Media Literacy Activity

**Directions:** Choose a current immigration issue you would like to explore. In the Computer Lab, find two articles, each with a different viewpoint on your chosen issue. Fill in the chart below with information about your current events articles.

**The Bias Rule**
This rule says that every source is biased in some way. Follow these guidelines when you use a source for information:

- Every piece of evidence and every source must be read or viewed skeptically and critically.
- No source should be taken at face value. The creator’s point of view must be considered.
- Each piece of evidence and source must be cross-checked and compared with related sources and pieces of evidence.

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<th>Article 1</th>
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<td>Source</td>
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<td>Author + information about him/her</td>
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<td>Immigration Topic Addressed</td>
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<td>Expressive Language (language that shares a feeling or attitude)</td>
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<td>Directive Language (language that directs or commands)</td>
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<td>Words with Positive Emotive Meaning (words with a positive emotional impact or positive connotation)</td>
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<td>Words with Negative Emotive Meaning (words with a negative emotional impact or negative connotation)</td>
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Carlos Cortéz, De la tierra somos. ¡No somos ilegales! / We are of the earth. We are not illegal., 1984, linocut, N.N., 36 3/8” x 16 3/8” (paper size), National Museum of Mexican Art Permanent Collection, 1990.29, Gift of the Artist.

Black ink, a sheet of paper, a block of linoleum, and a small linoleum cutter: these are the only tools artist Carlos Cortéz needs to re-write history, fill viewers with compassion, and strike back against a word many people believe takes away immigrants’ dignity and individuality. The term in question is “illegal” or “illegal aliens.” In the 1970s and ’80s, groups that did not want undocumented immigrants from Mexico who had worked and lived in the United States for many years to receive the legal right to reside here started using this term. The word “illegal” to describe undocumented immigrants continues today, though many people are working to abolish it from use in newspapers, government documents, and the public sphere in general.

In this linoleum print by Carlos Cortéz, bold, block letters at the top and bottom of the image proclaim: “DE LA TIERRA SOMOS—¡NO SOMOS ILEGALES!” (“WE ARE OF THE EARTH—WE ARE NOT ILLEGAL!”). These words frame the faces of a child, a woman, and a man, as well as a corn stalk and a pyramid-like structure.

The faces of these three individuals are formed by carefully chosen horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines—some thick, some thin. Cortéz’s strong lines create a frontal view of each face and intense dark eyes that look straight out at us. Even if you or I do not look exactly like them, we may still be able to relate to them as children, parents, or members of a family.

The wide-brimmed hat the man wears gives us a clue to his possible identity as a person of Mexican origin, linking him and his family back to the controversial “illegal” issue mentioned in the text that frames the image. The issue of unauthorized immigrants to the U.S. from Mexico was a hot topic in the 70s and 80s and remains so today. Carlos Cortéz aims to show, through imagery, that not only are these so-called “illegals” legitimate family members and individuals; they are “of the earth.” He does this through symbolism that shows their close relationship to the land and also informs us that they have lived here since long before the United States of America existed. The cornstalk in the print refers to the nutritious, life-sustaining grain domesticated by indigenous Mesoamerican groups over 7,500 years ago—revealing their close connection to the land and their self-sufficiency since well before Europeans arrived. Likewise, a structure resembling the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (an ancient city in Mexico) reminds viewers that, before Europeans arrived, civilizations in Mexico completed sophisticated engineering projects and had highly developed societies.

Cortéz, who was the son of two immigrants to the U.S., felt a strong bond with the people experiencing discrimination like the man, woman, and child depicted here. He worked to promote social change using both his art and poetry. For many of the political and civil rights groups he belonged to, Cortéz created prints like this one. He favored prints because they could be copied many times, pasted up around town, and printed in magazines or journals, making them easy to see and furthering the causes he cared so much about. What are some of the causes that are important to you? How do you spread ideas or messages about the things you care about most? What would you include in a poster design for something that matters to you?
Carlos Cortéz, De la tierra somos. ¡No somos ilegales! / We are of the earth. We are not illegal., 1984, linocut, N.N., 36 3/8" x 16 3/8" (paper size), National Museum of Mexican Art Permanent Collection, 1990.29, Gift of the Artist, photo credit: Michael Tropea
Teacher Biography: Carlos Cortéz (August 13, 1923–January 19, 2005)

“When you do a painting that’s it, it’s one of a kind. But when you do a graphic the amount of prints you can make from it is infinite. I made a provision in my estate, for whoever will take care of my blocks, that if any of my graphic works are selling for high prices immediate copies should be made to keep the price down.”

