El Llano Grande Journal

Rural Challenge in South Texas

Volume 1, Number 1 | Editor: Francisco Guajardo | August 1997

Studying Ourselves in Our Schools: An Idea/Project Guide for Edcouch-Elsa and La Villa Teachers

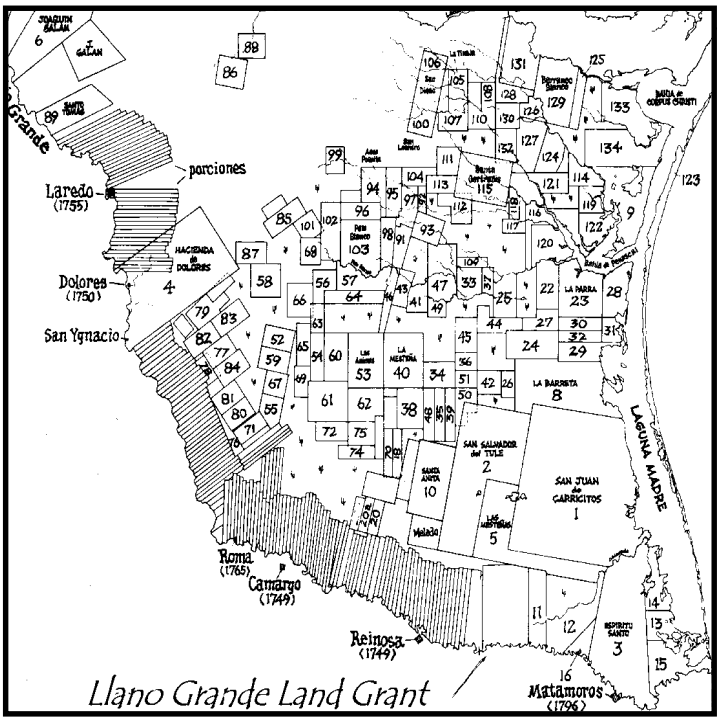
An Overview of Rural Challenge

B*ienvenidos* al *Llano Grande Journal*, a publication named after the place it serves, a land named El Llano Grande in the late 18th Century when it was granted to Juan Jose Hinojosa by the Spanish Crown. First the Spanish took the land from the Natives and settled it; then Spanish lands gave way to Mexico; then Mexican lands gave way to the United States. Today the towns of Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa exist within the geographical boundaries of that old Spanish land grant.

Y bienvenidos al Rural Challenge. In the spring of 1997, under the leadership of Edcouch-Elsa I.S.D. Superintendent Mary Alice Reyes, several folks from Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa developed a proposal which was then submitted to the Annenberg Foundation to enter its Rural Challenge competition. The Rural Challenge grant encourages rural communities across the United States to rethink the way they teach, namely by placing high value on what are rural and local. We share the Foundation's vision that we fundamentally empower ourselves when we assign a high value to what is local: in history, in science, in the arts, and in every other discipline.

We are pleased to report that we won the grant this summer and are excited about beginning our first year; years two and three will be funded when we demonstrate satisfactory first year work. The Rural Challenge grant offers resources to rural schools willing to be innovative, and they have offered us an opportunity to put Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa in the center of our instructional universe.

Volume 1, Number 1 of *El Llano Grande Journal* is authored by Ernesto Ayala, Carlos García, Mónica Marroquín, and Francisco Guajardo. Graphics by Lic. Guillermo C. Bosque.



Drawing by: Jack Jackson, from *A Shared Experience.*
Based on the Old Map Collection, General Land Office, Austin, Texas.

Contents:

Aerial view of Edcouch-Elsa High School, circa 1950 by photographer Yoder is a prime example of a local historical artifact we can use for study. Notice, for instance, the absence of the present-day gymnasium and band hall. Also make note of an unpaved Yellowjacket Drive and new football field stands. What has changed? What has stayed the same?

Focusing on the Local

Teachers in our districts frequently encourage students to study local history themes. Yearly our students research their genealogy, native vegetation, local politics, etc. But while we have centered some instruction on what is local, we have not followed a local focus throughout the schools and across the curriculum on a given year. We will have that focus and direction this year. A concerted effort emphasizing local themes in classrooms from kindergarten to senior high school can potentially yield terrific volumes of information which we can publish through the Rural Challenge project. If your students produce work you and they are proud of, PUBLISH IT! We will help you.

Some Language from the Proposal

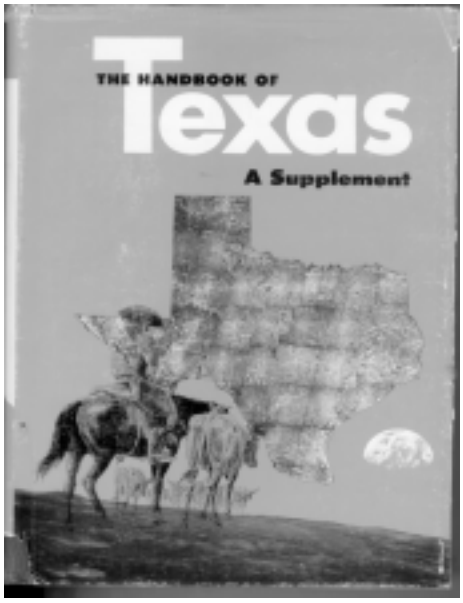
The following are excerpts from the proposal presented to the Annenberg Foundation; therein we discuss our challenges and explore the plan we have proposed to meet those challenges:

How can we establish pride and develop a sense of community? We notice the need to connect to our past, to preserve it for the future and to develop a sense of historical and cultural identity. We recognize the need to improve the social studies and history curricula, and we plan to make them more relevant and meaningful by incorporating local history scope and sequence of instruction. Edcouch- Elsa and La Villa schools districts propose to embark on a comprehensive school and community-wide project whereby the schools, in union with the community, can work to preserve our South Texas heritage.

