

125 MIN • SECONDARY/POST-SECONDARY

Rethinking Borders

Objective: In the rethinking borders workshop, students will be asked to reflect on conceptions of and assumptions about borders and their geographies.

Preparation: Preparation varies by exercise(s) selected; see below.

Duration: Depending on the exercises the instructor chooses, the duration will vary.

Instructor Note: This workshop is designed as a guided listening exercise. As you listen to the clip there will be a number of highlighted portions that have discussion or activity options. Choose the places to stop that you think most closely align with your class.

Lesson Plan

Task 1: Introductory Activity

20 MIN

Engaging in Oral Histories

As a class, listen to the excerpt from an interview with members of the Bridges Not Borders/Créons des Ponts advocacy group. In this excerpt three members of Bridges Not Borders/Créons des Ponts based in the Quebec-New York border region speak about how the group formed in 2017. Sparked by a desire to offer an alternative perspective on asylum seekers arriving in Canada at Roxham Road, the group describes their work as welcoming newcomers. Listen to the interview excerpt as a class all the way through. It may help to follow along with the attached transcript. After listening, discuss your general impressions or initial thoughts about the interview.

“Because we want people to know that they're welcomed,
at least by us.”

1:08:45-1:17:40



[Listen to the excerpt from the interview](#)

Task 2: Guided Listening

Small Group

Below we present five guided listening exercises that engage different excerpts from the Bridges Not Borders interview. Instructors are encouraged to focus on those selections that align with their class themes and interests.

Note that exercise B includes an additional reading, which could be prepared in advance or done in class.

Exercise A. Bridges vs. Borders

15 MIN



01:08:45-01:10:09

[Listen to the excerpt from the interview](#)

Wendy: And I think about borders. Our name, I do feel a bit ambivalent about our name. It was a name that we adopted because one of our members had made this wooden cut-out. This is actually the basis of our, and so on. And we just sort of took the name. We didn't really think about it. The notion for us is I can't speak, we don't have a position about borders. But the idea is that we want to... borders are a place where we can actually be welcoming to people in need. It's not about destroying borders. That's not the purpose of our group. We're not, although I'm sure there are individuals in our group who are not in favour of borders and some who are. We've never really had that discussion. But I think our name lends itself to people thinking that we're opposed to borders, which I think is an issue. In English; in French, Créons des Ponts doesn't, is more neutral.

Grace: And that's probably more our position.

Wendy: Yes. Yeah.

Grace: Ultimately.

The name of the organization is Bridges Not Borders in English and Créons des Ponts (Building Bridges) in French. In this excerpt, BNB members discuss how they arrived at the names and what they associate with the concepts of “bridges” versus “borders.”

Brainstorm and make note of words you associate with each concept.

- What are the characteristics of each concept?
- Which actions do you associate with them?
- What feelings are associated with each concept?

Think about the relationships between borders and bridges. Can borders act as bridges?

Exercise B. The “Borderless” Borders of Europe

30 MIN



1:10:10-1:11:08

[*Listen to the excerpt from the interview*](#)

Wendy: Yeah, let's be open and let's be welcoming. Rather than, yeah. I think for most people in the world, except for people who are forcibly displaced.

Or who have thought about it, or who have political views about borders, most people take borders for granted. That they are part of human reality and social reality. And that nations are separate and that we should have borders. I doubt that there are really very many people that question that.

Pascale: In Europe there is no more borders.

Wendy: Okay. That's true. That is true.

Pascale: At the beginning, I think people were very afraid of it. But now they are used to it and it's just normal.

Wendy: Yeah, that is true. That's a good point-

Grace: But there are borders around fortress Europe.

Pascale: Yeah, but they are very different countries. And you are going from one country to another. And it's okay. And the specificity it is there. So they know it doesn't.

Grace: But no. It's funny because we're both from Europe right. And I grew up with that. Borders are just kind of, not very meaningful.

Wendy: But they are because they're still structures that exist that-

Grace: They're political structures yes.

Wendy: Yes, yeah. This is getting maybe a bit philosophical.

In this excerpt, BNB members discuss their experiences of growing up in a Europe that they experienced as “without borders.” The EU is often held up as an example of a “borderless” space - and offers a social and political experiment of what the world could look like if borders were not presumed to be given. And yet, the blog post below shows how quickly things shifted under the global pandemic of 2020: “During the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the majority of Schengen states have partially or totally sealed their land, sea and air borders with the outside world, including to their Schengen/EU partners.” Read this blog post.



Castan Pinos, J & Radil, S.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the myth of a borderless Europe.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2020/06/12/the-covid-19-pandemic-has-shattered-the-myth-of-a-borderless-europe/>

Discuss the following questions:

1. The authors argue the global pandemic has “shattered the myth of a borderless Europe.” What do they mean by this?
 - a. Can you think of other historical or contemporary examples of when states have strengthened their borders in response to a wider event?
 - b. Was Europe ever actually “borderless”?

1. Do you agree with Wendy’s reflection that “most people take borders for granted”? Why or why not? Explain using examples from the interview, the article, and/or your experiences.
2. Consider the impacts of the “rebordering” of Europe under the pandemic on people who have been displaced.

Exercise C. No Borders?

15 MIN



01:11:07-01:13:05

[Listen to the excerpt from the interview](#)

RRTeam: It's great. It's great. I'm curious about that.

