



Lesson Plan: Using the Military at the U.S.-Mexico Border

OVERVIEW

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film, *The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez*, the story of an American teenager who was shot and killed by United States marines deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border to watch for drug smugglers. Classrooms can use this lesson to examine the pros and cons of using the military to support law enforcement activities at the U.S.-Mexico border.

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

Please visit our Film Library at http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php to find other films suitable for classroom use or to make this film a part of your school's permanent collection.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and note-taking strategies to understand and interpret a video clip.
- Determine the pros and cons of using the military to support operations at the U.S.-Mexican border.
- Carefully examine photographs and classify their observations.
- Prepare themselves to respond to this essay exam question: "Should the policy of using military troops at the U.S.-Mexico border be continued or terminated?"

GRADE LEVELS

6-12

SUBJECTS

Civics, U.S. History, Current Events, Geography

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Method (varies by school) of showing the class an online video clip
- Computers with access to the Internet
- Map showing U.S.-Mexican border and the location of Redford, TX
- Handout: [Viewing Guide](#) (PDF file)
- Handout: [Pro/Con Scale Graphic Organizer](#) (PDF file)

Visit the "Graphic Organizers" section and scroll down to the "Pros and Cons Scale": <http://freeology.com/graphicorgs/pdf/proconscale.pdf>

ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION

One 50-minute class

SUGGESTED CLIP

Lesson Plan Clip: The Shooting of Esequiel Hernandez (length: 13:57)

The clip begins at 20:03 with the quote, “We only used the military for observation...”
The clip ends at 34:00 with the quote, “...our Marines took him out.”

BACKGROUND

The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández is a film that points out the risks of using the military as domestic law enforcement — a role that the military, under the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, had been prohibited from taking. That changed in 1989, when the George H.W. Bush administration declared drug-trafficking a “threat to national security” and authorized the deployment of thousands of troops to the U.S.-Mexico border. In 1997, during the Clinton administration, Esequiel Hernández became the first American killed by U.S. military forces on native soil since the 1970 Kent State shootings. Shortly afterward, the administration suspended all military operations along the border. By January 1999, the U.S. Department of Defense announced a new policy allowing armed groups along the border but only with specific permission from the Secretary of Defense or his deputy. Several years later, in 2006, the George W. Bush administration announced plans to deploy as many as 6,000 National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the War on Terror and to stem illegal immigration. For more details on the history of the military’s role along the U.S.-Mexican border, please read about it on the P.O.V. website (www.pbs.org/pov/).

ACTIVITY

1. Show the class the U.S.-Mexico border on a map. Explain that the border between Mexico and the United States is nearly 2,000 miles long. Concerns about illegal border crossings from immigrants, drug dealers, and terrorists have triggered heated debates for many years over how best to secure the border. One policy approach has been to use military troops to support the efforts of the U.S. Border Patrol.
2. Tell students that you are going to show them a 14-minute video clip that shows an incident from May 1997 involving four marines and an American teenager named Esequiel Hernandez, Jr., who was out grazing his goats in the small border town of Redford, Texas. (Point out the location of this town on the map.) The soldiers were secretly conducting border surveillance, which meant lying still in the desert for long periods of time, wearing full camouflage in hot temperatures and reporting observations to the U.S. Border Patrol. The marines had been falsely told that Redford was an unfriendly area and that 70 to 75 percent of the local population was involved in drug trafficking. Ask students to take notes on the [Viewing Guide](#) as they watch the clip.
3. After watching the video, allow students to react to what they saw and to discuss their notes from the [Viewing Guide](#).
4. Tell the class that after Hernandez’s death, there were a number of investigations into the incident, but ultimately, no one was indicted for any crime.
5. Distribute the [Handout: Pro/Con Scale Graphic Organizer](#). Have students write their name in the gray area, and, “Use of the Military at the U.S.-Mexican Border” in the white space at the top of the page. They should then label the left side of the page, “PRO” and the right side, “CON.”
6. Show the class the [photo gallery](#) at the P.O.V. website to see recent images of National Guard troops deployed by President Bush to the U.S.-Mexican border. Ask students to carefully examine the photos and make pro/con notes on their graphic

organizers about how the military is being used at the border. Point out that classifying some observations as “pro” or “con” can be subjective.

