

The Fence

Lesson Guide

By Greg Timmons

FILM SYNOPSIS

In October 2006, the U.S. government decided to build a 700-mile fence along its troubled 2000-mile-plus border with Mexico. Three years, 19 construction companies, 350 engineers, thousands of construction workers, tens of thousands of tons of metal and \$3 billion later, was it all worth it? *The Fence (La Barda)* investigates the impact of the project, revealing how its stated goals – containing illegal immigration, cracking down on drug trafficking and protecting America from terrorists – have given way to unforeseen consequences.

PROGRAM RUNNING TIME 33:00 (35:00 with credits)

THEMES/TOPICS EXPLORED

- Homeland security
- Illegal immigration
- Constitutional authority
- Partisan politics/fact versus opinion
- Unintended consequences

CONTENT AREAS: Social Studies, U.S. History, Civics and Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The student will...

- Understand the social and political reasons for the Secure Fence Act of 2006
- Identify the unintended consequences of building a security fence along the U.S. – Mexican border
- Document key points presented in the HBO film *The Fence* and analyze their relationship to the issues of terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration.
- Analyze the proposals for and against increasing security along the U.S. – Mexican border and addressing the problems with illegal immigration.
- Formulate a presentation that describes and evaluates proposals for addressing border security and illegal immigration.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

From McREL (www.mcrel.org)

Civics

- **Standard 1:** Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
- **Standard 14:** Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

- **Standard 15:** Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power
- **Standard 19:** Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media
- **Standard 21:** Understands the formulation and implementation of public policy
- **Standard 28:** Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This lesson guide offers teachers the flexibility to have students experience the film through different instructional methods. Student can view the film in its entirety and in the Post Viewing Activity discuss the questions provided. Or students can view the film in segments, taking notes on the included graphic organizers, and discussing important themes and concepts. Teachers can also choose to have students conduct the culminating activity on current proposals to address the problems associated with illegal immigration. Teachers can opt to have students write essays on these proposals or present their findings in class presentations or digital postings online.

NOTE TO TEACHER: Due to the politically and emotionally charged nature of this subject matter, you should keep the backgrounds of students and their families in mind when adapting these activities for the classroom. Encourage students to participate in class discussions with respect and sensitivity to others.

POST- VIEWING ACTIVITY

Show students the film to the class or have them watch it for homework. The discussion questions included in this lesson guide are designed to help students analyze key points in the film. Review the questions with the class or have students discuss them in small groups and report back their findings to the class. Students can also answer any of the questions in a written essay.

FILM SEGMENT VIEWING ACTIVITY

In this activity, students will work in small groups to explore in depth key issues presented in *The Fence*. You can have all students view all three film segments or divide students into three groups to view individual segments. If you choose the latter, it is recommended that students watch the entire film first before viewing their individual segment. Intro and exit cues are provided on the handout.

1. Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 students.
2. Distribute the note-taking graphic organizers for each student. Show the film segments in class or have students watch the segments as homework and take notes on their graphic organizers.

3. After students have watched the segments, have them review their notes in their groups and discuss the questions at the end of each segment. Then have students share their findings with the class.
4. After students have reviewed all segment discussion questions, have them address the series of questions below in their groups or discuss them as a full class.
 - What are the factors that motivate drug trafficking and illegal immigration into the United States? Why does the border fence not address these factors?
 - Explain why these factors are important to the people involved in drug trafficking and illegal immigration as well as to people in the United States.
 - Explain why it is important that these factors be addressed in order to effectively address the problems along the border.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Begin this activity by reviewing what students have learned about the effectiveness of the border fence and the complexity of preventing terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration as they pertain to border security.

Then explain to students that in this activity, they will be engaged in examining several proposed solutions to address the problems along the U.S./Mexican border. They will work in small groups to research these solutions and develop position papers/projects that describe the solutions and viability of implementing them. Students could present their research in written essays or in presentations. Students can develop slide presentations for class presentation or digital postings on the class or school website or blog. Student can also produce a symposium for parents and community members that explore these issues.