To harness the potential strength of the community, everyone must participate. Our approach must necessarily be inclusive as we propose to employ the talents of students, professionals and paraprofessionals, and the entire community. We believe in the philosophy that effective child development is a product of the entire community's work. At the core of this extensive history research project, then, is the student: student learning, development, and growth.

Our challenge is to move from the traditional methods of instruction where teachers and administrators control, to a more democratic educational process where students, and just as importantly, the community become integral in the decision-making and research processes. Our project is an ambitious one because it promises to employ the participation of so many, but we are convinced that by democratizing the process can we begin to tell our story. Just as importantly, by democratizing work can we begin to prepare our youth and have effective, sustainable development. If we develop and prepare our youth, we assure ourselves of a brighter future for our community.

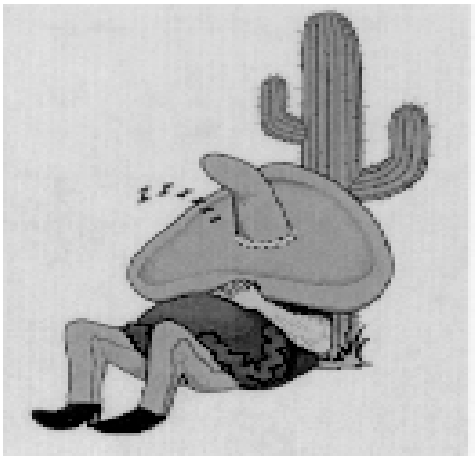
The Rural Challenge program at Edcouch, Elsa and La Villa is staffed by Francisco Guajardo, project coordinator, and Ricardo Gamez, researcher and archivist; both can provide direct support to faculty, students, and members of the community needing assistance with local research projects. Their office is at Edcouch-Elsa High School. Please call either at 956 262-4731 for any assistance you may need. Or e-mail them at FGuajardo@panam.edu.



The Handbook of Texas, published by the Texas State Historical Association, provides a traditional look at Texas history.

One immediate concern to confront is the traditional method by which history is taught. Ninety-nine percent of Edcouch-Elsa and La Villa students are of Mexican ancestry, yet our history textbooks treat people of Mexican origin only peripherally. The history of rural South Texas as it unfolded socially, culturally, or economically has yet to be told. Only the region's political history as it relates to the state and national levels has received notice by the mainstream history. Some historians have chronicled the region's past, but their narratives have generally been of the mainstream variety focusing on the major *politicos*, but marginalizing the social, cultural, and even most of the economic aspects of the area's past. Our community thus exists without a thoroughly- documented history, and we're all poorer because of that. As we begin to retrieve elements of our past, our students and our community will begin to understand and give shape to a truer and more personal context of themselves and their community. A new history will be born, one which will empower its authors as they work together to give themselves a clearer and richer identity.

The rich history of the complexities of a bicultural, bilingual, and biracial South Texas has yet to be told, and yet is told every day. We listen to it in the traditional *corridos* (folk ballads), and we listen to it as it flows out of elderly Mexican American men as they gather occasionally to make their *pan de campo* (outdoor bread). Or when women meet to weave their complicated *colchas* (quilts), or when they team up for the festive *tamalada* (making tamales) during the holiday season. The history is rich; it is in the people and in their stories—in the folk oral traditions. But it is not in the books. And because it is not, young Mexican American students feel that their culture and history are of lesser value. "Did Mexicans not exist at that time," asked a La Villa student in a United States history class a few years ago. The circumstance prompting the question is not just a shame, but it is also a disempowering process which makes young people feel inferior. We see it everyday. The force of marginalization and exclusion can be profoundly damaging to individual and collective self-esteems.



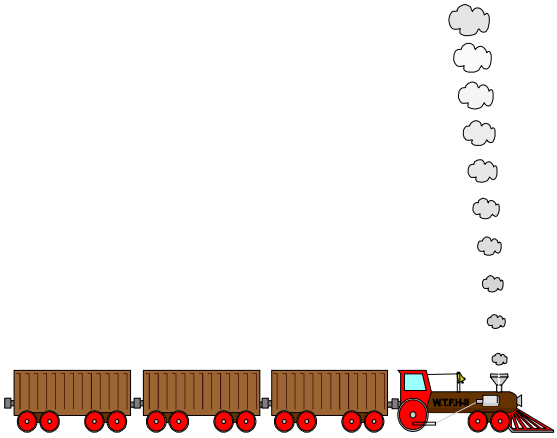
This is but one of the numerous stereotypes perpetuated in the popular culture.

