EDUCATORS’ GUIDE

ERRE: THEM AND US / ELLOS Y NOSOTROS
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This Educators’ Guide is intended as a resource for middle and high school educators to use in conjunction with a field trip to see ERRE: THEM AND US / ELLOS Y NOSOTROS. The exhibition features a replica of the border fence between Tijuana and San Diego, several sculptures recalling the visual landscape of migration and detention, and works that play with language and text to make the U.S.-Mexico border more present and immediate, and to complicate viewers’ understandings of the self and others.

The activities in this guide are intended to help you and your students use ERRE’s work to think critically about issues such as race, nationality, migration, and history, and are connected to state and national curricula in the English and Language Arts, Visual Arts, and Social Studies, with additional emphasis on Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL). The end of the guide features selected resources to support further investigation into ERRE’s work and the topic of immigration.

While this guide was designed with middle and high school audiences in mind, MASS MoCA educators would be happy to help you adapt the content to different audiences.
About Them and Us / Ellos y NOSOTROS

The U.S.-Mexico border has been the subject of increased attention and heated debate since Donald Trump declared the building of a permanent wall along the 2,000-mile boundary between the two countries as one of his top priorities as president. Artist ERRE, who lives and works between Tijuana and San Diego, has made the border a central part of his work for over two decades, examining its oft-forgotten history and shifting contours (California, Texas, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma used to be part of Mexico), as well as its current social, economic, and political implications. The primary checkpoint between Tijuana and San Diego, the San Ysidro Port of Entry, is one of the most heavily trafficked land border in the world, where over 30 million people pass each year. The endless flow of goods and people is evidence of the intricate and interdependent relationship of the two cities, and of the United States and Mexico more broadly.

For those of us who live far from its realities, ERRE brings to MASS MoCA a palpable image of the border wall with the installation, Of Fence (2017), a sculptural recreation of the weathered metal barricade that the artist knows well. This formidable architectural obstruction is—and has been for a long time—a powerful physical and psychological fact in Tijuana, where houses, restaurants, and beaches butt up against the imposing barrier. At MASS MoCA, the rusty-red metal fence stretches across 120 feet of the museum, marking the entry to a gallery where a selection of new and existing works by the artist is on view. ERRE pairs this sculptural wall with a wall of text featuring a stanza from Langston Hughes’ 1936 poem “Let America Be America Again.”

O, let my land be a land where Liberty Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath, But opportunity is real, and life is free, Equality is in the air we breathe.

The poem by the influential Harlem Renaissance writer frames the American dream as one that is deferred for most, yet imagines a future when “equality is the air we breathe.” These words bring to mind those of the oft-quoted sonnet immortalized on a plaque at the Statue of Liberty, which entreats “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” At the same time, the title of Hughes’ poem is eerily reminiscent of Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again,” which is related to tougher policies regarding trade and emigration for our neighbors to the south. The entryway leading into ERRE’s main exhibition space is lined with bar-like vertical strips of vinyl text, a work titled Umbral / Threshold (2017) which spells out the questions that ICE asks travelers crossing the border.

Language and wordplay are central to ERRE’s sculptural and conceptual practice, evident in Of Fence, which spells out a variation of the word “offense.” The double meaning is clear, with the wall acting as a deterrent to the offense (a word associated with criminal activity) of crossing the border illegally, while the crude barricade itself can be seen as an offense to the landscape and the families and communities it separates.

ERRE’s work often emphasizes the bonds between the two countries he calls his own. Perhaps his best known work, created in 1997 for InSite, an international art festival that takes place in both Tijuana and San Diego, is a 33-foot-tall wooden...
horse with two heads. Referencing the Trojan horse of Greek mythology, the monumental, hollow structure on wheels was placed at the marker that defines the geographical border line. With its two heads sharing a single body, but facing in opposite directions, the horse symbolizes the need to live in concert with each other. Yet, by invoking the Greeks’ entry into Troy, the towering structure also makes references to war. One might think of the Mexican-American War of 1846–48 which resulted in the U.S. annexing half of Mexico’s territory. The story of subterfuge might also bring to mind recent reports of undocumented immigrants entering the U.S. inside the trailer beds of commercial trucks, like the Greek soldiers hidden inside the legendary horse.

