



LESSON PLAN

Building a Community of Trust



RELATED FILM

Barrio de Paz

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Building a Community of Trust

Key Idea

Youth are kept on the margins of society in urban areas where violence and gang activity is high. Organizations and individuals who focus on community youth development and conflict resolution can transform violence into peace.

Background

The film *Barrio de Paz* documents the work of Nelsa Curbelo, a 70-year-old former nun who founded the organization *Ser Paz* (Being Peace) in 1999, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Guayaquil is the largest and most populous city in Ecuador with 2.69 million people. Nelsa is a proponent of non-violence who has fought for indigenous peoples' rights and worked as a mediator in armed conflicts throughout South America. The mission of *Ser Paz* is to work with youth gangs in Ecuador's southern city of Guayaquil and to help them reintegrate into society by providing them with education and professional training. Through her work, many of Guayaquil's most dangerous gangs have disarmed, agreed to abandon violence, and are now working together to rebuild the community.

Members of rival gangs have come together to form print shops, music studios, and pizzerias, which offer alternative economic opportunities to underserved neighborhoods and provides youth with outlets for creative expression. *Ser Paz* is a positive model for working with marginalized youth everywhere. Nelsa, in *Barrio de Paz*, helps youth channel their needs for unity, structure, and love into empowered participation within society.

Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 [or 11-12] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.



Film: 17 minutes

Class: 60 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- English Language Arts
- Modern World Studies
- Sociology
- Spanish

COLLEGE

- Cultural Anthropology
- Philosophy
- Sociology
- Spanish

THEMES

- Conflict resolution
- Fear versus love
- Violence versus peace
- Youth development

MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

PREPARATION

- None



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Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.5.9-12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the film by telling students that they will be watching a film about a 70-year-old former nun who has transformed gang youth in Ecuador. There are many contributing reasons why youth join gangs. They include the need for physical protection, a way to develop identity and a sense of belonging, and high racial or ethnic tensions. Gangs can also reflect the struggling communities of which they are part. In 2011, the National Youth Gang Survey estimated there were 29,900 gangs and 782,500 gang members throughout 3,300 jurisdictions with gang problems in the United States. Ask students what they know about gangs. Why do gangs exist? Why do they think a young person might join a gang?

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Direct students to take note of the insights Nelsa offers in the film and the reasons why gang members joined their gangs. They should observe Nelsa's comments in the film, how they reveal her philosophy on life, and how she provides opportunities to strengthen the community based on love and support. Nelsa builds a community of trust. What are some ways she creates this community of trust? What is her intention?



Delving Deeper

1. Ask students to get in pairs to discuss trust and what it means to them. How do they build trust in their lives? Do they think trust is powerful? Share this quote that started the film, “Everything in society tells us to distrust others. I think it’s the other way around. We need to profoundly trust in those around us, in their potential and in who they are.” What do they think about this quote? Do they think they need trust in their lives? Ask the paired groups to share their answers with the class.
2. Lead a discussion around the following questions:
 - Nelsa suggests that street gangs act as a mirror of society, reflecting parts of ourselves that we don’t want to see. What do you think she means by this? What could be reflected?
 - Nelsa has a presence on the streets of Guayaquil and validates the positive elements of gangs, including teamwork, commitment, and belonging. Why do you think the gang members respect Nelsa?
 - Nelsa has found that gang members who commit violent crimes often do so in order to feel present, as if to say, “I am here.” What does this mean? How does Nelsa use this outlook to create a positive outcome from something that is harmful? Have you ever broken rules or misbehaved as a way to feel alive, present, or “here”?
 - Nelsa identifies many types of power, but says the most important power comes from the inside, which she calls the power of service. What does the power of service mean to you?
 - In *The Guardian* article noted in the resource section, writer Caspar Walsh describes that a “gang is simply another word for tribe. In essence, gangs are good for society. In a healthy state, they are about the formation of groups that operate under ethical and moral codes of conduct upheld and enforced by the elders of the community.” What are some positive characteristics of the gangs represented in the film?



Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. At the end of the film, Nelsa says, “Nothing is more revolutionary than love. Love is the greatest power. Love is more powerful than violence, more powerful than the atomic bomb. Love has the power to transform lives, to change cities, and the whole world. Only love has this deep creative power.” Do you think love can change one’s behavior? Why or why not? Do you think love is more powerful than violence? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
2. The opposite of violence isn’t non-violence, suggests Nelsa. Rather, it’s empowerment. What do you think she means by this? Do you agree? Why or why not? (CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.c)
3. What decision did Nelsa make to begin this work with Ser Paz? How did this decision impact the gang members? What can you take from her decision and apply it to your own life? (C3.D2.Geo.5.9-12)
4. What comment from today’s discussion had the most meaning to you? Why? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1)

Resources

(Community website) [“Ser Paz.”](#)

Hilary Hart, [“Nelsa Curbelo, Former Nun And Schoolteacher, Takes on Ecuador’s Toughest Criminals.”](#) *Huffington Post*, July 2, 2008.

Caspar Walsh, [“Gangs are good for society.”](#) *The Guardian*, November 10, 2011.