

PBS Series: *Borders*

www.pbs.org/pov/borders/

Borders is a video documentary about three teenagers who are facing one of the biggest challenges in their lives: leaving home for college. There are ten online episodes beginning October 8, 2002.

ESL CLASSROOM — Leaving Elsa

The following lesson plan was developed by Janet, an ESL teacher in California. Each of her students chose a character to follow at the beginning of the *Leaving Elsa* series. They watch the video journals every week and Janet plans exercises and activities around the journals. Attached are questions and video summaries that Janet has developed. Feel free to use them in your ESL classroom.

PDF VERSION

Note from Janet, ESL teacher:

These are some comprehension questions I've been using with my students before watching each episode. Each student in my class is following one of the three teens. After they watch the episode, they write the answers to the questions. Then they meet in groups to discuss them along with new vocabulary words. The following day, I pass out the episode summary as a follow-up. It serves the dual purpose of keeping them abreast of all three teens. That way they can compare the three more effectively.

I have a volunteer in my classroom that has been helping with the questions and writing the episode summaries. She moved to the United States when she was 8 years old, and went on to graduate from Stanford University. After working as a technical writer for a computer software company, she decided to get her feet wet in education. Her insight and experience have been extremely helpful both to the students and to me.

I don't know if the questions will be of much use to you. They are very basic because of the limited English skills of the students. Gradually, we plan to elicit students' opinions with more sophisticated and open-ended questions. We also plan to prepare them to write an essay. It's all still a work in progress from week to week. Thanks to POV for providing such a stimulating opportunity for learning.

Meet Cecilia

Go to “**Choose a Story**” and click on the picture of **Cecilia**. To meet Cecilia, click on the video link under her picture.

1. How old is Cecilia?
2. How does she describe herself?
3. What was difficult about her first year away from home?

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4. What does her mother say about her daughter?

Meet Gilbert

Click on the picture of Gilbert and then click on the video link under his picture.

1. Has Gilbert graduated from high school yet?
2. Has he ever left the valley town of Elsa?
3. Where does he want to go to college?
4. He wants to be a _____ when he graduates from college.
5. He has had a _____ time convincing his mother to let him leave home.

Meet Kate

Click on the picture of Kate and then click on the video link under her picture.

1. Where was she born?
2. What is her dream?
3. Her mother is from _____ and her father is from _____.
4. What does Kate say about living in the valley?

Write the name of the person you will follow for the next 9 weeks: _____

Video Episode 1

Go to the website and click on your person. Select **Video Journal** and click on **weekly entry 1**.

Cecilia

1. What is a carne guisada?

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2. What will Cecilia do with the \$550.00?
3. How does Cecilia feel about leaving Elsa?

Gilbert

1. What does Gilbert say about his goal of going to college?
2. Why do you think he is having doubts about his future?
3. How does Gilbert feel about starting his senior in high school?

Kate

1. What is Kate doing to prepare for her trip to Boston?
2. Who are the people that are like family to Kate?
3. How does Kate feel about leaving Elsa?

***Borders* Episode 1 – *Leaving Elsa* Episode Summary**

Cecilia's Video Diary 08/17/2002

Today Cecilia attends a carne guisada food sale that her family and friends organized to help raise money for her college education. The fundraiser is a big success and brings in about \$550 dollars. Cecilia is almost moved to tears when she speaks about how grateful she is for everyone's help and support. She is looking forward to going back for her

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second year of college in New York. She feels that she needs to get away from Elsa, Texas, but she is also concerned for her family because they are having some problems right now.

Gilbert's Video Diary

08/16/2002

It is 4 days before the start of the new school year. Gilbert will finally be a senior in high school. He is not as excited as he once was about going back to school. He believes his future lies in going to a good college so he can eventually become a senator and help make an impact. But he is having doubts. Because he has always been a mature and responsible young man, he has never allowed himself to wonder if this is truly what he wants. Now Gilbert is terrified that he may not be making the right choice.

Kate's Video Diary

08/5/2002

It is a couple of weeks before Kate leaves for college in Boston. She tells the viewers a little about her life in her hometown of McAllen, Texas. Her room is messy with clothes scattered everywhere as she prepares to pack for her trip. At the dance studio where Kate teaches, her students and friends say goodbye to her and tell her how much they love her. She feels very close to them, like they are all part of a big family. Kate knows that college will be very different and that she won't know anyone at first. But she feels ready to take on this new challenge. She says that people need change in their lives because it is part of the adventure.

Video Episode 2

Go to the website and click on your person. Select **Video Journal** and click on **weekly entry 2**.

Cecilia

1. Why is Cecilia going to visit her friends?
2. What kind of problem did she have last summer?
3. What does Cecilia say about the need for change in her life?

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Gilbert

1. What is different about being a senior in high school than Gilbert expected?
2. What happened that he is excited about?
3. What is the Llano Grande Center?

Kate

1. Who gave Kate a surprise party?
2. What does she say about her dorm room?
3. How many students are living in the dorm suite?

***Borders* Episode 2 Episode Summary**

Cecilia's Video Diary 08/28/2002

Today is Cecilia's last day in Elsa before going back to New York. She goes to visit some of her friends and stays up late packing for her trip. Cecilia tells us she crashed her best friend's car last summer. She has also had difficulties this summer. She is ready to go back to school and make some changes in her life. She hopes the saying "whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger" is true. Cecilia's grandfather sees her off at the airport the next day. By night time, she is back in New York where she will begin her second year at Columbia University.

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Gilbert's Video Diary

08/24/2002

Gilbert has just finished his first week as a senior in high school. Being a senior has not turned out to be what he expected. Gilbert has always thought that seniors were special, that they walked with a certain style and talked with a certain confidence because they were seniors. However, he hasn't felt that way because he knows the year will end soon. Recognizing this has been an eye-opening experience for him. Gilbert also tells us about an exciting event that happened this week. A reporter from People Magazine came to the school to do an article on the Llano Grande Center, and he was invited to participate in the interviews.

Kate's Video Diary

08/28/2002

Kate is leaving for college tomorrow. She has spent the whole day packing for the trip. A surprise party was thrown for her last night. It was her first surprise party ever, which she enjoyed very much. The next day, her family says goodbye to her at the airport. By September 1st, Kate has finally moved into her new dorm room. It is a suite with 5 bedrooms. Four of the rooms have 2 girls each, but the 5th room has 3 guys. They all share a common area and 2 bathrooms. Kate's new roommate is from Massachusetts.

Video Episode 3

Go to the website and click on your person. Select **Video Journal** and click on **weekly entry 3**

Cecilia

1. Cecilia didn't have all the money she needed to buy all her books. How did she deal with this problem?
2. What has Cecilia been afraid of?
3. What positive things has Cecilia been doing for herself?
4. What did Cecilia do on Saturday morning?

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5. Where does Cecilia's friend Jason live?

Gilbert

1. How old is Gilbert?
2. Who did Gilbert grow up with?
3. What was the worst thing for Gilbert growing up?
4. Where does Gilbert's father live?
5. Why doesn't Gilbert stay in touch with his dad?

Kate

1. What happened to Kate's computer?
2. Why were Kate's classes cancelled?
3. How does Kate feel about Boston and her roommate?
4. What kind of club is Amigos?
5. How is Boston different from McAllen?

***Borders* Episode 3 Episode Summary**

Cecilia's Video Diary 09/16/2002

Cecilia first takes the viewers to a large, beautiful cathedral as she guides us through the rest of her afternoon. While sitting in her dorm room, Cecilia talks about what she has been doing for the first couple of weeks of the new year. She didn't have enough money to buy all of her books, and she is afraid of her situation back home and not doing well in her classes. However, she has also been doing a lot of positive things for herself such as going to church and praying every night. Recently a friend of Cecilia's from her dorm suite invited her to a prayer breakfast. She shared her confessions and prayers with the

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group and came out of the meeting feeling great. She is at ease with herself and hanging in there despite everything that is going on.

Gilbert's Video Diary

09/15/2002

Gilbert decides to talk about his background and how he grew up. He had a difficult childhood because he grew up with his mom only and didn't have a father figure in his life. One of the worst things for him growing up happened during school functions where parents were invited. He had to tell his friends that he didn't have a dad. Although his father lives nearby, Gilbert doesn't feel that he needs to stay in touch with him. Despite this hardship, Gilbert says he wouldn't change his life for anything.

Kate's Video Diary

09/11/2002

Kate's week has been kind of a mess. She had to get her computer fixed because it had a virus. Today's afternoon classes have been cancelled because the school is holding a memorial service on the anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Kate loves Boston and her roommate. There are many interesting and different people. She has adjusted to her new surroundings fairly easily because she has been away from home for the past year. There is a lively social scene at Kate's college. She plans to check out the different clubs and sororities, particularly the Amigos group, the Latin club on campus. Boston is different from McAllen because there are a lot more Caucasians. Fortunately, Kate is not having any trouble fitting in.

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Video Episode 4

Go to the website and click on your person. Select **Video Journal** and click on **weekly entry 4**.

Cecilia

1. What class did Cecilia go to?
2. What is Cecilia a little worried about?
3. What is Cecilia praying for?
4. What do Cecilia's friends tell her?
5. Does she sound confident about herself?

Gilbert

1. What two great things happened to Gilbert this week?
2. Where does Gilbert work?
3. What has Gilbert been waiting for all summer long?
4. What does Gilbert want to tell those people who have been let down by their teachers?
5. Does he sound confident about himself?

Kate

1. Why did Kate miss her ballet class?
2. What things are causing stress in her life?
3. What happened to Kate's arm?
4. Who will judge the dance piece she is preparing?
5. Does she sound confident about herself?

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***Borders* Episode 4 Episode Summary**

Cecilia's Video Diary

09/23/2002

Cecilia begins by showing us around her school before her Latin American Studies class. She says hello to a passer-by outside her dorm room window. Then she takes us to a stately building with the names of several great philosophers inscribed on the front. Later on, Cecilia talks about a paper she needs to write for homework. She is also worried about a hurricane in Mexico that might hit the Rio Grande Valley. She tells us that she is still going to church and praying regularly. She is trying to get refocused on school. Cecilia's friends are impressed with the way she has been able to hang in there and keep herself together despite everything she is going through.

Gilbert's Video Diary

09/20/2002

Gilbert is really excited because two really good things happened this week. First, he got paid for working at the Llano Grande Center. He is very proud of having earned his very first paycheck. The second great thing was something Gilbert has been waiting for all summer long. He received his Brown University application in the mail! Although he knows that many other people are also applying to this college, Gilbert is confident that he has a good chance of getting in. Still, he feels a lot of self-doubt. He says this is why he wants to help and to give back to the people of the valley. He wants to give a message to every person who has been let down by teachers who tell them that they are not good enough to think about going to a school like Brown. He wants to tell them: "you can go anywhere you want to go."

Kate's Video Diary

09/17/2002

Kate is sick and had to miss her ballet class today because she needed rest. She is also already feeling stressed even though it is only the second week of school. She has a lot of books to read and several essays to write. After she got better, she is gradually getting back into classes. Kate is also working on a dance piece that she will show the faculty next week, who will decide whether her group will get to perform it. She has been practicing very hard, even getting painful bruises on her hands. But Kate feels it is worth it because she believes it is a great piece. She is crossing her fingers and hoping that her professors will agree.

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Video Episode 5

Go to the website and click on your person. Select **Video Journal** and click on **weekly entry 5**.

Cecilia

1. What food did Cecilia buy?
2. Why is Cecilia worried about her paper?
3. Why does Cecilia believe she needs more credit cards?
4. Why did Cecilia need to go to the emergency room last semester?
5. What does Cecilia's insurance company plan to do about her bill from the hospital?

Gilbert

1. What does Gilbert think might be his role in life?
2. What will happen in two weeks?
3. Why does Gilbert want to be a senator?
4. What did Gilbert realize when he was looking at his teacher in class?
5. How did Gilbert's teachers help him in high school?

Kate

1. How did Kate react when she found out she will get to perform her dance piece?
2. What kind of organization is Amigos?
3. How does the Valley compare with the rest of Texas?
4. What woke Kate up in the afternoon?
5. What did Kate do at her sorority meeting?

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***Borders* Episode 5 Episode Summary**

Cecilia's Video Diary

10/02/2002

Cecilia is concerned about several things in her life. She has her first paper due soon for her Contemporary Civilizations class. Although she did some of the reading, she didn't like it at all. She also needs to pick up her grades. Cecilia then shows us a letter she received from a credit card company denying her credit. She feels she needs to establish more credit because she has things she needs to buy. Cecilia also got a letter from her insurance company about an emergency room visit she made last year. The insurance company is refusing to pay the \$600 bill from the hospital. Cecilia is worried because she doesn't have the money to pay the bill herself if she cannot get her insurance company to pay it.

Gilbert's Video Diary

09/28/2002

Gilbert is excited because the SATs are two weeks away. He wants to do well on the SATs. Another interesting thing happened which he didn't expect. Gilbert was sitting in class and thinking about his future. He thought that he wanted to become a senator to help change lives. But he also realized that teachers do the same thing on a daily basis. Teachers have been very central in helping Gilbert get to where he is today. They helped him through the most difficult as well as the best times during his high school years. Now Gilbert is thinking perhaps he might become a teacher instead of a senator.

Kate's Video Diary

09/27/2002

Kate's third week in school has been really good. She found out that she will get to perform her dance piece, which made her very excited. She also went to a meeting for Amigos, the Latin club on campus, where she met some really cool people. There were even people from a town near where she is from in Texas. They were all very surprised because there are not too many people in Boston from the Valley area of Texas. Most of the Texans are from the larger cities like Houston. Kate also went to a meeting for a sorority where she got to hang out with and mingle with the members. She will find out in the next couple of days if she is going to pledge that sorority.