7. For homework, ask students to complete their Pro/Con Scale handout by adding significant points from the video clip, and by pulling relevant details from these two resources:

[History of Military Deployment at the U.S.-Mexico Border](#) (P.O.V. website)
[National Guard Wrapping Up Its U.S.-Mexican Border Duty](#) (Arizona Republic)
<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2008/06/12/20080612jumpstart0612.html>

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students can be assessed on:

- Completion of the Viewing Guide.
- Providing thoughtful responses on the Pro/Con Scale graphic organizer.
- Participation in class discussion.
- An exam with the essay question, “Should the policy of using U.S. military troops at the U.S.-Mexico border be continued or terminated?”

EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS

- Reference P.O.V.’s [History of the Use of the Military at the U.S.-Mexico Border](#) to create a visual timeline of these events that sets the context for viewing the film clip in the main lesson activity.
- Research the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. What is its historical context? What are its provisions? In what situations does the act not apply? How does or should the law influence today’s border policies? Debate whether or not its provisions are still relevant.
- Find out your elected representatives’ opinions on how to best secure U.S. borders. Then write a letter to one of these leaders and praise or constructively criticize his or her views. Be sure to include relevant research points to defend your analysis.
- Read the Department of Homeland Security address in the [Resources](#) section below. List the various methods currently in use to secure the U.S.-Mexico border. Divide into groups to gather more information on each of these methods and its effectiveness and report back to the class.
- Compare and contrast the U.S.-Mexico border with the U.S.-Canada border. How are they different in terms of size, traffic volume, and immigration/security issues? Use a Venn diagram to organize your findings.
- Watch and discuss other P.O.V. films that address U.S.-Mexico border and immigrant issues, such as *Al Otro Lado* and *Farmingville*. Each film has companion website resources and educator activities to support their use in the classroom.

RESOURCES

Department of Homeland Security: Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Department of Commerce Secretary Gutierrez at the State of Immigration Address

http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1213101513448.shtm

This June 9, 2008 press conference transcript outlines U.S. efforts to defend its borders and address issues related to illegal immigration.

Hernandez Memorial Gallery

<http://www.dpft.org/hernandez/gallery>

The Drug Policy Forum of Texas provides a gallery of photographs related to the death of Esequiel Hernandez.

National Guard Wrapping Up Its U.S.-Mexican Border Duty

<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2008/06/12/20080612jumpstart0612.html>

This June 12, 2008 article in the Arizona Republic reports that the two-year mission of National Guard troops at the U.S.-Mexican border is almost over, that the mission is considered successful, and border-state governors would like to have their mission extended.

President Deploys Troops to Border, Calls for Reform

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/politics/jan-june06/bush_05-15.html

The Online NewsHour reports on a May 15, 2006 address by President George W. Bush that called for deploying 6,000 National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border.

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Standard 15: Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power.

Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy.

Standard 22: Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy.

Geography

Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Language Arts

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

U.S. History

Standard 30: Understands developments in foreign policy and domestic politics between the Nixon and Clinton presidencies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Background Sources

Sources: "After Marine on Patrol Kills a Teenager, a Texas Border Village Wonders Why," *The New York Times*, June 29, 1997, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0CE0DE1E31F93AA15755C0A961958260>; "Bush's Plan to Seal Border Worries Mexico," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/15/washington/15bush.html>; "Soldiers on the Border," *The Texas Observer*, September 8, 2006, Department of Homeland Security <http://www.whitehouse.gov/deptofhomeland/sect3.html>; "New Tactics to Control Immigration Are Unveiled," *The New York Times*, February 23, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/23/washington/23immig.html>; "Tougher Tactics Deter Migrants at U.S. Border," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/21/world/americas/21border.html>; "U.S. Aides Accuse Mexico As Drug Trade Surges," Joel Brinkley, *The New York Times*, May 12, 1986; "U.S. Details Plan to Combat Drugs at Mexico Border," Joel Brinkley, *The New York Times*, August 14, 1986.

The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez Viewing Guide

Name: _____

Directions: Respond to the questions below based on information in the video clip.

1. What was the mission of the four marines?
2. Why was Esequiel Hernandez armed with a rifle?
3. How did the marines respond to the shots fired by Hernandez in their direction?
4. What is a ghillie suit?
5. What are marines trained to do when they are under attack?
6. In your opinion, did the marines respond appropriately to the situation?