—Carlos Cortéz

In the above statement, graphic artist, poet, photographer, muralist, and political activist Carlos Cortéz attests his fervent opposition to capitalism, as well as his lifelong support of working class emancipation through woodblock printing, painting, and poetry. Woodblock printing has been used since the sixteenth century to spread political messages; it is a very effective tool because, with one woodblock design, a printer can make unlimited copies of posters for rallies, political cartoons, and magazine illustrations. Carlos Cortéz used his woodblock and linoleum prints to champion the nonviolent social movements he was passionate about, including peace, immigration, Chicano farmworkers’ rights, Native American rights, and the protection of the environment.

Carlos Cortéz’s interest in the above issues was rooted in his heritage as well as his social and political awareness from an early age. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to a German-American social pacifist mother and Mexican-Indian father (member of the Industrial Workers of the World, a radical industrial union). When persecuted at school for being Mexican, Cortéz’s mother reassured him: “Don’t let the children at school call you a foreigner, because through your father you are Indian and that makes you more American than any of them.”

During World War II, Cortéz conscientiously objected to the draft, refusing to “shoot at fellow draftees.” He was consequently sent to prison. After his release, Cortéz worked a variety of jobs in construction and in factories. Like his father before him, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and remained a member until his death nearly sixty years later.

Cortéz was mostly a self-taught artist. He learned the basics of woodblock printing in high school and began printing professionally for the IWW, completing illustrations for the union’s radical journal Industrial Worker. He explains: “Many radical papers—not having advertising, grants or angels who are rich radicals—operate on the brink of bankruptcy. So Industrial Worker couldn’t afford to make electric plates out of line drawings. I saw that one of the old-timers was doing linoleum blocks and sending them in because the paper was being printed on a flatbed press. I started doing the same thing, and each issue would have one of my linocuts.” When linoleum prices were too high, Cortéz used pine and cedar wood from discarded furniture scavenged from alleyways, a practice he continued into his old age. In later years, Cortéz would serve on the General Executive Board of the union and as one of the journal’s editors.
In the 1960s, Cortéz married Marianna Drogitis and the couple moved to Chicago. There he became heavily involved in the Chicano art movement (founding the Movimiento Artístico Chicano [MARCH] in 1975 with José G. González), the Chicago Public Art Group, Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America, and Galería Aztlán. For many of the groups he belonged to, Cortéz created posters and works of poetry.

Cortéz’s work is profoundly inspired by José Guadalupe Posada, the Mexican artist whose satirical and political prints influenced turn-of-the-century Mexican society, and by Käthe Kollwitz, a German Expressionist artist whose work portrayed the human condition and the tragedy of war. Cortéz’s work has been compared to ‘outsider’ art, being characterized by raw simplicity and immediacy. His best-known works include poster portraits of fellow activists Joe Hill, Lucía González de Parsons, Ben Fletcher, Ricardo Flores-Magón, Mother Jones, José Guadalupe Posada, César Chávez, and Frank Little.

Considered by many an elder statesman of Chicano graphics, Cortéz is admired for both his artistic skill and his steadfast social and political convictions. His work has been exhibited in the United States, Mexico, and Germany and is included in the collections of numerous major museums. In addition to his visual art, Cortéz wrote three books of poetry and was Board President of Charles H. Kerr Publishers for twenty years. Most importantly for Cortéz, all his artistic creations, except for some nudes and landscapes, have a social message.

For over forty years, Cortéz created images that speak to the struggles of common people. He considered himself “a people’s artist” until the end. Even through his handwritten will, he continues to be wary of the high prices that art often brings in today’s market. As the opening quotation indicates, Cortéz left the National Museum of Mexican Art a copy of each of his prints and his entire collection of woodblock prints, specifying that if his work starts selling after he is gone, they are to print copious quantities to bring the price down. Carlos Cortéz died in January 2005 in Chicago. The following quotation sums up his life and work:

“I’m basically a soapbox artist and poet ... putting in a big pitch for trying to make this world a better place.”
—Carlos Cortéz

Sources:
“When you do a painting that’s it, it’s one of a kind. But when you do a graphic the amount of prints you can make from it is infinite. I made a provision in my estate, for whoever will take care of my blocks, that if any of my graphic works are selling for high prices immediate copies should be made to keep the price down.”