We will respond to this by writing our own books. As we do that, we will all become empowered: our youth because they will find out about their ancestors' contributions and their own heritage, and the larger society because it will understand that Mexican Americans from rural South Texas are more than what the traditional stereotypes suggest. "We can erect our own Statue of Liberty," said one Edcouch Elsa student as he climbed Lady Liberty last year. "Why do European immigrants have this to commemorate their past, but we have nothing to show our struggles and history," he continued. Indeed, his insight has moved us, and we intend to begin erecting that symbolic structure of finding out about ourselves through a collective inquiry. We expect that all will be better for it.

A Very Concise History of the Area:

Archeological studies done in South Texas have yielded sparse findings on pre-Columbian societies. The area was generally unsettled because of geographical reasons: hot climate, aridity (we get about 22 inches of rain per year), aggressive vegetation. Spanish conquistador Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, marooned off the Gulf of Mexico, walked through this region in the early 1530s and recorded the rough terrain, though he found the natives to be generally humane and god-fearing. The earliest Spanish settlements began in the 1750s and were characterized by ranching communities; they engaged in limited agriculture after becoming convinced of the unfavorable conditions for large- scaled planting. Ranching persisted into the Mexican era (between 1821 and 1836), into the Republic of Texas period (1836-1845), and well into the United States era.

Before the 20th Century and before the founding of Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa, the region was home to nomadic natives, then to Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo ranching communities. Before the United States-Mexican War, the population of the region was almost exclusively of mestizo and indigenous ethnicity. After the War, a small Anglo-American presence established itself in the region, and it grew slightly after the American Civil War; soldiers made up the larger portion of those settlers. The large influx of Anglo settlers came around the turn of the century when the economy began



Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa were founded during this period of rapid social change. The farming era was ushered in during the turn of the century, following the construction of railroads. As South Texas experienced this intense change, land companies played an important role in promoting an arid, semi-desert area as a tropical paradise promising the prospect of abundance and riches. By early 1930's, palm trees planted by land development companies lined a number of South Texas streets. The Rio Grande Valley, as the area came to be called, would follow the path cleared by those promoting agriculture during the first decades of the 1900's, and South Texas would thereafter become dependent on agriculture for the greater part of the 20th Century.

North Elsa road leading to Engleman Farms, circa 1945, photograph by Clarence Johnstone.

Ideas for Projects

The following is a sampling of ideas intended to aid teachers/students as they develop projects focusing on local themes. It is but no means an exhaustive list. Teachers should feel free to add to the list or to pursue other local topics they may find more relevant for their instructional needs. Again, this is but a supplement.

SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSES

Castroville

Archeology:
Teachers and students can work with local archeological sites designated by the Texas Historical Commission's Office of the State Archeologist to find how Indians and the early Spanish dealt with the harsh conditions of the area;

Pedernales

Arrowheads are from a publication of The Texas Historical Commission.

Architecture:
Students can study Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo American styles of building; study how townships were laid out, etc.; through studying architecture students can also learn of the natural resources used to build structures. The *jacal* below, for example, is made from mesquite wood and filled with a variety of other local resources. What are those other ingredients?

Photograph of a *jacal*, from *A Shared Experience.*

Autobiography:
Develop autobiographies through which each student can pursue genealogical studies; students can also write/read biographies of local people;

Culinary Arts:
Students (and teachers) can learn how to make *tortillas*; study the dietary value of *tortillas*; learn about *tamales*, *buñuelos*, *pan de campo*, *fajitas*, etc; students can study the effects of Mexican food: good health/bad health; *empacho*, etc.;

Economics:
Students can study local, regional, and global economies as they directly relate to local people; relevant topics include farming, irrigation, cheap labor, entrepreneurship, formal economy vs. informal economies; study relationship between race and class within given economy; how does the economy south of the border compare or contrast with the economy north of the border? How do they impact one another?

Etiquette:
Do South Texans behave any differently than do others? study issues of behavior, manners, respect, etc.;

Gender Roles:
Study roles of men, women, girls, and boys; roles of grandmothers, grandfathers, *tías*, *tíos*, etc.; study *machismo* historically and as a contemporary issue;

