

Study Guide: *Barrio Stories 10 Year Anniversary 2026*

Barrio Stories 10 Year Celebration

with contributions from Elaine Romero, Silviana Wood, Martin Zimmerman, Milta Ortiz, Veronica Weatherbie, Chanel Bragg, Marc David Pinate, and Lydia Otero

The plays:

- *Dirt* by Elaine Romero
- *Building a Family Home* by Veronica Weatherbie
- *Meet Cute* by Veronica Weatherbie
- *Bees in the Trap* by Chanel Bragg
- *I Know this Place* by Lydia Otero
- *Slap, Slap, Brush* by Martin Zimmerman
- *La Curandera* by Silviana Wood
- *That's Another Story* by Marc David Pinate
- *Mujeres Poderosas* by Marc David Pinate
- *Chinese Markets* by Milta Ortiz

The Barrio Stories Project

From Oral History to Theater

Barrio Stories is a celebration of the history and heritage of Arizona's historic Mexican-American neighborhoods. Conceived by Borderlands Theater in 2015, the project is an ongoing site-specific series intended to preserve and reflect the stories, people, and places that made these barrios so vital to the cultural fabric of the Southwest.

Over a 60 current and former residents of Barrio Viejo, Barrio Anita, Barrio Hollywood, Menlo Park, and Nogales were interviewed, recounting memories of growing up in each neighborhood. Themes of Loss, Celebration, Adversity, Food, Family, and the Ways of the Barrio emerged, heavily shaping each Borderlands production. Residents were interviewed on video. The video oral histories and community memories made up a large part of the event.

Barrio Viejo (also known as "La Calle") and Barrio Anita became the primary subjects of the Borderlands Theater project, each taking on a different process and presentation. For its third iteration, Barrio Stories was presented over two nights in Nogales, Arizona.

The First Installment (2015-2016): The Time Capsule-Barrio Viejo "La Calle"

For Barrio Viejo –the subject for the first Barrio Stories (2016) – the production was based on interviews with elders who once lived in the neighborhood. Their stories told of the destruction of their barrio and their displacement under **urban renewal projects** by city planners of the 1960's. This first iteration of Barrio Stories addressed a painful, yet profound history of displacement, and drew heavily from Lydia Otero's book on the subject, ***La Calle***. There was

also celebration, culling memories of going to the cinema, of the people, the food, music, and folklore. In effect, this first Barrio Stories was a **time capsule** of different voices, interviews which inspired playwrights to adapt them into vignettes, giant puppet performances, and video installations which Borderlands staged in **the same place Barrio Viejo used to exist– in what is now the plaza of the Tucson Convention Center.**

Barrio Anita and Beyond

While the first iteration of *Barrio Stories* in 2016 focused on **creative place keeping** by re-inhabiting the Tucson Convention Center grounds with the memories of Tucson's original Mexican-American neighborhood, *Stories* in Barrio Anita focused on **building stronger connections** among the current residents. After surveying neighborhood residents in the Fall of 2017, it was clear they felt disconnected from their neighbors. Working with a small contingent of Anita residents looking to reestablish an official neighborhood association, project artists designed the culminating event as a way of bringing residents out of their homes to viscerally experience the history of where they live, and generate enthusiasm and opportunities to get to know each other in order to better organize themselves to make improvements to the neighborhood and address growing gentrification issues.

For the third installment, *Barrio Stories: Nogales*, Borderlands travelled an hour away to the Arizona-Mexico border. Nogales, Arizona was once a city booming with traffic as a gateway from country to country. Mexicans would cross over to buy American goods in a shared city but due to the militarization of the border wall, the city fell into economic collapse. Through the help of Southwest Folklife Alliance, which had been crucial partners since the beginning of the Barrio Stories project, Borderlands interviewed business owners and community members to tell the story of a life-changing separation.

The latest installment of *Barrio Stories*, *West Side Stories*, tells the history of the folks in the Menlo Park and Barrio Hollywood neighborhoods, who built the houses and businesses they still live in to this day. These stories featured the generational differences from past to present and how a strong foundation leads to a strong future. There are stories of pride, belonging and preservation.