1. Divide the class into seven groups and assign each group one of the following proposed solutions:
 - a. Deny citizenship to children born to undocumented immigrants
 - b. Better enforce existing laws
 - c. Provide a quick and painless path to citizenship
 - d. Further build up security along the U.S. Mexico border
 - e. Deny social services to undocumented workers
 - f. Let individual states pass their own immigration laws
 - g. Schumer–Graham immigration reform proposal
2. Distribute the handout, “Proposals to Address the U.S.-Mexican Border Problems” to all students. Review the directions with them.
3. Provide time for students to conduct their research and compile their findings.
4. Give students the opportunity to develop presentations for the class and/or community.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Have students examine some of the “virtual fences” the United States had built through immigration legislation. Timelines of immigration laws from the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 to the most current laws can be found online. Have students analyze these laws looking for trends, motivating reasons for their enactment, correlations to today’s laws,

and how they reflect public sentiment of the time period. Students can write essays, develop presentations, or create digital postings for online viewing.

- Have students look at the role of walls, barriers, and fences in preventing intervention throughout history such as the Great Wall of China, the Iron Curtain/ Berlin Wall, Israeli West Bank Security Fence, Spain-Morocco Wall, and others. Students should document details of the fence: construction timeline, materials, length, location, builder, purpose, and result. Then students should evaluate the level of success of these walls and security fences to their intended purpose and whether alternative solutions might have been more successful. Students can compare the effectiveness of these fences with the border fence on the U.S. – Mexican border.

RESOURCES

Information on the Secure Fence Act of 2006

- **White House Archives (Bush Administration)** <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061026-1.html>
- **GovTrack legislative Tracking** <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h109-6061>

Immigration Organizations

- Human Borders <http://www.humaneborders.org/>
- National Immigration Forum <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- AILS (Immigration Lawyers) <http://www.aila.org>

Minuteman Organizations

- Minuteman Civil Defense Corps <http://www.minutemanhq.com/hq/>
- Minuteman Project <http://www.minutemanproject.com/>

Stories on Walls and Fences

- Guardian UK <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/24/iraq.julianborger>
- PBS NOW <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/432/security-walls.html>

Post Viewing Discussion Questions

Watch the film in class or as homework. Then discuss the following questions in small group or as a full class.

- As demonstrated by Americans' negative view of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, building a wall to keep people out (or in) has never been an "American thing to do." Why do you think many Americans in 2006 felt a fence *was* a feasible solution to the problems along the U.S. – Mexican border? What does the border fence mean to you, both symbolically and literally?
- Describe the convergence of forces (the American public's memory of 9/11, the media, the drug war in Mexico, the 2006 midterm elections) that amassed in the fall of 2006 and led to Congress's enactment of the Secure Fence Act. Which do you think was the most important concern(s) regarding border security that needed to be addressed? Explain your answer. Do you think this concern or concerns were addressed by building the fence? Explain your answer.
- Generate a list of the unintended consequences that resulted from the fence's construction. What are the short and long term effects of these unintended consequences?
- Identify the different ways the director of the film uses humorous archival footage and satire. How does this use of humor reflect the director's point of view in telling the story? Do you think this is an effective way to present this type of subject matter? Why or why not?
- Describe the role of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps from their point of view. Evaluate how effective you think they are in keeping the border safe and secure.
- What evidence does the film present that the fence is effectively addressing any of its intended purposes? What do you think might be a more effective alternative to the fence to meet the same objectives?

Video Segment Viewing Activity

Note-taking Graphic Organizer

Video Segment 1

Entry cue: 2:02: (Narrator) In October 2006, the United States decided to build a fence.

Exit cue: 11:50: (Narrator) Hire an additional 82,000 Border Patrol agents.

Directions: As you watch the video, take notes on the following questions:

1. What did the Secure Fence Act of 2006 authorize? _____

2. Describe the fence's construction and its location along the U.S. – Mexico border. _____

3. List the concerns created by the fence in the following categories

Misplaced Location	Environmental Concerns	Flooding in Mexico

Discuss the questions below with your small group. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think about the fence's place in American history? What were some of the unintended consequences of building the fence?
- How effective do you think the fence is in accomplishing what it was intended to do? Explain.
- In the film, a number of alternative uses for the \$3 billion spent to build and maintain the fence are suggested. Among these alternatives, what would be your choice for using this money instead of building a fence? Explain your answer.