Geography

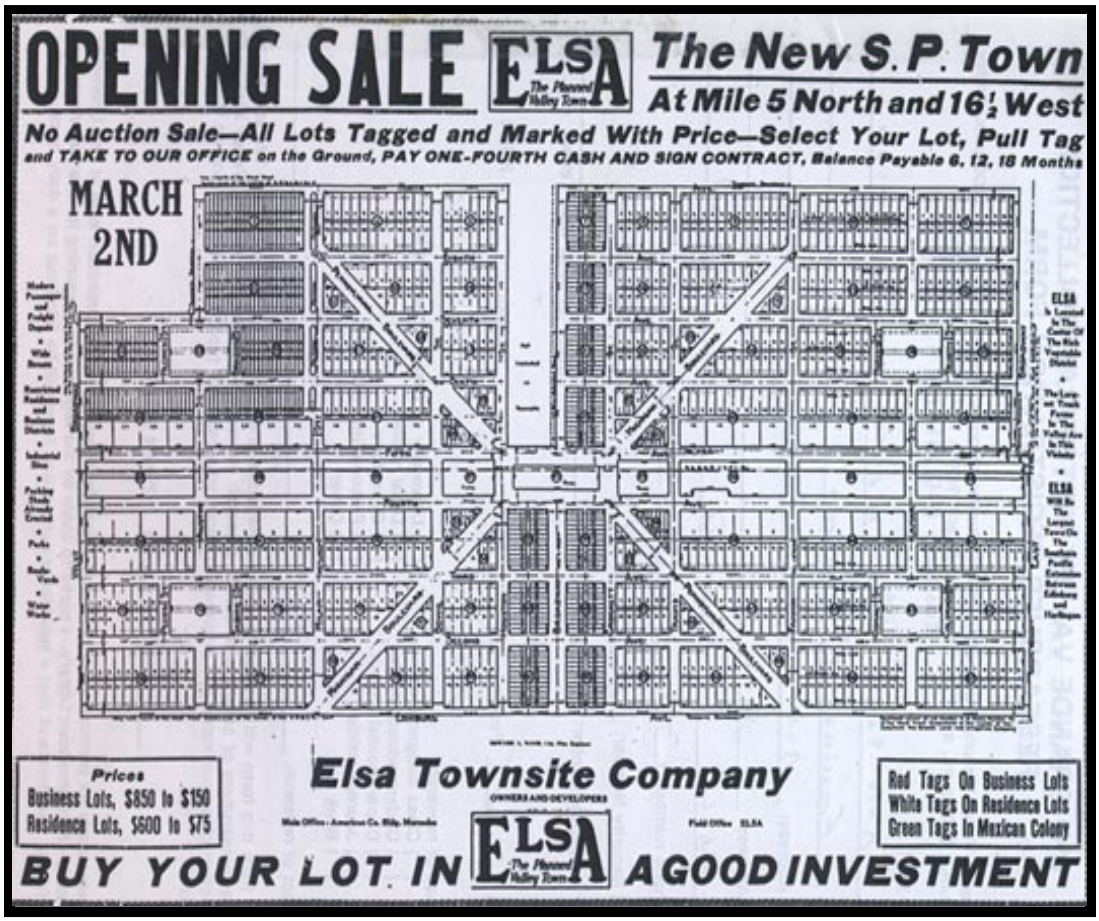
Students can study the **topography** of the Delta area; arrange outdoor activities to expose students to geography of the area.

The political entities controlling South Texas. From *A Shared Experience*.

Political and cultural geography:
Study Indian groups who inhabited the Rio Grande delta; study the first Spanish explorations, settlements, and old Spanish land grants given in present-day South Texas; trace the evolving political boundaries as the area changed from Native to Spanish to Mexican, to Republic of Texas, to United States, to Confederate state; study county and township political boundaries; study land formations, water, rainfall, etc.

Mapping:
Students can identify who lives in each household of Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa; they can play the role of Census Bureau by mapping the entire area; the massive data collection can be effectively done through the oral interview process;

City Planning:
Students can use geometric and basic math skills (area, acreage, mileage, etc.) to create models of cities. Or they can use the same skills to study a layout of a city such as the illustration below of the Elsa Townsite on March 2, 1927.



Race Relations:
Students can study the relationship between Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans locally, regionally, nationally, even internationally; photo below shows race relationship within specific labor setting.

While relations between Mexican-origin people and Anglos were often cordial, the historical record also shows there were times of conflict. This Robert Runyon photograph (to the left) shows three Texas Rangers with what they described as "Dead Mexican Bandits." It turned out the dead men were ranchhands from Las Norias, a ranching community north of Raymondville.

Clearing mesquite and brush in South Texas. Photograph by Robert Runyon.

The *Virgen de Guadalupe* carries great religious and symbolic value in the lives of many Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Students can study the history and meaning of the Virgen.

Religion:
Students can study the role of the Catholic church and its importance in the communities; study the emergence of Protestant denominations in the area; understand the role of religion in Indian societies of South Texas during pre-Columbian times;

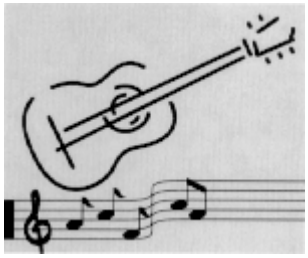
Identity:
It is a complex but critical theme which can be explored in good depth through study of history, geography, literature, science, etc.; who are you, individually, and who are we, collectively? It is healthy to have a firm grounding regarding who we are as historical players, as members of families, as members of a community, etc. as seen through the eyes of local people;

Timelines:
Students can trace local history as it corresponds to national and global events; for example, what was happening in this region when the Founding Fathers of the United States met at Independence Hall in the summer of 1776? It just so happens the Nuevo Santander colony was into its fourth decade of life. One report from the Viceroy's office in New Spain states that in 1757 (when British American colonials were fighting the French in the French and Indian War) 8,993 colonists settled in 24 villas along the Rio Grande, and their livestock totaled some 58,000 horses, 25,000 cattle, 1,874 burros and 288,000 sheep and goats. Clearly, there was robust activity and an abundance of life along the Rio Grande delta well before the United States of America was even conceived;

Language Arts:

Cognates:
Students can study the derivation of specific words unique to region; attempting to understand elements of the Tex-Mex dialect can be a challenging academic exercise.