Themes

- Community and belonging: Barrio Stories focuses on the intergenerational relationships within neighborhoods of families and neighbors. It examines how specific buildings, homes, streets and people become connected to individuals' memories and sense-of self.
- Memory/Oral History: Barrio Stories preserves the stories of residents-past and present-and histories that may not appear in textbooks or official records.
- Displacement/Loss: Barrio Stories highlights what happens when communities are removed from their homes, how they rise up or against, and what happens as a result.

- Resilience and reclamation: Barrio Stories uses artistic storytelling to uplift histories that have been forgotten, ignored, or replaced.
- Civic engagement and social change: Barrio Stories seeks to empower each community by not only remembering the past but strengthening neighborhoods to shape their communities' futures.

Neighborhood Landmarks

These spots served and currently serve as third spaces-places where the community gathers, shares resources, organizes, mourns and celebrates. Though some of these places may no longer exist, the solace and protection they provided for their communities will be felt and remembered for generations to come. This list is not comprehensive as there are countless homes, worship spaces, parks, restaurants, bars, event spaces, stores, etc. that have helped to keep these neighborhoods alive.

The Bee Hive (1900-1938)- a speakeasy on the corner of Meyers and Convent in the historic Barrio Viejo. A sanctuary where musicians, travellers, and locals gathered to listen to music, dance, and enjoy. Predominantly a space created for black joy and solace.

El Rio Neighborhood Center (1972-present day)- Located in west Tucson and born out of the social justice movement, the center sits on Speedway between Barrio Hollywood and Barrio El Rio-a symbol of resistance against the El Rio Golf Course and the injustices the west-side was facing. It has always been a learning and organizing space. Today you'll find resources for the elderly, youth, a library, a basketball court and more.

Southside Presbyterian (1906-present day)- Originally named the Papago Presbyterian Church, as a response to white congregations' refusal to worship with Indigenous peoples, this church sits in South Tucson in a predominantly Tohono O'odham community. Throughout its long life, it has served as a meeting place for groups to organize and band together. It was the central meeting space for the Civil Rights Movement in the 50s and 60s and the birthplace of the Sanctuary Movement from 1969-1980s.

Sentinel Peak/"A" Mountain (pre-1692-present day)- for centuries Sentinel Peak was used as a lookout and for signal fires by Indigenous peoples and early settlers. In 1916 an "A" was mounted onto the side of the peak by University of Arizona football players, who hauled rocks up the mountain on the backs of horses. It serves as a symbol of pride and a natural meeting place for locals and tourists alike to take-in the city of Tucson.

The Del Rio Ballroom (1948-1994)- a cultural hub for social dances, weddings, and parties. The building was demolished in 1994 for the expansion of I-10, it used to sit at 718 W. Speedway.

Sosa-Carrillo House (1850s-present day)- a historic adobe residence in downtown Tucson, dates back to the 1850s–1860s and was associated with José María Sosa III and his family before Leopoldo Carrillo and his wife, Jesús Suárez Carrillo, acquired the property in the late 1870s. The house has been known by several names, including the Sosa-Carrillo House, Carrillo House, and Fremont House or Casa del Gobernador. The Fremont name referred to a long-standing local tradition that John C. Frémont, Arizona’s first territorial governor, and his family stayed there; however, the National Register documentation notes that this connection is historically uncertain and debated. The property was originally listed on the National Register in 1971 as the Fremont House, but its name was changed to Sosa-Carrillo-Fremont House in 1992 to better reflect the documented history of the Sosa and Carrillo families. Historically, it is one of the few surviving remnants of Tucson’s former Mexican barrio that escaped the large-scale urban renewal of the 1960s.

La Cinderella (1947-present day)- The oldest living store on Morley Avenue in Nogales, AZ. La Cinderella is a historic, family-owned retail store founded by the Kory family in 1947. Originally established on Morley Avenue, near the U.S.–Mexico border. It has sold women’s shoes, clothing, handbags, jewelry, and bridal-related goods, and remains an important example of the family businesses and cross-border commerce that shaped downtown Nogales.

Morley Avenue (late 1800s-present day)- the historic main commercial street in downtown Nogales, Arizona, running through the city’s traditional business district near the U.S.–Mexico border. Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it has been an important center for cross-border trade, tourism, and local businesses. Its historic buildings and businesses reflect Nogales’s identity as a binational border community.

Key Words and Phrases

1C: in Tucson public schools- a mandatory, segregated English-immersion program that operated from about 1919-1967. It was created for Latine, Indigenous, and Chinese students who were not fluent English speakers.

