De la Tierra Somos

(¡No Somos Illegales!)

Carlos A. Cortéz

1984

heART | History Explored through Art

presented by Friends of the West Chicago City Museum

Overarching Goals of the heART program:

- **Explore** local history through **creative** expression
- **Reflect** on historical or contemporary art and **extend** themes of historic or contemporary art into one's own art
- **Use** art processes to **create** a work of art

Objectives of the Carols A. Cortéz heART lesson:

- **Interpret** the message conveyed by the artwork.
- **Identify** ways in which the medium helps to convey the message.
- **Extend** their understanding by creating their own high-contrast artwork to convey a social or political message.
- **Use** art vocabulary when discussing, planning, and making art
- **Use** art techniques as presented by the instructor

As with any creative expression, there are **no rules** as to what the final product will be, only ***guidelines***. It is only natural for students to make a project their own, and the more personalized they make a project, the more they are using higher-level thinking skills. Students should **NOT** be discouraged from taking a modified or different approach to the project, as long as they are *engaged* in art making and *thinking* about the information presented.

Art History Brief

Carlos A. Cortéz
1923-2005

Carlos Cortez, *Photo: José Gamaliel González*

The son of a German mother and a Mexican father, Mr. Cortéz was born and raised in the Milwaukee area. Imprisoned for 18 months as a conscientious objector during World War II, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World in 1947. He wrote a column and drew cartoons for the union paper, *The Industrial Worker*, from the early 1950s through the early 2000s. He moved to Chicago in 1965.

In the 1970s, Mr. Cortez joined the Hispanic mural movement, painting walls of city buildings to communicate political messages about the ills afflicting society. Inspired by the Mexican printmaker Jose Guadalupe Posada, whose woodcuts depicting violence and executions were sold at low cost to the masses, Mr. Cortez broadened his medium to printmaking. After carving images into wood and linoleum blocks, he applied ink, then pressed paper over the ink-covered surface.

Welcome Home, 1965

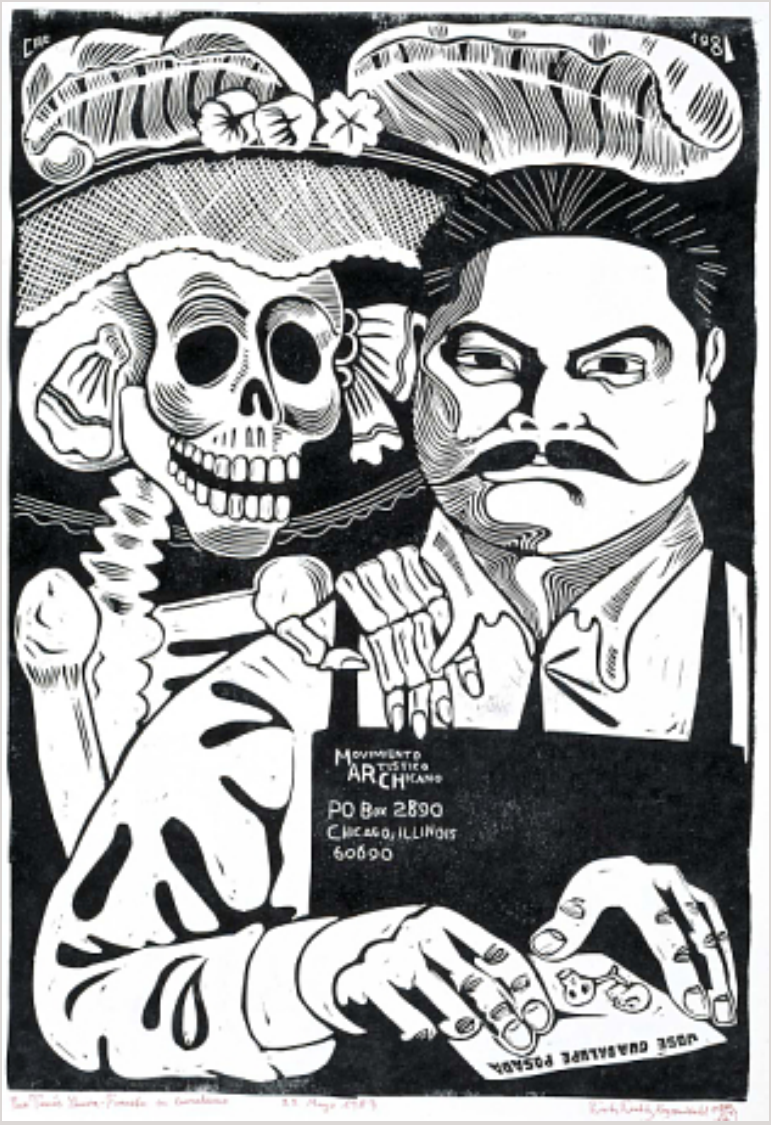
A blue-collar worker and pacifist, Mr. Cortez portrayed military invasions, parents crying over a casket draped with the American flag, and the wrinkled faces of workers worn down by their plight. His artwork always remained on the side, while he made a living working in factories.

