



Life on the Line: Coming of Age Between Nations

Seen through the eyes of teenage Kimberly, this film illuminates the changing face of America through the story of her family. Kimberly's undocumented mother is stuck in Mexico after returning to see her dying grandmother. As a result, the rest of the Torrez family moves as close to the U.S.-Mexico border as possible so they can still cross and see one another. Many of the inefficiencies and flaws of our current immigration system are powerfully brought to life through the Torrez's family struggle to be reunited.



Recommended for ages 10+

Themes: immigration; social justice; coming of age

Director(s): Jen Gilomen and Sally Rubin | **28 min** | **Documentary** | **2015** | **Country:** USA | **Language:** English

Official film website: www.finefilms.org/lifeontheline

SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This film was made during a time of great debate about immigration in Arizona. In 2010, Arizona passed a bill called SB 1070, which required police to detain anyone who looked like they might be an illegal immigrant and ask them for their papers. Although nothing in the bill specifically mentioned race or ethnicity, in practice that meant detaining people who looked Mexican or Latino. This created a climate of intense anxiety for Latinos in Arizona. This bill was part of a larger trend towards tightening the borders between the U.S. and Mexico, a trend that tears apart families like the Torrezes.

During the filming of this documentary the public also became aware of the enormous toll immigration laws take on the lives of children. In 2014, tens of thousands of unaccompanied children were caught crossing the U.S. border by themselves.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **B-roll:** Supplemental film footage that can be used to edit a scene. B-roll is the footage used to cut away from an interview to help tell the story.
- **Establishing Shot:** Usually the first shot of a new scene, designed to show the audience where the action is taking place.
- **Green Card:** A permit allowing an immigrant to live and work permanently in the U.S.
- **Symbol:** A thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object that represents something abstract.
- **Transfronterizos:** Students who live in Mexico but cross the border every day to go to school in the U.S.
- **Visa:** An endorsement on a passport indicating that the holder is allowed to enter, leave, or stay for a specified period of time in a country.
- **Undocumented Immigrant:** A person who crosses into another country without having the official documents that are needed to enter, live in, or work in a country legally.

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcfri.org/FilmHub).



Pay attention while watching

Clues
and
Cues

- Notice the b-roll footage of the border. Think about what message the filmmaker sends by using these artistic shots.

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- How does the filmmaker introduce the main characters? How does the b-roll help establish how we understand the personalities and feelings of the main characters?
- Do you identify with Kimberly? Why or why not? How does the filmmaker make her seem sympathetic?
- What does the border represent to Kimberly, her family, and the other kids in her class at school? [hint: it represents a lot of different things, not just one]
- What do the cartoon sections of the film communicate? Why do you think the filmmaker used them? How do they help explain immigration?
- How are Nogales, USA and Nogales, Mexico different?
- When Kimberly's father talks about his family's situation early in the film, what is the most difficult part of this whole process for him? Why do you think Kimberly's father announces that he's not coming back to the car lot? Why do you think he gives up in that moment?
- What role does Kimberly have to play in her family? What role do immigrant kids have to play in their families, especially when their parents don't speak the language? Think about the scene at the car lot to answer this question.
- What voice in the movie represents the voice of the filmmakers themselves? How can you tell? (Hint: we often hear his voice over b-roll.) What is the film's overall argument about immigration?
- One of the protestors in favor of SB 1070 says, "It's my land, but it's not your land." How do you think his comments would make Kimberly and her family feel? What do you think about his idea of who belongs in America and who doesn't?
- Kimberly can see people trying to cross the border illegally from her apartment window. Why do so many people from Latin America risk illegal crossings to come to the United States? Have you ever crossed a country's border? How did it feel? What are the connections in your life to other countries?
- Balty Garcia says that Kimberly lives in two worlds. What are the two worlds that she lives in? Do you live in two worlds like home versus school, or church versus school, or one group of friends versus another group?
- What would you do if you were Kimberly's mother? Would you wait for papers or risk crossing illegally?
- Has this film challenged your stereotypes and changed your perceptions of undocumented immigrants?

GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

• Writing Prompts

For middle school or high school students:

Write a poem or a creative essay about a bird that flies over the U.S./Mexico border. What does the bird think of this human-made boundary and the suffering it creates?

For middle school or high school students:

Pretend you are Kimberly and your father has just moved to Phoenix for work. Write a letter to him describing your life in Nogales, Mexico and your thoughts and feelings about your family situation.

For high school students: Have you ever experienced a border or boundary in your life, which has prevented you from achieving your dreams? It can either be physical or metaphorical.

For advanced students: Write a one-page policy paper describing what you think immigration law should be for families divided by the border.

• Have a Debate

Materials: None

Divide into groups of 3 and debate whether Kimberly's mother should be allowed in the U.S. One person in the group should be Kimberly, one person should be the anti-immigration protester at the rally, and one person should be Balty Garcia, the founder of Kimberly's school.

• Map Your Migration Journey

Materials: A large map of the U.S., pushpins, yarn

Document the journey of your family to the U.S. using a world map plus yarn and pushpins. Do your research. Interview family members to get background information about where your family came from and how far back in generations before arriving in the United States. It might be helpful to include the generations on the map itself or to create a timeline on the back of the map.

• Photography

Materials: Camera or phone with camera

Take a picture of a literal or metaphorical border or boundary—some kind of boundary that makes it hard to achieve your dreams or do what you want to do. Example: if you have trouble with writing, you might take a picture of a pencil or a blank piece of paper. Your example can be personal, political or both.

MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

BOOKS

- **Return to Sender**
by *Julia Alvarez*
Alvarez tells a contemporary immigration story through the alternating viewpoints of two young people in Vermont.
- **Homestretch**
by *Paul Volpon*
A runaway boy with nothing finds everything he needs, including a family, in the most unlikely place: a racetrack.
- **Downtown Boy**
by *Juan Felipe Herrera*
A novel in verse tells of a year in the life of 10-year-old Juanito Palomares in late-1950s California.
- **Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow**
by *Faiza Guene, Translated by Sarah Adams*
The story about a teenaged Moroccan immigrant girl living outside of Paris.

FILMS

- **Paper State: Undocumented, Unafraid, Undeterred** (2014)
This documentary short follows four undocumented students in the Hudson Valley, NY, as they make the transition from high school to college.
- **Maquilapolis** (2006)
This is a film about a group of activists fighting poor working conditions in factories on the US-Mexico border.
- **Which Way Home** (2009)
A film about unaccompanied minors making the dangerous journey from their homes in Latin America across the US border by themselves.

🕒 Indicates PCFF festival selection

LOCAL CONNECTIONS:

- **Coalition of Advocates for Student Opportunities (CASO):**
A local non-profit organization dedicated to removing barriers for undocumented students. www.casori.org.

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **Crossing Borders. A radio documentary series by Hearing Voices, a collective of independent radio producers.**
www.hearingvoices.com/special/2006/border
- **President Obama passed legislation creating more legal pathways for children to join their families in the U.S.:**
www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/us/obama-approves-plan-to-let-children-apply-for-refugee-status-in-central-america.html
- **Young U.S. Citizens in Mexico Brave Risks for American Schools:**
www.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/us/young-us-citizens-in-mexico-up-early-to-learn-in-the-us.html?scp=1&sq=Tijuana%20and%20go%20to%20school%20in%20Chula%20Vista,&st=cse
- **Undocumented Young Activists Talk About Depression And Suicide:**
www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/02/undocumented-activists-dream-act_n_1251152.html?ref=immigration-reform
- **Immigration dividing families:**
www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/08/children-immigrants-deportation-splits-families_n_1137828.html?1323435924&ref=latino-voices
- **Interactive Map (2014) tracking where migrant children are coming from and where they are going:**
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html
- **Rhode Island House debates in-state tuition for undocumented students:**
www.providencejournal.com/article/20140506/News/305069986
- **Immigration rallies in Providence about undocumented children:**
www.providencejournal.com/article/20140718/NEWS/307189969