Grace B: Well, if you're curious, I grew up thinking of myself as a citizen of the world. I never felt comfortable with my German nationality. So I... it didn't make sense to me, to define myself like that. And I don't know, why I had this idea, but I always had this idea that I was a citizen of the world. And I still feel like that, essentially. And I think my position would be, that practically speaking it's unrealistic to abolish borders at this point. But ideally, I'd want to abolish all of them. But, yeah. That's...

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RRTeam: Do you think that's part of what brought you to this work?

Grace B: No, that's an interesting question. I think it was more just kind of feeling that there was this issue, about people coming across at Roxham. And I never had any big reflections on it. It just seemed an obvious thing to get involved in. And for me, it wasn't so much about borders. It was more about welcoming refugees really. Yeah.

In this excerpt, Grace sets up a contrast between what she sees as “idealistic” / unrealistic - i.e. abolishing borders - versus what she sees as “practical” / realistic - keeping borders in place in their current form.

Discuss the following questions:

- Why is maintaining borders seen as the “practical/realistic” position?
- How do you see it?
- What issues might arise in either scenario?
- How could or would you address the issues raised by your group?

Exercise D. How Do Borders Inform People's Identities? 20 MIN



01:13:20-01:14:13

[Listen to the excerpt from the interview](#)

Wendy: Just now what occurred to me is growing up Canadian in Canada, I would say I was always very glad there was a border with the United States. Because the United States is such an overwhelming presence. So I do think that is a particular Canadian perspective. I can't speak for all Canadians.

Grace: Maybe we want to build a wall [laughs]

Wendy: That we grew up wanting to differentiate ourselves. That we grew up wanting to differentiate ourselves from the Americans. And I think that does give a slightly different perspective. And certainly, now, I'm very grateful that there's a border. Although of course, that's totally hypothetical-

Pascale: I don't think-

Wendy: No, no.

In this excerpt, Wendy begins and ends by expressing gratitude for the existence of the border between the US and Canada and links it to her personal identity.

Answer the following questions in a group, or record your individual answers:

1. What personal experiences have you had with borders?
2. Think about your own personal identity. How do borders inform how you talk about your background or express who you are?
3. Think about your own country's national identity and how it distinguishes itself from neighbouring country/countries.
 - a. How are borders used to maintain this distinction?
 - b. Is national identity useful? For whom?

Exercise E. "Borders Are For Some Kinds of People"

20 MIN



01:14:14-01:17:50

[Listen to the excerpt from the interview](#)

Pascale: Borders are for some kinds of people and not for others.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah. But yeah. It's a big question. Yeah.

Pascale: For me, borders, no way. It's really something I think. It defends some interests and that's all. Just the way I see this place is... we are moving, you know. And countries are changing, borders are changing. And suddenly we think it's normal. But sometimes we think it's not normal. So it's something really that we people and government and economical issues are putting in our head. But it's not logical at all. There is no reason, no natural reason. It's just something that is just good for economical reasons and to constrain people in some way. But for me, borders is not good for humanity.

Wendy: I would agree with that. I think at heart, I do agree with that. I was only reflecting-

Pascale: Yeah. I understand-

Wendy: This position as a Canadian, which I never really thought about that too much. But I think what we are going to be faced with in the future inevitably is such massive movements of people. I think that that will happen. It's already happening. But it will be even bigger, that the notion of borders will become like... very very difficult to maintain at some point in the future. I don't know-

Pascale: Yeah. But it's also useful for wars, borders.

Grace: Yeah.

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Pascale: So it's something, if there is a border there can be war. And war is a way. Is a very strong way of directing people in their mind too. So I think, I don't know, but I think for me, it's why I'm interested in immigration because I think immigration is really the base of understanding what is humanity and how we understand the world. If we are not able to work with people because they are from another country, I think we are not able to manage what is happening actually. In environment issues, other things. I think it's all linked. If we don't have this capacity of seeing globally human people, we can't fight against climate changing and other things. For me, it's the base. So I think it's the reason why I'm more engaged in this kind of.

Grace B: Yeah.

This excerpt points to the different scales at which borders have impacts.

Brainstorm and take note of how borders operate at different scales:

- Global
- National
- Local
- Family
- Individual

As you reflect, consider:

1. The range of economic, social, political, and environmental factors and implications.
2. Who benefits from and who is disadvantaged by the ways in which borders are implemented at these different scales?

Task 3: Concluding activity

5 MIN

Final Takeaways

Think back to the opening discussion that you had about this oral history interview. Have your impressions changed? Now that you have taken a closer look at the interview, what is something that you will take away from the discussion?

Resources

HAVELOCK • 1 HR 42 MIN

Bridges Not Borders' story

"Because we want people to know that they're welcomed, at least by us."



[LISTEN TO THEIR STORY](#)



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Additional Resources

Anderson, B. Sharma, N. Wright, C. - Refuge



Editorial: Why No Borders?

<https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/32074>

Three members of Bridges Not Borders speak about how the group formed in 2017. Sparked by a desire to offer an alternative perspective on asylum seekers arriving in Canada at Roxham road, the group describes their work as welcoming newcomers.



[*Read the excerpt from their story*](#)

Wendy, Grace, and Pascale

Havelock, Quebec

10 August 2019

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