

2017

Grace Pilz Reflection 2

Grace Pilz
Kenyon College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/bordersinplayreflections>



Part of the Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, and the Modern Languages Commons

Recommended Citation

Pilz, Grace, "Grace Pilz Reflection 2" (2017). *Borders in Play Reflections*. Paper 11.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/bordersinplayreflections/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Borders in Play at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Borders in Play Reflections by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

Grace Pilz
Reflection #2
Prof. Román-Odio
11/2/17

My time at Columbia Elementary School has taught me that assuming the role of an educator requires a huge amount of critical thinking and adaptability. Early on in the experience, I realized I would have to transcend my traditional role as a student. Instead of having a good grasp of content (themes, plot, characters, etc), I now needed to be one who could guide students to their own understandings. This challenge reaches a new level in that I wouldn't be teaching fellow college students but economically/socially disadvantaged 5th graders from a community acutely different from my Kenyon bubble. It was clear from the start that pedagogically speaking, some special care needed to be taken to ensure key learning targets were coming across.

Unsurprisingly, my peers and I wanted our kids to get a sense of the idea of borders. In our own course, we discuss how systems of oppression actively construct and perpetuate all types of borders that affect marginalized groups. Specifically, Chicanos face barriers to meaningful participation in American and Mexican cultures, equal education, fair wages, and so much more. While none of my students personally identify as Latino, there is no doubt in my mind that they all face one or more force that restricts their upward mobility. Therefore, it became my mission to get the kids to connect with the stories and poems that we studied. I knew that there was a little bit of Margot or Esmerelda or Tomás in all of them... even if they didn't realize it at first.

Our weekly lesson plans served as the backbone for the students' learning. We tried to keep a consistent plan so that the students felt like they were getting into a groove. To begin, we'd recap the lesson from the previous visit. At the very least, we asked them "What happened in the piece?" and "What were some of the themes we discussed?" From there, Madi or I would introduce the new work by talking about the author and asking a question. For example, in our study of "The Very Old Man With Enormous Wings", we explained that Gabriel García-Márquez uses *magical realism* to add an element of the fantastic to his stories. Students were asked to think about this topic as we read then share with the group what they found. This tactic of assigning things to think about as we read seemed to make the kids feel more prepared for a follow-up discussion. All throughout this experience, we've wanted nothing more than to build our students' confidence to the point where we see the lightbulbs going off in their minds and their smiles shine brightly. If it means figuring out any way possible for them to feel self-assured, my partner and I will do it.

The theme of borders began to strongly emerge during our discussions of identity. Many of the characters had some facet of their identity that made them special albeit socially ostracized. As my group would readily tell you, characteristics such as *bilingualism* and *biculturalism* made our protagonists subject to bullying and/or dismissal. The kids seemed upset and/or surprised by the treatment of these characters which lead us to discuss the impacts of being perceived as "different". In "A Rice Sandwich", Mother Superior assumes that Esmeralda is from the poorest, dirtiest part of town because of her Latina indicators. From then on, the

conversation feels like a scolding. Our students quickly identified the injustice of this scene, but, as with the other works, they struggled to overtly source the issue as *borders*.

Even during the creation of the final project, the students were resistant to the word “border”; they couldn’t understand its application to a scenario in which someone is treated unfairly due to something they couldn’t control. Instead, our group preferred terms like “compassion” or “identity”. I suppose this is right about where my personal bias comes into play. Throughout my Kenyon career, I’ve taken courses that highlight the structural forces that keep marginalized groups at a disadvantage. Therefore, it’s easier for me to see that being a Chicano or being poor sets you up for a lifetime of struggles, regardless of your IQ or work ethic. My hope is that by the conclusion of the public presentations, students will be able to explain the role of borders in the literature. From there, they may use their new knowledge to examine future works more critically.