Video Segment Viewing Activity

Note-taking Graphic Organizer

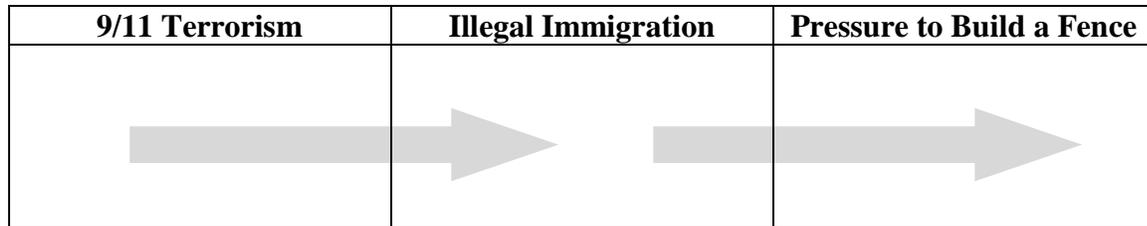
Video Segment 2

Entry cue: 11:57 (Start segment with the scenes of Ground Zero and Pentagon)

Exit cue: 21:55 (Narrator)... the estimated number of drugs entering the U.S. has not decreased since its [the fence's] construction.

Directions: As you watch the video, take notes on the following questions.

1. Describe the cause and effect relationship between 9/11 terrorism, illegal immigration, and pressure on government to build a fence from the perspective of the Minuteman Civil Defense organization.



2. Describe the level of commitment you observed in watching the border Minutemen prepare to go on patrol. _____

3. Describe the perception many people have about terrorists coming into the country and the reality of where terrorists have entered the country over the past quarter-century.

Perception of Terrorists' entry into the country	Reality of Terrorists entry into the country

Discuss the questions below with your small group. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe the political rhetoric you saw on news/opinion shows. How do you think this message affects people listening to these programs?
- Even though no terrorists have come across the U.S.-Mexican border, do you think this is a potential point of entry for terrorists? Explain your answer.
- Summarize the level of effectiveness the fence has had on illegal drug smuggling. Why do you think this is so?

Video Segment Viewing Activity

Note-taking Graphic Organizer

Video Segment Activity 3

Entry cue: 21:56 (Graphic of Blueprints of border fence Title Card “Illegal Immigration”)

Exit cue: 32:07 (Narrator) Now it’s estimated that one or two migrants die each day.

Directions: As you watch the video, take notes on the following questions:

1. Describe the methods many of the “coyotes” use to smuggle people across the border that makes the fence ineffective. _____

2. What factors in Mexico and the United States motivate Mexican migrants to illegally enter the United States? _____

3. From information in the film, describe how America can be characterized as a nation of immigrants. _____

Discuss the questions below with your small group. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the border fence seem contradictory to the concept of America being a nation of immigrants?
- While the fence doesn’t seem to have reduced the number of illegal aliens crossing the border, it has forced migrants to move into areas other than their normal crossing zones. What has been some of the unintended consequences of this for the illegal aliens?
- What do you think should be done about these consequences?

Proposals to Address the U.S.-Mexican Border Problems

Directions: In your groups, research information on your assigned proposal. Resources are provided for you at the bottom of this handout. Also, you will want to check news resources as well as organizations that have opinions on these proposals. Be sure to review these sources with an objective, analytical eye.

You might want to divide the tasks among members of your group to better utilize your time on both the research and presentation phases of the project. Present your information in creative ways incorporating maps, charts and graphs, pictures, political cartoons, and videos wherever appropriate. Consider integrating digital technology in your presentation such as online links, digital slide presentations and video clips.

PROPOSAL 1: Deny citizenship to children born to undocumented immigrants. Normally, anyone born within the borders of the United States or its territories is automatically a citizen, but this privilege shouldn't be granted to people whose parents entered the country illegally.

Questions to consider:

- Approximately how many children of undocumented immigrants live in the United States today? Explain the importance of this number.
- Has this plan or a similar plan ever been proposed before? If so, how effective was it? If not, why not?
- What group would be negatively affected by this proposal? Explain how.
- How does this proposal align with the 14th Amendment to the Constitution? What problems arise and what solutions are being proposed to address these problems?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan to deny citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants?