Corridos:
Study *corridos* as literature. What do these folk ballads say about people, about community, and about history? Are there similarities between corridos of South Texas and the musical expressions of people from other parts of the world? Study the "Corrido de Gregorio Cortez, the *corridos* of heroes and outlaws, and the thousands of other characters whose experiences are tied to a South Texas context. Our students can also write their *corridos*, just as they compose essays and short stories. Let's expand the boundaries of the traditional canon of American literature, or let's create our own canon.



Folklore:
Tales, *leyendas*, etc. of the region can be used as literary expressions of culture; those can be compared and contrasted with folklore of other regions, states,or countries. There is plethora of legends, tales, jokes, etc., all of which can be treated as literature.

German and French Classes:
German and French language students can participate in translating oral interviews into the languages they study.

Local Literature:
The literature on our area may be sparse (check selected bibliography at end of section); but if the literature is insufficient, then we need to create our own. Our students are as creative as any. Let's create the tradition of publishing our own stories so future generations can readily access local literature.

Novels/plays:
Pieces of literature selected by teachers can be more meaningful if they deal with local themes; some of these may be hard to find, but they are out there. Relevant playwrights such as Luis Valdez and Carlos Morton are but a few people to consult, though we should also create our own historical and contemporary drama.

Shakespeare, **et al**:
A word on the Bard and others such as he: the Shakespeares, and the Dickens, and the Hawthornes are clearly important writers who have much to offer. However, our students' cultural and language experiences are generally removed from that which the mainstream literature offers. We can get our students excited about literature more easily if we can expose them first to what is local. Use local literature as a springboard to study more traditional, mainstream works. Interestingly, we will quickly find the universality of our local literature; we will explore the same themes and issues which which Shakespeare himself so insightfully played.

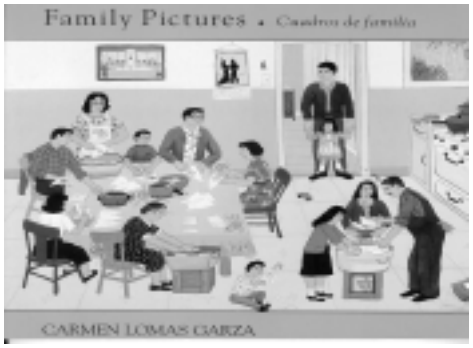
Spanish Classes:
Students in Spanish classes can work on their Spanish language skills by translating transcripts of oral interviews done with Spanish-speaking interviewees. Spanish classes can also take a literature approach by writing biographies, stories, poetry, etc., which the Rural Challenge project can then publish. We can begin to create our own Spanish language literature.

Reading Locally and Universally:
There is great inherent value in telling, writing, and reading our own stories. But there may be even greater value in comparing our stories to those of people from different places. Is our *La Llorona* similar to the Greek Medea, for example. Is *El Cucúi* like the American mainstream culture's Boogie Man? Do Asians or Africans, or other Americans have something similar to our *corridos*? When our students begin to research these questions, they may find that the specificity of their historical and cultural experience is really universal.

Selected Bibliography:

Elementary Grades:

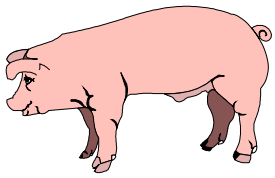
Gloria Anzaldúa, a native of Hargill, has published several books including her most recent children's book *Friends from the Other Side*, which deals with Mexican American children who discriminate against a "*mojadito*" from Mexico; it is good elementary literature. Juan Sauvageau-Pro's *Stories that must not Die* has become a classic of sorts (Pan American Publishing, Co., L.A., 1989). Linda Jacobs Altman's *Amelia's Road*, a good read with beautiful illustrations, is about a seasonal fieldworking family (Lee & Low Books, Inc., 1993). Omar Castañeda's *Abuela's Weave* focuses on the knitting and weaving experiences of women of the Southwest (also Lee & Low Books, Inc., 1993). Maria García's *The Adventures of Connie and Diego* deals with origins, food, and culture of Mexican people and has colorful illustrations by Malaquías Montoya (Children's Book Press, 1987). Similarly, Clara Lomas Garza's *Family Pictures* (Children's Book Press, 1990) combines beautiful artwork with clear narrative.



Norma Cantú, an English professor at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, has published the reflections of a Mexican American girl living along the border in *Canícula*, good for late elementary but especially junior high reading. Two favorites are *Tórtillitas Para Mamá*, a collection of nursery rhymes (Henry Holt & Co., 1981) and Gary Soto's *Too Many Tamales* (Putnam, 1993).

Junior High:

Two terrific books for junior high reading are David Rice's *Give the Pig a Chance* (Bilingual Press, 1996) and Danny Santiago's *Famous all over Town* (Plume Books, 1983). *Pig* focuses on growing up in Edcouch—can't get any more local that. Students have responded excitedly to this critically-acclaimed book. Despite some provocative language, it is a book every teacher should have. Santiago's story is about kids growing up in East Los Angeles. Though it is the urban experience, it is nevertheless about Mexican American kids who deal with issues common to our students'.



