

“Walls on their sides are bridges - Las paredes vueltas de lado son puentes.”

- Ned Dougherty

Memorial crosses on the wall in Nogales, Mexico

Bridging Borders

Ned Dougherty, Josán Perales and Toni Wright / Expeditionary Learning Schools

The U.S.-Mexico border bisects one of the most dangerous areas of the entire North American continent. The three of us traveled to this scorching area of our country to investigate an incredibly misunderstood, complex, and divisive issue shared by many cultures across the two nations. Hundreds of thousands of migrants cross into our country each year, many risking arrest or loss of life. These people are forced to forge across our border through the Sonoran Desert of Sonora, Mexico and Arizona. We had no idea how profound and life changing our immersion into this issue would prove to be. We emerged from our experience a new group of teachers, humbled and inspired to expose the ugliest and most precious truths of this issue for our students in New Mexico. Returning home, we have captured our students' hearts and minds with personal stories from the border. Through listening to us and to the many experts we've spoken with (like the migrants themselves, Minutemen and humanitarian activists attempting to aid this tidal wave of humanity), the students are beginning to understand how incredible it may be to attempt the crossing. More than 2,000 people have died since 1994 from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, but the Sonoran Desert of Arizona is the deadliest landscape of this inconsistently enforced line between us. Whereas the heat was enough to challenge us physically, the people we met during our trip have forever reshaped our view of what it means to be human.



Potter's Field in Holtville, California



Josán and T interviewing at No More Deaths desert camp



Shrine of discarded migrants' possessions found in the desert

Professional and Personal Growth

- Provided an opportunity to participate in humanitarian aid efforts with various groups in the Sonoran Desert.
- Exposed us to the myriad of perspectives that continue to define the U.S.-Mexico Border conflict.
- Gained new understanding of border communities and the lives of Mexicans and Central Americans willing to risk their lives for a better life in America.
- Established relationships with experts to be utilized in the classroom, such as Border Patrol personnel, Minutemen, human rights activists and humanitarian aid volunteers.



Filling water tanks with humanitarian aid organization Humane Borders



Unwinding at Wisdom's Cafe in Tubac, AZ

Benefits to Students and School Community

- Teachers with first-hand experience relating to the many facets of a controversial topic as opposed to passing on information gained from news publications and print resources
- A multitude of primary source items for student examination, including interviews, archives, items discarded by migrants, and bug specimens.
- Hours of footage from individuals representing the many "sides" of the issue so that our students can look into their faces and their words allowing for deeper exploration and development of their own opinions.

Works in Progress

- Our semester began with a three day immersion kicking off our semester-long expedition
- Students are exploring the history of the U.S.-Mexico Border
- Interview skills are being honed in English class to aid their own investigations with border experts
- A bilingual (Spanish-English) investigation into the impacts and impasses created by personal borders
- A final investigation into the lives of people attempting to cross into our country
- The semester will culminate during our Celebration of Learning: A Borders Museum and Summit to expose the reality of borders affecting our own community in rural Northern New Mexico



Humanitarians of the No More Deaths desert camp