

Illegal by Bettina Restrepo

Discussion, writing, and research opportunities

Heritage and Immigration

1. “We Are All Immigrants”—Have students investigate their heritage and share around the room in a poster project or as a verbal discussion. Encourage them to bring in objects or pictures that are important to their heritage or culture.
2. Heritage Research Project—Have students interview relatives about a family member the student doesn’t know (one who has passed away or is living far from home). Students should write this up into a report, complete with documentation and then present their findings to the class.
3. Research: What does it take to immigrate to the USA? What is the full legal process?
4. Examine different groups’ cultural ideas (Christmas traditions, New Year traditions) or coming of age ceremonies (*Quinceañera*, bar mitzvah, etc.) and find commonalities and differences. What is expected, who does what, what special items/decorations are involved and so forth.
5. Research customs of a *quinceañera* through interviews, the internet, and other resources. How have customs changed in the last thirty years?
6. Discuss what defines a culture. What marks one culture from another? Is it religion? Language? Behavior?

Border Problems

1. In chapter three, a claim that South Texas steals water from Mexico. Investigate/ research his claim and the relationship between the two areas.
2. Research the recent ideas about immigration. What problems are discussed? What solutions are proposed?
3. Research and compare the standard of living in North Mexico, Mexico City, and South Texas.

Gangs

1. In the second half of the novel as Nora becomes more a part of the society in Houston, gangs become more prevalent. Research gang initiation, gang marks, gang activity. Then come back to the novel. Has the author accurately portrayed gang activity for a young adult audience?

Creative Writing: Poetry

1. Nora thinks that “Cedula’s small enough to sit in my head and burn a hole through my heart.” Write a poem, using this structure, substituting Cedula for something that is profound and has affected you—use this as the first two lines of a poem of ten lines length. (Students might describe a person, a pet, a favorite belonging, a place, etc.)
 - a. As an additional idea, consider describing the “thing” using grammatical structures (perhaps appositive phrases, prepositional phrases, participles) you are studying in class. Direct the students to use a different phrase on each line or to use several of the same phrases to create the bulk of the poem.