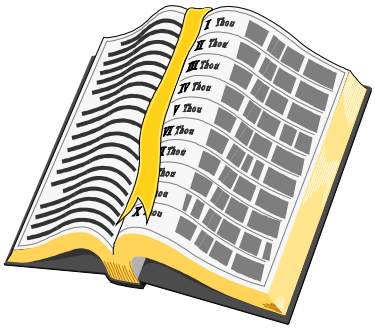
Norma Cantú's aforementioned *Canícula* is good for this age level, especially because Mexican American female have much more of a presence in the stories. For more women's literature close to the South Texas experience, Arte Público Press in Houston should be consulted. Arte Público publishes the works of numerous Latina writers including Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, and María Helena Viramontes just to name a few outstanding writers. Teachers can select appropriate selections from the literature. But please, add to this terribly abbreviated list by identifying other works and by having your students produce their own.

High School:

Jovita González's *Caballero* (1996) is a fascinating historical novel set in the Mexican American War of 1846-1848. It is a terrific read replete with issues of gender, nationalism, patriarchy, class, and race—good for high school. Rolando Hinojosa's series on the Klail City mysteries has been in circulation since the 1970s, and he continues to add to it. His numerous novels about politics and culture in Hidalgo County are appropriate for high school classes. Tomás Rivera's *Y no se lo tragó la tierra: And the Earth did not Devour Him* is an award winning book which focuses on the struggles of a migrant farmworking youth. Rivera's book is published by Arte Público Press as are numerous other works that deal with issues relevant to our students' experiences.

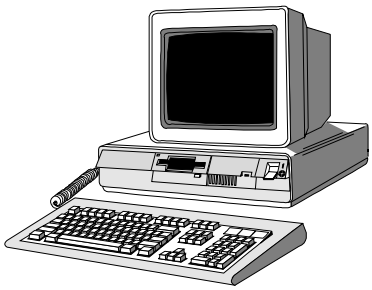
Corridos also provide a relevant literary genre. This folk ballad musical expression is among the oldest mediums by which we communicate our experiences. The study of the lyrics and the music of *corridos* in literature classes can open new ways of "hooking" students into reading, writing, and learning. Have students create their own *corridos*: about themselves, their families, their *barrios*, their experiences.

Again, please force this list to grow by inspiring your students to produce their own literature.



Vocational Classes:

Building trades classes can study the Mexican tradition of building with sandstone, mesquite, mud, adobe, etc. Students can study how that tradition differs from the Indian style of building. Which elements did each use to build? How do early local structures differ from other structures found along the Rio Grande River. Students can study how Camargo, Mier, Guerrero Viejo and other old towns were built by the early Spanish settlers and compare how those structures differ from the *jacal* and other early structures of the Delta area. What about chimneys? How important are water resources for building? Students can study the role of men and women in the construction of homes, etc. Let's study how regional people have worked to construct local structures. Similarly, hand craftmanship has a long tradition in South Texas, from building fences and *jacales*, to working with computers in the contemporary era.



Computer Classes:
Students can develop data bases, design newsletters, prepare publication materials, etc. Technology classes will be an important part of our project.

The Fine Arts

Themes related to the fine arts are everywhere in our community, ranging from popular culture concepts such as contemporary music and graffiti, to the more traditional religious icons used in the Catholic church to praise life. The traditional art has lost much attention in contemporary Mexican American life for a variety of reasons: among them is the relative neglect we give it in the schools. This is unfortunate because there is much to learn from the old traditions; there are rich symbols of life, death, celebration, rites of passage, etc.

Though we may be losing the art, ironically, we've kept the artists. Numerous youngsters in our community demonstrate incredible musical, drawing, and painting talents. The fine arts, however, are not highly valued in our community, largely because our people are too concerned with issues of economy or in many cases survival. Issues of art, then, are frequently suppressed. We are a creative people, but to revive this relatively dormant creativity, we must allow our youth an opportunity find their art. It promises to be a gradual process, but one which will bear great creative work.

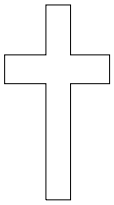
Fine Arts Classes

Holidays:
Students can study the numerous holidays: *día de 1os reyes magos, el día de los muertos*, etc. Holidays in Mexico and the United States Mexican have much in common, yet they have much in contrast. Students can compare/contrast the experiences.

Local art activities:
Students can draw, sculpt, paint, photograph, design, etc. on local themes: e.g., photographing an elderly man sitting outside H.E.B.; drawing a sketch of a local woman walking into the local *panadería*; painting kids playing en *un canal*; designing a local building, etc. These ideas can be central to an art class, and the products can be submitted for competition in art contests.

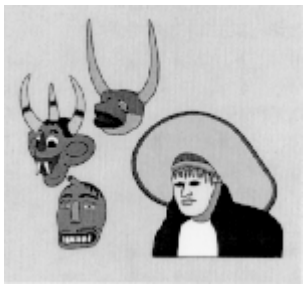
Works can also be displayed in school hallways, in school offices, in libraries, in community buildings, in public offices, etc.; create your own museums...