"You couldn't separate the manual labor he did

from who he was," Tortolero said. "Carlos was always about the real value of things. It was never money. He never supported himself as an artist."

In 1975, Mr. Cortez helped found the first Mexican arts organization in Illinois, Movimiento Artistico Chicano, or MARCH. He also became a fervent supporter of and frequent exhibitor at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum (now the National Museum of Mexican Art). His work also is on display at the New York Museum of Modern Art and in galleries in such countries as Spain and Sweden.

In addition to his papier-mache sculptures, murals, prints and poems, he wrote three poetry books, edited a book on Posada and contributed to a number of others. For almost 20 years, he served as board president of Charles Kerr Publishers, one of the oldest working-class publishing houses in the world.



José Guadalupe Posada, 1981, signed 1983

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

The I.W.W. was "a union based on the principles of Marxist conflict and the indigenous American philosophy of industrial unionism," according to historian Joyce Kornbluh. The Wobblies solicited new members among the most discriminated-against groups of the workforce: unskilled workers, non-whites, immigrants, women, and migrant workers. These working people were barred from the skilled workers' unions that formed the American Federation of Labor, which tended to support white, male, skilled workers. The I.W.W. hoped to create "one big union" through which workers would own the means of production and distribution.

West Chicago History Connection

Mexican Immigration

Mexican immigration to West Chicago came in two major waves: the 1920s and the late 1940s. These two groups laid the foundation for a Mexican community that continues migrations between north + south.

Over time, a majority of immigrants have come from the State of **Michoacán**. In recent years, West Chicago has also seen an increase in immigrants from the state of **Oaxaca**, a result of poverty and political unrest there.

Not all of West Chicago's Mexican migrants come from Mexico. Since the mid-nineteenth century, when the southwestern United States belonged to Mexico, Mexicans have lived, owned, and worked the land in that area. Many of the first Mexican farmworkers to come to West Chicago in the late 1940s and 1950s came from Texas.

West Chicago became a destination for Mexican migrants looking for a new home north of the border, and our Mexican-American community grew. The early immigrants established a community here that provided future Mexican immigrant workers an environment in which to begin a better life. These immigrants helped to fill the labor shortage in West Chicago industry. Friends and family from Mexico joined the West Chicago community in a chain migration.

Mexicans as Workers

The railroads were among the first United States businesses to seek out Mexicans as workers in the Midwest, beginning in 1910. Since initially these jobs were seasonal, workers traveled back and forth between the two countries. They used the railroads as their means of transportation.

Title: Mexicans entering the United States. United States immigration station, El Paso, Texas
Creator: Lange, Dorothea, **Date**: 1938

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 brought immigrants fleeing the chaos of war to the U.S. Eager to find work, Mexicans took jobs considered undesirable by U.S. citizens due to high risk, low pay, and generally poor working conditions.

During the U.S. involvement in World War I (1917-1918), much of our country's labor force was fighting overseas. Work opportunities for Mexicans increased. An exemption to the 1917 Immigration Act encouraged Mexican immigration due to the need for agricultural workers. This led to a massive wave of migration nationwide.

