
Sample Lesson 12: US Undocumented Immigrants from Mexico and Beyond: Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles

Theme: Systems of Power

Disciplinary Area: Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 5

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Chronological and Spatial Thinking 1; Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View 1, 2, 4; Historical Interpretation 1, 4

CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.2–5, 8; WHST.9–10.1, 2, 4

CA CCSS ELD Standards: ELD.PI.9–10.1, 2, 3, 5, 6a, 10

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

The lesson is applicable to many US urban areas but is written specifically about the Los Angeles Boyle Heights area. Some students in urban working class communities have been impacted by gentrification (the process of upgrading a neighborhood while pushing out working class communities), the growing housing crisis, and being undocumented/DACAmented. Consequently, many families have experienced detention and deportation, while others express growing concerns of being pushed out of their community altogether.

This lesson introduces students to the plight of undocumented immigrants, gentrification in the greater Los Angeles area, cultural preservation versus assimilation, and Greek mythology and tragedy. Students will learn about the use of immigrant laborers for the construction and garment industry; the impact of drug cartels and lack of opportunities in Mexico and how that factors into people's decision to emigrate; and how contemporary playwrights of color are leveraging ancient literature and theater to discuss modern-day issues.

Key Terms and Concepts: colonialism, cultural preservation, assimilation, gentrification, undocumented, patriarchy, machismo, barrios

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Develop an understanding about the process of migration, assimilation, cultural preservation, and gentrification
- Engage key English language arts content, such as literary and dramatic devices
- Explain how organizing and advocacy counteract institutional racism as it relates to housing and immigration

Essential Questions:

1. What is gentrification and why is it disproportionately impacting communities of color? What are the short and long-term effects on communities of color?
2. How and why were barrios created? How did it influence the identity and experiences of the communities living there?
3. Why do Indigenous populations from Mexico and Latin America migrate to the US? What are the push and pull factors? To what extent has migration been a positive or negative experience for these populations?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

1. Begin the lesson by posting the definitions of *bruja*, *chisme*, *curandera*, *el guaco*, *migra*, *mojada*, and *Náhuatl*⁶ on the board. Provide definitions of multiculturalism and assimilation or provide time for students to research these topics. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two. Also provide a compare and contrast chart of the ancient Greek playwright Euripides and the contemporary Xicanx playwright Luis Alfaro—author of *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*. In this introduction, thoroughly cover the tenets of Greek mythology and tragedy, the traditional roles of women in Ancient Greece, the garment industry in Los Angeles, the use of immigrant labor to construct the edifices of gentrification development, and drug cartels in the Mexican state of Michoacán.
 - a. If available, consult with the English Department of your site to collaborate on a reader's theater approach to the play *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*. Students could be provided time to engage the play in both classes.
2. Following the in-class readings, ask the students to reflect on the characters and their relationship to immigration, gentrification, and cultural preservation versus assimilation. Later divide students into small groups where they are tasked with responding to the following questions. The questions can be divided equally per group, or the teacher can choose to focus on some of them as time allows.

6 *Bruja*: witch; *Chisme*: a rumor, a piece of gossip; *Chismosa/o*: a gossip; *Curandera*: healer; *El guaco*: migrating falcon of the Americas, often referred to as a laughing falcon because of its call; it is an ophiophagous (snake-eating) bird; *Migra*: immigration police; *Mojada*: offensive term used for a Mexican who enters the United States without documents; *Náhuatl*: an Uto-Aztecan language, which is widespread from Idaho to Central America and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean; *Náhuatl* specifically refers to the language spoken by many tribes from Southeastern Mexico to parts of Central America; it translates to an agreeable, pleasing, and clear sound