Focus on Latin American art, just as we focus on European and mainstream American art; develop your own art shows: campus wide, district wide, or community wide. As many of our art teachers have done, let's continue to nurture our own artists through the study of local themes.



Students can connect local art to holiday themes; be as create as you can with ideas. One student suggested erecting a type of mural or sculpture in a public place to look similar to the Stations of the Cross at the *Virgen de San Juan* Shrine. Each station, he suggested, can be about an event that has occurred in Edcouch, Elsa, or La Villa history. Each station can include a description of the impact of the event/history involved.

Las Mascaras:
Have students make their own *mascaras*; study the meaning behind the creation of this macabre work of art; elementary students especially love this kind of work.



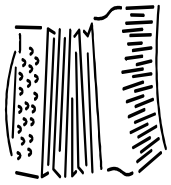
Dress-up Day:
How did the Indians, Spanish and Mexican rancheros, the Anglo immigrants, the Mexican immigrants of the Rio Grande delta dress? Teachers and students can develop any type of project with the focus on those questions.

Art Displays:
Hallways, libraries, public buildings, and building of commerce can all display local artistic themes which can be produced by anyone—teachers, students, and other members of the community.

A piñata party drawn by Clara Lomas Garza in *Family Pictures*.

Monument:
A student recently suggested erecting a historical structure, because we have nothing like the Statue of Liberty. His suggestion "to commemorate the struggle of Mexican Americans through a symbolic structure" can begin through this project. It can be a local theme pointing to strong local values, but it can also reflect the universality of our struggle--of the struggle of people. There is no limit to what we can do.

Holidays:
Music can be part of any holiday. Let's focus local music to make holidays richer. *Cantando las mañanitas* and doing other kinds of *serenatas* are beautiful forms of expression that should be kept alive.



Music:
Students can learn about the origins of the Mexican music: *Conjunto*, *Tejano*, etc. Instruments such as the *bajo sexto*, the accordian, and the *guitarrón* have an important role in regional and local music. Music contest such as what Mr. Layton sponsors should continue to be encouraged. Let's focus on local themes through music. Let's dance to it too, and let's do it with the entire community. Students can have music club through which they can sponsor numerous events.

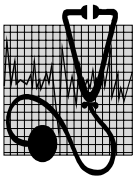
La Fiesta:
Students and teachers can show their work in an annual *fiesta* where the entire community becomes involved. This can be a multiple day event, similar to the old Spanish/Mexican fiestas. Art contests, dress-up contests, dance contests, food competitions, etc. There is no limit to what we can do with such as *fiesta*.

Publications:
Students and teachers can publish a monthly magazine with a focus on local art.

Science classes:

The role of the sciences in the Rio Grande Valley cannot be underestimated. From the food we eat to our methods of healing, science in one way or another affects our lives. In our classrooms the focus should shift to all the important local instances of science; in effect we can bring science to the students. By doing this we promote interest in those subjects that merit important consideration for future generations. The following are suggestions for projects and assignments that can be incorporated into science curricula. Please add your own ideas to the list.

Native plants and animals:
Students can study the native plants and animals of the Delta area; which are the native grasses, trees, etc.; did buffalo roam the Rio Grande delta at some point in history? Which are the native birds, etc.? Are mesquites native?



Medicinal uses:
Students can study the differences between the use of folk healing methods and traditional medicine use in our community. Study reasons why many locals buy medicine in Mexico.

Students can study meaning of ***curar de susto*** and other local folk concerns.

Curanderismo:
Students can study the role and value of *curanderismo* in the community. What about the role of *parteras* (midwives)?

Illnesses and Diseases:
Are there illnesses and diseases common in South Texas. What about high rates of diabetes in the Mexican American community?

Environmental:
Students can study environmental issues such as waste in the Rio Grande, and the environmental impact of maquiladoras along the border.

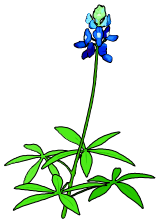
Land Studies:
What type of soil do we have in the Delta area? How fertile is it for agricultural purposes? Is it adequate for other types of industries? What is the salt concentration in the soil?

Students can research the historical and present uses of **irrigation** in agriculture in the Delta area;

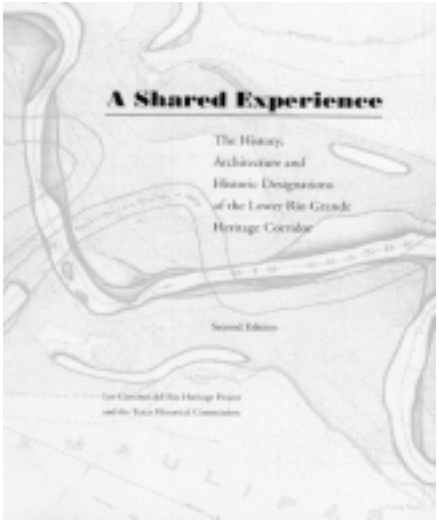
Students can study the levels of **rainfall** in South Texas. Given our water shortages, is this a good place for agriculture?