Adobe: a building material made from earth (dirt), clay, straw, and other organic material, that dries in the sun and absorbs heat and keeps the inside of buildings naturally insulated.

Calle: a street, road, or neighborhood.

Conjunto music: One of the earliest forms of “Tex-mex” music, originating in the 1920s. “Conjunto” directly translates to “together” in English. The main instrument used is the accordion with influence from German folk music, it is music of the working-class, often heard at family celebrations, dance halls, and community gatherings. Other common instruments heard are a bajo sexto, electric bass, and the drums.

Curandera: a traditional folk-healer or medicine woman, who often combines Indigenous healing traditions with Catholic rituals, using herbs, natural remedies and spiritual forms of prayer.

Descendant: a person, animal or thing that comes from a specific ancestor or earlier form.

Dicho: a saying, proverb, or witty remark.

Ethnography: a qualitative research method where the researcher immersives themselves into a specific community or culture for a long period of time to understand the community or culture from the perspective of the people being studied.

Gentrification: the process of wealthier people and businesses moving into a lower-income, historically marginalized neighborhood leading to the displacement of long-term residents.

Juke joint: an informal roadside establishment featuring music, dancing, gambling, and drinking-historically run by and for African Americans- providing a safe-haven for Black laborers to socialize and celebrate.

La migra: a colloquial term for immigration enforcement authorities, originating from the term migration.

Placemaking: a collaborative, community-driven project that reinvents public spaces to strengthen the connection between people and their shared environments.

Plaza: an open public space, square, or commercial center in a town or city.

Poderosa: a powerful, mighty, or strong woman.

Pullman Porter: a black man hired by the Pullman Company from the late 1860s to 1968 to work as an attendant on luxury railroad sleeping cars.

Redevelopment: the act or process of improving an area or property by replacing, renovating, or reusing existing old buildings and structures with new ones.

Sanctuary: A. A place of refuge and protection. B. state and local policies that limit cooperation with federal civil immigration enforcement.

Squalor: extremely dirty and unpleasant living conditions usually caused by poverty or neglect.

Discussion Questions

Elementary (k-5):

1. What makes a place special to you or your family? Ex: *We always laugh when we go to the movies. or I feel happy when I go to the park because I can see my friends and play.*
2. Why is it important to remember stories from the past?
3. What places in your community bring people together?
4. How can we remember a special place if it is no longer there?

Middle School (6-8):

1. How do neighborhoods and gathering places create a sense of community?
2. What can personal stories teach us about a community's history?
3. How might a community change when important places are lost or destroyed?
4. Why is it important for younger generations to learn about their community's past?

High School (9-12):

1. How do personal stories shape our understanding of a community's history and identity?
2. How can the loss of physical spaces affect cultural memory and a sense of belonging?
3. Whose stories are often left out of traditional historical narratives, and why?
4. In what ways can storytelling serve as a form of historical preservation and community reclamation?

Lesson Plans

These lessons can be adapted to fit almost any classroom environment and are meant to help students understand how theater and the arts are powerful tools in documenting history and understanding communities. The three lessons feature on

Lesson 1: Creating Place-This Place Matters

Focus: Place, memory, community, visual art

Length: 45–60 minutes

Goal: Students create an artwork representing a meaningful community place and what it means to the people who use it.

Students will:

- Identify places that are meaningful to themselves or their community.
- Explore how places can hold memories and stories.
- Create a visual representation of a place and its significance.

Activity

Begin by discussing third spaces—places outside of home and school where people gather, such as parks, stores, churches, plazas, restaurants, or community centers.:

What does this place look or feel like?

1. What places bring people together?
2. What memories do you have or can you make there?
3. What would happen if that place disappeared?

Students then choose a meaningful place and create a *memory map*. Students can draw/sketch, paint, illustrate, collage, or use mixed-media to bring this place to life. They can include the building, people, objects, words, symbols, or memories connected to the space.

For older students, have them incorporate historical photographs, maps, or archival information alongside their personal interpretation.

Discussion

How can art help preserve the memory of a place, even after the physical place changes or disappears?

Lesson 2: Preserving Histories- I remember when...

Focus: Creative writing, oral history, and memories

Length: 45–60 minutes over 2-3 days

Goal: Students explore how personal stories can become part of a community's history.