—Carlos Cortéz

In the statement above, artist, poet, photographer, and political activist Carlos Cortéz reveals his strong dislike of capitalism, as well as his support of victims of injustice through the arts of woodblock printing, painting, and poetry. Woodblock printing has been used since the 1500s to spread political messages; it is a very effective tool because with one woodblock design, a printer can make unlimited copies of posters for rallies, political cartoons, and magazine illustrations. Carlos Cortéz used woodblock printing to defend the social issues he was passionate about, such as peace, immigration, Chicano farmworkers’ rights, Native American rights, and the protection of the environment.

Carlos Cortéz’s interest in these issues was rooted in his heritage and his awareness of discrimination in U.S. society from an early age. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to a German-American mother and an Mexican-Indian father, both active in radical politics. When persecuted at school for being Mexican, Cortéz’s mother reassured him: “Don’t let the children at school call you a foreigner, because through your father you are Indian and that makes you more American than any of them.”

When he was drafted for World War II, Cortéz refused to join the military, saying he did not want to “shoot at fellow draftees.” Refusing to join the military during wartime was against the law, so Cortéz was sent to prison as a conscientious objector. After his release, Cortéz worked a variety of jobs in construction and in factories. Like his father before him, he joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a major labor union, and remained a member until his death nearly sixty years later.

Cortéz was mostly a self-taught artist. He learned the basics of woodblock printing in high school and began printing professionally for the IWW, creating woodblock illustrations for the union’s radical journal Industrial Worker. He explains: “Many radical papers—not having advertising, grants or angels who are rich radicals—operate on the brink of bankruptcy. So Industrial Worker couldn’t afford to make electric plates out of line drawings. I saw that one of the old-timers was doing linoleum blocks and sending them in because the paper was being printed on a flatbed press. I started doing the same thing, and each issue would have one of my linocuts.” When linoleum prices were too high, Cortéz used pine and cedar wood from discarded furniture he found in alleyways, a practice he continued into his old age. In later years Cortéz would serve on the General Executive Board of the union and as one of the journal’s editors.
In the 1960s, Cortéz married Marianna Drogitis and the couple moved to Chicago. There, he became heavily involved in the Chicano art movement (founding the Movimiento Artístico Chicano [MARCH] in 1975 with José G. González), the Chicago Public Art Group, Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America, and Galería Aztlán. Cortéz created posters and works of poetry for many of the groups he belonged to.

Cortéz’s work is profoundly inspired by José Guadalupe Posada, a Mexican artist whose wood-block prints ridiculed turn-of-the-century Mexican society and spread political messages, and by Käthe Kollwitz, a German artist working in the 1920s whose work portrayed the effects of war on everyday people. Cortéz’s work may look rough or unfinished at first glance, but in reality the artist carefully chooses only the most important details and uses coarse lines to create images that are startling and eye-catching. His best-known works are his poster portraits of fellow political and social activists.

Cortéz is considered by many an elder statesman of Chicano graphics. This is due to both his artistic skill and his firm beliefs. His artwork has been displayed in the United States, Mexico, and Germany and can be found in the collections of many major art museums. In addition to his visual art, Cortéz wrote three books of poetry. Most importantly for Cortéz, almost all his artistic creations have a social message.

For over forty years, Cortéz created images that show the struggles of common people. He considered himself “a people’s artist” until the end. In his will, Cortéz left the National Museum of Mexican Art a copy of each of his prints and his entire collection of woodblock prints, indicating that if his artwork starts selling for high prices after he is gone, they are to print more copies to bring the price down. Carlos Cortéz died in January 2005 in Chicago. The following quotation sums up his life and work:

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Sources:
Imagery in Poems
Carlos Cortéz studied Japanese culture and interacted with Japanese contacts during the 1960s. As a result of this, he wrote several haiku and haiku-like poems. These poems capture certain moments and topics, touching on politics and the urban, working-class experiences of many Mexican Americans.

**SPERANZ!**
A small green leaf Breaks its way Thru a crack in the pavement, Glories briefly In its new-found freedom, then withers;
But the root beneath Grows Stronger and stronger

**Morning Haiku**
Dawn merging With a street light At the bus stop; Somewhere a rooster Crows ……

**Windy City Haiku**
Winter morning The factory whistle Stabs the sky Like a knife.

**Blues for a Bus Driver**
The driver takes a weary glance In the overhead mirror Seeing for the thousandth time His equally weary load Of wage slaves.

**Windy City Christmas**
In a chilly alleyway Off West Madison Street, Santa Claus is an old man With a dirty beard Passing a bottle of cheap Muscatel To his buddies.