Titled Toy-an Horse, the work makes yet another play on words while referencing childhood, both the artist’s own (when he first learned the story of the Trojan Horse) and that of his children who were three and five when the artist created the work. Looking like a toy enlarged to giant proportions, the work seems to frame the border as part of a childish game, while simultaneously suggesting that we must teach our children history, or it is doomed to repeat itself. Given the recent separation of children from their parents at the border, the toy-like appearance of the structure takes on added meaning. At MASS MoCA, ERRE will display the 8 x 10 foot colossal heads of Toy-an Horse, which have been removed from their shared body and charred, as if the remains of some conflagration. Arranging them on the floor in a position that mimics the yin-yang symbol, the artist continues to emphasize the symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, despite the recent damage to our ties.

With a selection of new and existing work that emphasizes how language, movement, and architecture shape our experience and our identities, ERRE brings to MASS MoCA new perspectives on the border and the U.S. and Mexico individually. While the artist is a well-known figure on the West Coast, this presentation marks his first solo exhibition on the East Coast.

— Susan Cross, Senior Curator of Visual Arts
WHO IS ERRE?

Marcos Ramírez, known as ERRE (a nod to the rolled ‘r’ of Spanish), was born in Tijuana in 1961. He studied at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, graduating with a law degree, and later worked in the construction industry for many years to support his visual art practice. He has been the subject of a number of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA (2016); Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, CA (2014); MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, San Jose, CA (2012); Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City (2010), and Centro Cultural Tijuana, Mexico (1996). He has also participated in group exhibitions at the Oceanside Museum of Art, Oceanside, CA (2017-18); Today Art Museum, Beijing (2016-17); SITE Santa Fe Biennial (2014); the California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA (2008); Moscow Biennale (2007); The São Paulo/Valencia Bienal Valencia, Spain (2007); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2005); Havana Biennial, Havana, Cuba (2000); the Whitney Biennial, New York, NY (2000); and the InSite 1997 and 2000 editions in the San Diego / Tijuana border region.
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS & OBJECTIVES

Essential Questions:

• In what ways do we categorize people as “us” and “them?” Is it possible for people to change categories, and, if so, how does that happen?

• How does the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the surrounding political discourse contribute to an “us” and “them” mentality?

• What are other examples of ways in which groups or communities get closed off from each other?

Objectives:

• Students will consider the interconnected relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, what the two countries have in common, and what we can learn from each other.

• Students will understand borders as a metaphor for how we treat people as “other” and exclude them, and discuss other kinds of physical and metaphorical walls.

• Students will consider borders or divisions in their own personal lives and how they create, interact with, and cross them.
ART & ACTIVISM: THE BORDER WALL
Visual Arts, Current Events

Before you visit:

Contemporary artists frequently respond to current events, thereby contributing to shaping narratives about how these issues are understood more broadly. One of the most contentious issues today concerns the U.S.-Mexico border, and the debate over whether and how to increase border security and if a stronger physical border wall would be effective or necessary. Artists such as ERRE, among many others, are describing the border in their multimedia art with the goal to inform and build awareness of the complexity of issues surrounding it.

Hold a class discussion about the relative merits of making art about current events. How does art help raise awareness, and does that have any impact on changing conditions? Can your students think of any examples of when artwork had an effect on how they understood a contemporary issue?

Then, explore the following four examples of artists creating works about the border wall (page 7).

Students can research these projects in small groups to present to the larger class. Ask them to consider such questions as:

• What medium(s) are used? What is the effect of using that medium?
• How do these works interact with the border, both physically and metaphorically?
• How do these artworks encourage, discourage, or depend on participation from viewers? How does that participation connect to ideas about borders and border crossings?
• What makes these works art?
• What emotional responses do you have to these works, or do you imagine other people are having to them? What purpose might it serve to inspire these emotions in viewers?
• Who are the audiences for these works? How do the artists ensure their work reaches a wide audience? How does Instagram and “going viral”—particularly in the case of the Teetertotter Wall piece—affect the impact of the work?

Finally, students should identify 1–3 characteristics of these works (such as emotional resonance, medium, collaboration...) to adopt in creating their own activist art piece to raise awareness around a topic of their own choosing. Team up with your art teacher for additional support for students’ activist artworks.