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- a. Have students take 5 to 10 minutes to research online the definition of tragic hero. After completing this task, ask the students to respond to the following questions: (1) To what extent does Medea fit the definition of a tragic hero? (2) What is her tragic flaw? (3) What does Medea learn from her journey? (4) What does the audience learn from her journey?
 - b. At the beginning of the play, Tita says that being in the United States is Hason's dream. What is his dream? How do Medea and Acan fit into his dream? What is Medea's dream?
 - c. Have students refer to their research on multiculturalism versus assimilation. Which characters are able to assimilate to living in the United States? What are the benefits for characters that are able to assimilate? Which characters are not able to? What is the cost of their inability to assimilate? Which characters are able to be in the United States and still maintain their native culture?
 - d. Have students find Michoacán and Boyle Heights using print or electronic maps. How is the physical environment of Michoacán different from that of Boyle Heights? Why can't Medea leave her yard? What role does Medea's environment play in her inability to assimilate?
 - e. In what ways are Medea and her family in exile? How does immigration and specifically the idea of exile help the audience understand Medea's journey in the play?
 - f. What abilities does Medea possess that keep her connected to her Mexican culture? In what ways does this connection conflict with Hason and Acan's desire to fit in and become "American"?
 - g. What is Hason willing to do to achieve success in the United States? Does he make those choices for his family or for personal fulfillment? What are the consequences of his ambition?
 - h. In what way does the assault Medea experienced during her journey affect her ability to adjust and thrive in the United States? When accosted by the soldiers at the border why does Medea sacrifice herself? How does Medea's sacrifice affect her relationship with Hason?
 - i. Compare and contrast Medea, Armida, and Josefina. What were their journeys to get to the United States? How does each react to being in a new country? In what ways does each woman's choices bring them success? What is the cost of some of their choices?
 - j. Refer to your research on and discussion of multiculturalism and assimilation. What comparisons do Medea, Tita, Josefina, and Armida make between Mexico and the United States? In what ways is the love of their

culture and Mexican way of life seen as anti-American, and by whom? How does each character reconcile the division they experience between old and new worlds, if at all?

- k. In what ways is Euripides's Medea hindered by a male-dominant society? In what ways is Alfaro's Medea hindered by a male-dominant society? How do Tita, Josefina, and Armida work with or against their gender roles to survive and achieve success? In what ways is Hason privileged by these traditional gender roles? In what ways is he hindered by traditional expectations?
 - l. In what ways is Acan torn between the old world of his mother and the new world his father has decided to embrace? In what ways does he contribute to Medea taking vengeance?
 - m. How does the revelation of Medea's circumstances in Mexico and the reason for leaving heighten the stakes surrounding the eviction from her apartment? What is Medea running from and why? What does her past tell us about her in the present?
 - n. Why does Medea refer to herself as a *mojada* or wetback with Armida? In what ways does she believe she is a *mojada*? In what ways does she not? What is the significance of the title, *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*?
 - o. What events contribute to Medea taking vengeance on Hason and Armida? In what ways does the story of Medea's life in Michoacán contribute to her killing Armida and Acan? Why does Medea kill Acan?
 - p. Who has betrayed Medea in Mexico and in the US, and in what ways? What effect do these betrayals have on her? How do the betrayals contribute to her actions at the end of the play?
 - q. Refer to the definition of *el guaco* provided at the beginning of the lesson. In what ways is Medea like *el guaco*? What becomes of Medea at the end of the play? What could her final transformation symbolize?
 - r. If you are seeing *Julius Caesar*, compare and contrast what Brutus and Medea want to pass on to the next generation versus Hason and Caesar. In what ways is violence a part of the legacies of Brutus and Medea? In what ways is it a part of Hason and Caesar's legacies? How do Hason and Caesar contribute to their own downfalls? What other actions could Brutus have taken toward Caesar and Medea toward Hason?
3. Have students demonstrate their knowledge by developing and delivering a brief presentation that applies the concepts learned from the play to current topics of immigration and gentrification in their respective communities.

Making Connections to the History–Social Science Framework and the *English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework*:

These two curriculum frameworks contain an extensive lesson example that shows how teachers can work with colleagues across disciplines to address a common topic. In this case, the example is how a language arts teacher and a history–social science teacher collaborate to teach the novel *Things Fall Apart*, addressing both language arts and history–social science standards in their instruction (the example begins on page 338 in the *History–Social Science Framework*, and on page 744 in the *ELA/ELD Framework*).

Ethnic studies educators should also consider how they can collaborate with their peers to integrate ethnic studies instruction with content in other areas. Depending on at which grade level the ethnic studies course is being offered, the ethnic studies educator can include a literary selection that connects to the content students are studying in their history–social science classroom, or work with the language arts teacher on lessons that address grade-level standards in reading or writing.

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Students will work in groups to analyze and discuss the text while responding to the provided questions.
- Students deliver a presentation to an authentic audience that connects the play to experiences in their communities.

Materials and Resources:

- *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*, a play by Luis Alfaro