



// Borders manifest themselves in many ways. People always have obstacles to overcome, a wall to climb or daunting odds to prove wrong. Opportunity often lies on the other side of the border. The U.S.-Mexico border is a volatile example of a border with many faces. //

– Josán Perales, 2009 ELS Fellow



A mural of crosses on the border wall in Nogales, Mexico, each with a name of a deceased migrant who died in the desert.



Ned refills water tanks in the desert with Humane Borders.



Toni and Josán visit with Border Patrol after they apprehended two lost migrants who gave up their journey through the desert.

Unmasking Humanity Behind The Politics

While the war in Afghanistan and Iraq consumes our country's greater conscience, the largest military build up on American soil since The Civil War continues to expand along the US - Mexico border - constituting a raging battle encompassing issues of homeland security, economic impact and the moral issue of humanity. Determined to document the multiple issues and perspectives surrounding the debate, three Expeditionary Learning School teachers from Taos, New Mexico, spent their Fund for Teachers' fellowship researching the migrant workers' experiences crossing the border.

Comprising the Humanites Department at Vista Grande High School, the team included: Josán Perales, a bilingual Spanish instructor who facilitated interviews with Mexican individuals and organizations to understand the international perspective of border issues; Toni Wright, a history instructor who examined the conflicts unique to the U.S.-Mexico border in the context of root causes and present issues; and Ned Dougherty, a Language Arts instructor who met with activists and organizations in order to understand the varying perspectives.

Attempting to avoid political arguments, the team interviewed representatives from humanitarian organizations such as No More Deaths and Humane Borders, law enforcement representatives from the Minutemen Project and Border Patrol, and those in the middle making the often lethal sojourn across the Sonoran Desert. Their end game was to create a learning experience that provides primary resources

for a year-long, multi-disciplinary and school-wide curriculum entitled "Borders." Exploring the shared humanity of migrants and Minutemen alike provided the team a compelling study in contrasts and an often haunting view of the people on both sides of debate. By gaining first-hand experiences relating to the many facets of the border control issue, the team now relays facts that can empower students' deeper understanding of the issue and development of their own opinions.

"The three of us traveled to this scorching area of our country to investigate an incredibly misunderstood, complex and divisive issue shared by two countries, many cultures and a frightening reality," said Ned. "We had no idea how profound and life changing our immersion into this issue would prove to be. A group of new teachers emerged, humbled and inspired to expose the ugliest and most precious truths of this issue for our students in New Mexico."

"Through our own voices and that of many experts involved, like the migrants themselves, Border Patrol and humanitarian activists, the students are beginning to understand how incredible it may be to attempt to cross, inhibit the passage or aid this tidal wave of humanity crossing into our country daily," said Toni. "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. Let us remember that, beneath everything, we are one."