The Great Depression of the 1930s ended this northward migration. As U.S. workers lost jobs, demands to remove immigrant workers increased. The U.S. government began the Mexican Repatriation, a mass deportation of Mexican families. As many as 60% of deportees

were legal U.S. citizens. While these workers had been eagerly sought out and welcomed the decade before, they now were not wanted or needed.

Again, during World War II, much of the U.S. labor force was away fighting the war. Immigration policies during this time allowed the entry of millions of Mexican "*braceros,*" or contract laborers. The *Braceros* program was extended after the war due to pressure from agricultural industries. Wages were low and work conditions were substandard, but as many as five million *braceros* came to the U.S., with hundreds of thousands making the U.S. their permanent home.

Coming to West Chicago

West Chicago's first wave of Mexican immigrants came in the early 1920s to work on the railroad as part of a national trend of U.S. railroad companies actively recruiting Mexican laborers.

Some railroads provided housing for workers: railroad boxcars. By 1928, twenty boxcar camps existed in the Chicago area, operated by seven railroad companies. In West Chicago, the Chicago & North Western Railroad had established a boxcar camp by 1920. The Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad had established a camp by the late 1920s. In these camps, many families, like the Zarates, had their first home in West Chicago. *(Pictured is Mo Zarate outside his family's box car home in the late 1940s).*

Contemporary Connections

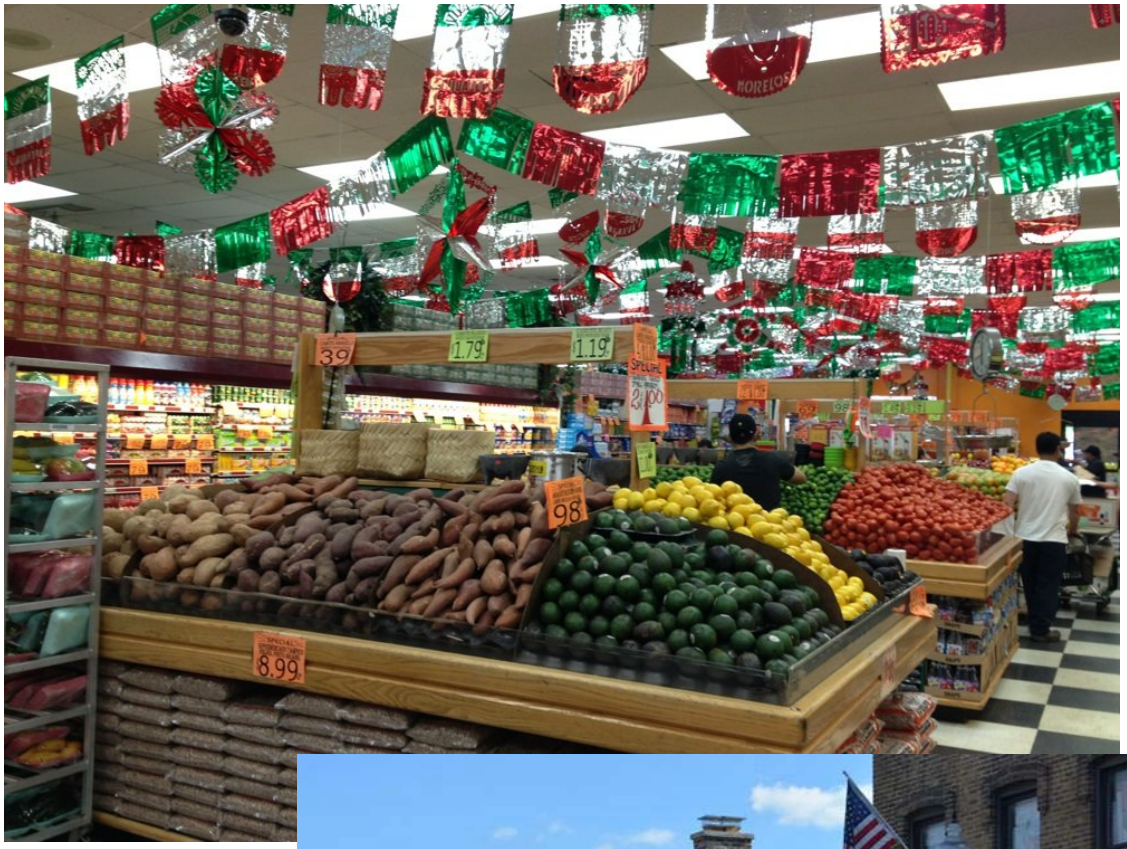
Dave's Latin American Grocery

Mexican immigration to West Chicago has continued into the twenty-first century. As the Latino population continues to grow in West Chicago, there are more Latino-owned businesses. Today, we can look around our community and see the growing multicultural presence.