PROPOSAL 2: Enforce the laws that exist now. The U.S. government should enforce the laws already on the books by restricting immigration to a set number of immigrants, seeking out, arresting, and deporting undocumented immigrants, and prosecuting businesses and individuals who hire them.

Questions to consider:

- Identify and provide details of the 1986 and 1996 federal immigration laws and the 2005 REALID Act. How do these laws address problems with illegal immigration?
- Explain with supporting evidence how effective these laws have been in restricting illegal immigration. How might stronger enforcement of these laws affect the U.S. economy?
- Of the three areas mentioned in the description above, which do you think should have the most attention—restricting the numbers of immigrants overall, more arrests and deportations of illegal immigrants, more prosecutions of individuals who hire illegal immigrants. Explain why.
- What do critics say is missing from these current laws that new law would address?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan just enforce the current immigration laws?

PROPOSAL 3: Provide a quick and painless path to citizenship. There are an estimated 11 to 20 million undocumented immigrants in the United States today. Many have been here for years and

have children born in this country. Streamline the process for acquiring citizenship for these undocumented immigrants already living here.

Questions to consider:

- Describe the leading plans to provide citizenship to undocumented immigrants.
- Which plan do you think is most effective and fair? Explain.
- Which group gains and which group loses with this plan? Explain.
- Has this plan or similar plans ever been proposed before? How effective was it?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan to provide a quick path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants?

PROPOSAL 4: Further build up security along the borders. Undocumented immigration creates a security problem for the United States. The government should put up walls along both borders with hi-tech surveillance systems and more intense border patrols to keep people out.

Questions to consider:

- Describe what actions have been taken in the past five years to strengthen border security in the United States including along the U.S. – Mexican border.
- How effective has current border security been in restricting the flow of illegal immigrants and drug trafficking? Support your answer with details.
- Describe the new proposals for border security and how they differ or are an extension of what exists now.
- What are some of the arguments for and against this plan?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan to further build up security along the border?

PROPOSAL 5: Deny social services to undocumented immigrants. Federal, state, and local governments should deny social security benefits, medical care, and other social services to anyone who cannot show proof of citizenship.

Questions to consider:

- Why do people who support this proposal believe it is an effective way to address the problem of illegal immigration? What do you think is the overall goal of such a policy?
- How might such a policy affect undocumented workers and their families in the United States?
- How might this policy affect the American economy either positively or negatively?
- What are some of the objections to this policy?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan deny social services to undocumented workers?

PROPOSAL 6: Let the individual states pass immigration laws suitable to their needs. More states should follow Arizona’s lead and develop their own immigration laws that would best suit their individual needs and not be subject to a “one size fits all” solution.

Questions to consider:

- Describe some examples of laws pending or in place that give state and local governments the authority to control immigration in their area.

- Describe the controversy surrounding the Arizona immigration law SB 1070 and the Constitution.
- How does this law compare to other laws passed by the federal government to restrict immigration?
- What are the arguments for and against state and local management and enforcement of immigration?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of this plan to allow individual states to pass their own immigration laws?

PROPOSAL 7: Charles Schumer – Lindsay Graham proposal for immigration reform. In March, 2010, Senators Lindsay Graham (R-SC) and Charles Schumer (D-MA) met with President Barack Obama to discuss their 3-page outline for comprehensive immigration reform. The plan calls for biometric Social Security cards, increased border security, enforcement of illegal hiring, development of a program for admitting temporary workers, and a path to legalization.

Questions to consider:

- Describe the details of this plan.
- How is this plan similar to other programs of the past? How effective were these earlier programs? Why do supporters say this plan is different?
- What are some of the arguments for and against this plan?
- What needs to take place for this plan to be passed by Congress?
- Based on your research, what is your opinion of the Schumer – Graham immigration reform proposal?

Resources:

- ProCon.org <http://immigration.procon.org/>
- Schumer-Graham Immigration proposal <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/17/AR2010031703115.html>
- Constitutional Rights Foundation—Immigration <http://crfimmigrationed.org/>
- National Immigration Forum <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- U.S. Illegal Aliens <http://www.usillegalaliens.com/>
- KEYTLaw (analysis of the Arizona immigration law) <http://www.keytlaw.com/blog/2010/04/anti-illegal-immigration-law-part-1/>