Students will:

- Understand the value of oral histories and personal experiences.
- Practice writing from another person's perspective.
- Consider whose stories are preserved in history.

Activity

Introduce students to the idea behind Barrio Stories: the history of a community is understood and preserved through the memories and experiences of the people who lived there.

Have students choose an elder community member to interview—such as a grandparent, a neighbor, an aunt/uncle, a crossing guard, or a local business owner. Students can voice record the interview, record it on video or try to scribe the answers in the moment.

Interview questions you can include:

1. What place in your community is important or special to you?
2. What do you remember about this place when you were younger? How long have you been going there?
3. Who would gather there, and what would people do together?
4. Can you tell me about a specific memory or story that happened there? Like the first time you went there or a time you met someone special?
5. What did this place mean to you and your community?
6. Has the place changed over time? If so, how?
7. What happened or what could happen if the place changes, closes, or disappears?
8. Are there traditions, celebrations, or important events you associate with this place?
9. What do you think younger generations should know about this place?
10. If you could tell someone who had never experienced this place one thing about it, what would you say?

Questions for older students to consider:

1. Whose stories or experiences do you think are missing from the history of this place?
2. How did this place contribute to a sense of community or belonging?
3. What changes in the neighborhood affected this place?
4. Why do you think it's important to preserve stories about places that no longer exist?
5. What does this story tell us about the larger history of our community?

Students write a short piece from the perspective of the interviewee. It can be as short as a paragraph or as long as 500 words. It can be turned into a poem, a monologue, or an essay. It should begin with: "I remember when..."

Encourage students to focus on:

- A specific place
- A person or group: a community hero, rivals, a savior, a martyr, "powerful" vs. the "powerless," rich vs. poor, etc.
- A memory: Can be dream-like, nightmare-ish, poetic
- Sensory details: smell, style, feeling, sounds, the music, the food, etc.
- Why the place mattered: What themes are present and how are those expressed in the story?
- What changed over time: describe an oral timeline or oral map.

Final Discussion

How can personal stories help us understand history in ways that textbooks and historical records cannot?

Lesson 3: Sharing our own barrio stories: Performing History

Focus: Theater, storytelling, and community history

Length: 60–90 minutes

Goal: Students transform a historical or personal community story into a short performance.

Students will:

- Explore how stories can be communicated through performance.
- Collaborate to interpret a community history.
- Use voice, movement, dialogue, and staging to communicate and examine meaning.

Activity

After attending a performance of Barrio Stories, use the discussion questions to examine and give context to what you have seen. Ask students to recall a favorite play from Barrio Stories they got to experience that day.

In groups of 3-5, students will identify a story of their own they want to recreate. You can use stories they created in **Lesson 2** or have them identify a new one as a group:

1. Who is telling the story?
2. Where does it happen?
3. What happened?
4. Why does it matter?
5. What does the story tell us about the community?

Groups then create a 3-7 minute performance. They can create:

A short scene: Dialogue between 2 or more characters.

Ex:

Dad: There's still dishes in the sink!

Son: I'll do them when I get back.

Mom: I need the pan done for dinner tonight!

Son: Ugh, fine.

A monologue: a speech delivered by a single person/character.

Ex:

Maddy:

My mother's cooking is terrible! I know it's disrespectful, and I just interrupted the middle of math class, but I have to get it out! The smoke alarm is now our dinner bell. It warns us to be prepared...Now you know why I never invite anyone over. It's not because we live in a haunted mansion; it's the food that's haunted. Sorry, Mr. Smith, please continue.

A spoken-word piece: a poem or song heavily using vocal auditory elements to tell a story.

Re: Tucson Poet Laureate Logan Phillips:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJ8I4vq8YrM>

A combination of narration and movement: Play a song/music that is reminiscent of the place or the memory being portrayed with movements like dance or tableaux to tell the story.

For older students, challenge them to incorporate and present how change, displacement, or redevelopment (gentrification) has affected the area.

Discussion

How does performing a story change the way we understand the people and places in it?

FINAL *Barrio Stories* DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How can art, writing, and performance preserve the stories and identities of communities and the places that shaped them?
- How does participation in an event like *Barrio Stories*, as an audience member, affect the way you see your own neighborhood or community?