The Mexican Independence Day Celebration & Parade is also a growing celebration in West Chicago. This event offers a chance for all residents to experience Mexican culture and share in the unique heritage of over half of West Chicago's population.

The experience of Mexicans in West Chicago is just one small piece of the larger story of Mexicans in the United States. Mexican West Chicago shares many similarities with other areas settled by Mexican migrants throughout the Midwest. As Mexicans have sought a home in this country, they have contributed culturally and civically to our community

as they have searched for an identity. Although there is no one Mexican American identity, the shared hopes, dreams, and unique immigrant story binds them together and adds to the larger history of our immigrant nation.



Supermarcado Tampico

Dancers at Mexican Independence Day Celebration 2015

Instructor's Guide

Introduction/History

1. Look with the students at *De la Tierra Somos (¡No Somos Illegales!).*

    What people do you see? Describe them.

    What else is in the image?

    What do the words mean?

2. Discuss the use of the word "illegals" when used in reference to people. What does it mean? Is there more than one meaning? What other words are used to describe people who immigrate into another country?

3. What message is Cortéz trying to convey? Is this a social message? Political? Other?

4. Optional: Explain the process of linoleum cutting and printing. Compare and contrast with painting or drawing; why is printmaking well-suited for social and political messages?

5. Ways to use West Chicago History and Contemporary Connections: Collaborate with social science teacher; or art teacher can highlight Mexican history in West Chicago and share photographs.

6. Introduce art-making process to students.

Art Vocabulary, Concepts, and Process

Vocabulary + Concepts:

contrast: black and white provide sharp contrast and draw the viewer's attention to the image and words, placing importance on the message.

Linoleum cut (linocut): a design is cut into a linoleum block with a sharp tool. The raised (uncarved) areas create the positive image when printed, and must be carved in mirror image. The lino block is inked and pressed onto paper of fabric. Many prints may be made from one block.

line: an element of design. Line can repeat to show texture or surface shape, as in the faces of the people in Cortéz's work.

Process: **Lino Cut***

Students will create a graphic image to express a social or political concern.

1. Brainstorm ideas for the message they wish to convey or an idea they want to share. Brainstorm in words or pictures, individually or in groups.
2. Sketch images and words for final composition. IF WORDS are used they MUST BE IN REVERSE! An easy way to do this is to write the letters forwards on the back of the paper—then hold against a window and trace them for the final design.
3. Transfer design to linoleum block—draw by hand or use charcoal or graphite transfer method.
4. Carve away negative space. Add details using line to positive space.
5. Print.

*This project may be done using black colored pencil, marker, cut paper, etc: any way in which a black and white image can be created to mimic the look of a print.

Illinois State Learning Standards Met

Fine Arts

25.A.4 Analyze and evaluate the effective use of elements, principles and expressive qualities in a composition/performance in dance, drama, music and visual arts.

25.A.5 Analyze and evaluate student and professional works for how aesthetic qualities are used to convey intent, expressive ideas and/or meaning.

26.A.4e Visual Arts: Analyze and evaluate how tools/technologies and processes combine to convey meaning.

26.A.5 Common for all four arts: Analyze and evaluate how the choice of media, tools, technologies and processes support and influence the communication of ideas.

Social Science

14.D.5 Interpret a variety of public policies and issues from the perspectives of different individuals and groups.

14.F.5 Interpret how changing geograph-ical, economic, technological and social forces affect United States political ideas and traditions (e.g., freedom, equality and justice, individual rights).

16.A.5a Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings).