class where students can update their classmates on their group's progress and/or share project drafts. This is another opportunity for collaboration and for students to receive feedback on their projects.

#### **PART 4: Be Clear About Expectations**

Be clear with students about how they are being evaluated/graded on this assignment. Instructors are encouraged to develop a grading rubric that best fits their needs/expectations. Share this rubric with students. When returning their progress reports to teams, include a completed rubric that gives teams a sense of how you are currently evaluating them.

#### **PART 5: Presenting Final Projects**

Teams will ultimately share/present their final projects. Teams are also encouraged to submit their final projects to the Underground Chamizal National Memorial.