

## **“Crossing Borders with Poetry and Art to Promote Reading and Creativity in Schools”**

### **Borderlines: Drawing Border Lives: Fronteras: Dibujando las vidas fronterizas**

**By Dr. Steven Schneider, Professor of English, UTPA and Reefka Schneider, Artist**

**Target Audience: Teachers and Librarians. Secondary. College/ University.**

1. Several recent Literacy Studies (NEA, NAAL) indicate literary reading is declining, especially among Hispanics.
2. Successful instruction in how to read is not enough to create avid readers. The next step is to find “su novia.” As Sandra Cisneros explained to hundreds of Gear-Up students during FESTIBA 2009 at The University of Texas–Pan American (UTPA), “su novia” is the book one falls in love with and which provides the key to unlocking the door of the world of reading.
3. At the 2010 FESTIBA at UTPA, Matt de la Pena, author of Mexican White Boy and Ball Don’t Lie, told the story of the book that opened his heart and mind to reading. He also explained that students need to know that it takes time to transition into the world of each book – important information in our fast –paced, over–stimulated world.
4. These two factors are the missing knowledge that students need to take the right angle to dive vertically into the depths of reading – to read for pleasure and to take pleasure in reading for knowledge.

5. Dr. Steven Schneider has successfully used this approach for years in his Sophomore literature classes at UTPA. Many lapsed and non-readers as well as ELL readers have become avid readers as he guided them to culturally relevant texts they could relate to and that reflected their worlds.
6. Joan Parker Webster, in her book **Teaching Through Culture**, defines culturally relevant literature as literature in which students “can see themselves ... represented accurately and respectfully.” Louis Moll contends that “existing classroom practices underestimate and constrain what Latino and other children are able to display intellectually.”
7. As a culturally relevant text, providing high quality artistic imagery and poetry in English and Spanish, **Borderlines / Fronteras** can be used in numerous ways to promote literacy and creativity.
8. The art draws in the students and provides a bridge to the poetry. It is heart touching art in which readers can see their communities reflected. Students see themselves on the page and this gives them the patience to allow their hearts and minds to open to a new text and to new forms of poetry.
9. The bilingual text allows further fluency of understanding and acquisition of both languages. The many different poetic forms in the book, such as the villanelle, sestina, triolet, and decima as well as free verse – serve as models for instruction in both English and Spanish.
10. Since 1990 creativity scores in the US have been declining in school students. The images and poems in **Borderlines / Fronteras** can be used to promote

creativity – as intertextual prompts for creative writing  
and art and for engaged discussion of the many issues  
the poems confront.