MA Curriculum Standards:
SLCA.6–8.1, ARTS.VA.05.06, ARTS.VA.05.10, ARTS.VA.05.12, ARTS.C.06.03, ARTS.C.07.09
ERRE, Of Fence, 2017²

Enrique Chiu, Mural of Brotherhood (in process)³

JR, Kikito, 2017⁴

Ronald Rael & Virginia San Fratello, Teetertotter Wall, 2019⁵


UNDER THE SURFACE: USING ICEBERG DIAGRAMS

ELA, History & Social Studies

Common Core Connections:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

MA Curriculum Standards:
W.PK-12.8, RCA-H.6-8.8, RCA-ST.6-8.8, SLCA.6-8.2, SLCA.6-8.3, HSS.8.T7.06, HSS.NML.T4.04, HSS.USII.T5.05

Begin by having students explore the iceberg metaphor. Discuss how the bulk of the iceberg is usually hidden below the surface of the water, and therefore invisible to viewers, and introduce how that concept often applies to current events. The current phenomenon is the tip, and the history is the bulk of the iceberg.

Demonstrate the iceberg diagram for students. Use the template provided here, using an example from THEM AND US / ELLOS Y NOSOTROS. Write in “migration of corn subsistence farmers from the U.S. to Mexico.” Hold a discussion with your class about how this phenomenon is just the tip of the iceberg, with many different underlying causes. Fill out the rest of the iceberg with some of the causes that led to this particular group of people immigrating to the U.S., including: “NAFTA (passed in 1994) driving down the price of corn,” “NAFTA flooding the market with cheap, easy-to-grow yellow corn,” “farmers not wanting to switch to growing yellow corn because of taste, tradition,” “higher wages in U.S.,” “farmers can no longer find a big enough market to support themselves growing landrace corn,” and “lack of infrastructure to support displaced workers in Mexico.” (See “Related Resources” on page 14 for background information on NAFTA and its effect on migration.)

Next, have students create their own iceberg diagrams in small groups. Have each group choose its own current event to write in the tips of their icebergs, or choose from a curated series of topics based on your curriculum or current events. Ask the groups to start out by brainstorming everything they already know about that topic—and then have them check to see whether what they have gathered are facts or assumptions.

Before you visit:

Have students assess their current knowledge of immigration by taking this quiz from PBS: http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/immigration-quiz-2/

After you visit:

Create a Facing History and Ourselves “Iceberg Diagram” together as a class to research and discover more about the issues that came up during the tour. This teaching tool is meant to help students become aware not only of the underlying causes of a social phenomenon, but also of the limits of their own knowledge and of media coverage of a specific phenomenon—that what they know or hear about only represents the tip of the iceberg, so to speak.

One example relating to both Mexican immigration to the U.S. and THEM AND US / ELLOS Y NOSOTROS has to do with the migration of corn subsistence farmers from the U.S. to Mexico. ERRE addresses this history in his piece, Presidential Bed (La Cama Presidential) (shown here).

6 https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/iceberg-diagrams
help them conduct research to discover what else might be below the surface, using the following questions from Facing History and Ourselves as guidelines:

- What happened?
- What choices were made in this situation? By whom?
- Who was affected?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?

There are resources about immigration that students can use as starting points for their research in “Related Resources” (pages 14–15).
BORDERS AND LANGUAGE
English Language Arts, History & Social Studies

Common Core Connections:

MA Curriculum Standards:
R.PK-12.4, R.PK-12.6, R.PK-12.9, HSS.8.T7.03, HSS.NML.T4.04, HSS.USII.T5.05

Before you visit:

Introduce students to literary examples of walls and boundaries—one prominent example is Robert Frost’s 1914 poem “Mending Wall” (page 11). Have students take turns reading the poem out loud, and then hold a group discussion using the following questions:

• What is the dynamic between the two characters in the poem?
• What do you make of the phrase “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” repeated twice in the poem? What are the forces that require the neighbors to rebuild the wall year after year? What does that statement imply about how durable or sustainable walls are?
• What is the purpose of the wall, from the narrator’s point of view? What are other ways the neighbors might use to define property boundaries?
• The poem is written from the point of view of one of the neighbors. What might the poem say if written from the point of view of the other neighbor?
• Why do you think the narrator continues to work with his neighbor to mend the wall, if he does not fully believe in its purpose?
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
‘Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.’ I could say ‘Elves’ to him,
But it’s not elves exactly, and I’d rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father’s saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’
After you visit:

Have students read and compare the two poems “The New Colossus” (this page), written by Emma Lazarus in 1883, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s poem from his anthology published in 1900, “Unguarded Gates” (page 13). Lazarus asks us to see refugees from the standpoint of a mighty statue, accepting of all, while Aldrich’s metaphorical gates ask us to question whether the freedom to enter is beneficial and in our best interest. Students should consider the following questions in a similar vein to the Robert Frost exercise, but this time thinking about immigration:

- What kinds of language do the two poems share, and how do they differ?
- What tone is used in each?
- What similarities or differences are there between the poems and ERRE’s exhibition?

Then ask students to find a news article covering a topic within immigration, and have them analyze the language used to describe the different people involved. Have them consider such questions as:

- What adjectives are being used?
- When do authors use the words “illegal,” and when do they use “undocumented”?
- How are the two descriptors different?
- What does it mean to refer to someone using a noun versus an adjective? What other examples can they think of (e.g. language used in the LGBTQAI+ movement)?
- How does language shape who we are and what groups we belong to?
- What other kinds of “language barriers” can you think of?

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The New Colossus (1883)
by Emma Lazarus
Source: www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”
WIDE open and unguarded stand our gates,
Named of the four winds, North, South, East, and West;
Portals that lead to an enchanted land
Of cities, forests, fields of living gold,
Vast prairies, lordly summits touched with snow,
Majestic rivers sweeping proudly past
The Arab’s date-palm and the Norseman’s pine—
A realm wherein are fruits of every zone,
Airs of all climes, for, lo! throughout the year
The red rose blossoms somewhere—a rich land,
A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bound
But if a slave’s foot press it sets him free.
Here, it is written, Toil shall have its wage,
And Honor honor, and the humblest man
Stand level with the highest in the law.
Of such a land have men in dungeons dreamed,
And with the vision brightening in their eyes
Gone smiling to the fagot and the sword.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng—
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World’s poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,—
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!

O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
Fold Sorrow’s children, soothe the hurts of fate,
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn
And trampled in the dust. For so of old
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,
And where the temples of the Cæsars stood
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.
RELATED RESOURCES

On ERRE:
• Marcos Ramirez ERRE Artist Website marcosramirezerre.com
• Andrea Bowers and Marcos Ramirez Erre: A Conversation Beyond Borders vimeo.com/213752288 (video)

On NAFTA:
• “Want to Understand the Border Crisis? Look to American Corn Policy,” The New Food Economy (7/24/18) newfoodeconomy.org/border-crisis-immigration-mexican-corn-nafta

On Immigration:
• Introduction to Human Migration, Classroom Activity for Grades 6-8, National Geographic www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/introduction-human-migration
• United States Immigration Resource Library for Grades 5-8, National Geographic www.nationalgeographic.org/topics/resource-library-united-states-immigration/?q=&page=1&per_page=25
• “Beyond Walls: Why the Forces of Global Migration Can’t Be Stopped,” Special Report from Time Magazine (1/24/19) time.com/longform/migrants/
• “30 Days: Immigration” video of a Minuteman who agrees to live with an immigrant family for 30 days and visits their home country vimeo.com/11155073
• “What Part of Legal Immigration Don’t You Understand” Infographic from Reason Foundation (10/08) visual.ly/community/infographic/politics/what-part-legal-immigration-dont-you-understand
• “No One Knows How Long Legal Immigrants Will Have to Wait,” CATO Institute (7/28/16) www.cato.org/blog/no-one-knows-how-long-legal-immigrants-will-have-wait
• Define American media organization from journalist Jose Antonio Vargas defineamerican.com
• “Legal Immigration” clip from Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (9/15/19) (note: contains adult humor & language) www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXqnRMMU1fTs
On Sing Sing Prison:
- “Dramatic Escape” PBS Documentary on Sing Sing Prison (PBS Documentary) [www.thirteen.org/programs/thirteen-specials/dramatic-escape-8ozpej](www.thirteen.org/programs/thirteen-specials/dramatic-escape-8ozpej)

On Advocacy:
- Berkshire Immigrant Center [berkshireic.org](berkshireic.org)
- The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) [www.miracoalition.org/home](www.miracoalition.org/home)
- Resources for Undocumented Students Applying to College from Unafraid Educators, a chapter of the Boston Teachers Union [bit.ly/unafraidcollegeguide](bit.ly/unafraidcollegeguide)

Open all links:
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ERRE installing Of Fence (2017) at MASS MoCA for the exhibition ERRE: THEM AND US / ELLOS Y NOSOTROS