Heat: students can study effects of heat on people,on land, and on plants in South Texas. Also study how South Texans deal with heat.

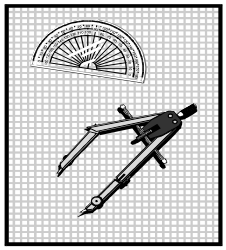
Students can grow **botanical gardens** which include native as well as agricultural vegetation;



A Good Sourcebook:
An outstanding book which covers regional history (though not local necessarily), architecture, and some science is *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor* edited by Mario Sánchez. Published by the Texas Historical Commission's Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project, it is accompanied with a teacher's guide with the same title and subtitled *A Teacher's Companion Activities and Resource Book*. By September each of our campus libraries should have at least a handful of copies for teacher, student, and community use.



Mathematics:

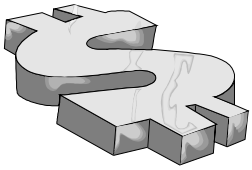


Mathematics in a historical project is very relevant. From studying the utilization of mathematics by the indigenous inhabitants of the Rio Grande delta to the use of mathematics by the modern statisticians, we can investigate the impact math has had in the Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa area. Please add to this abbreviated list.

Calendar/astronomy:
Students can investigate how the indigenous people utilized celestial bodies to create a calendar in which they were able to calculate precise agricultural seasons; try to replicate some of these calendars.

Land Studies:
Students can familiarize themselves with common units of measurement such as acres, miles, etc. which are commonly used in the Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa; students can find out how large the Delta Area is.

Population Counts:
How accurate is the most recent census? Is the Census Bureau counting every single one of our residents? Let's research to find out. We can use the oral history approach to answer these questions (see page 14 for explanation of oral history).



Income research:
Asking people how much money they make may be a sensitive question, but if you and your students can find a way to do it, you can conduct an important analysis of income levels in our communities. From data collected students can then do other demographic analyses and add variables to the study: how much money do men make compared to women? difference in income between ethnic groups? income of single parent homes vs. income of two parent households, etc.

Disease statistics:
Students can call local hospitals, clinics or family practitioners to inquire about which diseases most inflict the residents of the Delta area; from the data gathered students can then compile demographic information matching the most common diseases with the number of people affected by each disease.

Interdisciplinary Studies:
Math classes can collaborate with other classes on specific research projects. The City Planning entry on page 6, for instance, can be used for research by both a history and a math class. Measuring dimensions of the city's layout can be done by math students, while history or even geography students can study the extant social and cultural conditions which would allow for processes such as segregation. Students can also study the impact of the railroad on the creation of a town. The possibilities are endless.

On doing oral histories

To reconstruct the history of our community we must hear the stories of the people. Much of the history of South Texas is not in the books we study, but they are instead in the folk oral tradition. To capture that history, we must conduct oral interviews. Oral interviews can be an integral part of any course's instructional process. Just as a history class can profit greatly from oral interviews, so can a biology class, or an art class, or any other class. A biology class, for example, can ask people specific questions which relate to plants, animals, and other life forms with which local people interact.

The oral interview process has a structure. First, students and teachers follow the process of identifying interview subjects, after which the student should ask the subject for permission to be interviewed. Then a questionnaire instrument relevant to the class and the interview subject is developed: included here should be objectives and goals of the interview. After fine-tuning the questionnaire (see bottom note on questionnaire development) and securing equipment a tape recorder, cassette, and photo camera if possible, students should then conduct the interview. The final phase, the transcription, is perhaps the most arduous. Students should type the interview, edit, and finalize. Revision of the product would determine whether a follow up interview is necessary.

Every class should tailor the questionnaire to meet the needs of the class, but every questionnaire should also ask for the same biographical information. An effective format could have two parts: part one asking for standard biographical and part two asking for questions specific to the needs of the student and class. Part one can follow this model:

Interviewer:
Date of Interview:
Place of Interview (address):
Questions on Interviewee:
Date of Birth:
Place of Birth:
Lived in area since:
Size of family (number of boys? girls?):
People residing in household:
Families living in household:
Level of education:
Income level (optional):
Education of children:

Every interview should also include an Interview Agreement. Please feel free to use the format on the following page; make as many copies as you need.

Oral histories provide an effective means of retrieving information from the past. Illustration from *A Shared Experience.*

LLANO GRANDE CENTER
FOR RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Interview Agreement

The purpose of the Llano Grande Center for Research & Development's oral interview project is to gather and preserve family and demographic information. Tape recording and transcripts resulting from such interviews become part of the archives of the Llano Grande Center for Research & Development. This material will be made available for historical and other academic research by researchers and members of the family of the interviewee.

We, the undersigned, have read the above and voluntarily offer the Llano Grande Center for Research & Development full use of the information contained on recordings and in transcripts of these oral interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this research material, we hereby assign rights, title, and interest pertaining to it to the Llano Grande Center for Research & Development, Edcouch-Elsa Independent School District and La Villa Independent School District.

Interviewer (signature)

_____

*Date:*_____

Name of Interviewer (print)

_____

Interviewee (signature)

_____

*Date:*_____

Name of Interviewee (print)

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